FROM CULTURAL TO POLITICAL HEGEMONISM

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Abstract: In this paper, the author interprets the political aspects of cultural hegemonism. Firstly, a theoretical differentiation is made between the cultural and the political hegemonism, and then, a discussion is opened about the occurrences of cultural annexation. The practical instances of cultural hegemonism, upon which political interests are being reflected, are taken from the Balkan region. Chronologically, the initial forms of Balkan cultural hegemonism observed here are from the second half of the 19th century, while also taking into account their later implications in the 21st century. Particular attention is focused on the 'Macedonian case'. The code of 19th-century Balkan cultural hegemonism was visibly activated at the beginning of the 21st century, while it was latently trailing through the entire 20th century. The author argues that cultural hegemonism is a historical phenomenon, governed by general historical principles and laws, so it may be foreseeable and replaced by better solutions.

Keywords: cultural hegemonism, political hegemony, imperialism, postcolonialism, Balkans, Macedonia.

Introduction: The cultural hegemonism paradigm

If political hegemony is the predominance of one nation or state over others, then cultural hegemony is a (political) strategy that enables the predominance of one culture over others. The predominance of one culture means a subordination and subjugation of another. Cultural predominance and subordination are the two opposing faces of the same phenomenon—the hierarchization of cultures. In order to dominate over one or more cultures, the hegemonic culture exerts its influence upon them by means of information, communication, propaganda, media, and networks (in accordance with the historical and civilizational circumstances), thereby modeling their systems of cultural values, tastes, and perceptions. Cultural hegemony is accomplished through a historical process of transformation, not by a revolutionary overthrow—hence the difference between cultural hegemony and cultural revolution. In this paper, a slight distinction is also made between the notions of hegemony and hegemonism. Hegemonism is the strategy for achieving political, social, or cultural domination, while hegemony is the historical actualization of the hegemonistic model, an already installed system of predominance and ruling. In this paper, the notion of cultural hegemonism is preferred since it explicitly emphasizes that in

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certain circumstances the phenomenon of predomination (having dominion over others, ruling others) is accepted as a concrete political strategy, even as an elaborate methodological system.

As a political strategy, cultural hegemonism uses various means and measures to enforce its policies of domination. Its means and measures are directed towards: a) suppression of inherited cultural matrices and marginalization of tradition (language and linguistic memory, mythical, ritualistic, and historical heritage); b) assimilation and conversion of the foreign cultural identity; and c) creation of a regionally or globally powerful, paradigmatic and *cult culture*.

In its milder and more sophisticated form, cultural hegemonism is seen as a tendency for 'leadership' (avant-gardism), leaving a lasting first impression of logical supremacy of the avant-garde culture over the traditional one.[2] But in certain radical instances, hegemonic cultural policies are directed towards a revision and negation of foreign identity, thereby becoming brutal and conflicting. In addition, the kinship between the cultural traditions in question is possible (also spatial and historical contact), but it is not a necessary factor in cultural hegemonism. For instance, kinship and homogeneity are of no crucial importance in global hegemonic policies. Yet, in local and regional circumstances, kinship and shared sites of memory among cultures are being used and abused to achieve cultural hegemony.

The predominance of one culture over another implies a hierarchical relationship of superordination and subordination of the cultures and nations. The predominant position of a culture that is set in a hegemonic role includes numerous forms to institutionally manipulate the culture that is set in a subordinated and subjugated relationship: conditional politics, blockades, hate speech and threats, abuse of the position of power, appropriation of the history and identity of the people who are in a subjugated position (without protective state institutions or with corrupted ones), the introduction of measures for sophisticated but (in essence) coercive ethnic conversion, confusion between the categories of citizenship and ethnicity (Maalouf 2003: 81, 133), etc. It is an invasive approach that annexes the cultural and historical heritage, not the territory at this point. However, this invasive cultural strategy is a consequence of the primary imperial geopolitical predominance of the hegemonic state over the subjugated states.

In the imperial and colonial epoch, the goal of cultural hegemonism was to acquire possession over the historically marginalized, indigenous, migrant, or other minority cultural communities. However, in the post-imperial or postcolonial epoch (and constellation), hegemonic cultural policies are led toward other foreign states—at first, regionally among neighboring states, but then also wider, within linguistically cognate or homogenous cultures (for instance, South Slavic, Slavic, Latin American, Francophone, or Anglophone cultures). When these policies are led toward nearby cultures (adjacent, contiguous, or neighboring), they are imposed not only upon homogenous cultures (like the Balkan South Slavic cultures, for instance) but also upon heterogeneous cultures living together in proximity (like the pan-Balkan cultures: Greek, Albanian, Turkish, Aromanian, and South Slavic cultures). It seems that the "borders between the 'close or same' communities are easily moved" (Kramarić 2020: 26). In this context, the cultural hegemonism of the small Balkan

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[2] Edward Said writes about 'cultural leadership' as Antonio Gramsci's 'hegemony' in the Introduction to *Orientalism* (Said 1978: 15).

nations with big pretensions (megalo- nations and nationalisms from the 19th century onward) seems to be a post-imperial phenomenon inspired by neocolonial discourse.

Fast forward to the turn of the 21st century, the epoch of globalism has shown that cultural hegemonism has surpassed the borders of spatial and linguistic kinship. Globalism does not know of spatial and linguistic borders since it is transcultural and transnational. In its initial phases, it is firstly carried out in the form of a 'soft hegemonic colonialism' (Kramarić 2020: 70), but in time, it aquires the form of hard colonialism, thereby questioning the thesis that, in the 20th and 21st century, we are living in a postcolonial epoch. It creates implicit hierarchies of cultural systems (instead of explicit ones), which are being used to instigate consciousness (not only feelings) of 'latent inferiority' (Chepulis 1985: 26–9). In this way, it deepens the differences between the Western and Eastern cultures to the degree of their mutual alienation and latent value hierarchization. Thus it creates imaginary centers of cultural values with real power (Eurocentrism, US-centrism/suprematism). The cultural interest of the global hegemon is geostrategic and farfetched. It applies methods from the position of power, i.e. the position of 'flexible positional superiority' (Said 1978: 15). Thereby, cultural hegemony does not exclude the territorial hegemony (the annexing of territory) as its final goal, and cultural domination is not only an epilogue but also a prologue to economic and political domination.

The genesis of the Balkan cultural hegemonism

Contemporary Balkan cultural hegemonism ought to be observed through its development. It has its own story with an exposition (prehistory), plot conflicts (confrontations, complications) and resolutions (denouements, closures), which are repeated in a cyclical manner, thereby transforming the story into a saga. Hegemonism is a transhistorical phenomenon and may be observed as a repeated historical actualization of the *archetype of the hegemon*. Its starting point ought to be found in the ancient epochs, and its development may be followed continuously during the medieval feudal territorial conquests. The hegemonic relations have been known to be functioning on the vertical axis (between societies who are in a position to be very superior or very inferior in some martial aspect) but also on the horizontal axis (among relatively equal and nearby societies who are probing if anyone may prove to be more powerful in politics or war). The contemporary inter-neighborly hegemonism of the Balkans is most probably a remnant of the class socioeconomic formations of the past, the slaveholding and the feudal societal systems. Our main interest in this paper, however, is connected to the establishment of the new-age Balkan nation-states in the 19th century, when the local and regional Balkan interests were once again scaled up to wider, international, European proportions. American social anthropologist and archeologist Anastasia Karakasidou explains this unique and complicated period in Balkan history in this way:

> Modern nation formation in the Balkans was intimately linked to broader diplomatic developments and shifting "balance of power" alliances in Europe and Asia. As the Ottoman Empire declined and disintegrated, national liberation movements took root in Christian areas of the Ottoman Balkans. Through a variety of channels, including commerce, education, and Protestant missionary work, the revolutionary spirit of the European Enlightenment diffused

to regional intellectual and political ellites, who often used it to construct an ideological framework for popular mobilization and armed insurrection. These enlightenment ideologies, however, [...] were essentialist in their character and rhetoric. [...] The rhetorical debate in this contest focused on the progressive capacities of each national group, creating new ideological hierarchies of identity in which some national groups were deemed more worthy of European support and empowerment than others. In their discourse, these Enlightenment writers created the ideological bases for emancipation and liberation from the Ottomans. But they also fostered new partisan constructs of identity, solidarity, and difference that encouraged separation and stigmatization. (Karakasidou 2009: 77-8)

Cultural hegemonism remains a constant in the historical development of the new-age and modern Balkans from the 19th till the 21st century. In order to understand it properly, a historical digression will be necessary.

The Ottoman imperial policies were set on an entirely different conceptual paradigm about the notions of nation and ethnocultural identity. Their identity policies were more concerned with state security and economy, rather than with cultural issues. The Ottoman imperialism was a reflection of the Darwinist concept for racial hierarchy since it was based on the idea that there are evolutionarily selected, advanced, and superior races/religions/cultures vs. inferior and primitive races/religions/cultures. The Ottoman Empire had a stable strategic interest that was not directed toward socio-cultural or religious domination but toward socio-economic domination—thereby, it acted from the position of a colonizer (Maalouf 2003: 80). It actualized the archetype of a hegemon (tyrant) by legalizing the principle of selective exclusion: governing class vs. the *rayah* (the subject non-Muslim peasants), Muslims vs. non-Muslims, Asia vs. Europe, East vs. West, and Orient[3] vs. Occident.

During the time of its expansion, the Ottoman Empire was indifferent to the subjugated social, ethnic, cultural, and regional identities, so it allowed a certain cultural autonomy of the colonized people. All citizens of this empire were 'the subjects of the sultan' (Maalouf 2003: 80). However, as its decline commenced, it started to introduce measures for collective and systemic religious conversion of the non-Muslims (such as laws for taxation of the Christian population). The closer it got to its collapse (from disintegration and fragmentation to breakup) and its regime change (from theocentric and imperial to civil and secular), the more it undertook measures and policies that bore the sign of cultural hegemonism. Thus, their economic domination started to attain dimensions of cultural domination.

The initial indifference of Constantinople's Sublime Porte (the Empire's central government and top political structures) toward the smaller cultural identities brought about some regime and legal measures that created a new hierarchy of the Balkan cultures, which could thereafter be seen through the traditional prism of religious, linguistic, and ethnic identities. The inherited paradigm of the Ottoman millet system was replaced with a new ethno-national system. The Orthodox Christian Rūm millet was an administrative category based only on religious affiliation,

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[3] On the term Levant, which is complementary but not identical to the term Orient, see Amin Maalouf's *Le Naufrage des Civilisations* (Maluf 2020: 11–17).

not an ethnically or territorially homogeneous category.[4] There was even 'no ethnic monopoly' on the ecclesiastical institutions, 'the "Serbian" patriarchate of Peć [Kosovo] and the "Bulgarian" archbishopric of Ohrid [Macedonia] had no ethnic nature either formally or in practice' (Anscombe 2014: 151). Within this supraethnic context the notion Bulgarians didn't have strict ethnic dimensions, but referred to the Slavophone Orthodox Christian population. Just a few decades earlier, on January 16, 1767, the Archbishopric of Ohrid was abolished with the *irâde* (decree) of His Majesty Abdülhamid I (the 27th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire)—not by a religious cannon— thereby creating a vacuum in the Orthodox Christian practice in the Church Slavonic language. This decision not only diminished the role and influence of the Archbishopric of Ohrid in the Orthodox Christian world (as a church, enlightenment, and cultural leader), but it also initiated the process of marginalization of the Macedonian factor. The abolishment of the Archbishopric of Ohrid sustained the church hegemonism of the Constantinople Patriarchate, the Bulgarian Exarchate, and the Patriarchate of Peć (Ipek), thereby creating favorable conditions for an expansion of policies like (modern) Hellenization, Bulgarization, and Serbization of the Macedonian Slavic population. The church hegemonism grew into cultural hegemonism, while the latter was foreplay and entranceway to political hegemonism. So, it was then in the 19th century, and so it is now in the 21st century, in the Balkans.

Characteristics of the Balkan cultural hegemonism of the 19th century

In the 19th century, the Balkans was subjected to fundamental and complex social transformations of decolonization, which created borderline situations in the sphere of political and cultural identities.[5] During this time, the geopolitical interests of the major European powers had greater influence over the regional interests. Nevertheless, the social processes characteristic of Western Europe were taking a different course on the Balkans ('the Balkan way'): - despite the establishment of several nations and states with a high degree of 'imaginariness' or arbitrariness (in comparison with the traditional ethnic communities), those states (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia) still retained their conservative ethnic principle in their constitutions; - despite the breakup of the large centuries-old empires (the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire), as well as their feudal imperialism and colonialism, a new regional and micro-colonial system was being

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[4]   For instance, Anastasia Karakasidou explains the Ottoman Rum millet in this way: 'For over four hundred years following the conquest of Byzantium, the Ottoman administrative system had organized populations and defined "nations" through the *millet* system, which classified inhabitants on the basis of religion. *Millets* were administrative rather than territorial jurisdictions, and the Christian and Muslim "nations" of the Ottoman Empire, divided under this system, were administered according to different regulations, offices, and procedures. While Muslims were belonged to the Muslim *millet*, all Orthodox Christians belonged to the Rum *millet*, and were subject to the direct and indirect control, supervision, and administration of the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul, which enjoyed a privileged and powerful position in the Ottoman Empire. The Orthodox Rum *millet* included a diverse Christian population dispersed across vast territories of the Ottoman Empire.' (Karakasidou 2009: 78–9)

[5]   Although a person's identity 'is made up of a number of allegiances', it is 'also singular, something that we experience as a whole', it is 'not an assemblage of separate affiliations, nor a kind of loose patchwork; it is like a pattern drawn on a tightly stretched parchment', 'touch just one part of it, just one allegiance, and the whole person will react, the whole drum will sound' (Maalouf 2003: 26).

installed in the Southern Balkans (by Greece, Bulgaria, and Serbia toward Macedonia, Thrace, and Albania). And since the major European powers remained uncritical of this regional ethnocentrism and colonialism, it has evolved and survived to this day (as modified as it may be).

The gradual and partial decolonization of the Balkan peoples from the Ottoman Empire[6] led to new forms of local micro-economic and cultural colonialism (Ḱulavkova 2021: 17–38). This inequality and unfairness turned the Balkans into a zone of cultural conflicts (negation, assimilation, supremacy). The new hegemonic ambitions were directed toward neighboring and minority people, so the best example was their attitude toward Macedonia. An attempt was on the horizon to annex the Macedonian cultural and historical heritage by invasive economic, educational, religious, and linguistic propaganda: 'the early stages of the Macedonian conflict, i.e., those decades immediately preceding the armed confrontation of the turn of the century, were characterized largely by a propaganda war between Greece and Bulgaria (as well as between Greece and Serbia) for the "hearts and minds" of the Slavic speakers of Macedonia" (Karakasidou 2009: 78), and since 1862, even Romania was 'also involved in a national consciousness-building campaign in Macedonia' by establishing a Macedon-Romanian Committee (276).

The most powerful propagandist institutions in Ottoman Macedonia were the churches, so those who had an influential ecclesiastical center in the Ottoman Empire (like the Greek Patriarchate of Constantinople and later the Bulgarian Exarchate) had an advantage. Greek and Bulgarian church, enlightenment, and national propaganda among the Slavophone Macedonian population—the 'converging frontiers of two modern state-expansion and nation-building campaigns' (77)—were significantly enhanced after the establishment of the autonomous Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870. Education was the second most important front and field of influence (establishing and sponsoring their 'national' primary and secondary schools), but there were also other auxiliary social spheres of influence as well: culture (sponsoring their 'national' cultural associations, newspapers, statistical research, manifestations, even coffee shops and barber shops), politics (sponsoring international diplomats and 'national' political parties), banking (establishing 'national' banks and bank branches), health care (dispatching and appointing doctors and medical personnel, sponsoring health care centers and pharmacies), and even military engagement (dispatching military units) (Minov 2021: 197).[7] All these propagandizing efforts 'stressed the innate and primordial

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[6]   Following the armed Balkan national uprisings against Ottoman dominion, which were aided by the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy and the rising Russian Empire, the major European powers mediated treaties between Russia and the Ottomans, which lead to the establishment of the Balkan 19th-century national kingdoms. Following the Greek Wars of Independence (1821–32) and the two national uprisings in Serbia (1804–13, 1815–17), the Treaty of Adrianople concluded the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29 and declared the Kingdom of Greece the first Balkan independent nation-state in 1829, while Serbia was promised autonomy (its suzerainty was officialized by 1839 as the Principality of Serbia, and it gained de facto independence by 1869). After the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 that concluded the national uprising in Bulgaria (1876) and the Tenth Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, Serbia gained de jure independence (later changing its status to Kingdom of Serbia in 1882), while Bulgaria was given autonomous status as the Principality of Bulgaria (de jure under Ottoman suzerainty until it declared independence in 1908 as the Kingdom of Bulgaria).

[7]   For a thorough and detailed historiographic account on the propagandist efforts of Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania in Ottoman Macedonia, see Nikola Minov's paper "The Balkan State-Sponsored Propaganda in Ottoman Macedonia" (Minov 2021: 193–218). The paper analyzes the role of three different state-sponsored propaganda tools

characteristics of one's own national group while "Orientalizing" those of others' (Karakasidou 2009: 78) and were especially closely connected to the modern Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian nationalism and hegemonism.

At first, the postcolonial ambiance in the Balkans triggered a need in the existing identities for reflection and auto-reflection, which led them to recognize the kinship of the Slavic cultures and their heterogeneity with the non-Slavic cultures. This was followed up by initiatives for new cultural contacts, especially in areas such as folklore, literature, philology, and historiography. It became obvious that the Balkan cultural area had been a zone of cultural contact throughout the past. However, instead of this leading to mutual political and neighborly solidarity between the decolonized and the colonized people, and to the development of the traditional Balkan intercultural dialogue, the decolonized people and their nation-states began exclusive and intolerant politics of negation. The new Balkan states chose to legitimize megalomaniac policies, which generated a series of sophisticated forms of persecution, negation, and conversion of the extrinsic cultural identities (Othernesses). One may say that the legalized policies of ethnocide and culturicide became the main characteristic of Balkan political and ethnocultural hegemonism.

Cultural hegemonism and the case of the Republic of Macedonia

The Macedonian case is characteristic of Balkan cultural colonialism and hegemonism. Just as Ottoman colonialism loosened its grip in the 19th century, the *cultural colonialism* of the new Balkan nation-states got more and more established. Later on, this cultural hegemonism will turn into an explicit and aggressive political hegemonism after the independence of the Macedonian state from the Yugoslav Federation in 1991, and especially in the first decades of the 21st century. Macedonian culture became the objective of appropriation and negation just when it began to be publicly promoted and aware of being the main differential marker of the Macedonian national identity. At first, this 19th-century Macedonian Renaissance and Romanticism Era stirred up the auto-reflection and the scientific study of the Macedonian culture. However, the kinship cult of the different South Slavic people having kindred languages was used as a trap to seize and transfer Macedonian linguistic, oral literary, and even archaic cultural heritage (Kulavkova 2021: 23).

One part of the propaganda, church installations, and revisions of the Macedonian history were a logical consequence of the cult Slavic kinship, which had been degraded to political dogmas like the one that the Macedonian language is a dialect of the Bulgarian language and Macedonian history a component of Bulgarian history. This dogma was recycled again and again in all the sensitive periods of the more recent Macedonian history, and after the breakup of the Yugoslav Federation, a superstructure was built on top of it with additional biased and problematic interpretations of ancient and medieval history (in other words, the entire Macedonian cultural heritage). Macedonia's history is ironic: from a "Cradle of Slav Orthodox Culture" and "a major

by these four Balkan states in the shaping of national identity in the last decades of Ottoman rule in Macedonia: the textbooks used in primary and secondary education, the funding and establishing of national high schools, and the influence of medics. It also analyzes how historiographers and scientific authors of all four states have covered these activities of their strategic opponents as foreign propaganda but never admitting to their own.

religious and cultural center" that played an important role "in the cultural beginnings of all the Slavs" (Rossos 2008: 32), it became an objective of numerous denials and aspirations in regard to its culture, history, language, ethnicity, state, everything but its territory.

In the 19th century, the Macedonian Slavic population[8] was continuously faced with new state borders, which always caused new personal, familial, and national traumas, thereby disintegrating and fragmenting the inherited millennia-long Macedonian ethnographic continuum and creating confusion among the Macedonians themselves. We will give only two flagrant examples here:

1) with the Treaty of San Stefano (March 3, 1878) the ethnographic territory of Macedonia was separated from the Ottoman Empire and annexed to the new monarchic Bulgarian state (the Austro-Hungarian influence was spreading to the Southern Balkans, in both the case of the Greek and the Bulgarian state); 2) only a few months later, with the Treaty of Berlin (July 13, 1878) signed at the Berlin Congress, the major European powers decided to return the region of Macedonia to the Ottoman Empire, only to partition it between the three newborn neighboring nation states three decades later, with the Treaty of Bucharest (August 10, 1913): Aegean Macedonia (the vilayet of Salonica) was annexed to the new Hellenic monarchic state (Greece), Pirin Macedonia remained annexed to the Bulgarian monarchy, and Vardar Macedonia was returned to the Ottoman Empire. These two treaties—the former Eastern European, the latter Western European—will have a long-lasting effect with hegemonic implications. The former always recycles the dream for a big 'San Stefano' Bulgaria, while the latter gives its European support to the megalomaniac-national aspirations of the Greek monarchy (which was established in 1832) and anticipates the Serbian cultural hegemony within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (created as a constitutional unitary monarchy on January 1, 1918). Both of these treaties together reflect on the First Balkan War (October 8, 1912–May 30, 1913) and the Second Balkan War (June 29, 1913–July 31, 1913), as well as on the First World War (July 28, 1914–November 11, 1918).[9] There are many elements in support of the thesis that the platform of these two treaties between the major powers (in combination with the Treaty of Bucharest, which ended the Second Balkan War on August 10, 1913) reflect upon the social realities on this part of the Balkans in the first decades of the 21st century and still to this day. In other words, the cultural hegemonism of the Southern Balkan states toward Macedonian culture was encoded by the treaties of the major European powers from 1878 till 1913.

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[8]   The notions Slavo-Macedonian and Macedonian Slavic (population) refer to the Macedonians (Macedonian people) with Slavic culture and language (the Macedonian language is scientifically classified in the South Slavic branch of Slavic languages). The ethnic Macedonians have a Slavic cultural identity. The Aromanian community (also called Vlach, Tsintsar, and Macedo-Romanian community) from the ethno-geographic region of Macedonia represents itself as Macedo-Vlach, i.e., Aromanians from Macedonia. The category (Greek) Macedonians—who are ethnic Greeks—is an artificial hegemonic construction of Greece. The Greek repressions on the Slavic Macedonian population in Greece is well documented and followed up by numerous laws with explicit hegemonic character: the law on citizenship, the changing of the toponyms, the negation of linguistic rights, the coercive exile of the Slavic Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia during the Greek Civil War of 1947. On all this, see Misha Glenny's *The Balkans: Nationalism, War & the Great Powers, 1804–1999* (2001: 539–544). For a thorough case study on the denial of the ethnic identity of Slavo-Macedonian inhabitants in Greek Macedonia since 1913, see Karakasidou's paper "Politicizing Culture: Negating Ethnic Identity in Greek Macedonia", published in the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* (1993: 1–28).

[9]   On the two Balkan Wars see Misha Glenny's *The Balkans: Nationalism, War & the Great Powers, 1804–1999* (2001: 228–248).

Approved by the major European powers, the Balkan nation-states continued to deny the Macedonian ethnic and cultural identity in the 20th century, while the census data were no longer reliable. Macedonian Canadian historian Andrew Rossos describes in detail these manipulations with the ethnographic data:

> Because the Bulgarians, Greeks, and Serbs did not recognize Macedonians as a separate ethnic group or nationality, gauging ethnographic structure became virtually impossible after partition. The Bulgarians continued to claim all Macedonians as Bulgarians. The Greeks and Serbs moderated their claims; the former claimed only the Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia as Greeks, or Slavophone Greeks, and the latter only those of Vardar Macedonia as Serbs, or South Serbs. Consequently, the interwar censuses could not include a Macedonian category but treated Macedonians as Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian nationals, respectively. All pre-1913, non-Greek statistics find Macedonians the largest single group in Aegean Macedonia. [...] The region's number of Macedonians began to decline in both absolute and relative terms during the Balkan Wars. The process accelerated after 1918 under Greek plans to transform the region's ethnic structure. Policies included colonization, internal transfers of Macedonians, and 'voluntary' (with Bulgaria) and compulsory (with Turkey) exchanges of populations, or what we now call 'ethnic cleansing.' By the mid 1920s, removal of 127,384 Macedonians and settlement of 618,199 Greeks (most of them refugees from Asia Minor) had completely changed the ethnography of Aegean Macedonia. Macedonians had become an unrecognized minority in their own land. Greece's census of 1928, and its successors, presented the kingdom as ethnically homogeneous. It classified Macedonians as 'Slavophone' Greeks and cited only 81,984 of them—a figure far too low in the light of all the non-Greek, pre-1913 statistics. The 1951 census, the first after the Civil War (1947–49), by which time the Greek state had become even more oppressive and repressive *vis-á-vis* Macedonians, recorded only 47,000 Slavophones—an equally unreliable and misleading figure. [...] Macedonians in the other three parts of their divided homeland also experienced discrimination, repression, and forced de-nationalization and assimilation, but not the mass-scale ethnic 'engineering' of their Aegean counterparts. They constituted majorities in their regions between the wars and may do so even today. (Rossos 2008: 5–7)

These regional policies continued to be supported by the major European powers in the period between the World Wars (1919–1941). The young Macedonian historian Teon Djingo has researched the issue of Macedonian national identity in the interwar foreign policy of Great Britain, which dominated the political processes in Europe after WWI (Djingo 2021: 245–261). His research shows how the British diplomatic correspondence changed its negative position on the Macedonian national identity. During these two decades, despite the factual situation being reported by the diplomats from the field, official London diplomacy was set on maintaining the regional balance by ignoring and closing the Macedonian question and by fully supporting the 1913 partition of Macedonia and the 1919 confirmation of borders. However, in the years before WWII, in the process of gaining allies, it began to interpret the situation differently and acknowledge that nothing less than autonomy would be acceptable to the Macedonians who are the majority population in this region. In spite of all odds, the organized institutional oppression could not suppress the historical process: "Each diplomatic pressure, economic incentive, and promise for military support failed to eliminate the Macedonian issue from the agenda. The absence of official

recognition did not mean a destruction of the Macedonian national identity. *Macedonism*, in all its various forms, was deeply embedded among the Macedonians" (Djingo 2021: 258).

Negation of cultural identity is merely the other side of negation of ethnic identity, all under the strategy for denying the right to establish a new nation-state. These politics have left consequences on the Macedonian political consciousness and state establishment in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. The denial strategy was 'scientifically' justified by the argument that the population on the territory of the entire so-called ethno-geographic Macedonia is multiethnic (Kulavkova 2018).[10] This argument, however, ignores the fact that, by definition, all nations have some multiethnic dimension, as well as that the Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, and later Albanian nation were also founded on a multiethnic basis, but this was never posed as an obstacle to the recognition of their national identity and state sovereignty:

The struggle for Macedonia—an irreconcilable competition for Macedonians' 'hearts and minds' by Bulgarian, Greek, and Serbian nationalisms—did not increase the knowledge about and understanding of the land and its people. It only made a bad situation worse: it transformed ignorance into confusion. By denying Macedonian identity or by claiming the Macedonians, the Bulgarians, Greeks, and Serbs created two false but lasting perceptions: first, that the Macedonians were Bulgarians or Greeks or Serbs and, second, that Macedonia was a hopeless ethnic mix, a *mélange*.

Undoubtedly, through the centuries the population of Macedonia was ethnically mixed. However, in the age of nationalism the Macedonian Slavs, the largest ethnic group, began forming a national identity on the basis of their own ethnic (linguistic, cultural, and historical) attributes, their mythology, and their political, social, and economic interests, just as the Bulgarians, Greeks, and Serbs had recently done. Once one accepts the factors in this historical reality—the existence of the Macedonian Slavs, the Macedonians—their land no longer appears a 'hopeless' ethnic mixture, as the neighbors' irredentist propaganda has claimed. Indeed, other areas in the Balkans, Eastern Europe more generally, and Europe as a whole were just as mixed ethnically as parts of Macedonia. (Rossos 2008: xix)

The cultural hegemonism of the small Balkan nation-states had nationalistic overtones and it became a generator for neocolonialist pretensions. It was encoded with the dominant state slogans: 'Greece for the Greeks', 'Bulgaria for the Bulgarians', 'Macedonia for the Macedonians'. It is just another confirmation that the "battle for nationhood is [specifically] a battle for hegemony, by which a part claims to speak for the whole nation and to represent the national essence" and "the triumph of a particular nationalism is seldom achieved without defeat of alternative nationalisms and other ways of imagining peoplehood" (Billig 1995: 27–8). The only positive effect of this post-Ottoman colonialism for the Macedonian side was that it stirred up the consciousness for a Macedonian identity, which was a precondition for an organized and mass national movement. Macedonian resistance against Ottoman imperialism turned into a multiplied resistance against the Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian ethnocultural hegemony.

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[10]   This same argument was brought up again during the 2001 war conflict in the Republic of Macedonia.

From the position of acquired state power and international influence, the hegemonic cultural policies (for instance, of Greece and Bulgaria, both in the past and today) have always been promoting insinuations for the inferiority of the Macedonian culture in comparison to the superiority of neighboring Balkan cultures. Since Macedonia liberated itself from the Ottoman domination later than the other Balkan entities, it became the object of desire and the target of severe religious, political, and identity propagandist and assimilating cultural policies. The Macedonian culture has always been a zone of contact in the past, and it still is, yet it has never lost its quality of being recognizable and its inherent and dominant identity. In fact, the entirety of any centuries-long culture, as the Macedonian as well, is composed of different and even contradicting parts. Identity is a whole, which is not a mechanical sum of its parts, but a superstructure created on top of the interconnection of its parts, a 'higher' category, and an inter-related system. Therefore, Macedonian culture may not be reduced either to its local or its contemporary dimension. History is an important and inalienable dimension of any national identity. Even the anti-essentialist views on culture and the proponents of political multiculturalism have come to the conclusion that culture is best defined as a social precipitate of history. In Alan Patten's social lineage account of culture, for instance, culture is "the precipitate of a common social lineage", it is "what people share when they have shared subjection to a common formative context", while the "division of the world, or of particular societies, into distinct cultures is a recognition that distinct processes of socialization operate on different groups of people" (Patten 2011: 735–749).

Propaganda has always been and still is a tool of cultural hegemonism and colonialism. It proves that the boundary between cultural, national, and territorial annexation is very thin. The Macedonian case is a didactic example that the policies of cultural hegemonism have covert territorial pretensions. In fact, Macedonia is an academic proof that when a state renounces its historical, cultural, and national narrative (the Preamble of its Constitution), and when it allows a radical revision of its Constitution under coercion from outside and within, then it becomes a 'legitimate' target to the regional and global hegemons. It has been almost two centuries that the option of its fragmentation and annexation is in play. It was initiated by the collapse of the Balkan imperialism and colonialism, and then, it was reactivated by the breakup of the Yugoslav Federation—not rarely also understood as a 'state-party' (Kramarić 2016: 23)—but in essence, it has always been coming back to the story about the artificiality of Macedonian identity. Macedonia today, more than any other time in the past, is a personification of the *archetype of Sharing*: shared dreams, shared history, and shared heritage. The methodology of denying the existing reality with the goal to create a new reality has proven efficient, especially in times of virtual and viral realities (simulacrums). *Summa summarum*, the consequences are becoming more and more serious.

The current policies toward Macedonia are a replica of the initial aspirations for cultural and political hegemony over it, which in the second half of the 19th century had the form of propaganda (Greek, Bulgarian, and Serbian), partially or entirely legitimized by the several consecutive Balkan and European peace treaties. Regardless of their explicit rhetoric, each of this propaganda separately and all of them together were focused on the denial of Macedonian identity. It is

well known that the 'rhetoric of power all too easily produces an illusion of benevolence when deployed in an imperial setting' (Said 1994: xvii), however, it has always been and will remain a tool of hegemonic policies: by conquering a nation's culture, one may conquer the nation and its territory; by conquering its history, one is halfway there to conquer its future.

Undoubtedly, the model (archetype) of cultural hegemony is immutable, only the circumstances, tools, and historical figures change. At the start of the 21st century, the tools of cultural hegemony have been upgraded with the tools of political hegemony, and most dramatically of all, they have been approved by the current official Macedonian representatives with the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement and the 2018 Prespa Agreement. The methodology of constitutional subversion has proved efficient in delegitimizing the Macedonian nation and in undermining the unitary character and the sovereignty of the state Republic of Macedonia.

Conclusion

History has its own patterns and general laws of historic recurrence (the repetition of similar events caused by similar actions and circumstances, whether cyclical, fluctuant, reciprocal, re-enacted, revived, or other). Thereby in theory, historical processes are repetitive and may be foreseeable. Similar historical constellations may lead to similar consequences and turnovers (Ḱulavkova 2021a: i-xxii). In Macedonia's case, history may have lessons to impart as well. There are enough historical indications to show that the closing phases of the historical process that created the Macedonian nation may not be blocked. This factual historical process was reflected in the constitutional narrative of the state Republic of Macedonia from 1991 (and previously in 1946, with the first Constitution of the People's Republic of Macedonia within the Yugoslav Federation), but it was revised through amendments after the 2001 War Conflict and by the Ohrid Agreement (which was arbitrated again by the so-called 'international community' of the western major powers). However, just as any other cultural and national narrative that is a result of an actual historical process, the Macedonian narrative may not be and should not be an instrument of coercive and radical revisions, negotiations and concessions (Kulavkova 2018). The new story is a new interpretation of history that opens up the possibility of unjust and dubious installation of other nation's expansionistic fiction (falsification) as faction. The 2001 Ohrid Agreement gave a visa to the Balkan hegemonistic policies, now no longer involving only cultural hegemony but political hegemony as well.

Cultural and historical hermeneutics both allow various approaches, premises, and conclusions. The interpretation of history is an open, rather than closed process. The political agreements and treaties, on the other hand, endeavor to put a closure to the process. Therefore, one ought to go back to reading science and free interpretation of absent historical times, instead of promoting dogmatic political 'solutions'. History can tolerate multiple narratives about the same historical events, and such an approach allows further scientific research and civilized intercultural dialogue. Instead of supporting latent cultural hegemonism (which may easily grow into a political and annexing hegemonism), it would be better to develop a new consciousness of interpretative pluralism and respect for the existing cultural identities.

There is no contemporary national identity without a historical and evolutionary genesis, or without its cult and constitutional historical narrative. Moreover, no Balkan national identity is 'unitary', but each of them is a complex and layered whole. A unitary identity imposes a 'linear and subsuming' historiography, while the complex identity a 'contrapuntal and often nomadic' historiography (Said 1994: xxv). Balkan politics misses this consensus about the non-unitary and layered character of its national identities. The Balkan identities have their own shared zones of historical contact, just as they have zones of shared demographic and cultural contact.

Bearing all this in mind, contemporary Balkan politics ought to respect the separate national and historical narratives and to avoid exclusive politics toward the cultural and historical heritage, because these kinds of policies have proven to have a hegemonic background. Negation of the identity of the Other is not a good compensation for affirming one's own identity. It is precisely the shared places of memory and the shared history that point to the obsolescence of all the forms of predomination, appropriation, and annexation of the history and culture of the Other. In this context, denial and annexation of another cultural history is most often a cover for new territorial expansionism. Besides, as paradoxical as it may sound, Balkan cultural hegemonism is a symptom of the deep discontent of some nations (conceptualized as unitary entities) by their own culture and an attempt to over-compensate their dark places in history. However, if the rising Balkan cultural hegemonisms are set within the wider international context of interpretation, they are certainly not a naive local form of expansionism. Quite on the contrary, they show serious indications of political hegemonism, which is instigated by 'impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination' (Said 1994: 9). It is precisely the repeated actualization of these hegemonic ideologies and imagologies that might serve as an explanation for the consecutive 'capitulations' that have continued from the breakup of Yugoslavia till today.

[Translated from Macedonian into English by Jasmina Ilievska-Marjanovic]

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