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## **Nation, Education and Historiographic Narratives: the Case of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia (1944-1990)<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

In discussions of identities (ethnic, national, religious, gender, etc.) and of areas in which complex political, social, economic and cultural transformations and turmoil take place, the Balkans (Southeast Europe<sup>2</sup>) have occupied centre-stage for scholars, pundits and public alike.

In the sea of political, academic and media debates, the “Macedonian question” is back in the limelight. If you Google the phrase “Macedonian question,” some 20,000 results will appear! Even a superficial glance over the first 10 links would lead you to a wide variety of responses to the questions: Whose is Macedonia and who are the Macedonians? The answers depend on their authors’ nationalities, their ideological and political standpoints, their education, and also on the methods they utilize, which include various “historical”, “linguistic” and numerous other “facts and evidences.”

My goal in this work is to analyze certain aspects of the historical processes through which the Macedonian national identity came to be legitimized. After a brief discussion on theoretical perspectives on nationalism in general, and on pre-state Macedonian nationalism in particular, I trace the socio-political context in which the Macedonian historiographical discourse was created, especially the modes, structure and concept of historical thought in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia. The aim therefore, is not to attempt a final, comprehensive answer to the “Macedonian question,” but rather to challenge some of the presumptions that mark it as distinctive.

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<sup>2</sup> Bracewell, Francis -Drace 1999: 47-66.

## **Fragments of the History of Macedonian Nationalism: An Introduction to the Research Problem**

“Mister Superintendent, sir, we are  
neither Bulgarians nor Serbs, we  
speak Macedonian at home”<sup>3</sup>

M. Stefoska, 1941, Sofia

The problems pertaining to the Macedonian ethno-national identity belong to a wider field of studying nationalism, ethnicity and nations. Since achieving such a goal exceeds the limits of this research, after the brief theoretical overview I shall reflect on few general and particular features of the pre-state Macedonian nationalism.

In the classic literature on nations one could generally find that nations are modern phenomena or “imagined communities” created through the discursive practices of the intellectual elites (historians included). The intellectuals are supposed to be the first “inventors” of nation and nationalism.<sup>4</sup> Postmodern theories emphasize the implications of the meta-narratives which historians employ in order to find meanings in the past. These narratives of national appearance and destiny need not be related to a particular political interest, or simply become suitable fictions created in the historians’ imagination, or as a rule exclude the alternative visions of the past. They could help constitute the very entity they claim to describe, a self-conscious national community.<sup>5</sup>

R. Brubaker questions the view of nations as substantial collectives typical not only for the “primordialists”, “modernists,” “constructivists” but also for those defining it according to subjective factors: common myths, memories and mutual understanding. Trying to re-conceive the reality of nationhood, Brubaker suggests that the nation should be considered as an institutional form, that is to say not as

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<sup>3</sup>An event often proudly repeated by my grandmother Marica Stefoska. She had the conversation with a high police official in Sofia in her attempts to have my grandfather, Jovan Stefoski, released. Soon after the Bulgarian occupation in Ohrid 1941, he was arrested and sent in a village near the Black Sea, Bulgaria. She went to Sofia nine times on her own and, to her account, managed to have my grandfather released with the help of a huge bribe to the police.

<sup>4</sup>An overview of various theories on nation in: Smith: 7-16; Brubejker 2003: 283-286; Balakrishnan 1996; Belgrade Circle 1996/1997: 11-199.

<sup>5</sup>Bracewell 1999: 150.

substance, not as collective, but as practical category, a phenomenon that has simply been occurring.<sup>6</sup>

Discussing the various theoretical schools (apart from the postmodern concepts of nation), G. Uzelac,<sup>7</sup> similarly to Brubaker, deems that they all tend to define the nation by focusing on one or more constitutive elements, or a combination of such. In her opinion, nation could be defined as: “a social agent politically organized as a community, the demands *for* the rights of which are founded on the culture determined as its own.”<sup>8</sup> Since the forming of the nation is a process, the issue whether a nation gives birth to nationalism or nationalism “creates” the nation actually lose relevance. Nationalism might be the sign that the processes of forming, reforming or constructing a nation are at hand.

The terms national/ethnic identity are oftentimes synonyms in the Balkan context. “Ethnic” has been interrelated with “national” since the state political ideologies have constantly represented the nation as a unified ethnic community.<sup>9</sup> Contemporary anthropology defines ethnicity as a situational and relational category. It does not focus on the “cultural” composition of the group, but on the various manifestations expressed through inter group communication.<sup>10</sup> Although the “objective” features, language, religion, customs, race, territory, etc., might be important in self-definition for the member of the group, distinguishing her/him from the other group, they cannot determine ethnicity since no group is ethnic by itself.<sup>11</sup> Ethnicity is a conscious act of self-definition on the part of the person and the group becoming ethnic, by relating to other communities, by identifying its members and displaying their identity in social practice.

In the complex political and social processes of early modern Balkan, P. Kitromilides notes that the national definitions indicating the awareness of ethnic distinction among the orthodox Christian groups illustrate the transition from ecumenical Balkan orthodox communities and religiously defined millets into the initial and inarticulate world of modern linguistic nations. The fact that Balkan Orthodoxy was a composite of diverse collectives, primarily different in language is evidenced in the publication of the first grammars, dictionaries and textbooks

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<sup>6</sup>Brubaker 1996: 13-22; Brubejker, Kuper 2003: 415-420.

<sup>7</sup> Uzelac 2003: 127-146.

<sup>8</sup> Uzelac 2003: 144-146.

<sup>9</sup> Rudometof 2003: 17.

<sup>10</sup> Bart 1995: 211-255; Eriksen 2004: 69-86; Hall 2001: 219.

<sup>11</sup> Nedeljković 2007: 28, f.n. 22.

attempting to provide some codified form of their vernacular languages. Kitromilides argues that the ethnic definition and potential nationalism were distant products of the new ethnography introduced as part of the efforts to raise the flag of civilization<sup>12</sup> for the Promethean fire to shed some light on the traditional Balkan societies.

In this sense, the Macedonian case is no exception. The grammar and text books of the first enlighteners in the Macedonian national canon testify to the first steps towards making the Slavic speaking population in Ottoman Macedonia<sup>13</sup> literate. V. Friedman illustrates the processes of developing the Macedonian language and the gradual construction<sup>14</sup> of the Macedonian identity. The first texts in Macedonian dialects were published between 1794 and about 1840 when the very foundation of the identity shifted from the Muslim-Christian to the Greek-Slavic opposition; the second period (1840–1870), when the first textbooks and anthologies of Macedonian popular literature were published (Miladinov, Šapkarev, Hadži Konstantinov-Džinot) and when a number of intellectuals preferred the use of a common Macedo-Bulgarian standard language founded on Macedonian dialects; the third period (1870-1913), when the first grammar books and nationalist articles were published (Gj. Pulevski<sup>15</sup>, K. P. Misirkov<sup>16</sup>, D. Čupovski<sup>17</sup>, IMRO members, etc.), in which the Macedonian national identity was fighting off Bulgarian, Serbian and other interests, and the fourth period, between 1913 and 1944, in which the standard Macedonian language in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria was developed, enabling its codification in post-war years.<sup>18</sup>

Displays of nationalism, when the acknowledgment of language-based diversity in the ethnicity constructing process intensified, were undoubtedly influenced by contacts and familiarity with the neighbouring Slavic languages (Serbian and Bulgarian), in the already codified canon of which Macedonian was considered their dialect. On the other hand, Friedman considers that despite Serbian and Bulgarian influence, the crucial role to the distinct character of Central/Western

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<sup>12</sup>Kitromilides 1994: 151-152; Mazover 2002: 65-108.

<sup>13</sup> A term which in historiography denotes the three villaets covering the region of Macedonia: Salonika, Kosovo-Skopje and Bitola/Monastir.

<sup>14</sup> Identification in the sense of construction, a never-ending process – always in “process,” Hall 2001: 217.

<sup>15</sup> The author of a trilingual dictionary (Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish), published 1875 in Belgrade, Stalev 1963: 91.

<sup>16</sup> Misirkov 1974: 13-148, (a phototypic edition).

<sup>17</sup>One of the authors of the *Memorandum* of the Macedonian students in Saint Petersburg on the standard Macedonian language published in 1902, Dokumenti vol. I, 1981: 445-446.

<sup>18</sup>Fridman 2003: 270; Fridman 1975: 83-98.

Macedonian dialects was played by the opposition emerging in the contacts with the non-Slavic languages, Greek, Turkish and especially Vlach.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the *differentia specifica* of Macedonian dialects had to be determined in relation to two ‘departures’ in which the distancing from the already codified Slavic languages posed an additional difficulty.

During the first phase of the Serbian-Bulgarian contest for winning the Macedonian Slavs’ favour, between 1870 and 1912, the contestants waged their war through schools, churches and various cultural societies. The struggle supposed fierce irredentism and social/revolutionary organizational forms with a dynamic confusion of names and unstable memberships.<sup>20</sup> IMRO,<sup>21</sup> formed in 1893 (the first to introduce the “Macedonia to the Macedonians” slogan), and later its successors, incited the population to an armed uprising, took guerrilla actions, and became one of the most renown and ideologically motley revolutionary organizations in the Balkans.<sup>22</sup>

The division of Ottoman Macedonia after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) was followed by cultural, religious and political monopoly of Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece in their respective parts of Macedonia: the Vardar, the Pirin and the Aegean. A. Rossos pointed out that all three states led a politics of destroying any signs of Macedonian nationalism, and carried out colonization and cultural assimilation of the population. Certain differences might be noted in the intensity and the modalities in Bulgarian politics.<sup>23</sup>

There have been opinions<sup>24</sup> that, due to the repression by Serbian authorities, the Vardar Macedonia population was prepared to welcome the Bulgarian army both in the First and the Second World War as liberators. Even if this supposed readiness was evident in part of the population, however, Bulgarian politics in both cases – the measures taken to bulgarize the population – actually reinforced the Macedonian national idea.

Despite various orientations within the Macedonian national movement, which in Rossos’s opinion could be defined as the: “Macedonianism (Nashism) of the

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<sup>19</sup> Fridman, 2003: 269.

<sup>20</sup> Rusinow 1995: 370.

<sup>21</sup> Literature on Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization is extensive. See especially: Adanir 1979: 10-70; Peri 2003. CF. Katardžiev 1993; Todorovski 1997; Pandevski 1998; Frusetta 2004: 110-130.

<sup>22</sup> Rusinow 1995: 370.

<sup>23</sup> Rossos 1995: 233- 234; Rossos 2003: 142-146.

<sup>24</sup> Brown 1995: 234-235, f.n. 10.

population, and as the Macedonianism, but also Macedono-Bulgarism of the intellectual circles,” he argues that they gradually united to form Macedonian nationalism which in the years between the two world wars was clearly articulated primarily within the Left.<sup>25</sup> Defined in relation to older nationalisms and already established irredentist programmes as: Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian, Macedonian nationalism prevailed. The declaration “we are neither Serbs nor Bulgarians, we are Macedonians” is not found in statements by intellectuals and political activists only, but by so-called ordinary people, too.<sup>26</sup> The phrase, “we are neither,” which does not begin affirmatively, actually confirms that national identities develop as opposed to the category of “Other.” The people realize who they *are not* before discovering who they *are*. It also demonstrates that the nationalist policies of forced assimilation could create the national identities they aim to expunge.<sup>27</sup>

In M. Todorova’s opinion the processes of constructing ethnicity, nationalism and state are related. Regardless of whether these processes occur separately, often alongside one another, or simultaneously, nationalism is the key link connecting ethnicity and statehood. She argues that the main feature of Balkan and East-European nationalisms, as opposed to the West-European, is their defensiveness and the search for self-identification.<sup>28</sup> Almost every nation in Eastern Europe: “felt the need to discover its identity and resorted to one or another form of populism in the search for ‘its specific roots’.”<sup>29</sup>

Analyzing the Bulgarian nationalism, Todorova considers it as particularly acute since it defined itself as opposed to older (Greek and Serbian) nationalisms. From such a perspective, and in the context of its opponents, Macedonian nationalism, both the pre-state and the state one in the period of SR Macedonia, repeats the same pattern and could be qualified as extremely defensive. As P. Shoup noted, the post-1945 obedience of Macedonian communists to the instructions of the Yugoslav Communist Party was greater not due to the lack of national feeling among the Macedonian party members. Their refusal to follow certain trains of thought resulted from their fear that it might open a Pandora’s Box, or would incite fierce response by the federal authorities in Belgrade. If Slovenian communists could speak

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<sup>25</sup> Rossos 1995: 241.

<sup>26</sup> Rossos 1995: 242-243. Ivanovski 1995: 92-98.

<sup>27</sup> Denfort 1996: 93.

<sup>28</sup> Todorova 1995: 71-74.

<sup>29</sup> Sugar 1995: 418.

of “secession” without openly inviting disciplinary actions by the Party, it is questionable whether this lax attitude would have prevailed if similar demands were made by Macedonian communists.<sup>30</sup>

A declaration issued in 1935 by IMRO (United),<sup>31</sup> the party which between the two world wars provided the organizational structure and the foundation for developing communism and nationalism in Macedonia, states:

*As Macedonians under Greek rule are neither “Slavophones” nor “pure” Greeks, as Macedonians under Serbian rule are not “real” Serbs, so Macedonians under Bulgarian rule are neither Bulgarians, nor wish to become ones. The Macedonian people has its own past, present and future [...] which has for decades struggled for its right to self-determination, and even separation in an autonomous state political unit independent of the imperialist states contesting it.*<sup>32</sup>

Apart from the ideological (leftist) connotations, this declaration illustrates the strong defensiveness and the struggle against the inferior position.

Macedonian nationalism before and during World War II developed as opposed to the ideologies and regimes (Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek and Italian) within the Macedonian and the Balkan Left, in all three parts of Macedonia. The communist parties of Bulgaria, Greece and Yugoslavia recognized the separate Macedonian identity and rights of Macedonians to their own state. Nevertheless, it did not mean that they accepted a complete solution to the “Macedonian question.” The Yugoslav Communist Party (YCP) acknowledged the position of Macedonians who would not comply with anything less than a “free Macedonia” – that is, Macedonian statehood.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the relative frailty of the Macedonian nationalism and the strength of its opponents, the legitimation of the separate Macedonian identity within the Yugoslav socialist federation provided the foundations for its further promotion into the next phase – “national communism.”<sup>34</sup> The aspirations within various ideological circles of pre-war Macedonian intellectuals, the same who were actually the fundamental reason for the severe conflict within the first political and party leadership in PR of Macedonia,<sup>35</sup> for a free and united Macedonia (being a member of

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<sup>30</sup> Shoup 1968: 183.

<sup>31</sup> Pačemska 1985: 68-99. Part of the declaration is quoted by A. Rossos, too.

<sup>32</sup> *VMRO (Obedineta)* vol. I-II 1991:294. In both volumes the documents are translated into Macedonian from: Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek, German, Italian and Russian.

<sup>33</sup> Rossos 2003:148-149.

<sup>34</sup> Influenced by P. Sugar, *Eastern European Nationalism*, Introduction.

<sup>35</sup> Veljanovski 2002: 15-51; Crvenkovski, Tomovski 2003 : 96-103.

some future Balkan or South Slavic federation, or under the UN protection), which from a Macedonian national perspective would mean complete solution to the “Macedonian question” – remained in history.

### **Historiography, States, Nations: *Tango Fatal?***

1.1 According to the teleological view of history, the main purpose of which is the forming of a national state, for Macedonians is the founding of the Peoples Republic of Macedonia,<sup>36</sup> as a constituent part of the SFRY in 1944. This provided the conditions for further development and modernization<sup>37</sup> of the Macedonian society.<sup>38</sup> Within which, the *nation building process*<sup>39</sup> took place in the manner of the Macedonian and Yugoslav party, political and intellectual elites had perceived it, and also in the manner that might have suited SFRY political interests.<sup>40</sup> The “Macedonian question” influenced the relations of SFRY with its neighbours, Bulgaria and Greece, but not to the point of causing considerable political and diplomatic problems in the region until the dissolution of SFRY.

Hence, the processes of institutionalising of the Macedonian ethno-national identity cannot be studied outside of the complex social, political, economic and other circumstances in SFRY. The noncritical approaches towards this past, which are categorizing the matter in a black or white perspective, cannot explain how and in

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<sup>36</sup> Veljanovski 2004: 21-42.

<sup>37</sup> The first waves of modernization began as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Ottoman Macedonia and Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Adanir 1998: 240-245; Stavrijanos 2005: 565-614.

<sup>38</sup> On the modernization from a socialist perspective in: Kazer 2003: 176-186. On the Yugoslav socialist model in general, Jović 2003: 122-155.

<sup>39</sup> I.S.’s *curative*. I see the processes of creating a nation as partially an objective process, that is, what in Anglo-Saxon literature is known as nation formation, as well as a subjective – the activist part expressed through the *nation building* syntagm.

<sup>40</sup> The forming of the Peoples Republic of Macedonia in the Vardar Macedonia region certainly contributed to the delegitimation of Serbian and Bulgarian aspirations to this territory. The nation building processes of the Macedonian nation and the “Macedonian question” in general are analysed in two often quoted studies: those of P. Shoup and of S. E. Palmer – R. R. King (see f.n. 61). Even though invaluable, these studies in Brown’s opinion have still left sufficient room for debate since they stress the importance of the fickle political circumstances in the region and the political milieu in which the communist parties of Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria promoted the existence of the Macedonian national identity in order to serve their own purposes and interests. I agree with Brown’s argument placing both studies in the so-called schools of “social realism.” According to these schools, the states are presented as actors and people merely as passive recipients and mimes. These approaches, states Brown: “make politics the ‘empire’ of the states, so that they read history through such a prism as well. The problem with such readings of history is in exclusion and delegitimation of the existing national movements. Hence, the ‘states or parties’ are the only actors and it is a historical coincidence that they seek legitimacy by enrolling their subjects into an *ethnos*,” Brown 1995: 224.

what way the Yugoslav and communist context influenced the development of Macedonian society back from which the post-communist Macedonian realities are borne from.

The policy of national equality in SFRY contributed to the integration of the federal state. Despite of its interpretation, this policy as L. Perović notes: “gave people the freedom to be what they are” and contributed to the emancipation and modernisation of the multinational Yugoslav society derived from the various economic, administrative and cultural heritages. Antifascism represented the main foci around which the culture of memory was built; it legitimised the power of the ruling elites, and at the same time secured the interethnic tolerance.<sup>41</sup>

The new Yugoslavia was created on the principles of decentralisation and federalism. D. Jović writes that this policy did not include a political democratisation of liberal type, but also excluded the unitarian centralisation, i.e. the creation of a Yugoslav nation and suppression of the existing national identities.<sup>42</sup> This new Yugoslavia, set up on a radically different basis than the pre-war one, provided favourable circumstances especially for the smaller nations to develop.<sup>43</sup> Most Yugoslav communist considered the national question as a democratic issue. Yugoslav socialism for most wasn't appealing only due to the radical change in class structure, but also because of the proclaimed national and social equality and protection. Securing the peace and stability legitimised the new order as fundamentally successful.<sup>44</sup>

For most Macedonians, Yugoslavia managed largely to solve the Macedonian national issue. Macedonians in the SFRY were equal to the other *narodi i narodnosti*, irrespective of the historical differences and circumstances. As stated by the prominent Macedonian and Yugoslav politician K. Crvenkovski,<sup>45</sup> Macedonians did not accede to the new Yugoslavia because they strove towards some Illyrianism or to the Yugoslavism in general (movements that had no tradition in the Macedonian political thought), but because in such a society they had an opportunity to develop

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<sup>41</sup> Kuljić 2002: 412.

<sup>42</sup> Jović 2007: 77.

<sup>43</sup> Jović 2007: 79.

<sup>44</sup> Jović 2007: 72.

<sup>45</sup> K. Crvenkovski, a Macedonian liberal was eliminated from all political and party positions in the period of Yugoslav liberalism, i.e. 1974.

freely and as a civilised nation. Crvenkovski considered that love of one's own country creates the basis for cooperation and mutual respect with other nations.<sup>46</sup>

It is a common perception in all former Yugoslav republics, that the “national sentiment” was suppressed in favour of the internationalist ideology. Very often it is considered as the main reason for the widespread of the fierce nationalism after the fall of Communism. The Yugoslav communists' fear of the aggressive and violent, but also of the non-violent nationalism, and their constant struggle against the unitarian or separatist tendencies, does not imply that political elites led antinational policies. For them, the national and class struggle were connected issues that could have been resolved with a radical overturn. Post-communist nationalisms and the tensions that they carry may be interpreted as a consequence of the strengthening of the national ideologies in the Communist era.<sup>47</sup>

The institutionalisation of the very fluid categories used for classification, such as: *narod*, *narodnost* and their uncritical inclusion in the platform for equality, progress, brotherhood and unity contributed to the ethnic homogenisation and stimulated various ethno-national myths.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, the regime suppressed nationalism in various ways, and on the other the national phenomenon institutionalised the ethnical nationhood. Being a member of the ethnic nation, i.e. *the narod*<sup>49</sup> was an important social and cognitive category, to use the words of R. Brubaker.<sup>50</sup> The republics and the autonomous provinces were (quasi) state entities with a defined territory, constitution, parliament, government, legislation, administrative system, cultural and scientific institutions etc., where the ethnic nationality had institutionalised social and cultural forms.

The idea that class and nation don't contradict themselves reaches its normative peak with the 1974 Constitution. Drafted in the tradition of the socialist constitutions which were more of a fictional work – a type of literature which justifies the existence – than constitutions that should function in reality - it actually deconstructs SFRY as a unified community.<sup>51</sup> Yugoslavia become an ideological project, in which ethnic similarities no longer played an important role, and the republics become national states by form, and socialist by structure. The creators of

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<sup>46</sup> Crvenkovski, Milosavljević 1996: 221-222.

<sup>47</sup> Brubejker 2003: 2003, 289-295; Verderi 2005: 39-78, 203-207.

<sup>48</sup> Vangeli 2009.

<sup>49</sup> The category 'narod' is actually a kind of synonym of the category ethnic-nation.

<sup>50</sup> Brubejker 2003: 288-289.

<sup>51</sup> Puhovski 2008: Intervju.

the Constitution considered individual, personal and national interests as immanent to socialism. Although to Yugoslav communists, nationalism was considered the greatest enemy to be fought permanently, the abovementioned doctrine represents a compromise between the communism and the nationalism.<sup>52</sup> The recomposition of the Federation and its decentralisation, perceived as greater autonomy of the republics and autonomous provinces, also implied a decentralisation of the historical memory. In the critical phases of changing the integrative strategies, the risk of romanticising the independent historical pasts and their almost inevitable chauvinistic component was underestimated.<sup>53</sup>

The transformations in the political and economical system weren't followed by reforms in the Party. The role of the Party, which now remained as the sole integrative factor in Yugoslav society, strengthened even more. Analysing the first half of the 1970s, L. Perović will say that: "Although Tito accepted the changes in the country, he believed, resting mostly on the army, that he has enough power to weaken them. It was very important for him as a statesman, the unity of Yugoslavia to be expressed through its civil visage and its democratic shroud."<sup>54</sup> The main ideological argument, and Tito's chief instrument of rule was a strong and unified Party. In such circumstances, Perović points out that: "Yugoslavia was never a real Federation, and never could be, irrespective of the changes in the normative relations between the republics and the Federation."<sup>55</sup>

In this sense, Perović even anticipates some of the future goings-on in the country. For a long time, the motto that all nationalisms are equally dangerous survived in the ideology of the Party. This motto, in the form of a decree contributed to the integration of the federal state. In turn, this points to the inability of the Party to recognize the social contradictions in its ideology. After the death of Tito, the belief that all nationalisms are equally dangerous was waning.<sup>56</sup>

The processes of institutionalisation of the Macedonian ethnic nation during SFRY do not differ much from the well known examples in the Balkan region. The fact that the nation-building process was led by the "national communists" does not make the Macedonian example exclusive. On the contrary, it shows how and in what

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<sup>52</sup> Jović 2003: 143.

<sup>53</sup> Kuljić 2002: 409.

<sup>54</sup> Perović1991:194.

<sup>55</sup> Perović1991:194.

<sup>56</sup> Kuljić 2002: 411.

way the 19th century's nation building strategies functioned in the context of the Yugoslav socialism. Although the ethno-national ideologies with all their contradictions were established throughout SFRY, the class ideology and supra-ethnic vision primarily related to the liberation war (WW2) balanced the ethnic ideologies and ethnic tensions, while the decreed memory expressed through the principle of brotherhood and unity cosmopolitised the Yugoslav space for a long time.<sup>57</sup>

Establishing national institutions in SR Macedonia began with several different projects typical of the first nation-building phases in which key models for defining the ethno-national identity are: language, history, territory, culture, tradition. The technology of identity building in the region, according to I. Dičev, was introduced as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then it has been available to every nation-state willing to legitimize its national identity. Apart from sovereign institutions legitimation also includes the imaginary production such as glorious ancestors and myths of origin, literary heritage and national museums, centralized folklore, etc.<sup>58</sup>

Part of this common pattern of diversification in the region is also the standardization of the language "top-down" and the role played by various state institutions in accomplishing the final formation and acceptance of the normative-standard language. The Macedonian language was codified in 1945, and by drawing various fundamental documents, post-1950, from the codification phase the process moved onto the stage of elaborating the norm.<sup>59</sup> Without discussing the choice of the Western/Central dialects as the foundation of the standard Macedonian language,<sup>60</sup> I would only like to mention the well known Bulgarian and the Romanian cases in comparison. In fact, in 1879, when codifying the language, the Bulgarian state chose the Eastern dialects as the foundation of the norm, that is, the ones farthest from Serbian. Romanian 19<sup>th</sup>-century intellectuals and politicians replaced the Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin, and replaced the Slavonic language in church services with Latin, purifying it of all Slavisms!<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kuljić 2002: 411

<sup>58</sup> Dičev 2003: 270.

<sup>59</sup> Lunt 1959: 19-26. Andreevski 1991: 138-156.

<sup>60</sup> V. Friedman criticizes S. Troebst who falsely presented the process of codifying the Macedonian language, Friedman 2003: 273-275. Cf. Troebst 1994: 103-139.

<sup>61</sup> They are mentioned in Dičev article too. See also the Norwegian and Swedish cases for comparison, Löfgren 1989: 16.

## 1.2. Mistaken exceptionalism: contemporary foreign scholarship on the Macedonian question and historiography

The Macedonian related matters have been researched by numerous scholars outside the region.<sup>62</sup> For the most part, their contribution is very important in framing the issues in wider academic context. Often, an out of region views are more free of prejudices that in many cases, whether we admit it or not, affect our work. Nevertheless, there are cases which appear to have under-examined these prejudices and presumptions, even in works by leading scholars on Macedonian related matters.

Speaking about the ethnonym Macedonian, S. Troebst in one article says that: “It could be said that Macedonians declare themselves “Macedonians” for no other reason, than at least because they are, first of all, convinced as to the necessity and all-inclusiveness of the ethno-national self-determination; and, second, because the identification ‘Macedonians’ seems to them to be the most attractive option out of all that could have been chosen from 1944 onwards (...) considering the large constructive share of this identificatory example and the competitiveness of the identifications ‘Bulgarians’ or ‘Serbs’ particularly successful until mid-last century.”<sup>63</sup> The same author in another article describes how the ruling elites created the Macedonian national identity “overnight”: “National language, national literature, national history and national church were not available in 1944, but they were accomplished in a short time. The south-east-Slavic regional idiom of the area of Prilep-Veles was codified as the script, normed orthographically by means of the Cyrillic Alphabet, and taken over immediately by the newly created media.”<sup>64</sup>

Troebst's argument about the identification “Macedonian” prompts several questions. First, it is unclear on what basis he claims that the identifications “Bulgarians” and “Serbs” were especially successful up until the mid-last century. He doesn't explain what had happened until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century regarding the identity of

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<sup>62</sup> The literature in Western languages accompanied by comments by Rossos 2003: 140-159, f.n. 1-3. Adanir 1979: 42-72; Shoup 1968: 144-183; Palmer, King 1971: 133-184; Banac 1984: 307-328; Barker 1992; An overview of recent articles regarding the “Macedonian question” in: Troebst 2000: 125, f.n. 8. Rudometof 2003; Danforth 1993: 3-10; Denfort 1996; K. S. Brown, *Of Meaning and Memories: The National Imagination in Macedonia* (Ph. D. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago 1995) 5-6. Published under the title: *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation* (Princeton, NJ, 2002); Brunnbauer 2004: 165-200; Caplan's controversial and much criticized study, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*. The critical responses to Caplan's work are numerous. Cf: Cooper 1993: 592-593.

<sup>63</sup> Troebst 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Troebst 1992: 431.

the people he talks about. Aside from that, he applies a generalisation (in evaluating the appeal of the various ethnonyms) without making a distinction in the social identification of the populace. If so, how can it be claimed that the identifications ‘Bulgarians’ or ‘Serbs’ were particularly successful until mid-last century? In my opinion, Troebst's argument is based on the premise that the “bad guys” that is to say the communists invented and imposed from above the Macedonian ethno-national identification through the *choices* (the author does not “list” the choices) they made available to the population. Was it be possible that the majority of the population in SR Macedonia, i.e. in one collective voice, to choose that identity “on the identity market”? Isn't it well known in the modern social sciences that ethno-national identities are complex social structures which cannot be created by decree?

No doubt that since 1944 Macedonian national institutions contributed to institutionalising of the Macedonian national identity. But, it is arguable why the applied strategies (a codified language, national literature and national history, a national church etc.) are considered as unique exclusively in the Macedonian case? If the Macedonian example is exclusive, can we say that the similar examples in which the elites used the same models did not follow to the desired results? Or, does it also mean that in the other regional nation-building cases these strategies were “regular,” and only became “irregular” in the Macedonian case?

The function of history in the nation-building processes<sup>65</sup> and fostering “national awareness”<sup>66</sup> among the members of these imagined (modern) communities is a generally accepted fact. Analyzing the role of Macedonian socialist historiography, U. Brunnbauer<sup>67</sup> considers that: “Immediately after its establishment, the new Republic embarked on the nation building process that *turned*<sup>68</sup> most of the Slavic Orthodox population of the Republic into ‘Macedonians’(...) their ethnic identities had been ambiguous and contested, and a Macedonian national consciousness had been limited to small circles of intellectuals.”<sup>69</sup>

Hence, my intent is not to auction the ethnicity, language or religion of the predominantly rural population, almost 70% of which, according to the first post-war

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<sup>65</sup>Todorova 1992: 1105.

<sup>66</sup> A concept introduced by H. Seton –Watson which is difficult to define as pointed out in: Uzelac 2003: 131.

<sup>67</sup>Brunnbauer 2004: 165-200; Troebst: 1997. Cf. Brown 2003: 202-214.

<sup>68</sup> I. S.'s cursive.

<sup>69</sup>Brunnbauer 2003: 294. In the Bosnian translation the verb “pretvoriti” (‘to change, transform’) for the English “turn” is used. Cf. Brunnbauer 2005: 266.

census<sup>70</sup> was illiterate or to apologetically (in a primordial sense) claim that most of the people have affirmatively identified themselves as Macedonian. However, Brunbauer's statement does raise several questions. What has this opinion been founded on, and to what criteria has the author determined the ethnic identity (albeit not stating which one) of the population, hence its ambiguity? Then, what number of intellectuals would suffice in order for nationalism to be legitimate?

Balkan statistics and ethnographic research of the ethnic, religious, linguistic or demographic structure of the population in Ottoman Macedonia between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the WWII had been a mirror of the ideologies of those times than useful research data. For instance, according to Bulgarian statistics the majority of the population in Macedonia consisted of Bulgarians, while according to the Greek ones – they were Greeks, and predominantly Serbs according to Serbian statistics.<sup>71</sup>

Apart from those originating in the Balkans, there are also various other ethnographic studies,<sup>72</sup> maps and reports of non-Balkan origin, in which one could find various classifications of the (Slavic-speaking) population in Macedonia, such as Bulgarians, Serbs, Slavs, Macedonian Slavs, Christians, Slavophones, Macedonian Bulgarians, Macedonians, etc. There are also travellers' accounts noting the existence of a separate Macedonian identity, not merely restricted to a handful of intellectuals and spread among the rural population.<sup>73</sup> During the days of early Macedonian nationalism and identity forming particularly notable is the absence of the "voices of the Macedonians themselves, which, if heard, were distorted and dismissed."<sup>74</sup>

In comparison, one of the most respectable authorities on Balkan history, L. Stavrijanos, has a rather different viewpoint from Brunbauer and Troebst. Speaking about the population in Ottoman Macedonia, Stavrijanos informs us that: "The statistic data on the population in Macedonia are of practically no significance (...). Based on the information available, one could only draw several relevant general conclusions. The inhabitants of Macedonia living close to the Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian borders could mostly be determined as Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs respectively. The rest of the population, apart from the declared minorities such as Turks, Vlachs, Jews and Albanians, could be considered a separate Macedonian

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<sup>70</sup> Jurukova 2003: 35.

<sup>71</sup> "Rival Statistics about Macedonia," in: *The Balkan Wars*, WB 3, 2005: 42.

<sup>72</sup> Brejlsford 2003: 134-172.

<sup>73</sup> Myrivilis 1933: 174; Burnet 1921: 80; Nobis 1919: 95; Lebedev 1917:137, 140-141.

<sup>74</sup> Fridman 2003: 264.

community. These Macedonians had their own dialects and certain cultural distinctions justifying them to be determined as a separate South-Slavic group.”<sup>75</sup>

A summary of the classifications mentioned raises the question on who actually comprised the majority population of Macedonia: Orthodox Slavs; an archaic Slavic mass; Southern Serbs; Bulgarians; Greeks, or Macedonians? Should the accuracy or inaccuracy of the classifications be considered, and what would be the reasons to accept one or another? Since each of the classifications could at the same time be accurate and inaccurate, they could either express, or not, a certain identity reality implying the “essential core” of the modern Macedonian ethno-nation.

Let us assume that all listed classifications are equally correct and legitimate, which raises the question of who would the nation building process in SR Macedonia need to *turn* into Macedonian? The orthodox Slav denomination (religious/cultural) could be equally applied to ethnic Bulgarians, Serbs or even Russians. That a rural and illiterate population has no defined national identity is commonly accepted in the theories of nations. Why the same, in the spirit of E. Weber (*Peasants into Frenchmen*) cannot be applied in the Macedonian case i.e. “peasants into Macedonians.”

It appears that the core of the problem, which results in the above described absurdity, is the approach preferring to *a priori* discover the assumed “essential core” of the contemporary Macedonian national identity. This is without implying that it was created *ex nihilo*, or that people were *tabula rasa*. Such approach suggest that nation building is a formal process occurring exclusively “top-down” in the shape of ideological engineering and state propaganda, and neglect to consider the processes as a dialectical phenomenon, the informal side of which is expressed “bottom-up” in the shape of popular enthusiasm and national feeling.<sup>76</sup> The superseding the *lethal* logic of binary oppositions (nothing-something) lies not in implying an essential identity core, rather more in recognizing the conditions of a dynamic system of inter-group relations where the consensual features of a group are articulated in relation to other groups, and the very dynamic practice of identity in the social surroundings. The state, its institutions, and the political discourse have certainly proved important to the

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<sup>75</sup>Stavrijanos 2005:493-494; Pavlović 2001: 207-209, 356-359. In the context of Stavrijanos’ statement, the information (although still insufficiently researched) from the USA emigration services of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are also interesting. In the emigrants’ ethnic identity column one could find the answers *Macedonian and Macedonian language* for people from Bitola, Voden/Edessa, etc. Cf. Brown 1996. I quoted according to Freidman 2003: 32, f.n. 38, 264.

<sup>76</sup>Denfort 1996: 40.

creation of national strategies through which the ideological boundaries of the group identity are defined.

Defining members of a particular group allows for the creation and maintenance of the group identity and mutual solidarity. Cultural phenomena such as the language are used as recognizable markers for distinguishing one group from another. Nevertheless, what is important in nationalism, as well as “race” and “ethnicity”, is not the cultural content – shared meanings, histories and traditions – within certain social boundaries, but the meanings ascribed to the cultural markers and the borders they represent.<sup>77</sup> The processes of creating the borders and their maintenance outrange the processes of forming the cultural and social identity, and enter the political realm when the group insists on institutionalizing and legalizing its borders. Conceiving the state as an “organization of membership,” Brubaker and Cooper argue that citizenship, as the instrument of social affinity, is central to the administrative structure and the political culture of the modern nation-state. The “social affinity” is also secured by the borders separating the outer from the inner members.<sup>78</sup>

Accordingly, the sociopolitical and ideological context in which Macedonian historiography was established, along with the methodological paradigms of studying history and especially the national history, considerably influenced the structure of the historical narratives and academic thought. From its very beginning Macedonian historiography<sup>79</sup> grew under the impression that history had an important role in society, similar to many other nation-building processes in the Balkans and throughout Europe. The difference is in a small, *subtle* point - the degree of ideological and political dependence of the state and the methodological approaches used in researching the past. Nevertheless, the overemphasis of the ideological aspects of Macedonian historiography, and assigning the (assumed) role of a “nation builder” implies the danger of non politics free qualifications.<sup>80</sup> The aim of historical knowledge was twofold. One was to legitimize the Macedonian national identity supplying it with a “proper” cultural capital and continuity with the past. The other

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<sup>77</sup> Robinson 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Brubejker, Kuper 2003: 426.

<sup>79</sup> Pačemska, Ačkoska 2007: 116-140.

<sup>80</sup> Braun 2003: 203.

was to legitimize the socialist ideology and the “long struggle for independence of the Macedonian people.”<sup>81</sup>

The Yugoslav party elites supported and sponsored a historiography which was supposed to support the new visions of the world. History was “evoked” in order to legitimise the new socialist state by providing “examples” from past.<sup>82</sup> This is how I. Banac summarised the basic features of Yugoslav historiography in 1991:

*“Yugoslav historiography could not survive the notion that the distinction between historical truth and popular legends was not a matter of importance. It could not survive the notion that there were different truths negotiated by professional historians (...) legends and historical distortions were often promulgated by the best historian, not by amateurs. Yugoslav historiography was never harmoniously arranged (...). The historical guild will have a difficult task in removing not only the heritage of the Communist dirigisme, but also the consequences of the post-communist chasm.”*<sup>83</sup>

The Macedonian historiographic discourse was formed in the socio-political milieu of permanent “interplay” of two paradigms (national and class). Even though primarily nation-oriented, it shifted as required from nation onto class struggle, and vice versa. Often, it attempted to integrate both paradigms that at times resulted in incredible interpretations of the past. From today’s perspective of many Macedonian (national) historians, historiography in the previous system had not sufficiently covered the problems of national history. Even when the research focus was on topics such as the national revival, liberation revolutionary movement, etc., “(...) the general methodology, the so-called ‘materialist’ notion of history, isolated the national concern”.<sup>84</sup>

From present-day perspective, it isn’t hard to notice that Macedonian historiography was ideologically and politically dependent on the regime;<sup>85</sup> to notice its political angle in the interpretations of the past, as well as certain lapses and elisions in writing the national history. Neither it is difficult to find aspects that can be

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<sup>81</sup> “There is no free Macedonia without federal Yugoslavia,” a line from L. Mojsov’s brochure entitled *Federativnoto uredenje-osnova na demokratizacijata na Jugoslavija*, as quoted in: Pačemska, Ačkoska 2007: 121.

<sup>82</sup> Jović 2004: 277-291, especially 279-282.

<sup>83</sup> Banac 1992: 1103-1104; Stallaerts 1999: 321-324.

<sup>84</sup> Melovski 1993: 19.

<sup>85</sup> Katardžiev 1991: 9-29; Ačkoska 2000: 487-504; Todorovski 2000: 505-518; Brunnbauer 2004: 174.

criticized.<sup>86</sup> It is also easy to claim that the discipline as a whole ignored the Western methodological and theoretical paradigms. From the same perspective, it isn't hard to demonize communism, forgetting V. Havel's famous claim that the only thing worse than the Communists are the anti-Communists, and to uncritically glorify (Western) European countries.

These and similar assumptions, which have life of their own, cannot be constructive to non-judgementally, while not implying lack of critical elaboration, interpret the processes in which historiography contributed to the consolidation of the Macedonian imagined community. Finally, nations are not a matter of biology, geography and meteorology, but a state of heart and mind. In the modern world, each of us could choose which nation to belong to, as well as to belong to none.<sup>87</sup>

### **The Narrators' Education**

E. H. Carr states that the historian is him-/herself a product of history. Like everyone else, historians are "prisoners of their 'point of view,' in other words the stereotypes, assumptions or mentalities of their own time, place, and social group including of course, their gender."<sup>88</sup> The formal education is an important segment of the history, the product of which is the historian him/herself. The relation between the educational system and the nation-building processes has oftentimes been considered from various angles in the social sciences.

As in the socialist period, the only institution in the R Macedonia where one could graduate in History is still the Department of History at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje. *All historians, who later either venture into research activities, or teach in primary and secondary schools, get their education here.* At this point of my work, I will use the synchronic and diachronic perspectives offering a glimpse into the history of the Department itself, and into the structure of the history curricula with emphasis on the topics covering Middle Ages.

The Faculty was founded by the 1945 *University Law* in Skopje with departments for Macedonian Language, Yugoslav Literature, *History and Art History*, Philosophy and Teacher Training, Classical Philology, Romance Philology, as well as

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<sup>86</sup> Brown 1995: 19.

<sup>87</sup> Jović 2003: 59.

<sup>88</sup> Burke 1994: 179-180.

Natural Sciences department.<sup>89</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Faculty, a renowned classical philologist and first Dean M. Petruševski stated: “It is no coincidence that the establishment of the University in Skopje took place in 1946: that was the first normal year in the existence of our new state (...). It was the third year of freedom for our part of Macedonia. The enthusiasm of our citizens, free for the first time in history, and the zeal of the people in the post-liberation years were also felt in the intellectual circles involved in rebuilding the country.”<sup>90</sup>

In that very same 1946, Petruševski emphasized that: “a distinctive feature of the first Macedonian University is its Yugoslav composition, not only of the student body, but also the teaching staff and the first administration with the first Macedonian dean (M. Petruševski), and the first Slovenian prodean F. Petre. (...) the Macedonians taught in Macedonian, and the ones coming from the other brotherly republics in Serbian and Croatian.”<sup>91</sup>

The Department of History started with few scholars from SRMacedonia, and number of others from the other parts of Yugoslavia. A small quantitative and comparative analysis of the number of history graduates in various periods demonstrates that the interest in History was strong in the first three decades after the establishing of the Department. In 1976, out of the nearly 2,000 graduates, almost 50% graduated in history.<sup>92</sup> In the following decades the number of graduated historians decreased. In 1995, out of more than 6,000 graduates, around 13% were history graduates.<sup>93</sup> Postgraduate studies in History were introduced in 1971.<sup>94</sup>

Commonly, history curricula represent the official historical awareness of society. They are the framework determining the values, the knowledge and the skills, students acquire during their studies. The first post-war undergraduate curricula at the Department were designed to meet the goals of the historical education in the Republic as a member of the Federation. They focused on fostering the national

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<sup>89</sup> Kambarski 1994: 108-113.

<sup>90</sup> *Filozofski fakultet* 1976: 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Filozofski fakultet* 1976: 7.

<sup>92</sup> *Filozofski fakultet*, 1976: 109.

<sup>93</sup> *Filozofski fakultet* 1996: 181.

<sup>94</sup> The postgraduate curriculum consisted of *four* subjects in total: 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Macedonian History, Methodology of Historical Research, a language of choice (Ottoman or Greek) and a foreign language. It was later complemented with Medieval Macedonian History. *Filozofski fakultet* 1976: 93. The historians who were choosing the Middle Ages/Byzantium studied: a classical language, a foreign language, Methodology of Historical Research and *Macedonian Medieval History*. Compared to what could be considered as a more common academic structure, the curriculum lacked courses such as: Theory and Methodology of History, History of Byzantine Empire, Medieval Sources, History of Byzantine Historiography, Byzantine Literature, Palaeography, Epigraphy, etc.

sentiment (Yugoslav as well as Macedonian); promoting the socialist ideals; acquiring historical knowledge and skills; and promoting the historical continuity within the history of the Southern Slavs. This focus remained unchanged until the dissolution of SFRY. The predominant theoretical paradigm was positivism along with the “schematized, Marxist/materialist view of historical processes. Similarly, this methodological approach remained the same. Since each historian was educated in the same manner, it is quite understandable that no one could ever write any differently than it was written back then.”<sup>95</sup>

The curriculum was structured chronologically by selecting certain topics within each of the periods. The main courses in the curriculum were history of: Antiquity; the Middle Ages; the Modern Period; the Yugoslav Peoples; and the Macedonian People; with the last two from the arrival of the Slavs to modern times.<sup>96</sup> There is an apparent lack of course/s covering the histories of the neighbouring Balkan countries: Greek, Bulgaria, Albania, etc. In this context, it is important to note Petruševski’s persistent attempts to establish a Centre for Balkan Studies in SR Macedonia.<sup>97</sup>

The changes in the curricula in following decades were not substantial. For instance, the 1975 curriculum changes divided the History of the Yugoslav Peoples into three courses: Middle Ages, Modern, and Contemporary History; and the History of the Macedonian People into two courses: Middle Ages and Modern History; while the General Medieval History into four courses. Additionally, classical language, Marxism and other general subjects were required, for a total of 18 courses required for becoming a history graduate.<sup>98</sup> The official name of the History Department, *History of the Yugoslav Peoples with General History* was later renamed into Institute of History only.

This short summary illustrates that the history of the Macedonian people had not taken much space in the curriculum until the 1990s. It was studied in two separate

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<sup>95</sup> Melovski 1993: 18.

<sup>96</sup> State Archives of the Republic of Macedonia, Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje Fund (1920-1982), No. 323, vol. 1, p. 33-66. History Curricula 1954 -1969.

<sup>97</sup> In this sense Petruševski in 1967 said: “Placed in the heart of the Balkans, Macedonia can unite all Balkan peoples, since it is the most suitable area to study Balkanology (especially regarding languages, but also history, geography, folklore, music, economics),” *Archive Documentation of the INH*, slide IV, 355, 1, p. 5-6. The efforts of Petruševski to establish a Centre for Balkan Studies within the University in Skopje had not been heeded by either federal or republic authorities.

<sup>98</sup> Nastavni planovi (Curricula) 1975: 85-87. Cf: Nastavni planovi 1977/78: 185-188; Nastavni planovi 1978/79: 229-233; Nastavni planovi 1982/83, 1983/84: 165-168; and Nastavni planovi 1988/89: 1-3.

courses (Middle Ages and Modern History), in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> terms respectively, within the group of courses on the history of the Yugoslav peoples. In comparison, the medieval history of the Yugoslav peoples was being studied for six terms (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>); the modern history in six terms as well (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup>), with most recent history – the People’s Liberation War and the socialist revolution - covered in the 7<sup>th</sup> term. Even though the core of Yugoslavism is based on “historical traditions,” it was adapted to the studies of national history so that both viewpoints complemented and historically motivated each other.

Statistically, national (Macedonian) history took up less than 20% of the history related segment of the curriculum, and approximately 4% of the whole curriculum. Stemming from the constitutional changes of 1974, the term *nationalities* was appended to the national history courses resulting in: History of the Yugoslav Peoples and the *Nationalities*, and History of the Macedonian People and the *Nationalities*.

The topics of national medieval history in the curriculum,<sup>99</sup> mainly structured according to political events, show how the beginnings of the nation were conceived in time and space. It is evident that the emphasis falls on territory: the arrival of the Slavs in the Balkans and their link to the Macedonian territory. From the moment of locating the Macedonian Slavs, i.e. the “Macedonian people” in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, starts the journey of this cultural community through the times.<sup>100</sup> There is also another group of topics focused on Macedonia under Bulgarian rule (“locating the national Other”), along with the topics of the glorious 9<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. the spreading of Christianity and Slavic literacy) integrating and legitimizing the Macedonian Slavs in the wider Byzantine and European cultural milieu.

The continuity of the cultural community is represented by topics such as: the Bogomil Movement interpreted from the class perspective; the anti-Bulgarian and anti-Byzantine (another “national Other”) uprisings; and the foundation of Samuil’s State, which is considered as the principal link with the modern national state and statehood traditions. In the following centuries, the unspoilt cultural community succeeds in resisting various enemies: Byzantium, the Crusaders, Epirians, Nicaeans, Bulgarian and Serbian rule, right up to the Ottoman conquest of Macedonia.

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<sup>99</sup> Nastavni planovi 1972: 65-67.

<sup>100</sup> For linearity as a conceptual means in writing national history more in: Lilian- Antoniou, Nuhuglu-Soysal 2005: 109-111.

The room in the curriculum assigned to courses of non-national, so-called general medieval history (including Byzantine History as a separate course)<sup>101</sup> is twice as large as the national history ones, and approximately the same as the one provided to the history of Yugoslav peoples.<sup>102</sup> The topics, explained from a Marxist perspective had a wider focus: the medieval history of Western and Eastern Europe, Scandinavian countries included!

Since the establishment of postgraduate studies at the Department in 1971, the number of MA theses until 1990 demonstrates that there is a negligible interest in medieval (national) history when compared to modern history,<sup>103</sup> with only four MA graduates between 1982 and 1989<sup>104</sup> with topics focused on the medieval history of Macedonia. Due to the lack of Byzantine studies at the Faculty in Skopje, number of historians obtained their MA's at the Philosophy Faculty in Belgrade, covering topics of the Slavic and Byzantine history of Macedonia.<sup>105</sup> Only two PhDs in medieval history were awarded at the Faculty in Skopje before 1991.<sup>106</sup> One of two dissertations is titled: "Theophylact of Ohrid<sup>107</sup> as a source of the medieval history of the Macedonian people." A PhD on the urban medieval history of Macedonia was defended at the Ljubljana University, and one in East Germany at the Halle University.<sup>108</sup> The dissertation topics, except the one mentioned above, are not particularly focused on "the history of the people", rather more on the medieval history of the region of Macedonia.

On the other hand, from the late 1960s there was an extensive publishing of works<sup>109</sup> by non-historians<sup>110</sup> covering the Slavic and Byzantine period of Macedonia and the Macedonian people, with international symposiums and conferences.<sup>111</sup> The

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<sup>101</sup> Nastavni planovi (Curricula) 1972: 40-44.

<sup>102</sup> Nastavni planovi 1972: 51-56.

<sup>103</sup> There were a total of 29 MA theses and PhD dissertations covering the topics from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. *86/60 godini Filozofski fakultet* 2006: 175-200.

<sup>104</sup> *86/60 godini Filozofski fakultet* 2006: 176-177.

<sup>105</sup> *40 godini Institut za nacionalna istorija* 1989: 35-38. In the INH' Perspective Programme topics such as *Macedonian Sklavinas, Medieval Roads and Cities in Macedonia, Feudal rulers in Macedonia*, etc. were planned to be researched. CF. *Perspektivnata programa* 1967: 6-8.

<sup>106</sup> *86/60 godini Filozofski fakultet* 2006: 158-159.

<sup>107</sup> Byzantine archbishop at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Ohrid.

<sup>108</sup> *Filozofski fakultet* 1976: 87.

<sup>109</sup> *Istoriografija na Makedonija* 1982: 16-26; *Istoriografija na Makedonija II* 1987: 32-50; *Istoriografija na Makedonija III* 1990: 25-51; *Spomenici za srednovekovnata i ponovata istorija na Makedonija I-II, 1975-1977*.

<sup>110</sup> Archeologists, Art Historians, Slavists, Classical Philologists, Architects, Ethnologists, etc.

<sup>111</sup> The Twelfth World Byzantology Congress in Ohrid was held in 1961; Actes du XIIe Congres international d'etudes byzantines I-III, 1963; *Simpozium 1100-godišnina od smrtta na Kiril Solunski I-*

production of writings in these disciplines considerably exceeded that of the historians.

The interest for medieval (national) history was rather poor, mostly likely resulting from several different reasons: the policy of the academic institutions and the state in general, the main objective of which was to profile experts on modern Macedonian national history; the lack of appeal of the Middle Ages concerning the opportunities for academic career and privileges as compared to study the People's Liberation War and the socialist revolution, the revival, the national movement, etc.; the unappealing postgraduate curriculum; the personal affinities, as well as those of the *academic power structures*. It is worthy to note that several historians choosing a medievalist profile left to pursue their MAs and PhDs to other centers in Yugoslavia and abroad.

Considering the structure of the undergraduate curriculum, the Macedonian historians were educated in a manner fostering historical and national (Yugoslav and Macedonian) awareness and "fragmented" memory. This was further strengthened with an ideology of longevity of the national identity. The academic instructions were not based on what are considered standard and acceptable training methods and practices in the field. The focus was on framing the historical images for the journey through the centuries of the imagined cultural community, and in parallel reinforced with the importance of the national territory where it was formed.

The objective of the post-graduate curriculum was to educate national historians (for different historical periods), and not necessarily to provide a required knowledge and necessary skills at the graduate level. The small number of MA and PhD dissertations covering medieval Macedonian history indicates the marginal position of the medieval studies at that time. However, this is not supported when factoring in the intense production of materials related to the medieval period, as there is an inconsistency in comparison to the limited number of historians in the medieval field.

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II, 1970: 5-293, 5-429; *Iljada godini od vostanieta na komitopulite* 1971: 7-305; *Bogomilstvoto na Balkanot* 1982: 5-250.

## **Narrating the Medieval Past: Examples from Macedonian Historiography**

Memory and narration are phenomena typical for human beings. Left without memory, they are unable to create their own self-image, lacking the set of experiences comprising our identities. The society that does not re-examine its past is burdened by the frozen, often collective structures of narratives raised to the level of paradigms of scholarly established truths, and dismissing all attempts of critical reflection on identities seen as a *process*. Such a society does not re-examine its own origins and circumstances producing it as a system, thereby lacking the knowledge of its current positions as well as its future directions. To know of the past implies to place self in context, and to realize that no one is a lone atom floating about freely, but all of us are products of the surrounding and influencing circumstances even prior to our existence.<sup>112</sup>

One's affiliation might refer to the space one inhabits: the home, the village, the city, the state, the region, etc. Since the moment given territory is "delimited" becoming a state-national territory, the concepts of the shared common past could link inhabitants together. Within that "nationalized" space, various processes of establishing the national culture occur, with the support of intellectuals providing the symbolic capital through which a nation legitimizes its own unique identity.<sup>113</sup>

Generating a one-dimensional and unambiguous national history is difficult when modelled like or based on the already existing complex and contradictory ethnic histories of the region, which in turn have been created with the aim of stabilizing and maintaining particular national identities, thus promoting themselves as the sole authoritative scholarly truth of the respective regional states.<sup>114</sup> In creating the national narratives, the collective memory and collective forgetting are equally important,<sup>115</sup> as people attempt to forget what divided them in the past, while aspiring to remember what presently unites them together.<sup>116</sup> History is primarily seen as self-service and selecting what is appealing, while discarding what is not. Therefore,

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<sup>112</sup> Ćelstali 2004: 28-29; Zeldin 2006: 11-31.

<sup>113</sup> Bourdie 1977; Löfgren 1989: 5-23.

<sup>114</sup> Denfort 1996: 42.

<sup>115</sup> Anderson 1998: 263-289, 286-288. On the role of historians in creating collective memory see: Nora 2004: 19-35.

<sup>116</sup> Renan 1995: 145.

writing history in national modes is oftentimes the generally accepted “departure point” in the professional historiography.<sup>117</sup>

The (ethno) national narrative, the aim of which is to promote an exclusive concept of a nation, is narrating a history which is vibrant, familiar and acceptable. It is not merely a sum of historical data and facts logically arranged, but it also comprises events, motives and actions. The ethnocentric perspective in the narrative from psychological perspective enables the self-esteem of each individual as a member of the group united by common culture, language, tradition etc.<sup>118</sup> From a post-modernistic perspective, these types of narratives contribute to the creation of the self-conscious national community, which national historians only claim to be describing.<sup>119</sup>

Nonetheless, there are numerous reasons obligating professional historians to maintain the critically oriented focus on the nation. Critical analyses regarding nation-building could prove as a valuable remedy for the permanent eulogies and flatteries promoted by nationalist mythmakers, especially in times of political turbulences.<sup>120</sup> Each “truth” considering itself as the only legitimate and untouchable by critical interpretation of the past, as well as the present, is reduced to nothing more than a myth. Complete elimination of mythological interpretation of the past is highly unlikely, since myth is inscribed into the subconscious and could be awakened with certain effort.<sup>121</sup> Establishing a personal and collective critical approach to the past will oppose the mythicization, and provide means to deal with this phenomenon. On the other hand, history does not imply complete (re)construction of the past. Historians encounter various sources, themselves subjective and imperfect interpretations of the past realities. They are also products of authors whose notions were socially shaped and inevitably motivated by their contemporary preconceptions. Each narrative is an interpretation of the past, and the interpretation is inevitably determined by the motives behind its creation. By using various sources, methods and skills, professional historians could merely come close to the past in the attempt to reconstruct it completely. Therefore, rigid conclusions generate complex consequences. The necessity to mythicize is due to a need to integrate the knowledge

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<sup>117</sup> Lorentz 2004: 36.

<sup>118</sup> Petroska-Beška, Najčevska 2006: introduction.

<sup>119</sup> Bhaba 2000: 1-7, 291-322.

<sup>120</sup> Bracewell 1999: 150.

<sup>121</sup> Budak 1998: 27; Kolstø 2003: 1-34.

of the past in a narrative describing the identity of the individual or group. The lack of “historical truths,” i.e. the view of history as a construction, is similarly problematic because it leads towards absolute relativism. Consequently, two diametrically opposite positions emerge: an uncritical acceptance, or complete rejection of the past. Considering these two extreme positions, a potential solution might be the introduction of “consensual” approach with non-static arguments that are in permanent state of potential replacement and mutual predominance as knowledge expands.<sup>122</sup>

Critically oriented historian, same the anthropologist, has the ethical responsibility not to allow principally “destructive” analysis to be used against a group of people whose cultural authenticity was legitimated by the national histories and ideologies.<sup>123</sup> The difficulty is in establishing a relation of responsibility and tolerance,<sup>124</sup> since “from an anthropological standpoint, all identities and cultures have been equally created and equally true,”<sup>125</sup> even though all national histories are not necessarily equally accurate. Simply because a given national histories are based more or less on “objective” or “righteous” historical evidence than others “does not imply that the culture or the identity legitimized by said history are any less ‘true’.”<sup>126</sup>

Quite often, the West-European national histories and their respective identities have been considered stable, “canonized” and “unproblematic” as oppose to the “small” or “peripheral” nations, in particular with those with “problematic” identities. They should inevitably be re-examined, however not to the point of their total deconstruction and dismissal. The thorough rejection of discourses of the *epoch* discussed in previous chapters opens up the danger for de-identification and potential zealous mythicization of the past.

To consider how this theoretical frame could be applied on the historiographic narratives from the Macedonian national history regarding the medieval Slavic/Byzantine period, selected examples from the body of historiographic interpretations are provided to demonstrate the identification pattern, and in particular, the concept of the nation and its evolution beginning in the Early Middle Ages. From the viewpoint of other Balkan (national but no less nationalistic) historiographies, as

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<sup>122</sup> Ricoeur 1985: 29.

<sup>123</sup> Denfort 1996: 51.

<sup>124</sup> Žižek 2008: 660-682.

<sup>125</sup> Denfort 1996: 51.

<sup>126</sup> Denfort 1996: 51, f.n. 12.

well as from the viewpoint of the critical historiographic discourse, these narratives certainly leave room for debate. The Macedonian historiography approach based on partiality, and the criticism levied such approach by the neighboring historiographies and critical oriented historians, does not fully consider the context and the need for national building. In the comparative analysis of identity building patterns in the region, the anthropologist I. Dičev notes: “Macedonian historians and intellectuals had a difficult task of bridging the gaps between the ancient kingdom of Alexander the Great, the 10<sup>th</sup>- and 11<sup>th</sup>-century reign of Tsar Samuil, and their contemporary socialist Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, appearing on the map in 1945.”<sup>127</sup> As such, Dičev never contested the legitimacy of the need to create a historical continuity through such a pattern, and only studied the similarities in the regional technologies of identity building.

National histories describe the location, the heritage and the culture of a nation (state) through temporal and spatial representations. The national/geographical space marks the territorial borders of the nation, while the national time frame characterizes its evolution. The two representations legitimize the nation as a geographical and cultural entity in time and space. They are conceptual instruments in creating, writing, as well as studying history.<sup>128</sup> The idea of common origin is an inevitable component of all ethnic ideologies in the process of constructing the ethnic/national identity. It is at the same time problematic. Without common ethnic identity and ancestors, how many generations should we go back in order to find the source of the present day ethnic identity? The answers, according to Eriksen, would always depend on the social context.<sup>129</sup>

My efforts to grasp the term *ethnogenesis*, most often employed by national historians and ethnologists, have most often proved difficult to say at least. “Ethnogenesis” as a concept was historically conditioned by the situation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. At best, it has selected and analyzed the circumstances, components and features contributing to the development of the distinctiveness of a people.<sup>130</sup> The process of *ethnogenesis*, i.e. the early history of the Macedonian people according to historiographic interpretations, began in the Early Middle Ages, following the arrival of the Slavs. The history of the Macedonian Slavs was thus

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<sup>127</sup> Dičev 2003: 272.

<sup>128</sup> Lilian-Antoniou, Nuhuglu-Soysal 2005: 110.

<sup>129</sup> Eriksen 2004: 123.

<sup>130</sup> Ćirković 1997: 173.

interpreted through various political events and processes until the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>131</sup> The region of Macedonia, inhabited by various Slavic tribes, has been defined according to the ancient notions of the term, while the toponym itself appeared and disappeared throughout the centuries. Such defined geographical area,<sup>132</sup> which considerably larger than the present day Republic of Macedonia, provide the context on which Macedonian historiography is based and follows the national evolution through time. As in numerous other instances of national historiographies, a teleological grasp of historical processes is promoted, and the temporal dimension in the texts is essential in the consecutive definitions of the Macedonian nation.

The Slavic/Byzantine heritage of the region of Macedonia, confirmed by the various humanistic disciplines, is an important authentic and symbolic capital in identifying and legitimizing the Macedonian ethnic nation. This is how the medieval past is interpreted from national perspective: “everything Slavic... starting from the Slavic literacy in the language of the Slavs from Macedonia created by Cyril and Methodius, through Clement and Naum of Ohrid, Father Bogomil and the Bogomil Movement, all the way to Samuil’s Slavic Empire and the numerous uprisings taking place exclusively on Macedonian territories throughout the Middle Ages, *is the history of the ancestors of contemporary Macedonians...*”<sup>133</sup> I have chosen this particular quote since it expresses the basic idea of the medieval national history. It summarizes the key identification pattern from the glorious Slavic past of the Macedonian nation, presented in detail in the standard *Istorija na makedonskiot narod* (*History of the Macedonian People* 1969), and covered in historiography and other disciplines in particular. The same markers to the Slavic heritage could also be found

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. *Istorija na makedonskiot narod* I, 1969: 59-79; Antoljak 1985: 5-939. The work consists of 34 articles and a monograph, all divided into 6 themes: 1. narrative sources for the history of the Macedonian people; 2. Macedonian sklavinias and the ethnogenetic processes; the military/administrative affiliation of the parts of Macedonia under Byzantine rule; 3. the monograph of Samuil’s State and articles on the same topic; articles on the 11<sup>th</sup>-century uprisings of the Macedonian people and the Bogomil Movement; 5. articles on the economic history of Macedonia, and six articles on toponymy; B. Panov is the author of the third volume of *Srednovekovna Makedonija*, 1985. As the first volume, *Srednovekovna Makedonija* is a collection of various articles divided into five topics: 1. the Slavic colonization of Macedonia, ethnogenetic processes, creating the Macedonian sclavinias and their development into semistate formations; 3. Samuil’s Empire and the 11<sup>th</sup>-century uprisings of the Macedonian people as well as the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century battles for conquering Macedonia; 4. papers dedicated to the Cyrilomethodian tradition; the deeds of Clement of Ohrid; the Bogomil Movement; 5. urban history, etc.

<sup>132</sup> *Makedonija kako prirodna i ekonomska celina* 1978, reprint of the 1946 edition.

<sup>133</sup> Taškovski 1974: 12-13; Cf. Taškovski 1970: 231-259. The author places the birth of the nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

in D. Vlahov's<sup>134</sup> work (*Macedonia – Comments on the History of the Macedonian People*), published 20 years prior to the standard history. Vlahov writes “We have something to boast with and be proud of... we endowed Slavism with the brothers Cyril and Methodius, the Salonika (Thessaloniki) apostles, creators of the Slavic alphabet and literacy, men who 11 centuries ago gave the Slavic world the instrument to enlighten and develop that very world.”<sup>135</sup> The author narrates the history of the Macedonian people from the moment the Slavs arrived to the Balkans. In both examples, the perceived beginnings of the national identity and praise of the national ancestors is similar. The message that the Macedonian Slavs endowed the whole Slavic world with literacy is crucial, accomplished by stressing the universal impact of this glorious past, legitimizing the Macedonian nation as a part of a broader Slavic universe.

The linear history in the first image, expressed through listing the glorious ancestors, promotes the idea of continuity and homogeneity of the cultural community in time. Hence, this cultural community (that is, the “Macedonian people”) existed as early as the Middle Ages, when its journey through time began. In comparison, the periodization of history in the first volume of the standard *History of the Macedonian People* (1969) begins with the “foundation and the development of the ancient Macedonian state” – the age of Alexander the Great. Even though the focus of this section is on the history of Macedonia and not that of the people, it implies this cultural component in the history of the region. Nevertheless, within the structure of the book covering a broad historical period from Antiquity to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this section is written in fifteen pages.<sup>136</sup>

In conceiving the nation as a cultural community traveling through time, in Macedonian historiography Samuil's medieval state holds a particular place in the national grand narrative.<sup>137</sup> In the early 1970s, the composer K. Makedonski wrote the opera *Tsar Samuil*, which is nowadays again performed at the Macedonian National Theatre. The medieval Samuil's state is presented as the link with the modern

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<sup>134</sup> Dimitar Vlahov is one of the old prewar revolutionaries and a renowned Macedonian intellectual.

<sup>135</sup> Vlahov 1950: 18; Vlahov 2003.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. *Istorija na makedonskiot narod* I, 1969: 33-49. To the history of Ancient Macedonia 15 pages only are devoted.

<sup>137</sup> Taškovski 1961; *Istorija na makedonskiot narod* I, 1969: 117-142; Antoljak 1985: 237-698; Panov 1985: 42-50; Melovski 1976: 177-183.

Macedonian state and expressing the glorious state traditions regarding the region of Macedonia.<sup>138</sup>

Evoking the historical traditions<sup>139</sup> was the predominant criterion in legitimizing the claims of “historical nations” in Europe. Analyzing historical maps from a late-19<sup>th</sup>-century atlas published in Bulgaria, which define the whole Bulgarian “historical tradition” between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, M. Todorova states that: “as is to be expected, they fix moments of greatest political expansions of the Bulgarian state when it incorporated Dobrudja and Macedonia, and at various times part or all of Serbia, Wallachia, Albania, Bessarabia, etc. (...) There is no doubt that the whole historical argument was focused on Dobrudja and Macedonia, and particularly on the latter, the perpetual wound in the Bulgarian national psyche.”<sup>140</sup>

The history of Samuil’s Empire (as well as other topics), has been the subject of fierce debates between the Macedonian and the Bulgarian official historiography. These debates most often take place outside the academic and within the political sphere, regarding the ownership of and the rights to this or other historical sequences. The “Samuil’s debate” is only one of the typical examples of the tendency to “privatize” the historical heritage and the strife ensuing between the contestants. In these symbolic wars over the heritage, the contents of the identity emblems themselves are in fact far less significant.<sup>141</sup> In cases when history is the subject of fierce contest, so this is the objectivity too, that “alleged product of Western rationality.”<sup>142</sup> The disastrous strategies of essentialism in the region, starting from the assumption that there can be only one outcome and solution after the “thorough study of history,” result in discounting the possibility of multiple answers or ambiguities. The problems as indicated by M. Herzfeld are not typical only for the Balkans.

Samuil (976-1014) reigned over a relatively large medieval state in the Balkans, which was built on the political remnants of the former Bulgarian medieval state defeated by Byzantium in 976. The political centres of Samuil’s State were Ohrid and Prespa, situated on the territory of the current R Macedonia, far from the traditional political centers of the Bulgarian medieval state. Samuil’s state was

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<sup>138</sup> On the other hand, Tsar Dušan’s medieval 14<sup>th</sup>-century Serbian state, comprising the Macedonian territory too has not been included in the state traditions of the areas of Macedonia.

<sup>139</sup> Mishkova 2004: 269-293.

<sup>140</sup> Todorova 1995: 79.

<sup>141</sup> Dičev 2003: 273.

<sup>142</sup> Herzfeld 2004: 158.

defeated by the Byzantine emperor from the *Macedonian dynasty*, Basil II, who was afterwards called *Bulgaroktonos*.<sup>143</sup> There have been various theories on Samuil's origine, and for a long time considered to be of *Armenian origin*.<sup>144</sup> In the Bulgarian official historiography<sup>145</sup> and national imagination, Samuil's state is presented as the continuance of the previous medieval state, while in the Macedonian official historiography<sup>146</sup> and national imagination it is presented as an authentic and distinct state creation solely of the Macedonian Slavs.

The exclusiveness of both sides in presenting this medieval episode results from the applied methodologies in the service of national mythomanias - the literal interpretation of the fragments in the sources, or their disregard in accordance with the primordial perspectives of creating the *ethnogenetic* connections. From the viewpoint of the critical historiographic discourse, the motives behind such an "inventive" history writing are in the uneven national historical foundations, so that differences in the quality and quantity of documented past have become the cause of "either pride or frustrations in the nationalist *cousines*."<sup>147</sup> Either way, the interpretations of the Samuil historical sequence in the abovementioned historiographies is an excellent example. On the one hand, it shows the need for evoking "historical traditions" in the process of legitimizing, and the right to participation in history in the Macedonian nation building. D. Taškovski noted that: "the physical annihilation of the Macedonian people is only a step away, since, should you deprive a people of its history, you in fact deprive it of its very existence."<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, it shows an instance of fierce competition over the identity emblems between the two contesting (national/istic) readings of history. Finally, we could see the range of interpretations and current consequences resulting from *retrospective nationalism* when applied to the 10<sup>th</sup>-century realities! What other connection (except imaginary) or what impact could the Samuil's sequence have on the two modern ethno-national states?

Furthermore, why would a 9<sup>th</sup>-century heretic movement, the so-called Bogomil Movement, earn a place in the national historiography? Part of the region of Macedonia in the 9<sup>th</sup> century belonged to medieval Bulgarian state, and part comprised the Byzantine provinces. While reviewing the presentation of the Bogomils

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<sup>143</sup> Ostrogorski 1969: 286-288.

<sup>144</sup> Adontz 1938: 1-63.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Drinov 1909 : 317-364 ; Mutafčiev 1943: 280- 300; Blagoev 1925 : 485-590.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. f.n. 134.

<sup>147</sup> Jordanovski 2001:, 269.

<sup>148</sup> Taškovski 1974: 12.

in the historiographic narratives,<sup>149</sup> the “justification” of their presence becomes apparent. The “inquisitive” researcher would “discover” that this heresy first appeared in Macedonia, resulting from the *escalated class struggle*, since its “population felt the feudal and political oppression the hardest”!<sup>150</sup> Puzzled by this revelation, the researcher might think that the population in other parts of the Byzantine Empire, or in the medieval Bulgarian state, was probably more fortunate. Sympathizing with the oppressed Macedonian population (*the proletariat*), s/he would argue with the Bulgarian and the Byzantine exploitative establishment (*the bourgeoisie*), especially with the former since immediately after conquering the Macedonian areas: “*the Bulgarian state machinery repressed the self-governing traditions, imposing thereby feudal exploitation.*”<sup>151</sup>

The researcher will also learn that even though the sources reporting of this movement are scarce, “there is no scientific doubt on the existence of the priest (Father Bogomil), who was certainly a member of our clergy, in contact with the masses and sharing their views.”<sup>152</sup> S/he will, among other things, find that the Bogomil belief was new movement, despite the incorporated elements from Paulicism and Manichaeism, beliefs brought by the colonists from Asia Minor. The aim of the Byzantine colonization policy was to “break the compactness of Macedonian Slavs.”<sup>153</sup> The surprises, however, are endless: there was a legend of Father Bogomil indicating that he was born in the village of Bogomila (near the modern day city of Veles), where he lived and died. It is of no importance that the information in the legend, as in all legends, are not necessarily been confirmed by written sources. What is important according to the narrative is that “the Bogomil Movement could only have appeared in these Macedonian regions *since the very name of the village of Bogomila testifies for the emergence and activities of the Bogomils in Macedonia.*”<sup>154</sup> Instigating the people and spreading their heretic belief as opposed to the official Christianity, the Bogomils were brutally persecuted by the Bulgarian tsar, according to the instructions of the Constantinople archbishop Theophylact. The narrative ends:

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<sup>149</sup> Taškovski 1961: 27-80; Panov 1985: 247-287; *Istorija na makedonskiot narod I*, 1969: 107-116.

<sup>150</sup> *Istorija na makedonskiot narod I*, 1969: 111-112.

<sup>151</sup> *Istorija na makedonskiot narod I*, 1969: 109. I. S.’s cursive.

<sup>152</sup> *Istorija na makedonskiot narod I*, 1969: 112.

<sup>153</sup> *Istorija na makedonskiot narod I*, 1969: 112.

<sup>154</sup> *Istorija na makedonskiot narod I*, 1969: 112. The scholarly merit of the argument need not be commented.

“neither imprisonment nor the execution of a large number of Bogomils, could have destroyed it since it became *people movement*.”<sup>155</sup>

Irony notwithstanding, this short digression demonstrates what type of incredible interpretations result from the combination of the national/nationalist and the socialist/Marxist discourses when applied to a medieval phenomenon. Historiographic interpretation of the medieval “local” episode tends to unite the two ideologies of the Yugoslav socialism, the class and the national, thus legitimating the regime. In this metanarrative, the Bogomils are representatives of the national and social-revolutionary movement, which struggled for social justice as early as the Middle Ages!

Within these ideological frames, the above mentioned interpretations of the (national) Slavic past allow the individual to locate him-/herself in time; to interpret the present; and to anticipate the future. Providing an existential security as well, these narratives instruct, remind and motivate, comprehensively confirming their affiliation to the uninterrupted present.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to relate, from a historical/anthropological perspective, the various phases in the complex historical processes through which the Macedonian national identity was established.

In the first part of the paper, I discuss the processes through which (pre-state) Macedonian nationalism was articulated as opposed to the “older” nationalisms in the region. This can be defined as particularly defensive and relatively weaker compared to its opponents. The motto “we are neither Bulgarians nor Serbs nor Greeks” is the central axis around which the Macedonian nationalism was articulated.

The idea of free Macedonia and a separate Macedonian identity culminated and was legitimized with the founding of the Macedonian federal republic within SFRY. A distinctive characteristic of the process is that the national ideology in SR Macedonia included various and oftentimes contradictory discourses: the nationalistic, promoting unique identity; the Yugoslav, for unity and brotherhood of the Yugoslav people and the dogma that “there is no free Macedonia without SFRY”;

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<sup>155</sup> *Istorija na makedonskiot narod* I, 1969: 115.

and the internationalist/meta-national, i.e. class discourse. These diverse and mixed theoretical and ideological discourses created an ambiguous situation, which is one of the main differences between the Macedonian and the other e.g. regional nation building processes.

In the second part of the paper, I analyze the concept of historical education in SR Macedonia within this discursive interdependence. According to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century pattern of nation building, history as a discipline was expected to provide the context, significance and continuity of a nation, linking the past and the future through national narratives. For that purpose, I examine the professional education of historians in general, at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, and the examples of historiographic narratives specifically discussing the medieval past.

The review of the history curricula has demonstrated that the main aims of history education on undergraduate level were: fostering the national sentiment (Yugoslav as well as Macedonian) and affirmation of the socialist ideals; certain historical knowledge and skills; and promoting the historical national longevity within the common history of the Southern Slavs. The history of the Macedonian people through space and time is core of the postgraduate history curriculum; therefore, the national historian was shaped at the higher levels of education. The curriculum further indicates the modest knowledge and professional skills acquired at this educational level. The low number of MAs and PhDs covering the medieval topics implies the negligible interest in profiling medievalists, which on the other hand is partially contradicted by the production of materials on the medieval past.

The historiographic publishing in the first two decades after 1945 primarily focused on the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century history of the Macedonian people. This effort was expanded to include the Middle Ages since the late 1960s. The key identification characteristics of the early history of the Macedonian people/nation refer to the medieval Slavic past in the Balkans-region of Macedonia. These narratives report the idea of the origin and the development of the cultural community. The nation, seen as perennial, is moving through time and space, unchanged in character or ideal, while the collective protagonists and the individual heroes, confront the historical circumstances and enemy threats. The objective is to define the “borders” between the members sharing the common past, and those that do not. Historical events that occurred in the area of (SR) Macedonia, which became national (i.e. Macedonian) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through a selective reconstruction of the past has become “ours”, e.g.

Macedonian national history. Produced in the appropriate socio-political and ideological context, these narratives evoke and remind the current generation of its debt to the illustrious collective Slavic ancestors, and noting the injustices done by the “Other”. Finally, these narratives could also be interpreted as providing a context for permanent collective action in response to the current challenges and problems in the process of consolidation of the Macedonian “imagined community.” While the developmental path of the Macedonian national identity has certainly some challenges, it isn’t less legitimate than other national identities, either in region or further.

From the viewpoint of the identitary reality, these narratives might be considered as the catalysts enabling the stabilization of the Macedonian national identity. However, from the viewpoint of the critical historiographic discourse, their function might be questionable, since focusing on the nation (and the class struggle) and researching medieval history in presentist manner, results with a “distorted” reading of the past and promoting retrospective (ethnic) nationalism under socialist guise. The argument that the ethnocentric reading of history had once contributed to stabilizing the Macedonian national identity could neither dismiss nor disregard the destructive component of ethnic ideologies. In the equally complex political and social circumstances of the Macedonian society today, such permanent and enhanced ethnocentric reading of history contributes to the destabilization of the Macedonian ethno-national identity itself, which in the previous century had been legitimized through such historiographic discourses. In addition, it degrades history as an academic discipline and paralyzes the necessity for further professionalization of Macedonian historiography.

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