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NATIONALISM AND THE NATIONAL MYTH

All national ideologies are based on a single fundamental idea, a single ideological burden, which creates the nucleus of the national myth. This idea, in reference to the Greek national myth, is “*the tribal invincibility of the genus*” or “*the continuance of the nation from ancient times to this day*”. In a nutshell - it is the idea of the existence of a common language, culture and genus of the Greek people living and breeding in Greece, but also in the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean, at least from the Bronze Age to this day.

Providing proof for this assumption as the principle element of the Greek national myth yields as its product an associating procedure which was completed by the middle of XIX Century.

The existence of three elements had a decisive influence on this development: firstly, the excitement in European intellectual circles over the classical antique, in the midst of which was the movement of Greek enlightenment. Secondly, the authority of the Greek over Orthodox Balkan worshipers, thanks to the Greek-speaking individuals¹ at the Universe Archbishopric in (Constantinople) Istanbul and thirdly, the financial power and social blossoming of a coastal, very wealthy trade class of Greek merchants.

Accepting a national myth with no factual foundation is going to have two major consequences in the future. The first one in the field of thought and science, and the second one in the field of politics.

Recruiting educated Greeks, in an effort to establish the foundations of national thought, certainly with the financial assistance of the Greek government, turned into a mandatory service. The three branches of science - history, linguistics and the study of folklore - which are essential to the shaping up of national ideology, have lost their character and have grown to be in its service, mostly to meet internal needs and government propaganda.

Greek historians, up until the last two decades when individual exceptions started to emerge, have ignoring or counterfeiting sources and have produced works of a purely ideological character. Greek linguists put on “blinkers” to prevent them from meeting a different language abundant in language dialects, while Greek folklore experts cut off completely certain geographical regions in their research so that they don’t come across the customs, the dances and the songs of the “barbarians”.

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¹ Greek-speaking people.

They all worked together in commissions for renaming the toponyms in the country. The Geographic Military Service put the final touch on their work by renaming the microtoponyms on headquarters' maps.

Political consequences were far worse because they had an impact on people. Language or ethnic minorities had to go through dark times when they gradually gathered together with the Greek state, and they (the Greeks) expanded through military clashes.

Their language was doomed to persecution and it was reduced to a whisper, not a single song could be heard outside closed windows. The Greek teacher, with his national mission in mind, would teach them Greek Katharevousa² by slapping their faces and by using a ruler. The priest, drawing power from heaven, would endeavour to teach them popular Greek language through the Gospel. Local tycoons would Hellenize their names arbitrarily. The local traitor would sneak up on them, the police would terrorise them, the judge would convict them. And when all these failed to eradicate their mother tongue and to change their conscience, the military, under arms, took over to bring order and to create an image, forcing the perpetrators to exile.

My book "Mixed Nation"³ was dedicated to those speaking a different language. And also to the memory of my grandparents: the Albanians, my mother's parents, the collectors of the consequences of the Greek grand idealism, as well as the refugees from 40 churches, my father's parents.

The book's title ("Mixed Nation"), suggested by a suitable excerpt from the Monemvasija Chronicle, ascertains the existence of the population of the state and at the same time underscores the strength and the beauty of its colourfulness.

As far as the subheading "short notes"⁴ is concerned, in addition to the shortness of the texts, they reflected the reasons for which they had been written and the author's spiritual suffering regarding these issues.

II

The central fundament for national ideology is the idea of the existence of one eternal generality - the nation.

To the national idea nation is not just contemporary existence and an organised community of language, culture, civilization and economic life, but also the unity of the state or the merging of different state forms. Nationalism (**c.f. earlier - that's why this sentence here sounds stupid**) of the nation survives the longest. There is a "historic

² Former official style of the new Greek language that is now obsolete.

³ Dimitris Litoksou, Mixed Nation: or About the Greeks and the Ruined Different-language-speaking People, "Az-Buki", Skopje 2005

⁴ Untranslatable into Macedonian: *sparagmata* are short notes, brief comments, but the corresponding meaning in Greek is something which is ripped off, rooted up, and the like.

stretch” where this survival is taking place and whose borders are considered flexible and expanded.

Nation is considered a living organism. The life of the individual finite cells - its members - is insignificant. Nations’ traces are lost into the past and, after another reading (unless that is impossible) into deep antique. Regardless of the way it was produced and of wealth distribution, regardless of the forms of rule and the alternation with cultures, a nation’s being and “its soul” remain unchanged.

The national myth emerges from this idea. The materials of the national myth are to be found or researched in history. The structure must be as robust as possible. Willful or unreasonable interpretations of facts certainly **have to be preferred before** the conjuncture of circumstances, **because they offer** higher resistance to the ideological attacks of nationalism’s opponents.

The pieces of this mythical mosaic come together in the time vortex of nationalistic intellectuals. They are great writers, inspirational story tellers and virtuosos.

Each nation has its own Paparigopuloses. Next come the most capable craftsmen, the best experts, linguists, folklorists, anthropologists, archaeologists, historians: Hadzidakis, Politis, Kugeas, Andriotis, Kirjakidis, Kumaris, Zakitinos, Trijandafilidis...

Then come the fanatics, mostly semi-educated “learned patriots” dilettantes and bureaucratic figures of mental provincialism: an army of teachers, priests, lawyers, officers, politicians and reporters.

Each nation has its own public servants, professional re-designers and supporters of the national myth, the same ones who nourish and thrive on nationalism: the Papatemelids, the Martids, the Merdzuks, the Kargaks, the Vakalopuls, the Hristoduls.

History written **in this way** is one gigantic myth. It depicts heroic deeds of grand-grandfathers and their victories against the enemy. The existence of enemy countries, which surround our nation and are concocting a conspiracy against “our” nation is the central foundation of the myth.

National history is the **foundation for** the school books in the educational system and it comprises nearly all bibliography on history. It serves to educate the young generations and to make peace with their parents. Ancient respect for ancestors **in modern societies** is being transformed **into** national history, in other words into a national myth, which is touching, enchanting, educational and encouraging. The burden of national heritage thus places contemporary society (**I would prefer the word community everywhere**) before new **responsibilities**. Much like each of its members, by adopting national history it fulfills an obligation towards the deceased. It is an honourable act to stand worthy before this heritage and to step towards self-sacrifice.

National conscience is a **purely ideological issue**. As proof of **its robustness**, **let's remember** that most of the victims of the Greek state, whose neither one or both parents are indigenous or refugees of Greek origin, after having completed their mandatory ninth-grade education, feel proud to be the descendants of ancient Hellenes in any possible relationship (marriages with Albanians, Macedonians, Vlachs, Orthodox Christian Turkish-speaking individuals, Armenians or less frequently Gypsies or Jews).

Nationalism shapes up an ideology of **generality** which **results in** collective equality. As an ideology, it is recent in human history and it first emerged at the end of the XVIII Century. Ideology was created by the bourgeois class following the fall of the empire, an ideology of modern bourgeois states.

Education and the emphasis, **through** state mechanisms, on a dialect or on any feature of an official language has become a necessity, both for effective market operation and for political union.

Social differences are considered a mistake, digressions or temporary limitations. Members of rural municipalities **leave**, but the spirit of collectivity remains. The victims gain significance **in the sense that through them** the nation **turns modern** and stands up to other nations who are better positioned. Political dispute is considered a national imperfection, which usually leads to disaster. A united nation is capable of creating grand deeds.

Greek history identifies with the Greek myth. Greek citizens nowadays consider themselves the descendants of the citizens of ancient Greek cities. Orthodox Byzantine - Hellenism's gravedigger - represented itself as the continuance of the ancient Greek spirit, and the modern Greek state as the heir to the properties of the deceased.

Should there be anything that is in no way linked with official Greek history, then it is the events that took place in this geographic territory in the past.

Indeed whatever is going on in Greece can definitely be observed happening in all Balkan countries. An identical picture, an identical ideology: dwelling on the past, aspirations for historical space, counterfeiting of title deeds, fighting over the heritage of the deceased. Similar national myths are being recorded in neighbours' school books. Grand ideas, **cries for freedom**, government propagandas.

The image of nationalism is, **ultimately**, the same everywhere. This can be seen clearly if we look at the method with which it keeps the enemy off its property. In other words, it is the liaisons of the governing state nationalism with the minorities **within** its borders.

Incorporating the individual into society is not the result of his or her own free will, but a procedure which was imposed on them the day they were born. Personal choices are far too determined and independent of his or her desires. Material life conditions render the picture complete.

In spite of rhetorical **definitions**, national awareness is not entirely a matter of self-determination, but rather another inevitable determination **in regards to** a society liable to marginalising.

State borders in the Balkan Peninsula today are the product of two Balkan Wars and two World Wars. The desires of the local population were never taken into consideration. Not a single referendum was conducted about the demands of those speaking another language. Each stronger state took some territory away from its defeated neighbours, who were stalking for revenge.

Minorities have been fostering the apple of discord among nationalisms here for decades. The proposal which Balkan states had to offer to minorities was the same everywhere: the rule of military regimes until complete assimilation or forced migration. Minority rights protection was considered national treason.

Nationalism is characterised by lies and hypocrisy. Or else, it has two faces and it nourishes the spirit of hypocrisy. Habitual criticism of nationalism and the injury inflicted upon its spirit, i.e. upon the national myth, creates the assumptions that the proposal for expanded borders and for the creation of United Europe does not seem like Utopia.