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*Macedonian National Identity: Quantitative Differences Between Unitary and Subaltern National Myths and Narratives*

**Introduction**

National identity studies have become very fashionable in social sciences. The literature abounds on the topic in the last decades of the twentieth century. Identity research of the past two decades shifted due to new stage phenomena such as social and nationalist movements and attention to group agency and political action (Cerulo, 1997: 386). The aim of this paper is to try to distinguish between categories of national identities and argue that, for analytical purposes, this can be done by delineating two basic types of categories: ethnic/cultural and national/state identities. Further, this paper will review the literature and explore its contents and dimensions, in an attempt to elucidate the elements of national identity. Finally, the paper will argue that, on the one hand, national identity is not as sound and unitary as the proponents of national groups want us to think, and on the other, that there are individuals and groups who have subaltern feelings about the national narrative and the governing myth. The latter argument will be supported with empirical data from the Macedonian national case.

**Problematising people's national identity**

The study of identity started as a concept with roots in psychoanalysis, psychology and sociology, increasing in scope through the 1980s and 1990s to include not only individual but also collective forms of identity. For a long time the concept of society dominated sociological research in relation to state and nation, in such a way that these three became indistinguishable. 'It might appear to matter little which term we use – society, state, nation. But yet it does' (McCrone, Kiely, 2000: 22). Some argued that genuine 'societies' are those in which social, political and cultural dimensions are in alignment. McCrone has doubts about this. Arguing that the concept of 'identity' is central to much contemporary sociological analysis, Bendle points out that even though the identity is vital and problematic in high modernity, it is still 'under-theorized and incapable of bearing the analytical load that the contemporary situation requires' (Bendle, 2002: 1-2). Considering the diversity in the area, Miller stressed that 'whatever terminology we use should convey the idea that national identity can exist at more than one level' (Miller, 2000: 130-1). This can be clearly seen in the statement of one Spaniard quoted on BBC News online, who explained that he 'works for an English company, on a project in Italy run by our Dutch office'.[i] And if this

way of life continues, we can only guess what this 'European' will 'imagine' as his primary or secondary collective belonging.

In the beginning, people's identity was very local, concerning the village, the valley, the immediate surroundings. There were limits, but there were no boundaries. 'A world in which it is natural to have a national identity was meeting, and overrunning, an older world' (Billig, 1995: 62). A new world of fixed boundaries and 'fixed' identities replaced the older world. As Eriksen has argued, today 'the challenge comes from a much more general tendency in social theory to emphasize change and movement, the relativity of boundaries, the multiplicity of identities and internal diversity, sacrificing cohesion, stability, homogeneity and structure as key concepts' (Eriksen, 2004: 50). Hall stressed that identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. 'Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, with the new cultural practices they represent, we should think instead of identity as "production", which is never complete, always in process' (Hall, 1990: 222).[ii]

The question is always where to start 'surfing' from. Let us try with Hastings's definitions of ethnicity, nation and nation-state. 'An ethnicity is a group of people with a shared cultural identity and spoken language. It constitutes the major distinguishing element in all pre-national societies, but may survive as a strong subdivision with a loyalty of its own within established nations' (Hastings, 1997: 2-5). For Hastings, a nation is a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity. It may be formed from one or more ethnicities, claiming the right to political identity with the control of specific territory. Furthermore, the nation-state identifies itself in terms of one specific nation and there is thus an identity of character between state and people. Where do these elaborations lead us? First, it seems that there are at least three basic types of identity: ethnic, national and state identity (including nation-states). Second, ethnic/cultural identity is the basic one. The nation, consequently, can consist of one or more ethnicities, and the state can consist of one or more nations. And, third, they are all interwoven. Anthony Smith has introduced one more form of identity between ethnicity/culture and the nation, the ethnie. Ethnie, according to Smith, is a 'named human population with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity' (Smith 1986: 32). Smith's argument leads us to distinguish between the following identities: ethnic group, ethnie, nation, state. This is a crucial point in the Smith ethno-symbolist theory, namely the separation of ethnie from ethnic group on its way to

'becoming' a nation. Guibernau, for instance, needs only two basic identities and speaks of the nation as a cultural community and the state as a political institution, arguing 'that a clear-cut distinction needs to be drawn between three main concepts: "nation", "state" and "nation-state"'. (Guibernau, 2004: 131) Also, Guibernau insists on distinguishing between nation-states and nations without states.

It is complicated to 'produce' sociological categories, as well as ideal types, and it is often a very dangerous task, especially when the space to do it is limited. Also, authors more often use a pair of identities as if the two terms are synonymous, such as ethnic/cultural, ethnic/national, ethnicity/nationality, without a clear distinction between the issues. Following the above scholars, and for the purposes of this paper, let us analytically divide these phenomena into two broad theoretical categories: ethnic/cultural and national/state identities.

**Ethnic/cultural identity**

Gilbert says that some, like Anthony Smith, have taken many nations to have originated in pre-existing ethnic groups. 'The appeal of the national identity they involve is, then, derived in large part from that of those ethnic identities' (Gilbert, 2000: 72). Smith 'offered fresh and illuminating insights into pre-modern forms of collective cultural identity such as those embodied in *ethnies'* (Guibernau, 2004: 125-6). Guibernau points out that Smith explores the origin of nations and national identity and finds them in ethnic identity as a pre-modern form of collective cultural identity. 'Collective cultural identity refers not to a uniformity of elements over generations but to a sense of continuity on the part of successive generations of a given cultural unit of population…' (Smith, 1991: 25). Smith's research on the role of myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols, as powerful differentiators and reminders of the unique culture and fate of the ethnic community, is fundamental to his analysis of national identity. The ethno-symbolist approach puts emphasis on the subjective components of national identity, while simultaneously underlining the sociological bases of collective cultural identities, like ethnies and nations (Smith, 2002: 15). In his *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Smith usefully presents an overview of six constituent elements or 'dimensions' of the ethnie as he sees it: a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity. The most important criterion of ethnic identity, according to Smith, is the sense of solidarity, but the common myth of

descent also plays an important role (Smith, 1999: 22-31). And finally, Eriksen, following Smith, points that 'seeing oneself as culturally distinctive, collectively and individually, from other groups, and acting accordingly, is crucial for ethnic identification to endure' (Eriksen, 2004: 52).

Other scholars have different accounts. Joireman shows that the formation of ethnic identity consists of ascribed traits plus social inputs. The ascribed traits are appearance, place of birth, language, and the social inputs are ancestral myths, subjective beliefs, political power of the group, economics, religion and language. 'Our ethnic identities can shift over time as the context we are in changes. They can also change in relation to varying economic and political incentives and as the context an individual is in alters' (Joireman, 2003: 56). In ethnic nationalisms, 'national identity is often perceived as a reflection or awareness of possession of "primordial" or inherited characteristics, components of "ethnicity", such as language, customs, territorial affiliation, and physical type' (Greenfeld, 1992: 1). All told, 'when people think about "identity" they have in mind things like language, ethnicity, religion, symbols (e.g., myths, historical monuments, and anthems)' (Constantin, Rautz, 2003: 189). Identifiers of ethnicity, some argue, do not automatically generate an 'identity', because the key will be how an individual chooses to identify with these characteristics. But culture, like everything that is historical, undergoes constant transformation. Identities are 'far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power' (Hall, 1990: 225).

**National/state identity**

One can argue, as some do, that ethnic/cultural categories precede national/state identities. Some argue that national/state identities are more recent phenomena, not more than two centuries old. In the existing literature, it is complicated to trace the theoretical background of national/state identities. It is easier to trace themes in which one can find substantial elaborations on the topic. One possible way is to re-visit the theory through four themes: culture/politics interplay, ethnic/civic dichotomy, subjective/objective characteristics and group/individual agency. Through these themes one can assume the complexity and multidimensionality of the processes that 'bred' national identities.

*Culture/politics interplay*

Symbolic resources like political values/institutions, culture, history and geography, provide the symbolic raw material which social actors use as they define national identities in public discourse. Thus, 'what matters with regard to the construction of national identities is less *what* resources political actors draw upon than *how* they put these resources to practical use …' (Zimmer, 2003: 181). 'The central fact seems to me that what has really happened in the modern world is that the role of culture in human life was totally transformed by that cluster of economic and scientific changes which have transformed the world since the seventeenth century' (Gellner, Smith, 1996: 367-368). Ernest Gellner argued that the political and national unit should be congruent. On this account, national identity is in a certain sense inherently political. In claiming a certain national identity, people make a political claim. 'National identity can seem natural and immemorial, but its political character shows it is neither of these things' (Gilbert, 2000: 59). Schoplin also points out that the nation is above all a political category. This does not mean that nations do not have cultural, sociological, anthropological or other dimensions. He argues that without understanding the political dimension, too much is lost. Furthermore, 'political power and ethnic identity cannot be decoupled, given that the state will always have a role in cultural reproduction, making control of the state a key target of political action' (Schoplin, 2003: 487). The study of nationalism as a political phenomenon stresses the idea that cultural markers are not in themselves political but need to be politicized to serve as a basis for claims of self-government. 'The ideology of nationalism connects culture and politics. It establishes cultural distinctiveness as the basis for political action' (Lecourse, 2000: 158). However, if the state claims legitimacy by associating itself with a nation, then it follows that all others are excluded from political life. Nationality and citizenship, for some scholars, actually belong to different spheres of meaning and activity. 'The former is in essence a cultural concept which binds people on the basis of shared identity … while citizenship is a political concept deriving from people's relationship to the state' (McCrone, Kiely, 2000: 25).


*Ethnic/civic dichotomy*

'The ideal articulation of "nation" as a form of cultural community and the "state" as a territorial, political unit is now widely accepted and often taken as unproblematic' (Biswas, 2002: 178). Research on this question has led to a widely accepted

distinction between two types of nationalism, ethnic and civic, and two types of nations, cultural and political. Let us consider some elaborations of the ethnic/civic dichotomy. 'The myth of the *ethnic* nation suggests that you have no choice at all in the making of your national identity: you are your cultural inheritance and nothing else. The myth of the *civic* nation, in contrast, suggests that your national identity is nothing but your choice …' (Yack 1996: 198). It seems that ethnic identity is unchosen – not even a possible subject of choice. 'It is this, crucially, which distinguishes ethnic from civic nationalism; for on the latter, national identity is presumed either to have been chosen or at least to be what it would be rational to choose' (Gilbert, 2000: 71). Brown referred to these two bases of national identity as 'Cultural (or ethno-cultural) Nationalism and Civic Nationalism. Ethno-cultural nationalism depicts the nation as a community of (ethno-) cultural sameness, while civic nationalism depicts the nation as a community of equal citizens' (Brown, 2002: 557). Some argue that the differences between them are essentially historical and geographical. 'The enlightenment and western liberal tradition promoted a certain conception of nation identity as citizenship…' (Heathorn, 2000: 221). Another type is evolving in the post-Communist states. 'Nicknamed "ethnic democracy" … it takes the ethnic nation, rather than the citizenry, as the cornerstone of the state' (Smooha, 2002: 425). What does play a part, and especially in determining whether a particular nationalism will be defined as civic or as ethnic, is the perception of a nation's status relative to other nations, whether it is perceived as a part of the West or not. Greenfeld argues that such perception is dependent on the traditional, prenational beliefs in the society in question (Greenfeld, 1995). Theoretical arguments, very often, link ethnic nationalism and cultural nations to an objective definition of the nation, while civic nationalism and political nations are linked to a subjective definition. It is easy to say, but difficult to argue.

*Subjective/objective characteristics*

Speaking about the nation, Hroh defines it 'as a large social group integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical), and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness' (Hroh, 1996: 79). 'I argue that national identity is a modern phenomenon of a fluid and dynamic nature, one by means of which a community sharing a particular set of characteristics is led to the subjective belief that

its members are ancestrally related' (Guibernau, 2004: 134). Some authors, like Guibernau for instance, claim that it is a belief in common heritage and destiny that is important in constructing a national identity. Shulman remarks that cultural characteristics of the members of a nation are the key features that give substance to national identity. 'Because culture is complex and multifaceted, what matters for the content of national identity are not peoples' "objective" cultural characteristics, but their subjective perception of these traits and how they compare to the traits of other populations' (Shulman, 1999: 1013). Nationalist thinking involves more than a commitment to a group and a sense of difference from other groups. 'It conceives "our" group in a particular way. In doing so, it takes for granted ideas about nationhood and the link between peoples and homelands; and about the naturalness of the world of nations, divided into separate homelands' (Billig, 1995: 61). If and when cultural differences come to be expressed territorially, then the ethnic movement becomes a nationalist one. 'A state exercises sovereignty over a specific territory. A national identity is, therefore, in normal circumstances a type of *local* identity. It identifies someone in terms of their relation to a specific place, as a town or village identity also does' (Gilbert, 2000: 60). Territoriality for Hechter is one objective criterion that does seem to be a necessary characteristic of the nation. He argues that the presence of a real or putative homeland is properly regarded as a defining feature of the nation. 'Nations are territorially concentrated ethnic groups' (Hechter, 2000: 14). A nation is more than an imagined community of people, for a place – a homeland – also has to be imagined.

*Structure/human agency*

'[W]hen "national identity" is employed as an analytical category by theorists of nationalism there is often little discussion of the manner in which identities are forged and reproduced across time and space' (Bell, 2003: 64). The key question is how national identities emerge and are then translated over time. And what is even more interesting sociologically are the processes through which, and structural circumstances under which, different views are constructed. Miller asks whether we are still in the area of studies of structure versus action. 'The tension is between accounts which focus on how, on the one hand, legal, political and cultural institution lay down definitions for actors and accounts which argue on the other, that actors have more freedom to construct identities for themselves' (Miller, 1995: 17). 'It is

slightly less customary to point out that states have created nations perhaps more frequently than nations states; in the classic nation-states of Western Europe state-building bred national identity than simply following from it' (Handler, 1988: 7-8). The state tries to assimilate or incorporate culturally distinctive territories and to make a multicultural population culturally homogenous. Some of the main strategies generally employed by the state are: 'the construction and dissemination of a certain *image* of the "nation"; the creation and spread of a set of symbols and rituals charged with the mission of reinforcing a sense of community among citizens …' (Guibernau, 2004: 140). 'While it appears that it is the individual who has to fit in with nations, it is nevertheless evident that people make decisions about nations, on the basis of their knowledge of "national cultures", and locate themselves and others accordingly' (Thompson, 2001: 18-32). Thompson further stresses the necessity of more detailed considerations of social action and human agency in sociological theorizing on national identity, to illustrate how each of us is implicated in organizing, categorizing and invoking ideas of nation and national identity and exploring the role of individuals as active agents. 'Nations are dual phenomena constructed from above, but in order to be understood must be also be analyzed from below, from the ordinary people's view, which is exceedingly difficult to discover' (Gellner, 1983: 6-7).

All of the above aimed to show the complexity of the notion of national group identity, which is generally assumed to stem from the local cultural environment, come through the processes of culture/politics interplay and structure/human agency, finally arriving at nationality categories. Nevertheless, all of those categories stated previously are interrelated, evolving one from another. As our interest is specifically in national identities, we will further track some of the elements of national identities.

**Elements of national identity**

Let us look at the attempts of three authors to elucidate the elements of national identity. Smith considers national identity as multi-dimensional and lists five fundamental attributes: an historic territory or homeland, common myths and historic memories, a common, mass public culture, common legal rights and duties for all members, and a common economy with territorial mobility for members (Smith, 1991: 14). He thinks that national identity can never be reduced to a single element. In Guibernau's view, national identity, too, has five dimensions: psychological, cultural, territorial, historical, and political (Guibernau, 2004: 135-8). Miller, also, noted five

elements of national identity: a community constituted by mutual belief, extended in history, active in character, connected to a particular territory – homeland, and thought to be marked off from other communities by its members' distinct traits (Miller, 1995: 28-30). Be it attributes, dimensions or elements, in this paper we are interested in subjective (historical) parts of national identities: common myths, historic memories, beliefs in common ancestry and national narratives.

For ethno-symbolists, what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritage. Smith argues that each nationalism usually contains more than one myth of descent, that different images of past and future tell us much about the divisions in the social and cultural life of a community experiencing rapid change, and the difficulties it faces in trying to achieve social integration (Smith, 1999: 9, 86). It is necessary to draw a clear distinction between myth and memory. Myths are constructed by deliberate manipulation and intentional action. Bell stated that myths are to be found in two positions: their governing and multifarious subaltern forms. 'Memory can function in opposition to myth, whether of the governing or subaltern variety(s). It represents a conceptually distinct category' (Bell, 2003: 76). The most relevant quality of national identity components, including myths and memories, is whether they are felt as real by those sharing a common identity. 'The attributes sustaining the belief in common ancestry are key to national identity and foster a sense of belonging' (Guibernau, 2004, 135). Miller stresses that national communities are constituted by belief: 'a nationality exists when its members believe that it does' (Miller, 2000: 28). Consequently, the existence of a nation depends on a shared belief that its members belong together. Bell argues that there is no singular, irreducible national narrative and this is why it makes compelling sense to talk instead about a governing myth. 'We can view the nationalist governing mythology in a similar way, as the attempt to impose a definite meaning on the past, on the nation and its history' (Bell, 2003: 74). He adds that there will always be dissent and the story will never be accepted consistently and universally. Contrary, then, to nationalist discourses, the nation is not a unitary entity, in which all members think, feel and act as one. 'Instead, each of us engages in many different ways in "making sense" of "nations" and "national identities" in the course of our interactions with others and in making the ideas of nation and national identity accountable to us' (Thompson, 2001: 24). It is unlikely that there will be some single unitary culture for a given group. 'Rather there will be a variety of cultural

constructions from contestation between conflicting interests in the formation or development of the group' (Gilbert, 2000: 40).

**Macedonian identity: between unitary and subaltern national narratives**

The tragic death of the Macedonian state President Boris Trajkovski was an important event not just as the loss of the head of state, but as a symbol of the politics of the nation. For instance, the Council of the Foreign Policy and Security, which is working under the auspices of the private think-tank Euro-Balkan Institute from Skopje, issued a statement declaring that 'the death of the President Trajkovski is experienced as a national tragedy and it has integrative influence upon the nation, manifesting unity independently of political, religious and ethnic belonging'.[iii] Bearing this and the multiethnic character of Macedonian society[iv] in mind, it is always a challenge to employ the term 'Macedonian nation' in the state context, with all the characteristics stemming from being situated on the eastern side of European nationalism theories. And what is the governing myth of the Macedonian nation?

*Macedonian governing myth of origin*

Ulf Brunnbauer argues in *(Re)writing History* that until World War Two only a small circle of intellectuals had expressed the idea of a separate Macedonian nation. According to the dominant modernists, all the nationalist movements started with the ideas of the political elite. The new republic was constructed as the national state of the Macedonian nation in 1944. For the first time in modern times the Macedonians had sovereign control over a particular territory, albeit within the Yugoslav framework. So, the republic was established, Brunnbauer argues, but the nation had still to be created. Tracing the origins of the nation became a primary task for historiography. 'Since in the sources, "Macedonians", particularly as an ethnic group, are rarely mentioned, Macedonian historians employ a device equally well-known to their Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian colleagues, namely to replace the terms "Christians/Greek Orthodox/Bulgarian Exarchists", usually used for the designation of the Orthodox population of the region during Ottoman times, with "Macedonians"' (Brunnbauer, 2004: 185). It was extremely difficult to make space for Macedonian national myths and narratives. 'In the Macedonian case, there are few historical symbols utilized by the Republic of Macedonia that are not disputed by conflicting historical traditions in neighbouring states' (Frusetta, 2004: 110). Macedonian

historiography was a latecomer. All significant events and personalities were already included in the national narratives of neighbouring countries Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, which had substantiated their territorial claims to Macedonia by their particular interpretation of the history of the region and the ethnic identity of its population. 'Any Macedonian national narrative was bound to come into conflict with these older historiographies. The Macedonians, in turn, had to begin from scratch in their efforts to present a long history of their nation' (Brunnbauer, 2004: 177).

The first generation of Macedonian historians traced the emergence of the Macedonian nation back to the nineteenth century. 'Macedonian national history was traced to the nineteenth century, with its most prominent expression being the revolutionary struggle for freedom, equality and independence' (Frusetta, 2004: 112). Intellectuals began to articulate 'Macedonian' national consciousness. The 'Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation' (VMRO), which was established in 1893, and the Ilinden Rising against Ottoman rule on 2 August 1903, were the first significant political manifestations of Macedonian national consciousness. Later, thanks to the efforts of the Communist Macedonian partisans during World War Two and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, whose role was particularly emphasised by socialist Macedonian historiography, a Macedonian state in the form of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was established within Yugoslavia. The official discourse created a semantic chain between the Ilinden Rising (2 August 1903) and the first session of the 'Antifascist Assembly of the National Liberation of Macedonia', (ASNOM) in 1944, which established the Macedonian Republic and also happened to take place on 2 August. ASNOM became perceived as the 'Second Ilinden' which would bring the unfinished business of the Macedonian revolutionaries to an end.

The first important shift in tracing the myth of origin was the attempt to find the origins of the Macedonian nation further back in history, namely in the Middle Ages. 'Now, the medieval empire of Czar Samuil and his successors (969-1018), whose capitals were Prespa and Ohrid in Macedonia, was re-evaluated as a Macedonian state although existing scholarship had regarded it Bulgarian' (Brunnbauer, 2004: 179). The Macedonian historiography separated the Macedonian ethnogenesis from the Bulgarian one. During the second historiographical shift in the early 1990s, efforts were made to include the ancient Macedonians in the national narrative. Macedonian historians challenged Greece's 'exclusive ownership' of the symbols and territory of the ancient Macedonians in order to back up their claims to the name and the land of

Macedonia[v] and to create their own ancient national patrimony. The main claim was that the ancient Macedonians were not Greeks but a different, non-Hellenic people who joined in the ethnogenesis of the Macedonian people by melting into the Slavs who had come to the region in the sixth and seventh centuries. They asserted that ancient Macedonians and ancient Greeks were completely different peoples. The discourse on the ancient Macedonians was intended to substantiate the Macedonians' claims to a long national pedigree and also to a homeland. 'New alternative theories of national origin that might minimize IMRO and the Ilinden uprising – such as the descent of the modern Macedonian nation from intermarriage between migrating Slavs and remnants of the ancient Macedonian people of Alexander the Great – proved controversial at best among scholars, and met a mixed reception in popular forums' (Frusetta, 2004: 116).

At last, on 8 September 1991, the year of the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the Macedonians voted in a referendum and proclaimed full sovereignty and independence. The journey was finished. The impression was that the Macedonians had created their 'natural' nation-state. This impression was not shared by scholars of the national narratives of Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbians, who occasionally contested elements of Macedonian national identity.

*External stimuli and internal differences*

'The fund of ethnic elements, the ethno-historical heritage handed down through the generations, is always being reinterpreted and revised by various social groups in response to internal differences and external stimuli' (Smith, 1999: 17). In the case of the Macedonian nation, there was a substantial amount of 'external stimuli'. Numerous anti-Macedonian 'historical facts', mainly Greek, Bulgarian and older versions of Serbian narratives, tried to show 'inauthenticity' of Macedonian national narrative. The Serbian historiographer Cvijic argued that the Morava and Vardar valleys represent a complete geographical and economic whole. 'He claimed that after 1913 the effects of previous Bulgarian propaganda efforts were rapidly dissipating, and Macedonia would have been completely Serbian if it had not been for the world war' (Sardamov, 2001: 187). For Bulgarians, it was time for a re-interpretation of Macedonian history, counterbalancing Serbian 'versions'. 'Bulgarian historiography views Macedonia as western Bulgarian lands, the medieval empire of Tsar Samuel as a Bulgarian realm, and Samuel himself a Bulgarian Tsar from the dynasty of Simeon'

(Giannakos, 2001: 162). Lastly, the strongest attack came from Greece in 1990s. 'By calling themselves "Macedonians" the Slavs are "stealing" a Greek name; they are "embezzling" Greek cultural heritage; they are "falsifying" Greek history' (Danfort, 1993: 4). Therefore, the nineteenth and twentieth century rivalry about the 'Macedonian question' gained new impetus and new depth. 'New challenges from Greek and Bulgarian historians that Macedonian identity was the product of "Titoist brainwashing" encouraged Macedonian historians to focus on defending the historical legitimacy of that single identity for the population in general and IMRO (VMRO) specifically' (Frusetta, 2004: 117). One can say, connecting the past and external stimuli, that Macedonian national identity was something everyone wanted to have: the Greeks the right to the name Macedonia, the Bulgarians the right to the language, and the Serbians, even recently, the right to the church. However, according to the theories of nationalism, the most wanted element was primarily territory, as one of the main indicators of the nation. So it was in the Macedonian case.

Scholars also devoted their efforts to the issue, trying to figure out the roots of the contested perceptions. 'Where there are clashing interpretations of ancestral homelands and cultural heritages as for example in Macedonia, Kashmir, Nagorno-Karabagh, and Palestine – normal conflicts of interest are turned into cultural wars, and moral and political crusades replace everyday politics' (Smith, 1999: 9). History and culture, two separate but inextricable processes, were 'subjects' of proving 'our truth' against 'their truth'. The interplay of politics and culture in the Macedonian case was not yet finished. Yet the perception of Macedonia as a state threatened by hostile neighbours, the diplomatic disputes with Greece and Bulgaria over the use of historical symbols, and the perceived threat posed by the ethnic Albanian minority encouraged a sense of cohesiveness. 'In a time of perceived crisis and with limited alternatives, there was little inclination among ethnic Macedonians as a whole for a radical restructuring of national symbols' (Frusetta, 2004: 118). There were 'challenges' even from within.

Rapid social changes in the society freed some 'hidden' versions of the national narrative. The main 'ideological' struggle was between the two strongest political parties on the Macedonian political scene, Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party of Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE).[vi] While the SDSM stuck to the left-wing version of the national narrative, excluding the rest, the VMRO-DPMNE tried,

from the pre-socialist period right-wing perspective, to present to the public other 'forgotten' national heroes. Efforts were made to re-open questions from history and consequently to re-think parts of the national narrative. The most controversial revisionist effort, according to Brunnbauer, concerned the attempt to include the 'Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation' (VMRO) of the inter-war period in the Macedonian national narrative. 'The rationale of these attempts was to construct a historical rightwing tradition, which the nationalist VMRO-DPMNE party could claim for itself, and to oppose the pro-Yugoslav interpretation of Macedonian history that was politically associated with the post-communist SDSM party' (Brunnbauer, 2004: 192-3). Jovan Donev, a historian from Skopje, stressed at a public event that the right-wing tradition should come up with its own 'version' of history, as had the left-wing. The reconciliation of the two historic 'memories' held by both parties, one as a subaltern perspective different from the governing ones, did not find fruitful soil. After the VMRO-DPMNE stepped down as the ruling government-led coalition party (1998-2002), we saw, at least from the public perspective, a fading out of the attempts to exploit different national 'stories'. 'Both options offer different explanations and solutions for the deep political and social rifts that arose during transformation. But in the end, they are two sides of the same coin: they stress the national and ethnic individuality of the Macedonians' (Brunnbauer, 2004: 195).

*Quantitative differences between unitary and subaltern national narratives*
The Macedonian nation, after the nineteenth century 'appearance' as a distinct ethnic/cultural identity and more than half a century of peaceful construction of the national/state identity, still struggles with different historical opinions and attempts to disregard the existence of the Macedonian national identity. The more this identity was contested, the more prominence it gained on the international scene. Different external perspectives contested the nature of the Macedonian nation, name and language. 'The standardization of the Macedonian language, the creation of an autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church and new interpretations of history all reinforced this identity' (Frusetta, 2004: 112). After all of this, in the period of 1991-2001 the Macedonian state faced a decade of turbulent events. In 2001, too, internal conflict erupted among its sizeable Albanian minority. The conflict ended in 2001 with the signing of the Framework Agreement (in Ohrid) and the introduction of constitutional amendments that widen the political and cultural rights of Albanians.

Even though public surveys containing issues concerning Macedonian national identity have been made on very rare occasions since 1991, a survey was conducted after the conflict in 2001 with the aim of gathering data in relation to national feelings and the national myths and history of the Macedonians. We will show some of the data in support of some of the arguments stated earlier in this paper. There were 2004 ethnic Macedonians respondents, and the sample was random and representative. We will examine only three questions from this survey. In Table 1, there are data deriving from the question: 'What makes you feel like a Macedonian the most?'

**Table 1**[vii]

**Question:** What makes you feel like a Macedonian the most?

|            |      | Age | 18-25 | 56-65 | Edu. | Prim. school | Univ. | Pol. Party | SDSM | VMRO-DPMNE |
|------------|------|-----|-------|-------|------|--------------|-------|------------|------|------------|
| Language   | 7.81 |     | 5.29  | 10.07 |      | 8.74         | 6.97  |            | 8.60 | 6.95       |
| Church     | 4.49 |     | 4.76  | 3.60  |      | 10.38        | 2.79  |            | 3.17 | 10.70      |
| State      | 4.65 |     | 3.70  | 5.76  |      | 6.56         | 2.79  |            | 6.11 | 6.95       |
| Ethnicity  | 4.90 |     | 5.82  | 3.60  |      | 2.73         | 4.53  |            | 4.30 | 5.88       |
| All above  | 78.16|     | 80.42 | 76.98 |      | 71.58        | 82.93 |            | 77.83| 69.52      |
| Total      | 100% |     | 100%  | 100%  |      | 100%         | 100%  |            | 100% | 100%       |

Here we show the responses in relation to three independent variables: (1) two different age groups, (2) one group with primary school education and a university-educated group, and (3) two groups affiliated with the two strongest political parties, SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE, independently of their political party status (not necessarily members).

At first sight, there are no significant differences between the responses. The highest result to the question ('all the above' – 78.16%) shows that in the Macedonian case the interplay between culture and politics has reached its peak. Almost all of the additional categories (language, church, state and ethnicity) are submerged into the last answer – 'all the above'. The top-to-bottom homogenizing processes have played their part from the structural point of view, the subjective categories have been 'objectified', and, one can rate the Macedonian nation as an ethnic nation, for the reasons explained previously. There are no significant differences between the average answers among young people, the older generation, university-educated and

SDSM-affiliated respondents. Also, there is little variation between primary school-educated respondents and VMRO-DPMNE affiliates, with one small difference: these respondents are prone to have slightly stronger feelings towards the church compared to the other respondents. Handler argues that 'however individual members of the nation may differ, they share essential attributes that constitute their national identity. Sameness overrides difference' (Handler, 1988: 6). Following this, the differences in the perception of the elements of the Macedonian national identity are insignificant. 'It is not necessary that the whole of the population should feel so, or behave so, and it is not possible to lay down dogmatically a minimum percentage of a population, which must be so affected' (Seton-Watson, 1977)[viii].

The next question reveals some differences from the general pattern (Table 2). The question is about recent history: 'What is the most important event in the modern Macedonian history?' The three stated events marked the birth of the Macedonian nation in the twentieth century. The twentieth century started with the unsuccessful Ilinden Uprising against the Ottomans (1903), the second was the national and social revolution and anti-fascist resistance during World War Two (1941-1945), and the third was a referendum for independence on 8 September 1991, during the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia. Macedonian historians, as we saw, made a direct connection between the Ilinden uprising of August 1903 and the Partisan struggle against Bulgarian and German occupation between 1941 and 1944. 'Through these struggles the Macedonian people confirmed the historic existence of the Macedonian nation. Only through the latter struggle had, indeed, a Macedonian state finally been achieved. The Yugoslav Socialist Republic of Macedonia thus fulfilled the goals of Ilinden as defined by the new national ideology' (Frusetta, 2004: 112). The proclamation of the new Constitution on 17 November 1991 marked the first day of full sovereignty. Here we are faced with national myths, as well as historic memories, because the last event happened in 1991. The differences in national feelings in relation to the events from twentieth century are very clear.

**Table 2**

**Question:** What is the most important event in the modern Macedonian history?

| | | Age | **18-25** | **56-65** | Edu. | Prim. school | Univ. | Pol. party | SDSM | VMRO-DPMNE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ilinden | 29.32 | | 32.28 | 28.06 | | 34.97 | 22.30 | | 24.89 | 36.36 |
| ASNOM | 23.84 | | 19.05 | 28.78 | | 25.14 | 32.06 | | 31.00 | 10.70 |
| Indepen. | 31.64 | | 36.51 | 20.86 | | 16.39 | 34.15 | | 33.03 | 32.09 |
| Other | 8.80 | | 7.94 | 7.92 | | 9.84 | 7.67 | | 7.01 | 12.83 |
| Don't know | 6.40 | | 4.23 | 14.39 | | 13.66 | 3.83 | | 4.07 | 8.02 |
| Total | 100% | | 100% | 100% | | 100% | 100% | | 100% | 100% |

The average Macedonian thinks that the most important event in modern Macedonian history is the Referendum on 8 September 1991 (31.64%). Just below is the Ilinden uprising of 1903 (29.32%) and ASNOM in 1944 is in third place (23.84%). The responses by social groups show some differences between groups. Generally, almost every group in Table 2 fails to follow the rating of the average Macedonian, except the 18-25 variable. The younger generation have a similar rating, highest for Independence (36.51%), but differ in rating ASNOM lower than average (19.05%). The older generation prefer ASNOM as the most important event (28.78%), primary school-educated respondents prefer the Ilinden uprising (34.97%), while university-educated respondents and SDSM affiliates rated the Ilinden uprising as third in relevance, Independence Day first and ASNOM second. The biggest difference can be spotted among VMRO-DPMNE affiliates respondents, who think that the Ilinden uprising is the most important (36.36%) compared with ASNOM (10.70%). Because the political parties control the state of affairs, and SDSM proclaimed itself as a successor of the previous nomenclature, this result shows that the VMRO-DPMNE affiliates do not see ASNOM as a very important event in modern Macedonian history. 'Nations often do not typically have a single history, but there are competing tales to be told. Thus, national histories are continually being re-written, and the re-writing reflects current balances of hegemony' (Billig, 1995: 71). This supports the arguments about the attempts by the VMRO-DPMNE party to re-consider some events and 'heroes' from the Macedonian past.

The last question was: 'What are the historical roots of the Macedonian state?', shown in Table 3. This is the most contested part, on the part of Greece and Bulgaria, of the Macedonian national narrative. Previously we stated the Macedonian historiographical version of Macedonian myths and memories. 'In Macedonian historiography though, "Macedonia" never ceased to exist, and is often portrayed as a collective actor. This discourse is intended to substantiate the Macedonians' claims to a certain territory, which is portrayed as the homeland of their ancestors' (Brunnbauer, 2004: 182). So what are the implications of Macedonian historic myths and memories?

**Table 3**

**Question:** What are the historical roots of the Macedonian state?

| | | Age | 18-25 | 56-65 | Edu. | Prim. School | Univ. | Pol. party | SDSM | VMRO-DPMNE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alexand. | 21.35 | | 19.58 | 10.79 | | 17.49 | 24.74 | | 18.33 | 26.74 |
| Samuil | 15.37 | | 13.23 | 16.55 | | 10.93 | 18.47 | | 17.19 | 11.76 |
| Ilinden | 24.75 | | 26.46 | 20.86 | | 24.04 | 21.95 | | 27.15 | 31.02 |
| ASNOM | 16.78 | | 12.70 | 25.18 | | 16.39 | 19.51 | | 17.42 | 8.02 |
| Indepen. | 2.74 | | 2.65 | 4.32 | | 1.64 | 1.39 | | 2.71 | 2.14 |
| Other | 4.73 | | 7.94 | 5.04 | | 5.46 | 5.57 | | 4.75 | 5.88 |
| Not know | 14.29 | | 17.46 | 17.27 | | 24.04 | 8.36 | | 12.44 | 14.44 |
| Total | 100% | | 100% | 100% | | 100% | 100% | | 100% | 100% |

The average Macedonian thinks that the historical roots of the Macedonian state are connected with the Ilinden uprising (24.75%) or with Alexander the Great (21.35%), and are followed by ASNOM and Czar Samuil. Divergence from the average result was recorded among the age groups 18-25 and 56-65, university-educated respondents and VMRO-DPMNE variables. The younger generation, again, prefer Ilinden (26.46%) compared to ASNOM (12.70%), the older generation prefer ASNOM (25.18%), while primary school-educated respondents prefer the Ilinden uprising (24.04%). Interestingly, among university-educated respondents Alexander the Great (24.74%) was the most popular choice. Bigger differences, again, are spotted between VMRO-DPMNE affiliates, with Ilinden first (31.02%) and

Alexander the Great the second choice (26.74%), giving ASNOM barely (8.02%). Again, VMRO-DPMNE affiliates have significant differences not just in the rating of the historical roots, but in the percentage of importance. This supports the argument that 'alternative political identities have been emerging, different from those laid down by exiting state structures' (McCrone, 1998: 31). This implies that some social groups have different perspectives on national narratives, view national history differently, or at least have subaltern national 'versions'. In the Macedonian case, these groups are the older generation aged 56-65, the primary-educated respondents and, to some extent, university-educated groups. In sum, the most important differences are those held by affiliates of the VMRO-DPMNE.

All the above supports this paper's argument that in the case of the Macedonian national identity there are competing differences between unitary and subaltern national myths and narratives. 'The governing myth thus coexists with and is constantly contested by subaltern myths, which are capable of generating their own traditions and stories' (Bell, 2003: 74). This is the case with many nations, both older and younger ones. That means that it is a challenge to statistically research the categories of nation and national identity because of the constant transformation of the forces and agents within culture and history. 'Even many "established" nations are riven by embedded cultural differences that generate rival symbolic and political projects. In many countries we find the emergence and elaboration of rival visions of the nation' (Hutchinson, 2000: 661). Identities, both national and other forms of identities, are never fixed and final. They are always in process; they are connected in many ways with cultural, political and state factors; many elements act as their prerequisites and many are the product of the structures and individuals that view them as objective or more often as subjective 'realities'. Carens argues that identities are partly subjectively determined and partly objectively imposed, and that the mix of these two varies from one context to another. People sometimes experience their identity as given, sometimes as chosen, as sometimes as a combination of the two. '[T]he meaning and salience of a given identity varies from one person to another among those who share the identity and may shift over time on both of these respects both for the group as a whole and for individual members within it…' (Carens, 2000: 15).

**Conclusion**

This paper has dealt with feelings of national identity in relation to national myths and narratives. First, its aim was to try to discern between different categories of national identity. Then, the paper traced the literature attempting to elucidate the elements of national identity. Finally, I argued that national identity is not as sound and unitary as the proponents of the national groups want us to think. There are individuals and groups who think differently, namely, have subaltern feelings about the national narrative and the governing myth. This paper study showed that in the Macedonian case there are social groups with subaltern feelings about the national narrative. Different social groups hold different feelings and memories concerning Macedonian history, recent and past as well. Also, an alternative political identity emerged, different from the governing myth. This demonstrates that there are competing tales to be told and that there is no single national history. All told, identities are never 'fixed' things. They are always in processes of transformation within history, politics and power relations.

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[i] See http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3 … [accessed 23 February 2004].

[ii] Quoted in McCrone, D. (1998) *The Sociology of Nationalism,* London and New York: Routledge, pp. 29-35.

[iii] See the web page of the Euro-Balkan Institute in Skopje, project "Lightness', www.euba.org.mk.

[iv] The 2002 census showed that Macedonia has 2.022,547 citizens, of which, according to ethnic affiliation, 64.18% are Macedonians, 25.17% are Albanians, 3.85% are Turks, 2.66% are Romas, 1.78% are Serbs, 0.84% are Bosnians, 0.48% are Vlachs and 1.04% others. The data are cited from the Release of the State Statistical Office, Release 2.1.3.30, www.stat.gov.mk.

[v] The name Macedonia is used as an abbreviated form of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. By resolution A/RES/47/225 of 8 April 1993, the General Assembly (UN) decided to admit as a Member of the United Nations the state being provisionally referred to for all purposes within the United Nations as 'The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' pending settlement of the difference that had arisen over its name.

[vi] SDSM emerged from the former Communist party. It has split in Social-Democrats, Socialists and Liberal-Democrats. It is one of the two strongest Macedonian political forces, holding the government cabinet from 1992-1998 and 2002 till the present day. VMRO-DPMNE is one of the two strongest Macedonian political forces. It was in the government cabinet from 1998-2002. Many view it as anti-Communist, while they themselves claim that they are the successors to the historical 'Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation' (VMRO), created in 1893. Both political parties, SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE, claimed publicly to have close to 100,000 party members.

[vii] The questions cited in the paper were part of a nationwide survey conducted by the 'Centre for Ethnic and Security Issues', which is part of the 'Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research' of the University of Skopje. The survey was carried out through written questionnaire on a random sample of 2004 ethnic Macedonians, in the framework of the project 'Macedonian-Macedonian Dialogue' sponsored by the Swiss Embassy in Macedonia in 2001, after the signing of the 'Framework Agreement'. The tables have been modified for the purposes of this paper.

[viii] See http://meggs007.freeserve.co.uk/essays/whatnation.htm [accessed 11 March 2004].