Neoliberalism Illustrated: Privatization in the Republic of Macedonia’s Tikveš Wine Region

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Abstract

This paper draws upon anthropological fieldwork carried out in 2010–11 in the Tikveš wine region of the Republic of Macedonia. Unlike most other countries of the former Eastern Bloc, Macedonia’s post-socialist transition was held off due to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The result is that a slower, more subtle shift has occurred there. But it has been one guided by neoliberal principles, thus significantly altering the livelihoods of the country’s inhabitants. My research in Tikveš illustrates the role privatization is playing in the region’s transition from government to private ownership and production, specifically in the wine growing business. Although the quality and selection of wine in Tikveš has improved, the lives of the independent grape growers and their families have not. Instead, the growers have been subject to the leverage of the winery owners—who have reduced and delayed payments to them—while a neoliberal government has taken a laissez-faire approach to market regulation. This photographic essay therefore focuses on how individuals in the region are both protesting and adapting to the change at hand, by staging protests and blocking main roads, and more so through rearranging their livelihoods and work. Indeed, grape growers have been left with a surplus of grapes and a dearth of income and certainty, inciting some to produce vast quantities of homemade rakija (brandy) while others replace, abandon, or sell their vineyards. New ways of bringing in income, such as selling one’s brandy, produce, or homemade goods, are also modes of survival. Yet many claim that is all they are doing, and “not living, just surviving.”

Keywords: Privatization, neoliberalism, post-socialist transition, wine, Macedonia

Introduction

Located just north of the border with Greece in the former Yugoslavia, the Tikveš region of Macedonia is well-known for its wine production. However, in the last decade it has undergone a drastic transition: the privatization of formerly state-owned wineries along with the state’s severance of long-held ties with the individual lozari ‘grape growers,’ who traditionally supplied the wineries, have led to confusion, chaos, and criminality. More specifically, connected businessmen and bureaucrats, whom the growers call the vinska mafija, ‘wine mafia,’ have taken control of the wineries and industry. In doing so, they have rearranged the wineries’ administration, production, and thus function, with the local communities in tow. What were once state-owned wineries, which bought all grapes grown regardless of quality, have now become modern facilities that utilize new technology in order to source a limited amount of grapes. They in fact produce better quality wine that is on par with contemporary...
standards, which is necessary given the incredibly competitive European and global wine market.\(^1\)

However, while improving wine quality, this transition’s “deregulation” has led to lawlessness and to wineries’ unabashed exploitation of the region’s now unprotected independent growers. Following the move to privatization, the “mafia-controlled” wineries have blatantly disregarded the costs that such independent growers incur in production and the remuneration they expect; instead, these wineries now seemingly purposefully sow confusion. For instance, as grape buyers, the winery owners have specifically spread misinformation in terms of what sorts of grapes they need and when they intend to purchase them; they may during any week of the harvest state that they intend to only buy a certain grape type, and will setup a purchasing station for it. Furthermore, many wineries have in effect used the grape growers to subsidize their business by taking the growers’ grapes but not paying them for one or more years—until the wineries have produced and sold the wine they made using those grapes. Sometimes the wineries fail to pay the growers back altogether. Such circumstances have resulted in the growers protesting on many occasions; one such protest I document here.

Given a judicial system that has received international criticism for its ineffectiveness, corruption, and inability to objectively enforce the rule of law, there is little growers can do about their losses. The immediate consequences are that such unpaid and under-paid harvests have left many of them in debt, and have radically shifted their economic situations and thus livelihoods. Many growers have therefore adopted a variety of means to survive, from producing and selling en masse the region’s famous grape brandy, as well as zimnici, ‘homemade foodstuffs,’ to ripping up their lozje, ‘vineyards,’ and planting staple produce for home consumption—a so-called “return to the peasantry” during post-socialist transitions. Such circumstances, seen by scholars and their ethnographies of other post-socialist countries such as Bulgaria (Creed 1997, Kaneff 2002, etc.), Romania (Kideckel 1995, Sampson 1995, and Verdery 1996, 2003, etc.), Hungary, and Poland (Hann 2003, 2006; Lampland 1995), framed my initial research. But by focusing on privatization and development in one region of the former Yugoslavia, I discovered a variety of unique mechanisms at work and issues to contend with. Overall, my project attempted to understand the very specific context of the lived experiences of those individuals undergoing the painful transition to neoliberalism, where the “market” does not operate as “freely” as one might imagine.

I therefore illustrate the transition with images of various forms of work, protest, and adaptation that I witnessed during my anthropological doctoral fieldwork in 2010–11. Through participant-observation, media research, and interviews, I sought out a framework for understanding the post-socialist to neoliberal, “free-market” transition occurring in Macedonia. I have chosen to illustrate this research through photographs because such images are not only “worth a thousand words,” they also show us the appearance of the land, and its people and their emotive expressions as well. We can see and thus better understand both the fruit and the toil of their labor, and the various colors of their crops and country.

Theoretically speaking, several anthropological ethnographies offer insight into the process of neoliberalism and its societal reworking, from Chris Hann’s text “Not the Horse We Wanted!” Postsocialism, Neoliberalism and Eurasia (2006) to Stephen Collier’s reworking of

\(^{1}\) See Colman (2010) and Veseth (2011) for further insight into the “wine wars” and political and economic forces which shape the global wine industry.
neoliberalism with social modernity and biopolitics in Post-Soviet Social (2011), among others. Hann argues that the spread of neoliberal economic principles and identity politics alongside private ownership, multi-party politics, and the proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are poor compensation for a decline in the substantive material and moral conditions of post-socialist citizenship. Collier, however, steers away from this focus on the 1990s privatization of the post-Soviet sphere and its effects, and instead draws upon Foucault’s lectures from the 1970s on biopolitics, examining neoliberalism as a central form of political rationality in contemporary societies.

I find rational explanations of neoliberalism in the work of both scholars, in the sense that I find various micro and macro level manifestations of neoliberalism’s effects—its “tentacles” if you will—touching and shaping every level of human experience and society. I therefore take neoliberalism to be a particular set of phenomena—political, economic, social, and historical—and consequent lived experience, which on the one hand are strategically implemented within a unique set of circumstances, and which on the other hand emerge in random manifestations. Given the nature of today’s interconnected, global markets and the resulting competition, I see neoliberalism as a reaction to and function of this economic structure, and strategically speaking, as a particular way of organizing these markets in order to benefit particular interests—all in the name of “rationality.” Its proponents are businesses and large commercial enterprises, which use economic arguments of self-interest to claim that trade, production, and consumption should be as minimally regulated by governments as possible in order for their business to thrive, survive, and profit. However, its emergence in random form means that the implementation of neoliberalism is malleable and its manifestations are many, and are often unexpected. I thus turn to Hann’s conclusion, where he decries the drastic changes in standards of living throughout the post-socialist world and emphasizes the specificity of local history in viewing these on-the-ground transformations. I also move forward with Collier’s vision of neoliberalism as a tour de force in the early stage of the 21st century which must be examined in regard to its specific form of political rationality—how within a society it can be rationalized and supported through political systems and their actors. Because neoliberalism is undergirded by arguments of logic and systematicity, an ethnographic examination of its permutations in practice contributes to problematizing its claims.

Understanding the overarching circumstances of the transition in Tikveš—namely privatization in the wine industry as the country prepares for EU entry—is essential to better examining the on-the-ground reworking and negotiations linked to the neoliberal privatizing, yet EU development-oriented transition, at work in Macedonia. Indeed, a series of steps designed to streamline markets and create opportunity for workers at all levels has actually led to a more stratified society. Characterized by the shift from government owned wineries and purchasing to the creation and distribution of subsidies to both buyers (wineries) and sellers (grape growers), the region has been subject to the EU’s Instrument for Pre-accession Access (IPA) since 2006. The IPA includes several components, but I focused on Rural Development (RD) initiatives in my fieldwork research. The IPARD, as it is known, is designed to: “Improve the technological and market infrastructure of commercial agricultural holdings and the food processing industry, aiming to increase the added value of agri-food products and achieve compliance with EU quality, health, food safety, and environmental standards, whilst at the same time assuring the quality of life of the rural population, increasing rural incomes and
creating new employment opportunities” (Delegation of the European Union, Fact Sheet 2010/03). The IPARD program can have significant effects for a predominantly agricultural region such as Tikveš, as the IPARD’s clearly stated aims are to transform not only the agricultural industry in Macedonia, but also the communities in which they exist. Yet such reorientation of production and livelihoods is difficult, as rural producers and their fields are generally oriented toward one main crop—grapes in the case of Tikveš. Growers are therefore rarely capable of generating the required capital needed for change themselves, so it is the region’s elite (several of whom I interviewed) who have benefited from the IPARD’s funding. They are the ones who have been able to match large sums of money in order to expand their business operations, or to create new ones altogether. The EU’s policies, reflecting “free-market” capital priorities, thus intend to incorporate Macedonian agriculture and rural communities into an economic structure that does not seem to promote opportunity, but instead inequality at the hands of local elites who seek to exploit the increasingly impoverished pool of labor available to them.

The likely unintended consequence of the neoliberal project is thus ultimately an exclusion of rural families from the capitalist marketplace that is supposedly attempting to integrate them. Further, the urban and rural live in a sort of symbiosis, with the projects and capital of the urban population and government continuously restructuring rural production and livelihoods. In this case, without sufficient rural production of goods, namely produce, those living in urban settings will also suffer from higher food prices and shortages, and the state’s lack of attention and consideration to its agricultural production will be to blame (along with the neoliberal agenda which guided it there).

Methodologically, my fieldwork research included documenting the growers’ methods of survival, as well as the shifting circumstances, customs, identity, and agency of the grape growing communities. Unfortunately, the plight of the growers has not improved since my fieldwork. Protests in early February 2013 over the sudden bankruptcy of one winery which had not paid its grape suppliers in five years—and owed an estimated six million euros—caused an eruption of protests. Such as in the photographs below, growers blocked regional roads and called on the government to intervene. It is a situation that will only be clear in distant hindsight, but if the protests from 2010 (and others) are any indication, the government will do little to assist. Moreover, protests are being politicized, as the growers are essentially divided into their respective political parties via populist grandstanding. Politicians, whether in attempting to represent their constituents or merely gain clout, call upon the opposition and blame them for this kriza, ‘crisis,’ in the wine industry. Yet it appears to only be a crisis to the extent that it is engineered as such by the powers that be, the so-called wine mafia.

Harvesting and Delivering the Grape Crop

The following photo (Figure 1) is of a lozar, ‘grower,’ waiting at a makeshift buying station (at a timber facility) setup by a large winery from another town in the region. This was the first time such a method of purchasing had occurred at this location, and it was by no means a smooth process—the grower below had been waiting for three days to sell his grapes, which were quickly fermenting in the midday heat, and he expected to wait in line another two

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2 See Otten (2013) for an article on the IPARD and its participants.
days. Yet he was not even certain what to expect in terms of payment; those ahead of him had merely received an IOU potvrda, ‘confirmation slip.’ Such a slip allows both the buyer and seller to claim government subsidies, but that may be all the grower receives in the end.

Many growers in the region have indeed come to wonder whether their work is in vain and za dzabe, ‘for nothing,’ as they often state when discussing the crisis in their occupation. Reactions to the radical transition in the wine industry for growers depend on the kinds of grapes they are selling, the other means of income they have, their social status and their social connections, among other things. However, there is a clear set of vocabulary that is generally used in their discourse, and in addition to the above, I heard the situation described as a katastrofa, ‘catastrophe,’ and their lives and labor mizerija, ‘misery,’ or maka ‘arduous/suffering.’ As the middle-aged grower in Figure 1 said to me: “Maka mi e život,” ‘my life is suffering.’

Figure 1: A grower waiting in line for days to “sell” his grapes at a makeshift purchasing station in the town of Kavadarci.
This series of images (Figures 2–7) from the growers’ strike in September 2010 shows the extent of their frustration. Blocking the entrance and exit ramps to the country’s main highway (E–75) and the crossroad which intersects it near the town of Negotino, they physically and verbally protested the lack of payments made on their previous one to two years’ harvests. With no clear understanding at that point of what the wineries were doing and expecting—what their new “standards” were—growers were furious and confused.

Furthermore, when the government did nothing to help them, it was unequivocally a turning point for the growers, who realized that from then on the system and “rules of the game” (Kideckel 1995) of privatization had changed. Indeed, the very fact that their protest was labeled a “strike” is loaded with meaning—for up until that point being a grape grower was an official occupation worth declaring. Like factory workers, truck drivers, and school teachers, if they as a group were dissatisfied, they felt that by striking they could exact change. But that did not turn out to be the case in 2010, and the last few years have thus seen a downward spiral for the region’s growers as they shift away from grape growing as an occupation and as a way of ensuring their livelihoods. The region’s local newspaper labeled the year 2010 a “catastrophe” and I heard this word uttered frequently. In conversations on the street, or whenever I asked growers about their situation, they nearly always retorted “katastrofa e,” ‘it’s a catastrophe.’ They would follow by explaining their plight—the cost of their fuel and pesticides, about their debts, and how they cannot earn enough to feed their families. They were not only in debt and uncertain about the future, but they felt abandoned by the industry which had structured their livelihoods for half a century.

Figure 4: “We’re coming to Skopje, bringing you grapes without money.”

3 “Katastrofalna godina za lozarstvoto vo Tikvešijata, monologot na vinariite ke ja uništi vekovnata tradicija, lozjata ke se kopačat, no što da se sadi na nivoto mesto” (Kav'darečki Vesnik, October 22, 2010). Note: all translations in the text are the author’s own.
Figure 5: “Strike—we’ll throw out the grapes, without money we won’t give it away”

Figure 6: Growers awaiting a resolution sit below a Tikveš Winery billboard on a hilltop beside the E-75 highway.
Figure 7: Sacks of grapes symbolically left in the middle of the road by protesting growers.

Figure 8: Grapes left unpicked on the vines. With no guarantee for payment, an estimated 50 percent of growers abandoned their vineyards after the strike-protests of 2010, unwilling to spend the time or money on the labor required to harvest them.
Gender roles have shifted throughout this transition as well. Whereas during socialism women were encouraged to work for the state (and all individuals were guaranteed employment), the many factory and state positions that they once held have since been lost. However, men have also lost their livelihoods in significant numbers, and from my research they appear more burdened by the catastrophic crisis in the wine industry and region than women. This is likely because at present, women are more likely to be employed—albeit in an exploitative fashion—in shops, banks, schools, hospitals, etc., and yet still must maintain the traditional role of mother and domakjinka, ‘homemaker.’ On the contrary, droves of unemployed men restlessly seek work in order to sufficiently provide for their families—fulfilling their “traditional role” and satisfying their integrity, yet are often unsuccessful and thus left in a liminal space. Such men converse in the town center or sit in cafes, and are ultimately left much less busy than women. There is thus a different and unequal gendered burden: large numbers of men seem to find nowhere to fit it in this new system, while women may appear to do so. Yet women’s relatively successful adaptation to the changing circumstances largely relies on their family’s needs and thus their acceptance to take lower pay. In doing so, they take on a subjugated position while also still bearing the burden of housework and childcare.

Figure 9: A woman from a village near the town of Negotino prunes the vines at the start of the growing season. Her husband assisted with this labor, but used a dredging tool on the tractor to collect the old vines into large heaps (which are then burned on the spot).
This stands in some contrast to the more egalitarian, gender-inclusive work environment that I witnessed in family vineyards. Although it is the men who are predominantly registered as grape producers, zemjodelci, 'agriculturalists,' and who have participated in the strikes, both grandmothers, mothers, and daughters work alongside grandfathers, fathers, and sons in tending to the vines. Such as Turesky (2012) found in the Netherlands, there are some notable roles that are generally performed along gender lines: only men drive tractors, do the initial, ceremonious krojenje, ‘pruning of the vines,’ in February, and spray the fertilizers and pesticides. Women, on the other hand, must prepare and setup the picnic lunch and tea or coffee that is consumed while out in the vineyards for the day. Yet, both men and women prune the vines together and eventually help pick the grapes during the harvest (see Figure 9). As I have been repeatedly told by women during my fieldwork, “nothing can be done without [the help of] a woman's hand.”

Although this is obviously changing, the roles individuals have in terms of labor is based not so much on gender as on socio-economic status. That is, while families have usually worked together to maintain their vines throughout the year, come the berba, ‘harvest’—when the grapes must be picked over just a few days—additional labor is hired. The argati, ‘laborers,’ are often (but not exclusively) of the Roma minority and will include both men and women. However, the men are usually paid the equivalent of $2–3 more per day because of the heavy lifting they must do when stacking the crates of grapes, which weigh 20–25 lbs. each (such as in Figure 10). Bringing in just under $20 per day, their income is hard earned: day laborers must work ten hour days, doing arduous labor in the late summer heat.

Their employment is not cheap, however, as paying even five individuals to pick the grapes over a few days will total $300 (an average month's income in the region). In addition, the expenses of gas for the tractor, which the grower use to get to his vineyards and often drive several miles to reach them, and pesticides constitute a significant portion of a grower's inputs into his vineyards. Therefore, the expenses of the laborers—who demand payment immediately—make the transition in the Tikveš wine industry all the more painful. Many growers, unable to cover the expenses necessary to maintain and harvest their crop, have abandoned their vineyards altogether. They have therefore begun cutting corners on goods, bills, and debts, which in turn has led to the closing of shops and the severance of everything from telephone to cable to electric service, and more so to relationships with other individuals. The region is thus in disarray, with families slowly rearranging their work, production, and consumption.

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4 Ništo ne može bez ženska raka.

5 One day's pay of 800–900 Macedonian denari (MKD) is roughly equivalent to $17–19, where one US dollar equals approximately 46 MKD.
New Standards and Expectations

The following two photos (Figures 11 & 12) are from a soopštenije, ‘official declaration,’ by the largest formerly state-owned winery, Tikveš Winery. Posted just three days before the date mentioned, the image in Figure 11 primarily states: “This notifies the reader that a measurement of the grape sort smederevka (a white wine grape) will begin from 9/27/2010. A minimum of 19 brix (sugar content) is the boundary [minimum] for the invitation to [have your grapes] chosen. Everything that is below that will be returned, and the grape grower assumes the risk. Only grapes which fulfill the criteria for quality will be purchased.” The second photo, Figure 12, shows the 19 brix row in gray and is a price list for the popular smederevka grape based on such sugar content levels. The pricing ranges from 7-9 MKD ($0.15-.20) per kilogram.6

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6 The standard price for grapes in the European Union is twice this amount, at $.30-.40 per kilogram.
Figure 11: An official declaration of one winery’s standards & buying procedures.

Figure 12: The winery’s grapes prices based on sugar content (brix) with the cutoff at 19 brix in grey.
Responding to privatization

In this series of photos, growers Dejan and his father, Vane (pseudonyms), use their unpurchased grape harvest to make homemade wine and brandy. While production of the latter is traditional in the clear majority of grape-grower households (including their own), I discovered that home wine production was actually not as common as I had expected, and for Dejan and Vane it was merely an experiment. The infrequency of home wine preparation may be the result of the socialist state’s production of decent, affordable wine. Furthermore, many individuals whom I surveyed about home wine production replied that it is complicated and not worth it—wine is only consumed locally in modest quantities and is best left to the wineries to produce for export. Brandy, however, is simple to make, bears a high alcohol concentration,
and is sought out by Macedonians and others throughout the Western Balkans for its flavor, as well as cleansing and medicinal qualities.\(^7\)

Figure 13 shows Dejan bottling wine, his first time doing so. Yet Dejan’s and Vane’s plight was like that of so many growers in the region—they were left with several tons of grapes with which they were uncertain what to do. Most growers indeed produced brandy in vast quantities, creating what many called a *poplava*, ‘flood,’ of it in the country. Thus just as the government has enacted stricter laws on the production and sale of such homemade alcoholic goods, growers have been forced to illegally transport the spirit around the country to try to make ends meet. Fortunately, they can sell it for up to $2 per liter in other towns and cities, which is much more than they are able to get through sales of the same initial grapes to wineries or through sales of *rajika brandy* locally. However, if growers are caught by the police selling it, they face strict fines that may amount to thousands of dollars.

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\(^7\) *Rakija* is used in a variety of ways. I met several, mostly older, individuals who drink a small glass of it every morning and claim that their good health is a result of this habit. It is more often drank at the beginning of the main meal of the day, as an accompaniment to the meal’s salad. Alternatively, it can be used for medical purposes. For instance, wearing socks soaked in brandy is a method used to bring down fever. It is also used as a cleansing agent—on the skin as a disinfectant, and on other surfaces such as tables or glass.
Effects on the Local Economy and Adapting to Change

It is estimated that half of all families in Tikveš are involved in agriculture, which until recently was dominated by grape production. The effects of privatization—decreased demand for individually grown grapes, and unpaid and under-paid grape harvests—has left the local economy struggling. From cutting back on spending, to buying na veresija, ‘creating a tab,’ at the local grocery for food, to bartering goods, families and communities have had to adapt to their new reality.

The following photos (Figures 16-19) provide a glimpse into this new world of changing circumstances, with Figure 16 picturing a “for rent” sign in a shop window—one of two dozen empty shops on a formerly busy commercial street near the center where I lived in the town of Kavadarci. Sandwich shops and bakeries were some of the casualties, as students from the nearby high school who used to support them are given less pocket change than before. And as the owner of one boutique, which had just barely managed to stay in business, told me “before (the crisis) fall was the best time for me—growers and their families, having received payment for their crop—would come in and spend 5,000 denari ($105) on new clothes. Now they come in with just a few hundred denari when they can, and only buy what they absolutely need.”

Figure 17 is an image of an increasingly common sight—vineyards for sale. With no income from grapes, some growers have decided to sell their land rather than start anew. Indeed, after years of growing grapes, not only is the investment to plant a new crop difficult, so is learning how to grow and sell it. In Figure 18, we see the effects of a cash-strapped economy: although grape-growing communities have less income than before, they still desire and/or need to make purchases. Used car lots like these consist of imported used vehicles
from Austria, Slovenia, and Italy), satisfying a niche market given the tight finances for many families.

Figure 16: A “for rent” sign in the window of one of many vacant shops.

Figure 17: “Vineyards se prodava, ‘for sale,’” are an increasingly common sight.
In Figure 19 we see a new form of exchange—roadside commerce. In fact, with the buying out and closing of former state-owned jarring factories, the home production of such goods has increased in Tikveš. Similar to production in traditional peasant (non-industrialized) economies, this production creates self-sufficiency for families but also a surplus to sell (cf. Wolf 1969). As Deema Kanef similarly saw in Bulgaria, “the family’s involvement is not only vital in the preparation…it [the family] is also the main recipient” (2002:42).
**Pazari,** ‘town markets,’ have thus become notoriously overcrowded with sellers and such goods, be they produce (fruits and vegetables) or jarred and bottled goods (condiments, pickled vegetables, preserves, brandy, and fruit and vegetable juices). Figure 19, from the small town of Rosoman, shows just how some locals have set up permanent shop at the town’s market, which happens to sit on its main road—a major artery through the region connecting the country’s main highway (E–75) with larger towns and cities in the southwest. Selling for above-average prices, they mainly attract buyers traveling from the capital, Skopje, or the cities of Bitola or Ohrid, who are willing to pay more for the rural products.

**Conclusion: Adapting but “not living, just surviving”**

Graffiti expressing dissatisfaction has become common in the region. The above states, “I haven’t eaten like a (hu)man in four years.” Another common sight was graffiti proclaiming “I’m not living, [just] surviving”—a fact of life for many, indeed.

I utilize these statements in concluding my photo essay because they call upon the exclusion that results from standardization and new forms of regulation. Or in the case of neoliberalism in Tikveš, a free-market lack of regulation through control by the wine mafia, which has been left unchecked by the government. The wine mafia, mostly wealthy businessmen who took control of former socially owned enterprises after the breakup of Yugoslavia, sees the grape growers as a nuisance. At his lavish villa and private winery outside of Kavadarcı, I met and spoke with the former manager of Tikveš Winery, who oversaw its privatization a decade ago. He warned me not to listen to the growers, stating, “they’re lying and complaining because they’re lazy.” I have also been informed of the winery owner’s attempts at lobbying the government to regulate homemade brandy production. The wine

![Figure 20: “I haven’t eaten like a (hu)man in four years.”](image)
mafia only desire such government intervention when it benefits them, but see the assistance demanded by the independent growers as undesirable, since it might clearly interfere with the company’s production and profits. Thus, the combination of such regulations with the state’s lack of concern for the welfare of growers and other citizens has in fact redefined citizenship and state legitimacy, and put private [business] interests before those of the people.

The transition in Macedonia has been particularly drastic because of the country’s starting point, from where it has transitioned. Unlike the former Soviet Union and its satellite states, such as neighboring Bulgaria, the standard of living in Yugoslavia was nearly on par with the rest of Central and Western Europe: citizens had good and guaranteed income, passports with which they could freely travel, and sufficient civil liberties. Although delayed due to the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, the slide down the slippery slope to free-market capitalism has therefore been relatively painful. Traditions and expectations established via a good standard of living during the many decades of socialist governance mean that many people, including the grape growers and their families, have come to feel as Hann found elsewhere in Eastern Europe—dehumanized and victimized by neoliberalism’s manifestation and growing hegemony in their modern world. Indeed, such as Hart (2012) claims, the post-socialist marketization, deregulation, and valuation of individual self-management are reflected in a reorganization of economic and political systems. This new configuration then seeks to erode the elective relationship established in the 20th century between the nation-state and industrial capitalism.

There is a consequent lack of trust as the state, industry, and even individuals become more exploitative. I heard a handful of stories about friends and relatives cheating each other out of money, while members of the older generation, benefiting from a good penzija, ‘pension,’ are subject to the demands and needs of their unemployed and under-employed children and grandchildren. There is thus an increase in illicit behavior (or at least an increased fear of it), from stealing from one’s relative to stealing from one’s neighbor and from others. Specifically, to make the matters worse for grape growers, many have suffered vandalism due to the theft of the metal poles which hold up the rows on which their grape vines grow, as the valuable metal can be sold on the black market.

With shifting gender roles, production, and payment, alongside the costs of personal and hired labor, there has been a significant transformation in livelihoods and worldviews. The previous system of guaranteed payments and sufficient income to cover costs, provide for one’s family, and take a two-week holiday on the seaside has been replaced by an arduous and comparably impoverished existence for many, particularly for rural grape producers. In the region’s most isolated villages, utilities have been severed and schools closed, leaving an entire generation of children to grow up working the land, as their distant forefathers—but not their fathers or grandfathers—once did.

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8 As my barber lamented site kradaat deneska, ‘everyone’s stealing today.’
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