

# “If you don’t vote VMRO you’re not Macedonian”

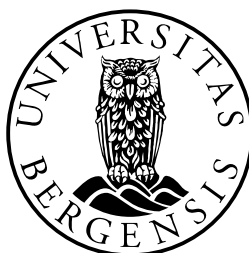
A study of Macedonian identity and national discourse in Skopje.



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Frontpage pictures is from the Macedonia Square. They are all taken the same day. Before, and under a political rally for the Government party VMRO-DPMNE.

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Map of Macedonia



Map of Macedonia showing the surrounding countries.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

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On one of my first days in the field I met the next door neighbour's son as he was waiting for the elevator. I estimated the boy to be around 16 years of age. I said hello and presented myself in Macedonian. He could probably hear quite easily that I was a foreigner and he used the opportunity to practice his English when he presented himself. We went into the elevator and stood there without saying anything until the elevator started to move down from the fourth floor. He asked me where I was from; I told him I was Norwegian. His response came immediately, "Norway is the richest country in Europe." I was surprised, but countered by telling him, "that may be so, but it is also the most expensive country to live in." The elevator stopped and we both went towards the front door of the building. The boy said "Macedonia is the poorest country in Europe", he opened the door, stopped, looked out towards the street and said "why did you want to come to hell?"

One of my favourite scholars on Macedonia, Vasiliki P. Neofetistos, is among the few who have done work on identity construction in Skopje. He states that "Even though at first sight Macedonian society seems to abound with rigid stereotypes that actors deploy to organize their social world along ethnic lines, a closer look reveals the existence of the alternative classificatory principles (...) upon which local actors model the porousness of ethnic boundaries and the endorsement of selected 'others' who are seen to escape the conventional images (...) The rigidity of stereotypes and the porousness of ethnic boundaries should be seen in relation of dialectical interaction with one another" (Neofetistos 2004:63).



Neofetistos ideas concerning ethnic relations and boundaries in Skopje, and my approach will follow the same lines of thought. I will in this thesis take a closer look at the current nation-building process and how it affects the ethnic Macedonian population in Skopje. I argue that the incumbent government party VMRO-DPMNE juxtaposes descent, history, and religion with ethnicity in their political rhetoric and makes it harder for Macedonians in Skopje to negotiate their identity and live in mixed ethnic communities. The majority of the Skopje population manages to navigate between expressions of rigid stereotypes and maintain good relations with people from different ethnic backgrounds. The “selected others” from a different ethnic or religious group described by Neofetistos above, are often persons who maintain close relations due to attending the same school, or being neighbours. Those who believe in coexistence regardless of ethnic origin are being challenged by today’s national identity building in Macedonia. This might create a future with less porous ethnic boundaries (Neofetistos, 2004).

The domestic political life and ethnic relations in Macedonia are an under-researched area in social science and particularly in social anthropology. A number of scholars have, however, studied the border area between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia (Karakasidou 1997; Danforth 1995). Among the international scholars who have done extensional work on domestic Macedonian issues are Brown (2003 et al.), Brunnbauer (2004 et al.) and Neofetistos (2004, 2008). Brown and Brunnbauer are both focusing on the construction of history as a factor in nation building. Neofetistos is focusing on the ethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians in Skopje.

Macedonia was in the early 1990s a success story among the former Yugoslav states. President Kiro Gligorov was seen as the father of a nation that had managed to break with the Federation of Yugoslavia and become independent without armed conflict, as the only one of the countries that got their independence in 1991. Together with Slovenia they were also the only country to fulfil the Badinter criteria<sup>1</sup>.

### Research Question

In this thesis, I analyse the linkage between ethnicity, identity and political power in Macedonia. I will through my analyses identify enabling structures and constraining factors for identity construction within the Macedonian political landscape. To achieve this purpose, I

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<sup>1</sup> The Badinter commission consisted of 5 presidents of constitutional courts in Europe, and gave legal advice on the split of SFRY. The criteria’s for Macedonia regulated their relation to the surrounding countries as well as the constitution.

will use the 2009 presidential elections as an extended case study. My aim is twofold. By utilising a social constructivist perspective inspired by ethnicity theory I wish to show, through an anthropological approach, how the incumbent government party, the VMRO-DPMNE<sup>2</sup>, uses its political position, to gain support for its view on national identity and thereby why Macedonian identity is changing now. Furthermore, I want to give examples of the political tactics, and the political discourse used in Macedonia during the election and how these affect ethnic identity and the Macedonians possibility to navigate and negotiate identities within the nation-state.

My empirical examples are derived from observed events, political debates and election materials, and drawn from data I collected during my fieldwork at the Macedonian Square and surrounding areas in Skopje from January to July 2009. I have followed the election campaign, the election itself, and the aftermath of the election with particular focus on the Macedonia Square in the centre of Skopje as a front stage for national discourse.

This thesis will discuss history as a contemporary political factor. I will try to use the former Yugoslav federation to exemplify with when I discuss history and national discourse on history. My concern is not though, with Macedonian history as such, but rather with the perception and interpretation of national history. I will also discuss how the past is shaping a political landscape and a national discourse in the present. I do not aim to analyse historical trajectories per se, I will merely analyse the use of historical narratives in contemporary political discourse. Rogers Brubaker is criticizing the fact that analysts too often see coexistence and conflict through the prism of ethnicity. Not everything people do is “ethnic”, people do not necessarily interact with each other as members of ethnic groups, but under certain political circumstances they do. The processes leading to this is what needs further analysing. It is not my aim to assess the competing claims from Greek or Albanian nationalists. Following theories of ethnicity and ethnic groups discussed among others by Fredrik Barth (1969, 1994a, 1994b), Katherine Verdery (1993,1996) and Rogers Brubaker (2002). Within specific chapters Maria Todorova, Umut Özkırmılı and Vasiliki Neofetistos will be important. Todorova’s accurate account of historical legacy in the Balkans founded in her profound knowledge of former Yugoslavia makes her theories valid also in Macedonia. Özkırmılı’s point of view from Turkey, a rather young nation-state derived from the Ottoman Empire gives his take on nationalism more credibility in Macedonia due to Macedonia’s close historical relation with the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Neofetistos gives us an accurate

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<sup>2</sup>Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity

account of ethnicity in both ethnic Macedonian communities and Albanian communities in Macedonia.

The issues addressed in this thesis have been actualised domestically by the 2009 election and internationally by the Euro-Atlantic integration process where Macedonia was denied NATO-membership at the Bucharest meeting in 2008 and had to delay EU accession talks, both due to the name issue with Greece<sup>3</sup>. The denial invigorated the public debate on two intimately connected issues, namely, the name issue and the issue of national identity in Macedonia.

### Theoretical Framework

This thesis is concerned with the Slavic speaking Macedonian population in Skopje and their conceptions of identity. I seek to explain how the Macedonians I met throughout my stay in Macedonia negotiate aspects of their identity, as citizens in the Republic of Macedonia. In the following I will explain the theoretical approach I have used to analyse discourse on Macedonian identity. I find it useful to begin with a presentation of different approaches to ethnicity and ethnic identity. Later in the chapter I will elaborate on analytical approaches to critical discourse analysis, national identity, and history in identity construction.

### Ethnicity, Groups and Boundaries

“Ethnicity is not more decided or changeable than the culture it is a part of, or the social situations that produces or reproduces it. Ethnicity as social identity is collective and individual, and is expressed in the public sphere through social interaction, and in the private sphere through self-identification.” (Jenkins 2002:4824)

Fredrik Barth’s theory on ethnic boundaries (1969) was ground-breaking for its time, and is still a foundation for further research on ethnicity even though it is strongly criticised for lacking aspects of history, and for not addressing important questions modern nation-state societies needs in the study of ethnicity. The theory is based on ethnic identity as an aspect of social organisation and not an aspect concerning culture. Barth says that culture is formed within the frames of a social unit. Barth’s main point is that we must direct our research towards boundary processes and recruitment processes and not towards the cultural values

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<sup>3</sup> The name issue is the conflict between Greece and The Republic of Macedonia over the name Macedonia. Ever since the Macedonian independence in 1991, Greek authorities have objected to the name. The reason is complex but the core of the problem is that the Greek area bordering Republic of Macedonia is also called Macedonia. The antique Macedonia is part of the Greek national history and therefore so important that they are objecting to the matter. UN has assigned a special representative to lead the negotiation between the two countries.

created and maintained within the frame of the social group. Through focusing on these processes Barth and the other contributors in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969) argued that ethnic groups are created through interaction where historical, economic and political factors are especially important. Ethnic groups are thereby shaped through local situations and are not predestined or fundamental cultural factors as the research before *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* implied (Barth 2004).

*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was important for the study of ethnicity, but the field has advanced its theories since then, and not to forget, the world has changed considerably since *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was written. Katherine Verdery did research on Romania both during Soviet times and after 1989, as a post-socialist state in the 90's. Her critique of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* were given in the article "Ethnicity, nationalism, and state-making" (1993). In this article Verdery focuses on several questions concerning state-making and nation-building processes. She also highlights some interesting questions concerning modernity and capitalism and how this has implications for ethnicity studies. A central element in her article is the link between ethnicity and nationalism, Verdery says that "it used to be possible to talk of ethnicity without landing in the great swamp of 'nationalism', but this is no longer the case" (1993:42). She boldly asks questions like "What is the relation between ethnicity and forces that seek to reify and homogenize culture – to make it shared?"(1993:43). Verdery places ethnicity and nationalism in a contemporary context saying that "The precondition to answering these questions is to juxtapose ethnicity with nationalism in the context of modern capitalism and state-formation"(1993:43). Several scholars have attempted to explain the link between ethnicity and nationalism (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1990), they tend to speak about nationalism instead of ethnicity according to Verdery (1996) and fail to explicitly bring ethnicity into the discussion. Brackette Williams (1989) sees state-formation as the most salient context within which ethnicity is produced. According to Williams, nationalism and ethnicity is a product of the states' different "plans and programs for constructing myths of homogeneity out of the realities of heterogeneity that characterize all nation building" (1989:429). Williams here give words to the thoughts I was left with after my stay in Macedonia, and are useful to explain how the political elite are tracing genealogy back to ancient myths in order to create homogeneity. Together with political power, the government party VMRO-DPMNE creates political, and social structures based on ethnicity and ethnic origin through their nation building. Following Williams et al., Verdery says that "Ethnicity is the product of state-making, not its precursor (cf. Fried 1968;

Williams 1989). It is not from ethnic identities that national identities develop; rather, the latter create the frame that generates the former” (Verdery 1994:47).

Ethnicity, in a modern constructivist view, is most often referred to as a trait of a ‘group’. The ‘group’ concept is scarcely addressed in anthropological literature, if not to say social sciences as a whole. The subject is far better researched within the field of social psychology (Hamilton et al. 1998, McGrath 1984). The sociologist Rogers Brubaker (2002) addresses the problematic consequences following the tendency to take groups for granted in the study of ethnicity, race, and nationhood, he is an advocate for interdisciplinary research on the subject:

“In the domain of ethnicity, nationalism and race, I mean by ‘groupism’ the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed. I mean the tendency to reify such groups, speaking of Serbs, Croats, Muslims and Albanians in the former Yugoslavia, Catholics and Protestants of Northern Ireland (...) as if they were internally homogenous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes.” (Brubaker 2002:164)

One of Brubaker’s goals is to address the “formation” of ethnic groups in the Balkans during the 1990s. He argues that “Challenges to ‘groupism’, however have been uneven. (...) [E]thnic groups continue to be understood as entities and cast as actors.” He explicitly addresses the assumption that “constructivist approaches of one kind or another are now dominant in academic discussions of ethnicity. Yet everyday talk, policy analysis, media reports, and even much ostensibly constructivist academic writing routinely frame accounts of ethnic, racial and national conflict in groupist terms as the struggles ‘of’ ethnic groups, races, and nations.” (2002:165)

Quoting Hirschfeld (1996) Brubaker says that “[T]he tendency to partition the social world into putatively deeply constituted, quasi-natural intrinsic kinds, is a key part of what we want to explain, not what we want to explain things with; it belongs to our empirical data, not to our analytical toolkit.” (Brubaker 2002:165).

Ethnicity, race and nationalism are cognitive schemes, discursive frames, and political projects. Following Brubaker, ethnicisation, racialisation and nationalisation are political, social, cultural and psychological processes and need to be analysed as such. As dialectical to group he introduces the concept of *groupness*. He explains *groupness* as a “contextually fluctuating conceptual variable”. (Brubaker 2003)” He then distinguishes his concept of

*groupness* from the static conception of the ‘group’. To be able to incorporate a more fluctuating view of groups in the Macedonian society, I have in the following made use of some analytical levels to better illuminate the variables in the Macedonian society.

Fredrik Barth points out that we need to find analytical procedures that differentiate states in terms of their structures and the patterns of action they pursue. He argues that we need to start by “analysing the policies of each state, linking these policies to features of the regime, that is, the state policy-making core” (Barth 1994a:20). We are then able to depict the power presented by the state as a specifiable third player in the process of boundary construction between groups. As actors they therefore will pursue dissimilar policies towards ethnic categories and movements in the population they seek to control: “Identity management, ethnic community formation, public laws and policies, regime interests and measures, and global processes thus fuse and form a complex field of politics and cultural processes” (Barth 1994a:20).

### Three Interconnecting Levels

To try and navigate in these complex fields of politics in a modern society like Macedonia, where different forces connect to the process of identity construction, I will use Barth’s method of situating the process on three different levels, a micro, a median and a macro level. The use of this analytical distinction of the three levels for my purpose does not imply that the boundaries between them are fixed in any way neither by me or any of my informants.

I will use Barth’s model as a frame for my further analyses in the thesis and the extended case study. I use the model to help me explain and categorise the various levels where I am trying to identify enabling and constraining factors for identity construction within the political landscape. I start out by using the micro level to find mechanisms which traditionally are researched by social anthropologists, with focus on persons and interpersonal interaction, the embracement or rejections of symbols, and social fellowships. Enabling and constraining factors will on the micro level mostly derive from other levels according to Barth. On the micro level, this thesis will explore the dichotomies between Macedonian identity construction in the making and the individual perceptions by my informants. I will focus on the lived experience of my informants, how my informants embrace or reject symbols, and how social fellowships are formative of the consciousness of ethnic identity. The present identity constructions seen in relation to the Yugoslav Macedonian identity, fit in to Michael Hertzfeld’s semiotic model of disemia (1987, 1997). Hertzfeld developed this

model during his research on Greek nationalism and national identity. Hertzfeld's model defines two discursive antipoles; one is called self-representation or self-display and the other, self-knowledge and self-recognition (Hertzfeld 1987). On the micro level individual identity will come together as a context of lived experience affected in some way or the other by the discourse on the median and macro level. The individual identity will eventually have an impact on a person's activities and interpretations when negotiating between self-representation and self-recognition.

The median level takes into consideration processes that collectivise and mobilise groups for different purposes. This level is where ethnic entrepreneurship is found. This is where stereotypes are established, often by emphasizing certain aspects of common identity and disregarding other factors (Greenwald et al. 2002), or by strengthening historical and mythical links already initialised by the political elite or the academic community on the macro level (Brunnbauer 2004). Processes on this level intervene to constrain and compel people's expression and action on the micro level; package deals and either-or choices are imposed, according to Barth. This thesis seeks to explain the role of ethnic entrepreneurs in Macedonia and to which extent they construct the views of the political elite and what means they use to do so.

Last but not least is the macro level, which often involves state policies, policymakers and academics. The legal creation of bureaucracies allocating rights and impediments according to formal criteria, and the arbitrary uses of force and compulsion, are often defined on this level. Ideologies are articulated and imposed, for example nationalism or ethno-nationalism, which often subtly transpose some of the identities arising from ethnicity. The control and manipulation of public information and discourse are an important part of the activities of every state. Global discourses, transnational NGOs and the international community play a variable but increasingly important part on this level, often articulating closely with interests on the median level (Barth 1994a). On this level, this thesis seeks to view the role of history within national identity construction, using the work of both Todorova (1996, 2004), Brunnbauer (2004) and Brown (2003) as examples. On the Macro level this thesis will also explore the national discourse presented on this level.

Barth's three levels are somewhat instrumental in their framing, Bentley (1987), implies that the debate concerning instrumentalist and primordialist views on ethnicity was merely two different levels concerning the issue of ethnicity. The debate evolved around the issue of whether or not ethnicity was made by old boundaries going back centuries (primordialism/essentialism), or if it was more of a constructed identity shaped by politicians

and society based on the context (instrumentalism). The debate no longer exists and the majority of academics within social anthropology agree on a social constructivist direction built upon ideas of instrumentalism.

Rogers Brubaker's (2002) perspectives on *groupness* focuses on the need to find out what people or organisations do to create categories; "this includes limiting access to scarce resources or particular domains of activity by excluding categorically distinguished outsiders" (Brubaker 2002:169). Comparing Brubaker's thoughts with Barth's ideas of ethnicity as social organisation, Brubaker also uses levels to divide when examining the different ways of looking at categories. "From above, we can focus on the ways in which categories are proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched and generally embedded in multifarious forms of governmentality (macro level), from below, we can study the 'micro politics' of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade or transform the categories that are imposed on them (micro level)" (Dominguez 1986 in Brubaker 2002:170). Brubaker suggests that we break it down and uses cognitive research and conversation analysis to study socio-cognitive and interactional processes on a micro level.

### Nationalism and Identities

I choose to approach nationalism with a social constructivist view and see nationalism as a form of discourse. A discourse analysis in a Foucaultian way, "whereby discourses not only serve to reflect and represent, but actually construct and shape society" (Fairclough 1995: 3-4), will be a useful tool for further analyses, following the discourse on all levels in Macedonia. This applies especially if viewed from a critical discourse perspective as "an inherent and irreducible element or facet of all social phenomena and all social change" (Fairclough 2007:10). Thus, discourses form parts of wider discursive strategies that serve to connect the past and the present with "(...) predictive or prescriptive imaginaries for the future" (Fairclough 2007:12). Critical discourse analysis explicitly focuses upon discourse as political and ideological practice.

I will use this as an analytical tool to follow processes of national discourse in Macedonia and how they are reproduced on a daily basis following Michael Billig (1995) and Umut Özkırımlı (2000, 2005), especially the latter, on critical discourse analysis.

Billig (1995) criticizes a view on nationalism that incorporates the ability to pin negative associations of nationalism on others. "[T]he case of 'nationalism' (...) being



semantically restricted to small sizes and exotic colours, 'nationalism' becomes identified as a problem: it occurs 'there' on the periphery, not 'here' at the centre. The separatists, the fascists and the guerrillas are the problem of nationalism. The ideological habits, by which 'our' nations are reproduced as nations, are unnamed and, thereby unnoticed." (Billig 1995:6) Billig introduces the term *banal nationalism* to enable him to talk about "our" established nation-states which are normally defined as "the West", whether it is Great Britain or New Zealand. Billig argues that people in western nation-states do not see the banal nationalism we are being presented with on an everyday basis. Nations where the daily reproduction of nationhood is politically important due to a nation-building process is often being more clear-cut and easier to focus on. Countries, often without a common national identity are the "others", the ones who have a 'nationalistic ideology'. Macedonia is one of these countries, a country struggling to find their national identity within the frames of a post-modern Western world. I will approach this question in chapter 3.

At the turn of the millennium, the relations of nationalism to the new global order, on the one hand, and to ethnicity, gender, and class, on the other, were facing new challenges. The theory of nationalism takes many forms and shapes, and are linked to various historical developments. A discussion of different approaches to the study of nationalism is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. The theory of nationalism which is most useful for my thesis is part of a new theoretical understanding of nationalism. This theory of nationalism was introduced in the 1990s, especially by Anderson (1998), who distinguished between nationalism in its classical version and that of ethnic politics, 'politics of identity' or 'politics of ethnicity'. Other scholars argue that the difference between classical nationalism and ethnic politics is a liberal distinction between 'good' and 'bad' nationalism, and that it is not so much different types of nationalism as it is the inadequacy of classical nationalism to properly represent the full range of political life within a post-modern society. Michael Billig (1995) suggests that "Consequently, an identity is to be found in the embodied habits of social life. Such habits include those of thinking and using language. To have a national identity is to possess ways of talking about nationhood." (Billig 1995:8) I argue that these "ways of talking about nationhood" is affected by the political elite in Macedonia on the macro level, through social networks of identity entrepreneurs on a median level; this effects the population in Skopje on a day to day basis at the micro level of Macedonian society. "Nationalism is a discourse that constantly shapes our consciousness and the way we constitute the meaning of the world. It determines our collective identity by producing and reproducing us as 'nationals'" (Billig 1995:6)

Building on the idea of imagined communities (Anderson 1983) and the thoughts on social constructivism and critical discourse analysis by Fairclough (1995, 2007) I will follow Özkırıklı(2000, 2005) and Billig (1995) and define national identities in my thesis as “ways of talking about nationhood”(1995:8).

### History and Identity

History is an important part of a person’s identity, and it is an important part of collective identity. History comes in many forms and shapes, everything from myths, to amateur history, and other forms of unofficial histories. In Macedonia there are different forms of histories. On several occasions, informants told me they would talk to me about these issues, because they loved their country and wanted me to tell the rest of the world about the “real” history of Macedonia. Through these experiences with my informants I learned that it is important to apply a minimum of historiography to define what kind of history I am applying in my thesis. I will use Keith Brown and Ulf Brunnbauer (2003,2004) as sources for a more balanced historical understanding. They have both at different periods been affiliated with the faculty of History at the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. I will use my informants’ perceptions of history and follow Maria Todorova (1996, 2004) and her line of thought when it comes to history as legacy to analyse understandings of history among my informants’ in Skopje. This will enable me not only to analyse the discourse, but hopefully to come to a deeper level of understanding as to why the Macedonians focus on antique history and Alexander the Great and why this is happening now.

### Stereotypes

Stereotypes are found in all societies, and are used within many different categories. The social psychologists Greenwald and Banaji (2002) mention race, gender and ethnicity as some of the issues that are affected by stereotypes. I argue that stereotypes lead to a development in the Macedonian society that increases processes of polarisation and are not just a simplified analytical description of a process shaping ethnic groups. Indeed ,I will argue that we need to see stereotypes as fundamental basic cognitive processes which again create a foundation for increased ‘groupness’ (Brubaker 2002) leading to polarisation of the two largest ethnic populations (Slavic-speaking and Albanian-speaking) in Macedonia. In the field of social anthropology few studies have included elaborations on the processes of stereotypes. There is, however, some research done by social psychologists on stereotypes. Banaji (2002) argues

that stereotypes refer to thoughts, knowledge, and expectations about social groups. From a psychologist's point of view she says that "stereotypes are fundamental in the ability to imagine, to the memory, planning, and in actions." Research within social psychology indicates that stereotypes within a group are minimized, and stereotypes between groups with different cultural perspectives are being exaggerated. It is generally assumed that there is a correlation between a social group and its attributes. Stereotypes are viewed as natural in the way that they are a bi-product of basic human processes as perception, categorising, learning, and memory. This cognitive view on stereotypes has dominated the field of research since the early 1980s.

Banaji (2002) divides stereotypes between their content and their processes. Content is what you believe about a social group. Process is how a stereotype affects the relation between people or social groups. Banaji underlines that both aspects are important to understand the origin and function of a stereotype in social interaction. I will argue that discourse on who 'we' are and who are 'the others' effects the content of a stereotype, but not the processes a stereotype has in social interaction. This can be viewed in relation to Barth's three analytical levels and Neofetistos view on close relations in Macedonia. The content of a stereotype is often rooted in median and macro levels. The process is expressed on a micro level and is therefore not affected by the content.

### [Ethnographic Context](#)

Even though the name Macedonia can be traced back to ancient times, it has been a contested name in modern times. The region Macedonia stretches out to Lake Ohrid in the west bordering on Albania, and to the east the Rodobe Mountains create a natural border to Bulgaria. In the south it reaches the Aegean Sea and the Pindos Mountains in Greece, and the northern borders are the Šar Mountains bordering on Kosovo. This geographical definition of Macedonia will hereafter be referred to as the historical Macedonia. It is considerably larger than the area that constitutes the Republic of Macedonia. The area which makes out today's Republic of Macedonia will hereafter figure only as Macedonia. The historical Macedonia is currently divided into three distinguished areas; Vardar-Macedonia which is the same area as the Republic of Macedonia, the part located in Greece is Aegean-Macedonia, and the part in Bulgaria is Pirin-Macedonia.

The Vardar valley goes straight through Macedonia, and was one of the most important roads between Donau in the north and the Aegean Sea in the south of the Balkans.

During the Roman Empire the main transportation route between Rome and Constantinople went through Macedonia. Macedonia is located in the centre of the Balkans and the strategic location of the area has made an impact on the people living there for hundreds of years. (Mønnesland, 1999).

The Macedonian national identity, which will be the issue at the centre of attention in this thesis, is built upon history from the last hundred years. Contemporary political discourse also builds on myths of ancient Macedonia, but to understand the current controversies of today, one also needs to understand the old history of the region.

In Macedonia it was not unusual for my informants to trace the genealogy of the Macedonian nation back 1,500 years, and some informants went back even further. One important aspect of ancient history is to understand the massive pressure the inhabitants of Macedonia have on their identity from the surrounding countries. The Greek claim to the area, which includes, name and identity as Macedonians are rooted in the Byzantine Empire with special emphasis on the antique Macedonia. In approximately 600 A.D. Salonika (Thessaloniki) was under siege by Slavic intruders, and even though the Byzantine Empire managed to maintain control of the area, Slavic tribes settled as far south as the Peloponnese Islands, but the southern part of Greece remained Greek speaking. From that point on, the historical area of Macedonia started a long lasting coexistence of Greek and Slavic speaking inhabitants (Mønnesland 1999, Brunnbauer 2003).

The city of Ohrid, situated on the Eastern shore of Lake Ohrid in the far west of Macedonia, is a city of great importance to the Slavic population in Macedonia. The city was not only a major cultural and religious centre for centuries, it was also an episcopal residence. St. Clement of Ohrid was a student of St. Cyril and Methodius. The latter ones are considered as the creators of the Cyrillic alphabet which today stretches out in the entire Slavic world, being the main script of the Christian Orthodox Church. Ohrid is where the first Slavic university was established and thereby the first centre for Macedonian literature. During the regency of Simon the Great of Bulgaria (893 – 927), Macedonia was a part of the Bulgarian Kingdom. King Simon had two heirs to the throne and the kingdom was split between two brothers. Samuil (976 – 1014) became king of the Western areas of the kingdom. He made Ohrid his capital. Samuil's kingdom is highlighted by Macedonian nationalists as the first autonomous Macedonian state. After this rather short period of time Macedonia became part of the Byzantine Empire. At the start of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Macedonia was part of the "Latin kingdom" established by Crusaders after their conquering of Constantinople in 1204. The Byzantine Empire managed to re-establish its rule in Macedonia and reigned until the Serbian

Kingdom of Dušan in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Shortly after Dušan's death, Macedonia was conquered by Ottoman forces in 1392. They would rule the area for five centuries until 1913 (Mønnesland 1999:132).

The time during the Ottoman reign has had a major influence on Macedonian culture. During the time of the Ottoman Empire the name Macedonia was seldom used. For the Ottomans, Skopje and its surroundings was closer to Constantinople than Serbia and Bosnia, and because of that more people from Turkish speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire were settling down there. According to Mønnesland (1999), Brunnbauer (2004) and Brown (2003), the Christian Slavic population lived relatively good lives during the Ottomans despite the strict hierarchical *Millet* system. In this system the Christian Orthodox population was under the Bulgarian Exarchate in Ohrid which existed until 1766 and was demolished due to pressure from the Greek Orthodox Church.

During and after the down period of the Ottoman Empire in 18<sup>th</sup> century several local leaders in the Balkans rebelled against the Sultan. This had an impact on Macedonia in the sense that the Albanian leader Ali Pasha took parts of the then Ottoman Macedonia as a result of a successful rebellion. In 1821 the Ottomans had their hands full with Ali Pasha, and the Greek rebellion arose. This was the end of Ottoman sovereignty in Greece, but the Sultan managed to regain control in Macedonia. Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century the conditions got worse for the Slavic population in Macedonia as the landlords of the *çiftliks*<sup>4</sup> got more power, and thereby they became more oppressive against the local, non-Turkish population. This resulted in, among other things, the Ilinden uprising in 1903.

When the other South Slavic countries realized that the Ottoman Empire might not be in the central Balkans forever, they started making claims to Ottoman areas. Bulgaria had a cultural awakening in the 1840s which again created a Bulgarian nationalism. One of Bulgarian nationalism's main objectives from the 1860s and onwards was to counterattack the Greek and Serbian influence in those parts of the Balkans still under Ottoman control. During this period Bulgaria needed support, and found that they shared common interests with Russia. After the Russian-Turkish war in 1877 – 1878 and as a result of the war, the San Stefano Treaty declared Greater Bulgaria to be under Ottoman supremacy. This enclosed the hole of today's Macedonia. Austria and Great Britain would not agree to a greater Bulgaria, and therefore Macedonia once again came under Ottoman rule.

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<sup>4</sup> Tyrkiske landeiere i byene

The Bulgarians were not the only ones who wanted a share of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Serbia demanded to get back their ancient Serbia. In 1902 the Serbs managed to convince the Ottoman leadership that they would be better off with a Serbian bishop in Skopje than a Bulgarian. Even the Romanians wanted to influence the Macedonian area. In Macedonia there was a large Romanian-speaking population, called Vlachs. Romanian schools were established, and the Vlach population even got their own episcopal residence in Bitola.

Both the Bulgarians and the Greeks were using history, language and ethnicity as arguments as to why they were the rightful rulers of Macedonia. The Greeks claimed that the Macedonians had been a part of the Byzantine Empire and that the Macedonians were Slavophone Greeks.

The Serbs were the last to claim parts of the then Ottoman-controlled area. They claimed that since Macedonia once was part of Tsar Dušan's kingdom, they had close ties with Serbia. They made an effort to show that both linguistically and ethnically the Macedonians were closer to Serbs than to the other surrounding countries. The Serbian name for Macedonia at the time was "Southern Serbia".

The Macedonians were approached from all sides, both with schools using different languages, and with the surrounding countries culture and nationality. Mønnesland (1999) argues that Macedonia was exposed to a unique cultural battle. The Turks, the Greeks, the Bulgarians, the Albanians and the Serbs made claims to the land and its people. In addition the Romanians had their cultural activity. The entangled situation pushed the population struggling for survival to extreme actions. As an example Mønnesland (1999) says that "It was not unusual for a father to send his sons to different schools (i.e. Bulgarian speaking, Greek speaking etc.) And the sons could thereby get education in different languages, and be affected by different cultures, and get different nationalities. In certain cases a father could be "Greek" while his sons were "Serb", "Bulgarian", or "Romanian". (Mønnesland 1999:135)

August 2 is Saint Elijah's day (*Ilinden den*). On this day in 1903, an uprising broke out in the Kruševo area. The uprising was planned and carried out by one of many secret organisations at the time fighting for Macedonian rights, the VMRO (The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation). The organisation was working for an autonomous Macedonian state, and their slogan was "Macedonia for Macedonians". The uprising lasted for around ten to eleven days). The *komitadjis*<sup>5</sup> of the VMRO entered the city of Kruševo and

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<sup>5</sup> Rebel fighting forces.

defeated the relatively small number of Ottoman forces stationed in the city barracks. When they had occupied the city, the leaders of the uprising Goče Delčev wrote the *Kruševo Manifest* to the Muslim population, stating that the uprising was not directed towards Muslims, but against injustice and violence towards the people. History even states that they managed to write a constitution for the young republic.

Several scholars have written about the history of Macedonia, but Keith Brown is the one who has put the most focus on the Ilinden uprising and its role and narrative within different national discourses. Brown (2003) refers to a book about the Ilinden uprising by George Ditsias written in 1904. The title of the book was *The Catastrophe of Krousovo: Outrages of Bulgarians and Ottomans against the Greeks* (Brown 2003:92). Brown uses old historical sources from the area<sup>6</sup> to interpret what actually happened in Kruševo the 11 days the *Kruševo Republic* lasted. The narrative seems to come in different wrappings, depending on who one is talking to. One of many opinions is that the post-World War II Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia found this uprising to be ideal for nation-building. They constructed a narrative fitting the Macedonian state they made and their policies at the time. Brown (2003) argues that the Ilinden Uprising is one of the most important happenings in Macedonian history due to the constructionist use of it in the post-modern era.

### Identity Discourse

Macedonia is a country with a rich history and a region which has been contested for centuries. According to Maria Todorova (1997), the Ottoman Empire had immense impact on the area, and its legacy is still apparent in Macedonia today. That said, this thesis will focus more on the Slavic-speaking Macedonian population and their identity shaped through nation-building processes. It is therefore important to take a closer look at the last hundred years of identity perceptions. The history shortly described above gives the reader an idea of how difficult it can be for Macedonian Citizens of today to base their identity on the past. In the following I will outline four distinct periods of time within the last hundred years of Macedonian history where identity discourse has been prominent.

The period of time during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the first period where identity discourse becomes important in a nation-building context. During this period of time the Ottoman Empire was shrinking, and the surrounding states made their influence on Macedonia.

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<sup>6</sup>Old archives from the city, and narratives written by eyewitnesses stored in a library in Skopje.

The first period of time in regards to identity discourse I have named The Yugoslav Macedonian time. During World War II Bulgaria took Germany's side and thereby became an allied of the axis countries. The partisan groups who fought the German and Bulgarian troops alongside the allied forces in the Balkans established the Yugoslav federation after the war. It later became the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia. Macedonia was one of six republics within Yugoslavia. The transformation from being an area of Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian interest and influence to become a member of a Slavic federation where Macedonians were defined as a distinct *narod*, was immense. The Yugoslav view on identity was not only an ideological category, but represented also political values that shaped identity construction to fit the new Macedonian state. The Yugoslav identity construction was rooted in the Slavic heritage of the middle ages, tracing genealogies through Slavic origin back to present time. The Socialist construction of identity had several distinct differences in comparison to the post-modern identity construction. Among other things religion was a non-existing factor in highlighting Slavic identity due to Socialist ideology. "The ideas, symbols, and rituals became so much part of the existence of growing up in Yugoslavia (and ultimately of identity) that they had to be purged not only from politics and public structures but from people's minds and emotions too" (Bringa 2004:148).

The next period I named The Slavic Macedonian time period, it came after the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1989 gave way for another shift in the conception of Macedonian identity. In 1991 Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia and took the name of the Republic of Macedonia. After 46 years in the safe haven of Yugoslavia, Macedonia was again "attacked" with claims to land, culture, and people. Again, Macedonia met challenges to their identity. This time the rhetoric had changed. Greek objections were the most dominant. Greece objected to the name, which they saw as a claim to the northern region of Greece. They objected to the flag which they claimed had a Greek symbol in it; the Vergina Sun. The Greek also refused to recognise the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The situation with Greece became so troubled that it ended in a full trade embargo.

Bulgaria on the other hand, continued more in the track they had done before Yugoslavia. The Bulgarian Embassy in Skopje was handing out Bulgarian passports to everyone who wanted to declare themselves Bulgarians instead of Macedonian. They still continue to claim that the Macedonian and Bulgarian language is the same, and that there is only difference in dialect.

Young domestic Albanian radicals advocated for a separate state for ethnic Albanians living in Macedonia. They named it Yliria, but they never managed to realise their plans, one



of the reasons were that they never got the support from the established ethnic Albanian political community. The largest turnover for the population was however that they went from a stable Socialist federation to a post-modern, liberal capitalist, democratic European nation-state, overnight. The rapid transformation resulted in Macedonia emerging into an interstitial position between “the Balkans” and “the west” becoming “the Balkans’ other within” (Neofetistos 2008:17). The transformation basically gave way for an identity search where the imagining of “the west” and the imaginings of “the Balkans” laid a basis for interpretation of one’s own identity (Todorova 1994, 1997, Neofetistos 2008). Furthermore, Neofetistos argues that “in local official discourse (...) ‘the Balkans’ are identified with antagonism and lack of order whereas ‘the West’ is associated with cooperation and order” (Neofetistos 2008:21).

The turn of the millennium marked another shift in Macedonian identity construction, this time it was more domestic than an outside threat giving way for “the ethnic Macedonian” period. The outbreak of war in Kosovo was followed by Albanian refugees flowing over the border, seeking shelter among Albanian relatives on the Macedonian side. Members of the Slavic Macedonian community felt threatened and nationalist sentiments rapidly developed. Nationalist forces in Macedonia started talking about the threat of Greater Albania<sup>7</sup>. When I was in Skopje I often heard statements like “we never had problems with the Albanians before the war in Kosovo”, or “It is the Kosovars who are the problem, our old Albanians were never a problem”. According to several historians writing on Macedonia (Brunnbauer, Brown et al) there were several Albanian riots throughout the Yugoslav period. The first came in 1967 and then several in the late 70s and in the 80s following the riots in Kosovo demanding better rights concerning language and education. These riots and claims were never a political issue during the Yugoslav period. The riots were often reduced to small notes in the state press Tanjug, stating “Youth riots in Tetovo” with no reference to either ethnic backgrounds or claims for equal rights. The anti-Albanian attitude from Slavic Macedonian nationalists, in combination with the growing distrust from the Albanians in Macedonia following the war in Kosovo, created a political division along ethnic identities. Political leaders among Albanians in Macedonia were displeased with the development of the new independent state, which indicated that the Slavic majority did not want a multi-ethnic state with equal rights. That said, Albanian political leaders did not ferment ethnic conflict upon Macedonia; the conflict was initiated by UÇK<sup>8</sup> in Kosovo, in combination with young rebellious Albanian politicians

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<sup>7</sup>Greater Albania is an old Albanian idea of a large Albanian nation consisting of Albania, Kosovo, North Western Macedonia and South Western Serbia.

<sup>8</sup>Kosovo Liberation Army, the rebel group from Kosovo fighting the Serbian Army.

(often referred to as extremists) who wanted to gain political power through this conflict. This conflict was never about Albanians wanting their own state within the borders of Macedonia. The escalation of the Kosovo war gave momentum to the nationalist parties in Macedonia. Some even feel that the international community are partly responsible for escalating the situation in Macedonia in its eagerness to regulate the domestic politics and the Macedonian community in order to stabilise the region and create European Security (Vik, 2001). Due to the Greek embargo in the mid-1990s the nation-building process had been slow, and the Macedonians started to grow impatient. When the Macedonian conflict erupted in February 2001, the people of Macedonia were forced to choose side. The political elites on both Macedonian and Albanian sides, failed to prevent the conflict. In a report from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee dated 2001, the author Ingrid Vik states:

“A major challenge has been the strained relations between the ethnic Albanian minority and the Macedonian majority. This eventually led to the current dramatic developments with confrontations between Albanian extremists and Macedonian forces.” (...) “The current violence must be understood in the context of the difficult inter-ethnic situation in Macedonia during the last decades. Despite positive multi-ethnic collaboration in the governing coalition, the main characteristic of the Macedonian society is the general process of segregation. Besides the fact that the principal ethnic groups speak different languages and practice different religions, they are increasingly congregating in different geographic regions and separate neighbourhoods. In addition ethnic Albanians and Macedonians operate in more or less separate economic spheres” (Vik 1/2001:7).

The report gives us a view of Macedonia seen from the perspective of international community. It is a good description first and foremost of how the international community at the time was assessing the situation. This reflects It also gives us a sense of the pressure the population was under to reify the “ethnic groups” they were identified as part of.

The fourth and last identity formation in Macedonia during the last century is the “Antique Macedonian” period. From 2006 when VMRO-DPMNE came to power and renamed Skopje airport to “Skopje Alexander the Great airport” they gained harsh criticism from Greece and increased their domestic political popularity. I argue that the political discourse in Skopje has moved from an ethnically divisive nationalist approach, to a nation-building discourse based on mythical genealogical descendant. The nation-building discourse

is constructed to override both cultural and regional claims from the surrounding countries, giving Macedonians something to be proud of, and at the same time downplaying the ethnic divergence in the country. When the current political elite are downplaying the ethnical discourse they do not want a compromise with the non-Macedonian speaking population, they want to prove that Macedonians are the indigenous people of the area and thereby the legitimate rulers of the territory, according to many of my informants. Identifying today's Slavic-speaking population with antique Macedonia creates a solid base for Macedonian identity, overriding all other claims to the region including Albanian claims for equal rights within the Republic. This is hereafter referred to as the process of antiquisation.

### Political Landscape

The government party is by far the most dominant political factor in Macedonia today. Currently, it holds the Presidency, the Office of the Prime Minister, the majority in the Parliament and the majority vote in 56 of 85 municipalities in Macedonia. The party was established in 1991, after the fall of the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia and the independence of the Macedonian Republic. The party in its present form is rather young, but claims to be heirs of the VMRO party, established in 1893, fighting for an independent Macedonia, during the Ottoman Empire. They present themselves as being a conservative Christian Democratic Party, but most scholars (Brunnbauer 2004, et al) would probably agree that their policies are quite ethno-nationalistic. After the break-up of Yugoslavia, Macedonia was seen as the peaceful example of the post-Yugoslav states. The first President of the independent republic, Kiro Gligorov, was a former high official from Belgrade who continued to pursue some elements of the policies from the Yugoslav federation through his Social Democratic Party, SDSM. The break with the Yugoslav past was half-hearted as most Macedonians still nurtured nostalgic feelings for Tito's contribution to the creation of a Macedonian nation and for the Yugoslav socialist welfare system (Brunnbauer 2004). The question of the referendum on independence was indicative of that: "Are you for a sovereign and autonomous Macedonian state that has the right to join a future union of sovereign Yugoslav states?" (Mojanoski 2000:31 in Brunnbauer 2004). During the Yugoslav era, Macedonia was one of the few republics within the Federation that was able to nurture patriotic feelings towards their ethnic origin, and fortify its national borders. One of the main reasons for this was Bulgarian claims to the language and culture of Macedonia. Bulgaria was one of the Axis countries and a former fascist state in the eyes of the Yugoslavian partisans. It was important for the officials in Belgrade that the young Republic of Macedonia established

its own sense of nationhood. After independence in 1991, the country's Albanian minority demanded equal rights, having been suppressed by Yugoslav authorities for so long. In the first years of independence, there was only one Albanian political party, the PDP (Party for Democratic Prosperity). Its only political agenda was to improve the rights of the Albanian population. To ethnic Macedonians, the idea of Albanians getting the same rights as themselves was unfamiliar after so many years under Yugoslav rule. As a spill-over effect of the Albanian uprisings in the Serbian Preševo Valley in 2001, rebel groups claiming to represent the Albanian population entered into skirmishes with Macedonian government forces. These encounters had their roots in other armed conflicts in the region, and soon became a conflict where the population had to take sides, and ended up as an ethnic conflict. The conflict was brought to an end with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) in August 2001.

The armed conflict in 2001 was an important factor in increasing the polarisation between the ethnic Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority, which constitutes around 25 per cent of the population. Following Brubaker (2002), this was a crucial moment in Macedonian history with regards to the crystallisation of groupness. This stands in stark contrast to the Serbian and Croatian wars where ethno-nationalism triggered off the armed conflicts that were to end up in creating a more homogenised community. Macedonia is therefore an example that fits into Brubaker's conception "high levels of groupness may be more the result of conflict (especially violent conflict) than its underlying cause" (Brubaker 2002). With the Ohrid Framework Agreement, negotiated by the international community, came new political divisions. The ruling coalition was from that point on obliged to encompass both a Macedonian and an Albanian party. The Macedonian political landscape was divided. The current landscape consists of some political parties that exclusively address the needs and expectations of the Macedonian population (VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM etc.) and some that represents the Albanian population only (DPA, DUI, etc.). That said, in theory the population has the freedom to vote for the party of one's own liking. Neofetistos (2004) referred to the 'boundaries' as porous, when he wrote about identity negotiation among Macedonians and Albanians in Skopje in everyday situations, but the stereotypes were still rigid.

An example of this from the 2009 presidential election was the man from Negotino, a small town in the heartland of Macedonia, who went to the religious leader of his orthodox church to ask for permission to vote for the candidate from an Albanian party: "Since I consider myself to be a big believer, and my fellow citizens know me

as one, I consulted my priest in order not to make a mistake, since Imer Selmani is a Muslim,” said one Negotino resident to the local "Dnevnik" newspaper<sup>9</sup>.

The political parties referred to in this thesis are divided in accordance with ethnicity, i.e. Macedonian and Albanian. It is important to note that these are the categories used by my Macedonian informants and not my analysis of the parties. The categorisation of one's own identity as Macedonian or Albanian is also based on different approaches to the idea of what it is to be a Macedonian.

### Methodological Considerations and Analytical focus

Arriving at Skopje Alexander the Great airport in mid-January 2009 I literary landed on one of the core themes of my thesis. I had been there several times before when I was working as a trainee at the Norwegian embassy in Skopje. I had been there on Easter holiday in 2008 and was now finally coming back to Skopje. The first impression was very nice, meeting old friends again, being able to explain that this time I'm going to stay for a longer period of time, and that they would see much more of me this time. I thought I would get a flying start on my fieldwork. In all honesty, I thought it would be much easier to regain contact with my old network and start my fieldwork and my participatory observation. In many ways it was easy to get back in touch with old friends, but as I was about to find out, it was much harder to show up in Skopje and ask them to become a part of their life again. A lot of things had happened since I left Skopje two years earlier. Two of my best friends had been in a terrible traffic accident, and was still physically affected by the incident. Others had married and gotten a family. In other words there was no room for an investigating anthropologist in their lives. New relations had to be made, I tried to get into conversations with people in parks and on the street, but discovered quite quickly that they told me exactly what I wanted to hear. Some of them even saw the opportunity to influence me with some political propaganda. I learnt an important lesson during those first weeks on fieldwork; building and maintaining good and trustworthy relations with your informants is an important part of anthropological fieldwork. It also became quite clear to me the advantages of participatory observation in comparison to doing regular interviews or using quantitative methods. To be able to build and maintain relations during fieldwork I needed to get out and meet people and spend a lot of time with them. Another concern was to steer clear of the international community. Many of

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<sup>9</sup>Balkan Insight.com 18 March 2009

them true and trusted friends, but for every hour I spent with members of the international community I lost an hour with my Macedonian informants.

My general first impression of friends and the city was that everything had changed to the worse.. People were disappointed by the fact that Macedonia once again had lost the opportunity to gain NATO membership, and thereby remained a country held on an arm's length to the Euro-Atlantic community. I realised that people in Skopje had a much more pessimistic attitude in general now than when I left 18 months earlier. One could sense a pessimistic mist hanging over the whole city. The future, in terms of economic stability, and employment opportunities did not look good seen through the eyes of a Macedonian. There was one thing that had changed though, the perception of Macedonia as an independent country. In 2006 I met people who did not believe that Macedonia would stay independent, these same people now thought of "Macedonia the cradle of modern society".

#### **Informal Interviews and Participatory Observation**

During my fieldwork an important method was the use of interviews. Interviews were conducted as both informal open-ended interviews. In addition my participatory observation was loose conversations over dinner, coffees, or drinking beer. I found that for the most part loose conversations were more useful both due to their more informal structure but also because they opened up for a wide range of other topics which I did not even consider in the first place. The negative side with more loose conversations was that they tended to drift off to something completely different than the topic I was interested in. When the conversation went out of my area I somehow always managed to get it back on topic again asking some new questions. As I participated actively in the daily lives of people in Skopje, I was in constant interaction with many different citizens' who shared their knowledge, their thoughts and their ideas with me.

During my fieldwork in the centre of Skopje I came in contact with a local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called Training Centre for Management of Conflicts (TCMC). They collaborated with a larger German NGO called Ziviler Friedendienst (ZFD). This local NGO's main task was to create dialog between groups, villages or persons in Macedonia with a strained interethnic relation. The employees from both NGO's gave me valuable inputs to my research question and provided me with empirical examples of importance to the thesis. It also gave me a unique opportunity to meet with both Albanians and Macedonians working together, and to get a side view of the Macedonian antiquisation

from representatives of the Albanian population. During the period of what the media reported as “interethnic violence in Struga” the affiliation to the local NGO gave me access to the discourse surrounding the Struga school issue in Skopje, and the possibility to relate the impressions my informants had of the Struga-incidents to my thesis.

I was also included into family life with several of my informants, and with my colleges at a local NGO. This was a great way of getting an insider’s view of Macedonian society and everyday life. I observed election rallies, and went to the traditional family dinner after voting. I also had the pleasure of going on trips to family cabins in the countryside, and different work-related trips with many of my informants.

### Analysis

In this thesis I focus on the majority Christian Slav population in Macedonia and follow their daily lives on the Macedonia Square and in vicinity of the square in the centre of Skopje. I have also followed some of my informant’s home to the municipality of Aerodrome where they live.

The most important location during my fieldwork was the Macedonia Square. The large square in the middle of Skopje is one of Europe’s largest city squares. It is used as a main arena for election campaigning both by the government party and the other larger parties. This is also where the largest political rallies were held during the election. The square is the centre of attention during my fieldwork and my main research area. Beside from the election the square is a meeting point for all of Skopje’s inhabitants. On the edges of the square there are numerous cafes and restaurants where people meets to take part in the old ritual of coffee drinking. In connection to the Square Macedonia is the riverside with even more cafes and restaurants. Here you will find that the modern meets the traditional, this is the place to see and be seen, the definitive and undisputed part of the political front stage (Goffman1959) in Skopje. Several of my informants frequented the square on a daily basis, living in the area, some even born and raised in Skopje centre. Prior to my arrival in Skopje, Macedonians told me that no-one actually originate from the centre of Skopje. “The centre is where everybody who has money moves to”. During my fieldwork I proved them wrong; actually quite a few of my informants came from families with deep roots and old history of occupancy in the Skopje centre. Macedonia Square was also an important place for domestic political scrutiny during my fieldwork in Skopje. The government decided to erect a large Christian Orthodox church on the square. The decision created massive protests especially from students and the younger generation. The protest materialised in to two protest marches.

Participants in the first protest march, thus of a peaceful character, were beaten up by pro-government activists. The unofficial version was that these pro-government activists were police officers in civilian clothes ordered to stop the demonstrators. The second protest march numbered a couple of hundred activists mostly students led by the student union from the Faculty of Architecture. In this way they signalled that they were not anti-government, only disagreeing professionally as future architects.

Aerodrome is the name of Skopje's biggest municipality and literary means Airport. After the earthquake in 1968 the people needed a place to live and the area surrounding the old airport, already demolished by the earthquake, was selected for housing purposes. The architecture is obviously dominated by late 1960s communistic style concrete buildings surrounded by public parks and green areas, so characteristic for the Yugoslav-era. The population is mainly working class and lower middle class citizens. The majority of the population in the Aerodrome area is Macedonians, but there are also Albanian citizens living in the Municipality. The area was home to a few of my informants, they commuted to the centre of Skopje on a daily basis to work which took around ten minutes.

This thesis is written with minor emphasis on the name issue or the current situation with Greece. The name issue is when addressed, solely viewed from the Macedonian perspective and seen in relation to the Macedonians view on their own identity. Greece must therefore be considered as an external other in issues concerning identity and nation-building.

The analysis in this thesis is done through an extended case study of the presidential election. My main analysis is connected to the Macedonia Square in the centre of Skopje and its surroundings. The area is part of the Centar municipality. I have also followed persons participating in rallies on Square Macedonia or working in the vicinity of the Square to their homes in the neighbouring municipality Aerodrome. I have within the frame of the extended case study done some smaller case studies. Focusing on one relatively small area in an urban setting, gives me the advantage of going in-depth on political opinions and enables me to present empirical examples representative for a relatively larger amount of collected observations from the same area. In the ensuing analysis I have as described earlier chosen to follow some of the same lines as Fredrik Barth did in his 1994 article. I have established three analytical levels; the micro, median and macro level. In order to highlight how the present political discourse is negotiated by different generations, and which factors they emphasise, I will present three generations in chapter 2.



### Interpretations and Confidentiality

Due to my previous residency in Skopje I had basic knowledge of the Macedonian language prior to my arrival. During my fieldwork I had language classes twice a week. This enabled me to follow most of the conversations in Macedonian. That said most of my informants spoke very good English and many of them preferred to speak English instead of Macedonian to me because they wanted to work on their English language skills. In the situations where both mine and my informants language skills were insufficient I spoke English and he or she would speak Macedonian. On some occasions some of my informants would insist on interpreting the conversations. These occasions were most often when we were together with senior members of their family, I got the impression that they did not want their uncle or grandfather to make a fool of himself by talking poor English, French or German. One of my discoveries was that the younger population would moderate many of the elders' viewpoints. Sometimes the elders noticed that they were erroneously interpreted and started to argue with their younger family members about the meaning of what they said. This created many interesting episodes. Most of the erroneously interpretations often came out as a more politically correct version than what was originally meant.

The name of the city and other locations in the thesis have not been changed as the particular location, the size and history of places within the thesis are important in the analysis of Macedonian identity construction. A big city like Skopje does not present the same issues of identifiability of informants as small scale face-to-face communities do. I have, however, chosen to give my informants aliases, or used other ways of preserving their anonymity. I have, stated the sex and age of my informants in empirical examples where these factors are of analytical significance.

### Chapter Overview

In chapter two, I will focus on the use of history in identity construction. My goal is to explain why a change in identity conception among the Slavic speaking majority occurs and why it occurs now. Following the work of among others Maria Todorova, I will use my informants conceptions of history juxtaposed with Todorova's conceptual distinction between the roles that history play in nationalist discourse and historiography in the Balkans. I have grouped my informants into three generational shifts, these shifts are divided on the basis of my own observations, and are used as analytical categories in combination with Todorova's conceptual distinction between history as legacy and history as perception to better grasp the

current nation-building process and the current discourse and construction of history in Macedonia.

In the third chapter, I discuss national discourse and identity construction in Macedonia. By merging theories of nationalism, and critical discourse analysis and by taking a social constructionist approach to nationalism, I explore different conceptions of Macedonian identity from a nation-building point of view. My aim is to give the reader a better understanding of the national discourse and how this provides me with some answers as to why the identity of the Slavic-speaking majority population in Macedonia is so contested.

In chapter four, I analyse my findings through an extended case-study of the 2009 presidential and municipal election with specific focus on the Macedonia Square in the centre of Skopje. Following the election campaign, the election and the aftermath of the election, I focus on the Slavic speaking majority population in Macedonia. This chapter includes two smaller case studies: The first is the demonstrations for and against the building of an Orthodox church on the square; the second is the Struga school incidents, where youths with Albanian and Macedonian ethnic background started fighting in the school yard, which lead to a politically charged debate about ethnic separation, going all the way up to the Minister of Education. These cases illustrate the national discourse and how ethnicity are used as an enabling factor for strengthening the ethnic boundaries between the Macedonians and the minority population in the country. I further try to view my informants on an individual level in society and look at the different motivating factors for supporting the national discourse. I aim to show how some individuals manage to negotiate a more heterogenic understanding of the Macedonian identity on the micro level, and by doing so opposes the homogenous conception of the Macedonian identity related to the national discourse.



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## Chapter 2

### History and Myths

#### The struggle for a national identity

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##### Introduction

*“The only basis of European culture and the only bias towards European civilization to be found in the Balkans after centuries of subjection to Asiatic Byzantinism, is the consciousness of nationality. Therefore, wherever and whenever in the Balkans national feeling became conscious, then, to that extent, does civilisation begin; and as such consciousness could best come through war, war in the Balkans was the only road to peace”<sup>10[1]</sup>(British diplomat, 1915, 31.)*

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<sup>10[1]</sup> Nationalism and war in the Near East (by a diplomatist), Oxford: Clarendon.

There are many aspects concerning identity construction in the young republic of Macedonia. My focus in this chapter will be on the perceptions and legacies of Macedonian national history following the work of Maria Todorova (1996, 2004). History was an important part of everyday discussions amongst my informants during my stay in Skopje in the spring of 2009, and seemingly functioned as a legitimization of Macedonia as an independent country. History was also used in order to distinguish Macedonians from the neighbouring countries. According to Brunnbauer, "History possesses important orientating and legitimising functions for society and the new political order." (Brunnbauer 2004:10).

Among my informants, history was not only a subject in school, but a subject people would discuss over dinner at home, in family gatherings or in coffee bars. The topic would often arise strong passions. The perception of the "real" history of Macedonia was contested and would often have political connotations. Brunnbauer argues that "Southeast European national identities are often contested, making history liable to contamination by myths" (Brunnbauer 2004:14). While Todorova is trying to deal with what she sees as unfair labelling of the Balkans by Western scholars. "[It] would be much better if the Yugoslav, not Balkan, crisis ceased to be explained in terms of Balkan Ghosts, ancient Balkan enmities, primordial Balkan cultural patterns and the proverbial Balkan turmoil (...) and instead was approached with the same rational criteria that the west reserves for itself: issues of self-determination versus inviolable status quo, citizenship and minority rights, problems of ethnic and religious autonomy, the prospects and limits of secession, the balance between big and small nations and states, the role of international institutions"(Todorova 2004:8).

### Lived Experience as History

In Macedonian society there is a contested notion of the past. To be able to describe why the Macedonian population has divergent notions of their history I will divide society into three different generations. My informants in the following example are between 18 and 92 years old. The informants between 18 and 32 will be called group A. Informants ranging from 32 to 70 years of age are called group B, and senior informants from 70 years and upwards constitute group C. Of course there are political, ideological, religious and many other factors that influence how one sees history in the Balkans, but dividing Macedonian society into three generations gives me a basis for further analyses. The three categories are not definite; they are more a sketch of how different Macedonian generations were affected by The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), based on my group of informants. Group A

represents those of my informants with the majority of their formative years (from primary school to university) in the Republic of Macedonia post-Yugoslavia (age 18 to 32). Group B consists of informants with the majority of their formative years within the SRM. (Age 32 to 70). With group C it is difficult to talk about formative years, due to a war torn country, and few educational possibilities.(age 70 to 93).

The first of my three groups is group A. The idea of introducing group A is to imagine how they have been influenced, growing up in Skopje mainly after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Viewed in a Bordieuan habitual framing it is possible to see how this group would have a different basis for their personal opinions compared to the two other groups. This group have mainly gone to school after the country's independence in 1991. In that sense, they represent the first generation without lived experience from the former Yugoslavia, and the first Macedonian generation with a post-socialist identity. Historiography is important in a social constructivist view, and history and whether or not it was constructed in the former Yugoslavia or by the present political elite, was often at the core of the discussion among my informants. Brunnbauer (2004) looks at all history as constructed and says that "Historiography had certainly been one of the most highly ideologised disciplines because of its special usefulness for the legitimisation of communist rule." (Brunnbauer 2004:9). History was also instrumental for the construction of post-socialist identities (2004). Due to its strongly centralised and institutionalised control, Macedonia is especially fragile to such political control since a politically aligned historiography forms a more homogenous body of scholars. Brunnbauer indicates that within the narrow academic circles in Skopje there is no room for criticism if you want to keep your job. This was confirmed by academics from different academic institutions in Skopje whom I spoke to. Group A is in general proud of Macedonia's antique history and sees themselves as direct descendants of Alexander the Great. The Yugoslav period gives them bad associations because they feel that the Macedonian population was treated as a second class *narod*. Expressions like "The Federation (Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia) also confiscated land, and a lot of people were unrightfully imprisoned" were common among this group. The majority of the group could only accept the name *Republic of Macedonia*, and would not make compromises with Greece regarding the name issue. The attitude to EU membership is mostly positive, but as one of my informants points out, "What is the point of getting into the EU if we cannot use the rightful name of our sovereign country?" Attitudes like this seem to be popular among my younger informants, and follow the political line of the government.

Group B is made up by the generation between 32 and 70 years of age. With this group I want to exemplify the historical perception of the population who grew up in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia (SRM). The core of this group ended their education and lived most of their lives within the Socialist Republic. In my view, group B reflects more upon their identity as Macedonians, and take into consideration the political “framing” of historical facts in past and present. An important aspect of their lived experience which the younger population now lacks was their ability to travel with a Yugoslav passport. In their youth they had the opportunity to travel anywhere in the world with their passport due to the unique position of Yugoslavia as a nonaligned state in cold-war Europe. Today this is impossible because of visa regulations and restrictions making the young and largely unemployed<sup>11</sup> population more or less imprisoned within the borders of their own country. As a stark contrast to group A, this group expresses a satisfaction towards the living conditions of the Yugoslav period. They highlight the fact that most people had a very good life due to a non-existing unemployment rate, a well-functioning educational system, with recognition in the rest of the world. This group spoke about a well-functioning system with professional and free healthcare and a secure society for the general population. In 2006 approximately 68 percent of the Macedonian population states that they would have been better off with a strong leader like Tito, than they would have with democracy<sup>12[2]</sup>. The majority of Group B does not emphasise antique history, and they feel that there is too much focus on Alexander the Great. A common historical argument of group B is that Macedonia got its name due to the Yugoslav Federation. This is an important historical moment, due to the fact that the area where Republic of Macedonia is located now, was divided between Serbia and Bulgaria before WWII.

Group C is constituted by senior informants, 70 years of age or older. They have a tendency to be more enthusiastic about the official nation-building process. They tend to agree with the official nationalist claim to descendancy from Alexander the Great; they often advocate the idea that their forefathers always lived in the area known as Macedonia. They are pointing out that this also applies to their fellow Macedonians in Pirin Macedonia and Aegean Macedonia in addition to Vardar Macedonia.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, they highlight that

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<sup>11</sup>The official unemployment rate in Macedonia at the time was 38%. The “grey” economy is large, so the actual unemployment is perceived to be between 20-25% for the young population.

<sup>12[2]</sup>OSCE Early warning report nr.3, 2006.

<sup>13[4]</sup> This refers to the Ottoman division of the area Macedonia. The area is now partly in Greece, partly in Bulgaria, and Partly in Skopje. Aegean Macedonia refers to the part in Greece, Pirin Macedonia refers to the part in Bulgaria, and Vardar Macedonia refers to the Republic of Macedonia.

Macedonians always fought for this land. During the Ottoman rule there was a constant resistance movement fighting the Turkish. According to group C, there had been a long battle for an independent Macedonia ever since the Ilinden uprising.<sup>14</sup> I suggest there were many different reasons why the older generation embraces the new nation-building process. A plausible explanation is that most of my informants in group C had experienced quite a lot of turmoil in their life's, and had lived through several wars. This may give them a reason to hope for a more stable future. One example of this was an old man of 92, who had lived in six different countries in his life and never been outside the area now called The Republic of Macedonia.

He told me that he had gone to primary school three times when he was young. Every time he started school there was a new war. The old man had never finished primary school, but emphasized with a smile on his face that he had almost graduated from the hard school of life

The most obvious reason as to why this group embraces the new ideas of a Macedonian nation and its legacy from the antique Macedonia is that some of the informants in this group have experienced life before Yugoslavia was formed. A small discovery here is that the older generations tend to refer more to what their father told them, and how their older family members were treated by the authorities. The second possible explanation is that this generation is more connected to different aspects of leadership in Macedonia, within political spheres, as well as economic and cultural spheres. This makes them social entrepreneurs in what I see as a social network of give and take, a heritage from Yugoslavia. I will explain this in detail in chapter 4.

### Historical Symbols as Political Discourse

Two weeks before Election Day, VMRO-DPMNE had its grand political rally at the Square Macedonia in the centre of Skopje. The celebration started early with numerous local branches of the party parading in the streets, carrying banners in black and red (the official colours of VMRO-DPMNE) with slogans telling the bystanders which local branches they were representing. The parade ended at the Macedonia Square where the organisers had put up a large stage and loudspeakers bigger than those used at an average rock concert. Around 5 PM, the rally was about to begin; the music had changed, the square was almost filled up with political supporters, most of them having marched under some of the banners, many of them had wrapped

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<sup>14[3]</sup> Explained earlier in the thesis, see Keith Brown 2000, for further readings.



themselves in or were carrying the old Macedonian flag with the 16-ray Vergina sun<sup>15</sup>. Other VMRO supporters in the square were wearing party t-shirts with the picture of Gorgje Ivanov, the presidential candidate, and some had even painted their faces in black and red. The crowd mainly consisted of young people below 35 years of age and senior citizens above 60 or older. Between political speeches from the different candidates running for mayor in some of Skopje's municipalities, the crowd was singing VMRO songs waiting for their reformist, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski. Presidential candidate Ivanov gave a speech and everybody was cheering, but still it was as if the crowd was waiting for its leader. Gruevski arrived to the tune of the national anthem, and red flares were set off with professional coordination in strategic places in the square. The noise was at least the double of what it had been earlier during the rally. They greeted him as they would have greeted Tito. (From fieldnotes)

The experience at Square Macedonia in March 2009 gave me a feeling of almost being at one of the old Yugoslav gatherings, as Tone Bringa describes them in her article "The peaceful death of Tito and the violent end of Yugoslavia" (2004). Furthermore, I believe it shows that some supporters of VMRO-DPMNE have embraced the notion of social fellowship, so common during the Yugoslav period. Experiencing the political rally caught my attention as to how symbols were important to VMRO supporters. One of the VMRO supporters told me "you know that the colours black and red were the unit colours used by roman legions stationed in this area, and have always been the colours of this area" (referring to the area where the Republic of Macedonia is situated). The flag with the Vergina sun is said to be a nationalist symbol. I believe, however, from the way I saw it in use, that it is a symbol that is subject to individual interpretation. At the same time as it is embracing the idea of the present-day Macedonian population being the descendants of the ancient Macedonians, I saw it used as both a symbol of anti-Greek sentiments and as an anti-Albanian symbol within Macedonia.

The nation and, thus, Macedonian ethnicity have many different faces. The political elite in Macedonia are in the process of creating a national identity that is different from the identity the former generation grew up with in Yugoslavia. The process is referred to as *antiquisation*.<sup>16</sup> One important aspect of my research problem is to consider different identity perceptions of the Slavic speaking population in Skopje. The difference between the persons who see Macedonians as ancestors of the antique Macedonians, and the individuals who disregard this history is of interest, and history as such is important in Macedonian identity. I make a distinction between these two conceptions of history and identity. Vermeulen and

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<sup>15</sup>The old Macedonian flag became a nationalist and party symbol after VMRO-DPMNE continued to use it as a protest against the changing of the flag in 1995. Macedonia had to change its flag after vast protests from Greece, which claimed that the Vergina sun is a Hellenic symbol.

<sup>16</sup>See page 22 Introduction Chapter

Govers argue that there are different ways to distinguish ethnic identities from other social identities, some consider the “belief in a shared culture (...) others consider an ideology of common descent, substance, and/or history as the main differentiating characteristics (see e.g. Wallerstein 1991:78; Wolf 1988 in Vermeulen, Govers 1993:3). In Macedonia’s case the question of descent and cultural origins is highly contested in the population.

### History as Genealogy

In the following I present examples of how the Macedonians trace their genealogy back to the antique Macedonians. The empirical example below is a good introduction to the process of antiquisation. The example is taken from a poster that was heavily debated in Skopje at the end of May, early June 2009, in the aftermath of the election. The letters on the poster were of the kind that one finds written on marble from ancient times. The background of the poster was decorated with pictures of Alexander the Great, Gorče Delcev, Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius together with Tčento, the first leader of ASNOM (Anti-Fascist Assembly for the People’s Liberation of Macedonia), and the aforementioned Vergina sun, an ancient symbol of Alexander the Great’s empire. In the beginning, the discussion evolved around who put the posters up. Of course, it was somebody with strong nationalist interests, but the poster was made of good quality paper; judged from the detailed background, it was an expensive poster. It had been put up during the night so nobody had seen the persons who had done it. In addition, there were several thousand copies and they hung everywhere in the Skopje area.

### “Gordost” “Pride”

*Fillip was Macedonian*

*Aleksandar was Macedonian*

*Saints Cyril and Methodius were Macedonians*

*Saint Climent Ohridski was Macedonian*

*Tsar Samuel was Macedonian*

*King Marko was Macedonian*

*Karpos was Macedonian*

*Gemitiite were Macedonians*

*Gorče Delcev was Macedonian*

*Dame Gruev was Macedonian*

*Nikola Karev was Macedonian*  
*Krste P. Misirkov was Macedonian*  
*M.A. Tčento was Macedonian*  
*Be proud of our history; be proud of our ancestors,*  
***Be proud that you are Macedonian!***  
[Transcribed from the Cyrillic alphabet]

The names on the poster are all chosen because they say something about Macedonia as a nation. Most of the names are quite disputed when used with Macedonian in front of them and says something about Macedonia's relation to the surrounding countries and how difficult it can be to navigate within the history of the region. Phillip and Aleksandar on top is Philip the Second and Alexander the Great. Both are also claimed as ancestors of Greece. Saints Cyril and Methodius are chosen due to their status as creators of the Cyrillic alphabet and for their relation to and evidence of a long-standing orthodox Christian tradition on Macedonian soil, they are also claimed by Bulgaria. Saint Clement Ohridski is mentioned for the same reason, but also for having founded the first university in Ohrid around 900 AD. Tsar Samuel is a Bulgarian king who reigned from 997 to 1014 AD. He moved the capital city to Ohrid, which today is situated in Macedonia. Therefore, also the Macedonians claim him as their hero. The next one on the list is King Marko, who in Wikipedia<sup>17</sup> is mentioned in two separate paragraphs; one for Serbian epic poetry and another for Bulgarian epic poetry. His capital was Prilep, which today is situated in Macedonia, so the Macedonians regard him as a Macedonian. Gorče Delcev, Dame Gruev, and Nikola Karev are all heroes of the Ilinden uprising mentioned above. Karev was the president of the Kruševo republic during the ten days it lasted, before Ottoman forces came back with reinforcements and killed the rebels before they punished the population of the village. Misirkov is claimed as a Bulgarian writer in Bulgaria, but he is famous in Macedonia because he constructed the modern Macedonian language. His nationality is highly disputed. Tčento is mentioned because he has become a symbol of anti-Yugoslav sentiments. He is not a prominent figure in Macedonian history and is mostly used among nationalists. In Skopje you could see graffiti on walls and monuments with the name Tčento spelled with an ancient cross inside the O in his name, a typical nationalist sign.

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<sup>17</sup> Here I am using Wikipedia not as a reference, but as an empirical example, because it says something about the understanding between the people who has written the text on King Marko.

If we take into consideration the details on the poster, it represents a process of antiquisation among Macedonians in Skopje. It starts with ancient names and then mentions the other names in chronological order up until Tčento (1953). It is almost as if one can trace descent all the way from Alexander the Great to our time. It suits the purpose of tracing genealogies for the current nation-building.

Another aspect of the poster is that it is directed towards “Macedonians”. The historical persons mentioned on the poster are only addressing members of the population who identify with symbols of antique history, Orthodox Christianity, or Slavic ancestors. Persons and symbols that the Albanians of Skopje could relate to are left out. Just to illustrate my point; a person that would have been very easy to include in the poster is Mother Theresa, who was born in the centre of Skopje and was both an Albanian and a Christian.

The heading in one of Macedonia’s biggest newspapers stated: “Political centres use anonymous propaganda: Proud Macedonians, but hiding themselves” (Vreme 2 June 2009). This was not the first “poster campaign” Skopje had seen, there have been posters put up in the same manner advocating both anti-abortion campaigns and religious education in schools. In the summer of 2008, there was even a campaign telling people not to spend their holidays in Greece, a country that denies their identity. In the aftermath of the poster case, it leaked out that it was the government party itself which had initiated the stunt.

#### “Legacy as Continuity” vs. “Legacy as Perception”

Macedonia as part of the Balkans has during the past two centuries experienced what Todorova (2004) refers to as “cruel twists”. She explains these periods as having been characterized by rapid social change, political turmoil and drastic identity transformations. In Macedonia’s case there have been three ‘cruel twists’ during the last century. The first appeared between the end of 500 years with Ottoman rule and the First Balkan war, the result of the first cruel twist was Serbian rule of the area now called Republic of Macedonia (RM) until they came under Bulgarian rule after the first Balkan war. According to Todorova (2004) The Balkan states in general started the process of disregarding the Ottoman characteristics immediately after 1913. The area was between the first Balkan War and the end of the Second World War characterised by chaos, especially concerning borderlines and ethnic homogenization processes<sup>18</sup>. In the time period between the end of WWII and the formation

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<sup>18</sup>[5]With special reference to Danforth (1995), Karakasidou (1997) on the Greek nation building in the North of Greece, between Thessaloniki and Bitola.

of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia the second ‘cruel twist’ appeared. Post WWII<sup>19[6]</sup> Macedonian identity was during Yugoslavia formed on the basis of socialist values dominating the SFRY, and as part of Yugoslavia Macedonians enjoyed the benefits of a major political power broker in world politics. The third and last of the ‘cruel twists’ happened in 1991 when the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) collapsed. In Macedonia’s case it ended in the foundation of a new autonomous Republic of Macedonia in 1991. Macedonia was the only one of the six states within the former socialist federation which both fulfilled the criteria of the Badinter Commission<sup>20</sup> and avoided internal conflict.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have given a short overview of the different “cruel twists” that Macedonia has been going through during the last century. I now intend to give an explanation to how long these transitions lasted. How the people adjusted to them, and how the identity of the population was transformed. This is important to understand the present identity shift, from being an independent Republic as a result of the end of Yugoslavia, to becoming the ancestors of the antique Macedonia.

Maria Todorova believes that historical memory has been important in legitimising and explaining ethnic identity construction among political elites. Historical memory is also closely linked to the mobilisation of ethnic groups. By following her steps I will be able to answer the questions presented earlier. Firstly she says that “The real question is not that collective memory can be manipulated (of course it can), but why do people hear the message at a particular moment, so that they can say that they just *learned* what has always been known” (Todorova 2004:4). To cite Alon Confino, “the crucial issue in the history of memory is not how a past is represented but why it was received or rejected”.<sup>21</sup> According to Todorova (2004) the question is not one of reconstructing, but of constructing the past. She distinguishes between what she defines to be *legacy as continuity* and *legacy as perception*. She describes the difference as “in both cases the categories designate social facts but that they are at different removes from experience. In the instance of ‘perception’ the social fact is removed yet a step further from immediate reality and one can perhaps juxtapose the natural versus the cultural” (Todorova 2004:12). Legacy as continuity is explained as a process that begins after a certain rule ceases to exist within a particular region, which then shapes itself into a successor state. The characteristics of the former rule are handed down mainly from historical situations of the time period. Applying this to the Macedonian case, I argue that due

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<sup>19[6]</sup> In Macedonia WWII is better known as the war against the Fascists.

<sup>20</sup> See previous footnote

<sup>21[7]</sup> Alon Confino ‘Collective memory’ 1389-90, *American Historical Review*, 102, Dec. 1997.

to the fact that most of the Macedonian population was satisfied with the Yugoslav federation and the way of life within it, they were not in a hurry to break with the characteristics of socialist Yugoslavia. The new president Kiro Gligorov was a former official from Belgrade, and continued to organise the young republic in a more or less socialist manner. Even though one might argue that the legacy of continuity started immediately after the break with SFRY in Macedonia due to the fact that they changed to a social democratic system, free elections, and unregulated free markets, I would argue that the process of thinking of Macedonia as an independent country went slowly among the population. One could argue that Macedonia did not manage to break with its socialist past until VMRO-DPMNE came to power in 1998, and even this political break was pushed by the poor economic situation in the country caused by the Greek boycott in 1995<sup>22[8]</sup>. Approaching the question from another angle one could say that Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia went through an all-out ethnic war putting them in the “high-speed lane of transition”<sup>23</sup>. The transition in the relatively peaceful Macedonia, which in other circumstances would be described as normal, then seems slow only when compared to the other republics of former Yugoslavia.

Todorova (2004) argues that the Balkan states had made a break with the Ottoman characteristics almost immediately after they achieved political independence in 1913, i.e. legacy as continuity, and by the end of the WWI the break as a whole was completed. After that, Todorova argues, it turned into legacy as perception. This applies to both the political, cultural, social, and economic spheres. She points out that one sphere is not affected by Legacy as perception, the demographic sphere, meaning “the complicated ethnic picture and the persistence of a sizeable Muslim element” Todorova (2004:12). Following Todorova, I argue that the present situation in Macedonia is one where society treats the legacy of Yugoslavia more like legacy as perception and less as legacy as continuity. What I mean by this is that Macedonian society is in a process of interaction between an ever-evolving and accumulating past, represented by Todorova’s theoretical view of legacy as continuity and an ever-evolving and accumulating perception of the past. This is represented by Todorova’s theoretical view on legacy as perception. In this process people are redefining their evaluations of the past i.e. constructing the past. According to Todorova (2004), legacy as perception is firmly built into the discourse of Balkan nationalism. I would argue that this is also the case in present time Macedonian discourse of national identity.

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<sup>22[8]</sup>Greece boycotted all trade with Macedonia due to the name issue.

<sup>23[9]</sup>In reference to Chip Gagnon et al. saying that social changes are rapid within the frames of conflict.

Considering the process of legacy described above, I argue that Macedonia has gone through a process where the legacy of Yugoslavia has been treated as continuity. This process lasted for about 10 years, from 1991 to 2001. After the conflict in 2001, the political elite with the help of a growing nationalism in the population started treating the Yugoslav legacy as perception. Macedonia went through the transition from a stable socialist country, to a small, young, independent and highly insecure country, in the decades where socialist states were “loosing” their foothold all over the world. At the same time large parts of Eastern Europe went from the Warsaw pact to the EU, this had implications for all of the spheres mentioned above (political, cultural, social, and economic). The political transformation in this time period and the negative associations with socialism at the time, have implications for Macedonia and the current developments into legacy as perception. In Macedonia the Yugoslav past is therefore remembered more for its negative sides than for its positive. The empirical example below is one of many negative stories I heard about the Yugoslav past during my time in Skopje.

Goran, a 32-year old from Skopje, wanted to talk to me about the “lost history of the Macedonians”. The occasion was one of many dinners I had with Goran. He blamed the Yugoslav government and communism for the present conditions in Macedonia. He described the conditions during the Yugoslav period as “artificial reality”. He said that “Tito had made a construct, in this construct Macedonian history started in 1945, and the Ilinden uprising in 1903 was turned upside-down in a way so that the political left-wing participants of the uprising were highlighted as the heroes of the revolution”. Goran told me that “The whole idea of Yugoslavia was that Serbia and Croatia together with Slovenia were supposed to abuse the resources of Macedonia, Bosnia and Montenegro to their own gain. We (the three states mentioned last) were the slave states, and the three states in the north were the ones that were going to rule Yugoslavia. It wasn’t for nothing that the Macedonians were called “Macedonçe” which means “little Macedonians”. According to Goran it is in the post-Yugoslav period that Macedonians have regained and discovered their old history. Goran told me with great pride that:

“We (the Macedonians) can now prove that we are not a Slav population, and that we are a people who have been living in Macedonia ever since Alexander the Great and before that even.”

Perceptions like the ones above were quite usual among the younger population of Skopje. The perceptions were usually presented as facts that Macedonians had discovered after they became independent. The perceptions came in many varieties and twists, but usually they represented negative sentiments toward the SFRY and they were rarely self-experienced. During my time in Skopje I experienced that these perceptions were told by different people

with almost an identical use of words. I believe these perceptions were part of a larger political discourse shaping the perceptions of young people in Skopje.

Among my informants was a group of young students. They believed in European integration and EU membership. They had visions for the future and all of them were studying at the university or had studied at the university.

One of them told me that “nowadays the children learn in school that they are descendants of Alexander the Great. If someone had said that to me, without laughing, when I was in primary school, I would tell them they were insane”. Other opinions expressed were “can’t they just stop arguing about this stupid name! I really don’t care if we are called North Macedonia or the Republic of Macedonia. We should just settle for a name and get into NATO and the EU”. The members of this group took it for granted that they were Slavs and had problems taking what they called “mythical bedtime stories” seriously. This group of informants were part of a larger group of students that at one point during my stay organised a demonstration that was viewed as anti-government.

One of my informants in this group was Dimovska. She is an academic working as a language teacher for foreigners learning Macedonian.. From my point of view she was a reflective girl with a lot of opinions about Macedonian society and completely without political ambitions. Unlike many other young Macedonians she had travelled outside the borders of Macedonia, and had seen how other societies function<sup>24</sup>. During one of our many coffee appointments in the centre of Skopje I asked her about the political and historical focus on Alexander the Great.

“Earlier there was no-one in Macedonia who believed they were ancestors of Alexander the Great. If anyone would say something like that it would be just for the fun of it. I mean, people would laugh of him because it would be a stupid thing to say. Now it is almost turned upside-down, all the younger Macedonians have the idea that we are the ancestors of Alexander. There have been erected several statues of Alexander both inside the airport and at other locations in Macedonia.” The airport was renamed Alexandar Velliki Aerodrome (Alexander the GreatAirport) in 2006. I asked her when this focus started, was it in 1991? She said that it started much later; she estimated that 2001 would be more correct, during the conflict<sup>25</sup>. Or maybe even as a result of the conflict.

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<sup>24</sup>[10] In our European society it is easy to take for granted the freedom of movement. In 2009 Macedonians needed visas for almost every country in the world. Something they would be denied if they were unemployed or didn’t have enough money. According to an OSCE Early Warning Report, almost 70 percent of the population under the age of 25 never been outside the borders of Macedonia.

<sup>25</sup>The 2001 conflict in Macedonia between the Macedonian government and Albanian rebel forces.



These empirical examples function as an example of the fact that the focus on Alexander the Great and the antique history is a recent phenomenon. This in combination with the trace of genealogy all the way to Filip II, father of Alexander the Great, through a number of important persons originating from the area of Macedonia, should therefore be viewed in the frames of legacy as perception. It is also evidence of the fact that the majority of the people I talked to in Skopje had a rather ambivalent relation towards their history.

In the preceding paragraphs I have talked about History as Legacy and legacies as both continuity and perception. This needs to be framed in a larger context. Due to Macedonia's large influence both from the Ottoman Empire and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and seen through the prism of constructivism<sup>26</sup>, one must take into account the diversity of the population that exist in the area which defines the Republic of Macedonia. We need to ask: who has defined these borders? In the case of Macedonia, we can approach the question as my 92-year old informant did earlier in the chapter, by stating that he had lived in six different countries without travelling at all. "History is only geography stretched over time" as they say in the play *A Walk in the Woods*<sup>27[12]</sup>. Macedonia as a nation and the population living there are products of the political transformations over time; this is also what makes it so complicated to navigate in the jungle of identities. Brunnbauer (2004) separates the "Europeanness" and the Slav groupings in the Balkans, Todorova (2004) argues that the "institutionalised ethnically homogenous bodies may well be an advanced stage of the final Europeanization of the region, and the end of the historic Balkans". In the first part of this chapter I illustrated the views of three generations on past, present, and future. If we look at the different categories (group A, B, and C) and how they view history, we find that their perception of the Macedonian nation is quite different. When group A speaks of Macedonia they are talking about the independent Republic of Macedonia within its present borders. Group C on the other hand is speaking about Macedonia as Aegean, Pirin, and Vardar Macedonia claiming that the three parts were divided as part of the Bucharest agreement in 1913. Group B often emphasised that the state of Macedonia was created by the SFRY. The three groups all highlight different periods in the history of the city and country they live in.

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<sup>26</sup>Constructionism according to Özkırmılı "claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. (Özkırmılı 2005:163)

<sup>27[12]</sup> Lee Blessing, *A Walk in the Woods: A Play in Two Acts*, 1998. Quoted in Todorova 2004:11.

## Conclusion

Macedonia is a country shaped by political shifts through centuries with overlapping historical ties to a Hellenic, Roman, Ottoman, and Yugoslav heritage. In this chapter I have tried to give an account of a Macedonian history that holds relevance for my informants and their perception of that history as negotiated by contemporary Macedonian society. I have done this by using Todorova's accounts of how history in the Balkans often has developed. Through Todorova's thoughts on history as legacy and legacy as both perception and continuity, I have highlighted the importance of history for the Macedonian population. I have also tried to give an account of how the Ottoman and Yugoslav past more or less is being forgotten about or diminished. Through the three generational groups A, B, and C, the idea was to show, first, that there are generational shifts in how Macedonians understand their past. Second, my aim was to give an account of how the different generations see the history of their country. This chapter have also pointed out how political processes in Macedonia create a history that fits the government's political ambitions. The "cruel twists" coined by Todorova are an identity shift taking place in today's Macedonia where the perception of the past is shaped by political discourse. Borrowing from Todorova (2004) in seeing history as legacy and making an analytical distinction between legacy as continuity and legacy as perception, helps me explain; why history is so important to nationalism and nation building in present day Macedonia.





## Chapter 3

### Who Are The Ethnic Macedonians?<sup>28</sup>

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I chose ethnicity and identity in Skopje as the topic of this thesis primarily because I was struck by the contradictory ideas about Macedonian identity expressed both in the public and the private domains and the conceptions among the Slavic speaking majority population in Macedonia. When I sat down to write about the Macedonian identity issues it soon became more complicated. This chapter aims to explore the different conceptions of ethnic identity and conceptions of Macedonianness among citizens' of Skopje. Through this chapter I seek to illuminate the difficulties citizens of Skopje experience when identifying themselves as ethnic Macedonians, within the boundaries produced and maintained by the national discourse of the political elite. It will identify both enabling and constraining factors within this dominant discourse for Macedonian identity construction.

Kathryn Verdery argues that Western Europe “changed the rules of the game for all subsequent players, setting up imperatives that may have run counter to local developments in

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<sup>28</sup>Hugh Poulton (2000) wrote the book *Who are the Macedonians* trying to explain who the Macedonians are. The book consisted of statistical data and descriptions of historical events. The book does not take into consideration the nation building process of today's Macedonia.

other societies.” (1993:36). According to Karakasidou “Nation building processes in the Balkans had certain important distinctions from those in Western Europe. Much of the region’s population had lived under foreign, non-Christian occupation for several centuries.” (1997:19). The area where Macedonia is situated today were under Ottoman rule for five centuries, this has played an important role in Macedonian identity construction. The Ottoman rule was characterised by social and economic exchange between various peoples, and the whole Macedonian area was a central crossroad, both regarding religion and ethnic origin. When the Ottoman forces withdrew in the early twentieth century, Macedonia was influenced by the European nation-states. The areas where people once moved freely were now limited by borders turning the boundaries people used to cross with ease into hard borders which restricted and prevented movement and interaction.

The study of Identity in Macedonia is, a fluid historically rooted construct, as boundaries created between groups and newcomers who are assimilated into the groups, constantly shift and change (Karakasidou 1997:20). When I speak of identity through a nation-building point of view I talk about nationalism. Corrigan and Sayer (1985) characterise state formation as a process of cultural revolution. Through this, education, religion, institutions, and symbols of state control, shape the creation of a national identity. I will approach ethnic Macedonian identity construction through a nation building point of view, and examine the discourse of nationalism concerning Macedonian national identity, where education, religion, institutions, and symbols are deemed important in my informants’ perceptions.

In the first part of this chapter I will follow Karakasidou and her thoughts on identity construction based on her study of the northern Greek territory of Macedonia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Ethnic groups are discussed earlier in the thesis and I draw heavily on the boundary theory of Barth (1969) and the critical view of Brubaker (2003).

In nation-building literature, an ethnic group is often seen as a group of the people on its way to national enlightenment, going through several stages where the initial stage is self-consciousness, before it goes on to national liberation through political self-determination in the form of statehood (see Smith 1987). According to Karakasidou (1997) ethnic groups are often seen as a transitional stage in the formation of nations and nation-states among scholars such as Anderson, Hobsbawm, and Smith. Many scholars using Barth’s theory on ethnic groups take for granted the existence of ethnic groups and focus instead on how their identity has changed. According to both Karakasidou 1997 and Brubaker 2003 they often forget to conceptualise that the criteria for group “membership” often vary. They do not take into

consideration that members of an ethnic group, whether self-proclaimed or externally ascribed, also distinguish among themselves on the basis of material interests, and idiomatic notions of identity other than ethnicity. Neofetistos (2004), a Macedonia scholar, has done a comparative analysis which goes beneath the “ethnic layer” in the Slavic and Albanian population and takes a closer look at what criteria the population renders as important when negotiating their identity. I will return to this study later in the chapter.

Glazer and Moynihan (1970) have recognised that ethnic groups are basically interest groups. The political aspect of this theme was further developed by Abner Cohen, who described ethnic groups as people sharing common interests and “coordinate their activities in advancing and defending these interests by means of communal type organization, manipulating in the process such cultural forms as kinship, myths of origin, and rites and ceremonies” (1981:308). Change in ethnic identity does occur, but is precipitated by “radical changes in the political-economic contexts in which people live” and should therefore not be explored independently of them (Keyes 1981:27).

#### [Ethnic Identity and Ethnographic Context](#)

People living in Skopje often claim descent from the antique Macedonians, and the Empire of Alexander the Great. However, over the course of the two millennia separating present time from the empire of Alexander the Great, Macedonia has been dominated by several imperial state systems. Roman rule was followed by the domination of the Byzantine Empire, and Slavic migration and settlements in the region during the sixth and seventh centuries altered the ethnological composition of Macedonia. During the ninth century the Slavic population converted more or less to Christianity due to massive missionary work. Macedonia became part of the Serbian Empire of Dušan in the fourteenth century. The Serbian Empire was later defeated by the Ottoman Empire and Macedonia came under Ottoman control until the twentieth century (Singleton 1976, Karakasidou 1997, Mønnesland 1999). After the Ottoman occupation ended in 1912, and before the Yugoslav Federation, Macedonia entered a period of immense political pressure from all the surrounding states. This political pressure and claims to the land was also the reason for the Balkan wars. The political pressure consisted among others of information campaigns directed towards the Macedonian population. In present time Serbian, Bulgarian, and Greek nationalist groups all claim a piece of Macedonia as their own, as if the 48 years of Yugoslavia never had existed. The “cultural battle” for Macedonia thereby continues in present time. An example of this is Bulgaria which issued

Bulgarian passports for free to Macedonians who were willing to denounce their Macedonian citizenship and identity by signing a decree saying they were Bulgarians. The Bulgarians know that Macedonians have slight chances of getting a visa to travel abroad with a Macedonian passport, and utilises the opportunity.

Karakasidou (1997) uses three different examples: Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian claims to the Macedonian land, culture and population. As I mentioned in the introduction, Svein Mønnesland (1999) writes about several hundred Bulgarian schools being established in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The Greeks had at least that amount of schools and Serbia, Albania, and even Romania tried to influence the educational and cultural life of the people living in the area.

Greek claims to Macedonia are quite strong. It is argued that “Macedonia cannot exist as a separate nation because the Macedonian state of antiquity was an integral part of the nation (*ethnos*) of the ancient Hellenes.”(Karakasidou 1997:14) In competition with the other surrounding states the Greeks highlight the *religious criteria*. The definition of nationality proposed by Greek scholars draws heavily on religion and the fact that the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate in Ohrid, who controlled the Christian population, was part of and controlled by the Greek Orthodox Church until 1766.

Bulgarian scholars and officials, and especially those at the turn of the twentieth century, frequently attested that all Slavic speakers in Macedonia were “Bulgarians” (cf. Kiril 1969; Nikov 1929; Radeff 1918; Tosheff 1932 in Karakasidou 1997). Bulgarian writers highlighted the *language criteria* as the visible marker proving that the Macedonian population in reality was Bulgarian. Such claims sought to legitimise attempts by the Bulgarian nation-state to extend its sovereignty over the Macedonian population to the west.

Serbian claims to Macedonian land, culture, and population was rooted in both the *language criteria* and in the *descent criteria*. Serbian authorities argued that Macedonia had been Serbian at the time when the Ottomans had conquered the land some five centuries ago, and they held Bulgarian cultural and educational approaches responsible for the Bulgarisation of the Macedonian Slavic speakers.

The official discourse between the three nation-states focused largely on demographics and the supremacy of one group or category over others. This has been highly problematic. Karakasidou bases her arguments on a number of historical sources (Christoff 1919, Carnegie endowment report of 1914, et al.) the demographic debates at the time lacked standard criteria for category definition or group membership. The Greek advocates based their calculation on Church affiliations and claimed that Greeks were the majority population in the area



numbering 652,795. Bulgarian demographers based their data mainly on language, claiming that the Bulgarians were predominant, numbering over 1.000.000 people. Serbians, on the other hand, judging national groups on their language, dialect, and customs, claimed that the Serbs were the predominant group in the region with over 2.000.000 of the population.

The cultural and educational influence from the surrounding countries and the various criteria's they based their claims to the Macedonian land on in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, are still viable criteria's for their claims today.

### Nationalism

The discourse of nationalism is a discourse of national identity, which, drawing on Barth's boundary theory, defines the national "self" against an "other" through which the "self" acquires its salience. Thus, the discourse of nationalism presents "particulate formations of the nation as the natural and authentic version, and thus glosses over its heterogeneity and internal diversity" (Özkırmılı 2005:164). These processes, through which ethnic and national identities are articulated, are, however, rarely uncontested. Indeed, as Craig Calhoun argues, "not only are there claims from competing possible collective allegiances, there are competing claims as to just what any particular ethnic or other identity means" (Calhoun 1997:36).

The Macedonian government are in present day Macedonia in the forefront of the national discourse to convince the international community and their own population that their claim to Macedonian identity is rooted in antique Macedonia. One of the government's strategies during my fieldwork was to speed up the excavations of four large ancient cities. Some of these cities date back to 350 B.C. The four excavations were Skopje Fortress in the centre of the capital; Stobi, an ancient town one hour's drive from Skopje; Heraclea Linkestis; and Necropolis Isar, both in the far south of Macedonia closer to the Greek border. The government allocated 20 million euros to these excavations. The main idea according to some of my informants is to use these archaeological sites to claim that the Macedonians of today are the descendants of the people that once inhabited these villages, being able to trace their descent back at least to the year 350 B.C. These excavations are accompanied by a political discourse from the government constantly reproducing a certain history to be able to reproduce the nation (Billig 1995). A central aspect of this (re)production is tied to Orthodox Christianity The poster presented on page 43 mentions three Orthodox Christian saints out of the 14 forefathers they trace genealogy from. Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius were also central in formulating and developing the Cyrillic alphabet. Therefore they are also central not

just in religious matters, but also have a role in the linguistic roots of Macedonia, according to the political discourse of the government party VMRO-DPMNE. Saints Cyril and Methodius also have a national holiday in Macedonia. The holiday on May 24 is one of many religious holidays added to the list after the break-up of Yugoslavia. After the government regained office in 2006 there have been new revisions of holidays, adding more religious holidays of both Orthodox Christian and Muslim origin<sup>29</sup>. The government has initiated the building of a large Orthodox church in the centre of Skopje. The church was supposed to be a replica of a middle-age church presumably being situated on the same spot hundreds of years ago. For the Albanian population the church was seen as another degradation of the Albanian population and their Muslim belief following in the footsteps of the Millennium Cross built in 2002.<sup>30</sup> For the political elite in Macedonia this was a part of the national discourse to further strengthen the Orthodox Christian identity of the Macedonian nation (for discussion of the protest against the building of the church see p. 85).

In many ways, the criteria's presented above by Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia (in the following mentioned as the external others) reflect the main sources of the Macedonian nationalism today. The perception of the main sources in the Macedonian political discourse is according to Gagnon (2004) not random. On the contrary, Gagnon argues that a government in a post-modern nation-building process is normally using external others to unite the population, and create a collective identity. In the area where Macedonia is situated, people are, regardless of hard borders, feeling Macedonian even though they may live on the Bulgarian or Greek side of the border. The surrounding countries claim Macedonians as their "ethnic brothers" in the sense that Bulgarian authorities states that all Macedonians are Bulgarians, and not a unique ethnicity of their own. Macedonian authorities use religion, language, and descent to create ethnic boundaries between external others i.e. the surrounding countries and by doing this creates a stronger feeling of unity. The Macedonian political elite also use the same sources to create ethnic diversity between themselves and Albanians also referred to as the others within (Neofetistos 2008).

Religion, language and descent are mainly followed on a macro and median level of the discourse. The political discourse is in general concerned with incentives in foreign policy, the name issue, and not to forget the EU candidacy talks. Elaborating on the EU membership issue is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. I have, however, included

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<sup>29</sup>The Muslim population consists of both ethnic Albanians and Slavic speaking Macedonians.

<sup>30</sup>A 33m tall cross located on the highest hillside (Vodno) in the vicinity of Skopje. It is a symbol of 2000 years of Christianity in Macedonia

an example of how the president (Gorgje Ivanov) negotiates the name issue in international media as an example of the political discourse on the foreign policy arena.

*Spiegel online:* For how long will this conflict continue? Is there a name that would be acceptable for you?

*Ivanov:* The name should not harm the honor and self-esteem of our people. Over 120 nations have recognized us under the name the Republic of Macedonia. Greece wants us to dispense with this name and instead wants us to be called North-, Upper- or Slavo-Macedonia. A UN directive also stipulates that the name of the nationality and the language be adapted to the country name. I don't know how the Albanians living in Macedonia would react if they suddenly became Slavo-Macedonians who speak Slavo-Macedonian. (Der Spiegel Online, 23.06.09)

The example shows how the Macedonian government uses the complex situation in the country to negotiate the name issue on the international arena. In the domestic sphere there are numerous examples of the same politicians fronting the identity and language issues in a way that advocates Macedonia as a Slavic speaking country (see empirical example on the StrugaSchool on p. 90).

#### Identity and Groupness – “Our” Others

On the median level, the discourse took many different forms and shapes. The empirical example below illustrates how visible political discourse was during the election period in 2009. The example is from a concert at the Macedonia Square in the aftermath of the election. The concert was dubbed “Our name is Macedonia”.<sup>31</sup> The concert was according to the posters “a support concert for the Macedonian name issue.” The advertisement of the concert stated that “no one has the right to dictate another people’s identity”.

Macedonia Square was filled with people carrying Macedonian flags, both the official Macedonian flag and the former flag<sup>32</sup> that was opposed by the Greeks and changed in 1992. The majority of the audience was of the younger generation as one would find on most concerts, but there were a few representatives from older generations as well. Some had even brought with them their grandchildren. The children were given a better view by sitting on their shoulders, that way they were able to follow what was happening on stage. Among the performers going on stage was the opera singer Boris Trajanov, a public figure and a VMRO-DPMNE follower who has been an eager participant in the public discourse on the name

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<sup>31</sup>The concert was also held the year after in 2010 with many of the same artists.

<sup>32</sup>Flag with red background and a golden Vergina Sun in the middle

issue. Other performers were folk dance groups who presented traditional Macedonian folk dances, and other celebrities supporting the name issue in the public discourse. They were all working for free in support of their own conviction. During my time in Skopje there were on numerous occasions' different forms of happenings on Macedonia Square. The list of these happenings contains everything from presidential speeches to election campaigns, rock concerts, and the marking of national holidays. When there were political happenings occurring on the square people used posters and Macedonian flags. On this particular occasion people had posters and banners saying "one name, one nation, Macedonia forever", and "one name, our name, MACEDONIA!". Some were more original saying "Republica Macedonia, flowers of peace." The posters and banners were a mix of homemade and official ones. The homemade ones were often made with paint brushes or markers on a piece of clothing or a large piece of paper. The official ones had been made specifically for the occasion. They had the right colours, black and red, and they often had the golden lion and letters printed with antique fonts. The support concert was not officially supported by the government, and no support statement was made by key politicians. It is possible to argue that artists performing at the concert, especially the ones active in the public discourse on the name issue, are social entrepreneurs on a median level fronting the name, the antiquisation and the political discourse. Yet, a concert like this could not be arranged without consent from the political elite, according to one of my informants in the Helsinki Committee.

Macedonia square, I argue, can be seen almost as a giant front stage for the political elite's nation-building process. Following Özkırmılı and a social constructionist approach<sup>33</sup> I choose to go further and say that the square is a stage for the social construction of reality (Özkırmılı 2005:162). Social constructionism according to Özkırmılı "claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. This mode of meaning generation is 'social', however, in the sense that it is shaped by the conventions of language and other social processes."(Özkırmılı 2005:163) In my attempt to look deeper into the Macedonian process of nation-building, I will approach nationalism by using the theories of Özkırmılı (2005) and Michael Billig (1995). By nationalism I mean nationalism as a form of a discourse (2005). In the Macedonian nation-building process I view the national identity discourse on the macro level as nationalism and as the Macedonian political elites' efforts to create a national identity. As I have described earlier in the thesis, the basis for the Macedonian national identity is contested by all the groups that represent

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<sup>33</sup>The words Constructionism and Constructivism are used interchangeably.

“otherness” i.e. those who fall outside the group defined as ethnic Macedonians by the political elite, both external and internal others. Even international scholars and journalists have dismissed the Macedonian identity as based on myths and fairy tales. Özkırmılı argues that “[f]irst, whatever their origins and the extent of mythologizing that go into their making, nations assume a life of their own in time.” (2005:166). Thus, the Yugoslav past, or any other past may not be more or less important than the people of Macedonia wants it to be. Özkırmılı says further that

“They are home to the manifold social ties their members develop and the locus of their hopes and dreams. Second, they are very real as aspects of lived experience and bases for action. In fact, as Calhoun notes, people often endorse narratives they know to be problematic, gaining an identification with these as ‘our stories’, and a recognition of them as background conditions of everyday life (1997:34).” (Özkırmılı 2005:166)

During my time in Skopje I saw numerous examples of people in their thirties who had experienced the last years of Yugoslavia and dismissed what they had learned in school during that time. They told me that they were the ancestors of the ancient Macedonians and this was their ‘real history’. To justify or rationalize this, some would imply that the Yugoslav authorities had hidden the ‘real history’ from them, an assertion I will return to later in the chapter. To be able to analyse the Macedonian discourse of nation and collective identity, I want to look closer into how this collective identity can be constructed. This is not an easy task, considering all the possible factors active in the construction of a collective identity. I therefore continue to draw on Özkırmılı and his theory saying that we need to

“Remind ourselves constantly that people are members of different collectivities at any one time. This alternative view of social identification may enable us to see a person’s identities in terms of a set of partly overlapping group allegiances. This means that a person’s sense of ‘national’ identity may have to compete with other sources of identity derived from class, gender, age, religion or ethnicity. Finally, given the existence of multiple competing definitions of national identity, we should be able to ask which version will be victorious and why.” (Özkırmılı 2005:169)

I have in the introduction chapter tried to outline some Macedonian identities referring to the Yugoslav Macedonian, Slavic Macedonian, Ethnic Macedonian and Antique Macedonian. Some of these may in some cases serve as competing definitions of a national identity. It will however be more interesting to look closer into which sources Macedonians in Skopje draw on to define their national identity.

### National Identity and “Self”

First, my Macedonian informants would identify themselves as Macedonian. Like Igor, a 32 year old, they would often present themselves saying: “I am from Kruševo a small town in the middle of Macedonia. My family has a house there.” Even though Igor was born and raised in Skopje and his parents had lived in Skopje most of their life, he still considered himself to be from Kruševo. That was the town where his descendants came from and he still had close relatives living there. Igor has pride in his voice when he tells me he originates from Kruševo. He might as well have told me “I am a real Macedonian”, the Macedonian heritage and its language are built on the Slavic Macedonian dialect from the area surrounding Kruševo. The Macedonian identity is seen in a dominant relation to other ethnic groups in the country. Neofetistos argues that the Macedonians have a hierarchical orientation to the world they are living in. He says that in “the hierarchical conception of the individual that exists in Macedonia (...) the state subsumes the individual.” (Neofetistos 2004:53). He draws on Herzfeldt saying that the state encompasses a unity, and argues that

“[s]uch a unity is hierarchical in the sense that non-Macedonians form part of the encompassing unity of the Macedonian state, but not of the Macedonian nation that is made up of people with Macedonian ethnic extraction exclusively. In this framework, Macedonians are connected to non-Macedonians in a dominant relation of encompassment while non-Macedonians are connected to Macedonians in a subordinate relation of incorporation.” (Neofetistos 2004:53)

In other words, descent is used as a source of ethnic identity in Macedonia’s national discourse, as Igor presented to me above, which again reflects on both collective and individual identity. My informants also connected history and language to the issue of descent. The other major source of Macedonian identity is religion. For most of my informants below 35 years of age, showing that they were orthodox Christians was important. A majority of them wore small praying chains, with small knots tied together by a cross, as bracelets to show allegiance to the church. These bracelets are of the kind one can purchase inside Orthodox churches and monasteries. They took great pride in their religious history and Macedonia is a country with an extraordinary number of churches and monasteries. Macedonian script was also connected to Orthodox Christianity through Saints Cyril and Methodius, the developers of the Cyrillic alphabet. In the following I present two empirical examples illustrating the significance of descent and religion to a sense of being Macedonian.

In 2009 there was a public debate concerning two different projects on Square Macedonia. The first was a 22 meter tall statue of Alexander the Great sitting on top of a

horse. And the other was the building of a large Orthodox church that would occupy almost half of the original square. These two state funded projects are of interests for my further analysis on identity in Macedonia for at least two reasons. It generated discussions among my informants, and I see them as examples of a national discourse driven by the political elite.

The statue of Alexander the Great followed the renaming of the airport in 2006, and the later renaming of Highway 1 going through Macedonia (mentioned earlier). The statue is part of a larger discourse accompanied by altered history curriculums at school and the emergence of a new national history based on the idea of Macedonians being descendants of Alexander the Great's Empire. The nationalism discourse in this case comes in the shape of a statue. In the Yugoslav era (1945-1990) statues were used to commemorate heroes of the federation, giving the people a feeling of being close to their leader Josip Broz Tito, and to reproduce the Macedonian nation, and the Yugoslav Federation. Özkırımlı says that "national identities are the product of social and economic changes that render pre-existing commonalities as both important, and ones with which people identify." (2005:166). The political elite in Macedonia uses much of the same national discourse as it did during the Yugoslav era to produce and reproduce a national identity. This entails the promotion of one strong party and a discourse where large public statues are symbols taking some of the same forms as they had during the Yugoslav era. The use of statues to reproduce the nation on an everyday basis in people's minds has increased in Macedonia after I left the field, and by 2014 a new city plan is to be completed with numerous statues of national heroes, and symbols.

In the midst of these events local initiators in Skopje invited to a workshop on the theme, "Reading the City: Urban space and memory". According to one of the local initiators,

"every historical, political, and social development and trend is mirrored in the city's built environment. Cities, accordingly, consist of a multitude of layers of narratives and thus become an image of individual and collective memory."

"Due to the intimate relationship between memory and identity, the city itself and its urban spaces play an important role in the shaping of collective identities."

Among the population in Skopje there were diverging opinions about the statue of Alexander the Great. Some of my informants found it rather blunt, and thought that Macedonia should not provoke Greek authorities unnecessary. They felt that it did not fit with their conception of history. One thing was the mythology, but to actually carve it in stone and place it in the middle of the capital gave it a too strong a profile, as one of the informants told me. Others,

like Alexander, a 31 year old man, thought it was about time they showed the Greeks that they had just as much rights to the ancient history as the Greeks had. Others again were embarrassed when I asked them. One girl told me that she was sick and tired of these immature politicians. How could she vote for politicians who only wanted to provoke the neighbouring states?

The Church as a symbol is first and foremost a symbol of the religious source of the nation-building process. The building of the church and the discourse seen in the form of a civic protest against the political elite will be more thoroughly dealt with in a case-study presented in chapter four.

In the following I will present four dimensions of national discourse which Özkırımlı (2005) argues differentiates nationalism from other political discourses. The four dimensions he refers to are “the spatial, the temporal, the symbolic, and the everyday”. These dimensions are according to Özkırımlı not “mutually exclusive; rather they overlap and intersect to a significant degree” (2005:179). By following these dimensions I seek to show why the government version of national identity is “victorious”.

### The Spatial Dimension

A nation’s spatial dimension is characterised as a particular territory, an actual or imagined homeland. In this sense the spatial dimension becomes central to the construction of ethnic and national identities according to Özkırımlı (2005:179). In Macedonia, the political discourse on the spatiality of the Macedonian land is still ongoing, and an important part of the nation-building discourse. On the macro level the ministry of foreign affairs in Macedonia are still struggling with neighbouring states on the formalisation of state borders. On the median level, some social entrepreneurs are advocating for an extended interpretation of the Macedonian land going back to the Bucharest Agreement of 1913.<sup>34</sup> They argue that Macedonian land stretches all the way down to northern Greece and the city of Thessaloniki (Salonika in Macedonian). Others are using red and golden flags showing the sketch of today’s Republic of Macedonia incorporating northern Greece; an often seen object on Macedonia Square during political rallies. On the micro level my informants are most concerned with the fact that they are confined within the country’s narrow borders and do not have the opportunity to get a visa to travel outside the borders of their country.

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<sup>34</sup>Peace Agreement after the Balkan wars. Among other things the agreement divides the Macedonian area up in three Pirin Macedonia in Bulgaria, Aegean Macedonia in Greece and Vardar Macedonia in present republic of Macedonia(in 1913 to Serbia)



Özkırmılı argues that “[t]he reconstruction of social space as national territory is then an essential component of the project of nation-building.” (Özkırmılı 2005:180). The government in Macedonia created several TV commercials to reach out to the population during my time in Skopje. One of the most appealing was a commercial prompting people to spend their holiday within their beautiful country, exploring unknown Macedonian destinations and cultural sites. Another important part of the nationalism discourse is, according to Özkırmılı, creation of symbols connected to the spatiality of the nation-state. In doing this, particular sites are selected to provide the population with evidence of a “Golden age” and highlighting important episodes of the national history (2005:182). These features of the national discourse in Macedonia are quite visual, both through excavations, the old churches and monasteries, and the glorification of the Ilinden uprising in Kruševo. The town of Kruševo has in itself become the heartland of the nationalism discourse. Not only is Kruševo the place for the ilinden uprising. It is also the place which is considered to be the centre of Macedonia. This means that it is the place furthest away from the Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian border, making it the most Macedonian city. My informants in Skopje told me that Kruševo was the place with the purest Macedonian dialect, the dialect from the area had not as much influence from Bulgarian and Serbian language as other places in Macedonia. Arjun Appadurai reminds us that “[w]ithout some idea of territorial sovereignty – and here one might add the idea of a ‘homeland’ – the modern nation-states loses all coherence.” (2000:135).

### Temporal Dimension

This particular dimension does not reveal itself as easily as the dimension presented above. Nevertheless, Hobsbawm argues that once observed, nations without a past, as some critics would classify Macedonia, are contradictions in terms. “What makes a nation is the past; what justifies one nation against others is the past and historians are the people who produce it.” (1996:255). If we continue to follow the thoughts of Özkırmılı, he argues that “So far as nationalism is concerned, the question of a true history is beside the point. National histories sanctify as real not what is veridical, but what is felt to unify the community. Thus whatever works for the community are selected from the past and present as ‘facts’ outside of relations of time and space.” (Özkırmılı 2005:185). Within the same context Michael Billig (1995) writes about the reproduction of national history, and Marvin and Ingle talk of this as “the process of reframing strategically with the past (Marvin and Ingle 1999:155; see also Allan and Thompson 1999). I argue that the history of Macedonia was still in the making during my

stay in Skopje. I believe that the political elite and Macedonian historians were in a process of “reframing strategically with the past as Marvin and Ingle argues over. During the period I followed the political processes in Skopje, there was constantly presented “new” historical facts, turning the historical legacy towards a perception that laid the foundation for the political elite’s claims to heritage, descent, language and religion. I believe this observation opens up for questions of continuity. Is the temporal dimension in the national discourse an ever evolving process, or did I observe a discourse on the temporal dimension still finding itself in a transitional phase where history still was in production? Following Billig (1995) the nation is reproduced through national discourse. For something to be reproduced it first have to be produced. In many European countries and in North America the production of the nation is founded on events that happened hundreds of years ago, as for example the North American civil war narratives and interpretation in the USA. My argument is that Macedonia had not reached the level in their national discourse where they used reproduction alone to maintain their national identity, like Billig and the others above are referring to. I believe they also produced history based on myths to make the historical construct fit with their national discourse. Özkırmılı is quoting Allan and Thompson saying “what is chosen to be remembered is partially determined by what is chosen to be forgotten” (Allan and Thompson 1999:42 in Özkırmılı 2005:186). This fits well into my observation of the national discourse in Skopje where the Yugoslav past was chosen to be forgotten, and other historical aspects were chosen to be remembered.

In Skopje people’s narratives about the past often totally skipped the historically recent 45 years of the Yugoslav Federation, and thereby creating new links to the past. My informants who believed in the antiquisation often talked of the Yugoslav era as something negative. They tended to highlight how “Tito had made them an artificial reality” and How “the communists in Belgrade had lied to them”. One of their main evidence of this was the former president of Macedonia Metodija Antonov Tčento. He was the first president of the socialist republic, but was removed after Tito chose to break with the Communist International (Comintern) tie to Moscow. According to the national discourse presented by the political elite, the officials in Belgrade erased him from Macedonian history. You can see Tčento’s name on the poster presented on page 43, together with other national heroes and mythical figures the national discourse draws a national genealogy from. Another interesting observation is that those unwilling to accept the antiquisation narrative in the national discourse, would tend to identify themselves with old Yugoslavian or socialist symbols almost functioning as an anti-antiquisation. I will elaborate on this later in the chapter.

## Symbolic Dimension

The symbolic dimension is presented as nationalism taking shape “through the visible, ritual organization of fetish objects” (Özkırmırlı 2005:187). For Macedonia, this is shown through extensive use of flags, both the official flag, and the former flag with the Vergina Sun often seen as a symbol of resistance to the Greek claims. The flourishing of folk dance groups, the excavations of old cities, and the building of Orthodox religious symbols to mention some. One should not forget the symbols often used in commercial advertisements, and business logos where the name of the company was presented together with the Macedonian flag, or on a yellow and red surface. According to Özkırmırlı, the symbolic dimension can also be seen in what he refers to as the organization of “collective fetish spectacle” (Özkırmırlı 2005:187) meaning team sports, like the Macedonian interest for football and handball as well as mass rallies like the ones I have described earlier in the thesis. Smith argues that “[s]ymbols indeed appear to be necessary for the establishment of social cohesion, the legitimization of institutions and of political authority, and the inculcation of beliefs and conventions of behaviour. “ (Smith 2001:522). The symbols of the discourse create a cognitive map, in this case for the antiquisation, and a new nation-state. A cognitive map helps the social actors navigate within the ideology presented, by giving them limitations and possibilities, according to Özkırmırlı (2005:190). I want to elaborate on the notions of team sports. Though, it is hard to argue that football hooliganism is any worse in Macedonia than in other European countries, and that this is an expression of the national discourse, in Skopje there is a large crowd of football hooligans who are perceived by my informants as a group expressing right wing political sentiments. Most of these political sentiments took the form of anti-Albanian expressions. One of my Albanian friends in Skopje told me that he liked going to football matches, especially when the Macedonian national team was playing. However, nowadays he could no longer go to these matches because he felt threatened by Macedonian hooligans. They would chant insults and threats about Albanians and what they would do to an Albanian if they got hold of one. The songs he said, felt really threatening, and he and his friends tried to keep away from the park area surrounding the football stadium in Skopje on match days. My Albanian informant told me that “They are really stupid you know, first they sit and watch a football match were Macedonia wins with one goal and the player who scores the goal is an Albanian. Then they go out of the stadium and chant that they want to kill all Shiptars (Albanians).” The general population in Skopje also enjoys going to sports events, and one of my informants tried to explain to me why they were so excited about it. Gordana, a woman in her mid-40’s, told me that

“We don’t go to a football or handball match just because we want to see sports. We go because we can scream, and sing, and dance as much as we want. I go because I feel so much better after the match. Here I can let all my frustration out on the other team. You know when Skopje had the handball team in the European League all the other teams feared coming to Skopje to play matches, one team said it was like playing in hell.”

Gordana was an educated woman with a good job, when she went to football or handball matches she always wore a red and yellow cap with Macedonia on it, and a red and yellow scarf with Macedonia printed across it. Sometimes she even wore t-shirts in the right colours. A football match in the context of a national discourse might be perceived as something uncontested. Supporting your team and waving your flag or colours at a football match is something one could do without necessarily being active in a political discourse.

### Everyday Dimension

In describing the everyday dimension in a national discourse, I will move from Özkırmılı to Billig (1995), as Özkırmılı uses Billig’s theory to explain this dimension. Billig uses western democratic societies, represented by the USA and Great Britain, to explain how the everyday dimension helps “us” to not forget “our” national identity. Billig refers to banal nationalism, describing the small everyday words, phrases and symbols “our” nation is filled with and which accompany the inhabitants of a nation on a daily basis. He argues that “nationalism is not confined to the florid language of blood-myths. Banal nationalism operates with prosaic, routine words, which take nations for granted, and which, in so doing, inhabit them.” (1995:93). He argues that the everyday dimension lies in small words like “we” and “our” and in the use of the definite article. Changing the name of the nation-state from the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to “The” Republic of Macedonia (Republica Makedonija), changes the perception of national identity. This creates a foundation for the present nation-building and the national discourse following it. It would not have been possible for the political elite in Macedonia to formulate a nationalist discourse based on the idea of direct descent from Alexander the Great and of ownership to the land through ancestry with the pre-Slavic tribes who first populated the area, if the proper name was FYROM. The Yugoslav authorities had created a history dating back to these Slavic tribes, so the name FYROM would both pin the population to the Yugoslav history, and give associations to the socialist federation of Yugoslavia. If we focus on the everyday dimension, the election phrases of VMRO-DPMNE are good examples. For president Ivanov the slogan was “Eden ca

Cite” (“One for all”) “All” meaning all Macedonians of the nation, not all the world, or all the people of the Balkans. The slogan for the municipality elections was “zaedno mojeme povekje” (together we can do more). “We” meaning we the Macedonian nation, not “we” as the whole Balkans and I will argue, not “we” as in the Macedonian state incorporating Albanians, Turks, Bosniaks, Vlachs, or the Roma population. These are mere examples of the discourse based on phrases which are offered constantly, phrases which barely has a conscious meaning for the population. The discourse on national history also contains constant references to the land being, “the home of Macedonians for 2000 years”. Everyday forms of knowledge are rarely the subject of conscious reflection. According to Özkırmılı this is “because they constitute the arsenal of skills required to sustain social life.” (2005:191). According to Löfgren “this is precisely why the strongest influences of ‘the national’ are found on the level of everyday practice rather than in rhetoric or ideological statements.” (Löfgren, 1993:190).

Let me return to Özkırmılı’s claim that one version of national identities will be victorious over others. Within the Macedonian national identity discourse, the antiquisation is winning in the sense that it is becoming the most dominant version of national identity. This is based on the political elite’s ability to shape the four dimensions discussed above in a manner that represents their view of the Macedonian nation. I have briefly discussed the four dimensions of national discourse above. I argue that these dimensions are found in the development of a Macedonian national identity, after 2006. The identity is based on a Macedonian nation where national identity is formed on the basis of the dominant ethnic group, the Macedonians. This is quite common according to both Özkırmılı 2005, and Billig 1995, creating a divergence between other ethnic identities within the state which these dimensions and the reproduction of the nation do not fit. Following the four dimensions above outlined by Özkırmılı I argue that these are enabling factors making it possible for the government in Skopje to form a national identity based on ethnicity.

### Otherness Within as Constraining Factors

In his 1993 book on Ethnicity and Nationalism, Hylland Eriksen argues that “nationalism is essentially a dual phenomenon with its loci in the formal state organisation and in the informal civil society” (1993:1-2). Furthermore, he argues that nationalism seen within a state is only successful when it is acknowledged in civil society. Yet the identity presented by the institutions of the state does not always fit in with the experiences of the people to whom it is

directed. According to Eriksen, nationalism as an ideology does not, in these cases, communicate with the needs and aspirations of part of the population, and its symbolism is ultimately impotent (see Eriksen 1993). In Macedonia there are groups of people who do not identify with the antiquisation, when viewed as the new national identity. These groups are represented both by minorities and other Macedonians. The Albanians in Macedonia is the largest group of people who will be excluded from a Macedonian national identity category based on the antiquisation narrative. This narrative excludes their religion, history, language and cultural symbols of other forms. A discussion concerning Albanian nationalism and its role as a dialectic nationalism in Macedonia is beyond the scope of this thesis. My concern for here is with the Macedonian population in the country as defined in the introduction. In the following I will present people of Macedonian origin which represent groups of the population not adapting to the new identity (see also examples in chapter two).

A support concert like the “our name is Macedonia” concert exemplified above, and similar arrangements, always managed to draw a large crowd of supporters on Square Macedonia. That said, the Macedonians of Skopje did not agree on either the name issue, or their descent. Neofetistos (2004, 2008) has shown that the society in Skopje is not as homogenised as the political discourse claims. In the following I will try to show examples of opinions that never come to the surface of the Macedonian political discourse. These are vivid examples fitting into the theories of Brubaker (2002), Calhoun (1997) and Özkırımlı (2005) in the Macedonian national discourse, exemplifying how the Skopje population with easiness negotiates the ethnic boundaries in their daily lives. Neofetistos indicates in his 2004 article that an ethnic war was prevented in Macedonia because of the people living there and their ability to negotiate their identity, and not the intervention of the international community. He also believes that contemporary Macedonian society will most likely not be able to create an ethnic conflict on its own, due to the inhabitants’ relations and long lasting peaceful history. The empirical examples below are a continuation of these thoughts.

I was meeting Boris, a 38 year old man who had lived in Skopje his whole life. He worked as a manager of an Italian restaurant in Skopje. Boris was one of those men I met in Skopje who was a firm supporter of the Gruevski government. He believed in antiquisation, and was a well-connected man in Skopje after 20 years in the restaurant business. We sat for a couple of hours at a bar and discussed Macedonian politics. He was convinced that the Albanians were the main problem in Macedonia. “If we did not have the Albanians here, we would not have any problems”. Later that night we went to another place where Boris knew the manager. There was a band playing, which is quite usual in Skopje. I recognised the

singer/guitar player from another place I had been to during my stay. He was fairly tall for a Macedonian and had long dark-blond hair and glasses. He had black jeans, boots and a t-shirt with the insignia of a heavy metal band on it. He had a good reputation, and Boris also told me the band and especially the singer was really good. Boris said to me “he is an Albanian you know, and he both drinks and parties” I asked him if he thought that was unusual? He told me that he (the singer) was probably from one of the old Albanian families. He was no typical Shiptari.<sup>35</sup> He then pointed at a girl sitting close to the band. “That girl over there, she is the singer’s sister, she is also Albanian, and she also drinks alcohol.”

Boris obviously did not look at the singer as he did other Albanians, and could not fit him into the stereotypical image of “the Albanian” (cf. discussion of stereotypes in chapter1:17) Jane, a 35 year old man working in the Macedonian ministry of defence in Skopje had a different background and experience based knowledge of Albanians. His relatives originated from a small village in the north of Greece on the border to Albania, and were Orthodox Christians. His parents, who both originated from the same village, grew up during a period of time when this particular village was still located in Albania. According to Jane, they had to flee from the village before he was born. He was therefore born and raised in Skopje. He grew up in a neighbourhood where the majority of the population was Albanian Muslims. According to himself he was never accepted by the other Albanians as an Albanian. Jane identifies himself as a Macedonian.

I am a Macedonian, I feel more Macedonian than Albanian. Even though my parents are Albanian, I have never been accepted as an Albanian. It is because they (his parents) do not have any family here. You know, I speak both Albanian and Macedonian, and I do not have a feel for one language over the other. I am a Christian you know, so they (the Albanians) do not see me as one of them. I feel more Macedonian (...)

Chip Gagnon argues that “this marked disparity in perceptions about interethnic relations is a vivid illustration of the fact that while political elites can attempt to construct people’s views about ethnicity from above, such attempts have their effect mostly in perceptions about such relations outside of their own lived experience. The impact of their own communities is minimal.” (Gagnon 2004:36-37). This example shows that Jane negotiates his national identity based on exclusion and inclusion where he grew up. He does not use heritage, origin, or religion when he defines his ethnicity. Neofetistos also shows us how his informants on a

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<sup>35</sup>Shiptari is a negatively loaded word which contains a set of negative stereotypes about Albanians in Macedonia. It is only used by Macedonians in a negative context, but is the common word for Albanian in the Albanian language, then it is pronounced Shqiptari.

general level have a certain stereotypical view of who the Albanians are and what the differences are between “us” and “them”. This view often corresponds with the national discourse on the macro and median level of society, but on the micro level many of both my own and Neofetistos’ informants are friends, neighbours or have other everyday relations with Albanians and regard them as “one of us”. Such expressions of inclusion, is based on their own lived experience as Gagnon suggests above.

Ljubica, one of my dear friends and informants in Skopje, is a 26 year old girl who has lived in Macedonia all her life. Like many others of her age, she has an ambivalent relation to the future. When referring to the future, she means both her own and the future of her country, and even though she is a highly educated girl, or maybe because of that the future is hard to talk about. We were sitting in a café talking about the future, she was just graduating with a master’s degree from the University of Skopje and did not know what to do. She told me that if she could choose she would go to work abroad. Somewhere in Europe was preferable, Holland was her favourite country, she would love to go there. She had only been outside Macedonia once, when she had been to a conference in Holland. She then told me that she could only dream of getting a qualified job in Holland. The exams and degrees from the University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje was not recognised anywhere in the world. So basically her degree was not worth more than the paper it was written on outside the borders of Macedonia. We discussed different alternatives regarding scholarship solutions outside Macedonia, then she stopped talking for a second and said “this is just stupid to talk about, you know, I could never really imagine to live anywhere else than Skopje. This is where I have all my friends and family, how can I survive without them?” The conversation continued around work opportunities in Skopje, she told me that she had slight chances of getting a job. Even though she, according to herself, was the best student in her class and was offered a position as a research assistant at her faculty, she had to work almost for free. In addition, the majority of the professors at the faculty were old men, and some of them were constantly harassing her sexually. She did not really see any future there. Her last hope she told me was to get a job another place, something she considered extremely difficult. “You need to have some really good connections to get a job in this country, you know.” She continued with questioning the position her country was in, “why can we not just forget about this stupid name issue. Who cares anyway, if we are called North Macedonia or Republic of Macedonia? These stupid politicians why do they think we care? You know what the worst thing is? There is really no one to vote for. The politicians only care about themselves. We are left with incompetent politicians, and fucking Albania has become a member of NATO!”



Ljubica expresses views on politics shared by numerous people, I spoke to, from the younger generation in Skopje. Her perceptions reflect on the difficulties young people encounter in their daily lives. They also reflect a frustration of having few real options at elections.

In a country which changes its national identity, the banal nationalism that Billig (1995) argues reproduces our national identity, does not come into effect before the national discourse is produced and, as Eriksen argues, is acknowledged by the civil society (here meaning median level of society) (Eriksen 1993). Therefore, at least the generations above formative age,<sup>36</sup> are in a position where they are able to choose if they believe in and acknowledge the “new” national identity or not, and whether they want to participate in the national discourse. Eriksen states that

“People are loyal to ethnic, national, or other imagined communities not because they were born into them, but because such foci of loyalty promise to offer something deemed meaningful, valuable or useful.” (Eriksen 1999:55)

Eriksen’s point makes sense in a Macedonian republic where people are struggling for recognition of their own identity. The citizens live in a Macedonian state with scarce resources, an unemployment rate above 25 percent, and an international situation where they feel left behind in the Euro-Atlantic integration process. The question of descent, language, or church, ultimately leading to the question of a national identity, then becomes a question of future perspectives on a imagined community, where a consensus on the national identity can be a stabilising factor.

Those citizens who refrain from participating or oppose the national discourse would often draw on alternative history and personal experiences to identify as Macedonian. By opposing the production and reproduction of a “new” national identity in Macedonia with focus on the antique past and Orthodox Christianity, they instead often advocated for the Slavic past and the socialist values of the Yugoslav past. The opposition was not visible in the formal discourse. The exception was the demonstration opposing the building of the church on Macedonia Square. Many of the demonstrators signalled that they opposed the government by wearing hats or t-shirts with stalinist, maoist, or Yugoslav symbols representing an anti-antiquisation point of view. The symbols shown by some of the demonstrators were hats with a red star in front, or an old Yugoslav flag on the t-shirt, some

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<sup>36</sup>After having finished mandatory school.

even had buttons with old socialist slogans on them. The demonstrators represented what both Eriksen (1993) and Gagnon (2004) state as groups not fitting into the homogenised society the government seeks to create with their national discourse. They are thereby representatives of political and cultural heterogeneity in the society. When I asked one of them what they wanted for the future he said “We just want hope for the future. We want to be part of Europe and get the same opportunities as other European youths. With this focus on Alexander the Great and all this other stuff, we will never get that chance.” I believe it is important to note that the demonstration was not a political anti-government demonstration, but it was quite clear that many of the demonstrators were from groups of civil society not supporting the sitting government and their political strategy for shaping the future.

Drawing on Neofetistos (2004) and my own empirical examples I will argue that heterogeneous groups in society are constraining factors to the Macedonian national discourse. By this I mean that by opposing what is known by my informants as the mainstream political discourse, they are a hinder for further homogeneization in the Macedonian society. This is shown both by people using the Yugoslav past as an anti-antiquisation force and by people who manage to negotiate their identity on a micro level where they incorporate Albanians as “one of us”. By doing that they manage to by pass the nationalist discourse attempt to homogenise and unify the Macedonian nation under a set of criteria’s only fitting Slavic speaking Orthodox Christians descending from antique Macedonians.

### Concluding Remarks

I started this chapter in the same way most of my informants started talking about Macedonians, by referring to the history, before trying to clarify which claims the surrounding states have on Macedonia and what this means for the Macedonian identity. I have through the first part tried to show that the claims presented by the external others surrounding the country are not solely made up by present political agendas, on the contrary, they have existed over the last hundred years. These claims from the surrounding states are experienced through lived experience by most of the population in Macedonia, whether they have visited the country or have been involved in a discussion on the Internet or just read about it in the newspaper. Through these commonly known claims it is easy for the political elite to shape a national discourse presenting boundaries complying with the Macedonian majority population and eventually changing the Macedonian self-representation (Hertzfeld 1997). These

boundaries strengthen the Macedonian collective identity in relation to the external others when seen from a macro or median level. The Macedonians who identify with the antiquisation of Macedonian identity are motivated by something of value to them (see Eriksen 1999, above). The motivation creating such value could be something visionary and subtle as hope for the future, or more direct and concrete as employment opportunities like one of my examples in the next chapters indicate. Regardless of what the motivation is I argue that the political discourse affects the individual identity to a certain degree on the micro level, but mostly it is expressed towards external others. The part of the Macedonian population who does not see the antiquisation of Macedonian identity as meaningful, hence are not taking part in the homogenizing discourse, will not let the national discourse affect their individual identity. The relation between the population on an everyday basis is therefore not affected, whether it is relations between Macedonians of different opinions or other relations between persons with different ethnic background. The enabling factors for ethnicity presented by the national discourse are the homogenising spatial, temporal, symbolic and everyday dimensions. The spatial dimension strengthens the awareness of the land producing the nation, and the borders surrounding it. The temporal dimension is particularly important for Macedonia, to unite the Macedonian population under one historical frame of reference. The symbolic dimension creates a unity experienced during the Yugoslav era by many of Skopje's citizens. The everyday dimension expressed through news media, commercials and political messages produces and reproduces the nation. It enables the Macedonians to talk of themselves as one ethnic group seen in relation to both external others and internal others. The heterogeneity of the political arena is, at large, the constraining factor for ethnicity within the national discourse. The part of the population that refuses to be incorporated into a nation claiming descent from the antique Macedonia, is the ones who manages to create other options for its identity. Some of these people are still holding on to the identity of the past, others disregard the ethnic boundaries and manage to negotiate an individual identity based on their lived experience. It is in the mixed relations between Macedonians and other ethnicities that the national discourse on ethnicity is disregarded. The individual experiences across the ethnic boundaries are then becoming constraining factors to the national discourse.



## Chapter 4

### “If You Don’t Vote VMRO You’re Not Macedonian”<sup>37</sup>

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#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the linkage between ethnicity and political power in Macedonia. I will try to show how enabling structures and constraining factors of the national discourse come to the foreground of the political stage, and how history is an important part of the Macedonian political landscape. In so doing, I will make use of the political environment in Skopje, the capital and largest city of Macedonia. I emphasise that I see Macedonia as a post-Yugoslav country, organised as a strong central state, which makes Skopje the centre of gravity of political life.

This chapter is an extended case study of the time before, during, and after the presidential and local municipality elections, and how this played out on Macedonia Square as a front stage for the political discourse. Restricting the analysis to an extended case study of the presidential elections gives me the advantage of going in-depth on the political discourse

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<sup>37</sup>The title of the chapter was an argument often heard from conservative party volunteers on the streets during the election; one of many examples of political discourse.

and enables me to present empirical examples. Within this extended case study there are two events of particular significance to the thesis. The first case is the building of the Church of Saints Constantine and Elena and the demonstrations that followed on the square. The second case is the Struga School, several hours drive from the capital, but which became an important issue also for my informants in Skopje. The roundtable discussions following the incidents in Struga took place in Skopje, and most of the political discourse was directed towards the majority of the voters located in the area of Skopje.

These two examples have been chosen as illustrations of the everyday political discourse during the elections. The examples also show how the political elite in Macedonia contributed to the national discourse and interpreted national history, and how it affected the median and macro levels of society, referring to Barths analytical levels presented in the beginning of the thesis.

### Three Interpenetrating Levels

To navigate in complex modern societies like Macedonia, where different forces connect to the process of identity construction, I will, as indicated in the introduction chapter, use Barth's method of displaying the process on three different levels; a micro, a median and a macro level. I am trying to show how ethnicity is an enabling and constraining factor for political power.

The government party, the VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), has a central position in this chapter. Its main political goal when I was there in 2009 was to build a strong national consciousness. Its political measures and discourse used during the elections and how this reflects upon ethnic identity and ethno-nationalist nation-building are important empirical examples of the median and macro level in this chapter.

In this chapter I will discuss history as a contemporary political factor, and offer examples of the national discourse. Through these examples it will be possible to identify how enabling structures and constraining factors in the national discourse are connected to ethnical processes via motivational factors like employment opportunities and affiliation to political parties.

### Ethnicity as a Political Factor

Fredrik Barth points out that we need to find analytical procedures that differentiate states in terms of their structures and the patterns of action they pursue. He claims that we need to start by analysing the policies of each state by linking these policies to features of the regime, that is, the state policy-making core. We are then able to depict the power presented by the state as a specifiable third player in the process of boundary construction between groups. As actors they will therefore pursue dissimilar policies towards ethnic categories and movements in the population they seek to control. I argue that the political parties in Macedonia take different stands towards a Macedonian nation-state. Further I argue that VMRO-DPMNE policies make them a third player, as Barth argues, and thus affect the boundary construction between groups in Macedonia.

### VMRO-DPMNE, Political Affiliation and National Discourse

VMRO-DPMNE was established in 1991 after the fall of Yugoslavia. It traces its history back to the older VMRO organisation established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in opposition to Ottoman rule in Macedonia. Even though there are no real links between the two political parties, established some hundred years apart from one another, the choice of name was not random. VMRO-DPMNE is a party on the political right. It views itself as a moderate conservative party and is member of the European Political Party, an interest organisation for conservative political parties in Europe. One of my informants was an international representative for the Helsinki Committee in Macedonia. She placed VMRO-DPMNE on the far right side of the European political landscape. In this case study I follow the view of the historian Ulf Brunnbauer (2003), who sees VMRO-DPMNE's policies as nationalist.

VMRO-DPMNE has been a political factor in Macedonia since the country gained its independence in 1991. It came to power for the first time in 1998, by entering into an alliance with the DPA<sup>38</sup> party, which mostly strove to improve the rights of Albanians in Macedonia. This was a surprising move which led to the loss of power for the SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia). This was the first time a Macedonian and Albanian party formed a coalition and may be viewed as the first real break with the conceptions of the Yugoslav past. The coalition soon withered away, ending in armed conflict in 2001. VMRO-DPMNE lost the parliamentary elections to SDSM in 2002. Then VMRO-DPMNE won the 2006 and the 2008 parliamentary elections, and the 2009 presidential and local elections. The SDSM's number of seats in the parliament has decreased from 43 in 2002, to only 18 seats, shared with the "Sun"

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<sup>38</sup>Democratic Party for Albanians

coalition, in 2008, where the SDSM was the leading party. After the administrative elections in April 2009, the SDSM as the main opposition party held a majority in only seven out of 85 municipalities.

In the 2009 elections, the VMRO-DPMNE's main slogans were "One for all" (Eden za Cite), alluding to the presidential candidate Gorgje Ivanov, and "Together we can do more" (Zaedno mojeme povekje) for the local elections. The main issue in these elections was how the various parties would deal with the name dispute with Greece. VMRO-DPMNE was firm in its policies, making guarantees to voters that no compromises would be made in the name dispute.

VMRO-DPMNE policies are implemented by playing on underlying notions from the Yugoslav period, and some even before that, still latent in the population, such as the administrative organization of citizen's in to formal groups. To exemplify, both during the Ottoman Empire and the Yugoslav Federation there was formal social organisation in groups. The Ottomans had the Millet system, and the Yugoslav Federation distinguished between *narod* and *narodnost*; the Slavic Macedonians being a *narod*, while the Albanians living within the borders of Macedonia were a *narodnost*. This is shown by Tone Bringa when she writes

"the state administrative and political structure already had a system in place that implied that people were recruited not on a basis of membership of diverse political parties, but on the basis of allegiance to one and the same political party and membership of different ethnic communities. Hence, during the 1990 elections, people voted according to the principles of a one-party system with ethnicity as the basis for representation" (2004: 190).

Neofetistos shows that this idea is still latent in the population when he refers to a perceived ethnic hierarchy among both the Macedonian and Albanian population in Skopje. "I view the hierarchical ideology as dominant in Macedonia because local actors construe it as such" (Neofetistos 2004:54).

In such a divided political landscape, the VMRO-DPMNE slogan from the 2009 elections, "Together we can do more", is most likely addressing the Slavic Macedonian population only, with an appeal to once again gather around one strong party. One of my informants told me that this slogan's rhetorical subtext is "together we are stronger", we being Slavic Macedonians.

The present nation-building process draws the historical lines of the Macedonian people back to the ancient Macedonians that lived in the region, and has special reference to



King Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, and Alexander himself. This differs from Yugoslavian history, where the historical ancestors of Macedonia were Slavic tribes that lived in the area around 600 A.D. Constructing the past has a twofold aim in nation-building. First, political elites want to give the population a history to be proud of, something that sets them apart from their Bulgarian and Serbian neighbours, who both claim that Macedonia geographically and culturally is part of their country. Second, history enables Macedonian politicians to claim “ownership” to the country, by saying “we were here first”. This quest for authenticity is a bone of contention between Albanians and Macedonians. In Macedonia, these kinds of questions are dealt with by the academic elite; in this particular example the historians are central and, one might argue, ethnic entrepreneurs. When dealing with history in Macedonia, one is treading into a political minefield. Stefan Troebst wrote already in 1983 that historical research in the SR Macedonia was not a humanist, civilizing end in itself, but was about direct political action (Troebst 1983). This claim is supported in more general terms by Brunnbauer:

“The close relationship of historiography with nation building and nationalism gives it a political angle, which is not necessarily the results of direct political-ideological interference and censorship, but reflects the assumption of historians themselves that their task is to affirm, develop, and defend the nation by means of their discipline“ (2004:166).

Historians working on Macedonia are unfortunately almost solely from the Institute of National History in Skopje and have gotten their positions by being loyal to their superiors and to the nation-building project. One of my informants, a history professor working at an official institution in Skopje, told me that

“In these election periods one must be careful of what one says, it has happened to me several times that someone is coming in to my office checking that I know who to vote for. Comments like ‘you know it might be cutbacks on the budget after the election so no job is safe!’ are quite common.”

He also told me that he had joined his stepdaughter at a demonstration to protest against government plans to build an orthodox church at Square Macedonia in the centre of Skopje. The reason for accompanying her was that the last time she demonstrated against the same building project, she was beaten up by pro-government hooligans. On this specific occasion, a senior colleague at work had seen him in the background when watching the news broadcast.

The next day the history professor was questioned about the incident and warned he could lose his job.

Brubaker says “[W]e can ask how people – and organizations – do things with categories. This includes limiting access to scarce resources or particular domains of activity by excluding categorically distinguished outsiders.” (2002:169). I believe jobs are such a scarce resource in a country where the official unemployment rate is 38 per cent. In response to Brubaker, I will argue that political elites can use employment as one of many factors to place people in to categories drawn up by the national discourse. In the first place, you need to be an ethnic Macedonian, and secondly, you need to vote for the right party. If one compares the empirical example above to what Bringa wrote about former Yugoslavia in her article cited above, one might argue that the government party is using job opportunities, and job security to create allegiance to the party. The empirical example above is only one of many. In the following I would like to present two examples that may illustrate how the public sector is especially vulnerable to this categorisation.

One of my informants was a politically active medical student who was involved with the VMRO-NP (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Narodna Partija). The party was formed by former VMRO-DPMNE members. His sister, who lived in one of Macedonia’s south-western villages, was finished with her medical studies, and was unable to get a job because her brother and her mother were supporting the wrong party.

A young teacher in her 20’s from Skopje told me that all the teachers at her school were VMRO supporters. Personally, she was not so interested in politics, but her brother was a member of the party (i.e. the VMRO-DPMNE). She told me that it was not possible to get a job at her school if you were not a member of the “right” party, again with reference to VMRO-DPMNE.

The examples above show that your allegiance to the right party is important and categorises you, in these cases, being in the right category will enable you to get a job. Is it possible to say that the political affiliation to VMRO-DPMNE becomes an integral part of being ethnic Macedonian. And further, if you are Albanian or from the Roma population, is it socially accepted among your group to vote for VMRO-DPMNE. Or should we instead direct our attention towards persons with Albanian or Roma identity, and see if they would be accepted as Macedonians if they voted for VMRO-DPMNE; having the title of this chapter in mind.

The political discourse and decisions of nation-states and the rhetoric used on the political arena, have effects on local societies, and social entrepreneurs may use discourse and

rhetoric for navigation. Social entrepreneurs may then strengthen the belief in these messages for the general population (see Brubaker 2002). To exemplify, we can use a legislation that was passed by the parliament in 2008. The legislation stated in brief that if you did not have children before you reach the age of 27, you were taxed 5 per cent extra. This was broadly considered by my informants as a measure to increase the birth rate among the ethnic Macedonian population. Macedonian right-wing politicians argue that the Albanian population gives birth to four times as many children as does the Macedonian population, and that this will lead to an Albanian majority within 20 years. These messages were again echoed by ethnic entrepreneurs in Skopje. If we see the two claims together, it can be viewed as legislation made to increase the Macedonian population with the aim of equalising the birth rate among the ethnic groups.

### Lived Experience and Ethnic Relations

I started my analysis by focusing on the micro level to view mechanisms which traditionally are researched by social anthropologists, with focus on persons and interpersonal interaction, the embracement or rejections of symbols and social groups. I will start to explain by using one of the Macedonian families I had close contact with during my fieldwork, the Abramovich<sup>39</sup> family. In this way I am able to use empirical findings to exemplify processes of identity formation. Within the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia had an educational system that could compete with European standards, some say even better. The children in the Abramovich family, Zoran and Dimovska, are now 30 and 35 years of age. They both attended school during the Yugoslav era. Within the school system of Yugoslavia (which ended around 1990), all citizens within my research area attended school. Regardless of ethnic background they all attended the same school system and the teaching-language was Serbo-Croatian, formalised as the official language within the Yugoslav federation. When the Abramovich family talked about today's identity challenges they told me, "I went to class with several Albanians, we never had any problems with them." Or "One of my best friends in school was Albanian that was never a problem for me." The years at school are as Barth argues "deeply formative experiences" (Barth 1994a:22). The formative years of the generation I have called group B in chapter 2, were within the Yugoslav school system. Zoran

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<sup>39</sup>This is an alias surname to ensure the family full anonymity.

even told me “Our Albanians in the centre of Skopje are the old Albanian families, they are perhaps even more Macedonian than we are<sup>40</sup>”.

During these formative years, developments of cross-sexual relations<sup>41</sup> are inevitable. Statistics from among others Poulton (2000:132) shows us that western scholars give the reader a picture of Macedonian society as divided, telling us that 95-100% of the fathers of a household would not let his son or daughter marry a person of different nationality. I do not have data saying that this is incorrect, but the lived experience of my informants and their stories provide a more nuanced picture of the cross sexual relations. Dimovska and Zoran told me they both had friends who have had Albanian or Turkish boyfriends or girlfriends. One of their stories involved a Macedonian boy in their class who dated an Albanian girl in high school. They met in secrecy for over 5 years. They were constantly afraid that someone would tell their families. After being together for 5 years they had to tell their parents that they wanted to get married. Marriage was of course complicated they told me, but the parents of the couple met and discussed what they should do. The couple got engaged, but they did not manage to sort out all the problems. The parents of the Albanian girl wanted the boy to convert to Islam. The matter became so complicated in the end that the girl moved to relatives who lived in another city. Even though this example ended in the couple not getting married, it is proof that these relationships exist. Zoran and Dimovska also had a Macedonian-Albanian couple in their circle of friends. That was never a problem for them they told me. The only reason I managed to find out that this particular couple had different ethnic origin was after I had attended a party with the couple at Zoran’s place. Zoran tried to explain to me who one of the girls was, he mentioned that she was the one who were not drinking. She was a Muslim and could not drink alcohol he told me. My experiences with cross-sexual relations in Macedonia do also contain contrasting stories. The episode I am going to explain in the following happened together with a younger crowd of people.<sup>42</sup> These friends were between 20 and 23 years of age. It was a birthday party, and it was held in a local kafana,<sup>43</sup> a restaurant where people go to sing, dance, drink wine and eat traditional Macedonian food. Two people were dancing and I asked one of my friends if they were a couple? The person just laughed and said “of course not, she is Macedonian and he is Albanian. They cannot be together, it

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<sup>40</sup>The Albanian families in the centre of Skopje used to be the administrators of the Ottoman bureaucracy. As local Muslims they were more trusted than their fellow Christian Slavs.

<sup>41</sup>This term was used by Poulton (2000) to explain a relationship between heterosexual couples of different ethnicity. I choose to use the word in lack of something better.

<sup>42</sup>This episode happened while I was working in Macedonia in 2007. I choose to include it in the thesis, because this was one of the happenings that made me aware of the controversies surrounding identity in Skopje.

<sup>43</sup>A mix between a café, a bar, and a restaurant.

would never work between a Macedonian and an Albanian.” It was obvious that for my informant it was unthinkable for a Macedonian and Albanian to date, and my impression was that this was regardless of the ethnicity of the girl in the relation. I am not trying to indicate a change or a difference between age groups. I merely try to point out that within the same area of Skopje, there exists different views on cross-sexual relations, and that my informants’ thoughts on cross-sexual relations are heterogeneous within my research area. It is also an example on how ethnicity could possibly be an enabling or constraining factor on the micro level in Barth’s model. If we see this in relation to Barth, he says “[W]hat we see unfolding in such cases are the individual and social processes involved in identity formation” (Barth 1994a:23). The individual processes in my empirical examples are shaped by the formative years Slavic Macedonians and Albanians spend together. Social processes are shaped by society’s senior men who are often more “traditionalist bent” according to Barth (1994a). The empirical examples above can also be related to Brubaker’s “groupness” theory (Brubaker 2002). My Informants have contrasting views on a subject like cross-sexual relations. It is not given that the efforts of the ethno-political entrepreneurs trying to shape a Macedonian identity and strengthening the ethnic boundaries, manage to create “groupness” that eventually crystallises into a homogenous group.

### Patrons or Ethnic Entrepreneurs

When Barth defines the median level he starts out by saying that “most studies of ethnicity have quite reasonably focused on the median level” (Barth 1994a:24). The median level takes into consideration processes that collectivise and mobilise groups for different purposes. This level is where ethnic entrepreneurship is found. This is where stereotypes are established, often by emphasising certain aspects of common identity and disregarding other factors (Greenwald et al. 2002), or by strengthening historical and mythical links already initialised by the political elite or the academic community on the median level (Brunnbauer 2004). Processes on this level intervene to constrain and compel people’s expressions and actions on the micro level; package deals and either-or choices are imposed, according to Barth. In the following I seek to explain the role of ethnic entrepreneurs in Skopje and to what extent they construct the views of the political elite and which means they use to do so.

The most important actors on the median level, according to Barth, are the ethnic entrepreneurs. The persons most commonly thought of as ethnic entrepreneurs are persons with an elevated status in society, either because of celebrity status or more formal positions

in society. I believe that the category can be extended in Skopje. My perception of Skopje is that persons who had a senior male position in an extended family relation were often sought out for advice and opinions. They almost functioned like a patron, in a patron-client relationship. By society they were seen as a peer person for the extended family, especially in relation to political affiliation and in dealing with government offices, and health care issues where acquaintances and personal networks were important. Even though these persons are not entrepreneurs in the traditional sense of the word, they were used to navigate in the social landscape. I will call them the “new” ethnic entrepreneurs. I will first try to explain the role of the “new” group of ethnic entrepreneurs. Then I will turn to the more “traditional” ethnic entrepreneurs in Skopje.

During my time in Skopje, I often got the same answer when questioning people about their opinion on Macedonian ancestry, and their identity. The response often was “you must talk to my uncle” or “you must talk to my brother; he is interested in these issues and knows a lot about this.” These uncles and brothers were without exception nationalist in their views and opinion bearers in their local community. The following empirical example is from one of these meetings, this time with the uncle of one of my informants.

We arrived at his house in the afternoon, our visit was preannounced and the uncle – Mr Alexandar – and his wife came out of the front door of a small house to greet us. The inside of the house was decorated like a traditional Macedonian home with colourful woven carpets, and dark brown wooden bookshelves, probably bought sometime in the 70s. It was like a normal Macedonian home, except for one thing. On the wall in the living room, there was an eye-catching plaque with a gun and a knife crossing each other, and underneath it said: “Death or Freedom for Macedonia”. I recognized the plaque as the symbol and slogan of IMRO,<sup>44</sup> an organisation established by Macedonians at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mrs Alexandar had prepared a huge meal for us, with home-made wine. The conversation was like many others I had these months. Mr Alexandar was very interested in history, like other opinion formers I met. He agreed to talk to me because he wanted me to know the “true” story about Macedonia. He was particularly negative about the Yugoslav period, and pointed out that they were the direct descendants of the ancient Macedonians. During the Yugoslav time, he said, people had continued their fight for independence, and his grandfather had taken him into the basement to teach him the real history of the Macedonians. Such teaching was not very popular with the Yugoslav authorities. Mr Alexandar and other opinion formers I met

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<sup>44</sup> Here I use the English abbreviation to distinguish the old VMRO from the present political party, the VMRO-DPMNE.

during my time in Skopje had all gained the trust of family and friends and had a number of followers. Mr Alexandar had with his brothers, sons, and brothers' in-law practical influence on 5 families. If we count in friends I believe we are close to 50 people that would seek his advice. I argue that these opinion formers are ethnic entrepreneurs in Macedonia. Brunnbauer states that "of course, amateur history has a strong impact on the historical consciousness of the public" (Brunnbauer 2003:167). These amateur historians tend to be without critical thoughts toward their sources and they often get their inspiration from professional historians loyal to the nation-building process.

The Macedonian nation-building process has a number of what Barth refers to as ethnic entrepreneurs. I have chosen to exemplify with one who are well known in the public debate. Dragan Latas has a column in one of Macedonia's largest newspapers the *Večer*. I was not acquainted with his column before I one day heard that people were talking about him. I asked a good friend of mine that I knew were relatively objective in this regard. First she told me, "he is a fool that nobody listens too, or, well, that is actually not correct. A lot of people read his column, it is a pity. He has been writing his racist nonsense for 20 years. Everybody used to think he was a fool, the problem is that now days people starts to listen to what he has to say. People actually think he has some good points." I asked her, what is so bad about his column? "Well, he writes a lot of bad things about the Albanians, especially the Kosovars. Then he is constantly arguing about the name issue with Greece, telling people how the Greeks are this and that. It's just really simple propaganda, that's all." Dragan Latas are by several of my informants viewed as a one of few people who dares to contribute to the public nationalist discourse. Latas is an advocate for antiquisation, and those critical to him see him as an opportunist and a populist. His followers believe he is a sincere and loyal Macedonian writing the truth about the minorities and the surrounding countries.

The two entrepreneurs presented have their sphere of influence on two different levels of society. They are, however, a vital part of the national discourse in Macedonia. The ethnic entrepreneur I have called "the new entrepreneur" has his influence in the individual sphere, being a role model and spokesperson for an extended family, or a small community. The more "traditional" ethnic entrepreneur influences a broader part of the population, but is perceived as being more of a populist. The two entrepreneurs are both contributing to the dynamics of the national discourse by reaffirming the political messages, and to some degree strengthening these messages. The entrepreneurs will also make use of historians and other academics, and express their point of view in a more understandable form for the general population. In these processes such views can be misinterpreted or changed according to the will of the

entrepreneur. These processes placed by Barth on the median level are important for the perception of, among other things, national history in the general population, and the dynamics of the national discourse.

Brunnbauer (2004:165) argues that “Nations need myths of descent, spatial origin, ancestry, a heroic or “golden” age, decline and regeneration, and historians are encouraged to write these myths. History is therefore closely bound to nation building.” Ethnic entrepreneurs in Macedonia have a strong interest in the nation-building process because they want to maintain a favourable position in society. They are often members of VMRO-DPMNE and have a huge network around them. They are inside the ‘boundaries’ set by the political elite, not necessarily by knowing somebody in the governing apparatus, but because they show allegiance to the party. Having this position in Macedonian society, they are much sought after by people looking for employment. They know where people with the “right” political sentiments can go to get a job, and whom to talk to. The argument for ethnic entrepreneurs also presents us with an explanation of why VMRO-DPMNE voters often tend to be young people under the age of 35, and senior citizens. A female student told me, “you would never imagine what kind of political connections you need in this country to have a prospect of getting a job when you are done studying.”

In this section I have used employment, allegiance, and network as some of many possible motivations that entrepreneurs use to constrain and compel actions and gain their followers’ loyalty.

#### [National Discourse and the International Community](#)

At the level of states and nations we find the global international arena, the major religious communities and the imagined communities that relate to ethnicity according to Barth (1994a). Within studies of ethnicity in Macedonia my main focus for analysis was the discourse between the state and the population. Nevertheless, nation-states also need to look towards the international arena. For Macedonia, the most important task is to secure its position as an internationally recognised nation-state, and seek legitimation for The Republic of Macedonia. There are still a large number of border issues between Macedonia and the surrounding countries. One of these pending border issues is the case between Macedonia and the new state of Kosovo. These issues are important for the dimension of spatiality discussed in chapter three. In addition, the Macedonian Orthodox Church is still not recognised by the



Greek or Serbian Orthodox Church. Barth describes what he refers to as negative and positive actions a state (regime) can use to control the population. Among the negative actions are persecution, violence, and genocide. The positive acts Barth describes can be selective recruitment to the army or to the state bureaucracy, allocation of public goods and similar incentives.

#### [The Church of St. Constantine and St. Elena](#)

The negative and positive actions of the state or regime as Barth describes above, are used to control the population. I will describe two cases in Macedonia that could be related to such actions. The first is the suppression of a demonstration at the Macedonia square, the second is the quotation of minorities into the state bureaucracy. Both are important examples of how national policies influence national discourse.

One of the most interesting things that happened during my stay in Skopje was the two demonstrations against the building of an orthodox church in the centre of the city, the Church of Emperor Constantine and Empress Elena. The city has, as described earlier, a large square in the centre. The local population was proud of the square and told me it was one of the biggest open squares in Europe. The government wanted to build a large orthodox church on the square. The church would occupy roughly half of the current area of the square. It would also become a large Christian icon in the capital where almost half of the population are believed to be Muslims.<sup>45</sup> The church also had a history to go along with the announced building. There had been an orthodox church located on the same place in the middle ages. Today the place where the church was supposed to be built is probably best known as the birth place of Mother Theresa.<sup>46</sup> Mother Theresa, herself a Roman Catholic without any connection to the Macedonian Church, is not a part of the national discourse. Neither the Albanians nor the Macedonians are claiming Mother Theresa as “theirs” in anyway; she is hardly mentioned in the national discourse. The Muslim Albanian population expressed dissatisfaction with the planned building. There were also some scattered protests from the Albanian communities, but the initiators of the demonstration came from the Faculty of Architecture, the group called themselves “The First Archi Brigade” (Prva Archi Brigada). Their main slogan was “Sloboda Plostad” (Free the square), other slogans seen on the square

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<sup>45</sup>There has not been a population census since 1994, so the official numbers are outdated. There is an ongoing population census now. The results are supposed to be ready in 2012.

<sup>46</sup>The Albanian Catholic nun who received the Nobel peace prize for her work with poor and sick in India. This church must not be confused with the Catholic Church built in commemoration of Mother Theresa two blocks away from the Macedonia Square in Skopje.

were “Metropola ne Nekropola” (Metropolis not Necropolis) and “Da, i nie mojeme” (Yes, we can also) with clear connotations to the VMRO-DPMNE’s election slogan. Their demands were not ethnically or religiously motivated, at least not in their appearance. Their demands were of an architectonic character, and in support of a beautiful city. The initiators of the protest wanted to give people who did not agree with the plans a chance to demonstrate under slogans that were not ethnically or religiously loaded. They referred to their actions as “civic participation in urban development.” During my time in Skopje there were two demonstrations. The first demonstration was attacked by hooligans covering their faces with hoods or masks. They were obviously pro-government supporters who did not like that people demonstrated against government plans. Rumours spread quickly: the attackers were supposedly police officers in civilian clothing mixed with VMRO supporters transported in from villages outside Skopje. The police officers were supposedly ordered out in the street to suppress the demonstrators. After a couple of days it was a commonly known fact within the centre of Skopje that the attackers were police officers. I never heard anything about this in the news. In relation to Barth’s theory above, the suppression of this demonstration might be seen as a state’s negative action against their population. The demonstration numbered approximately 150 people. It was of a peaceful character until the counter-demonstration arrived. This protest was unique compared to many others. International human rights representatives told me this was the first time in their three year sojourn they had seen anyone opposing the incumbent government in public.

The second demonstration was organised two weeks later. The organisers had then made sure that media and international organisations were present at the square so that they would not be attacked again. This time the demonstrators numbered approximately 250 persons. Many of them were young people with a more liberal and socialist political orientation using the opportunity to show their discontent with the sitting government. The second demonstration also had a counter-demonstration, but this time of a more peaceful character. The day before the second demonstration took place, the government-supported counter-demonstration handed out leaflets stating, “Who is against the building of the Church, is against God.” Followed by a quote from the Bible, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23.34). They also raised the question “Why does the Church on the city square need to be built? And answered the question with “Because it is an inseparable part of the examples of capital city squares from all over the world” and “to shape the non-urbanised city square.” The leaflet recounts in detail the history of Emperor Constantine and Empress Elena. Constantine is according to the leaflets born in a small city outside Skopje.

The example above illustrates the national discourse in Macedonia in 2009. There are at least two interesting aspects. One is the use of religion as a legitimising factor for both the building of the church, but also as an excuse for the demonstrators. The authors of the leaflets promoting the building of the church knew that the demonstrators were ethnic Macedonian students, and therefore chose to focus on religion. The fact that this leaflet was handed out in the streets the day before the demonstration, clearly shows that it was meant to have a preventive effect. The second interesting aspect is the use of history in advocating for the building. Through my stay in Macedonia, I discovered from time to time “new” historical aspects. These aspects are not necessarily new; but historical figures and facts were continuously introduced into the national discourse. The story of Saints Constantine and Elena, and the fact that Constantine supposedly was born in a small village outside Skopje, was one of these “newcomers”. I argue that through the building of the church and the naming of it, the church represents a political decision to further reify the national discourse on antiquisation through the building of a large symbol. The fact that pro-government demonstrators physically attacked a peaceful demonstration shows that the authorities are willing to implement what Barth (1994a) refers to as negative actions in order to neutralise the constraining, heterogeneous factors of the Macedonian society.

The second example gives an account of the attitude towards quotation of minorities into the state bureaucracy. Thanks to the international community’s early interference in the 2001 conflict, one managed to sketch out a legislative frame for a multi-ethnic Macedonian community. The Albanians got more rights, and they got their own quota system for recruitment into the civil service, the police and the military. They also got quotas for university enrolment. My Macedonian informants often told me they felt they were not competing on equal terms with the Albanians. Approximately 50 per cent of my informants during my fieldwork were unemployed or students. Alexandra was a school teacher in an evening school in Skopje. She worked 50 per cent and did not make a lot of money even though she had graduated with a master’s degree in English literature. She told me with anger in her voice that if she only could compete on equal terms with these Albanians on the same jobs, she would have had a well-paid job in the government. But she who had worked hard for her degree did not get those jobs. And she was upset because she had heard that the Albanians went to Tetovo and bought their degree from a corrupt academic system. Alexandra had several friends who worked in the government and they had told her that they worked with Albanians and that they did not understand a thing! They were completely unqualified for the position. She asked me “how can we build our country when 20 per cent of our state

institutions are filled with unqualified people?” Alexandra and others who shared her view of the quotation of minorities in Macedonia<sup>47</sup> never blamed the Macedonian government. They blamed the international community. They told me that it was not Gruevski’s fault that Macedonia had written the stupid quota system into the constitution. The quota system has been under harsh criticism from several angles. The international community and especially the EUMM<sup>48</sup> has criticised Macedonian authorities for not recruiting people with ethnic minority background to government positions. The quota system states that 20 per cent of state employees have to be Albanians.

I have attempted to show how actions on the state level, as a result of international pressure can instigate reactions creating diversification, and distinction between persons of different ethnic origin in Macedonia. The example with the school teacher Alexandra above shows us how ethnicity in itself functions as an enabling structure. Through laws and regulations on the macro level ethnic entrepreneurs manage to create stereotypes about the Albanians working in the state apparatus. At the same time this example may also be interpreted as a case where ethnicity functions as a constraining factor for the homogeneity of the Macedonian nation. The quota regulations were part of the Ohrid Framework Agreement where the whole idea was to create a foundation for a multi ethnic nation-state. Here being Albanian is a precursor to gaining employment in the state bureaucracy, the visible presence of Albanians in the state apparatus and the influence they may have, works as a constrain on the possibility for the Macedonian national discourse to create further homogenisation of the population. It can also be argued that the example shows that Macedonians react to these constraining factors by the creation of negative stereotypes of Albanians working in the state bureaucracy. Barth classifies this as a state’s positive action towards an ethnic group’s relation to the state. In this case, quotation is positive for the ethnic group’s relation to the state, but it creates negative connotations and the construction of ethnic Albanians as others by the Macedonians is strengthened.

### Information Control

The control of mass-media and information is an important political tool. In Macedonia the information control is effective. Until 1 January 2010 common Macedonians and especially the young population did not have the possibility to travel outside Macedonia, except for surrounding countries like Serbia and Kosovo. Macedonians were cut-off from the rest of European society due to visa regulations. My experience is that visa regulations lower the

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<sup>47</sup>My empirical examples focus primarily on Albanians, but the other minority populations also had quotas.

<sup>48</sup>EU Monitoring Mission

level of reflection, and interest in the rest of the world among the general population. This gives the authorities an easier job in shaping reality to fit with the picture of the imagined community they present to their voters. According to Barth “a regime’s effectiveness in controlling information and stamping out forms of ethnic assertion may create a subjective sense in each of being alone with an unacknowledged sense of ethnicity” (1994a:27). It is important for the politicians fronting the nation-building process i.e. VMRO-DPMNE that the perception of history, and the national discourse, manage to support the imagined community they set out to create. A large part of the macro level according to Barth is a government’s work on the international arena to legitimise and secure its position. When we talk of ethnicity and identity as part of politics, the international arena is important. Macedonia is under immense pressure from the surrounding states, and is also pressured by the European Union to implement rule of law and a democratic multi-ethnic society that will fit the European model. The Macedonian government not only “fights” to be acknowledged as a sovereign nation, it also “fights” to be considered as a distinct nationality separated from the identity of its neighbouring countries, with its own heritage. They fight for the right to have antique Macedonian ancestors and for their constitutional name the Republic of Macedonia. How the government deals with this will now be subject for further scrutiny.

When VMRO-DPMNE won the parliamentary elections in 2006, one of their first actions was to rename the international airport in Skopje “Alexander the Great Airport”. At the same time they communicated to the population that they would never compromise in the name issue. This action became immensely popular among the majority of the Slavic-Macedonian population. The government shortly after followed up the success by renaming the highway going through Macedonia to the Greek border “Fillip II Highway”. Both of these moves made Greek politicians furious. This was for many Macedonians seen as the first sign of a Macedonian government fighting back. One of my informants told me that they had initiated a campaign after this. Blago, a 28 year old man and his friends played an on-line game on their computers called *Football Manager*. In this on-line game they could play with people from all over the world. This was one of their channels of communication in order to interact with people outside Macedonia. Their campaign was to boycott all internationals who wanted to play against them until Greece had acknowledged their constitutional name. They had been satisfied with themselves when they joined the campaign. They felt they were doing something for their country.

In 2008 the government initiated a poster campaign telling people in Skopje, and possibly also in other parts of the country, that they should not go to Greece on holiday, or to

work for the summer. The poster stated “why contribute to a country that does not recognise the name of your country.” In 2009 when I did my fieldwork, the Macedonian authorities initiated a set of poster campaigns and TV commercials. One of them suggested that Macedonians should start to explore their own country. The commercials gave the audience as set of destinations within the border of Macedonia for them to visit in the summer.

These more trivial examples above is way to shed some light on the everyday dimension of the Macedonian national discourse (see chapter 3) these are examples of what Billig (1995) refers to as banal nationalism. TV commercials like these are something you will find in every European country. One might hide it behind the fact that it is the national travel association and that the overall goal is purely capitalistic, by the fact that the hotels just want to make more money. But, as Billig argues, everyday things such as TV commercials and newspaper articles reproduce our national consciousness and create homogeneity.

The battleground for information in the Macedonian government was in 2009 the historical legacy of Macedonia. When discussing the historical legacy of Macedonia I refer to Todorova (2004) and the discussion in chapter two of this thesis, on historical legacy as continuity or perception. The national discourse on heritage was often combined with anti-Greek sentiments and the “quest for precedence” stating that the Macedonians were here first. The educational policies aim at shaping the school system was an important arena. I have earlier in the thesis described how teachers are recruited on the basis of political allegiance and not on skills or experience. I spoke to a history professor at a private school; he told me that the children who came from public schools would oppose his history teaching. His opinion was that the children in Macedonia were taught fairy-tales and historical facts that were incorrect. I have earlier in this chapter stressed the importance of the formative early years in school for the perception of history. I argue that the state school system is one of the main arenas where the Macedonian government shapes the imagined community through teaching the young generation a politically correct history and language, and thus shaping their identity.

#### [The StrugaSchool](#)

During my stay in Macedonia the eruption of clashes between Macedonian and Albanian students at a high school in Struga, a small town in the south west of Macedonia, became an important political issue, and a part of the public discourse. The Struga school case was presented in all the major newspapers for weeks and it became an important case in the election period.

Struga is an ethnically mixed town consisting of approximately 50 per cent Macedonians and 50 per cent Albanian families. The school is split in a Macedonian part called Niko Nestor and an Albanian part called Ibrahim Temo. These two schools are teaching in the same building, and it was not the first time there had been clashes between the Macedonian and Albanian pupils. Fighting first took place back in 2002, when they fought over incidents from the war. There have also been more recent incidents at the Struga school. During the parliamentary elections in 2008 there were clashes between student groups at the same school. Similarly to the 2009 incidents, the fighting in 2008 originated from election campaigns. During my field work I worked as a volunteer for a German NGO called Ziviler Friedensdienst (ZFD). This NGO worked primarily with projects on conflict resolution, and promoting dialogue between Macedonians and Albanian communities. One of the employees at ZFD was hired by the OSCE<sup>49</sup> to mediate between pupils and parents at the Struga school in 2009. This particular employee was an important informant for me on this case. The person, himself from Struga, also gave me the opportunity to sit in on conferences with all parties in this incident when they met in Skopje. The discourse in this case study is, however, mainly rooted in my informants from Skopje and their impressions and opinions on the matter, in combination with the political messages from the ministry of education and VMRO-DPMNE.

The first reports from the school incidents contained information about Macedonian and Albanian high school children attacking each other. These messages were quite rapidly connected to the previous clashes at the StrugaSchool in 2008. The next day the newspaper wrote “parents keeping their children away from school in Struga” (Vecer). This was again followed up by Macedonian parents who told the government through the media to separate the Macedonians and Albanian pupils. Stojanovski, the Minister of Education, responded with the decision that “it was best for the two groups of pupils to attend different ‘language-shifts’”. Knowing that the OSCE is involved and having the international organisation monitoring the process the Macedonian government was trying to resolve a delicate matter of ethnicity and politics by language classification. Most of my informants were not surprised, some would even agree. They told me that in Skopje this was a quite common practice. It started after the conflict in 2001. Igor, a man in his thirties told me that his old school, the Nikola Karev high school in Skopje was now divided (the Albanian part of the school is called Zef Ljus Marko). The Macedonian students attended school in the morning, and the

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<sup>49</sup>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Albanian students started school in the afternoon. That way both Macedonians and Albanians used the same building. According to Igor the school administration had separated the classes around 4-5 years ago.

Maria is 45 years old and has a daughter who attends a mixed school in Skopje. She told me that “according to my daughter, the pupils split up and goes to separate places in the school yard anyway. She does not think there is anything they as parents can do about it. She says that “the practice with separated schools will only increase in the future.” When I talk about this case with my informants, many of them think it is difficult to talk about. It is obvious that this subject is controversial. Igor told me that “Maybe it is not so bad that the classes are separated. It is not the children’s fault, you know. It is their parents that influence them, and then it does not matter if they go to the same classes in school.” According to Stojanovski, the Minister of Education, “the governments stand in this matter is that for now it is best to divide the two groups.” The Minister of Education acknowledges that this is a complicated issue, and he adds that he is open for suggestions, but right now he does not know how they can solve this issue in a better manner. The local Macedonian politicians in Struga agreed with the Minister of Education. Even some of the teachers at Niko Nestor felt that this was the best option. Among my informants in Skopje there were some who felt that this was the wrong action to take. Mile, a man in his 50s tells me that he believes they are moving in the right direction. After the conflict (2001) people wanted to separate the pupils at school, now he does not think that people care that much. He believes that most parents would allow for their children to be taught in the same classroom as Albanian pupils. Sasha, another man in his late 40s, told me that “I just do not understand what the problem is. When I went to school, we all went to the same classes. We learned the same things, and we never had any problems. Of course back then we all learned in one language. I have many good friends from school days who are Albanians, it was never a problem for us back then.” In the newspapers I read interviews with young students who were open for mixed classes. They said they were not afraid of Albanians and they welcomed and initiative to learn together.

I found it especially interesting to talk to the student council at the StrugaSchool. The student council representatives also gave hope to an ethnically mixed and well-functioning school. All the representatives present at the seminar I attended had a clear message to the politicians. First of all they wanted to convey the message that the students who made trouble were a minority at the school. They did not recognise the situation as it was presented in the



media, and they asked the politicians present at the seminar to stop using their school as a political tool in the election.

This particular case ended with a separation of the student groups. It was decided by the Ministry of Education that the school should introduce “language-shifts” in the short-run and that they would try to allocate funding for building a new school building in Struga so that they could separate the Macedonian and Albanian pupils. In the aftermath of the Struga School incident in early 2009, several cases came up where the educational authorities had more or less deliberately pushed integration policies aside and separated pupils according to ethnic origin, language, or history lessons. The largest case was from 2003 when the Ministry of Education approved the segregation of over 1,700 Albanian students in Kumanovo, Macedonia’s third largest city. The reason was supposedly that the Albanian pupils refused to attend class with Macedonian pupils.

I would like to point out that in the aforementioned example the curriculum is different for Macedonian and Albanian students. The consequence is that history lessons are differentiated. Even though this thesis is not about interethnic relations I believe that the potential for creating otherness is worth mentioning. This might eventually alter Macedonian identity, as ethnic identity is negotiated and seen in relation to “the others” (Barth 1969, Eriksen 1993, 1999, Gagnon 2004, Verdery 1993). I argue that the policy of “two schools under one roof<sup>50</sup>” implemented by the governing party VMRO-DPMNE in this example may be interpreted in the context of the national discourse. It is furthermore a policy contributing to shape the formative years. This may have future implications for Macedonian identity, when the generation of tomorrow does not experience a life in a mixed ethnic community, and thereby loses the lived experience enabling the majority of their parents’ generation to negotiate their Macedonian identity. It is in the light of these arguments, I argue, that the “two schools under one roof” policy in the long run can have an effect on the ethnic boundaries by creating further polarisation of the society and less lived experience in coexistence.

### Concluding Remarks

In this thesis my aim has been to take a closer look at the connection between ethnicity, identity and political power in Macedonia. I have tried to achieve this by focusing on identifying some enabling structures and constraining factors for identity construction on three analytical levels of the Macedonian community in Skopje. I started out by focusing on the perception of history among my informants, just like my informants often started out by

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<sup>50</sup>Is the expression used in Bosnia-Herzegovina for the compromise solution to ethnically separated schools by the OSCE.

discussing perceptions of history in our conversations. I have tried to take a closer look at the different shifts in Macedonian history, which I have indicated by leaning on Todorova's "cruel shifts" are identity transformations. I have further indicated that such an identity transformation started in Skopje around 2006 and are still ongoing. I have also suggested that the identity issues with the surrounding countries are based on controversies going back at least a hundred years, making it easy for the political elite to make use of in contemporary identity construction. In addition I have attempted to show how the government through their dominant position in Macedonian politics is fronting poster campaigns drawing the Macedonian genealogy back to the antique Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great. I have divided the Macedonian population into three generations and referred to them as group A, B, and C. My aim was to show how the three generations interpreted the Macedonian history based on their own lived experience, and the present national discourse. One of my conclusions is that the Macedonian history as presented in Skopje by the official Macedonian history narration is legacy as perception, and that the Macedonian government party is shaping this perception through its national discourse.

I move on to explain how the political elite influences the perception of national history, by creating a national genealogy going back to the antique Macedonians' and by doing this influences the perception of Macedonian identity. I also try to show how this is restricted to the ethnic Macedonian population through juxtaposing history, descent and religion with ethnicity to create and maintain ethnic boundaries. In chapter three of the thesis I have chosen to focus on the national discourse analysed through a critical discourse analysis perspective. I chose to focus on the national discourse because I saw through my fieldwork that nationalism was an important aspect connecting nation-building with ethnicity and the ongoing identity discourse. I used Özkırımlı's theoretical approach to national discourse to identify four important dimensions within the Macedonian national discourse. These were identified as the spatial, temporal, symbolic and everyday dimensions. The four dimensions are important in the national discourse as enabling homogenisation of Macedonian identity. Studying these four dimensions' role in nationalist discourse also reveals how the political elite's view of Macedonian national identity as completely separate from neighbouring Slav national identities is gaining popularity over the old Yugoslav idea of Macedonian as a South Slav identity. Neofetistos (2004) argues that in interethnic relations the discourse from the political elite does not affect people's own lived experience. I support that argument, but also argue that the political elite make use of lived experience to negotiate the perception of history,

descent and religion and reify their interpretation of the past, in order to shape a new Macedonian identity. In that way one might argue that group A and C from chapter two, who do not have their formative years in the Yugoslav era, more easily will adapt to a new national identity.

The constraining factors for the national discourse in Skopje are the people who oppose the identity construction from the political elite based on the juxtaposing of ethnicity with history, descent and religion. These people oppose the narration of a national history which does not subsume the entire population within the state of Macedonia. By constraining factors I also mean those factors that prevent people from generalizing and thinking of each other as static groups with certain stereotypical assets.

These groups are the groups of the population described by Eriksen (1999), where the symbolic value of the national discourse becomes impotent. These groups oppose the “new” identity by holding on to the former identity conception which some of my informants managed to express through socialist symbols. The other groups in Macedonian society functioning as a constraining factor to the homogenisation of society, are the part of the population which manages to negotiate their identity on the basis of their own lived experience. This part of the population has close social relations with the minorities within their own community, and perceives them as their own. The impact on their community is therefore minimal. Socialist symbols may be an expression of the old identity, but it might also be an expression of anti-antiquisation because the political elite portrays the period under the Socialist Federation as negative. To exemplify, the Macedonian political elite renders the Yugoslav era as a negative historical past. This is based on lived experience from people that were in opposition to Belgrade’s leadership during the Yugoslav era. The claims to history, descent and religion, are reified by the social entrepreneurs both on an individual level (uncles and brothers) and collective level (celebrities). It is reified either because their lived experience confirms the claims or because they have a motivating factor (Eriksen 1999). Those opposing the official version of history, are the persons with different lived experiences from the Yugoslav era, consisting mostly of the group referred to as group B in chapter two of this thesis, with their formative years from the Yugoslav era. These individuals will, in a community where it is still socially acceptable, advocate the positive aspects of the Yugoslav era. They will presumably also hand this positive lived experience down to their children and grandchildren, creating continuity in the lived experience. The perception of history in Macedonia is also a source for further research to understand the complex shift in identity

which I argue was in progress in Skopje during my stay in 2009, and is a process probably still in progress.

I have tried to give a picture of how ethnic entrepreneurs interpret the discourse from politicians and academics and make use of employment, party affiliation, social and familial networks in order to secure loyalty towards the nation-building project. In the continuation of these processes the entrepreneurs are strengthening the ethnic boundaries within a society. The political elite thereby successfully manage to employ either-or choices, and make it more difficult for people in Macedonia to negotiate their identity and overcome the issue of ethnicity (Neofetistos 2004). The deliberate separation of schools in a multi-ethnic country like Macedonia, I argue, is a political strategy to strengthen ethnic boundaries. This will in time create a polarised and ethnically split country. The school children of today who do not experience everyday life with different ethnicities around them will be less well equipped to negotiate their own identity and create interpersonal relationships with people from other ethnical backgrounds. As Barth says, the years in school are “deeply formative experiences” (Barth 1994a:22).

The conception of history and the national discourse in Macedonian nation-building has been in focus throughout this thesis. My aim has been to use history conception and national discourse to illuminate how ethnicity, identity and political power influence each other in Skopje. There are however many other variables that go beyond the scope of this thesis. One of the factors I was unable to discuss is the economic factor. Economy plays an important role in every political turmoil and according to Todorova (2004) also in identity transformations. VMRO-DPMNE won the elections in 2006 by promising the population a “financial revolution” speeding up the foreign direct investments to the country. The results have so far been disappointing to the population, and further research on Macedonia would have to include the effect of the degree of economic stability and security on nationalist discourse and identity formation.







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