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CULTURAL HERITAGE IN TRANSITION: NATIONALISMS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Abstract: The paper is an independent student essay prepared for the course Anthropology of the Cultural Heritage within the ethnology and anthropology study program at the Institute for Ethnology and Anthropology on the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the Ss Cyril and Methodius University from Skopje. This paper will contemplate the changes made to the center of Skopje as a result of the placement of monuments and the construction of new museum buildings.

Key words: Skopje, Macedonia, monuments, cultural heritage, policy.

Often, when we pass through the square, my friend and me make a few playful conjectures about how the Macedonian or, for that matter, all current archeologists would feel in this environment in about ten thousand years when they will face, probably, the biggest cultural shock ever unearthed. Just imagine, on one hand you have a monument of the communist Metodija Andonov Chento, then the triumphal arch, Byzantine emperors and preachers, Goce Delchev, Dame Gruev and a group of “komiti” (Macedonian guerilla fighters against the Ottoman dominion), the Thessaloniki assassins (misunderstood anarchists), ancient Greek, Austro-Hungarian and socialist architecture, a memorial museum of the victims of communism, and, as the cream on the cake let’s add the religious buildings for example. An extraordinary example here would also be the Phalanx which, in comparison to their warrior leader, will look like an army of hobbits. And the leader, Bucephalus the great, ridden by its master Aco (Aco a short name for Alexander) the Greek, will surpass the height of most of the buildings in the center of Skopje, thus giving us the honor of and we will have the honor to look, from a worm’s eye view, only its testicles, which, we agreed, would be best if they are built as disco-balls. This, at least would seal yet another memory of the special nightlife in this city that ends before the night begins and dates back to ancient times.

All of these peculiarities of our dear beloved “Macedonism” will certainly hugely “flummox” the archeologists the archeologists here in ten thousand years, when the civilization that we know today will probably no longer exist, and, in the meantime my friend Risto and I continue “rattling on” to certain extremes that we feel capable of making a mockery of anything that bothers us. In fact, if I think about it, this huge desire to jest with the activities of the current government and the opposition, except, naturally, being built in our DNA as it is ingrained in the core of anybody from the Balkans, has been initiated uniquely by all of that circus presented to us by the politics and the media, whether on TV, radio, live, dead and so forth... And undoubtedly we can safely say that slowly, but surely we become aware of the exceptionally difficult problem that Macedonia has with respect to culture and its stuck and frozen progression. These last few decades, as if

on purpose, everything somehow stands still, and it is not as if it should go someplace far ... all it takes is to fix the teeth of gears so that they can turn again and everything can run its course, and not be left to the mercy of time.

However, while we talk and openly debate these topics, illegal diggers “fence” the artifacts to those on top of the hierarchical pyramid, the archeological sites rot, folk costumes get eaten by moths, handiworks deteriorate, the museums would be better off if we turned them into giant aquariums and fill them with little fish and sharks, at least then something will exist which, if only for a moment, will divert our minds from this deeply trampled and pointless situation. All jokes aside, but I truly fail to understand what is that cultural heritage that we should be proud of when all of its history is twisted, we face false artifacts that we cannot see nor touch, and on the account of that one, some kind of new cultural heritage is being created that should serve the future, but somehow strangely contradicts the ideology of those that build and only compounds the confusing stew cooking in the collective mind of the people. If they ask me, we should use the discovered material testimonies originating in prehistory to understand a long gone culture that existed in these regions. I seriously doubt that the people of the past were aware of national identities and religious affiliations when the clan structures in which they lived imposed only the need for the elemental, essential resources and did not bear any tendencies for promotion of their superiority, for no other reason that the fact that such a thing did not exist, does not exist and will not exist.

However, the prehistoric excavations here are used rather to support ethnocentrism and to prove the elitist superiority of this people above all others. At one time I felt nauseous looking at the racist advertisements on MTV1 that say that “every white man is our brother since the white race in the world originated from the Macedonians” and that “the Macedonian state and civilization are the first in the world and all other were inspired by us”, leaving behind a huge blemish and passionately defecating over such concepts as *education* and *institution*. It is as if the lengthy and laborious research activities of our cultural activists, professors and scientists are gradually losing every bit of significance, every bit of respect and as if overnight they are spat on with most vile of phrases and cast into the water to drown wretched and hopeless as they appear in the shadow of the deceit called “patriotism”. Now all those things appear somehow funny and I perceive them as a huge, stupid, mediocre, conformist and idiotic reality show. Something like the “Big Brother”, but instead of the prison being a house, it is spread between the four “walls” of our dear and crude Macedonia.

But, what really scares me to hopelessness is the fact that all of the background and fundament setup for the building of a completely healthy, advanced and modern society is ravished almost to a point of no return. The laborious work of the politicians to wash people’s brains has been, unfortunately, successfully realized, and we all know that it takes precious time to change the mentality of a peoples and even more time to choke and crush its past habit under the boot of a new partisan dictatorial culture of death.

During this period of transition of our history we witness a horrible picture that shows us how cruel and accursedly difficult it is for an individual to survive in this “quasi – western oriented” society, let alone to guarantee life to a plethora of cultural legacy, material and spiritual heritage. As professor Risteski once emphasized, although, the still enduring rituals or customs of the Macedonian peasants still transfer and successfully preserve essential information about our spiritual, material and social past, we still seem to

turn our back to communication, seem to forget that the basic and the strongest part of lore in our culture through verbal communication, we seem to forget to talk. This is undoubtedly so, but this problem possibly has deeper roots here because of the very nature of this culture – the spiritual cultural heritage is usually transmitted through verbal rather than written venues. However, the neglect of these characteristics and the forgetting to establish communication with an already dying medium that connects us to the past and our characteristics in it suffices to say that we literally, as a nation, turn our backs to the cultural heritage. Although the campaigns for the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage go to an extreme where the propagators themselves setup a fundamental problem – they do not know where to start, they attempt, very wrongly, to inform us of the existence of the material or spiritual artifact. The cultural and social correlation within a “specific” culture cannot develop by forgetting its basics, its foundations and by compensating with extreme perverse overcrowding of the space intended for movement, with concocted or distorted cultural symbolisms.

Be it as it may, already bulls, minxes, masks of hypocrisy parade our squares, our bridges are guarded by lions (that probably died a long time ago in this area, if they ever existed here) and lions – robots (that look like something out of “Star Wars”), the hills are brimming with religious buildings, the domes with crosses and minarets slowly and surely bar our view to the sky and leave no room to receive the rare rays of the extremely worshipped sun, and the people are left to their tresses, the houses of “god” slam their doors in people’s faces, health clinics work better with blackmail and audacity than with blue coupons and kindness, and the lord Sauron vigilantly trained his hellish eye on us and it is unlikely that he will allow us to move anywhere in the next few years. The Nazgul, or if you prefer – the alpha males have us at arm’s length to sell us the morale that they have been known to urinate on sometimes and to hurl us into the depths of the insufficiently unknown culture, so that they could teach us what is cultural and what is not.

The poor magna mater, keeper of our homes has already been usurped and exiled from her spiritual, but profane position, her milk squeezed out, her breasts wrenched to such a level of gluttony and audacity that she will sooner become our mass tomb, than an embrace and love that offers shelter against the onslaught and the wrath of the gods. The empty stories of the coming of the apocalypse and the fear of the fiery flames and the trident of the abyss shackle the hearts of people and the church constantly and ever more intensely condemns the bringing of sacrifices to the saints. The end of the world is forthcoming; we have helped its beginning pouring the city from its complexes onto the cultural heritage and its true values in a ruthless and apocalyptic manner.

Традициски култури и општества



Traditional cultures and societies

