Singing for Macedonia: Glocalization and National Identity Construction in Macedonian Idol

By Dave Wilson

This piece was awarded the Ki Mantle Hood Prize at the SEMSCHC meeting in January 2013. An expanded version of Wilson's prize-winning work has been submitted for consideration by another academic journal. Still, we would like to recognize this piece in its original conference paper form for its success, and thus have included both the original paper abstract and some relevant video links provided by the author. When the expanded article is accepted for publication, we will also link to it in this space.

Abstract: American Idol is a phenomenon that has swept the globe quickly in its eleven years of existence. Following the well-worn path of globalization to franchises in forty-three territories, the Idols empire typifies not cultural imperialism, but rather Appadurai's model of global culture flows, in which local mediation of a global brand can reveal multifarious influences from the local culture, the brand's home culture, and often the brand itself. Globalized media not only invokes Roland Robertson's idea of glocalization, the ways in which global cultural products are adapted for local audiences, but also provides opportunities for those local audiences to both enunciate a desired cultural identity and challenge others to move towards that identity. In Macedonia, a nationalist commitment to receiving both affirmation as a unique culture and recognition of that uniqueness by the international community (notably the West) often drives public policy, public opinion, and popular culture as Macedonians look for new sites for the construction of a globally-relevant Macedonian identity. In this paper, I suggest that the debut (and only) season of Macedonian Idol (2010-2011) provides a site for glocalized identity construction through an analysis of the program's musical content, narrative model, voting procedures, and audience response as models and modifications of American Idol. Through infusing its program with Macedonian sensibilities and through adopting and adapting the narrative model of American Idol, Macedonian Idol provides an image of a Macedonia that can attain relevance as a cosmopolitan society while retaining the distinct characteristics that define it as a nation.

Links to video:

1. "Macedonian Idol – Mini-Concert I – Viktor Apostolovski"

This excerpt is from an early episode of the ten male semi-finalists of the competition. It focuses on Viktor Apostolovski, shows a vignette of him in Macedonian regional town, Bitola (his hometown), as well as his performance of "What Goes Around Comes Around" by Justin Timberlake, followed by comments of the judges.

2. "Macedonian Idol – Finale – Ivan Radenov – Si Zaljubiv Edno Mome"

Ivan Radenov, the eventual winner of Macedonian Idol, performs a Macedonian folk song in this example taken from the competition's finale. Before his performance, he is shown in a national folklore museum, learning about Macedonian folk history from music producer Garo Tavitjan.

3. "Macedonian Idol – Finale – Miki Sekulovski – Jano Mori"

Also taken from the finale, this excerpt shows Miki Sekulovski performing Macedonian folk song "Jano Mori." Beforehand, he is shown re-enacting a folk fable with Garo Tavitijan, who, as part of his role in the re-enactment,

passes on folkloric wisdom regarding marriage.

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