

Abstract *Class* and *ethnicity* represent major obstacles in establishing new forms of homosexual encounters and emotional engagements between Macedonian and Albanian men at the ‘gay’ scene in Skopje. This article pays special attention to the nationalist imperatives that order Macedonian and Albanian ‘gay’ men to use each other’s penises and orifices as weapons and targets of torture. More precisely, the article offers a multilevel analysis of a range of social (class, ethnic, and gender) relations, as invested in and experienced in the male body, that prevent Macedonian and Albanian ‘gay’ men from establishing new forms of mutual friendship and love.

Keywords homosexuality, Macedonia, masculinity, nationalism, queerness

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Suck My Nation – Masculinity, Ethnicity and the Politics of (Homo)sex

‘I must not love an Albanian man!’

It was a cold November evening in 1995 in Skopje, and I was on my way from the ethnically mixed suburb of Chento, where my parents live, to the centre of the city. My body was shivering with dread, because a friend of mine convinced me to return to a place from my gay past now in the capacity of a student of homosexuality. This ‘gay’ underground haunted me with memories of unpleasant sex, aggressive national chauvinism and machismo. Everyone on the bus seemed to be so tense. I could not stop wondering about the moment when the illusion of civic normalcy, the pact of non-aggression between Macedonians and Albanians, between rich and poor, would shatter into Bosnian pieces.

I got out at the bus stop in front of the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences, just opposite one of the busiest ‘gay’ cruising spots in the Macedonian capital, called derogatorily by Macedonian ‘gays’ the *Selska*

(*The Peasants' Terminus*). The majority of activities in this cruising area happen in and around one of the main Skopje urban transport bus interchanges. All buses arrive and depart from here to the outskirts of the capital or the villages surrounding the capital. Its spatial position and its not completely urbanized ugliness reminds Macedonians of their rural past, and as such it bears many symbolic meanings for both straight and gay Macedonians. This is a marginal, dark place sandwiched between national institutions, where jobless hustlers mix with the Macedonian nouveaux riches, where plumbers bump into public servants, and where students meet their teachers.

I was chatting to some friends at the bus stop until a breathtakingly handsome man in his mid-twenties entered my field of vision. I was taken by this man's beauty. Tall, with long dark hair, broad shoulders and narrow waist, with a slightly cocky walk and a noble face, this man alerted us to our desire. I started trembling silently in anticipation of numerous possibilities of enjoyment. The man glanced at me, cheekily giving me a signal that the next move was mine. However, at the very moment my eyes met his, I turned my gaze, filled with guilt, sorrow, frustration, and incomprehensible anger, away from him. In a fleeting moment, I understood that *this* could not happen, 'must not happen', because the man was Albanian. Although I had never seen or talked to this man before, I knew immediately that he was Albanian.

It took only a few seconds to read his haircut, his dress, his bodily gestures, and his walk as signs of his Albanicity.¹ As soon as I was able to symbolize this man as an 'Albanian', I felt paralyzed. In a flash I felt the mobilization of something within my body ordering me to stick to my Macedonian gender/sexual/ethnic script.² I obeyed by putting the (discursive) mask of my Macedonicity over my body.³ As soon as I recognized an 'Albanian', I assumed the role of a 'good Macedonian'. I denied myself the thought of satisfying my desire for this *other*. I projected onto him the forfeit of my desire as soon as he realized that I was a Macedonian, and therefore cast in the role of a Macedonian 'bottom',⁴ as written in the sex script of the gay scene in Skopje, but not in my desire. It does not matter whether the Albanian would have really acted like that if I had had the courage to approach him. What matters is the process of self-policing of my desire, of sublimating my gay desire, of exchanging it for a wish to be a 'good Macedonian'. If I had seen this man walking down Oxford Street in Sydney, where I live, I might have reacted quite differently, but in the capital of Macedonia I retreated to the terrorist security of my Macedonicity, not prepared to take any chances. My past experiences of the 'gay' scene in Skopje, mediated by a symbolic script of violation (of my masculinity) as contained within the Macedonian language, did not allow me to see this man as anything else but a verbal and physical threat to my integrity.

Who was I trying to impress? How could this desire to be a ‘good Macedonian’ resurface ferociously when I, as a politicized queer, spent so much time and effort to subvert and ridicule it? I felt the suffocating clutches of the Macedonian ‘gay’ scene. The underground world of man-to-man sex in Macedonia always left me despondent. Caught between the imperative to be a ‘good Macedonian’ conforming to the heterosexist, misogynistic, homophobic, nationalist norm, and my (homo)sexual desire, I found myself compromising both. In other words, I never experienced pleasure deriving from a compulsion to obey the socially constructed norm (Grigg, 1991), nor did I experience any genuine sexual pleasure as an active member of the so-called ‘gay’ scene in Skopje (1982–1992). I found it almost impossible to transgress the sexual/gender/national norm. It is within the context of an analysis of the social factors that conditioned me as a ‘gay Macedonian’ that I situate my ethnography of the Skopje ‘gay’ scene.

Doing a queer ethnography

The idea for the title of this article came to me in a profoundly painful moment of reflection on the images, the memories, the narratives, the smells, the sounds, and the emotions I associate with the disciplines that constitute me and other ethnic Macedonians as ‘gay Macedonians’. By making my own (Macedonian, Australian, gay, queer) identity an ‘explicit and integral part’ (Wafer, 1996: 261) of my ethnographic text, I signal my intention here to write a *queer experiential ethnography* of the ‘gay’ scene in Skopje.⁵ To write a queer experiential ethnography does not mean to write a *confessional* ethnography, in which the ethnographer confesses his/her perversion (his homosexuality), according to many homophobic protocols established by canonical genres of academic writing in the humanities (Miller, 1992). Writing an experiential ethnography means to *write from* one’s own *experience*. This, however, does not mean that ethnographers should elevate themselves to heroes in the ethnographic text at the expense of an ethnographic analysis of the social factors that have constructed them (Wafer, 1996).

To write a queer, experiential ethnography is to commit an act of ethnographic honesty, whereby the ethnographers implicitly acknowledge that the social and cultural environment in which they have lived (in my case for more than 12 years) is not an objective reality separate from ethnographers themselves (Wafer, 1996: 264). As I demonstrated in the introductory pages, I entered this text as just another participant ‘in the social and cultural world being described rather than as an observer with a god’s-eye view’ (Wafer, 1996: 264). Queer ethnographers (including myself) refuse to commit themselves to a textual lie, which continues to

persist in much of what is considered a 'real ethnographic work', by demonstrating that the ethnographer does not enter the ethnographic field as a 'disembodied and therefore asexual being' (Wafer, 1996: 264). The ethnographers' habitus (Bourdieu, 1993), their sets of class, ethnic, religious and gender dispositions inform their desires, including their sexual desires, as I hope to show in this article, which in turn permeates their interpretation of the data. One cannot observe someone else's sexual desire from a safe, detached, distance. One has to experience it in order to understand it (Bolton, 1995; Wafer 1996).

An increasing number of feminist, postcolonialist, gay and lesbian, and queer anthropologists have challenged/decentred the notion of the ethnographic 'field' as a relatively closed, small-scale physical space (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Wilson, 1995) that could be easily observed by traditional methods of detached participant observation (Weston, 1997). They have replaced the notion of the 'field' with the notion of 'location'. The main aim of these ethnographers is to demonstrate the wide-ranging possibilities of such an ethnographic method in observing one's own culture(s) and social locations. Location is not just 'something one ascriptively *has* (white middle-class Macedonian male homosexual, for example) – it is something one strategically *works* at (a queer trying to break the confines of his/her gender, nation, class, ethnicity, etc.; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 37). In other words, these ethnographers demonstrate that one cannot study sexuality, gender, class and ethnicity without paying attention to the 'interlocking of multiple social-political sites and locations' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 37) in the production of a certain social phenomenon, culture or behaviour. The social nature of the 'gay' scene in Skopje requires an analysis of this type.

The 'gay' scene in Skopje does not produce by itself any of the main subject-locations (sexuality, gender, class and ethnicity) that I analyze in my ethnography. The 'gay' scene in Macedonia demonstrates a unique way of negotiating these subject-locations in a sexual encounter between two men of different ethnicity and class (a middle-class Macedonian man and a working-class Albanian, for example). However, a simple description of this negotiation will not reveal why the negotiation takes this particular form (the Albanian usually fucking the Macedonian, for example), and not some other form. The 'gay' scene in Macedonia is just one ring in a tightly connected chain of social sites in Macedonia. As I later show, the 'gay' scene is inextricably linked to the Macedonian school system, the structuring of Macedonian and Albanian families and kinship relationships, the Macedonian state and its political history, the Macedonian medical system with its power to mark and segregate 'abnormality' (read homosexuality), etc. This is the main reason why I could not simply rely on data gathered from interviews conducted with members of the 'scene'.

In most cases, the members of the 'scene' were unaware of the complex social, economic, political, historical and cultural dynamics organizing their sexual desires. Many Macedonian 'gays' told me that they did not want to have sex with Albanian men; when I asked them why, all they did in response was to reproduce their racist prejudices. They were completely oblivious to the economic and social realities masked by their prejudices. Simply describing their prejudices here would not have amounted to much. For this reason, I simply could not write an ethnography of the Skopje 'gay' scene purely in terms of grounded theory developed out of my primary ethnographic data. My primary ethnographic data consist of participant observation field notes, detailed field notes about 20 semi-structured conversations with members of the scene, my personal diaries from the period when I lived in Macedonia (1980s and early 1990s), and the diaries and literary works of a prominent gay Macedonian intellectual. I read these data against a range of government documents, statistical data, printed media articles and scholarly works on Macedonian history, politics, and nationalism. I do this type of ethnographic reading in order to provide critical insights into the construction of homosexual behaviours and identities in Macedonia. At the same time, I try to intervene in the debates in my academic field, which is the area of studies of gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity. For this reason, the ethnography I present here is a *critical* ethnography.

Furthermore, the very constitution of the 'gay' cruising area in Skopje as a place called for imaginative use of ethnographic methods of collecting data. The place itself defies spatial categorizations. It is a place that is private and public at the same time. It is a space that is both material and imagined at the same time, since its blurred boundaries and (sexual) functionality depend on a creative use of public spaces (public toilets, dark street corners, bushes in public parks, the underbelly of stairways leading to public buildings, car parks, under bridges). Its imaginary boundaries and possible uses are known to a group of initiated men who are not willing to share this knowledge with any outsiders. It is an intense space where the excitement of breaking the law converges with a myriad of techniques of social control. It is a leaky, vulnerable place where exclusion of the unwanted voyeur, the violent gay basher, the security guard and the policeman is almost impossible (Woodhead, 1995: 239).

The only way for one to get an intimate, rich and meaningful knowledge about how these men perform the 'gay' scene's clandestine rituals, how they produce its knowledges, and what meanings and emotions they ascribe to their sexual acts, is to participate in this (sub)culture. One cannot barge in here with a tape recorder and say: 'Hi, I'm an ethnographer from Australia. I want to interview you, so I can get information about what sort of meanings and emotions you ascribe to your sexual acts'.

As Bolton notes, 'sexual behaviour is not easily observable' (1995: 148). Remaining detached from the 'sexual interaction system', insisting on 'unobtrusive naturalistic observation', results in superficial, or even worse, in inaccurate ethnographic accounts (Bolton, 1995: 149). In many ways, this ethnography would not have been possible if I was not an 'insider' in this milieu. The members of the 'gay' scene would not have provided any meaningful information to an outsider who is unaccounted for in the symbolic/gender/ethnic/class classificatory codes developed by the scene (Wafar, 1996: 266). The virulently homophobic environment in which Macedonian 'gays' live, and the history of state intimidation, make Macedonian 'gays' very wary of 'outsiders'. My respondents refused to be taped, thus forcing me to take extremely long and detailed notes after the end of every conversation in the field. They also refused to sign any consent forms. They did not want to be identified in any way due to an understandable fear that the information might be used against them. Since my primary ethical duty as an ethnographer is to prevent any harm being inflicted on my respondents, I had to give up on the idea that I could follow a patently unsuitable, for this case, subject/researcher ethics protocol developed by western university ethicists for western research contexts. After I gave my respondents the protection assurances they sought, I was seen just as an old member of the scene who, after a considerable absence, had returned 'home'. By being positioned in this way, I was offered access to the most revealing aspects of the lives of the members of the 'gay' scene.

In summary, what I am attempting to do here is write an *insider, critical* and *experiential* ethnography of the multitude of social locations (class, gender, ethnicity, religion) from which 'gays' in Macedonia are positioned, governed, controlled and silenced as subaltern people. In order for us to understand the predicament of these people a multilevel analysis is required. I initially provide an account of how homosexual *desire* at the 'gay' scene is structured around the gendered axis of masculinity/femininity and activity/passivity. This analysis is immediately followed by an exploration of the impact of class and ethnicity in the discursive multiplicity involved in constructing homosexual *identities* at the scene. The absence or presence of homosexual identities at the scene is then linked to the effects of class and ethnicity in negotiating the sexual *acts* performed in encounters between Macedonian and Albanian men. Further to this, I add another layer to my analysis by demonstrating how Macedonian and Albanian nationalism controls the bodies of Macedonian and Albanian 'gay' men. I conclude with an analysis of the absence of social conditions for the emergence of a multicultural gay community in Macedonia and the impact of this absence on developing new forms of friendship and love between Macedonian and Albanian 'gay' men.

Bugger the other

In organizing my argument here, I follow Huseyin Tapinc's lucid ethnography of Turkish homosexualities. Tapinc, in his essay 'Masculinity, Femininity, and Turkish Male Homosexuality' (1992), discusses the construction of different male homosexualities in contemporary Turkish society. In many respects, his analysis can also be applied to Macedonia. Macedonia was culturally, politically, and economically a part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire for five centuries (from the early 15th to the early 20th century). Traces of Ottoman rule are still highly visible in contemporary Macedonia. The presence of Islam is strongly felt too, although its interactions with the Orthodox Christianity of the majority (around 70% of the population) and the communist atheism of the Macedonian state in the last half century produced different Moslem cultural formations than those present in Turkey.

Tapinc's essay provides a good starting point, since all Balkan and Mediterranean cultures share a particular configuration of patriarchy, misogyny, and homophobia. There are some important differences in the constructions of homosexualities in the Balkan, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies from the constructions of homosexuality in the West, presenting enormous difficulties in making ethnographic data concerning homosexualities in these cultures intelligible to western readers. The terms 'homosexual' and 'gay' do not necessarily have the same meanings in Macedonia that they have in the developed West. The term 'homosexual' in Macedonia is used mainly in official medical/legal/mass media discourses. The term 'gay' is used by a tiny minority of middle-class Macedonian homosexuals in order to describe a very fragile, hybridized form of a (homo)sexual identity that only simulates gay subjectivity as known in the West. This explains why I consistently put the terms 'gay' and sometimes 'homosexual' (and their derivative adjectives) in this article in inverted commas.

However, the 'gay' scene in Skopje is a microcosm of power/knowledge that is in many respects a unique place, very different from, let us say, the gay scene in Istanbul. Tapinc's analysis reveals four 'homosexual' scenarios. In the next few sections, I focus my attention on the first three models, which revolve around rigidly understood distinctions between masculinity and femininity. I explore the fourth form of homosexuality at the end of the article, since it is qualitatively quite different from the first three modes of homosexual behavior and identity.

Tapinc's first scenario is that of the masculine 'heterosexual' (1992: 40). This involves sexual behavior which 'is confined to mutual masturbation and excludes oral and anal sex' (1992: 40). Men engaging in this type of sexual behavior consider it a 'heterosexual' experience, because

masturbating with other men in these societies (the Turkish and Macedonian) is not considered to be homosexual behavior.

The second scenario of homosexual encounters is that of the masculine 'heterosexual' and the feminine homosexual. As Tapinc notes in the case of Turkey, and this is true of Macedonia too,

. . . the key aspect of this model is the clear distinction between the masculine, 'active' inserter and the feminine, 'passive' insertee, who regard their sexual/gender identity as heterosexual and homosexual, respectively. The most common sexual practice among individual participants is expected to be anal intercourse and then fellatio in which the well-defined conventional sexual roles, being 'active' and 'passive', persist in both sexual acts.

This socially recognised separation between 'active' inserter and 'passive' insertee roles in homosexual behaviour enables many heterosexual men to engage in homosexual relations which are considered to be a 'secondary sexual outlet', since, for them, although the sexual relation takes place in a 'homosexual context', it satisfies a 'heterosexual need' . . . This suggestion in fact echoes the widespread preference for and occurrence of anal sex in which the masculine, 'active' inserter partner (not necessarily homosexual) represents the almighty power of the penetrating phallus, while the feminine, 'passive' insertee (and homosexual) stands for the anal powerlessness (Hocquenghem 1978). In fact, this relation of power is analogous to heterosexual sexuality in which the man with his phallus exercises power over women who lack it. (1992: 41)

Tapinc's third 'homosexual' scenario is the script of a social/sexual relationship between a 'masculine homosexual' and a 'feminine homosexual'. Although both partners involved in this type of relationship internally assume a homosexual identity, the division between 'masculine' and 'feminine' sexual/gender roles is still rigidly enforced. The erotization of the body in this model includes more areas of the body than the second homosexuality. In other words, in contrast to the purely genital sexuality of the second model, the third model involves kissing, fondling, and caressing of the whole body as a legitimate sexual expression that does not threaten the 'masculine' and 'feminine' identities of both partners, as long as both always play the same 'appropriate' roles in genital sexuality (anal coitus and fellatio). The social/sexual identities of both partners in this model are constructed within a social framework of inequality, which in Macedonia derives from the phallogocentric investment in the 'superiority' of masculinity manifested in the exclusive penetrative sexuality of the masculine heterosexual or the masculine homosexual. Most casual and long-term homosexual relationships between partners with the same ethnic backgrounds are constructed within the boundaries of this model.

In the fourth model, to which I return at the end of the article, the traditional boundaries between active and passive partners disappear. The second and third 'homosexual' scenarios are hegemonic forms of

homosexuality at the Skopje ‘gay scene’ and as such they are part of the web of social institutions which reproduce hegemonic masculinity. Those men who play the active role of an inserter are known at the Macedonian ‘gay’ scene as *ebachi* (*fuckers*). This is regardless of whether they internally assume a masculine ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’ identity. Those men who play the passive role of an insertee are known at the scene as *tetki* (*aunties*). The more derogatory term for *aunties* is *buljashi* (*arse givers*).

The second scenario is particularly interesting because of its highly, although not immediately apparent, politicized nature. The division within this model between masculine ‘heterosexuals’ and feminine ‘homosexuals’, as I have suggested, is played out also along ethnic, religious and class lines in Macedonia. The camp of masculine *ebachi* (*fuckers*) at the ‘gay scene’ comprises mainly working-class Moslem Albanians, while the contingent of feminine *aunties* comprises mainly Christian working- and middle-class Macedonians. There is a paradoxical ‘class solidarity’ between working-class Albanian *fuckers* and working-class Macedonian *aunties* or *buljashi* in enforcing a rigid gender division between ‘tops’ and ‘bottoms’ at the scene. Both groups of men validate their superior gender and sexual capital at the ‘gay’ scene – although they assume diametrically opposed positions on the axis of privileged masculinity/activity and subordinate femininity/passivity – by policing and excluding mostly middle-class Macedonian gays who refuse to subscribe to the mentioned gender and sexual divisions at the scene. Since this is a very complex and complicated issue, I ask the reader to bear with me as I try to develop my argument about the impact of class on (homo)sexual behavior in the next two sections.

By insisting on constant reversal between being an inserter and insertee, middle-class Macedonian ‘gays’, known at the scene as *zbargonotetki* (*blokey sisters*), threaten to abolish the gender configuration of power asymmetry at the scene and thus disband one of the few social sites in Macedonia where working-class men who have sex with men feel superior to middle-class men. This is even more important to Albanian working-class ‘gays’ since the marginalization they experience in Macedonian society is so extensive that they cannot tolerate a shift in the configuration of ‘gay’ sex towards de-privileging of penetrative, phallic masculinity as a criterion of social superiority. Although Macedonian working-class *aunties* complain of the harsh treatment they receive at the hands of working-class Albanian *fuckers*, they more or less actively cooperate with them in identifying *blokey sisters* and making sure that the *blokey sisters* are excluded from the scene. Many times this exclusion takes the form of a bashing of the *blokey sister* performed by *fuckers*.

Homosexuals, arse givers, class and ethnicity

Macedonian 'gays', as marginal(ized) members of the socially, economically, and politically dominant ethnicity in Macedonia are exposed to a set of normalizing disciplines that do not apply to Albanians (including Albanian men who have sex with other men). This is as much a result of the systemic discrimination against Albanians since the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia in 1945 as from Albanians' active resistance to participating in hostile institutions (the Macedonian school system, the army, the public service, etc.) (Lambeviski, 1997). Three crucial, and closely interconnected, discursive regimes (and sets of practices) that inform the 'gay' sex culture in Macedonia, as I have outlined briefly, reflect these complex social interactions between Macedonians and Albanians.

The first is the modern medical discourse with its pathologizing regime of (homo)sexuality from which Albanian men have been largely excluded due to their inferior socioeconomic position. For ethnic Macedonian gays, easy access to better and higher levels of education (high schools and university) means absorbing the epistemology of the homosexual as constructed by the medical discourse and disseminated in different ways through the educational system. This privileged access of (middle-class) Macedonian homosexuals to (*scientific*) knowledge makes their very imagining as *homosexuals* possible. In opposition to this, the general lack of educational, and thus job opportunities (Lambeviski, 1997; Macedonia, 1997) for ethnic Albanian men who have sex with men, has resulted in a complete, and not very regrettable, bypassing of the pathologizing medical discourse's epistemology of the homosexual. In a nutshell, this means that the same sexual acts at the 'gay' scene produce very different (if any) sexual identities in the two ethnic groups of men. While a considerable number of Macedonian men who have sex with other men identify as homosexuals, with all the pathologizing implications that come with that identification, most Albanian men who frequent the beats do not identify as 'homosexual'. Nine out of twelve ethnic Macedonians whom I interviewed at the scene identified as homosexuals and had sought psychiatric treatment at some stage of their lives for their 'disease'. All Albanian informants (eight of them, and all of them working class) made it clear to me that the term 'homosexual' was utterly alien to them.

The second discursive regime that underpins Macedonian homosexual culture is the discourse of popular homophobia. This discourse is enunciated by a range of social sites like the family, the school, the state, the media, the medical profession and the 'gay' scene itself. The discourse revolves around images and signifiers that denote a 'sexually deviant and gender-deviant male, [who] is defined by his supposedly "feminine" love of being sexually penetrated by other men' (Halperin, 1998: 100). This

gender-deviant male is known at the 'gay' scene as the already mentioned *buljash* (*arse giver*). By signaling that he 'wants' to be penetrated by other men, the *buljash* effectively is stripped of all of his male privileges. He becomes a completely dehumanized object for the sexual satisfaction of the 'real' men. He is constructed as a completely passive, submissive creature that is even supposed to 'enjoy' being raped, bashed and abused. This discourse is perhaps best exemplified by the curious overlap that exists between the attitudes of macho men who rape *buljashi* at the scene, and the Macedonian police's response to it.

The third discursive regime is that of the 'gay' scene itself with its indigenous and imported knowledges. This discursive regime produces multiple and contradictory, or rather hybridized, identities housed in one body. As I indicated earlier, Macedonian men who have sex with men are, generally, in a better economic position than their Albanian counterparts. They travel to the West more often than Albanian men do and they bring snippets of western gay culture to Macedonia, including western gay pornography. US gay video pornography, with its emphasis on the gay hypermasculine clone, has almost single-handedly contributed to the discursive severing of the associative links between 'being a real, muscular, macho man' and 'not getting fucked' among many young Macedonian gay men. They can view this material in privacy since many Macedonian middle-class homosexual men live on their own (because they can afford to), or with friends, thus effectively escaping parental/familial surveillance (which is completely the opposite case from the majority of Albanian men who have sex with other men). The homes of middle-class ethnic Macedonian homosexuals are more or less open to younger, attractive, working-class Macedonian men (since they enlarge the circle of possible sexual partners for middle-class Macedonians.), thus allowing these Macedonian working-class men to negotiate an untraditional sexual identity. This results in a rudimentary construction of a homosexual/gay cultural identity (as we know it in the West) for both middle- and working-class Macedonians.

However, many working-class Macedonians are excluded from this network because of their age, lack of physical beauty and lack of basic cultural capital that would make them appealing to Macedonian middle-class men. This exclusion in turn produces such a resentment on the part of the excluded working-class Macedonian 'gays' that they are quite happy to see Macedonian middle-class 'gays' getting bashed by Albanian hustlers at the 'gay' cruising area in Skopje. Albanians are more or less completely excluded from this network because they are constructed as 'primitive and dangerous', as people lacking the required cultural capital to socialize with middle-class Macedonians.

Having signaled the impact of class and ethnicity on sexual acts performed in (homo)sexual encounters between Macedonians and

Albanians, I now further develop my argument about 'gender' and 'sexual' capital.

Class, gender and sexual capital

From the very outset here, I want to stress that one needs to be very careful in bringing class analysis of any form into an area of social life like pleasure, sexual desire, and fantasy which are not, properly speaking, constituted as class processes (Fraad et al., 1994).

Although I do not view sexual pleasure as a class process, this does not mean that class doesn't play any role in it, or that sexual pleasure is devoid of various forms of power, including domination, exploitation and government of sex. Class as a marker of one's position within the system of economic production does not produce uniform power effects across the whole range of possible social interactions one might have in a myriad of social sites. One may be an exploited or powerless gay factory worker in a capitalist economy, but this does not necessarily mean letting one's male exploiters as a class deploy one's body as they wish if you bump into them in a sex venue, or at a cruising area. Contemporary homosex is a locally coded set of discourses and practices that requires what Foucault calls microphysical analysis of power. The 'gay' scene in Skopje as a site of power does not simply replicate the power relations that exist between, for example, working-class Albanians and middle- and upper-class Macedonians in the economic sphere. The scene produces, as I demonstrated earlier, its own micro-configuration of power.

Both Macedonian and Albanian men bring their *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1984) to the 'gay' scene. This is a knowledge that is accumulated through upbringing and formal education (through the education system) and confers a special social status on its holders. Thornton succinctly summarizes Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital by saying that it 'is the linchpin of a system of distinction in which cultural hierarchies correspond to social ones and people's tastes are predominantly a marker of class' (1995: 10). Further, she observes that in addition to the cultural, economic and social capital,

Bourdieu elaborates many subcategories of capital which operate within particular fields such as 'linguistic', 'academic', 'intellectual', 'information' and 'artistic' capital. One characteristic that unifies these capitals is that they are all at play within Bourdieu's own field, within *his* social world of players with high volumes of institutionalized cultural capital. However, it is possible to observe subspecies of capital operating within other less privileged domains. (Thornton, 1995: 11)

One of these less privileged domains in Macedonian society is the 'gay'

scene in Skopje. The 'gay' scene develops a peculiar *subcultural capital* (Thornton, 1995) that is objectified and embodied in particular images and postures of masculinity (*gender capital*), and sexual desirability (*sexual capital*). An analysis of the subcultural capital of the 'gay' scene reveals an alternative hierarchy in which the axes of gender,⁶ sexuality and ethnicity are all employed in order to reverse the power effects of class, income and occupation as they are produced in other social sites in Macedonia. While highly educated Macedonian 'gays' are seen as rich in cultural capital, they are seen by most working-class Macedonian and Albanian 'gays' as lacking in gender and sexual capital. They are seen as both effeminate and sexually undesirable. To be more precise, they are sexually undesirable in the eyes of Macedonian working-class 'bottoms', while Albanian working-class 'tops' view many middle-class Macedonian 'gays' as appropriate sexual partners as long as they (the Macedonians) play the 'bottom' part.

Roughness, aggressiveness, plain speech, no-nonsense clothes and hairdos, strictly controlled bodily gestures are all signs of an extensive masculine (gender) capital. The handsome Albanian man I referred to at the beginning of the article was rich in masculine (gender) capital. One's investment in one's appropriate performance of masculinity is paid off in being sexually desired. This means that if one is being rich in sexual capital, one is able to demand the 'right' to be sexually serviced by all the other men who are seen to be poor in gender capital at the 'gay' scene.

This is perhaps best demonstrated by an insight offered to me by one of my respondents – Midhat H, an ethnic Albanian who consistently plays the role of a 'bottom' and has sex only with Albanian men. Referring to middle-class Macedonian men at the 'gay' scene,⁷ he confided to me that he never allows Macedonian men to penetrate him. 'They are just too soft for me. Too cultured. They do not know how to fuck you hard', he said. All working-class Macedonian 'gays' interviewed for my research (six of them) expressed their sexual preference for working-class Albanians, because they are the 'real' men.⁸

Now, to complicate things further, I feel I have to add another layer to the construction of homosexual acts and identities at the 'gay' scene in Skopje. This layer involves the issue of nationalism, which in combination with the already mentioned impact of class, is one of the main social factors in determining what Macedonian and Albanian men do with each others' bodies in homosexual encounters.

The (self) government of sex

Hindess, following Foucault, defines domination as a relatively stable and hierarchical set of power relationships 'in which the subordinated have relatively little room for manoeuvre' (1996: 97). The concept of

government of sex, to quote Hindess here who actually talks about other forms of government of the self,

... lies between domination and those relationships of power which are reversible; it is the conduct of conduct, aiming to affect the actions of individuals by working on their conduct – that is, on the ways in which they regulate their own behaviour. (Hindess, 1996: 97)

There is a series of gradations and interplays between domination, government, and resistance at the ‘gay’ scene. Firstly, the ‘gay’ scene reproduces sexual/social domination between homosexual partners of different ethnicity when there is very little room for manoeuvre as far as sexual roles between these two groups of men are concerned. Albanian men usually occupy the position of the dominant ‘top’ in sexual encounters with Macedonian men, a position which is reserved for Macedonian men in other social sites. The same Macedonian man, who might be dominated sexually, or even raped, by an Albanian, may exercise his ethnic/class domination when deciding whether the Albanian should get a university place, or a hospital bed, or get a passport, or a public bus line leading to his suburb, or a license to open a private business.

Secondly, there is nationalist governance of sex which orders Macedonian homosexuals to avoid Albanians as much as possible when looking for sexual liaisons, while at the same time requiring Albanians to assume the ‘top’ position in their sexual encounters with Macedonians. The situation is still more complex, for there is a considerable number of ethnic Macedonian men who enjoy being sexually dominated by Albanian macho men. However, one cannot help but wonder about the not so subtle racist overtones which structure this desire. The exclusive desire for the dominant Albanians and the pleasure that these Macedonian men take in being fucked by such Albanians, can only be sustained as long as the Albanian plays the role of a ‘hard-fucking brute’ that is given to him in the fantastic scenario of Macedonian nationalism. In other words, these men’s desire for the Albanian other is sustained as long as the other stays *the Other* as constructed in the racist fantasy script of Macedonian middle-class snobbery and nationalism. The more ‘Macedonian’ the Albanian becomes, the more he starts to resemble dominant Macedonian men in gesture, sophistication, dress, social status, etc., the less desirable he becomes in the eyes of the Macedonian *auntie*.

Thirdly, a very tiny minority at the scene resists the imperatives of both Macedonian and Albanian nationalism by refusing to subscribe to the rigid division between *fuckers* and *aunties*. Here, the sexual roles between Macedonian and Albanian men become constantly reversible.

In this context, I want to draw particular attention to the issue of men being raped by other men at the ‘gay’ scene. This issue shows another

particularly complex configuration of hegemonic masculinity, homophobia, nationalism and national citizenship. Rape of men by men is a violence that is not discussed anywhere in Macedonia. It is a form of violence that is not reported to the Macedonian police. The discourses and practices of the police are marked by the same hypermasculinity that marks the sex script at the 'gay' scene. In a perversely obscene way, the police even welcome this type of rape. The very reproduction of the narratives used by Macedonian 'gay' men to cope with rape helps the police dispel the possibility of Macedonian and Albanian men establishing a strategic alliance against the homophobic nationalist order in Macedonia. These narratives reinforce the 'inferior' otherness of the Albanians by constructing them as 'primitive, brutal, aggressive, Asiatic, illiterate savages'. Macedonian nationalism, as I have shown elsewhere, thrives on these images (Lambevski, 1997).

Samoil X was the only person among my respondents who told me that he had reported to the police that he was raped and bashed on several occasions in the late 1980s. The response he got from the police was: 'That's what you get for selling your arse, you *buljash*, to dirty Shiptars', and they continued to psychologically abuse him. 'Dirty Shiptar' is a pejorative term used by Macedonians to signify the otherness of Albanians. The signifier is in constant discursive circulation among Macedonian homosexuals at the 'gay' scene. The tragic irony of Samoil X's life was that he was desperately trying to protect his 'arse from being sold' (Lambevski, 1997: 199–217). He transgressed the law of the Macedonian symbolic by pursuing his gay desire, but at the same time he was, unconsciously, desperately trying to adhere to it by not allowing his 'arse to be fucked' by anyone, particularly not by an Albanian.

Samoil X was guilty, in the eyes of the police, of being a Macedonian man 'soliciting' sex at a gay beat, and 'that's what happens when you go to places like that'. For the police, by his very presence at the beat, he signified that he 'wanted to be fucked by an Albanian'. He was naive to believe that the police, the vast majority ethnic Macedonians, would follow up his report of rape just because his rapist was an Albanian. His rape happened in the period of new nationalist hegemonies in Yugoslavia where all Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Christians were mobilized against 'rapist' Albanian men, who rape 'innocent Christian girls'. The ideological state apparatuses (Althusser, 1984) – the media, the Orthodox Church, the Communist Party and the state – mobilized themselves in producing images of threat to the purity of both nations, contained in the bodies of the 'national' women. Rape of Albanian women by Albanian, Serbian, or Macedonian men went unnoticed, as did the far more frequent rape of Macedonian and Serbian women by 'their' (Macedonian and Serbian) men (Denitch, 1994: 121; Magas, 1993: 61–3; Salecl, 1994: 22–3).

Police knowledge of the desires of Macedonian gay men indicates the acceptance of 'gay' sex as long as it does not produce relationships of love between Macedonian and Albanian men which might subvert the current misogynistic, nationalist, homophobic social order in Macedonia. This order is generated and produced not only by the Macedonian state, but also by other non-state power/knowledge apparatuses, from family structures and informal support networks, to religious institutions, on both sides. The police know how homosexuality is organized and played out at the 'gay' scene. They never try actively to 'clean up' the 'gay' beats. Rather they use them as an insidious form of control over those who have already transgressed or might decide to transgress the norms of full Macedonian national citizenship. The public sphere, the citizen, and the state are constructed as (a heterosexual, misogynistic, homophobic) *man*. Defending the state means defending its masculinity, and the homosexual is a threat per definition.

The police are positioned as the Big Other for Macedonian gay men, by materializing the fantasmatic construction of a superpowerful overseer of the children of the Macedonian nation, who gazes upon his subjects and punishes them for their transgressions of his law. The virile hypermasculinity of both national groups constructs the public sphere (and the state) as masculine, so in order to stay in the public sphere a man has to prove that he is not being 'fucked with' (Lambevski, 1997: 99–119).

In their struggle for equality, Albanians in Macedonia follow this hypermasculine logic by constructing the Macedonian man as politically and governmentally inadequate (Lambevski, 1997: 99–119). Albanian nationalism constantly produces and reproduces images of the effeminacy of the Macedonian man, which are incorporated into the Albanian symbolic. Albanian nationalism questions Macedonian male citizenship by rendering, wherever and whenever it can, the Macedonian man feminine, relegating him to the private sphere of the woman.⁹

Probably the clearest example of this logic is demonstrated by the discourse enunciated by one of the more extreme Albanian nationalist leaders in Macedonia – Menduh Taci, the leader of the Democratic Party of Albanians in Macedonia. This is a political party which is a member of the current Macedonian coalition government. Taci has repeatedly stated for the Macedonian media, before he joined the Macedonian government of course, that Macedonian men are 'weaklings' who cannot fight with arms (Lambevski, 1997: 132).

Military prowess represents one of the most important themes underlying hegemonic masculinity in the Balkans (Gjuric, 1990; Stojanovich, 1967; Tomasic, 1948). This implied lack of prowess suggests that the place of these 'weaklings' is in the subordinate private, female, sphere where they are offered the protection of the 'real' men. The 'weaklings' return the

favor by serving the 'real' men faithfully, and by not interfering in the 'real' men's business in the public domain (running the state and the economy). The 'gay' scene as a place that is both public and private shows this in a literal way. The very body of the Macedonian male Other, particularly his anus, becomes a stage where this masculinizing fantasy of class and ethnic revenge can be acted out. It is a fantasy since the power relations at the gay 'scene' do not change the power configuration in the economy, or in the Macedonian state. However, staging this fantasy creates an inverse form of inequality/asymmetry which is no less real for the affected 'gays' in Macedonia.

Having examined the impact of the discursive and performative intermeshing of nationalism, class and masculinity on the sexual acts and identities of men who have sex with men in Macedonia, I want to complete the picture by pointing out the impact of objective socioeconomic limits on the construction of (homo)sexual desires in Macedonia.

Social limits, scarce bodies and (homo)sexual desires

The relative fixity of the dominant socioeconomic and political position of ethnic Macedonians does not translate into ethnic Macedonian domination of the gay scene. More precisely, for a considerable number of ethnic Albanian men, the 'gay' cruising area offers a chance to reverse the power relations between the two ethnic groups. However, there are some objective socioeconomic limits to the position Albanian men take in their sexual dealings with Macedonian men. The lack of educational and job opportunities forces young Albanian men to rely on the economic and other support of their large, patriarchal families. This support carries the price of surveillance and conformity to the rules of Albanian peasant and working-class culture.

Albanian Moslem heterosexual men, particularly those of working-class backgrounds, find it extremely difficult to engage in pre-marital sex with women. Albanian women are 'off limits', because the Albanian symbolic places specific, and very severe, restrictions on any pre- or extra-marital sexual activity. Here, I present a possible, quite tentative, explanation of the behavior of Albanian 'gays' based on my interviews with three Albanian 'gay' men.

What their narratives revealed was that the very purity of the body of the Albanian community (nation) seemed to depend on the purity and chastity of the Albanian woman, who can engage only in conjugal sex with her husband. She is the one who is responsible for the procreation of the Albanian nation, and for keeping the sanctity of the Albanian home (meaning the 'honor' of her man).¹⁰ Albanian women, according to the

interviewed Albanian 'gays', in many cases enter the economy of sexual pleasures of Albanian men more as a duty than as a pleasure.¹¹ Furthermore, racism on both sides, class and other sociopolitical differences make Macedonian women unapproachable.

The Islam of the Albanian men in Macedonia does not prevent them from pursuing *kjeif*, 'a real sexual pleasure', as I was told by Arben M, an Albanian masculine 'heterosexual', in other ways. Arben M, apart from being married to an Albanian woman with whom he has two children, regularly has sex with Macedonian men, and occasionally with Bulgarian, Bosnian and Romanian female prostitutes in Skopje.¹² For Arben M, there are Christian women or men, prostitutes of any background, and/or younger and effeminate male Moslem teenagers that enter the spectrum of 'real sexual pleasure' of the Albanian 'real' man.¹³

In this context I also want to point out that the psychic organization of the sexual desire of many Albanian men who have sex with other men is, probably, predominantly 'heterosexual'.¹⁴ As far as the 'heterosexuality' of this particular group of Albanian men is concerned I have to point out that their 'heterosexuality' means something quite different from what that term signifies in the West, or even for middle-class Macedonians. As I demonstrated earlier, these men could have sex with other men and still be 'heterosexuals', since one's gender/sexual identity depends on being in the masculine, top position in sex regardless of the anatomy of the sexual partner. Here, I just want to acknowledge the possibility that these men may prefer anatomical women as sexual partners to anatomical men positioned socially and sexually as women.

Considering all the mentioned social and cultural factors, it becomes clear why these Albanian men cannot imagine a different kind of sexual/emotional encounter with Macedonian men. This also helps explain many unhappy encounters between (Macedonian) men, whose sexual desires are genuinely gay, and (Albanian) men who are actually 'heterosexuals'.

The emergence of the Macedonian gay/queer?

For a handful of Macedonian gays 'the traditional distinction between "active" and receptive sexuality disappears' (Tapinc, 1992: 46). They face many complicated questions. How can they practise their gayness? How can they avoid the traps of phallogentric power within the masculine 'heterosexual'–feminine homosexual model of homosexuality, or the masculine homosexual–feminine homosexual model of homosexuality? Where to find partners with whom to practise one's gayness or even more radically one's queerness in Macedonia?

Foucault saw queerness not only as a 'resistance to social norms or a

negation of established values but [as] a positive and creative construction of different ways of life' (Halperin 1995: 80). In his interview for *Gai pied*, he asked:

How is it possible for men to be together, to live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their leisure, their sorrows, their knowledge, their confidences? What exactly is this thing – to be among men, 'stripped down' outside institutionalized relationships, family, profession, obligatory forms of association [nation, class, race, age, etc]? (quoted in Halperin, 1995: 80)

Macedonian gays dream of establishing new forms of friendship between men. However, the problem of inventing (male) queer relationships in Macedonia, as I hope to have demonstrated here, lies in the cumulative effect of differences between the partners in age, class and ethnicity. Furthermore, 'there exist no readily available social formulas for mediating and negotiating those differences' (Halperin, 1995: 80).

Class and *nationality* represent primary obstacles to inventing queer relationships between Macedonian and Albanian men. Here, I refrain from suggesting any models of how these relationships could be established in Macedonia. It is up to actual Macedonians and Albanians to face

one another, without armour, without conventional phrases, without anything to stabilize the meaning of the movement which takes them one toward the other. They have to invent from A to Z a relationship without a form. (Foucault, interviewed in Bitoux, 1981: 38)

In the absence of such queer relationships, both Macedonian and Albanian 'gay' men are left with narratives, complexes and institutions that structure their lives as cultural scripts (Marcus, 1992: 388–9), tediously rehearsed in most sexual encounters between Macedonian and Albanian men.

I want to note that the gay model in Macedonia can be predominantly found in 'urban, young, educated, and middle-class homosexuals' (Tapinc, 1992: 46) with a highly developed sense of their masculinity. However, the way gender, sexual and ethnic identities are constructed in Macedonia, leaves Macedonian gays, like the earlier mentioned Samoil X, with no choice but to shift among the three of Tapinc's homosexualities. Gays represent the minority within the minority of homosexuals in Macedonia. Their society still does not recognize their gayness. Even the so-called 'gay' scene does not recognize their gayness. They do not have a social place where they can socialize, and find an appropriate partner. Macedonian gays are left with three options. If they are lucky and find a gay partner, they can try to develop a relationship that does not subscribe to the phallocentrism of Tapinc's second and third homosexual scenarios. The second option for gays in Macedonia is to stay alone and without any sexual partners, if they want to be consistent with their refusal to be subjected to the humiliation of the macho display of power within (homo)sex in

Macedonia. This represents some sort of Foucauldian *enkrateia* (Foucault, 1990: 63–77) over their gay desire. The third and most dominant option is to develop a gay self that is constantly renegotiated in the face of the ‘temporary’ acceptance of the other two hegemonic forms of homosexuality.

As Jeffrey Weeks points out:

. . . [gays] need complex social and political conditions for their emergence – to produce a sense of community experience which makes for collective endeavour. Five conditions seem to be necessary for this: the existence of large numbers in the same situation; geographical concentration; identifiable targets of opposition; sudden events or changes in social position; and an intellectual leadership with readily understood goals [and I would add considerable economic power]. (1985: 191)

None of these conditions exist in Macedonia, and it is difficult to predict when these conditions can be achieved. Until then the Macedonian queer dream – a dream about new forms of love, friendship and pleasure between men, a dream about a new form of community that successfully resists the network of dominant social sites regulating sexuality – remains a distant dream.

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Notes

1. As Luc Boltanski notes, ‘the body is, in fact, like all the other . . . objects whose possession sites the individual in the hierarchy of social classes’ (1971: 232). One’s physical features, one’s dress, one’s walk or bodily movements, one’s muscularity, or the lack of it, are ‘signs of [social] status, perhaps the most intimate and, therefore, the most important of all’ (Boltanski, 1971: 232).
2. Here I draw from the works of Marcus (1992) and Gibson-Graham (1996/7) on the rape script/globalization script. As Gibson-Graham (a composite author) points out: ‘Marcus is led to explore the construction of rape as a linguistic artifact and “to ask how the violence of rape is enabled by narratives, complexes and institutions which derive their strength not from outright, immutable, unbeatable force but rather from their power to structure our lives as . . . cultural scripts”’ (388–9). A language shapes the rape script – ‘the verbal and physical interactions of a woman and her would-be assailant’ – ‘permitting the would-be rapist to constitute feelings of power and causing the woman to experience corresponding feelings of terror and paralysis’ (1996/7: 4).
3. Anna-Marie Smith, following both Foucault and Lacan, understands identities as being ‘wholly constituted through the inevitable and endlessly

shifting practice of adopting discursive masks. In ontological terms, all identifications are equally “unreal”, all identities are equally precarious and all masquerades are equally contingent’ (1994: 128).

4. ‘Top’ and ‘bottom’ are English-language signifiers that mark the positions of the inserter (‘top’) and the insertee (‘bottom’) in homosexual anal intercourse. In Macedonian homosexual subculture, similar words are used to demarcate gender performances along the axis of masculinity/activity and femininity/passivity.
5. I do not see ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ as antithetical terms. In many ways, the term ‘queer’ is historically linked and associated with the terms ‘gay and lesbian’ (Jagose, 1996: 1–2). For me to be a ‘queer gay’ means to adopt a fluid community identification based on desire, rather than on an essentialist, no matter how positive, narrative, that would give me the truth of my existence.
6. ‘Gender, to be of any use as an analytical tool, ought to be defined as the structure of relations between and within the sexes, not just between men and women’ (Dowsett, 1995: 152).
7. Midhat H, indicatively enough, considered all Macedonians to be ‘middle-class’. He did not use the term ‘class’ at all. However, he acknowledged in his own way the socially privileged position of Macedonians in Macedonian society.
8. Four of them are over the age of 40.
9. Macedonian nationalism subjects the Albanian to the same logic, although the effeminization of the Albanian takes a different form.
10. For the role of women as biological and social reproducers of the nation see Yuval-Davis (1993).
11. As ‘Alexandre Sourin’, a character in Tournier’s philosophical novel *Gemini* (1998), notes: ‘Casablanca. In Africa I can breathe more easily. I recite to myself the Arabic proverb: women for a family, boys for pleasure, melons for ecstasy. Heterosexuality here lacks the quality of oppression and constraint which its monopoly gives it in Christian countries. The Moslem knows that there are women and boys that one must ask of each what each is fitted to provide. Whereas the Christian, immured in heterosexuality from childhood by intensive training, is thereby reduced to asking everything of woman and treating her as a substitute boy’ (Tournier, 1998: 265).
12. Most of them live in Macedonia as illegal refugees.
13. Young, effeminate Moslem teenagers are not part of this ethnography since they are not members of the ‘gay’ scene in Skopje that I analyze here.
14. For the role of fantasy in the psychic structure of sexual desire and gender identity see Friedman (1988).

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