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## **POLICIES FOR REINTEGRATING THE PAST IN POST-SOCIALIST MACEDONIA**

*Abstract:* The fall of the socialist political system and after the independence of Macedonia, was followed by a period where the past was reexamined. A big part of the cultural heritage and the artifacts which, during the previous system were favored, were mostly neglected in the new situation with an explanation that they had been a tool of the single-party system. The current pluralistic ideologies and political centers of power began to fight over the control and reinterpretation of the past, which had direct or indirect impacts on the definition or redefinition of the national identity.

*Key words:* Macedonia, socialism, post-socialism, past, parties, politics, left wing, right wing.

### **I**

The main characteristic of a cultural heritage is its past. In fact, any artifact which has been classified today as cultural heritage, first and foremost has certain memory and a specific past. The past and the history of the artifacts (also related to specific important events that happened throughout history) can be followed from the first records that later, as a result of the research and the conclusions based on them, receive the status of cultural heritage. The initial findings about the artifacts, the first theorizations and the attempt to extract the information related to their history, that artifacts carry with them, fit into the sphere of what can be called the past of the artifacts or the past of the cultural heritage.

The overall relation towards the past inevitably impacts the concept for protection of its material and immaterial remnants, which usually continue to be considered as “objective” traces of past times, although the whole story of revisiting the past began with the analyses of the preserved monuments and artifacts, i.e. by asking the question: what did the preserved monuments and artifacts mean to the people in a modern society? In addition, the next question is: why do they deconstruct the myths surrounding them and why do they try to understand them? What did these artifacts and monuments represent in their time, and what were they used for within the culture that produced them (Nora, 1996: 19-20)? Therefore, the methodology used to answer the questions related to artifacts is very important, i.e. how do people that study artifacts understand them. In addition, the manner of presentation of the memory extracted from artifacts and the ensuing conclusions is also very important. This, demonstrably, is very often related to the ideology, but also to the current political and economic circumstances in society. In fact, specific artifacts, a part of some past period, do not necessarily have always the same meaning in different periods. Very often, the political power that controls it, wants to use the past to real-

ize certain predefined goals. Therefore, it can be concluded that any reading of the past is exceedingly discursive. This also applies even to the most recent past. A good example would be the reading about the same historic events during socialism and the utterly different consideration and interpretation of such events after the fall of socialism.

In addition, parts of the so called scientific public still continue to believe that history is given once for all times and objective (in terms of fact and in line with the objectiveness of natural sciences). Also there are authors that invent new syntagmas (Gavrilović, 2009: 41) or use a so called modern terminology whereby history revisits its disciplined past and thereby they managed to verbally reform their conviction about the “truthfulness” of history, and thus, at least at first glance, to fit it into the current understanding of history as a discursive discipline. If such an idea about history still exists in the field of the scientific community, then clearly the public discourse has not even touched the idea about the objectiveness and invariability of history (education also has a strong influence on the shaping of such an idea: history is taught to children similarly as physics or mathematics without suggesting to the students the possibility of different interpretations of the facts) (Gavrilović, 2009: 41).

In fact, one thing that characterizes world history of cultural heritage today is that there are attempts to revisit the attitude towards the past, and thereby revisit the attitude towards artifacts, by gradually removing the influence of ideology and politics on these spheres. However, some of the post-socialist countries in Europe, at least the public discourse regarding this issue still reflects the notion to insist on one absolute (political) control over the past, which, in a way, also means control over the presence and the future (Gavrilović, 2009: 42). Therefore the concept of the past relies on the premise of invariance and everlasting, and as a result leads to various problems caused by the overlapping of the basis used to constitute the national identity, i.e. the identity of the state, including the international / interstate misunderstandings and truces (Gavrilović, 2009: 37). In that context, the current so called *interpretation of the past*, i.e. *interpretation of the cultural heritage*, can be considered only one of the building blocks, almost completely immersed within the mosaic used to apply complete power in society.

Therefore, the cultural heritage is of exceptional importance when constituting countries. The fact that the term cultural heritage appears in the Macedonian constitution, i.e. the Preamble of the constitution, several times (Constitution, 2003: 29-30) corroborates this notion. Indeed, the Republic of Macedonia, constituted right after the Second World War, quickly formed institutions which were expected to work on collecting, safekeeping, analyzing and presenting the cultural heritage, which, certainly, should be in favor of the national identity of the population. In spite of the fact that, previously, before the formation of the Macedonian state, certain artifacts and monuments were treated as cultural heritage of other countries and peoples, the new Macedonian institutions enabled the cultural heritage found on Macedonian territory to be included in the story of the common history of the Macedonians. At the same time, these institutions managed to almost fully eradicate the past significance of that cultural heritage and to create a completely new picture for it.

At the same time, Macedonia’s neighbors still try to establish control over what in Macedonia is considered to be Macedonian cultural heritage. So, the countries control the cultural heritage used for purposes related to nation building or, the more extreme alternative, to building of nationalism. In addition, controlling the cultural heritage also

means controlling the territory where such cultural heritage is located. For example, the disagreements between the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Macedonia, first and foremost arise from the fact that both countries base a part of their respective identities on the ancient cultural heritage. Also, the disagreements between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia arise from the fact that both countries base a large part of their respective identities on the cultural heritage from the middle ages. In addition, however, Bulgaria and Macedonia also disagree about the more recent history, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century etc. Practically the world is firmly divided by state or national borders, but theoretically this are equal, i.e. the protection of “our” cultural heritage abroad becomes a way to establish control over a part of the territory of another country (Gavrilović, 2009: 40).

## II

In the last hundred years the Balkans and Macedonia witnessed the changes of several societal systems and each one had its characteristics: the Ottoman Turkish system featured very strong feudal relations; the Serbian monarchist system and the Bulgarian monarchist system did not recognize the existence of the Macedonian people; the socialist system recognized the Macedonians for the first time, but also persecuted all of those that disagreed with the idea and the construct of the Yugoslavian federation, and finally we come to what today we call Macedonian democracy or a society that still transitions and seeks a model that will enable it to survive and to join the European and Atlantic systems (Trpeski, 2009: 97). Subsequently to the social changes, Macedonia, for the fourth time in the last hundred years, intensively “works” on changes to its past and its own history. Until about sixty years ago this was done against its own will and under a direct dictation of those that ruled the land. After becoming independent, “the country itself” intervened in its past and dismissed some parts of its culture or rewrote other parts, but with other words. In addition the country renounced a part of its own history and embraced something new which has direct or indirect implications on the identity.

Indeed, a part of history, which as a result of the previous ideology, was unpopular or “forsaken”, after the independence of Macedonia, gained in significance and also an exceptionally important place in Macedonian history. Thus, at the time of the onset of certain forms of European and world liberalism, and the ever stronger forms of post-Yugoslav national ideologies in Macedonia, the process of changing standpoints and demolition of the existing Yugoslav history also commenced. In particular, the existing history was revised and even significantly contorted. Namely, what happened was the so called *nationalization of history*<sup>1</sup> and historical persons which involved most of the cultur-

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<sup>1</sup> According to some authors (Verdery, 1991; Ramet, 1992), students of socialism, the nationalism in former socialist countries did not begin after the fall of socialism, but rather it existed the whole time, since the establishment of the socialist countries. In fact, nationalism is permanently fostered during socialism. To corroborate this we consider that quickly after the formation of the Macedonian state in 1948 the remnants of Goce Delchev, as one of the most important representatives of the Macedonian national movement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are transferred from Bulgaria to Macedonia; then, in 1948, the Scientific Institute for National History is formed (today: National History Institute) in Skopje. The purpose of this institute was to study the national and cultural history of the Macedonian people. The

al heritage of Macedonia, primarily the heritage that “just a short while ago” had been treated and viewed rather differently. Thus, for example, from today’s viewpoint, when looking at a snapshot of the situation in Macedonia after independence, there are notably to important histories that have the same model, but different content and ideas. One is the Albanian history and the other is the Macedonian history.<sup>2</sup> These two histories are utterly at odds with each other. They frequently clash about the issue of “ownership” of some of the historical figures that had some influence or that acted in the area of Macedonia. The most important such figures are: Alexander the Great,<sup>3</sup> Mother Theresa<sup>4</sup> и George Kastrioti Skanderbeg.<sup>5</sup>

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formation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in 1967, with consent of the Party also corroborates this thesis. Certainly, similar examples were present in the other Yugoslav socialist republics and represented the basis for what was to come later, during the interethnic and interreligious armed conflicts on the territory of former SFR Yugoslavia. In addition, the research conducted by the anthropologist Keith Brown in Macedonia, as a guest of the National History Institute in Skopje, came to this conclusion, i.e. that nationalism existed also during the socialist regime. Even the collection of data and the interest in the history of history was the root cause for the tension between him and the institute staff (Brown, 2003: 210).

2 After the publication of the “Macedonian Encyclopaedia” by MAAS (Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences) in 2009, there were quick reactions from the Macedonian public. However, the reactions from the Albanian political parties and the Albanian organizations in Macedonia were of special significance. These reactions were related to the theory about the origin of the Albanians that was incorporated in the encyclopaedia. This, to some extent, led to the publication of another encyclopedia entitled as “Albanian Macedonia”, which, in fact was a response to the encyclopedia published by MAAS. According to the editor of the first volume of the encyclopedia “Albanian Macedonia”, Nijazi Muhamedi, the purpose of the encyclopedia was to demonstrate the permanent and continuous presence of the Albanians in the geographic area called Macedonia. According to the author, the encyclopedia raises the issue whose is ancient Macedonia and what is Alexander the Great – Greek or Albanian? (Utrinski Vesnik, 2009). About the Macedonian – Albanian relations in (Rossos, 2008: 278-281).

3 The Macedonian historiography treats the figure of Alexander the Great as heritage of Macedonia and the Macedonian people. Although the Government of Macedonia (VMRO – DPMNE and the Macedonian coalition parties) officially have not expressed an opinion on the issue, still, secretly, together with the city of Skopje, aims at placing a monument of Alexander the Great on the square Macedonia in Skopje. On the other hand, for the Albanian historiography Alexander the Great is an Ilir and the Albanians are direct descendants of the Ilirs. Therefore, they should have the right to use the entire capital related to the figure of Alexander the Great. In addition, Seint Naum of Ohrid was also Albanian, as well as the monastery St. Jovan Bigorski (Nova Makedonija, 2009).

4 Mother Theresa today inspires the formation of a multitude of forums on the internet. These forums host intense discussions about the origins of Mother Theresa. According to some she was Albanian, others claim she was Vlach, and a third group thinks she is Macedonian (Bagra, 2010). The fact that the Government of the Republic of Macedonia finances the construction of the memorial for Mother Theresa, located in the center of Skopje, also supports this.

5 According to the Albanian historiography Skanderbeg is an Albanian hero, but according to the statements of some Macedonian historiographers, writers and history researchers, Skanderbeg is Macedonian, and for some of them (Petar Poposki and Petar Basheski) his real name is Georgija Kastriot (A1, 2006). Also other renowned researchers join this thesis, such as Professor Dr. Ljubica Basotova and Professor Dr. Vesna Dimovska Janjatova, who worked on the translation of a book about Skanderbeg from Latin into Macedonian language. According to them, the book also mentions the origins of Skanderbeg; in particular it mentions the name Ematija, a name that, according to the historian Justin is the oldest name that refers to Macedonia. Hence, Professor Ljubica Basotova draws the conclusion that the “Mace-

However, it can also be said that Macedonian history, in fact has two opposing histories,<sup>6</sup> one of which is left oriented and the other is right oriented. If the left oriented history prevailed and was favored during socialism, then, in the period that followed, its place was slowly but surely taken over by the right oriented history. Most of the historical figures that were, in a way, “anathemised” during socialism by the party and the regime, not are either rehabilitated or were, or are still a part of a political war for their rehabilitation. Also, people go as far as changing history and present history in accordance with the viewpoints of certain centers of power.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the rising right wing history, the left wing history, on the other hand, finds itself in a situation where it has to modestly defend itself from the accusations that it had not been objective with respect to certain historic events. However, at the same time the left history cannot comparably respond to some of the radical forms of attack used by the national history.

Certainly, the “war” between the left and the right (Rossos, 2008: 118) represents a historic dispute that exists for a long time and maybe is reflected even since the formation of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. However, the misunderstandings become more noticeable with the divisions within the Organization, i.e. the ideological division into the left wing (centralists) and the right wing (supremacists or “vrhovisti”) (Katardjiev, 2000: 400). Later, after the right wing wins within the organization (Rossos, 2008: 95), the left wing forms VMRO (unified) led by Dimitar Vlahov and Dimo Hadji Dimov in Vienna (Brown, 2003: 43; Rossos, 2008: 132, 160-177). Afterward, during the period between the two world wars, this organization integrates almost completely into the communist parties that were active on the Balkans. Later, during the Second World War, its members join the partisan movement that becomes a serious organized resistance against the fascist occupying forces (Katardjiev, 2000: 394; Rossos, 2008: 180). This is a time of a new ideological shift as well as persecutions of those that wanted a national state of the Macedonians outside of the federation of the other Yugoslav peoples. However, it is worth noting that the part related to VMRO, i.e. the so called socialists from the Ilinden period and the Krushevo Republic was accepted (Brown, 2003: 3).

After the fall of socialism, Macedonia experienced the abolishment of the super-national matrix and acceptance of a national matrix which raised the issue of rereading and revisiting history. Thus, amongst other things, people outside the history profession tries to write and wrote their standpoints with respect to specific historical problems. Obviously, it was very important to make such standpoints in opposition to the history of the

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donian and Christian origins of Georgija Iskender is beyond any doubt” (Vecher, 2008).

6 Keith Brown also states that there are opposing standpoints in the Macedonian history. Thus, he states that if one group of Macedonians consider themselves as descendents of Alexander the Great, others see this issue as a great absurd (Brown, 2003:51). Branislav Sarkanjac states the Serbian example about the two histories, but he stresses that this is not the case in Macedonia (Sarkanjac, 2001: 57).

7 In this context, in Prilep, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary from the demise of the first president of the Presidium of ASNOM, Metodija Andonov – Chento, the five pointed star from his cap was erased. In fact, the whole town features photographs of Chento without his remarkable five pointed star on his “titovka” cap, which was criticized by the veteran organization in Prilep as well as the relatives and friends of Metodija Andonov – Chento (Vest, 2007).

previous ideology. This is a symptomatic nationalization of history, with attempts to have history controlled by politics and political parties. On one hand, the fight for control can be reduced to a mere fight for power between the political parties, which can, at times, refer to the “science” of history. (Sarkanjac, 2001: 57).

In addition to the existing internal clash between the Albanian and the Macedonian ideology, as well as between the two Macedonian ideologies, the international factors also tried to change the history in Macedonia. In fact, the idea was to change the national history of the Balkan peoples and to make a common history, relieved of all stereotypes and possibilities for future conflicting situations in the Balkans. However, this type of history significantly displeased the national structures in the Balkan countries (Utrinski Vesnik, 2007). Indeed, the critical approach, something which is usual for the scientific and societal debates in the Western European and the North American countries, is not the standards for the Macedonian and Balkan historiography. On the contrary, history is continuously reinterpreted to fit the current political agenda (Roudometof, 2003: 21-22).

Bernard Cohn (Cohn, 1998: 6; Brown, 2003: 2010), comparing the disciplines, says that, relatively speaking, history research is based on creation of data. In addition, exploited in the service of the interests or goals of the nation, history, which in itself is an artificial and utterly reified entity, becomes a valuable good. It is kept jealously, and it has to be circulated so that its value can grow and be realized. This very paradox between the exclusion and inclusion lies in the heart of the term “nation”.

### III

Therefore, the past or the artifacts, or the *sites of memories / remembering (lieux de mémoire)*, as they are called by Pierre Nora (Nora, 1996:14), represent rather complex issues. At the same time they are natural and artificial, simple and equivocal, concrete and abstract, as well as monuments, sites or objects. Also they always have three states: material, symbolic and functional, which always interact and coexist. The sites of memory became especially important because they represent huge *memory funds* which the people have used constantly and therefore have exhausted them. As a result, such funds have become current again in certain societies as a result of the attempts to reconstruct history. Indeed, the old political and intellectual framework was built on the basis of the research that was implemented then for the purposes of the society of that time. However, due to the new political discourses, that framework is threatened and it is in a state of confusion (Nora, 1996:14). Therefore, as a result of the changes, of the various claims referring to the same set of monuments, sites and objects, and as a result of the various interpretations related to their history and their significance, today the sites of memory represent hybrid places, i.e. mutants in the strictest sense of the word, a medley between life and death, the time and eternity, endless circles of the collective and the individual, simple and austere on one hand, and sacred on the other hand (Nora, 1996:15). In short, the artifacts and the past are the objective of various “Divine interventions” of sorts, and seem like exercises in nostalgia, sad and lifeless. The political centers of power relentlessly involve them into the ceremonies of an “unceremonious” modern society.

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