

# **From Creation to Promotion: Arts and Politics in Macedonia and BiH from 1945 until the present**

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## **Introduction and research objectives**

The inextricable, highly polemic and openly missionary relationship between arts and politics during the Yugoslav federation (1945-1990), especially in the early nation-state building phase, begs for empirical and theoretical explication. The re-articulation of this relationship after 1991 also deserves careful examination since it reveals features of the “new democracies” and the larger nation-state regime. Grounded in my previous research experience on nation-building in Macedonia, this project builds on the assumption that art has been one of the key building stones of the process of national consolidation in the republics of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina during Yugoslavia and in the period afterwards. Similarly to the other collective projects central to the nation-state building process initiated and supported by the Yugoslav government (e.g. production of official national history, folklore, or officially-institutionalized language), art had a specific role in creating distinct Macedonian and Bosnian identities through institutionalization of different art events and venues, and by encouraging specific individual art creation. In the period after 1991, art has been mostly used for promoting the newly-formed independent states.

By demonstrating the ability of artists to create individual pieces of art, but also promote and celebrate the national specificity of their respective republic, I surmise that arts and artists during Yugoslavia were caught in conflicting roles of, on one hand, national affirmation of their particular republic, and on the other, of celebrating a common Yugoslav bond that would confirm the “natural” socialist and south Slavic unity of the Yugoslav federation. At the same time, arts was both a vehicle and crucible of modernization and international connectivity that put Yugoslavia on the international scene as a modern socialist country which larger orientation was towards the future rather than towards the past. The first generation of poets and writers in Macedonia, for instance, reveal this triadic mission imposed on and expected by artists: they were pioneers of nation-state building writing Macedonian, so-called engaged poetry (*angazirana poezija*) and were directly involved with politics (e.g. the prominent poets and writers such as Aco Sopov, Jovan Plevnes, Luan Starova were appointed as Yugoslav ambassadors in Senegal, Peru and Tunisia respectively).

By validating and encouraging the artistic potential and talent of individual artists, the process of promotion of art in Yugoslavia was far from spontaneous. It was rather carefully planned by the government, requiring subtle negotiation between national specificity, Yugoslavianism and internationalism. Was the ability to balance and provide enough but not too much of these three components a key to success for the artists? What was the road of their success? What was the mobility pattern among the artists between the Yugoslav republics, the socialist countries and the larger international artistic

exchange?<sup>1</sup> What was the reaction of opposing dissident forces who objected to such a tight link between arts and establishment and who refused to comply with federal imposition? What are the differences between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia in the link between arts and politics?

Other than the historical aspect, I will address the role of arts and nation building after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The central hypothesis that guides my research is that from the initial role of being linked with *creation* of national identity in Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina, art has played a significantly different role after 1991 and has become primarily a force of *promotion* of these two independent states on the larger international scene. Although I mentioned that the promotion component was present during Yugoslavia too, I suspect that since 1991 the promotion dynamics are completely different. While during Yugoslavia the international promotion was on behalf of the Federation which role on the international scene was significant and fortified by the symbolic prestige of the idiosyncratic Yugoslav socialism different from the Soviet one with many elements of consumerism and western capitalism, after 1991 Macedonia and Bosnia are faced with a different larger context. Both states occupy marginalized role in the international market of nation-states and have been implicated in ethnic wars and conflicts. How has the rise of ethno-nationalism affecting artists and artistic production in these two countries? What role does the international presence through peace-keeping missions have in both countries? How and why have films and visual arts been most predominant mode of promotion for both countries since 1991? How is the artistic production affected by the ethno-national characters of the countries and what is the role of artists in the condition of ethnic tension?

To answer these questions I will use the following data-collecting strategies:

\* Interviews with artists, art officials (directors, curators, and committee members), politicians from the ministries of culture, foreign affairs, etc.

\* Participant-observation during several important art events and art institutions in Bosnia and Macedonia.

\* Institutional analyses of events and institutions (e.g. Struskite veceri na poezijata, Majske Operne veceri, Art Colonies in Galicnik, Strumica, Kumanovo, Ohridsko Leto, Sarajevo Film Festival, MESS, the national galleries of modern art, philharmonic orchestra).

\* Analyses of artistic production that has made significant impact: novels, poems, musical pieces, visual arts creations such as paintings, sculptures, movies).

\* Analysis of print media: catalogues, reviews, archival documents on particular decisions during Yugoslavia.

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<sup>1</sup> In founding the first institutions related to the music scene in Macedonia for instance, the founding role was played by several musicians from Croatia who were “expelled” from Croatia and sent to Macedonia to be involved in establishing a philharmonic orchestra, the Academy of Music etc.

