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Old Boundaries and New Cultural Landscapes of a Multiethnic City in Modern-Day Macedonia

Abstract

In the context of Macedonian and Albanian ethnonational discourses functioning in North Macedonia that constitute a significant component of the system of the city's symbols and semantics, we come upon confrontational strategies between the Slavic and non-Slavic entities that function in the cultural area of Skopje. On the one hand, these confrontational strategies determine the polemic nature of urban space, understood as both material cultural space established on the basis of places of memory and cultural artefacts, and, on the other hand, they are a product of space as an area of activity of actors and social and political networks, often used to construct incoherent self-defining processes within the space defined by the influence of ethnocultural processes.

Based on the two entities in this discourse, one Slavic and one non-Slavic (Macedonian and Albanian), a semantic model of the city, described as a "polemic city", was created as an outcome of the empirical research performed. This model can also be used for analysing other cultural areas characterised by polycentric

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interethnic relations. A significant point of reference, a category that constitutes the key component of this analysis, is the transformative nature of the place as an area of stigmatisation by ethnic, cultural and political determinants and subjected to a game with the participation of social and political actors. Anthropological research distinguished semantic categories referring to the place and the contestation of place, all of which I have analysed, drawing special attention to the Slavic and non-Slavic entities in Macedonian and Albanian discourse in North Macedonia.

Keywords: North Macedonia, multiethnic city, borders, Albanian and Macedonian discourses.

Introduction and Research Framework

The city is a system of numerous signs that create the semantic structure used in symbolisation processes with the participation of many social actors affecting the consolidation of this created image. Elements constituting the urban structure as a system of symbols include projections of images of the past, the urban palimpsest, and representations of collective spatial memory which, subjected to political discourses and practices, generate a continuous reproduction and transformation of systems of symbols, setting the framework for a political and social (collective) identity.

The concentration of symbolic elements within the city structure creates an urban iconography of the nation: a space for historical memory through multiplication and overlapping of images of different cultures and political visions that inspire the development of symbolic power within the ethnocultural *topoi* of place.

In this paper I will refer to the case study of Skopje – the capital of the Republic of North Macedonia – as an example of a multi-ethnic city featuring polemic discourses around the urban landscapes, which constitute and reinforce already existing boundaries. The polycentric character of the city emerged in the early 20th century, when work on the construction of a “new city” was initiated along the south bank of the River Vardar. The aim of this transformation was to diminish the symbolic and representative importance of the northern part of the city, accommodating the heart of the Ottoman city together with a medieval fortress [*Skopsko Kale*].

There are at least two cities (Skopje): the city of critique, intensity and imagination, and the sparkling city of turbo-culture and turbo-politics, symbolised by numerous monuments in the turbo-baroque style (Kolozova & Sadiku, 2013, p. 37).

Breaking the natural division of the city between the private and the public (perfectly maintained in the Ottoman structure) and by introducing polycentrism, i.e. breaking up the city centre through symbolic divisions and boundaries set within one spatial organism, the city underwent complete decomposition, to a state that can be described as the progressing polarisation of several centres that represent, in fact, different centres of authority.

In this paper, I will present and analyse Albanian and Macedonian political and cultural discourses present in modern-day North Macedonia. Based on the analysis of contestatory reactions, actions taken in the media, and by intellectual circles and nongovernmental organisations, I will draw attention to the opinions of different civic and nongovernmental communities, taking into account the political context which precipitated the appearance of a new ideological and aesthetic order, accompanied by the spatial and architectural reorganisation of the city of Skopje.

Attention should be drawn to the special role that politicians play in the process of constructing and controlling collective identity in Macedonian and Albanian discourse, which reflects the relations between collective (official) and individual self-defining processes observed in North Macedonia after 1991. As social actors and disposers of the instruments of power, individual political units are responsible for shaping the collective or official vision of identity processes, embodying and expressing the (self-defining) national concepts in an open manner.

I have used the knowledge acquired in the field to show universal processes and discursive structures in a particular place, namely Skopje. "Inside research" allowed me to get to know discursive practices related to the transformation of systems of symbols in Skopje's public space and, therefore, to formulate proper questions and select adequate sources for further analysis.

I have observed how different social and political actors assigned meaning to systems of symbols in various source materials, focusing on ethnocultural duality and action-oriented optics and locating them in specific places. This type of research orientation allowed me to discover how actions of individuals engaged in a specific network of practices can influence the production of discourse under real social and political circumstances. This further shows how the experiences of social actors affect the form of practices and discourses constituting them. The civic narrative, primarily encompassing the standpoints of both Macedonian and Albanian intellectual elites, contains materials from 20 in-depth interviews with Albanian and Macedonian social actors (activists, journalists, faculty members, political analysts, members of NGOs, etc.) who actively participated in activities contestatory towards the new identity policy in North Macedonia between

2006 and 2016 (until the Colourful Revolution emerged). An analysis of the interviews will make it possible to restore the dynamics of Macedonian and Albanian, i.e. “contestatory”, civic discourse in the first years of the *Skopje 2014* project and to show how intellectual circles in North Macedonia construct “national” and “supranational” cultural identities, revealing their polemic attitudes towards official discourse. Furthermore, the research reveals discrepancies between political and cultural discourse related to the *Skopje 2014* project.

The first proposed category, “memory of place”, refers primarily to statements of respondents who pointed to the most important memorable layers of the city and also to the functionalisation of specific artefacts and space significant to social practices. Within this category, three levels of codes have been distinguished, which can be defined in diachronic and synchronic terms as three separate though interacting narratives which are essential for presenting the full essence of the social and political transformations in North Macedonia.

Two categories and an analysis of integrated discourses – the “memory of place” and the “image of place” – directly related to processes of constructing systems of symbols distinguished three codes that allude to three different political and sociocultural orders. The Ottoman city and the oriental model form a category embedded both in the layer of collective memory and in the city’s physical fabric, which has been taken over, to a large extent, by Albanian discourse due to the attachment of this tradition to Muslim culture. The next layer of urban space, attributable mainly to the Slavic tradition, is the Yugoslav city and the modernism of socialist architecture, notions that refer directly to the value of social solidarity and, something frequently emphasised in Macedonian and Albanian discourse, try to reduce the category of a divided city in favour of poly-dialogue and community.

The identity of the city referring to the Ottoman tradition is, to a greater degree in Albanian discourse and to a smaller degree in Macedonian (Slavic) discourse, an important point of reference in building the memory of place and defining its further divisions together with contestation of the present antique and Macedonian tradition. Today, it would be difficult to refer to Skopje in aesthetic, social or cultural terms without mentioning its Ottoman tradition, which had a profound influence on the city’s spatial and cultural character. Skopje has undergone significant changes, first as a regional centre in the Ottoman era (its economic and cultural influences reaching lands as far apart as south Serbia, Sandzak, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania), then as a city of national character, the Macedonian capital during the times of Yugoslavia, and then within North Macedonia from 1991 onwards.

The last category that has had an impact on the city's transformation, within the context of the system of symbols and social practice, is the process of 'antiquisation' of public space, which is linked to the phenomena of Europeanisation and de-Ottomanisation of Skopje. The process can be observed primarily between 2009 and 2016, in the development and implementation of the *Skopje 2014* project, which is in opposition to the two earlier cultural traditions and, in turn, reinforces the category of the historical and cultural discontinuity of the city.

In the analysis of the network of social practices in the public space of the city of Skopje, attention must be drawn to their multilevel divisions into institutional and contestatory practices, generating two elementary contexts: the context of production and the context of reception. All kinds of practices, both institutional (initiated by the authorities, religious centres, scientific circles) and contestatory (civic, including artistic and those related to the operations of international organisations), enter public space and are revised.

The in-depth interviews conducted for the purpose of the research revealed the existence of common opinions that reflected the reality that they were deeply rooted in the historical context of the city's structure and in its vision as a polemic structure with diversified identities – the political identity of place. They also confirmed the presence of contestatory movements and tendencies and revealed criticism of the city transformation process, all accompanied by recollection of the destruction of the past. Furthermore, they indicated a variety of identities and identifications constructed within the multiethnic Macedonian community, constituting "the articulation of the thesis that identities are types of spaces created among the multitude of competing identifications, motivations, aspirations and individual and collective models of being" (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008; Probyn, 1996).

In the context of Macedonian and Albanian ethnonational discourses functioning in North Macedonia that constitute a significant component of the system of the city's symbols and semantics, we come upon confrontational strategies between the Slavic and non-Slavic entities that function in the cultural area of Skopje. On the one hand, these confrontational strategies determine the polemic nature of urban space, understood as both material cultural space established on the basis of places of memory and cultural artefacts, and, on the other hand, they are a product of space as an area of activity of actors and social and political networks, often used to construct incoherent self-defining processes within the space defined by the influence of ethnocultural processes.

Based on the two Slavic and non-Slavic entities in this discourse, a semantic model of the city, described as a "polemic city", was created as an outcome of the empirical research. This model can also be used for analysing other

cultural areas characterised by polycentric interethnic relations. A significant point of reference, a category that constitutes the key component of this analysis, is the transformative nature of the place as an area of stigmatisation by ethnic, cultural and political determinants and subjected to a game with the participation of social and political actors. Anthropological research distinguishes three semantic categories referring to the place understood as a symbolic construct – the memory of place, the image of place and the contestation of place, all of which I have analysed, drawing special attention to the Slavic and non-Slavic entities in Macedonian and Albanian discourse in North Macedonia.

How It All Began

In February 2010 the Macedonian government promoted an animated video entitled *Skopje 2014* (“Macedonia timeless capital Skopje 2014”, n.d.), visualising the city’s new image as a result of an aesthetic and political project for the new landscape of the Skopje city centre. In accordance with the initial plan, transformations were to apply to the main square in Skopje, Ploštad Makedonija, and the neighbouring facades of buildings along the bank of the River Vardar. As Rozita Dimova (2013, p. 116) argues, the components featured in the video and comprising the shape of the city’s new image are part of the ongoing North Macedonia “revival” strategy that originated with the political victory of the radical right-wing VMRO-DPMNE in the 2006 elections. This event ultimately turned into a political and ideological platform that won even greater support during the 2008 elections, when the main electoral platform of VMRO-DPMNE was itself viewed as the aforementioned “revival”, described on more than 100 pages in *Prerodba vo 100 čekori* (Revival in 100 Steps) which outlined a series of economic, political and cultural projects that promised improvements in the standard of living of Macedonian people. The “revival”, as Dimova aptly notices, was to be the end of fifteen years of transition that started in 1991 with the independence of the republic (Dimova, 2013, p. 116). The doctrine of VMRO-DPMNE also underlined the notion that the rule of the social-democratic SDSM (with the exception of the period between 1998 and 2002, when VMRO-DPMNE won the elections) had been a continuation of the socialist legacy disadvantageous to Macedonian society, not only in terms of economic stability, but also and especially due to the lack of a policy reinforcing a feeling of Macedonian national identity. The revival introduced in 2006-2007 aimed to correct the socialist vision of development and create a radically different vision of society and its members by creating a “real person”, defined by such virtues as a sense of freedom, patriotism and religion (VMRO-DPMNE, n.d.). The

engineering of this “new Macedonian” matched the aims of the political programme of VMRO-DPMNE from the time of their victory in 2006 under the leadership of Nikola Gruevski, the main architect of the Macedonian “revival”. Gruevski began his political career as minister of finance in the government run by Ljubčo Georgievski between 1998 and 2002, and as one of the people closest to Georgievski, the then prime minister and president of VMRO-DPMNE. After they lost the elections in 2002, Gruevski ousted Georgievski from the party leadership and united a growing group of supporters, paving his way to party leadership. He then went on to win the elections in 2006, 2008 and 2011.

The party’s programme focusing on the “revival” was transformed, and the engineering of the post-socialist Macedonian was equal to the reorganisation of public space in Skopje and to a new image of political power in the Republic of North Macedonia. In April 2011 the mayor of Skopje, Kocce Trajanovski, stated in a press release that the new shape of the city, based on a style defined by the signatories of this project as *baroque*, *neoclassicism* or *neoromanticism*, was the beginning of the city’s transformations that would, *contradictio in adiecto*, give the city “a new classical face of old Skopje” (after: Dimova, 2013, p. 118).

In symbolic terms, the Albanian and Macedonian conflict was reflected in numerous social and political practices and activities that demarcated ethnocultural areas which had hitherto been under the influence of particular ethnic groups. An example of such practices were the attempts of the Albanian political elites aimed at commemorating Albanian historical figures by erecting monuments to them, confirming their presence in Skopje and other important cities in North Macedonia, and proving the equal social status of Albanians within the framework of a redefined Macedonian identity. The Skopje Fortress [*Skopsko Kale*], the site of archaeological excavations in 2010 and 2011, is an example of a place where such symbolic interethnic struggles took place. The Office for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, during the period when the excavations were carried out, decided to build an Orthodox church-museum on the grounds of the 13th-century church, which had been destroyed. The Skopje Fortress and the entire urban concept, located in the Albanian district [*opština*] of Čair, thus became an area of conflict over the ethnocultural origin of this heritage. On 10 February 2011, the news reported that the Albanian community organised around the nongovernmental organisation *Zgjohu* had tried to destroy the existing steel cornerstones of the church-museum, provoked by the Macedonian government’s refusal to build a mosque within the framework of the same reconstruction work (Dimova, 2013, p. 134). Additionally, demands were made to include Albanian archaeologists in

the excavation work to guarantee objective and non-manipulated research results; the guarantee was essentially a stand against the marginalisation of the Albanian historical presence. The media discussion surrounding the fortress conflict made analogies between the events in 2011 and the Albanian and Macedonian military actions in 2001 that had started at the Tetovo Fortress (Dimova, 2013, p. 134).

The case of the Skopje fortress is only one of the examples discussed in this paper on the politicisation of public space, the city structure and the system of symbols linked to the engagement of opposing political actors, i.e. the ruling parties: VMRO-DPMNE, BDI and SDSM. The events focused around the Skopje fortress in 2011 were further marked by a wave of criticism towards the VMRO-DPMNE ruling party and accusations that maintained the party was too closely aligned with the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

The *Skopje 2014* project reawakened interethnic antagonisms that had been simmering beneath the surface after the 2001 conflict but had moved into the shadows, into a more discreet sphere, only to explode once again as a result of actions related to the creation of the city's new image. The concept to reconstruct the Saints Constantine and Helen Orthodox Church¹ (2009) in the central square in Skopje gave rise to several contestatory actions from Albanian political elites, (Albanian and Macedonian) intellectual circles and the residents of Skopje, who supported the notion that a mosque should be erected next to the planned Orthodox church, especially given the fact that during the Ottoman Empire a mosque was situated where today's North Macedonia Square is. Skopje intellectuals organised around architectural circles [*Prva Arhibrigada*] and social activists dealing with urban space [*Ploštad Sloboda*] questioned the location of the Orthodox church due to the city's development plan and the heritage of modernist urban planning of the 1970s. In a manifesto announced in 2009, entitled *First Architectural Uprising* [*Prvo arhitektonsko vostanje*], a group of students from the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning (Saints Cyril and Methodius University) in Skopje published the key demands connected with the construction of the church in the main city square, which were accompanied by such slogans as "Don't rape Skopje!" [*Ne go siluvajte Skopje!*].

¹ An Orthodox church dedicated to the same saints was built in 1926 during the times of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and located in a place that today features a department store, south-west of North Macedonia Square. The church was destroyed in the earthquake of 1963 and in 1970 was replaced with *Градски Трговски Центар*.

Котек за студентите

ДЕМОКРАТИЈАТА ЦРКВАТА НА СКОП

Уставот ни гарантира право и на јавно протестирање, освен во услови на вонредна или воена состојба. Доколку веќе не сме во редовна состојба, ред би било тоа и да ни се каже, за да не живееме во заблуда. Во спротивно, да се сочине со поразителниот факт, дека уставот нема поголемо значење од она што го имаат тарабите, на кои може сешто да пишува, а тоа, нормално, никого на ништо да не обврзува. Соочувањето е нужно, доколку навистина сакаме да се извлечеме од деревето на кое спаднаваме!

Пишува

Љубица ГРОЗДАНОВСКА
ДИМИШКОВСКА

Гаго и Тина се двајца студенти што во саботата на плоштадот беа дел од групата од 50 до 100 студенти и граѓани кои протестираа против изградба на објект, без разлика на неговата намена. Гаго е студент на трета година на Архитектонскиот факултет во Скопје и е член на Првата Архи Бригада. Тина, пак, е студентка на втора година на Природно-математичкиот факултет (ПМФ) во Скопје, која го поддржува првото архитектонско востание во земјата. Обојата потресени од саботниот инцидент, но, најмногу се разочарани од институциите на државата и непостоеното демократија, кое го оневозможува искажувањето на личен став. Тие признаваат дека прв пат се соочиле

со таква ситуација, дека не биле добро организирани и дека не побарале поддршка од нивниот матичен факултет. Нејутно, сепак, тргнале на плоштад со помислата дека се зрели луѓе, со изграден став, а најмногу со архитектонски вкус и убедување дека имаат демократско право да го искажат своето мислење!

ВОСТАНИЕ ШТО ТРАЕШЕ ЕДВАЈ ЕДНА МИНУТА

— Не не разбираа ниту тие што не поддржаа, ниту оние што не не поддржаа. Нашиот собир беше против изградба на објект на плоштад, без разлика на неговата намена. Ние не сме против изградба на црквата. Не сме политички поврзани, ниту сме должни да имаме верски став. Тоа беше став на студентите по архитектура. Сакаме само да предизвикаме критичко архитектонско мислење. На почетокот се изразувавме кога видовме дека има и друга

група граѓани. Мислевме дека ќе добатиреме за и против, започнува бригадирот, Гаго.

Договорот за протест на плоштадот паднал минатиот петок.

— Тогаш се договоривме да бидеме поделени во четири групи, на четирите страни од плоштадот. Точно на пладне, сите требаше да се собореме на местото на марширањето за граѓа на црквата на скопскиот плоштад, да направиме квадрат, согласно димензиите на проектираната црква, со цел да покажеме колкав простор од плоштадот ќе зазема тој објект. Но, нашето прво востание беше задушено на само една минута по 12 часот. Нормално, сега се шегуваме на наша сметка. Нашиот собир го нарекуваме прво архитектонско востание, иако знаеме дека сите први востанија во Македонија биле криво задушувани, раскажува тој.

Кога студентите ги извадиле плакатите на кои пишуваше: Не го силкувајте Скопје, од толпата граѓани кои дошле да ја изразат својата поддршка за изградба на црква на плоштадот, прво почнале да стигнуваат вербални напади (дел од нив скандираа — Шиптари, Шиптари), плески и плукања, за ситуацијата набрзо да излезе од контрола, па неколкумина од разгневаната толпа почнале да ги кинат плакатите, да ги туркаат студентите, да им удираат шлагунци... Насилството е сениено од ТВ камерите. На снимките се гледа дека полицијата не интервенира толку колку што е потребно во такви, ма-

After the first demonstrations took place in the centre of Skopje, the architecture students were supported in their protests by representatives of the Muslim community and city residents, expressing their discontent with the construction of the Orthodox church². Protests against a church being built in North Macedonia Square resulted in the suspension of the construction of Saints Constantine and Helen Orthodox Church, mainly due to the opposition of the Muslim community and their demand to erect a mosque in the main city square; after five years, the church was assigned a new location. Shortly after backing off from the plans for the church, in early 2010 the Macedonian authorities announced initial plans for the reconstruction of the city, eventually called the *Skopje 2014* project.

An example of one iconic building that fell victim to the “facade interventions” aimed at transforming public space in the centre of Skopje in a pseudo-baroque style was a department store [Gradski Trgovski Centar, GTC, 1970] designed by a Macedonian architect, Živko Popovski. The building was a semi-open public space spanning the River Vardar. According to the concepts of the Skopje city authorities, the GTC was to be covered with a neo-classical facade, completely contradicting the modern purpose of the building. At the initiative of the Association of Macedonian Architects in 2013, an “I Love GTC” [*Go sakam GTC*] campaign was organised with the participation of city residents protesting against the new image of the GTC. The protests gathered several thousand people.

The new image of Skopje (*Skopje 2014*) was strongly criticised by the intellectual elites, especially architects who had affirmed the virtues of a modernist city such as Skopje as early as the 1970s. Eclecticism and the secondary aesthetic nature of *Skopje 2014*, according to several experts,

² A group of ca. 100 people protested against the construction of any building in the main square in Skopje, regardless of its function. When the students took out their banners with the slogan *ne go siluvajte Skopje*, the inhabitants who supported the building of the Orthodox church responded, shouting back the offensive words: Šiptari, Šiptari!, leading to a clash between the demonstrators. The use of the Slavicised form Šiptar (the proper form in Albanian being *Shqiptar*) had a significant ideological slant, serving the unification of the Albanian people disseminated in a spatial and confessional context, and forming, as Victor Friedman puts it, formal and informal linguistic contexts that indicate a linguistic and national identity of Albanians in the Balkan cultural area. The process of the pejoration of the meaning of Šiptar and the associated pressures from the Albanian community to exclude the use of this term from public discourse was related to two synchronised events, namely the emergence of an Albanian movement demanding greater autonomy in the 1950s and 1960s, which was accompanied by ethnic unrest and contestation, and the standardisation of the Albanian language (1968-1972) carried out by Albanians in Yugoslavia, particularly in the sector of educational institutions. The police on site failed to respond to the acts of violence carried out by “church defenders”, who also included members of the Macedonian Orthodox Church who displayed their flags along with other Orthodox symbols (*Republika*, 28.03.2009: 14).

Logo associated with the protests against reconstruction of the GTC, source: author's archive.

exposed the objectives of the Macedonian “revival” strategy put forward by VMRO-DPMNE, the aim of which was to create historical narratives eliminating the memory of socialism.

The already mentioned individual self-defining processes remaining in complete opposition to the official identity interpretation and represented by social and political activists, intellectual and academic elites, both Macedonian and Albanian, should be considered a significant element of public Macedonian discourse. The processes of the shaping and functionalisation of new codes, and the revision of discourse elements essential for earlier codes, allow to examine individual social actors in the construction of “new” or the reconstruction of “old” self-defining processes.

On the other hand, Macedonian discourse includes opinions supporting the existence and development of the *Skopje 2014* project. These are

primarily the voices of the co-authors of the material and the ideological vision of the new city, who insist that ‘Macedonian Baroque’ was the first form of baroque art searching for roots in ancient art (Vangel Božinovski, Danilo Kocevski or Blaže Ristovski). Enthusiasts of the *Skopje 2014* project seek meaning through the exposition of components of the Macedonian historical and national process – from antiquity to the present day – and, on the other hand, indicate the need to destroy ideological and aesthetic elements of the Yugoslav system of representation, which is to be ensured by the cultural production of the city’s new public space. These ideological tendencies are reflected in the comments of G’orgije Slamkov, another politician from VMRO-DPMNE, who, in an article published in the *Nova Makedonija* daily in July 2012, stated:

The idea is to show that this nation possesses continuity from antiquity through the Slavs to this day; that in all those mixtures of people the core is retained, as a special nation with its own culture, language, customs, territory, past and future (Slamkov, 2012).

This approach is shared by Blaže Ristovski, an academic and ideologist of the new Macedonian historical narrative, who considers the process of nation representation expressed in the *Skopje 2014* project to be a useful tool. “We are a young state and prior to 1944, when the communists took over, we simply couldn’t build anything other than churches and mosques. Only with the creation of our own country were we at liberty to present our past and culture and show our struggle for Macedonian statehood. These monuments don’t just fill a gap, they are a very useful way of presenting ourselves as a nation” (Smith, 2011).

How to Turn a City into a Museum

The city of Skopje can be described by three dominating elements: the River Vardar, the fortress, and Čaršja. The River Vardar was a significant determinant in the construction of the new city plan, constituting a clear border and organising, in a natural way, space on both sides of the river. Kale Fortress, an iconographic element of the city, is a central and dominating symbol referring to the time of glory of Skopje and the Slavic tradition. Čaršja, the former city centre, located north of the River Vardar, in accordance with the objectives of the new city plan was not to be treated as “a folkloristic museum” but as a developed and upgraded centre integrated with the modern city on the other side of the river.

From the early 20th century until the earthquake in 1963 the central square in Skopje was perceived in traditional urban categories of public

space, the main function of which was to reflect the three-dimensional image of power: political, financial and cultural. The symbolic tripartite separation of powers was reflected in three buildings: the National Bank, the Officers' House functioning as a town hall in the times of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, located on the right-hand bank of the River Vardar, and the National Theatre located on the opposite, left-hand side of the river. All these buildings were connected by the Ottoman Stone Bridge and concentrated around the central square (*Ploštad Sloboda* in 1920-1940, currently *Ploštad Makedonija*), which symbolised, along with the new architectural style, the dominance of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941) or, in other words, Serbian cultural dominance dating back to the period directly after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) until the First and Second World War.

The creation of a new system of symbols in 21st-century Skopje and the saturation of public space with extraordinary amounts of monumental artefacts allows us to conclude that the "new" city was purportedly an expression of an enormous effort to transform public space into a museum (Čausidis, 2013, p. 41; Janev, 2015, p. 111; Marina, 2013). Museums, according to Timothy Luke, possess a power to shape collective values and social understandings (Luke, 2002, p. xiii). The role of a museum, therefore, is not limited only to the production of a certain narrative but should support self-defining processes and the representation of collective memory, and, in some circumstances, can also assume the role of an active actor in constructing a collective identity. This definition of a museum also corresponds to its figurative description referred to by Čausidis, who talks about moving the function of an exhibition institution into a city's public space, where historical exhibits are subjected to symbolic and physical translocation from museums (public space that follows certain laws) to everyday life, consequently leading to the historicisation of the institution of the state and the *museumification* of the city-symbol (Čausidis, 2013, pp. 36-37).

A national narrative created through a patriotic, traditionalist and national-romantic urban concept, *Skopje 2014* is based on opposing semantic categories. On the one hand, it refers to the Balkan indigenes of the Macedonian nation (regardless of whether it is Slavic or ancient), while on the other, through the applied aesthetics, to the glamour and wealth of European cities.

The aforementioned process of the *museumification* of Skopje's public space generated a system of cultural symbols and social practices leading to the creation of cultural heritage objects that, in the case of *Skopje 2014*, represented the implementation of ethnonational narrative components and the symbolic reorganisation of public space in the process of creating its

УРБАНИСТИЧКИ ПЛАН НА ЦЕНТРАЛНОТО ПОДРАЧЈЕ — СКОПЈЕ

Rendering of Kenzo Tange's Skopje master plan, illustrating the plan's orientation towards the River Vardar and other geographical features. Traffic and railway circulation routes are indicated, as are dedicated-use facilities, marked by colours on the black and white print. Source: <http://okno.mk/node/27852> (Angelov, 2013).

own variant of the past (Janev, 2015, p. 111; Kolozova & Sadiku, 2013; Vilik, 2013). Goran Janev aptly observes that the new image of Skopje must look older and forget about those elements of the past that do not fit into the new national narrative (Janev, 2015, p. 112).

By its decisions, the ethnocratic regime in North Macedonia introduced divisions based on ethnic origins in the spirit of essentialism characteristic of this type of power, bringing order to public space and strengthening interethnic antagonisms. Another tool constituting a break from earlier systems of representation and *topoi* of place is the superficial Europeanisation of structures from the times of the Ottoman Empire or Yugoslavian modernism, which is meant to validate the supposed continuation of European civilisation in this region and reinforce the myth of ancient origins. The Europeanisation of Macedonian public space often alludes to a specific vision of European tradition that is mostly created (in a post-oriental and post-socialist travesty) and based on the category of luxury and wealth: the view of the ruling political and economic class that combined Eurocentrism with the classicist style on an aesthetic level.

Graffiti in the centre of Skopje associated with violent anti-Albanian actions in 2014: *My Dad is Macedonian, my Mum is Albanian, whose shop shall I burn?*, source: author's archive.

A number of analysts and researchers (Čausidis, 2013; Janev, 2015; Kolozova & Sadiku, 2013; Vilik, 2013) acknowledge the decisive role of politics present in the structure of the new national narrative, meant to confirm a specific version of history based on the assumptions of a national

ideology that successively erases elements of the past. However, as Janev rightly observes, “we must not forget that history is written into the city’s landscape” (Gould & Silverman, 2013). History and the memory of place, apart from the *Skopje 2014* project discussed here, has always formed a polyphonic structure revised in social practices, and, at the same time, functions as a counterweight to the idea of incorporating artefacts of monumental art and the artificially implemented process of historicisation, all polemics against the multiethnic, multi-confessional and multilingual Macedonian reality.

According to Christian Voss, the *ethnification* of Macedonian society, meant to compensate for the loss of Yugoslav identity, brought two new aspects into Macedonian national discourse (Voss, 2007, p. 167). The first one was a separatist mental map of a “Great Macedonia”, manifesting itself through the annexation of various cultural traditions and incorporating them into Macedonian self-defining discourse. The other aspect of social ethnification is related to the broad process of the antiquisation of Macedonian space together with the iconic statue of Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Vergina Sun, which, according to Voss, have been borrowed from symbols associated with the cultivation of identity from the transatlantic Macedonian diaspora (Voss, 2007, p. 167). The symbol of the Vergina Sun, although removed in its original form from the insignia of the national symbol (the flag of the Republic of North Macedonia), occurs frequently as an element of social practice, and has become a highly recognisable sign of “Macedonianism”, for example in promotional materials of the VMRO-DPMNE party or the Komiti Vardar football team.

Emergence of Macedonian Urban Resistance

Skopje as a semantic structure may be defined through the categories of conflict and confrontation, taking into account both the major narratives defining city space (Muslim, Orthodox and national tradition) and the minor narratives encompassing the activities of particular social actors in the city’s public space that comprise the *Skopje 2014* project as well as contestatory reactions. An example of such intervention in common space was a plan to build an Orthodox church³ in North Macedonia Square, causing protests of architecture students at Saints Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. It also aroused the discontent of the Muslim community, which demanded

³ The plan to build the Saints Constantine and Helen Orthodox Church was described in public discourse by the initiators of this undertaking as the reconstruction of a non-existent Orthodox church dedicated to the same saints, but which had a completely different architectural form and was formerly located in a different place.

the erection of a mosque in the vicinity of the planned church, eventually leading to the work being suspended.

First of all, if I tried to define Skopje, I would say that it is a terrain of conflict and confrontation, especially of a historical nature when we go back to Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire, then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and then through Socialism and Modernism and also through the great narratives built upon all this conflict. Mosques are built on the foundations of churches; then a church is built on the foundation of a mosque; churches are razed to their foundations by royal or state institutions. So, the aspects of big narratives are based on conflicts. Small narratives, however, are also conflict-based narratives, especially in the aspect of private interests in a contemporary context, such as the total destruction and total lack of urban planning precisely because of this conflict (interview No. M-02/16/03/16).

The functionalisation of the Orthodox doctrine and symbolism within the ethnocultural discourse of the VMRO party has been replaced with the central narrative of the *Skopje 2014* project that focuses on antiquisation and uses symbols that refer to pre-Christian traditions. In early 2016, in a central location in Čair (a Skopje district that is predominantly Albanian), the 15th anniversary of the Albanian-Macedonian conflict was commemorated by the unveiling of a monument depicting a double-headed eagle, the Albanian ethnonational symbol, along with a plaque commemorating the military actions of the NLA paramilitary organisation. As a reaction to the erection of this monument/symbol in the Albanian part of the city, an Orthodox cross was placed in the neighbouring district of Butel, dominated by Macedonians. Within the context of the dispute over the two monuments/symbols erected in Skopje's public space, we may speak of a process that compensates the Christian component, which was depreciated to expose factors responsible for the antiquisation of Macedonian identity.

The contextualisation of national and religious symbols in Macedonian cultural space, present in Macedonian and Albanian discourse following the "eagle and cross" incident, points to the presence of rivalry over symbolic space, the aim of which is for a given ethnocultural tradition to take over a specific area and accentuate its prevailing role therein. Macedonian cultural space is abundant in examples of these types of practices; the most spectacular include the construction of an Orthodox church in the Kale Fortress, the location of monumental art marked with evident national symbolism (*Skopje 2014*) at the entrance to Čaršja, and the erection of the cross on Vodno Hill (2002).

The double-headed eagle located in Čair, a Skopje neighbourhood with an Albanian majority, was erected in response to the presence of the "defenders" monument (*braniteli*), an element of the *Skopje 2014* project.

The confrontational nature of the ethnonational Macedonian and Albanian narratives fits the discourse of a divided (polemic) city. The symbolic struggle for dominance in public space and the presence of different symbols is not limited only to the discussed example but highlights the meaning and scale of the problem determining the specificity of the city of Skopje as a space of rivalry and dispute.

The presentation of the Albanian narrative within this space requires an equal presence of Albanian and Macedonian symbols that function to a high degree in accordance with the action/reaction, attack/counterattack mode, underlying the conflict-generating nature of mutual relations, as seen in the case of the cross that emerged in response to the realisation of an Albanian symbol commemorating the military conflict in 2001.

These recent events need some explanation. First, what happened after placing the eagle, or rather a monument to the NLA commemorating the 15th anniversary of the war fought by Albanians ... We cannot treat the eagle and the cross equally, because the NLA monument can be compared to the monument of Macedonian defenders found opposite the parliament; and this means that if 2001 happened and the 2001 event had two sides to the conflict, one defending the then constitution and the other demanding its change, the claims of the victorious side, the National Liberation Army (NLA), then both parties in the conflict should be considered. But, firstly, this cannot, however, be compared to what happened in the municipality of Butel. Secondly, if African lions and a zoological park are being erected throughout Skopje, why not place an eagle that is an Albanian symbol constituting the Albanian flag, an official symbol in the Republic of North Macedonia and municipality of Čair, somewhere? A third issue that requires clarification is the fact that we have nothing against putting up a cross in a church or minaret, or next to a mosque, but once it is placed at the intersection of streets, then we are against it because it's a political cross, not a sign of respect for religion but an act aimed at enflaming tensions within a society (interview No. A-10/16/03/16).

Albanian discourse does not wholly reject the use of elements of religious symbolism of the Christian tradition within practices related to religious worship, but instead points out that the presence of religious symbols located in public space for political reasons is an instrument of exercising authority that inevitably deepens divisions between the two ethnic and confessional communities.

Culture, as a set of social practices and artefacts and symbols produced by various actors and groups, became a sensitive instrument in the hands of the Macedonian power structure. The "national enlightenment" realised within the Macedonian public sphere after 2006 (the *Skopje 2014* project) and the construction of a new system of national symbols, according to

many respondents from the opposition and contestation civic movements led to the complete destruction of the city's cultural fabric, i.e. its artistic and cultural symbols.

The social struggle for public space continues through the confrontation of orders or systems of opposing values that function in the structure of a polemic city, replacing poly-monologue⁴ with desired dialogue. One of the most lasting traditions, one deeply rooted in the cultural memory of North Macedonia, is Yugoslav modernism (in socialist North Macedonia), which paid particular attention to the humanist dimension as the only superior dimension of existence in social space and was used in its planning.

Opposition practices have uncovered that nouveau culture was the instrument, or the instrumentalisation of nationalism, and so to say enlightenment. And over that time, they built a new symbolism, and, in principle, monuments were built. Architecturally and symbolically the whole city changed, so everything was used as an artistic symbol and that somehow changed the meaning of the city. Now we have the total devastation of cultural content (interview No. M-01/14/03/16).

The attempt to build an Orthodox church in North Macedonia Square gave rise to a number of social initiatives of a political, religious and civic nature. Among actions that proved to be the most significant from the point of view of resistance movements (disobedience) were initiatives organised by students from the Faculty of Architecture of Skopje University (*Ploštad Sloboda, Prva Arhibrigada*), who condemned the physical violation of public space, an area that is intended to promote communication between different social groups.

Social struggle over public space, I think, should be developed at least for my generation and generations after mine. We were raised in the spirit of modernism, in the spirit of socialism, in the spirit of raising a man as an individual, using spaces in the spirit of stimulated planning in social spaces. What happened around the church on the square was of a political nature; an initiative against the building of a church was thus conducted. However, the manifestation of our initiative, an association of people from the field of architecture, was to show the physical disorder of the public space. So, there is still some thread of public consciousness, though I think it's still quite weak. *Skopje 2014* destroyed ample public space – squares, parks, green areas, facades of buildings, etc., and it took away empty spaces that were intended to be empty due to a certain social function. Here, I'm referring to physical voids, unregulated, without meaning,

⁴ I use this term following Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "monologue discourses", referring to the situation of a multitude of monologues – poly-monologues instead of dialogue. See Bauman, 1997, p. 141.

such as passages, clusters between two different points; they have now somehow been absorbed in the *Skopje 2014* project (interview No. M-02/16/03/16).

The development of the *Skopje 2014* project, initiated around the idea of building Saints. Constantine and Helen Orthodox Church, considerably breached the rules of shaping public space by appropriating undeveloped space, an essential element of every city's urban planning. Both major and minor narratives (public/private, universal/local) functioning within Skopje's public space will remain in a state of permanent struggle as a constituent of social, ethnic and confessional divisions within the city.

Macedonian public space is marked by conflict and the presence of signs of disobedience. The notion of social and political fragmentation, also present in Albanian discourse, allows us to refer to many "Macedonias", many national and ethnocultural narratives. The functionalisation of parallel narratives builds, in a subjective and episodic manner, a coherent structure that consolidates different groups. The effect of this is the absence of community models, at the level of social practice or within political programmes or culture-forming initiatives, in Macedonian cultural discourse.

North Macedonia has had its existentialist curses, elementary fragmentation, which means that everyone here has their own North Macedonia. And that usually means there is no coherent North Macedonia that applies to all of its inhabitants. Unfortunately, also throughout the past 25 years, there have been few community-based models of North Macedonia built by people or their representatives in the form of political parties, or through social or cultural initiatives. Ethnic and confessional divisions surely indicate the greatest divisions. But there are also divisions within certain camps, which are not small, without considering various localities and other divisions resulting from historical layers. The same fate is characteristic of Skopje, which is the best proof of a lack of resistance towards marginalising projects such as *Skopje 2014* (interview No. A-11/13/03/16).

The crucial divisions in the city are potentiated within particular (political and social) camps, defined in Albanian and Macedonian discourse in ethnic and confessional terms and embedded in two historical and cultural discourses referring both to the oriental tradition and to the tradition of the European modernisation of Balkan space.

The struggle observed in Skopje concerns Skopje's public space. Skopje was denoted by a de-Albanisation and de-Islamisation plan. And if we look at the map of Skopje, we will see a wreath of Albanian villages surrounding Skopje and the other Macedonian parts dominated by Macedonian Christian communities. Objects of Muslim cults have been located in such neighbourhoods as Čair, inhabited mainly by Albanians (interview No. A-12/15/03/16).

In the early 21st century, Skopje's public space became a battlefield over symbols and counter-symbols, in a battle fought by actors from within the power system and disobedience movements of various backgrounds, all present in Macedonian public space. Along with the development of the *Skopje 2014* project came an awakening of social awareness reflected in numerous movements and civic initiatives fighting for the right to public space and for the protection of the Yugoslav heritage of modernism. An important aspect of the functionalisation of this fight over symbols was the emergence of hitherto unseen Macedonian apolitical movements determined by social and cultural factors, eventually leading to the formation of autonomic social movements in Macedonian space, represented in several areas of social life.

Macedonian activism from 2009 onwards is an important turning point in the Macedonian tradition of resistance and the history of Macedonian culture. Although the events of 1968 (see Fichter, 2016, pp. 99–121) also struck a chord in North Macedonia, mainly through contacts with student movements in Belgrade and Zagreb, they did not have the desired impact on the development of Macedonian activism. It was not until the last wave of protests in North Macedonia (2014 and 2016), which were not directed specifically against the authorities, and the protests of students in 2014 demanding their active participation in social life, that Macedonians finally emerged into a new dimension of social awareness. Civic awareness has now helped shape the new generation growing up in independent North Macedonia.

I am grateful to this project because, for the first time in Macedonian history, to my mind, it has opened us up to responsible citizenship full of passion, as it happened with *Prva Arhibrigada*. So, for the first time, non-political organised protests appeared. Some protests had, in fact, appeared earlier; it's not true they had never existed, but they were organised by political parties. So, the first pure civic awareness is precisely *Prva Arhibrigada*. This is a very important event for me, especially because Macedonian culture or society has no such experience with this in a wider aspect. In fact, the 1968 movement was brought to North Macedonia through students who studied in Belgrade, who had taken part in protests there, bringing liberation and free-thinking movements from there, as they were these movements' participants (interview No. M-05/15/03/16).

The elementary components of the conflict that emerged between social and political actors were supposed to be related to the marking of public space with foreign symbols and its destruction not merely via the semantics of the new system of symbols, but through restrictions on and the closing down of common space.

Instead of Conclusions

It should be remembered that disobedience movements and civic activism in connection with Macedonian cultural space is a recent phenomenon and it is hard to anticipate from today's perspective where it will go. Throughout the 20th century, no strong civic culture developed in North Macedonia. Instead, it witnessed a struggle for *topoi* and common spaces, a struggle that can be compared to other similar Western European movements, considering the specific social and political context and historical circumstances that the young ethnocultural community had to grow up in. All the aforementioned social movements may be understood as a prelude to the emergence of urban resistance in Macedonia that was fully expressed by the Colourful Revolution [Šarena Revolucija] in 2016 – a performance of discontent of Slavic and non-Slavic communities, resulting from the far right-wing policy of the Macedonian government.

Colourful Revolution [Šarena Revolucija] in 2016, source: author's archive.

A new wave of resistance that has emerged similarly to other urban disobedience uprisings of the 21st century has created a new socially driven way of resistance. It can be connected with two different arguments. First the concept of the city, with its special perception in the context of Balkan cities, might be treated as a problematic issue, because of “neglecting the

essential interrelatedness of the opposites of urban / rural and urban / non-urban in capitalist societies” (Mayer, Thörn, & Thörn, 2016, p. 26). The issue of the opposition between the two terms, rural and urban, cannot be broadly analysed in this study, although some issues connected with the translocation of certain features of rurality into the urban landscape might be clearly visible also in the approach presented in this research. The second issue is connected with the notion of a boundary in the city structure. If relatively clear boundaries ever existed in the city, such boundaries have been dissolved by cultural landscapes produced by different groups that have destroyed a coherent urban structure in the process of construction of vast zones of urbanised areas. In this context, following the concept of Harvey (1982, 2005, 2012), Brenner and Schmid (Brenner & Schmid, 2014, 2015) and Keil (2013), we may think of a conceptual shift aimed at abandoning the concept of ‘the city’ and instead emphasising the urban process and urban life. Like many other urban uprisings, also the Macedonian case study can be contextualised in the perception of social and political transformations through the images and dynamic changes of the city structure or urban life. The destruction of centrality, known in traditional cities as the main axis, not only on a material – architectural, but also a symbolic level, has also influenced the development of social movements. Skopje is one of the examples where in fact it is very difficult to point to an exact central point, if it ever existed. The example of the Macedonian urban uprising might be defined by the challenging of power and domination by social movements that occupied public spaces through urban activism and on some occasions treated architectural objects as physical manifestos of a new public sphere. The early 21st century also brought about a new model of social activism no longer derived from political or confessional factors, which undoubtedly facilitated the formation of new, independent social movements aimed at revitalising space and supporting the development of cultural and collective memory processes in the context of the city’s identity.

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Interviews

- BT 2016, M-01/14/03/16, digital recording (Biljana Tanurovska, Macedonian, cultural studies professional, Skopje).
- BT 2016, M-02/16/03/16, digital recording (Ivana Dragsic, Macedonian, activist, Skopje).
- BT 2016, M-05/15/03/16, digital recording (Nejboša Vilic, Macedonian, university professor, art historian, Skopje).
- BT 2016, A-10/16/03/16, digital recording (Izet Mexhiti, Albanian, politician (BDI), Skopje).
- BT 2016, A-11/13/03/16, digital recording (Ramadan Ramadani, Albanian, political analyst, Skopje).
- BT 2016, A-12/15/03/16, digital recording (Zeqirja Ibrahim, Albanian, researcher, politician (Lëvizja Besa), Skopje).

Stare granice i nowe krajobrazy kulturowe wieloetnicznego miasta we współczesnej Macedonii

W kontekście macedońskich i albańskich dyskursów etnonarodowych funkcjonujących w Północnej Macedonii, które stanowią znaczący element systemu symboli i semantyki miasta, natrafiamy na strategię konfrontacyjną między komponentami słowiańskimi i niesłowiańskimi, które funkcjonują w obszarze kulturalnym Skopje. Z jednej strony te strategię konfrontacyjną składają się na polemiczny charakter przestrzeni miejskiej, rozumianej zarówno jako materialna przestrzeń kulturowa ustalona na podstawie miejsc pamięci i artefaktów kulturowych, a z drugiej strony są produktem przestrzeni jako obszaru aktywności aktorów, sieci społecznych i politycznych, często wykorzystywanych do konstruowania niespójnych procesów auto-definitywnych w przestrzeni zdominowanej przez procesy etnokulturowe.

W oparciu o dwa komponenty: słowiański i niesłowiański (macedoński i albański) w analizowanym dyskursie powstał semantyczny model miasta, określony jako „miasto polemiczne”, w wyniku przeprowadzonych badań empirycznych. Model ten można również wykorzystać do analizy innych obszarów kulturowych charakteryzujących się policentrycznymi relacjami między etnicznymi. Istotnym punktem odniesienia, kategorią stanowiącą kluczowy element tej analizy, jest transformacyjny charakter miejsca jako obszaru stygmatyzacji przez uwarunkowania etniczne, kulturowe i polityczne oraz poddanego grze z udziałem aktorów społecznych i politycznych. W badaniach antropologicznych wyróżniono kategorie semantyczne

odnoszące się do miejsca i kontestacji miejsca, które przeanalizowano, zwracając szczególną uwagę na komponenty słowiańskie i niesłowiańskie w dyskursie macedońskim i albańskim w Macedonii.

Słowa kluczowe: Macedonia, miasto wieloetniczne, granice, dyskursy albańskie i macedońskie.

Note

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