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FROM PAST  
NECESSITY TO  
CONTEMPORARY  
FRICTION:  
MIGRATION, CLASS  
AND ETHNICITY IN  
MACEDONIA

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# From Past Necessity to Contemporary Friction: migration, class and ethnicity in Macedonia<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that the migration policies of the Yugoslav Socialist Federation (1943-1991) and the ensuing diasporic links have contributed to interethnic tension in Macedonia since its independence in 1991. As part of the Federation, ethnic Macedonians were a privileged “working class” whose members enjoyed a comfortable, state-sponsored lifestyle and other advantages. Since then, not only have they lost this status, they have also been confronted with the increasing prosperity of many ethnic Albanians, whose ties with relatives abroad have enabled them to open modest businesses, to build large houses and to buy expensive commodities. I have already analysed the complex topic of nationalism and consumption (Dimova 2004), based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork in a small Macedonian town, where I showed that the link between migration and nationalism manifests itself in everyday life: consumer goods and material objects make the differentiation between the two ethnic groups highly conspicuous. The newly acquired prosperity of many ethnic Albanians sets them apart as “the others”. This analysis, by contrast, primarily concerns the link between migration and nationalism, a link which I argue is mediated through the process of consumption. The subsequent analysis addresses the complicated history of migration and national politics in the Federation during and since its violent dissolution in 1991.

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## Historical Overview

In 1943, together with Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, Macedonia became part of the Yugoslav Socialist Federation. For the first time in its history the Republic of Macedonia celebrated its own officially-recognised national distinctiveness, although as a part of the broader unity of the other republics of the Yugoslav Federation. As Brown points out, “socialist Yugoslavia had served simultaneously as a guarantor of the existence of the Macedonian *narod* as one of the peoples of the Federation, while providing individuals with a state-based nationality that defined them differently when traveling abroad” (Brown 2003). Although Tito’s official view of the Federation was that there should not be any discrimination along ethnic (or national) lines, the structural configuration of the Federation built on the previous Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1919-1938) allowed certain republics to have more power and fuelled different processes of inclusion and exclusion of minorities, especially those without a republic of their own (Dimova 2004). The case of the Albanian minority clearly illustrates this process of exclusion and marginalisation.

From the inception of the Federation, the government was aware that some republics and provinces were significantly underdeveloped and hence launched an elaborated program to assist these economically-impooverished republics and provinces to achieve “socialist modernisation.” In the initial years following World War II this program consisted of five-year plans aiming at rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of the republics. While most of the republics realised economic growth, Kosovo, portions of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina remained significantly underdeveloped. In the 1960s and the 1970s, therefore, the government allowed people from the regions in Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to migrate abroad and by working in foreign countries for a limited period of time, to improve their economic standing. This migration, seen then as temporary, was government policy specifically formulated to reduce the vast economic discrepancy between the economically-impooverished parts of the Federation. Many of the temporary workers abroad were ethnic Albanians, who for structural and cultural reasons, found themselves on the periphery of the Yugoslav socialist society.

Some explanations of the economic disparity between the former Yugoslav republics have cited the divide between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a primary reason for the uneven distribution of wealth in the Yugoslav Federation (Lampe 1996, Woodward 1995). The north/south (or west/east) divide accounted for the better economic conditions in the urbanised and more modern western Empire rather than the Ottoman lands, which had struggled for centuries before the Ottoman Empire finally collapsed. Regardless of the reasons behind the uneven economic situation in the Federation, the Yugoslav government acknowledged the need for a well-developed state program that would lessen the divide between the economically impooverished republics and the more affluent republics such as Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia.

One of the principal reasons for the government’s concern to diminish the economic unevenness between different regions was fear of ethnic unrest, which showed first signs in 1968 in Kosovo and Metohija when Albanians protested against Serbian dominance. Initially drafted as “temporary work abroad,” the migration opportunities allowed many ethnic Albanians to work and settle abroad. Since then, migration abroad has unfolded in a complex process with unintended consequences that have directly affected relations between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in independent Macedonia.

## Migration during Yugoslavia: a historical necessity

When asked about the reason for migration, most of the people of ethnic Albanian background interviewed during my fieldwork research pointed out that this had been their “inevitable destiny” since the formation of the First Yugoslavia following the Paris Peace Conference after World War I (1921-1939). They were unanimous in their view that they had been victims of the long Serbian (Slavic) campaign to reduce the ethnic Albanian presence in Yugoslavia by forcing them to migrate abroad. Turkey was frequently mentioned as a destination where ethnic Albanians were sent by two Serb nationalist officials: Vaso Čubrilović and Aleksandar Ranković. Čubrilović was a Minister in the government in the 1930s during the period of the Yugoslav Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the First Yugoslavia), and Ranković was a Minister of Interior of the Yugoslav Federation (1943-1991) during Tito’s government from 1946-1965. Both identified Albanians as a threat to the unity of the Slav nations and the Yugoslav Federation (Smlatic 1978).

The intention of the “great Serbian bourgeoisie” to expel Albanians by using different violent methods appeared to be especially strong under Vasa Čubrilović in 1936 and 1937, when thousands of Albanians were forced to emigrate to Turkey (Hoxha 1978). Čubrilović made an official agreement with the Turkish government to accept an additional 250,000 Albanians. Because of the outbreak of World War II, this agreement could not be fully accomplished. Before the socialist Yugoslav federation and after its establishment, Islam was closely associated with Turkey and the Turkish rule.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, many of the Muslims who migrated officially were declared as Turks, when they were in fact, Albanians (Pajazit 1978).

While Ranković was minister of the interior during the Yugoslav Federation (1951-1965), many Albanians were either forced to migrate to Turkey or did so voluntarily.<sup>4</sup> Most of the people who migrated to Turkey were educated intellectuals from urban areas. They soon managed to become acculturated into Turkish culture and become fully respected citizens of Turkey (Smlatic 1978). Most of the Muslims who moved to Turkey were from Sandzak, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The emigration of Muslims from Kosovo proceeded via Macedonia where many ethnic Albanians joined the Muslims and moved to Turkey. The only condition to gain emigration approval was to officially declare oneself a Turk. Thus, the official census from 1963 registers the 120,000 Muslims from Macedonia as Turks (ibid.: 7). The ethnic Albanians however, point out that this was a deliberate strategy instigated by Aleksandar Ranković who was accused of promoting an anti-Albanian campaign to “cleanse” the orthodox population of Kosovo and Macedonia of as many Albanians as possible.

After Ranković was dismissed as minister of the interior in 1965, the government attempted to ease the tension among ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Around this time (1965), a migration policy became part of the larger Yugoslav ideology. Beside self-management (participation of the workers in decision-making), brotherhood and unity, and the non-alignment movement, freedom of

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<sup>3</sup> With the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in 1389, the Turkish officials staged massive conversions of Christian population into Islam. The conversion was most intensive in the 17th and 18th century when a large number of people converted. Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria were most subjected to conversion by the Ottomans. Most of the Albanians who live in contemporary Macedonia are Muslims who adopted Islam in the 16th and 17th centuries, although Albania’s population is religiously mixed: Muslim, Orthodox Christian, Catholic and today Protestant. Muslims, however, comprise 78% of the population (Smlatic 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Hoxha for instance mentions 70,000 Albanians (Hoxha 1978: 31). Albanian official sources mention 350,000. Leku mentions a number of 400,000 Albanians, pointing out that if these people would not have emigrated, and if there would not be more than 1,000,000 ethnic Albanians living in Turkey, the overall Albanian population would be more numerous in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro (ibid.: 32).

movement and the possibility to migrate abroad became one of the principal pillars of Yugoslav socialism.<sup>5</sup> The break with Stalin encouraged more cooperation with Western European countries. In this vein, the free movement of workers who wanted to migrate was one of Yugoslavia's most important achievements that distinguished it from other socialist countries. It was supposed to show to the world that the Yugoslav people had the democratic right to free travel. Migration also connected the Federation with the West; Tito envisioned migration as something that would assist Yugoslavia in its pro-Western orientation and as part of the effort to join the international division of labour (Joncic 1978). More precisely, other than the desire to refuse the Soviet socialist model, the Yugoslav Communist party also wanted to maintain connections with workers' movements in the countries to which Yugoslav citizens migrated (ibid.: 6).

It can be successfully argued, however, that the initial motive for crafting a migration plan was economic – an attempt on the part of the leadership to reconcile the uneven economic development of the republics. Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and, especially, Kosovo (as an autonomous province of Serbia), as the most “under-developed” republics, received special economic support from Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, which were economically much better off. Slovenia for instance, the most developed republic in the Yugoslav Federation, had a 200 percent higher income per capita than Kosovo (Rusinow 1967, 1977).

Although migration later became a significant part of the federal agenda, migration had taken place in the 1950s and early 1960s too. Also labelled “temporary migration abroad,” these earlier migrations consisted mainly of professionals and skilled workers from Slovenia and Croatia who were supposed to acquire new experiences and knowledge during the migration period, bring back their savings and thus stimulate the Yugoslav economy (Joncic 1978).

Surprisingly, however, prior to 1970, political statements and administrative regulations referring to migration abroad hardly ever mentioned the return and reintegration of migrant labourers. Migration *per se* was regarded a temporary phenomenon with a cyclical trajectory: departure from the country of origin; temporary residence in the country of immigration; and return to the country of origin. Numerous Yugoslav institutions and social-political organisations were formed to assist those workers who wanted to go abroad. Along with domestic organisations, the Yugoslav government formed organisations in Western Europe, the USA, Australia and Canada to facilitate Yugoslav workers' attachment to Yugoslavia. The main aim of these organisations was to maintain the link between the country of origin with the country of migration prior to their final return to Yugoslavia (Joncic 1978).

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<sup>5</sup> The Yugoslav Federation was founded after the multi-faceted 1941-1945 struggle. It was simultaneously an anti-fascist struggle, a people's liberation war and, ultimately, a “successful” socialist revolution involving the defeat of the king and the Serbian Monarchy. Unmistakably, this initial model of the federation was taken from Soviet socialism. It complied with Stalin's intent to create a strong eastern European bloc, cemented by an effective supra-national socialist ideology that eliminated ethnic, cultural and class differences in favour of a cohesive bond transcending nationality. Tito complied with Stalin's leadership for three years after World War II. In 1948, Stalin decided to position Soviet military troops in all Eastern European countries. Tito refused to allow Soviet military formations and heavy weaponry into Yugoslavia, despite their acceptance in all neighbouring socialist countries – in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia. This precipitated his rift with Stalin and this schism had a crucial impact on further developments in Yugoslavia. It meant the decentralisation of the economy, greater worker participation in industrial decision-making and the steady curtailment of state functions. These “improvements” on the Soviet model were features of what later would be called “socialist self-management,” which, together with the federal system and the policy of non-alignment, came to constitute the three pillars of Yugoslavia's political system after the split. Caught between the Soviet and the Western systems, Yugoslavia increasingly nurtured aspects of a market economy, which constituted its link with the West, but, at the same time, maintained many features of the Soviet system (Banac 1989). By refusing to be part of Stalin's bloc, Tito intended to create a unique socialist formula that would blend classical Marxist socialism and Yugoslav specificity. As mentioned above, with its geopolitical location between western capitalist and eastern socialist blocs, Yugoslavia represented a buffer zone, which, Tito hoped, would balance the two factious political-economic regimes.

Soon it became evident that there was a need for a better-developed centralised migration policy that could pay more attention to recruitment towards unskilled, unemployed labour in the less-developed republics and regions. It also became evident that many of the professionals who left did not return (Schierup 1990). For many professionals, migration was not temporary but permanent, and it became obvious that Yugoslavia was constantly losing skilled workers. For this reason, at the fifth congress of the Communist Party in 1965 the government decided to change the course of migration policy. Instead of focussing on the developed republics such as Slovenia and Croatia, migration policy was directed at people from Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first step towards this goal was the establishment of a Migration Bureau (*Biro za Migraciju*) to watch over an organised and supervised effort to place workers from Kosovo and Western Macedonia, most of whom were ethnic Albanians (Joncic 1978).<sup>6</sup>

The gap between the developed and underdeveloped republics continued to grow, despite the effort of the Yugoslav government and Tito to improve the economies of the least-developed regions. The government encountered ethnic and political tension: an uprising of the students in Kosovo in 1968, who, for the first time, officially demanded a *Kosova-Republika* (Kosovo Republic). One of the most urgent responses to the Kosovo unrest was improving the economic situation of the province. Migration was central in this project and the federal policies should be understood as part of the government's response to ethnic tensions and economic dissatisfaction in Kosovo.

While most ethnic Macedonians became involved in massive internal migration in their own country from rural to urban places— so-called “village-town” migration – since the 1950s, ethnic Albanians rarely left their rural surroundings because their large households could not be maintained with only one worker's wage. Rather they required a communal farm and the agricultural effort of several members of the household. Thus, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Yugoslav employment offices started giving preferential treatment to the rural poor and unemployed of the least-developed regions for employment in Western Europe (Toroman 1978). This greatly accelerated their emigration. The government had an official agreement with a number of Western European countries that accepted workers from the underdeveloped regions of Yugoslavia. The government even paid for the initial journey of the workers or found institutions in the host countries to pay for the trip: the National Bureau for Immigration of France, the General Institute for Workforce in the Netherlands, the National Bureau of Labour in Western Germany and the Institute for Workforce Market in Sweden (Schierup 1990). The introduction of the workers in the new environment was arranged through official bodies, which considerably increased the opportunities for emigration for poor and uneducated people from economically-backward regions. Thus, although their migration started relatively late, it reached impressive proportions between 1970 and 1973 (*ibid.*).

While the salaries of many Yugoslav citizens integrated in the mainstream socialist society could allow them to live a “consumer” lifestyle, which was tolerated and even encouraged in Yugoslavia unlike in the other socialist countries of the Soviet bloc, for many Albanians migration was the only route to consumerism. For many Albanians, remaining in their own country inevitably entailed poverty and financial struggle.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, in 1971 54,433 of the 151,000 Yugoslav migrants were from Macedonia. In 1973, this number increased to 89,000 people, with most of the migrants originating from Western Macedonia, where the majority of people are ethnic Albanians. 54.4 percent of the emigrants were agricultural workers, 8.7 percent were industrial workers, 8.8 percent manufacturers, and 8.8 percent dependants who moved with their families (Komarica 1970).

As suggested earlier, due to the uneven economic prosperity of the republics, not all areas of socialist Yugoslavia could share in consumerism to the same extent. The rise of a consumer culture created popular expectations that could not be satisfied in the poorer parts of the Federation, thereby exacerbating the north/south split. Hence, in the late 1960s and 1970s the Yugoslav government encouraged ethnic Albanians – then considered the country’s most “backward” ethnic group – to migrate to Western Europe or the United States. As a result, many ethnic Albanians who migrated managed to improve the economic status of their households. Moreover, only through migration were they able to share “the Yugoslav dream”: to be a part of a socialist and yet consumer society. Only a few Albanians would have access to this dream if they remained in the country. Their large households, rural lifestyles, and inability to get a good job because of their relative lack of education were structural obstacles that prevented them from partaking in the “Yugoslav dream.”

Consumer culture driven by desire for Western commodities and comfortable lifestyles motivated the Yugoslav government’s effort to silence the revolt in the areas populated by Albanians such as Kosovo and Western Macedonia who could not afford the “Yugoslav consumer dream.” By allowing Albanians to migrate abroad and take active part in the consumer “game,” the Yugoslav government attempted to defer the ethnic tension in Yugoslavia that had been growing since the first demonstrations in Kosovo in 1968. It was evident that due to the massive economic “backwardness” of Kosovo and Macedonia, migration abroad seemed to be the only path towards consumerism.

The new Yugoslav constitution from 1974 gave Kosovo an autonomous status. Yet, the dissatisfaction of Albanians continued despite the legal changes and the possibility to migrate abroad. The formal attachment of Kosovo as part of Serbia remained a point of dispute that has not been resolved until today. This led to the violent protests of the Albanian students in Kosovo in the spring of 1981, one year after Tito died. The demonstrators claimed that Kosovo should become a republic. Nine people died and several hundred were injured as police, firing tear gas, broke up a march of at least 10,000 protesters through the provincial capital of Priština (Dobbs 1981).

Although the Yugoslav government believed that it had solved the problem of nationalities, of national republics and, in the framework of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, the problem of autonomous regions in the best possible way, the Albanians in Kosovo argued that they had all the features and characteristics that constitute a nation; hence Kosovo should become a republic. The intensity of migration during the 1980s was very high, primarily because of fear of persecution by Serbs and the Yugoslav state. Very few official studies or reliable data exist on the Albanian migrations in the 1980s, because emigration from Yugoslavia abroad was no longer state-sponsored and systematically recorded. It became illegal, conducted through informal, familial links, without official permits or visas, and yet migration continued to rise in the 1990s.

The Yugoslav leadership feared that if Kosovo would become a separate republic, it would soon join Albania and would lead to the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation. The relational nexus between the Albanian minority and Albania as a homeland resulted in a constant fear among the Yugoslav leadership that Kosovo would secede and join Albania (Brubaker 1996). Yugoslav officials from Serbia and the other republics, including Lazar Koliševski, a Macedonian and the first president of the Yugoslav Federation after Tito’s death in 1980, argued that Kosovo’s aim was indeed to secede from Yugoslavia and form a Greater Albania. Thus, the central government in

Belgrade staged an anti-Albanian campaign that was especially prevalent in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, the three republics that had large Albanian minorities.

The most forceful anti-Albanian campaign was propagated by the Serbian elite, who asserted and clarified the inseparability of Kosovo and Serbia, thus generating a new discipline, the so-called “Mythology of Kosovo,” led primarily by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) (Qosja 1990). The battle of Kosovo in 1389 in which Serbia was defeated by the Ottomans, became the hallmark of Serbian historiography. The Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences sponsored numerous academic seminars, publications and workshops. Serbian newspapers and magazines staged a long and persistent campaign to show the forced expulsion of the Serbian people from Kosovo by ethnic Albanians. Serbian daily and weekly newspapers and magazines, such as *Nin*, *Borba* and *Politika* led this campaign with daily reports, describing the Serbian people’s suffering in Kosovo.

In the face of the political tension in the Federation, the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s were marked by the migration of many Albanians because of political uncertainty and fear. Estimated 300, 000 Albanians left Kosovo in the 1980s and early 1990s many of whom moved to the United States. These émigrés were able to use familial and personal networks with Albanians who had already migrated at the beginning of the 1970s (Qosja 1990). But with the official dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, most Western European countries began to require visas for citizens of the former Yugoslav Republics. Austria, the last European country to require visas, did so only in 1993, so that, apart from those who had family connections outside Macedonia, most emigrants from Kumanovo – the town where I did my research – went there.

The strict visa regime introduced for the Western Balkans (Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) since 1993 has been a structural predicament for both temporary migration and even short term visits of relatives. The long lines in front of Western consulates consisted of Albanians who had relatives abroad. But nowadays the number of Macedonians is significant as well. The economic situation along with the lack of perspective for a professional future have induced the desire among many people (especially the youth), regardless of their ethnicity, to apply for a visa, either with the sponsorship of a relative, or as a tourist or exchange student.

### **The Return of the Émigrés: a contemporary snapshot**

I became aware of the importance of Albanian migrants from the very outset of my fieldwork in Kumanovo in August 1999. My arrival in Kumanovo was marked by unbearably hot weather. Barely into the first month of my fieldwork in Kumanovo and still in the process of getting to know people and get them used to my presence in the town, I felt good about the response I received from Albanians. I assumed that being a Macedonian would help in networking with my own co-ethnics. The Albanian links at the beginning were more disconcerting for me. It turned out, however, that my acquaintance with a literary critic and a lecturer at the University in Tetovo, paved my way into the Albanian community. This contact reassured me that I could speak openly to Albanians. Luana, a young ethnic Albanian, introduced me to many people who were open, friendly and willing to share their hopes, anxieties, frustrations and fears during my first few weeks in Kumanovo. I regularly met with Luana in the Café Star in the afternoons during the first couple

of weeks of my fieldwork in Kumanovo: a site where Albanians from different generations gathered in the afternoons to socialise.

Kumanovo, an ethnically-mixed town in northern Macedonia near the borders to Kosovo and Serbia, defies aesthetic considerations in urban planning. On the one hand, it was ugly, displaying little or no effort to embellish the streets and the public spaces. On the other hand, it reminded me of romantic vacation towns on the Adriatic coast, although without a sea or even a decent river. Kumanovo certainly is not a tourist centre, but rather a transit town where people pass by on their way to Skopje or Greece. But in August 1999, especially in the late afternoons and evenings, it was bursting with people, noise and music until late into the night.

Many times during the day, music and car horns announced yet another wedding or *sunet* (a Muslim circumcision ceremony). Many of the grooms had returned from Western Europe or from the US to be engaged, to marry, visit relatives or attend family celebrations. Luana also confirmed my assumptions that the town's Albanian population tripled during the summer months. Her cousin, for instance, who has a CD shop next to a cafe, was pleased because during summertime the business flourished. The café,<sup>7</sup> which is in the main mall, called *Garnizon* (Garrison), in the centre of Kumanovo, was full of people, who were cheerful, well-dressed and appeared happy. I saw presents being exchanged among family members who came to meet in the café. It was hard to find a free seat.

I usually sat at a table on the outside patio, accompanied by Luana and one of her male relatives. Often, my conversation with my companions was interrupted by someone who approached us to greet them. They hugged according to the Muslim tradition, just nearing their cheeks without actually kissing. These greetings were exchanged between relatives who came from Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Turkey, etc. Most of them arrived in expensive cars with foreign plates, richly decorated with satin ribbons and flowers, which honked loudly, and displaying the Albanian flag – the red background and black two-headed-eagle vigorously waving outside the cars.

People pointed out that the festive mood had just returned to the town; a few months earlier it was full with refugees from Kosovo, who escaped the province in March 1999 when Milošević staged an offensive against the Albanians. During the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia, from March to June 1999 (the war ended only two weeks before my arrival in the town) many more ethnic Albanians found shelter, fleeing Milošević's oppression. Although full with people, the overall mood in the town was somber – the refugees were scared, feeling burdened by the four-month displacement and fearing for their homes in Kosovo. One informant, an ethnic Albanian whose five relatives had stayed with his family for four months, explained that he and his family were willing to offer their hospitality to the refugees for a much longer time, despite the economic burden on the family budget. However, the refugees felt uncomfortable about causing hardship for their local hosts and insisted on contributing to the monthly expenses.

Although everyone was apprehensive about the outcome of the crisis, the mood in Kumanovo changed after the refugees started returning to their homes in Kosovo the month following the cessation of the “successful” NATO bombardment, which had destroyed many important strategic points in Serbia and forced Milošević and the Serbian military to withdraw from Kosovo. During

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<sup>7</sup> The mall is built on the place of the former building *Garnizon* where the Baracks and the Army of the old Yugoslavia (The Kingdom of Yugoslavia that existed before the Yugoslav Federation, from 1919 until 1939) were stationed in the 30s. The old building was torn down in 1992 and the mall along with a tall residential building, were erected.

these three months, Macedonia had received almost 300,000 refugees from Kosovo: 120,000 were stationed in several refugee camps, the largest of which was Stenkovec with about 100,000 people. Around 200,000 people were scattered among Albanian families in Macedonia. Many of them had familial connections, but others were received by their host families because it was “a humane gesture.” The Kosovo province became a UN protectorate with a temporary UN government with more than 40,000 UN troops, officially labelled as KFOR (Kosovo Forces) which have settled in Kosovo and Macedonia since then.

During conversations with ethnic Macedonians, I learned that the Albanian flag had become an indispensable symbol at Albanian festive occasion in the summer of 1999, whether a wedding, a *sunet* or an engagement. This disturbed many Macedonians. “Why do they display a flag of another state – they should go to Albania. This is Macedonia and here we have a different flag”, Vesna, a Macedonian said as we sat in the park. She continued saying:

It is a new habit. They feel empowered after the war in Kosovo. They know they have the West on their side, which just manipulates them, but they feel strong now: they can stick their fingers into our eyes now. Look at these big houses, expensive cars and goods that they have. It is hard to look at all this. Things were different during Yugoslavia and they knew their place. Everything has gone array these days (...). Soon we will be expelled from our own country and will have to ask them for permission what to do in our own country.

Vesna’s view was common among many Macedonians from Kumanovo. The popular belief among Macedonians is that Kosovo’s independence would be the end of Macedonia, as it not only has a large ethnic Albanian minority but also shares borders with both Albania and Kosovo.

The size of Macedonia’s Albanian minority is uncertain. The official figure from the 2002 census cites 25.2 percent (cf. Dimova 2006a). Many Macedonians believe that this combination of an Albanian minority in Macedonia and the proximity of Albania and Kosovo would inevitably lead to ethnic conflict and an all-out war with even larger proportions than the Bosnian war. Evidently, ethnic Macedonians see the ethnic Albanian minority in former Yugoslavia as closely tied to the Albanian motherland. This perception seemed to become particularly strong after events of the spring of 1999. Moreover, many Macedonians were troubled by the presence of the Albanian émigrés who returned to Kumanovo during the summer months.

The fears raised among ethnic Macedonians that Albanians have expansionist aspirations that involve Western Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania have been fuelled by the worsening economic situation. Since 1991 only a small number of Macedonians became rich by privatising the former state-owned companies. Most of the people have struggled for mere survival. The situation has appeared deadlocked: without a real hope that the economy could change and that lives could actually be improved in a foreseeable future, many Macedonians admitted that it was hard to watch Albanians enjoy economic privileges. Although the independence of Macedonia brought about possibilities for opening private businesses, many Macedonians did not have the initial financial support to become entrepreneurs. Many Albanians, however, received this kind of assistance from their relatives abroad. Not surprisingly, many Macedonians felt the presence of Albanians from abroad as a deliberate provocation not only because of the Albanian flag but also because of the proudly-displayed western commodities such as luxurious Western cars, clothes and jewellery in the latest Western European styles, expensive cell phones and other conspicuous and pricey goods.

In the initial phase of my fieldwork, I too was struck by how many Albanians lived abroad, how well their diasporic familial networks functioned and how intensively their presence was felt in Kumanovo. Many of the Albanians indicated the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s as the time of their migration (or of their parents' since many of the young émigrés were already of the second generation, born abroad). It took an intensive library research to understand the historical reasons behind such a large migration of ethnic Albanians.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

The support from the ethnic Albanian diaspora has been crucial not only in its economic but also in its political and military aspect. A newspaper article titled *From Brooklyn to Kosovo*, published in the fall of 1998 in the *New York Times*, describes the role of Albanian migration in the USA for the Albanian minority struggle in Kosovo. A young Albanian émigré in Brooklyn, frustrated by the refusal of the Kosovars' political leadership to confront Serbian repression directly, left Kosovo in 1989 as part of a wave of more than half a million refugees who sought political asylum abroad, mainly in Germany and the United States. From Brooklyn he donated three percent of his income to Rugova's political party. After realising that Rugova's pacifist approach could not change anything, he started sending items such as two-way radios, flashlights, camouflage uniforms and bullet-proof vests to Kosovo. The 300,000 Kosovar refugees in the United States raised \$ 100 million to finance an armed resistance in Kosovo, effectively sidelining Rugova. To trace exactly how Albanians in Kosovo are connected to their diaspora, Stacy Sullivan, the author of the article, followed the young Albanian from Brooklyn to Kosovo. Their first stop was a visit to the young man's relative in Albania, near the borders with Kosovo and Macedonia, in the mountainous region of Sar Planina. Full of Kosovo Liberation Army (K.L.A.) soldiers, Kosovars who recently returned from Germany, Switzerland, and the United States to fight, the house was bursting with activity:

Stacks of ammunition boxes clutter his courtyard, and pistols and rifles are strewn around inside. Besnik's wife and daughter spend their day cooking for the soldiers. His two sons, who just returned from studying in Switzerland and Pakistan, shuttle soldiers and guns in his two four-wheel-drives. Six Albanians from Alaska have just arrived with a briefcase of cash they raised among Alaska's 300 strong Albanian community. (Sullivan 1998)

The initial newspaper story became the basis of the subsequent book *Be not Afraid, For You Have Sons in America* (2004) in which Sullivan describes in more detail how a small group of men in Kosovo, backed by émigrés in the United States started a guerrilla army that drew US support for their war and changed the course of history in the Balkans (Sullivan 2004).

The vast body of literature on transnational migration has persuasively argued for the importance of familial networks established between the migrants and their relatives who remain in the homeland (Rouse 1991; Basch, Glick Schiller et al. 1994; Clifford 1998). These networks have affected the circulation of the economic as well as symbolic capital transforming "communities," affecting and deterritorialising class, ethnicity and gender in unprecedented ways. This article has focused on the re-articulation of Albanian ethnicity through different consumption practices and

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<sup>8</sup> The research for this section was conducted in the summer of 2001 at the National Library of Macedonia in Skopje and at the Hoover Library at Stanford University, California, USA.

class identity induced by interaction with the Albanian diaspora. The changes, although historical rooted in the larger Yugoslav experiment, inform the contemporary reconfiguration of class and ethnicity.

Contemporary nationalism in Macedonia cannot be satisfactorily addressed without examining the crucial variable of internal migration. Contemporary circulation of economic capital between the migrants and the relatives who remained in the country plays a key role in the free market economy adopted by independent Macedonia since 1991. Empowered by their relatives' financial support, many ethnic Albanians in contemporary Macedonia have become wealthier (or more able to count on financial support from relatives abroad) than ethnic Macedonians who neither migrated under the Yugoslav Federation on so large a large scale as ethnic Albanians nor have financial support from family members abroad.

I have argued that the shift in consumption practices after the independence of Macedonia in 1991 can be traced to Yugoslav migration policies. The necessity to migrate during Yugoslavia as the only road to becoming a consumer has allowed ethnic Albanians to take the consumer lead in the post-1991, market-oriented Macedonia. With the dismemberment of the Federation, the Yugoslav "dream" disappeared, leaving many Macedonians poor and unable to provide for their basic subsistence, whereas earlier they had been able to participate in the "Yugoslav dream" without having to migrate abroad. This, in turn, has prevented the development of diasporic familial networks that would allow ethnic Macedonians to rely on their relatives' financial support and the possibility to open private businesses. Albanians, however, have been able to count precisely on such familial support. The reversal of roles and the loss of previous consumer privileges on the part of Macedonians shape their views of, and reactions towards, socially mobile Albanians (Dimova 2004).

The large numbers of ethnic Albanian émigrés who return to Macedonia during the summertime, along with the financial assistance they provide for their extended households, allow ethnic Albanians in Macedonia to become better "consumers" than ethnic Macedonians – more able to share the "dream of globalisation" – to consume and "enjoy" Western commodities. As recently as twelve years ago, the picture was different. While Macedonia was part of Yugoslavia, consumption power was a Macedonian privilege. Since 1991, the independence of Macedonia as well as political economic changes, such as the introduction of private property and the market economy, have enabled ethnic Albanians to become upwardly mobile due to financial assistance from relatives who live abroad. The rise of small and medium-sized businesses owned by Albanians has threatened the economic and class privileges of many ethnic Macedonians, who now accuse ethnic Albanian entrepreneurs of drug trafficking, smuggling and illegal trade.

The forced emigration of ethnic Albanians from Yugoslavia has been integral to the "minority struggle" rhetoric of the contemporary Albanian minority. But a close analysis of the migration process reveals that forced migration under Čubrilović and Ranković were transformed into an "additional measure" of the economic reform in 1965 for economic reasons. The emigration wave in the 1980s was motivated out of a different reason, namely the demonstrations in Priština in 1981, following Tito's death. And while many of my Albanian informants from Kumanovo mainly evoked the repressive aspects of migration abroad – as a mean to escape the persistent discrimination of Albanians by the ruling Slavic nations – relatives who live abroad would often mention that they were lucky to have had the opportunity to migrate and build more prosperous lives there while also assisting their relatives at home.

Indeed, after decades of longing in 1991, ethnic Macedonians have finally gained the international recognition of an independent nation-state, but they did so only at the cost of losing their former class privileges. Many who were once “working class” during Yugoslavia and enjoyed relatively privileged consumer lifestyles, later found themselves unemployed, poor and, as I have argued elsewhere, emasculated (Dimova 2006b). While Macedonians and Albanians in Kumanovo now try to find a *modus vivendi*, they become entangled in shared views of loss of class and ethnic privileges fuelled by the harsh economic reality, unstable political situation and limited possibilities of free travel abroad owing to the severe visa restrictions.

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