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**THE ROLE OF THE ANTHEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA AS A
NATIONAL SYMBOL**

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The nations that can't find their national identities are the victims of other nations.
(Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, 1923)¹

Introduction: The Anthem as an “Internally” Contested Symbol

The political struggle for the international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia was primarily presented and justified as being a struggle against the opposition of the neighbouring countries who denied them their Macedonian national identity and national symbols. With the official state policy of “equidistance”, the bordering states were not potential allies but “hunters” on the prowl for their prey (the Macedonian nation) and rivals going to all lengths to reveal Macedonia as an “artificial construction” with a national identity that was highly dubious or altogether lacking. In this political context, researchers focused mainly on the role of national symbols in the struggle for the international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia, often also presented as a struggle for the international recognition of its national identity: with the state name and the flag as symbols contested by official Greek politics; the Macedonian language and the Ilinden Uprising heroes as symbols contested by official Bulgarian politics; the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Anti-Fascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) as symbols contested by the Serbian Orthodox Church and certain Serbian politicians.

National symbols, however, were not only contested “from outside”, but “from inside” too. Therefore this analysis of the processes of political construction of the Macedonian state symbols will also take the “internal” political struggle into account. Two political fronts may be identified within the political/party struggle: one is between the dominant “community” and the dominant non-majority “community” and the other within the “Macedonian political bloc”, which is mainly between the alternating ruling and key opposition parties of the VMRO-DPMNE and the SDSM. The political struggle regarding

¹ A famous Kemal Atatürk quote, displayed in the Atatürk Memorial Room at the People’s Museum in Bitola.

the definition of state symbols has so far been primarily fought between the political parties of the ethnic Albanians (as opponents of the state symbols voted out by the majority led by the “Macedonian political bloc”), and the political parties of the ethnic Macedonians (as their supporters).

Unlike the flag, the current national anthem of the Republic of Macedonia, *Denes nad Makedonija (Today over Macedonia)* is one of the marginalized national symbols, which has been the target of internal rather than external contention.² The anthem was unanimously adopted in 1992, on the same day as the flag with the sixteen-ray sun. This was done, however, in the absence of all political representatives from the “Albanian political bloc”. Even though the legislation process met the constitutional demands for a two-third majority (88 out of 120 MPs voted “for”), the political contention over the anthem began the day that *Today over Macedonia* was officially declared a national symbol.³ [...]

1. Official Narratives about the Republic of Macedonia National Anthem

1.1 Searching for an Official Narrative

After a relatively unsuccessful walk, both literal and virtual, around the legislative “home” of state symbols, I continued my search from the “grass roots” in Struga. From initial conversations with the locals I learned that not only is the “city of poetry” the place where *Today over Macedonia* was created and first performed, it was also here that – thanks to the local initiatives taken for the formal celebration of this event – that the first official narratives about the Macedonian anthem were constructed.

1.2 The Narrative about “Today over Macedonia”: an Unsuccessful Attempt for Creating a National Myth?

Local initiatives for constructing an official state narrative about *Today over Macedonia* as a national symbol might fall into the category of ongoing attempts for creating national

² This is probably why the anthem was only mentioned once by Danforth [Danforth 1996, 251] in his detailed analysis “of the role national symbols have played in the struggle of the international recognition of the Republic of Macedonia” [Danforth, 1997, 668]. Unfortunately, the anthem as a national symbol was also neglected in Kolsto’s [2004, 189] analysis, in which the focus is not merely on the external, but also on the internal conflicts regarding the Macedonian national symbols and their role in “creating a *separate* Macedonian identity”.

³ The MPs from the PDP-NDP coalition expressed their view at a special press conference, stating that they “could not accept the *Today over Macedonia* anthem since they found it of a communist nature, with its lyrics glorifying the struggle of only one people – the Macedonians, denying the struggle of the other nationalities in Macedonia” [‘Pres konferencija na PDP-NDP...’, 1992, 3].

myths of continuity.⁴ The lyrics for *Today over Macedonia* really do present an excellent occasion for constructing an integral myth of continuity containing all three components: the name of the territory (in the title as well as the verse “Free Macedonia lives freely”); ethnic identity (in the verse “Macedonians are fighting...”); as well as the “age-long struggle for statehood” (in the verses “The flag once again stands over the Krusevo Republic”). [...]

1.2 Narratives about the Official Anthem: Conflict of Interpretations

The official Assembly version of the anthem was published due to the controversial anniversary in Struga in 2001 and provides for an interesting analysis in which one may identify three different conflicts. The first conflict is between the attempt to construct a national myth of the anthem “from below” (based on the local myth of the “Premiere” in Struga) and the attempt to construct an official account “from above” (based on the democratic proceedings at the Assembly which resulted in the adoption of the national anthem). The second interpretive conflict is between the various parties of the “Macedonian political bloc” attempting to create an official account of the anthem in accordance with their “reading”, which is to say, their “writing” of history. We find evidence of the third conflict in the absence of all the representatives of the ethnic Albanians taking part in the ritual of the formal celebration of the sixtieth anniversary in Struga. This absence could be seen as a symptom of the conflict between the “Macedonian political bloc” and the “Albanian political bloc”. The former seek to legitimize the existing anthem as a meta-ethnic national symbol, while the latter tend to oppose *Today over Macedonia* for being an exclusively ethnic symbol that is not appropriate for all the citizens.

1.2.1 The “Official” Parliamentary “Narrative” about the “Official Anthem”

The official narrative about the anthem, told by Stojan Andov, president of the Assembly in 2001, might be interpreted as an attempt to legitimize the national anthem as a state symbol a) enacted in accordance with the Constitution and democratic proceedings; and b) as an inclusive, unifying symbol with which all citizens could identify.

⁴ Brunnbauer distinguishes between three components of the continuity myth regarding Macedonia: “the name of the territory, the ethnic identity and the age-long struggle for statehood” [Brunnbauer, 2005, p.277].

[...] Once the texts submitted for the competition had been considered by a special working group, the Constitutional Issues Committee received three anthem proposals⁵ and decided that the “*Today over Macedonia*” proposal both textually and musically incited feelings of pride, dignity and affiliation for an independent and sovereign Macedonia”. According to the committee, as interpreted by Andov, *Today over Macedonia* expresses the “... age-long endeavour of the Macedonian people towards achieving statehood”.

Andov’s attempt, however, to legitimize the selection of *Today over Macedonia* for having met the criteria required, faces numerous difficulties. Andov’s frail account triggers several questions not only about the claim that the *Today over Macedonia* composition was elected according to the required criteria and democratic proceedings, but also the statement that it “has generally been accepted as the Anthem by the Republic of Macedonia citizens”.

Firstly, it remains unclear how *Today over Macedonia* textually and musically incites “affiliation with an independent and sovereign Macedonia” considering that the lyrics and the melody had been composed fifty years before Macedonia was declared independent and sovereign, and the first musical coverage by Todor Skalovski was produced in 1944.

Secondly, it is uncertain how the selected anthem actually expresses “the natural features of the Republic ... and the modern endeavours towards achieving a democratic society and integration with Europe and the World.” In fact, apart from the ambiguous mention of “Macedonia”, there is only one reference to “natural features” in the lyrics, in the verse “Macedonian mountains resound in song...” How then could one expect a song written by a Communist as early as 1941 to express the “modern endeavours towards a democratic society”? Even more questionable is how the song expresses any *modern* endeavours towards “integration with Europe and the World”, considering that the song mentions no other geographical or political entity apart from “Macedonia”.

Thirdly, there is also the lingering question of how *Today over Macedonia* expresses the “... *age-long* endeavour of the Macedonian people towards achieving statehood”, considering that the song refers strictly to the historical traditions of the Krusevo Republic, not even a century, but a mere eighty-nine years before the Macedonian national anthem was proclaimed.

Nevertheless, one of the most controversial objections regarding the selection of *Today over Macedonia* as a national anthem is as to whether the song in any way expresses “unity

⁵ It refers to Taki Hrisik’s *Himna (Anthem)*, then *Today over Macedonia* in Todor Skalovski’s musical coverage and Aleksandar Dzambazov’s *Da ni bides vecna (May You Be Eternal)*.

and cohesion". This objection prevailed in the post-conflict period, when the sixtieth anniversary of its first performance was celebrated. In his analysis, Andov stresses that "*Today over Macedonia* has generally been accepted as the anthem by all citizens from the Republic of Macedonia". However, the statement made by Boris Trajkovski, the at that time president of the Republic of Macedonia, in a telegram that was read at the celebration sheds a somewhat different light on the whole issue. In this telegram Boris Trajkovski first delivers the general view that "The anthem is one of the most distinguishable symbols of statehood and an expression of the unity and determination of the citizens of all countries." Immediately afterwards, he expresses the "belief that our freedom-oriented anthem will resound all over, bonding and uniting us with our motherland for ages to come." ["Telegrama od Pretsedatelot na Republika Makedonija Boris Trajkovski", 2001, 25]

Trajkovski's belief that the anthem will successfully accomplish its mission as a bonding and uniting symbol in the future might also be seen as an admonishing suggestion that its mission had not been achieved by the end of the post-conflict year of 2001. This is indicated by the absence of political representatives of the ethnic Albanians from Macedonia participating in the sixtieth anniversary celebrations for the "anthem" in an ethnically divided Struga.

One may detect two more tendencies in Stojan Andov's "official narrative": the marginalization of the formal celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the premiere of *Today over Macedonia* in Struga, and the emphasis of his own role as "one of the national fathers" who took an active part in defining the national symbols. [...]

1.2.2 Selecting the Official Anthem: Much Ado About Nothing?

The *Today over Macedonia* national anthem was a contested symbol not only at its original enactment, but also during a parliamentary proceeding for selecting a "new" anthem for the Republic of Macedonia. The analysis of the conflict between the members of the jury responsible for the lyrics and those responsible for the melody of the songs, as well as the conflict regarding the authorship of *Today over Macedonia* has been undermining the "official myth" that the anthem, as a "generally accepted" symbol, had been selected following all democratic proceedings. [...]

1.3 Struga Narratives about the (Un)official Anthem

The official narratives about *Today over Macedonia* describe the *democratic* proceedings that took place after the adoption of the new Constitution in 1991 as being a significant event. The citizens of Struga, however, have attempted to create their own official narrative about the anthem, whereby they primarily describe the *communist* activities during the 1942 celebrations in Struga as being significant. Nevertheless, in the first more serious attempt to create an official history of “Struga and its surroundings”, little emphasis is put on the performance of the “popular song” [Kalanoski, 1970, 90-1]. It was not until 1981, at a scientific symposium in Struga, that the 1942 New Year’s celebration received wider acclaim, precisely due to the “first launch of the *Today over Macedonia a Sun is Born* song”. During the reconstruction of the event conducted by the author Vlado Maleski himself, the song that in 1970 was described as “the popular song” was re-described as “the most popular song in all of Macedonia” and as “a sort of a Macedonian anthem”. [‘Stenographer’s notes...’ 1981]. [...]

After the popularity of the song⁶ reached a climax having been proclaimed national anthem of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in 1989, the citizens of Struga rooted for the same song to be declared national anthem of the Republic of Macedonia, lyrics included. [...]

After proclaiming *Today over Macedonia* to be the Republic of Macedonia anthem, the citizens of Struga have persisted in presenting the act of creating the “anthem” as a historical event, now even of mythical proportions. [...]

In the attempt to create a coherent local narrative about the famed 1942 New Year’s celebration in Struga, conflicting interpretations regarding several instances of the “historical” event appeared. Is the song called *Today over Macedonia*, *Today over Macedonia a Sun is Born*, or *Today over Macedonia a the New Sun of Liberty is Born*? Did Vlado Maleski sing the song alone and accompanied by a guitar, together with Bore Puto (Hadzieski) and Dimce Kosarko (and Stefo Baltoski), or in an improvised choir like everyone else? There have also been great discrepancies about who was present at Sotir Suta’s house during the 1942 New Year’s celebration.

Also an area of conflict is the question as to whether the aria of *Today over Macedonia* was the fruit of Maleski’s work (as attested by Cakarevski) or if it was a song already known and covered. According to the alternative narrative by Sotir Stefan Opetceski, Vlado

⁶ The popularity of the song is, among other things, due to the fact that the programme of the Skopje Radio and Television started and ended with this “ceremonial song”.

Maleski was both the composer and the lyricist. The song *Nadezda bolna legnala* (*Nadezda Has Fallen Ill*), however, was not Maleski's inspiration for composing *Today over Macedonia*, but the songs: *Buketot toj sto mi go dade pri zaminuvanje na vojna* (*The Flowers He Gave Me before Going to War*), *Ajde brakja da mineme preku Vardar za Velesko* (*Let us Cross the Vardar, Brothers, and Go to Veles*) and a third song, *Telegrama dojde od Evropa za sultanot* (*A Cable from Europe Arrived for the Sultan*). These songs were indicated both in content and in melody to Stefan Opetceski, who as an accordion player was present at the premiere of *Today over Macedonia* [Opetceski, 2004, 70-1]. Opetceski's narrative is the alternative version of the official narrative by Todor Skalovski, the first melographer of *Today over Macedonia*, who claims that the melodic core of the song is the folk song *Nadezda bolna lezi i umira* (*Nadezda Has Fallen Ill and Dying*).

Different interpretations from various political perspectives were expressed at the celebration of the "sixty years since the first performance of *Today over Macedonia a Birth* - the Republic of Macedonia anthem", especially regarding the song's symbolism. Thus, according to the president of the Struga fighters' alliance, the song has become "something of a symbol for the fierce militant tradition of the Macedonian people" [Baloski, 2004, 90]. The poetic speech from Romeo Dereban, the mayor of Struga, creates the impression that the song expresses the freedom-oriented spirit and the new age – the "new sun of liberty". According to Aco Sajkovski from the VMRO-DPMNE MP, *Today over Macedonia* has evolved into a "symbol of the eternal struggle of Macedonians for their own identity and personal freedom, for intellectual affirmation", indicating the triumph of "internationalism and the endeavour towards creating a metanational feeling of some sort". Despite the notable objections that the song is a communist creation expressing communist goals and ideals, after analyzing the reasons behind the appearance of the *Today over Macedonia* anthem, Sajkovski infers that "the song is merely a fraction of the grand idea of the liberation of Macedonia, transferred over the generations for centuries". He deems most important that the anthem "included the VMRO goals" and "maintained continuity in the historical struggle of the Macedonian people" [Seeset godini..., 2001, 8].

2. Perceiving the Anthem as a National Symbol

My field research was not only motivated by the question of how the national anthem, as a *public* symbol, represents the national (or ethnic) identity, but also by whether the *private* memories and experiences that the anthem evokes are closely related to the feelings of national (or ethnic) affiliation. [...]

“Which song was performed as the national anthem of the first Macedonian state?” was the first question that I posed. It was deliberately ambiguous and confusing, motivated by the methodological insight that certain ambiguous and confusing questions might prove useful in analyzing ambiguous and confusing identities. Considering that in the Republic of Macedonia there is a thriving trend for speaking about “national symbols” without making reference to any particular existing national states, the question was specifically formulated in such a way so as to evoke memories about the “national anthem” while still confining them to the context of the “first Macedonian state”. According to my personal memories regarding the “first Macedonian state” – the ASNOM Macedonia, founded on the 2nd August 1944 – I expected the majority of my interviewees would share similar memories and that their answers to the first question would, for most, differ when answering “What is the current anthem of the Republic of Macedonia?”

However, after asking the first question and holding mostly informal interviews about the anthem, my original expectations collapsed.

2.1 The Anthem of the First Macedonian State – Ancient Macedonia

*Which song was performed as the national anthem of the first Macedonian state?
- I wouldn't know, a song praising Alexander, perhaps.. King Alexander... the Great..*

(Senior citizen, Bitola, aged 67)

One of the biggest surprises in the informal interviews was the great number of answers placing the first “national anthem” in the context of Ancient Macedonia as the “first Macedonian state”. [...]

2.2 The Anthem of the First Macedonian State – Samuil's State

*The first Macedonian state? Are we talking about a state that isn't Samuil's?
(Twenty-five year old female artist from Skopje)*

When considering the “first Macedonian state” and the “national anthem”, the least number of interviewees referred to the so-called “medieval Macedonian state” – one of the current arenas of the cultural conflict fuelled by the Macedonian and Bulgarian historiographies. [...]

2.3 The Anthem of the First Macedonian State – the Krusevo Republic

Which do you consider the first Macedonian state?
- *The Krusevo Republic... I suppose... (...)*
- *Yes... ten days, who cares...*
(Graduate student from Skopje)

The national myth⁷ of the Krusevo Republic as the “first Macedonian state” is not only perpetuated in the verse “The flag of the Krusevo Republic once again flutters...”, but in the memories of a great number of Republic of Macedonia citizens as well. The myth of the “first republic in the Balkans” has been a crucial element in the national memory re-activated every 2nd August in Krusevo – at a great popular meeting at Meckin Kamen⁸. This ceremony, held each year in front of the Pitu Guli monument, has this year ensued precisely by reciting the *Today over Macedonia* anthem, sung collectively by most of the attendants⁹. [...]

2.4. The Anthem of the First Macedonian State – the ASNOM Macedonia

What do you consider to be the first Macedonian state?
- *The AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) Macedonia. Even though some do not think we were liberated back then. So the first anthem would be Today over Macedonia, as today. Only Today over Macedonia there is a birth of new criminals..*
(Professor from Bitola)

Even though, as expected, most interviewees located the “first Macedonian state in the year 1944/1945, referring to it more often as “ASNOM Macedonia” and seldom as “AVNOJ Macedonia”¹⁰, I still found it surprising to realize that almost as many interviewees could not temporally locate the “first Macedonian state” whatsoever.

Another surprise was the fact that for most of my interviewees the answer to the question about the anthem of the “first Macedonian state” and the answer to the one about the current anthem of the Republic of Macedonia were identical – the *Today over Macedonia* song (which was first declared as the anthem as late as 1989). Only two of the interviewees explicitly pointed out that at the opening of the first ASNOM session, not the

⁷ In his 2nd August speech in Pelince, the president of the Republic referred to Ilinden in 1903 as the “Macedonian national myth and spiritual spring”.

⁸ The prime minister, in his speech at Meckin Kamen on 2nd August 2007, reminded that “... at the beginning of the 20th century, the fundamental aspiration in Macedonia was the struggle for freedom and the creation of an independent state...”

⁹ Nevertheless, as during the crucial moments of the Krusevo and Meckin Kamen rituals, the song *Zemjo makedonska (You Macedonian Land)*, which was considered by the VMRO-DPMNE to be the “informal anthem” and rejected at the new anthem competition, was played.

¹⁰ None of the interviewees mentioned its official name – *Democratic Federal Macedonia*.

Today over Macedonia, but the “forgotten” *Izgrej zora na slobodata*¹¹ (*Rise, You Dawn of Freedom*) song was performed as the anthem. [...]

2.5 The Anthem of the First Macedonian State – the Republic of Macedonia

Despite the latest media trends to locate the traces of the “Macedonian pre-state” in pre-history and the attempts of the “state” archeologist Pasko Kuzman to transform the government’s building into an ancient museum, a few of the interviewees expressed that we could only speak of the national anthem of the “first Macedonian state” after 1991:

What would you say if someone asked you about the first Macedonian state?
- *Well, yes, I would say '91-'92... At least I see it that way.*
(an NGO activist from Skopje) [...]

2.6. National Anthem and National Identity

I am Macedonian first and Vlach second... I signed up as a Macedonian at the last census.

(Ica Guli, grand-daughter of Pitu Guli)

I am Macedonian first and Roma second. I have no other home but Macedonia, I was born here, I grew up here, I served in the army here

(Seed vendor, Krusevo)

A statement from Pitu Guli’s granddaughter, which partly coincided with a statement from a fellow citizen, who preferred the “Macedonian” national identity to his own ethnic identity, was in fact instigated by the question “Is it appropriate to mention Pitu Guli as a Macedonian in the anthem?”¹²

According to the answer from a professor from Bitola, the identity “Macedonians” in the anthem implies something broader than the current use of “Macedonians” in the ethnic sense: “In the anthem, *Macedonians* does not merely imply ethnic Macedonians, but more broadly, everyone fighting for Macedonia - regardless of ethnicity.”

Most other interviewees thought in a similar vein. They believed that Pitu Guli’s being Vlach should be no hindrance for including him with the illustrious Macedonians fighting for “their rights”:

¹¹ “Before the beginning of the Assembly, the people’s delegates and the attending crowd sang the *Rise, You Dawn of Freedom* anthem...” [Stenographer’s notes from the first ASNOM assembly, 292].

¹² Even though Pitu Guli’s name is not mentioned immediately after the verse “Macedonian are fighting...”, the four Krusevo Republic heroes referred to have been perceived in that particular light.

- *Doesn't matter if he's Vlach. He fought with the others for the liberation of Macedonia.*
- *He's Vlach, it's true. But he was fighting for Macedonia, for a Macedonian Republic*
- *Sure, since he was living on Macedonian territory. And he fought for the liberation of Macedonia.*
- *Well, he too was courageously fighting for Macedonia... gave his life even.*

For a young salesgirl in Bitola, the mention of Pitu Guli as Macedonian poses no problem whatsoever: "If he considered himself Macedonian and fought for the liberation of his country, we need to recognize him as Macedonian." According to her, in order to recognize someone as "Macedonian" it does not suffice that he "fought for Macedonia, for the liberation of his country", but he also needs to "consider himself Macedonian". A Skopje student, however, deems that the fact Pitu Guli became part of Macedonian history allows him to be included among the Macedonians: "Well, if the Krusevo Republic is considered Macedonian history, he too is part of that history, I believe..."

A certain number of interviewees demonstrated a tendency to explicitly identify Vlachs as Macedonians. An eighty year old housewife from Skopje, with fresh recollections of the socialist youth singing *Today over Macedonia* as the anthem before every event said the following when asked whether it was appropriate to mention Pitu Guli as a Macedonian, "I don't know what to tell you. We were all one back then." Her statement alludes to the current effects of the state policy of exclusive ethnic identities and to the fact that nowadays all Republic of Macedonia citizens are not "one" as in the socialist "then", but are either Macedonians, or Albanians, or Turks, or Vlachs, or Roma, or Bosnians, or Serbs, or "others".

However, even though the majority of citizens today find it inconceivable that a Macedonian citizen might declare himself Albanian and Macedonian, some Vlachs and the ethnic Macedonians deem it acceptable for someone to declare himself both Vlach and Macedonian. [...]

Several months prior to the beginning of my research I posted a question on my personal blog about whether the inclusive ethnic metaidentity "Macedonian", supposedly promoted in *Today over Macedonia*, is compatible with the current exclusive ethnic identities, promoted in the Constitution, on my personal blog several months prior to the beginning of this research:

Does it [the mention of Pitu Guli] mean that in the lyrics of our anthem, the word 'Macedonians' is being used in a non-ethnic sense?
Sounds nice, but in that case the lyrics would not fit our post-Framework ethno-nationalist reality.
If, however, it is not, would it be fair to only mention the ethnic Macedonians, and not the other constitutive ethnicities mentioned in the preamble of the Constitution?

[Trajanoski, 2006]

In her very first comment, the popular blogger Oxymoron preferred the spirit of the anthem, inspired by the principles of the Krusevo Manifesto, as opposed to the “new game rules” in post-framework Macedonia set by certain “human rights fighters”:

*Have you ever read the Krusevo Manifesto calling out to uprising?
It states: “... regardless of religion, nationality, sex or convictions...”
At the beginning they were all one and they fought for the same thing For equal opportunities.
On an arena for cultural competition among nations. For an independent state For Macedonia. :)
And then certain human rights fighters came along grabbed the ball and set some new game rules ;)*

Although the preamble of the 1991 Constitution referred to the “state/legislative traditions of the Krusevo Republic”¹³, the Republic of Macedonia was not founded as a state belonging to all citizens “... regardless of religion, nationality, gender and convictions...”, but primarily as a “national state of the Macedonian people”¹⁴. Before the dilemma of whether to prefer the spirit of the Constitution of “post-*Framework*” Macedonia or the spirit of *Today over Macedonia* (referring to the Ilinden Uprising for an “independent state” – Macedonia), Oxymoron chose the current anthem:

There is nothing wrong with the anthem – it dearly states that everyone living on Macedonian territory, regardless of religion, nationality, gender or beliefs... is Macedonian. That statehood comes before ethnicity. I find that completely logical and acceptable

The view that “there is nothing wrong with the anthem” was shared by another commentator, who also stressed that Pitu Guli is a “Macedonian hero, regardless of his ethnic background”:

*He fought for the benefit of this state and that is why his name is mentioned in the anthem, as everyone else's, being the most important characters in the Macedonian national history.
Besides, isn't it enough that the Manifesto called out to EVERYONE to fight the enemy?!*

This line of thinking coincided with most of my interviewees' views, convinced that the mention of Pitu Guli only legitimizes the anthem as an inclusive symbol which reflects the struggle of “all nationalities for their rights”, as worded by a young civil activist.

There were also different points of view though. In a conversation with two senior citizens from Struga, for instance, one of them suggested that

¹³ After the changes of 2001, only the “Krusevo Republic tradition” remained.

¹⁴ Even after the “change of the game rules” from 2001, the word *people* has still been used in the sense of *ethnicity*. With the changes in the preamble, the bearer of sovereignty became “the Macedonian people, as well as the citizens living within its borders which are part of the Albanian, Turkish, Vlach, Serbian, Roma, or Bosnian peoples, as well as others.”

... not only Pitu Guli, but they should've mentioned some Turk as well. Remember, there were also Albanians and Turks in the film on the Krusevo Republic. Turks too were part of the people. Some Turks were also being repressed.

It was symptomatic that even though in the film on the Krusevo Republic¹⁵ there were “also Albanians and Turks”, my Struga interviewee rooted only for the mention of “some Turks”, with a vote of approval from the other senior citizen. Only later in our conversation did I discover that they were old friends, one of them an ethnic Macedonian, the other one an ethnic Turk, nostalgically recollecting the times following the liberation, when there was ethnic cohesion in Struga.

I asked two provoking questions about the anthem which triggered various responses: 1) is it fair to include all the other constitutive (ethnic) communities mentioned in the preamble of the Constitution apart from ethnic Macedonians and Vlachs; and 2) is it fair not to mention any women whatsoever?

Instead of a Conclusion – Numerous Unanswered Questions

The purpose of the field research presented in this paper was to investigate the role of the national anthem as a national symbol and as part of the national imagination. In the first section of the paper, which was a study of the official narratives about the current Macedonian anthem, I tried to illustrate why the efforts to construct an official narrative about *Today over Macedonia* failed to create a new national myth for the continuity of the Macedonian statehood. I also sought to demonstrate why the efforts, on behalf of the Struga citizens, to impose the *local* myth of the “first performance of the Republic of Macedonia anthem” as a *national myth*, celebrated as equally important as the myth of the “firing of the first rifle” on 11th October, had failed. As to my opinion, the failed attempts of the Struga citizens are not only due to the irreconcilable conflict of interpretation between the partly “local” perspective¹⁶ and the perspective of the “centre” regarding the creation of the national anthem, but also due to the persistent contention of *Today over Macedonia* as a state symbol by the political parties of the ethnic Albanians, having imposed themselves as crucial partners in the nation-building process after 2001.

¹⁵ The interviewee referred to the *Republikata vo plamen* (*The Republic in Flames*) film, directed by Ljubisa Georgievski (1969).

¹⁶ Even though certain Struga citizens have attempted to justify the myth of the *Today over Macedonia* premiere as an inclusive myth, the political representatives of the ethnic Albanians from Struga have had no part either in the process of constructing the official narrative, or during the official celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the first performance of the “anthem”.

By identifying the “cracks” in the official narrative about the anthem which was reconstructed in Stojan Andov’s analysis, I tried to point out the existing gap between the coveted *new* national anthem and the *old anthem* that was selected. Despite the criteria set in the state competition, envisioning the anthem as an integrative and generally accepted symbol emanating democratic and European values, the “re-election” process of the old anthem reflected the old undemocratic and ethno-nationalist values.

I also attempted to illustrate that *Today over Macedonia* has been a contentious symbol ever since its first adoption, by analyzing several “mythical” conflicts: the conflict between the jury members, the conflict regarding the authorship of *Today over Macedonia*, as well as the “conflicts of interpretation” in the process of creating a local myth and the attempt to establish it as a national myth during the formal celebration of the anniversary of the “anthem” in Struga. At that time, from various party perspectives, *Today over Macedonia* was being both rejected and accepted as a “communist creation” and as an expression of the “VMRO goals” respectively.

In the second section of this paper I tried to show that the ideological messages disseminated by *Today over Macedonia* do not correspond with the existing concepts of the “first Macedonian state”, classifiable in five different periods. This is easy to understand, particularly when taking into consideration the fact that the *Today over Macedonia* lyrics date as early as 1941. The song was an expression of the propagandist attempts of a group of “progressive” communists who, articulating the idea of a Macedonian nation, attempted to draft as many anti-fascists as possible, agitating that “the flag of the Krusevo Republic once again flutters”¹⁷. If one considers the current government trend of inventing a longest-lasting state tradition possible, as well as the insistence on “lustrating” the “communist” past, then one could assume that the success of these processes might question the official myth of *Today over Macedonia* as an expression of the “...*age-long* endeavour of the Macedonian people towards achieving statehood”.

Certainly, the official myth of *Today over Macedonia* as a generally accepted “national” symbol was seriously undermined by signing the “Framework Agreement” and the arguments of the “Albanian political bloc” that the anthem was an ethnocentric symbol that was incompatible with the multiethnic aspirations of “post-*Framework*” Macedonia. Arben Xhaferi’s idea of the anthem being an ethnocentric “code” that needs to be abolished and replaced by a non-ethnic code has been corroborated with the conviction of it

¹⁷ Or, according to one version, that the “illustrious builders of the Krusevo Republic” have been resurrected.

being perceived as an alien and enemy “code” by the members of the Albanian “nation”¹⁸. Ali Ahmeti shares this conviction as well, promoting the stance that “the anthem should represent us all equally, and the two largest communities in that” [‘Liderot na DUI...’ 2005]. Unfortunately, I still find the question of whether the perception of most ethnic Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia corresponds with the views of their political representatives¹⁹ unanswered. Several other questions have remained open:

Will the laws for the new Republic of Macedonia state symbols be passed according to the contested²⁰ “Badenter majority” principle or the “two-third majority” principle?

With regards to the national anthem, will the search for a “mutual identification code” (Xhaferi) as a “factor of bonding and uniting in the future” (Trajkovski) prove fruitful?

During the potential selection of a new national anthem, will it represent a “combination of Macedonian and Albanian symbols”²¹, or the “neutral” non-ethnic symbol Xhaferi is trying to promote?

Will the *Today over Macedonia* lyrics and melody be included as “Macedonian symbols” in any potential combinations, or will some “neutral” lyrics-free melody be favored?²²

After the potential election of a national anthem “acceptable to all citizens”, will the intonation of the Albanian anthem at gatherings organized by the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia cease?²³ If so, will *Today over Macedonia* be accepted as an unofficial “ethnic symbol”, as the flag with the “Sun of Vergina” was accepted as an unofficial ethnic flag by certain ethnic Macedonians?

¹⁸ That is precisely why Xhaferi has suggested that the lyrics of the anthem mentioning Goce Delcev should be deleted and replaced with a composition from Beethoven: “... The Beethoven idea actually represents a liberal way of thinking on how to find a mutual identification code, if ethnic codes are not enough” [‘Makedonja kje ja zagubi bitkata so Grcija’, 2005].

¹⁹ Attempts to hold a conversation in Macedonian about *Today over Macedonia* were rejected by several Albanian shop keepers in Ohrid and Struga. that the reasoning for this was usually that they did not wish to comment on the apparently sensitive subject, or that they had no interest in “politics” whatsoever. Some of them even stated that they did not know what the anthem was.

When speaking to a senior citizen in Struga, I could clearly feel his discomfort upon mentioning the national anthem: “Do you know what the current national anthem is?”

- *Well, some Macedonian... Since it's a separate Macedonian state now... I'm sorry I can't answer your questions. You should ask someone else.*

²⁰ According to Gordana Siljanovska, a Constitutional Law expert, “if the government wishes for these laws be passed with a double majority, they will have to add an amendment to article 5 of the Constitution” [‘Ustavot protiv drzavni simboli...’, 2007].

²¹ As the government spokesperson has recently declared, regarding the possible combinations for the future emblem [‘Ustavot protiv drzavni simboli...’, 2007].

²² According to a statement by a DUI representative, from the time when DUI was part of the ruling coalition: “The anthem should be acceptable to all citizens. It would be most acceptable if it were a lyrics-free melody, since that would be the quickest way to a compromise.” [‘DUI saka himna bez tekst, 2005].

²³ According to the statements by DUI representatives, it should not be expected: “... No, you cannot expect us to renounce the Albanian anthem since we are Albanians. At party gatherings the Albanian anthem will be intoned, while respecting the national anthem” [‘DUI saka himna bez tekst, 2005].

The desire to find the answer to some of these open questions is a motive for further research. For some of the answers one would only need to wait for the outcome of the political struggle in defining the Republic of Macedonia state symbols.

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