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## Monumentality and Identity: Macedonian Cultural Politics (2006-2016)

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**Abstract.** For the Republic of Macedonia, the period of transition, which foresees a move from a socialist political system to a capitalist one, accompanied by an appropriation of Western democratic values and principles, ushered in a process of international recognition for the new country. As part of the efforts placed in said realm, cultural politics stands out as the key factor in the country's attempts to create its self-image as well as the image it wishes to showcase globally. By negating elements that constitute the Macedonian identity, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, through so-called capital projects in the realm of culture, enforces a well-defined cultural politics that redefines the Macedonian identity. The implemented cultural politics aims at creating a dominant discourse that positions the "true" story about Macedonia, oppositional to the already present stereotypical representations, with the goal of "cultivating" the collective's memory, now rooted in a mythic past. The stated aim of this strategy is to instigate a personal identification with the state, thus strengthening its international position. However, the effect of said strategy has resulted in the following: internally speaking, a divided society, internationally speaking, an uncertain outcome of the processes accompanying Macedonia's international integration.

**Keywords:** cultural politics in the Republic of Macedonia, national identity, monumentality, top-down politics, resistance, the Colorful Revolution

## 1. Introduction

The cultural politics of the Republic of Macedonia has been conditioned by the specificity of its context. The breakup of the former Yugoslavia meant that the Macedonian people could, for the very first time, constitute its fully independent and sovereign state.<sup>1</sup> Though Macedonia managed to secure its international affirmation and recognition, today it remains to face the negation of key elements necessary to firmly establish its sovereign identity. Due to the ongoing issue with neighboring Greece, namely in terms of its constitutional name –Macedonia–, it continues to be recognized under the FYROM reference.<sup>2</sup> The other neighboring states have also negated certain aspects of Macedonia's identity: Bulgaria has negated the existence of the Macedonian language, whereas Serbia the autonomy of the Macedonian church. In 2001, the Republic of Macedonia was also faced with an armed conflict, instigated by the ethnic Albanian minority, framed as a human rights fight.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the name dispute, directly, as well as the other mentioned issues, indirectly speaking, have contributed to the country's EU and NATO integration processes being fully blocked.

Facts speak to a missed opportunity to constitute a state at a time when the other Balkan countries establish its statehood, followed by a failed international integration during the present day, something that has left Macedonians feeling scorned and disadvantaged. Most Macedonians feel as if Macedonia's unfavorable history is repeating, and with that, present day sensibilities reaffirm the already established past image of Macedonia as a "powder keg", as a "mixed

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<sup>1</sup> The Macedonian people had constituted its first independent and sovereign state at the end of the Second World War, during the First Presidium of ASNOM [the Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia], namely in 1944; however, this state was a federative unit within Yugoslavia.

<sup>2</sup> It needs to be pointed out, however, that the majority of states have recognized the country under its constitutional name (the Republic of Macedonia).

<sup>3</sup> Albania has never officially or formally for that matter underscored the territorial integrity of the Republic of Macedonia; however, the presence of Albanian irredentism cannot be sidelined.

salad", as "Europe's Other" (Georgievska-Jakovleva, 2012; Pavlovski & Georgievska-Jakovleva, 2009).

Through its cultural politics during the last decade, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia has attempted to establish a new model of (self)identification that can be analyzed through two segments, namely the so-called capital projects in the publishing industry and the *Skopje 2014* Project.<sup>4</sup> The fact that these projects were not financed through an open call, which is the standard practice, nor was their realization accompanied by a wider public debate, brings us to the following thesis, namely that capital projects in the realm of culture have afforded the political elites in power a "top-down" way to implement a well-thought of strategy that would redefine the national identity, and with that the Republic of Macedonia's international position.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Each year, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Macedonia announces an open call for the financial support of projects that have a national interest, within the cultural realm, as well as projects aimed at the development of the creative industries. So-called capital projects are not a part of this established practice. In terms of this paper, only capital projects that clearly represent the direction that the Republic of Macedonia's cultural politics follows and at the same time fall outside of the established financing parameters.

<sup>5</sup> The capital projects in the publishing industry are: *135 Volumes of Macedonian Literature* an edition aimed at showcasing the literary production having taken place on Macedonian soil since the Middle Ages; The translations of the *135 Volumes of Macedonian Literature*, and the 8 volume "Anthology of Macedonian Literature", namely a selection and translation of the most representative pieces in six world languages (French, Spanish, Russian, German, Arabic, and Chinese); The translations of selected works by Nobel Prize-winning authors; "World Literature Pearls", encompassing 560 works; "Macedonian Temptations", monographs with CD-rom editions of documentary films by the Macedonian National Television, in 66 volumes; "Best in World Philosophy, History, and Psychology with Psychoanalysis", 150 books; "Anthology of World Poetry", translated in Macedonian, 5 volumes; "Anthology of Macedonian Childrens' and Yough Adult Literature", 3 volumes; The translations of the anthological works from world architecture, painting, sculpture, internal design and ornament art into Macedonian, 22 works; The translations of the 150 most significant works from the world of sports, health and nutrition, and The translations into Macedonian of 150 biographies, autobiographies, memories, and monographs of world famous people. The *Skopje 2014* Project, on the other hand, encompassed the construction of a large number of buildings and an even larger number of statues being placed, primarily in the downtown area of the capital city of Skopje.

Despite the "top-down" politics, the key characteristic shared by the two projects is their monumentality. This term references a physical and numerical size, that is to say, it speaks to two projects of enormous size and scope. Whilst promoting the projects, the powers that be (the Government and the Ministry of Culture) emphasized the grandeur and significance of the undertakings. Hence, in terms of the capital projects in the realm of the publishing industry that serve to represent Macedonian literature domestically and internationally, through translations in several world languages, we can say that we are dealing with an "all-encompassing approach" that aims to "represent the rich and nuanced world of the highbrow and definitive literary values of the writers" from Macedonia (Katalog, 2015: 7), while the projects related to the translations of world literary masterpieces into Macedonian aim at "enriching Macedonian culture with such treasured masterpieces by authors that marked the literary canon for the last hundred years (...) thus affirming the commitment to bring Macedonian readers world renown literary works" (19). The "Macedonian Temptations" project, on the other hand, aims at "elevating the forsaken and unwritten history of the Macedonian people, by offering up scientifically verified facts, arguments, and interpretations that speak the long history of the Macedonian struggle for statehood and independence" (230).

By analyzing the aforementioned projects, the following questions can be addressed: have the implemented cultural politics undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia been effective *vis-à-vis* the stated goal, namely the introduction of a new model of (self) identification and full international recognition of the Macedonian state under its constitutional name. The answers will be provided through a description and interpretation of what message has been sent, what it signifies, and the kind of world order the said projects help usher in.

## 2. (Re)imagining the National Identity

### 2.1 *The Dominant Narrative Intervenes*

It seems that when creating its cultural politics the Government of the Republic of Macedonia takes into consideration the claims that suggest that in order for the nation-state to function, apart from the necessary components for a functional state –such as political sovereignty, statehood, the consolidation of territory (Giddens, 1987; Mann 1993)–, ideas and myths that serve to sentimentalize the collective experience are needed (Holsti, 1996). This, in turn, focuses on nurturing a sense of a shared heritage and history, as a prerequisite for national cohesion, i.e., for collective consciousness and identity. Or: it asks for "the choreographing of the power of [the] imagination by locating it in an invented history, and grounding it in an imagined geography. The orchestration of such collective remembering and, if necessary, collective amnesia, constitutes the crucial underpinning of national-state identities" (Osborne, 2001:7). Henceforth, nationalism persists as "the most compelling identity myth in the modern world" (Smith 1995:1). And this showcases the psychological and emotional bases for constructing and stabilizing the national identity (Connor, 1994), symbols and myths (Zelinsky, 1988), namely, the position that the state "must be symbolized as being loved, imagined so that it can be constituted". (Walzer, 1967 in Zelinsky, 1988:65; my own translation)

In order for the state to be "symbolized and imagined in order for it to be loved", an idea that could be summed up as the following is being constituted: the request for an independent and internationally recognized state of the Macedonian people under its constitutional name is a just cause, for it involves an ancient (Biblical) people, whose struggle for freedom has been long-lasting and heroic, and whose long historical continuity has added with its specificity to the European cultural and civilizational development. Said idea requires a balanced narrative, which first and foremost will act as counter-balance to the attempts to deny the Macedonian identity. Bearing in mind the statement by Francis that our narratives "produce the language that we use to describe ourselves as a community" and that

"if we are not telling ourselves the right narratives, then we cannot imagine ourselves acting together to resolve our problems" (1998: 475) and the position by Friedman that "identity is literally unthinkable without narrative" (1998: 8-9), the powers that be look to such a "true" narrative in the literary and historic production. The capital projects in the publishing industry are in fact serving to actualize and/or create myths, namely, literature is looked at to provide the creation of the myth about the cultural and heroic past, whilst history provides the origin myth.

The *135 Volumes of Macedonian Literature Project* serves at least two functions: on the one hand, it ought to represent the "continuity" of the Macedonian nation as a literate nation, starting with medieval times and all the way to present day, hence, it helps create an image of Macedonia as the cradle of Slavic literacy.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the re-publishing of an edition of already anthological literary works – though not ideologically monolithic–, never bring into question the existence of the Macedonian identity, aims at mapping the "key spots" for identification. This is possible since, due to the unfavorable historical events, Macedonian literature would often serve a compensating function. Namely, it would compensate for the absences in the real world by creating mythic stories of a historic past (Georgievska-Jakovleva, 2006). To illustrate: said function is present in only two novels from the aforementioned edition, namely *Pirey* by Petre M. Andreevski, where the indestructibility of the titular weed stands metonymically for the Macedonian people, and *Marko Krале* by Slobodan Mickovikj, which rests on the epic poem cycle about Marko Krале and stems from the author's interest in how a historically marginal figure such as Prince Marco rises into a hero of

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<sup>6</sup> This idea rests on the thesis that the sheer birthright of Saint Cyril and Methodius (Thessaloniki) and their sphere of influence (the territory of present-day Macedonia), and consequently, the assumption that Old Church Slavonic was most definitely their mother tongue, gives Macedonia, and with that the Macedonian people, the right to consider itself as the place whence Slavic literacy originated and spread from. This thesis rests on the shoulders of an older, already established thesis by the Macedonian literary science, that the fact itself about the so-called Macedonian edit of the Glagolitic legitimizes the conversation about Macedonian medieval literature.

unprecedented strength and a protector of his people within the lyricism of folklore.

The *Macedonian Temptations Project* is tied to aspects and segments of Macedonian history that can be marked as forgotten/forbidden by the previous political system. Namely, it speaks to a revisiting and re-addressing aspects of Macedonian history by revising the already established processes, persons, and works, and replacing them with new ones, with the goal of imagining a different dominant image about Macedonian history from the previously established one. This new image reads: due to the circumstances surrounding the Macedonian people's right to sovereignty, as part of a larger political unity (Socialist Yugoslavia), it had to relinquish a part of its history. Though the project addresses the processes and figures from the turn of the century (20th), a time when the idea of nation-states in the Balkans gains prominence, freed from Ottoman rule, it adds onto another "forgotten" history: the right of the Macedonian people to reference a shared history with the ancient Macedonia from the days of Alexander the Great.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the image of Macedonia as a "powder keg" or "Europe's Other",<sup>8</sup> said projects attempt to create a different image of Macedonia, within the cultural politics of the country, from

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<sup>7</sup> Under the influence of the current authorities' ideology, a part of the Macedonian historians postulate the thesis that Macedonia has been the victim of the interest of more powerful nations, first and foremost the Serbs, when part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. According to this thesis, due to the upper hand Serbs had they were able to practice a politics of annexation, then followed by the Bulgarians and Greeks, Macedonia was a lose during its Yugoslav days: divided, whilst the idea about independence and unification most severely punished. Henceforth, each idea about the possibility of seeing present-day Macedonia as the inheritor of Alexander the Great's history is being sanctioned, which in the eyes of said Macedonian historians the present Macedonian state has an inalienable right (claim continuity). Literature guards the "forbidden" history of the idea about Macedonia's wholeness, however the idea about Macedonia as the inheritor of ancient history has been entirely forgotten, hence the efforts to its re-actualization. In fact, the very insistence on such historic continuity is what turns the capital projects of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia into key components of a well-thought of strategy.

<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the projects tied to the translation of books from various disciplines into Macedonian aims at demonstrating the readiness to adopt Western influences (for its influences are demonstratively present), thus treating Macedonia as a part of Europe, rather than as "Europe's Other".

the already established one, both domestically and internationally. Unlike the disputed Macedonian identity and the already ascertained stereotype of Macedonia as a "powder keg", these project are to help create an image of Macedonia as the cradle of civilizations, as a Biblical and ancient land, and with that help change the dominant self-identification of the Macedonian people from the position of the proverbial loser to the stance of the heroic victor, thus help increase the country's international ratings.

For the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, said narrative is the true story of the country's identity, and as such it is a constitutive part of the strategies employed to resolve the current issues tied to the obstacles accompanying the international recognition of the country under its constitutional name and its NATO and EU integration.

## *2.2 The Visualization of the Constituted Narrative*

The *Skopje 2014* project is the visualization of this discourse, for it contains the four components represented by the capital projects in the publishing history: antiquity, continuity, heroic past, and the ancient Macedonian culture as the inalienable part of civilized Europe. The project does not only help voice the constituted discourse, but also afford its dominance by adding on a series of details. Namely, the project favors the constituted narrative about Macedonia, aimed at its self-identification, since, in the words of Massey, places become tied to people through lived stories: "[the]identity of places is very much bound up with the *histories* which are told them, *how* these stories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant" (1995: 37). For Raymond Williams, such lived narratives instigate "structures of feeling", which then bind people to their worlds by enrooting them in a given place (cited in Harvey 1996: 37). Most authors recognize the paradigmatic power of myth: "[m]ost history, when it has been digested by people, becomes myth. Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture's deepest values and aspirations. (...) Myths are so fraught with meaning that we live and die by them. They are the maps by which cultures navigate through time" (Wright, 1992: 5).

The *Skopje 2014* Project is a practical proof of such a claim. Situated in the state capital, referenced by the name itself, it stands in accordance with the stance that the nation's capital is the best suited place for narrativization and recollection, that is to say the focal point for the nation's imagination, thus representing a pantheon of historical figures incorporated in the public and ceremonial space.

A monumental sculpture titled "Warrior on a Horse" has been erected on the main city square, Macedonia (opened to the public on September 8, 2011, commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Republic of Macedonia's independence),<sup>9</sup> while at the Pele Square, in the vicinity of the Macedonian Square, "Porta Macedonia".<sup>10</sup> The two monuments are situated in such a way so that it gives off a visual

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<sup>9</sup> The monument is 14.5 high, cast in bronze and set on a concrete basis that is 10 meters high. Under the monument, there is a fountain surrounded by eight soldiers, also cast in bronze and 3 meters in height, as well as eight lions, 2.5 meters high. The column basis of the warrior statute consists of three rings with relief plaques that contain images of three battles. They are separated by three rings made of bronze, with decorations and relief figurines. The top ring projects a water curtain, whilst upwards a fog effect is released. The fountain plays music. The statue was cast in Florence Italy by Ferdinando Marinelli, and its author is Valentina Stefanovska. Unofficially, 7.5 million euros were spent for its construction.

<sup>10</sup> The monument is in the shape of a triumphal arch, open to the public on January 6, 2012, with a speech by the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, where he self-identified as the ideologue behind the entire project. It was officially open for use a few months after the set date (September 8, 2011, namely the 20th Anniversary of Macedonia's independence). The Porta is 21 meters high. On its exterior, it is adorned by reliefs covering a surface of 193 square meters, while its interior is a gallery space, on two levels and a souvenir shop. The rooftop contains an observation platform, with three telescopes, to be reached by two elevators. It is also known under the name "Triumphal Arch", and it is the work of the sculptor Valentina Stefanovska. The monument was built by the construction company "Granit" from Skopje, at a cost of 4.4. million euros. It also consists of 32 reliefs on top of a marble surface from Prilep, "Sivec", depicting scenes from pre-history, including images from the Bay of Bones settlement, Alexander the Great's antiquity, the Middle Ages through the all-Slavic educators Cyril and Methodius, Clement and Naum of Ohrid, Tzar Samoil, followed by some later periods, with Krale Marko and Karposh, whilst the 20th century is depicted through Ilinden, ASNOM, the Aegean Macedonian exodus, all the way to 1991 and the declaration of Macedonia's independence. Apart from the historical scenes, the side ways are adorned by artefacts from folklore material culture, accompanied by four bronze statues situated on the corners of the sill.

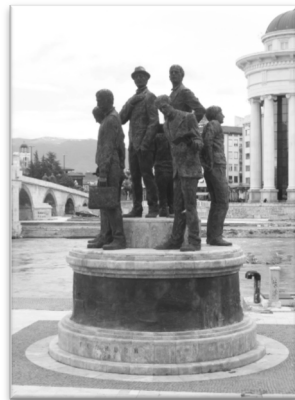
connection. When observed from a particular spot - in front of the "Porta Macedonia", they create a unity, namely, through the "Porta Macedonia", the "Warrior on a Horse" can be seen. This perspective is not random, rather it stands as the most illustrative example of the imaginary narrative whence the antiquity of the nation<sup>11</sup> should give birth to its present-day victory/triumph.



Warrior on horseback



Porta Macedonia



The Gemidzii



The first Presidium of ASNOM

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<sup>11</sup> The current Government of the Republic of Macedonia begot a process that helped solidify the thesis that Macedonians are the descendants of Alexander the Great, also known as "the antiquization of Macedonia".

This narrative is visualized by a staggering number of monuments depicting rulers, revolutionaries, freedom fighters, and political figures, striking particular poses and cast in magnanimous dimensions (for example, the monuments of Justinian I, Tzar Samoil, Saints Cyril and Methodius, the revolutionaries Goce Delchev, Dame Gruev, the Gemidzii, the Brothers Miladinov, the first president Metodija Andonov-Chento, the controversial leaders such as Todor Aleksandrov, and many others), enrooted in the downtown area so as to depict the master narrative.

In fact, we are dealing with a so-called process of conceptualizing the place that is tied to the processes that constitute identity politics (Featherstone, 1993). The whole construction of the *Skopje 2014* Project is "to communicate this government visually to the governed" (Vale, 1992: 10). This type of a concept pays particular attention to the buildings housing the Government and the Parliament, structures intended to deliver a flashy, impressive, suggestive image about the dignity, grandeur, and power of the state. Erected in the days prior to and short after the Second World War, these structures were originally in the style of the then dominant functional modernism, a style that did not follow the dominant narrative and functions for which it was conceived. Hence, the complete reconstruction of their exteriors (as well as the facades of most downtown residential and commercial buildings), in the Government chosen so-called "baroque" style.

The grandeur of the nation can be attested to through the new "baroque" structures, located on the left bank of the Vardar River, namely: the building of the Old National Theatre and the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, the Criminal Court building, State Archives building, the Archeological Museum, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Agency for Electronic Communications, the Financial Police and State Prosecutor's buildings, the new concert hall of the Macedonian Philharmonic.



The old and the new Government Building

The chosen style –baroque– is not a random choice. It serves the imaginative narrative about Macedonia as "the cradle of civilizations" and a member of the European family. Henceforth, the adopted style

aims at representing Skopje as one of Europe's metropolises. In the context of this narrative, we can also trace the idea of having all Macedonian artists in a single spot, thus pointing out their numerousness, as well as the various periods they belong to. For example, "The Art Bridge", adorned on two sides by sculptures of well-known Macedonian writers, painters, sculptors, musicians, manifests said idea in said space. Thus, the style and sheer number of sculptures representing artists, not just on the Bridge, but also on the facades of the newly constructed museums, theatres, and administrative buildings, stands as a visual representation of the idea to subvert the stereotype of Macedonia as a "barbaric country" This narrative is continued with the sculptures of: Saints Cyril and Methodius (on the left bank of the River, a central city spot) and their students, Saints Clement and Naum, as well as those adorning the building of the so-called Old National Theatre, which was originally destroyed in the 1963 Skopje earthquake.



The Art Bridge



The Reconstructed Old National Theatre



The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

By enforcing these so-called capitalized project, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia aims at ascertaining a national chronicle, namely a narrative that the nation is to identify with. This, in turn, results in identity politics that re-address and re-negotiate history,

memory, and identity. Bent on reaching a consensus about the said constitutive elements of identity, while realizing that this is by far a complex process with a good deal of obstacles, the emotional bond that exists between citizen and statehood is being manipulated, thus resulting in a so-called patriotic narrative. Media play a key role in propagating said narrative, namely, populist tools such as public announcements, press releases, public service ads, etc., have transformed Skopje, quite swiftly and unexpectedly, into a "commemorative town", i.e., "a ritual site" (Hutton, 1993: 51 in Osborne, 2001: 21). An example in support of this claim are the celebrations accompanying the day of independence and the reception of the National Basketball Team following the 2011 European Championship.



The iconography of the Macedonian fans during the 2011 European Basketball Championship and the iconography of a winning team



The reception of the National Basketball Team by the political elites and the masses, Skopje, 2011

### 2.3 *Capital Projects and the Economy: Selling Place*

The Prime Minister, through public service announcements, had stated several times over that the *Skopje 2014* Project contributes to the state's economic growth by employing local construction and artisan firms and strengthening the power of tourism. Thus "unlike other countries, Macedonia experienced the lowest fall during the financial crisis" (Makfax, 2013). As many other ones before them, particularly those of former communist states, the current Government of the Republic of Macedonia manipulates places so that it can create a national narrative that would be linked to measures aimed at strengthening the country's economy, by directly assisting companies, whilst creating places and narratives aimed at a consumerist mindset. Hence, "[w]hat history has always been to national identity, so heritage is now to "social cohesion" and economic vitality" (Osborne, 2001: 21). Consequently, the *Skopje 2014* Project can be viewed also as a theme-park tied to the development of the nation. Said politics by the Macedonian Government are not isolated cases, for they are a part of a worldwide trend, or to borrow from Lowenthal: "All at once heritage is everywhere –in the news, in the movies, in the marketplace– in everything from galaxies to genes. It is the chief focus of patriotism and a prime lure of tourism. One can barely move without bumping into a heritage site. Every legacy is cherished. From ethnic roots to history theme parks, Hollywood to the Holocaust, the whole world is busy lauding - or lamenting - some past, be it fact or fiction". (1996: ix)

Said politics, particularly those focused on place-making, are not unknown to the annals of history. Towards the end of the 19th century, cities such as London, Paris, Berlin, and Washington were on the receiving end of the "construction of spaces and landscapes of sovereignty suitable for choreographing the drama of state power", i.e., they became "assemblages of inspirational monuments, imposing state architecture, and theatrical civic display" (Osborne, 2001:21), namely, they became a symbolic space that would reflect the national ambitions and the independence dream. Thus, monuments, architecture, the exterior outlook of the capital city's buildings, in

particular the downtown area, become symbolic icons that allegorically speaking attesting to the country's progress from a colony to a nation-state (Sarkanjac, 2009).

Certainly, people do not remain passive agents in said process. Society's diversity guarantees, after all, that despite the didactic performances of the nation-state's identities, they will remain "polysemic" (Jensen, 1990; Rodman, 1992). Practically speaking, this implies that said monuments and the accompanying commemorative practices and rituals always project several different meanings, despite their origins through top-down "state creating" (Breuilly, 1993) or "state reinforcing" (Mann, 1994) practices, some diametrically opposed to their original intent.

It is no longer tenuous that our memory - individual and collective - is rather elastic. Jacobs speaks about "sites in the process of becoming" that is to say "sites saturated with the cultural politics of transformation", whence the construction of a heritage is treated as a political process, whence the inherited elements are either inserted or erased by the "sanctioned view of the national legacy" (Jacobs, 1992: 101 in Osborne, 2001: 21). Jacobs concludes: "[W]hich places do or do not become part of heritage and what transformations places undergo in this process of recognition is a key arena for combative struggles of identity and power. It is not simply that heritage places symbolize certain values and beliefs, but that the very transition of these places in heritage is a process whereby identity is defined, debated and contested and where social values are challenged or reproduced" (Jacobs, 1992:35 in Osborne, 2001: 21). Hence, people are rarely passive recipients, and their reaction to the whole spectrum of mnemonic devices about national cohesion oftentimes reveals more about the present than it does the past.

#### *2.4 Emotions and National Sentiment: Manipulations*

Henceforth, there is no public consensus about the public sculpting, the national heroes, and the political iconography, thus, public art in Macedonia has become a contested site, rather than a symbol of public identification and unity. The main reason behind the

Macedonian public's derision of said project is the pervasive attitude that the project fails to help build emotions and national sentiment, but rather manipulates them.

As Harvey points out, so do many Macedonians believe, namely that the conceptualization of place which is tied to identity politics is a "reactionary place-bound politics" (1990), that does not secure unity; quite the opposite, the Macedonian identity is being constituted through non-existent, fabricated, and thus dangerous elements, which do not attest to the grandeur of the nations, but rather serve to construct and demonstrate the grandeur of the cult of personality, in this case that of the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. Along those lines the critics to the cultural politics of the Macedonian Government deem the *Skopje 2014* Project inapt for a civil and liberal democratic state, whence a plural and liberal nationalism is examined through the relations of inclusivity. Instead, the *Skopje 2014* Project enforces an ethnic nationalism that privileges the emotional and exclusivist celebration of national identity (Osborne, 2001).<sup>12</sup> Hence, the iconic landscapes and mythic tales become a place of disunity rather than a site of cohesive collective memory, based on the applied style and aesthetics,<sup>13</sup> and based on ethnic belonging and economic

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<sup>12</sup> Unlike the *Skopje 2014* Project, the capital projects in the publishing industry were not the targets of criticism, at least not along the lines of the former project. What has been generally stated about them by the critical public is that the selected works are badly translated, that there is no consensus in the manner in which the selections were made, however, the value and necessity of the project is not being questioned.

<sup>13</sup> One of the most vocal and engaged critics of the Project, Nikos Chausidis, believes that through its "disregard for the existing architectural experience", the Project adds on the already seen tactics of the former conquerors of Macedonia to destroy the cultural heritage found, namely who see what was built before them as someone else's heritage (which "records" someone else's memory) and thus needs to be disintegrated (Chausidis, 2013: 19). Chausidis believes that the strategy of "building in already developed places" is being applied in this case, which could be interpreted as a sign to dismantle Macedonian identity, the analogy being that the Project's creators here act as an occupying force. His conclusion, *inter alia*, is based on an analysis of the psychological profile of the Project's creators (describing them as "cowardly aggressive", with a desire to present physical inaptitude as "spiritual power"), which, in his view, leads to *exaggeration*, *temporal discontinuity*, and *absurdity* to stand as the Project's chief qualities. This line of

reasoning.<sup>14</sup> Unlike them, many others, like Massey, claim that such and similar processes contain nothing reactionary, since places can be seen as something other than fixed or regressive, namely, outward-looking and defined by plural identities and histories (1997). According to Massey, instead of viewing identities as "singular, fixed and static" or interpreting places as "bounded enclosed spaces defined through counter position against the Other who is outside" (1997: 168), the *Skopje 2014* Project, by incorporating figures and events from Albanian history successfully incorporates the politics of inclusivity and diversity.

It seemed as if the *Skopje 2014* Project had the support of the majority of the Macedonian public up until the emergence of the so-called "Colorful Revolution", a wide-net civic activist platform led by the "I Protest!" movement, and identified by the slogan "No Justice, No Peace!". The "Colorful Revolution" was a public act demonstratively recognized by the public throwing of paint at the monuments from the *Skopje 2014* Project in protest of the current political events (wiretapping scandal, governmental coverups,

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reasoning best summarizes the negative outlook of the Project's critics' side to the debate.

<sup>14</sup> The Institute of Policy Research and Good Governance in project *Skopje 2014 (PE) Construction of Identity Through Monuments* (Institute of Policy Research and Good Governance, 2012) identifies four key points of disagreement with the Project which are, by extension, points of social disintegration: (1) Disagreement over the interethnic problems it causes, due to the feelings of Albanians in Macedonia of being unequally represented, leading to the conclusion that the Project doesn't reflect the spirit of multiethnic reality in Macedonia; (2) Disagreement over the religious problems it causes, provoked by the decision to build a church in the vicinity of the square, arguing that there was a mosque on the square until 1917; (3) Disagreements over the negative reactions of neighbouring countries, especially Greece and Bulgaria, who believe that the monuments mean usurpation of their respective national histories; (4) Disagreements over the confrontations provoked inside the Macedonian nation itself, between the two leading government and opposition parties, with the opposition objecting to high corruption and the non-aesthetic solutions. We should add here another point of disagreement: (5) Disagreements inside the Macedonian nation caused by the attempt to redefine its identity: From Slavic to an identity rooted in antiquity and from a history that records only certain "clear" personalities and figures in relation to their views on the "Macedonian question", to history that "involves" other figures that held "dubious" positions on that same question.

appropriation of public funds for private gain). The members of the "I Protest!" movement gave out the following statement: "Why do we throw paint and color? We color as a sign of revolt, protest, to point out the corruption and the public waste of funds embodied by the *Skopje 2014* Project. Our anger and our paint-filled balloons are aimed exclusively at the symbols and the people responsible for the decisions these ungodly sums of money have produced, as they have been stripped from our very pockets". (Facebook page of the civil organization "I Protest!") A series of activities that the media report on follow: paint on the Porta Macedonia, the Ministry of Culture, the Fountain of the Warrior on a Horse, the municipal barracks of the City of Skopje, tonight the Government of the Republic of Macedonia was not spared at the hands of the "Colorful Revolution"; faces painted with all sorts of colors, young and old, calls for even greater numbers, not backing down from the demands about political responsibility; Hundreds of palms colored yellow, green and red...



*Skopje 2014* Buildings  
colored by the "Colorful Revolution"



A protest against the arrest  
of a "Ja Protestiram" member



Iconography of the Colorful Revolution



The protesters of the Colorful Revolution with the slogan "No Justice, No Peace!"

"The Colorful Revolution is the best thing that has ever happened to Macedonia. It unites people and stands in opposition to the grayness of the regime and the deathly paleness of *Skopje 2014*. The Colorful Revolution is all VMRO is not; it stands for multi-ethnicity and multi-confessionality, different ideologies united for a common goal. (...) The Colorful Revolution is cool; it is love and a warning sign, desire and dissent. The Colorful Revolution is salvation and the basis for a new, healthy, colorful, prosperous Macedonia. Its colorfulness celebrates diversity. I love being colorful! I am sick and tired of the authorities' grayness!", says Nikola Pisarev for Okno (2016).

The aforementioned quotation best summarizes the differences between the two concepts battling it out. The result of this battle, still ongoing, will determine the value system of contemporary Macedonian society. The concept the Macedonian Government has been following is based in the logic of processes characteristic for all states at the onset of their respective journey, and which reemerge today as the result of migrations and globalization. The mentioned projects that address the shared public space as a site for ritualistic remembering and performance are the Macedonian Government's way of addressing its two most current and pressing issues: the unfavorable (auto)imagology about Macedonia, the reason behind the unfavorable international affirmation and the country's poor economic state. For the opponents of the Government's cultural

politics, said projects are a reflection of an authoritarian, dictatorial rule, which manipulates national sentiments for personal criminal financial gain, which in turn cancels democracy and freedom in Macedonia, and with that, prolongs the country's desired EU and NATO membership.

### 3. Conclusion

The current state in Macedonia does not allow us to draw a conclusive, objective, concrete, and clear-cut conclusion. What can be stated here, rooted in the presented findings and examinations, is a necessarily subjective fact, along the lines of personal considerations and predictions, not based on solid argumentation. Even if we take out of the equation the criticism attesting to the kitsch aesthetics of the *Skopje 2014* Project, for it is a part of the subjective domain, and take into account the facts shared through the wiretapping affair,<sup>15</sup> the claims made by the civil organizations that protested against the current authorities seem valid. On the other hand, if we take into account the unprincipled politics of the EU *vis-à-vis* Macedonia,<sup>16</sup> as the ever increasing self-centeredness of nation-states in terms of their

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<sup>15</sup> The opposition party, SDSM, towards the end of 2015, announced to the public the existence of recorded telephone conversations between the highest members of the ruling party, attesting to behind-the-scenes dealings and irregularities, connected to the voter registration, appointment of judges at the whim of governmental representatives, corrupted deals, even pointing to the possibility of the highest members of government being involved in terrorist activities and murders. A number of the recorded conversations deal directly with the *Skopje 2014* Project, which from this angle represents a money laundering venture involving public funds.

<sup>16</sup> No one is contesting the fact that the Republic of Macedonia's NATO and EU membership have been prolonged due to Greece's blocking of the country's international membership under its constitutional name as well as the FYROM reference despite the fact that several years have passed since the country's EU candidate status recognition (thus attesting to conditions having been met for negotiations to commence). The Republic of Macedonia has experienced continuous pressure at the hands of international representatives to resolve the name dispute, although set European values state that each ethnicity has the right to its name.

ethnicity, the said governmental projects are seen by many as the appropriate response and a way to maintain national pride.

What effects projects have in terms of the stated goals about a people's identification with their state could be also measured according to the public's support for them. If we take into account the mass attendance of citizens that took an active part in Colorful Revolution (although there is no statistical data available), we could say that the *Skopje 2014* Project does not have the public's support. However, on the other hand, if we judge based on the votes casted in support of the ruling VMRO party at the most recent elections, where it won by a tight margin, we could then say that the current Macedonian Government, and by extension its capital project, enjoy the majority of the public's support. Hence, at present no relevant conclusions can be drawn in terms of if and to what extent the capital projects realize the national cohesion aim.

What remains, though, is the fact that the cultural politics of the Republic of Macedonia during the last decade have divided the populace, on several grounds, including (1) the ethnic lines, basically Macedonians and Albanians; (2) along the lines of historical belonging, namely into Ancient Macedonians and Slavs; (3) along the lines of the aesthetic qualities of the project, namely into supporters and opponents; (4) along the lines of economic benefit and investment priorities, namely into those who are privileged and get wealthier at the expense of the public, and those who are marginalized, and are on the receiving end of bad public service in education, health services, infrastructure, the poor and the welfare cases.

In terms of the efficiency of the implemented cultural politics in terms of the country's international position, the fact that we are not yet EU and NATO member states, in and of itself, at least for now, speaks to their ineffectiveness.

Hence, is the implemented strategy, in the eyes of many outdated and characteristic for dictatorships, effective, alludes a final and definite answer. In lieu of one, perhaps the words of Charles Taylor could suffice for now: "We have to learn how (...) achieve some kind of common understanding. And this can only be by recognizing that our being *together* is important to us, that it enriches us, that it is

something we all cherish. (...) common identity includes a set of basic principles that recognize that we all want to work with each other to preserve these historical identities with their differences intact" (1998: 341). To add: national identity is best defined along the lines of a rational estimation of the rights, obligations, and responsibilities of the stakeholders, which in turn need to be accompanied, even in part, by the symbolic idea of what a people see themselves as.

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