
DENOUNCING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS IN GREECE: THE CASE WITH THE MACEDONIAN ETHNIC MINORITY

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Abstract: Throughout the formation of the Greek nation state and its political and economic expansion, a phenomenon of cultural hegemony of the Hellenism against the ethnic Macedonian culture on the territory of “Aegean Macedonia” has appeared. This process of cultural hegemony, contributed to eradication of an entire identity of the Slavic population living in the territory at that time, and violated the right of self-determination of the identity of non-Greek population. The purpose of this article is to prove that by changing the basic components of the identity of the Macedonian population in Aegean Macedonia, Greek authorities succeeded to create a specific form of nationalism, which later turned into a major derivative for the construction of the Modern Greek nation, i.e. the specific “Greek” identity. Namely, the purpose of this paper is to prove that there is violation of the basic human rights of the non-Greek ethnic groups in the country, with denunciation of their different ethnic and collective identity.

The main research methods of this paper will be a synthesis and a comparative analysis. Namely, through these methods the author aims to prove the hypothesis that: “By means of denoting the Greek hegemonic identity, there is violation of the basic human rights of non-Greek ethnic groups in Greece”.

Keywords: identity, ethnic-group, nation-state, nationalism, ethnic cleansing, homogenization...

FORMATION OF THE GREEK HEGEMONIC IDENTITY

The history of their modern state begins with the new Bavarian prince Otto, who becomes a Greek king in 1832, and his counsellors from Bavaria, who promptly get involved in making a modern nation state that will be in the style of European countries in the 19th century. Thus, all of a sudden, the beginning of the reforms in schooling, the legal and economic system, the bureaucratic apparatus in the country, as well as reforming the church and the army are all immediately designated (Petropulos 1968: 501). In particular, with the introduction of new modern and pro-European forms of country management, Greeks are imposed to unknown elements of separation between the spheres of the state. However, they make these reforms not in the style of Ottoman or Byzantine, but in the style of European bureaucracies, i.e. French and German (Vryonis 1978: 166). Thus, this modern nation state is the first in the Balkans, which not only tears off from its Ottoman past, but also forgets it as not being part of their history.

In that process of creating its nation state, Greek ruling elites create an image of Macedonia as a geographical region, which throughout the history is an inseparable part of Greek people or the Greek sphere of influence. It is inconceivable that there can exist a separate nation that is called “Macedonian”, which is not a subset of the Greek one. This claim by some Greek authors is supported by the idea that if today's inhabitants of the region called Macedonia are direct descendants of the ancient Macedonians who in culture and ethnic (national) affiliations⁹ are Greeks, then just as their ancestors and today's inhabitants of ethno – geographic region Macedonia are part of the Hellenic nation (Martis 1984). On the other hand, few are those authors who by the end of the 20th century deny this thesis that when it comes to ancient Greeks, Macedonians are not Greeks despite the fact that they spread some parts of Greek culture in other geographic regions, such as in Western Asia (Borza 1990: 277).

When the attitude of not only Greek political elites, but also of academic elite members is observed, we get an impression of a generally accepted conclusion, that according to the ideologists of the Greek nation (since the creation of the modern Greek state in the 19th century, through the process of conquering the lands of Aegean Macedonia and Aegean Thrace, as well as actions that were committed during the civil war (1946-1949)), the biggest problem is that there is a group that identifies themselves as “Macedonians”, whereas declaring themselves as not being an integral part of the Greek nation. In fact, it is unimaginable for these elites, to exist a nation that speaks Macedonian (which belongs to the group of South Slavic languages), that owns Macedonian culture and traditions, and they are not Greeks (Vakalopoulos 1988). Nevertheless, what is amazing for those who are searching through historiography in order to justify the artificial collective memory that they have created themselves, in order

⁹Although this historical period the ethnicity and nation did not exist as determination

to form the modern Greek nation, is that Macedonia has historically managed to resist the centurial pressures, ethnic conflicts or population exchanges among countries in the Balkans.

In the text below, the focus will be laid on the whole ideology that this productively reproductive process has forged, ideology that is called - Greek nationalism and has a single purpose, which is meant to supplant the collective memory of the local population in Aegean Macedonia and to change the same individual through violent history change. To be more specific, through the repressive processes that Greek authorities apply in the period between 1913 - 1990, they manage to forcibly change people's personal experiences, memories and destinies by making them suffer severe repercussions and terror in order to incorporate all of the above mentioned in their collective memory. As a matter of fact, in this article we will try to explain that through the creation of violent cultural hegemony of this territory, the government succeeds to eradicate an entire national identity of indigenous peoples, and through various measures of economic expansion, ethnic cleansing and exchanging population, they achieve to establish domination of Hellenistic culture, or to submerge weaker ethnic groups in it.

TRANSFORMATION AND HEGEMONIZATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH DENOUNCING THE IDENTITY OF OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

What is interesting in the case of the establishment of the modern Greek nation is that the words of Ernest Gellner - Nationalism is the main derivative in nation-building and the expansion of the state and nationalism creates nations and not vice versa (Gellner 1983), in the case of Greece are reversed, and the nation creates nationalism. The modern Greek nation state is a result of the expansion of state-regulated nationalism, through the processes of denationalization and assimilation of an entire indigenous population group in Greece through distorted dissemination and interpretation of the identity of the nation, and that by continual imposition of a culture, there is a radical process of transforming smaller ethnic groups' cultures, thus, creating an entirely imaginary ethnic homogeneity of the Greek nation.

In the process of assimilation and disclosure of an identity the primary role is not the national but the local identity or the individual's one. In this part of the article an analysis is applied on the process of the transformation of identities in Aegean Macedonia by the Greek state authorities, who have accomplished that through the assimilation of the Macedonian ethnic identity by the hegemonic Hellenic identity and the Hellenistic culture.

When an identity should be defined, then the most appropriate definition would be: a set of bridging elements that are unique for only one group of people, such as: the name which the group is epitomized with, common history, collective memory, culture, traditions, and in some cases unified religion of the group. However, if there is a necessity to define the nation, then the best definition is given by Antony D. Smith's: "As a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (Smith 1999: 14). Smith's economic and legal frames of the nation are actually the same as the economic and legal frames of the state. So, this socio-legal and economic framework of the state (which is the same as the one of the nation) affects on the transformation of the identity and the common culture of the region and institutes a process of assimilation on the territory of Aegean Macedonia in the northern part of the modern Greek state. In addition, Anastasia Karakasidou states in her research that: "National ideology is expanding through the local relations. In Assiros this process of propaganda was conducted by the local grecophonous elites who helped the state authorities to implement efficient political administration within the region" (Каракасиду 2011: 275). Through a successful political and administrative apparatus the Greek authorities have succeeded to conduct complete implementation of the Greek culture in this small village in Aegean Macedonia, and to substitute the local Macedonian Slavic culture with the state supported Hellenic one. This way of hegemony of one culture over another is actually implemented through the transformation of the personal identity of the individual, who for some benefits and in order to protect themselves from the terror of the authorities gradually changed their personal identity. Furthermore, this contributes to a change in the local identity, gradually merging with the stronger one which in this case is the Greek identity.

The transformation of the local identity happens through the continuous identification and glorification of the state's favorite (in this case Greek) identity, mostly by the unified educational system, i.e. by implementing a completely new perception of the identity among young generations, or by changing the historical myths of local communities. With this change of the interpretation of local historical myths, the authorities succeed to transform the collective memory of the locals, and through celebration of the state supported identity to change completely the indigenous personal and regional identity (Каракасиду 2011).

This transformation leads to substitution of the collective memory for the myths from the common past, and instead of celebrating the ancestors, they begin to glorify the heroes that contributed in the creation of modern Greek state, i.e. those local grecophones that supported the incorporation of the territory within Greece.

The process of hegemonizing of the Hellenic culture where all the minor cultures, i.e. identities, are absorbed, is actually typical for the formation of the modern Greek nation state. Moreover, the modern Greek state is based not on the collective memory of the entire population, but on the set of several local collective memories, which in different regions are producing different national myths. Actually, through the whole history, the Modern Greek state has created “improper” national understanding, which is traced by the state regulated Hellenic hegemonic identity. In other words, this identity uses the same myths as the neighboring states, though they are acknowledged as Greek in the national historiography of the Hellenic Republic.

The phenomenon that causes the transformation of the identity of the population on the territory of Aegean Macedonia today is a major culprit of the conflict between national identities of the three Balkan countries - Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria. What is more, by the process of absorbing cultures and through transformation of myths, i.e. accepting them and nationalizing them through a state-regulated process of creating a national historiography, Greece succeeds in the last hundred years to create a homogenous structure of their nation. Although the question that arises from this process of hegemonization is: Upon which price? Is it worth changing the identity of the whole group by force in order to achieve homogeneity of the nation? The answer should be: No. No, because this kind of processes not only lead to conflicts with other identities, but also destroy their own identity and its uniqueness and diversity. With the process of denationalization of the Macedonian population in Greece, the entire history of the region was literally erased. On the top of that, such changes and transformations of the history of one group have led to discontinuity of the cultures and customs in the entire region of South-East Europe. The Greek national doctrine is the best example of the use of national identity as a weapon for negation and destruction of the existence of a different group.

The most famous product of the modern Greek nation state is actually its foreign policy doctrine from the first half of the 20th century known as “Megali idea”. Likewise, Megali idea is one of the most irredentist doctrine in the entire human history. Megali idea is an outcome of the collective memory of the Greek nation that dates back to the time of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire); “The Kingdom of Greece is not Greece. It represents only one part (territorial), the smallest and the poorest one...” (Миричев 2012: 71).

In modern political history of Greece exists a huge problem, and that is Macedonia. Particularly the non-recognition of the Macedonian nation and its identity by the Greek authorities makes a historical precedent where; nation state A doesn't recognize nation state B, because the name of the nation state B is used as a territorial determination for the geographical region in the nation state A. By this kind of action, the identity of one group is transformed into a foreign policy strategy, only caused by the fear from the past. This is why, Greek authorities can't accept the fact that there are two Macedonia(s) and two different types of Macedonians (Малески 2012). Greek elites have to consider that accepting the existence of separate Macedonian nation without Hellenic roots, will not lead to extinction of the identity, culture and the glory history of Ancient Greece, which are the core of modern Greek collective memory and the nation's one as well.

CONCLUSION

There is no nation state on the Balkans which is not scared of the history. Actually, the constant transformation of the national historiographies is caused by the fear of the shared history with neighboring nations. This fear leads to hegemonization and transformation of proper and different identities and cultures within the nation states which results with manipulation and denouncing of the identity of others within the borders of the state. This kind of transformations and negations of identities of smaller cultural groups represents humiliation of those groups and disrespect of their minority rights. In fact, the one way interpretation of the history, its distortion and the legitimization of one group and its identity over the others is the largest problem in the region in the sphere of minorities' and human rights. In addition, the absence of common interpretation of modern history of our nation also creates problems (Малески 2012: 495). These problems are a result of the fact that peoples on the Balkans are not interpreting the history, but they are living it. Thus, on the Balkans from the beginning of the time the history is glorious and magnificent. This kind of issue comes from the necessity of legitimizing our presence (Berlin 1958) by negation of others. The need of negation rises from the reason that the history in this region is common for all groups.

From present point of view, the acts of the Greek govern elites, as using primordial and perennial interpretation of their nation in order to proof the superiority of their identity and culture over other groups is literally violation of the minorities' human rights. In other words, by applying their government supported actions in the past (especially during the Greek civil war 1946-1949) they assimilated every different culture on the territory of Northern Greece, and that is how they violated the cultural rights of more than 2 million people. By demonstrating

hegemony of their Hellenistic identity and by using the state supported nationalism, they transformed the national identity in a mechanism for assimilation and denationalization of minor identities.

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