

FACING THE YUGOSLAV COMMUNIST PAST IN CONTEMPORARY MACEDONIA: TALES OF CONTINUITY, NOSTALGIA AND VICTIMIZATION

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Abstract: The paper critically examines three main sets of narratives regarding the memory of the communist past and generally, three images of Yugoslavia that have been generated in today's Macedonia. The narrative of continuity is centered around the embeddedness of Yugoslav communist past in the contemporary Macedonian context, marked with the idea of "uninterruptedness beyond interruptions", caused by the lack of a sudden and clear-cut regime change. The nostalgic narratives are the ones that take in account the importance of the political transition, yet they are focused on the idealized image of the Yugoslav past. The third approach towards the Yugoslav past is the revisionist-victimizing one, which confronts the mainstream image of Yugoslavia as a benevolent hegemon, sees communism as a dark chapter of Macedonian history and is dedicated to delegitimizing its remnants today.

Keywords: Macedonia, communist past, lustration, representations of communism, public discourse, post-communism

INTRODUCTION

The legacy communism has left in Macedonia has been ample and multifaceted. Internationalist communism, and later on, the Yugoslav version of state socialism, had been the main allies of the Macedonian national(ist) cause for the most of the twentieth century. On another note, during the Yugoslav era, regardless of the benefits that the new Macedonian state had from the relationship with Belgrade, it never achieved full sovereignty within the socialist Yugoslav federation. Moreover, the uncompromising attitudes of the communist leadership resulted in numerous political trials and the repression of opponents of the regime, which permanently scarred Macedonian political reality.

The issue of remembering communism in Macedonia has therefore been marked by a multitude of narratives, which have different overtones and often contest each other. The main research task of this paper is to determine the present state of the politics of memory of the Yugoslav past in the country and to discuss the highly politicized issue "memory of communism" in post-Yugoslav Macedonia. The question raised here is what has been the political

and social impact of the communist era in the last two decades? In order to tackle these issues, I focus on both the political developments, but also on the general attitudes and perceptions towards the communist past and the representations of communism in the public discourse. The main task is to assess various ways of interpreting the legacy from the communist era in today's Macedonia.

The topic of the politics of memory of the communist past has received only a modest amount of attention in the contemporary scholarship regarding Macedonia. The Macedonian case has been included or referred to in several studies with a regional scope discussing the issue of memory of the communist era in the post-Yugoslav countries, such as the study on *Titostalgia* by Mitja Velkonja¹, which employs anthropological methodology in the vivid portrayal of the phenomenon of nostalgia for the Yugoslav days, or the studies on different aspects of Yugo­nostalgia and (post) Yugoslav identities by Nicole Lindstrom² and Zala Volcic.³ Focusing solely on the Macedonian context, Dane Taleski examines the nostalgia for Tito's days as part of the broader topic of political myths in the country.⁴ A seminal work has been produced by Tchavdar Marinov, who thoroughly analyzed the contemporary revisionist attitudes towards communism as opposed to the Yugo­nostalgic narrative.⁵

This paper aims to fill in the vacuum left for studies on the perceptions and memory of communism in Macedonia. After briefly reviewing the history of communism in Macedonia, it critically discusses three separate approaches to the reading of the communist past and generally, three images of Yugoslavia that have been generated in the Macedonian public discourse in the last twenty years: the one of *continuity*, the one of *nostalgia* and the one of *victimization*. First, the paper discusses the embeddedness of Yugoslav communist past in the contemporary Macedonian context, marked with the idea of "uninterruptedness beyond interruptions". It is argued that the lack of a sudden and clear-cut regime change has contributed to the creation of an image of post-Yugoslav-but-Yugoslav Macedonia, which has been reflected in the preservation of symbolic practices and values from the previous regime regardless of the political developments. The second group of narratives, the ones of the so

¹ Mitja VELIKONJA, *Titostalgia – A Study of Nostalgia for Josip Broz*, Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2008.

² Nicole LINDSTROM, "Yugonostalgia: Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia in Former Yugoslavia", in *East Central Europe/L'Europe du Centre Est/Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, January 2006, vol. 32, no 1–2, pp. 231–242.

³ Zala VOLCIC, *Neither "East" nor "West": The past and present life of Yugoslav identity*, Sofia: Centre for Advanced Studies Working Paper Series 2, 2009.

⁴ Dane TALESKI, "Da beše Tito živ, ke go vikavme Aleksandar: Politička memorija, politiki na sekavanje i nedovršena država" [If Tito was alive, we would have called him Alexander: Political memory, policies of commemoration and the unfinished state] in Milan PODUNAVAC (ed.), *Politička i konstitucionalna integracija duboko podeljenih društava* [Political and Constitutional integration of the deep divided societies] (Belgrade: Heinrich Böll Foundation), pp. 30–40.

⁵ Tchavdar MARINOV, "Anticommunist, but Macedonian: Politics of Memory in Post-Yugoslav Macedonia", in *Tokovi Istorije*, 2009, no. 1–2, pp. 65–83.

called *Yugonostalgia*, comprise a discourse which takes into account the importance of the political transition that has happened, yet it openly does favor the communist past compared to the post-communist present. Central to the Yugonostalgic discourse is the idealized image of the past, and the mourn over the loss of the great country that Yugoslavia once was. The third approach towards the Yugoslav past discussed in this paper, is the revisionist-victimizing one, which confronts the mainstream image of Yugoslavia as a benevolent hegemon, views communism as a dark chapter of Macedonian history and is dedicated to delegitimizing its remnants today.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: COMMUNISM AND MACEDONIA⁶

Communism had played a huge historical role in the processes of establishment of the modern Macedonian statehood. While late nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century have been marked by substantial efforts for fulfillment of the cause of “Liberation of Macedonia” from the Ottoman rule, none of the major political movements were directed towards the creation of an independent and sovereign Macedonian state in the modern sense of the word. After the Second Balkan War and the Bucharest Treaty in 1913, the geopolitical landscape of the Balkan Peninsula has undergone substantial alterations. With the Ottomans being forced out, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece drastically expanded their territories by annexing portions of the region of Macedonia. The only side to be visibly discontented with this outcome was Bulgaria, as it was left only with a relatively small portion of the territory compared to its initial aspirations. In the years to come, Bulgarian agencies, such as the right-wing terrorist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO), became politically and militarily involved especially in Vardar Macedonia, which at the time was under Serbian control. Bulgarian agents were pursuing the idea of “Liberation of Macedonia”, which as an autonomous entity would unite with Bulgaria. Later on, this stance was refined, as the later interwar VMRO under Mihailov adopted the idea of independent greater Macedonia (a federation of the multitude of ethnicities that inhabited the region), although it never recognized the existence of a separate Macedonian nation and never abandoned the idea of Bulgarian hegemony. Other political factions such as the diasporic communist VMRO-United, established in 1925, and the authentic leftist student movement MANAPO (1936) embraced more moderate stances, and were promoting the idea of the existence of separate non-Bulgarian Macedonian people.

In the interwar years’ there existed a plethora of different and competing national claims over the region of Macedonia. The role played by the

⁶ For more elaborate historiographic work see Chapters 12 and 13 in Andrew ROSSOS, *Macedonia and the Macedonians: A History*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2009; Dimitar BECHEV, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Macedonia*, Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2009.

Communist international (Comintern) was crucial amongst these. The Comintern in 1934 supported the claims of VMRO-United and the tendency of the regional Communist Parties (in Yugoslavia, Greece and Bulgaria) for the recognition of a separate non-Bulgarian, non-Serb and non-Greek, but Macedonian nation and language. At the time this was a major contribution towards the official definition of the concept of the Macedonian ethnic nation.

During the Second World War, after the successes of the Communist-led resistance (1941–1944) against the Axis forces and under the supervision of the Communist party of Yugoslavia, the first modern Macedonian state was proclaimed, named “Democratic Federal Macedonia”. It was later included as an equal part of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia. This particular act was loaded with substantial amount of symbolic capital, as for the first time in history a modern state bore the name Macedonia. At the same time, for the first time the Macedonian language was treated as an official one, later on codified and standardized in the mid 1940s, under the supervision of the Communist Party.

As a newly established state, Macedonia had its integrity, symbols, nation and national minorities in the neighboring countries recognized and included in the institutional design. The Yugoslav authorities took measures of de-Bulgarianization and de-Serbization of the Macedonian culture thus fortifying the Macedonian ethnonational identity. The nation building was carried out primarily through establishing various official cultural and scientific formal bodies that would advance and “affirm” the Macedonian *narod*, the Macedonian nation and the unique Macedonian ethnonational identity, such as the Institute of National History (1948), the first Macedonian university “Ss Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje (1949), the Institute for Macedonian Language “Krste Misirkov” (1953) the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (1967), but also the Macedonian Orthodox Church (1967), an act incompatible with the secularist and even atheist principles of communism. Arguably, with the involvement in the Civil War in Greece 1946–1949, Yugoslavia pursued the ideal of “liberating” ethnic Macedonians in Greece and pursuing the idea of Macedonian unification. In the years to follow, the Yugoslav authorities took other measures in terms of advancing the Macedonian national self-definition, by building monuments and investing into historical research. Stefan Troebst points out that in Yugoslavia, Macedonia was the only case where Yugoslavism as a rhetoric was subordinated to the doctrine of Macedonism.⁷

In terms of the socio-economic development, the first decades of Yugoslav communist rule in Macedonia were arguably the most prosperous period in the history of the country. The poor infrastructure of the country was dramatically extended; the virtually non-existent industrial capacities were soon multiplied and the state established a multitude of public institutions (in the first place public education and health care institutions). The literacy rate has

⁷ Stefan TROEBST, “Historical Politics and Historical ‘Masterpieces’ in Macedonia before and after 1991”, *New Balkan Politics*, 2003, vol. 6, http://www.newbalkanpolitics.org.mk/OldSite/Issue_6/troebst.historical.eng.asp (accessed 28.09.2010)

been immediately increased and generally, the economy and the welfare state rapidly started to develop. For a substantial part of the population, this period has been one of ultimate prosperity and well-being.

However, as an authoritarian regime, Yugoslav communism was intolerant towards individuals and groups that did not comply with the official political narratives and interests of its leadership. In this sense an undisclosed number of people had been prosecuted and penalized for political reasons. Opponents of the Communist party were exposed to oppressive measures undertaken by the authorities, with no respect towards individual liberties. In Macedonia, several categories of people were among the target ones. First of all, anyone who fought against the Communist-led army in the war was brutally oppressed, such as Serb loyalists (*Četniks*) and the ones who supported the Bulgarian side in the War. In addition, Macedonian nationalists, separatists and right wingers have been politically ousted and imprisoned. After Tito's break up with Stalin in 1948, Stalinists and people supporting the Cominform (also known as the Inform Bureau) have suffered major political pressure and repression. Any supporter of the infamous 1948 Cominform resolution "On the state of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia" which condemned the Yugoslav leadership and called true Yugoslav communists to side with Stalin were immediately punished. Moreover, many people who kept close relations to the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and had pro-Bulgarian national orientation suffered because of the fact that after 1948 the BCP became an enemy of Tito. Another category of people who have been victims to the new regime in the first years after the establishment of Yugoslavia, due to the newly introduced centralist economy, comprised of large scale businesses owners and private entrepreneurs (the *capitalist bourgeoisie*) from the previous regime, but also people who earned significant amounts of property during the war years (war profiteers). In all of the cases private properties were confiscated (so called *nacionalizacija*) and turned into public ones, and in many cases the owners who did not cooperate with the state were charged, sentenced or even executed. After the gradual normalization of the relations with Moscow and Sofia, and later on with the adoption of market self-managing socialism instead of centralist economy, the repression reduced. The category of people repressed the most were the radicals who were advocating secession from Yugoslavia or were in any other way plotting against the integrity of the state and the party. In the decades to follow, however, the regime became much more tolerant towards political opponents.

"EVERYTHING IS THE SAME, ONLY HE IS GONE": CONSTRUCTION OF CONTINUITY

The last years of Yugoslavia, paradoxically, have been the beginning of a transformation of the country into a modern liberal-democratic federation under the leadership of the progressive leader Ante Marković. However, even though the fall of the one-party system preceded the disintegration of the state, public opinion often perceives the two processes as overlapping.

In fact, the processes of transformation from state socialism into capitalism, the process of political transformation from one-party to pluralistic system in Macedonia, along with the remodeling of the country from a federal into an independent republic, was a multi-layered, highly complicated political and economic change. Their main characteristic was that they were carried out from above. There was no public unrest and no mass political movement that initiated the regime fall. The Parliament brought the decisions for the adoption of the principles of market economy and liberal democratic political order, while the independence from Yugoslavia was verified through a national referendum. In this sense, although the political change was substantial, it was barely perceptible. There was no clear break between the old regime and the new one. The political debates, both in and outside the Parliament, were marked by more or less consensual attitudes between various political factions, with the only division existing along ethnic lines. In fact, when discussing the regime change in Macedonia, the impression that prevails is that there was a very strong notion of continuity and resemblance between the late communism and early post-communism years. Additionally, there was no substantial change in the political, economic and cultural elite, despite the ousting of several major communist leaders, that were in power during the last years of the Federation.⁸ Even members of the contemporary VMRO-DPMNE⁹ elite and other politicians who today embrace anti-communist attitudes, before 1990 used to be Yugoslav communist cadres. Good examples of this are the ones of Stojan Andov, a senior politician who initiated the lustration debate, and Mihajlo Manevski, a Minister of Justice at the time when the lustration law was debated, enacted and started being enforced. Both of them had notable careers as members of the Yugoslav institutions, while in the contemporary political context they are amongst the soundest revisionists of the former regime.

One important indicator of the context of the transformation that the society was going through can be seen in the question asked as part of the referendum for independence from Yugoslavia: “Are you in favour of independent Macedonia with the right to enter future union of sovereign states of Yugoslavia?” The question itself was quite ambiguous and potentially misleading. Ironically, many people celebrated the outcome of the referendum in 1991 (the absolute majority voted for independence), by waving the Yugoslav flag featuring the red pentacle, rather than the Macedonian national one.¹⁰

⁸ For the a discussion of the regime transformation in Macedonia see Židas DASKALOVSKI, “Elite Transformation and Democratic Transition in Macedonia and Slovenia”, *Balkanologie*, July 1999, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 5–32.

⁹ Standing for Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija – Demokratska Partija za Makedonsko Nacionalno Edinstvo (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity). The party emerged as the vanguard of the nationalist, pro-secessionist and anti-communist campus in the late 1980s.

¹⁰ Žarko TRAJANOSKI, “*National*” *Flags in the Republic of Macedonia*, Berlin: Free University Berlin, Working Papers on New and Ambiguous Nation- building Processes in South-eastern Europe, 2008, p. 11.

There have been other indicators of continuity regarding the Macedonia post-communist course. Even after gaining its independence, Macedonian institutions kept many of the Yugoslav federal symbolic practices. The pace of replacement of the Yugoslav flags with the Macedonian ones and the pace of removal of other symbols, such as Tito's portrait was very slow, and the general stance of the people was fairly neutral about these changes. The coat of arms containing the red pentacle was not changed, and the official narrative about the importance of the Yugoslav era for the creation and the maintenance of the country was perpetuated as well. The most significant change introduced in this respect, was the adoption of a new state flag that featured a contested ancient symbol, the Star of Vergina. Due to the dispute with Greece, in 1995 the flag was altered, and the Interim Agreement for the name was signed. The ironical solution chosen for the problem was the provisional name of the country "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". As the provisional name remained in use and is still in use today, Macedonia remained one of the few remnants of Yugoslavia. After the renaming of the neighboring "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" into the "State Union of Serbia and Montenegro" in 2003 and the abolishment of the ".yu" Internet country code in 2010, Macedonia's temporary international name remained to be the sole official "artifact" that contains the word Yugoslav within.

The Yugoslav Macedonian state-framed national discourse and the major national myths of the Yugoslav era were sustained in the years of the Macedonian independence as well. Although for instance, certain historians and quasi-historians tried to revise the official narratives of origin, stressing the Ancient rather than the Slavic descent of ethnic Macedonians, the president Kiro Gligorov (in office 1991–1999) several times stressed the fact that Macedonians were South Slavic people, hailing from the Kruševo Republic and that the anti-fascist liberation struggle had been the most important and most relevant historical episode for the constituency of modern Macedonian nationhood.¹¹ At the same time, although Bulgaria was the first country to recognize the Macedonian independence, due to the contests over historical legacy and the official Bulgarian stance regarding the authenticity of the Macedonian ethnicity and the Macedonian language, the old anti-Bulgarian rhetoric, as nurtured in the Yugoslav era was being perpetuated as well. Public spaces still are symbolically marked by the remnants of the Yugoslav communist past, such as the memorial table containing the words given by Tito after the Skopje earthquake in 1963. Similarly, the most elite public high school in downtown Skopje still bears the name "Josip Broz-Tito", while a large monument to the communist leader is exposed in its main yard.¹² In fact, monuments and references to the Yugoslav era can be found all over Macedonia.

¹¹ Kiro GLIGOROV, Viorni VREMINJA: *Republika Makedonija – realnost na Balkanot* (Times of Whirl: The Republic of Macedonia – a Reality on the Balkans), Skopje: Kultura, 1999, and N/A, "Kontroverzni izjavi" (Controversial statements), *Vreme* Daily no. 1057, 03.05.2007.

¹² Vasko MARKOVSKI, "Titoviot kvart" ["Tito's District"], *Forum Weekly*, 25.12.2009, <http://www.forum.com.mk/15181> (accessed 28.09.2010)

The crucial factor, however, for the perpetuation of “Yugoslavism” in post-Yugoslav Macedonia is the existence of the so-called “Yugosphere”, defined by Tim Judah as the sphere of restored cultural, economic, political and even criminal cooperation between the countries of former Yugoslavia, after the years of mistrust primarily because of the wars in the 1990s.¹³ For Macedonia, especially crucial are the economic and the cultural aspects of the “Yugosphere”, contributing to the image of continuity. As Judah points out, “Macedonia’s leading export market is Serbia”, it is also an important factor for the Kosovo market; similarly, Telekom Slovenije, the Slovenian communications corporation is a major investor in Macedonia etc.¹⁴ Culturally, Macedonia “imports” various products from the other former Yugoslav countries, primarily because of the shortage of its own cultural production. With the expansion of cable television, for instance, TV Channels from all over the post-Yugoslav space are broadcast to Macedonian homes. Newspapers from the ex-Yugoslav republics are sold along with the domestic ones and bookstores sell books in Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian/Montenegrin usually not considering them “foreign” literature. Night clubs and bars very often organize thematic parties titled “ex-Yu” or “Yu”, in which popular music from the former countries of Yugoslavia is being played, including numerous hits from decades ago, sung in Serbocroatian.¹⁵ Movies and series from former Yugoslav countries are broadcast regularly, including old Yugoslav movies, many of them inspired by the partisan movement in the Second World War. All of these aspects of the “Yugoslavization” of the Macedonian culture lead to the conclusion that despite the case of temporary skepticism and reluctance regarding the leftovers of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the “Yugoslav” ties have been in a way advanced after the relative stabilization of the region. A very fitting phrase that describes the situation was coined by the Macedonian popular singer Tijana Dapčević, living and working in Belgrade, whose song “Sve je isto samo njega nema” (“Everything is the same, only he is gone”, the “he” clearly referring to Tito) made an instant hit in all of the former Yugoslav republics.

“THE ERA OF THE RED PASSPORTS”: CONSTRUCTION OF YUGONOSTALGIA

The so called “Yugonostalgia” and/or “Titostalgia” are phenomena typical of the whole post-Yugoslav space. It can be briefly described as sentimental

¹³ Tim JUDAH, *Yugoslavia is dead, long live the Yugosphere*, LSEE Papers on South Eastern Europe, London, 2009.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 3–6.

¹⁵ Marijana MITROVIĆ, “(T)ko to tamo p(j)eva? Transnacionalizam u post-jugoslovenskoj popularnoj muzici i njegove granice” (“Who’s singing there? Transnationalism in post-Yugoslav popular music”), *Etnoantropološki problemi*, 2009, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 117–144 and Iva PAUKER, “Reconciliation and Popular Culture: A Promising Development in Former Yugoslavia?”, in *Local-Global: Identity, Security, Community*, 2006, vol. 2, pp. 72–83.

remembrance of the Yugoslav communist past.¹⁶ Yugoslavia is portrayed as the lost “Golden Age”, which was interrupted by inner and outer dark forces, and the outcome of it was the degraded present. Often, the idea of future re-unification complements the Yugonostalgic rhetoric, since the unity of the South Slavic peoples (and often the Balkan Unity, such as the idea of Balkan Federation) are believed to be the only permanent solution for the region. In this viewpoint, the political and cultural change and the reality of post-communist, post-Yugoslav Macedonia is fully acknowledged.

The Yugonostalgic rhetoric can have both evocative and reflective functions.¹⁷ Many people from Macedonia were raised during Yugoslav times and based on their experience (or their perception of that experience) mourn over the loss of the good old days, sometimes embracing even restorative attitudes, such as commemorating Yugoslav holidays, displaying Yugoslav national symbols and Tito’s portraits and even trying to reinstate the Yugoslav spirit in the public space by organizing events or taking other public actions to pay tribute to the Yugoslav past. The other important feature of the Yugonostalgic rhetoric is its reflective aspect – it uses the idealized image of the Yugoslav past as a reference point or as a gauge of comparison for the contemporary social reality. Interestingly enough, this viewpoint is not embraced only by people who experienced Yugoslavia, but also by younger people that never actually had the opportunity to live in it. In this sense, the memory of Yugoslavia has the function of a political myth which is used not only to be contrasted to the image of the contemporary humiliation, but also to serve as the ideal for the future.¹⁸

In general, the post-communist setting, marked by the crises of legitimacy, “morality” and of values, became fertile grounds for raising political myths.¹⁹ Among the plurality of myths in Macedonia (ethnic/national, religious, the myth of the omnipotent liberal democracy, etc), the one of the glorious communist past had an important position. In the nostalgic mythological discourse towards the communist past in Macedonia, for instance, the principles of the Yugoslav communism as a meta-narrative is never seen as a factor of the collapse and later the dissolution of the country. Usually, the fault is ascribed to corrupt politicians and practitioners, the Western involvement and explained by conspiracy theories or by simplifying historical complexities through the idea of an unjust flow of history. In this sense, communism is not seen only as an ideology or political system of values, but an inherent part of the Yugoslav nostalgic narration and even the Yugoslav political or national identification. The main function, however, of the Yugonostalgic discourse is to compensate for the disappointment of the present.

¹⁶ An outstanding study of the topic can be seen in Mitja VELIKONJA, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Build upon Nicole LINDSTROM, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ For a discussion on the topic with regards to cases in Bosnia, see Monika PALMBERGER, “Nostalgia matters: nostalgia for Yugoslavia as potential vision for a better future”, *Sociologija*, 2008, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 355–370.

¹⁹ Anastas VANGELI, “Post-communist Transition and the Myth”, in *Political Thought*, September 2009, vol. 7, no. 27, pp. 109–121.

The nostalgic sentiments do manifest both through romanticism, but also in down-to-earth, prosaic ways. For instance a pattern of arguments supporting the theses that the Yugoslav times were better than today, can be recognized. The main argument is based on the significance of the Yugoslav “empire” in the world order, compared to the relative meaninglessness of post-Yugoslav Macedonia. People usually compare the privilege they had, to freely travel with their “red” Yugoslav passport anywhere in the world, while in the years of independence they needed visas even to go across the border (for those who do not possess a biometric passport, this is still the reality). The benefit of possessing Yugoslav citizenship in this respect, is seen as a logical outcome of the fact that Yugoslavia was a strong and important player on the world stage. For instance, the historian Violeta Ackoska in 2006 used this particular argument in order to oppose to the European Resolution for condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes by comparing the freedom of movement in Yugoslavia and the unfairness of the visa regime for the post-Yugoslav countries:

[...] In that communist state we were free to travel in 186 countries. That means, our freedom of movement was not limited, and now I feel like a degraded citizen with harmed human rights in a democratic Europe, because I need to wait for days in lines, begging for visas [...] ²⁰

Similar rhetoric was used by the president of the Union of Tito’s Left Forces (STLS), Slobodan Ugrinovski, in the eve of the visa liberalization for Macedonia:

[...] What we celebrate today – the liberalization of the visa regime – is something that we had 20 years ago. We could travel without visas in 88 years in the world (...) Tonight we will celebrate something that we had 20 years ago, but no one will take responsibility that our citizens were degraded and brought back in the past for 20 years (...) The European Union is a copy of Yugoslavia. They abolished the visa regime and the passports, but gave us six passports. They abolished the borders, but imposed six borders to us. They abolished their currencies, introduced the Euro, but imposed six currencies to us. Now they are designing mutual economic system, but they imposed different national economies to us. All of what Yugoslavia had, is now reproduced in the European Union [...] ²¹

²⁰ Quoted in Goran MOMIROVSKI, “Reakcija na makedonskite istorichari za rezolucijata protiv komunizmot” [“Reaction of Macedonian historians regarding the Resolution against communism”], *A1 News*, 19.01.2006. <http://a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=57151> (accessed 28.09.2010)

²¹ Statement by Slobodan Ugrinovski, the leader of the party, as cited in Vasko MARKOVSKI, *A1 News*, 19.01.2006. <http://a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=57151> (accessed 28.09.2010)

Approximate to the “red passports” argument about the historical grandeur of Yugoslavia are the beliefs that Yugoslavia used to be a military powerhouse (allegedly the fourth military force in all of Europe). Many of Yugo-nostalgic people derived pride from being Yugoslav – their country was respected and was known in the world, while Macedonia is small, still has problems with its recognition (especially when it comes to the name dispute) and is fairly unknown. A very common reasoning is that for instance, Yugoslavia was also very successful in sports, some sort of an offspring of national pride – the national team as well as Yugoslav clubs were competing and winning World and European tournaments in various disciplines, while Macedonia has never had notable sports achievements as an independent country. This argument seems plausible even beyond the borders of Macedonia, as in the light of the football World Cup in South Africa in 2010, journalists and football experts argued that if Yugoslavia still existed, it would have had a “dream team” comprised of players “from Ljubljana to Skopje” that could become a world champion, stressing that disunited, separate national teams no matter how strong, cannot be as strong as a Yugoslav team would be.²² A further case that is often used as a proof of the Yugoslav superiority is based on the fact that the Yugoslav society was marked by a spirit of technological advancement, compared to the prevailing of nationalism and religious fanaticism in the aftermath of the dissolution of Yugoslavia.²³ It also speaks for the Yugo-nostalgia as a nostalgia for the lost homeland, but also as nostalgia for the lost values and perceptions, or maybe even “nostalgia for having promising future”.

Other explanations that can be come across in terms of praising the communist past, are the accessibility and the efficiency of the social welfare system back then, the spirit of equality and the perception of the government as close to the people.²⁴ In a study by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, the

²² Augustin PALOKAJ and Zeljko PANTELIC, “Yugoslavia ‘dream team’ could win World Cup, if it existed”, *WAZ European Observer*, 05.06.2010, <http://waz.euobserver.com/887/30216> (accessed 28.09.2010) The latest news are that the Croatian and Serbian presidents Ivo Josipović and Boris Tadić are now contemplating the revival of the Yugoslavian football league in the form of a Southeast European regional league. This has not only nostalgic aspects, but is also another form of cooperation within the Yugosphere as mentioned above. See Milorad STOJMANOVSKI, “Od Vardara, pa do Triglava” [“From Vardar to Triglav”], *Dnevnik daily*, 28.07.2010, <http://www.dnevnik.com.mk/?ItemID=DCA3E9211EDBA14C923552F2123001E9> (accessed 28.09.2010)

²³ For instance, Yugoslav scientists designed do-it-yourself computers in the mid 1980s, whose parts were disseminated along with science magazines and were collected by the broad readership. As well, in the 1970s and 1980s Yugoslav popular culture was marked by the emergence of numerous Sci-Fi comic books and magazines. When discussing with people socialized in that age, they point out that for instance for them the Yugoslav 21st century was imagined as an era of “flying cars” and conquest of the space, while later on, the Macedonian reality of the 21st century was marked by neo-tribalist divisions and a military conflict (in 2001). For the DIY Yugoslav computers, see the entry GALAKSIJA, Old Computers Museum, <http://www.old-computers.com/museum/computer.asp?st=1&c=330> (accessed 28.09.2010)

²⁴ This rhetoric is not typical only for the Macedonian and the other post-Yugoslav societies, but is also common for other post-communist societies across Europe.

following statements were given by some of the respondents from Macedonia asked about their memory of Tito's Yugoslavia: "There was no division between rich and poor, everybody could afford to go to school and have a home and a job"; "Patriotism was fostered on a broader scale; it meant respect of everything related to the uniqueness of all the nations and nationalities that were part of Yugoslavia"; "The standard of living we had provided us with economic security and many social benefits"; "Everyone could afford a flat and a car"; "We were impatient for the day when [Tito] would visit our town [...] It was like a holiday and we would all gather in the square to welcome it and see it off on its way to another town".²⁵ Very often people refer to the fact that in the Yugoslav days, most of the public enterprises had their own resorts in tourist places, often on the sea shore, in which workers spent their vacation days for free. Many men even praise the service in the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), both as an experience that earned them life-long friendships with people from all over the federation, but also was an opportunity for them to dwell in various areas around the country, as the practice often was for a recruit to serve far from home. Nowadays, vacations are considered a luxurious good, accessible only to the upper strata of society.

The nostalgia for the Yugoslav days and the appreciation for the communist past had various manifestations in the political sphere as well. It has usually been associated with the left political wing, led by the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija – SDSM), the successor party of the former Communist one. In 2005, then the president Branko Crvenkovski, a prime minister in the 1990s and a marquee leader of the SDSM, and a leader of the opposition from 2009 onwards, publicly demanded that Skopje should erect monument of Josip Broz Tito. As he argued:

[...] At least two things [about Tito] deserve our full recognition and respect. Josip Broz Tito is one of the undisputed leaders of the struggle against fascism in the time of the Second World War. And secondly, Josip Broz Tito is a historic person who had given an exceptionally positive contribution towards the Macedonian national question and the building of Macedonian statehood [...].²⁶

Crvenkovski's idea was supported by the government and the mayor of Skopje; however, due to the controversy at the time when governments around Europe enacted laws that claimed communism as a totalitarian ideology and a counter-part of Nazism and the European Council adopted a Resolution

²⁵ Vladimir SUDAR, "Nostalgia Grows for Tito's Lost World", *BCR*, 21.02.2005, no. 500, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/nostalgia-grows-tito%E2%80%99s-lost-world> (accessed 28.09.2010)

²⁶ As cited in N. SELMANI, "Branko go bara Tito" ["Branko asking for Tito"], *Vest daily*, 09.05.2005, <http://star.vest.com.mk/default.asp?id=96688&idg=5&idb=1458&rubrika=Makedonija> (accessed 28.09.2010)

for the condemnation of the communist totalitarian regimes, the initiative to erect Tito's monument was abolished.

In 2006, the Macedonian political scene has been enriched with the emergence of already mentioned political party Union of Tito's Left Forces ("Sojuz na Titovi Levi Sili" – STLS). This radical left party, often mocked in public as an anachronistic and comical, turned out to be a very serious political actor, as it has managed to win a place in the Council of the City of Skopje in the local elections and has later joined the largest opposition party SDSM in a wide anti-governmental opposition front. The party's political vision is inspired by the values and the politics of Tito's Yugoslavia, based on the strong cultural autonomy of Macedonia and strong welfare institutions. They have made notable public commemorations of Tito's birthday, Tito's death and other Yugoslav holidays. Often STLS representatives have referred to the contemporary political situation in comparison with the old days in Yugoslavia, usually blaming "the West" for the demise of the glorious state that once was.

The mourners of the Yugoslav past have included notable civil society actors and private entrepreneurs. For instance, cult cafes, bars and restaurants downtown Skopje bear the name of Tito and are dedicated to the commemoration of Yugoslavia, earning the city the cynical label "Tito's district".²⁷ Ugrinovski, the leader of the STLS also owns the Restaurant "Yugoslavia" located in downtown Skopje, which displays Yugoslav political symbols, portraits of Tito and in various ways evokes the memory of communist times. The preppy "Broz" cafe is another relic of the Titostalgia in downtown Skopje.

Nevertheless, the most illustrative example about this is the preposterous restaurant "At the Marshall's" ("Kaj Maršalot"). The restaurant, considered to be a place where people from the Skopje elite gather, opened in 2005, on the symbolical "Day of Youth", which was Yugoslav state holiday (Tito's birthday), with a mini-concert that featured performances of Yugoslav partisan songs, the communist international and songs devoted to Tito.²⁸ Soon the restaurant became known among locals and grew into a tourist attraction because of its lively interior, "decked out with iconic pictures of former Yugoslavia, pictures of Broz shown in all imaginable situations (e.g. at receptions or in informal environments drinking a toast), plus pictures of the flags of all the successor countries to former Yugoslavia"²⁹. Its menu is for instance designed in a way to sublime most of the Yugoslav political and popular mythology, and the waiters wear uniforms that resemble the Tito's pioneers' wear. "At the Marshall's" paradoxically fits in all of the categories of Yugonostalgia that Zala Volcic typologizes: it is essentially revisionist towards history in the sense of dropping out episodes that are not in favor of the idealized image of Yugoslavia; it recalls

²⁷ Vasko MARKOVSKI, "Titoviot kvart" ["Tito's District"], *Forum Weekly*, 25.12.2009, <http://www.forum.com.mk/15181> (accessed 28.09.2010)

²⁸ N/A, "Glumcite peeja, Marshalot gi gledashe" ["Actors were singing, the Marshall watched them"], *Vest Daily*, 27.05.2005, <http://star.vest.com.mk/default.asp?id=97745&idg=5&idb=1474&rubrika=%40ivor> (accessed 28.09.2010)

²⁹ Mitja VELIKONJA, *op. cit.*, pp. 54–55.

the historical grandeur and evoking and trying to preserve Yugoslav values (the Yugonostalgic form of aesthetics/traditionalism in Volcic's taxonomy) and is at the same time escapist and utopianist place: through the consumption of Yugoslav inspired utopian world, people are offered imaginary escape from reality.³⁰

REVISIONISM AND VICTIMIZATION: THE CONSTRUCTION OF "THE COMMUNIST YOKE"

While the popular culture and the political elite of the left have been the main carriers of the nostalgic attitudes towards the Yugoslav Communist past, it was another, quite opposed stream that gradually overtook the momentum in the public discourse regarding the politics of memory. The anti-Yugoslav faction, led by the VMRO-DPMNE party³¹, gradually established itself during the years of the decline of Yugoslavia and in the first years of independence. One important obstacle for the anticommunists had been their association with the Bulgarian interests. Therefore, in the first mandate of the VMRO-DPMNE (1998–2002), the only notable step made with regards to the revision of the communist past and taking retroactive measures was seen in the so called "denationalization" of state owned real estate gained during communism, marked by many controversial decisions over the (re)distribution of the confiscated property. While the so called "denationalization" was a process with considerable publicity and effect on the public discourse, several other measures taken by the VMRO-DPMNE towards the revision of the communist past, did not gain the public support and went almost unnoticed in the public discourse. The most important such measure was the enactment of a "Law on the rights of the individuals who were exiled and imprisoned for their ideas for the originality (*samobitnost*) of the Macedonian *narod* and its statehood and the rights of their family members".³² The law was focused on providing reparations in the form of financial aid for the victimized, and did not have any major political implications.

It was only in the years of the second mandate of the VMRO-DPMNE that substantial measures of revising the past were taken. The new rhetoric was

³⁰ Built upon Zala VOLCIC, *op. cit.*

³¹ "People of Macedonia! Communism is a fraud, delusion and utopia. It is the enemy of freedom and democracy. Its authority is violence, terror and dictatorship. The communist dogma and bureaucracy stop the economic development, which brings poverty and social injustice to the people.", N/A, "Letok na VMRO-DPMNE od 1990 godina" ("VMRO-DPMNE's leaflet from 1990"), *Makedonska Nacija*, <http://www.mn.mk/istorija/2027-Letok-na-VMRO-DPMNE-od-1990-godina> (accessed 28.09.2010)

³² N/A, "Zakon za pravata na progonuvanite i zatvaranite lica za ideate na samobitnosta na makedonskiot narod i negovata drzhavnost i na chlenovite na nivnite semejstva" ("Law on the rights of the individuals who were exiled and imprisoned for their ideas for the originality of the Macedonian narod and its statehood and the rights of their family members"), *Sluzhben Vesnik na Republika Makedonija (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia)*, 26.07.2002, no. 61.

first promoted in the public sphere, carried by historians and social scientists. However, this process is highly debatable as it is marked by several points that can be easily contested.

As Marinov puts it, the newly promoted tendency in the Macedonian public debate in recent years is for historical acts that used to be “stigmatized as ‘pro-Bulgarian treason’” to be “rebranded as ‘Macedonian patriotism’”³³ The revised narrative of the communist past portrays the Yugoslav regime as if it had repressed national feelings and sentiments which presupposes that there had been a mature Macedonian national sentiment before the establishment of Yugoslavia, which later suffered precisely because of the formation of a new polity.³⁴ Having in mind the actual historical developments – the role of the Communist International in the fortification of the idea of Macedonian nation and the role of Yugoslavia in building it, it is not hard to label this discourse as a perpetuation of the “quasi-Freudian” myth and misconception in the study of nationalism – what Rogers Brubaker labels as the fallacy of “the return of the repressed”.³⁵ Similarly, in the Macedonian context of revisionism of the communist past, one of the labels of this period is that of an era of “forced” or “imposed” atheism/anti-theism, referring to the secularist tendency of communist ideology. However, historical facts prove that Yugoslav communism was extremely tolerant towards religious issues and has sometimes even taken radical action with regard to the protection of the rights of believers.³⁶ In the Macedonian context, not only has the Communist Party

³³ Tchavdar MARINOV, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

³⁴ It is also important to mention that besides the political right-wing, there has been another, more moderate approach towards the revision of the communist past, carried out by academics who promoted more nuanced and less biased approach towards the communist past. For instance Jasna Koteska, a social scientist, drawing upon the case of her father Jovan Koteski who was political prisoner in Yugoslavia, discussed Yugoslav communism and communism in general from a psycho-analytical perspective. See Jasna KOTESKA, *Komunistička Intima*, (Communist Intimacy), Skopje: Templum, 2008. However, their rhetoric remained marginalized, as the political critique of communism marked by the right-wing attitudes is the prevailing and increasingly popular form of revising the communist past. Here it is important to mention that the anti-communist rhetoric of VMRO-DPMNE and the affiliated political actors is openly hostile rhetoric towards supporters of communism, and especially towards their political arch-enemy, SDSM, the successor of the Communist Party. For example, VMRO-DPMNE’s representatives still refer to the SDSM people and actions as “communist” or with the derogative derivative *komunjar*. The term has been borrowed from Serbian nationalists in the 1990s. By *komunjar*, they usually mean un-reformed communist, or a former communist who has put on a capitalist liberal-democratic mask. The label *komunjar*, however, is applied not only to SDSM members or Yugonostalgic people, but also to the dissenters of the party’s stance on the “national question”, or for that matter, anyone who openly confronts the party.

³⁵ Rogers BRUBAKER, “Myths and misconceptions in the study of nationalism”, in John A. HALL (ed.), *The state of the nation: Ernest Gellner and the theory of nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 272–306.

³⁶ A paradigmatic case is the 1966 verdict of the Communist Party in which an atheist poet Vladimir Gajsek was penalized for hurting religious feelings of the people. As the report says, Gajsek, although “a really gifted young poet, may love Marx, Engels, Lenin and Tito and live by their teachings”, his derogatory poem ridiculed and put to shame the religious sentiment. See

been very tolerant towards religion, but it has directly helped in establishing of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which was an act against the canons of Orthodoxy. Furthermore, the Communist party has awarded the Church a lot in downtown Skopje for the purpose of constructing of the main temple, the construction of which was also aided by the Party. As well, churches, monasteries and mosques have been preserved and maintained by the Yugoslav government as historic monuments and part of the cultural heritage.³⁷

A notable catalyst for the development of critical approach and revisionism of the communist past have been the ongoing processes of condemnation of communism in Central and Eastern European countries and the in-depth research of secret services' archives. As a result, one of the aspects typical of the revisionist approach towards communism in contemporary Macedonia is the simplified equation between Yugoslav and Soviet versions of communism. Politicians and intellectuals have, from time to time, adopted a critical discourse towards the communist past as if the Macedonian Yugoslav experience approximated the Central and Eastern European post-Soviet ones. For instance, political representatives of the Macedonian Assembly regarding adoption of the Resolution 1481 of the Council of Europe, which expressed the "Need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes" in "central and eastern Europe".³⁸ Namely, with the exception the members of SDSM and the Liberal Democratic Party (at the time its loyal coalition partner), the Macedonian Assembly delegation to the Council of Europe did support the resolution which condemned communism. Furthermore, the deputies that refrained from supporting the resolution were exposed to a strong political pressure by the VMRO-DPMNE.³⁹

A more illustrative example was seen during the celebration of the twenty year anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Macedonian officials lamented over the fate of being repressed from the other side of the Berlin Wall, although Yugoslavia was not part of either of the Blocs during the Cold War.⁴⁰ In fact, at the dawn of Yugoslavia, the country was very near to be-

Slobodan STANKOVIC, "Yugoslav Communist Court Punishes Atheist Poet for Offending Religious Feelings", *Radio Free Europe/Open Society Archives*, 26.04.1966, <http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/76-4-274.shtml> (accessed 28.09.2010)

³⁷ Anastas VANGELI, "Religion, Nationalism and Counter-secularization: The Case of the Macedonian Orthodox Church", *Identity Studies*, 2010, vol. 2, <https://sites.google.com/a/isytemsinstiute.org/identity-studies2/anastas-vangeli> (accessed 28.09.2010)

³⁸ See COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2006, Resolution 1481, <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta06/eres1481.htm> (accessed 28.09.2010)

³⁹ VMRO-DPMNE, "Vlasta ne sobra hrabrost da go osueti komunizmot vo parlamentarnoto sobranie na Sovetot na Evropa" ("The government did not have courage to baffle communism in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe"), official party web site, <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=1079> (accessed 28.09.2010)

⁴⁰ For instance, Aleksandar Spasenovski, a Member of the Macedonian Assembly and the Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee EU – Republic of Macedonia, argued that the fall of the Berlin Wall "was a chance for the young Macedonia, which (...) managed to push out the claws of socialist authority". See Aleksandar SPASENOVSKI, "Spomenot za berlinskiot i padot na Shengenskiot dzid" ("The memory of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Schengen one"), *Nova*

coming a member of the European Community and even though a “Non-Aligned” country, it was much closer to the NATO than the Warsaw Pact. Furthermore, the Yugoslav context was intrinsically different from the Soviet one. Due to the harsh break-up between Tito and Stalin in 1948, any traces of Sovietism in Yugoslavia were considered politically hazardous and pro-Soviet elements were exposed to oppression. Similarly, an idea borrowed from the countries from Central and Eastern Europe is the construction of a Museum of the Victims of Communism in Skopje, the first grand project that condemns Yugoslav communism in all of former Yugoslavia.⁴¹

Another aspect of the revisionist approach is the interpretation of Yugoslav communism as an oppressor of Macedonian national identity. The main argument is that even though Yugoslav communists were the most important agency of Macedonian nation-building process, it was directed by Belgrade and controlled by Tito’s servants. The political prisoners of the regime, among which, there had been numerous Macedonian nationalists and propagators of Macedonian secession from Yugoslavia provide evidence for this argument. Moreover, VMRO-DPMNE had promoted the idea of ancient nationhood and statehood as an antipode to the idea of very recent Yugoslav ones, trying to alter the image of “Macedonia as a Yugoslav creation”, a phrase that prevails in the neighboring historiographies, considered very offensive by Macedonian nationalists. In the “new and older” history of Macedonia, the nation is projected as a *longue duree* entity from times ancient, till today. The central role in this version of the national history is assigned to Alexander the Great; his empire has become the new “Golden Age” of the Macedonian nation.⁴² VMRO-DPMNE and the general right-wing oriented population had been using the ancient descent, the anti-communist narratives and Orthodox Christian rhetoric to contest the popular Yugonostalgic sentiments throughout the 1990s, and after their second election victory in 2006, have enacted their ideas as policy. One interesting aspect of the process of “antiquization”, however, can be seen in the remark of Dane Taleski, that even though juxtaposed as the polar opposite of the communist past, the cult of antiquity resembles precisely

Makedonija daily, 12.11.2009, <http://www.novamakedonija.com.mk/NewsDetal.asp?vest=111291017596&cid=13&setIzdanie=21835> (accessed 28.09.2010) Similar statements have been made by the president Ivanov. For a critique see Vangel BAŠEVSKI, “Padot na antiKomunizmot” [The fall of anti-communism], *Okno Magazine*, 14.11.2009, <http://www.okno.mk/node/3174> (accessed 28.09.2010)

⁴¹ Aleksandra BUBEVSKA, “Postaven kamen temelnikot na muzejskiot kompleks ‘Makedonska Borba’” (“The cornerstone of the museum complex ‘Macedonian struggle’ set”), *A1 News*, 11.06.2008, <http://217.16.95.24/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=94034> (accessed 28.09.2010)

⁴² Boris GEORGIEVSKI, “Ghosts of the Past Endanger Macedonia’s Future”, in Adrian MOGOS et al., *Identity: The Search for Belonging in a Changing Europe* (Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence, 2009) http://fellowship.birn.eu.com/en/main/publication/articles_2009/23132/ (accessed 28.09.2010)

a substitute for communist ideals; furthermore Alexander the Great becomes the “new Tito” in the popular mythology.⁴³

The process of revisionism has been accompanied by acts of rehabilitation of some of the political opponents of communism. In the revised version of the history, they are seen as anti-Yugoslav “martyrs” and national heroes who confronted the one-party dictatorship. The first concrete political acts which have revised the official stances towards the Yugoslav past, however, were taken in 1991, as a response to the pressure made by the rising right-wing forces in the country. Metodija Andonov – Čento, who used to be convicted for treason, was rehabilitated through the overturning of his conviction by the Supreme Court of Macedonia. Čento used to be a notable opposition politician in the years before the Second World War. He was a political prisoner several times, imprisoned both by the Yugoslav and Bulgarian authorities for his political beliefs, which varied from communism to radical Macedonian nationalism. Although he was flirting with the right-wing and pro-Bulgarian political forces during the war, his reputation as a man of the people earned him the role of speaker of the Anti-Fascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) where the Macedonian statehood had been proclaimed. After the war, he advocated Macedonian secession from Yugoslavia and military involvement in Greece in order to “liberate” the Greek (Aegean) part of Macedonia. For these reasons he was sentenced for treason and served nine years in prison. He was commemorated by the VMRO-DPMNE party as a martyr for the Macedonian national cause. After the second term of VMRO-DPMNE administration, Čento’s status was elevated to the level of the most important Macedonian statesman in the modern history. A five meters high statue made of marble, portraying Čento was placed in the main square in Skopje in 2010. The statue represents Čento wearing civilian attire and speaking to the people, which is quite contrary to his traditional representation in history books, wearing Yugoslav partisan uniform.

In 2004, in Veles, the SDSM government erected a monument of the local historical figure Panko Brašnarov, thus commencing the process of his official rehabilitation.⁴⁴ Brašnarov had decades of communist revolutionary activism behind him, was a political prisoner under the Interwar Yugoslav regime and one of the crucial figures at the ASNOM, and is ascribed with a lot of credit for the fortification of Macedonian statehood. He was charged by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia because of his autonomist tendencies and the affiliation with the Cominform after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948. He served ten days at the Goli Otok prison camp (the counterpart of the Soviet gulag) before he died in 1951.

⁴³ Dane TALESKI, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Ubavka JANEVSKA, “Velesani mu podignaa spomenik na Panko Brašnarov” [“Velesians erected a monument in tribute to Panko Brašnarov”], *A1 News*, 01.08.2004, <http://a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=35469>; Panko Brašnarov’s life has been also subject to extensive historiographic research. See Vera Vesković VANGELI, *Dosie Brašnarov*, (Dossier Brašnarov), Skopje: Logos, 2004.

The case of Panko Brašnarov is of exceptional meaning regarding the process of his rehabilitation in the public discourse. First, due to his leftist political beliefs, he is portrayed as a hero of the political left in the country, which is not the case with for instance for many other rehabilitated figures. At the same time, he has been also praised by the right, since he is considered to be the only second martyr during communism, after Čento.

Venko Markovski is another important historical person that has been rehabilitated. Markovski, a renowned poet, intellectual and politician, had been imprisoned in 1948 due to his affiliation with the Cominform. After his release from prison, he moved to Sofia. Throughout all his life he supported the idea of cultural and political proximity between Macedonia and Bulgaria. In public forums held in 2006, historians argued that regardless of his pro-Bulgarian attitudes, he had made a major contribution to the Macedonian national cause.⁴⁵

Finally, the most interesting case is the one of the self-declared Bulgarian revolutionary Pavel Šatev. He was a former anarchist, member of the anarchist terrorist group Boatmen (Gemidžii) and a survivor of the Thessaloniki bombings⁴⁶, who has later become a dedicated Stalinist and a Soviet secret agent. Šatev was arrested in 1949 due to his affiliation with the Cominform.⁴⁷ However, regardless of his explicit revolutionary anarchist and later communist beliefs, today he is praised as one of the heroes of the political right. In 2008, the VMRO-DPMNE party established the Institute “Pavel Šatev”, which among other things will work on “promotion of the views and ideas of conservatism and conservative thought” and “understanding and support of the Christian values and the Christian heritage of Europe”.⁴⁸ In 2010, the government erected a monument of Šatev’s terrorist group (including him).

Besides the victims of the political “cleansing” after the Tito-Stalin split, other political prisoners and opponents from the Yugoslav past are being rehabilitated as well. One such case has been the rehabilitation and the revival of the diasporic “Movement for Liberation and Unification of Macedonia”, which embraced strong anti-Yugoslav and radical Macedonian nationalist rhetoric, demanding secession of Macedonia from Yugoslavia and actions for

⁴⁵ Aleksandra BUBEVSKA, “Tribina vo chest na Venko Markovski” [“Public forum in tribute to Venko Markovski”], *A1 News*, 09.04.2006, <http://a1.com.mk/vesti/default.aspx?VestID=61080> (accessed 28.09.2010)

⁴⁶ The Boatmen were a group of adolescents from Salonica that have formed an anarchist faction. In April 1903 they attacked several strategic points in Salonica, including the Ottoman Bank and a French trade steamboat. Most of them were killed or arrested. The event was supposed to draw the attention of the European forces and to put the “Macedonian question” in the spotlight.

⁴⁷ Šatev has stated his anarchist beliefs in an autobiographic novel. See Pavel ŠATEV, *Solunskiot atentat i zatočenicite vo Fezan* (The Thessaloniki bombing and the prisoners in Fezzan), Skopje: Kultura, 1994.

⁴⁸ VMRO-DPMNE, “Šoopštenie do javnosta” [“Press release to the public”], Official web page of the VMRO-DPMNE, <http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk/mk/zapis.asp?id=3169> (accessed 28.09.2010)

unifications with the Macedonians in Greece and Bulgaria. Its leadership has been subject to various oppressive measures by the Yugoslav authorities. Many of the members of the Movement faced the brutality of the Yugoslav Secret Services. Dragan Bogdanovski, a political emigrant and the ideologue of the Movement and later one of the founders of the VMRO-DPMNE party, had been jailed for 13 years. It has functioned mostly through publishing pamphlets and organizing protests in Western Europe. It was also publishing the newspaper “Macedonian Nation”, which was re-activated in 2009 with the support of officials of the VMRO-DPMNE party.⁴⁹

The most important symbolic step towards the revision of the communist past, on another note, could be seen in the removal of the red pentacle from the coat of arms of the Republic of Macedonia. The coat of arms had been the only national symbol that had remained unchanged and uncontested from the establishment of the Macedonian statehood. While the name and flags were changed along with the transformation of the regime (including the changes of the Yugoslav regime), and have been contested in the first place by Greece after the independence, the coat of arms remained the same. In 2009, the Parliament voted for the removal of the pentacle from the coat of arms.⁵⁰

Chronologically last, but ontologically the central process of revising the communist past, came the lustration debate.⁵¹ In the Macedonian case, the lustration was conceptualized as a process dealing with the informants of the secret services during communist times and securing access for the general public to the secret personal files from the time. Nonetheless, the attempts to enact a lustration law in Macedonia had been surrounded by a lot of controversy. One of the core reasons for the inability of the Macedonian system to successfully carry out the grand lustration projects of dealing with their communist past has been the lack of sensitivity towards the particular problem of the communist past in general. Although there was a consensus among the political elite for the critical examination of the communist past and taking actions towards revealing the long-lived secrets about the work of the collaborators of the secret police, there has been large criticism regarding the unintended side effects of the lustration project, such as the time period that it would refer to and the possibility of a selective approach towards the subjects of the law which might eventually turn in into a political witch hunt. Several proposed versions of the law had a hard time going through the scrutiny of legal experts and the Constitutional Court, which has led to belated adoption

⁴⁹ See MACEDONIAN NATION, <http://www.mn.mk> (accessed 28.09.2010)

⁵⁰ N/A, “Macedonia removes Communist past from its national emblem”, *Panorama News*, 17.11.2009 <http://www.panorama.am/en/politics/2009/11/17/macedonia/> (accessed 28.09.2010)

⁵¹ One particular study that thoroughly reviews the whole process can be seen in Marjan MADZHOVSKI, “Lustracija vo Republika Makedonija – Vo presret na implementacijata na Zakonot za opredeluvanje dopolnitelen uslov za vrshenje na javna funkcija”, September 2009, *Political Thought*, no. 27, pp. 87–96.

of the legislative, on top of the belated opening of the debate, more than a decade and a half after the regime change.

Paradoxically, the focus of the debate about the revision of the communist past had been shifted to the revision of post-communist past. The VMRO-DPMNE insisted that the lustration should cover the period from 1945 until 2008, when the version of the law was prepared, in order to deal not only with the communist past, but with the “transition past”, seen as a sequel of communism, and a period when former communists (*komunjari*) from the SDSM campus committed terrible crimes motivated by self interest. Oddly enough, this viewpoint was initially shared by the SDSM party, in an attempt to evade from the burden of its communist legacy. This perception certainly perpetuates the narratives of continuity. It is, however, interesting that in this case the continuity is not evident regardless of the regime change; what is emphasized in this rhetoric is that because of the continuity a regime change never happened. At the same time, the substance of the law was left out of the mainstream debate. Nevertheless, human right experts have argued that in its essence, the law is superficial and does not represent a concrete step towards repairing the damage, since it does not focus on the victims of the regime, nor on the perpetrators of crimes, only on the perpetrators’ associates – the informants (often in that role against their free will are victims themselves); at the same time it does not determine legal measures against the violators of human rights, as the worst thing that can happen to someone is to be considered ineligible for a public position. Finally, the main sources upon which this law will be based are the files of the Yugoslav secret services, which paradoxically legitimize the old regime for the sake of condemnation.⁵² The initial version of the law was amended by the Constitutional Court in 2010, narrowing the time scope of the law from 1945 to 1991, and removing certain provisions that were allowing violation of personal freedoms and basic human rights of its subjects.⁵³

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Discussing the memory of the Yugoslav communist past in the context of the Republic of Macedonia seems to be a very challenging issue. As the paper has argued, there are three general, distinct yet co-existing tales about the Yugoslav past: the first one in which regardless of the social developments, everything is seen as the same as it used to be, meaning that the Yugoslav chapter has never ended; the second one in which the corrupt present makes people evoke the Yugoslav historic splendor and contemplate its restoration; and the third one,

⁵² See MACEDONIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, *Lustracija – dali može da se gradi sistem vo koj se počituvaat čovekovite prava i slobodi vrz osnova na dosiejia koi gi vodela tajnata policija na prethodniot politički sistem?* (Lustration – is it possible to build a system in which human rights and liberties will be respected based on files maintained by the secret police of the previous political regime?), Skopje, 2007.

⁵³ N/A, “Odluka na Ustaven Sud” [“Decision of the Constitutional Court”], no.42/2008; no. 77/2008, 24.10.2010, Skopje.

a tale of victory over the evil communist monster in which retroactive justice should be executed. Arguably, the tales of continuity and nostalgia can be seen as quite approximate and contemplative, while the narrative of revisionism resembles a sharp break in terms of the politics of memory in the Macedonian context.

On the other hand, while the narration of continuity can be described as a spontaneous process following the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation, the Yugo-nostalgic and the revisionist-victimizing attitudes are quite different in terms of their historicistic orientation. They are both ideologies inspired by the distorted past – not only by the actual events, but by the interpretation of those events. Certainly, in their discourses, the historical complexities are simplified – Yugoslav communism is portrayed as the “golden era” or the “darkest chapter” of history respectively. In this sense, both viewpoints require not only acts of remembering, commemoration and research of historical facts, but also “unremembering”, thus forgetting or intentionally omitting others, features of what Margaret MacMillan labels “bad history”.⁵⁴ Yugoslav communism can never be imagined as a golden era if one takes into account the oppression that opponents of the regime suffered; and it can never be the darkest chapter in history, if one takes into account that the Yugoslav communism was a crucial factor for the establishment of the first Macedonian state and its institutions, along with the rapid modernization of the society.

These conflicting viewpoints have been reflected in the political sphere as well. Almost a clear division can be made between the Yugo-nostalgic and the anti-communist factions, which are more or less distributed along party lines. That makes the perception of the communist past not only a challenge for the public debate, but also a possible source of discord which could perpetuate hostilities among different political subjects and their supporters. At the same time, the question of the historical role of communism, in the Macedonian context means yet another aspect of the burdening national question. The division regarding the communist past tentatively corresponds to the division on the narrative of ethnic origin of Macedonians: pro-Yugoslav narratives are more compatible with the Slavic narrative of origin, and anti-Yugoslav ones with the narratives of Ancient Macedonian origin.

Finally, the politics of memory of the communist past was proven to be not only important for the formulation of politics on a formal level, as it has been related towards concrete legal processes. The confronting attitudes towards the issue have been reflected in the judicial sphere and have ultimately resulted into inefficient lustration efforts. This, of course, contributes to the image of diverging perceptions and the multitude of meanings the communist past has in the contemporary Macedonian public discourse, even two decades after the regime change. The chapters of communism and remembrance of

⁵⁴ Margaret MACMILLAN, *The Uses and Abuses of History*, London: Profile Books, 2009, pp. 36–37.

communism in the Macedonian context, therefore, can be said to remain open, both for the politics and academic inquiries, and are still to be resolved.

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