THE POET ON THE BRIDGE IN THE BIBLICAL LAND: ETATIZATION OF ART THROUGH FESTIVALS AND BRAND-NATIONALISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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The Poet on the Bridge in the Biblical Land: Etatization of Art through Festivals and Brand-Nationalism in the Republic of Macedonia

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Introduction

In his unfinished, posthumously-published *Aesthetic Theory* (1970/1997), Adorno elaborated on the relationship between art and reason (the rational). He argued that art is inevitably engaged in dialectic with reason in its various forms: as cognition, construction, technique, spiritualization, objectification etc (see also Nicholsen, 1997). Art overcomes the constraining and unreflective nature of rationality through the very act of expression of non-identity (the void) within itself and thus brings us closer to truth. The 'truth-value' of art arises from this ability to sustain "a discrepancy between its projected images (concepts) of nature and humankind, and its objects' actuality" (see also Held, 1980/1995, p. 82). In other words, art has a capacity to grasp truth(s), although in itself art is not an immediate truth. By arguing this, Adorno makes clear distinction between projected images and the objects’ actuality. The slice between these two domains, according to Adorno, creates the very dynamic in which art is considered as an autonomous field, a creative force able to grasp “truths” and to carry a strong critical perspective.

Rightly viewed as a predecessor of postmodernism, he and the other Frankfurt school theorists have made major theoretical contributions in the domain of critical theory, which has constituted one of the central building blocks of poststructuralism and postmodernism. Critical theory has offered new perspectives on the shortcomings of positivism, and new ways to theorize and study contemporary societies. In addition, critical theory, as formulated by

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2 Adorno argued that art and aesthetics do not belong to a separate order and do not obey some pure detached aesthetic logic as such, but instead have a co-determined link to the 'otherness' that, putatively, they sought to escape. Art, aesthetics and critical theory had a 'power' to disclose 'truths' about society. In contrast to "shoulder-shrugging aesthetic relativism," Adorno (1970/1997) insisted that "art is directed toward truth, (but) it is not itself immediate truth: to this extent truth is its content. Adorno, and his Frankfurt school colleagues, reject any pretensions to absolute truth and argued that valid knowledge cannot be detached from knowing subjects — knowledge always has to be conceived as mediated through society and has a dialectic 'nature' in the interplay of the particular and universal, of the moment and totality.
Adorno, has opened up new epistemological possibilities for intellectual traditions such as aesthetics, women’s studies, cultural studies and literary criticism. But, although hailed as a father of postmodernism, unlike the postmodernists, Adorno strongly insisted on the difference between art and life “whose interplay of appropriation and repulsion is not given. Art reaches in gesture for reality only to shrink back from it in the very moment of contact(...) By rejecting reality – and this is not a form of escapism but an inherent quality of art – art vindicates reality” (Adorno 1970: 10).

Indeed, by rejecting and vindicating reality, Adorno saw art to open up critical possibilities. I would extend his argument and insist that it is between rejecting and vindicating reality that art also lends itself to unscrupulous appropriation by the state and its power. Adorno’s distinction between art and life, between objects and projected images, poses the question on the relationship between art and the state. Is art able to resist being circumscribed to dominant state ideology? How easily does art land itself to being used (and abused) by the state or can art subvert and contest state power? I explore these questions by analyzing two art festivals in Macedonia. Fully aware that these two events are not directly synonymous with art and artistic creation, I nonetheless view them as podiums staging and revealing the blurry boundary between art, the state and its ideology where the process of “rejecting and vindicating” takes place.

Departing from the Althusser’s instrumentalist view of the state seated at top and ruling through its “ideological state apparatus” (Althusser 1971), recent works in anthropology and social theory have made significant contribution in re-theorizing the state and its power. James Scott (1998), for instance, by focusing on large processes such as collectivization, argues that “high modernist” states govern by using techniques of representation to make both natural and social worlds legible. The state itself is a reified actor and rules by abstracting data, turning them into highly-stylized models which then are turned into reality (Scott 1998: 132). A number of anthropologists have pointed that the modernist state does not exist anymore in its condensed form as discussed by Scott (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Ferguson 2005, Herzfeld 2005, Sharma and Gupta 2006). They rather take the Foucauldian view of the state as an assemblage of actors and practices, in which nonstate actors such as scientists, doctors, I will add artists too, and NGOs, are as complicit with the process of creating regulatory regimes as states are, and that they act both directly and indirectly as state agents (for more see Foucault 1983). This makes even those, seemingly, state-free social spaces to be implicated in state practices. Hence, the arguments of the neoliberal proponents that in the age of late capitalism the role of nation-states is diminishing...
in the face of the rule of civil society, the market and the large corporations (see for instance, Ohmae 2005), deserve to be questioned. On the contrary, we should ask whether the social space becomes even more “étatized” and condensed with subtle state regulations (Verdery 1996, Ong and Collier 2004).

The central argument of this article is that “étatization” of art in Macedonia has been inseparable part of the nation-building process during socialist Yugoslavia, and in the ongoing post-1991 period. The quality of the recent “étatization” however has dramatically changed: from serving primarily as a financial supporter to public art events during socialism, in current times “arts and culture” have turned into a main field of political struggle where the state creates its political representations. On one hand, the state in Macedonia after the Ohrid framework agreement in 2001, the year of the military conflict through which ethnic Albanians demanded more comprehensive integration into the government and the state structures such as administration or higher education, has been more sharply split from within along ethnic lines. This fission has fostered the state to become at the same time more enforcing (the different ethnic parts of the state aggressively pursuing their own political schemes “for the benefit of their ethnicities”). But, on the other hand, the consolidated ethnic power has triggered additional actors and agents in the civil society, the domain of sciences, and “arts and culture,” to both comply and oppose the ethically-determined policy in Macedonia.

Art-festivals and nation-building

Nestled on the coast of the lake Ohrid in south western part of Macedonia near the border with Albania, and set only 14 km. apart, the two towns of Struga and Ohrid have recently turned into sites of unprecedented political and ideological struggle where ethnic and national borders have been constructed, negotiated and contested. Abounding with architecture, art and intellectual legacy running through medieval and modern times, the Ohrid Lake and its towns have offered an unsurpassed package of delight and resources for students and lovers of art. Indeed, many monographs, PhD and scientific studies have been written on the artistic achievements and beauty of the fresco-painting, wood-carving, archaeological (underwater and land) excavations, the sacred and profane architecture, the

3 While coalition with ethnic Albanian parties in the government has existed since 1991 and the introduction of the pluustrial system, only after the 2001 Ohrid framework agreement the state administration has witnessed a vast employment of ethnic Albanians. In addition to division along ethnic lines, the state has also been sharply divided along party, class and gender lines.
lives of intellectuals such as Sv. Kliment, Sv. Naum, Gligor Prlicev, Krste Petkov Misirkov, Konstantin and Dimitar Miladinov.

In this article however I will focus neither on art per se nor on artistic creations, producers of art, or its consumers. As suggested earlier, I am rather interested in the marriage between art and the state, a union which renders itself so explicitly visible through the two art festivals that I analyze: the Ohrid Summer Festival (OSF) and the Struga Poetry Evenings (SPE). During socialist times, and to a certain extent until 2001, the main visibility of Struga, and especially Ohrid, was as tourist destinations. They have also hosted these, important festivals crucial in promoting artists from Macedonia. Established in 1961 and conceptualized, primarily as a music, dance and theatre festival, the Ohrid Summer Festival has showcased the best of the world class in the domain of performing arts. One year later, in 1962, the town of Struga became a host of the Struga Poetry Evenings, a festival initially intended to supporting and promoting national poets and writers. Gradually, these festivals became internationally recognized transcending the borders of Macedonia and Yugoslavia. They have also been caught up in dense political struggles enabling the political (party), intellectual and artistic elites to appropriate and manipulate them. But only recently the two festivals have become spaces where the state creates, promotes and implements its political agendas, thus making the field of “arts and culture” complicit with the process of constructing, challenging and reasserting ethnic and national borders in Macedonia.

From their initial foundations, these festivals have been undergoing changes, reflecting the processes in which Macedonia, first as a socialist republic within Yugoslavia, and after 1991, as an independent state, has been transforming. Negotiating between localized politics and larger international context the two festivals have turned into battlegrounds of building new political identities by bringing “arts and culture” to the foreground of political struggle. The current governing political party, with its commitment to “strengthening the cultural values of Macedonia,” has made the two festivals vehicles to promoting political aims (especially related to national and ethnic politics). These aims have been conditioned by two factors: the conflict with Greece over the name Macedonia and the new, now legally-sanctioned presence of ethnic minorities, especially Albanians, after the 2001 Ohrid framework agreement. These factors, in effect, have engendered radical politicization of the festivals, altering their artistic content and outlook. By becoming places of two seemingly opposite “cultural” and ethnic politics, the festivals in Struga and Ohrid nonetheless testify to a common process that has had a steady rise: making the domain of “art and culture” as
primary locus of identity politics and of drawing ethnic and national boundaries. Moreover, this article contends that the public sphere of “art and culture,” manifested through festivals and public events, has become the MAIN site where the national and the ethnic character of post-2001 Macedonia has been shaped. The primary reason for placing “arts and culture” at the center-stage of ethno-national politics, stems from the logic of the phenomenon which I call brand-nationalism, a process directed towards producing and promoting Macedonia as a commodity with an equal place in the larger nation-state market. Hence, brand-nationalism uses festivals and public events to (re)create the image of Macedonia targeting consumers such tourists, foreign politicians, NGO representatives, ordinary people (for more on the production of the image of Macedonia see Graan 2008).

Fully aware of the complex and problematic distinction between ethnic and national, I refer to it primarily as an analytical tool to distinguish between the different political agendas assigned to these two festivals. OSF has been utilized to demonstrate the ancient and biblical (Christian) “nature” of the republic of Macedonia. Triggered primarily by the conflict with Greece over the copy-right of the name Macedonia, the ruling parties in Macedonia, especially the ruling nationalist, right-oriented VMRO DPMNE has set up a forceful agenda to show to the world that Macedonia is a biblical land, a cradle of antiquity, Christianity, and Slavonic literacy. Is there a better place for this project than the town of Ohrid, often called “Macedonian Jerusalem,” standing proudly on the shores of the lake Ohrid and waving its ancient (antic) monuments and medieval churches? Could not the town of 356 churches, (“a church a day,” or where a visitor could visit a different church every single day of the year) “affirm” the biblical character of the country and Ohrid? In addition to proving to Greece and the world that Macedonia is old, the mission of Ohrid and its festival is also to “reveal” that Christianity dominates whereas Islam and the presence of Muslim population in the Ohrid area represented by the Albanian, Turkish and Roma communities, should be viewed as marginal and irrelevant.

Struggles over the (multi)-ethnic character of the country have become especially acute after the 2001 armed conflict when the Albanian insurgents demanded major changes in the constitution and the legal outlook of Macedonia. The six-month insurgency ended by reaching the Ohrid framework agreement, co-signed by the largest ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonian parties, according to which in every territorial unit with a minority population

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4 By “cultural” I mean primarily politics with upper case “C,” belonging to the domain of high arts, planned and coordinated by the Ministry of Culture with a clear “mission” to protect Macedonian “culture” (and the “cultures” of the minorites living in Macedonia).
over 20 percent, the language of that population becomes official. By having the population quota and language determining the main character of the territorial units, the towns Struga and Ohrid present sharp contrast: Stu
ga has an Albanian mayor and Albanian population is considered majority.5 This dominance was manifested explicitly during the 2007 opening of the Struga Poetry Evenings when the festival was opened by the minister of culture, an ethnic Albanian, and the mayor of Struga, also an ethnic Albanian. The ethno-political claims of the festivals, I already suggested, sharply depart from the legacies of the towns: Ohrid has always had a strong presence of Muslim population while Struga has always been considered a centre of the Macedonian revival during the 19th century, a home town of the Brother Miladinovi, in whose honour the Struga Poetry Evenings were established in this town in the first place.

Ohrid – Macedonian Jerusalem

“The long term existence of the Ohrid summer festival is established on its tradition. The tradition arises from a place given by GOD, the city of Ohrid – the spiritual metropolitan of the Republic of Macedonia, the city of ancient times with its magical blue lake, a city with long cultural history through the centuries, a city ornamented with the riches of the antic civilization and the first Slav universities in Europe, the city of Samuil’s kingdom and last but not the least, a city representative of the spiritual and cultural history of the Republic of Macedonia. This is the reason why, not accidentally, God sent his noble message to mark the beginning of something that was supposed to happen. And it did: on the 4th of August 1961, mid-summer day. A spark of light dazzled below the marvellous cupola of the ancient cathedral church of St. Sofia – a segment of monumental riches of the city of Ohrid (11th century). That spark and the Macedonian opera Prima Donna Ms. Ana Lipsa Tofovic, marked the birth of this manifestation, later named Ohrid Summer Festival. In the initial years vocal music in the church of St. Sofia dominated in the program concept of the Festival, but with a great endeavour for artistic quality on one hand, and the need for works inspired by Cyril and Methodius’s sacred deed on the other, which will emphasize the importance of the city of Ohrid as a cradle of Slavonic literacy. In the initial years the Ohrid Summer Festival determined itself as a pillar of Macedonian cultural tradition.” (ohridsummerfestival.com.mk).

In this excerpt from the official site of the Ohrid summer festival, the managing director Simovski describes the role of the festival for the town of Ohrid. The explicit link

5 There has been a dispute over the number of ethnic Macedonians in Struga. Many people that I talked to persuaded me that Macedonians have outnumbered Albanians in the town of Struga. It is only in the surrounding villages where Albanians count more than Macedonians. It is due to this “rural” invasion of Albanians that Struga has become albinska (Albanized).
between Ohrid as a “God given place,” the festival and the role of the two for the cultural life of the Republic of Macedonia stitches together different time-periods through the existence of ancient and mediaeval architecture and monuments. This organic link is firstly emphasized by the cathedral-style church of St. Sofia which exact construction date is uncertain because there are no inscriptions that would help to determine it (see table 1). Most likely today's church was either built or restored during the period of the Archbishop Leo who was on the throne of the Church in the period between 1035-1056. Its original shape was a three-naval basilica with a transept, a dome, and galleries on the side naves. This “irreplaceable hall for chamber music” became a central venue for the performances at the OSF: from the fist edition of the festival, “when the first concert on August 4th, 1961 in the church of St. Sofia by the Macedonian opera Prima Dona Ana Lipsa Tofovic filled the acoustic ambient of the church, it became evident that the Ohrid Summer Festival would attract both world-famous artists and audience thirsty for good artistic performances.” Gradually, the festival attracted more and more artists and ensembles from all over the world and in the 70s and 80s many world famous names both from the country (former Yugoslavia) and the world performed at the Festival.\textsuperscript{6} In addition to St. Sofia, the most used spaces for theatre performances were the yard of the church of St. Sofia, Dolni Saraj, Samuil’s Fortress (Samuilova Tvrdina), and the church of St. Naum.

During the Yugoslav Federation, Ohrid Summer Festival, along with Dubrovnik Summer Festival, was considered one of the best in quality in the entire country. After the 1991 independence a major factor that sustained its further existence and confirmed the quality was the 1994 membership to the European Festival Association in Geneva. After being admitted and passing the strict criteria of the association, the Ohrid Festival became an “equal member in the family of European Festivals.” Generously supported by the state, the main funding sources came also from private sponsors although their presence was not as merely emphasized as in the case of the May Opera Festival in Skopje, for instance (Dimova 2007). During the 2007 edition of the OSF however the sponsors’ presence has been

\textsuperscript{6} Some of the most famous artists performing at the festival are: Mstislav Rostropovic, Aldo Ciccolini, Gideon Cremer, Ruggiero Ricci, Viktor Tretjakov, Henryk Szeryng, Salvatore Accardo, Elena Obrascova, Katia Ricciarelli, Victoria de Los Angeles, Maxim Vangelov, Vadim Repin, Julian Rachlin, Ivo Pogorelic and many other vocaland instrumental soloists. The most famous ensembles were: Munich Chamber Orchestra, Virtuosi diRoma Chamber Orchestra, George Enescy Chamber Orchestra, Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, Symphonic radio orchestra of the Austrian Radio, and the choirs such as the Madrigal Bucharest, Glinka from St. Petersburg, the Vienna Children and many others.
overshadowed not so much by national symbols such as the flag or coat of arm, but rather by the antic and medieval character of the venues, as one of my interviewees working in the organization of OSF said, “who speak for themselves and mesmerize the visitors with the ancient and biblical character of our country.”

A key factor that has shaped the character of the festival and the town of Ohrid is the conflict with Greece over the name Macedonia. The copy-right dispute and the struggle over the brand Macedonia has added important dimension by pushing the antic legacy of Ohrid and Macedonia into the “front-game.” This became especially pronounced when VMRO-DPMNE, the right-oriented nationalist party came into power in 1999 with a clear agenda to enforce and straighten the national identity on the country (zajaknuvanje na makedonstinata), and hence instigating many activities in the domain of “C/culture.”

One of their most significant projects was the construction of the site Plaosnik (see table 2). Located in Ohrid’s old town, Plaosnik is an entirely “unique phenomenon”: its new building was completed on August 11, 2002 in the style of a Byzantine church, by paying special attention to typical Byzantine red bricks and mortar. This new construction had been built on an early Christian sacral building dating from the 5th century, which was built over the remains of an older antique building whose cistern was found in the atrium of the newly built temple. The publicity surrounding the construction of this project, and its finalization asserted that this site, Ohrid, and Macedonia, for that matter, rest on a continuous linear history: from antiquity through medieval period until the present one should not question the link that current Macedonia has with its ancient ancestors. Hence, I was told by an official from the Ministry of Culture, no one can say that Macedonia is new.

Another significant moment that made a similar claim was the opening of the antic theatre, a venue that soon became the most-widely used location for the festival performances (tables 3 and 4). The antic theatre was renovated in 2001, a year prior to Plaosnik, and thus became the largest summer scene with 3000 seats. Its opening was in 2001 with the premier of the theatrical project by Ivan Popovski “Macedoine,” followed by other spectacles such as a performance of the Russian ballet and opera, and the concert of Jose Carreras. The importance attached to the scene of the antic theatre became evident to me last year when I attended the official opening of the 47th edition of the festival in the antic theatre stage of Spartacus performed by the Ukrainian national ballet (see table 5). My impression during the spectacular performance staged in front of a large political diplomatic representatives
including the presidents of Austria, Croatia, Bulgaria, was to show that Macedonia is entitled to its claims to antiquity, to its name and “culture” and that this theatre corroborates that.

The speech of the current director stressed the role that culture plays in promoting the country:

Today we can say that the Ohrid Summer Festival presents an exquisite dignity and a distinctive cultural rich both, of Ohrid and the Republic of Macedonia, a manifestation which presents them in the world with great honour. Meeting the 47th performance, we can say that the Ohrid Summer Festival brings about another noble mission of equal competition of artistic values, with the attempt to fulfil new visions with higher aims, reaching the European and global cultural fields. Ohrid Summer Festival is lucky to have the city of Ohrid, but vice versa the city is twice as lucky to have the Ohrid Summer Festival as its treasure (the speech by Toni Simonovski, the manager of the Ohrid Summer Festival at the 2007 opening of the festival).

The 47th edition that I followed in the summer of 2007 indeed featured remarkable concerts such as the Mendelssohn chamber orchestra from Hungary performed in the church St. Sofia, several theatre performances from the Balkans and Europe in the court of St Sofia, concert of the American operah singer Barbara Hendrix performing modern jazz tunes, the ballet performances St. Bartolommeo Night and Scheherazade performed by the Macedonian Ballet, etc.

In the midst of the high-quality performances of the 2007 edition of OSF, there was an unexpected “show” of Vangel Mackovski, introduced in the official program as a Macedonian multi-instrumentalist who plays 17 different music instruments (see table 6). He formed his music band in 1978 and since has performed throughout Europe and Australia. A born Macedonian Vangel has been living in Palma De Majorca for many years, but “has never ceased to present and promote Macedonia and its beautiful music where ever he performs.” His performance was staged in the enchanting court of the church St. Sofia. His show featured popular songs such as Stranger in the night, We all live in a yellow submarine, The Greek Zorbas, the Condor flight, etc. Vangel also included the most popular Macedonian folk songs. His performance was accompanied (or rather dominated) by a distractingly loud rhythm machine, which he mechanically followed with one of his 17 instruments, some of which were a water bucket, a rubber ball, cattle’s bells etc. In addition to his performance, the show featured a female a-capella group from Slovenia called Pella (as the capital of Alexander’s
ancient Macedonia) with 4 singers dressed (wrapped) in white drapes that seemed as vindication to the name of their group. A friend who attended the show along with me remarked rather than like ancient Macedonians, the women had looked like Druids. I was later told that this was probably the highest (or the lowest) point of bad-quality, uninventive, performance to reach the OSF in years since the festival had been “notorious” for its strict criteria and difficulty for many artists to get access to perform there. Most likely Vangel’s patriotism, theatrical display of his and his guests’ love for Macedonia, and his personal connections with the festival’s officials have allowed him to be on the main program and perform on the open-air stage at St. Sofia.7

Throughout the 2007 performances of OSF, dominated by embellished stories of the town of Ohird with its antic and biblical legacies, there was a complete absence of the contemporary presence of Muslim population in the town with an exception of the tourist guide mentioning the “destruction” of the church St. Sofia by the Turks.8 The districts populated with Turks, Macedonian Muslims, Albanian, and Roma people are confined within the margins of the town. The oldest mosque in town known as Cross Mosque (Hadzi-Durgut Dzami), dating from 1466, is deteriorating along with the roads in the Hadzi-Durgut district. The erasure of Muslim presence has been especially acute since the 2001 military conflict, when the Albanian insurgents in Macedonia, after the 6 months of armed struggle demanded more rights in the Republic of Macedonia. Since then, and with the growing pressure from Greece to change the name, Ohrid has become a stronghold of protecting “our identity” (for more on the erasure of the Muslim presence in Greece see Herzfeld 1987, 1991).

The 2001 conflict: the background and subsequent effects

While attempting to report on the border village of Tanuševci in February 2001, a television crew from Skopje encountered a group of armed men who guarded the border but who were not part of the regular border patrol or the Macedonian army. These armed men held the TV crew hostage for three hours. They also destroyed their footage and equipment. A reporter later described the incident in detail, causing public surprise and disbelief in Macedonia, and raising the question of who the armed men might be.

7 A snapshot of his performance can be seen at the following link: http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=199616620
8 “With the arrival of the Turks, the church St. Sofia was converted into a mosque. They ‘took care’ to reshape the church almost entirely so that it could serve the Muslim religion. The frescoes were whitewashed, the ornamented plates from the iconostasis were used for constructing the internal staircase, and a minaret was built above the northwest dome. These undertakings distorted the structure of the entire church” (Guide through Ohrid, 2007).
Speculations regarding the identities of the armed men came to an end a month later. During demonstrations organized by students and professors from the Albanian University in Tetovo in March 2001, armed groups, members of the so-called ONA (Liberation People’s Army formed by ethnic Albanians), attacked the police and military forces who were trying to disperse the demonstrators. This event marked the beginning of armed conflict in Macedonia. The armed group that had attacked the television crew in Tauševci reappeared at the demonstrations in Tetovo, but now in larger numbers, with better organization. They also voiced concrete demands, primarily for changes to the Macedonian Constitution that would lead to greater integration of ethnic Albanians into the mainstream of Macedonian society. From the beginning of the crisis, it became obvious that the international community -- as represented by its top officials, Javier Solana, chief commissioner of the EU and Lord Robertson, the general secretary of NATO -- intended to be fully involved in the conflict. But many Macedonians, along with their leaders, were disturbed by the presence of international officials, given the close ties that had developed between ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and the West after NATO “liberated” the province 1999.

While the West and the international community initially condemned ONA’s violence as a terrorist act, Western rhetoric changed in the months that followed. The “terrorists” became “rebels” and some aspects of their military struggle were treated as justified. Many ethnic Macedonians, especially the nationalists and those in the government, felt coerced, cornered and denigrated by Western support for the Albanian insurgents. Although the West took an active role in trying to negotiate an end to the conflict, ethnic Macedonians and the government did not perceive Westerners as acting impartially. The ethnic war in Macedonia came to an official end much sooner than anyone had expected. The Ohrid agreement signed in August 2001 formally ended the military confrontation. During the two weeks of meetings and negotiations in Ohrid, international mediators required representatives of the four largest political parties -- two representing ethnic Macedonians and two the Albanians -- to negotiate, reach an agreement and implement their decisions within a four-year period.

The first three principles of the Ohrid agreement required: 1) an end to violence; 2) the cessation of hostilities; and 3) the creation of a decentralized government. It soon became clear that implementing the third of these principles would require a new law on local self-government. The key factor that would determine the drafting and implementation of new laws for local self-government would be the size of ethnic groups in Macedonia. As a result, the numbers of people identifying with specific ethnic groups became crucial, and the only
way to determine such numbers was through counting people in the upcoming census. The size of ethnic groups also determined how other principles of the Ohrid agreement would be implemented. The agreement established 20 percent as the cut off point to distinguish between ethnic groups entitled to more rather than fewer rights. The sixth principle of the Ohrid framework agreement concerned official languages. It required the state to provide funds for university level education in those languages that were spoken by at least 20 percent of the population. Although Macedonian is the most widely spoken language in the country, and was declared the official language at independence, the Ohrid agreement required that any other language spoken by at least 20% of the population be also designated as an official language of the republic.

The official census results, which were published in January of 2004, claimed that Albanians comprised 25.2 percent of Macedonia’s population and were the most numerous minority. Ethnic Macedonians comprised the majority at 62 percent. This composition allowed implementation of the Ohrid agreement. Soon after, parliament began discussing the new law on self-government.

The proposed law, however, created new problems. Ethnic Macedonians in Struga and Skopje staged massive protests against implementation of the new law on decentralization, which used the census results to redraw municipal boundaries. The protesters complained that the new municipal borders were “artificial” and were drawn in such a way that Western Macedonia and parts of the North could easily secede from Macedonia to join Kosovo and Albania. Also, ethnic Macedonians living in towns where ethnic Albanians comprised over 20 percent of population feared that Albanian municipal governments would make them “subordinate and discriminated against in their own country.”

**Struga: the town of poetry**

The lengthy sketch of the political reality of the 2001 conflict and the consequences thereafter are crucial for understanding the events that have been surrounding the recent editions of the Struga Poetry Evenings festival. The festival began in 1962 as an informal poetry readings by a number of Macedonian poets in honour of the two brothers, Konstantin and Dimitar Miladinov, intellectuals, teachers, and writers, born in Struga in the early 19th century. Konstantin Miladinov is considered to be the founder of modern Macedonian poetry and each year the festival officially opens with his memorable poem "Longing for the South" ("T'ga za jug") written during his student days in Moscow. From the initial edition of the
festival with mainly Macedonian poets (the first and second generation poets of Socialist Republic of Macedonia formed in 1944 as part of the Yugoslav Federation), in the years that followed other poets from the Yugoslav republics also joined the festival. The festival committee established the award "Brothers Miladinovi" for the best poetry book published in Macedonia between two Struga poetry festivals. By 1966, the SPE turned into an international poetry event and, consequently, an international poetry award called "The Golden Wreath" was established, given to a world renowned living poet for his poetic oeuvre or life achievement in the field of poetry. The first recipient of this award was W. H. Auden. Last year the golden wreath was given to Mahmud Darwish, the great Palestinian poet who has been frequent visitor to the festival. Two years ago the SPE and UNESCO established a close cooperation and jointly promoted a new award called "The Bridges of Struga" for the best first poetry book by young authors from all over the world.

The official festival site claims that:

“Despite the tremendous difficulties and harsh realities that the festival has had to live with - the fall of Yugoslavia, the war in Bosnia, the Kosovo crisis, the political and ethnic clashes in Macedonia, the terrorist crisis after September 11th attacks, a number of political and economic embargoes imposed on the region, the Festival managed to go on and is currently the oldest festival in the world, held in continuation for 45 years. It has successfully flourished and is now one of the most important poetry events in the modern world. And that is it’s a tribute to world poetry and the poets (struskiveceri.com.mk).”

Officially, I was told by the organizers, SPE was the oldest and the most famous poetry festival in the world. Yet, this festival has been saturated with contemporary politics. Its origins, carried the most central mission of the nation-building process in the socialist republic of Macedonia: affirming and promoting the Macedonian language and its literary production. The official ortography of Macedonian took place in 1946, and since then Belgrade and Tito fully encouraged national production in every artistic genre. Literature and poetry however were viewed as central in carrying out this process, distinguishing Macedonian “culture” from Bulgarian or Serbian. In this context, the first editions of the SPE allowed the first generations literary artists from the R. of Macedonia to have exchanges and cooperating with colleagues first from Yugoslavia and later from other countries. The explicit connection that the poetry festival made with the brother Miladinovi in Struga was a
significant political act of stating the distinctness of Macedonian identity differentiating it from the surrounding countries (Dimova 1997).

The first and second generation of Macedonian poets and writers enjoyed full support from the party. Financially and socially encouraged by the state, they played significant role with their literary production in affirmation of the Macedonian national identity. The so-called “angazirana literatura” or commissioned literature although written in Macedonia, addressed primarily World War II part of history, and thus was part of the larger ideological process of maintaining social cohesion in Yugoslavia.

During the first decade of its existence, the Struga Poetry Festival was turning into a world poetry event with an amazing speed. Bringing poets from all over the globe, providing space for their poetry readings, generous gourmet treats including sightseeing of the Ohrid Lake area and the towns of Struga and Ohrid, soon became a compelling feature of the festival which encouraged the most renowned poets from the world to participate.

The Struga Festival between Ethnic Politics and UNESCO’s intervention

And yet, the official membership and support by UNESCO was received as late as 2004. Although UNESCO has been a great supporter of the festival from the seventies onwards (has also been listed as a financial supporter), the official and formal membership arrived only three years ago. What propelled this organization to extend its membership so late? How did UNESCO reach the decision to include SPE as its member?

Main reasons for this decision were the political changes in Macedonia after the 2001 military conflict. Several people involved with the organization of the festival pointed out to me that it was the political situation in Struga and the country after the 2001 conflict had endangered the “life” of this festival and thus forced the UNESCO officials to intervene. Namely, the already-mentioned demonstrations in Struga opposing the new of law of self-governance revealed that the mixed Albanian and Macedonian ethnic population would cause

9 The national belonging of the brothers Miladinovi has been a highly sensitive issue. There have been claims that they were “Bulgarians” given that the edition of their collected volume of folk songs published in Zagreb in 1861 under the title “Bulgarian folk songs.” The brothers died only one year after the publication of the volume, in 1862, in a Carigrad’s prison (present Istanbul) due to their fight against the Greek expansion and the Phanariots.
10 Aco Sopov and Slavko Janevski’s most celebrated poems and required in the school curriculum Oci (Eyes) and V Tikveshko negde! (In Tikvesh somewhere!), for instance, considered as the greatest poets and writers from the first generation, devoted most of their artistic opus to the partisan movement from WWII.
11 Among the most prominent poets participating in the Struga festival some of whom were awarded with the Golden Wreath, are: W. H. Auden, Joseph Brodsky, Allen Ginshiba, Pablo Neruda, Eugenio Montale, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Artur Lundkvist, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Ted Hughes, Makoto Ooka, Miroslav Krleža, Yehuda Amichai, Seamus Heaney, Mahmud Darwish, and domestic authors such as Blaže Koneski.
tensions: since Struga had more than 20 percent Albanian population, Albanian evidently would become second official language in the town, and Albanians would be entitled to other political “advantages.” The mayor of Struga was ethnic Albanian, and sooner than later, Struga would become “Albanian territory.” As an effect, I was told that Albanians felt entitled to “Albanize” the Struga Poetry Festival, because it was taking place on “their territory.”

As a reaction to the passing of the law of self-governance in 2003, a group of ethnic Macedonian poets decided to prevent the festival taking place in Struga. Hence, in 2003, the Struga Poetry evenings took place in Skopje. It was in this period that the president of UNESCO intervened and the organization invited the festival to become a member of UNESCO – in a way to secure its existence but also to show support for the Ohrid framework agreement which was fully-endorsed by the international community as the only way to stop the fighting between the army and the Albanian rebels turning into a full-scale war. Since then, however, I was told that the festival has changed significantly for worse.

As every year, in 2007 too the festival proceeded with its already-established events: the opening ceremony took place on the plateau in front of the Cultural Centre in Struga including a traditional reading of Tga za jug (A Longing for The South) the famous nostalgic lyrical poem written by the Struga-born poet Konstantin Miladinov. The opening ceremony was followed by the section of the festival called Meridians, a poetry reading by various international poets in the Cultural Centre following the opening ceremony.

The second evening entitled Portrait of the Laureate is an event devoted to the year's main award recipient traditionally held in the church of St. Sofia in the nearby city of Ohrid.

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12 There has been a dispute over the number of ethnic Macedonians in Struga. Many people that talked to persuade me that Macedonians have outnumbered Albanians in the town of Struga. It is only in the surrounding villages where Albanians have been more numerous, I was told. The official statistical office in Struga did not want to reveal the census results during my visit in August 2001.
Mahmud Darwish read selections from his vast opus, echoing his refugee experiences through the language of poetry and reaching out to universal feelings within many of us related to displacement and search for home (see table 7). The third event was *Nights without Punctuation*, a multimedia artistic events featuring experimental forms of poetic presentations, with ethno music and video art. The daily poetry picnic at St. Naum springs near the Ohrid Lake including ethnic music and dances from Macedonia was an event of closed character that I was not allowed to attend. The festival closed with the ceremony *Bridges* traditionally held at the *Bridge of Poetry* on the river Drim in Struga, another breathtaking event including poetry readings by the poets and the awarding ceremony (see table 8).

While alert and attentive to the political in the 2007 edition of the Struga festival, I managed to get a glimpse into the magic of the festival that has indeed become a jewel-event for the poets from the world. The shared energy among the poets seated on the bridge, their voices shimmering with love for the written word and the poetic form, the obvious respect for each other, the strong feeling of comradery and kindred spirit soaked with love for poetry, along with the poems dropping from the bridge towards the audience sitting or strolling on the embankment of the river Drim, made the earlier political controversies of the opening, the mayor, the minister, the reaction of the Macedonian poets so distant and irrelevant.

And yet, the strong feelings that remained with me after I had attended the festival, especially after the closing ceremony *Bridges*, and that made me think that this festival is ultimately about poetry and the power of art, were shattered to pieces by the political uncertainties that would arise in the winter and spring of 2008, shaking and threatening the festival’s very existence.

“**Nationalism and Politics are destroying the Bridges of Struga**”

The winner of the golden wreath is usually announced in February of each year. Thus the festival is ready to present its program, the winner and the details of that year’s edition of the festival to UNESCO and to take active participation to the World Poetry Day in Paris on March 21. In 2008, however, for the very first time after the establishment of the award, the winner was not announced in February and the whole procedure came to a halt. The minister of culture appointed a new president of the artistic board, Puntorie Mucha Ziba, an ethnic Albanian poetess, a high school teacher of Albanian language, who due to a personal trip to the US did not convene the board in time to decide on the winner at the required time. Strong
reactions came from the poets and members of the manifestations who voiced their reactions against such irresponsible behaviour. Two weeks after the appointment, followed by outraged reactions of the artistic community in Macedonia, the minister of culture had dismissed her and appointed a new president, the poet from Tetovo Ilijaz Osmani.

After failing to participate in the celebration of the world poetry day in Paris on March 21st. Zoran Ancevski, the president of the executive board last year stated that it was not serious to miss the opportunity for an international introduction of the festival. Going to Paris elevates this festival to higher standards and the omission will affect the international popularity of the festival. Risto Lzarov, a poet and president of the Macedonian P.E.N. center claims that it should not be allowed in the future that the organization of this festival to suffer due to political influences:

It is sad to have this happen to the poetry. Nonetheless, as sad as it is, it gives us strength to proceed more forcefully in creating creativity and artistic production. The Struga evenings and Poetry should be defended against politics which succeeded to mud what artists managed to create. The Struga Poetry Evenings is a Festival that the States stole from the writers and therefore it should be returned. In other countries governments sponsor national manifestations, however they do not interfere in their organization (Dnevnik, March 22, 2008).

Stronger criticisms came from Mihail Rendzov, one of the oldest participants of the SPE and member of the artistic board:

The political interference is not confined only to appointing the new director of the artistic board. There is an attempt to bring in the Ohrid framework agreement within this cultural manifestation and bilanguilism becomes a priority for the director and the minister. This intention has been around for a long time. To take over the SVP has been an old idea. At one point, there was an intention to make a parallel festival, but they didn't manage to do that.Today, due to our passivity and indifference (seirdzistvo) we allowed the previous managing team was dismissed, and Eftim Kletnikov to be eliminated as a president of the artistic board...The literary association, the founder and owner of the festival just watched what was going on. The entire attention was directed towards the “grand” publishing endeavour of 130 books, but we forgot about the SPE which carries the torch of the Macedonian literature.....SPE conducted such an invaluable mission in the world, that even the recognition of Macedonia as a state came as a result of the support of prominent people from other countries knowing us through the festival. Is this part of the dying out of the spiritual torch of
Macedonia? This is not a problem only of writers but of the whole nation and the state. We must not allow the destruction of SPE. We are recognized in the world through SPE (Utrinski Vesnik, 14 March 2008).

The member of the artistic board from the town of Struga, Jemi Hajredini, stated that the first thing that has to be done about the 2008 edition of the festival is to introduce bilinguialism as a standard and to make a commitment to respect this standard. The entire promotional, informational material has to be in Macedonian and Albanian. This is needed to face the reality and keep up with the changes that are taking place in the country, especially in Struga. Translation into Albanian has to be facilitated with the usage of modern technology so that during the program of “Meridians” and “Bridges,” the poems should appear also in videobeam with a translation in both official languages of Struga. The last discussion that I followed in the media was focusing on lack of financial resources and time to realize this intention.

In addition to the deliberations on bilinguialism (dvojaznicnost), the main apprehension was directed towards expecting the announcement of the 2008 winner of the GoldenWreath. Wrapped in delays and anticipation finally the winner’s name was finally revealed: Fatos Arapi from Albania. In an editorial written in Utrinski Vesnik, the reporter Tina Ivanovska criticized the interference of politics with the organization of the festival stating that “nationalism and politics are destroying the bridges of Struga (Utrinski Vesnik, 22 March, 2008).” But at least for the 2008 edition of the festival, the controversy surrounding bilingualism (at least for the opus of the winner) has been resolved.

Conclusion

Do these stories of the OSF and the SPE, then, shed answers to the question posed at the beginning of the article on the relationship between art and the state? I suggest that the two festivals in Ohrid and Struga, although seemingly reveal different processes, are nonetheless grounded in a same paradigm, namely that the state appropriates them in the production of “brand-nationalism.” Through this process, however, the state, as Scott (1997) points out, also becomes a reified actor: it produces itself and materializes its presence. More precisely, rather than having a clear distinction between the state as an agency that affects and regulates these art events, I would argue that the state is, at the same time, produced through these festivals: through them the state acquires its ontological contours. The “antiquization” and “christianization” of the OSF, and the “albanization” of SPE, point out to the intention
that in both cases, either Macedonia as a nation, or Albanians as ethnicity, the state validates its presence through artistic production within the framework of these festivals. It is this type of nationalism that regulates the main dynamics of post-2001 Macedonia. We should observe the transformation of these art festivals within the framework of neoliberalism and neoliberal political-economic regimes which are reconfiguring relationships between governing and the governed, sovereignty and territoriality, power and knowledge, nation-state and its subjects (for more see Appadurai 2006, Ferguson 2006, Hansen (ed.) 2005, Ohng 2006, Sassen 2006, Sharma and Gupta (eds.) 2006, Tsing 2005). The specific conflict over the name between Greece and Macedonia however adds a unique dimension to the logic of neo-liberal sovereignty, to belonging and national sentiments in Macedonia.

In conclusion, these two art festivals, become the main vehicle for conducting ethnic and national politics. But also, these art festivals become the primary sites where the brand of the nation, the brand of the state, and the brand of the different ethnicities are produced and packed for further international and domestic consumption.

Table 1. The church St. Sofia in Ohrid

Table 2. The monastery Plaosnik rebuilt in 2000.

Table 5. The Ukrainian national ballet performing Spartacus at the opening of Ohridsko leti 2007 at the antic theatre.

Table 6. Vangel Mackovski, the instrumentalist with 17 instruments.

Table 8. The Bridge of Poetry on the river Drim in Struga

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