

# Public Art in FYROM: From Tito to Alexander the Great

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## 1.0 Introduction

Public art aims at the construction of a historical continuation thus reproducing a “useful past” into the present. Within this concept, “places of public memory” are an ever-changing visual recording of historic memory. Ideologies, political and historical circumstances as well as current expectations are but a few elements that shape the way in which humans depict the past. As a matter of fact, public art remains an essential part of the complex institutional dynamic, linking the political state and the nation.

In the case of the People’s Republic of Macedonia (PROM)<sup>1</sup>, both public art as well as the broader artistic activities of this, previously, federated state were severely influenced by the establishment of the totalitarian regime which prevailed after the termination of World War II. After 1945, the domination of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) defined and controlled the content and the style of public and broader art. The mechanism of propaganda and agitation (*agitprop kultura*) determined the framework and context in which art was to move, and this was the context of socialist realism. Essentially, through social thematography and left oriented art, artists were compelled to “explain” to the people the “achievements of socialism”, but also be inspired by those achievements.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 First period (1945-1950)

Art now aimed at the cultural and artistic configuration of the people; it sought to express the “new socialist society, the thoughts and the desires of the people”; and to present the attempts of the central government in the shaping and moulding of the new socialist milieu. The “new age” required new ideas, innovative rhetoric and fresh illustrations.<sup>3</sup>

Although the aims and the objectives were clear, the establishment of state public art was developed in particularly difficult circumstances. The country was devastated by war. There was no money for the construction of public monuments. However, even during those harsh years a number of monuments, with specifically oriented purposes, began to appear in PROM. Among the first monuments constructed in Skopje was that of Tsvetan

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<sup>1</sup> The People’s Republic of Macedonia as a federated state of the Republic of Yugoslavia maintained this designation until 1963. In that year it adopted its new nomenclature Socialist Republic of Macedonia (SRM). Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia this state was recognised by the UN as Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).

<sup>2</sup> Ljubodrag Dimic, *Agitprop kultura. Agitpropovska faza kulturne politike u Srbiji 1945-1952 (The Agitating Culture. The Agitating stage of the cultural politics of Serbia, 1945-1952)* [in Serbian], Belgrade 1988; also Branka Doknic, Limic Petrovic, Ivan Hofman (eds), *Kulturna politika Jugoslavije, Zbornik dokumenata (Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia 1945-1952, A Collection of Documents)* [in Serbian], vol. A-B, Belgrade 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Dragan Calovic, “Vizija novog drustva u Jugoslovensko pesleratnoj umetnosti”, *Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti*, v. 39 (2011), pp. 183-302.

Dimov. The latter was a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Macedonia (CPM). He was arrested and executed in August 1942 by the occupying Bulgarian police force in Skopje. By July 26, 1945, he had already been declared a national hero or rather a popular hero of the PROM. In October 1945 the local authorities decided to erect his monument as a tribute to his national struggle.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after, an epitaph monument was erected for the twelve antifascists, among them two Bulgarians, who were executed in prison in Skopje. Simultaneously, there was an initiative to build a monument to the liberators of the city of Skopje. However, this move was implemented several years later.<sup>5</sup>

The establishment of monuments on a large scale in Skopje had been the concomitant of the political manoeuvres that had taken place in the wider region. It is known that Yugoslavia and Bulgaria worked on a project to merge their two countries into a Balkan Federative Republic (1946-1947). Under pressure from Stalin, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) recognized the existence of a "Macedonian Nation". Stalin perceived the notion that the unification of Macedonia ought to have as its nucleus the PROM and that a "united Macedonia ought to remain within the sovereignty of Yugoslavia".<sup>6</sup> The new orientation of Bulgaria resulted in the delivery of the mortal remains of Goce Delchev to Skopje. He graduated secondary education in Thessaloniki's Bulgarian male high school; worked as a Bulgarian teacher in Ottoman Macedonia and was one of the leaders of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO). Delchev died on May 4, 1903 in a skirmish with the Ottoman police near the village of Karie, Greece.<sup>7</sup> During the First World War, when Bulgaria was temporarily in control of the area, Delchev's remains were transferred from Karie to Sofia, where they rested until after the Second World War. On October 10, 1946, Delchev's mortal remains were transported to Skopje. On the following day they were placed in a marble sarcophagus in the yard of the church "Sveti Spas" [Saint Saviour]. On the same day (October 11th) the first statue in honour of Goce Delchev was unveiled and adorned the city of Skopje. The selection of the day was symbolic; it was relating Delchev's political aspirations with the struggle of the "Macedonian" people against fascism, which was celebrated on 11th October.<sup>8</sup>

During the following years PROM refrained from erecting new monuments to fulfil its nationalistic aspirations. In alignment with the directives of the central government in Beograd, its leaders continued placing memorial plaques referring to their heroes and their struggles against the invading fascists of WWII, including the Bulgarians. Hence on 25 February 1947 they unveiled the memorial plaque honouring the Kuzman Josifovski-Pitu. Josifovski was a high-ranking member of the CPM and a member of the main headquarters of the people's liberation army and partisan units of Yugoslav Macedonia. He was arrested and executed in early 1943 by the occupying Bulgarian police force.<sup>9</sup> In 1948 the authori-

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<sup>4</sup> Newspaper *Nova Makedonija*, 6 October 1945.

<sup>5</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 1 December 1945.

<sup>6</sup> Spyridon Sfetas, "Bulgaria and the Macedonian Question (1950-1967)" in Ioannis Koliopoulos - Iakovos Michaelidis (eds), *To Makedoniko sta kseni arxeia (The Macedonian Issue in the Foreign Archives)* [in Greek], Athens 2008, pp. 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 7 October 1946.

<sup>8</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 12 October 1946.

<sup>9</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 25 February 1947; see also Gjorgji Tajkovski, *Pregled na spomenicite i spomen-obelezjata vo SRM [Overview of monuments and memorial plaques in SRM]* [in Slavomacedonian], Skopje 1986, p. 71.

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ties in PROM unveiled the bust of Ortse Nikolov, who, in his effort to organize an insurrection in the region, was shot by the Bulgarian police on 4 January 1942.<sup>10</sup>

It becomes clear that during the first period, public art was not in the focus of the regime of PROM. Efforts were made in isolation, but in each case they were politically motivated. Their objective was primarily to construct national heroes targeting first Goce Delchev, who emerged as the dominant symbol of the struggle of the “Macedonian” people for liberation from the Ottomans, but also as a symbol of the struggle for the unity of “Macedonia”. The remaining cases involved isolated individual personalities of the communist movement, who had two distinct characteristics: First, they were members of the CPM, and secondly, had been killed by the Bulgarian occupation forces.<sup>11</sup>

This situation changed radically after Tito's split with Stalin in the summer of 1948. The conflict sharply highlighted the need to develop a new national identity for the Slav residents-members of PROM to differentiate themselves from the Bulgarians. At the same time, Tito's move was to emphasize the self-contained character of PROM as a state and the need to idealize the national liberation struggle in order to legitimize the universal authority of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. However, the Tito-Stalin conflict did not emerge with major consequences in the orientation of Yugoslav art, which continue to reproduce the soviet model for a number of years to come.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of PROM, on October 1948, and despite the serious economic problems facing the country, the systematic commemorative plaques for events and persons associated with the activities of the CPM and the liberation movement of the “Macedonian” people began. In October 1948 the Ministry of Culture of PROM invited tenders for the installation of statues in Bitola and Krushovo. The aim was “*the highlighting of historical significance of the national liberation movement of the Macedonian people from the late 19th and early 20th century, as well as to bestow high recognition to participants of this liberation struggle*”. One can observe that from 1948 the struggle of the heroes of Ilinden was placed in the epicentre of the public art produced in PROM. This objective was clearly and profoundly depicted in the proclamation issued to celebrate the monument in Bitola: “*This monument should reflect the glorious fighting traditions of the Macedonian people*” and in particular should outline the contribution of Goce Delchev and Ilinden. Concurrently, this monument “*should portray the democratic, anti-imperialist and mass character of the [Ilinden] movement, which was later linked to the further struggle of the Macedonian people and the victorious liberation struggle led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and comrade Tito*”.<sup>13</sup> However, the national liberation struggle was presented as a unity which started from Delchev and ended to Tito.

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<sup>10</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 30 March 1948.

<sup>11</sup> It is also significant to note that the inaugural committee for the erection and protection of the historical monuments was established in PROM only in November 1947. The objectives of this committee included the arrangement of the environment around the statue of Goce Delchev and the care of the tombs of the people's heroes; especially those who had fallen during the national liberation war against the invading fascists, *Nova Makedonija*, 20 November 1947. Its establishment was also triggered by the decision of the central government of Beograd to celebrate the Day of Yugoslav People's Army (23 December 1947), *Nova Makedonija*, 23 and 24 December 1947.

<sup>12</sup> Miomir Gatalovic, “Izmedju ideologije i stvarnosti. Socijalisticki concept kultutne politike Komunisticke partije Hugoslavije (Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije) 1945-1960”, *Istorija 20. veka*, vol. 1 (2009), pp. 37-56.

<sup>13</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 31 October 1948.

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The first public historical monuments, because of financial constraints and lack of time, were humble constructions. The monument devoted to October 11th, 1941 (when the Partisans began to organize and mount an armed insurrection against fascism during World War II in Yugoslav Macedonia), placed in the city centre of Stroumitsa in 1949, was a simple concrete construction. It had the shape of a pyramid and bore an inscription dedicated to the fallen fighters of the national liberation war.<sup>14</sup> Similar was also the memorial devoted to the 18 protagonists of Prilep as well as the shrine dedicated to the Woman-Fighter of Koumanovo in 1951.<sup>15</sup> In the western region of PROM, where the robust Albanian minority was evident, the erected monuments had as their prime objective to designate and give prominence to the common struggle of Albanian and Slavomacedonian partisans.<sup>16</sup> In the same period the unveiling of the memorial devoted to the Liberators of Skopje took place. Given the importance of the project, since it was placed in the centre of the



Liberators of the city of Skopje, Ivan Mirkovic, 1955.

capital of the country, the composition had a monumental character. The sculpture depicted a cluster of fighters incorporating a partisan, a woman and a child. The whole composi-

<sup>14</sup> Tajkovski, *Pregled na spomenicite*, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 12 October 1949.

<sup>16</sup> See celebrating events commemorating the 11th October Day in Debar, *Nova Makedonija*, 12 October 1949.

tion was influenced by the principles of socialist realism reminiscent of the respective soviet manifestations of art.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.2 Second period (early 1950s - early 1970s)

Since the early 1950s Yugoslavia gradually gave up the principles of socialist realism; a position occupied by bland modernism. It was something between the art of abstract and virtual, between tradition and modernity, between localism and internationalism.<sup>18</sup> As far as the theme of artistic creation was concerned, artists were asked to find their inspiration in the “Yugoslav revolution” and “Yugoslav traditions” amongst all other Slavic people comprising Yugoslavia. This orientation has led to the fragmentation and decentralization of the “Yugoslav artistic space”. In essence, local cultural capitals emerged as centres of individual Yugoslav republics.<sup>19</sup>

Within the framework of promoting the contribution of each of the Slavic peoples comprising Yugoslavia in the national liberation struggle against the Axis, it was seen also the construction of museums and memorials to demonstrate the input of the “Macedonian” people within the Yugoslav Federation of States. Again all memorials sought to promote the self-contained character of the uprising of the “Macedonian” people against fascism and its elements. The building, where the struggle against fascism began, accommodating the services of the People’s Police Force and later on the cleaning services of the Municipality of Prilep, was transformed into a Museum of National Liberation Struggle and was appropriately opened on May 1, 1952.<sup>20</sup> Concurrently, with the placement or erection of public monuments the authorities wanted to increasingly emphasize the connection between the struggles of the 1940s with the uprising at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1953, using as a pretext the fiftieth anniversary of the uprising of Ilinden, the authorities opened a homonymous exhibition in Skopje, and later on turned this building into the Museum of Skopje. In Krushovo they erected the statue of Pito Guli celebrating his fall during the Ilinden uprising; he was a commander of the revolutionary groups in the Kroushevo region. In the same city they also placed the statue of Nikola Karev; he was a member of the Bulgarian Workers’ Social Democratic Party and worked as a Bulgarian teacher in the region of Krushovo. He also took part in the Ilinden uprising against the Ottomans. In PROM he was considered to be the “president” of the “Republic of Krushovo”, supposedly, of the so called contemporary “Macedonian” state.<sup>21</sup>

The elevation of Yugoslavia in the third pole of the international stage, following the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement, in conjunction with its economic improvement gave Yugoslavia a new impetus to public art. The country now had enough prestige and adequate financial resources to strengthen her image. In the interior of the state, the process resulted in the transformation of Yugoslavia into a huge construction site. Across

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<sup>17</sup> Danjela Velimirovic, “One su bile svuda - stizale su sve: konstrukcija heroina novog doba (1945-1951), *Etno-antropoloski Problemi*, vol. 1 (2012), pp. 167-183.

<sup>18</sup> Miodrag B. Protic (ed.), *Jugoslovensko slikarstvo seste decenije (Yugoslav Painting in the 1960s)* [in Serbian], Belgrade 1980.

<sup>19</sup> Gatalovic, “Izmedju ideologije i stvarnosti”, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.bitolamuseum.org/images/stories/zbornik\\_2012/Belevski\\_Rubinco.pdf](http://www.bitolamuseum.org/images/stories/zbornik_2012/Belevski_Rubinco.pdf); See also *Nova Makedonija*, 2 May 1952.

<sup>21</sup> *Nova Makedonija*, 2 August 1953.

the country, monuments celebrating the partisan struggle and honouring those who fell on the battlefield were constructed. The erection of colossal architectural creations emerged from the need to give prominence to the image of the national liberation struggle and its historical meaning in the rise to power of the CPY.

The first in a series of colossal architectural edifice in PROM was the Monument to the Unbeaten [Mogilata na nepobedenite], which was constructed in 1961 celebrating the



Monument to the Unbeaten, Bogdan Bogdanovic, 1961.

memory of those who fell during the national liberation struggle. This monument was planned by Serbian architect Bogdan Bogdanovic; it comprised of two portions, the crypt and its memorial urns. The crypt consists of a common tomb for all those fallen for the liberation of the country, whilst in its marble flagstones their names were inscribed. The other portion depicts eight marble urns which symbolize the eight divisions which were formed during the national liberation war. The main urn, which is the largest, symbolizes the unbeaten "Macedonian" people.<sup>22</sup> During the same period monu-

ments of the same thematography, yet of reduced proportions, were placed in other urban centres. For example, the memorial complex Butel [Memorijalni Kompleks "Butel" (1961)] at the Skopje's cemetery, the memorial commemorating those fallen in Tetovo, as well as the memorial in Beltsista and so on. Despite their memorial character, these monuments had as their central theme again the liberation struggle of WWII (1941-1944). Broadly speaking, the monuments had a local character and referred to those who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of these particular regions.

During the 1960s in Yugoslavia there was a conflict between supporters of centralization and those of decentralization. The fall of the Deputy President and head of the secret services Aleksandar Rankovic (1966) marked the beginning of a new period. The victory of the supporters of decentralization of the Yugoslav state apparently was reinforced. Nationalism had begun to develop among the peoples in the various Republics of Yugoslavia. During this period Yugoslav historians failed in their effort to compile a unique and common history of the peoples comprising this federated state. As a consequence, each federated state began writing its own national history. In 1969 in Skopje the three-volume *History of the Macedonian People* was released. At the same time, reinforcement of the institutions that promote national identity, such as the "Macedonian Orthodox Church", the "Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts", etc., began. In essence, the process leading to the decentralization of the authority of Belgrade, which offered increasing power to the States as a

<sup>22</sup> Vaska Sandeva, Katerina Despot, Aleksandra Dimoska, Ana Mitanoska, "Analysis of the composition and decorative monumental sculpture in the park.pdf", <http://eprints.ugd.edu.mk/3973/>

matter of fact, was used as a pretext in reinforcing the power of the nationalist elite of the constituent republics.<sup>23</sup>

At the beginning of the 1960s, Greek-Yugoslav relations were in crisis because of the Macedonian Question. The rift was caused as a result of the comments raised by Slavomacedonian officials about a “Macedonian” minority in the Greek region of Macedonia, Greece. The Greek tangible position was that “there was no Slavomacedonian minority” in its territory. Furthermore Athens did not recognize the existence of a “Macedonian” nation. Yugoslav-Bulgarian relations faced the same problems. In 1963 the BCP believed that it was after 1945 that the “Macedonian” national identity began to be constructed within PROM. Moreover, it believed that the “Macedonian” nation could not have historical roots in the 19th century or earlier.<sup>24</sup>

The Socialist Republic of Macedonia (SRM) responded by building huge monuments to refute the claims. In 1968 the new monument for Ilinden uprising called “Makedonium” was designed. Princeton scholar Keith Brown depicted in his studies the interest-



Makedonium, Jordan and Iskra Grabul, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> Stavroula Mavrogeni, *Ekpaideutiki metarithmisi kai ethnikismos. I periptosi ton xoron tis proin Yugoslavias (Educational Reforms and Nationalism: The case of the former Yugoslav States)* [in Greek], Thessaloniki 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Konstantinos Katsanos, *To “aniparkto” zitima. Oi Ellino-giougkoslavikes sxeseis kai to Makedoniko, 1950-1967 (The “Non-issue”: The Greco-Yugoslav Relations and the Macedonian Question 1950-1967)* [in Greek], Thessaloniki 2013; also, Spyridon Sfetis, *To Makedoniko kai i Boulgaria. Pliri ta aporrta eggafa, 1950-1967 (The Macedonian Question and Bulgaria. Unabridged the Strictly Confidential Bulgarian Documents, 1950-1967)* [in Greek], Thessaloniki 2009.

ing redevelopment of the original proposal concerning this monument from an artistic as well as a political perspective. The artistic solution which was given by Jordan and Iskra Grabul, who had originally designed the memorial wanting to transmit a universal message about freedom, suffered a series of interfering changes which finally led to a futuristic result.

The monument had a dual meaning: first, was its futuristic artistic construction; second, was the political message. The political message of the monument was clear. Yugoslav Macedonia sought to ensure exclusively for her history the heritage of Ilinden uprising, which was claimed by Bulgaria and was refused by Greece. The political meaning of the monument was the result of the prevailing perception vis a vis history of the "Macedonian People" in SROM as this was manifested in the homonym history published by the Institute of National History. In the crypt of the monument there was a list of heroes and events connected with the history of the "Macedonians". The list began with the name of Saint Clement of Ochrid followed by the name of Bulgarian Tsar Samuel (997-1014), the Karposh's Uprising (1689) and the names of the Miladinov brothers (Dimitar, 1810-1862, and Konstantin, 1830-1862) as well as references to the Greek Civil War (1946-1949). At that time, politicians did not accept this view of history. The presentation of the history of the "Macedonian" people finally was restricted only to the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th from the originally scheduled 11 centuries that they wished to cover. Yet, the political messages that they wished to convey were clear: (a) presentation of Ilinden uprising as an introduction to the national liberation war (1941-1944); (b) recognition of the SROM as an equal member of the Yugoslav federation after the first plenary session of Anti-fascist Assembly for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM), the proclamation of a "Macedonian" nation-state (1944), and (c) the "Macedonian" area grandiosely extended across the whole of the geographical area of Macedonia incorporating in addition the sovereign regions of Bulgaria and Greece.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, "Makedonium" was the first monument to recount the whole national liberation struggle of the "Macedonian" people and declare as "Macedonian" the entire geographic area of Macedonia. However, it selectively presented various historical events and historical figures who participated in them to serve political means.

### 1.3 Third period (late 1970s - 1991)

The process for the construction of "Makedonium" caused broader discussions on the role of public art. It became apparent that the legal framework had to change to accommodate the legitimacy of the arguments. According to the laws of 1960 and 1965, public monuments were only architectural, sculptural or painterly constructions of proven artistic value placed in public places.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, the law of 1972 clearly defined what was now to be considered as public monuments: "*...those that refer to events or personalities of the history and culture of the Macedonian people, ethnicities and ethnic groups in the*

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<sup>25</sup> Keith Brown, *The Past in Question: Modern Macedonia and the Uncertainties of Nation*, Princeton 2003, pp. 153-180.

<sup>26</sup> «Zakon za podiganje na javni spomenici», *Sluzben Vesnik na Socijalisticka Republika Makedonija*, vol. 16/20 May 1960; see also «Zakon za podiganje na javni spomenici», *Sluzben Vesnik na Socijalisticka Republika Makedonija*, vol. 14/17 April 1965.

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*SROM, history and culture of other nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia, the international labour movement and cultural history in general*'.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it became now evident that broader concepts such as the value of freedom, as envisaged by the Grabul couple, would no longer be acceptable in the public art. Therefore, monuments that were built after this law, such as those in Stip (1974) and Veles (1979), have explicit meanings in terms of the national liberation war. At the same time, since the enforced law did not constrain thematography of public monuments on or about the national liberation struggle, specific monuments that were constructed in various parts of the country began to draw their themes from other historical periods and mainly from the original list of the "Macedonian" heroes who were identified with the construction of the "Makedonium". In Galitsnic they established a museum dedicated to Georgi Puleski, whereas in Ochrid they erected the statue of Grigor Prlicev, in Strounga memorial in memory of the Miladinov brothers and finally in front of the central library of Skopje the statue of Saint Clement of Ochrid.<sup>28</sup> Many years later, at the square facing the parliament of the new state, the authorities erected a memorial dedicated to the events of the Greek Civil War and specifically to the evacuation of children from Greek Macedonia (1948-1949).<sup>29</sup>

#### 1.4 Fourth Period (1991 - today)

It becomes clear that during the period of socialism the national liberation struggle was the focus of public art, whose aim was to legalize the power of the Communist Party under the leadership of Tito. The situation dramatically changed after the proclamation of the independence of "Macedonia" in 1991. In that country we now have a new version of political history, the creation of a new past and the formation of a new national identity. The authorities are now seeking at any cost the re-examination of their history. The history of the "Macedonian" people is now presented as a continuation of the ancient Macedonian Hellenes to the Slav-Macedonians.

The end manufactured result of this process was the public art program entitled "Skopje 2014". The program is the best example of architecture which Jovanovic has called "Turbo Architecture". The Serbian architect pointed to it as "a post-socialist mainstream in nationalizing collective identity through architecture".<sup>30</sup> As Julia Lechler notices, "Turbo Architecture" turned Skopje to a city "*between Amnesia and Phantasia*".<sup>31</sup> Hence the statue of Alexander the Great together with the communist president of PROM Metodija Andonov Cento as well as the Albanian communist and legal personality Nexhat Agolli coexist within the same space. The latter was executed in 1949 by Slavomacedonian fighters who were defending their country against the Albanian fighters of the Albanian National Liberation Army (UCK). The new, loyally dubious process in the country was named "antiquisation" or

<sup>27</sup> «Zakon za podiganje na javni spomenici», *Služben Vesnik na Socijalistička Republika Makedonija*, vol. 44/25 December 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Tajkovski, *Pregled na spomenicite*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>29</sup> Loring M. Danforth - Riki Van Boeschoten, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory*, Chicago 2012, pp. 255-266.

<sup>30</sup> Srđan Jovanović Weiss, *Almost Architecture*, Stuttgart 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Julia Lechler, "Reading Skopje 2009: A City between Amnesia and Phantasia. Architecture, urban space, memory and identity", in Stephanie Herold, Benjamin Langer, Julia Lechler (eds), *Reading the City. Urban Space and Memory in Skopje*, Berlin 2010, pp. 37-49.

“boukephalism”. Monuments concerning the latter period of the country’s history started to spread all over, including monuments of controversial personalities as well as those concerning the history of ancient Hellenic Macedonia (Alexander the Great, Phillip of Macedon etc.). The new trends established a deep schism amongst the Slav-Macedonians, dividing them between those who identified with the Ancient Macedonians and those who insisted on their Slavic identity.<sup>32</sup>

By 2001, however, it became obvious that in addition to the intra-ethnic identity conflict amongst the Slav-Macedonians, the ethnic crisis between them and the Albanians reinforced the position of the robust Albanian minority in the country. The inter-ethnic rift impelled the Albanians to claim prominence and prestige for their own history and to place monuments of “their own” heroes, mapping, thus, “their own” areas. Just opposite the statue of Alexander the Great, the newly discovered ancestor of the Slav-Macedonians, the Albanians constructed the statue of Skanderbeg.<sup>33</sup> Representatives of the Albanian minority also developed their own historical revisionism and memory of WWII and the internal crisis of 2001. Their leaders erected numerous monuments commemorating their own history in the FYROM, including the shrine dedicated to the activities of the Albanian nationalist



Alexander the Great, Valentina Stefanovska, 2011.

organization “Balli Kombetar” and the statue of Antem Yiasari, founder of the National Liberation Army in Kossovo.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, to celebrate the centenary from the foundation of the Albanian state (1912), the leader of the Albanian Party in the FYROM unveiled, in the village Sloupcane, a monument dedicated to the National Liberation Army.<sup>35</sup>

From the aforementioned analysis, it becomes apparent that public art was a political tool employed in mapping out areas and in the invention of a new past and the genesis of a new national identity. At the same time public art is being manipulated in the process of mapping certain regions with a new historical past as well as an exhibition of power from the two dominant ethnic groups in FYROM. In 2006 the statue of the Albanian Skanderbeg was the highest in Skopje until the placement of a 25-meter statue of Alexander the Great. Opposite that, a 30 meter statue of Mother Teresa, who was born in Skopje but was of Albanian origin, was planned to be erected.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/ghosts-of-the-past-endanger-macedonia-s-future>

<sup>33</sup> “Otkriven spomenikot na Skender-ber vo Skopje”, newspaper *Utrinski Vesnik*, 28 November 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Kuzman Georgievski, “Vo Skopsko Blace se podiga spomenik so izmisleni fakti”, *Utrinski Vesnik*, 1 December 2004.

<sup>35</sup> <http://a1on.mk/wordpress/archives/63928>

<sup>36</sup> “Postavena pločata za monumentalniot spomenik na majka Tereza”, newspaper *Dnevnik*, 25 January 2013.

Similar disputes and rifts between the two dominant communities erupted during the time of the construction of the Officers' Club building. In 1929 in the central square of Skopje and at the site of Bournali Mosque the Serbs had erected there the Officers' Club as a symbol of the Serbian domination in the region. This building was demolished during the 1963 earthquake. According to the elaborative yet controversial program "Skopje 2014" the old building had to be replaced by a new grandiose Officers' Club incorporating also an impressive hotel. However, the sizeable Islamic community in the country strongly reacted against the initiative considering the move a provocation against their faith and symbol and places in danger once again the fragile inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in FYROM.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.0 Conclusions

As Julia Lechler clearly ascertained, "to erect a new symbolical capital, as we see in nowadays modern Skopje, is not an easy undertaking and goes along with the erasing of memory and a forced collective amnesia. To cause this collective process of forgetting there are needed special strategies, as Umberto Eco states: that which should be forgotten must be overlaid and reproduced by false synonyms. The actual development is creating amnesia among the people and tries to create the tabula rasa. VMRO needs to accomplish its ideas of the Macedonian [*sic*] national identity, which will not help to strengthen the weak multi-ethnic and multi-religious state of Macedonia and to create the imperatively necessary common state identity in which all citizens can find themselves".<sup>38</sup> However, leaders in Skopje do not seem to recognize the need to develop a common state identity. These efforts are isolated. The statue of the Unknown Soldier, which worldwide symbolizes the unity of the nation, was placed in the centre of Skopje only in 2012.

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<sup>37</sup> Josif Dzokov, "Gradot si ja vrakja najmonumentalnata gradba", *Nova Makedonija*, 5 January 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Lechler, "Reading Skopje 2009", *ibid*, p. 46.

