INTRODUCTION

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'Dragi', lanky, tall, slightly stooped, a once handsome face weathered into middle-age, somewhere between forty, fifty years of age . . . He climbs without aid to the tips of the Molika tree, the native species of pinus peuce, to collect the much-prized pine cones seeds. Precariously perched on the tip, he starts to sway its supple, whimsical branches, to and fro, to and fro, until enough momentum gathers to grab hold of a branch from its neighbour tree. Then, in a deft move, effortless it seems to the on-looker below, he latches onto the other tree, simultaneously releasing his hold of the now coneless one. As he moves, rustling from one tree to the next, his bulging sack is the only cue for descent. When it's time to empty the sack, his almost opposable toes cling to the sides with a deftness that seems natural and yet conditioned through the years of effort. The cones then need to be taken back to the village and the seeds removed and packed, ready to be sold to pharmaceutical company traders. Though foraging is common, particularly the collection of berries, mushrooms, nuts, seeds, wild herbs, and grasses for folk medicines and potions, there is also a growing market for those with knowledge and skill to turn what they do into commodities. Here, Dragi is in a league of his own; able to supplement his sporadic earnings in the village factory to pay for his daughter's city education.

—Excerpt from fieldnotes, 1996

In the folk imaginary of individuals such as 'Dragi' modernity provides hope in the promise of a better future. Central to such conceptualisations of modernity is the idea of individual discernment: a capacity to navigate change through being more self-aware and open to new ways of thinking and doing.

On surface introduction Dragi appears nothing if not a typical villager: his dress and mode of bodily carriage, the weathered face and stooped body, reflect years of physical toil. In conversations with Dragi, typically sitting at his kitchen table while his wife prepared coffee, he would often take pains to distinguish himself from 'this village', or 'these villagers'. Being an educated and well-read 'modern man' made Dragi out of place and out of sorts from those around him. He would often say that there is no hope in the village. For Dragi, hope is directed not at himself, he has resigned himself to the village.

Rather, Dragi's hope rests with his daughter getting an education, finding a city job, and maybe then she would find a good man 'not like these villagers.'

The conundrum for many village actors, such as Dragi, is not a lack of modernness. Being modern is a given. In fact, as a mode of distinction asserting that you are modern is passé for many contemporary village actors in rural Macedonia.[1] Being modern is highly individualised and conceptualised as residing within – brought forth perhaps by education or work in a city, but still more about a state of feeling and engaging irrespective of their locality or socio-political positionality. Posited along the lines of individual qualities, discernment and capacity, a 'modern' person, in other words, can be found anywhere.

The difference, however, is in the manner that modern subjects externalise and objectify sites and relationships. In the interactional domains between local actors there are always tensions between social distinction and embeddedness. Most individuals would often assert that they were 'not like the others around here' and yet, they were also clearly part of the local village world. In the pursuit of individual distinction and claims to modernity the distantiation and disambiguation from others in the village is crucial. But there is also a compulsion to have that individual distinction acknowledged by others. Acknowledgement, however, sits alongside judgement. Modernity as some kind of process, and modernness as the internalisation of it, is but one aspect of an often competitive local social arena. The problem for many individuals is that they are perpetually blocked or denied such acknowledgement. That is, as with Dragi and many other rural Macedonians, the cause of individual anxieties about navigating modernity and the frustration to have their modernness yield desirable outcomes rested with 'this village' or 'these villagers'.

The term 'modernity' is undoubtedly, as Tomlinson highlights, 'ambiguous and chronologically elastic' (2002: 140). As a central leitmotif of social science, modernity has been extensively interrogated for what it implies about relationships, power and identities. The interrogation of the discourses, symbolic representations and fields of interactions have debunked to a large extent dichotomies such as the 'West and the Rest' (Hall 1992), East and West (Said 1978), or the construct of 'The Balkans' as the antithesis of modernity in the Western or European imaginary (Todorova [1997] 2009). Nonetheless, the hegemonic framing of modernity as 'sitting in place' reinforces various kinds of symbolic and interactional fields of engagements in which power and domination are implicated: something that Western (European) societies 'have', for example, and those of the non-West fall short of possessing. To be sure, the ethnocentric purveyance of modernity has also generated various kinds of counter-narrative. Even in counter-narratives such as notions of 'alternative' modernities, however, inference of deviation

or rejection of the presumed norm – of refractions, shards, adoptions, rejections, or fusions – reaffirm European sense-making and sensibilities as modernity's origin and pivotal site. The reference to the 'pursuit' of modernity is replete with analogous terms such as 'process', 'roads' or 'pathways' that dominate developmentalist logics and interventionist agendas. As in the case of the ex-Yugoslav state of Macedonia following 1991 independence, being 'on the road to modernity' (Arsovska 2007) is often found wanting. In many studies, the pursuit of modernity engenders a struggle to enact and make sense of change at both a societal and individual level (see Thiessen 2007, 2010; Janev 2011a, 2011b, 2017).

In a similar vein, where modernity is associated with cities, being from a village automatically relegates even the most modern person such as Dragi to a non-modern positionality. In the conundrum that individuals face between being socially constituted and true to self, the presumption of immovability – fixity, intransigence and immobility – can have fundamental consequences for navigating meaning in and of life.[2] Some categories of people are stuck, be it in ideas, relationships and identities or localities and such immovability stands apposite to notions of modernity. Rapid depopulation or the 'dying' of rural communities attests to the powerful hold of the imaginary of modernity as residing beyond such localities. Where individuals' self-realisation is rendered possible only through movement toward the city, rural sites are found wanting: places to leave. And, for those who cannot move, the ready judgement is of some kind of deficiency in navigating modernity.

That is, if modernity is about the 'liberty to transgress', or to 'consume in an unfettered world of desire' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 293), it not only 'falters', as the authors argue, but can also be blocked. Constraints of structure and identities that stick as a priori categorisation are powerfully embedded and can be difficult to break through. In any given society, changing social structures leave some categories of people behind, irrespective of their endeavours to illustrate individual discernment and capacity for navigating modernity. Change brings about a rupture of social institutions and modes of living that call for a new set of life skills and values, interlocutions between illustrating and performing modernity that are not automatically possible or available to all.

Human subjectivity and the ontological possibilities it affords within modernity (cf. Heidegger 1987, 2000) is nowhere entirely in the hands of an individual. The valorisation of the western 'Self' as a sacred entity, a bounded self that has internalised modernity in its totality (and all the responsibilities as well as potentialities that come with it), makes it seem as if the structures and social, economic and political systems that created such reifications are irrelevant. Instead, in the 'ethos of individualism' the privilege afforded to

the 'western' individual stands in opposition to the supposed sociocentricism that produces 'dividuals' in other, non-modern sites.[3] The pursuit of personal liberty, however, is conditioned on the cooperativeness of others. And, it also depends on the sensibilities and skills accrued by individuals for navigating and negotiating a balance between self-integrity and social embeddedness.

As Goffman notes, there is a 'reciprocal influence of individuals on one another's actions', but it is not simply as he suggests brought forth by being 'in one another's immediate presence' ([1956] 1959: 15). The internal dialogue is set at the barometer of the social as the mediator of personal reality and integrity. An individual may want to be seen one way, but may instead be relegated to a different positionality, viewed as the apposite of the right way for a 'modern' person who keeps up with the shifts in markers for what it constitutes. The kind of decisions individuals make and how they seek the meaning of existence is not simply a matter of 'essence' (meaning in the sense of Sartre [1956, 1960]) and authenticity (being true to self). Essence is socially constructed, indeed, can be experienced as an imposition. If existential angst resides between the cracks of the transcendence of ego and nothingness, the 'void' (Žižek 2008, 2017) is often filled by the social conscience residing within. The true void is essentially the loss of the social and the lack of moral guidance or 'anomie' (Durkheim [1897] 1951) taken onto the individual body and disposition.

In this sense, *habitus*, or the dispositions that provide the 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990: 82), reinforces the importance of being in the game. The problem, however, is where the sense of the game is lost, can no longer contain the necessary beacon of light for navigating individual or collective behaviour. Such a break is aptly captured by Bourdieu:

> Only for someone who withdraws from the game completely, who totally breaks the spell, the *illusio*, renouncing all the stakes, that is, all the gambles on the future, can the temporal succession be seen as a pure discontinuity and the world appear in the absurdity of a future-less, and therefore senseless, present, like the Surrealists' staircases opening on to the void. The 'feel' (*sens*) for the game is the sense of the imminent future of the game, the sense of the direction (*sens*) of the history of the game that gives the game its sense. (1990: 82, original emphasis)

Some categories of individuals are caught between or within systems, structures and values that cannot accommodate them; they are both the outcome of modernity and its refuse. As such, the forms of navigating through life are both unique and, yet, typical of structurally non-containable modern beings.

In short, the frame of meaning-making in relation to modernity is not a matter of questioning whether one is a subject, an individual or a 'self', but, rather, the form that the subject should and does take in the context of the

social world they occupy and which occupies them. Modernity as process and discourse is enfolded into these worlds, interwoven into the repertoires and various strategies and tools of individuals in daily meaning-making. However, the social world that we are part of, or the local worlds that we occupy at any particular time, presents a range of contradictory messages about norms and expectations, desirable and undesirable qualities and behaviours. The reflexive individual may pre-empt or even counter-perceive social norms and expectations; however, it is a second-guessing exercise that can misfire or go wrong. The mercurial nature of social norms and expectations, including the shifting expectations and values about how to be socially present or what constitutes modernness, may be negotiated only to a degree.

TOO MANY MEN: AGING BACHELORHOOD AND RURAL PRECARITY IN MACEDONIA

The intersections, continuities and discontinuities in the trajectories of rural decline experienced in Macedonian society in varying degrees both mirror and diverge from those of other rural (village) communities in Europe. Generally speaking, the kind of rural life mitigated by agricultural or other rural activities for the most part appears to make the rural 'sector', and thus rural people, disadvantageously placed vis-à-vis broader structures and processes. For instance, within the Marxian school of thought the 'peasantry', whether a distinct class or not, are posited within the frame of economic activity at odds with urban or global modes of capitalist production (see, for example, Wolf 2001: 230). Writing of peasants and revolutions in the 1960s, Wolf uses phrases such as the 'increased order and disorder' and concludes that 'the advancement of one sector has been bought at the price of dislocation and rearrangement in the other' (2001: 231). In contrast, Hann reminds us that for Hungary, and more broadly perhaps of the post-socialist world of Eastern Europe, in the privileging of neo-liberal societal transformations 'the rural sector has been penalized heavily and the gap between town and countryside has widened again' (2015: 904).

Alongside the precarity that is brought forth by broader socio-political change, there is also considerable discussion of the mindset, mentality or behaviour of rural people, the way in which they think and do things, the *habitus* that for Bourdieu forms into 'tradition' (see Reed-Danahay 2004: 96). Bourdieu, as a 'home' anthropologist undertaking ethnographic research 'in his own natal region, among people he knew, even having his own mother serve as an informant' (Reed-Danahay 2005: 32; see also Silverstein and Goodman 2009: 8; Mead 2016), is particularly scrutinised for his nostalgia, the imaginary of a 'pristine traditional society' that cannot withstand the ad-

vances of enormous social, economic and political change. The deployment of the dichotomies of 'urban vs. rural' and 'peasant vs. city-dwellers', argues Reed-Danahay, are a 'strong thread linking Bourdieu's early work in these two societies' (2004: 95–96); the 'theme of rupture and a break with tradition is prevalent' (2004: 97). The imposition on the rural of the outside – in the case of Bourdieu the influences of the nation state or the broader social, economic or political transformations – resonates with a strong trend in scholarship of rural societies in terms of transition, disruption and dislocation. Indeed, 'rupture' seems to perpetually beset, amass and confront the rural.

Moreover, the analytic treatment of rural 'peoples', 'communities' or 'societies' of Western Europe (the cradle of modernisation, industrialisation, cosmopolitanism) is often distinguished from the rest of Europe. For instance, in his historical lens on the Macedonian town of Kruševo, and its place in the national imaginary as the site of the 1903 Ilinden Uprising, Brown highlights the western imaginary of the peasants of Ottoman Macedonia as 'passive victims of fate, awaiting salvation from outside intervention, whether divine or European' (2013: 41). Thus, Brown argues, 'if peasants turned out to fight, most analysts conclude, they must have been coerced or duped by external agents – either in another country or from the urban centers of the empire itself' (2013: 43). This leads to the point that in the case of the Balkans and/ or post-socialist spaces, it is not simply about how the rural-urban divide is conceptualised but it also speaks of the inherent schism that is often noticeable in the imaginary of difference between the 'west' and 'east', particularities of nation-state formation out of the rubble of empires, and in the case of the ex-Yugoslav region, the impact of the social engineering that accompanied socialism. Alongside the various expressions and articulations of socialism and the social engineering associated with reframing the rural context that this entailed, in the case of Yugoslavia Halpern and Kideckel argue that 'the greatest shift in social relationships has occurred as a result of the postwar processes of urbanization and industrialization' (1983: 385).

Irrespective, be it about a 'transition' to a socialist, capitalist or global economy or shifts in societal values and norms, there continues to be differences of some form or another between the 'rural' and 'urban', and the problematics associated with how rural peoples navigate change, shifts in policy, political or economic systems and processes or, more broadly speaking, modernity. Importantly, there are invariably tensions associated with change that are often presumed to place rural societies at a disadvantage. And, as a site of rupture, disruption, contestation, dislocation, resistance or nostalgia, the 'rural' is fundamental to the construct of the 'urban', and modernity.

Tempered by different socio-political and nationalising contexts, the particularities of rural precarity in regions such as Macedonia are more often

than not presumed rather than critically investigated. To be sure, the impacts of more powerful social, economic and political forces are not everywhere experienced in the same way. In the case of Macedonia, the precarity of village societies and rural subjectivities in the face of rapid depopulation and changing structures are especially notable in the impact on men. The significant disparity between numbers of unmarried men and women is noticeable across an overwhelming number of villages. Overall, across many of the villages where I conducted fieldwork in the mid-1990s, I found the average ratio of *stari bekjari* ('old bachelors' past the socially appropriate age of marriage) to unmarried women was nine to one. Most locals are apt to claim that *stari bekjari* are more prominent in lower status or remote mountainous villages. To be sure, in the lower socio-economic state of development in some regions or band of villages, such as the flatlands of the Palagonia (surrounding the river Crna), there are many *stari bekjari*. In one village in the region, for instance, there were forty-five unmarried men to six unmarried women in a total population of just over two hundred inhabitants. Likewise, in my own natal village, situated broadly in this region, there were around sixty unmarried men to five unmarried women, with a similar total population of just over two hundred. However, a large number of unmarried men were equally present in so-called high social status villages. In high status villages, such as Capari in the Caparsko Pole, a similarly high imbalance was notable, with sixty-four unmarried men to nine unmarried women, or approximately seven men to one woman. So too, in Gorno Orizari, a virtual suburb of the town of Bitola, with a tobacco factory and a population of approximately 1,000 inhabitants, the sex imbalance in 1997 was 115 unmarried men above the age of twenty-five and only sixteen unmarried women. In short, rural Macedonian men whose self-identity is framed around being 'high-status' villagers (and thus presumably holding a competitive advantage in the marriage market over other village men) are equally confronted by the exodus of women.

In the 1990s, the issue of *stari bekjari*, or having unmarried men aged in their late thirties or well into their forties, was a cultural shock and treated as an unpalatable new phenomenon. The problem of too many unmarried men, however, is no longer a cultural shock. Though abhorred, the exorbitant number of unmarried men in the 1990s was only a familial problem. For *stari bekjari*, and their families, there continued to be hopefulness that the state of things in the present was not indicative of how they would be in the future. Hope rested upon the possibility of marriage, and regeneration, in the future. Thus, though they perceived a delay in the realisation of self through marriage, a future for the men and their families seemed still in sight. In the 1990s the men were referred to, at least symbolically, as part of the category of *mladi* (youth, unmarrieds). Even if being nominally referred to as *stari bekjari* the men were at least in the category of bachelors.

In the two decades following the start of my fieldwork, the very same men I interviewed in the 1990s are now aged well into their fifties, sixties, and even a few in their seventies. Two decades later, the men are not even afforded the derogative label of *stari bekjari*. The men are instead simply described in terms such as 'He never got married', i.e. they had become of a never-married rather than not-married category. Hopefulness has given way to resignation and despondency. An unimaginable point had been reached of the inevitability of the desolation of the *kukja* (house) and thus the *familija* (family), a reality that is difficult for a society accustomed to universal marriage. In an attempt to describe the situation in her village where there was an increasing number of *stari bekjari* past the age of sixty years, one woman said, 'We have many dry [dead] trees' ('Mnogu suvi drva imame'). Many of these *stari bekjari* were the very same men who had been described by their mothers in the mid-1990s as 'beautiful boys' from 'good families'.

Given the cultural precept of adulthood constituted at marriage, the inevitability of the desolation of the *familija*, of being unable to transfer authority before death to a never-married son, is something unimaginable and, yet, now a reality. For parents of *stari bekjari* in the 1990s, the idea of their sons living alone was often expressed as the death of their own sociality. Socialising with others was often avoided; fear of being judged a pitiful household that could not maintain social status equivalence and of others gloating of their achievements in having a son to marry ahead of their own was emotively expressed by one mother as being 'Smrt' (death) for her.

Aging bachelors have not only lost the 'feel for the game', but are also unclear about what game they are participating in. The body of practice is at odds with emergent changes to structures and values. In this sense, aging bachelors are automatically consigned the status of the non-modern 'other' within their own societies: sandwiched between structural positionality within rurality, kinship, family, age and gendered identities that cannot be transformed into actualisation of modernity. Rural men are thus socially present, but often as a derogatory category, a visible reminder of failure, and the tools they draw on to illustrate their modernness are perceived as a camouflage for a less than modern heart residing beneath their inherent villageness. To put it differently, aging rural bachelors are both the outcome of modernity and its refuse.

THE BACHELOR SPECTACLE AND THE PRECARITY OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Aging rural bachelorhood is a rising phenomenon that has become particularly noticeable in the last few decades across many societies. The problem

of aging bachelorhood has reached 'manic' proportions in some countries, referred to as a 'ticking time bomb', even a 'bachelor bomb'.[4] Various strands of scholarship on aging bachelorhood such as in Asia, for instance, have particularly focused on the tensions between modernity, 'agonistic masculinity' and the perceived 'crisis of masculinity' (see, for example, Chowdhry 2005; Reeser and Seifert 2003). Thus, aging bachelorhood is typically explained as a product of male bias, son preference and a discrimination of women that has led to gender imbalances.[5] The profound impact of sex selective abortions and female infanticide in some societies has resulted in what Sen famously referred to as 'missing women' (1992, 2003; see also Tilche and Simpson 2018). Indeed, increased social instability and security, crimes against women and a growing trade in sexual trafficking in some cases is explained as a direct result of male-biased sex ratios (see Jin et al. 2013: 4; Zhou and Hesketh 2017: 5).

From the perspective of the men, experience of life as a dead-end – stuck in a village, tied to family and land, and rejected by women as undesirable for marriage – has led to various forms of self-destruction. The desperation of men disadvantageously placed in the marriage stakes and who regard their fate as hopeless has led to increasing rates of suicide, alcoholism, and psychological and other forms of ill-health across many societies.[6] That is, for aging rural bachelors the social pressures that are created by existing structures of property transmission and morality in an age of massive rural depopulation are profoundly significant and personal. Where the known ways of navigating life, sociality and presentation of self are in discord with the changing world around them, there is no returning to some old ways of being or moving on. They are structural victims of systems and values that cannot accommodate them.

Marriage, and where it sits in the cultural imaginary of the meaning and order of life, is correspondingly a critical site of contestation for negotiating modernity. Needless to say, marriage strategies, inheritance systems and the connection to land found in rural sites frame discursive identities and discriminations between men and women more broadly but also internally within the form of kinship and family. For Bourdieu (1976, 2004, 2008), as for many others, the demise of rural men in the symbolic marriage market is undoubtedly connected to more powerful external economic and political forces that cannot withstand local customs and kinship systems, such as the overarching emphasis on male primogeniture in inheritance.

Bourdieu argues that delayed marriage and high rates of permanent bachelorhood in Béarn are directly related to parental strategies focusing on the designated heir (1976: 122). In the marriage strategies of parents and the primogeniture inheritance system, as long as there is an heir (older son) who can marry, a younger son can be 'sacrificed to the imperatives of the land' (1976: 551). As Bourdieu elaborates,

> No doubt there were other ways in which a younger son could become a confirmed bachelor, from the marriage that did not materialize to a gradual process of getting used to the situation until it was 'too late to marry,' all of this taking place with the complicity of families who were, consciously or unconsciously, glad to keep such an 'unpaid servant' in their service, at least temporarily. (1976: 556)

The younger son, depicted as either stuck servicing aging parents or compelled to leave home 'to make his living in the city or to seek his fortune in America', is a common feature of the stem-family that as Bourdieu says is concerned with the 'preservation of the patrimony' (1976: 556).[7]

That is, a younger son being unmarried is a problem primarily for the individual pitted against an unbending system that valorises the transmission of property intact to a single heir. Thus, Bourdieu argues, the younger son is 'the *structural victim*, that is, the socially primed and therefore willing victim of a system that lavished a panoply of protective devices upon the "house," a collective entity and also an economic unit or, better, a collective entity based upon its economic unity' (1976: 557, original emphasis). The differential positionality of older and younger sons within marriage strategies and primogeniture that have compelled younger sons to be 'structural victims', however, stands in stark contrast to the plight of older (designated heir) sons who are unable to marry.

In his book, *The Bachelors' Ball* (2008) the problematic of the older son (designated heir) who has become unmarriageable is for Bourdieu 'a highly significant social fact' (2008: 2, 4). Again, Bourdieu turns to the local custom and kinship forms that relegated the younger son to be 'the structural victim', by posing the somewhat rhetorical question, 'By what paradox can men's failure to marry appear to those men themselves and to all around them as the most striking symptom of the crisis of society which has traditionally condemned its younger sons to emigration or bachelorhood?' (2008: 9). It is at this point that it becomes clear that for Bourdieu local customs and kinship systems valorising older sons cannot withstand more powerful social, economic and political forces. Bourdieu argues that the 'social enigma of the bachelorhood of eldest sons in a society renowned for its fierce attachment to the principle of primogeniture' serves as a,

> concrete and visible realization of the market in symbolic goods, which, as it became unified at the national level (just as it is, now, with homologous effects, on a global scale), had thrust a sudden, brutal devaluation on those who were bound up with the protected market of the old-style matrimonial exchanges controlled by families. (2008: 4)

Bachelorhood of older sons, the heir-apparent, is a threat to the economic and symbolic capital of a family, a looming threat of collapse of the 'house' and village hamlets that is a structural travesty, a 'brutal devaluation' and

'the most striking symptom of the crisis of society', as Bourdieu emotively evaluates.

In a broader sense, the plight of aging rural bachelors reflects the discriminatory positionality of the 'peasant' vis-à-vis the broader society. Even in the interactional domains of communal life, such as the village ball described by Bourdieu, the broader society's judgements of the 'village' and the 'villager' (or 'peasant' as he refers to it) are clear. The plight of aging bachelors, as with villagers more generally, is simultaneously enfolded into, and driven by, the broader social and economic conditions. The discriminations and prejudices associated with being a 'peasant' for Bourdieu influence the 'mediation of the consciousness that men attain' through the village ball, of a self-awareness of an individual as 'grasping himself as a "peasant" in the pejorative sense of the word (2008: 86). Confirmation of this, argues Bourdieu, is found in the fact that 'among the bachelors one finds either the most "empeasanted" peasants or the most self-aware peasants – those most aware of what remains "peasant" within' (2008: 87). That is, the villager, being a peasant, marks *habitus* and constitution and somehow seeps into the consciousness of individuals that makes them disadvantaged, discriminated against and bypassed for marriage consideration by upwardly mobile (urban focused) women. As Jenkins points out, however, in Bourdieu's account there is a danger in assuming an overwhelmingly pessimistic story of the rural ethnographic subject, be it the aging bachelor or the village that cannot withstand the more powerful external forces but can only internalise their own defeat or domination (2010: 151). Indeed, Bourdieu's depiction of aging bachelorhood, 'with the pitiless necessity of the word "unmarriageable"' (2008: 4), is for Jenkins nothing more than the scholar's 'pity' (2010: 142, 153). That is, we cannot assume the village as an isolate locality or the villagers (or 'peasants' as Bourdieu refers to them) as passive, agentless and inconsequential rural people.

Irrespective, aging bachelorhood in the recently renamed 'Republic of North Macedonia' is no less 'exceptionally dramatic', to use Bourdieu's phrase. In contrast to the case of Béarn presented by Bourdieu, however, among the Macedonians the phenomenon of aging bachelorhood is not connected to the inheritance or marriage strategy based on male primogeniture. In the case of Béarn it is clear that a younger son and an heir-apparent are equally 'structural victims', at very least, the former of the fierce attachment to primogeniture, the latter of the more global forces and shifting values that relegate a rural man undesirable for marriage. In contrast, Rogers notes that in the case of an Ayeyronnais community, Sainte Foye, education is afforded to younger sons but denied to the designated heir, which had 'the effect of trapping the designated heir on the farm, reinforcing the pattern of male primogeniture' (1991: 150). In short, depending on what structures we are

referring to, there is always likely to be some kind of 'structural victims'. In the Macedonian case, for instance, women are undoubtedly the 'structural victims' of partible inheritance among brothers and the androcentric bias that even though a sister is able to legally claim a share of patrimony alongside her brothers, social norms work against her doing so. Further, widows were, and continue to be to a great extent, bypassed from claiming a share of the patrimony of their deceased husbands. The pivoting of the *kukja* and *familija* (family) as an agnatic moral universe leaves little room for the inclusion of women (see Denich 1974).

RURAL WOMEN AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF COMPLICITY

In contrast to rural men who are overwhelmingly presented as agentless and unsuccessful in the new marriage market, women's agency is especially highlighted in accounts of the rising rate of unmarried women in cities, such as in Asia (see Jones 2005: 99; 2010). The rising rate of unmarried women in cities is typically explained as an outcome of women's empowerment, access to education and work that affords greater choice in the kind of partner they seek and the expectations they have of men (see Sorge 2008: 815; Yan 2006; Hamilton and Seyfrit 1994). Although many rural women leave for purposes of education and work, there is often an assumption that the exodus from rural sites is connected to gender empowerment. Moreover, rural women's exodus is often assumed to be permanent but many continue to visit or send remittances home. Irrespective, what is clear is that the exodus of rural women is most pronounced in the withdrawal from marriage to rural men. It is in this sense that the phenomenon of rural aging bachelorhood is stereotypically described as caused by the exodus of women.

Nonetheless, scholarly attention on rural women as individual subjects and how they enact their agency as individuals is rare. That is, the exodus of women is incorporated in general, rather than specifically investigated, in accounts of rural depopulation and aging bachelorhood. Indeed, accounts of aging bachelorhood, including Bourdieu's, have to a great extent omitted to explore more directly women as agents and how they impacted on the decline of rural societies and the flight from marriage. To be sure, for Bourdieu the generational shifts and the 'gulf between the sexes' (2004: 587) is hyperbolically expressed at such events as the village ball. The difference is expressed not simply as a 'gulf between the sexes', however, as much as in the implication that while men remain the same, women's choice-making has significantly altered. In short, notwithstanding explanations for disparity in rural sex-ratios due to 'missing' women as mentioned above, there is clearly an exodus not simply *of* but *by* women.

That is, women appear to be far more successful in navigating changing social and economic conditions. This may be because the systems of inheritance either ignore or disadvantage women or compel them to seek higher social status further afield and beyond local sites. But, it may equally be the case that the aspirations of village girls to get away or never to return, and further of city girls never to condescend to living in a 'village', speak to women's withdrawal of complicity in the androcentric imaginary of order. If women's participation in upholding the androcentric imaginary is voluntary, in other words, once choice is available, they are not only exiting the village but also opting out of marriage, or marriage to 'just anyone'.

Of course, rural women are not necessarily vocal about their reticence to remain in the village or to marry a village man. Such candour is typically expressed among women friends rather than as a publicly voiced ideological stance or personal preference. In fact, with some individual exceptions, women most often avoid public confrontations of any form; such attention may bring censure. Many indeed prefer to navigate experiences of discrimination through complicity with the androcentric imaginary of order, at least in the public domain. The strategy of women to navigate local customs without overtly challenging the androcentric imaginary of order may be gleamed from the standard tropes of resignation expressed especially by older generations of women: 'that's how things are' they would say, or 'You can't argue with them [men]'.

In the case of Macedonian rural women, especially those who are studying in cities and come home for the weekend, they would often say to me that 'there is nothing in the village'. They would on occasion evoke being modern or emancipated subjects by rejecting having anything to do with village men. For contemporary Macedonians, there is an onomastic violence inferred in the very label of 'village' (*selo*) or 'villager' (*seljani*) that is especially abhorrent to modern women seeking to disassociate themselves from such labels. Women have no compulsion to remain in or return to a village once given the opportunity to leave. In the 1990s the exodus of women from rural sites was everywhere apparent, mainly due to marriage with men living outside of the village but also as a post-study decision to remain in a city.[8] For many women, even living in town as a *stara čupa* (old girl, i.e. unmarried woman past the socially appropriate age of marriage) was preferable to remaining amongst villagers and the gnawing *selski mentalitet* ('village mentality').

That is, where the familiar modes of asserting selfhood for men is through the prism of one's positionality within kinship, and, where the competitiveness associated with agonistic masculinity is becoming unstuck, this is not because of the machinations of the state to reform subjects or because of some omnipotent forces such as 'industrialisation', 'globalisation' or 'modernisation' processes, though all these are clearly present. Rather, the de-

stabilisation or stuckedness of rural men largely stems from the fact that women have made better use of opportunities and shifting societal contexts and processes.

Indeed, women have contributed to a fundamental reshaping of modernity, and the consequences for men and the androcentric family are enormous. Further, the withdrawal of women from rural sites (or more accurately from rural men) has not only reshaped social and kin identities and relations but has also impacted more broadly on society. In his classic model of circulation of women, Lévi-Strauss ([1949] 1969) argues that the circulation of women is axiomatic to the shaping of kinship and social relations between groups. Although criticised by some feminists, Lévi-Strauss was not wrong; women do make the world go around. Contrary to his thesis, however, women's mobility in contemporary societies is not a consequence of men forging alliances with others. Nonetheless, women's mobility undoubtedly has significant implications for men.

The rural exodus of women, or their lack of complicity with marriage norms, for instance, has reinvigorated the focus on marriage and the 'marriage market'. In the pursuit of external women, the reformed marriage market has led to an increase in the role of intermediaries (match-makers). The state or religious institutions have also participated in this space. However, what is different perhaps is the manner in which the reformed marriage market has also implicated women's capacities to navigate structural and social disadvantage. The reinvigorated practice, and in some cases industry, of intermediaries most often involves pursuing women from neighbouring 'poor' communities or foreign countries (through deploying new technologies such as the Internet). That is, the pursuit of brides for aging rural bachelors points to the diversification of marriage strategies in the face of shortage of women (Kaur 2004: 2599) but also reformations of gender divides and the discrimination of some categories of women alongside changing marriage patterns. Typically, poor, uneducated or rural women of some other peripheral sites of modernity are filling the gaps left behind by modern or educated women.

MODERNITY AND THE 'UNMAKING' OF MEN

Modernity does not simply evoke tensions (cf. Habermas 1987) but also presents as a vibrant interactional domain in which the very concept of 'modern' is enacted, played with in various ways to navigate, include and exclude some positionalities, identities and relationships. In this, notions of desirable and undesirable qualities of 'man', 'manhood' and 'masculinity' have particularly come under fire as a site of contestation.

The call to make 'gender visible' and render structural transformation itself as a 'crisis of masculinity' (Spike Peterson 1997: 199) has in many ways coalesced modernity with the unmaking and remaking of men. Alongside the rising attention paid to gender equity and the empowerment of women, scholarship on men, manhood and masculinity has been significant. Demographic shifts – such as the phenomenon of aging population, low fertility rates, delayed marriage and increased numbers of unmarried people – are part of broader structural shifts that are often connected to changing gender relations and identities that have brought forth scrutiny and critique of male bias, especially displays of particular forms of masculinity.

Notable in the growing attention on men is the implied link between rejection of particular expressions of manhood and masculinity and resistance to the male bias of power. There is a strong tendency in studies of gender to portray particular expressions of manhood and masculinity as lingering manifestations of undesirable, archaic sexist values and behaviour unbefitting of a modern subject. Whether it is within the family or household arrangements or in the more political and public domains, androcentricism or male bias is typically contested not only as undesirable but also a form of deviance. In the concern with Western gender roles and identities, for instance, Connell's notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' (1985) is especially influential in giving shape to ideas of male bias and domination (see also Donaldson 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

However, the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' has also been extensively critiqued. The tendency to essentialise masculinity (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 3), for instance, often runs in tandem to the concern with the Western-centric purveyance and prejudice in constructs such hegemonic masculinity. The construct of hegemonic masculinity omits the racialised, classist undertones in depictions of 'other' men (see Amar 2011). Further, the lack of inclusion of 'marginalized and subordinated masculinities' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994: 201) has led others such as Demetriou to conclude that the problem with Connell's thesis is in its 'elitist' view of a process where 'subordinate and marginalized masculinities have no effect on the construction of the hegemonic model' (2001: 345).

Masculinity has to a large extent been 'dislocated', to borrow Cornwall and Lindisfarne's (1994) phrase, in that it can no longer be treated as an essentialist category. But, displays of 'hegemonic', 'agonistic', or whatever label is given for undesirable expressions of manhood, have to a large extent been relocated. That is, the perpetuation of male bias and discrimination against girls and women may be found as a general condition of gender roles and identities. However, particular displays of aggressive, hegemonic or agonistic masculinity is often associated with marginal socio-economic positionalities and localities. In the pursuit of distinction and disambigua-

tion about what is desirable or undesirable in a modern being, such terms capture the popular imaginary and are deployed in various strategic ways within the interactional domains of meaning-making. Located among the non-moderns within a modern society, in peripheral, exotic practices, or a part of a bygone era such as Guttmann notes of how Mexican informants conceived 'machismo' (2007: 221), some forms of manhood and displays of masculinity are conceptualised as the antithesis of what is desirable in modern men. Indeed, 'hegemonic masculinity' is a presumably all-encompassing ideology and practice that is readily drawn upon to problematise deviance and violence against women and used in interventions seeking to address them through the call for re-educating men and boys (see Jewkes et al. 2015).

Although somewhat different from the scholarship of masculinity discussed above, in anthropology there is a wealth of literature on the gendered nature of identities and relations and the importance of examining the relational aspects of gender constructs. In particular, Mediterranean and south European studies of kinship, gender and village societies are especially rich in exploring men, manhood and masculinity. Whether in furthering family business (Campbell 1964) or engaging in men's business more generally, there is often much importance attached to male sociality as an interactional domain within which manhood is displayed, reaffirmed and challenged (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991).

Interestingly, Herzfeld (1985) draws a parallel between the persistence of agnatic kinship on the one hand and the competitiveness associated with agonistic masculinity on the other. Within the world of male sociality in the community referred to by Herzfeld as 'Glendi', the performance of manhood is reported to involve male performativity of various kinds such as sexual prowess, risk taking, drinking or pitting oneself against the state. In such an arena, the essentially relational nature of masculinity is not only reaffirmed but also enfolded in meaning-making. As Herzfeld argues, it is not enough simply to be a man but it is rather about 'being *good at* being a man' (1985: 16). That is, the 'poetics of manhood' is connected to the sacrifice, strength and fortitude coalesced into an expansive ideational construct of positionality of men within family, and the social and political world they occupy. Again, as with 'hegemonic masculinity', Herzfeld's account has been critiqued for presenting a 'single point of view' that does not necessarily capture variant constructs of manhood (Loizos 1994: 77).

As Cornwall and Lindisfarne argue, what is important is to look 'in detail at everyday usage and the contexts in which people talk of masculinity' where the complexities become apparent (1994: 2). This of course does not necessarily mean that everyday 'usage and context' might be different from what is often reported as typical of forms, ideals or displays of manhood and masculinity. However, it is important to consider the inflections, modalities

and expressions found in particular localities and contexts. Change, transitions from one system or another sit alongside shifting expectations not only about how to navigate change but also the reconfiguring of relationships along the process.

VILLAGENESS AND SCHOLARLY ENDEAVOURS

Scholarly attention on villages is inflected with its own political and academic currencies and trends. A significant body of anthropological scholarship on European village societies emerged in the early to mid-twentieth century. Alongside groundbreaking works such as by Redfield (1941) in Mexico, many turned to the peripheries of Europe.[9] Although occasional references to emigration and modernisation are made by many, anthropologists could still find in villages that which seemed to have disappeared in cities or, at least, existed in a seeming vacuum from the drastic changes evident in Western European modernities. As a picture of a world out of step with modernity, they seemed to cling to tradition. Unaffected by change or in the process of transition, villagers seemed to go about their lives with an insularity (or lack of mobility) that ensured discreet, if not, 'unifying principles' across not only villages, but also regions.

For most Western anthropologists, the turn to the peripheries of Europe coincided with the surge of independence movements emerging out of the rubble of the crumbling European colonial empires that rendered accessibility to the classic sites unfeasible.[10] The unconscious attachment to conceptual and methodological precepts, however, was reflected in a continued focus on compact 'communities', or small-scale societies of the colonial ethnographic subject. The work of 'Mediterraneanists' established a renewed comparative focus on 'culture areas', with the aim to construct a 'unity' of shared values, mores and kinship structures and systems (see Peristiany 1965, 1976; Davis 1977). Indeed, though later critiqued (notably in Brandes 1987; Gilmore 1982), the purveying frame of analysis has resulted in an impressive body of scholarship, in which relations are dominated by kinship, rituals and modes of self-governance based on such codes as 'honour and shame'. Such an endeavour encompassed not only features of specific peoples but also geographically bounded entities such as the 'Mediterranean', 'Southern Europe', 'South Slavs', and 'the Balkans' (see, for instance, Pitt-Rivers 1976; Davis 1977).

The turn towards European village societies at the point of their virtual disappearance is more often a lament for bygone ways that reflects the romanticism of the observers rather than the realities of how life may have been conducted.[11] Moreover, in anthropology's 'reflexive turn', the post-

modernist aversion to essentialisms rendered 'culture areas' and 'village' so-
cieties as somehow out of step with changing fashions of thought. Although
subsequent scholarship has moved beyond the 'village fetishism', as Gilmore
(1982: 184) notes, the contributions by 'Mediterraneanists' have left a lin-
gering image of village societies. Just as colonial ethnographies have framed
the purveyance of 'kinship systems', 'clans', 'tribes' and the like, so too have
such notions as 'honour and shame', 'localism', 'familialism', 'regionalism'
and the gendered dichotomies of space and identity remained powerful.

Further, in turning to European societies, anthropologists trained in
Western institutions made 'theorising' a point of distinction from the mere
descriptiveness of the indigenous ethnologists (Claes 1996: 99). Yet, in the
case of the Balkans, it made for a peculiar kind of symbiosis between West-
ern and native anthropology (or the 'ethnologists' and the 'folklorists'). The
early twentieth century, to the period of the outbreak of World War II, gen-
erated significant ethnological and ethnographic interest in the Balkans. The
key themes, beyond the social evolutionary paradigms of Serbian human ge-
ographer Cvijić (1918a, 1918b), focused on social organisation.[12] The 'south
Slavs' as a 'culture area' was definitive in subsequent scholarship as a site of
a distinctive form of social organisation, the *zadruga* or extended joint-
fraternal household, alongside various shared customs and beliefs.[13] The work
of 'Yugoslav' ethnologists was especially fruitful for 'Western anthropolo-
gists' who drew on their accounts of social organisation among the peasantry,
especially the *zadruga*.[14] Similar themes of traditionalism, communalism
and kinship continued to reverberate in Mediterraneanist and 'Southern
European' discourses in mid-twentieth-century scholarship, often referenc-
ing the earlier village-cum-*zadruga* model. The *zadruga* also shaped a lasting
impression of 'southern Europeans' or 'south Slavs' kinship as the 'anoma-
lous' case amidst the Mediterranean bilateral kindred (see Davis 1977; Pina-
Cabral 1992; Schubert 2005b).

The few studies of Macedonians in the period of early to mid-twentieth
century likewise focused on themes of social organisation found within vil-
lages.[15] The analytic frames of the South Slavists and the Mediterraneanists,
however, served as a pivotal point for historic judgement in the scrutiny of
nationalist assertions following the independence of the ex-Yugoslav state. In
the early 1990s, protests by Greece over the name of the newly independent
ex-Yugoslav state and the use of ancient Macedonian symbols would hold
up international recognition for nearly three decades. The 'name issue' or
'name dispute' also brought anthropologists into the broader debates relat-
ing to (ethno)national identity. Indeed, as of the early 1990s Macedonia be-
came, as Brown highlights, 'a major site of ethnographic production' (2010:
817) and a vast volume of literature emerged from this period that primarily
focused on shifting identities and identity politics, frequently drawing on

history and the geopolitically framed 'Macedonia Question' and occasionally also on previous ethnographic studies.

Where the study of village communities was in a state of hiatus for a number of decades, the turn toward contested identities in the 1990s provided an impetus for the emergence of anthropology of Macedonia. Anthropologists who had conducted fieldwork in predominantly village communities of northern Greece where people of Slav-Macedonian origin often referred to themselves as 'locals' (see Danforth 1989: 65; Cowan and Brown 2000: 5; Cowan 1990: 39) were particularly prominent in engaging with the name issue.[16] With some trepidation, northern Greece specialists drew attention to the 'Slavo-Macedonian' minority alongside the plight of the ex-Yugoslav state in pursuit of international recognition. It was taken as a given that locals of northern Greece shared 'the same socio-cultural background and they were all Slav peasants' (Agelopoulos 1995: 255). But, 'national' was distinguished from 'ethnic' identity, and both were seen as part of a range of socially constructed, subjective narratives of belonging and solidarity (see Danforth 1995; Brown 1998: 111).

Moreover, as Karakasidou notes, the 'area-studies paradigms of the Cold War era' and the connection to national cultures and ideologies came under 'radical critique' (2000: 415). But, there is a discernible reframing rather than abandonment of 'culture area' approach notable as of the 1990s. The hegemonic framing of the Macedonia region as a contested category and the people that refer to themselves as 'Makedonci' as an exemplar of the problems associated with shifting and contested identities (see, for example, Cowan and Brown 2000: 3; Cowan 2008: 340) was difficult to avoid as the central or stand-out feature. Amidst the political sensitivities at the height of the name dispute in the 1990s there was understandably a need for anthropologists of Macedonia, as Brown argues, to steer clear of 'making claims to adjudicate between competing truth-claims embedded in different uses of the term', and concomitantly, challenge 'the hegemonic and essentialist "western" views of the Balkans' (2010: 818). Challenging hegemonic and essentialist western views, however, sits alongside a purveying discourse of difference that continues to reaffirm 'the Balkans' as a category or entity in various ways. The representation of the region as the 'Other' of Europe (Todorova 1994, [1997] 2009) continues and often in unexpected ways as a subtext, for instance, of the problematic continuities of kinship systems and mentalities. The 'patriarchy' of the 'ethnic' Macedonians, Albanians or other peoples of the region would occasionally draw on early to mid-twentieth-century ethnographic studies, for instance, to substantiate assertions that the discriminative treatment of women was grounded in kinship and the value hierarchies espoused within village societies (see, Bošković 2002; Halpern, Kaiser and Wagner 1996). Nonetheless, there were

few in-depth studies of Macedonian village communities, lifeworlds and experiences especially within the now Republic of North Macedonia, beyond concerns with (ethno)national identity.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE RETURNING GAZE ON 'VILLAGE'

As is attested by a number of recent studies, including special essays in journals such as *Critique of Anthropology* (2015, 2017), the study of village societies is a long way from being complete. Moving beyond the accounts of the bounded, isolated and essentialised unity of rural sites or the conceptualisation of a rural-urban dichotomy, many have pointed to the village being 'good to think', to borrow Lévi-Strauss' (1963) phrase. The reinvigoration of village ethnographies is a reminder, as Herzfeld highlights, that 'no village community has ever genuinely been totally isolated from the larger world' (2015: 339). As Eriksen stresses, no 'local community is completely self-sustaining and unchanging through time' (2015: 75). Nonetheless, Grandia, for instance, argues that 'villages are marvellous sites for telling small human stories against a large canvas of political economy' (2015: 319). As Gallo, among others, also notes, 'villages lie at the heart of increasing connections between mobile people' (2015: 249; see also Shnederman 2015: 319).

Villages are indeed 'spaces' and 'sites' that reify the pursuit of meaning-making around not merely spatial and temporal terrains but also relational terrains (Vasantkumar 2017: 367). That is, a focus on the shifts in sociality, intimacy, reciprocity, relationality, mobility and the advance of technologies of connectedness makes any essentialist or unitary divide between rural and urban seem nonsensical. Certainly, there is greater mobility, technological creep if not sophistication in use of such networks and devices as the Internet or mobile phones that speaks to the rural being emplaced within the global and the urban sites.

But as Chio rightly argues, 'differences matter, even when these differences are flexible and when the rural–urban distinction is more of a continuum than a certainty' (2017b: 424). Likewise, relationality invariably encompasses difference and hierarchy (Stasch 2017: 445). Though not always expressed in spatial or temporal terms perhaps, there continues to be a dynamic in the encounter between urban and rural people where some kind of difference is both felt and experienced (see, Koleva 2013: 148). Re-engagement with 'village worlds', as Sorge and Padwe (2015: 241) have phrased the returning gaze on village studies, may indeed point to closer attention to difference as an important factor in analysing social identities and relations. Indeed, difference is a feature of many of the more classic studies mentioned in the previous section. In these more classic studies of villages,

the comparative approach highlights various aspects of differences. For example, difference is found to reside within kinship systems and structures, local socio-political strata and positionality, and gender relations and identities. The link between differences and precarity of village societies has also been notable and highlights connections between village societies as well as the manner of differentiation of villages from national, global or symbolic worlds. Thus, I would suggest, it is not difference per se that is called for in a reinvigorated contemporary study of villages but, rather, the shifting modes of significant difference in the changing forms and consciousness of what constitutes 'modern' subjectivity.

In short, contemporary village ethnography is not simply about villages as locations (sites) nor some kind of opportunity to lament culture loss, defeat and despondency. Although there are many cases of loss (death of villages, looming threats of extinction, etc.), villages are also sites, 'microcosms' if you will, of the local–global and global–local continuum of relationality. The urban/rural divide and where the 'village' sits in the imaginary order of modernity persistently present as an ideational foil for meaning-making endeavours of 'modern' subjects in navigating the complex terrain of both shrinking and expanding relationality.

FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As Geertz highlights, 'the locus of study is not the object of study' (1973: 22). Anthropologists, argues Geertz, do not study villages so much as 'they study *in* villages' (1973: 22, original emphasis). Further, Geertz cautions that the 'methodological problem which the microscopic nature of ethnography presents' is 'not to be resolved by regarding a remote locality as the world in a teacup or as the sociological equivalent of a cloud chamber' (1973: 23). Herzfeld too is mindful of distinguishing location (locus) from personal proximity – the pursuit of building knowledge and understanding through more 'intimate' relationships between ethnographer and the people they study:

> the emphasis should not be on types and sizes of location, but on degrees and kinds of social intimacy. The markers of social intimacy are often clear: code-switching to more informal forms of talk and gesture, accelerating reciprocity and hospitality, increasing distance between official rhetoric and confidential explanations. Villages are indeed great places for achieving such personal proximity, without which the telling detail that is ethnography's special contribution would simply be impossible. (2015: 339)

As an ongoing research agenda, villages have been a central scholarly concern for me since conducting fieldwork for my doctoral research in the mid-

1990s. Privileging sites of village above town was to me 'both familiar and strange', to borrow Srinivas' (1997: 22) phrase. It drew attention to the multiple subjectivities that cut across the researcher/subject paradigm as well as the divergences and convergences between insider and outsider accounts. I not only study villages but was also born in a village. I spent the first eight years of my life in a Macedonian village located along the southern border between Greece and the ex-Yugoslav republic. In many ways, even in migration to Australia the village came with me. Most of those we associated with in the transposed Australian context were ex-villagers, maintaining rituals and celebrations that exaggerated 'local customs' at weddings, christenings and annual celebration of the village *slavas*.

Although I conducted fieldwork in regions quite removed from that of my birth village, and entered as a stranger with no social or kin connections, locals would often remind me of my village origins. Many people in the villages I studied across the Bitola, Ohrid and Prespa regions were especially interested in situating me within the context of my villageness. The village I was born in and the stereotypes of its character or identity were not only presumed to be innately embedded within me but were also evident in the occasional slippage to my local dialect and the mode of engagement and presentation of self among them.

Mindful too of what Doja refers to as 'the ideological foundations and political practices of scholarly production' (2014: 291), I often found myself straddling 'Western' academic training and the sentiments and sense of 'knowing' that is engrained in being a *Makedonka* (fem. Macedonian). The discrepancies and convergences of outsider and insider accounts of 'Macedonia' and 'Macedonian' have generated enormous scholarly debates, which from my own personal perspective have at times been confronting. The representations of what I understood as 'my culture', but also the charge of the politicism and historicism clouded by (ethno)nationalist prejudices of local scholars, are especially acute in the case of writing about the much contested categories of 'Macedonia' and 'Macedonians'. No simple statement of the ethnographic subject can be made without inviting comments, even among scholarly peers, to make a qualification such as 'Slavo-Macedonians', those of 'ex-Yugoslavia', 'not Greek' or to add a note that such an identity is inherently contested, and further, that others also identified with or felt connected to 'Macedonia' or a 'Macedonian' identity. This dilemma was best addressed, according to my doctoral supervisor Roger Just, by taking as my cue how people refer to themselves.

Further, with ethnographic study having the potential to be noticed, under surveillance and scrutiny (see Zadrożna 2016), I often assumed the role of a 'fly on the wall' – absorbing what was said and done without actively

engaging in often heated political debates. As I would join men on their so-journs to city nightclubs or political rallies, I was not only careful to avoid expressing my personal views about what they did but also to avoid engaging with institutional or more powerful actors.

Of course, as naturally happens in social interactions, my endeavours to navigate between engagement and neutrality would on occasion backfire. As a woman studying the world of men, I was partially 'sister' and 'diplomat' as some of the men would say, but still a 'woman' and, furthermore, a perceived villager. For example, in the social world of local villagers (women predominantly) no one is exempt from being a target of gossip, and in my embarrassment at becoming such a target, the judgement, according to an interlocutor, was that I was behaving like a villager, that I behaved as if I had a 'fly on the hat' (*muvata na kapata*); that is, I was affording others power over me that no self-respecting local would allow, giving fuel to the gossip in my display of discomfort or embarrassment that is automatically assumed to point to some truth to the rumour. The incident was a reminder of the importance of two-facedness (*dvoličnost*), where the public 'face' guards against potential entry of harm and differentiates between intimacy and that which should or should not be displayed to others through 'holding up' one's 'head' (see Herzfeld 1985: 45). In the social world of the *Makedonci* (pl. Macedonians), as elsewhere, keeping up appearances and the presentation of a public self that is distinct from that shown to the more intimate members of one's social and personal world were crucial to maintain.

So too, rather than a timely reminder of the dangers of transgression, of going 'native' or having 'gone troppo' as it was once referred to in anthropology (see Marcus 2001: 109), the incident highlighted the challenges of engaged ethnography and the need to remind myself that as Coffey aptly describes, 'fieldwork is personal, emotional and identity *work*' (1999: 1, original emphasis). That is, if you were to become a truly engaged ethnographer, you might be called to assert your presence as an individual in an often uncomfortable social arena. Furthermore, locals often referred to the naivety of visiting ex-villagers; in my case, I was excused as an *Australianka* (fem. Australian) who was presumed to have either forgotten or did not know how to navigate gossip or the other modes of interaction appropriate in village sociality. In the end, through some individuals taking me in their confidences, my discomfort at hearing that there was some gossip directed at me actually served as a way of developing more genuine interpersonal relations. Thus, as fieldwork went on, this tension between the expectations of scholarly detachment, straddling 'embedded' ethnography, and becoming 'familiar' or 'intimate' with the 'ethnographic subjects' emphasised that I too was a subject of study for them.

NOTES

1. The much contested issue over the name of the ex-Yugoslav state of 'Republic of Macedonia' that emerged as of independence in 1991 and following vehement campaigns by Greece was eventually resolved in February 2019 with the state agreeing to change its official name to the Republic of North Macedonia but nonetheless insisting on the right to reference as a cultural group by the name 'Macedonians'.

2. For further discussion of (im)mobility see, for example, Salazar and Smart (2011); Adey (2006).

3. For discussion of the notion of 'dividual', see Dumont (1965, 1970); see also Marriot and Inden (1977); Marriot (1976); Strathern (1988); Holland and Kipnis (1994); Busby (1997); Sökefeld (1999); Whittaker (1992); Spiro (1993); Wikan (1995); and La Fontaine (1985).

4. The reference to high rates of aging bachelors in China has frequently been described as a 'ticking time bomb' or 'bachelor bomb'. For an overview of aging bachelorhood in China, see, for example, Liu et al. (2014); Tucker and Van Hook (2013); Guilmoto (2012); and Hudson and den Boer (2008).

5. There is an enormous volume of literature on the gender imbalances in Asia, especially for China and India but also in many other societies in the region. For an overview of the phenomenon in the region, see for example, Bongaarts and Guilmoto (2015) and Jones (2007, 2010).

6. A number of studies of aging bachelors have pointed to ill-health and deviant behaviour. See Scheper-Hughes ([1977] 2001); Tilche and Simpson (2018); Jin et al. (2013); Zhou and Hesketh (2017: 5).

7. Bourdieu alludes to the fact that the plight of younger sons within kinship systems that focus on the older son and thus the preservation of patrimony intact may be common in other societies. Bourdieu notes, for example, that 'Japanese peasants experienced a form of expulsion from marriage very similar to that of the peasants of Béarn' (2008: 4). This is reaffirmed by various studies, including the study of the Japanese stem-family by Kitaoji (1971).

8. In a brief search through Capari council records, for instance, I found that out of a total of 102 marriages, 96 were out-marriages: 48 women married men from the nearby city of Bitola; 42 women married ex-Macedonian men residing in foreign countries and subsequently emigrated with their new spouse; and, 6 women married men from other Macedonian cities. Overall, there were only 6 marriages of women to local village men. The pattern of out-marriages described here resonates with local informants' accounts where they would often emphasise the high status of their village. That is, where Capari women sort to marry men outside of the village they desire men from the city, rich foreign countries or men of comparatively equivalent status villages as their own.

9. For some notable studies of village societies in Europe see, for example, Arensberg and Kimball (1940) for Ireland, and for the Mediterranean and Greece, Pitt-Rivers ([1956] 1961); Friedl (1962); Campbell (1964); Peristiany (1965); Du Boulay (1974); Loizos (1975b); Davis (1977); Ott (1981); Dubisch (1983); and Herzfeld (1982).

10. See Wolf (1975); Cole (1977); Claes (1996); Pels (1997); Ross (2008); and Schneider (2012) for a discussion of anthropology's turn to Europe.

11. For disappearing village communities see, for example, Friedl (1962, 1964, 1976), Du Boulay (1974) and O'Rourke (2006) who conducted fieldwork in Greece.

12. Though it is difficult to pinpoint when the term 'south Slavists' came into scholarly discourse, one of the earliest mentions is grounded in the evolutionist paradigms by Serbian human geographer Cvijić (1918a, 1918b) and his students, such as Stanoyevich (1919) and Filipović (1965). For Cvijić, mirrored by Stanoyevich, 'the Macedonian type' represented the least evolved or modern.

13. Many anthropologists of the Balkans – such as Mosely ([1940] 1976a, [1943] 1976b [1953] 1976c), Halpern (1965), Balikci (1965), Hammel (1968), Rheubottom (1971), Lockwood (1972) and Buric (1976) – drew reference to Cvijić's work on the *zadruga*. The work of sociologist Vera St Erlich, published in her book, *Family in Transition* (1966), a phenomenal feat in which she surveyed 300 Yugoslav villages during World War II, covering the variety of customs and beliefs, was also influenced by studies of the *zadruga* and peasant society of the earlier indigenous scholars; her work, too, is often cited by Western anthropologists.

14. The influence on western anthropologists of the work of ethnologists may be explained in the pedigrees of association. Cvijić trained Filipović who was a close friend of Mosely (who was also a colleague of Margaret Mead and collaborated with her on projects relating to the Slavs). Mosely was also Halpern's mentor (see Halpern 2002). In the establishment of the state of Macedonia within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the dominance of Serbian ethnology can be seen in both theoretical and methodological approaches (see Bošković 2008; Risteski and Dimova 2013), as well as the academic posts by those trained in Serbia, such as Filipović (see Halpern and Hammel 1970).

15. From the early mid-twentieth century till the outbreak of World War II, ethnographies specifically focusing on Macedonians were scarce. The work of Polish anthropologist Jozef Obrebski, who conducted fieldwork in the Poreche region of Macedonia (1932–1933), became known to English readers via Halpern (2002) and Halpern and Kerewsky-Halpern (1976), posthumously. Though not ethnographic, the work of Brailsford (1906) is fascinating for its delving into the 1903 Uprising and the plight of 'Bulgarian' peasants in Macedonia at the time of the British and European humanitarian relief effort. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were a few studies of 'Yugoslav Macedonians', notably the work of Balikci (1965), who conducted fieldwork in the Bitola region (Skočivir, now completely depopulated), Rheubottom (1971, 1980) in Skopska Crna Gora, and Ford (1983) in the capital city Skopje. It should also be mentioned that many anthropologists of 'South Slavs' have also studied Macedonia, such as Hammel (1980), from the perspective of the joint-fraternal household (*zadruga*), and Halpern (1975a, 1975b), in relation to migration.

16. See, for example, Cowan (1990, 2000); Karakasidou (1993, 1997); Danforth (1993, 1995); Sutton (1997); and Vermeulen (1981), to name but a few anthropologists of northern Greece.