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TOWARDS A EUROPEAN IDENTITY: THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL HISTORIOGRAFIES IN THE CREATION OF BALKAN MYTHS

Abstract

The rise of the nation and the promotion of national ideology have a key role in the redefinition of the Balkan identities. The new era of modernity is actually offering brand new standards for the definition of Otherness which is a precondition for the construction of the borders among the groups. During the imperial era, the communities were building the vision of the world through religious systems and their obeying as universal criteria. The new conditions of the market economy and citizenship offered the new national state as the only alternative, along with the nationalism, as an accompanying ideology.

However, in order to homogenize the future national entities, it is necessary to create criteria for ethnicity that would be able to create a unique ethical awareness or expulsion on the basis of the so-called mutual collective memory, regardless of the territorial bases or the linguistic-cultural distinctions. Therefore, even during the 19th century the proto-national intelligence would accelerate, establishing the ethnical boundaries, pursuant the myth of the origin and the durability of the discrepancies. This would become an eternal task of the social engineering, as well as a task for the creators who shaped the framework of the Balkan historiographies.

The challenges for the collective identity in the Balkans and the rest of Europe are approaching slowly, but surely. Simultaneously with the new mainstream of the political and

economical integration of the Balkan countries into the European Union, the legal framework for the direct mutual communication and collaboration is being created. This threat is, at the same time, diffuse, uncertain and silent. It is not only an outcome of the external threats of the international terrorism which actually crystallize and strengthens the community as destined.

Key words: national historiography, national myths, nation- state, Balkans

Introduction

The rise of the nation and the promotion of the national ideology have a key role in the redefinition of the Balkan identities. The new era of modernity is actually offering brand new standards for the definition of the Otherness as a precondition for the construction of the borders among the groups. During the imperial era, the communities were building the vision of the world through religious systems and their obeying as universal criteria. However, the new conditions of the market economy and citizenship offered the new national state as the sole alternative, along with the nationalism as a necessary ideology.

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The origin of the Balkan nationalisms

The national project which arose from the religious settlement in the late Ottoman Empire generated the contemporary Balkan national discourse. These discourses were arriving from the Western Europe and a clash among the models for building a national ideology appeared. Since the original national ideology, under the veil of liberalism, humanism and the Enlightenment established itself within the framework of the Christian

communities, the ethnicity related to the Orthodox Church would become the basic criteria for the building of the national originality. In the early 19th century Pan-Orthodoxy began its evolution toward the promotion of Pan-Slavism. The opposition towards the liturgy in “the Holy Greek Language” became the basic motif for the beginning of the quest for the medieval Empires’ roots of the Slavic communities.

This phase continued along with the subsequent transformations. In the middle of the 20th century, the Slavic groups began to construct their own “ethnic boundaries”, based on the speech dialect. In addition to that, while the Serbian nation created an institutional framework first, the Bulgarian proto-nationalism which soon followed maintained the Pan-Slavic aspect of the separation of the Orthodox Greek linguistic ecumenism. Hence, the Macedonian example would equally head toward the language distinction from the Greeks at the end of the 19th century in an effort to construct the boundaries toward the Otherness, but seemingly in terms of political distinction from the Bulgarian and Serbian factor.

First, the proto-national elites generated by the citizenships strive to construct special churches that would later establish the basic paradigms of the presence of the nation, while representing the secular modern system within the mass education. Hence, at least one generation would be needed to go through the educational institutions in order to secure the project of creation a homogeneous nation. The myth of the national unity in the forthcoming phase could be sermonized in terms of the primary societal institutions of socialization, as it is, for example, the Family. Nevertheless, in practice, the inconstancy of the character in these institutions, such as the variable nature equally regarding the physical and ethnical boundaries, prolonged the whole national homogenization until the first decades on the 20th century.

Nation’s genesis becomes a fundamental element in its strengthening. Even if there is a fictive past, yet it must be real. This is the reason why the culture continuity is contingent and inessential (Mirtimer (ed), 1999: 34). Hence, the historical continuity needs to be invented, by creating an antique past that would overcome the effective historical continuity through semi-fiction or falsification. (Smith, 2000: 53)¹. National thinkers attempt to provide an answer to the following questions: what is the nation’s origin, what are the nation’s diacritical features, who belongs and who does not and what is the future of the nation (Brunnbauer,2004: 165).

“Critical markers” such as religion, language and mutual territory do not denote one, same identity. Therefore, there must be a so-called “invention of the tradition”, there must be a creation of “imaginative communities“ and there must be “a basic invented myth”. The group needs to own a mutual famous past, divine ancestors, hard times in the past, etc. Smith does not argue on the significance of the relativistic position of the historical truth and even not about it being irrelevant for the national phenomenon. Clearly, the ability of the national historians to document fables and the explosion of the unsatisfactory fictions is an important element within the sustainable relations amongst past, present and future, on which the national community is based (Smith, 2000: 55). According to Gellner, the high cultures strive to become the basis of the new nationality when right before the emerge of the nationalism, the religion was tightly defining each underprivileged as an opposite of the privileged ones, especially in times when the underprivileged have not got other mutual positive feature (such as the mutual history) (Gellner, 2008: 107).

Geertz locates the most obvious changes that appear along the process of national constituting within the second and the third phase, but the largest part of the far-reaching changes – the ones that change the general direction of the societal evolution- are happening less spectacularly during the first and the fourth phase (Geertz, 2007: 329).¹

- I- Nationalism firstly appears as an expression of resistance towards the foreign (foreign culture, language, religion etc). This resistance within the industrial society, along with the sense for collective destiny with others creates the collective awareness and contributes to the generating of groups of intellectuals – the ones that consecutively are the first bearers of the nationalism. They strive towards creating political unit and, further on, toward creating a nation on the place of the country.

- II- The euphoria lasts for a certain period after the creation of the state. After the establishing of the institutional system, the question arises again: “Who are we doing such a thing?”

¹ According to Rousseau: “ the first role that we need to follow is the one for the national character. Every population has or should have one, character; if it is lacking we need to start stimulating it.

The politics for Renan is not enough. The country as such cannot function solely as a social cemented nor can the relation among their citizens. It could be provided solely through the “ history” or even more through the historical comprehension and “ the cult of the ancestors” (Smith, 2000: 8, 11).

- III- Creating the artificial “we”, while there is a defining of the language as an issue during the defining of the nation itself (Ibidem, 330-333).

Balkan historiographies and the creation of national myths

Within the context of the Balkan nationalism and the building of the collective national awareness, the educational institutions have a key role. Through their curricula, they reconstruct the vision of the mutual past. In addition to that, the primordial aspect of the organic origin of the nation predominates almost universally. It is primarily based on ethnolinguistic traits of the group. Analyzing the Macedonian historiography, Brunbauer argues that the national discourse is determined by the primordial and essential approach that refers to the national and ethnical identity as something inherited and not a subject of change (Brunbauer, 2004: 188).²

Hence, even in the Balkan context, the myth or the myths are a product of the contemporary period. Even if they existed in the preindustrial past, their significance and symbolic value have considerably changed. National historiographies insist on the quest for a more profound historical past, in order to place the nation solidly and as far, as possible, into history. Thus, the Greek myth about the origin comes from the amalgam between the Byzantine Christian tradition and the antique past of “classical Greece”³. The Serbian and Bulgarian examples both insist on maintaining the continuity from the legendary medieval Christian Empires. Further on, the Macedonian historiography creates an image of a synthetic generating of the nation from the ancient past and the medieval Slavic tribes. The Albanian history has a pure religious and anti-Ottoman feature, but attaches a national overtone to the Skenderbeg’s rebellion.

It is clear that one cannot neglect the era of Enlightenment and National awakening as a significant segment of the historical past. However, it is built through attaching an essence to a natural and necessary process that comes as an outcome of the past, and vice versa - the

² “Facts” are organized and the sources interpreted in a manner that would serve as an evidence of the existing of the Macedonian nation. The question about nation and nationalism in the Macedonian Historiography lacks with theoretical basis (Brunnbauer, 2004: 189).

³ The Elements of the national narration under the sponsorship of the central government are pulled from the past. Karas claims that even in the self-aware modern country where the national identity mainly if formed through school programs (geography, history, literature and religion), worship of the national monuments, ceremonies on the national holidays, military and civil service, yet there is a transfer of the fundamental tradition (Karas, 2004: 295).

past as a product of the reformed conditions of the present. Thus, in practice, the national unity is maintained on the basis of referring to the blood relations and the ethnicity in the country, rather than the commitment and loyalty towards the civil state. More or less, this is being replenished with the usage of mechanisms for coercion and idealistic stimulating.

Modernism and the creation of the modern state do not deny and supplant the primordialism at once, while the latter appears as dominant, especially in conditions of building of the newly-formed states. All of this contributes to the phenomenon and strengthening of the nationalism, racism or tribalism and the interstate separation with disputes (Geertz, 2007: 24-28). The increased Primordialism does not present an issue by itself inherited from the past that comes as an obstacle for political, social and economic modernization, but it is a reflection of the first serious (even though still relatively unsuccessful) attempt to realize a modernization of such type. This dialectics, dissimilarly expressed, is a general trait of politics of the new states (Ibidem, 29).

It should be stressed that the influence of the historical curricula within the reconstructing of the memory and tradition of the collectivities, should not be considered as a classical invention of tradition, but as a final form of the created general awareness through selective interpretation of facts. In the case of the Balkan nations there are some examples when the tradition itself is completely invented, such as the case of the system of rituals and symbolic manifestations derived from the building of the cults of the national monarchies, symbols (flags, hymn etc.) or the events from the distant ancient or medieval past that were completely erased from the collective memory and to which a new form and significance is being given - all of that in a function of the nation.

Even though these examples could be seen in all Balkan nations, they do not structure the national core, neither they dominate the system of construction of the national discourse. Historical facts, events, individuals and symbolic values derived on their own basis in terms of contemporary times are reshaped on the basis of selective reading regarding facts, events or individuals. For that reason, the contemporary national historiographies most often clash in their efforts to establish a monopoly of the national myth. The foreign myth could be experienced as a historical threat regarding the building of the alternative vision of the past. Further on, it can directly jeopardize the national myth through its direct negation, including the perception of the sense of jeopardizing, in terms of undertaking the values of the myth

itself. Those values, as well as the negativities are equally inseparable in terms of the system of national historiographies.

Hence, the selection of the historical facts, events and individuals can be done in two ways. The external selection means excluding foreign historical elements, regardless of their relevance in the production of the historical processes. The tendency is clear. By exclusion of the Otherness, the one that is into possession is enraptured often being put into function of the contemporary politics. The second is directed toward the exclusion and selection regarding our own historical moments - meaning that the heroic past is created by the modern national historiography through elimination of all events and individuals that cannot merge into the appointed matrix of history. This selection could be equally motivated by ideological, political, religious, traditional and other reasons.

The depiction of continuous existence through time, while creating the nation up to the contemporary modernity is replenishing the myth of the origin. The establishing of the connection between the Antique and the Middle Ages with the modernity is actually a challenge to which the national history devotes a significant part of its mission. In addition to that, even in conditions of nonexistence of a certain continuity for national self-recognition, the myth for organic origin is being constructed through a search of relation with the distant past in terms of linguistic and historical traits. Frequently, the variable nature of the Balkan case is being explained as a foreign national infliction or as a national superiority, deep into the history of the medieval empires and antique kingdoms.

According to Smith, proliferation of the invented nations' traditions is qualified as "state-mania". According to the socio-constructivists, nations are socio-politically constructed falsifications, even though fabricated by the cultural engineers which design symbols, mythologies, rituals and histories in order to compete in specifically chosen manner with the mass modern needs. The historical continuity needed to be invented by creating the antique past that overcomes the effective historical continuity or through semi-fiction or by falsification (Smith, 2000: 53). Smith does not argue that the essentiality of the relativistic position of the historical truth and likewise is irrelevant to the national phenomenon, as well. Clearly, the ability of the national historians to document fables and exploding unsatisfactory fictions is an important element within the sustainable relations amongst past, present and future, to which the national community is being based on (Ibidem, 55).

For example, in 1830 Jakob Fallmeraijer attacked the national stance that the modern Hellenic people are the descendants of the antiques and he claimed that they are mostly Slavs and Albanians. In response to that, Papanigopoulou claims that the Hellenic identity has been linguistic and cultural, but not racial. He strengthens the position of the Byzantism as a positive part of that certain continuity whose civil code was adopted by Kapodistria in 1928 and King Otto in 1835 (Karas, 2004: 318). This aspect of the fundamentalists of the Greek historiography justifies the assimilation that is being transforming from the significance of the “Holly” language with the framework of the Church service to a more contemporary interpretation of power of “the high culture”, that is, in the case of the Greek nation, represented through language and culture⁴.

This refers to the models for national constituting and building the nation alone. Namely, within the context of the Balkans until now in the current scientific thought dominates the assumption that the nations are based on the ethno-linguistic model of existence of the organic settled nations. The basic substantial national elements are the language, the culture and the territory, according to those aspects bears the second denotation. But as long some deepened substantial theoretical analyses are done, the conclusion is different. Beginning from the assumption of Brubaker, according to which the French comprehension for nationalism is state-centered and assimilation - oriented and the German one is Volk-centered and differentiating- oriented. Therefore, the first one is based on building universal cultural values and the second one is based on organic cultural, linguistic or racial communities. Hence, the second comprehension of nation is considered ethnocentrically and not as a political fact (Brubaker, 1999: 1). Such interpretation of Brubaker could be implemented in the framework of the Balkan historical- national context while there we may distinguish two differentiated phases within the national construction:

1. The first phase includes the French model using the assimilative power, placed on political ground;
2. In the second phase, the sense of ethnicity of the organ nations or ethnos is built. After the ascertaining it will get a tendency to recycle with the next generations.

⁴ Thus, Paschalis Kitromilides refers to the cultural continuity through which “the forms of cultural expression, related to the Christian kingdoms and Orthodox service are being inherited”. The other argument that is used is the opposition of the Palaeologists forwarded equally towards both the western Catholicism and the Ottoman- Turks, which is interpreted as for an issue for expressing the Greek nationalism. But therefore the question arises: Is this Byzantine (Romaic) sentiment not only a confessional loyalty or is it ethno-religious nationalism? (Smith. 2000: 43).

“The nation alone is a culmination of the long past for challenges, sacrifices and devotion. Out of all the other cults, the one for the ancestors is the most legitimate, because they made all that we are now. The heroic past, great men, fame etc. are the societal base on which the national idea is rising” (Smith, 11). For Renan, the shared suffering is more important than the shared joy. The first is especially the one that maintains the collective memory for a long time through the history (Smith, 12).

Collective memory of the national community is consolidated through emphasizing the historical moments of suffering and sacrificing on behalf of the group. The memory of the hard times is used by the political subjects of the national present as a mobilizing attribute that is being used in the moments of the crisis of the present. Frequently, in moments of economical crisis, national consolidation is an alternative for sustaining the unity and the order in the society. But, as in the example of former Yugoslavia, the exploitation of nationalism into political aims could cause new national catastrophes, ethnic, religious or group disputes that are difficult to control.

Yet, every Balkan historiography constructs visions of the historical past where they were the victims in collective national sense. Thus, the one that the Greek historiography presents as a myth about the refugees after the Greek-Turkish war, then the Bulgarian one has it by the “injustice” with the preclusion of the “San-Stefan’s Bulgaria”, further on the episodes of the national rebellion such as the massacre at Batak. Furthermore, the Serbian historiography is a collective victim of the “Kosovo Battle,” but seemingly the recent history of national defeats related with the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia etc. While the Macedonian historiography focuses to the “Bucharest Peace” of 1913 and its separation of the “ethno-geographical” whole. It is impressive that each Balkan nation- state, except R. of Turkey, places the myth of the “Turkish slavery” through their national history as a dark, illegitimate part of their past.

One of the most essential segments of the modern history derives from the relation of the nations- states towards their Ottoman past and their general interpretation of the history. There are two approaches towards the Ottoman heritage of the Balkans: first, it is illegitimate (the myth about the Turkish slavery) and it represents a black hole in the history of this region and, second, the Ottoman heritage is being experienced as a legitimate continuation of the Byzantine tradition (Mazover, 2003: 19, 20).

The first interpretation is the fundament according to which every official historical fact of the Balkan nations- states was built. According to it, the Ottoman period is only the dark side of their history and this period appears only as an obstacle of the continuity of their medieval and antique kingdoms into modern nations-states. The Orthodox Christian tradition of culture and religion of the Balkan peoples is placed in a function of their perception of the Ottoman past where, framed through the religion, a survival of those cultures is provided. The latter is the basis for the building of the national myths, as well as the one that is named as “famous history of the ancestors” (Karakasidou, 2002:16). At the same time, there is the following perception of the West: “*The Balkan and the Adriatic as a final line of control and defense to the Muslim East*” (Noris, 1999: 18).⁵

The second interpretation is to comprehend the Ottoman heritage as a complex symbiosis of the Turkish, Islamic and Byzantine - actually the Balkan tradition. It is based on the logical assumption that the mutual life during few centuries needed to result with a mutual heritage (Todorova, 2001:241). The Balkan is, before all, very important as a western hypostasis of the Ottoman historical heritage, and its significance is increasing or decreasing into one complex and indirect linkage with the refusing or accepting the Ottoman past. This is the case especially nowadays, as almost in all of the Turkish ideological and political spectra a profound reexamination of the Ataturk republican heritage is being done (Ibidem, 74). Mazover claims that due to the desire to become Europeans, the citizens of the Balkan national states ought to deny the legitimacy of the Ottoman past (Mazover, 2003:21). Thus, for example, the discrepancies that were imposed on the Christian citizens in Macedonia into the national competition at the beginning of the XX century radically violated the dynamics of trade, intercourse and coexistence that were present during the late Ottoman Era (Kakraksidou, 2002: 84).

“The Golden Age” of the Balkan national myths is identifying mainly two constitutive elements: Pre-Christian powerful empires and cultures that arose in this region and the Christian medieval empires that preceded the Ottoman Islamic domination. The one

⁵ This viewpoint is followed with the perception that, excluding Albania, is built by the nations- states in terms of the process of Islamizing as an illegitimate, regardless if this process was done in a violent or peaceful way. Especially in the 20th century all of the above was used by the Bulgarian state to conduct a coercive re-Christianization of its citizens, while the rest of the nationalisms, the attitude towards the Muslim monolinguals remains as discursive attitude towards the Otherness, equally produced from the Christian non-accepting of the group but as well as from the refusing of the Muslim communities to be integrated into the frame of the national whole.

that to the Greek myth represent is an antique classical heritage and medieval Byzantium. The Bulgarian, Serbian and the Macedonian myths represent the medieval Christian Empires that owned their own territorial centers onto which modern national states extend. Nevertheless, the Macedonian myth about the “well-known times” tremendously overlaps with the Bulgarian myth for existence of the statehood. Both of them neglect the fact that the Empire model is based on the triangulation religion- ruler- vassalage and it is not based on the national centric perspective to see the ethno- linguistic context of the group determination. Even more, the Serbian myth is undermined in its last decade, due to the loss of territorial base that redefines the manifest content after the establishment of the independence of Kosovo.

Seemingly, the battle for building the fundamental myth between the Pre-Christian antique past and the Christian concept of the historical statehood is remarkable. In the case of Greece, those discussions were opened during the creation of the modern state in the 19th century. They are tremendously manifested through the battle for establishing an official language on the basis of antique *Koine v Katharevousa* or the Folks contemporary demotic. Yet, among the others, those discussions are vastly opened after the year of 1990. Therefore, in Macedonia there is a tendency for reexamination of the Golden Age in favor of the Antique Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, while in Bulgaria more of the significance was given to the Pre-Christian culture of Thrace. Yet, it must be mentioned that as much as the “Pan-orthodoxy” and the “Pan-Slavism” were supported or facing a support from the Russian sphere of influence, Pre-Christian antique had become an integral part of the “Western Civilization” and it has been supported from the West. Hence, the current conditions of recalling the Antique in some of the Balkan nations which derived from the communist regimes after the 90-ties in the 20th century is actually tremendously a product of the modern globalization of the thought and the canalizing of the West as a basic criterion according the which the intellectual elites perform their defining.

The Heroic time is completely established in the Christian perception of construction of collective visions for self-sacrificing on behalf of the others. Hence, the heroic time proceeds after “the Golden Age⁶” and it is being given an anti-Ottoman and anti-Islamic trait.

⁶ An exception is only the constructing of the myths for heroic past of the Antique. But those myths are not vernacularly established and a product of the collective memory, but artificially produced from the institutions in the nations- states. Hence, their mass presence in the Greek state is an evidence for strong institutional presence and usage of the mechanisms of the legitimate coercion, while in the cases with the rest of the Balkan nations, even though they exist, the extent of such myths is minimal. It the foreword of the “Shadow

Even Skanderbeg's "Albanian" rebellion is being given a Pan-Christian trait, despite the fact that the contemporary historical visions build different images of the national heroism. The rest of the myths are mainly connected with the national liberation movements and rebellions directed against the Ottoman Empire – First and Second Serbian Rebellion, Greek Rebellion and the Battle for Independency, April Uprising in Bulgaria, as well as the Ilinden Uprising in Macedonia. Further on, the Nation's War of the Balkan People during the periods of the Greek and Macedonian Battle, The Balkan Wars, World War One and World War Two and even the Greek Civil War that despite of its general ideologically bases, in practice grew into a dispute of the Greek nation – a state with Macedonian minority.

It is interesting to mention that many of the heroes are a subject of aspiration of several nationalisms. Thus, the heroic mythography about Alexander the Great is equally produced by the Macedonian and Greek historiography, even though that it is incorporated much earlier by the second one; the myth about the heroisms of *Krale Marko* (King Marko) is equally placed into the Macedonian, Bulgarian and Serbian national epics. The mythology that is made about the character of the Macedonian revolutionary movement in the late Ottoman period is a subject of competition between the Macedonian and Bulgarian historiography.

Even if many of the educated members of the audience still stand for the belief that the roots of their own nations could be traced several centuries ago, most of the educated has nowadays left the old perennialism. Current dominant Orthodoxy is mostly modernistic (Smith, 2000: 27). Therefore, the integrative revolution does not slay the ethnocentrism. It only modernizes it. On the road to modernity, the national state tends to amortize the clash of the primordial and civilized linkage. The future of such nations-states is either balkanization, fanaticism or leviathan state that would enforcedly deny the recognition of the ethnicity (Geertz, 2007: 79-82).

However, the Balkan primordial viewpoint still remains grounded within the framework of the national historiography. The primordial clashes are mainly concentrated around the battle of the educational system that unites the linguistic and religious issues and questions (Ibidem, 32, 33). This emphasized the primary role of the curricula as a base for the

of the Balkan", the Bulgarian poet Pencho Slaveikov writes: "Our folk songs do not pass the border of the 14th century, i.e. they do not signify previous historical events"... In his songs they (the people) have kept the names of a few pre-historical animals, but not the name of any king, for us" (Brajsford, 2003: 171,172).

national homogenization and proliferation of the national mythography. The linguistic identities are being passed on from generation to generation through folk songs and oral traditions while the collective memory and national identity are being passed on from professional class of constructors of identity and institution (educated bureaucracy) that is being raised in the modern period (Brunnbauer, 2004: 293). Creating the national identity by the national historians, especially in the early constituent period is experienced as a national and state assignment. The basic scheme of the national historiographies is to establish a linkage of the continuity between the Middle Ages (or earlier) and nowadays (Ibidem, 293, 294).

Conclusion

Creating homogenous nation state was the first priority in the newly formed Balkan nation- states. During the 19th century they produced preconditions for social, national and identity integration which was supposed to be imposed by institutions of mass education. The groups which do not fit in projected national pattern were predominantly assimilated or expelled. This was a proof that in the process of building Balkan myths both territorial and ethnical national models were used. In the same time, national mythology of separate nations clashed on their border lines. Some national heroes or events were excluded, but others became subject of pretension of several nations.

The future projections of this region develop toward the integration into the European Union. So, the common European identity project can also be imposed in the region of the Balkans. But, in the same time, Europe creates West Balkan region which, besides being a symbolic waiting room, can also be seen as political ghettoization of few problematic national issues and, in David Noris's terms "the last line of defense against Muslim east".

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