

MACEDONIAN AND ALBANIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BALKAN
WARS: COLLISION OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES
МАКЕДОНСКИ И АЛБАНСКИ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ НА БАЛКАНСКИТЕ
ВОЈНИ: КОЛИЗИЈА НА ИСТОРИСКИТЕ НАРАТИВИ

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Abstract: This article deals with the collective memories and legacies of the Balkan wars (1912/1913) as they are enshrined in the popular memory of the Macedonians and the Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia. The focal point is on the political in memory; i.e. an attempt is made to examine remembrance of those past events among the public opinion-makers and the impact of memory on the general public and on the current political developments. The relationship between the 'real' history (history as it actually was) and the cognitive history of the Balkan wars (history as it is perceived) is portrayed as it is seen by the two dominant ethnic groups. The basic premise is that so-called 'subjective history' (which consists of perceptions, emotions and attitudes) is in the minds of the today's actors so it affects the beliefs and values underlying their actions much more than the historical facts and knowledge gained by professionals. The centennial of the Balkan wars proves that the two major ethnic communities share the same myth of victimization; yet it confronts rather than brings them together. Furthermore it adds to the ongoing deepening of the societal division that threatens the existence of the political community.

Key words: Balkan wars, collective memory, history, legacy, ethnicity

Апстракт: Статијата ја анализира колективната меморија и наследството од Балканските војни (1912/1913) онака како што се тие вградени во меморијата на Македонците и Албанците во Република Македонија. Централна точка на анализата е концептот на „политичкото во меморијата“, а се прави обид да се истражи сеќавањето на настаните од пред сто години кај група креатори на јавно мислење, како и влијанието на овие сеќавања врз пошироката јавност и на тековните политички случувања. Врската помеѓу

'реалната историја' (историјата каква што навистина се случила) и когнитивната историја на Балканските војни (историјата како што се перцепира) е прикажана низ призмата на двете доминантни етнички заедници. Основната премиса е дека т.н. „субјективна историја“ (која се состои од перцепции, емоции и ставови) е онаа која живее во свеста на денешните актери, па оттука таа има многу поголемо влијание врз уверувањата и вредностите кои се основа на нивните акции отколку што е тоа случај со историските факти и знаењето формулирано од професионалните историчари. Стогодишнината од Балканските војни покажа дека двете етнички заедници споделуваат ист мит на виктимизација, кој сепак повеќе ги конфронтира одошти ги зближува. Освен тоа, ваквата состојба дополнително за продлабочува општествената дела која се му се заканува на опстанокот на политичката заедница.

Клучни зборови: Балкански војни, колективна меморија, историја, наследство, етницитет.

INTRODUCTION

Antagonizing and highly politicized debates over the past of (and in) the Republic of Macedonia have been ongoing for years. However, this process is nothing specifically related to this country because many speak of so-called “epoch of memory”. Jacques Derrida notes that recent events signify “a universal urgency of memory” (Derrida 2001, 28), while Pierre Nora uses a concept of ‘global upsurge of memory’ (Nora 1993). Apparently, the centennial of the Balkan wars (1912/1913) coincides with something that has been taking place on the wider scene. The revision of history (or as some authors name it “re-writing” of history) is particularly typical for post-authoritarian societies and in the ones that have recently gained independence, i.e. everywhere it is a societal priority to give new answers to the old questions - such as, “who we really are”. The debated in Macedonia not only embrace a very long time span (from antiquity up to the more recent history) but more importantly they include not only historians (and even quasi-historians) and scholars but also non-historians (intellectuals, politicians, religious leaders, journalists, etc.). In the cacophony of voices it is often hard to refine well-articulated and reasoned interpretations based on credible facts and arguments. Such a societal ambience represents a challenge for any researcher interested in examining the way in which a particular historical period is situated and (mis)used in the context of ongoing political and interethnic tensions and clashes. The Balkan wars’ period is selected only as an example that may help understand how the collective memories affect the present

state of affairs and how they impact the future of the modern Macedonian state.

The ongoing proliferation of scholarly works on memory and its utility as a creator of identity prove that what happens is a global trend. No surprise that Nora's notion has gained such a support among scholars who deal with political in memory or the politics of memory. The process described by Nora includes elements, such as: critique of the official versions of history and the return to what was hidden away; search for an obfuscated or 'confiscated' past; cult of 'roots' and the development of genealogical investigations; boom in fervent celebrations and commemorations; legal settlement of past 'scores' between different social groups; growing number of all kinds of museums; etc. At glance it is obvious that upsurge of memory has not by any means bypassed the Republic of Macedonia but the focal point of the numerous analyses has been the project "Skopje 2014" (Koteska 2011). Prior to embarking to the analysis devoted to the Balkan wars' legacies and collective memories it is necessary to define some key concepts that the paper relies upon.

The epoch of memory is characterized by a construction of social experiences through public discourse over the past events, which is an endeavour that requires imagination in remembrance, as well as a process of narration. A growing number of authors have introduced the distinction between the concepts of "politics of memory" and "the political in memory". The second one, i.e. political in memory is the one that questions the notion of "collective memory" and the "social frames of memory". It refers to and highlights the cohesive and reproductive force of memory in the collective processes of identity construction; on the other hand, remembrance of past events that do not fit well into the collective narrative of "our common history" is the factor that produces uneasiness and disturbances. Truly, "to contest the past is also to pose questions about the present, and what the past means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward" (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003, 1). Despite the apparent focus on memory (politics of memory and/or political in memory), there is insufficient work on exploration why some events preserve political salience or elaboration of the process through which they become important in domestic and inter-state politics. In practice of everyday politics, memory exerts effects in two ways: from the bottom up, as interpretations of the past that affect the identities and understandings of political elites, and from the top down, as public figures place certain events into the national consciousness while ignoring others. To use Anthony Smith's phrase (quoted from Hosking and Schöpflin 1997, 37), the

basic question that is to be addressed in this article reads: does this particular historic period (the Balkan wars) qualify as “usable past”? Nietzsche’s thought that the state never has any use for truth as such but only for truth which is useful to it, still rings true. However, this paper does not deal with history of 1912/1913 wars as such and even less with historical truth about them. The focal interest is on their interpretation(s) by the intellectuals in the Republic of Macedonia. Thus the following text is an analysis that revolves around concepts such as public discourse, cultural trauma, historical consciousness, narratives, contested past(s), etc.

Halbwachs (1992) has a point when he argues that the collective memory is socially constructed, and that the idea of an individual memory absolutely separate from social memory, is an abstraction almost devoid of meaning. Construct or not (as nationalists usually claim), the IR theorist Wendt (1999, 225) rightly draws out the similarities in the role played by memory in individuals and collectives: “People are distinct entities in virtue of biology, but without consciousness and memory – a sense of ‘I’ – they are not agents, maybe even not human. This is still more true of states, which do not even have ‘bodies’ if their members have no joint narrative of themselves...” This applies on any self-conscious societal group. In the words of the famous holder of Pulitzer Prize for history Arthur Schlesinger (2007), as persons deprived of memory become disoriented and lost, not knowing where they have been and where they are going, so a nation denied a conception of the past will be disabled in dealing with its present and its future. The relationship between memory (collective memory, especially) and history is not straightforward. Since recently, due to the growing interest in memory (so-called memory studies) some scholars argue that it should be treated as something distinct from history; majority of historians disagree and challenge the utility of this distinction. On the other hand, some authors point out that neither memory nor history seems objective any longer. In both cases one should be aware of conscious or unconscious selection, interpretation and distortion of facts, which is socially conditioned. Schlesinger (ibidem) believes that all historians are prisoners of their own experience: “We bring to history the preconceptions of our personalities and of our age. We cannot seize on ultimate and absolute truths. So the historian is committed to a doomed enterprise – the quest for an unattainable objectivity.” According to some scholars (Fogu and Kansteiner quoted from Lebow et al, 2006) memory is not history, least of all in the academic sense, but it is sometimes made from similar material. The slippery borderline between memory, truth, myth and history is evident in many cases so a comprehensive concept has been named mythistory (McNeill 1986). Others speak about history as narrative and of historians as

narrators (Munslow 2006). Unlike history, collective memory is not about objective facts, but how events of the past are understood. Memory studies are interested in the reasons, actors and ways collective perceptions of historical events are constructed and the manners in which they affect present state of affairs (Ballinger 2005, 5). For the purpose of this analysis, the common definition of memory refers to simultaneously dealing both with what individuals (in this case, the intellectuals from two ethnic campuses) think they remember about the past, and with the efforts by various actors to affect interpretations of the wartime past.

THE CENTENNIAL OF THE BALKAN WARS - REASON FOR MOURNING AND/OR CELEBRATION

If - to quote Kissinger - history is indeed the memory of state, consequently a range of intriguing questions arise with regard to the Macedonia's statehood and history. The majority citizens, members of the Macedonian nation, had had no state of their own, no archives and no specialized institutions for historical research until the Second World War. On the other hand, as far as the Albanians (who comprise the second biggest ethnic community with 25% of the population) are concerned, they shared the political destiny of the Macedonians but never truly felt a part of the common polity. Among other instances, this was proved by the 2001 conflict and even its aftermath: the issue to whom the state belongs i.e. which community has greater/smaller role and share in the statehood is still an open one.

In order to appreciate an institution adequately, it is necessary to understand the historical process in which it was produced (Berger and Luckmann 1991, 72). The institutionalized world is experienced as objective reality because tradition gives it a character of objectivity; in other words, this is a man-made, constructed objectivity (ibidem, 78). Yet the Macedonian state institutions as well as the academic ones (i.e. the ones that deal with history as such) have just a short tradition of existence. A deconstructivist (Munslow ibidem, 6) argues, "just as it is impossible to have a narrative without a narrator, we cannot have a history without a historian. What is the role of the historian in recreating the past? Every history contains ideas or theories about the nature of change and continuity as held by historians - some are overt, others deeply buried, and some just poorly formulated. The theories of history mustered by historians both affect and effect our understanding about the past, whether they are explicit or not." As history is written by historians, it is best understood as a cultural (and institutional) product existing within society, and as a part of the historical process, rather than an objective methodology and commentary outside of society. Karl Marx (1852)

rightly argued that men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. Martin Luther King rephrased the same idea: we are not makers of history; we are made by history. The same applies to the researchers, historians, anthropologists, etc. and their worldviews, no matter how objective and neutral they claim to be.

At the beginning of Macedonia's democratic transition and independence (1991), the first steps were directed towards denouncing everything that looked like a fabricated historical narrative within the Yugoslav framework with supranational teleology. The endeavour ended in an equally fabricated narrative(s) although in an opposite (national/istic) direction. The Macedonians discovered that they had already been portrayed by others as an "uncertain nation" or even as mythical "Yeti". On the other hand, the Albanians in Macedonia were enthusiastic in seeking for their historical roots and the common pan-Albanian past. Up to the eve of their centennial, the Balkan wars had not been a focal point of the collective awareness because both nationalisms were far more ambitious in their historical quest. Having faced a cold welcome of the international community and the denial by the neighbouring states the Macedonians gradually embarked on a search of their origin since the antiquity; the Albanians' claims to be Illyrians, i.e. the oldest (and the 'most authentic') inhabitants of the region, that used to be subdued now could flourish more freely (Proeva 2010, 1-2).

Institutional memory describes efforts by political elites, their supporters, and their opponents to construct meaning of the past and propagate them more widely or impose them on other members of society (Lebow et al *ibidem*). Precisely this institutional memory was to be built *av ovo* - along with the newly independent state in very unfavorable international and regional constellations that existed in 1991. The conventional wisdom reads that the state has ceased to be the only actor that has power to re-consider the usefulness of the historical facts/truth. In an ethnically divided society the situation has been even more complex because of the existence of numerous and competing 'guardians' and 'interpreters' of the past events. The present incessantly reinvents the past. In this sense, all history, as Benedetto Croce said, is contemporary history. Conceptions of the past are not stable because they are perennially revised by the urgencies of the present. The legacies of the Balkan wars (1912/1913) have not been an issue for quite some time because of the latest cycle of Balkan (ex-Yugoslav) wars (1991-2001) as well as because of the urgency to establish a new polity and to gain international recognition for the state.

More than twenty years after gaining independence, the national-building and revision of the national history are processes far from being completed. In the recently published memoirs, the former Prime Minister Ljubčo Georgievski points at Macedonia as the greatest falsifier of history.¹ Almost at the same time, another ex-prime minister cum former President of the Republic (Branko Crvenkovski) accuses the ruling party IMRO-DPMNU (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) of 'historical engineering' through the "Skopje 2014" project.² The official response to these allegations may be summed up in the following way: the preceding absence of monuments to any Macedonian national heroes spoke by itself of the confiscated past and intentionally erased/suppressed memories by the Yugoslav regime. The current government legitimates the rebuilding project as something that should have been done decades ago. The crucial effect of the rather expensive endeavour is expected to be "strengthening of the national spirit with the Macedonians". However, the project known as "Skopje 2014" (Chausidis 2013) has become a flash point of intra- and inter-ethnic tensions that illustrate that instead of building national unity and common narrative of the political community it has turned into the opposite (Koložova 2013). However, the heated debate over the monuments and the memorialisation of the past heroes that shakes the intra-ethnic relations in the Macedonian campus disregards another fact: the upraise of heroic past was initiated by DUI (i.e. Democratic Union for Integration, the party that was formed by the former UÇK combatants and since 2002 is almost continuously member of the ruling coalition). It was in 2006 when it insisted and succeeded to erect a monument to the all-Albanian national hero Skenderbeg in Skopje. Since then the spiral was made loose. The project "Skopje 2014" indeed predominantly symbolises the "Macedonianness" as understood by the ruling IMRO elites but the Albanian ones act on a regional level and in an orchestrated manner. For instance, monuments of the same historical personalities (Skenderbeg, Hasan Prishtina, etc.) have been built in Tirana, Prishtina and Skopje.

The centennial of the Balkan wars has been seen as an opportunity to address old grievances, traumas and/or glories. The interpretations of this historical period made by the Macedonians and the Albanians have been done not only in a detached but also

1 During the public promotion of his autobiography "That's me", Georgievski gave such a public statement, which surely provoked wave of reactions. The former Prime minister who got Bulgarian citizenship some years ago now advocates the Bulgarian origin of the Macedonian people. See more <http://www.mkd.mk/40860/makedonija/ljubcho-georgievski-toa-sum-jas/> (accessed on 4 October 2012)

2 Actually, two former prime ministers, Georgievski and Crvenkovski, have created a joint opposition front against the current government led by Nikola Gruevski.

in a confrontational/competing manner. On the eve of this anniversary there was general confusion and dilemma, especially among the Macedonian political and other elites - is this something to be marked, or even celebrated, at all? While the Macedonians were reluctant, the Albanians had already built a consensus (nationally and on a regional level): it was a perfect occasion to celebrate Albanian statehood understood in wider terms as a historical achievement of all generations of Albanians who fought for a state of their own, regardless the fact that they had been living in different political communities dispersed in 4-5 Balkan states. As expected, at the end of the day there was a cacophony of interpretations. The ethnic Macedonians share a common belief that those events represent the greatest national trauma and gross international injustice: the Balkan wars symbolize a separation of what once was a whole, i.e. the imagined fatherland of all Macedonians. At the same time, the emotions among the Albanian elites were also high but at unlike the Macedonians they shared feelings that were a combination of national pride and sorrow: pride for the centennial of the Albanian statehood and sorrow because of that state's imperfection in terms of not uniting the Albanians from the region in a 'natural' nation-state.³ Very few have paid attention to the attitudes and emotions of the Turkish minority in Macedonia or the Serbian one - i.e. the representatives of the historical 'losers' and 'winners'. Speaking in terms of victors and losers, comparative review of the national historiographies shows that the Macedonian and Albanian along with the Turkish one (and partially, the Bulgarian one) belong to the same category of historiographies that contain element of victimization and define the Balkan wars as aggressive rather than wars of national liberation (Georgiev 2012).

In general, the Macedonians wonder why they would even mark this centenary that symbolizes forceful separation of the Macedonian 'natural/ethnic body'. The public discourse has been that of lamentation over the misfortune and international injustice inflicted on the Macedonians. The dominant popular narrative goes that the first two decades of the 20th century Balkan wars were traumatic and important episode of the Macedonian people's hard history. For instance, in a newspaper columnist (Filov 2013) wrote the following: "The Bucharest Agreement of 10 August 1913 inflicted the gravest injustice a people, a state, can go through. Macedonia was divided among the Balkan states, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece." According to some critical historians the ethno-centric approach wrongly puts the (non-formed) Macedonian nation on the centre-stage and depicts Ottoman Macedonia as already

³ In a TV show in Albanian in early 2012 Ermira Mehmeti-Devaja, a member of the Macedonian Parliament stated: "If you ask me personally, I as any other Albanian, hope for unification, I want unification of all Albanians - but the question is how to achieve that. Is there any platform, a manifest or a document about that?"; *Vecer*, 21 March 2013.

defined fatherland of all Macedonians. Briefly, according to the national historiography and the general belief, during the Balkan wars the Macedonian revolutionary movement suffered internal weaknesses and clashes, while the international support was missing. Furthermore, the newly established Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian states had already manifested competing claims over Macedonia, which became 'an apple of discord', prior to the Balkan wars. The Bucharest Treaty meant de facto division of the spoils of war, i.e. the territory of Ottoman Macedonia and its population. This version, of course, collides with the grand narratives and experiences of the other non-Macedonian inhabitants of today's state. Behind the facade however there is a feeling of national embarrassment because of the failure and disorganization of the Macedonian Revolutionary Movement in a very critical moment of Ottoman Empire's dissolution.

Concurrently, the Albanian ethnic community is far more focused and concrete: it has been celebrating the centennial of Albanian statehood through a range of political, cultural and other events (financed with the state budget of the Republic of Macedonia) as well as through numerous trans-border events and meetings of the Albanians in the region and the Diaspora. The latest proposal launched by some Albanian politicians refers formation of so-called Balkan Benelux (political union that would embrace all countries in the region with significant Albanian population - Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro). The celebration of the centennial of the Albanian statehood revolved around more nationalistic (and politically more useful) interpretations of the past. The traditional narrative that does not changed much goes as follows (Pollo and Puto, 1981): the Albanians' struggle for freedom and independence dates as far back as 15th century (the era of Skanderbeg) and progressed in linear fashion. On the eve of the Balkan Wars, a vast popular movement demanding independence arose across Albania, demonstrating the remarkable level of political maturity the masses. This narrative conveniently downplays the complex identities and loyalties of the masses as well as their illiteracy, backwardness and the traditional tribal organisation - all factors that obstructed build-up of a more coherent community based on a distinct national identity. Furthermore, as Bernd Fischer (2002) rightly points out, Albanians found themselves in a favoured position within the Ottoman Empire and therefore did not share the level of discontent with foreign rule felt by most of the other Balkan peoples. Quite the contrary, the Albanians often saw the Turks as protectors against the often hostile Greeks and Serbs. For many Albanians, the Ottoman Empire provided a career with the opportunity for advancement in the army or within the administration, where they served in disproportionate

numbers. The decline of Ottoman rule was the momentum for gaining state independence but Albanians were not united in their decision to join the Balkan League. Despite practical efforts of the Serbs and Montenegrins to make Albanians choose their side in the First Balkan War, Albanians followed the dogma "better the devil you know". Some of today's Albanian interpretations (Ramadani, Ameti and Celiku 2013, 2) claim that "one of the main goals of the Balkan countries was to invade Albanian territories." On the eve of the Balkan Wars Albania lacked all of the necessary preconditions for nation-state's emergence: it could not look back to a powerful medieval empire, it had no religious unity and no leadership offered by a self-conscious class; it had little foreign intellectual stimulus and lacked linguistic unity. Finally, it did not even have a population particularly discontented with foreign rule (Fischer *ibidem*). In sum, Albanians were not the ultimate arbiters of their statehood. The state came into being as a result of a bargaining of the Great powers. The state created on the negotiating table in 1912 with no concern for the people has become one of the major national (and regional) traumas. More than a half the population was left out of the borders of the artificially created state.

Given the fact that the Macedonian society is fractured along bi-ethnic lines, the centennial of the Balkan wars left behind a bizarre picture: while one group laments over its 'lost fatherland', the other one celebrates one-hundred years old 'imagined community' and summarizes the overall pan-Albanian progress. From the ethnic Macedonian point of view the general conclusion is that in addition to the motherland Albania today there is Kosovo as a second Albanian state, the power-sharing regime in Macedonia that gives the Albanians a status of constitutive nation, and improved minority rights status for the Albanians in Montenegro (and less in Serbia proper). It is something that causes more fear than relief. The Albanians, from their side, still stick to the rhetoric of a divided nation and to the dream of all Albanians in one state (or at least, in the European Union). While the Macedonian government did not embark into any manifestation to mark the anniversary, some of its ministers and even the President of the Republic welcomed the political guests from Serbia who celebrated their historical battles and glories on what is today's independent state. It caused grumbling not only among the Macedonians but also among the Albanians who still see Serbia as archetype of eternal enemy. The ruling IMRO-DPMNU was caught between two fires and tried to find a compromise claiming that there is nothing for Macedonians to celebrate and that the historical IMRO fought both against the Turks and against the Serbs while the ministerial attendance of the Serbian commemoration of Kumanovo battle was made out of respect for the neighboring state and in the spirit of the European values and good neighborly relations.⁴

4 See: "ВМРО-ДПМНЕ: Зебрњак не треба да го прославуваат Македонците, министерката

In addition to a few modest academic conferences and public round tables, the most active in this regard was the Macedonian Diaspora (i.e. United Macedonian Diaspora and the Macedonian World Congress). The Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts held two conferences - one purely national and the other one modestly international (with few international speakers) but the general conclusion was the same. The president of the Academy summed it up in the following way: "Macedonia was the greatest victim".⁵ On the other hand, the Albanian community was far more active and creative, especially during 2012. The members of the ruling DUI and of the intellectual community took part in various events organized by the Albanian diaspora as well as by Albania and Kosovo. Despite the attempts to keep interethnic tensions calm, the members of the political elite could not refrain themselves and thus miss the opportunity to gain from the momentum. By default the celebrations were accompanied by strong nationalistic rhetoric and gigantic national flags.⁶ It served well the Albanian party DUI ahead of the local elections but raised many worries among the Macedonians in many parts of the country where they are a minority on a local level.⁷ Commemorations and celebrations are over but the interethnic tensions have remained alive.

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BALKAN WARS AMONG THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

In an era of expansion of memory, historians have lost the position of exclusive guardians of the interpretation of the past. The historians in Macedonia complain of the

Канчевска присуствуваше од почит кон Србија", A1on, 28 October, 2012 (available at <http://bukvar.mk/news/vmrodpmne-zebrnjak-ne-treba-da-go-proslavuvaat-makedoncite-ministerkata-kanchevska-prisustvuvasho-od-pochit-kon-srbija?newsid=q1M>), accessed on 20 October 2013)

5 The Macedonian Academy (MANU) organized a symposium entitled "From the Balkan wars - towards the Balkan peace", and its president, Prof. Kambovski said: "The Balkan wars obstructed creation of the Macedonian state because the Macedonian nation was on the half way to build-up of its own national consciousness. Division of Macedonia did not bring sustainable peace and denial of the national identity of the Macedonian people was one of the sources of continuous conflicts among the states that participated in the Balkan wars." (See: "The Victim was the Last to Mark the Anniversary", Dnevnik, 3 December 2012, available at: <http://www.dnevnik.mk/default.asp?ItemID=216FBE4BF758B5418EFB12CD79D894E5> (accessed on 1 September 2013) In the book of abstracts, academic Kambovski argues the following: "The outbreak of the First Balkan war is a significant event in the contemporary Macedonian history. It marks the beginning of the tragedy of the Macedonian nation, while its destiny was concluded by the 1913 Bucharest peace agreement, which divided the ethnic wholeness of the Macedonian nation on three parts..." (available at: <http://www.academia.edu/2452255/>)

6 See a photo gallery at: <http://www.netpress.com.mk/mk/vest.asp?id=114388&kategorija=1>.

7 In November 2012, Ali Ahmeti gave a speech in the Kichevo village Greshnica on the occasion of the erection of a huge Albanian flag "in honour of all Albanian victims of the Balkan wars" in which claimed "Albanian territories" and also warned that "not a single black hand will be allowed to touch the flag". See Borjan Jovanovski, "The Albanian flag on 35 metres high mast induces new tensions", VOA, 21 November 2012, available at: <http://mk.voanews.com/content/raising-albanian-flag-controversy-macedonia/1550615.html>

unprincipled competition of the quasi-experts and “popular historians” who have taken the central position in the public debate. Instead of comprehensive and boring elaborations of the past, the citizens rather consume popular history like fast-food. Some historians believe that they should refrain from taking part into the public debate even if it concerns new readings of the past. The others have been trying to make their voice heard even in the international political arena.⁸ The promoters of popular interpretations are easily identified among politicians, journalists, writers, artists, and even NGO activists - that is, people that are influential as policy-makers and/or public opinion-makers. They have become alternative guardians of the historical memory of the Balkan wars, too. Collective memories and myths reproduced and interpreted by them are in a dialectic relationship with the academic and/or “official” historiography. This is especially important in a society preoccupied by, if not obsessed with, historical themes, i.e. they dictate the discourse and divert the public opinion off the more urgent and existential issues (Proeva *ibidem*, 176). For the purpose of this research, the author interviewed over sixty leading intellectuals, journalists, NGO activists, university professors, actors, writers and poets of Macedonian and Albanian origin. (With their permission some of the most interesting or the most illustrative attitudes have been quoted in the following text.)

As already said, the Macedonian society is deeply divided along ethnic lines, and an ongoing conflict between the two dominant groups revolves around the basic question: to whom the country belongs? And who has a major say in designing the future of the political community? The Ohrid Framework Agreement that concluded the 2001 armed conflict institutionalized (or better, constitutionalized) the ethnic differences, which only entrenched the divisions and perceptions on literally everything. The centennial of the Balkan wars took place only 12 years after the internal conflict, and at a critical point of implementation of the power-sharing system. Thus no wonder that any historical event has been (mis)used to prove one’s current political position. At this point it is important to remind that ethnicity is very much about the past. Virtually all ethnic groups, and virtually all theoretical conceptions of ethnic groups, make some reference to the past. Anthony Smith gives six attributes of ethnic groups, two of which are past-related: “a myth of common ancestry” and “shared historical memories”. In the context of this paper, the second one seems much more relevant than the

8 Prof. Žežov has addressed the Greek president Papoulias in an open letter on 7 July 2012 (available at <http://kurir.mk/makedonija/vesti/77045-Pismo-od-profd-r-Nikola-Zezov-do-grckiot-pretседател-Papuljas>, last accessed on 4 October 2012). He appealed to the Greek president to acknowledge the existence of the historical reality and the existence of the Macedonian national identity but also refers to the period of the Balkan wars and Greece’s territorial appetites since the beginning of the 20th century.

first one. At least, the ethnic differences are so visible and clear that no ethnic group has a potential to assimilate the other. The point of agreement is precisely in the thesis that “we do not share a myth of common ancestry”.

Regardless their ethnic background, the interviewed public personalities by and large agree over the dominant perception of the Balkan wars and their consequences. Both groups, more or less, point out several postulates: a) on the eve of the Balkan wars there were Albanian and Macedonian peoples who sought independence and self-determination but they had always been freedom-loving people who had not waged aggressive wars against anybody; b) they were exploited and unjustly treated in the Ottoman Empire but at least they lived together with no borders to divide them; c) during the Balkan wars “their ethnic territories” were an object of conquest among the aggressive Balkan neighbours; d) the major war consequence was a shattered fatherland (be it “natural” Macedonia or Albania); e) Macedonians/Albanians were the biggest victims of the Balkan wars and major international injustice was inflicted on them; f) the Balkan wars period was one of the most tragic events in the national history; g) the neighbouring nation-states betrayed the Macedonians/Albanians i.e. stabbed a knife in their backs; h) the Balkan wars were not wars of national liberation but wars of territorial expansions at the expense of the smaller Balkan nations. The Turkish occupier was replaced by the Balkan ones.

Despite these points of agreement one can also distinguish a number of differences: having been divided in three parts, the Macedonians became strangers in their own homeland; the process of national awakening was brutally suppressed and they became an object of harsh assimilation by the Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks. Unlike them, one part of the Albanian people gained an independent state, i.e. their statehood and nationhood were internationally recognized. Yet it is still perceived as a national tragedy by those parts of the Albanian nation that ended up as (unrecognized) national minorities in the neighbouring states. Regarding the character of the Balkan wars at glance it seems that the intellectuals from Macedonia are unanimous: Macedonians/Albanians did not gain anything/much from either of them. To the contrary, there is even a dose of “nostalgia” for the Ottoman times - because of different reasons, of course. There is obviously lot of romanticism and selective memory unlike the memory of Yugoslav times (especially among the Albanians). Interestingly, among the Macedonians the trauma is only occasionally related to human costs of the war but is mostly perceived as a collective tragedy and a lost opportunity for self-determination. On the other hand, the Albanians insist on war crimes and even genocide committed by the Serbs and

Montenegrians. Only few more critical intellectuals point out that the dominant narrative is a part of national imagination: the Macedonians and Albanians could not lose something they did not have at the time. In the words of a Macedonian analyst, the Balkan wars represent a watershed: the beginning of the shortest Macedonian century that started with these wars and ended up with the establishment of the full independence in 1991. According to the Albanian intellectuals, for all those who were excluded from the independent Albanian state what followed was murderous and discriminatory life under Serbian (anti-Albanian) rule. The Macedonians have slightly different perception: Ilinden Uprising (1903) was only a beginning, the second 'Ilinden' (1944) is related to the national self-determination and equality within Yugoslavia, while the third 'Ilinden' (1991) to the full-fledged statehood.

Asked to reflect on how much the dominant perception of the Balkan wars coincides with the historical events, and particularly with the way they are presented in the historiography, the majority interviewees find high degree of concurrence. The respondents consider themselves well-informed, but the same does not apply to the wider public. There are opinions that the general public have deliberately been made disinterested in their past: first, in Yugoslavia the history was levelled in order not to open wounds; and nowadays due to the flammable inter-ethnic relations and the complex regional complex, the international community takes over the role that used to belong to the communist elites - it imposes the attitude that past is less important than the future. Some analysts identify two basic stances among the population. The majority is ignorant and indifferent to events from one hundred years ago. It looks at them as if they are related to somebody else's history: past is a foreign country for them. The other part of the society (although a minority) is congruent around a nub that is still nameless because the veil of anonymity has covered the people whose fight and suffering remained unrecognized as if they never existed. These people are intrinsically interested in the past and are in desperate need to document the truth of what happened to their ancestors. The family narratives and oral folklore keep that urge alive: they still want to get recognition of the pain which was and still feels real, because if they find the answer to this pain, it will be a cure too. According to the Albanian journalist, the Albanian historiography (meaning the one from the Republic of Albania) has been going through the process of de-politicization and revision of the old interpretations of events/historical personalities. Given its huge influence on the public opinion among Albanians that live in the other Balkan countries, what matters the most is the dominant ethnocentric approach and self-victimization. Critical historians and intellectuals are still exceptions in

all Balkan states. As far as the direct participation in the military operations is concerned, the Macedonians think of themselves as participants (voluntarily or forcefully recruited) in various Balkan militaries, while the Albanians have an opposite opinion: their ancestors were not welcomed by the Balkan League and their territories were perceived as war loot, while the population was something to be get rid of. The attitudes vis-a-vis the other Balkan nations among the Macedonians differ as they often cherish mixed feelings of brotherliness and hostility. A journalist argues: "The political elites have always been engaged in myth-making in order to cover their ineptitude or in order to create a mentality of an 'unlucky, pitiable and incapable Macedonian'. But even the analysis of the folklore and the traditional songs shows that the half-educated audience has chosen to be in a role of a sufferer and victim rather than to be an active agent and a fighter." On the other hand, the Albanians cherish a myth of a heroic warrior but with the respect of the Balkan wars many of them 'skip' the historical facts regarding mass participation in the Ottoman military and political structures.

Having been conscious about the handicaps of the historiography the respondents are not very trustful in the "official truth". Some have greater expectations from the process of re-writing history since 1991. The subtle distrust is probably the reason why most of the respondents emphasize the importance of collective memory i.e. the narratives that have been transferred from one generation to another. Again the Macedonianness/Albanianness i.e. the continuity of the people's self-awareness is the focal point in both campuses. For a Macedonian political scientist collective memory is *modus vivendi* for any people with short, complicated and denied state/constitutional history as the Macedonian one is. Without collective memory the national consciousness could have not been preserved especially in an absence of a state of one's own to take over such functions. She asks: "Is it possible for written materials to have greater power than the words of those we love, respect and trust when they tell us - I am Macedonian, my father was Macedonian and his father was Macedonian too?" Almost all respondents regardless the ethnic background share stories about their grandparents who made time-charts of their memories in accordance to who was the occupier or in whose state institutions their ancestors worked ("during Ottoman times", "during Serbian or Bulgarian time", etc.).

Along with the memory of mass murders and expulsions, representative of both ethnic groups emphasize lack of historical acknowledgement of national suffering and reconciliation. A poet puts this in a more emotional form: the reliance in our collective memory should be increased, because the general public should be convinced that the

sufferings our grandparents went through were not fiction but fact. He argues: "One cannot be indifferent when s/he has lost her/his ancestors of two different generations, while the official historiography does not even mention them or classifies them as "others" or mere statistics." Along with the notion of a shattered and divided fatherland, there is a feeling of being castrated and deprived from any memory. Those whose relatives were refugees or war victims in the Balkan wars say that the pain is the only thing they possess, along with the memories about the trauma and the narratives of the witnesses of those events. In his words, today, more than ever, division and pain define the Macedonian ethos. However, the Albanians have claims over trauma and pain too. Two Balkan wars as well as a good deal of the WWI were waged on the Macedonian soil but history has no remembrance of any Macedonian victims (be they civilians or soldiers). Even the graveyards that are well preserved are named according to the respective state army that took part. Within a project related to remembering the First World War a retired Macedonian ambassador proposed a symbolic name "Macedonia: necropolis of foreign soldiers". The soldiers were buried under different state flags and symbols, i.e. remained anonymous and unaccounted. The most illustrative material testimony is a soldier's gravestone.⁹

Objectively few respondents have preserved any family evidence or photos of that time. Some point out that memories is mainly intimate/family category that is unreliable because it is an object of exaggeration, self-censorship or selective oblivion. Somewhere in-between the picture of the greatest national tragedy and the painful individual memories there is the gross emptiness, i.e. absence of any memorial that would relate to this period. This is evident even in the new museum of the Macedonian revolutionary battle with few exponents that would illustrate this period. It is questionable if this is a result of subconscious embarrassment because of the failure to create a nation-state (as it is perceived by the Macedonians), and especially change of sides during the wars. One respondent clearly points at unpleasant issues that are neglected not only in the historiography but also in the family narratives: only recently he found out that some of his ancestors were collaborators with the occupying forces. He concludes: "Probably we are unwilling to accept the fact that some of our ancestors used to declare themselves as Bulgarians, Serbs or even Greeks." Professor of psychology points out a gap between the general picture of these events and the individual/family memories that are shattered across the region (i.e. preserved in what is named

9 Liskovski Petko from the village of Dobruševo, Bitola region, according to the data on the gravestone served in three armies: in the Turkish (1910-1912), the Serbian (1914-1915) and the Bulgarian one (1916-1918). The photo is available at: http://united_macedonia.blog.mk/tag/%D1%81%D1%80%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0/?afilter=status (accessed on 17 September 2012)

emotional remembrance).

In a 2011 survey a specific question referred to events that had strong influence on ethnic groups in Macedonia, few respondents (less than 6 %) chose an event prior to the Second World War (Klekovski 2011, 11-12). The leading researcher draws a conclusion that older historical experiences have been forgotten or pale in the face of more recent events (such as the 2001 conflict). An artist recalls that the citizens still have no complete picture of what happened 11 years ago and that memories even about war crimes have been buried quickly mainly because of the "peace at home" and the international community's persistence. A writer concludes that the collective memory is important but at the same time it is legitimate to ask to which degree was it "tailored", or - what and why we do remember or decide to forget other events? A journalist is sceptical if it is possible to speak of collective memory of any population (be it Macedonian or Albanian) that has been living in different societal, cultural and political settings since 1913. Experience shows that collective memory is alike pastry - it could be modelled and manipulated throughout time. Another journalist concludes: "Nationalism is always somewhat artificial. It does not call for better and deeper knowledge about events from the past; it takes advantage of some general points and in doses that are useful, no more and no less." The quest for the guilt-bearer is a never-ending story of any nationalist agenda.

As far as the historical legacies are concerned, the two ethnic groups obviously hold different positions: given the ongoing denials of the Macedonian nation (mostly related to the so-called "name issue" but also extended in many other respects), the Macedonians believe that the consequences of the Balkan wars and divisions are still alive. The Albanians are more optimistic: the nationalistic version of the EU integration promises fulfilment of the dream for "all Albanians in one state". Yet the blockade of the Republic of Macedonia by the Greek veto, both in NATO and EU, raises inter-ethnic tensions. The most radical Albanian leaders speak of "going to Europe with or without the Macedonians". The European officials also warn of a possible security threats and fragmentation in case the Macedonian state is not moved forward towards full membership in NATO/EU.

In sum, in the view of the intellectuals it is very important to claim that (our) history is no foreign country, while others accept that forward-looking tactics and diminish the importance of historical knowledge. Only few argue that war histories should not be explored at all; wars in general mean sufferings, death, destruction and narratives that try to identify who was right and who was wrong de facto keep the seeds of mutual hatred. Such cries

remind of Nietzsche's arguments against scientific-historical forms of knowledge in favour of unhistorical living.

CONCLUSION

Historiography, to use Napoleon's aphorism, may be seen as a fable agreed upon. It is often seen as a process of selection and arrangement of facts (or 'facts') according to apparently reasonable patterns. Such patterns simply provide for one possible representation of 'history' out of the chaos of the available primary 'facts'. Generally, any concept and debate within the social sciences is biased and reflects a certain philosophy and understanding of the societal relations upheld, explicitly or implicitly by the researchers themselves or their institutional and societal setting. Quite often appearance and development of certain theoretical standpoint is not a result of any actual change in the reality. According to the critical thinker, Robert Cox (1981, 128), theory is always for someone and for some purpose.

The centennial of the Balkan wars displayed the similarities in the collective memory of the Macedonians and the Albanians; yet, they do not contribute to creation to a national narrative that would overarch ethnic separatism. On the contrary, politics has been contaminated and historicized, while the history has become even more politicized. Any attempt for the Macedonians and the Albanians to find a joint narrative leads towards identification of a common enemy. As the former Great powers are not possible to be presented as such - they have transformed into preferable allies - the only 'solution' is to find one among the neighbours, most likely the Serbs and Greeks. The most disastrous politics is still the one that claims that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. The Macedonians and the Albanians that are citizens of the common Macedonian state have failed to identify "shared historical memories", i.e. a common myth of belonging to the same political community. The intra-state conflict is still alive while few even think of the necessity of reconciliation. Furthermore, the common vision for the future - membership to NATO/EU - seems to have become something that divides than rather than brings them together as the price for it is to be paid only by the Macedonians (their name and national identity).

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