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**DANCE CULTURE AND IDENTITY:
THE FOLK DANCE SCENE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
BETWEEN 1975 AND 2005**

Ivona Opetcheska-Tatarchevska

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Dance Culture and Identity: The Folk Dance Scene in the Republic of Macedonia between 1975 and 2005

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*In Bosnia do not sing in Serbia do not dance,
in Macedonia neither sing nor dance¹*
(Yugoslav proverb)

Introduction

This proverb reveals one of the greatest Yugoslav stereotypes for the folk/musical identity of Macedonians throughout the socialist period. What, however, has happened to the “danciest” and “the most musical” people in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY)? Where have the 2000 different folk dances from this nation’s repertory (as the folk artist Pece Atanasovski once counted) disappeared to? What has happened to the Macedonian dances, which published ethnographic sources dating up to the 1970s, described as being a ‘living tradition’?

I begin this analysis from the premise that music and dance folklore is a medium where the ongoing process of building the ethnic and national identities of all ethnic communities in Macedonia takes place. Regardless whether it is *local* or *national*, it is the least disputable identity as far as Macedonia is concerned. That is precisely why I am interested in how the “vivid” image of the Macedonian nation as “singing” and “dancing” has been reduced to a dance repertory of practically 5 types of dances for social dance occasions in nearly all ethnic communities. I would also like to examine why there were only little over 15 thematically diverse *folklore choreographies* to mark the sixtieth year of the active existence of Macedonia’s institutionalized folk scene.

¹ The meaning of this proverb is that in Bosnia, which so famous for its songs and talents, one (a visitor or a foreigner) should not sing since s/he could not match with the local talents. Serbia is most famous for its dancing talents and one should restrain from dancing to avoid being embarrassed. Macedonia is famous for both, its singing and dancing, thus one should try to avoid either since the local population is so skilful in these two fields.

The subject of my research within the *New and Ambiguous Nation-Building Processes in South Eastern Europe* Project is to map the complex and contradictory processes occurring in the heterogeneous folk dance scene in the Republic of Macedonia between 1945 and 2005, in the context of building the national identity of Macedonia. Due to the absence of any anthropological analyses of the Macedonian folk dance scene, this paper (based on sources from 1975-2005) is only an introduction to the doctoral thesis on this topic¹. As such, it reviews and sets the system of:

- the three dominant state cultural/political concepts in which dance folklore in Macedonia existed/exists;
- its connection to the national-identity-building process through the involvement of different social and political organizations in the process of designing, institutionalizing and realizing this scene;
- the varied structure of the system of folk dance culture “carriers,” as well as the media (conditions) in which this culture exists.

This paper places special emphasis on the period between 1975 and 2005, in which several different concepts of dance culture intertwine. Starting with the social conception of folklore in the “Brotherhood and Unity” period (1945-1970), followed by the ethnic differentiation which has been predominant from 1975 up until today, and finally, the latest transitional attempt to unite the folk dance scene into a multicultural² (which, some argue, in the Republic of Macedonia boils down to a bicultural) concept, I shall attempt to add new insights to the prevailing narratives of the state-building process in the Republic of Macedonia. Often societies experience real and potential conflicts between majorities and minorities³ who are rarely equal. This social inequality also manifests itself through different “types” of culture, including folklore. As group domination generates resistance, it also finds a powerful mean of its expression through art and culture.

In the process of self-identifying and redefining the identities of the ethnic communities in Macedonia, folk dance culture has had a central role in building a subjective feeling about ethnic, religious, and other similar matters. These forms of social contest have often reflected emotions such as patriotism, racism, elitism, nationalism, and are thus closely related to manifestations of collective identities as well.

The central topic of this paper⁴, therefore, addresses the forms of legitimizing the social culture relations within the institutionalized folk dance scene, in the context of Republic

of Macedonia's state-building. I pose several key questions which answers will assist us to understand the processes of institutionalization, development and transformation of the dance scene in Macedonia:

- What is the position of the folk dance scene in the Republic of Macedonia between 1975-2005?
- What are the variables and the constants in the process of institutionalizing and developing the scene, here named as mediators, moderators and carriers, on a local and national level?
- How is the vast network system of forms and ways of presenting dance folklore, through which the diverse ethnicities in Macedonia have been manifested, organized?

In addition to these questions, I will also elaborate on the repertory policy later in this paper. What kind of social life images have been projected on this scene? What kind of cultural history should be remembered and which one should be forgotten? What cultural history has been revived after the 1991 Independence of Macedonia? I chose this particular approach since it directly reflects the nature of my ethnographic experience. I believe that the best way to recontextualize the general topic is to present the complex, sometimes divergent, processes of the folk dance scene in the Republic of Macedonia in the period between 1975 and 2005.

These developments in the folk scene have long been under my personal observation from several viewpoints: from the real-life experience of a participant in folk dances until 1994 (as an active folk dancer), from the perspective of an active participant in organizing aspects of these events (board and committee member of different festivals and ensembles), and finally, from the standpoint of an ethnographer and a researcher.

Folklore from being a Factor in the “Struggle for Developing Production Potentials” to the “Support of a Prosperous and Tenable Development”⁵

The subtitle indicates the two extreme concepts (chronologically speaking) of folk culture on the level of state cultural policy in Macedonia in the 1975-2005 period. Other than the terminological division, conceptually, it is hard to observe any large differences between

the first concept from 1975, when dance folklore was defined as an important factor in the “struggle for developing production potentials” and the later concept, in which the phenomenon is defined as the “support of a prosperous and tenable development”, and which was also promoted in 2005 in the *National Culture Program for the 2004-2008 period*. In addition to these two approaches, in the period between 1975 and 2005, a parallel, but fairly strong third concept appears - that of the ethnization of the folk dance scene. It has been persevered on both local and national levels, but has never been publicly promoted. During the socialist period, music and dance folklore was identified by the political elite as being a particularly significant idiom for presenting Macedonian national identity. Research has shown that the institutionalized folklore in the socialist period was more a form of mass education, an “Agitprop”-activity and recreational tool for the “working people”, with the purpose of improving the “productive strengths of labour”⁶. It was also a professionalized activity, defined as a branch of the labour culture. In fact, *Tanec* (which literally means *Dance*), the professional song and dance ensemble, was registered as a labour union organization.⁷ The vast network of arts and culture societies (ACS) belonged to the so-called *cultural self-activities* (this term was coined by Marx and meant free creativity in which a person “feels thoroughly at home with himself...and experiences his energies as his own”). Nowadays this term is referred to as *cultural amateurism*⁸.

The ideological backdrop of the “brotherhood and unity” ideology, along with the existence of “working class”, “working people” as a primary social stratum during Yugoslavia, delivers the first conception of the folk scene in Macedonia that has an explicit social dimension to it. The active participants were workers from all ethnic communities living on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. These workers “in the frontlines” were responsible for engaging the army of factory workers, the ones in the agriculture establishment and other workers in the so-called self-activities.

Folklore as a cultural life-form was planned, analyzed and treated as a “social” activity, having almost an equal treatment with the educational and worker-information activities. According to the creators of cultural policies at the time, collective music and dance memory, combined with individual imaginations, was the key to preserving our historical “roots”. Folklore, including folk dances, were referred to as “a document”, as “an evidences” and “a true chronicle of Macedonian living throughout the centuries of oppression”⁹.

“Culture and self-activities,” including folklore, were organized in different kinds of so-called “free activities” and were as such a “factor in the struggle for developing produc-

tion potentials”¹⁰. As stated in published material from the 25th Assembly of the Syndicates Union of Macedonia – Bitola Municipal Council in March 1979, culture and self-activities should be reintegrated in society according to the Union Labour Law from 1974.¹¹

After the SFRY Constitution was passed in 1974 and the minority cultures were introduced to the mainstream Yugoslav scene¹², the concept of *ethnic differentiation* of the folk dance scene in Macedonia appears as the predominant approach, remaining fully-operational from 1975 till this day. Often these concepts existed simultaneously given that a strong need for presenting local ethnic diversity emerged in the late 1960s. In those days however such ideas for promoting ethnicity were hindered in different ways. In 1968, for instance, the Vlach minority in Struga organized a meeting in the form of a social gathering, calling it a “Vlach night”. In 1971 the Vlach minority formed the Friends of Gorna Belica Amateur Society, fostering traditional Vlach songs and dances, particularly from their village (Gorna Belica, the Struga region) which was completely abandoned at the time. This self-financing society attempted to reconstruct a traditional Vlach wedding in order to preserve their particular cultural and ethnic identity for the generations to come¹³.



1.



2.



3.

Photographs 1, 2, 3

A reconstruction of the Vlach wedding ceremony in Gorna Belica. 1971/1972.

Despite their conscious attempt to promote their ethnicity at the State Folklore Parade in Zagreb, which was the biggest cultural event of this sort in the federation at the time, their group was simply named *Struga* on the banner.



4.



5

Photographs 4, 5

Vlach cultural association "Friends of Gorna Belica" at the State Folklore Parade in Zagreb. 1974.

The reasons for such self-representation could be found in the fact that the political and police structures in Struga during the 1971-1974 period, responded unfavourably to the Vlach initiative for folk gathering; the founders and the organizers of the society were interviewed by the police, and the workers who were active members received formal warnings from their employers¹⁴.

The contemporary conditions are vastly different though: the most recent transitional attempt not only that has not excluded the ethnicization of the folk dance and music

scene, but nevertheless made the effort to unite the ethnically differentiated folk dance scene and represent it as multicultural.¹⁵ One can successfully argue, however, that after 2001 in the Republic of Macedonia, this concept practically verges on biculturalism. Multiculturalism has been promoted as a fundamental idea in Macedonian society after the referendum for Macedonia's independence from the SFRY on 8 September 1991. The strong NGO network, through numerous social projects funded mostly by foreign foundations, introduced the concept of *multiculturalism* in the mid-1990s.

The state, on the other hand, after the 2001 armed conflict, first promoted the multiethnic society concept in the preamble of the 2002 Constitution, whereas in the cultural sphere this concept was promoted in the form of the National Culture Programme for the 2004-2008 Period. In this programme, on a high national level, the multiculturalism of the state, its development and the cooperation with the NGO sector were promoted as part of the priority prescriptions¹⁶. The national culture programme for the abovementioned period, although being a responsibility of the Culture Law since 1998, was passed after six years of preparation in October of 2003. But even four years later even its fundamental principles (*availability, versatility*- in which the multicultural identity concept falls, *openness, responsibility, flexibility*), have still not been sufficiently implemented in Macedonian society.

In addition to state cultural policies, the common people's view in Macedonia regardless of their ethnicity, folk dance practice is still identified as an "ancient tradition" and as a representation of national identity. Folk choreographies (which sometimes aesthetically devalue the semantics, function and other morphological elements of authentic traditional dances) are identified as "tradition carriers" or "keepers of our national identity", on which basis they are performed in a folk manner while often the dancers are wearing (good or bad) copies of traditional costumes. Such rhetoric is found even today, especially in the speeches of political elites or in the printed media where "folklore"¹⁷ is referred to as "the carrier of unwritten Macedonian history"¹⁸. It is precisely in such statements that we see the paradox the position of the dance folklore in society, since, despite phrasings such as these, society (the responsible ministry, the experts) has not developed any mechanisms to distinguish or analyze the contents presented in this dance scene. The latest edition of the *Ilindenski denovi (Ilinden Days)* Festival in Bitola, which took place from 29 July to 1 August 2007, only confirmed this paradox.

Namely, the same programme committee, with only minor changes in membership, has been coordinating the festival programme for almost thirty years. This committee, lack-

ing development strategies, was unable to acknowledge the initiatives taken by this year's presentation of Macedonian ethnicity from Tetovo in an oriental fashion. This effort however received no attention whatsoever. Due to lack of acknowledging inventive presentations¹⁹, the festival has lost its appeal, thus losing public support, and, in the end, its main purpose of transferring authentic knowledge about dance and musical folklore to the generations to come²⁰ - regardless of whether anyone approves and likes it or not. Through this example we can raise the question of quality and quantity in the folk dance scene, since the appearance, in fact, of the Macedonian folk dance in an authentic or stylized form²¹ only represents a compilation of a certain amount of artefacts, the concept of which is constantly being restructured. We must also question the education in this sphere, which has been a strong factor in the overall developments on the folk dance scene²².

The state has, on one hand, been formally creating mechanisms for better operation of the scene through:

- A special department on folklore amateurism, operating within the Ministry of Culture since September of 2005.
- An office for developing and advancing the culture of minorities since 2002.
- A traditional dance department within the Ilija Nikolovski Luj Music and Ballet High School in Skopje.
- An ethno-choreology department at the new Goce Delcev State University in Shtip.
- Financing festivals and manifestations, anniversaries, the work of a state folk song and dance ensemble, arts and culture societies; for which the 2007 budget set aside amounts to a little over 11 million dinar.

On the other hand, there are no thorough ways to consider the quality and quantity in realizing the proposed and planned programmes for the folk dance scene by competent people whose opinions would be valued and implemented.

Mediators, Moderators and Carriers of State Cultural Policies (1975 – 2005)

During the socialist period, the main mediator (between the people and the state cultural policies) and initiator of the state “action” programmes, was the Syndicate's Union of Macedonia. It established a network of municipal councils in the cities and mobilized the

other social/political organizations²³ such as: the Socialist Youth Alliance; the Self-Governing Interest Communities; the Culture and Education Community (with a network of municipal offices); and the Women's Organization of Macedonia. In all the Union Labour Organizations (ULO) it formed a "cultural committee" and a special "culture and entertainment committee". The Syndicate's Union of Macedonia played a key role in "creating" and realizing the planned programmes and action plans of the Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM), hence also of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). Apart from the civil initiatives within the local communities in rural areas, that is, within Workers' Universities and Culture Halls (transformed nowadays into Culture Centres), in urban centres the ULOs were also responsible for creating conditions for developing the labour culture. All the above-mentioned mediators and moderators, regardless of whether they acted among the agricultural population or among workers, had the additional responsibility of organizing what people did in their spare time. For this purpose, the so-called "folklore clubs", "drama clubs", "music" or "arts" clubs were arranged, where workers could socialize and relax after hours. In the previously mentioned Report of the twenty-fifth Syndicate Assembly in Bitola, in 1977, only six of the larger factories in Bitola had council sessions for the *Development of Cultural Self-Activities Only Zito-Bitola*, a factory for food products, started a special initiative for organizing a music and folklore club.

But what happened with the folk groups that had been created after the 1950s euphoria? Why are the late 1960s characterised as being an extremely unfavourable period where folklore amateurism falls into serious crisis²⁴? In the monograph about the twenty-five year anniversary of the *Ilindenski denovi* State Folk Song and Dance Festival in Bitola, an important factor is said to be the tendency of supplanting authentic dance folklore with choreographies of meaningless and unsuitable ballet stylizations and dance folklore from the other Yugoslav republics²⁵. However, taking into consideration that collectivization and industrialization profoundly changed people's lives, both in rural and urban areas, suddenly the context of the presence of a folk dance scene changed as well²⁶. The action plans of the above-mentioned social/political organizations, therefore, allowed for these forms of cultural engagement for the working class and the peasantry, which by moving into the urban centres often had to transform themselves into working class, to be integrated in the above-mentioned cultural self-activities.

The process of establishing the music/folklore and dance (national) identities of every republic in the former SFRY implied that each Socialist Republic had one professional

dance ensemble, such as the as *Tanec (Dance)* in Skopje (Macedonia), the *Kolo (Dance)* in Belgrade (Serbia), and the *Lado (Dear)* in Zagreb (Croatia). The state radio and television networks also formed their own folk music orchestras. For radio and television in Skopje, the *Macedonian Radio and Television Chalgja* was formed. It was an orchestra fostering the Macedonian “urban” tradition. A second *Orchestra of Authentic Folk Music Instruments* was also created, and which according to its repertory, maintained the old “rural” tradition. These two orchestras were a medium for important and influential developments. For instance, the codification of the Macedonian language amongst the population, which was due to the power of the audio-visual medium for mass information.²⁷

The *Tanec* Folk Song and Dance Ensemble from Skopje was formed on 24 March 1949, with a decree by the government of former People’s Republic of Macedonia (PRM). This ensemble was announced in the Government Gazette of 4 April that same year with its fundamental purpose to “reveal the so-far-hidden, repressed and assimilated cultural treasure and to show the world what we are made of”. In the year of its foundation, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, its main objectives are defined in a special article in the decree:

- a) *To foster, develop and raise the artistic importance of folk dances.*
- b) *To foster, cover and develop folk songs.*
- c) *To prepare a programme of folk songs and dances and to present it through public artistic performances.*

With a special resolution of the Executive Council of the PRM People’s Assembly No. 30 of 2 June 1953, the Macedonia State Folk Song and Dance Ensemble changed its name to the *Tanec* Folk Song and Dance Ensemble of Macedonia, and after the independence it once again received the attribute *state ensemble*.

The idea to create a symbol for the Macedonian folk art and culture and of the ‘fraternal peoples and nationalities of Yugoslavia’ was fuelled by a hidden agenda and acting policies. This was reflected above all in the ensemble repertory where traditional dance rituals of a religious context were dismissed from the stage, as well as in the liberalization and hyper-production of the so-called choreographies in which *tradition* was being recontextualised. In those days the general belief was that such recreation was in fact an *artistic advancement of tradition*. Much attention was also centred on the manner in which they presented themselves on the level of the *local* Macedonian and *regional* Yugoslav musical and dance identity of the population living in former Socialist Republic of Macedonia. The

model introduced was very much oriented on the Soviet State Folk Dance Ensemble policies²⁸.

Starting in the 1950s the “official” state ensemble (and the professional orchestras and singers from the Macedonian radio and television) became a dominant form of producing authorized “artistic” dance creations. In Macedonia, in all their variations, these practice persisted far into the post-socialist age. At times, the acoustic symbols of the Macedonian bagpipe, or the emphasized sound of the drums and the zurla, serve as ethnic acoustic illustrations in the choreography *Yugoslavia, Serbia, Rugovo, Vranje*, or *Bunjevki*, etc.

The euphoria or the climax of the state-building creation and of self-promotion in both an ethnic and a national sense, contributed to the maximization and expansion of the network of so-called ACSs (Arts and Culture Societies), and VIGs (Vocal and Instrumental Groups). There is presently insufficient information on the *House of Culture*, the *Cultural Centres*, or within the rural local communities and the larger factories and agricultural establishments (Zemjodelski kombinati). Its greatest “achievements” have been to identify the term ‘folklore’ and the verb ‘dancing,’ and to unify (reduce and standardize) the local rural and urban repertoires. From an ethno-choreological perspective this accounts for an irredeemable loss in the cultural diversity of the vocal, instrumental and folk dance tradition in Macedonia.

The repertoire policy required that a vast segment of the traditional dances and songs on display was removed. This was done partly out of ignorance and partly to meet the obligation of presenting also the folklore of the other “fraternal peoples and nationalities” within Yugoslavia. There was a selection, of one or two songs and dances, intended to symbolically represent each ethnicity within the SFRY. This resulted in the most notable choreography of the day, of a unifying nature and name: *Yugoslavia*. Symbolism could also be found in the staging of the *Kozara* partisan dance at the beginning of the above-mentioned choreography, which symbolically presented the “beginning” of the new state as a creation that was different to the former Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The folk ensemble concerts began, and often even ended, with this choreography.

There was an attempt to create a *prototype* for each ethnic identity. The Macedonian dance prototypes were the contrasting *Lesnoto (Simple)* and *Teskoto (Difficult)*, which were listed in the Yugoslav encyclopedias as being one of the fundamental symbols for Macedonian folk dance and musical culture.



6.

Photograph 6.
Lazoropole's male dance group performed "Teshkoto" in Bitola at the "all peoples" celebration of 11 October 1947

The Festivals as the Main Form of Existence for the Folk Dance Culture

As the main form of existence for the institutionalized folk dance culture, and as a medium for presenting this type of cultural identity, we encounter the various cultural events within the state itself, which are presented in this paper as a hierarchical network of:

a) *Regional, republican and state* parades in several self-activities. Towards the mid 1970s there was such an elaborate network of various parades that every town in the former Socialist Republic of Macedonia had the opportunity to organizationally present itself before the other towns in the Republic. Debar, for instance, organized the *Regional Folk Parade* for South Western Macedonia, Struga organized the *Regional Drama Parade*, etc. The competitive spirit was also present in the programme concepts of the parades, not merely in organization.



7.



8.

Photographs 7, 8

Albanian dance group at the south western regional dance parade in Debar, 16 May 1976. Of significance is the bilingual naming of the event (see left corner of the photo 7 and right corner of photo 8).

The best performances at the parades were rewarded with an appearance at the republican festivals, such as the *Ilindenski denovi (Ilinden Days)* in Bitola or the *Balkanski festival (Balkan Festival)* in Ohrid. Only one representative from the former socialist republics had the “privilege”²⁹ of appearing at the grand federal *Smotra folklor (Folk Parade)* parade in Zagreb;



9.

Photograph 9.

Dance group from "Raspeani struzani" at the "first regional parade for old city culture" in Kichevo . June 1985.



10.

Photograph 10.

Concert in honour of "Youth Day" and the "Birthday of the Josip Broz -Tito" Struga. 25 June 1976

b) *State festivals*, were restricted and not everyone could take part in them. The programme for these festivals was submitted and approved by the so-called *selection committees*. In the name of “preserving” the original form of dancing, the selection committee for *Ilinden Days* in Bitola dared even to suggest changing group programmes on the day of the performance. They even suggested changes in the concept of the rituals that the groups were meant to present, which certainly negatively affected the basic feature of the folklore in general, which is versatility. All this information contributes to the unification of the folk dance image in Macedonia. We would again like to refer to the issue of the educational profiles of the provisional *experts* in the festival *selection committees* and *programme committees* who dared to disqualify the performers if the group in any way went outside the “programme” box of the dance event in question.



11.



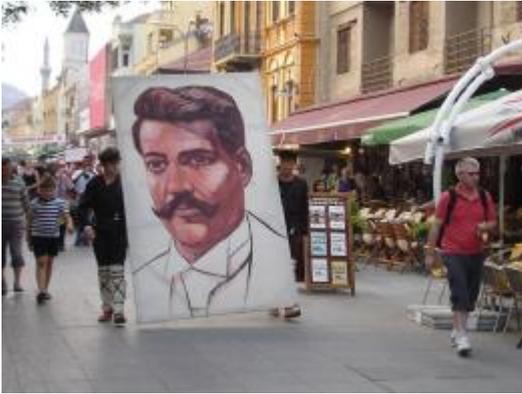
12.

Photograph 11, 12

Dance group of "Raspeani strudzani" at meetings for the “Old City Culture” Festival in Ohrid August 1977.



13.



14. The beginning of the parade



15. "Touch the Soul of Macedonia" - exhibition during the Festival



16. Folk dance group from the Macedonian community in Serbia



17. Dance group from the turkish minority "Karadzaoglan" v. Konche,(Radovish) at the parade
Photographs 13, 14, 15, 16, 17,.

Selection from the "Ilinden's Days" Festival in Bitola. 29 July – 01 August 2007

During these festivals there were also seminars for foreigners and folk group managers and participants were educated about issues concerning Macedonian "folklore". Thus, once again we encounter the issue of disseminating dance folklore knowledge, which under the guise of formal and informal Macedonian folk dance education will form a substantial part of the greater analytical study of this project;



18.

Photograph 18.

Seminar for macedonian folk dances at the "Drim" hotel in Struga. 1988 g.

c) It is interesting to observe the ways in which the folk dance culture is represented outside the Republic of Macedonia borders, through the so-called *tours* and the way they are arranged. As part of the state programmes, international agreements were signed with foreign countries, enabling folk dance ensembles to travel abroad for foreign collaboration in the realm of music/stage activities. Serious activities were undertaken both before and after these tours. There was an outburst of reactions following the *Tanec* State Ensemble Tour into the United States in 1951 (the first eastern-bloc folk ensemble making such a tour in the US). In those days the police were trying to infiltrate their men to travel with *Tanec*; so three first-lineup dancers were left behind, including the greatest Macedonian dance presenter in the USA today, George Tomov. Mane Chuchkov, the director at the time and labeled "politically inept" (due to his political support of Metodija Antonov Chento), opposed these national security interventions in the organization of the tour. Immediately after *Tanec* returned from the American tour, Mane Chuchkov was relieved of his duty as director of *Tanec* and ended his career and his life in a form of a house arrest³⁰.

CONCLUSION

This introductory essay on the folk dance scene in the Republic of Macedonia has attempted to review and question the ways of presenting and perceiving the folk dance culture by the state official cultural policy during the period of intense social changes in the Republic of Macedonia, between 1975 and 2005.

I view the phenomenon of the folk dance culture, placed in the context of the historical process of building the national identity, as a dynamic process, conditioned by several factors. I also envision that the purpose of this doctoral thesis, as an ethnographic study on dance, identity and folk culture, will be to identify the professionalism, amateurism and state policies in culture and education as the key factors for the appearance and development of the divergent folk dance scene in the R of Macedonia.

Analyzing the dance scene as a field of different activities, symbols and practices (cp. Manos, 2002:164), one may, in the process of institutionalizing the dance folklore in Macedonia, distinguish between the main actors of that scene as performers, moderators, and the audience - all with an equally important role in defining the cultural identity of the nation. Therefore, I hope that this essay - as an initial product of an ongoing research - could contribute towards answering questions on the key factors in the contradictory developments in this dance scene, placed in the context of building the Macedonian national identity.

What should one infer from this text as the introductory chapter of a more comprehensive study? Taking into consideration that this topic has received very little expert and analytical attention, the research so far has shown that, when reconstructing the national identity in Macedonia of the last thirty years, the folk dance scene within the state cultural policy was included in three different concepts, only two of which have been operating for a longer period of time:

1. The first important concept is the social one, operating in the brotherhood and unity period, when all “working people” regardless of their ethnic background were actively involved in the dance scene, through different forms of presentation;
2. Even though the end of the 1960s brought about ethnic tensions, in 1975 a space for manifesting minority cultural identities was officially established through the folk dance scene in Macedonia (Maners, 200), and festivals included the appearance of arts and culture societies from the Vlachs, Albani-

ans, Turks, or “Aegeans” (*Egji* – Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia now within the borders of Greece).

3. The third concept was officially promoted in the new National Culture Programme for the 2004-2008 period, when the Macedonian cultural space, including the folk dance scene, was defined as multicultural.

From the three concepts, which were not mutually exclusive but coexisted as parallels, I argue that the ethnic one has been predominant. The fact that as a result of the uncontrolled liberalization of the folk dance scene, different ethnic promoters of dance scene have been ghettoized, hence, instead of initiating a cultural dialogue, this field has been dominated by groups and factions who reject any constructive conversation. As I pointed out earlier, the officially promoted multicultural model, within the political and the cultural space of today, has built a bicultural self-image of the country.

A further serious factor in this phenomenon has been the ambivalent treatment of the folk dance scene in Macedonia. On the one hand, there is the “loud” government support, (more than 130 arts and culture societies and six national festivals have been funded, and also over thirty-five local folk music and dance culture events in last year have been supported); on the other, there is the unrealistically small budget for these cultural activities and the lack of evaluation mechanisms for the realization of the submitted programmes, resulting in an elemental survival of the folk dance scene.

Some factors for these developments may be the result of the cultural policy which recognized *a priori authorities* in the cultural sphere. There has been a lack of real competition for creating a quality value system and aspects of the events have been formulaic - with the individuals or institutions having to stay “in line with the requirements of the current ruling party”.

Evidently, certain individuals and groups have played key roles in institutionalizing the folk dance scene in Macedonia during the past thirty years. The structure of building a professional dance scene required a representative dance ensemble created following the example of the Soviet Union State Folk Dance Ensemble, rather than an elaborate network of amateur folk groups - the existence of which could be analyzed in social, political, ideological or other contexts.

The capacity of these carriers of the scene begs for explaining two important factors in the process of establishing the institutional dance scene:

- The repertory policy, which has shown very little change as an institution during the last thirty years. This inertness in the repertory selection policy played a key role in the process of unifying the Macedonian dance image as well, imposing several Macedonian dance prototypes.
- The educational policy in the realm of dance performance, ethno-choreology, dance anthropology, etc., as one of the constants with a crucial impact on the conditions in the sphere.

The lack of a critical view, whether by the expert or the general public, resulted in glorifying the folk scene, elevating the dance and music folklore as the “keeper of traditions”, as “our unwritten history”, in which:

We Macedonians do not have pyramids or sphinx, our motherland is not decorated with palaces of material monuments, but we do have something that neither centuries, nor natural disasters, nor the demonic hands of tyrants could destroy... That unbreakable force was molded into a unique monument – the folk song the most precious legacy left to us from the past Macedonian life and culture, preserved to this day.

(An often quoted excerpt from the Preface in Josif Chesmedziev’s anthology of Macedonian folk songs, Sofia, 1926)

With the second liberalization of the folk dance scene after 2001, the minority communities used this scene to promote their cause as a struggle for minority rights, therefore the number of festivals presenting the dance folklore exceeded the state’s financial capacities in the cultural sphere. The minority leaders viewed and argued that the lack of financing of their activities means suppression of losing minority rights. In 2002, therefore, an *Office for Developing and Advancing the Culture of Minorities* was formed, through which such tendencies should have been transparently balanced. This office has not been effective yet, and while the general public is satisfied with its merely formal existence, Macedonians judged it as an attempt to introduce a parallel state administration in the domain of culture politics.

In the core of this essay - a review of various questions within which one should further analyze the folk dance scene - the different mediators and moderators of the stage were presented as social/political organizations. During socialism, the coordination was the responsibility of the Syndicates Union of Macedonia - uniting all “working people” operating in the social sphere.

Crucial is the role of professional dance and music instrument ensembles as moderators of the folk dance scene (Nahachewsky, 2000). Over the course of the sixty year-long existence of an institutionalized dance tradition (through which the state has been promoting its policy), they have been responsible for the authenticity of the culture presented, through their representation of historical images and through the quantity and quality of the national dance repertory.

A special role has also been played by the *Tanec* State Folk Song and Dance Ensemble, the professional orchestras and singers from the Macedonian radio and television, who have inadvertently, yet actively, participated in disseminating the latest codification of the Macedonian language after 1945, due to the edited folk songs broadcast on the national radio and television.

The folk dance scene was generally presented at different public cultural events, which in the socialist period formed a hierarchical network of *municipal*, *republican* and *federal* festivals, later (after the independence of Macedonia) distinguished as *state* and *regional*. Regardless of the name or the level of importance attributed to the public event, practically all manifestations were funded for the larger part, by the state. Nowadays, after the first stage in the decentralization of culture of 2004, they are named and funded accordingly - *national* and *local*. It is indicative that after the creation of the above-mentioned Office for Developing and Advancing the Culture of Minorities, a number of initiatives, festivals, and manifestations appeared. They demand government funding based solely according to the ethnicity of the organizing programme board or the ethnicity of the performers, and regardless of content

Nevertheless, the research so far has shown that the folk dance scene, placed in the context of building the national and cultural identity, has formed part of the grand politically-initiated cultural projects, the actors of which still have been receiving certain benefits.

Creating identity through folk culture is merely a process of various negotiations, and often of political manipulations, in which the ordinary citizen makes a personal choice depending on the circumstances. Cultural institutions are here to promote the national and their own agenda.

Regardless of the transformation of the social/political relations, The Republic of Macedonia has in recent times been carefully transforming its heterogeneous folk dance scene through the process of decentralizing the local self-governance, and including it in the sphere of cultural tourism and state branding.

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- ¹ For a clearer analytical insight into the complexity and divergence of the proposed topic on this project, it was necessary to review the fundamental components of the phenomenon called the folk dance scene, which will be followed by an analytical development of the topic in several larger chapters.
- ² Ministry of Culture, 2004, *Nacionalna programa za kulturata za periodot od 2004 do 2008 godina (National Culture Programme for the 2004-2008 Period)*, Skopje, p. 13 and 21.
- ³ Dzordan, G., Vedon, K. 1999/2000, *Kulturna politika - Klasa rod, rasa i postmoderniot svet*, Templum, Skopje, p. 13; translated by Dragan Jakimovski; original: Jordan, G., Weedon, Ch.1995, *Cultural Politics - Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World*; Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- ⁴ I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Rozita Dimova for her selfless efforts with profiling the ideas for this paper. I would also like to thank her for her patience and for helping me to bring it into realization.
- ⁵ The subtitle brings about the essentials aspects of positioning folk culture in the socialist period and the post-socialist transition.
- ⁶ 'Kulturen zivot na rabotnicite vo zdruzeniot trud - Izvestaj za aktivnosta na Sovetot na Sojuzot na Sindikatite na Makedonija pomegu devettiot i desetiot kongres na SSM (Report on the activities of the Council of the Syndicates Union of Macedonia between the ninth and the tenth congress of the SUM), Skopje, 1978 p. 46;
- ⁷ Tanec – *Skopje* a monograph at its 30th anniversary, Skopje, p. 3.
- ⁸ Ministry of Culture, 2004, *Nacionalna programa za kulturata za periodot od 2004 do 2008 godina (National Culture Programme for the 2004-2008 Period)*, Skopje, p. 16.
- ⁹ Sazdov, T. 1979, 'Makedonskata pesna i igra', Tanec – *Skopje* a monograph from its thirtieth anniversary, Skopje.
- ¹⁰ Material from the twenty-fifth assembly of the Syndicates Union of Macedonia, Municipal Council – Bitola, March 1979, p. 46.
- ¹¹ 'Sojuzot na sindikatite vo razvojt na obrazovaniето, naukata, kulturniot zivot i informiranjeto na rabotnicite' - *Izvestaj za aktivnosta na Sovetot na Sojuzot na Sindikatite na Makedonija pomegu devettiot i desetiot kongres na SSM* (Report on the activities of the Council of the Syndicates Union of Macedonia between the ninth and the tenth congress of the SUM), Skopje, 1978 p. 46;
- ¹² 'Ostvaruvanje na megjunacionalnite odnosi' - *Zadaci na Sojuzot na Komunistite na Makedonija vo ponatamosniot razvoj na Socijalistickite samoupravni odnosi (Osnovi za podgotvka na politickite dokumenti i stavovi na sedmiot kongres na SKM)*, Skopje, January 1978 godina, p.39.
- ¹³ Source Lipi Pano (1933) born in Gorna Belica, living in Struga.
- ¹⁴ Source Dana Pano (1937) born in Gorna Belica, living in Struga.
- ¹⁵ Ministry of Culture, 2004, *Nacionalna programa za kulturata za periodot od 2004 do 2008 godina (National Culture Programme for the 2004-2008 Period)*, Skopje, p. 13 and 21.
- ¹⁶ Ibid. p. 13, 15, 21, 35.
- ¹⁷ The term *folklore*, with the exception of a narrow academic community of several related scientific fields, is generally equated with dancing folk dances, especially in associations entitled ACUs (arts and culture societies). This term has largely ("thanks" to inappropriate education - another factor in the processes of institutionalizing the folk dance culture) united practically all activities - organizational, programme, repertory, etc. - related to this activity.
- ¹⁸ An excerpt from the speech of the mayor of Bitola, Vladimir Talevski at the opening of *Ilinden Days 2007* song and dance festival on 29th July 2007 in Bitola. (author)
- ¹⁹ There was a scandal at the *Ilinden Days 1979* festival, when during the performance of the "cult" *Nevestinsko (Bridal)* dance by a New York folk group brought by the choreographer of Macedonian origin, George Tomov, a dark-skinned girl appeared on stage as the bride.
- ²⁰ *Ilindenski Denovi - Bitola State Folk Song and Dance Festival*, a monograph at its 25th anniversary, Bitola, 1995, p. 4-26.
- ²¹ *Ilindenski Denovi - Bitola State Folk Song and Dance Festival*, a monograph at its 25th anniversary, Bitola, 1995, p. 8.
- ²² Ibid. p. 9.
- ²⁶ People from undeveloped regions were forced to move during the industrialization period, so the surgeries and the schools in their villages were being closed.
- ²⁷ The engaged and gifted singers at the Skopje Radio had the task of singing old songs and correcting the lyrics by omitting or replacing all the words that according to the editors at the radio were not part of the standard Macedonian language. This was detrimental to the dialectal versatility, and seriously affected the aesthetics of the melodic expression as well.

²⁸ The model according to which the state dance ensembles in the early 1950s were formed and operating, the Macedonian *Taneč* included, came from the former Soviet Union state academic folk dance ensemble scene (see: Государственный ансамбль народного танца СССР, or the acronym: ГАИТ СССР).

²⁹ Most often, political decisions concerning who and which repertory should represent Macedonia at the federal parades and festivals were brought to the level of the Republican Culture and Education Community of Macedonia (CEC) and the Self-Governing Interest Communities (SGIC) of culture in Macedonia, using current terminology (Ministry of Culture). The research so far has not shown whether at the federal folk parade in Zagreb there were at some point a Turkish or an Albanian dance group as representatives of Macedonia. The only information on the minority communities and their presentation at this festival I have received so far is the one on the *Prijatelji na Gorna Belica (Friends of Gorna Belica)* Vlach dance group, which in 1974, under the reduced name of *Struga* represented Macedonia at this parade.

³⁰ According to a testimony from one of the dismissed dancers from that first tour.

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