

Displaying a contested past:  
The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle and the shifting post-socialist  
historical discourses in Macedonia

By

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## **Abstract**

The project examines the newly emerged Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, as an exceptional case of a museum regarding its historical narrative and the visual representation of the narrative structure. The main analytical focus will be put on the historical narrative presented in the Museum on one hand, as part of the meta-historical narrative conducted by VMRO-DPMNE's government in contemporary Republic of Macedonia, and on the other hand, the functional purpose, the political and institutional aftermath of the Museum. Therefore, it will be argued that the Museum brings a particularly univocal, top-down version of one particular historical narrative, as a discursive feature with legitimizing political function. Finally, the thesis will focus on the particular need to establish museum of this kind, and moreover, will engage with the question why a museum as an institution and particular form of institutionalized memory is propounded as a solution in the contemporary Macedonian socio-political context.

**Key words:** Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, Macedonia, historical museums, national narration, contested past

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## Transliteration scheme

(Standard Macedonian – Cyrillic alphabet – Latin transliteration)

According to: Victor A. Friedman, “Macedonian.” In *The Slavonic Languages*, edited by Bernard Comrie and Greville G. Corbett, 249-306. London – New York: Routledge, 1993. P. 251.

<b>A a</b>	<b>- A a</b>	<b>И и</b>	<b>- I i</b>	<b>P p</b>	<b>- R r</b>
<b>Б б</b>	<b>- B b</b>	<b>Ј ј</b>	<b>- J j</b>	<b>С с</b>	<b>- S s</b>
<b>В в</b>	<b>- V v</b>	<b>К к</b>	<b>- K k</b>	<b>Т т</b>	<b>- T t</b>
<b>Г г</b>	<b>- G g</b>	<b>Л л</b>	<b>- L l</b>	<b>Ќ к</b>	<b>- Ќ к</b>
<b>Д д</b>	<b>- D d</b>	<b>Љ љ</b>	<b>- Lj lj</b>	<b>У у</b>	<b>- U u</b>
<b>Ѓ г</b>	<b>- Ѓ г</b>	<b>М м</b>	<b>- M m</b>	<b>Ф ф</b>	<b>- F f</b>
<b>Е е</b>	<b>- E e</b>	<b>Н н</b>	<b>- N n</b>	<b>Х х</b>	<b>- H h</b>
<b>Ж ж</b>	<b>- Ž ž</b>	<b>Њ њ</b>	<b>- Nj nj</b>	<b>Ц ц</b>	<b>- C c</b>
<b>З з</b>	<b>- Z z</b>	<b>О о</b>	<b>- O o</b>	<b>Ч ч</b>	<b>- Č č</b>
<b>S s</b>	<b>- Dz dz</b>	<b>П п</b>	<b>- P p</b>	<b>Ѣ ѣ</b>	<b>- Dž dž</b>
				<b>Ш ш</b>	<b>- Š š</b>

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## Introduction

The monograph of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Statehood and Independence begins with two introductory texts. The first one, signed by Nikola Gruevski, leader of VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) and Prime Minister of Republic of Macedonia from August 2006 to January 2016, brings the peculiar story of the motivation for constructing a museum of such type. Namely, the ex-Prime Minister is stating that the very idea emerged “through a conversation in a plane flight from Brussels to Skopje,” after he “read the documents provided on the Summit of the European People’s Party,” where the project for the “establishment of a Museum for the victims of communism in Brussels” was mentioned.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, “after the consultations with the chief of the cabinet,” the project for a Macedonian Museum of this kind was further developed “during the flight”, adding the part of VMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) as integral component in the history of the Macedonian struggle for independence.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the second text did not have the same privilege to be conceived in air, closer to the Platonic *topos hyper ouranious*, it also reflects on the very intention for the establishment of the Museum of Macedonian struggle. Composed by Elizabeta Kančeska-Milevska, Minister of culture in DPMNE government from 2008, the text was also focused on the motivation for the building of the Museum, as centralized over the idea “to link the contemporary Macedonian state

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<sup>1</sup> Nikola Gruevski, “Istoriski muzej so neprocenljivo nacionalno bogatstvo” [Historical museum with an invaluable national treasury] in *Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence, Museum of VMRO, Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime* (Skopje: NU MMS, 2012). p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Nikola Gruevski, *op. cit.*

with its revolutionary, intellectual and historical traditions in a meritorious manner,” and further on, “to open new pages and chapters from the plentiful and abundant revolutionary and political past of the Macedonian peoplehood.”<sup>3</sup>

Although the function of an introduction can be discussed on several levels,<sup>4</sup> the further exegesis on these particular introductory texts promulgate even more questions than answers for the motives behind the establishment of the Museum. The rhetoric of Gruevski’s text itself, completely written in first person singular,<sup>5</sup> suggests the institutional interplay behind the creation of the Museum. As such, it expands the object of analysis from the Museum’s narrative, to the political constellation, discursive struggles and power relations. Moreover, Kančeska-Milevska’s particular insistency on the “unselectiveness” as the key criteria for the exhibition on one hand, and the actual exhibition on the other, puts us in the middle of the theoretical debates over the historical representations, historiography discourse and memory politics in general.<sup>6</sup> At this point, it is important to mention that the notion of the direct and immediate political interference in the creation of the Museum is a premise which the reader should always bear in

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeta Kančeska-Milevska, “Muzej koj gi prezentira istoriskite, kulturnite i revolucionernite premrežinja na makedonskiot narod vo negovata povekjevokovna borba za sozdavanje na svoja nacionalna država na Balkanot” [A museum which presents the historical, cultural and revolutionary turmoil of the Macedonian people in their centuries long struggle for creation of their own national state on the Balkans] in *Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence, Museum of VMRO, Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime* (Skopje: NU MMS, 2012). p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> In the famous preface to the classic Derrida’s piece “Of Grammatology”, Gayatri Spivak emphasizes the very role of the prefaces in the text-productions, suggesting the key postulate of the post-structuralistic paradigm of the text as an unstable identity. More in: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s preface” in *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> Guevski refers to himself as the person who “suggested” that beside the historical artifacts, wax figures and artistic paintings should be added to the permanent exhibition. See in Gruevski, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> In Kančeska-Milevska’s words, “the entire ideological-historical solution of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle is directed towards complex and unselective representation of events, processes, persons.” See Kančeska-Milevska, *op. cit.* p. 9.

mind as approaching the discussion further on. In that sense, the Museum of the Macedonian struggle will be analyzed as an institution which provides a univocal, top-down version of one particular historical narrative, as a discursive feature with clear political function.

Nevertheless, to state that the establishment of particular state-sponsored, historical museum presents an act with direct political implications is nothing novel, regarding both the theory and the praxis of museology on one hand (which will be discussed in the next subchapter), and on the other, the immediate Macedonian political and social reality in the last decade (discussed in the Chapters 1 & 2). Therefore, the main purpose of the thesis is to provide a model for interpretation of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, based on the premise of approaching, or “reading” the Museum in its totality. Even though one can analyze particular aspects of the Museum’s complex nature in this manner, the very holistic approach to the Museum as a phenomenon is what makes it relevant as a contribution to the academic discourse.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Macedonian Museum, from the initial idea to the final opening to public, was finished in three years (2008-2011), even before the opening of the abovementioned museum in Brussels. Thus, one can state that this “efficiency” in constructing terms is another particular aspect which is worth further reflection. Therefore, the thesis will focus on the particular need to establish museum of this kind, and moreover, will engage with the question why a museum as an institution and particular form of institutionalized memory is propounded as a solution in the contemporary Macedonian socio-political context.



## Theoretical background: Collective memory

Beside the particular motives for the establishment of the Museum and the highlight on the “unselectiveness” feature of the exhibition, the introductory text by Kančeska-Mileska is further significant because, consciously or not, points out two particular theoretical tensions. Namely, the Minister is stating that the “whole ideological and historical solution for the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle is directed towards a complex and unselective representation of events, processes, persons which, beside their role being blackened up to now, become part of the Macedonian history and collective memory of the people.”<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the Museum is introduced as “complex and unselective” discourse, opposite to the “blackening” tendencies in the national historical narratives. Thus, the reference to the communist regime of memory, as closed, uniform and exclusive is clear in the abovementioned statement. Herein, the main argument is focused on the claim that the Museum’s narrative structure introduces a particularly inclusive regime of memory, not more open, uniform and univocal than the regime of memory it tries to oppose.<sup>8</sup> In addition, a brief review of the key contributions in the field of memory and museum studies will be provided, in order to better contextualize the claim of the political functionality of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle in the Macedonian case.

The emergence of the collective memory studies can be traced back to the 1970s, with the rediscovering of the works of Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), and the production of the capital, seven volume research-project on the French identity, history and memory by Pierre

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<sup>7</sup> Kančeska-Milevska, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly enough, the openness and the actuality of the “conservatism of VMRO-DPMNE”, as opposed to the “closed systems of ideas” is ascribed as one of the key values in the Doctrine of DPMNE. See in: *The values of VMRO-DPMNE* (Skopje: VMRO-DPMNE). Available at: <http://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/documents/doktrina.pdf>. p. 7.

Nora (1931), from 1984 to 1992 as major, critical events. Since then, one can trace the “boom”<sup>9</sup> in the memory studies field, crosscutting the social disciplines on one hand, and the various empirical case studies on the other.<sup>10</sup> The starting point of Halbwach’s research, which will afterwards be perceived as the particular shift in the memory studies, can be located in his “questioning of the assumption that memory reside in the individual.”<sup>11</sup> The French sociologist is pointing out that all the memories are organized in collective, social context, by interaction of the individuals, and moreover, facilitated by the social institutions. Nevertheless, Halbwachs’s concept of collective memory is not applicable on a national level, as a particular national

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<sup>9</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum* (New York & London: Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> More on the recent developments in the memory studies in: Chris Weedon and Glenn Jordan, “Collective memory: theory and politics”, *Social Semiotics* 22 (2012); Mihai Stelain Rusu, “The Media-History of Memory. Mapping the Technological Regimes of Memory”, *Philobiblon* 19 (2014) ; Victor Roudometof, “Collective Memory and Cultural Politics”, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 35 (2007); Victor Roudometof, “Introduction Beyond Commemoration: The Politics of Collective Memory”, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 31 (2003). Jeffrey K. Olick is introducing the concept of social memory, as more precise construct than collective memory, in order to avoid the perceptions of collective memory as collective consciousness. See in: Jeffrey K. Olick, “Introduction” In *States of memory: continuities, conflicts, and transformations in national retrospection*, edited by Jeffrey K. Olick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); “Collective memory: The two cultures”, *Sociological Theory* 17 (1999)); “Between Chaos and Diversity: Is Social Memory Studies a Field?” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22 (2009). Another extensive study on the conceptual treatment of memory in the sociological studies: Paolo Jedlowski, “Memory and sociology: themes and issues”, *Time & Society* 10 (2001).

<sup>11</sup> James W. Pennebaker and Becky L. Banasik, “On the Creation and Maintenance of Collective Memories: History as Social Psychology.” In *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Respective*, edited by James W. Pennebaker, Dario Paez and Bernard Rimé (New York & London: Psychology Press, 1997), p. 4. See Halbwachs’s *On Collective Memory* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). More on Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory in: Jay Winter, “Foreword: Remembrance as a Human Right” In *Memory and political change*, edited by Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Erica Apfelbaum, “Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory” In *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 1999); Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of social remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), p. 50-74.

memory, but moreover, it stands for the collective memory as performed by the particular associations within the civil society, along with their different interpretations of the past events. Finally, the collective memory as such has direct implications on the identity functions in Halbwachs's theory, since the "collectives of all kinds are defined by the narratives they fashion about the past."<sup>12</sup> In other words, the collective memory organizes the representations of the past into particular structures which produce a consciousness of identity through time. Finally, Halbwachs perceives these narratives (recollections, *les souvenirs*<sup>13</sup>) as dynamic and active selections of the past, and thus, as essentially performative, since they only come to a given temporal and spatial existence through specific kinds of memorial activity.

One can state that these memorial activities are in the very focus of the work of Nora, a French historian who builds upon the work of Halbwachs and applies his theoretical findings on the level of national narrative.<sup>14</sup> In this context, Nora introduces the concept of *lieux de mémoires* ('sites' or 'realms' of memory), as particular places where "memory crystallizes and secrets itself."<sup>15</sup> In Crane's interpretation, this 'sites of memory' artificially organize the past, while producing meanings which are being assimilated by various groups, in order to cope with the modernity.<sup>16</sup> Nora locates the creation of these 'sites of memories' in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the changes in the social context which implied the collective memory to lose its particular function. Herein, the crucial distinction between *lieux* and *milieux* ('real environments') of memory is being drawn, and as such, this dichotomy functions as a

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<sup>12</sup> Jay Winter, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*", *Representations* 26 (1989), p. 7-9.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Nora, *op. cit.* p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Susan A. Crane, "Introduction: Of Museums and Memory." In *Museums and Memory*, edited by Susan A. Crane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

cornerstone of Nora's claim on the social memory in the nation-states. Namely, the modern societies depressed the past, as distinct from the present, and thus, a historical consciousness of time began to prevail over a memorial one. Therefore, in Wood's words, "this is the era of the formation of the modern nation-state, whose legitimacy depends on the narratives of the nation that forged unchallenged continuities between nation's past, present and future."<sup>17</sup> Herein, Nora places the museums (alongside the archives, cemeteries, anniversaries, festivals, monuments, treaties) as particular 'sites of memory', which "originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory," and thus, "certain minorities of a privileged memory" deliberately create such *lieux*, since without such "commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away."<sup>18</sup>

The thesis argument in this manner will both depart from and further invert Nora's concept of 'sites of memory'.<sup>19</sup> Being located on the left bank of the river Vardar, in the very central city area, the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle occupies one of the central spots of the newly conducted "Skopje 2014" state-sponsored, mega-constructing project. With the placement of over 130 erected monuments, as well as buildings, façades, and other architectural undertakings in the very urban zone of the Macedonian capital, the project itself is without any precedent in both the immediate and the wider political, social and cultural contexts. Therefore, one can stress that the ideologist behind the project, simply moved the object-from-museums to

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<sup>17</sup> Nancy Wood, op. cit., Pp. 4. More on Nora in: Bill Schwarz, "Memory, Temporality, Modernity: Les lieux de mémoire" In *Memory: histories, theories, debates*, edited by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*." p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> As a particular "catachresis reading", a technique which purposely misuses the western-centric discourses in order to fit the immediate Macedonian reality, and thus, fill the gap of lack on research which directly refers to Macedonia. More in Branislav Sarkanjac, *Makedoniski katahrezis* [Macedonian catachresis] (Skopje: Makavej, 2009). The approach as such is close to the Levi-Strauss's "bricolage" argument.

the city central core, in the sphere of the everyday life. The Macedonian Professor of art semiotics and museology Nikos Čausidis, in his study of the semiotic functions of “Skopje 2014”, further expands this argument, stressing that the museums were left empty with extraction of the “museal” objects out of the “museal” spaces, with their placement in “unnatural environment.”<sup>20</sup>

## **Theoretical background: National museums, national narratives and national history**

The promotion of particular national narratives has been the fundamental aim in the museum politics and the museology as such, and moreover, it operated the moving idea of the establishment of an institution of this type in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>21</sup> In this context, Anderson is pointing out that the purpose of the museums, as well as the initially “museumizing imagination” were “profoundly political.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Simine is writing that “the institution of the museum is a product of the Enlightenment and as such it took on an instrumental role in the politics of

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<sup>20</sup> More in: Nikos Čausidis, *Proektot Skopje 2014: Skici za edno naredno istraživanje* [The project Skopje 2014: A draft for a future research] (Skopje: Nikos Causidis, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> See the capital study in this field: Tony Bennet, *The birth of the museum: history, theory, politics* (London: Routledge, 1996). More on the museum as nation-branding institutions in: Rhiannon Mason, *Museums, Nations, Identities* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007); Annie E. Coombes, “Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities” In *Museum studies: an anthology of contexts*, edited by Bettina Messias Carbonell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Susan A. Crane, “Introduction: Of Museum and Memory”; and Martin Prösler, “Museums and globalization” In *Theorizing Museums*, edited by Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers – The Sociological Review, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London & New York: Verso, 2002). p. 178.

identity of the modern nation-state.”<sup>23</sup> The particular break with this modernist approach to the museums as institutions for “breeding” nationalist discourses is to be traced back to the end of the Cold War, when “the surge in identity politics [...] has challenged traditional museum structures and operations.”<sup>24</sup> Regarding the paradigm shift in the traditional national-historical museums studies, one can stress that critical discourse varied from the critique of the hegemonic dimension of “museal” representations on general level (Bennet’s insight on the museums as “disseminating hegemonic national narratives”), to the more specific critiques on the certain museological practices which recreate national discourses. In this manner, Kolstø is describing the national museum as “containers of symbolism”, while Weiser is addressing the same institutions as “safe places for unsafe ideas.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, on the basis of the proliferation of the post-modern denunciation of the possibility of meta-narrative, the notion of national in museum politics and practices was further challenged within the political, social, class and gender perspectives.

The particular “boom” in the museum studies generated new practices regarding the exhibitions’ content on one hand, as well as a shift in the technical, logistical and visual museum experiences and curatorial practices on the other. Thus, the new paradigm, referred in the

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<sup>23</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (New York & London: Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies) p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Robin Ostow, “Introduction: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the Twenty-First Century.” In *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millenium*, edited by Robin Ostow (Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press, 2008) p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> More on the criticism of the national historical museums in: Tony Bennet, *The birth of the museum*; Elizabeth M. Weiser, “National Identity Within the National Museum: Subjectification Within Socialization”, *Stud Philos Educ* 34 (2015); Sabrina P. Ramet, “Introduction: Memory and identity in the Yugoslav successor states”, *Nationalities Papers* 41 (2013); and Pål Kolstø, “Introduction.” In *Strategies of symbolic nation-building in South Eastern Europe*, edited by Pål Kolstø (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

literature as the “new museology,”<sup>26</sup> became visible with the adoption of “new missions and new representational strategies” by the museum managements.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the paradigm of the exhibition practices shifted from the monolithic and hegemonic representations, to museum spaces open for contested voices and collections, as well as open to the particular narratives, as opposite to the totalizing regimes of representations.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Hooper-Greenhill is referring to this new trend in the museology as the age of “post-museum”, with the democratic opening to the diverse audience as a new functional paradigm.<sup>29</sup>

Having in mind the abovementioned points of the debate in the “new museology”, the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle can be approached as a particularly interesting case. Thus, the Museum is a combination of a traditional national-historical museum, regarding the historical content it presents, and in the same time non-traditional exhibitional space, regarding the manner in which this historical content is represented. In other words, the Museum exhibits an exclusive, nationalistic narrative, in a certainly post-modern and eclectic ambient and style. Additionally, one can stress that the museum exhibits only its own exhibition, which in a sense is the pure national narration as envisaged by the political/historical agents. Therefore, the analysis will shed

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<sup>26</sup> Sharon Macdonald, “Expanding Museum Studies: An Introduction.” In *A companion to museum studies*, edited by Sharon Macdonald (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), Pp. 1-12.

<sup>27</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *op. cit.* p. 8. More in: Andrea Witcomb, “Re-imagining the museum: beyond the mausoleum (London & New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Richard Sandell, “Museums and the combating of social inequality: roles, responsibilities, resistance” In *Museums, Society, Inequality*, edited by Richard Sandell (London & New York: Routledge, 2002) p. 7-28. The work of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is particularly relevant in this context, both with the promotion of the intangible heritage as feature of the “new museology”, and the critical argumentations for the multi-voiced perspective of the museum politics. More in: “Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production”, *Museum International* 56 (2004) and “A Theatre of History: 12 Principles”, *The Drama Review* 59 (2015). See also the seminal work by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination culture: tourism, museums, and heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)

<sup>29</sup> Ellean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the interpretation of the visual culture* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 20-22.

light on the question what exactly is the necessity for such museum and museum narration, as well as on the main message which the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle is providing.

## **Thesis structure and research design**

According to Crane, the museum is “existing” on several levels, starting from the building space and the architecture of the museum, followed by the exhibition, as the particular content of the museum, and finally, ending with the various extra activities as offered by the museums (from souvenir shops to research centers).<sup>30</sup> In such manner, the thesis is structured to correspond with Crane’s notion. Moreover, the structure as such particularly fits the holistic approach on the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle.

Building upon abovementioned theoretical constructs, the particular focus of the thesis will be put on the analysis of the historical narrative as presented in the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle on one hand, as part of the meta-historical narrative conducted by VMRO-DPMNE’s government in Republic of Macedonia, and the functional purpose, the political and institutional aftermath of the Museum on the other. Back to Kančeska-Milevska’s statement, the analysis will approach this “peculiar synergy”<sup>31</sup> between the memory and the nation, namely, as the particular juncture between the historiography discourse and the collective memory which culminated into the establishment of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle. Furthermore, the process of re-imagining the national past will be subject to deconstructive reading. The particular

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<sup>30</sup> Susan A. Crane, “Introduction: Of Museums and Memory.” p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, “Introduction.” p. 7.



model of the “historical” VMRO – as a floating signifier throughout the recent Macedonian history as the main paradigm in the narrative structure of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, will be the main analytical focus. Herein, this model will be approached as a “national narrative template” – a particular discursive construction which tends to establish itself as the “collective DNA” of the nation, or the “backbone of the national identity.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, in the first Chapter, a historical overview will be provided, in order to better understand the revisionist discourse of the Museum narrative afterwards. Additionally, the political context, as well as the case of “Skopje 2014” constructing project will be presented, as the critical rift in the memory politics in the contemporary Macedonian socio-political context. In Chapter 2, the institutional arrangement of the memory politics in the Macedonian case will be examined. Herein, the qualitative novelty in terms of historical narration and visual representations, as brought with the emergence of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, will be argued in the context of the distinction between “old” and “new” museum buildings in Macedonia. In the third Chapter, analysis on the historical narrative of the discourse will be presented. The two main findings will be consequently divided in two subchapters. In Chapter 4, a particular discussion on the possible contextualization of the Museum within the domestic political context is provided, as well as regarding the wider trends in the memory politics.

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<sup>32</sup> James V. Wertsch, “Deep memory and narrative templates: conservative forces in collective memory.” p. 173-185. The intertwine nature of the relation between the nation, the history and the national narration is emphasized by the social constructivist scholars in the study-field of nationalism. More in: Benedict Anderson, “Imagined Communities”; Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: narrating the nation” In *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (London & New York: Routledge, 2000) and Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation” In *The Location of Culture*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2004).

## Chapter 1 – History, politics, and politics of memory

### 1. Historical context: The triple “Macedonian question”

The scholarly discourse on Balkan history is explicit in the treatment of the occurrences and developments in the geographical region of Macedonia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> as the so-called “Macedonian question.”<sup>33</sup> The latter was part of the wider “Eastern Question” of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which emerged after the political and national consolidation of the Greek and Serbian state, and especially after the establishment of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870, which is to be considered as a turning point in the political engagement of the Bulgarian establishment in the “western provinces.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, the question-formulation as a paradigmatic approach to the Macedonian region refers to the open nature, and often unpredictable outcomes regarding the political management of the particular geographical area with particularly diverse, multiconfessional and multilingual population.

Moreover, the gradual withdrawal of the “Sick Man of Europe” from the Balkan Peninsula, namely the Ottoman Empire, catalyzed the competing interests of political, national

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<sup>33</sup> More on the emergence of the “Macedonian question” in “The Macedonian Question: Culture, Historiography, Politics”, edited by Victor Roudometof (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2000); Andrew Rossos, “Makedonsko pitanje i nestabilnost na Balkanu.” [Macedonian question and the instability of the Balkans] In *Jugoslavija i njeni povjesničari: Razumijevanje balkanskih ratova u 1990-im* [Yugoslavia and Its Historians: Understanding the Balkan Wars of the 1990s], edited by Norman M. Naimark and Holly Case (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2005) and Dimitris Livanios, “The Macedonian Question: Britain and the Southern Balkans”. A collection of original writings from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1950s dealing exclusively with the “Macedonian question” can be found in *The Historical Truth: The Progressive Social Circles in Bulgaria and Pirin Macedonia on the Macedonian National Question 1896-1956*, eds. Pero Korobar and Orde Ivanoski (Skopje: Kultura, 1983). Solid studies in English on Macedonia which expand beyond the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are Andrew Rossos’s “Macedonia and Macedonians” (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1992) and Stoyan Pribichevich’s “Macedonia: Its People and History” (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press).

<sup>34</sup> The Eastern Crisis was result of the simultaneous emergence of uprisings in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

and economic domination over the Macedonian region of the Great Powers and the regional state-formations. Therefore, the locution “Macedonian question,” as it emerged in this specific historical context, will remain the main paradigm of addressing the Macedonian turmoil during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, underlining and implying the contested claims over the territories in the Southern and Central Balkans referred as Macedonia. The following subchapter will approach “the three Macedonian questions,” as the crucial historical junctures, and moreover, will critically engage into the discussion of national and political dynamics in the regional Macedonian context as presented by both the Macedonian and international historical discourse. Moreover, the historical period which will be approached is the same period which the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle treats as a permanent exhibition.

### **The first “Macedonian question”**

After the Russian-Turkish war from 1877-8, as consequence of the Eastern crisis of the 1870s, the Preliminary Treaty of San Stefano was signed in 1878, granting the newly established Bulgarian state the political right over the vast part of the Macedonian territories. Nevertheless, the new political constellation was revisited by the Western Powers, due to the Russian overwhelming political influence in the novel constellation of powers on the Balkan Peninsula, and moreover, the geographical region of Macedonia was again allocated under Turkish, Greek and Bulgarian spheres of governance.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the time period from 1878 to the 1910s, was marked with the strong attempts of the Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek states to agitate their national platforms among the multicultural population of Macedonia (with a majority of

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<sup>35</sup> Livanios, *op. cit.*, p. 3-52.

Orthodox Slav population), still under the rule of the fading Ottoman state. As particular finale of the contested territorial aspirations over the Macedonian region, in the wake of the evident declination of the reformed Ottoman Empire, an armed encounter emerged 1912, which will be afterwards defined as the First Balkan War. Shortly after Montenegro declared war to Turkey, the newly composed alliance of Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia joined the Montenegrin side and managed to win the brief confrontation with the Turkish army. Notwithstanding the win, the Bulgarian state was not satisfied with the new division of governmental influence over the Macedonian territories, and thus, this political mood led to the Second Balkan War in 1913. The Serbian and Greek side, as allies in this war, noted a striking win which provided them the positions in the further negotiation process after the Bulgarian side surrendered. Finally, the war victory was determined in the so-called Bucharest Treaty from August 10<sup>th</sup> 1913, dividing the Macedonian region in three major parts (Serbia and Greece will take the bigger *Vardar* and *Aegean* Macedonia, while Bulgaria was limited to the territory of south-east *Pirin* Macedonia), and this political borders remained in the same condition until nowadays.<sup>36</sup>

On the level of Macedonian national and political consolidation, two phenomena from this particular historical period appeared as crucial in the further nation-building process. The first one in this manner, is the “sprang out” of various cultural circles in Europe, later denominated as the Enlightenment period in the national historiography, which promoted and

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<sup>36</sup> The Bucharest Treaty remained the crucial historical point of the Macedonian nationalism. Moreover, as it will be discussed in the two following chapters, the unification of the geographical region of Macedonia will be the main political project among the Macedonian nationalists, from the both sides of the political specter. For further insight in the division of the Macedonian territories and the discursive framing of this historical event in the political imagination of the Macedonian political emigration, see Marjan Ivanovski, “Makedonskite emigrantski politički organizacii vo Zapadna Evropa (1956-1990).” [Macedonian emigrant political organization in Western Europe (1956-1990)] In *Balkanot: lugje, vojni i mir* [The Balkans: People, Wars and Peace], Proceedings from the international scientific conference. Skopje, 2015.

agitated for the Macedonian romantic nation-liberation ideas. The focal point of this ideology of “Macedonianism”, as a platform for national and political unity of the Macedonian people, is the publishing of the seminal work by Krste Petkov Misirkov in 1903, named “On the Macedonian Matters” (*Za Makedonckite Raboti*).<sup>37</sup> The second event in this context, in Misirkov’s words ascribed as the “turning point in the Macedonian history,”<sup>38</sup> was the formation of an organization which opted for armed struggle and resistance against the Ottoman rule on the territory of Macedonia. Namely, the “Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization” (VMRO) was established in November 1893, in Salonika, by six members of the Macedonian intelligentsia.<sup>39</sup> Not while after the formation, the Organization gained massive popularity and support, gravitating around the charismatic leaders (Goce Delčev, Jane Sandanski, Ćorče Petrov). Furthermore, the Organization was founded on the idea of inclusiveness of the multiconfessional and multilingual population in the struggle against the “Turkish yoke” on one hand, and the strong emphasis on the aim for political autonomy and further independence for Macedonia on

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<sup>37</sup> More on Misirkov’s role in the building of the Macedonian national consciousness, along with the comparative Moldavian perspective and Misirkov’s participation in the Moldovan parliament, in Ermis Lafazanovski, “The Intellectual as Place of Memory: Krste Petkov Misirkov’s role in the Macedonian and Moldavian National Movements” in *The Ambiguous Nation*, edited by Brunnbauer and Grandits (Oldenbourg Verlag München: Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, 2013). The opus of Blaže Ristovski is the major reference in the Macedonian historiography concerning Misirkov and the Enlightenment context.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Rossos, “Macedonianism and Macedonian Nationalism on the Left”, in *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe*, eds. Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery (New Heaven: Yale Center for International Area Studies, 1995), p. 226.

<sup>39</sup> The revolutionary organization was firstly created under the name “Macedonian Revolutionary Organization” (MRO) and changed the name several times during its existence. More on the name-changes of the revolutionary organization in James Frussetta, “Common Heroes, Divided Claims: IMRO between Macedonia and Bulgaria”, in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, eds. John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest & New York: CEU Press, 2004).

the other.<sup>40</sup> The key achievement of VMRO as such was the ill-fated “St. Elijah Day Uprising” (*Ilindensko vostanie*), from August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1903, which resulted with the creation of the ten-days-lasting Kruševo Republic (*Kruševska Republika*) and in the words of the Macedonian historiography, was “brutally suffocated” by the Ottoman army.<sup>41</sup> The formation of this “first Republic on the Balkans”, beside its short lifetime, remained as the corner stone of the Macedonian national struggle in the collective memory of the Macedonian people. Nevertheless, after the unsuccessful Uprising, the Organization split across the ideological lines and lost its primary popularity from the pre-*Ilinden* period.

What is interesting in this context, as well as in the context of the Museum’s historical narrative which will be further discussed, are the forthcoming, interwar developments of the VMRO. Building on the symbolic capital and the popularity of the original VMRO, the structure of the Organization was rehabilitated after the WWI by the Organization’s pro-Bulgarian wing, making it active on the territory of Pirin Macedonia (or the Petrich district, the south-western part of the Bulgarian state). Without the Turks as the primary opponent and revolutionary *raison d’être*, the Organization was de facto subjected to the interests of the Bulgarian elites in practice, while on the surface, the romantic ideology of the pre-*Ilinden* VMRO, self-determination and

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<sup>40</sup> More on the national program and the political activities of the Organization in the first decade of its existence in the capital works by Duncan M. Perry, “Politics of Terror: Macedonian Revolutionary Movements 1893-1903” (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988) and Keith Brown, “Loyal unto Death: Trust and Terror in Revolutionary Macedonia” (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). See also Stefan Troebst. “IMRO + 100 = FYROM? The politics of Macedonian historiography”, in *The New Macedonian Question*, edited by James Pettifer (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan Press, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> More in Aleksandar T. Hristov, *Stvaranje Makedonske države 1893-1945* [The creation of the Macedonian state 1893-1945] (Beograd: Savremena Administracija, 1971) and Dragan Taškovski, *Rađanje na makedonskata nacija* [The birth of the Macedonian nation] (Skopje: NIP Nova Makedonija, 1967).

independence for the Macedonian region was being promoted.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the rightist VMRO operated as an unruly “state within a state” in the Petrich district, thus constantly undermining the local Bulgarian authorities, as well as the central government in certain periods.<sup>43</sup>

Herein, the name of Ivan (Vančo) Mihajlov occupies the central role in the re-imagination of the VMRO in the interwar period. Promoting himself as the leader of the Organization in 1924, Mihajlov transformed the revolutionary movement into consolidated terrorist organization, which controlled the Petrich district in administrative, political and economic sense. Another important aspect of the so-called “Mihajlovism”, namely the political credo and praxis of the Mihajlov’s interwar VMRO (autonomist), were certainly the interparty purges, perpetrated as brutal assaults both in the Balkan context, as well as across the European continent.<sup>44</sup> On international level, Mihajlov maintained strong connections with the Italian

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<sup>42</sup> More on the interwar right-wing VMRO in Zoran Todorovski, “VMRO 1924-1934” (Skopje: ROBZ, 1997); Darinka Pačemska Petreska, “VMRO 1918-1934: Hronologija” [VMRO 1918-1934: A Chronology] (Skopje: Filozofski Fakultet, 2014); Ivan Katardžiev’s “Vreme na zreenje: Makedonskoto nacionalno prašanje meѓu dvete svetski vojni 1919-1930” [Time of maturation: Macedonian national question between the two world wars 1919-1930] (Skopje: Kultura, 1977) and “VMRO-Ilinden-ASNOM” [VMRO-St. Elijah-ASNOM] in *Makedonija vo XX vek* [Macedonia in 20<sup>th</sup> century] (Skopje: Kultura, 2006). The assassination of the leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party and prime minister from 1919 to 1923, Aleksandar Stambolijski, is the most representative event in this context.

<sup>43</sup> More in Todorovski, *op. cit.* For a Bulgarian historical account on the interwar period, see the newest publication on this issue *VMRO i Ivan Mihailov v zashtita na bǎlgarshtinata* [VMRO and Ivan Mihailov in protection of the Bulgarianness] (Sofia: UI Sv. Kliment Ohridski, 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Starting with the mysterious deaths of the former leaders of VMRO, Aleksandrov and Protogerov, the assassinations of other figures from the high hierarchy of the Organization on the streets of Sofia and Petrich district and abroad (Todor Panica’s assassination in the Viennese *Burgtheater* in 1925). Mihajlovist VMRO is the key *dramatis personae* in the assassinations of the Yugoslavian King Alexander in the infamous Marseille assassination from 1934 (executed by Vlado Černožemski), as well as the assassinations of officials of the Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenes on the Macedonian territory in the interwar period (Mara Buneva’s assassination of Velmir Prelić in 1928 and the assassination of the army general Kovačević in Štip in 1927 among the others). See Naum Trajanovski, “Komemoracijata na Mara Buneva vo

fascists, Horthy's Hungary, and the Croatian Ustaša.<sup>45</sup> As a particular culmination of the international acknowledgement of the ideological and political provenience of Mihajlov, the Nazi establishment offered him the possibility to establish a puppet Macedonian state in the final year of the WWII. Nevertheless, Mihajlov remained in the diaspora, from the official ban of VMRO by the Bulgarian government in 1934 until the end of his life in 1990, being active in the pro-Bulgarian nationalist organizations.

### **The second “Macedonian question”**

Although the right-wing interwar VMRO justified its methods of terror as the only possible manner to keep the “Macedonian question” open in the post-WWI context, it was another organization which will superpose over the discourse of liberation of Macedonia. Namely, the socialist wing within VMRO, as well as the Yugoslavian and Bulgarian communist organizations in the interwar period, opted for a definite solution of the “Macedonian question” as a cultural and national autonomy in the framework of wider Balkan socialist federation.<sup>46</sup> The

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Skopje verzija 2015” [Mara Buneva's commemoration in Skopje, “version 2015”], *Politička misla* 49 (2015).

<sup>45</sup> See Nada Kisić Kolanović's “Zagreb-Sofija: Prijateljstvo po mjeri ratnog vremena 1941-1945” [Zagreb-Sofia: A friendship according to the war times 1941-1945] (Zagreb: Hrvatski Državni Arhiv, 2003) and “Ivan Vanča Mihajlov: makedonski revolucionar uskraćen za domovinu i korijene” [Ivan Vanča Mihajlov: Macedonian Revolutionary without Homeland and Roots], *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (2002).

<sup>46</sup> As Livianos is pointing out, already in 1894, a Balkan socialist conference in Paris had declared the establishment of an autonomous Macedonian state within a Balkan federation as “the only viable solution to the problem” (*op. cit.*, p. 31). The socialist tradition in Macedonia can be traced back to Vasil Glavinov's writings and political engagement from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of the federalism as a possible solution among the Macedonian socialist, and moreover, the particular popularity of the leftist ideas in the three parts of Macedonia can be illustrated with the massive support of the socialist parties in the elections, before they got banned by the state governments. More on the issue of the development of the socialism on the “Macedonian soil” in Rossos's “Macedonia and Macedonians” and “Macedonianism and



paradigm as such was accepted by the international communist organization – *Comintern*, having in mind the ideological priority of the class struggle on one hand, and the practical maneuver to sympathize with- and mobilize the politically not-recognized Macedonian population on the other. Herein, the immediate interwar period, VMRO was regarded as a consequent associate and a legitimate representative of the Macedonian people by the Comintern and furthermore, the Communist International put additional efforts to reconcile the opposing wings in VMRO.<sup>47</sup>

This proposed solution of the second “Macedonian question”, remained the main paradigmatic modus in the treatment of the Macedonian territory under Yugoslav rule after the Second World War. Interestingly enough, the predominance of the national paradigm over the class one was perceived as the key moment for the nation-building processes of the newly established states within the newly established socialist federation. This particular insistence on

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Macedonian Nationalism on the Left”, Tchavdar Marinov and Alexander Vezekov, “Communism and Nationalism in the Balkans: Marriage of Convenience or Mutual Attraction?” in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans: Transfer of Political Ideologies and Institutions* (vol. 2), eds. Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014); Marinov’s “Makedonskoto prašanje od 1944 do denes” [The Macedonian question from 1944 to nowadays] (Skopje: OSF Macedonia, 2013) and “Antikomunistička, ali makedonski [sic!]– politika sećanja u postjugoslovenskoj Makedoniji” [Anticommunist, But Macedonian: Politics of Memory in Post-Yugoslav Macedonia], *Currents of History* 1-2 (2009). In the Macedonian historiography context, the question is in the primary focus of Katardžiev’s work. Evangelos Kofos’s monography titled “Nationalism and Communism in Macedonia” (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1964) presents a solid work in the same context from a Greek historian perspective.

<sup>47</sup> This endeavor culminated with the signing of the famous May Manifesto in 1924. See Troebst, *op. cit.* and Marinov’s “*Makedonskoto prašanje od 1944 do denes: Komunizmot i nacionalizmot na Balkanot* [The Macedonian Question from 1944 till today: Communism and Nationalism in the Balkans]” (Skopje: Fondacija Otvoreno Opštество, 2013); “Communism and Nationalism in the Balkans: Marriage of Convenience or Mutual Attraction?” In *Entangled Histories of the Balkans: Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions*, edited by Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014), as well as “Anticommunist, But Macedonian: Politics of Memory in Post-Yugoslav Macedonia”, *Tokovi istorije* 1-2 (2009)”. For further analysis on the implications of the Manifesto. See also the original documents from the 1920s which anticipated the Macedonian quest for national recognition in Ivanoski and Korobar, *op. cit.*

homogenizing national narratives in the cases of Bosnia, Macedonia and Montenegro, can be interpreted on a general level, as a result of the Yugoslav state development in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as on the level of the federal units, considering the state, nation and institution building processes which were taking place.

One of the few places of consensus in the scholarly discourse on Yugoslavia is the very notion of the country's slightly different pattern of development, as opposed to the Soviet Republics, yet, as opposed to the Soviet "satellite states."<sup>48</sup> Thus, the approach as such is based on the premise of the Yugoslav socialist experience as transcending the strict Cold War East-West division. The founding features of the model are to be found in the national-liberation character of the Yugoslav resistance during the WWII (*Narodnooslobodilačka Borba - NOB*), and moreover, strengthened with the infamous Tito-Stalin split from 1948. The political split initiated the emergence of the Workers' Self-Management system (*Radničko samoupravljanje*) and the establishment of the "Non-Alignment Movement" (1961), with Yugoslavia as a founding state having de facto leading role in this international political platform. Moreover, in the particular cases of some of the Yugoslav federal units, the aftermath of the WWII was also marked with the initial state-formation. In this context, Macedonia, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina were granted the status of republics, while the case of Montenegro is still subject of wider discussion in this context, considering the historical statehood tradition of the Mediterranean country.

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<sup>48</sup> See John R. Lampre, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Pedro Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment 1948-1974* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1977); Catherine Baker, *The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) for an extensive account on the Yugoslavian history.

In the Macedonian post-war nation-building context, two particular aspects are substantial for the construction of the national and historical narrative of this southernmost Yugoslav state. Firstly, the key pillars of the Macedonian identity, namely the language and religion were officialized and institutionalized in the first post-war decades. The creation of the fundamental cultural, scientific and educational institutions was also conducted in the same time period.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, the stages of the Macedonian national narrative were drawn in such context, as part of the wider state-building. The crucial junctures of the Macedonian history in this manner, was emphasizing the direct connection between the *Ilinden* Uprising of 1903 and the “Partisan struggle against the Bulgarian and German occupation over 1941-1944,” culminating with the governmental structure- Anti-Fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (*ASNOM*), deliberately established on the same day.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, one can stress that on the Macedonian historical narrative was drawn on a particular line of continuity, expanding to the migration of the Slavs on the Balkan Peninsula in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century in terms of historical “depth”, and culminating with the Partisan struggle in

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<sup>49</sup> This “intertwinement” of nationalism and communism in the Macedonian case, is illustrated with the codification of the Macedonian language (1945), creation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (1958, autocephalous after 1967). Moreover, the Macedonian Academy of Sciences, the Skopje University and the first National Museum, as it will be further analyzed in the following chapter, emerged in this time period. Herein, the establishment of the Institute for National History in July 20<sup>th</sup> 1948 in Skopje with governmental decree is particularly important in this case, since the institution as such was granted with the monopoly over the historical production in Macedonia. Moreover, the Institute for National History was publishing the only journal of historical science in Macedonia, *Istorija* (History). More on the immediate post-war developments in the Macedonian state-, nation- and institution-building context in Stefan Troebst, “Yugoslav Macedonia, 1943-1953: Building the Party, the State, and the Nation.” In *State-Society Relations in Yugoslavia, 1945-1992*, edited by Melissa K. Bokovoy, Jill A. Irvine and Carol S. Lilly (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997). For an extensive study on the codification of the Macedonian language, see Victor Fridman, “Macedonian.” In *The Slavonic Languages*, edited by Bernard Comrie and Greville G. Corbett (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> James Frussetta, *op. cit.* p. 112

terms of historical “importance.” It is important to be mentioned that the process of selection of the national pantheon of historical figures was not only inspired by the collective memory of the Macedonian population in the newly established political unit, but was also fostered in the period of unsettled bilateral relations of the Yugoslav and the Bulgarian states, as a direct consequence of the abovementioned Tito-Stalin split. Namely, the efforts to produce a relevant academic discourse regarding the historical figures of the Macedonian national pantheon, including the Salonika-born brothers Ss. Cyril and Methodius, the medieval tsar Samuil and the so-called Enlighteners, was continuously contested by the Bulgarian side, which claimed legacy over the same historical persons. This contestation will determine the Bulgarian-Macedonian relations in the Yugoslav, and further on, in the post-Yugoslav period.

Finally, in the socialist historiography manner, the leftist organizations were favored as progressive elements of the history. The case with the interwar VMRO illustrates the best the abovementioned discursive practice. Namely, the Organization’s left-wing was granted the status of a legitimate predecessor of the National Liberation Struggle and ASNOM, determined as the two most important state-building events in the Macedonian context. In the same manner, the VMRO’s interwar right-wing was dealt as a non-progressive element and apologist of the interests of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, or more frequently, was ignored when addressing the particular historical period<sup>51</sup>. This historical narration will be further analyzed in the next chapter, since the symbolic rehabilitation of Mihajlov and mihaljovist VMRO will be one of the

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<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Mihajlov and VMRO under Mihajlov’s rule are perceived as an organization with a clearly fascist consciousness. For an extensive comparative analysis, see Frusetta, *op. cit.*; Nedeva, Ivanka and Naoum Kaytchev. “IMRO groupings in Bulgaria after the Second World War.” In *The New Macedonian Question*, edited by J. Pettifer (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001) and Zoran Todorovski. *VMRO 1924-1934* [VMRO 1924-1934]. (Skopje: ROBZ, 1997).

key sites of the revisionist politics in the Macedonian context and moreover, represented in the Museum as a particular materialization of this discursive reframing of the history.

### **The third “Macedonian question”**

The modern-day Republic of Macedonia declared independence after the successful Referendum from September 1991, thus, peacefully seceding from the Yugoslav Federation. Nevertheless, the particular avoidance of the Yugoslavian “bloody scenario” in the Macedonian context did not preserved the old contestation to reappear, once the country gained its independence and sovereignty.<sup>52</sup> Thus, after the declaration of independence, the Bulgarian state recognized the new Macedonian state, but questioned the existence of separate Macedonian language and nation. Republic of Serbia on the other hand, conspired division of Macedonia between Greece and Serbia in the Milošević era, while the question of the autonomy of the Macedonian Church is still disputed, after more than three decades of Macedonian sovereignty. Finally, Republic of Greece contested the name of the state, the state symbols (the Macedonian national flag – the sun of Vergina) and “its constitutional commitment to Macedonian minorities abroad.”<sup>53</sup> The Greek refusal to officially recognize the new Macedonian state,<sup>54</sup> ended up with

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<sup>52</sup> Once again, the phrase “Macedonian question” was utilized to denote the turmoil over the Macedonian political and social reality. In this manner, it is mentioned in the capital study by Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalisms since 1780: programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 166. See also Misha Glenny’s article “The Macedonian Question: Still No Answers.” *Social Research* 62 (1995). The phrase was also used as a title of the interdisciplinary collection of research papers dealing with the new, post-socialist Macedonian reality – James Pettifer (ed.), *The New Macedonian Question* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Ulf Brunnbauer, “Ancient Nationhood and the Struggle for Statehood: Historiographic Myths in the Republic of Macedonia.” In *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*, edited by Pål Kolstø (London: Hurst & Company, 2005) p. 268. See also Žarko Trajanovski, “National Flags’

an agreement monitored by the international community and thus, Republic of Macedonia entered the UN and was recognized by the European Community under the reference FYROM (*Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*).<sup>55</sup>

In the domestic political context, the armed conflict from 2001 marked the second decade of the state's independence. Approached as a direct confrontation between the Macedonian forces on one hand and the Albanian militant group National Liberation Army on the other, the conflict emerged over, and made visible the fragile inter-ethnic relations in the state. Namely, the quest for minority and language rights, proportional institutional representation and educational institutions teaching in the mother tongue were determined as the main demands from the Albanian side, while the state argued on the basis of national security, and the right to defend the state sovereignty.<sup>56</sup> The armed conflict was ended with the signing of the so-called Ohrid

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in the Republic of Macedonia.” In *The Ambiguous Nation*, edited by Ulf Brunnbauer and Hannes Grandits (Oldenbourg Verlag München: Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> The so-called Greek-Macedonian “name dispute” emerged as a bilateral conflict over the political usage of the name Macedonia, resulting in a deep political and economical crisis in the landlocked Republic of Macedonia. More precisely, since the Macedonian independence, the Republic of Greece is disputing the right of the new-formed state to use the name Macedonia, due to historical legacies of the very name on one hand, and due to the region in the Northern Greece with the same name on the other. This issue was solved with the Interim Accord from 1995, monitored by the international community. Both the Macedonian and the Greek state are in the process of negotiating and resolving this issue, monitored by the UN. Important aspects of this issue are the political implications which the region is suffering, mostly due to the Greek usage of its veto power over the Macedonian NATO and EU integrations. More in Markovikj and Damjanovski, *op. cit.*; Katerina Kolozova et al. *Who owns Alexander the Great? A Question Upon Which EU Enlargement Relies* (Skopje: ISSHS, 2013) and, Magdalena Rekšć, “The Political and Historical Myths and Their Role in the Ideological Struggles over the Republic of Macedonia at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.” *Politeia* 30 (2014).

<sup>55</sup> Trajanovski, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Keith S. Brown, “In the Realm of the Double-headed Eagle: Parapolitics in Macedonia, 1994-9.” In *Macedonia: The Politics of Identity and Difference*, edited by Jane K. Cowan (London – Sterling: Pluto Press, 2000) and Kevin Adamson and Dejan Jović, “The Macedonian-Albanian political frontier: the re-articulation of post-Yugoslav political identities”, *Nations and Nationalisms* 10 (2004).

Framework Agreement, thus, with meeting the conditions of the Albanian minority in Macedonia. Therefore, the Macedonian path of integration in the European Union and NATO was traced, since the country signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union in 2001, and further on, was granted a status of candidate state in 2005.

## 2. Political context

The last juncture in the Macedonian political context was the landslide victory of the center-right, conservative coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE in 2006 parliamentary elections. VMRO-DPMNE, as suggested in the party's official name, claims legacy over the "historical" VMRO.<sup>57</sup> It is important to note that the electoral win in 2006 came after a major inter-party restructuring, namely, after the complete change in the highest party hierarchy. In this manner, DPMNE abandoned the radical nationalism from the 90s, marked with strong anti-Albanian statements and sentiments, anti-communist discourse and rhetoric of territorial aspirations, and opened the space for the younger, "reformist" generation, which brought them the electoral win and the second term in the Macedonian government (the first one being in the 1998-2002 period). The political and national platform of DPMNE in the first decade of its existence as a political party in Macedonia will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Moreover, the highly evaluated tax reforms conducted by Nikola Gruevski, the Minister of Finance in the first DPMNE government, afterwards leader of the party (from 2003) and a

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<sup>57</sup> James Frussetta provides an overview of the political parties with the VMRO prefix in the communist and post-communist times. See Frussetta, *op. cit.* A brief summary of the right-wing parties in the Republic of Macedonia context can be found in Zdravko Saveski and Artan Sadiku. *The Radical Right in Macedonia* (Skopje: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2012).

Prime Minister (from 2006 to 2016), contributed towards the construction of his image as a technocratic economist, whose primary focus is the economy, rather than history, as it was the case with the previous charismatic party-leader, Ljubčo Georgievski. The paradigm as such can be found in the DPMNE's official doctrine, where the primary focus of the re-branded DPMNE is determined to be the "real man", as opposed to the "new man", the center of the "leftist-revolutionary" political platform.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly enough, even though DPMNE's agenda from the 90s was much clearer on certain historical revisionist issue, it never translated as a particular memory policy. On the contrary, the ten-year rule of the "reformed", and technocratic DPMNE from the mid-2000s, will be mostly marked with the major takeovers in the cultural and memory sphere. The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle especially fits into this paradigm.

Lastly, the process of re-branding of the DPMNE political agenda started from openly radical nationalist platform in the 90s, to modern-day European center-right Christian-Democratic political option in the mid-2000s. The process itself ended up positioning DPMNE as a nationalistic-populist pseudo-patriotic party, thus, the main agency in the recent domestic socio-political turmoil. Namely, the so-called political crisis was initiated by the "revelation of the incriminating voice recordings involving the prime minister and leading party and government officials" in February 2015, which "suggest massive abuse of office, including widespread corruption and the manipulation of the electoral process."<sup>59</sup> As an aftermath of these obstacles, the rating of the Republic of Macedonia's political rights declined "from 3 to 4 due to serious shortcomings in the April general elections and a related legislative boycott by the opposition."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the status of the freedom of the media during the last decade is a

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<sup>58</sup> "Values of VMRO-DPMNE: A Doctrine." p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Florian Bieber, "The Balkans: Back on the Radar", *Turkish Weekly*, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the world* (New York: Freedom House, 2015) p. 13.



clear indicator of the DPMNE's governmental performances as leaning towards authoritarianist type of governance. Herein, the *Reporters Without Borders's* World Press Freedom Index shows a drastic fall of the Macedonian media rating from the 34<sup>th</sup> place in 2009 to 117<sup>th</sup> in 2015.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, in the *Freedom House's Freedom of the Press* publication from 2015, it is clearly stated that "Macedonia's score has declined 10 points in the past five years, making it the worst performer in the region."<sup>62</sup>

Most recently, a particular decision by the Macedonian President Gjorgje Ivanov<sup>63</sup> to pardon the politicians faced with crime investigations from the wire-tapped allegations, was seen as an incentive to a serial of massive protests. Since April 12<sup>th</sup> 2016, a critical mass of citizens, oppositional parties, and NGOs are marching through the Skopje's streets, with a list of specific demands concerning mostly the presidential pardon, but also a set of demands regarding the human, political and civil rights. The scapegoat of the nonviolent protest became the very objects of the "Skopje 2014" project which are painted with colors, as a symbolic revolt against the government's most recognizable undertaking. Thus, the demonstration have been named a "colorful revolution", which under the banner *Protestiram* (I Protest), is mobilizing not only the ethnic Macedonian population, but also the members of the other ethnic minorities which are not satisfied with the work of the government.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly enough, the Museum of the

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<sup>61</sup> Reporters Without Borders's 2016 *World Press Freedom index*.

<sup>62</sup> Due to the several opposition-oriented outlets which "have been forced to close during this period and journalist Tomislav Kezarovski remained in detention throughout 2014 on questionable charges that he revealed the identity of a protected witness in a murder case". More in Freedom House 2015 report, *op. cit.*

<sup>63</sup> A DPMNE's candidate, Ivanov is running his second mandate as a state president.

<sup>64</sup> Decent in-depth analysis on the presidential pardon and the "colorful revolution" in English: Feargus O'Sullivan, "How Paint Become a Weapon in Macedonia's 'Colorful Revolution'", *City Lab*, 09.05.2016; Siniša Jakov Marušić, "Macedonia President Pardons Politicians Facing Charges", *BalkanInsight*, 12.04.2016; and "Demonstrations Continue in Macedonia After Presidential 'Pardon' in Wiretapping Scandal", *Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty*, 13.04.2016.

Macedonian Struggle became part of the whole protesting ambient. Namely, after the continuous painting of the Skopje's Arc of Triumph (*Triumfalna Kapija*), a building erected in the wake of "Skopje 2014" constructing activities, the director of the Museum of Macedonian Struggle made a public statement regarding the coloring of the Arc. Recreating the typical governmental discourse of foreign enemies and their domestic mercenaries,<sup>65</sup> the director accused the demonstrators for damaging the object which is under administration of the Museum.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the critical link between the political turmoil, the particular politics of memory and the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle gained yet another aspect in its entangled relationship. As such, it will be further analyzed in the Chapter 4.

### 3. A critical juncture in the memory politics: "Skopje 2014"

Although relatively new and even not yet finished,<sup>67</sup> the project "Skopje 2014" already provoked a serious amount of scholarly debate. Having in mind its eclectic nature, both in terms of style and historical periods, the bulk of literature cross-cuts this mega-constructing, state-sponsored undertaking across the scientific disciplines and specific subjects of analysis.<sup>68</sup>The

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<sup>65</sup> See Naum Trajanovski, "Whose Crisis? Some aspects of the post-2010 Macedonian media scene." *Media and Communication* 1 (2014).

<sup>66</sup> "Soros is giving money for ideas [...] We are ready for cleaning and building, the police and the judiciary are responsible for the rest, since I am not a doctor to heal these people". "Triumfalnata so perdinja gi ceka šarenite revolucioneri" [The triumphal arc is waiting for the colorful revolutionists with curtains], *Sakam Da Kazam*, 20.05.2016.

<sup>67</sup> More in Siniša Jakov Marušić, "Skopje 2014 prodolžuva i pokraj makedonskata kriza" [Skopje 2014 continues beside the Macedonian crisis], *BalkanInsight*, 05.07.2012. The euphemism which emerged in the Macedonian public on "Skopje 2014", regarding its "never-ending nature" is "bottomless pit", having in mind that the very name of the project was selected in order to refer to the planned and projected year of finalization.

<sup>68</sup> The most comprehensive study on "Skopje 2014" is Nikos Čausidis's "Proektot Skopje 2014: Skici za edno naredno istraživanje" [The project Skopje 2014: A draft for a future research]

project “Skopje 2014” itself is primarily located and occupies the central area, or the urban milieu of the capital city. Even though broadcasted with a great pomp on “every national TV station”<sup>69</sup> on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, as a short video of the projected new buildings in the Skopje’s “ideological and physical center of Ploštad Makedonija (Macedonia Square)”<sup>70</sup>, the core shift in the memory politics can be traced back in the contemporary Macedonian context. Herein, a specific set of governmental measures on different levels, namely linguistic, ethno-archeological and memorial, constructs the pre-history of “Skopje 2014”. The linguistic dimension is marked with the attempts to re-imagine the Macedonian language as ancient Macedonian one, even though the official language of Republic of Macedonia is scientifically considered to be part of the South-Slavic linguistic group. Mostly significant in this manner is the attempt by two natural

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(Skopje: Nikos Čausidis, 2013). The author is interested in the semiotic and psychoanalytical aspects of the project. For an extensive study which deals with the transitional justice elements and implications of the project, see Angelovska, “(Mis)representations of Transitional Justice: Contradictions in Displaying History, Memory and Art in the Skopje 2014 Project” In *The Arts of Transitional Justice*, edited by P.D. Rush and O. Simić (New York: Springer, 2014). Decent anthropological studies on “Skopje 2014” are Mattioli’s, “Unchanging boundaries: the reconstruction of Skopje and the politics of heritage”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20 (2014) and Goran Janev, “Narrating the Nation, Narrating the City”, *Cultural Analysis* 10 (2011). Magdalena Reksc, “The Political and Historical Myths and Their Role in the ideological Struggles over the Republic of Macedonia at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”, *Politeia* 30 (2014); Maja Gori, “Fabricating Identity from Ancient Shards: Memory Construction and Cultural Appropriation in the New Macedonian Question.”, *The Hungarian historical review* 2 (2014); Nenad Markovikj and Ivan Damjanovski, “Macedonia between Identity Politics and EU integration – New Paradigms, Old Mental Maps” and Naoum Kaytchev, “Being Macedonian: Different types of ethnic identifications in the contemporary Republic of Macedonia”, *Politeia* 30 (2014) are focusing on the political outcomes of the project. See also: Anastas Vangeli, “Nation-building ancient Macedonian style: the origins and the effects of the so-called antiquization in Macedonia”, *Nationalities Papers* 39 (2011); Ljubica Spaskovska, “The fractured ‘we’ and the ethno-national ‘I’: the Macedonian citizenship framework”, *Citizenship Studies* 16 (2012) and Andrew Green, “Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia”, *Cultural Anthropology* 28 (2013).

<sup>69</sup> Fabio Mattioli, *op. cit.* p. 599.

<sup>70</sup> Maja Gori, *op. cit.* p. 302.

scientists, Aristotel Tentov and Tome Baševski,<sup>71</sup> to propose a model of interpretation of the “Rosetta Stone”, claiming that the third, unknown language is the Ancient Macedonian one. Moreover, the ethno-centric archeological takeovers, launched by and linked with the name of Pasko Kuzman,<sup>72</sup> resulted with the establishment of several “new archeological open-air museums in key sites of the country.”<sup>73</sup> Finally, the memorial functions prequel to the official launch of “Skopje 2014”, are to be found in the renaming of the several important institutions, buildings and memorial sites.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, the year 2008 can be perceived as a particular juncture in the manner in which memory policies were both discursively framed and further implemented. Namely, the expected invitation for full-membership in the NATO Alliance at the 20<sup>th</sup> Summit in Bucharest did not arrive, due to the on-going dispute with the Republic of Greece, and the possible veto by the latter. From this point onwards, the Macedonian government abandoned the scrupulous and “timid” dynamic of administering the conservative, ethno-centric identitarian policies, and inaugurated the memory discourse as a top-scale political priority. The main paradigm in this

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<sup>71</sup> In an article named “Tracing the script and the language of the Ancient Macedonians” and published by the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2005. For an extensive critique of this paper, see Vojislav Sarakinski, “The Discrete Death of the Methodology”, *Istorija* 42 (2006).

<sup>72</sup> The head of the Cultural Heritage Protection Office until 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Maja Gori, *op. cit.*, p. 301-303. In this context, Gori is mentioning the Early Neolithic site Tumba Madžari and the Ohrid based Museum on Water. Analyzing the particular Greek and Macedonian archeological takeovers in comparative perspective, the author is stating that while the “archeology is absolutely central to the political debates surrounding contemporary Macedonian identity”, the same can be stated for the Greek case as well.

<sup>74</sup> Here, one can mention the renaming of the Skopje’s Airport as “Alexander the Great” (2006), as well as the Corridor 10 highway with the same name (“Alexander of Macedon”, renamed in 2008 - namely, the route leading to Republic of Greece). The main stadium in Skopje got the name after Alexander’s father, Philip the Second (2009), while many streets also got renamed after ancient Macedonian rulers. This process as such was not centralized in the capital, and the emergence of Alexander and Philip statues in one of the largest cities, Bitola and Prilep, are in favor of this notion.

context was the so-called process of “antiquization”, as a particular attempt to reconstruct the ancient Macedonian tribe with the contemporary Macedonian population. Thus, the project “Skopje 2014” was introduced in this very context, with the capital monuments referring to the Ancient Macedonian royal family.

Moreover, one can clearly state that the nation-branding project as such is a product of the entangled relations and contested claims with the neighboring nations, and therefore, it contributes towards the peculiar dialectics of contested claim-making, which mostly rest on a symbolic level. In this manner, the case with the abovementioned monuments’ name is significant. Even though the reference to the ancient royal family is clear and obvious, the monuments bear pretty abstract official names, such as “Warrior on a Horse” and “Warrior”, since an open nomination would result in direct confrontation with Greece.

Additionally, in Graan’s words, from “Skopje 2014” was inevitably expected to bring “international recognizability and competitiveness in a global marketplace”, and here can be found the reason why “the project has been positioned as the cornerstone of broader government efforts to construct a nation brand.”<sup>75</sup> Moreover, one can stress that the *initial capsule* of the project conducted by the right-wing anti-communist DPMNE was the initiative of the former Macedonian president Branko Crvenkovski in 2005, also founder and leader of the leftist Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), to erect a monument of Tito in the central place of the Skopje’s main square.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, Muhić and Takovski argue that “Skopje 2014” was

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<sup>75</sup> Andrew Graan, “Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia.” p. 162-163.

<sup>76</sup> The main argument being the contribution of Tito to the Macedonian nation. More on the Yugo- and Tito-nostalgia in the Macedonian context in: Marionov, “Anticommunist, But Macedonian: Politics of Memory in Post-Yugoslav Macedonia.” *Tokovi istorije* 1-2 (2009); Ilf Brunnbauer, “Serving the Nation: Historiography in the Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) After

predominantly related to the inter-ethnic issues of the country, thus promoting a clear Macedonian ethno-centric narrative for account of the other national minorities living in the Republic.<sup>77</sup> A recent survey supports this particular statement, showing that the Albanian population in Macedonia on a large scale is “not supporting at all” the project (58.4%), while only scattering 12.1% are “in favor of” “Skopje 2014”.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly enough, the project has not received the expected popularity envisioned by the government even among the ethnic Macedonian population, since 73% of the participants think of Goce Delčev as the leading figure in the Macedonian history, while only 9% assign this role to Alexander the Great.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, one can clearly state that the “antiquization” is just one part of the project “Skopje 2014”. In this sense, the project refers to different historical periods, with the “antiquization” as a starting historical point. Thus, the figures of Iustinianus Primus (*Justinijan Prvi*, c. 482-565) and Tsar Samuel (*Car Samuil*, 10-11<sup>th</sup> century), as well as a plethora of various persons and events from the recent Macedonian past, occupy the locations across the central city

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Socialism” *Historein* 4 (2003-4) and Anastas Vangeli, “Facing the Yugoslav Communist Past in Contemporary Macedonia: Tales of Continuity, Nostalgia and Victimization.” In *History of Communism in Europe – Politics of Memory in Post-communist Europe*, edited by Mihail Neamtu (Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2010).

<sup>77</sup> The authors are applying the theoretical findings of Michael Herzfeld on the particular case of “Skopje 2014”, namely the concept of cultural intimacy as the common denominator of the latent national sentiments, showing that the project “corresponds perfectly with the sentiment of many Macedonians to detach themselves from the Ottoman past and from the Islam, mistakenly correlated with the Albanian population who are often looked upon as enemies of the state by the Macedonian population.” p. 145. More in Maja Muhić and Aleksandar Takovski, “Redefining National Identity in Macedonia: Analyzing Competing Origin Myths and Interpretations through Hegemonic Representations.” *Etnološka tribina* 37 (2014).

<sup>78</sup> Trošanovski and Popovikj, “100 dena vlada – percepcije na građanite na Makedonija” [100 days of governing – the perception of the Macedonian citizens] (Skopje: IDSCS/MCMS, 2011) p. 14

<sup>79</sup> See Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities - Skopje (ISSHS) research projects “Skopje 2014 Project and its effects on the Perception of Macedonian Identity Among the Citizens of Skopje” (Skopje: ISSHS, 2013) and “Who owns Alexander the Great? A Question Upon Which EU Enlargement Relies” (Skopje: ISSHS, 2013).

area. In this context, the project is to be approached as a particular “amalgamation”<sup>80</sup> of the Macedonian past, as directed towards the creation of an “all-inclusive” meta-historical narrative of the nation (started immediately after the electoral win in 2006, and bustled after the 2008 NATO Summit as discussed before). Herein, the main political discourse over the very intention of the launch of “Skopje 2014” was the open emphasis on the function of reconciliation this project will provide.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, under this “veil of reconciliation”, a centralized, univocal and strongly controlled narrative was imposed, which ended up being more exclusive than inclusive in national, religious and multicultural sense.

The claim which can be made in this context, regarding the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle as a part of the “Skopje 2014” project, is that it presents a particular break or fracture in the very logic behind the mega-constructing project. Firstly, considering the very “content” of the historical narration, the Museum’s narrative structure is to be approached as a particular “zoom-in” to the meta-narrative of “Skopje 2014”, focused on roughly one and a half century struggle and resistance on the territory of Macedonia. In this manner, under the motto of “unselectiveness”, a strongly controlled historical tale is being imposed in the form of a permanent museum exhibition and collection. Secondly, the function of Museum can be perceived as a particular shift from the memorial and identitarian function of “Skopje 2014”, as it was discussed above. Namely, it can be stated that the Museum, among the other features, obtains a function of political legitimization of particular political party, as opposed to the national “reconciliation” of the pseudo-inclusiveness of “Skopje 2014”.

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<sup>80</sup> Nenad Markovikj and Ivan Damjanovski, *op. cit.*, p. 8

<sup>81</sup> Referring to the reconciliation of the various contested discourses over the Macedonian past, not to the reconciliation in inter-ethnic terms. More in Matolli, *op. cit.* and Markovikj and Damjanovski, *op. cit.*

## Chapter 2 – Institutional context, Museums and Museology in Republic of Macedonia

### 1. Museum of the Macedonian Struggle: A Museum within Museum?

The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, or as the full name suggests- *The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle; Museum of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization; Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime*, is one of the most dominant objects from the mega-constructing project of “Skopje 2014.” Built during the years of 2008 to 2011, the Museum was inaugurated on 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2011, on the twentieth anniversary of the declaration of Macedonian independence.<sup>82</sup> Located on the left bank on the river Vardar, right across the main city square – “Macedonia”, the Museum disposes a net area of 6435 square meters, while “the exhibition facilities are spread on 2500 square meters.”<sup>83</sup> According to the director of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, Svetozarevikj, the Museum holds a

“collection of 109 wax figures of prominent Macedonian revolutionaries, ideologists, voivodas, intellectuals, communist activists, politicians, and foreigners, 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. This collection is in constant process of enrichment through purchase of museum materials and through donations from citizens.”<sup>84</sup>

Regarding the spatial location of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, a peculiar dichotomy of “inside-outside” in spatial sense can be drawn. Namely, while the Museum narrative will be discussed as highly centralized and controlled (in a sense of visual representation, time period which the exhibition is showing, as well as the historical construction), the immediate setting and

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<sup>82</sup> Angelovska, “(Mis)representations”, p. 184 and Todorovski and Ačkoska, “Museum of the Macedonian Struggle.”

<sup>83</sup> Svetozarevikj, “Museum of the Macedonian Struggle”, 2011. *Museum Connects: Building Global Communities – Phase I Museum Profile Form*.

<sup>84</sup> Branislav Svetozarevikj, *op. cit.*, p. 2.



ambient of the Museum is consisting a divergent group of objects, mainly constructed under the “Skopje 2014” undertaking.

Thus, the Museum itself is located in a neo-classical building, an almost identical architectonic solution of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle in Thessaloniki.<sup>85</sup> This solution should be perceived in the context of the abovementioned contested claim-making and nation-branding processes. The other side of the Museum, namely the side of the main entrance, is looking to the newly constructed square of the “Karposh Uprising,” along with the figures of the saluting “Warrior,” the royal ancient Macedonian family, and further on, proximately distance to the Museum of the Holocaust and the Archeological Museum. Moreover, the space between the Museum and the river bed is occupied with a City Beach (*Gradska Plaža*), also part of the “Skopje 2014” project. Nevertheless, recent media reports brought the plan to demolish the newly adopted beach, in order to open space for the constructing activities concerning the new London Eye-lookalike Panoramic Circle (*Panoramsko trkalo*) over the river Vardar.<sup>86</sup> Herein, the thesis of the “amalgamation” of the national past, as performed with the “Skopje 2014” meta-historical narrative, is relevant regarding the immediate exterior ambient and the context in which the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle is located. Moreover, in urbanistic sense, the only unifying factor of these object on the left-bank square is the very fact that they are built in more-or-less, same period of time.

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<sup>85</sup> Florian Bieber, “The Museum with the longest name”, *Florian Bieber’s notes from Syldavia*, 18.01.2014. See also the official web-page of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle in Thessaloniki, available at: [http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/Museums/History\\_And\\_War/Mma\\_Thessalonikhs.html](http://www.macedonian-heritage.gr/Museums/History_And_War/Mma_Thessalonikhs.html).

<sup>86</sup> The new were presented with a provocative and suggestive subtitle. See Arbana Kjerimi, *Srušena plažata kaj Kamen Most – 8.7 milioni denari završija ‘vo voda’* [The beach at the Stone Bridge demolished – 8.7 million MKD denars ended up “in water”], *TV 21*, 26.05.2016.

On the other hand, the inside of the Museum is revealing a completely opposite structure than the immediate outside context, in terms of museal narrative and the manner in which it is presented. Firstly, the Museum is providing only guided tours in groups, and no individual can reach the exhibition space alone. Thus, the tour is predetermined and concise, since the guide has already prepared and learned text for narrating.<sup>87</sup> In Angelovska words, “the guide, a trained historian, determines the rhythm, trajectory and content of the visit”, and moreover, “all the tours are scheduled within a highly compressed time-frame which leaves no time and space for personal research and reflection.”<sup>88</sup> Additionally, no photographing is allowed during the tour.

Therefore, the permanent exhibition in the Museum leaves the impression that it is envisioned and designed as a one-dimensional walking tour through the recent Macedonian history in a highly controlled atmosphere. Herein, the Museum tour was described as “the strangest and the also most unpleasant museum visit” by Florian Bieber, while the renowned Croatian philosopher Boris Buden mentioned that he had a particular “sorrow feeling” during his museum tour.<sup>89</sup> Interestingly enough, one can link these confessional statements provoked by the visit in the Museum with the more general observation of the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk regarding the national museums from the 19<sup>th</sup>. Namely, Sloterdijk is defining the

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<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the very selection and the recruitment criteria for employment in the newly composed museums have been questioned in the public as highly instrumentalized by the political parties. Here, the particular confession of an ex-employee is emblematic, since he emphasizes his participation in anti-government protests as a main reason for being fired from the job as museum guide and educator. More in “Eks-vraboten vo Arheološkiot muzej: Me izbrkaa od rabota zatoa što ne stanav VMRO” [ex-employee in the Archeological museum: They fired me because I did not became VMRO], *NovaTV*, 08.06.2015.

<sup>88</sup> Angelovska, *op. cit.* See also the study from the same author “Preoblikuvanje and memorijata za comunizmot: Muzejot na žrtvite na komunističkiot režim vo proektot ‘Skopje 2014’” [Changing the memory on the communism: The Museum of the victims of the communist regime in the project “Skopje 2014”] *Kultura/Culture* 6 (2014)

<sup>89</sup> Bieber, “The museum with the longest name” and Boris Buden, “The house of the terror” “Kukja na terorot” [House of the terror], *Okno*, 17.12.2013.

national museum in the modern era as a particular “School of irritations” (*Schule des Befremdens*, referring on the strange and weird feelings which visitors are getting after the end of the museum tour.<sup>90</sup>

Consequently, the immediate urbanistic surrounding of the Museum is a perfect illustration of the whole eclecticism of the “Skopje 2014” project, in terms of both the architectural solutions and the displayed historical periods. The other way around, the highly centralized and controlled narrative of the Museum presents a particular novelty regarding the immediate chaotic, or even “confuse” narrativity structure of “Skopje 2014.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, in order to better understand the juncture which the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle anticipated in the recent Macedonian memory politics context, with a particular accent on the museums’ sphere, a more detailed analysis of the institutional arrangement will be provided in the next subchapter.

## 2. “Old” and “new” museums, “old” and “new” national narratives

Regarding the historical development of the museums in Macedonia, one can diachronically trace the creation of the very first museum in Macedonia back to the year 1920, when the Museum of the South-Serbs was established in Skopje by the authorities of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Nevertheless, the first Macedonian national museum emerged in the post-WWII constellation, along with, and in the same manner as the abovementioned state-institutions. Herein, the first Peoples’ Museum in Macedonia (*Naroden*

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<sup>90</sup> Pål Kolstø, “Introduction.” In *Strategies of symbolic nation-building in South Eastern Europe*, edited by Pål Kolstø (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). Sloterdijk’s insight is also cited from Kolstø’s text.

<sup>91</sup> Muhić and Takovski are approaching the “Skopje 2014” project as a particularly confusing historical narrative. More in Muhić and Takovski, *op. cit.*

*Muzej*) was established in the immediate post-WWII period (1946). Additionally, the Archeological and Ethnological Museums received their own buildings and exhibition spaces in 1976, even though they functioned as separate sections within the People's Museum of Macedonia from the very beginning.<sup>92</sup> Particularly interesting undertaking in this context is the Museum of the Contemporary Arts, the most imposing museum in post-war Macedonia. Although the initial idea of establishing a museum of such type can be traced before 1960s, it was the massive earthquake which stroke Skopje in 1963 that hastened the process of erecting an exhibition space of contemporary arts. Envisioned as an act of solidarity for the earthquake tragedy by the international artist community, the museum emerged as a gift from the Polish government. Thus, the final design was conducted by three renowned Polish architects, and moreover, was supervised by Le Corbusier himself, as an illustrious late modernist building. Moreover, the Museum of Contemporary Arts dispose with permanent collections of various celebrated authors (such as, inter alia, Petlevski, Lubarda, Picasso, Mason and others), donated in the wake of the post-earthquake reconstruction of Skopje. Finally, the abovementioned

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<sup>92</sup> The complete list of museums in Macedonia is consisting the Archeological museum (1944), Ethnological museum (1944), Historical museum (1952), Natural-Scientific museum (1964), Museum of the contemporary arts (1964), Historical museum of the town of Kruševo (1952), Historical museum of town of Kumanovo, The Prilep Museum of Tobacco, Museum of the Railways, Museum of the Post-Telephone-Telegraph. Furthermore, the general museums Peoples' Museums in Bitola, Ohrid, Prilep, Strumica, Struga, Veles, Štip, Museum of the city of Skopje, Museum of the Tetovo's region, Museum of the Pelagonia's region. Finally, various types of art galleries emerged after 1949, starting with the Art Gallery in Skopje, the Gallery in Davutpasa Haman, the Art Gallery in Bitola, Yeni Mosque, the Art Gallery of Nikola Martinovski in Kruševo, the Art Gallery in Novo Selo, as well as the Gallery of icons in Tetovo. More in "Muzei i muzejski zbirki" [Museums and museum collections] Republic of Macedonia State Statistical Office, 28.04.2016.

institutions provide various sorts of publishing and research activities, in accordance with the global trends in the museology and museological practices.<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, the Macedonian experts in the field of museology and art history are certain on the particular “vacuum” in the museum work which appeared right after the state’s independence in 1991.<sup>94</sup> The “vacuum” in this context can be discussed both as a lack of new museums open to the public on one hand, and on the other, as a lack of particular normative framework which will exclusively deal with the museum work.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the status quo was broken with the establishment of relevant legislation (firstly the new Law for Culture in 1998, and then, with the more precise Law for Museums in 2004), and secondly, with the emergence of a serial of newly established museums on the territory of Macedonia. In this manner, the open-air archeological Museum on Water “Bay of Bones” in Gradište, Ohrid, and the Memorial House of the Skopje-born Mother Teresa in Skopje, both opened for public in 2009, just opened the space for the further establishment of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle and Memorial House of

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<sup>93</sup> See the official web-page of the Museum of the Contemporary Arts in Skopje at <http://www.msuskopje.org.mk/msu.php?mode=nav&mid=7&id=7>.

<sup>94</sup> See Teodosievski’s two reports on the state in the Macedonian museology, “Macedonia (2010)” and “Macedonia (2011)”, *National Gallery of Macedonia*. See also Jovan Ristov, “Normativna ramka za ostvaruvanje na grižata za muzejskite dobra – preventivna zaštita.” [A normative framework for the realization of the careness of the museum objects – a preventive attention] *E-Štit* 1 (2013) for a more recent study on the same issue.

<sup>95</sup> The new Law defines the museums as “public non-profit cultural institution in service of the society that collects, documents, stores and conserves, researches, exhibits and popularizes the museum material (movable heritage) in the public”. Regarding the definition, Teodosievski is stressing that it “actually defines the museum activities rather than the museum itself”, while Ristov is further emphasizing the inconsistencies in the Law, in terms of defining the various types of museum as judicial persons. See Teodosievski, “Macedonia (2011)” and Rostov, *op. cit.*

Toše Proeski in 2011,<sup>96</sup> thus, culminating with the Archeological Museum, opened in 2014, as one of the key sites of “Skopje 2014.”<sup>97</sup>

Nevertheless, this emergence of new museum buildings and exhibitions encountered a diverse critical reception in the Macedonian public, mostly focused on the manner in which the exhibitions are created, the architectural solutions of the buildings, and the common in-consequences in the administrative procedures of the museums in the institutional designing-process. The latest point of critique is crucial in this sense, since the main argument of the experts was stressing the very procedure of encircling the relevant and legal expertise (on various administrative levels) on one hand, and was avoiding a public discussion of the actual relevance for projects of such kind on the other. The treatment of the “old” museums is also symptomatic in this context and it was emphasized by the oppositional politicians in several occasions.<sup>98</sup>

A particular explanation for the governmental behavior can be found in Bourdieu’s *The Love of Art*, where the author states that

“by designating and consecrating certain works of art or certain places [...] as worthy of being visited, the authorities invested with power to impose a cultural arbitrary, in other words, a certain demarcation between what is worthy or unworthy of admiration, love or

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<sup>96</sup> The museum is dedicated to the popular Macedonian singer and its based in his home town.

<sup>97</sup> The new Archeological museum is located in an imposing building on the left bank of the river Vardar, right across the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, both parts of the “Skopje 2014” project.

<sup>98</sup> Alagjovovski in this manner is stressing that “while the government is spending enormous amount of money on falsch museology, the old ones are sinking into depths. While the new ones are advertized on the public broadcasting service, the old ones are completely ignored”. Another event is worth mentioning in this context, since it also illustrates the particular reference of the Macedonian establishment to the cultural institutions. Namely, the biggest robbery of a museal artifacts took place in the National Macedonia in 2013. Seven stuff members, including the ex-director of the museum are charged for the act. More in: “Zatvorski kazni za kražba na artefakti od Muzej na Makedonija” [Prison punishments for the artifacts robbery in the Museum of Macedonia], *NovaTV*, 20.03.2015.

reverence can determine the level of visiting of which these works will seem intrinsically, or rather, naturally worthy of admiration and enjoyment.”<sup>99</sup>

Thus, it seems that DPMNE’s cultural politics are more than relevant in the abovementioned context. Namely, the particular search for a new national narrative in the recent Macedonian case, driven by the ideological determination to distance itself from the previous political regime, interestingly enough, led towards an open support for the newly constructed objects. Additionally, the administration of the “inherited” cultural institutions is appearing as neglected and ignored. The very fact that the monograph for the Museum of the city of Skopje was published 62 years after the establishment of the museum, while the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle received its textual counterpart after one year of its existence, is more than significant illustration for the abovementioned claim.<sup>100</sup>

### **3. Putting the party’s past on pedestal: “A wax figures fixation”**

The new constructing trend in the Macedonian cultural sphere, more precisely, in the field of national and historical museums, provides another juncture regarding the very historical period in the focus of the museums. In this context, three museums emerged since 2011, with a permanent exhibitions dedicated exclusively to the historical figures and events linked with VMRO. In comparison with the abovementioned newly established historical museums in the recent years, such as the Archeological one in Skopje and the Museum on Water in Ohrid, these three museums are completely divergent regarding the historical period which is in their focus.

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<sup>99</sup> Pierre Bourdieu et al. *The love of art: European art museums and their public* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p. 108-109.

<sup>100</sup> See “Monografija Muzejot na Grad Skopje 1949-2011” [Monograph The Museum of city of Skopje 1949-2011], *Večer*, 30.12.2011.

Therefore, the public reactions to the governmental cultural politics in terms of neglecting the role of the previously established museum institutions were again challenged with this peculiar tendency of favoring the museal representation of the party's own past.

The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, opened in 2011, was the first museum building in the abovementioned context. Nevertheless, the exhibition of the *Tikveš Uprising* from 2007, which although exhibited within the existing museum building in the city of Kavadarci, can be perceived as the first treatment of a particularly contested narrative of VMRO in a museum space on the territory of Republic of Macedonia.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly enough, as an author of the exhibition is signed Zoran Todorovski, a Macedonian revisionist historian, himself Kavadarci-born, who dealt extensively with the Uprising and contributed towards the “rehabilitation” of this moment of anti-Serbian resistance in the Macedonian historiography. The role of the revisionist historiography as such, in the wake of the emergence of the VMRO-dedicated museums on one hand, and the political support of this historical discourse provided by the governing party on the other, will be subject of analysis in the next chapter. Here, worth mentioning is the fact that Zoran Todorovski, as well as Violeta Ačkoska and Nikola Žežov afterwards, also revisionists in historiographical terms, will appear as authors of all of the museums dedicated to VMRO.

Further on, in 2014, a museum of the “Activists of VMRO from Štip and the Štip region (1893-1934)” (*Muzej na dejcite na VMRO od Štip i Štisko*) was opened. In similar manner as the monograph of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, the two inaugural speeches were delivered by the Prime Minister Gruevski and the Minister of Culture, Kanceska-Milevska. The museum is located in Novo Selo, a village next to the city of Štip, in a renovated house of the

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<sup>101</sup> The Tikveš Uprising took place in 1913. More on the Uprising in Zoran Todorovski, *Memento: Makedonski istoriski reminiscencii* [Memento: Macedonian historical reminiscences] (Skopje: Makedonska Reč – Makedonika Litera, 2009) p. 65-86.



city's prominent Andonov family.<sup>102</sup> The historical narrative of this museum is primarily focused on VMRO members and activists from the region.<sup>103</sup> Similarly to the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle in Skopje, a permanent exhibition with 11 wax figures, “photographs, authentic items, documents, military equipment and weapons” is presented in seven exhibition rooms.<sup>104</sup> The narrative which this Museum is promoting will be analyzed in the following chapter, along with the major reconstruction of the narrative over VMRO as a nation-building agent, as represented in the Museum in Skopje.

Lastly, a memorial house dedicated to the Tatarčev family was opened in Resen. The memorial site has Hristo Tatarčev, a Macedonian revolutionary and one of the founders of the VMRO in 1893 in its primary narrative structure.<sup>105</sup> Similarly to the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle and the Museum of the “Activists of VMRO from Štip and the Štip region”, this “Resen’s temple of the Macedonian disobedience”, exhibits 8 wax-figures, realistic paintings, as well as original materials from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>106</sup> Again, the memorial house was opened by Kančeska-Milevska and Gruevski, while the latter pointed out that Tatrčev “was not

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<sup>102</sup> As a typical rural house from this region. The architectural solution of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle exterior will be examined in the following subchapter.

<sup>103</sup> More in “Vo Novo Selo otvoren muzejot na dejcite na VMRO od Štip i Štipsko” [The museum dedicated to the VMRO activists from Štip and Štip region opened in Novo Selo], *Utrinski Vesnik*, 20.12.2014 and “Otvoren Muzejot na dejcite na VMRO od Štip i Štipsko” [The Museum of the VMRO activists from Štip and Štip region opened for public], *Večer*, 20.12.2014.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Moreover, the memorial house is displaying the Resen Consultations of the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization in 1894 and the Resen-based legion of Slavejko Arsov. More in: “Otvorena spomen-kukja na Tatarčevi vo Resen” [A memorial house of Tatarchevs opened in Resen], *Kurir*, 04.04.2016.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

only a significant person for the city of Resen, but moreover, for all of the citizens, the state and the nation.”<sup>107</sup>

Most recently, the Macedonian public was taken by surprise with the photos of the pre-ordered paintings for the newly reconstructed Palace of VMRO, which serves as the party’s main headquarters. Namely, over 50 paintings in realist style are portraying the party establishment, with the crowd in the photos’ backgrounds as a décor in the most of the cases.<sup>108</sup> Thus, the style of the paintings can be perceived as even more interesting solution in this manner. In Bieber’s words, referring to the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, “the style evokes the romantic nationalist paintings (in German these types of paintings are appropriately known as Schinken, ‘ham’) of the late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Antoni Piotrowski and his portrait of Batak – a key event in the Bulgarian national history.”<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the realist style irresistibly recollects the soc-realist style of painting, as suggested by Kotevska’s reading of the new paintings for the Palace of VMRO in Skopje.<sup>110</sup> Thus, one can argue that the very attempt to represent the historical past in the mostly possible realistic way (even in the recent context of the Palace of VMRO paintings), indicates that the very function of the paintings is to assist the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Herein, Gruevski is not mentioning the party in this context, even though the memorial house is mostly dedicated to one of the founders of the “historical” VMRO. This strategy of VMRO-centered discourse over the historical narrative will be further examined in Chapter 4.

<sup>108</sup> The case was, and still is extensively discussed in the Macedonian public sphere. Particular attention got the photo of the portrait of Nikola Gruevski and his family, designed for the party’s headquarters, due to its blowing proportions of 32 square meters. Additionally, it is speculated that the authors of the paintings are the same Ukrainian authors which were working on the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle. More in Filip Stojanovski, “Macedonia’s Ruling Party Has Resuscitated Socialist Realism without the Socialism”, *Global Voices*, 03.06.2016 and Maja Jovanovska, “Ukrainsko art scenario vo partiskata zgrada na VMRO DPMNE” [Ukrainian art scenario in the VMRO DPMNE’s party building], *NovaTV*, 01.06.2016.

<sup>109</sup> Florian Bieber, “The Museum with the longest name”, *Florian Bieber’s notes from Syldavia*, 18.01.2014.

<sup>110</sup> Jasna Koteska, “Od okultizmot do soerealizmot i nazad” [From occultism to sorealism and the other way around], *Deutsche Welle (Macedonian)*, 04.06.2016.

proposed historical narrative, as specific markers which are appending legitimacy and transparency to the historical discourse.<sup>111</sup> The idea to include wax-figures as exhibition objects in historical museums entirely supports this claim.

Nevertheless, any attempt to position a wax-figure museum beyond its touristic function, as in the Macedonian case, implies certain inconsistency in the methodological approach and questions the austerity of the historical discourse itself. In this context, the approach as such can be compared with another museum from the region, namely, the Museum of the Wax Figures in Jagodina, Republic of Serbia, as museum-space which tends to institutionalize the greatest names in the Serbian history (from medieval priests, politicians, scientists, as well as contemporary sportsmen, such as the tennis player Novak Đoković).<sup>112</sup> Therefore, the historical narrative will be further analyzed in the following chapter, while the particular attempt to contextualize this museum narrativity in terms of both the technical features and the revisionist historical discourse, will be conducted in Chapter 4.

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<sup>111</sup> Two more aspects are worth mentioning in this context. Firstly, the paintings were announced and presented as priceless pieces of art, whose particular value “is yet to come.” Moreover, in an interview for the Macedonian newspaper *Dnevnik*, two of the Ukrainian painters who worked on the Museum paintings, stressed that they “do not hide that the murals are painted with the help of our students.” For obvious reasons, this information was not mentioned in any promotional material for the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle. More in: Vesna I. Ilievska, “So uživanje ja slikavme makedonskata istorija: Kulakov i Papirna, umetnici od Ukraina koi slikaa vo Muzejot na makedonskata borba” [“We draw the Macedonian history with delight”: Kulakov and Papirna, Ukrainian painters who draw in the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle], *Dnevnik*, 08.09.2011.

<sup>112</sup> The Museum of the Wax Figures in Jagodina was established in 2008, and it contains 29 wax figures of the most prominent figures from the Serbian past. In the words of the author of the permanent exhibition, the intention was to “create a frozen picture of the time we live in”. See the Museum’s web site for further information: <http://www.muzejvostanihfigura.autentik.net/index.php>.

### Chapter 3 – “New chapters of the Macedonian history”: Analysis of the historical narrative as presented in the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle

One can argue that, in a historical museum with wax-figures and realist-style paintings, the narrative as imposed and designed is the distinctive feature which grants them the necessary symbolic value. In the other way around, both features of the museum exhibition serve as pointers, or markers, of the historical text which the author of the exhibition tends to present. Thus, the visual representation, as embedded in the wax-figures form and realist paintings in the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, is making the narrative possible and digestible, by providing a clear line of reference to the immediate ‘reality’ of the figures and the portraits.

Even though the name of the Museum might suggest a diverse and twisted historical narrative, it appears that one crucial theme can be isolated as concrete paradigm of the “museal” exhibition, namely, the concept of struggle. Additionally, this particular notion of national struggle as the key exhibitional paradigm is also stressed in the monograph of the Museum, thus, the emphasis is put on the “combative code of the Macedonian people and its revolutionary and spiritual force implemented in the realization of the liberation and state-building aims.”<sup>113</sup> Two particular aspects are important to be further considered regarding this narrative constellation. Firstly, the narrative *topos* of struggle is presented through the prism of general continuity, expanding from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the formation and the activities of VMRO, and finally,

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<sup>113</sup> Zoran Todorovski and Violeta Ačkoska, *Muzej na makedonskata borba za državnost i samostojnost; Muzej na Vnatrešnata Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija; Muzej na žrtvite na komunističkiot režim* [Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Sovereignty and Independence, Museum of VMRO, Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime] (Skopje: NU Muzej na Makedonskata Borba, 2012) p. 13.

culminating with the anti-communist struggle during the communist times. Secondly, the Museum narrative is ascribing the central and exclusive role of VMRO regarding the struggle of the Macedonian people for national and political independence, granting the Organization a particular monopoly over the national-liberation discourse.

Regarding the first aspect, two particular features of the discursive strategy can be further isolated. The permanent exhibition departs from the brigand uprisings from late 17<sup>th</sup> century, starting with the so-called Karpoš Uprising from 1689. In this manner, one can say that it is structurally problematic to include this Uprising in the section devoted to the Museum of the VMRO, since the Organization, as well as its national-political platform was developed approximately two centuries afterwards. Moreover, the particular start with the exhibition section dedicated to the pre-VMRO armed struggle can be further interpreted as an attempt to contextualize the Macedonian national-liberation struggle among the other Balkan resistance movements from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The narrative in this context, suggests that the armed struggle existed on the territory of Macedonia, it was nationally oriented, and finally led towards the formation of the VMRO as a particular culmination of the resistance and struggle of the Macedonian people. Moreover, the representation of the continuity of VMRO itself can be addressed as the second discursive feature of the Museum narrative. Thus, the exhibition, along with the selection of historical persons creditable for wax figures, and the motives of the realistic paintings, indicate a particular line of development of VMRO throughout the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Herein, the particular shift in the accent of the ideological wings of VMRO regarding the historical continuity, as well as the framing of the communist past through the lenses of the right-wing struggle, will be subject of analysis in the next subchapters.

The key outcome of the museum narrative and the topos of struggle as such, can be interpreted as a process of reimagining the pantheon of national heroes worth national admiration. The continuity-through-selection in this case, is disposed within the very technical structure of the Museum, since it is mostly consisted of wax figures and realistic paintings, which directly refer to particular historical figures. Moreover, the concept of selection in this manner clearly suggests the subjective approach when designing the structure of the exhibition, building upon a certain selection of “suitable” historical persons and events. Herein, it will be argued that the Museum presents the pure materialization of the historical discourse which favors the ideological right-wing tradition in the creation of the Macedonian nationhood. The main point in this context refers to the promotion of this historical focalization as a particular discursive construction which tends to legitimize a certain contemporary political platform.

### **1. The peak of the revisionist historiography: “Right turn on red”**

The line of continuity of VMRO as presented in the Museum ascribes the Organization a monopolistic role in the Macedonian past, absorbing the complex phenomena of resistance throughout the recent history. Thus, one can compare the connotative value of a particular floating signifier, granted to VMRO, with Anderson’s notion on the nation as a “sociological organism moving calendarically through homogeneous, empty time.”<sup>114</sup> Nevertheless, two particular paradoxes can be isolated in the narrative structure as such. Firstly, one can contextualize the historical narrative as presented in the Museum within the wider nation-building process in the Macedonian case. Herein, the Museum can be discussed in the framework

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<sup>114</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 2002) p. 42.

of the historiography debate regarding the formation and continuity of the national consciousness. Secondly, the very ideological basis of the proposed linkage of the rightist VMRO and the nation-building narrative, as presented in the Museum, will be case of a close reading. In this context, it will be argued that the historical narrative transcends the inter-party contestations of VMRO in the present time, using the strategy of visual representation and discursive legitimation.

The introduction of political pluralism in the Republic of Macedonia in 1991, contributed towards the emergence of plurality of various historical voices. Additionally, the contested historical discourses found their way to be incorporated in the fitting political platforms and in some cases, were even incepted by politicians and further transferred in the academic field. The case with Ljubčo Georgievski is *éclatant* in this manner, since the first leader of VMRO-DPMNE openly conspired historical revisionism and rereading of certain episodes from the national past.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the immediate political dimension of the historical narrations contributed towards further instrumentalization of the historical discourse as legitimating or delegitimizing tool in the political arena. Thus, the discussion of the Macedonian historical revisionism cannot encircle the political and institutional context, having in mind the fact that the whole historiography production is determined by the state in normative and institutional manner.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> See his collection of essays, interviews and speeches *Ostvaruvanje na vekovniot son [Accomplishing the century-long dream]* (Skopje: NIP Nova Literatura, 2001).

<sup>116</sup> Ulf Brunnbauer is especially in favor of emphasizing the institutional arrangement regarding the dynamics and development of the Macedonian historiography. In his meta-analysis of the historiography discourses, the particular notion of the highly centralized and controlled scientific production is illustrated with the monopolistic role of the Institute of National History on one hand, and on the other, the legislative framework which enables the Institute to function in such exclusive way. More in Brunnbauer's "Serving the Nation: Historiography in the Republic of

Moreover, the case of the Macedonian historical revisionism is also interesting in terms of the particular historical “content”, or the very historical period which appeared as subject of the process of post-socialist historical re-reading. In this manner, the interwar period, and especially the political role of VMRO in this time-frame, became the key locus of contestation in the recent Macedonian historiography. The appearance of Zoran Todorovski’s study on VMRO in the interwar years, titled “VMRO: 1924-1934”, can be isolated as the single inceptive in this context.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the re-imagination of the VMRO’s position in the interwar period became the corner stone of the new, patriotic historical construction. In other words, the symbolic capital of the clash within the VMRO in the interwar period across the ideological lines, will transform in particular discursive setting for defining the Macedonian national legitimacy almost 90 years afterwards. More precisely, the two main paradigms for the solution of the “Macedonian question,” as offered by the two main currents in the interwar VMRO, were the leftist one (federalization as political resolution and complete freedom of self-declaration as national solution) and the rightist one (unification and autonomy as political solution, while the unclear articulation of the issue of nationality). The latest issue, namely the unclear and shifting position on the question of the Macedonian ethnic and national identity, will be further interpreted as an overt demonstration of pro-Bulgarian sentiments of the rightist VMRO by the later, socialist historiography discourse.

Thus, these two contested national-liberation paradigms from the interwar period, received their political articulation in the new, post-WWII constellation of power on the Balkans.

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Macedonia (FYROM) After Socialism” *Historiein* 4 (2003-4) and “Ancient Nationhood and the Struggle for Statehood: Historiographic Myths in the Republic of Macedonia.”

<sup>117</sup> Zoran Todorovski, *VMRO 1924-1934* [VMRO 1924-1934]. See also “Dejnosta na desnite strui i na organizaciite” [The activity of the right wing and the organizations]” In *Zlatna knjiga: 100 godini VMRO* [Golden Book: 100 years of VMRO], edited by Aleksandar Trajanovski et al., 152-193. Skopje: Glas na VMRO-DPMNE, 1993.



Herein, the leftist VMRO paradigm became the core in the narrative of the struggle for independence as formulated and sponsored by the socialist historiography. More specifically, the leftist paradigm not only got a particular political articulation in the post-war period, but concrete instrumentalization and role in the new state- and nation-building process. On the other hand, the rightist paradigm, as conceived under Aleksandrov's and Mihajlov's VMRO, found its "refuge" in the political emigration centers, operating and building upon their stressed anti-communist sentiments. Nevertheless, the immediate post-war purges of anti-communist, radical "mihajlovists", but also "anti-mihajlovist" activists in Macedonia by the newly established Yugoslavian regime are important to be mentioned, since they occupy a vast part in the Museum's narrative and as such, will be further discussed in the next subchapter.

Lastly, the revisionist discourse in contemporary Republic of Macedonia in this context is primarily focused on substantiating and indicating the patriotism of the right-wing VMRO from the interwar period, underlying its anti-communist credo on one hand, and minimizing the fascist inclinations on the other. As such, the revisionist historians are colliding not only with the socialist historiography, but with the contemporary Bulgarian and Serbian scholarly work, as well as with the English-language based research studies in this field.<sup>118</sup>

On the level of Museum's narrative, the issue of the historical revisionism is solved in an exceptionally interesting manner. Additionally, one has to be aware of the fact that Zoran Todorovski and Violeta Ačkoska, the leading Macedonian revisionist historians, are signed as

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<sup>118</sup> This phenomenon is particularly well noted in the work of the Bulgarian historian Tchavdar Marinov, on the Macedonian historiography since WWII. See his monograph *Makedonskoto prašanje od 1944 do denes: Komunizmot i nacionalizmot na Balkanot* [The Macedonian Question from 1944 till today: Communism and Nationalism in the Balkans] (Skopje: Fondacija Otvoreno Opštество, 2013).

authors of the permanent exhibition in the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle. Thus, in pseudo-historical fashion, the Museum was introduced as an institution which opened “new chapters of the Macedonian history”. The point which the author/s of the syntagma “new chapters” suggest in this context can be seen as twofold. Firstly, the coinage “new chapters” in historical context is proposing the qualitative novelty of the historical discourse on one hand, while on the other hand, is suggesting that this particular historical event or figure (right-wing interwar VMRO in this context) has not been previously subject of analytical research. In this manner, one can argue that both implications are not correct as further manifested in the Museum’s space. Regarding the first one, the Museum is not presenting anything new in terms of original research, revisited or reread documents or materials. Considering the second implication, the Museum’s narrative is completely ignoring the scholarly production on the right-wing VMRO in the socialist period, which even though “indoctrinated” in the words of revisionist historiography, present the first coherent archival research on Mihajlov in particular, and right-wing interwar VMRO in general.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, it can be concluded that the Macedonian historical revisionism is in trivial position regarding the regional “revisionisms” as such, since the revisionist historians in Macedonia do not have any particular historical figure, with clear ideological fascist

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<sup>119</sup> Worth mentioning in this context are the studies on the right-wing VMRO in the socialist and the post-socialist period. The mere fact that these studies are conducted by journalists is indicating the general position of the official historiography regarding the right-wing tendencies in the Macedonian history. Interestingly enough, the studies emerged as feuilletons in only, state-sponsored newspaper in the socialist times - “Nova Makedonija” (New Macedonia). Andonovski, in Marxist manner, aims to set Mihajlov, VMRO under Mihajlov’s leadership and the “mihajlovism” as a historical error, which due to its non-progressiveness, will remain in the “shadows of the history”. More in his monograph “Sto godini segašnost” [One Hundred Years of Presence] (Skopje: Kultura, 2003). Cvetanovski, on the other hand, is focused on revealing of the pro-Bulgarian sentiments, as motive of the further activities of Mihajlov. See “VMRO: Slava i raskol” [VMRO: Glory and Cleavage] (Struga: IRIS, 2012).

consciousness, which can be rehabilitated in the wake of the post-socialist nationalistic revision of the history. Moreover, the institutional setting, as centralized and politicized institutional structures, was not open to historical experimentation in terms of flirting with the rightist currents in the interwar history, even after the collapse of the socialist regime. Thus, the Macedonian historical revisionism is to be perceived as a mere “historical correction”, rather than a discourse of full rehabilitation of certain historical figures or events. The particular answer to the question why the wax-figures-form is appropriate for representation in this context lies here, since the concrete interwar right-wing can be rehabilitated only partially, on quasi-historical and symbolic level.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, one can “attach” the argument of the functionalist dimension of the wax-figures and realist paintings, as envisioned to directly impact the collective memory of the audience in the Museum. Again, the particular tension of a newly constructed historical discourse on one hand and the collective memory on the other is being invented, since a clear memory of the abovementioned right-wing structures cannot be clearly traced among the Macedonian population.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, this tension is even more visible in the following section of the Museum, having in mind the fact that it refers to a more recent period of time. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the exhibition is suddenly “jumping” from the room where the right-wing

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<sup>120</sup>In this manner, the Museum exhibition contains the figures of Todor Aleksandrov, the rightist VMRO leader from early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the figure of Vančo Mihajlov is also present in the Interwar VMRO section of the Museum of VMRO. Additionally, the wax-figure of Mara Buneva is presented, in the pose and outlet of her assassination. Finally, the whole scene of the Marseille assassination of is recreated, with particular stress on the assassinator, the radical mihajlovist Vančo Černozemski “The Chauffeur” (the actual driver of Mihajlov) holding a gun pointed at the King Alexander, the chief of the first Yugoslavian state, and the French minister, who also died from the shots.

<sup>121</sup>The recent survey of the public opinion is showing that the partisan struggle from the WWII has almost the same score (30%) as the revolutionary movement from the beginning of the twentieth century (31%). The very notion that the interwar period is not mentioned in the analysis is more than suggestive in this context. See Katerina Kolozova et al, *Skopje 2014 Project and its effects on the Perception of Macedonian Identity Among the Citizens of Skopje* (Skopje: ISSHS, 2013).

VMRO figures are displayed to the room dedicated to ASNOM, without any additional context of the anti-fascist struggle of the Macedonian people.

## **2. Proliferation of the anticommunist historical discourse: The case of the “communist oppression”**

Although it seems that the *Floskel* of “anti-communism” functions as an empty phrase in the post-socialist states, which is further exploited on various discursive levels, the particular case of VMRO-DPMNE is somehow unique in this context. Being created in the Macedonian political diaspora, DPMNE’s main ideological matrix is certainly formed around the anti-regime sentiments of the first refugees from the newly established communist rule in the post-war Balkans on one hand, able to transform their sentiments into an articulated political platform on the other.<sup>122</sup> Herein, the party was recognized as “anti-communist as it is nationalist”<sup>123</sup> in the first years of the Macedonian independence. Regarding the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, this primary anti-communist bias, as the driving motivation for the patriotic Macedonian political emigration, will be argued as being a-historically combined and associated with other particular episodes from the Macedonian communist past (such as the immediate post-war purges, the purges after the Tito-Stalin split from 1948, as well as the political prisoners during the

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<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, one can argue that there was not a clear consensus among the Macedonian political emigration over the questions of the Macedonian identity on one hand, and the further political organization of the Macedonian state on the other. In the first case, the groups around Bogdanovski, the most eminent figure in the diaspora, were opting for the ethnic Macedonian cause, as directly opposed to the political formations with pro-Bulgarian affiliation and admiration for Mihajlov (such as the Macedonian Patriotic Organization, established in the United States in 1922 and still active in the publishing sphere). Secondly, a particular juncture in the diaspora’s program regarding the future arrangement and political constitution of the Macedonian state can be traced, since the emigration’s discourse shifted its open antagonism of any kind of socialist organization in the early 60s, to a more moderate, plebiscitary solution in the 80s.

<sup>123</sup> Hugh Poulton, *Who are the Macedonians?* (London: Hurst & Company, 1995) p. 207.

communist regime). Therefore, the abovementioned notion of struggle on one hand, appropriated and manifested under the “banner” of VMRO on the other, are the two key artistic and aesthetic features in the following section of the Museum, dedicated to the victims of the communist regime. The narration as such, as it will be further argued, tends to recreate the communist past in the manner of political oppression for the persons with clear national consciousness.

In the context of the historical revisionism in Macedonia, the historical discourse on the anti-communist struggle is becoming visible after the abovementioned primary historiographical focus on the interwar VMRO. Thus, the emergence of this narrative must be interpreted in the abovementioned institutional and political context.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, the anti-communist revisionist discourse got a particular “boost” after the DPMNE led coalition won the parliamentary elections in 2006.<sup>125</sup> Thus, if the new reading of the Macedonian communist past was anticipated with the pioneer study of the post-war agrarian politics in Peoples’ Republic of Macedonia by Ačkoska (1994), than the particular “explosion” in this field of studies happened in the early 2000s, with the emergence of the studies on the repression of the political opponents.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, the topics of agrarian disparity on one hand, and the political repression on the other, can be perceived as particular attempt to define the communist regime as politically authoritarian, culturally oppressive and finally, fatal for the different-minded, patriotic activists

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<sup>124</sup> The Ministry of Culture became the main publishing institution of the revisionist discourse. This point will be further analysed in the following chapter.

<sup>125</sup> It is worth mentioning that the most outspoken historical revisionists were granted with highest academic, research and administrative functions. Thus, Zoran Todorovski became a director of the State Archive for a second time in 2006 (and stayed on this function until his death in 2015). His first mandate as a director was also during the DPMNE rule. Ačkoska on the other hand, is holding a position of a regular professor at the Institute for History (Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje).

<sup>126</sup> Herein, the most emblematic is the study of Violeta Ačkoska and Nikola Žežov on the repressed activists in the Macedonian history. See Stefan Troebst, “Historical Politics and Historical “Masterpieces” in Macedonia before and after 1991.” *New Balkan Politics* 6 (2003) and Brunnbauer, “Serving the Nation.”

in the Macedonian context. In this manner, the Macedonian state-sponsored nation-building process in the socialist period is reduced to the argument of partial cultural autonomy for the Macedonian people within the Yugoslavian federal framework, for the account of the political one.<sup>127</sup> In other words, the communist past is approached over the construct of complete political dependence and submission of the Macedonians in Yugoslavia in political terms on one hand, and the freedom of independent decisions on the other. Here, the key feature of this discourse is the common usage of the metonymy of “Belgrade”, referring to the specific political center of the Federation as a place where all the political decisions were made.<sup>128</sup>

Regarding the Museum exhibition itself, the anti-communist historical narrative gets its discursive materialization based on the idea of representation of both, the repressed and the repressors in the Macedonian communist past. Interestingly enough, the theme of repression is not included in the interwar VMRO section, having in mind the major purges by Mihajlov over the different-minded activists within the organizational structure of VMRO.<sup>129</sup> Thus, the section of the Victims of the communist regime is starting with Metodija Andonov – Čento (1902-1957), the first president of the ASNOM (Anti-Fascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia), the governmental body in the war years, who spent 12 years in the communist prisons due to his demands for bigger autonomy within the Yugoslav Federation and military

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<sup>127</sup> This argument got its particular materialization within the “Skopje 2014” project. Namely, when the façade of the Government building, designed by the renowned Macedonian architect Petar Muličkovski and built in 1970, was changed into baroque (even though the author of the building was still alive and not agreeable with the reconstruction), one of the arguments of the proponents of the project was referring on the very history of the building as ill-fated. Namely, the building use to serve as the main object of the Central Committee in socialist Macedonia.

<sup>128</sup> “Interview Violeta Ačkoska: Vreme e da si ja sakame sopstvenata istorija” [Interview Violeta Ačkoska: It is the right time to admire our own history], *Faktor*, 21.09.2014.

<sup>129</sup> Ivan Katardžiev, “VMRO i makedonskoto osloboditelno dviženje od krajot na Prvata Svetska vojna do raspadot na monizmot 1919-1990.” In *Makedonija vo XX vek* [Macedonia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century], by Ivan Katardžiev (Skopje: Kultura, 2006).

disobedience.<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, a peculiar aspect regarding the recent representation of the figure of Čento can be spotted. Namely, it seems that the cultural politics are directed towards certain re-contextualization of the historical role and position of Čento. Here, beside the Museum representation of Čento as imprisoned in the infamous *Goli Otok* (Naked Island) prison (and not in the section of ASNOM, although he served as a president of this partisan organization), the newly erected monument in the city center, part of “Skopje 2014” project, displays Čento in a civil uniform while giving a public speech (and not with his famous partisan cap with the communist star, as he is vividly recollected in the collective memory of the Macedonians).

Further on, the section of the victims of the communist past is bringing the wax-figures of Pavel Šatev (1882-1951) and Panko Brašnarov (1883-1951), both being actual victims of the political purges which emerged after the abovementioned Tito-Stalin split in 1948. Worth mentioning in this manner is the very fact that these two victims of the post-1948 purges, commonly referred as *informbirovci* (from *Informbiro*, the name of the Communist International in the Yugoslavian context), were the first to be rehabilitated in the post-socialist constellation.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, the exhibition also includes the figures of the workers in the sector of culture, such as the actor Risto Šiškov (1940-1986), the poet Jovan Koteski (1932-2001) and the novelist Živko Čingo (1935-1987). A common denominator regarding these persons, beside the fact that they were followed, overheard, victimized and even imprisoned by the communist regime, is their representation in the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle. Namely, all of the artists are displayed in a clearly bad condition, thus, suggesting the manner in which they were completely

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<sup>130</sup> In the national historiography, this disobedience is interpreted as the dispute over the further military activities of the partisan army. See Katardžiev, *op. cit.*

<sup>131</sup> Angelovska, “(Mis)representations of Transitional Justice: Contradictions in Displaying History, Memory and Art in the Skopje.”

devastated by the regime.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, the representation as such is problematic in terms of its visible bias against the political system, whereas the fact that all of the abovementioned figures achieved their status and reputation during the communist regime is completely neglected.<sup>133</sup>

On the other hand, in the repressors “team”, the most protuberant is the figure of Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980), the lifelong president of the Yugoslav Federation. Here, the wax-figure of Tito is positioned in a clear way to indicate his autocratic and despotic style of governance, since the Yugoslavian president is pointing with his arm to an official responsible for a wire-tapping machine. In this manner, the scene of wire-tapping and Tito as it is recreated in the Museum, functions as a particular interpretative key regarding the concrete ambient on one hand, and the aesthetic context of the section dedicated to the victims of the communist regime on the other. More precisely, the Museum visitor is “directed” to locate the very reason for the agony of the Macedonian activists and artists, as visually displayed in the exhibition, in the severe figure of Tito (directing the surveillance over the repressed?).

Therefore, it can be argued that this representation of the first president of the post-war Yugoslavia, is in direct collision with the collective memory of the Macedonian population, having in mind that a specific sentiment of “yugonostalgia” (or moreover, “titostalgia”) is still dominant across the cultural, social and even, the political sphere.<sup>134</sup> In this manner, Marinov is speaking about the visible “clash of memory” on the level of the Macedonian self-referent identity and perception of the past, as facilitated by the rightist currents in the Macedonian

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<sup>132</sup> Angelovska, *op. cit.*

<sup>133</sup> The argument as such is brought by Atanas Vangelov, Macedonian writer, and a former friend of both Koteski and Čingo. See his essay, “Čingo (1)” [Chingo (1)], *Plusinfo*, 02.06.2016.

<sup>134</sup> With the leftist-socialist political party “Tito’s Leftist Force” being active in the Macedonian political life. More on the “yugonostalgia” in the Macedonian context in Brunnbauer, *op. cit.* and Vangeli, *op. cit.*



society, historiography and politics.<sup>135</sup> More specifically, as main proponents of the pro-Yugoslav political discourse are envisioned to be the politicians and the supporters of the Socialist Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), a political party which emerged over the legacies of the former Communist Party of Macedonia and still presents the largest oppositional party in the Macedonian political context.<sup>136</sup> Thus, the function of the anti-Yugoslav discourse in this context can be leveled down to a particular discursive strategy to impute the “communist oppression” on the account of the contemporary left-wing political formations in Macedonia.

Finally, the case with Dragan Bogdanovski is particularly interesting in the context of the section devoted to the victims of the communist regime. Namely, Bogdanovski’s wax figure is presented as the last figure in the section, thus, the last figure in the Museum as a whole. In addition, one can state that this position is not coincidental, but moreover, a clear indication of the teleological discourse which the exhibition is imposing. The emerging academic work on Bogdanovski’s life and political activism in the last decade, is clearly pointing on his central role regarding the Macedonian political diaspora.<sup>137</sup> Experiencing various challenges during his lifetime, Bogdanovski managed to establish several political organizations abroad and in the same manner, to be active in the publishing sphere, openly agitating for his political platform. In this manner, it is Bogdanovski who articulated the anti-Yugoslav, anti-communist patriotic

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<sup>135</sup> Marinov, “Anticommunist, But Macedonian: Politics of Memory in Post-Yugoslav Macedonia.” p. 66.

<sup>136</sup> The case of the announcements for erecting a monument of Tito on the main city square in 2005 is the most illustrative in this manner.

<sup>137</sup> The key event in this manner is the five-volume publication of Bogdanovski’s work, edited by Zoran Todorovski and Marjan Ivanovski. Moreover, the life of Bogdanovski was inspiration for a state-sponsored documentary serial, as well as for a book published by the novelist Blaže Minevski.

discourse, framing the “Macedonian question” as “national, not political.”<sup>138</sup> Interestingly enough, Bogdanovski had a particular struggle with the pro-Bulgarian Macedonian organizations in the diaspora, most notably the mihajlovist Macedonian Patriotic Organization. Therefore, it indicates the inclusive and manipulative character of the rightist discourse on the Macedonian history, which includes particular historical figures in the same camp on the basis of their negative view on the communist regime, even though these figures were ideological and political opponents during their lifetime. Furthermore, Bogdanovski is being arrested by the Yugoslavian state-security in 1977 and sentenced to 13 years in the prison. After he exited the prison, Bogdanovski played a crucial role in the setting up of a patriotic political party in the wake of the pluralist reforms in Macedonia in the early 90s. Thus, as one of the founders of DPMNE, Bogdanovski’s wax-figure occupies the place of the “last man” at the “end of the history”, with his American vehicle plate “Macedonia” in front of his wax-figure. Next to the Bogdanovski, the exit door is leading again to the entrance hall, where the original document of the Declaration of independence is being presented.

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<sup>138</sup> Marjan Ivanovski, “Makedonskite emigrantski politički organizacii vo Zapadna Evropa (1956-1990).” [Macedonian emigrant political organization in Western Europe (1956-1990)] In *Balkanot: lugje, vojni i mir* [The Balkans: People, Wars and Peace], Proceedings from the international scientific conference (Skopje, 2015) p. 342

## Chapter 4 – Displaying a contested past in historical museum: Avenues further

### 1. Incongruous case of the Macedonian Museum: A general discussion

The monograph of the Warsaw Uprising Museum is beginning with a bombastic sentence - “History museums are back in business”<sup>139</sup>. Here, two particular aspects can be further dissected. Firstly, the usage of “history museum” in this context, suggests that the nation-states in the contemporary international community use the institutional form of museum to appraise their national narrative and history. In this manner, the very role of the historical museums is being re-imagined in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s sense of opening up for wide and international audience.<sup>140</sup> This leads to the second accent on the word “business”, which is to be perceived in the abovementioned context, proposing the corporative logic as the main rationale in the formation of this new type of historical museums. Therefore, the particular “mushrooming”<sup>141</sup> of historical and narrative museums in the post-socialist states can be approached in this sense, as a necessity to re-imagine the national past on one hand, and further on, to re-tell this version of the past to as much bigger number of museum visitors.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Lana Dąbkowska-Cichočka et al. *The Warsaw Rising Museum Guide* (Warsaw: Warsaw Rising Museum, 2015) p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination culture: tourism, museums, and heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) p. 131-135.

<sup>141</sup> Péter Apor and Oksana Sarkisova. “Introduction.” In *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, edited by Péter Apor and Oksana Sarkisova (Budapest – New York: CEU Press, 2008) p. x.

<sup>142</sup> The bulk of literature in this context is mostly focused on post-socialist sphere of Eastern and Central European context. See Apor and Sarkisova, *op. cit.*; Nikolai Vukov, “Visualization of the Past in Transition: Museum Representations in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria After 1989.” and Tileagă, Cristian. “Communism in retrospect: The rhetoric of historical representation and writing the collective memory of the recent past.”

Moreover, regarding the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, it can be stressed that the touristic function as such presents the crucial topic in the further representation of the Museum work in the Macedonian public<sup>143</sup>. Nevertheless, beside the occasional information on the number of visitors in the Museum, the residual claims of its importance in the internal state and nation context is the other discursive frame in which the establishment is speaking about the Museum. In this manner, Kančeska-Milevska's statement on the occasion of the promotion of a new theater-play exhibition can be seen as a rare attempt to go beyond the domestic contextualization of the Macedonian Museum. Herein, the Minister of Culture stressed that the new exhibition in the Museum can be "easily compared with the displays at the 'Madame Tussaud' in London, in Amsterdam, Museum of the terror in Budapest, the Canadian War Museum and the Museum of the Patriotic War in Kiev."<sup>144</sup>

The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle presents an exceptional case in the context of both Macedonian and international museology, not only with the historical narration which the Museum is imposing, but also with the manner in which this narration is materialized as a visual representation. Herein, the particular insistence on wax-figures on one hand and realist-style painting on the other can be isolated as the two key features of the Museum narrative structure. Moreover, these features appeared as common characteristics in the context of the recent undertakings in the museum sector in Macedonia, as it was stressed in Chapter 2. In this context, one can interpret both of the features as pretentious attempts to augment the narrative structure of a museum exhibition in pseudo-historical manner.

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<sup>143</sup> See "Edna godina od rabotata na Muzejot na makedonskata borba" [Museum of the Macedonian Struggle after one year of working], *24 Vesti*, 07.09.2012.

<sup>144</sup> "Muzejot na makedonskata borba kako „Madam Tiso“ vo London" [The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle as "Madame Tussauds" in London], *Republika Online*, 30.05.2014.

In his “Europeana: A Brief History of the Twentieth Century,” the Czech author Patrik Ouředník is stressing that after the WWII, “the war memorials were built in the victorious and the defeated countries, and in the victorious countries they chiefly celebrated victory and sacrifice and in the defeated countries chiefly sacrifice and courage.”<sup>145</sup> This observation can be further expanded on the level of collective memory and historical discourse in the European post-WWII context, as means for production of either a particular culture of victors on one hand, or culture of victimhood on the other. More precisely, the narrative of the historical museums thoroughly refers and relates to the abovementioned distinction, thus, promoting the victors or the victimhood national self-portrait. Back to the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, one can point out that the museum narrative, as a particular historical and memory discourse cannot be classified in the abovementioned categories. Moreover, this peculiar ambiguity of the Macedonian Museum in terms of clarity of the narrative structure was approached from the point of view of the context of the Macedonian historiography and immediate political reality. Herein, the political function of promoting certain political and ideological platform as museal exhibition is to be emphasized as the key interpretative key in the abovementioned context.

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<sup>145</sup> Patrik Ouředník, *Europeana: A Brief History of the Twentieth Century* (Normal & London, Dalkey Archive Press, 2005) p. 121-122.

## 2. “Closely observed narrative”: The “parallel life” of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle

The very first withdraw of VMRO-DPMNE government in the field of the memory politics, was the inauguration of the *Day of VMRO* (October 23<sup>rd</sup>) as a national holiday. In this manner, the critical reaction to this particular event of inauguration was discursively framed as an attempt to appropriate the legacy of VMRO in inclusive manner, as fixed to one particular political platform in the contemporary Macedonian society.<sup>146</sup> Thus, this appropriation of the “historical” VMRO by VMRO-DPMNE, can be further approached concerning its various levels of discursive appearance. Firstly, the recent emergence of museum-buildings dedicated to VMRO activists, was discussed as a particular venture of “monopolizing” the historical discourse over VMRO on the level of museum narrative.

In addition, the proliferation of visual representations can be regarded as secondary feature of this attempt to appropriate the romantic period of the national past. The governmental investment into historical films dealing with the recent past on one hand, and the emergence of over thirty documentary serials on certain figures from past can be mentioned as illustrations in this context. More precisely, two major state-sponsored epic historical films emerged in the time period from 2012 to 2014 (*Third Half* and *To the Hilt*), while the film projects “Tsar Samuil” and “Miss Stone” were publicly announced. The documentary serials on the other hand, state-sponsored and in some cases, produced by the public broadcast service (Macedonian Radio Television - *MRT*), similarly to the “Skopje 2014” project, were imagined as portraits of the most important historical figures and events from the Macedonian history. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>146</sup> More in “Makedonija go odbeležuva denot na makedonskata revolucionerna borba” [Macedonia celebrates the day of the Macedonian revolutionary struggle], *Utrinski Vesnik*, 23.10.2012.

documentary serials dedicated to persons from the recent past are especially relevant in this context.<sup>147</sup> In other words, the very attempt to symbolically rehabilitate certain contested historical persons, both in the historiography and the collective memory, has been anticipated and further legitimized with the appearance of the documentary film discourse.

The production of historical literature is to be noted as the third aspect in the abovementioned context. Herein, the key event is the launch of the edition “Macedonian Temptations” (*Makedonski iskušenija*), as a serial of historical studies on the “new chapters” of the Macedonian history<sup>148</sup>. Two particular junctures can be further interpreted regarding this edition. Firstly, on the level of historical discourse, the edition recreates the revisionist historical narrative and the DPMNE-centric historical discourse, which can be seen by the selection of editors for the edition, as well as the topics which are published. Interestingly enough, the edition was promoted as based “on the findings from the documentary serials.”<sup>149</sup> Secondly, on the level of academic production, a particular shift in terms of the publishing institution which issues the edition can be spotted. Namely, the Macedonian Ministry of Culture appears, not as a sponsor or supporter of the project, but as the key institution for the publishing of the edition of books. In this manner, it seriously undermines the tradition of historical production as a scientific discourse on one hand, and on the other, it certainly engages and intervenes in the work of the state-

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<sup>147</sup> Regarding the titles, the documentary serials are dealing with “The victims of the communism”, “The Macedonian Lustration”, “Dragan Bogdanovski” et cetera, practically the same topics which are presented in the Museum.

<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, there are other publications beside this edition. In this manner, worth mentioning is the recent collection of researches titled. Interestingly enough, the publication has the same structural order of the historical events as the Museum’s sections. Moreover, the revisionist historians appear as the authors of the abovementioned contributions. More in Vlaso Popovski, *Sozdavanjeto na sovremenata makedonska država* [The creation of the contemporary Macedonian state] (Skopje: Makedonska Reč – Makedonika litera, 2014)

<sup>149</sup> “Promovirani prvite izdanija od edicijata ‘Makedonski iskušenija’” [The first editions from the serial ‘Macedonian temptations’ are promoted], Republika Online, 15.05.2013.

institutions relevant for the production of historical research (such as the Institute for National History, the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, or the Institute for History). In other words, the ideological *credo* of a particular political party is occupying the official scientific discourse, thus producing pseudo-historical narrative with questionable methodological and academic relevance.<sup>150</sup>

In this context, the most interesting aspect considering the thesis project is the very discursive or ideological location of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle. Therefore, one can emphasize that the Museum occupies a crucial position in the wake of promotion of the abovementioned historical narrative. The other way around, it can be stressed that the Museum coordinates the various discursive strategies of historical and political narration, thus, harmonizing the in divergent voices in one, “closely observed” narrative. On the level of discursive analysis, this point-of-speaking can be interpreted as an attempt to further legitimize the very content of the spoken. In this manner, the Museum serves as an institution where the abovementioned publications are being promoted, subsequently, as a place of addressing the public. Notwithstanding, the Museum also takes part of the political occurrences on daily level.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Herein, one can present the fourth book in the edition, titled “The victims of the communist regime” and written by Zoran Todorovski and Violeta Ačkoska, as emblematic example in this context. Namely, the 136-pages long study on the communist rule in Macedonia includes neither reference nor bibliographical units. Finally, in comparison with the communist regime, one can stress that the contemporary Macedonian historiography production is even more centralized than the openly authoritarian regime. See Zoran Todorovski and Violeta Ačkoska, *Žrtvi na komunističkiot režim* [The victims of the communist regime] (Skopje: Ministry of Culture of Republic of Macedonia, 2012).

<sup>151</sup> Beside the abovementioned “intervention” in the so-called “colorful revolution”, the Museum made official announcement in the wake of the protests of the workers in the cultural sphere. Here, it can be noted that the Museum workers did not accept to take part in the strike. More in “Muzej na makedonskata borba: Ne go poddržuvame protestot vo kulturata” [Museum of the



Therefore, one can point out that the historical narrative over the VMRO legacies is discursively presented as re-imagined through the prism of a particular political party, namely VMRO-DPMNE in the present Macedonian context. As such, the discourse serves the particular function of self-promotion, constructing the modern-day political party as the only legitimate successor of the national liberation formation. And on the other hand, the particular discourse is utilized for delegitimizing the political opponents, since it is based on the premises of anti-communism and anti-Yugoslavlism as such. The museum of the Macedonian struggle is positioned as a center of the discursive recreation of the political narrative on a daily basis.

## Concluding remarks

The particular attempt to argue the presupposed exceptionality of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle, was structured along the interdisciplinary perspectives necessary for discussing an institution of such type. In this context, as major finding can be highlighted the particular role which the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle plays within the historiography on one hand, and the political setting on the other. Thus, the narrative structure was approached as a peculiar attempt to bridge these two contexts, namely, through the construction of the national struggle under the banner of the revolutionary organization. Additionally, the anti-communism was perceived as the main political motivation behind the establishment of institution of such type, due to the visible opposition and juxtaposition of the proposed narrative construction of the Museum. Finally, the very solution of wax-figures and realistic-style paintings was discussed as the only viable representation of the historical narrative as such, having in mind the contestation over certain events and persons on one hand, as particular historical phenomena which can be only symbolically rehabilitated in the Macedonian context. On the other hand, the museum features were perceived as an attempt to directly challenge the existing collective memory among the ethnic Macedonians, as opposing to the newly proposed historical narrative. Therefore, one can conclude that the agenda of the Museum is intrinsically political, thus, closely linked with the political affiliations of the authors behind the permanent exhibition as such.

Moreover, in order to approach the abovementioned claim, the thesis research was particularly focused on the concrete junctures which the emergence of the museum provoked. In this manner, it was argued that the Museum presents a concrete rupture with the institutional arrangement in the Macedonian context, both the pre- and the post-Yugoslav ones. Additionally,

the Museum was discussed in the wake of the newly emerged “Skopje 2014” constructing project, as well as within the novel trend of building museums and memorial spaces dedicated to the VMRO members. The development of the Macedonian historical revisionism in this sense, was seen as entirely manifested in the narrative structure of the Museum of the Macedonian Struggle.

Finally, In his response to Edward Thompson’s open letter, in extension to the debate among the European intellectual Left on the question of the new revisionism and the Marxist prospects, the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski points that “the convenience of the word “anti-communism”, the bogey-man of the leftist jargon, is precisely to put all of them (all of the given “communist modules” in the world in the 1970s- author’s note) in the same sack and never explain the meaning of the word”<sup>152</sup>. Few decades later, a bunch of state-borders and new political elites more, it appears that this semantic potential of the coined phrase “anti-communism” remained as open as identified by Kolakowski. Thus, one can state that the peculiar case of the Macedonian Museum is an emblematic example of the manipulative potentiality of the “empty historical sack”, in a highly controlled, pseudo-scientific manner.

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<sup>152</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, “My Correct Views on Everything. A Rejoinder to Edward Thompson’s ‘Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski’” *The Socialist Register* 11 (1974): 1-20.

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