

*Ethnic nationalism in the Balkans***New “old” nations and old “new” fallacies**

Ioannis Skaragas

What is the essence of social change if the creation and the dissemination of new ideas are controlled by those in power, those who impose change based on geo-strategic plans?

Social change is a term that has morphed from a positive connotation during the revolutions in the 19th century to a globalization-motivated consequence within the past decades. For example, the immigration issue has changed societies and disintegrated the traditional culture into smaller units as a global trend forming this way a new culture of nationalism. Nationalism is a political principle which holds that the political and national unit should be similar. One of the most interesting regions for someone to examine the origins and the modern aspects of nationalism is the Balkans.

The Balkans is a region that within the last decades has often been considered a cauldron of ethnic hatred. The dependence of Balkan peoples on the ideology of expansionist nationalism helped cynical post communist leaders to legitimate their rule. It also allowed the West to interfere, imposing their interests and building a new world on the rubble of the old and, of course, fighting genocides that in other cases -as the Armenian, the Kurdish, the Pontian Greek etc- have not even recognized. Former Yugoslavia is a study case that can provide many examples as it was only in 1945 when Tito re-formed Yugoslavia into six Communist-ruled republics.

The conflict in the region has been alleged to be a result of ancient ethnic hatred. The problems that arose in the former Yugoslavia have more to do with the issues raised by nationalism that developed during World War II and not centuries of three different peoples living together. But it was also the economic crisis that led for example to the long-mounting tensions between nations in Bosnia.

In 1981, the socioeconomic conditions in Kosovo were far worse than those in the other republics of Yugoslavia: extensive poverty and unemployment, deplorable standard of

living and a total mismanagement of aid provided by the federal government. It was time to bring out old ancestors and build myths of the chosen and the hidden truth. The Serb Empire on the one hand and the Great Albania on the other were a good start.

The Serbs always claimed the province as the “Cradle of Serbian Empire”. It was here that they first fought for independence from the Ottoman Empire in the 14th century. The Albanians claimed it to belong to their ancestors, the Illyrians that had supposedly formed their first communities in Kosovo. On March 11, 1981, the students of Pristina University, in Kosovo, organized a protest against the living conditions. The police brutality and the escalated unrest led to a martial law on April 3, 1981. It was the first time that the federal Government sided with one ethnic group over another. It was a sign of a new secession culture, realized with the war that erupted later, in 1991 after Slovenia and Croatia declared independence.

The bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 was a thoroughly organized plan that led to a dangerous experiment: how can we turn a nation-state to a “multicultural” map, where different cultures mean different borders and states with constitutions written on military bases by Western experts. How can we make separatism seem like a right for freedom?

New national identities should be understood as a denial of previous identities. No new nation can accept to be considered to derive from another nation because such a premise would cancel the very purpose of nation building. What they need is an honorable and unique myth of ancestry. It’s similar to Stalin’s words to the Bulgarian delegation (G. Dimitrov, V. Kolarov, T. Kostov, *The Kremlin*, 7 June 1946): “The fact that ethnic consciousness has not yet developed among the population is of no account; no such consciousness existed in Belarus either when we proclaimed it a Soviet Republic.”

Change of the borders in the Balkans usually came from a Western agenda. Kosovo is the new platform for the West to rehearse the redrawing of boundaries in Eurasia and Middle East and base the new dogma of international policy. The recognition of Kosovo offers a precedent to other break-away regions around the world and will create a domino effect in other dormant territorial conflicts. It is not going to be a “one-off”. If terrorism can produce the recognition of a state, then this will set the example for world

history much in the same way President Wilson's 'right to self-determination' did for the 20th century.

Communism left us with nothing in the Balkans. This nothing is hard when it means a lack of vision about how to go on. We don't want to realize that history belongs only to the people who suffered from their mistakes. Greeks took their lesson almost a century ago led by the vision of the High Idea. We believed that we would take back the territories of our ancient ancestors. We saw our people deported and butchered by the Turks. We thought that our allies, the West powers, would keep their promise as other countries nowadays expect the U.S.A. to help them with their expansionist visions. And we were failed, just like these countries will be, since the term promise exists only in the vocabulary of the ones who don't have the power to make an essential promise come true.

Now we witness other neighbours willing to repeat the same mistakes as if this is going to solve their problems. We try to build bridges with people who believe they have the exclusive right to use names, make up the past and worst of all dream of redrawing the boundaries.

Bringing out ancestors in the present is usually a lack of the present itself: this doesn't translate down on the splendour and the significance of these ancestors. It projects only the crude emptiness of people who are totally bereft from humanitarian ideas and who assign themselves to the identity of the chosen, especially when these names come with new maps and propagandas.

It is not the name that makes a difference; it is the adjectives that unravel the expectations, the strategies and the hidden agendas. Everybody can be named whatever they want to. But a name accompanied by adjectives such as sacred, constitutional, great, or anything else that implies a right to expand, redraw the map so as to relate to minorities, are not acceptable. New names and nations have always indicated tendencies and visions that our global society can easily reproduce as causes for change. And in this case, it's a forced change, a fallacy that supposedly benefits people while it just relieves them until the moment some other chosen ones will "discover" their right to a new heritage.

From Great Serbia, to Great Albania and Great Macedonia, it's always the myths that immunize the same virus of expansionism. And the quest for historical identity in a global world can become a pretext to erase identity and change borders. I was never afraid of names. I am afraid of acts in the name of.