

## Communicating Yugoslavia – cultural politics, media memory and broadcasting of the Yugoslav past in Macedonia

**Abstract:** *The aim of this article is to analyze how the shared Yugoslav past and history is communicated in Macedonia, 22 years after the dissolution. For that matter, the emphasis of the research will be on analysis of the media production of the state-owned, public service broadcaster in Macedonia, the Macedonian Radio Television (MRT). By analyzing a core of recently produced documentaries, the article aims to show how the recent change in cultural policy and the process of “nation-(re)building” is readable through new broadcasts and how the media memory of the Yugoslav past of Macedonia is present or absent from the media scene. Finally, this text aims to give answer to the question how, and to what extent, the recently produced media content contributes to the politics of remembrance/forgetting of the Yugoslav past.*

**Keywords:** *cultural politics, media memory, broadcasting, documentaries, Yugoslavia, Macedonia, past, history.*

### Socio-political and cultural context-(re)building Macedonian national identity

Analysis of the serials and documentaries produced by the Macedonian national broadcaster (MRT) needs to be preceded by a brief outline of a broader social, political and international context of contemporary Macedonia. Twenty years after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the declaration of independence, Macedonia is going through a massive and belated process of historical revisionism and invention of traditions. This process (unlike in the other successor states) did not take place during and following the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, along with discarding of its dominant *brotherhood and unity* ideology, nor did Macedonia undergo a process of rereading and rewriting of history at that point. So, what happened? What triggered this historical revisionism with a delay of 15 years after the dissolution of Yugoslavia? What events influenced and stimulated the change in cultural politics and identity

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policies? This foreword aims to situate the subject of analysis – the programs of the public service broadcaster – by putting it into context of this belated process of national identity building, by looking at the actual cultural politics of remembrance/forgetting of the past and the ways in which the collective memory is shaped/represented. As stated above, Macedonia is a rather peculiar case. Some seven years ago it began a process of rewriting history, which led to change of its national narrative, and its dominant discourses. By employing state-framed set of actions that change the narratives about the origin of the nation and the official history, two narratives, the old one (before the dissolution of Yugoslavia) and the new one, collide.

During the years of coexistence within the frames of the Yugoslav supranational and cultural space, Macedonia, alongside other republics, was part of the shared Yugoslav cultural space. The official politics of the Yugoslav socialist federation changed over the years, but at all times it sought one way or another to create a sense of common, shared identity; a cultural and political identity that will coexist simultaneously with the institutionalized national and ethnic identities of all the constitutive peoples, by preventing manifestation of intolerance within the patchwork of Yugoslav diverse cultural and ethnic groups. After the dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia, not only that the cultural space divided, but also the narratives of the identity (both cultural and national) underwent a process of deep transformation, rewriting, historical revisionism and invention of traditions. All the former Yugoslav republics to some extent initiated process of national/cultural identity revision. The cases of Croatia and Serbia are the most characteristic since there the processes of historical and cultural revisionism went farthest. They included revision of the official historical narratives concerning the Second World War and the creation of the Yugoslav federation, alongside with the linguistic policies seeking to create “genuine”, new national languages.

For 50 years Macedonia was building its cultural and national identity within the framework of the supranational Yugoslav project. The historical discourse through which Macedonia defined itself was that of the South Slav origin, and of the shared ancestors, culture, traditions and customs with the rest of the Yugoslav people. In the years preceding and following the dissolution, Macedonia seemed to be immune to the changes in the political discourse and the dominant nationalist narratives surrounding it. As Anastas Vangeli points out, Macedonia followed the established narrative of the Macedonians as South Slavs. But, in 2006, with the election of the new Government led by the right-wing VMRO-DPMNE, a belated process of invention and mass production of tradition and historical narratives began. It is carried out through the creation of new ceremonies, interventions in the public space and dissemination of mythological and metaphysical narratives of the origin of the nation deeply and directly rooted in the ancient Macedonian culture. Modern day Macedonians have been portrayed as direct descendants

of Alexander the Great (Alexander the Macedonian). That was not the case previously – antiquity-inspired national myths used to be absent from all the events that the Macedonian historiography considered to be cornerstones of contemporary Macedonian statehood and nationhood. Similarly, there were no references to Alexander the Great in the interwar platform for Macedonian national liberation, nor in the Partisan movement during the Second World War. These narratives about antiquity were not reflected in the proclamation of Macedonian statehood in 1944. This recent wave of rereading of history, this change in cultural and identity politics can be seen as a facilitation of the identity transfer, the one aimed at leading the people from one set of dominant narratives to another, and encouraging them to abandon the Yugoslav identification.<sup>2</sup>

This ideological turn and historical revisionism, followed by the invention of tradition is also rooted in, but not fully explained by, the constant and persistent denial of the unique and distinctive Macedonian cultural and national identity from its neighboring countries. The name dispute with the neighboring Greece is an obstacle and a precondition for Macedonia's EU and NATO integration. On the other hand, Bulgaria's denial of the separate Macedonian nation and language is summed up in their oft-repeated saying: "one nation, two states". The third neighboring country, Serbia, does not acknowledge the Macedonian Orthodox Church, thus making Macedonian identity disputed on three different "battlefields".

As Antoanela Petkovska points out, the socio-cultural entities which are, historically and in continuum exposed to "cultural trauma", undergoing a drastic change in the value systems accompanied with new normative regulations, are subjected to frequent change of the basic principles in creating cultural politics.<sup>3</sup> This cultural trauma is closely connected with the cultural disorientation resulting from the conflict of the old and the new normative regulations and is common trait of the countries transiting from socialism to capitalism, such as Macedonia and other successor states of Yugoslavia. The cultural trauma is always a result or subsequent elements of a wide range of social changes, almost every time resulting in a change of cultural politics. In Macedonian case, these changes concern the ideological and national restructuring in the politics of building and affirmation of national identity.

How can we trace this change in cultural politics? Cultural politics, in its main role to estimate and represent cultural identities, is an outcome of the ideological matrix, whose bearers are the political structures in power.

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2 Anastas Vangeli, "Nation-building ancient Macedonia style: the origin and the effects of the so-called antiquization in Macedonia," *Nationalities paper* 39 (2011): 13-23.

3 Antoanela Petkovska, "Some tendencies of contemporary cultural politics in the republic of Macedonia," in: *Tradition, Modernization, Identities – The Traditional and the Modern in the Culture of Serbian and the Balkan Nations*, 559 (Niš: Faculty of Philosophy – University of Niš: 2012).

This means that the change of the dominant political orientation can lead to change of the dominant cultural and national narratives, representations and cultural politics in general. Having this in mind, the manipulative function of the cultural politics is inherent to its social functions.<sup>4</sup> Translated to the Macedonian case, this shift in dominant narratives and cultural politics, as stated above, is in direct connection with the parliament elections in 2006, when after almost 15 years of rule of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, the Democratic Christian party (VMRO-DPMNE) led by Nikola Gruevski won the elections and formed the government.

What then started was a process of rereading, rewriting and “updating” history. The reference of the ancient past of the Macedonian and the assumption of the existence of direct link between Alexander the Great and the modern day Macedonians as his descendants, became a fact held indisputable. Supported by the official institutions, but also by quasi-historical research and findings, the official history is being rewritten; the Macedonian Academy of Science and Arts published the “Macedonian Encyclopedia” (2009) but because of hard criticism especially from the Albanian intellectuals and historians, it was quickly withdrawn. Still it is held by some as a source of the real history of the Macedonians as ancient people. This event opened the door to the institutionalization of the idea of the ancient Macedonian nationhood, which was further elaborated in the projects that followed.

### **History as a construction site**

This new cultural policy and rebuilding of national and cultural identity is centered on the *Skopje 2014* project. What does this *Skopje 2014* project consist of? The statue of Alexander the Great erected at the very center of the main square is imagined to depict the Golden Age, and to be the symbol of the glorious past. Monuments of other ancient figures, such as Iustinianus or Filip II, Alexander’s father, are placed around it. Nearby, we can see new buildings in predominantly neoclassicist and neobaroque style, as well as modern architecture buildings built in brutalist architecture style (built in the Yugoslav era), now being reconstructed in this same new manner. These new neoclassicist and neobaroque (architectural) styles are not a part of cultural or architectural tradition in Macedonia. They present a falsified past, invention of past and historical artifacts where there are not any. Their aim is to *imagine* a community on false (and invented) grounds.

This project aims to create new national identity or, to reveal “the true Macedonian national identity” to the nowadays Macedonians but also to the world, an identity that for so long, as officials state, was suppressed, contested or forbidden. For that matter, the power elites are reaching for nationalist

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4 Ibid.

practices and cultural politics. As Anthony D. Smith points out, nationalism is neither only a matter of ideology, nor only a form of politics. Nationalism must be treated as a cultural phenomenon also.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, nationalism is primarily a cultural doctrine or a political ideology with cultural doctrine at its core. All the elements usually present in the process of nation-building, are present in Macedonia's peculiar case. The process of rewriting history, erection of new monuments, usage of history, especially the cult of the Golden Age as a return to the glorious past through series of myths, introduction of new ceremonies, usage of symbols such as flags etc, are all evident in these past years.<sup>6</sup> To borrow the words from Benedict Anderson:

“Nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are *cultural artefacts* of particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what way their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such a profound emotional legitimacy.”<sup>7</sup>

So, how does this new project “narrates the nation”? By building new national space, concentrated in the center of its capital, Skopje, embodied in the 15 meters high statue of Alexander the Great, erected as a symbol of Macedonian's *axis mundi*, the point from which the history of the nation starts and towards which everything should gravitate.

But what about the people who lived this not-so-distant past? Who were born, raised, married in a country that defined itself as part of a bigger community of culturally similar peoples, with shared values, traditions, customs? Those who identified themselves as Yugoslavs that shared a supranational identity and space and still do not identify themselves within the frames of this new imposed identity and collective identification? Those who are against this new identity politics are marked as traitors, enemies of the Macedonians and Macedonian state, communists, atheists (the new cultural policy is deeply connected with the religious orthodox identity, so the atheists are by definition communists, traitors and *vice versa*).

### Media memory or media as memory agents

Why use media as an instrument to analyze the politics of remembrance of the Yugoslav past? The answer is straightforward – media serve as memory or mnemonic agents. Especially when it comes to publicly owned broadcasters,

5 Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 7.

6 See also the latest policy study from the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities in Skopje: *Who owns Alexander the Great: A question upon which EU enlargement relies*, issued in November 2013. The analysis can be accessed here: <http://isshs.edu.mk/index.php?newsinfo=96>.

7 Бенедикт Андерсон, *Измислени заедници* (Скопје: Култура, 1991), 4.

where the state is directly involved all the way down from media councils and advisory boards to the lower levels of decision makers such as program directors. State-funded channels are regarded as a part of the state's agency because through the nomination of board members, the powerholders find a way to constantly intervene in the decisions regarding agenda setting. But in this text we will not analyze the news and the informational programs, but the original program and broadcasts produced by the national broadcaster (MRT). The actual law for broadcasting strictly instructs that all national media (state and privately owned) must produce their own programs, in Macedonian language, and in the amount of at least 30% of the entire broadcasted program. The media in Macedonia started doing this in late 2011. But what grabs one's attention at a first glance is the type of the produced programs. Almost all of the new documentaries are about the past, and especially about history before the Second World War. They focus either on the ancient past of the Macedonians, or on the revolutionary past under the Ottoman rule. The Yugoslav past seems to be erased from the public media memory.

### **Public service broadcasting law and regulations**

When it comes to the public service broadcasters, there are laws and regulations that apply specifically to them. As a candidate country for the EU, Macedonia has harmonized its laws with the European media policy as part of the association process. According to these regulations, the public service broadcaster needs to act in accordance with the following core principles: universality, diversity, independence, distinctiveness and quality. In order to be of service to all citizens equally, regardless of their national, ethnical, racial and cultural background, or their political views, the public broadcaster must produce programs that will have a cohesive function, that will guarantee freedom of expression, retain independence from any political or economic power center, and that will nurture media pluralism and diversity. The European media policy is founded on the concept of public interest in the media sphere, associated with "good governance" and "effective citizen participation", assuming participation of informed citizens, which simultaneously implies a free circulation of plentitude of different, opposing points of view and access of the citizens to the media.<sup>8</sup> That way the public service broadcaster will serve its role as the primary arena for political and cultural communication. The public interest should be the utmost principle the Macedonian Radio Television should be ruled and guided by.

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8 Snezana Trpevska et al. *Analysis of the Public broadcasting in the Republic of Macedonia in the Context of European Media Policy*, [http://www.vs.edu.mk/attachments/1134\\_2ANALYSIS\\_of\\_the\\_Public\\_Broadcasting\\_in\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Macedonia\\_in\\_the\\_Context\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Media\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.vs.edu.mk/attachments/1134_2ANALYSIS_of_the_Public_Broadcasting_in_the_Republic_of_Macedonia_in_the_Context_of_the_European_Media_Policy.pdf).

But an analysis dating from 2010<sup>9</sup> that examined the actual situation with the public service broadcaster concluded that the implementation of the European media policy is not taking place on the TV screens. The key rules under which MRT should act are not respected at any level. For example, the principle of independence from outside sources, which implies equal representation of different and opposing views, societal actors, parties and interest groups, is brutally broken. Advisory Board, the Board of Directors and the Board of Program Directors are all stuffed with people close to the ruling party, who are thus not free from influence from the centers of power (the government, the parliament, the political parties). Three years after this report, things have only worsened, and the freedom of the media is one of the main concerns of the European Union and a big issue in the reports regarding the advancement of Macedonian EU integration process.<sup>10</sup>

Recent “resurrection” of the public service broadcaster, when it underwent a deep transformation that involved a new program scheme, was meant to bring the station closer to the viewers, and enable it to become the most watched TV station. The main criticism of the “old” MRT was that it was not producing its own programs, and was not taking care of the nourishment of the cultural and the national spirit. After the transformation, this line of criticism prompted MRT to move in an extreme direction. More than ever before, the public broadcaster is producing programs and documentaries, but these newly produced broadcasts are almost exclusively representing the views, ideology, cultural and national politics of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE. What is evident so far is a hyperproduction of historical documentaries and shows that narrate the history of Macedonia and the Macedonians, the content of which reflects the tendency of antiquization of the past and of tracing the lineage of the Macedonians as the direct descendants of Alexander the Great and of the ancient Macedonia. Thus far the number of produced documentaries is 20-25,<sup>11</sup> but having in mind that most of them are made as serials, the number of episodes is approaching the total number of 100, with approximate duration of 45-60 minutes per episode.

### **Why documentaries matter?**

Unlike feature films, the documentaries are “burdened” with a certain authority. We assume that what we see is exactly how it was. Documentary

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9 Ibid.

10 An overview of the news covering EU representative Richard Howitt’s latest visit in Macedonia via *Time.mk* news aggregator: <http://www.time.mk/c/1c5a890143/hovit-ja-skenira-sostojbata-vo-makedonija-po-izvestajot-na-ek.html>

11 The list of produced documentaries is constantly enlarging, as the new documentaries are still being produced and broadcasted.

films, by their nature, imply that in order to show things as they are/were, the director and the production team conducted research, consulted professionals and experts, and so forth. This is especially the case when it comes to documentaries dealing with past events and history. In communication theory, what matters in the documentaries is the role of the variable *communicator* (the source of the message, the one who is communicating the message); the key aspect in the efficacy in the communication process is the credibility and trustworthiness of the communicator. The expertise implies assumption that the communicator has the ability to give the relevant information for the subject and the trustworthiness that the communicator will tell the truth. So, why these newly produced documentaries by the state-owned broadcaster matter? Because by broadcasting them, by presenting the “official” history, the media is creating (or at least acts with the intention to create) a common, national memory with the intention to “show” before our very eyes how that History looks like, and insisting that this is the official and the only approved history. MRT in this case, plays the role of a cultural and ideological center; it has the central position in the process of establishing and shaping collective memory. The audience can see documentaries as didactic and plausible stories about the past<sup>12</sup> aiming at a sensation of objective realism about the past. It has to be stated that the format of the most of the documentaries is a mixed format – half played by actors to reconstruct the events, supported by the factual statements of the historians and other experts. Thus, their role is to give credibility to the stated and to present it as the official, accredited truth.

Media operate as memory agents; they shape the preferred version of the past. Media productions especially function as some kind of archive of the mediated past, history and collective memory. The corpus of newly produced documentaries can be seen as media-based documentation of the past. Why are these documentaries so important and why is so much money and effort put into producing them? In accordance with the actual cultural politics they serve as a tool in the process of remaking national identity. Using this mass media channel seems like the easiest and the quickest way to broadcast the message (the official history) about the real identity and origin of the Macedonians. Just like ceremonial commemorations, monuments, rituals and alike, media production serves the role of setting boundaries that will differentiate and firmly distinct our group from the outsiders, and play an active role in this process of shaping and reshaping the past: “The concept of collective memory rests upon the assumption that every social group develops a memory of its past; a memory that emphasizes its uniqueness and allow it to

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12 Jose Carlos R. Laffond, “Televising the Sixties in Spain: Memories and Historical Constructions,” in: *On Media Memory*, ed. Motti Neiger et al, 175 (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).



preserve its self-image and pass it on to the next generations”<sup>13</sup>

But what is the nature of the collective memory? Collective memory is a socio-political construct, and it cannot be considered as evidence of the authenticity of a shared past. Rather, collective memory consists of versions of the past, carefully selected and dosed by a given community (or particular agents in that community) in order to suit the needs of those in power and “advance its goals and serve its self-perception. Such memory is defined and negotiated through changing socio-political power circumstances and agendas”<sup>14</sup>. So, for these memories to serve the role of boundaries enabling the members to define group membership and to reaffirm the group’s core convictions, collective memory has to be concretized through physical structures and cultural artifacts, such as monuments, historical museums, educational system, renaming of the streets, documentaries etc. In the process of selection of past events in order to construct a narrative of the past, the facts of the past are led by their “usefulness”, the ones that fit the larger master narratives and suit current needs: “The selection/construction process of shaping collective memory is ongoing and it involves political, cultural and sociological confrontations, as different interpreters compete over the place of their reading of the past in the public arena”<sup>15</sup>

Normatively speaking, media should provide a public arena for various agents who wish to influence the ways in which collective pasts are narrated and understood. But, when it comes to Macedonia, the case is rather different and unique. Although the law clearly states that 30% of all broadcasted program should be of national production, the privately owned national TV stations do not have the financial means to produce expensive programs so they fulfill the criteria by synchronizing Turkish soaps operas. The only TV station that has the resources to produce program is the state-owned broadcaster. So, when no other TV station produces documentaries, the only voice to be heard is that of the power holders, through the state-owned TV shows. So the idea that media provide arena for various perspectives, actors and agents is not the case in the Macedonia. Another thing important in this case is that the Government is the main and the biggest marketer in Macedonia, so all the national TV stations are “surviving” thanks to governments commercials and almost none of these TV stations would like to mess with the government and its’ official statements and politics.<sup>16</sup>

So, the representation of the national and cultural identity proposed by the programs of the stated-owned MRTV, in absence of other, opposing or

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13 Motti Neiger et al, “Editors’ Introduction,” in: *On media memory*, 4.

14 Ibid., 5.

15 Ibid., 7.

16 “Vlada Makedonije godišnje troši 20 miliona evra na oglase,” *Tanjug*. <http://www.tanjugbiz.rs/vest/4064/Vlada-Makedonije-godisnje-trosi-20-miliona-evra-na-ogljase>.

different versions, representations and voices, becomes the dominant public memory about the nation. It is an example of the importance of popular television narrative in the circulation and updating of national conscience. We shape our national, cultural and eventually our individual identity through the collective memories. And media-mediated historical narratives about the past help shape collective memories through media memory agenda setting, through setting the frequency of use (showing/screening) of particular past events, through making them visible (and others invisible). If particular historical events are not on the screen, they do not exist. If something is broadcasted, then it means that it is important; if it is not broadcasted than it has no importance whatsoever. By gradually setting them aside, not broadcasting them, the things invisible/absent from the screen, are disappearing from the public scene and collective memory. Collective memory is “inherently mediated phenomenon”<sup>17</sup> and there can be no collective memory without public articulation.

Media memory agenda setting is a powerful way to influence collective memory – by highlighting or marginalizing the memory of specific events, like the recent Yugoslav past. This is particularly important in the case of past events that have acquired certain political meaning over time. For instance, in the Macedonian context the ruling party and its supporters are using the derogative term “комуњари” (“the commies”) for the supporters of the biggest opposition party Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDUM), the direct successor of the Communist Party in Macedonia. What is present in the discourse of the daily public announcements and the political speeches of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE is the connection of the Yugoslav past with SDUM, their direct political opponents. After the dissolution of SFRY, SDUM ruled for almost 15 years, with the exception of a single mandate of VMRO-DPMNE from 1998 to 2002. While understanding how events are remembered is crucial, much ideological power lies in the mere question of which questions are salient on the memory agenda and which are forgotten.

### **Victims, martyrs and traitors**

How are the new documentaries narrating the Macedonian past? How the Yugoslav past is narrated? Is it present or absent? Just by looking at the titles it is clear that we are talking about the absence of the Yugoslav past and history. But because even the absence is also a sign, I will analyze this absence of the shared Yugoslav past in the recent TV production. By employing textual analysis, I am paying close attention to how this past is absent, and when present, how it is narrated.

If the title of the documentaries is a semantic core that summarizes the

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17 Ibid., 3.

entity and acts as a powerful aggregator of meaning and emotional response, all of the so far produced documentaries insinuate the unrecognized and contested identity of the Macedonians. The title aims to communicate the general idea, to inform the audience of what they are about to see. On the other hand, the title is rich in meanings, not just the literal meaning, but it is also a bearer of an emotional meaning, has a goal to cause a reaction in the viewer, to intrigue the viewer and make him watch. If the title is not the name of the historical personality the documentary is about, it is paradigmatic that most of the titles are centered around the discourses of victims, tragic heroism, outer enemies, suffering and treason. To name just few of the titles: *Sworn for Macedonia*, *One century of exile*, *The Adamantines*, *Victims of the Communism*<sup>18</sup> etc. In a historical perspective, what these titles want to depict is a past where Macedonians were the victims of history and geopolitical power games, but at the same time were relentlessly defending the Macedonian cause, sacrificing their own life. There is a grain of truth here. Macedonia was under the Ottoman rule for five centuries, and after the Balkan Wars and the Bucharest Treaty, parts of Macedonia that geographically, and arguably ethnically, belonged to it were given to the neighboring countries. But that is not the core question we are dealing with here. The history of Macedonia and the Balkans in general is so complex and interwoven that Churchill was right when he said the “the Balkans produce more history than they can consume”.

The major historical documentaries produced by the public service broadcaster, are serials of 10 to 30 episodes, focusing on different periods of the past. *Macedonia in the Antiquity*, *Macedonia through History*, *Macedonia under the Ottoman Rule* and *Twenty years of Macedonian independence* are the centerpieces and the largest productions. *The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization* (the name of the historic precedents of the ruling VMRO-DMPNE) and *Victims of Communism* are also structured in series with 7-10 episodes each. Another series worth mentioning is the *Testimonies*, a series where exiled Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia,<sup>19</sup> direct survivors and their closest family members, narrate their experiences, struggle and the lack of resolution of the Aegean question before Yugoslavia's breakup. Other titles include almost every important figure in the Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (one of the names of IMRO, in the foundering phase of the organization): *Dame Gruev*, *Pavel Shatev*, *Hristo Tatarchev*, *Kuzman Josifovski – Pitu*, *Ivan Hadzi Hicolov*, *Anton Dimitrov*, *Hristo Batandziev* and the actor *Risto Shishkov*. Except for Shishkov, all these people were leaders and on high positions in MRO/IMRO and were active participants in the struggle for free, autonomous and independent Macedonia, first in the Ilinden Uprising against

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18 The index of all titles and broadcasts is at the end of the text.

19 A part of the historical region of Macedonia that after the Bucharest Treaty of 1913 was awarded to Greece and had a large population of Slavic-speaking Orthodox Christians.

the Turks (1903) and later in the Balkan Wars.

Another paradigmatic example is the section describing the series, visible on the official website of the Macedonian Television as well as in the TV announcements. Here, once again the discourse about the final revelation of the contested truth about the Macedonian identity is present. In the announcement for the documentary in two parts, *Macedonia in the Antiquity*, it is said that this documentary feature tells the truth about “The Macedonian state from its earliest beginnings. A documentary in which you can discover the truth about the origin of the ancient Macedonian state”. Although it is famously problematic to talk about nation states before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, another documentary, *Macedonia through history*, a series in 33 episodes, is described as “testimony of the Macedonian state from 323 AD to 19<sup>th</sup> century”.<sup>20</sup> *One century of Exile* – the description says that

“this documentary is about the systematic genocide against the Macedonians from the occupied territories in the last 100 years, with an ultimate goal to make Macedonians give up their motherland, their own name and history and to vanish off the face of the earth as a nation. Tragic testimony of the fatal fate of hundreds of thousands Macedonian, victims of the European clash for dominance over Macedonian peninsula.”<sup>21</sup>

What can we learn about the past from the newly-produced documentaries? In the documentaries about the historical figures, they are depicted and presented as real patriots and martyrs, because of their political views and struggle for independent Macedonia. Such are the cases of Hristo Tatrchev, Kuzman Josifovski – Pitu, actor Risto Shishkov and many others. They were victims of the Yugoslav system, they were followed by the communist secret police UDBA and either ended up in prison where they eventually died, or were forced into exile. They were in conflict with the Macedonian and Yugoslav communist authorities and were declared enemies of the state, as they proclaimed that Macedonia once again is a victim, not allowed to declare its own independence, and that especially after the Informbiro period the Macedonian communists (and the Partisans) had let down the Macedonian cause. Within the Yugoslav federation for the first time in history the Macedonians were recognized as a nation, with its own culture and language, but in the current official narrative these achievements are overlooked. In the MRT’s documentaries the period of the National Liberation War and the Partisan movement is also shown as a movement for Macedonian Liberation from all oppressors. Its final goal is said to have been Macedonia as an independent state, not in a federation with the other Yugoslav nations.

20 The full list of episodes can be watched on the YouTube channel entitled *Macedonian History* on the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8EC4A90F79789C1D>

21 The descriptions can be accessed on the official website of MRT: <http://www.mtv.com.mk>.

The most distinctive is the case of the actor Risto Shiskov, a doyen of the Macedonian theater and film, who ended up in jail after being accused of insulting Serbian and Croatian actors, as well as Josip Broz – Tito. He was found guilty as a Macedonian nationalist, chauvinist and separatist. Part of the reasons why a documentary is made about him, beside the fact that he really was an important figure in the contemporary Macedonian culture, is the fact that he was an Aegean Macedonian. The present government is especially interested in their faith because of their exile after the Civil War in Greece from 1946 to 1949, and the perceived failure of the Yugoslav Communist authorities to undertake more decisive action to protect this population.

The *victim* discourse is also present in the documentary serial entitled *Victims of the Communism*. The official description of the TV serial says that this is

“a documentary film dedicated to the Macedonian victims of the communism. Exclusive, tragic and shocking testimonies of the witnesses of the period contested and hidden from the public sight, with the archival footages from the period. Find out about the people that sacrificed their lives for the ideal of free and independent Macedonia.”

In seven episodes, the serial tells the story about the Macedonian autonomist and separatist movement, about the court processes against the pro-Macedonian movement, and about the individuals and groups jailed for the idea of IMRO and united and independent Macedonia.

From the analysis conducted so far, it seems that in those very few shots talking about Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav past is presented in negative light. The Yugoslav past is regarded as a mistake and is not what the Macedonians are said to have always dreamt of – *an independent republic in its full ethnical and geographical borders*. In many of the documentaries when experts elaborate what were all these revolutionaries fighting about, the above stated phrase is one of the most repeated: when talking about revolutionaries that also fought in WWII, when talking about the Aegean refugees, when talking about the historical VMRO, when talking about the actor Risto Shishkov.

Even when the documentaries are dealing with historical figures that took active participation in the National Liberation War during the World War Two, such as Kuzman Josifovski – Pitu, who was one of the most eminent representatives of the Communist Party in Macedonia, they are still depicted as victims. The reason is that, as the documentary suggests, they were fighting for the independent, united and democratic Republic of Macedonia. The historiographical notes say that Tito demanded that Pitu be removed from the initiative council of the Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) because of Pitu's insistence on united and independent Macedonia that would include not just the main part, “the Vardar Macedonia”, but also the parts under the rule of Bulgaria and Greece. This plan was not

in the accordance with the Yugoslav communists' ideas for resolving the Macedonian question.<sup>22</sup> What is also stated here is that during the WWII, the Macedonian communists' aspiration for independent Macedonia was different from greater-Serbian and Bulgarian plans and politics, and not in line with the Yugoslav platform for a federation of Balkan states. Instead it was in line with the oft-repeated goal of Macedonia as united country in its full ethnical and geographical boundaries.

Similar is the case of Hristo Tatarchev and Pavel Shatev – both of them were active during the WWII, but later were proclaimed traitors and enemies of the Yugoslav state. Pavel Shatev was the first Minister of Justice in the post-WWII Macedonia, but after the Resolution of the Informbiro, he was proclaimed an “enemy of the state”, because of his conviction that the Yugoslav Federation has done nothing to resolve the Macedonian question, and that the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party has not approached the problem in a way that would enable unification of all the Macedonians in one state, so that the united Macedonia could then become a part of the Balkan communist federation. Likewise, Macedonian revolutionary Hristo Tatrchev, one of the founders of Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, active in the Ilinden Uprising and in the Balkan Wars, returned to Macedonia after the liberation in 1944, but was soon forced back into the exile because of his previous activities.

This discourse of victimhood and heroism, the sacrifice for a better future, led by the sacred idea of an autonomous and independent Macedonia is a discourse present in the official statements of the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and the President of the State Gjorge Ivanov. This is the official and increasingly present discourse from the highest officials when describing the situation Macedonia is currently in: a tragic victim of more powerful neighbors, a victim of the geopolitical strategies and power plays, with external (and internal) enemies everywhere, and the call for national unity and togetherness in reaching the national goals and aspirations. The EU and the NATO integration of Macedonia is “on the pause” until the name dispute with Greece is resolved. Five years in a row the European Commission is giving the recommendation that the accession negotiations between Macedonia and the EU should start, but no final date is set due to the Greek veto and lately due to the deteriorating independence of judiciary and media freedoms in the country. In the situation like this, it looks like the only thing left to do for the Macedonian authorities is to turn inwards, “strengthening the Macedonian unity and revealing the truth about the Macedonian identity”.

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22 Statement by professor Violeta Ackoska from the documentary film *Kuzman Josifovski Pitu*.

## Conclusion

Media act ideologically, they promote or prefer certain understanding of the world, disseminate particular meaning over others, serve more to some societal interests than to the others. This ideological effect of media can be discovered through the analysis of the textual structure of the messages they emit. The shift in the nationalist ideology we are witnessing in Macedonia is evident through the program scheme of public service broadcaster and its program policy. It forms a part of a broader ideological project that also includes the *Skopje 2014* project, renaming of the streets, rewriting the educational materials, etc. The media representation of national and cultural identity plays a major role in shaping the national and cultural identity by suppressing or favoring certain aspects of the past, that way shaping the media memory of the present generations, and the generations to be. With a new generation of adolescents, born after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, who do not share the Yugoslav past with their parents, grandparents or co-citizens only years older than them, the oblivion of the Yugoslav past and history seems like an understandable and logical possibility. With the systematic erasing of this not that distant history, the new generation of Macedonians will know only about their supposed ancient roots, but will have only a limited and ideologically painted grasp of what was happening in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What can be concluded from this short analysis (the corpus of newly produced documentaries is so enormous, that a proper, thorough analysis will require many more written pages) is that the Yugoslav past of Macedonia is absent from the screen. When present, it is represented in a negative manner, as a part of the history working against the interests and aspirations of the Macedonian people; historical figures connected with the Yugoslav past are depicted as victims of the system, tragic heroes and martyrs for a greater cause. It remains to be seen if this is just a transitory phenomenon, but having in mind the ongoing cultural politics of the Macedonian government, the odds that further documentaries dealing with the Yugoslav past in a more objective manner will be produced, seem minimal.

What is peculiar, also, is the absence of the voice and the image of the other nationalities from the screen. They seem invisible. There is no sign in these new broadcast that they even lived here. Did they take active participation in the depicted historical events? Not a single documentary is made about these

minorities.<sup>23</sup> What we witness here, in general, is the support and showing only of one side of the story – what is absent also is the voice of those who took active participation in the Partisan liberation movement and the National Liberation War; we cannot hear their testimonies, cannot see their side of the (hi)story, they are not given a voice and are not screened on the TV.

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23 The second channel of the Macedonian Television is called MRT2, and it is a program service for the ethnic minorities, with shows and programs in their native language. I tried to find information about documentaries produced in the minorities' respective languages, but I could not find any, given the fact that there is no website for this channel. Although the trailer for the MRT's new production series for the season 2012-2013 stated that this trailer is for the production of the two channels, the recent TV guides for MRT2 list informational program, some entertainment shows and foreign TV production, while no documentary production is evident. See, for example, <https://grid.mk/tvprogram/23/mtv-2>. Finally, there is a third channel of MRT, called "Parliamentary channel" where the parliamentary sessions are live-broadcasted.



**Index of documentaries:**

- The Adamantines, Season 2 (Тврдокорни, сезона 2), 8 episodes  
Pavel Shatev (Павел Шатев)  
Risto Shishkov (Ристо Шишков)  
Dr Hristo Tatarchev (д-р Христо Татарчев)  
Macedonian in Antiquity (Македонија низ антиката), 2 episodes  
20 years Macedonian independence (20 години македонска независност),  
21 episodes  
Macedonia through History (Македонија низ историјата), 8 episodes  
Macedonia under Ottoman Rule (Македонија под османлиска власт), 8  
episodes  
Sworn for Macedonia (Заколнати за Македонија)  
Interior Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (Внатрешна Македонска  
Револуционерна Организација), 10 episodes  
One century of Exile (Еден век прогонство), 6 episodes  
Victims of Communism (Жртви на комунизмот), 7 episodes  
Witnesses (Сведоци), 3 episodes  
Todor Aleksandrov (Тодор Александров), 4 episodes  
Kuzman Josifovski Pitu (Кузман Јосифовски Питу)  
Dame Gruev (Даме Груев)  
Ivan Hadzi Nikolov, Anton Dimitrov, Hristo Batandziev (Иван Хаџи Николов,  
Антон Димитров, Христо Батанџиев).

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## Резиме

Ана Поп Стефанија

### Емитовање Југославије – културна политика, медијско сећање и емитовање југословенске прошлости у Македонији

**Кључне речи:** културна политика, медијско сећање, емитовање, документарни филм, Југославија, Македонија, прошлост, историја.

Циљ текста је да размотри како је југословенска заједничка прошлост емитована у Македонији, двадесет и две године после распада Југославије. С тим у вези, истраживање је усмерено пре свега у правцу анализе медијске продукције македонског јавног сервиса, Македонске радио-телевизије (МРТ). Анализирајући најважније недавно произведене документарне филмове, текст настоји да покаже како се недавна промена културна политике и процес „(поновне) националне изградње“ може ишчитати из емитовања нових документарних програма и да установи у коликој је мери медијско сећање на југословенску прошлост присутно на македонској медијској сцени. На крају, текст нуди одговор на питање на који начин и у коликој мери недавно произведени медијски садржај доприносе политици сећања или заборављања југословенске прошлости.

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