

Narrating the Nation, Narrating the City¹

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Abstract

This article analyzes expressions of power relationships in the built environment through the concept of narrative spaces. The specific case analyzed in this study is the major remaking of public space in Skopje, the capital of the Republic of Macedonia. The emerging ethnocratic regime in Macedonia aims at the creation of an ethnocratic spatial order through the installation of symbolic markers in the built environment that practically fragment the city into ethnically-defined territories. The citizens of Skopje have reacted to this division by crossing these new symbolic borders and by attending places at the border zone and transforming it into a contact zone.

Introduction

Studies of inter-ethnic relations, typically provoked or inspired by recent or ongoing conflicts and prolonged tensions, often remain confined to analysis of political discourse and actions. Analysis of spatiality in this branch of research is largely limited to the notion of territoriality, which is most closely connected with research into nationalism and is linked to the concept of the nation-state. As the compilers and authors selected in the copious reader on state space demonstrate (Brenner et al., 2003), probing beyond this assumed “territorial trap” opens up almost limitless analytical possibilities. I propose a more thorough elaboration on spatiality in the study of inter-ethnic relations within a nation-state. Moreover, I extend the application of the notion of territoriality

to street level, in an urban setting in particular. I will use a spatially-oriented approach to examine the tense ethnic relations in Macedonia in the capital city of Skopje. I employ the concept of narrative spaces to better understand social action in the political realm, expressed both in spatial practices and contained in the built environment, and the mutual influences of the social relations thus shaped, or inter-ethnic relations specifically. Since the early days of independence, the Republic of Macedonia—once famous for its ethnic diversity and even today with a significantly mixed population of 2 million structured as follows: 60 per cent Macedonians; 25 per cent ethnic Albanians; and 15 per cent Roma, Turkish, Serbian, Bosnians, Vlachs and others—has been negotiating a formula for the new nationhood that can accommodate such diversity. The emphasis on ethnic politics has led to the development of a political and social order dominated almost completely by ethnic interests. I will elaborate below on how the emerging order of the past two decades has led to the formation of an ethnocratic regime. Yiftachel (2006, 32) defines as “ethnocratic” those regimes that rupture the concept of the demos in favor of a single ethno-national group. On the basis of my material I suggest that relocating political legitimacy to ethno-national groups and emphasizing the plural is what has caused this rupture of the concept of the demos. The ethnocratic regime that has emerged in Macedonia, as I argue in this article, is best observed in the new spatial order. That is why I rely on spatiality to explore and explain the working of ethno-politics.

My fieldwork site is the city of Skopje

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where I was born and raised. I later trained as an anthropologist elsewhere and conducted my first fieldwork study in Macedonia as a researcher from abroad. For this present paper I have again conducted my research from abroad. I first became sensitive to spatiality through my interest in local government and the process of decentralization in post-conflict Macedonia. In 2001 there was a brief military confrontation between radical ethnic Albanians and Macedonian state security forces that maximized the polarization of inter-ethnic relations between Macedonians and Albanians. The new territorial distribution of the municipalities in 2005, designed to appease ethnic Albanian demands, provoked a renewal of tensions. The devolution of powers to local government held out great promise for a more participatory democracy but, at the same time, carried the danger that democratic participation would be limited to ethnic collectivities.

Macedonian-Albanian inter-ethnic relations are arguably the most appropriate for observing the subtleties of political economy of scale (Brenner et al., 2003) as they involve troubled international relations in the reshaping of the region of South-East Europe, inter-ethnic relations within the Republic of Macedonia, and local administration and regional dynamics within the country at sub-national scale. I started designing my research in 2008 when I realized that ongoing efforts to build a number of cultural institutions and erect a number of monuments were increasingly growing beyond affordable, imaginable, or necessary dimensions. Already, by late 2008, some of those intentions to

remake the city in nationalist fashion were becoming apparent and I decided to focus on this symbolic reconstruction. It was not until early 2010 that the government announced the "Skopje 2014" project, but it soon became obvious that acts of planning and urban design were rooted in existing power structures of nationalism (Fenster and Yacobi 2010, 1). This grandiose project is intended to make the capital of the Republic of Macedonia into the national capital of ethnic Macedonians. Favorable demographic distribution and ethnopolitical engineering in 2005 created an Albanian-controlled municipality of Chair. The local government responded by proposing the construction of a "Skanderbeg Square" to symbolically express their indisputable right over the part of the city that forms the nucleus of the old city. Therefore I decided to adjust my analytical apparatus to accommodate the increased importance of spatiality in my research. In this article I will elaborate the usefulness of the notion of narrative spaces for the study of politicized inter-group relations in urban settings.

My engagement with the city of Skopje demanded that I make a decision about my primary unit of analysis. In many ways this unit transpired to be Skopje's Old Bazaar, a remnant of the city nucleus from medieval times. On the other hand, I also explore the workings of nationalist forces in a country of great ethnic and religious diversity. Therefore, the bazaar, or *charshija* as it is called locally, is where I concentrated my fieldwork activities, but the implications of this study are much wider.

I was familiar with the *charshija* since my mother, a ceramic artist, ran

a studio/gallery in the bazaar with my father for five years in the early 1990s. At that time I was a student of ethnology and would often go to the gallery to allow my parents to have a break. The research I conducted fifteen years later has benefited from this prolonged engagement, for I was very familiar with the physical terrain. The social terrain had altered significantly, however, and so I needed to acquaint myself with the changed *charshija*. I conducted more than twenty in-depth interviews with various shopkeepers and held many other shorter exchanges and conversations. I also organized a short survey with over 400 respondents, including almost all of the shopkeepers in the Old Bazaar. Given that the word *charshija* still means “the talk of the town”, and given that this particular place still affords insights into the traditional social order and is located between the new boundaries in the Macedonian ethnopolitical landscape, I believe that the *charshija* holds the key to understanding the emerging ethnocentric spatial order.

In recent decades, spatiality has finally won a more generous reception across various disciplines, including anthropology. It has never been completely absent and there have always been researchers interested in observing social life through the analysis of spatial phenomena. In spite of the fact that engagement with social space was one of the major concerns of the founders of the social sciences, as noted almost half a century ago by Kuper (1972) space, social space, or any aspect of spatiality has yet to attain a mainstream position. The renewed and intensified interest in urban phenomena has contributed towards a

more privileged treatment of spatiality. Increasing disciplinary specialization, however, has been accompanied by a slight neglect of spatiality in the social sciences in general. With this case study of Skopje—and its Old Bazaar in particular—I propose that spatiality is a central aspect of inter-ethnic relations in an urban setting and requires openness between disciplinary boundaries to allow fruitful conceptual borrowings.

Urban scholarship that accepts spatiality as constitutive of social phenomena also tends to disregard disciplinary boundaries. This results in cross-disciplinary conceptual fertilization because borrowings and adoptions of concepts, studies, findings, metaphors and approaches are plentiful in current literature dealing with the spatial aspect of societies. Certainly, there are a great many sub-disciplinary divisions and sub-specializations stemming from increased attention to spatiality. That could be used to argue that many concepts have lost their communicative value as they have been specifically utilized within different contexts within each discipline. Creative license in the manipulation of concepts allows for breakthrough findings but could also introduce a great amount of confusion. There are also concepts that travel across social sciences and humanities and we should be careful when employing them if we are to avoid misunderstandings.

Rather than steering clear of such a potentially confusing situation, I intend to engage with spatiality by borrowing a concept of narrative space that has been developed elsewhere. This concept has been widely used in film and literary criticism, where it also means two similar

but different things. Narrative space has already been welcomed in the social sciences. I will use the notion of narrative space to analyze the consequences of the establishment of an ethnocratic regime in Macedonia and the ways in which this regime enforces a corresponding spatial order. Moreover, I will not limit the construction of narrative spaces by merely observing the narrative functions of the built environment and symbolic landscaping. I argue that narrative spaces are also constructed by immaterial actions of spatial practices that do not even require oral or literary expression. The approach to spatial practices and spatial acts that I use to construct my argument follows, to a certain extent, Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualization of *habitus*, the unspoken transmission of spatially-learned social roles and rules.

Narrative spaces

In a comprehensive volume that sets out to take stock of developments in the field of urban studies at the end of the twentieth century Eade and Mele propose that the most remarkable advance was achieved through a cultural turn. Including the symbolic and discursive within urban studies has enriched analysis which was hitherto concerned mainly with implications stemming from political economy (Eade and Mele 2002, 6). The cultural turn in urban studies has provided a broader base for critiquing the capitalist production of space, no longer confined to political economy. The field of urban studies has certainly benefited from the inclusion of processes that produce meaning in social space. Narrative space, however, is used in a great variety of ways in spatially-

informed analysis. In the same volume we find the definition of narrative as an analytical tool of urban scholars as an appropriate way to comprehend the expanding role of identitarian politics in increasingly diversified cities around the globe (Fincher, Jacobs and Anderson 2002). Trubina (2010) uses the term "rhetorical space" to explore the construction of the identity of Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad, the defining moment of which was the Battle of Stalingrad in World War II. Although often referring to various and contradictory narratives, Trubina opted for "rhetorical space" as most expressive of the transformations of the memory practices that define this city. Finnegan (1998) engages directly with the concept of narrative and remains dedicated to it from the title of her book, *Tales of the city: a study of narrative and urban life*, to its very last page. In her view, scholars tell their stories just as city planners, investors and people do. This perspective is quite similar to de Certeau's persuasive treatment of the planners' view from the top of a skyscraper that reveals the grid organization of the urban space of crosscutting streets at right angles and the acts of transgression of this order by walkers at street level whose trajectories cut through the planned corridors of movement (Ward 2000, 101-119). I build my argument in a similar way, but I add the notion of narrative space to help identify the emerging disjuncture between the clear-cut ethnic space of the new urban planners in Skopje and the trajectories cut through this space by the citizens of Skopje.

I am interested in the production of narrative space both as a top-down process and the social construction of

narrative space as a bottom-up process. In doing so I take my cue from Setha Low (2009) on the distinction and interplay between the social production and social construction of space. I am only adding the concept of narrative spaces to better capture the frantic developments in my research location. Therefore I intend to engage with narrative spaces not only as they are intentionally produced to invoke certain identitarian connotations, but also to understand how this production is accepted by the local population. In the case of Skopje, as mentioned above, this population is extremely diverse, and this is especially relevant, given that the producers of symbolic meaning in Skopje are acting as if they were oblivious to that diversity. With their interventions in the public space intended to define that space along ethnic lines, the ethnocrats are continually challenging the citizens of the capital city and their capacity to ignore the new symbolic order that divides the city by ethno-symbolic markers. By contrasting different narratives—those materialized in space by the ruling elites, and those of the immaterial spatial practices of Skopje citizens—I disclose the artificiality of ethno-nationalist discourse and the dangerous imposition of a divisive spatial order.

Finally, the concept of narrative space accommodates intangible components that shape and influence our relationships with the built environment. Narrative space can absorb Giddens' (1990, 19) phantasmagoria of global links that shoot through every corner of the planet and Appadurai's (1996) techno-, media- and ethno-scapes that are more than just a spatial metaphor. Pile's (2005) more urban-bound conceptualization of

a phantasmagoria of past traces, ghosts and local histories can also be used as a basis for conceiving narrative spaces. It is in these stories and otherwise-articulated urban imaginations that narrative space emerges. Narrative spaces are created by elaborated social relatedness in memories and imaginations regarding the past, present and future social and spatial positioning of individuals and their group belonging. Of course various, and even contradictory, narratives exist simultaneously, depending on converging or diverging positions. Which narrative prevails depends on the actual power relationships that determine the acceptance and promotion of the dominant narrative. The nationalist imaginary narrative has proved to be critical in defining social space and the narratives that legitimize it.

Nevertheless, everyday practice invariably proves the nationalist imaginary narrative to be an impoverished and oversimplified representation of reality, while spatial practices invariably reveal those contradictions. Rather than defining the concept itself, I will only point out the uses to which I will put the concept. Applying the notion of narrative space allows for a better understanding of symbolic interventions in the built environment as expressions of the power relations of ethno-nationalism. I will engage this concept to unpack the power relationships based on ethnicity which are turning Macedonian society into an ethnocracy. The exercise of political power in the built environment can be more or less implicit and on occasions apparently symbolic. The notion of narrative space is most useful when we analyze politically-motivated interventions in public space.

The project “Skopje 2014” and the project for Skanderbeg Square are examples of ongoing operations in the Macedonian capital, and the concept of narrative space will help to frame more precisely my ethnographic material which is awash with ethno-politics. Since the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Macedonia has been turned into a country in which ethno-politics determine the social and physical boundaries between members of different ethnic groups. At the same time, Macedonia is a country that has demonstrated incredible resilience to the perpetual confrontation between different “national interests” as they are conceived by the dominant ethno-political elites, as well as resistance to numerous calls for ethnic violence made by more radical individuals and politically-articulated organizations. This seeming contradiction is best explained by focusing on the spatial features of ethno-politics in Macedonia. The concept of narrative space is useful for observing the effects that the complex field of political action has on everyday practices that, in turn, reflect it, and reflect upon it, by constructing social reality through spatial practices, a set of inter-related processes that form the crux of this article.

The city of Skopje is currently under intensive assault by irresponsible ethno-politicians. I reiterate that the current building offensive encompasses the entire central part of the capital; it is aimed at no less than a total redefinition of the image of the city of Skopje. Over a dozen new buildings designed in an historicist and eclectic mishmash of Neoclassical and Neo-Baroque styles are being erected in

and around the central city square and will completely change the cityscape. Even the facades of the adjacent modern buildings are to be redecorated and adorned with Baroque ornaments. Over a hundred monuments and sculptures are being installed within the radius of one kilometer, none of them less than four meters high and the tallest being fifteen meters high and perched on a pedestal some 12 meters above the ground. All of the historical characters have been chosen for their value and function in the construction of Macedonian national identity. A Macedonian Triumphal Arch has even been built at the entrance to the city square. The central and tallest figure is that of Alexander the Great sitting upon a rearing horse and holding up a sword. This total reordering of the capital city's center has been dubbed “Project Skopje 2014”.

Macedonian political life has been reduced to the activities of ethno-political parties. Naturally, the Albanians who form the second largest ethnic group in the country are not inactive, passive onlookers in this spatial reordering. Their contribution to the new symbolic landscaping has not been directed towards the overcoming of ethnic divisions but to deepening these divides. In mid-January 2012, the leadership of the most powerful Albanian political party and the local government of the municipality of Chair, which is adjacent to the location targeted for Skopje 2014, inaugurated the construction of Skanderbeg Square. The equestrian statue of the greatest Albanian national hero will have no company in the square that carries his name. There is one such statue in Tirana, the capital of Albania, and one in Prishtina, the

capital of Kosovo. The construction of the Skanderbeg monument disregarded legal regulations when it appeared in November 2007. Skopje is divided into ten municipalities and Chair is one of those in which Albanians form the majority. The Mayor of Chair is a high-ranking party member of the largest Albanian party, the Democratic Union for Integration, which emerged transformed from the National Liberation Army that ignited the military confrontation in 2001. The total dominance of ethno-political parties and their respective policies and public discourse lead to the conclusion that Macedonia has stepped out of democracy into ethnocracy. These costly and gigantic projects are a direct expression of the ethnocratic regime in the social space. The intention is to create a new spatial order with clearly-marked ethnic territories within the capital. This new spatial order in Skopje is a perfect example of ethnocratic spatial order.

Public space has been targeted as a field for symbolic struggles since the early days of Macedonian independence. The practice of displaying flags, religious symbols and built objects, and finally monuments, has been used to mark ethnic territories over the past twenty years and has kept fragile inter-ethnic relations aflame. While there is no space here to fully engage with all the aspects of these symbolic struggles (Harrison 1995), it is rewarding to focus on the politicization of flags and the nationalist abuse of the flag as a symbolic object that marks out ethnic territories (Eriksen and Jenkins 2007). A whole separate study on the display of flags deserves to be written and would reveal the politicization of ethnicity in Macedonia since the first

days of independence. The most serious symbol-related incident in Macedonia occurred in the summer of 1997 and was provoked by contested rights and regulations about the use of national flags. The mayor of Gostivar, a small town 70 kilometers south-west of Skopje with a predominantly Albanian population, refused to obey court orders to take down the Albanian national flag displayed in front of the municipality offices—a flag which was only officially allowed to be hoisted on national holidays. On the 9th of July, police dispatched special troops to take down the flag. Thousands of Albanians came to demonstrate, calling for the flag to be reinstated. Several people were killed in the tense shootout that followed. The Mayor was arrested and sentenced for inciting hostilities on the basis of ethnicity and religion. He later lost his appeal at the European Court of Human Rights, which reaffirmed the prosecutor's claims that he had incited ethnically and racially motivated violence. Today, having served his prison term and having briefly pursued an academic career, Rufi Osmani again serves as the Mayor of Gostivar.

The flag incident and its aftermath have had profound and long-lasting consequences for the citizens of Gostivar. When I was doing my research in the town in late 2000 and in 2001, almost every person from any ethnic background I interviewed would inevitably mention the incident. The great significance attached to the armed confrontation concerned the numerous arrests, injuries and acts of police brutality that took place in the aftermath of the incident. The flag was not centrally present in these stories, but the violence sparked

by it remained a top priority for Gostivar citizens, both Albanian and Macedonian, for years afterwards. Those struggles over symbols in the hands of ethno-politicians always gain paramount importance and achieve an atmosphere of fear and distrust by being constantly related to security concerns. Social geography constituted in this way (cf. Banks 1992), based on spatial practices additionally defined and determined by the mapping of ethnic businesses, residential zones, and religious symbols, amounts in our case to the creation of safe and unsafe zones, depending on the ethnic composition of the neighborhood or part of the city. Fortunately, residential ethnic segregation in urban settlements in Macedonia is only at an early stage, yet some prevalently Albanian and Macedonian neighborhoods have gained the ethnic labeling that marks them as safe or unsafe depending on demographic predominance. This ethnic labeling further perpetuates ethnic segregation and makes it yet more concrete. The town of Gostivar is incredibly mixed, one finds Macedonians living next to Albanians and next to Turks in almost every other house—only the Roma live in relative cohesion, for multiple reasons related to their exclusion. In general, the residential segregation in practice is lesser than the ethno-political propaganda representations.

In Skopje such labeling practices are more frequent and areas with a highly visible Albanian presence are notorious for drugs procurement and other illegal, dangerous and mafia-related operations. Those parts of the city with only small numbers of Albanians are self-proclaimed as “pure”. This could also be explained

by the fact that the composition of the population of Skopje is constantly changing through the influx of new arrivals more prone to feeling insecure in their new setting. While there is growing correspondence between residential ethnic segregation and ethno-political rhetoric, the segregation encountered in workplaces and in cultural and educational establishments is potentially far more of an impediment to social cohesion. The Macedonian ethnocracy has turned the logic of minority rights on its head by creating a parallel society even less coherent than the pre-modern pluralist societies that managed multi-ethnicity through more accommodative practices (Grillo 1998). The final and most dangerous development is territorial segregation, a direct outcome of the ethnocracy established in Macedonia.

I shall now turn to another more recent territorial ethno-symbolic incident, analyzing it in the light of the current remaking of Skopje before focusing on one locality that still resists drives for ethnic territorial divisions. Both examples will be used to demonstrate the effects of ethnocratic spatial reordering and the reactions and even resistance to these impositions.

Acknowledging the symbolic dimension, signaling properties and semiotic content of the built environment is not novel, yet it remains somehow understated in social sciences. The concept of narrative spaces which relies on this perspective provides immediate access to the political dimensions of the built environment (Bender 2002). This understanding of political meaning in buildings, aesthetics and even infrastructure is of particular importance

in contested, divided and conflict-ridden cities. Narrative space implies a layer of meaning beyond the physical presence of the construction material used for building. It generates stories and histories, perceptions, intentions, aspirations, fears and hopes that help us orient ourselves in the maze of our built environment. To overlook the political dimension of symbolically-constructed space is to severely impoverish our analysis of related social phenomena.

Before approaching more directly the case that I offer for analysis on these grounds, let me clarify my argument about an implicit political spatial dimension, especially the nationalist dimension. As Kuper (1972) and Lawrence and Low (1990) remind us, the founding fathers of the social sciences—such as Durkheim and Mauss, and Morgan—engaged with social space through the study of classificatory practices and as expressions of native cosmologies. It is not my point here to criticize or praise binarism and it should suffice to say that all these categories and many others that appear from ethnographic evidence are intertwined and often combined but almost always permeated with power relationships, regulating and being regulated by intra- and inter-group relations. This leaves us with the political quality of space as universal and ubiquitous in every human culture. Twenty years ago, Gupta and Ferguson (1992) launched a powerful warning against this oft-neglected aspect of the spatial spread of the nation-state in social sciences. Appadurai (1996) is no less critical of this practice and offers a view in which the concept of locality is seen as a historical product with layers

of accumulated practices that form social relations which regulate diversity by accommodation and not by negation. Therefore locality almost always contains diversity and stands as a serious obstacle to nationalistic, territorially homogenizing efforts. Those authors who have engaged with territoriality and nationalism are firm in their belief about the aims of nationalism to homogenize the territory of the nation-state (Kaiser 2002). I bring together concerns about nationalism and territoriality to the inherently spatially oriented field of urban studies in order to demonstrate that it will enrich the analysis of ethno-nationalism. Amin (2002) tackles the problem of urban encounters of ethnic and racial groups that could go either way by focusing on micro-publics, the local public sphere, and mixed neighborhoods where daily negotiation of diversity occurs. The two examples I offer below demonstrate that some of his arguments can be applied generally.

The Kale Incident

In the past few years, archaeologists have been daily examining the Old Fortress overlooking the Old Bazaar and the central part of Skopje. The excavation and reconstruction of this fortress is one of many projects proceeding from the remarkable intensification of archaeological research that has taken place throughout Macedonia over the past several years. Even some of the defending walls of the fortress have been rebuilt. The fortress is now properly illuminated, more than ever dominating the city skyline at evening time. This is the site from which contemporary Skopje began to develop, over fifteen centuries ago, on

a huge rock which forced the River Vardar to skirt around it and thus create an ideal medieval fortification. The archaeological excavations at Kale, the Turkish word for fortress still in popular and official use for this place, are just a fraction of many other intensive explorations around the country. The government coalition of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization and the Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (IMRO-DPMNU) is particularly keen on excavating historical evidence to prove and showcase the national continuity of Macedonia. As archaeological artifacts require public display, a plan was put forward to build a museum within the fortress to house the artifacts excavated exclusively from that site. (A separate building to house the main archaeological museum with national treasures from all over the country is under construction on the bank of the River Vardar and is connected to the central city square by a new pedestrian bridge.)

The museum inside the fortress is planned only for those archaeological findings unearthed at Kale. The building for this museum happened to be designed in the shape of a church resembling a medieval Byzantine basilica. The museum was to be built where the foundations of such a construction had been found. In general, there is nothing provocative or contradictory in such an attempt to preserve the cultural heritage. As we shall see, however, this scientifically-attired conservation and reconstruction project was anything but calmly accepted. It almost provoked ethnic clashes in a country that barely ten years ago somehow managed to avoid a full-scale civil war provoked by ethnic

Albanian militants. The controversial museum is just one part of a much greater undertaking that is reordering the Macedonian capital into a Grand National Capital, producing territorial divisions in a city renowned for its diversity and openness, in a country that inspired the mixed fruit dessert called *salade macedoine*. The essentialist perspective of local politicians is forced upon Macedonian citizens by aggressive and radical interventions in public space. The story of the museum on Skopje Kale will help us unpack a set of complex socio-spatial or politico-spatial relationships.

It was a few weeks after I had returned from one of my fieldwork trips in Skopje to my cozy office in Göttingen that I was stunned by the news of a bloody incident involving hundreds of young Macedonians and Albanians at Kale. During the fortnight of my absence from the field, a metal construction for the new museum had appeared on the horizon. The metal frames unambiguously suggested that the new building at the edge of the old fortress would be a church, at least in its external form. Concerned citizens of ethnic Albanian origin reacted to this imposition of the cultural symbols of the dominant ethnic group in the country and alerted the mayor of the municipality of Chair. The mayor asked the Cultural Heritage Office to halt the construction. The ruling coalition government partners—IMRO, which represents Macedonian citizens of ethnic Macedonian origin, and the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), which represents ethnic Albanians—agreed to disagree, but a promise was given anyway that construction would be stopped until further notice.

Despite this assurance, the Cultural Heritage Office in charge of the reconstruction of the Kale fortress proceeded with the construction of the church/museum in the evenings after dark. Concerned citizens discovered this work and, led by the mayor of the municipality, marched to the construction site and chased away the workers. They arrived with pre-prepared banners and metal-cutting machines and began vandalizing the metal frame. The police arrived in small numbers and merely observed the protest with interest. Television cameras were there to document the event. After this energetic display of determination, the building of the church/museum was stopped for good. This provoked an avalanche of reactions in the ethnically-polarized public sphere. Hate-speech abounded and many Facebook groups were promptly banned as a result.

One marginal radical right-wing party (TMORO-VEP) called for the defense of Macedonian pride and scheduled a protest on 13 February 2011.² Its call was answered by a group of football fans called the *Komiti*, named after the rebels who fought against the Ottoman Empire. The public meeting was scheduled for noon on a Saturday. The Albanian NGO organization *Zgjohu!* (Wake Up!) was quick to organize counter-protests. Many football fans from ethnic Albanian clubs responded. When the two groups arrived at the fortress at the same time, police were there to divide them. First the Macedonians got in their round of speeches. As they were climbing down the slope of the fortress, Albanian youngsters succeeded in running past the small number of police officers and managed

to get hold of the Macedonian protesters. They outnumbered the Macedonians and the police were unable to prevent them from kicking and beating the cornered *Komiti*. Over the following hours and days the entire media—including Facebook—grew frantic. Public panic was so strong that I decided to catch a plane home to where I conduct my research.

The Skopje Old Bazaar

On the following Saturday riot police in armored vehicles surrounded Kale and secured central parts of the city to prevent any fresh protests. The next day I met with a friend at the entrance of the Skopje Old Bazaar just below Kale. It was the end of February but not very cold and with copious winter sun warming the air. It was a Sunday and many shops in the bazaar were open and there were a number of visitors. I observed to my friend that the bazaar was definitely coming back to life after all those years of abandonment from the mid-1990s onwards. He responded by telling me how he had come here with his wife and three-year old daughter for a midday stroll and some Turkish tea on the weekend before the incident at Kale. There had been hundreds of people thronging the narrow streets of the bazaar, he said, incomparably more than at the moment when we were speaking. He was concerned that the recently-revived bazaar might lose its momentum for recovery due to renewed ethnic tensions. As we were talking we arrived at my favorite part of the bazaar and entered a newly-opened coffee shop. We were the first customers that morning and when I wanted to pay with one of the larger banknotes the owner of the

place (apparently Albanian, as I had been able to overhear in the distance his phone conversation some minutes earlier) simply waved his hand as if to say “it doesn’t matter” because he had no change. I encouraged him to check options, to ask a neighboring shop for change, but he explained that we could pay some other time. At that point my friend took charge of the situation and found the exact amount in his wallet. The moment we left the coffee shop to continue our tour on the sunlit cobblestones of the tiny, winding streets of the bazaar, we simultaneously commented that there was still hope for the bazaar.

The bazaar was the central part of the town under the medieval fortification and has witnessed many changes of fortune—wars, fires, earthquakes, conquests, prosperity and misery. In the five centuries under Ottoman rule until the beginning of the twentieth century, it certainly gained an oriental flavor. Regardless of the source of the legacy to which I want to refer, the bazaar kept alive the ideal of *esnaf*. An *esnaf* was a guild, an association of craftsmen or traders, and was a fully-functioning institution under Ottoman rule which regulated all economic activities from production to trade, including the education and recruitment of new labor (Janev 1998). Even today, there is an association of shopkeepers that carries the generic name of *esnaf* where once each larger group of producers used to have a separate organization. The contemporary NGO unofficial association is far from the kind of organization suggested by the same name, but the choice of this name is an indicator of the high esteem in which the ideal of *esnaf* is held. In my

interviews and in the survey I organized in the bazaar, I learnt that *esnaf* evokes the highest moral qualities of decency, honesty, trustworthiness, reliability and integrity. Many would say that it is a value regretfully dying or even already extinct. The young owner of that coffee shop, however, proved that not all hope is gone. The bazaar itself produces a certain kind of sociability, open and receptive to diversity, since its primary values are entrepreneurial and civil, just as urbanity was once distinguishable and praised in its own right. The bazaar is no longer the central public space of the city—that city has grown ten or twenty times bigger since the bazaar last commanded Skopje’s trends, fashions, moods, and opinion. Yet the bazaar keeps alive the ideals of proper civic values and its stories offer many lessons to contemporary politicians.

Skopje Old Bazaar is one of the largest bazaars preserved in the Balkans. The 1970s and 1980s were a golden age for the bazaar. After the disastrous earthquake in 1963, Skopje was rebuilt as a modern city. The Japanese Modernist architect, Kenzo Tange, won a United Nations-organized competition for the new master-plan for Skopje. A large part of the old bazaar was incorporated in the new city of concrete buildings and straight boulevards. The bazaar gained improved infrastructural amenities and also acquired some additional functions. Several of the old Turkish baths were turned into art galleries, one of the old inns was turned into a lapidarium and, behind it, a museum complex was built to house the Macedonian Museum of Archaeology, History and Ethnology, while another old inn was adapted to host the Academy of Fine Arts. The revitalized

bazaar saw incremental progress and prosperity. The collapse of Yugoslavia and the wars in the north in the early 1990s destroyed the market for many products from the bazaar. The full-blown transition to private property resulted in a mushrooming of shopping malls in Skopje and availability of vast amounts of imported goods, both luxurious and cheap. The bazaar was simply unable to restructure itself under the pressure of transition. But this political-economic explanation of the misfortunes of the old bazaar from the 1990s to the present is incomplete: it was practically through the Albanianization of the bazaar that ethno-politics entered the main political stage in Macedonia, even in socialist Yugoslavia.

Radical demographic changes followed the growth of post-earthquake Skopje. The number of citizens doubled every fifteen years. The socialist ideal celebrated the happiness of industrial workers and the newly installed industries in Skopje needed a labor force. Not all of the workers who moved to Skopje were of ethnic Macedonian origin. Ethnic stratification in Macedonia was already taking shape in this period and Albanians were often sidelined when it came to employment or promotion. The bazaar was loosely connected to the socialist state that had begun to tolerate private economic initiative, after an initial period of collectivization and prohibition of capitalist modes of production. By the early 1970s, the flourishing businesses of the *charshija* offered opportunities for self-employment. Growing numbers of Albanians at that time would offer large amounts of cash to buy up the shops of elderly shopkeepers and craftsmen. This

was an opportunity for such shopkeepers to gain cash before retirement if they had no one to whom they could pass on their trade. This increasing presence of Albanians amounted to the Albanianization of the bazaar in the popular imagination. This is how the story of the bazaar can be concluded as far as it concerns developments during socialism.

The period since independence saw one unfortunate incident lead to the bazaar being sealed off for the next fifteen years. The Bit Pazar riots of 6 November 1992 were sparked off by an incident involving two violent police officers and a young Albanian seller of smuggled cigarettes. The boy was pushed, kicked and finally, after losing consciousness, carried away in an ambulance. Rumors spread fast and thousands of Albanians soon started rioting. They clashed with the police and gunshots were exchanged, leaving four people killed, including one overly-curious old lady who was shot by a stray bullet while peeking from behind her curtains. In the following days and weeks the police patrolled the area heavily and this police presence marked a border around the Old Bazaar as an unsafe area of the city. The threat to security was seen as coming from the Albanians. The *charshija* was still popular, however, and we continued visiting our favorite bars since police patrols would let us through their barriers as soon as they heard that we were speaking Macedonian. The police presence was reduced in less than a month, but the line was deeply drawn. The new geographies of power, colored with nationalist sentiments, left deep scars on the map of Skopje. The co-incidental change of consumption

patterns that arrived with the transition and the securitization of the perceived Albanianized space contributed towards the demise of the bazaar for a long period.

It took almost two decades for the *charshija* to come back to life and once again bustle with young people. This revival started in 2008 with the opening of a wine bar and a small alternative club close by. The two friends who own the alternative club illustrate the diversity that ethno-politics seeks to negate: one is a woman of mixed Macedonian and Greek ethnic origin, the other woman is of mixed Albanian and Turkish origin. In the following summer, the Macedonian owner of the wine bar, a busker who had spent his youth travelling throughout Europe, opened a beer garden above the wine bar and a fish restaurant further down in the bazaar. His businesses are flourishing. Next to his wine bar, a *rakija* bar has opened offering a variety of traditional Macedonian liquors (*rakija* is a traditional spirit). Next to these bars is a Turkish-owned tea house and around the corner is an Albanian-owned bar. The timing of this revival of the bazaar is curious. The rediscovery of the bazaar could have happened at any time between 1992 and 1997, or in 2001, 2005, 2006, 2007, or any other year. This poses the question of why the *charshija* is popular again right now? I argue that the movement of people across the old Stone Bridge from the city square to the Skopje Old Bazaar is an act of protest created and expressed by spatial practice. Pile invites us to think beyond the dichotomies of dominance and resistance, spatial technologies of governance and open acts of resistance, structural power relations

and articulated political identities: “it is not so much the act—and its structural determinations—that defines resistance (as has been the case so far), but the meanings that social action takes on in the practice of everyday life.” (Pile 1997, 14). With spatial practices, by creating only ephemeral trail, not even a trace, transgression is occurring across ethnically-prescribed spaces. The spatial practices of Skopje citizens, through movement, transform these ethnic spaces into spaces of mixture and diversity. We can argue that what has occurred amounts to a transgression of ethnic boundaries, a breaking of ethnic barriers that happens simply through the act of sitting next to one another. The mingling of ethnic bodies in a shared space is evidence of a possibility contrary to the claims of ethno-politicians who disregard ethnic *others* in their urban plans and commemorative sites. The trajectories that cut through the boundaries of ethnic territories refute ethnic segregation by showing the impossibility of achieving such clear-cut borders in an ethnically-mixed city.

The cosmopolitanism of those new bars owners is palpable. As is the cosmopolitanism of many shopkeepers I have met in recent years who further attest that new and traditional values which accept and accommodate diversity can achieve synergy in this locality. Such is the Turkish silversmith who is also a trained Islamic scholar, the Albanian owner of an antique shop who was trained as an electrical engineer, and the Macedonian owner of a souvenir shop who is trained as an ethnologist. These and many others have come to the bazaar driven by the desire to make a living; but

they are also aware that the bazaar has a history, different from the history which the dominant political discourse would like us to accept. In spite of the current dominance of Albanian shopkeepers in the bazaar, the *charshija* remains, and perhaps always will remain, a locality in which diversity is treated as an asset. The numerous stories I heard from the shopkeepers in the bazaar during my research testifies to their resilience to divisive ethno-politics. The majority of those I interviewed showed a high awareness of the political manipulations that endanger inter-ethnic relations in the country, while clearly positioning themselves as Macedonians or Albanians. The shopkeepers were even telling me about their regular quarrels about ethno-politics that affect, but do not destroy, their neighborly or friendly relationships. This situation resembles the agonistic political culture model emerging in places of regular contact described by Amin:

What goes on in them are not achievements of community or consensus, but openings for contact and dialogue with others as equals, so that mutual fear and misunderstanding may be overcome and so that new attitudes and identities can arise from engagement. If common values, trust, or a shared sense of place emerge, they do so as accidents of engagement, not from an ethos of community (Amin 2002, 972).

Even if they keep their ethnic identities entrenched, all the shopkeepers I interviewed would say that their immediate neighbors, one or two at least, were their best friends on whom they could count in any situation. As part of

the survey, I asked shopkeepers to name and rank their five best friends and later to attach ethnicity to them. Almost the entire sample responded by refusing to undertake such an exercise: they claimed there were no such divisions, despite the reality that there are. A similar answer was given to my question about the ethnic composition of their customers. This ideological position, even if only wishful thinking, demonstrates that socialization in the bazaar entails inclusivity, not exclusivity.

Almost everyone I interviewed invoked *esnafluk*, the quality of being a proper member of *esnaf* as it used to be and as it is remembered. *Esnafluk* is a moral standard which socialization holds in high esteem and which overcomes other markers of social differentiation. I realized that elder shopkeepers took a certain pride in pointing out that they had spent their entire lives in the bazaar. They see themselves as belonging to a rare and endangered group but they also carry with pride their lifelong membership of the otherwise undefined *charshija* community, a community characterized by *esnafluk*, a community of hardworking, trustworthy, skilled and honest shopkeepers. Many responses to the survey evoked *esnafluk* as a rich word, pregnant with obligations and moral imperatives. Those imperatives do not overlook ethnic and religious differentiations, but respect them. Sustaining or renewing those values is not so simple under the pressures of an ethnocentric regime, but the sudden popularity of the bazaar holds the promise of an opportunity as it emerges as a site offering an alternative model for negotiating diversity.

Conclusion

Ethnicity in Macedonia has been politicized and this affects everyday practices; a closer look at such practices, however, reveals a resilient resistance to ethno-politics. One level of resistance consists of a shared memory of more harmonious inter-ethnic relations. Here the bazaar plays a particular role as a locality that attests to those times. Secondly, *esnaf* is a key concept that contains a whole moral universe dictating mutual respect and disregard for ethnic or religious differences as defining characteristics of the shopkeepers in the *charshija*. Thirdly, the fact that the revival of interest in the bazaar has taken place precisely after the greatest effort to remake public space in the city according to the logic of ethno-politics can also be taken as an indicator of resistance contained in the trajectories of movement—of revolt expressed in spatial practices.

The Kale Incident reminded Skopje citizens that political manipulation of national sentiments can be quite dangerous. The use of archaeology for political purposes exaggerates the identity-related struggles and is not only a temporal extension of the nation, from the perspective of myths of continuity, but also supports the territorial claims of the nation-state. Therefore, that archaeological battle can be expected, if we read Pullan's analysis of similar processes in Jerusalem:

Archeology is a favoured vehicle for attempting to legitimate the settlers' presence in the Old City, primarily in order to enhance their claim to biblical continuity. In doing so, they follow a long tradition of using archaeology for nationalist purposes, and sometimes

the excavations have resulted in violent clashes (Pullan 2011, 8).

Pullan can be quoted word for word to explain the situation in Skopje "where many groups and individuals wish to impose their national and religious identities upon the city" Pullan 2011, **). In its eventful history, Skopje has attracted quite a few contenders. Those presently sharing the central government and controlling adjacent municipalities at local government level, guided by their ethno-political essentialist view, pose the greatest threat to the ethnic balance in Skopje.

In this article I argue that acts of resistance can be of an ephemeral nature—simple acts of crossing envisaged symbolical borders. The revolt against divisive policies and the awareness of the dangerous ethnocentric order is best expressed in the action of Skopje's most prominent flash activist group, the "Singing Skopjians". Only a few days after the incident at Kale, this group gathered to sing a song in both Macedonian and Albanian just outside the police-secured zone below the fortress. The song was titled "Injustice", which had been written by a legendary Macedonian rock band active in the 1980s which was composed of Macedonians and led by an Albanian. This song was an honest reaction to growing consumerism and emerging social stratification in socialist times and was very popular at the time. The bilingual cover version of the Singing Skopjians, who are themselves composed of many ethnicities, highlighted the absurdity of ethno-politics. There are other forms of activism and protest that react against the "Skopje 2014", like the "First

Archibrigade” and “Freedom Square”, but here I am interested in those verbally and discursively unarticulated spatial practices. Less overt acts of resistance are manifested by the mere presence of all ethnicities in the “dangerous” border-zone, thus transforming it into a zone of contact and habitual encounter. This, in itself, is not a guarantee of long-lasting transformative effects against the divisive intentions of those in power to carve out ethnic territories within Macedonia and within Macedonian cities. It deserves our analytical attention, however, as it serves to correct the picture of irreconcilable ethnic divisions. The dominant imposition of ethnic narratives in the built environment is met by spatial practices that undo such divisions.

Those government-led archaeological and architectural interventions in the public space of this remarkably diverse city are used to mark ethnic territories by way of unearthing material evidence and constructing symbolically-laden buildings. Bell (2003) defines this as a production of “mythscape”, but this materialization of myth-scaping affects not only imaginary but everyday life with its imposed spatial order that, in turn, has its own logic and dynamic. The mutual interdependencies and habitual encounters (Amin 2002, 969) that happen in the Skopje Old Bazaar, however, make it a typical place that contains diverse micro-publics and provides bases for daily negotiation of diversity. Those traditionally-established practices based on mutual respect are under constant pressure from the ethno-nationalistically driven pragmatic populism of Macedonian ethnic politicians. The bazaar is a reminder of alternative possibilities.

The revisiting of the bazaar by Skopje citizens demonstrates a desire and a will to overcome ethnic divisions that demand naïve acceptance of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices. The resistance that stems from the sheer fact of residential and otherwise expressed spatial mixing, as seen in the distribution of shopkeepers along the streets of the Old Bazaar, the resistance that this mix inspires as seen in the renewed popularity of such spaces, and the resistance expressed in the transgression of those ethnic lines and contained in the trajectories of Skopje citizens that transgress the invented ethnic boundaries, amounts to the creation of alternative narrative spaces totally opposite to those imposed narrative spaces of the ethnocratic spatial order.

Notes

- 1 This article is based on the findings of research funded by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Germany.
- 2 *Tatkovinska Makedonska Organizacija za Radikalna Obnova—Vardar Egej Pirin* approximates in English to “Fatherland Macedonian Organization for Radical Reconstruction-Vardar Aegean Pirin” (which refers to the three parts of Macedonia: Vardar, the current Republic of Macedonia; the Pirin part in Bulgaria; and Aegean Macedonia in Greece). This was, allegedly, the solution to the notorious Macedonian Question of the political destiny of the geographical territory known as Macedonia.

The partition that disregarded the Macedonian national aspirations happened in 1913 after the Second Balkan War. Seeking historical justice after a century of otherwise defined political reality amounts to irredentist claims made in the 21st century.

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