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Old/New Identities – The Case of Macedonia¹

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Abstract

In this paper we will begin with the argument that identities are subject of permanent change. In these processes we will stress the importance of the used resources and the impact of governing structures in constructing someone’s’ collective identity. We will then argue that the processes of authoritarianism may also support the change of identity. Even more, manipulations with identities needs and feeds on authoritarianism. Also, different aspects of national identity of Macedonians will be elaborated: ethnic, religious and the reinvigorated myth of Alexander of Macedon. All of these will be shown as part of contemporary Macedonian identity. Rationale for the arguments we can locate between the ideas of what one think it is and the contingency of what one can become.

Key words: identity, change, common myths, authoritarianism, Macedonian identity

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1. Introduction

The first generation of Macedonian historians traced the emergence of the Macedonian nation back to the nineteenth century.

“Macedonian national history was traced to the nineteenth century, with its most prominent expression being the revolutionary struggle for freedom, equality and independence” (Frusetta, 2004).

Intellectuals began to articulate ‘Macedonian’ national consciousness. The ‘Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation’ (VMRO), which was established in 1893, and the Ilinden Rising against Ottoman rule on 2 August 1903, were the first significant political manifestations of Macedonian national consciousness. Later, thanks to the efforts of the Communist Macedonian partisans during World War Two and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, whose role was particularly emphasised by socialist Macedonian historiography, a Macedonian state was established as a Socialist Republic of Macedonia within Yugoslavia. The first important shift in tracing the myth of origin was the attempt to find the origins of the Macedonian nation further back in history, namely in the Middle Ages.

“Now, the medieval empire of Czar Samuil and his successors (969-1018), whose capitals were Prespa and Ohrid in Macedonia, was re-evaluated as a Macedonian state although existing scholarship had regarded it Bulgarian” (Brunnbauer, 2004: 179).

During the second historiographical shift in the early 1990s, efforts were made to include the ancient Macedonians in the national narrative. Macedonian historians challenged Greece’s ‘exclusive ownership’ of the symbols and territory of the ancient Macedonians in order to back up their claims to the name and the land of Macedonia and to create their own ancient national patrimony. The main claim was that the ancient Macedonians were not Greeks but a different, non-Hellenic people who joined in the ethnogenesis of the Macedonian people by melting into the Slavs who had come to the region in the sixth and seventh centuries. They asserted that ancient Macedonians and ancient Greeks were completely different peoples. The discourse on the ancient Macedonians was intended to substantiate the Macedonians’ claims to a long national pedigree and also to a homeland. (Atanasov, 2004). The narrative with the ancient roots was kept low profiled until the 2008 and the Greek embargo for the membership of Macedonia in NATO because of the name issue. The Alexander the Great became Macedonian direct ancestor and the descent of the modern Macedonian nation was perceived as one from the intermarriage between migrating Slavs and remnants of the ancient Macedonian people of Alexander the Great. So, this resource that even existed longer in the Macedonian recent historiography was put into the full speed and the political elites used it as an element of ethno genesis and ethnocentric national identity.

Let us now turn to the indicators that can shed more light concerning the theses and the data.

2. Indicators for analysis

The first indicator for analysis is the fact that identities are in continues processes of change. Some collective identities precede others. Some last longer than the others. In that context, national/state identities are more recent phenomena. Talking about these modern identities, there are couple of elements that can be taken as an essence of their content. Four themes are central in the analysis of national identities: culture/politics interplay, ethnic/civic dichotomy, subjective/objective characteristics and

group/individual agency. All of them are important but two of them can explain better our theses. *Ethnic-civic dichotomy* is maybe one of the crucial characteristic of the national identity.

"The ideal articulation of 'nation' as a form of cultural community and the 'state' as a territorial, political unit is now widely accepted and often taken as unproblematic" (Biswas, 2002).

Research on this question has led to a widely accepted distinction between two types of nationalism, ethnic and civic, and two types of nations, cultural and political. It seems that ethnic identity is unchosen – not even a possible subject of choice. Brown referred to these two bases of national identity as

"Cultural (or ethno-cultural) Nationalism and Civic Nationalism. Ethno-cultural nationalism depicts the nation as a community of (ethno-) cultural sameness, while civic nationalism depicts the nation as a community of equal citizens". (Brown, 2002)

Another type is evolving in the post-Communist states.

"Nicknamed 'ethnic democracy' ... it takes the ethnic nation, rather than the citizenry, as the cornerstone of the state" (Smooha, 2002).

Subjective/objective characteristic is also an important element of identity, but the *structure/human agency* is even more interesting to express the processes through which, and structural circumstances under which, different views are constructed.

"The tension is between accounts which focus on how, on the one hand, legal, political and cultural institution lay down definitions for actors and accounts which argue on the other, that actors have more freedom to construct identities for themselves". (Miller, 1995)

Very often the state tries to assimilate or incorporate culturally distinctive territories and to make a multicultural population culturally homogenous. The process is the same with its own people through the production and spreadin of image of the nation, the common feeling of belonging. (Atanasov, 2004). That is why the immanent characteristic of the identity is the change not the stability. Different elements are stressed in different times according to needs.

The second indicator is concerned with the content of national identity. Smith considers national identity as multi-dimensional and lists five fundamental attributes: an historic territory or homeland, common myths and historic memories, a common, mass public culture, common legal rights and duties for all members, and a common economy with territorial mobility for members (Smith, 1991). He thinks that national identity can never be reduced to a single element and stress the role of the common myths and historic memories. Miller, also, noted five elements of national identity: a community constituted by mutual belief, extended in history, active in character, connected to a particular territory – homeland, and thought to be marked off from other communities by its members' distinct traits (Miller, 1995). Again, important element is one about national group constituted by mutual belief that is projected back in history. In this paper we touch upon common myths and beliefs in common ancestry. For many researchers of identity what gives nationalism and national identity its power are the myths, memories and ethnic/cultural heritage. Some argue that nationalism may contain more than one myth of descent and that the myths are also subject of change. The past can be point of disagreement between political forces within the society and in the same time the political processes influence the decision which myths and heroes will be celebrated.

The existence of whole nation may depend on a shared belief that its members historically belong together. But there might be more versions of the national narrative in one state. The governing myth is a choice of the political elites that is build in a longer period and established in official school curricula and celebrated in the commemorative days by everybody (Atanasov, 2004). It is more common that there will be different stories and myths preferred by different proponents. Such is the case in Macedonian context.

The third indicator for analysis is connected with authoritarianism. Authoritarianism can be approached in various ways. As a key obstacle to democracy and a participative political culture, as a "remnant" of former political systems (for the so called countries in transition) or as something inherent to social structures, because "the phenomenon of authority is basic to human behaviour" (Peabody, 1967). Whether it is treated as "formal power" or as "form of influence" in a narrow politological sense, the fact remains that authoritarianism determines the type of political culture of a country, the potentials for democratization of a society and its dynamics. Authoritarianism in this context will be discussed as a factor which directly influences ethnocentrism and through it – the reproduction and building of identities. More specifically, the inter-dependence of authoritarian values, and the perceptions of identities (as they are transmitted, created or manipulated with). Macedonian society is an interesting example for analysis. Can it be described as generally authoritarian? If it is, is it a residue of the former system or are there other factors reproducing it? How do the citizens see themselves in this context? Those are the key questions that have been challenging all analysts working on the case of the political culture of Macedonia. When political changes in Macedonia as a former socialist state started, the political transition was expected to bring advancement, improvement, progress, regarding the political culture. Those changes were meant to imply transformation of an authoritarian into a participative model, in a sense as Almond and Verba described it in their well known typology (Almond and Verba, 1989). Reflecting on the issue of identities it was expected that narrow ethnic boundaries would be replaced with more common values or at least that the historically burdened nationalistic mythologies will be marginalized in favor of the new values, aspirations, future oriented behaviors. This logical development of course has exceptions, and Macedonia is unfortunately one of the most interesting examples for it. The transformation in the matrix of the political culture did not follow the expected direction of advancement, but was moving forward and backward in a rather chaotic manner. One of the factors responsible for that were the still dominant authoritarian values among the citizens, directly obstructing the democratization of the society and creating a suitable context for political manipulation in general.

In analysis that follows data from several researches conducted in the past decade will be used and compared when possible. Mostly we will shed light on elements and the changeable nature of the Macedonina identity and the factors that support the creation of the "new" Macedonian "ancient" identity. For almost two decades Macedonian national identity cannot stabilize, internally and externally. Internally is connected with the multicultural essence of the society, externally with the Greek objection on Macedonian constitutional name. The Macedonian national identity is old as the nineteenth century old "Macedonian question". Macedonian historiography was a latecomer. All significant events and personalities were already included in the national narratives of neighbouring countries Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, which had substantiated their territorial claims to Macedonia by their particular interpretation of the history of the region and the ethnic identity of its population.

"Any Macedonian national narrative was bound to come into conflict with these older historiographies. The Macedonians, in turn, had to begin from scratch in their efforts to present a long history of their nation". (Brunnbauer, 2004)

3. Different aspects of modern Macedonian identity

There are different aspects of the modern Macedonian national identity that can be elucidated for analysis and clearly observed. These aspects are connected with the internal identity processes and identity construction.

The first process runs for two decades, since 1991, and that is the process of polarization of ethnicity. Macedonians as dominant ethnic group on defined homeland finally made to create its own independent state where ethnicity is established as a nation-state. This aspect of ethnicity can be identified with a question concerning the personal feeling of how citizens feel or describe their identity (**Table 1**). The process is with two ends and if on one side there are the ethnic Macedonians, on the other side exists separated ethnic groups of Albanians, Turks, Roma, Serbs, Vlachs and Boschnjaks. Ethnicity in both cases is defensive strategy, Macedonians against its neighbors and others against the Macedonians. By a majority on this question, the Macedonians, say that they feel dominant as citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. Macedonians connect their main identity to the identity of the state. Therefore, manifestation of the feeling of identity for them is linked with the culture of the dominant group in the country - Macedonian. But, in this particular case, it is about the identity of the dominant ethnic group. Here are merged the political and the cultural identity. The minor communities are on the other side of this dominant identity being more and more spatially isolated in their groups and trying there to solve their problems (through the same ethno political mobilization). This process "hit" Albanians first in the 1990s. The process of ethnicization nowadays affects the Turks too. (**Figure 1**) Ethnicity was the most powerful mobilizing factor in Macedonia too, as was the case in former federation.

Table 1. "How do you feel (describe yourself)?"

	2006	2009	2011
1. As a member of my ethnic group	14%	20%	24%
2. As a member of local community	3%	2%	3%
3. As a member of my region	2%	2%	2%
4. As a citizen of Macedonia	51%	53%	47%
5. As an European	7%	5%	6%
6. Just as a citizen	23%	18%	17%

Note: The results in **Table 1** represents answers on the question "How do you feel (describe yourself)?"², in the project "Political Culture in Macedonia" - 2009, with the comparative frequencies for 2006 and 2011.

The ethnic element is the dominant ethnicity category in the case of Macedonians. Whether is possible to build more civic identity it is still a dilemma. The current political processes speak with more ethnic vocabulary. The modern Macedonian identity is borne through cultural processes in 19 century. The same reactions by Macedonian neighbors then are still in the process today.

² Project: "Political culture in Macedonia", Foundation Open Society Institute, Skopje 2009. The project was conducted through field research and face to face interviews with 1600 respondents on representative sample for the Republic of Macedonia. (Representativeness was assured by ethnicity, sex, place of living and the region. The research was conducted in June 2010. Additionally, in July 2010 were conducted 6 focus groups with different groups of the population. The frequencies from 2006 and 2011 are from other researches. The 2006 results are from the "The Framework Agreement and the Public Opinion" and the results from 2011 are from the project "Democratic awareness of the citizens in Macedonia", done by Institute for Social Analysis.

“Thus, historical circumstances dictated Macedonians becoming a small, negated people. ... [T]he component we choose to call local tradition [Macedonian] is not limited only to a particular ethnic group and its language, but represents a complex structure, created in a much wider cultural sphere, which for centuries incorporated that people and their language.” (Friedman, 2000)

This is the trace how the cultural in Macedonia became congruent with the political.

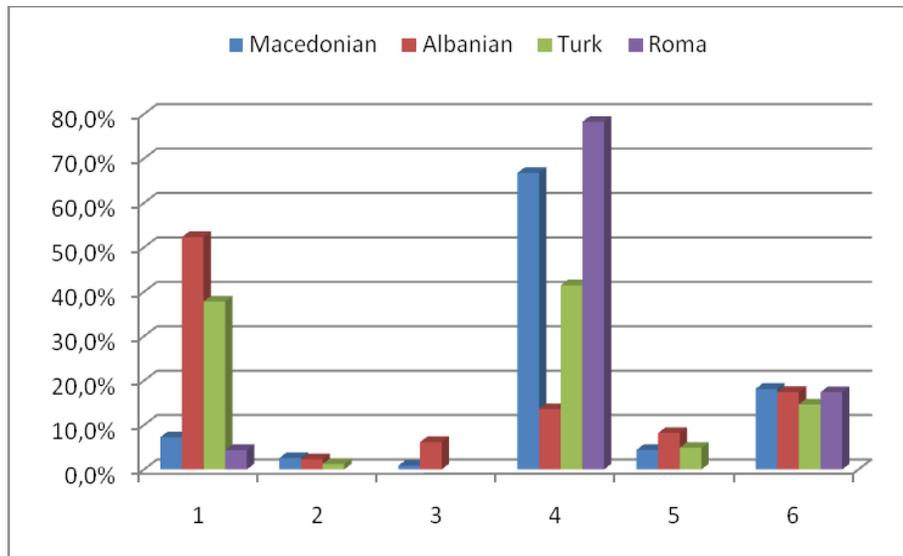


Figure 1. “How do you feel (describe yourself)?”

The results are from the research “Political culture in Macedonia” (2009), for the question “How do you feel (describe yourself)?”- Only for ethnic variable

Another aspect is connected with the secularist versus religious elements of the identity. In the multicultural society, as the Macedonian, the religious differences are important. In Macedonia there are two big religious communities, the Orthodox Christian and the Muslim community. Macedonian citizens in many researches identify themselves with their religious communities. In the democratic state citizens are expected to be more connected with the secular structures than the religious ones.

In the Macedonian case, the religious communities are very much present in the public life. The ratio between believers and non-believers do not clearly interfere with the collective identity of the two religious groups. Still, the identity of the citizens is more ethnically based and the religious components are more saved for the private realm. The identification with the religious holidays in Macedonian case is interesting fact and is maybe more psychologically based, not in a way of identity formation (Table 2).

The choice of the holidays is sharp. Macedonians and Christians choose Easter and Christmas and the Muslims choose Bajram, exclusively. The religious components of the identity are present but the ethnicity so far is stronger as active substance of identity.

Table 2. „According to you, which holiday is most important?“³

	2009
1. Easter	27,7%
2. Christmas	13,0%
3. New Year's Eve	5,9%
4. Bajram	21,7%
5. 8 th September	2,9%
6. 1 st May	3,4%
7. Ilinden	6,1%
8. 28 th November	2,6%
9. 11 th Oktober	0,7%
10. Other religious holiday	4,6%
11. Other public holiday	2,9%
12. No answer	8,9%

Note: The results are from the "Political Culture in Macedonia (2009)", the question was: „According to you, which holiday is most important?“⁴

Another aspect is a new process of enhanced search for ethno genesis and the so called political process of "antiquization", i.e. expansion of the historical identity with new state narratives, where the state structures build and present new elements of national identity that have already delivered measurable results in the past several years. The question in the research is related to the historical ethnogenesis of Macedonians and the attitude of the citizens to determine the most important historical figure concerning the identity (**Table 3**). Regularly, concerning the citizens' opinions about this issue, Goce Delcev is ahead, but according to the answers of respondents in the general distribution of frequencies, Alexander the Great had already reached the long term second rated, Josip Broz Tito.

Table 3. "What historical figure is the most important to you?"⁵

	2009	2011
Alexander the Great	9%	13%
Josip Broz Tito	14%	14%
Goce Delcev	21%	19%
Skenderbeg	9%	9%
Ataturk	2%	2%

Note: The results are from the researches done in 2009 and 2011, the question was: "What historical figure is the most important to you?"⁶

The analysis of the ethnic variable showed big differences. Josip Broz Tito already moves to the second place by Macedonian population, as a person that have less connection with younger generation. Skenderbeg is the choice of Albanians and Ataturk is the choice of Turks. Exception from this ethno cultural

³ Project: "Political culture in Macedonia", Foundation Open Society Institute, Skopje, 2009.

⁴ Project: "Political culture in Macedonia", Foundation Open Society Institute, Skopje, 2009.

⁵ Project: "Democratic awareness of the citizens in Macedonia", Institute for Social Analysis, Skopje, 2011.

⁶ Project: "Democratic awareness of the citizens in Macedonia", Institute for Social Analysis, Skopje, 2011.

identification is a part of the Turks and Roma population still identifying with Josip Broz to a certain degree. Perceptions of citizens are just a reflection of the contents that each nation tries to transfer to their descendants, primarily through the educational system, but also through certain activities for preserving historical and cultural identity of the nation. Political campaigns play an important part of it.

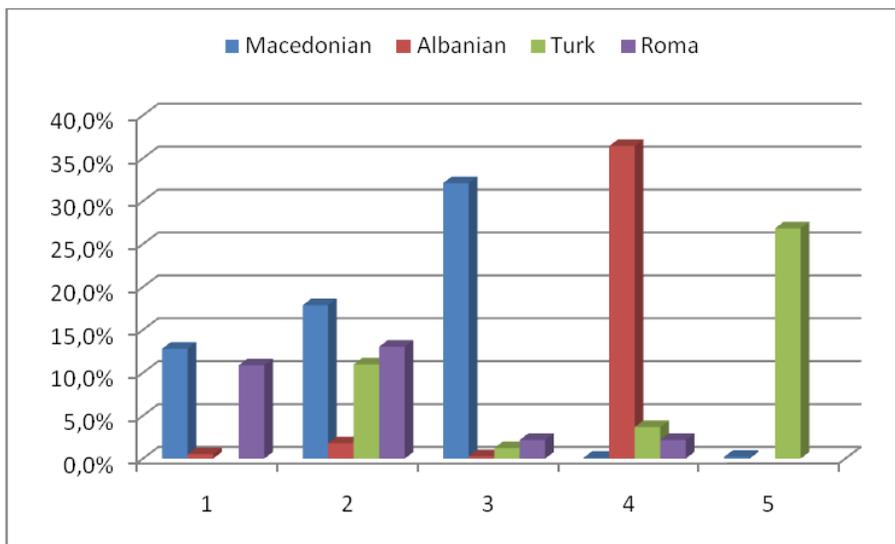


Figure 2. "What historical figure is the most important to you?" – Ethnic Variable⁷

The results are from the research in 2009, the question was: "What historical figure is the most important to you?"
 Only for ethnic variable⁸

A growing number of citizens are directly identified with Alexander the Great. Citizens are more likely to say that they descended from Alexander the Great, but concerning this there are also two streams: the harder and the softer one, forming together two thirds of the population. Alexander doesn't mean anything only to one third of the citizens. There are measurable indicators of identification changes but we still don't know the existing intensity and the way it is accepted by Macedonians. This is just an indicator of changes in the perception of historical antecedents and common myths.

Table 4. "What does Alexander the Great mean to you?"⁹

	2009	2011
1. It doesn't mean anything	24%	27%
2. He is most important, he is Macedonian ancestor	20%	20%
3. He is just one of the heroes in Macedonian history	42%	45%
4. I don't know	14%	8%

Note: The results are from the researches in 2009 and 2011, the question was: "What does Alexander the Great mean to you?"¹⁰

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Project: "Democratic awareness of the citizens in Macedonia", Institute for Social Analysis, Skopje, 2011.

¹⁰ Project: "Democratic awareness of the citizens in Macedonia", Institute for Social Analysis, Skopje, 2011.

If we analyze the independent variables, there are ethnic differences. There is a large number of Albanians who say that Alexander does not mean anything to them. But even higher is the number of Macedonians who share the opinion that Alexander is either one of the most important persons in Macedonian history or the most important person because Macedonian people are direct descendants of him.

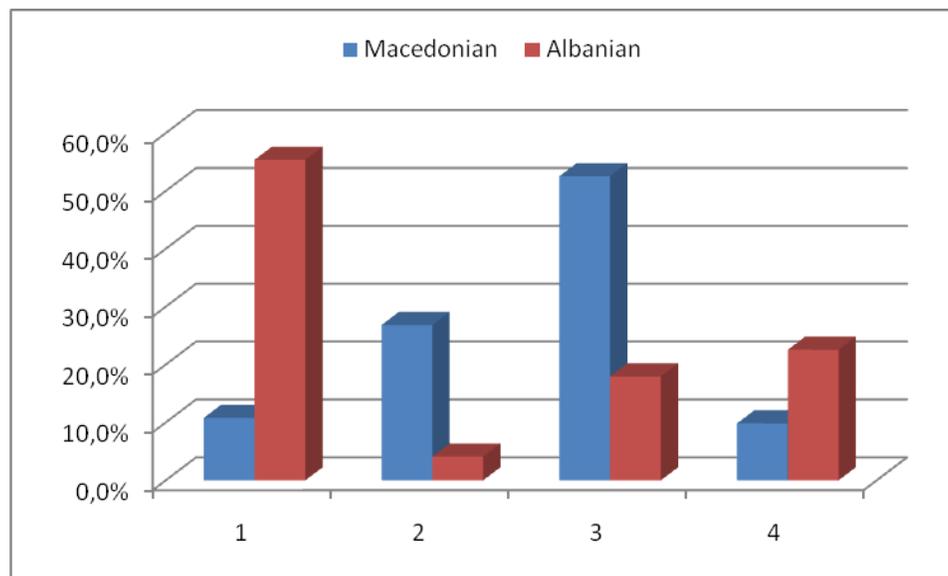


Figure 3. "What does Alexander the Great mean to you?"

The results are from the research in 2009, the question was:

"What does Alexander the Great mean to you?" – Only for ethnic variable¹¹

Concerning authorities, on the question who the citizens see as the biggest "authority" and do they need one at all there are very interesting answers. According to the responses, it appears that only around one quarter of the population in 2010 and 2011 does not have such a need. It is interesting that the number of people who declared that they do not need any authority is somewhat smaller than 10 years ago. However, the ones that do recognize some authority identify it mainly within their own ethnic or religious boundaries. If we look at the average numbers for the whole population, data show that on the top of the list of authorities is "God, or Allah" with 42% respondents who chose this option. (Table 5) This is the case within every ethnic group included in the survey. However, it is more interesting to look at all of the answers with regards to the ethnicity of the respondents. In this respect, one third of the ethnic Macedonians had chosen God as their prime authority, while the second one on the list with 20% is the President or the Prime minister (who are both ethnic Macedonians). Albanians and Turks chose Allah in a higher number (almost two times more than the Macedonians), but very few of their answers were related to politicians. (Figure 4).

¹¹ Ibidem.

Table 5. „According to you, who is the biggest authority?“¹²

	2009
1. President of the state, Prime minister	18,6%
2. Minister that my job depends on	2,1%
3. My boss, my general manager	6,6%
4. Professors of my faculty	3,5%
5. Leader of my political party	4,2%
6. The Chief of my religious community	1,0%
7. God, Allah	41,8%

Note: The results are from the “Political Culture in Macedonia (2009), the question was: „According to you, who is the biggest authority?“¹³

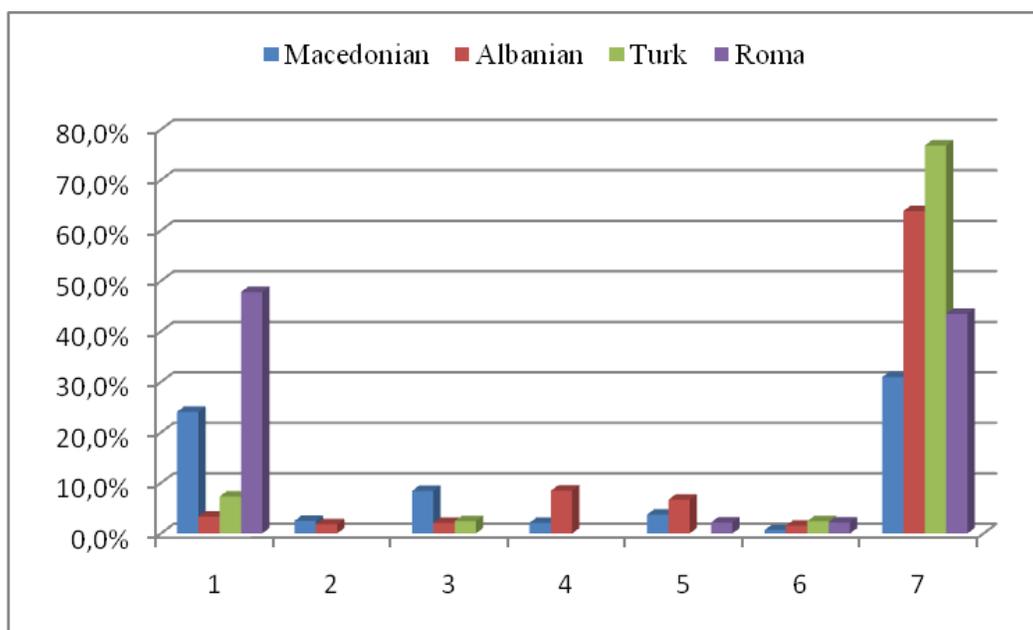


Figure 4. „According to you, who is the biggest authority?“
The results are from the research in 2009, the question was:
“According to you, who is the biggest authority?“ – Only for ethnic variable¹⁴

Very indicative (and disturbing) in this direction is the fact that all ethnic groups agree (around 70% in 2010 and 2011) that it would be good if “the state was run by only one person who would have authority”. Consequent to the previous answers, they all imagine him/her to belong to their ethnic group. In the

¹² Project: “Political culture in Macedonia”, Foundation Open Society Institute, Skopje, 2009.

¹³ Project: “Political culture in Macedonia”, Foundation Open Society Institute, Skopje, 2009.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

discussion on the focus groups, when they were asked why this person should be from their ethnic group, the most common answer was that "only the people from their ethnic group understand the problems of all ethnicities". Desiring a concentration of power in such a high percent is obviously an indicator showing that the political diversity and distribution of power are perceived as a practical difficulty. (This was confirmed in some conducted in-depth interviews). Additionally, in all discussions, the mistrust towards politicians (or authorities in general) which belongs to another ethnic group was evident. The following table gives a small, but indicative illustration of the above:

Table 6. „Do you agree that the state should be run by one authoritative person?“

	Ethnic belonging					Total
	Macedonian	Albanian	Turk	Roma	Other	
Yes	68,2%	50,0%	71,2%	77,8%	80,0%	64,3%
No	31,8%	50,0%	28,8%	22,2%	20,0%	35,7%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Note: The results are from the research in 2009, the question was: "Do you agree that the state should be run by one authoritative person?" – Only for ethnic variable¹⁵

Very surprising, but related and consequent to the previous question is the data according to which almost half of all ethnic groups perceive "too much democracy as harmful". This has never been the case in the past 15 years. Authoritarians and people who feared democracy appeared in much smaller numbers, not only ten years ago, but even in the time of the former socialist political system.¹⁶

Among else, this means that the citizens do not enjoy the contributions of democracy enough. (Discussions on the focus groups, included a feeling that their rights were more broken today than before). Looking for a solution, those respondents (around half of them) believe that:

- Obedience is very important (51%)
- Discipline, order are most important (49%)
- Sanctioning is the only way to establish order (46%)
- Severe sanctions are necessary (beating of the police, death penalty, etc.) (around 30%)
- Censorship is also necessary (39%) ("people do not recognize right and wrong")

It may not be a majority, but it is not insignificant that more than one third of the population shows all elements of the well-known Adorno's tested indicators about the authoritarian submissiveness, aggressiveness, and conventionalism. Compared to previous researches, it appears that those numbers have not changed drastically. The real problem is that the changes have obviously gone in the opposite direction. Instead of improvement, we can speak of certain deterioration. Compared to ten years ago there is less democratic culture, less participation than before; in one word – there is a process quite opposite to advancement going on in the Macedonian society. Furthermore, the social groups related to those characteristics have changed also. Ten years ago, such answers were typical for the older, less educated, middle class respondents. It was easy to explain it with their socialization in another political system. Today, such answers were given in a greater percentage by younger, more educated, urban citizens. The

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Project: "Ideology in the Macedonian Society", Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal research, Skopje, 1986.

difference with respect to the ethnic background is evidently narrowing, on the account of some social characteristics, like social status and education.

Evidently, around half of all ethnic groups believe that the system, the institutions are not functioning in favor of their expectations. They simply do not believe in it, which is perhaps why they reach for religious authorities in such high numbers. But it also makes them additionally vulnerable and easy to manipulate with. Having in mind that both major religious communities in Macedonia – the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic community are almost functioning like political institutions, the danger of abuse (complementary to the political abuse) is even greater.

4. Conclusions

The “antiquization” (Macedonian search for ethno genesis) as the process is ongoing and measurable and the new elements of ethnogenesis and common myths are acquired. The strengthening of the national identity and awareness of continuous common ancient origin is growing on the account of the bad economic situation and the obstacles for the integration in NATO and EU. The Alexander of Macedon is not a new element of the Macedonian history but it’s just intensified as a part of Macedonian heritage. Also, the non-recognition of the separate Macedonian national identity by Macedonian neighbors directly influences this process. Ethnicization trend of smaller ethnic communities continues, making long-term negative impact on the social integration. The new element is the growth of authoritarianism that also supports the change of identity. Even more, manipulations with upgrading identities feed on authoritarianism.

The previously presented data certainly illustrate the main topics which motivated this paper. Before all, they confirm that: the political culture in Macedonia is not advancing from an authoritarian towards a participative model as it was expected. There is a presence of authoritarian values among a significant part of the population which provides the dominant color of the picture. It would be too simplified to say that those values originate and are related only to the former political system. The type of political culture which is dominant (and is stimulated) strengthens the ethnocentrism, especially when identities are concerned. Tendencies towards ethnocentrism in the Macedonian society constantly feed on authoritarian matrixes. The need for “authority”, obedience, loyalty etc., has always been used as a “necessity” in building cohesion of the groups, especially ethnic ones. It was done regardless the danger that the rigidity towards “the other” can easily be transformed into exclusion of “anything different”. This true *circulus vitiösus* suffocates all diversities: political, ethnic, cultural...It simply ignores a very high priority. As Kymlicka points:

“minority rights should not allow one group to dominate other groups and they should not enable a group to oppress its own members” (Kymlicka 1995).

In relation with the national identity in Macedonia one can assume some general trends and processes: first, while the Macedonians as a separate ethnicity have stable identification with the state, including the cultural and the political aspects, their ethno genesis is not closed and it’s widening including other common myths, especially the myth of Alexander of Macedon; second, as a multicultural society the ethnicity of the smaller communities are politicized and their identity is parallel to the dominant one; third, religion as a category is very strong concerning the percentage of believers but does not influence the primary identity of different ethnic groups; fourth, the elements of “new and ancient” identity are a result of the wider process of populism and the identity is used as a more effective part of ethno-nationalism; fifth,

the Macedonian identity (ruling elite) is in search how to use, not what to use, the old elements in rebranding the new Macedonian national identity.

This paper is an attempt to picture current changes in the Macedonian governing narrative, which proves that identities are subject of permanent change. Rationale for the arguments we are locating between the ideas of what one think it is (objective or subjective) and the contingency of what one can become (building national identity image through state structures). Symbolic resources like political values/institutions, culture, history and geography, provide the symbolic raw material which social actors use as they define national identities in public discourse. Thus,

“what matters with regard to the construction of national identities is less what resources political actors draw upon than how they put these resources to practical use ...” (Zimmer, 2003).

The identity feelings are destabilized by new elements and the new challenges lies ahead of identity mechanisms.

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