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NATIONAL IDENTITY AS PART OF A CULTURAL POLICY IN MACEDONIA (2006-2016)

Abstract: The objective of this paper is to investigate, analyze and evaluate the cultural policy in Macedonia embodied in the government’s Skopje 2014 project, particularly in the Museum of Macedonian struggle for sovereignty and independence, the Museum of VMRO and the Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime= by putting the emphasis on the post-communist politics of memory, which is used for reshaping the post-communist national identity.

Keywords: Skopje 2014, national identity, nation, politics of memory, collective memory, cultural memory, cultural policy.

Introduction

The identity question concerns people who have the fear of losing their own identities. Identity is a social phenomenon that starts with the identity formation process by means of interaction with the “other” or against the “other”. Identity can also be defined by existence and belongingness. Identity consists of two pillars: identifier and identified. The individual is a subject identified as a “self” and the society is the main identifier named as the “other”. There is no culture or cultural identity that does not have its “other” of the “self” (Derrida, 1992).

In the Balkan states, all being newly-formed democratic societies within the past fifteen years, the cultural politics of building national identity (cultural memory) was left to be built by a position of power. The Republic of Macedonia, as a relatively young democratic country, gained its independence in the so-called ‘third wave of democratization’, i.e., in the year of 1991, following the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The Constitution¹ of the Republic of Macedonia, before and after 1991, expressed the multiculturalism of the country, but the country's policy was always directed towards the development of Macedonian national identity (Troebst 1992; Willemsen et al 2001). After the independence, the Macedonian country built its nationality on the form that emphasized the national rather than the civic element as a starting foundation of a civil nation. Such a form of nationality construction is represented in some other Balkan countries (Roudometof 2001). Such shaping of ethnic identity in Macedonia particularly happened after the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement; its implementation should induce a beginning of a civil country establishment alongside the ethnic gauges disturbing the previously created concept of a one-nation state.

Up to this point, we cannot say that the case of Macedonia is unique. As in other societies, the transmission and creation of myths in the country have proven to play an important role in political mobilization and the creation of political culture. The decision of implementing "antiquisation" in Macedonia was adopted by the ruling political elites that ruled from 2006 to 2016 in the country in order to prove the ancient origin of the Macedonian people. The uniqueness of Macedonia is in the official introduction of a particular myth of the 21st century, related to the period of Antiquity and Alexander the Great. It includes: imposing the very same hero as the most important for the Macedonian identity, filling the public space with monuments and pictures related to him, renaming streets after events related to that period, composing music, etc.

Furthermore, some of the historical heroes preferred are with no influence on the present history of the people, nor are significantly present in the cultural memory of the population. The context becomes additionally complex due to the fact that we are concerned with a country that has: a very complex and long history (an enormously rich source for myths related to various historical periods); a specific present composition of the population (a great deal of diversity regarding the ethnic and the religious background of the citizens); a mixture of political values (having in mind that there are still generations socialized with different ideology and mythology); a very high social, economic and political frustration, which makes the population vulnerable to manipulation. Therefore, the function of the national mythology is very specific and influential in the dominant political values of the society in the period of the ruling party of VMRO.

In the Republic of Macedonia, the ruling party in power during the period from 2006 to 2017 has taken up a controversial project, creating new cultural heritage at the expense of the old one with the sole purpose of redefining national identity through social engineering, all in order to create a nationalist super country. The idea behind Skopje 2014 project is to repeat the old patterns "as they once were", without any cynical distance, which makes this project problematic and shows a totalitarian demonstration of power.

1 In 2001, after the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, another change in the constitution took place, emphasizing that Macedonia is a state of the Macedonians, the Albanians, the Turks, the Serbs, the Roma people and the other minorities.

Theoretical background

The nation-building aspect of the Skopje 2014 project is simultaneously considered in the light of the historical events that took place in the 19th and 20th centuries. Skopje 2014 project can be considered to strive to be a representation of a “lost” or “untold” collective memory, thus enabling a reconstruction, reinvention or revision of Macedonia’s national identity after the independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Skopje 2014 project was conducted without any democratic debate and has been touted by the ruling political party; it considers art and culture as mere instruments used to implement the entire project. The Project’s monuments and buildings have become tools in the process of revision of the already generated and verified national identity.

Clearly, identity and a sense of belonging in the modern world are complex concepts. Cultural identity is a matter of becoming as well as of being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past (Hall, 1993). Most people are defined by plural connections. Class, gender, religion and ethnicity compete with local, regional and national associations. Finally, globalization and migration, trans-national identities challenge the liberal, nation-bound concept of citizenship and sovereignty. All citizens cannot share the same historical identity, and the nation-state needs to accept and work with a plurality of historical identities, but this is not the case with the current cultural policy in Macedonia.

Methodology

Much of the research for the work has been carried out through desk study (internet and literature), so as through observation, study visits, interviews and informal conversations with museum visitors and potential audiences.

The methods used for the research are qualitative content analysis of media texts regarding the issue, observation, interviews with historians, museum creators (if available), museum workers, visitors, and the general audience.

The empirical research is conducted through many facets: observation, description and explanation, individual in-depth interviews, structured and non-structured interviews, speaking narratives in the museum during the visits, contents or documentary analysis, and participant observation.

Case study: The research topic choice is an exploration through the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence – Museum of VMRO – Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime. The museum is the most suitable example for exploring and researching the reason for transformation and reshaping national identity because it contains all the parameters of mono and ethnocentric cultural policy. Inside the museum through the exhibition and the interpretation of Macedonian history all

parameters for reshaping and transforming of the national identity can be seen through the narration of triumphalism of the historical past of Inter revolutionary movement to the totally depreciation of the communist past, collective struggle, victimization, identity crisis, the need for megalomania, and also the Museum can be connected with today's political rhetoric in the country.

Cultural policy in Macedonia

There was no explicit cultural policy document that outlined a specific strategy and/or goals of cultural development, and, therefore, one could hardly speak of a consistent cultural policy after 1990. The Constitution and the 1998 Law on Culture provided a certain global orientation toward culture including provisions for civil rights and freedoms, minority rights, the obligation of the government to support and develop culture, etc. However, in practice, there is still a combination of old and new pragmatism and ad hoc temporary solutions.

In Macedonia, the culture or the cultural policy is primarily understood as a facade or as cultural engineering. Unlike the new European political imperatives in Macedonia, the ethnic origin and the “question of identity“ is still the beginning of the actual cultural policy.

Macedonian cultural policy is still highly centralized and there is no actual existence of the local strategies that define the cultural policy development, except the local cultural strategy of the City of Skopje².

The implementation of the idea of new participatory cultural policies in the state only shows that Macedonia is far behind the Balkan centers, where significant movements in the creation of the urban policy occur and where the non-governmental organizations create a kind of a city cultural policy boom.

This symbolic potential is often instrumentalized and used to serve as an ideology. Manipulation of symbols is always a powerful weapon in political action. Therefore, the relabeled image of Skopje can play an important role for future generations when modifying their history as more different from the one of their parents' and grandparents' memories and narratives. By such modification, instead of filling up the gaps in history, the government would create a “buffer zone“ between the collective memories of the young generations and the collective memories of their ancestors. Slavoj Žižek diagnosed the attempt to invest in the past as not a positive one, and, according to him, destroying monuments is not a negation of the past. Consequently, Skopje 2014 project, according to Žižek, represents a helpless passage, an unsuccessful investment, since, according to the reactions of the Skopje residents, the Project declines their collective memory³.

2 Strategija za razvoj na kulturata na grad Skopje 2011–2015, visit web page: <http://www.skopje.gov.mk/>, accessed 2022

3 Jasna Kotevska, Troubles with history: Skopje 2014, Skopje 2010

Right-wing political parties are increasingly oriented to the past, although the outlined Balkan left-wing political elite also used the discourse of national history.

Skopje 2014 project aims at strengthening the national identity through reinstating the narrative of the glorious past of their heroes and is a sort of compensation, i.e. a kind of means of preserving the pride of the Macedonian people because of the constant political pressures that it suffers due to the change of the name by its neighboring country Greece.

This massive urban renovation city plan faces polarized reception. There are many supporters who admire the plan and praise it as a positive effort of the Government to redevelop Skopje into a so-called "Europeanized" capital which would attract more visitors and develop the tourism industry. On the other hand, the opponents of the Project have offered numerous arguments against it. For instance, the Project is criticized as being too expensive, estimated at circa eighty to five hundred million Euros; it has also been claimed that the attempt of the so-called "antiquisation"⁴ of the city creates tensions between the present ethnicities in the Republic, such as the Albanians, the Turks, the Serbs, the Vlachs, the Roma people and the others. For example, there is no equal representation of monuments that would narrate the presence of ethnic Albanians in the state, with the exception of the statue of Skanderbeg and Mother Teresa.

Furthermore, the Project irritates the bilateral relations with the neighboring country Greece, since it has already disputed the name of the state, as demonstrated by the Greek politicians declaring that Greece has the exclusive right to the usage of the symbols referring to the Ancient Macedonian Kingdom, especially Alexander the Great and the name Macedonia.

The Project generated interethnic problems with the Albanian population which also asked for people and monuments of their history to be incorporated into the Skopje 2014 project. The Albanian population strongly opposes the Project because it does not reflect the spirit of the multiethnic and multireligious reality in Macedonia.

It can be concluded that the Project is a source of major confrontations and of deepening inter-ethnic relations of ethnic communities in Macedonia, due to the constant historical turmoil in the regions and the confrontations between peoples, and, for this reason, it is dangerous here to play a representation of identities in such a way.

The Skopje 2014 project confirms that in the era of global processes, besides the ability to connect different areas, such a project can sometimes also be a place of division, especially when marked by ethnic or religious terms by which a serious examination of relations between different ethnic groups that are part of a country are made. Cultural policies implemented by the current ruling party are oriented towards the past and, thus, motivate other communities to turn to the past and so the implementation of the policies creates a gap in their integration into society. On the other hand, such cultural policy of building or strengthening the national identity also means overstating the collective identity against individual identities and pluralism. Furthermore, apart from

4 Jasna Koteska, *Troubles with history*, Skopje 2014, Skopje, 2011.

the fact that the Project itself led to interethnic and confessional problems, with the rise of monuments – mainly male and militaristic heroes and rulers – Skopje 2014 project extols the patriarchal framework of gender division, almost not representing the women – except in the role of the nursing mother of the nation; thus showing the traditional values of women in society, on one hand, and the men, on the other.⁵

The Project insists on class and even “monarchist” division, emphasizing the contrast between the huge monuments of kings and rulers and almost imperceptibly small sculptures of ordinary people in the role of beggars or shoe-cleaners.

Skopje 2014 project is not only problematic because it is an identity problem and violates multiethnic relations, but, in fact, the Project is also problematic by its lack of transparency in the process of spending public funds and illegal building of monuments.

The entire procedure for raising memorials was done before a program or supplement program for marking significant events and personalities with memorial landmarks was brought and without agreements with the Strategy for the Cultural Development of the City of Skopje⁶, while the Municipality of Center did not have any legal authority to perform that type of facilities.

From the inspection of the list of monuments placed, there is no doubt that all the characters pictured by these monuments represent striking figures extremely important to the development of the statehood of the Republic of Macedonia. These tokens, according to the law, are immanent to the memorial monuments. Taking into account the monuments’ features, it is obvious that those represent memorial monuments, and the decision of their raising can be brought only by the Parliament, according to Article 3 of the Law on Memorials and Monuments. On the contrary, in the actual situation, all decisions about their placement are adopted by the Council of the Municipality of Center.

Thus, the body violated its responsibilities defined by law. The fact that these objects, by the individual acts of the Center Municipality (resolutions and settlements), are entitled as monuments (in fact, they represent busts, sculptures, tiles, fountains, and other artistic and architectural works, as well as works which with its contents and labels mark events and personalities of local importance), does not change the essence that the municipality did raise memorial monuments.

This implementation of the cultural policy in the country not only violates certain laws which have already indicated how to carry out the construction and the financing of such facilities, but also there is no economic justification for public spending, in terms of adoption of economic benefit and of development of the creative industries sector.

5 The Olympia Monument (mother of Alexander) represented as breastfeeding her son.

6 Visit web page: <http://www.skopje.gov.mk/images/Image/STRATEGIJA>, accessed 2022

The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence – Museum of VMRO – Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime – the Museum of Resistance or a Museum of Memories

The Museum's policy development is described as „a normative kind of moral discourse in the form of elaborate operations of communications“ (Boursier, 2012).⁷

The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence – Museum of VMRO – Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime is an institution established by a decision of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, as part of the Skopje 2014 project. The Museum was officially opened on September 8, 2011, in honor to the 20-year anniversary of the independence of the Republic of Macedonia.

According to the fact that the National Museum is subsidized by the national budget, it can be concluded that the Museum does not have an independent policy in producing knowledge and is closely tied to the request from the VMRO-DPMNE ruling political party in “leveraging nationalistic sentiments and partially recreating the history of their own party while reaffirming themselves as the true bearers of the Macedonian spirit“ (Prelec, 2014). The erasing of the socialistic past, which is visible in the architectural scope of the city, is replaced in a museum that refers to Yugoslavia as a “prison of the nation“ and Broz Tito as a tyrant.

Thus, it can be concluded that the Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime does not include a symbolic rehabilitation of all the victims who suffered during the regime; instead, it makes a strict selection of choice of the repressed during the regime, and, also, it provides an unclear picture of the communist past; however, the Museum does provide a certain narrative, strictly through the people that suffered ideologically – the followers and the supporters of the historic VMRO.

History museums work as public institutions that transmit the constructed history and are involved in representing and maintaining national identities (Anderson, 2006). Visitors are educated in the objectified narratives of nationality and ethnicity and, consequently, history museums have an important role in the construction of national identity. However, the Museum does not send the necessary message to create a national sense, but, rather, undermines the civil core in a declared multiethnic state and, also, does the research of the Macedonian National Unity in the Macedonian language.

Today's VMRO faces historical injustice due to the historical circumstances of the liberation of the Macedonian people and the establishment of the Macedonian state. The party of today also faces the inability to establish independent Macedonia which they gave their lives for, as well as the inability to deny the historical truth that Macedonia as a state is formed during socialist Yugoslavia and the Macedonian people are recognized as constitutive people within Yugoslavia during the Communist period. The new government that considers itself an heir to the revolutionary movement of VMRO, in the present context, wishes to correct the historical injustice by building cultural memory

⁷ Museum Policies in Europe 1990–2010: Negotiating Professional and Political Utopia, Eunamus, Report No.3

that is completely dedicated to erasing the communist past of the cultural memory of the Macedonian people, and by that representing VMRO as the sole fighter for the freedom of the Macedonian nation and its supporters and members as the only people terrorized by the “communist regime” as a consequence of their ideological matrix.

Selective parts of the history of the Macedonian nation since ancient times are reinterpreted and re-accommodated within the public space with the intention to support two strategic elements of the process of building national identity: the appropriation of the glorified past and the distinction from the “Other”. Meanwhile, the ethnic composition of the rural and the urban parts of the country has been changing, compelling different urban realms and demanding representational space for the “right to the city” by the others. The monumentalization of the historical narratives in public space and culture creates a new “national” ethnic identity of the city that contributes to the further ethnicization of the community memory. If further supported, it would threaten to create cultural-spatial enclaves with distinct mono-ethnic identity markers.

Such a representation of the national identity puts an effort to glorify, as well as hide the multiculturalism of a city and a state. Such a glorification and dominance in the narrative can also be sensed in the presentation of the Macedonian history presented in “the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence”, the “Museum of VMRO” and the “Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime” and it does not contribute to the society’s social and ethical cohesion; quite the contrary, it deepens ethnic and social tensions, and, what is more, it even points out the division in the society on all grounds. (Brubaker 2004) pinpoints the cognitive dimension of ethnicity. Ethnicity, race and nationhood are ways of perceiving, interpreting and representing the social world. Therefore, they are not objects in the world, but perspectives on the world. It includes an ethnically based way of perceiving (and ignoring) construing (and misconstruing), inferring (and misinferring) and of remembering (and forgetting). The cynical use of ethnic framing in order to mask the pursuit of the clique’s interests can alert us about the risk of an over-ethnicized interpretation and the “elite manipulation” view of the politicized ethnicity (Brubaker, 1998). Within these discussions, the Museum has been contested to have the potential to spur an ethnic conflict in the country and introduce a new political reality in the region.

Bauböck (2002) problematizes the belief of the historical and, often, the illusionary depth of a national identity which emerges in the process of the selective view of history, as the past of a present nation-state. In his view, it is questionable whether citizens must see themselves as sharing a common future and, thus, be willing to make sacrifices; however, it is impossible to imagine a common democratic future without, also, sharing the past (Bauböck, 1998). Hence, deconstructing a national history does not provide an answer to the real problem. The past should not be a simple historical narrative of national glories from which all atrocities have been purged.

On the contrary, public remembrance of past crimes (or injustice, discrimination etc.), especially those committed against ethnic and religious minorities, is the essential condition for tolerance and respect among diverse communities. Museums in practice become a space for shaping the elite and the patriarchal order, rather than radical

openness; yet the processes in the public sphere are very important and museums are a part of the public sphere itself (Bennette, 2011).

In the case of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence – Museum of VMRO – Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime, that kind of open communication with the public sphere and the issues of social life does not exist, especially in terms of the position of women in the past, and today in the political and social context, gender equality, social issues, national issues, foreign policy, cultural memory, the memory of the remembrance by the Other, the historical representation of the Otherness in relation to itself and so on.

Museums just because they have been so implicated in the identity concept and because of their particular articulations with the kind of identities argued to be under threat, represent significant sites and some of the claims of the identity transformation. If nineteenth-century style identities are, indeed, displaced, one might expect that museums as institutions would become redundant or, perhaps, that they would become museums per se – sites. Alternatively, (or additionally), we might expect to see transformations within museums as they attempt to address and express ‘new’ identities. Although the Museum opened in the 21st century, nearly two decades after the onset of the first museums, its functioning, narration and way it displays its narrative to the visitor as well as the creation of the Museum by the ruler, i.e. the Prime Minister and party leader of the party that bears the historical sign of the historic VMRO is, actually, the first narrator and meta narrator of history, as in the first royal collections that represented the ruler as the first actor in history.

The Government’s reasons for the effort to open the Museum were to create a new national political narrative including the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) of the inter-war period in the Macedonian national narrative to oppose to the pro-Yugoslav interpretation of Macedonian history, politically associated with the post-communist period. The reconciliation of the two historic memories, one a subaltern perspective different from the governing one could not be achieved.

Therefore, the 19th and 20th-century rivalry about the “Macedonian question“ reached a new impetus and a new depth. The challenge of the Government with the opening of the Museum was to proclaim that Macedonian identity is not a product of “Titoist brainwashing“ and to encourage Macedonian historians to focus on defending the historical legitimacy of that single identity of the population in general, and VMRO specifically.

More precisely, the identity is based on narrative templates, which give coherence to a nation’s past. Coherence is one of the cornerstones of collective identity: repetition and consistency constitute the two most important attributes of a nation’s historical consciousness (Assmann, 1993). These narrative templates do not arise from the past itself but are to be constructed only in the framework of cultural memory. The Narrative is the essential device for containing cultural memory and for guaranteeing the coherence of different events of the past. The Narrative binds the elements stored in cultural memory into one meaningful sequence, giving us a small collection of narrative templates, which, in a sense, is a remembrance for the nation. Macedonian national

historical narrative is inseparable from the concept of the independence of the nation. This articulation of history is supported by a narrative constructed with the aim of binding different uprisings into a single great struggle for independence.

The role of the Museum is to reinforce the national identity and the feeling of statehood through the prism of a single political ideology and, because of that, the message that the Museum sends to the public is different.

The Museum is here to remind us about our past and the difficult struggle of the Macedonian people in establishing their statehood, it sends an internal message for the unification of the Macedonian people and to the political left-oriented party to stop working on the destruction of the Macedonian statehood, as well as to send a message to the world that the Macedonian people are aware of their identity and that no one in the future can destroy the statehood of the Macedonian people.⁸

The Museum's subject is the representation of the battles and the uprising organized by the Macedonian people, which are interpreted as the long-term process of the Macedonian fight for independence. The construction of history through the narratives of victimization and glorification of the imagined national community is the main tool provided by the Museum. The Yugoslavia period is reduced to the single issue of the Goli Otok prisons, known for being used as a place of "political imprisonment". The exhibition specified the period of 1945-1956 as the framing time of the display and it is the only mention of Yugoslavia at the Museum. The reduction of a broad layer of recent history into a single issue is best seen in the explicit illustration of the non-neutrality of the Museum and, quite the contrary, of its ideological constructionist power.

The institutionally organized and constructed promotion of certain historical narratives from the collective memory of a single nation opens up a space for understanding a "symbolic history", and, thus, the effect of a reality that is remembered, imagined or forgotten (consciously or not). The new institution poses the question about the unwanted memories of our historical past and reads all these historical narratives in a new way and in another political context. The Museum also invited people to conceptualize a sense of national or racial difference from the „others“, in a political, ethnic or gender belonging. Moreover, it spreads the message that the Macedonians fought for freedom and independence of the country by themselves through great pain and suffering.

In a city of difference, majority groups need to rethink their past so that it includes the divergent past of all groups that share the common space and, therefore, a common future. Shared identity can emerge from a public culture that transforms itself in response to diversity. Shared identities cannot be fixed in their cultural and historical content, but should be self-transformative. In Brubaker's view, "the process of self-transformation of collective identities toward a more pluralistic outlook is needed because national identity if connected with majority historical glories cannot be shared". He further argues that it is essential to replace identity with less congested terms, as:

⁸ Interview with one of the creators of the Museum's narration, a Ss. Cyril and Methodius University lecturer and leader of the Civil Movement for Defense of Macedonia – Violeta Achkova.

“identification and categorization, self-understanding and social location, commonality and connectedness if shared future among different ethnic groups” (Brubaker, 2004: 5–11). Furthermore, he calls social analysts to rethink the concept of ethnicity, race and nation in processual, relational, eventful, dynamic terms, rather in discrete, concrete, tangible and bounded groups; in practical categories, cultural idioms, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms and political projects. Ethnicization and nationalization should, therefore, be viewed as political, sociological, cultural and psychological processes.

Another thing that Bennette highlights is the organization of the pieces, the building they are organized in and their presentation. While in the exhibition of royal collections the ruler was the first actor in history and its meta narrator, in museums open to the public the human should be the creator of the meta narration and the actor of history (Bennette, 2011). In the Museum, the strictly controlled walking and narrating route by a guide, makes the visitor but a listener that does not have the chance to deduce conclusions freely or to interpret history individually.

The politics of the Balkan Wars remembrance is most vividly presented in the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle display: a space dedicated to the Balkan Wars is almost nonexistent. There is only writing on the corner wall and a wax figure of Dimitrija Čupovski, a leader and an intellectual of the time, a co-author of the Memorandum sent to the Great powers prior to the London Conference of 1912–13, containing an appeal for a final closure of the Macedonian issue by the establishment of an independent Macedonian state. Interestingly enough, the period is presented as the “most tragic period for the Macedonian people” – a period of struggles and assassinations inside the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization.⁹

The narration transmitted in the Museum departs from all the “liberators” during the Balkan Wars united together in the fight against the Ottomans and their narrative. In the Museum, the Balkan Wars are marked as the transition from one slavery to another, from Ottoman to Serbian, Bulgarian or Greek. What are particularly stressed are the performance and the narration of the sufferings of the Macedonian people when Vardar Macedonia passed under the Kingdom of Serbia; the Museum shows it in the violent scenes of torture that the Serbian “occupiers” did on the Macedonian population. Such a representation of the Serbian people in the Museum is extremely dangerous in a multiethnic country where the Serbian ethnicity is one of the constituent peoples in the Macedonian country, and this fuels hostility to the two peoples, the Macedonians and Serbians.

What is rational for the Museum, according to its creators, is that there are also dubious aspects of Macedonian history, presented in the context of the liberation of the Macedonian people from the Serbian “occupiers”, a narrative that deeply touches into the cultural memory of the Serbian people – a concept being extremely dangerous. In this context, the wax figures of the controversial characters of Vanco Mihailov and Mara

9 Visit web page: <http://pecscanik.net/secanje-na-balkanske-ratove-u-makedoniji/>, accessed 2022

Buneva are displayed in the Museum, with an explanation that they, too, are part of history and that the black sports in the history of VMRO should be also shown.¹⁰

However, according to Piotr Piotrowski, the role of a museum in a society is to be a museum forum that will be involved in the public debate and will deal with the most important and controversial issues in a given society, the problems relating to the particular history of the society, and problems in their modernity (Piotrowski, 2010). The critical museum is an institution that works in favor of democracy and its work is based on discussion and does not tend to provide an absolute and objective historical narrative and artistic values manifested as a canon. That canon does not exist, it is not objective, it is constituted and that structure often hides very specific ideological preferences.

The permanent exhibition in the Museum contains 109 wax figures of prominent Macedonian revolutionaries, ideologists, dukes, intellectuals, communist activists, politicians and foreigners, a collection of artistic paintings – 25 portraits of prominent Macedonian activists and 85 mass scenes of significant events and battles from the contemporary Macedonian history; 1500 items including weapons, documents, photographs, ambient items, newspapers, brochures, albums, etc. These collections are in a constant process of enrichment through the purchase of museum materials and through donations from citizens.

The Macedonian creators of the Museum traced the emergence of the Macedonian nation back to the late 17th century till the beginning of the 20th century. In the Museum, the revolutionary struggle for freedom, equality and independence is presented, also the raising of the Macedonian national consciousness. The schematic narrative template The Great Battle for Freedom is presented in the Museum where Macedonian history is characterized by centuries of struggle for liberty, mostly against the Ottomans. As nations came to define themselves and trace their origins, the history of their conflicts became a central part of this process of definition, and the concept of the „nation“. (Howard, 1991).

The Museum's exposition begins with the Haiduk Movement – armed resistance against Ottoman rule in Macedonia. Chronologically, it starts with Karposh as the famous outlaw and leader of the first mass uprising in Macedonia in 1689 – the Karposh Uprising. Outlaws from this period are mentioned in folk songs and deeply etched in the collective memory of the Macedonian people as their protectors and inspirers for further fighting. Among them, the most prominent ones are: Ilija Markov Maleshevski, Duke Sirma, Duke Rumena, Tole Pasha and others also presented in the Museum. The next uprisings were: the 1876 Razlog Uprising and the 1878 Macedonian Uprising. The leader of the uprisings was Dimitar Pop Georgiev Berovski, one of the first creators of the Macedonian Political Platform for Liberation of the Macedonian People from the Ottomans.

The narrative about the Great Battle of Freedom – Battle of Mečkin Kamen, the prominent conflict with the Turks that Macedonians have kept in their cultural

10 Some of the assassinations that were committed by supreme VMRO and organized by Vanco Mihailov were the assassination of the Serbian official Velimir Prelić by Mara Buneva in Skopje in 1928, as well as the assassination of the Serbian King Alexander Karadorđević by Vlado Chernozemski on October 9,

memory as one of the glorious battles which was fought across Kruševo, and which the revolutionarist, Pitu Guli, was killed in a battle which was supposed to be crucial for liberating the Macedonians from the Turk slavery, but the dream did not come true because the uprising was suppressed by the Turkish army – in the Museum is presented through the art painting of a “historical genre”.

The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) established in 1893, and the Ilinden Uprising against the Ottoman rule on August 2, 1903, as the first significant political manifestation of the Macedonian National Consciousness, took a significant role in the Museum’s exhibition; as well as the period of ASNOM and the declaration of Macedonia as a Republic in the frame of the Yugoslav Federation, perceived as the Second Ilinden which would bring the unfinished business of the Macedonian revolutionaries to an end.

The Partisan Movement, as a part of the People’s Liberation Army of Macedonia, intentionally or non-intentionally, is not included in the Museum. The Museum only creates a symbol of the fighting spirit of the Macedonian people in terms of getting freedom and statehood; the symbol: a “partisan“ in military clothes with a five-pointed star, which was represented everywhere in Yugoslavia as a symbol of the National Liberation Movement in the Second World War, has now been replaced with the “rebel (komita)“ – Macedonian revolutionary member of the VMRO Revolutionary Movement, wearing rebel clothes and represented as the only soldier who should be incorporated in the collective memory of the Macedonian people.

As a new memorial museum in Macedonia, the permanent exhibition is focused on the personal conviction about the national Macedonian identity and the sacrifice in the struggle of gaining a Macedonian state. The permanent exhibition presents the individual victims who suffered in the “Communist regime” because of their beliefs in a distinctive Macedonian identity and fight for an independent country.

The exhibition of the victims from the communist regime is presented in a dark room with plates hanging on the ceiling and showing the numbers of the political dossiers and the prison numbers. On the walls of the rooms, small shovels¹¹ are set in order to show the torture of the politically imprisoned persons on the island of Goli Otok; also paintings with labor scenes on the walls are presented, to show the torture of the political prisoners and their hard work in the mines and in the stone-pits.

The wax figures of the political victims of the “communist regime” are also presented as linked with the narratives by the museum’s guides who interpreted the reason for arresting the persons in that period, as well as their individual sacrifice. All victims are presented and remembered as victims of Tito’s regime, especially during the Imformbiro period in Yugoslavia. The glorification of the victims is made by convicting the spies who worked for the spying services in Yugoslavia in the period, which is also presented in the Museum.

11 It was a tool used for torturing prisoners, since it could not have been used for any other proper work.

Another thing that Bennette highlights is the organization of objects and their representation. The main items there are the great historical paintings made in diorama style, through which the metanarration of the Museum is told; the historical persons made of wax; the awesomely constructed theatrical scenes that also serve to show the suffering of the Macedonian people in the struggle for independence. Also, there are original items (weapons from the Ottoman period, the 1991 Declaration of Independence of Macedonia which is placed at the entrance of the Museum). So, once again it can be said that, as in the royal collections, the ruler was the first actor in history; in this case, it is the ruling party and its meta-narrator. In museums that are open to the public, people should be the creator of the meta-narration and actors in history through the collection of objects that represent history, associated with specific historical events, people, places, etc. The items should act as role models to speak about people's lives.

The pedagogical function of the Museum is just to display only the past, in a way of reshaping the collective memory of the people, without strong evidence and arguments. The Museum lacks artifacts, evidence and other items that support the narration. The pedagogical function of the Museum is not only to show the past but also to improve the further development of the Museum through education and also through education to improve the audience and bring it into the progressive world.

A museum is a place where society needs to form its own identity, and also the place of government between the past and the future. The role of citizens is not to remain passive members of the hierarchy of society, but also to take control of the rituals that form these structures. Only then, we can say that the historical democratic processes in the basic conception of the public museum are realized. (Piotrowski, 2010).

The new formula of the museums, a product of the global processes, should be customer-friendly, and should be oriented towards the individual and the local society (Piotrowski, 2010), which is not the case with the Museum.

The approach to the user is not only limited to the ordinary citizen but, also, the movement through the museum's exhibition is limited nor accessible to people with disabilities, while completely unavailable for the deaf, because there are no sign-language guiding tours.

Even though the Museum has an animation program for the youngest, yet, it is done in a very conventional way, through the direct involvement of youths to sing Macedonian folk songs with historical content and through preschool and primary school pupils drawing animation with historical content that directly indicates the educational role the institution wants to carry out regarding the building of national identity from the earliest age.

The guide conveys what thus appears as the sole and absolute historical truth. In this strictly controlled and guided visit to the Historical Museum, the visitor is confronted with something that resembles a frozen past. As described by the museum's staff, wax figures are manufactured to portray historical figures very faithfully and precisely to the centimeter. They embody the past so convincingly that there is no space left for whatever doubt or a different demand.

Individual visits to the Museum are not allowed – only group visits with a guide in case of Macedonian visitors. In the case of foreign visitors, the visit must be announced in advance, so you can be provided with a guide. The guide is usually a graduated historian who determines the rhythm, the trajectory and the content of the visit, which does not leave space for individual research and reflection. The Museum display does not support the research approach and the interactive experience for the visitor. The catalog of the Museum offers only meager information and taking photos is not allowed – this increases the mysterious and even conspiratorial aspect of the Museum's policy.

The resulting museum is quite controversial and its existence must be called into question because its historical narrative is one-sided and politically motivated, since in the future, if the museum would not exist, this should completely change its historical narrative and give an active role of the visitor. In the future, the museum should mediate between all participants in society and become an active player in the shaping of critical thinking; the visitor should become an active participant in its creation and in the creation of the narrative, rather than a passive and silent observer. The Museum should be reshaped into a critical institution that would be built on academic foundations, and then, it should play an important role as a public space of debate in contribution to building global politics and global agora and would also be able to build a mechanism of control of the international politics and the good neighborly relations.

This concept connotes the Museum's policy of nationalism, so the Museum becomes an instrument of control of the collective memory and of shaping the national state.

Conclusion

In order to create a false historical identity of a nation, not based on the historical facts, artifacts and cultural memory of the population, the Government is spending a lot of money, and the Project has no justification, except the gathering of the populist support. It only caused anger among the local population because the state is not that economically strong to be able to withstand such a project, without affecting the finances of the more important part of public policies (health, culture, education, etc).

Moreover, the policy was introduced in an autocratic manner. Such conduct of cultural policy that is in no way participating and which is taken exclusively from a single center of power is very dangerous for a country that is about to head towards the European path and to adopt European values, such as promotion and protection of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, equal access to culture and freedom of artistic expression etc.

Skopje 2014 project is a politically ideological project that serves as a self-promotion of the ruling party. This cultural policy of redefining national identity significantly affects the protection of the true cultural heritage and the conservation policies in the country.

Furthermore, the project does not offer an equal representation of the monuments that would narrate the presence of the other ethnic groups in the state, leading to

conflicting communication among them. On the other hand, as a candidate country to the European Union, the politicians of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia have to decide which role will take the city of Skopje into the Europeanized context. Implementing the politics of European standards requests diminution of the meaning of borders, increasing migration and stimulating the multiethnic communication among inhabitants.

Macedonia's past cultural policy is a policy of erasure and of forced homogeneity; it is a policy that served to reinforce dominant identities; it is a policy of exclusion and hierarchies of difference. The Museum also avoids inclusion of national minorities and it fits the politics of homogenizing the Macedonian identity. Macedonia's cultural policy has to develop a political and legal culture that combines a commitment to universal values with recognition of diversity, because, under the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Macedonia is a multiethnic society that respects various languages, cultures and identities.

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