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AUTHORS' PATRIOTISM¹ ON THE BALKANS

Abstract: The concept according to which the scientists from certain social sciences and humanities have the duty to work in favor of nourishing, strengthening, and glorifying one's national identity is risky on many grounds. Although there are certain positive changes with new generations of scientists when it comes to this issue, still it can be stated that in a wider public discourse the romantic idea is very much alive - about the ethnologists or the historians who should (or must) be patriots. The position of “professional patriots²” is analyzed from a theoretical and methodological point of view, illustrated by examples from Macedonian ethnology and its relation to “historical truths” in a contemporary context. Urgent paradigm reforms are much needed in order for social sciences and humanities to become a factor of integration instead of a factor of disintegration on the Balkans.

Keywords: social sciences and humanities, patriots, ethnology, history.

Introduction

Ivan Cholovic in his book “The Balkans – the terror of culture” says that the Balkans suffer from a surplus of culture versus the western stereotypes that this region has a lack of culture. This surplus of culture means putting on a pedestal individual national cultures – on a level of deities, he says – in favor of patriotic and nationalistic discourse that is typical for all Balkan countries in their transitional periods (see Чоловиќ 2012). The power centers, the political parties, and people in power with nationalistic ideologies managed to press “the people”, at the same time calling on people's interests, in that tempting nationalistic illusion, as the straw that “the people” will eventually catch on in the attempts to find a way in times of crisis to love and respect themselves when there is no practical or real base for it except ones imagined/invented prominence. In this na-

1 The term “authors' patriotism” is taken from the article of Bozhidar Jezernik (Jezernik 2002: 37).

2 The term “professional patriots” is taken from the article of Ivan Kovachevic (Ковачевиќ 2006: 110).

tionalistic self-satisfaction imposed on “the broad masses of people” frantic by the hard handling of their everyday lives, very often the professionals from social sciences and humanities are involved, especially those that carry the burden to be “national” scientific disciplines. The problem is with those professionals in the service of initiating, inspiring, and worming up of this kind of self-satisfaction. Their “service” in individual Balkan nationalisms is very similar to the times of establishing the nations in this part of Europe towards the end of 19 and the beginning of the 20 century.

The critics of nationalism inspired by the political needs agree with the thesis that this kind of culture terrorizes; the culture that is referring to the blood of ancestors is causing bloodshed especially with the dissolution of Yugoslavia as a symptom of nationalistic immaturity that has finally been channeled by the bloodshedding in 1990-ies. The political (ab)use of the same model after this serious consequence is an insult to common sense for those who have recognized it as a model and who refuse to live in a nationalistically determined reality.

Another book by the author Ivan Cholovic titled “News form the culture” contains 18 essays that represent a certain archive of patriotic outbursts in Serbia, and among national workers of this kind, there are many declared professionals in “national” scientific disciplines (see Čolović 2008). Almost exact rhetoric is represented today in the Macedonian context by the “national workers” of any kind and style. That is why those kinds of “archives” about the individual Balkan nationalisms are worth collecting to deconstruct the interpretations of Balkan professional patriots as a testimony that there are other types of interpretations about the nationalistic models, those that are warning of their danger. Why they aren’t so attractive for the “wider popular masses” is an important question.

Macedonian context

In the last ten years in Macedonia, a nationalistic discourse has become very loud when it comes to Macedonian ethnic or national identity. This discourse contains all the elements of a 19-century concept of building a nation, especially typical for Southeast Europe. Some of the key elements are: stressing the mission of the state and its institutions for strengthening Macedonian national identity; stressing the ancient component of one’s people and culture; religious background of the national identity of the Macedonians and anathematization of non-adherence on different grounds; construing mythologized history: the myth of fictitious and assumed ancestors, connection to the land, homeland; the symbols of national identity have the aura of holiness (the land, ancestors, victims, name, historical happenings), etc. (see Smit 1998). This is a period of refreshed nationalistic discourse that has existed before but it is now highly legitimized according to its loudness and availability in the media, but also by other promoting mechanisms of “patriotic values”. Davorin Trpeski in his book titled “Who owns the past? The cultural politic and protection of cultural heritage in post-socialist Macedonia” gives a concise overview of the history of the political party VMRO-DPMNE that has been the governing party in Macedonia from 2006 to 2017. The key identification marks of this party represent it as conservative and right-oriented. Although throughout its history there were

some attempts of moving towards civic western European concept, the attempt was unsuccessful since the keywords that mark this party still have relevance: ethnic and populist party, with certain elements close to nationalism and religious fundamentalism, focus on national history and advocacy of the traditional values (see Трпески 2013: 77-82). According to those priorities of VMRO-DPMNE as a ruling party in that period, those topics have finally flooded the media in Macedonia which were also highly controlled by governing centers of power until recently.

Macedonian context throughout history

The important question here is why the Macedonian researchers from social sciences and humanities especially those with national character, need the first place to defend the Macedonian national identity? Certainly while defending it at the same time they are participating in the (re)creating and (re)constructing of the mythologized history of Macedonian people especially in the past years when it was suitable to the ideology of the ruling party from the Macedonian block in the period from 2006 to 2017. All of the involved sides need to have in mind that it is about practical and political usability that goes “before strict scientific, historical and theoretical curiosity: in the focus are practical and political needs of the present moment, rarely new scientific discoveries” (Ђерџић 2012: 108). This is an important point for the professionals that will let themselves support or be supported in their interpretations from certain centers of power.

Bozidar Jezernik says that all of the Balkan nations in times of their founding reached for Macedonia with “hopes for the realization of ‘great national ideas’ in the shape of Greater Albania, Greater Bulgaria, Greater Greece, Greater Romania, and Greater Serbia”. So in the second half of the 19 century, Macedonia becomes an “arena of political and cultural connections between Balkan states which regarded it as their promised land” (Jezernik 2002: 31). In his article titled “Macedonians: suspicious for their absence” are examined exactly those pretensions of newly formed Balkan states where famous scientists were involved in the propagandistic “scientific” actions. He discusses the statistical data for the number of the population in this area by three authors: the Serb Gopchevic, the Bulgarian K’nclov, and the Greek Nikolaides, published by the end of 19 century and the beginning of 20 century. Even though it seems like when it comes to statistics there is not much room for manipulations, still, the analysis of the results of the three authors showed exactly the opposite, since they used the numbers to express their own stories burdened by the nationalistic aspirations of their states. That is why in those individual Balkan statistics Macedonians are absent, but on their account, the number of compatriots of the author is rising so the number of Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs, etc. grows. Jezernik calls it “authors’ patriotism” (Jezernik 2002: 37).

In this article with an interesting title, Jezernik explores the specific context of establishing Balkan nations at the end of 19 and the beginning of 20 century and the point is about the incomprehension of the authors from that period about the ambivalence of the Macedonian identity in the specific surrounding. In the context of the professional patriots, but also in the context of the denial of the Macedonian national identity probably the most illustrative example comes from the famous Jovan Cvijic who identified this

population as a “flotation” or “amorphous” people who can accept any kind of identity if it is successfully imposed. Jovan Cvijic is a perfect example of a politically engaged scientific action (Јовановић 2012: 564) whose work represents the historical context in which he was engaged and that is why he is interesting only from a historical perspective, while from the contemporary perspective his work only shows how we should not write (see Цвијић 1966 and Миленковић 2008: 41–50).

In the contemporary and independent Republic of Macedonia, there is a need for proving and emphasizing the Macedonian identity inside Macedonia, but also towards its neighbors. Vesna Stankovic-Pejanovic states this in her article with the title “Disputable’ identity of Macedonia”. Macedonian identity stays to be disputable and suspicious for neighboring Balkan nationalisms even one century after the period that Jezernik was writing about. She says that Macedonia is still in the process of forming the identity and that this process is linked not only to the challenges imposed by the sub-national identities in the state (she refers to the Albanians in Macedonia) but also is linked to the important position of Macedonia as a subject in international relations and especially there is a strong need for proving the Macedonian identity toward neighboring nations (Stanković Pejanović 2011: 472). The national belonging when set as a priority before the civil concept of the nation, imposes serious problems in a multicultural environment such as Macedonia and according to the principle action-reaction, different nationalities in its frames are created, recreated, complement each other, oppose each other and often fight each other. Besides internal problems caused by the national/nationalistic concept typical for the Balkan context, for Macedonia, this concept is also exhausting in the relations with its neighbors since each of them are denying some of the important elements of the national identity typical for the Balkans (the church, the name, the language).

Because of this continuity in denying the presence of Macedonians, their right to history is disallowed also, especially the one that Macedonian “national workers” are referring to in contemporary context, from Alexander the Great to the latest historical figures and happenings from the first half of 20 century. In that battle of nationalizing of people from distant past or the ones from recent historical past, often arguments arise about who is whose on the Balkans. This appropriation of historical figures and happening from all sides on the Balkan is illustrated with the example of Alexander the Great for whom are fighting “rival Balkans historians combining their science with their nationalism” (Jezernik 2002: 33). Similar illustrations can be found in the Balkan context in the 21 century, as well as many other examples. According to that, instead of this exhausting national-nationalistic model of attacks and defenses, urgent changes of rhetoric are much needed that will somehow indebt the professionals from “risky” scientific disciplines on the Balkans to treat this topic as a subject of research and not an activist discipline.

Illustrations from ethnology for the professional patriotism

According to the wider perception, it is considered that an ethnologist should know how to play folk dances, sing folk songs, and be familiar with all the Macedonian customs, folk costumes, etc. Following the same principle an ethnologist should be a patriot and someone who knows, respects, celebrates, and often defends Macedonian tradi-

tional cultural values. But this concept can be especially dangerous when adopted by professional ethnologists and anthropologists. The idea that there is value-neutral research that the researcher is dealing with finding the scientific truth is problematic with those researches that are dealing with ethnicity. Ethnologists who have the task to defend their own (Macedonian) ethnic group, but are put in a position to talk about neighboring, other ethnic communities can easily adopt attacking rhetoric. For example, the book by Jovan Trifunoski for the Albanian population in socialist Macedonia, published in 1988 is full of distinctions between those who came (newcomers) and the indigenous people. His rhetoric is a good illustration of how we should not write about the “other”. Here are some key spots from his text referring to the following: Albanization of our population, extrusion, and eviction of our people, foreign people in our land, our old monasteries rejected the Muslim settlers, murders, death, the Slavs Christians were scared since their birth, surrounded and pressed Macedonian villages by the Albanians, Albanians are trouble, they occupy, they are violent, they are enclosing our population, they make damage, the unbearable situation for the Christians, etc. Because his methodology is keeping up with the old concept of the famous Jovan Cvijic, the title explains that the book is about anthropo-geographical and ethnographic research that according to this determination typical for the end of 19 and the beginning of 20 century, offers scientific natural-geographic data as well as “scientific” data about the character, mentality, morals, temperament, etc. of an ethnic community. I will illustrate his rhetoric by one quote that says: “No one will ever be able to calculate how many of our men have lost their lives in the battles with the settled Albanians and their bands. How many of our people were forced to move away, how many of our girls and brides were grabbed, how many cattle were stolen, how much of the best land is taken away etc.” (Trifunoski 1988: 86). In this context, it is important to make a comparison to the rhetoric of the researchers that are writing about the Albanians in the journal *Ethnologist* no. 9 published in 2009. When those articles are compared to the rhetoric of Jovan Trifunoski (who is quoted by almost every author who writes about the Albanians in the journal) it is evident that there is almost no improvement or change in twenty years. Things are simply quoted, the quotes are supported by “new” additional data and the “evolution” in scientific thought is becoming endangered.

At the end of this subtitle, I would like to share another example that adds up to the problem discussed above – about the Macedonian context throughout history. There is an article by professor Aneta Svetieva, a founder of Macedonian ethnology and anthropology, which is a review of the monograph by Veselka Toncheva - “The Bulgarians from Golo Brdo, Republic of Albania – traditions, music, identities” part 1, Sofia 2009, 328 pages. The review is published in the journal *Ethnologist* no. 15 released by the Macedonian ethnological society in Skopje 2013 (Светиева 2013: 200–204). Svetieva also has been writing about this problem before in the same journal no. 12-13, published in 2009 in an article titled “‘Our people’ will never be ‘yours’ although you have the wish, time, nerves and money” (Светиева 2009: 318–321). I will hold on to the first one at this point and try to explain her anger in this article. As it can be seen from the title of the monography by Veselka Toncheva, she rushed in identifying the people from Golo Brdo as Bulgarians by which she deserved the title that Svetieva gives to her as a person with “the Bulgarian profession”. Svetieva says that her book is organized by the old propagandistic model typical for different Balkan authors from the end of 19 and the beginning of the 20 century “concep-

tualized in an extremely traditionalist and populist-political manner” (Светиева 2013: 201). It is evident in the title of the monograph, but it is more directly replicated in the conclusion of the book. There Toncheva says: “For us, that community is unquestionably Bulgarian” and she thinks that for the traditional transferring of this Bulgarian identity it is necessary to study the local cultural and historical knowledge and it should be an imperative for the Bulgarian state and science as for every curious Bulgarian. What is interesting is that Macedonian ethnologists (including me) were conducting field research in Golo Brdo in 2003. There are lots of similarities but also lots of differences. In general, we (young researchers at the time) went to Golo Brdo unburdened by the nationalizing of their culture, and even those who were interested more directly in the ethnicity issues wrote about “the ambivalence in the ethnic identity of the people from Golo Brdo in Albania” (Трпески 2006: 56–61).

This illustration is related to the question of Macedonian context throughout history when, because of the specific historical, social, political, etc. circumstances those kinds of books, similar or identical to the one of Toncheva were massively written by almost all neighboring professional patriots or national workers with scientific titles. So there is nothing new here. What is relatively new is the existence of national disciplines because now there is a nation, state which creates those kinds of institutions that have to fight the negations of Macedonian ethnic and national identity. That is how the principle of action-reaction composes a certain model of interpretations: “But let’s see what they are and who they are. They say that Macedonian dialects are at the foundation of their language, they listen and produce Macedonian music, and they are crazy about Macedonia...! What is the thing? I can recognize only two answers. The first: that there in their ‘stepmother Bulgaria’ there are lots of Macedonians – besides those poor and oppressed from Pirin region and other places who even today claim to be Macedonians and suffer different consequences for that, there is a critical mass of former Macedonians – now with a Bulgarian ethnic identity. They are even greater Bulgarians than the Bulgarians according to the old folk rule that ‘those who accepted the Turkish identity are greater Turks than the Turks’. The second answer is that they don’t have or are not thrilled by their own folk culture so they are grabbing with hands and legs after ours – Macedonian culture” (Светиева 2013: 203).

What about Toncheva? According to her monograph that contains 328 pages she manages in an old politically propagandist style in the short conclusion of her book to resume the following: The Bulgarians from Golo Brdo live more than a century in the borders of Albania. They have lived in isolation and were closed (which is probably the precondition for the functioning of their traditional culture) until 1991 when dangerous transformation begins followed by the migration to the cities because that is how traditional songs, rituals, and local stories are forgotten. Those changes that were identified by the author since 1912 still haven’t managed to press out the Bulgarian identity but can be treated as a threat to the ethnocultural and language identity because it has opened a space for forming new identities. That is why, the author says, the connection to our compatriots in Albania should not be lost but should be renewed constantly. Her book among other things offers to the Bulgarians from Golo Brdo to recollect on their centuries-old kinship with Bulgaria which is, according to her, sealed in their traditional knowledge and their culture (taken from Светиева 2013: 202).

And this action-reaction principle can probably go forever.

Interpretations about (anti)heroes from Macedonian history

In September 2014 a monument of Andon Lazov Janev known as Kjoseto was set up in front of the Supreme Court in Skopje, as a donation from the Society for spiritual unification of Setinci, Popadinci, and Krushoardci from Lerin – Skopje. The media divided according to their support for the government of the former prime minister Nikola Gruevski or against the politics of the ruling party at the time (known as “opposition media”) started harsh polemics about the character and the deeds of Kjoseto. According to the headlines dedicated to this problem the interpretations of the opposition media about this historical character said that he was a “slaughterer”, “a butcher”, “bodyguard” of the revolutionaries from VMRO, “a man who has killed 100 people in a 100-year lifetime”, “a serial killer”, that “he was for uniting Macedonia with Bulgaria and against Macedonian minority” etc. The headlines of the pro-government media at that time said that he was “a man from whom the traitors and enemies felt fear and trembling!”, “he was a valued military leader and man of trust”, “he wasn’t an executioner but a revolutionary who fought for the freedom of Macedonian people”, “if Kjoseto is to be blamed for killing the enemies of Macedonia, then Dame, Goce and Karev should be blamed too, as well as the partisans”. According to the texts about the biography and the actions of Kjoseto it is evident that the base for the interpretations is similar for both opposed sides in this discussion (see for example „АНДОН КОСЕТО – КАСАПОТ: На денешен ден починал човекот кој бил страв и трепер за предавниците и непријателите!“; Puls 24, 09.01.2016). What is different is the context in which those interpretations are created. That is why this media polemic can be very illustrative about how the same data can be interpreted in different ways from different points of view when the discussion is about (in)significant historical figures in the contemporary context. Except for the interpretations of the journalists and columnists about the character and the deeds of Kjoseto and his (in)significance, in those debates, professional historians were included also who again had different interpretations about this issue. The examples that follow are showing this complex link between politics, the media, and science as the mechanisms that subtly or not so subtly are used for promoting the “suitable” interpretations.

The first illustration is an interview for the TV Chanel 5 with the historian Nikola Zhezhov. In the context of the topic, he carefully resumes that Kjoseto was a military leader and man of trust for the organization, that he received orders personally from Dame Gruev and he implemented the orders from the Central Comity of the Organization for eventual punishments and death sentences for spies, traitors, and representatives of different Balkan propagandas. In the end, in the context of the actual debates, he appeals to the Macedonian public not to politicize the stories of less-known historical characters and to leave the historians to deal with those issues. Contrary to the careful statement of professor Zhezhov, the editor and the journalist is much stricter in the intention to remove the stain from the character of Kjoseto with the support of the professional historian and to emphasize the greatness of this character. The second point of this interview is to offer a final historical interpretation of Kjoseto. So the final message of this interview

is that some other power centers are twisting the history for other interests denigrating such great historical names because “he was not an executioner but a man who fought against those opposing the interests of the leadership of Internal Macedonian revolutionary organization and Macedonian people” (see „Андон Лазов Јанев, познат како Косето или Касапот“, [an interview with Nikola Zhezhov on the news of TV Chanel 5, 18.9.2014](#)).

The second illustration is the interview for Nova TV with Vlado Popovski who thinks that the monument of Kjoseto should not be situated in Skopje. According to the examples that he points to, it turns out that Kjoseto and his temperament and character were used or were put in the favor of liberation work of the Organization. He is not denying the fact that Kjoseto is significant in the historical sense by participating in forming the village militia as well as with the development of the structure of VMRO. What is disputed regarding the positioning of this monument is the analysis of his personality? Popovski says that Kjoseto committed his first murder when he was only 14 years old. One event from his biography according to Popovski is especially problematic within the discussions of the significance of Kjoseto. “It says that when he was in the mountains in Mariovo he found some Pomaks coalminers that did not do anything to him. They were not an army, nor were they armed; fifteen Pomaks, and he killed them all! (...) Intellectually he was almost illiterate. That means that no one should celebrate him”. According to that, the historian agrees with the journalist Borjan Jovanovski in his conclusion that Kjoseto was an “executioner, mass murderer” („Владо Поповски за споменикот на Андон Косето“, part of the interview with Vlado Popovski on Nova TV, 15.9.2014). Since this interpretation is not in favor of those promoted by the media at the time known as pro-government, some of them are trying to discredit the historian Popovski by pointing to his affirmative rhetoric about some monuments that represent the Albanian history in Macedonia. The title of an article “Popovski thinks that Skenderbeg and Hasan Prishtina should have monuments in Skopje, and Kjoseto and Sugarev should not” suggests that his good words about “other”, “foreign” monuments in Skopje can be used to discredit those who allegedly attack the monuments of their own people (see „Поповски смета дека на Скендерберг и Хасан Приштина местото им е во Скопје, а на Косето и Сугарев не“, [Курир, 18.9.2014](#)).

For those on the first side of the discussion the dangerous man known as Kjoseto and his ability to kill so many people for the Macedonian cause is a virtue. For those on the other side of the discussion his ability to kill so many people for the Macedonian cause, or his terrorist obedience, is a mark of absolute worthlessness that is being represented by the monument in front of the Supreme Court of Macedonia.

In the end, in the context of the link between politics, media, and science an interpretation of a politician and MP of the then ruling party VMRO-DPMNE is very interesting. Ilija Dimovski as a guest of Janko Ilkovski in the TV show “Jadi burek” on TV Sitel talks about Andon Lazov Janev – Kjoseto. Probably fitting to his interests in historical figures connected to VMRO from the 19th and 20th century he describes in detail the biography of Kjoseto. What is interesting here is his interpretation of the data. According to the media polemics about Kjoseto his main intention with this interview is to neutralize the stories about the murders, representing those controversial actions as “an incident”, “a classic”, as something logical and even as a virtue when treated as his sacrifice for the Macedonian cause (that is how the situation when Kjoseto killed his broth-

er is explained): “One of my older colleagues said to me these days: ‘If we had at least a thousand men like Kjoseto, we would have had a state even then.’ So Kjoseto is an exceptional character who sacrificed himself and who was very much dedicated to the organization”. And finally about the accusations of the opposition media or as identified by the TV host “Sorosoid” media that Kjoseto was leaning to the Bulgarian side, Ilija Dimovski has a counter-argument: “No, but that is ridiculous. How should I say this, for every Macedonian revolutionary if you visit some of the Bulgarian websites you will find tons of books that will say that he is a Bulgarian. Right? About every Macedonian revolutionary. About Tatarchev, Delchev, Gruev, Sandanski, Sarafov, Gjorche Petrov, Pere Toshev. About every Macedonian revolutionary. So it is irrelevant” (see „Илија Димовски за Андон Лазов Јанев Косеро“, part of the show „Јади бурек“ on Сител, 17.9.2014). Regarding a load of politics with history and the mechanisms that can help these mediated historical representations to become “the true history”, Gordana Dzeric has a relevant point. She says that social orientation in the context of cultural memories and the history is imposed by the state with its influence on the institutions and on the public opinion because “more than the authors of the history textbooks, the mass media now shape the history” (Ђерић 2012: 108, 109). It is about strictly political historical offers for “the people” and if there was an awareness about the historical variants, probably then the politicians will willingly let the history to the professionals, as professor Zhezhov has pointed out, who again should certainly discuss the problems of contexts, and multitude interpretations, as well as other methodological dilemmas but also chances for producing more than one “historical truth”. And after all, that is not a tragic thing at all³.

Conclusion

Because of the specific epistemology of knowledge produced by the researchers from those disciplines, it becomes obvious the trap in which fall even some of the authors who declare resistance to the restricting and sinister nature of the ethnic and national identity of a primordial kind in a Balkan context. The trap inclines that while they consider dealing with objective science, actually what they do is promote their own politically loaded attitudes. Expressing attitudes is of course very common for the researchers from social sciences and humanities in a general sense of methodological dilemmas of these disciplines, but in this particular context, it can be highly problematic.

The image of ethnology and anthropology as disciplines that have to deal in a “scientific” manner with a value-laden and personal topic which in a positivistic manner, in the end, will reveal “the truth about Macedonia”, is very much mistaken. That is why it is

³ Sasha Nedeljkovic in his book “Honor, blood, and tears” says that history speaks much more about the present than about the past. That is why it is worth researching the stories for the past – the historiography narratives, and not the past itself to see how many different readings of the “facts/evidence” can exist depending on those who interpret them because “there is no objective social truth, there are only different perspectives. The understanding that the subjective images are becoming a reality and a constant which only makes sense to be studied, paradoxically makes anthropology to be more credible than historiography” (Nedeljković2007: 115).