



**Title VIII Research Scholar Program
Title VIII Combined Research and Language Training Program**

Final Report

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Brand Nationalism: Neoliberal Statecraft and the Politics of Nation Branding in the Republic of Macedonia

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Research Abstract:

This book project examines how state governance is being remade in the neoliberal era. It does so through an anthropological study of state-sponsored nation branding in the Republic of Macedonia. Nation branding—the effort to formulate national identity as a commodity that adds value to local goods and services—has increased exponentially in recent years, reflecting a growing dependence of national economies on global markets. Proponents of nation branding celebrate it as a strategy to stimulate investment, tourism and growth. This project, by contrast, investigates *the politics of nation branding* and the heightened regulation of public communication and public space that accompany state-sponsored nation-branding campaigns.

The book’s argument emerges through an ethnographic analysis of a controversial nation-branding effort recently undertaken in Macedonia. From 2010-17, the Macedonian government implemented “Skopje 2014,” a project to brand Macedonia through a massive overhaul of Skopje, its capital city. Ultimately, the book contends that Macedonia’s embrace of nation branding reflects a new modality of postindustrial governance, one that rationalizes intervention into public life through appeals to an entrepreneurial state. In Macedonia, government officials presented nation branding as an economic imperative and business opportunity for the country. Importantly, the purported necessity of a successful nation brand was also interpreted as a state license to police public speech and behavior according to whether they might tarnish Skopje 2014 and its nation-branding goals. One thus witnesses how a state program for economic development provided rationale for regulating the public spaces and discourses of the nation. By focusing on the social and political effects of nation branding rather than its economic promise, this project forges a critical ethnography of nation branding and develops a wider theory of governance in neoliberal times.



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Research Goals:

The research conducted for this project employs qualitative methods from the interpretive social sciences, including ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, media analysis, and archival research. The project also incorporates data that I gathered during short research visits to Skopje in 2010 and 2012; through interviews conducted over Skype; and via the analysis of media discourses and public debates that arose in the wake of the Skopje 2014 project. Through these means, I have already compiled a corpus that reflects: the planning and strategy of Skopje 2014; its relation to earlier nation-branding plans in Macedonia; the robust criticism provoked by the project; and the ancillary state-sponsored campaigns that sought to align public speech and behavior with Skopje 2014's nation-branding aims. The project also builds on 23 months of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in Macedonia between 2000 and 2008 for my doctoral research. The research goals for my American Councils fellowship to Macedonia reflect these methodological preferences as well as my previous fieldwork and data collection.

In conceptualizing my research for the American Councils' fellowship program, I therefore prioritized three primary goals that would aid in the completion of the book project. First, I sought to complete an oral history of Skopje 2014 as presented by three key groups: government supporters of the project; marketing consultants contracted to promote the project; dissident figures who contested the project. By triangulating these sets of insider accounts—the governmental, the professional and the dissident—my goal was to analyze the policies, decisions, and reactions that animated Skopje 2014 over its duration (2010-2017).

Second, I planned to review data on Skopje 2014 that surfaced through a government wiretapping scandal. In February 2015, it was revealed that the Macedonian secret police had tapped the phones of nearly 20,000 citizens, including most high-ranking government officials. Many of these recordings were leaked to the press and are now part of the public record, including numerous recordings related to Skopje 2014. This new data promises to provide an unprecedented “behind-the-scenes” picture of the state logics of nation branding. During my three-month visit to Skopje, I hoped to interview willing individuals who were implicated in the wiretapped recordings as well as Macedonian analysts of the affair.

Finally, I aimed to use my three-month period in Macedonia to research the how the new Macedonian government that came to power in June 2017 planned to revise and rebrand Skopje 2014.



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Working with contacts at Macedonia's Ministry of Culture, I would examine what the "unbranding" of Skopje 2014 reveals about nation branding as a mode of governance.

Research Activities:

I am pleased to report that my research on the project, "Brand Nationalism: Neoliberal Statecraft and the Politics of Nation Branding in the Republic of Macedonia," proceeded both smoothly and productively. As stated above, the overriding goal over my research stay in Macedonia was to complete an oral history of controversial "Skopje 2014" project that transformed the built environment of Macedonia's capital and came to symbolize the power and politics of the political party, the VMRO-DPMNE, that governed Macedonia from 2006 to 2017. Following the revelation of an illegal wiretapping program and a series of mass public protests that forced a new election, the VMRO-DPMNE was peacefully removed from power in 2017. My research was thus designed to be historical in nature and to be comprised of formal and informal interviews three core sets of individuals: public critics of the Skopje 2014 project, media professionals who worked on the nation branding campaigns associated with project, and government sponsors of the project. Given my pre-existing range of contacts in Macedonia—where I have been conducting anthropological research since 2000—I anticipated that it would be easiest to arrange interviews with public critics of the project. In the first third of my research stay in Macedonia, I therefore aimed to complete interviews with several active critics of the project and advance groundwork toward interviews with consultants on and sponsors of the project.

Overall, my research plan progressed according to expectation. I was able to conduct twenty-one formal interviews with some of the most active and most well-known critics of the Skopje 2014 project. Of these, I was given permission to record fifteen of the interviews. My interlocutors ranged from independent journalists working in Skopje, public intellectuals who vocally criticized the project, activists employed in the NGO sector, as well as some of the youth leaders of the so-called Student Plenums of 2014 and the protests dubbed the Multicolored Revolution which took place in 2016. These interviews proved to be extraordinarily enlightening, helping me to see how Macedonian activists interpreted the Skopje 2014 project as part of a much larger process of state capture and media control that was orchestrated by the VMRO-DPMNE-led government during the period of 2006-2017.



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In addition, I conducted informal, semi-structured interviews with twelve other individuals who were not actively involved in the public protest of the Skopje 2014 project but who observed and reflected on Macedonia's recent political history. This group gives me insight into how "ordinary" citizens understood and reacted to the project and the political moment that it symbolized. Furthermore, I traveled to the cities of Ohrid and Shtip to conduct some of these interviews. Since the Skopje 2014 project was centered in Skopje, as the project name indicates, I had wanted to hear first-hand how residents of some other Macedonian cities reckoned the project.

I was also able to talk to a few individuals who helped to organize promotional campaigns connected to the Skopje 2014 project as well as with government sponsors of the project. For example, I was able to conduct a formal interview with an employee from Macedonia's governmental agency to support tourism, an individual who had worked at the agency under the previous government and who gave me insight as to how campaigns to promote tourism to Macedonia intersected with the Skopje 2014 project. I also went on three guided walking tours of central Skopje to witness how the city, and the controversial Skopje 2014 project, were presented to foreign tourists visiting the city.

However, as I mentioned in my mid-project progress report, it became clear during my research that it will be difficult to talk to many of the government sponsors of the project. Due to revelations from the wiretapping scandal, several of the most public supporters of the projects have been indicted for wrongdoing and either are in the midst of or face legal action. As I expected, such individuals, and even their associates, were reticent to talk about their past government positions. Indeed, in almost all cases, my efforts to organize research interviews either went unanswered or were refused. Given that research ethics also recommends against conducting interviews with people vulnerable to legal action, I decided that it would be wisest to devise an alternative research plan. In consequence, I choose to conduct interviews with journalists and intellectuals who publicly (and even vociferously) defended the project and the VMRO government in the 2006-2017 period. I formally interviewed five persons fitting this characterization, and was allowed to record interviews with two. Such conversations at least allowed me to hear from individuals who were professed defenders of the project and its political and economic aims.

Similarly, I also realized that it would be near impossible to conduct interviews with persons implicated in the leaked, wiretapped conversations due to ongoing legal processes and the concomitant



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concerns over research ethics. However, I was able to collect recordings and transcripts of the wiretapped conversations that were published in the Macedonian press. While I completed a preliminary evaluation of the transcripts, I plan to conduct a closer analysis in the coming months.

I had better luck in pursuing my third research goal on the current government's plans to address the Skopje 2014 project. I was able to conduct and record interviews with two officials in Macedonia's Ministry of Culture. I was also able to conduct an interview with members of the committee that was established to evaluate the Skopje 2014 project as well as with an architect who won a competition that solicited possible redesigns of Skopje 2014 structures.

My time in Macedonia also allowed me to survey the Macedonian language media—past and present—for data that provided background to the oral histories that I conducted. The ability to follow up questions and speculations with friends and acquaintances in Skopje also proved invaluable. I.e. also used my physical presence in Skopje to photograph the many, many new sculptures and buildings that were constructed as part of the Skopje 2014 project as well as to visit the new museums that were opened under the auspices of the project.

Finally, during the period of my research, the Macedonian and Greek governments signed a treaty that promises to the end the 27 year “naming dispute” that antagonized relations between the two countries and that has stalled Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration. The treaty would result in Macedonia changing its name to “North Macedonia” with the expectation that this move will enable Macedonia's relatively swift accession to NATO and the European Union. Given the world historical significance of the agreement, I chose to also conduct some research to follow the ways in which citizens of Macedonia have been reacting to the agreement. On one level, this research was unavoidable. Everyone was already talking about and speculating about the referendum. Seizing this opportunity, I incorporated questions on the referendum in my interviews, I conducted media analysis on referendum coverage and commentary, and I attended several political rallies, organized both by opponents of the referendum and by supporters of the referendum.

Important Research Findings:

As one can likely imagine, it will take some time before I can properly analyze and reflect on all of the data that I was able to collect and experiences that I was able to share during my three months of



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research in Macedonia this summer. My report of important research findings can thus only be partial and preliminary. However, I have begun to process and systematize some of the key themes of my summer research. In particular, I was interested to see how across the oral history interviews that I conducted, the Skopje 2014 project was recurrently connected to the VMRO-DPMNE's broader strategies of public relations and media control. This is a surprising and important discovery. Most often state-sponsored mega-projects like Skopje 2014 are analyzed in terms of: their effects on the urban landscape, the political narratives that they symbolize, suspicions of money laundering and corruption, or the economic vision that they advance and implement (e.g., the privatization of public space). That is, mega-projects are usually not connected to a larger politics of public communication and the public sphere. The fact that Skopje 2014 was, I feel, says something about the specific history of Macedonia and the specific conduct of the VMRO-DPMNE party. But, I argue, it also reveals a political logic that is present in many similar mega-projects that seek foreign attention (in terms of tourism and investment) through spectacular architecture and the redesign of public space. Specifically, the Skopje 2014 project highlights how such projects constitute a medium of communication in their own right—one that privileges some forms of performing the nation at the expense of others—and also anchor larger efforts to regulate public communication in service of the effort to lure capital from abroad.

Through the interviews that I conducted, in informal conversations, and through media research, I thus began to delineate and interconnect some of the ways that agents and allies of the VMRO-DPMNE government worked to shape, and even to control, the Macedonian public sphere on politics over the period 2006-2016. For example, I emphasize how the nation-branding project centered on Skopje 2014 was itself part of an effort to regulate the Macedonian public sphere, by favoring some representations and performances of the nation while discouraging others. I then connect this logic of nation branding to accounts that I received of the VMRO-DPMNE's larger embrace of communications strategy as a political tool. I then combine interviewing data with independent research to document how the VMRO-DPMNE used advertising favoritism, legal challenge, proxy media and in some cases even intimidation to colonize the Macedonian public sphere on politics. However, rather than viewing the VMRO-DPMNE's encroachment on media freedom in Macedonia as a "return" to the illiberalisms (e.g., totalitarianism) often charged against Eastern Europe, I argue that these processes reflected the government's embrace of



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contemporary communications strategies and their strategic effort to engineer political impressions. Ultimately, then, the Macedonian case can function as a warning of what can happen when PR logics supersede evidence-based journalism. And, insofar as Macedonian citizens peacefully rallied in the street and at the voting box to remove the VMRO-DPMNE from power, Macedonia is also an inspiring example of citizen action to reclaim a political space from PR-manufactured domination.

While this line of argument is still preliminary, I have been fortunate to already present on research on this theme at two scholarly venues, the Macedonian-North American Conference on Macedonian Studies, held in Ohrid, Macedonia on August 28-29 and the “Politics of Participation” Symposium held at the University of Helsinki on October 18-19. In order to add substance to the argument, I include here an excerpt of the analysis that I prepared for the Helsinki symposium:

“There is much that I could say about the mass media public sphere in Macedonia and its transformation between 2006 and 2016. But for sake of time, I want to focus on a set of elite practices that sought to regiment the forms of participation that were permissible in country’s mass news public. This time period, 2006 to 2016, encompasses Nikola Gruevski’s tenure as prime minister. When elected as prime minister in 2006, Gruevski primarily positioned himself as an economic reformer, focused on liberalizing the Macedonian economy and attracting foreign investment. He launched several initiatives toward this end, including a massive, very controversial urban renovation project that sought to make Skopje, Macedonia’s capital “more European” as well as connected efforts to brand Macedonia as an attractive business and tourist destination through the “Macedonia Timeless” campaign. However, as his time leading the country progressed, he and his party, the VMRO-DPMNE were increasingly charged with encroachments on media freedom, abuse of office, and misuse of public funds. After an illegal, government surveillance that targeted 20,000 people was revealed in 2015, a series of mass protests and political actions began that ultimately resulted in Gruevski’s removal from office. Quite a bit of drama, to be sure. But how did we get here? How did a poster boy of neoliberal reformism come to be repainted as a dictator?

The answer to this question leads us more deeply into the politics of news media during the Gruevski years. As I have argued elsewhere (Graan 2013, 2016), the urban renovation and nation-branding project that Gruevski spearheaded is best understood as an effort to regiment public spheres.



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That is, through nation branding campaigns among targeted publics abroad, the Macedonian government sought to advance preferred representations of the nation (and to marginalize undesirable ones).

Accompanying these promotional efforts, however, were a set of new laws, practices and metadiscourses that sought to protect the nation brand and thus to regulate public speech and public behavior among publics inside Macedonia. In a variety of ways, the government called on Macedonian citizens to “live the brand” (cf. Aronczyk 2008, 2013; Volcic and Andrejevic 2011; Kaneva 2007, 2011) and government-sponsored, professionally produced media campaigns were launched to school Macedonians on how to act in front of foreign tourists. At the same time, critics of the urban renovation and nation-branding project were increasingly labeled by government-friendly media as ‘traitors,’ ‘communists,’ ‘Sorosians’ and ‘freaks,’ whose unfounded complaints risked tarnishing the national image (Muhic and Takovski 2014). In consequential ways, such actions marked some forms of participation as permissible in the Macedonian while discouraging others.

Taking a step back, I want to pause simply to characterize this form of intervention in Macedonian publics. In general, the media tactics of nation branding reflect the explosion of branding, marketing, public relations, and “communications” as growth industries. Importantly, these elite practices are fundamentally about publicity. They recognize the public, interdiscursive circulation of textual and visual artifacts and they work to shape trajectories of circulation in instrumental and value-producing ways. For instance, brand management exists as a social project that seeks to regiment how commodity objects are represented in publics so as to profit from their circulation in markets (Moore 2003, Lury 2004, Foster 2007, Manning 2010, Nakassis 2012, Graan 2016). Techniques of public relations are often deployed, for example in electioneering (Lempert and Silverstein 2013) and among activists (McLagan 2001, Paley 2001), to target audiences and to promote preferred representations within public spheres. And, as Douglas Holmes (2013) has recently argued, central bankers now rely on the public narration of economic analysis and forecasting as a means shape mass economic practice in accord with inflation and growth targets. At the core of such practices are metapragmatic discourses that frame some semiotic objects and some forms of language as appropriate to a particular market or public while framing others as inappropriate. Authorized brand representations are promoted while unauthorized brand representations are sanctioned; or, one reading of economic data is proffered while other readings are



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rejected. These practices amount to what could be termed “discursive engineering,” that is, interdiscursive and metadiscursive interventions that aim to regiment how objects, knowledge and representations circulate and thereby contribute to value-formation.

As I see it then, the nation-branding-inspired interventions into the Macedonian public sphere—which valorized some modes of participation and discouraged others—constituted an effort to engineer a particular sort of public. As in the Macedonian case, such efforts at reflexive engineering often channel highly professionalized, elite strategies and practices, such forms of coordinated, multi-generic messaging. They also often command sizeable resources and legal protections that contribute to productions values, media access and penetration. And, finally, they exist not as foundational structuring premises of publicity—such as public address and stranger sociability—but are sustained by typically multiple and repeated interventions into the public sphere that interact with and within the reflexive circulation of discourse.

I want to underscore this point. What I am calling the discursive engineering of publicity contrasts significantly with Michael Warner’s (2002) general model of publicity. For example, a sustained project of brand management, that operates through mass produced commodities; logos and taglines; advertisements in print, video and social media; celebrity endorsements; product placement in film and television; and a division of lawyers does not quite compare with a moment of public discourse that projects a specific character, way of speaking, and way of seeing the world and that “then goes out in search of confirmation that such a public exists.” Yes, strategic communications projects operate through public address and any given project’s vision of the world is not always taken up and recirculated. But, at a more basic level, these projects in their ubiquity shape the intertextual environments predicated by mass publicity. This is perhaps especially true in political branding and political advertising, where candidate branding seeks to sculpt an interdiscursive chain of positive messaging while negative ads sanction against public support of rivals.

The media tactics employed through Macedonia’s nation branding campaign—of valorizing ‘patriotic’ forms of participation while sanctioning ‘traitor’ forms of participation—should thus not be taken lightly. They highlight a level of the politics of participation within mass publics that remains



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invisible within Warner's liberal-tinted model. This is especially clear if we follow further developments in Macedonia during the time of Nikola Gruevski and the VMRO.

On a general level, the VMRO employed sophisticated political marketing strategies during its period of rule. As one media strategist in Macedonia told me in an interview, it was really the VMRO under Gruevski's leadership that brought modern PR and marketing techniques to Macedonian politics. According to him, the VMRO moved beyond elections-focused media campaigns toward an ongoing and sustained communications strategy. Strategists and party leader decided on core issues and messages; talking points were prepared for media appearances; unscripted media appearances were minimized; relationships were cultivated with sympathetic journalists and broadcasters; and so-called "hostile" journalists and broadcasters were shunned. Alliances between broadcasters and the party led to ancillary media (e.g., talk shows and documentaries) that tended to flatter and support the VMRO's political narratives. Finally, the party also commissioned a slew of public service advertisements, for example, to support the use of the Cyrillic alphabet, to honor the Macedonian flag, and to promote having a third child. Through these combined means, the political apparatus of the VMRO infiltrated media publics in Macedonia in an unprecedented manner.

The VMRO's aggressive approach to political marketing, however, was not limited to these strategies. In addition, the party began to isolate and even undermine journalists and news outlets that were considered to be overly critical of the party and the Prime Minister. Notably and most visibly, the VMRO government had Velja Ramkovski, the owner of Macedonia's largest and most popular independent television station, arrested and convicted on suspicious charges of tax evasion and money laundering. The government also began to practice advertising favoritism, directing its large advertising budget toward friendly media at the expense of critical media.

More ominously, those journalists who continued to produce critical reports were often attacked as "traitors" or foreign agents by pro-government media. Especially notorious were several online, government-aligned news portals, such as Kurir, Republika and Libertas, which would regularly publish anonymous, "hit job" stories on government critics. Oftentimes, the attacks published on the online portals were then referenced in reports published on "more respectable" television and print media, building an intertextual chain of slander. Similarly, shock jocks like Milenko Nedelkovski would slander



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journalists and encourage his audience to do the same. Alternatively, for those independent media outlets that persevered and that continued to publish fact-based criticism of VMRO policies, one “final” strategy was simply ignorance. That is, the government would simply ignore the reports, pretend as if they did not exist. Silence too then became a weapon in the VMRO’s assault on the Macedonian mass media. When we add this altogether, we can see that in a rather short period of time, the ecology of news broadcasters in Macedonia, and therefore too, the ecology of the mass public on Macedonian politics changed fundamentally.

As I report on the mass media context of Macedonia during the period of the VMRO, I want to be clear about my argument. It would be easy for one to conclude that the VMRO’s sustained infiltration of a mass media public on Macedonian politics was yet another manifestation of East European and Balkan illiberalism. To be clear, this is NOT my argument. Rather, as I have suggested, the VMRO policies extend from and mirror the broader embrace of marketing and PR strategies among political actors the world over. That is, the Macedonian case has more in common with the contemporary United States than it does with Romania under Ceausescu or East Germany. As with the contemporary US, the VMRO government worked decidedly to exert a measure of control on the mass media public via selective media engagements, strategic communication across media genres, and the metadiscursive regimentation of proper and (im)proper forms of participation.

I am quite serious about this. The media tactics evident during the VMRO rule in Macedonia—of media cronyism; of nested messaging that connects political performance to allied commentary to political advertising to entertainment media; of the metadiscursive polarization of the public sphere—all have analogues in the contemporary United States and in other so-called liberal democracies.

From this perspective, what distinguishes the case of VMRO-led Macedonia is not the VMRO’s media tactics in and of themselves but the degree to which they were able to pursue them within the institutional infrastructure and discursive space of the Macedonian public sphere on politics. The VMRO case is an example of sustained “discursive engineering” that sought the near monopolistic regimentation of the Macedonian mass news public. Of course, the VMRO’s success in capturing the Macedonian public sphere on politics should not be separated from the size and poverty of the country, which created structural vulnerabilities that were all too easy to exploit. Significantly too, Macedonia’s European and

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American supporters, pleased with the country's economic liberalization and preoccupied by the financial crises of 2008, irresponsibly turned a blind-eye during the early stages of the VMRO's power grab. The VMRO example is thus an extreme manifestation of the discursive engineering of publicity, but one I argue that is qualitatively similar to the PR and communications apparatuses found in other political contexts.



1. The centerpiece of the Skopje 2104 project, an 8 storey tall monument to Alexander the Great. Note the bridal photos taking place on the fountain steps.



2. The Alexander statue as backdrop for tourist photos

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3. A relatively new tourist map to Skopje, located just off of Macedonia Square. Note that most of the destinations are structures that were part of the Skopje 2014 project and that several of them are marked as still under construction.



4. A photo illustrating the "bigger is better" logic of the Skopje 2014 project. An older statue to Krste Misirkov has been awkwardly displaced by a newer and much bigger monument to Hristo Tatarchev.

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5. Remnant graffiti from the #protestirm demonstrations against Nikola Gruevski.



6. Remnant graffiti from the #protestirm demonstrations against Nikola Gruevski.

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

As indicated in my report on findings, the case of Macedonia under the VMRO-DPMNE government showcases the political dangers of attacks on evidence-based journalism and the promotion of PR strategies and goals over all else. That is, the Macedonian case anticipated both the saturation of



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news publics with so-called “fake news,” that is fabricated, instrumental reports to serve a political agenda and also the use of “fake news” as an epithet to intimidate and discredit institutions of evidence-based journalism that challenge bald political narrative. In Macedonia, such PR practices and discourses amounted to a virtual colonization of the news media public sphere and precipitous decline in media freedom. Fortunately for Macedonia, the work and courage of civil rights defenders and ordinary citizens led to a peaceful change in government and an ongoing political effort to restore and improve media protections in Macedonia.

Given this case study, I therefore recommend that:

- An international committee of investigate journalists be founded so as to formulate media policy and best practices that reflect the vulnerabilities to media freedom spurred on by new technologies, business models, media practices, and political conduct. The decline of so-called legacy media and the rise of internet-based and social media has radically transformed media ecologies in ways that threaten the viability of evidence-based journalism. Journalists from Macedonia and similar countries that have witnessed, and survived, systematic efforts to exploit legal, financial, and technological vulnerabilities with the media landscape for political ends. As Macedonia and similar countries work to formulate new media policy so as to protect a free press, the world at large, and especially the contemporary United States, would benefit for the resultant experience and insight. An international committee of investigate journalists would therefore provide a framework for comparative knowledge and policy-making that recognizes the global dimension of this issue and also its specific value for media freedom in the United States.
- The United States Congress consistently condemn verbal attacks on journalists and news media institutions, both abroad and at home.
- The US State Department increase its support to independent, investigative news media outlets.
- That the United States Congress and State Department support the development of news literacy programs, both abroad and at home.
- That the United States Congress found an independent commission, working on an annual basis, to fact-check and evaluate major print, television, radio and internet-based news outlets according to their abidance (or not) with the norms of evidence-based journalism.



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Co-Curricular Activity:

During my stay in Macedonia, I was fortunate to present my research at the Macedonian-North American Conference on Macedonian Studies, held in Ohrid, Macedonia on August 28-29. In addition, I also conducted interviews with several employees of local NGOs in Macedonia and with several colleagues who work at Macedonian universities. However, I did not offer formal research presentations, especially as universities were out of session during my visit.

Conclusions:

I sincerely thank the American Councils for International Education for their support of my research. Due to an American Councils Research Scholarship Fellowship, I was able to make significant progress on my project. Not only did I conducted a large number and important range of interviews during my time in Macedonia, but I was able to talk with friends, colleagues and acquaintances and so all the better situate my research questions in the experiences and concerns of my interlocutors. As mentioned, my summer research directed me to the connection between Skopje 2014 as a state-sponsored megaproject, targeted to investor and tourist publics abroad, and the VMRO-DPMNE governments' encroachment on media freedom during the period of 2006-2017. Already this finding has led me to investigate and analyze the relationship between neoliberal public relations and communications strategies and broader efforts to shape and control public spheres. As I continue to analyze my data and work on the book, I hope to develop these insights, both the enhance understanding of Macedonia's political history but also to mine lessons for parallel cases around the world, including in the United States.

Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:

I plan for this research to result in book-lengthed, ethnographic monograph, which I aim to publish with a major university press. I aim to complete the book manuscript in early 2020. As I work on individual chapters, I will present them at workshops, conferences, and professional meetings. I will also likely publish one chapter as a research article in a scholarly journal.

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