

THE TWO DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF NATIONALISM

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**regarding the
Macedonian
issue:**

**the goverment,
the radical patriots
and the globalised capital
in the city of Thessaloniki**

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On Sunday January 21st 2018, about 70,000 people protested in Thessaloniki, Greece, against the Republic of Macedonia being called Macedonia.



We will try to approach the present situation through a basic ascertainment: we see around us, in Greece and in other countries, nationalism to take place as a social move also from below, that considers itself resistant to the politics of austerity which undervalue the lives of the citizens of each country. Nationalist ideology is disguised as the resistance against the ever growing internationalization of the economy and its effects. The community of the nation appears as the last shelter in front of a reality where most of the efforts to influence state policies are failing.

A short prequel to the relation between the nation state and the capital

The previous decades, the social compromise that was achieved by the Keynesian model of production, fell into crisis. The capitalist response to this crisis was neoliberalism and global market integration. In this context, the national economic policy also changed. The state must intensify the competitiveness of the local labor market and support the expansion of its national capital. Its role as a mediator of the class struggle is now weakened. The labor unions and the political parties, basic political forms of representation, are being fragmented together with the collective subject of the mass worker. Welfare benefits shrink, working relations are restructured on more favorable terms for the capital and many state sectors are getting privatized. We could say that, in the context of capital's internationalization, each state takes over to carry out the economic policy which is collectively decided in the inter-state institutions where it participates, based on the competitiveness of the economy at an international scale.

The nation state is not in conflict with the global market, as a lot of people could hope. Instead, it adjusts the legislative framework to facilitate investment, it provides the necessary stability to accumulation, safeguarding the conditions of exploitation and control the labor mobility based on the needs of capital. So the nation state cannot be seen apart from capital. These are not two different spheres in conflict, but a unity, with its contradictions of course. On the one hand, the nation

state is the space where each social (capitalistic) relations take place. On the other hand, the capital changes its form by taking the nationality of each state (subscribes to the gross domestic product GDP, the money circulates in each national currency, etc.). However, capital is not necessarily coinciding with the core of the nationalist ideology, the creation of the undivided People and the imposition of the Peoples interests to the state. For this reason, nationalistic rhetoric is often against some aspects of capitalist expansion, in order to redirect them or to reward some others aspects of the capital, depending on the interests which it expresses each time.

Through this prism, we are going to examine the construction of greek nationalism as far as it concerns the "Macedonian" issue and we will try to illuminate the differences and similarities between the 1992 and recent nationalist rallies.

The greek situation and the nationalistic rallies of 1992

From the beginning of the 90s, neoliberal policies started to be implemented in Greece, in an increasingly larger scale. The national unity of that time was build upon the figure of the citizen, which had already emerged as a dominant social figure, in the previous years. Briefly: we are all citizens – individuals, typically equal before the law and at the same time members of the national community, in order for the state to recognize us. Gradually, the citizen undertakes to bear the cost of his/her reproduction, which previously was part of the welfare state. At the same time, the citizen is forced to find individual solutions, in order to achieve the longed-for upward social mobility, far from the collective claims of the past. Therefore, the ideology of individualism became an integral part of neoliberalism and penetrates every aspect of social reproduction.

The crisis of that period coincided with an influx of migrants in greece and at the same time the expansion of greek capitalism in the Balkans. The crisis, as a crisis (also) of exploitation, is the result of the refusal of the local workforce to get further devaluated. A refusal that was part

of the anti-austerity struggles. So, the migrants came and took over jobs that the local workforce was not willing to undertake, and in that way the greek economy was boosted by their cheap labor force. On the one hand, a part of the local lower middle class revaluated themselves by hiring migrants and reducing in this way their reproduction cost. On the other hand, another part of the lower middle class had to be further intensified, in order to remain competitive in the labor market.

The ideological transformations of that period converge to a nationalistic – racist rhetoric, against the migrants. Those who had “finally” manage to become bosses, as well as those who were afraid of the salary reductions, wanted the migrants to remain illegal and undervaluated. Nationalism is constituted on the distinction between the “interior” and “exterior” of each nation-state, the risk of the deterioration of ethnic/national homogeneity and the demand for security, against the migrants, which were constructed as criminals.

In the same period, the Greek capital was making a strong penetration in the Balkan countries, by increasing its exports and transferring many of its business in areas with cheaper labor. In this way the greek state gained a little ground in the competition with other european markets. At the same time, the greek state retained some territorial claims in the region, while war was in progress.

On the occasion of the issue of the name of Macedonian Republic, an unprecedented nationalist explosion was observed, which expressed many of the procedures described hereinabove. Mostly, the creation of the undivided People and the imposition of its interests to the state, that is the nationalization of the conflicts which existed in the interior of the greek society. The state mechanisms became the basic operator of the nationalist rhetoric and indicated the social practices that express the national interest. The schools, universities, public services were shut down, as well as most of the shops. The media motivated the people and the public transports transferred them, free of charge, to the rallies, under the blessings, of the church of course. So, the sizeable rally took place in February of 1992, with the uncompromising slo-

gan: “Macedonia is greek”. Two years later, the embargo by the Greek government took place. The function of the Greek consulate in Skopje stopped and the transport of commodities to and from the neighboring state through the port of Thessaloniki was blocked.

During that period, the nationalist rhetoric revolved around the indisputable historical continuity of the Greek nation, which reaches antiquity and tries to build cohesion through symbols, names and birthplaces of emperors. All united, the state mechanisms went into a series of communicative movements that tried to consolidate the above position. Already since the 1988 the ministry of northern Greece was renamed Ministry of Macedonia – Thrace. In 1991 the Macedonian News Agency was created. In 1992 the airport of Thessaloniki was also renamed Macedonia, while in 1995 the Macedonian airlines were created. In 1992 a big crowd gathered in the funeral of Manolis Andronikos, the man who “delivered” the main evidence of the Hellenism of Macedonia, through the excavation of Vergina. All these events took place, while the dispute over the name was intensifying.

The rally of the 21th of January 2018

If we want to point out a central difference between the rallies of 1992 and today, that concerns the role of the state institutions in the organization of the rallies. We would say that in the case of January’s protests and especially the one in Thessaloniki, most of the state institutions and politicians, didn’t create or promote the protest but rather tried to follow the events and their dynamics. The government acted indifferently against the masses, the opposition and the rest of the political parties were confused with no clear position, as did the church, which until the last moment insisted on separating the affairs of state and church. The big media were cautious and certainly did not promote the issue of these protests to a great extent.

Nevertheless, on Sunday 21-1, thousands of people gathered in the statue of Alexander the Great, to demonstrate about the name of the neighboring state, with the turnout being much larger than most pre-

dictions (80.000 people)¹. During the protest, fascists attacked two squats, Social space “School” and Libertatia. They managed burning down completely Libertatia. Meanwhile, a counter-protest was taking place mainly by political groups of the Anti-authoritarian movement, and groups of fascists tried to attack it, but the police confronted them.

Both people from Thessaloniki and residents of other regions gathered to trumpet their national beliefs. Young and old, men and women, bosses and workers, were all united in the name of national ideology, leaving their different interests aside. Once again, the inter-class subject “People”, the famous “99% of society”, appeared to show its most cynical face. It is worth noting that the appearance of the concept of the People reflects the defeat of the recent struggles. The People are not a particular social class, but rather a concept which needs to be created and represented; this concept not only tries to conceal the social contradictions and contrasts, but also tries to alleviate them. The People usually have a nationality and their sovereignty is claimed through their political representation on the horizon of the state. So we often notice the argument that starts with indivisible People, ending (and logically) with the national independence against foreign interests.

It is a fact that national ideology is reproduced and consolidated by the institutions of the state (school, church, family). The constitution of the nation’s community, however, also requires a social move “from below”. After all, national identity gives its subjects a double identification: On the one hand, a vertical one, with the nation and its symbols, and on the other a horizontal, among the subjects, among those who are recognized as co-nationals. The second case is often forgotten, although it plays a decisive role, giving people a deep sense of “belonging”, capable of covering their different positions within the class society.

As mentioned above, most of the mediation mechanisms did not support, at least openly, the rallies. But people gathered massively. The

¹ This is the final estimation given by the police. Their first estimation was 30.000 people. There have been many different estimations by the media, some even talking about 500.000 people.

“work” was done elsewhere. Mouth-to-mouth, in family tables and neighborhood cafes, in “cultural” clubs and in stadiums, workplaces and, of course, in social media, national unity was materialized. It was not just the nationalists and the fascists who managed to come out of their holes. The national unity not only has some standard operators, but it is established and decomposed each time some people start to act and see themselves in it.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the organizational form of January 21st rally resembled the modern social movements of the squares. A “neutral” initial call, far from party colors and leaderships (who remain de-legitimized in the consciousness of the people), relatively open to the way of expressing national sentiment, and based on a horizontal propaganda, mainly through the social media. Of course we do not deny that the event was started by a political initiative and by cultural associations supported by state structures. We support, however, that the socialization of the issue was primarily a matter of civil society.

After that Sunday, several political actors would like to capitalize such a meeting. A significant portion of the society, including the popular right, the patriots and the Greek Orthodox believers, seems to have come again to the forefront, in a traditionally conservative city, seeking a political form of expression, opposed to the government. At the same time, the far-right / fascist milieus attempted to get upgraded organizationally / operationally and to incorporate people into their ranks.

As the Athens rally was approaching, the political world had shown a change of attitude, unable to ignore and underestimate the dynamics that has developed. It became clear that the gatherings would now be a field of controversy in the central political scene. It is worthwhile to see what the different aspects of national governance were, and why they emerged.

On Sunday February 4th 2018, about 150,000 – 200.000 people protested against Macedonia in Athens². During the protest, a counter-protest was taking place by anarchists and some left organizations. A large group of fascists tried to attack the counter-protest and attacked the Theatre Embros squat. The fascists had some minor clashes with the police to get into the Exarcheia neighbourhood, but only a few managed to and were beaten by antifascists.

The nationalist protests during the summer of 2018

The rallies continued the whole summer. The number of participants was really small³, in contrary with the previous more numerous protests. The problem was the continuity of their actions, which constituted a living movement with nationalistic content. The media started calling the people that were going to these actions, as the protesters, a name which for years was used only to describe movements in a left orientation. During the summer, many immigrants were hunted or even were hit by them⁴. Furthermore, the public space of the city most of the times was conquered by them⁵.

At 8th September , the day that the annual Thessaloniki International Trade Fair⁶ takes place, the nationalists did a rally with more than 6.000

2 This number is the official estimation given by the police. The organisers of the protest were speaking of over 1.5 million people.

3 About 15 different public protests were made until September. The number of the people participating varied from 100 to 2.000 as a maximum, that happened in the occasion of a motorcycle demonstration in 2th of July.

4 In 25th of July two immigrants and another person with alternative looking were stabbed by 15 fascists.

5 There were only a few public counter protests mainly call by the collective for the social anarchism "Black and Red", in which really few people attended. In addition a counter protest was organized by the most assemblies and political organizations of the city of Thessaloniki, that occupied the space, where nationalists were calling for their rally, in the 1st of July. In the counter-protest participated more than 100 people.

6 In the Thessaloniki International Trade Fair, each government usually presents the financial plan for the following year and almost all the leaders of the political parties speak out in public.

participants and at the same time there was another large protest organized by the radical left and anarchy organizations. Both of the sides were protesting against the government⁷, but in different places. The nationalists started confronting the police and tried to attack the mayor hall. There were many conflicts between police and fascists until the night. The fascists also tried to broke a few shops and cafes, some of them are operated by people from anarchist assemblies. There wasn't any public and collective attempt by any group of the antiauthoritarian movement to confront the main team of the fascists in the streets. Instead, many fights happened in the streets, between individuals antifa and facsists. In general, it was the first time that the fascists managed to be the ones that confronted the cops against the government, but still they didn't manage to achieve "the hundreds of thousands" people, that they expected to those protests.

Views of national ideologies

In a general context, the government's positions have remained the same almost from the beginning of its mandate and the magic words are: national independence and productive reconstruction. National independence is always a project of every nationalism. Syriza however, is the political force that managed to dominate simultaneously with the prevalence of anti-memorandum and national liberation tendencies within the movement of that period. It tried to expropriate the wealth of the struggles, which were developing at that time, letting them manage the poverty in the end. Part of this poverty is also the narrative of the foreign interests that covet poor Greece and the international organizations that impose anti-popular policies. This way, Syriza managed to shift criticism from the content of capitalist relations, to their management. From the state's point of view, and those who support it, economic demands and struggles can only be perceived as national ones, on the basis of the fact that they indicate a different version of state management at national level. This happens irrelevant-

⁷ Many groups were protesting also against U.S.A, because it was the honored country of the trade fair. They were also a few groups who had antifascist slogans.

ly to the more general projects/demands of the struggles (revolution, anarchy, communism). From the point of view of the social movements, the orientation towards the state is a limit that they are called to overcome. That is, the limit of the assignment, which covers the individual demands for improvement of living conditions and the more molecular denials within the capitalist relations, with the defending of the general interest. This year's rallies for Macedonia are precisely this: a generalist and abstract "common good", the "interest of our country". What is left of the «indignados», if we subtract the struggles that defined that period.

Syriza of course, wasn't so happy with the rallies. The "good" national interest is that which demands sacrifices from those who defend it. The rallies, were for Syriza, a rather inexpensive statement of national thoughts. The last years we have had a taste of the form of national unity which the government prefers. The nationalization of charity towards immigrants as a sign of the moral superiority of the Greek people, transferred a part of the management costs to the citizens, until the agreements with the other states were reached and the funds arrived. Over the management of a surplus population, a new field of value production was set up, while the beneficiary's working condition and the reciprocity in aspects of welfare policy were expanded and legitimized socially within the working class. At the same time, Greece has appeared in international organizations as a guarantor of stability. Briefly, Syriza sees the national interest through the resolution of the naming issue and the integration of Macedonia into the EU and NATO. The government believes that in this way, it will create better commercial, diplomatic and military relations with the neighboring state. Above all, Syriza sees that the two previously mentioned key words, namely national independence and productive reconstruction, are inseparable from each other.

In the previous phase of productive restructuring, a large part of the population was undervalued and cast on the margins of production. Many of them fled to the nation's community as the only stable community. Zizek points out that "the function of nationalism is not to offer

us a point of escape from reality but to offer us the same reality as an escape from a traumatic nucleus: social antagonism as an element within every society". That way, the symbolic interest of belonging to a community, with its social determinants and the status it offers, should not be underestimated in material terms. The efforts of many to gain control over their living conditions was replaced by an attempt to acquire the famous "national sovereignty."

So we come back to the initial assumption, that nationalism is trying to appear as a resistance to the international market and its imperatives. Around us we see many preceding the national independence, the national development, the national economy and, ultimately, the national prosperity. Supporters of the above view overlook the fact that these concepts could never be universally perceived in the same way. Also, there is no political structure which, on realistic terms, can describe how this rupture between the nation and the international market would take place in practice. However, we should not see the above view as an irrational romance of the time. On the contrary, we must not forget that it is produced within the logic of domination, which builds blood affinities over the millennia, which teaches us to hate people we never met, which forgets the class contradictions and legitimizes the state form.

Lastly, we would like to make clear that the two perspectives regarding the "Macedonian issue", both the one which overlooks the future through the expansion and depth of the capitalist relations in every aspect of the social sphere, as well as the other which searches in the past for the historical continuity in order to give meaning to today, speak the same language: the language of national interest. Even if at times they seem to be in conflict, at the same time they complete each other and form the two sides of national ideology, always within the horizon of the state. As such, we will continue to be against them.



On Sunday February 4th of 2018, about 120.000 people protested against Macedonia in Athens.



This presentation is about what happened in the current nationalistic protests (for the Macedonian issue) that took place in Thessaloniki and led to the attacks to squats, the burning of Libertatia and also attacks against immigrants. Also we want to share our opinion in the continuity of the nationalistic protests in an every day scale ever since mainly in the city of Thessaloniki. In general in our text we have tried to describe how this large (in participation) protests became possible in 2018, what's the differences with the 1992 massive protest and why the nationalistic protests try to present themselves as a resistance movement against the international capital. Furthermore we are going to present the two aspect of nationalism in Greece and the prospects of the creation of an anti-national movement, towards the re-appropriation of the public space.