Daughters of 'Post'-Socialist Macedonia[1]

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Abstract

My research deals with the post-Yugoslav world of a group of young female engineers in the city of Skopje, Republic of Macedonia. Having grown up in socialist Yugoslavia, these women entered university at the end of the eighties, studying in a predominantly male engineering faculty. Strong women, they embraced Western pop culture, giving Madonna and Beverly Hills 90210 a very new reading. However, the political changes in their country with the externally-imposed construction of post-socialism stifled their feminism (quite different from their mothers' and grandmothers' "liberation" through socialism) into submission towards the "fight against patriarchy" supposedly represented by their past. With this, their past was constructed as the past of their parents and grandparents; that their past derived from a post-Tito Yugoslavia, deriving from a different historicity, was overlooked. Their feminism was based on embracing their sexuality and their bodies. In the political turmoil that ensued, it was their sexuality and their bodies that were subject to the outside changes of Macedonia as a country. Pressed into the universality of womanhood, my informants experienced "the liberation of women" through Western countries as oppression rather than liberation. My research demonstrates the dangers of assuming the validity of a universal "feminism" based on the overthrow of patriarchy. It offers an example of a feminism outside North-American-Western European realms and how it was changed by the so-called liberation of socialist countries towards democracy, equality and liberal market economy using concepts such as gender, sexuality and feminism.

Introduction

It is 7 in the evening on a warm summer night, and we are sitting outside, not in VanGogh or Ciao - we have not been there for years - but at the Tennis Club, watching the little

ones play tennis or climbing around the playground. We are chatting about political events, wondering about friends, eating ice-cream, making plans for holidays; these are the daughters of 'Post'-Socialist Macedonia. In the early 1990s, when I asked my girlfriends what they would wish most for, it was a loving husband and an equal relationship, an adventurous life of traveling and their own business, or going abroad to work for a world organization. Sitting there on this warm summer evening, I can happily report that all their dreams have come true. Yet it was not luck, it was a strong will and a hard fight - a fight against 'post'-socialism, against the definition of themselves by those who declared that socialism was over. This definition encompassed a new world order of liberal and 'post' which resulted in specific gender conceptions in many other post-socialist countries.

On this summer night, my friends talk about times past, their longing for Yugoslavia - for peace, unity, happiness - not socialism *per se*. In this paper, I intend to show that these women have lived and are living a kind of socialism that cannot be found in any political textbook. It is a socialism that has carried my friends through the years over imagined and real borders and inscribed itself on their bodies. As in the eighties, when Maria, Zaneta's mother, taught us how to walk like ladies by having the two of us strut through the living room with *Das Kapital* on our heads. It was light enough to not cause us any serious injuries, but heavy enough not to fall off our heads.

Eastern European Anthropology

Despite the gargantuan changes in Eastern Europe during the last century, commented on by many political analysts and anthropologists alike, women's lives in the past have not only been seen as analytically irrelevant but also as politically ineffective, garnering merely exiguous interest today. In contrast I have argued (Thiessen 2007), that women's lives can be seen equally politically relevant as men's lives. Traditionally however, in Eastern European anthropology, ethnographies are either historically oriented (e.g. Halpern 1972) or deal with specific cultural traditions (Rheubottom 1971). Before the war in Yugoslavia, studies of life in socialist countries had been traditionally conducted in the more oppressive socialist regimes such as those in Hungary (Stewart 1987), Poland (Pine 1987) or Romania (Kligman 1988). Several anthropologists have worked in Yugoslavia in the context of the anthropology of kinship,

primarily, although not exclusively, on the zadruga system (Baric´ 1967; Denich 1974; Halpern & Anderson 1970; Hammel 1972; Mosely 1976; Rheubottom 1980; Erlich 1966). In social anthropology, Macedonia itself has been studied by Rheubottom (1976a,b; 1980 and 1993 [1985]) and Ford (1982) who deal with the adaptive character of traditional culture, Brown (1995) who looks at the issue of nationalism, and Brailsford whose seminal work dates back to 1906 (2nd ed. 1971). Despite some very interesting and moving works written by women such as Bringa (1991, 1995) on Bosnia-Herzegovina and Karakasidou's work on Greek-Macedonia (1997), the only time Yugoslavia or Macedonia has been under anthropological investigation was during the 1960s and 1970s when rural adaptation, kinship, and tradition were under consideration. (Robert Hayden's work is an exception.)

Although the field of Yugoslavia is currently under great political scrutiny again, with a few exceptions women have been left out of the picture for no apparent reason. Therefore, I would like to offer my insights, ranging from the late 1980s to today, about the very active lifestyle of my women-friends in Macedonia in relation to change and crisis. I will argue that by struggling to define European womanhood for themselves, they have created a very new discourse on European identity itself, albeit one of many, yet nevertheless, one that questions European borders.

The Republic of Macedonia presents a unique field of research in that it stayed relatively unscathed by the war, as well as faithful to Tito's socialism, while the circumstances of the war in Yugoslavia and its final disintegration shattered the lives of so many in Former Yugoslavia. Today, it is formidable in its own right due to the current rapid and profound changes in the Republic of Macedonia, which is being challenged in its identity and existence both by its neighbors, Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria, as well as through internal animosities sparked by events in Kosovo that resulted in a civil war in 2001 between the Slavic-Orthodox and the Albanian-Muslim population. The war in Yugoslavia and the unrest in Macedonia have often been attributed to the historical inheritance of 500 years of Ottoman rule as well as a strong patriarchal and agricultural past. In fact, this imagery that has been conjured up by outside politicians and journalists presents an image of Macedonia as frozen in the Balkan past. However, this fails to take into consideration that the Republic of Macedonia has an unusually high level of urbanization in comparison to other post-socialist countries, rendering Macedonia a complex and dynamic site of social change. In view of these circumstances, I will concentrate on

the specific cultural environment of Skopje and the women that live within it since the majority of Macedonia's population lives directly in the capital or in its proximity. My informants are women who were trained as engineers in the early 1990s. The disintegration of Yugoslavia meant that Macedonia was left with a marauding industry with no work for engineers. Therefore my friends used their English skills required to study engineering. English helped them to find work with foreign agencies and companies that came to Macedonia in an effort from abroad to jumpstart Macedonia's economy. In Macedonia there might be a gap between rural and urban perceptions about gender relations and the question of whether women are good engineers. There also might be a difference in expectation of which partner brings in the main household income. However, today's urban and rural communities have been drawn so closely together that it will be hard to find an isolated mountain range where men feud and women procreate, described in several ethnographies of the Balkan (take as example Boehm 1984; Denich 1974; Erlich 1966). What then are the gender relations in Macedonia? How do the women-engineers in Macedonia live their lives today? Are they Balkan women, androgynous socialists or liberal beauties? In response to this, I would like to follow Dubisch:

> '[...] for a true understanding of gender we must move - paradoxically - beyond gender, seeking out its relationship to other aspects of social life. Gender, sexuality, private and public, inside and outside are elements of important and powerful symbolic systems. They are ways of talking about society and individuals' experience in society. But they are more than simply an expression of social order. They are the means of creating and interpreting that order and, beyond that, of ordering and talking about life itself.' (1986: 35)

I will use this approach to look at the essential issue in political and economical debates concerning Macedonia: the question whether Macedonia is a Western-European country or a Balkan state. I am using these debates for the following reasons: first of all, this issue can barely be avoided in Macedonia; secondly, my women-friends greatly resent being viewed as coming from a Balkan country and actively live their lives against this assumption; thirdly, we will end up with a highly interesting twist, a realization that my friends, educated in the Engineering faculty, have made in recent years - their discovery of an identity that I call: Hyper-European.

Female Engineers, Mothers, Daughters

When Macedonia became independent, it was of great interest for me how this would affect the personal and public lives of my friends. Would they lose their jobs and become stay-at-home mothers as one might presume in light of the development from socialism to post-socialism? My women-informants started as university-educated computer or mechanical engineers in Yugoslavia. What would the future hold for them in the Republic of Macedonia? I started my research in 1988 and have lived in Macedonia in 1993 and 1994 and ever since have come back in the summers for at least three months. In this time I have documented the changing lives of my informants, through formal and informal interviews and participant observation. I have developed deep and lasting friendships with my informants. Together we lived through the changes of a socialist country, to a 'post'-socialist country to a country that tries to determine its future. The history of socialism in Eastern Europe originated from a revolutionary change of social relations, especially gender relations. What did post-socialism mean for gender relations in Macedonia? What kind of 'woman' would my friends, empowered through their engineering degree, come to represent?

My women-friends in Macedonia were all born in the 1970s and are living, or have always lived, in Skopje. They were the daughters of young men and women from the countryside. These young people had come to Skopje following the 1963 earthquake that effaced the city from the landscape. These young women and men lifted Skopje out of the ashes with their bare hands, often literally. Skopje became a symbol of the strength of Tito's socialism and his non-aligned movement. Looking at Skopje today, it appears to be a very bizarre modern landscape with its broad boulevards and concrete apartment buildings that create a very iconic cityscape. Today the Republic of Macedonia's government, drawing parallels to other European cities that have churches, fountains, and monuments in their city centers, plans to build a fountain with an Alexander the Great statue, a plethora of churches and monuments dedicated to masculine or wise men next to a space-age symphony as well as the Arc de Triomphe, smack next to the taxi-stand and the entrance of the shopping mall. This is clearly an urban space that surrenders public space instead of dressing it. It conforms to the objectives of the government to conjure up a "European" city rising from the ashes of the former socialist icon by erecting new-antique buildings. Constructed to reflect a European image, these buildings in essence veil the

public spaces that women frequent. However, this is very different from the way my friends used to usurp Skopje's spaces. They grew up with their siblings in the same room; in fact, in most families there was no difference made between son and daughter, either in education or preference. My friends all went together to the same kindergarten, played together on the playground and attended high school together.

A large part of their lives was lived in the public space: the cafés, along the river, the park, the center of town or the old part of town, the *Stara Čaršija.* These are the spaces where my women-friends, with hundreds of other young people, squeezed themselves through the narrow streets at night to meet friends, to laugh, and to have fun. Life was good and the hairstyles were as bad as anywhere else in the eighties. In the nineties, university life began and Europe seemed so close for my Yugoslavian friends: the fall of the Berlin Wall, Interrail and summers of traveling, and then the war. Today, following several attempts of Macedonia to join the EU, the government is changing the public spaces as a deliberate break with the Yugoslav and Ottoman past to create a different past that connects directly with Central Europe.

The Changing Times of a Vanishing Yugoslavia

During the eighties and nineties, my women-friends had started engaging in reformulating Europe by reshaping their own bodies. Today the government is reshaping Skopje, reminding Europe of Macedonia's ancient history, and therefore laying the claim to the beginning of European history itself. Why and how did my friends reshape their bodies? It took me a while to realize that my many of my friends were not eating enough food, but not because of the food shortages. The borders were closed, the trains were running through without stopping, Greece had been boycotting Macedonia since its declaration of independence, Serbia was under siege or besieging – one could not be certain which. Although one thing was certain: during this time my friends went to exercising classes at the gym and 'dieted' in the name of beauty and approximation to Western Europe. Surprisingly my friends' beauty image and their hunger were not internally directed against their body, but externally against the political border-delineation of the West (Thiessen 2007). The grandmothers, who had personally experienced several border re-mappings, were growing old taking care of the family plot in the village where the family would meet and cousins exchange stories. Whereas the mothers were proud of the

beauty of their daughters, so slim and lithe, the grandmothers began to worry about their granddaughters and begged them to eat. During this time my women-friends became upset about the reports from CNN and the BBC concerning the war in Yugoslavia - portrayed as one that was based on ancient hatred, Balkan and non-European - and shouted: "We are not the Balkans! What do these people think – we are modern Europeans just like them." Despite that, they had been marked as living in a world of ethnic and ancient strife, of crazy men in bad clothing killing each other, and of women as victims.

After the war, Europe and the US descended upon Macedonia, as soon as it was considered safe, in the form of consumption: television offering hardcore porn from Germany at three in the afternoon, advertising, glossy magazines, an influx of missionaries from the United States and Korea, and development agencies. All these brought about a specific notion of how women had to be in the new world order of a liberal-market driven democracy and glossy-magazine beauty that my friends had tried to emulate in the nineties.

In this new political order with the foreign political discourse for Macedonia centering around privatization and inter-ethnic conflict, the private sphere of social relationships has not been politicized. Therefore certain socialist achievements concerning gender equality remain legally untouched; this is in stark contrast to other post-socialist countries, which chose to overthrow their socialist inheritance. Abortion has remained legal and the proposed changes to eight-hour working days that accompanied the onslaught of privatization meant to 'Europeanize' Macedonia have been successfully resisted. Men and women continue to finish work at three or four o'clock to come home and spend time with their families. The social inheritance of socialism still exists in Macedonia and has become very important for my women-friends in their definition of themselves.

Admittedly, my friends went about the definition of themselves in an unusual, yet successful route. The consumption of images on television and in glossy magazines in the nineties led to an understanding of the body that supersedes appearance, but promised a whole new lifestyle. During my initial research, this prompted my friends into pursuing a rather extreme form of body alteration. These body alterations ranged from moderate dieting to visiting body-studios, where my friends spent more than a month's salary on a ten-day program that included exercise, electric currents, and a water diet. By the end of the nineties, my friends became savvy and saw 'reality' for what it was by now: 'image-experienced.'

Adversely the living expenses are very high in Macedonia, the incomes are low. Most women I know do not stay at home, but go to work. This is not portrayed as a condition that has to be remedied. None of my informants, neither women nor men, have ever expressed the wish for women to stay at home; indeed, it is viewed almost as 'unnatural.' Women in Macedonia are still in charge of their reproductive rights, and one can even conclude that Macedonian women's bodies, particularly from Skopje, are used as social discourse. This is a social discourse which at once gives the women control over their own bodies, but also gives the nation the possibility to respond with the modern bodies of Skopje's women to show that they are on equal footing with the powerful world around them. Just as women were used as an icon of socialism in Yugoslavia, they are used today to represent Macedonia in the world - as the beautiful and successful women of Macedonia.

Although Butler (1990) reads the body as a text in *Gender Trouble*, I understand the elegantly clad, slender, and beautiful bodies of my friends not as text, but as actual social feminist practice. However, I do not intend to fall into the trap of thinking that my friends use their bodies for the feminist cause by practicing their agency and resistance; this would entirely ignore that both these terms are concretely embedded in the social world of Skopje today. As in many other places in the world, they use their bodies to mark a difference. During my initial research, the difference lay between the younger generation and the parents' generation, as well as between the strong, modern woman from Skopje and the subservient, traditional, rural Albanian woman. Today these differences have lost their meaning as there is a far greater border to mark.

Gender, Borders, Insights, and Misgivings

The commonly cited phrase: 'After the fall of the Berlin Wall a shock wave went through Europe' never identifies through which Europe this shockwave passed. Yes, of course, all of Europe was affected by it, but so was Europe by the oil crisis. In the aftermath of the 'demise of socialism' my friends discussed exactly that issue during my research between 2007 and 2009. Yet it was a very different demise than the one proclaimed by the EU and the USA. For my friends, it was the demise of their freedom and the beginning of their incarceration since the fall

of the Berlin Wall constructed another yet wall, one that was demarcated by the European border construction project.

"We are being kept out of Europe, that is all" (Natasa 2008) and "they are scared that begging women with scarves are going to knock on their door" (Vesna 2007) and "1.7 Million Macedonians will flood the European Labor Market, they let Bulgaria and Romania in, look at their women" (Marko 2008), were the comments that challenged these borders. For my friends, these borders were perceived as constricting their individual identity and their identity as women. The world became divided into the civilized European world, which had seen the light, and the post-socialist world, which still lived in the 'wild' East.

My friends who have grown up being proud of their freedom in Yugoslavia in contrast to other Eastern European countries are left with a very different picture; it is one of belonging to a post-socialist country, which, if it is lucky, will be rescued by Europe. Even more aggravating for them is the fact that they have never been asked if they wish to be defined as post-socialist; Yugoslavia just ceased to exist. My friends found themselves severed from a country that they had loved - from their seaside in Croatia, their summer escapes to the seaside of Montenegro or into the mountains of Slovenia. In addition, they found themselves identified as *hinterland* as it was depicted by 19th century definitions of the influential author Rebecca West (1994 [1941]), or visualized by director Théo Angelopoulos in his film, Ulysses' Gaze (1995). Another source of dismay for my friends was the acceptance of Bulgaria and Romania into the European Union and the rejection of Macedonia. This exclusion should turn our eyes towards the issue of 'borders' themselves and how borders are represented by governments as physical entities when, in fact, they are metaphors of inclusion and exclusion. Giroux points out that at the center of the European territorial border definition lies the idea of 'European High Culture' as the center of civilization in which the overlap from the metaphorical use of borders implies "a transgress of the borders sealed by modernism" (1992:55). Moreover, Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 6) also address the hegemonic topography of borders:

> For example, the representation of the world as a collection of "countries," as in most world maps, sees it as an inherently fragmented space divided by different colors into diverse national societies, each "rooted" in its proper place.

This topography of borders is a physical reality for my friends; it is the reality of 'incarceration,' which is imposed on them by the European Union through visa regulations. Even though visas to enter countries of the European Union were lifted December 19, 2009, this only means that Macedonians can visit their relatives in countries of the EU for 90 days. It does not mean that my friends can travel to France to visit the Louvre. Previously, Macedonians would go to the embassies of the countries they wanted to visit with an invitation from a friend or organization in that country and with the regulated cash amounts of Euros. A friend of mine, traveling to Hungary, needed to show 10,000 Euros at the border and actually needed to travel with that much cash, since credit cards or debit cards with bank statements were not accepted. Now, my friends have the freedom of not having to line up for their Visa application at the embassy in Macedonia. Instead they can travel by car or plane to their destination just to be rejected directly at the border. I have seen people at embassies rejected for no obvious reason, except that the embassy official seemed to have a bad day. Malkki (1992: 25) argues:

> Often, the concern with boundaries and their transgression reflects not so much corporeal movements of specific groups of people, but, rather, a broad concern with the "cultural displacement" of people, things and cultural products (see as well, Clifford 1988; Goytisolo 1987; Hannerz 1987; Torgovnik 1990).

So if we follow Malkki here, we can say that the boundaries created by the European Union are concerned with the purity of 'cultural identity,' not with catching criminal elements. The question that my informants are now asking is how can it be that Macedonia presents a threat to 'Western' cultural purity?

Appadurai (1988:37) also elucidates the issue of Macedonia's exclusion from the current European projects by pointing out that the assigned immobility of drawn borders derives from the premise that borders can only be crossed from the West to the rest and not the other way around:

> The slightly more subtle assumption behind the attribution of immobility is not so much physical as ecological. Natives [*read: Balkan*] are those who are somehow confined to places by their connection to what the place permits. Thus all the

language of niches [*read: Non-Western*], of foraging [*read: Balkan mentality of ancient hatred*], of material skill [*read: Balkan peasants*], of slowly evolved technologies [*read: slow development of liberal market economy*], is actually also a language of incarceration.

[*My interpretation for the specificity of the Balkans in brackets.*]

Nevertheless, while international organizations and government leaders define the territorial borders of sovereignty and membership, the borders of individual and group identity may be quite different and certainly are formed by very different processes. My informants watched the horrors of Srebrenica on CNN and were told that the seed of such horror had been with them all along, somewhere lying dormant in their social identities (see Before the Rain, Milcho Manchevski, 1994). I took part in many discussions at that time about whether or not this could really happen in Macedonia. I will go so far as to argue that the conflict of 2001 was partly caused by this 'outside view' of Macedonia, by its exclusion from Europe. In fact, Grabbe contends:

The opening of east-west borders has coincided with a burgeoning internal security agenda within the EU. A policy area that could be called 'micro-security' is growing fast as policy-makers respond to myriad threats to the security of their citizens by developing new instruments at both national and EU levels. Unlike the 'macro-security' concerns of the Cold War - which primarily involved state-controlled and politically driven threats from national militaries - the new micro-level risks are from private individuals. This privatization of security threats from the east presents a complex dilemma because the movements of autonomous citizens are much more difficult to deal with in the international security framework [...]. (2000: 520)

Grabbe goes on to define the new security risks, foremost, the instability caused by refugees, crime, and the breakdown of law and order (2000: 520). My informants in Skopje are well aware that the European Union links their individual traveling to cross-border crime and the breakdown of civilization. It is not difficult to see that such an interpretation is quite insulting to

my informants who regard themselves as professionals and law-abiding citizens of Europe. In fact, many of my informants have claimed greater morality and less crime within Macedonia because of its socialist past and the compassion that has made Southern Europe a 'Europe with a heart.'

The question facing Macedonia as a state, as well as the individual actors within Macedonia, is: What are the conditions that Europe demands from Macedonia to be included in Europe? According to Grabbe (2002: 252), these conditions are not only general and vague, but also primarily centered on an economic agenda:

> The thrust of the EU's economic agenda [...] is neoliberal, emphasizing privatization of the means of production [and] a reduction in state involvement in the economy [...]. The socio-economic system they implicitly promote has a more "Anglo-Saxon" flavor than [...] [those of the] social market economies of France or Germany. (2002:252)

This presents a core problem to my informants in the city of Skopje who do not identify themselves with dictatorial socialism, but rather, in many conversations over the years, have identified with social democracy as the ultimate political system they had hoped to establish with independence. Analytically that presents one with the question if the term 'post-socialist' can be used so freely. All of my informants do subscribe to democracy, but they also do not want to give up on the 'socialist idea.' Nevertheless, I do know people who would not subscribe to such politics but rather choose to vote for the Nationalists and not for the Social Democrats. I argue that such a vote is made in part with the wish to expel 'the Muslim-Albanian' population - not at all in discrepancy with the EU's position on Turkey's acceptance to the EU.

However, such policies and decisions have real implications for the daily lives of my informants. I argue that my informants do not define the European Union spatially. It is not a place they would like to enter, such would be defined as 'exile;' they define the European Union/Europe metaphorically. Their metaphorical definition of Europe within their personal identity, enacted in the personal life choices on gender issues, consumer choices, and living the economic reality of Macedonia through their workplace choices is based on similarity to Europe rather than an emulation of the only identity that is given to them by Europe - the pariah. Many

Macedonians I know are rejecting the idea of a liberal market economy just as they reject its gender perceptions. Their daily life-choices are based on such rejection. In this way, by defining Macedonia for themselves, my informants redefine Europe and 'the West.' In many conversations, they pointed out to me that Macedonia was very much able to give something to Europe, to even improve Europe, especially concerning gender. With the European Union's rejection of Macedonia, my friends started to reject the relationship between Macedonia and the EU:

> Europe does not care for us. They wish we would not exist, swallowed up by
> Serbia (so they could hate us), or just, for convenience sake, be part of Greece.
> Hah! the Greeks [sic] would like that, wouldn't they? Can you imagine? (Biljana
> 2006)

> I cannot understand what Europe wants from us, they talk to us, but not really.
> All the foreigners here: I do not know what they do here. If I look at them they
> look lost to me. You love Macedonia, you have been here for such a long time,
> but why do they come? Just to make money, that's all. We are just another
> Bangladesh to them. I am sure when they come home they cannot even point out
> on a map where Macedonia is. Just this place within Europe that is not Europe -
> do you get this? (Katarina 2007)

So what creates Macedonia's identity for those from outside of Macedonia? I do not think that these questions have ever been seriously considered by European policy-makers or other international organizations that have come to Macedonia to ease its progress from post-socialism to liberal market economy.

Rather than taking the existence of borders and their recent political transformations as a political event, I am suggesting that these borders form my friends' identities, even further, their gender identities. How do borders appear in daily lives? While sometimes borders merge into each other, they sometimes change significantly in their meaning depending on who is using the term 'border' for identification of themselves and others. To illustrate this, I will look at the

process of 'border-crossings' as my group of informants are involved in them today and how these crossings define gender while crossing the borders to Europe.

Crossing Borders, Shaping Borders, and Bodies

When Yugoslavia still existed, my friends traveled freely throughout Europe; their border-crossings were the same as for any other Central European citizen. When Yugoslavia ceased to exist, my friends, who had come to visit me in Germany during so many summers, were not allowed to cross any borders for lack of a recognized passport. Today crossing borders has acquired a different meaning: it is not about crossing borders, but about how borders are crossed. My women engineer friends have, in fact, taken the active role in reshaping the EU borders that exclude Macedonia from Europe. This 'boundary-shaping' is redefining the meaning of the Balkans and Europe in a surprising manner. What if boundaries do not exclude but merge, creating mutual interdependence? What if there is a 'border-identity' whereby Macedonia becomes the borderland between the Balkans and Europe as well as the first real 'post post-socialist' country of Europe?

I do argue that such 'border identity' can be found everywhere in Skopje today. This 'border identity' is based on my women-engineers feeling that place and history have formed their specific Macedonian identity that is not related to ancient or modern Greece, but rather - as far as my informants are concerned – related to a distinguishable mixture of Europe and the Balkans. It is this identity that gives them the confidence to demand the right to participate and profit from 'trans-border' activities that can be found in development work and international organizations operating in Macedonia. These negotiations demonstrate interesting processes of identity formation in which women's bodies will play a fundamental role.

When one speaks traditionally about border-crossing, one imagines nothing much further than the actual border station. If that were the case, borders would be nothing more than a geographical marker designating the beginning and the end of political entities. However, borders are not lines drawn into the landscape but rather lines of inclusion and exclusion. Borders are crossed for political refuge, economic survival, family reunion, or even a dream. Sometimes this dream might be as banal as a holiday. Although I do not wish to put holidays on the same level as so many desperate border-crossings, they are, nevertheless, an undeniable

aspect of border-crossing. Without going further into the discussion of the phenomena of 'holidays,' I can say that 'holidays' in Macedonia challenge the concept of the border-station. After my friends return from holidays, they have, in effect, erased a part of the very line that was drawn to exclude them. This specific border-crossing corresponds to the internal 'border-crossing' that is going on today within the confines of Macedonia. I think it is safe to say that amongst many of my informants, the value of their identity is measured by their involvement with foreigners inside as well as outside of Macedonia. Their 'European style' holidays therefore defy the image of the Eastern European 'guest-workers' seeking Europe; instead, their creation of boundary fluidity augments European modernity within Macedonia.

Sitting on the beach together with German and English tourists is what makes Macedonia European and challenges anything 'Balkan' within Macedonia. It also offers a strange satisfaction and sense of superiority since many Western Europeans encounter Macedonians for the first time in touristic surroundings, thus giving Macedonians the advantage of knowing so much more about the West. Additionally, these 'Western European' tourists are in for a surprise, according to my friend Vesna (2009), once they realize they have encountered Macedonians. It is here where especially women's bodies and their identity as engineers, gain greater importance. It is Macedonian engineers with chic Gucci glasses and suntanned, hourglass-shaped bodies who are playing with their children in the sand or walking around a resort with them. The children are dressed in Benetton clothing with matching Benetton clothing for the girls' Barbie dolls that most German families could not afford. There is a general condescension amongst these Macedonian tourists about European tourists. Every year my informants tell me with great satisfaction how barbaric German or English tourists have behaved in their Greek beach resort and how badly dressed and cheap these 'European' tourists were.

It was at this point, in Skopje from 2007 to 2008, when personal communications with my informants repeatedly emphasized that the average Macedonian woman's body was so much better taken care of than that of an average European woman. Furthermore, they reiterated that Macedonia does not want to be part of Europe, but rather that Macedonia *should* be part of Europe. This is the epitome of a mindset that changes the dynamics of the EU 'bordering' quite dramatically. For my informants, the borders of the EU shift their meanings and their significance away from the physical borders to the bodies of women. My informants portray themselves as modern Europeans through the hyper-modernity of their sculptured bodies.

The effect of this is that what and who defines 'European identity' has been taken out of the hands of the Europeans and been reinvented by my Macedonian women-engineers through their bodies. Today in Macedonia my women-friends enjoy a multitude of freedoms. All of them have well-paid jobs, a partner who shares the housework and childcare, or they live on their own. However, these achievements did not arise from supra-political changes, were not born as result of the fall of the Berlin Wall or induced by a free-market economy and liberal democracy that divided Europe into the European Union and post-socialist Europe. Instead, my friends attained the lives of modern European women by their resistance to the aforementioned. 'We are proud of our past, it was what made us superior to you Western Europeans' (Silvana 2006). Silvana refers specifically to policies that came in the wake of a liberal market economy and were introduced from the outside, e.g. the change of the working time from 7 - 3 to 9 - 5 that would make it necessary for one parent to be at home when the school children came back for lunch, changes in the abortion law, changes in the placement of women in advertising and the rise of pornography aired in the middle of the day. Additionally, there were changes in the dress codes for women at the workplace and last but not least, the extreme rise in childcare costs.

While these changes occurred, many of my women-engineers started living on parsley soup, went for runs in the midday sun and to the gym. These women's bodies are not those of Balkan peasants or androgynous socialist women, or cover girls. In today's European power structure, Macedonia's dependency on foreign development and military aid is more than significant and beautiful bodies serve the country's economic interests: they invite foreigners in, they invite foreigners out, they present, they represent, they translate, explain, accompany, and also travel abroad becoming stakeholders of political or global businesses interests. It is in this respect that I contend that my women-friends successfully subvert EU-borders via their hyper-European bodies.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Continuation of Being Women Engineers

The real problem about incorporating women into the political discussion of socialism, post-socialism and political change does not lie at the level of empirical research, but at the theoretical and analytical level. However, my women-friends' transgression of European borders through their own transformation into Europeans or even Hyper-Europeans demonstrates their

political savvy and consequently should be admitted to the theoretical and analytical discussions of post-socialism. Women deal on a day-to-day basis with the political and economic consequences of post-socialism. My women-friends respond to recent border negations, such as NATO membership, EU membership, Schengen-visa, free visa for family reunions in the midst of Greece's reproaches about the name of the Republic of Macedonia, with their understanding of their bodies.

The hoped-for EU integration implied changes of gender relations. Women play a complex role in the political tug-of-war where the European borders start or end - if they exist at all. These matters are crucial in discussing identity and gender in Macedonia. One must not forget that in a world where individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options (Giddens 1991:5), the choices between the 'West' and 'Balkan,' 'us' and 'them' is only one of many. While the Nationalist government in its own right has started to oppose Europe and has ferociously pursued Macedonia's link with Alexander the Great for the past three years, my women-friends have opposed a post-socialist identity, translating their current identity into a 'hyper-European' identity. Whereas my friends were starving themselves in order to be accepted to a United Europe in the nineties (see Thiessen 2007), today they are highly stylish European women, highly educated, working out, playing tennis, and traveling abroad. They have children that dress in the most up-to-date fashion and go to English, ballet, and piano lessons. My women informants react to Europe's refusal to recognize Macedonia as European by creating their private and public world in Skopje, what I call 'hyper-European', meaning in their translation, 'better than European.'

My friends today have meaningful lives and relationships, and all of them work. They earn the same as their husbands, they have time for family lunch and evening activities with their children and friends. These are certainly very European lives. The point I would like to stress is that gender relations in Skopje have not changed for the worse since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Life changed for my friends: they grew up, finished their engineering degree, married and had children. They pulled themselves through the political and social changes in their country, through terror and chaos. It is these women who are questioning post-socialism. In respect to their personal lives, there is no viable evidence that foreign-imposed post-socialism actually took place and changed their social as well as political world. Even though there were economic changes that came with 'post'-socialism, it would, nevertheless, have to be argued that those

changes might have taken place anyway. For my friends, I can report that they live the life, socially and economically, they dreamt of when we went to the General University Building to register for their first seminar in 1988. It was a dream born out of Yugoslavia. My friends, with their strong sense of determination, have created themselves to be what and who they set out to be in 1988. Their objective never involved becoming post-socialist. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the war in Yugoslavia, however, my friends were declared post-socialist, belonging to an entity that had to be lifted to the demarcations of the European civilized world. In defiance, my friends, by means of their bodies and by the borders they cross, invested themselves not in being 'post'-socialist, but in being hyper-European.

Whereas my engineering-friends were still trying to emulate Western images in response to the creation of 'post'-socialism in the nineties, resentment arose in the 21st century upon their placement outside the borders of Europe with its implied gender and economic disadvantages. This resentment derived specifically from the loss of freedom that this placement created. Instead of bothering with the external border the EU created for them, my friends set out to cross those demarcations differently. What was Europe for them? When I ask my friends this, they tell me: the Louvre, the British Museum, the carnival in Venice, the Paleo in Siena, the Greek Islands of Mykenos and Santorini. These were easy-to-reach places during the existence of Yugoslavia, yet difficult to travel to today although the idea of a United Europe had promised even greater freedoms. However, when my friends do travel, they travel as 'Europeans.' They take Europe multi-directionally across the borders via their bodies. Europe travels in the clothes and shoes they wear, in how they cut and color their hair, how they walk, how well they speak English, and how well-read they are. Europe is carried in the bodies of women. My women-friends show who they are through their choice of what they purchase and where they shop.

All this sets them apart as European, but further, they are every bit as European as the Europeans, just a little bit better. Their clothes are immaculate, neatly pressed, and fashionable. Their posture is straight and confident with a slight air of condescendence and they are always fresh from the hairdresser. Women travel together on a shopping trip, alone on a business trip, or with their husbands on a vacation. Europe is a Europe of many faces, yet the European face of Macedonia has its own unique face - a beautiful one. I have taken some liberties here, but other than presenting these images, I cannot convey the disdain my friends felt when Macedonia was not accepted into the European Union even though Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria were

admitted. This is not meant derisively but the point remains that Macedonia was still not accepted. Today my friends do not want to be in a Europe that does not want them. They deem it unfit to beg for EU membership for Europe is theirs already, despite the borders that have been drawn by others.

Conclusion

With my example of today's women-engineers in the Republic of Macedonia, I hope to have pointed out the dangers of assuming universal borderlines of differentiation in concepts such as post-socialism. It is important to ask for each ethnographic site who declared socialism to be 'post.' In this paper, I have contrasted the concept of 'post'-socialism with another concept, that of 'Hyper'-Europe. Do both exist? Who is to tell? It certainly is analytically important to discuss 'post'-socialism as located within the realm of 'Western Europe' and not exclusively located in the theoretical and analytical realms of 'Eastern Europe' or 'Balkan.' Such analytical and theoretical concepts forego the possibility of 'crossing borders.' My friends' beautiful bodies challenge the theoretical and analytical concepts of 'post'-socialism and 'Western Europe.' It is their beautiful bodies that literally cross borders by crossing border-stations and iconic demarcations. *Das Kapital,* gracefully balanced on our heads, was heavy enough to re-shape our bodies, yet light enough not to fall and crush our big toe. The so-called liberation of socialist countries towards democracy, equality, and liberal market economy called post-socialism set out to reformulate economic and political concepts but forgot that these very concepts are based on lived experiences. I have found that my group of women-engineers provides an excellent lens on the changes in Macedonia and Europe, specifically because they refuse to submit to any fixed position within the borders of 'post'-socialism.

Notes

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