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NATIONAL AND UNIVERSAL IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM. THE PROCESS OF GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

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Abstract: In the education system of any nation, there are, to one degree or another, both universal and local, national tendencies and patterns.

It can also be noted that it is in national schools that, in the terminology of synergetic, those dissipative structures of educational technologies and methods of organizing education are formed and polished, which are subsequently mastered by other nations and countries, spread and standardized as the most productive means.

The article emphasizes the importance of implementing globalization processes not in opposition to or at the expense of national education systems, but in the spirit of their harmonious, mutual enrichment and influence.

It is indeed emphasized that one of the secrets of the viability and survival of the Armenian people is the awareness of the importance of school and the education system, traditions of harmonious combination of the national and universal.

The position is to put forward that in a globalizing world, it seems appropriate and promising to encourage such education systems that, while being national in form, comprise universal human values in content. Such strategy will play a significant role in increasing the effectiveness of the educational process, as well as reducing conflicts and developing cooperation between different countries and peoples.

Keywords: education system, national traditions, universal human values, form and content of education.

*As is the educational system,
so is the future of its people and country.*

In the modern conditions of globalization and the formation of transnational economic, political,

scientific and educational systems, the idea of a national school and education (as well as nation-

al culture) may seem to be losing its importance and relevance, retaining only historical and educational significance. At first glance, it may seem that the tendencies of universalization and internationalization, the convergence of educational systems of various countries reduce to zero the value and need for further development of national educational systems that have formed over the centuries.

Meanwhile, it is also obvious that in the educational system of any nation, to one degree or another, there are both universal and local-national traditions and patterns.

This is a methodological problem, although not yet fully developed. We are talking about the relationship of the cultural and educational heritage and historical traditions of different peoples, on the one hand, and the real trends of the world in the field of education and upbringing on the other hand.

The problem noted is not new, in fact, it has an instructive history. The tendencies of universalization and unification in the fields of culture, politics, law, as well as education and social life are observed throughout the history of the development of human civilization. When discussing world standards and civilization criteria, one can notice a certain relativity – contextual conventionality in the historical and temporal aspect, realities that have become acceptable for most at certain stages of civilization development.

In the ancient times and even long after that, Greek and Roman systems of education, educational institutions based on the ideas of Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, Greco-Roman philosophy, literature, culture retained a dominant position in the enlightened world.

In the Middle Ages, Byzantine culture and educational systems came onto the stage along with the educational and pedagogical traditions formed in the Christian and Islamic religious and theological systems where education and science developed in Greek and Latin, as well as Arabic languages.

During the Renaissance and later periods, the rethought values of antiquity, the ideas of the European Enlightenment, the pedagogical concepts of J. A. Komenský, J. G. Pestalozzi, A. Diesterweg and other classics became the fundamental and universal criteria in the organization of education.

Nowadays, the European and American edu-

cational systems, English-language culture and literature are considered to be the leading models.

Of course, the processes of globalization imply tendencies towards the formation of common values and educational systems for different countries.

Meanwhile, it should be taken into account that the values and educational systems that have received international recognition at various times take roots in national educational concepts. Naturally, the world-historical process and universal values cannot exist without specific subjects and bearers. It is the most valuable and promising components and principles of national educational systems that become widely disseminated and gain universal recognition in civilizations of different periods. It is in national schools that, using the terminology of synergetic, those dissipative (spreading, dispersing) structures (Nicolis & Prigogine, 1977, pp. 55-62) of educational technologies and methods of organizing education are formed and polished, which are subsequently mastered by other peoples and countries, spread and standardized as the most productive means.

It is fundamentally essential that modern globalization processes are carried out not in opposition to or at the expense of national education systems, but in the spirit of their harmonious mutual enrichment and mutual influence.

In the context of radical changes in the socio-political system, situations arise when theoretical thought is not always ready or does not have time to present a methodological and thorough scientific analysis. In situations where old concepts are no longer acceptable (sometimes simply because they are associated with the old political system), and new approaches are not yet complete and require discussion and additional elaboration, at least three possible ways to solve the problem are noted:

- a) updating, renewing and reinterpreting the old systems,
- b) mastering foreign successful experience in order to solve the problems of national education and school,
- c) developing and improving a national model by understanding the problems that have arisen before one's own country and society.

The second path often becomes dominant,

when “developing countries” are offered, presented with replica-models of the educational systems of economically and politically developed countries. However, the mechanical introduction of one’s successful experience in other countries does not always bring the desired result. In this sense, the educational systems of the post-Soviet republics are no exception (Mirumyan, 2019, p. 18).

By the way, both in Soviet and post-Soviet times, some intellectuals expressed and continue to express dissatisfaction with the policy of compulsion, the desire of the “power centers” to align everyone, albeit with the technology of “soft power”: “although the political situation in the world has changed radically, in fact, the universalizing educational system of the Soviet model has been replaced by a universalizing system of another – that of the Western production” (Mirumyan, 2019, p. 18). In particular, the dissatisfaction is justified by the fact that Western education systems are not aimed at transmitting fundamental knowledge, developing systemic and analytical thinking, but are rather aimed at transmitting specific, often fragmentary and not systematized knowledge and skills (Mirumyan, 2019, p. 19). In pedagogical theory, it is impossible to create something fundamentally new which is limited to the practical requirements, standards and stereotypes of the current day. In this sense, creative rethinking of the historical heritage, its comparison with the modern needs of society, seem valuable. This will create a powerful theoretical basis for overcoming modern educational challenges.

Of course, the above said does not exclude, but on the contrary, presupposes a multifaceted and in-depth study of the historical and pedagogical experience of other countries.

In integrating societies and throughout the world, **it seems important and promising to encourage such educational systems that, while being national in form, constitute universal human values.** In this sense, valuable traditions can be found in the historical and cultural arsenal of each nation. Only such a strategy will play a significant role in reducing conflicts and developing cooperation between different countries and peoples.

From this point of view, the history of Armenian science and pedagogical thought is more than rich.

Education systems and pedagogical concepts specific to different nations are largely determined by historical processes, traditions of statehood or their absence, the degree of political independence, the socio-economic structure of society, and, most importantly, the role and significance given to education in the programs and ideologies of the ruling elites. During its centuries-old history, Armenian people have experienced periods of both powerful political and cultural upsurge and deep decline. The people of Armenia were destined to experience the golden age of statehood, the bitter years of mass emigration, to be threatened with assimilation, to become familiar with the culture of developed countries and to coexist with peoples of less developed cultures. By the will of historical fate, the people were involved in the global processes of interaction between different cultures, became the object of military-political, religious, ideological and cultural expansion.

One of the peculiarities of the history of the Armenian people is the fact that Armenia has almost always been in the focus of the clash of interests of opposing strong powers, in the whirlpool of geopolitical clashes (Rome and Persia, Byzantium and Iran, Byzantium and the Arab Caliphate, Ottoman Turkey, Iran and Russia, and finally the East and the West). This circumstance, naturally, required certain knowledge and wisdom, diplomatic qualities, and flexible tactics from the spiritual and political leaders of the Armenian people to protect national interests. In such situations, the availability of military force alone could not be sufficient to resolve issues.

It is also clear that the process of forming a citizen, reproducing specialists and intellectual personnel is determined by the tasks set before the state and society, and how correctly these tasks and goals are formulated. Geopolitical conditions and problems have found their expression in the Armenian spiritual culture, and, of course, in the education and upbringing system.

For centuries, the Armenian people have faced the challenge of survival, preservation of national identity, and cultural independence. These involved issues found their solutions. Moreover, the Armenian people not only managed to preserve their national identity, but also to create a culture of universal significance.

One of the secrets of this phenomenon is the awareness of the importance of school and edu-

cation, the presence of fundamental conceptual approaches in this regard, stable traditions of harmonious combination of the national and universal.

Since ancient times, Armenian thinkers have had close ties with leading scientific and educational centers of their time. They received education and taught in scientific and educational institutions of Athens, Alexandria, Rome, Constantinople, Paris, Amsterdam, Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Mastering advanced academic and educational traditions, Armenian scholars not only perceived the scientific and educational developments of other countries and peoples, but also offered them their own approaches and shared their own achievements. Back in the 3rd-4th centuries, Paruyr Haykatzn (in Latin - Proairésios), who received his education in the famous scientific centers of his time, founded a school of rhetoric in Athens and Rome, where Emperor Julian the Apostate (Iulianus Apostata 331-363), the outstanding orator Libanius (314-393), the famous theorists of Christianity Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390), Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) and Basil of Caesarea (329-379) were educated (Gabrielyan, 1997, pp. 22-24; Mirzoyan, 2016, pp. 53-54). In the philosophical scientific circles of the early Middle Ages, the works of the 5th century philosopher David Anghat (the Invincible) (Gabrielyan, 1997, pp. 76-91) and the views

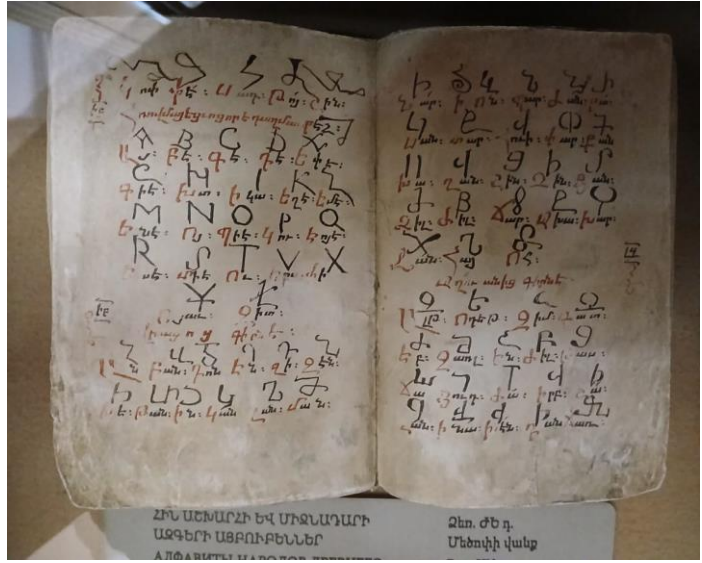
of the 7th century thinker Anania Shirakatsi in natural sciences (Gabrielyan, 1997, pp. 94-103) were highly recognized. The works and spiritual heritage of the 10th century theologian Gregory of Narek (Gabrielyan, 1997, pp. 133-142) earned the highest praise from the Christian Church. In 2015, the Pope elevated Gregory of Narek to the rank of Doctor of the Church.

It is worth noting that back in 405, the creator of the Armenian alphabet Mesrop Mashtots, with the help of his students, initiated the translation of works by famous authors of that era. The translation work of Mesrop Mashtots and his students was valued so highly that the Armenian Apostolic Church, starting from the 7th century, celebrates the Day of the Holy Translators, and since 2007 this holiday has been celebrated at the state level. It is also known that leading Armenian teachers and thinkers had a significant influence on the cultural and educational life of other peoples. In addition to the Armenian alphabet, Mesrop Mashtots also created alphabets for Georgians and Albanians¹. This is evidenced by M. Mashtots's student and his biographer Koryun (n.d., XV, XVI, XVII), the 5th century historian Movses Khorenatsi (1981, p. 293, LIV). Although these alphabets are no longer used due to historical circumstances, they have been preserved in stone inscriptions and written texts. See Pictures 1; 2.

¹ Caucasian Albania (in Armenian - Aghuank, Aghvank) was an ancient country-state located between the Kur River and the Caucasus Mountains, bordering Armenia and Georgia.



Picture 1. Armenian alphabet.



Picture 2. Armenian manuscript containing Georgian and Aghvanic (Albanian) alphabets. Collection of the Matenadaran Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, manuscript 7117 (15th century).

In the Middle Ages, starting from the 9th century, Armenia actively participated in the development and dissemination of university education. Famous universities operated in the monastery complex of Tatev (9th-15th centuries), in the

monastery complex of Sanahin (10th-13th centuries), in the capital city of Ani (11th-13th centuries), Gladzor University (13th-14th centuries). See picture 3; 4.



Picture 3. Tatev Monastery Complex (9th century), Marz (province) of Syunik, RA.



Picture 4. The process of defending a dissertation under the supervision of the founder of Gladzor University, Esai Nchetsi. Fragment from Jerusalem manuscript no. 365, 1299.

The foundations of the state organization of secondary and higher education in Armenia were laid in 1918. This work was developed on a large scale in Soviet Armenia and continues to progress in the post-Soviet years. Currently, in the context of unprecedented expansion of scientific and cultural ties with other countries, great opportunities and prospects have opened up for the integration of the educational system of the Republic with advanced educational centers. Today, there are more than 1,400 comprehensive schools, more than 25 technical schools, 108 colleges, 28 state universities, 25 private universities in Armenia. Yerevan State University was founded in 1919, Armenian State Pedagogical University named after Kh. Abovyan was founded in 1922.

The American University of Armenia, the French University in Armenia, the Armenian-Russian University, and a branch of Moscow State University are very popular in the RA. It is also worth noting the significant success of the Tumo creative technology center founded in 2011, whose branches already operate in Paris, Beirut, Moscow, Zurich, Berlin, Kyiv, Mannheim, Tirana, etc.

The fact that various approaches and models combine in educational systems **is an important source and factor of development**. In turn, the inclusion of universal values and components in

national education programs **is an important circumstance that promotes dialogue of cultures, conflict prevention, mutual understanding and cooperation**. On the basis of such a synthesis, the opportunity to successfully implement the ideas of modern reforms opens up. Research carried out in this direction is in great demand, but is still insufficient to resolve existing problems. In this regard, it seems important to encourage the activities of international organizations of specialists aimed at developing educational systems and optimizing the organization of their activities. It is also necessary to expand the dialogue of teachers, educators and scientists, to form and develop mechanisms for their interaction.

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STATUES AND VANDALISM IN ARMENIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA: EXPRESSIONS OF OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL NATIONALIST IDENTITY

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Abstract: In Skopje, there are many statues of heroes and patriots controversially claimed by Greece and Bulgaria. One statue now labeled ‘warrior on the horse’ due to Greek pressure was designed to be Alexander the Great. People still refer to the statue as Alexander, a testament to the persistence of nationalist beliefs. In Yerevan, the Mother Armenia statue looks upon Mount Ararat in modern day Turkey. She wields a sword, as if to say “it’s not over”. The same might be said about the graffiti in both states as both are heavily nationalistic in nature. These acts of graffiti/vandalism communicate a message of disorder and dissatisfaction against the state. These official and unofficial nationalist sentiments are expressed because of the need to recover, in North Macedonia’s case, a long suppressed sense of national identity, and in the Armenian sense, a nationalism under attack. Nationalism in this sense is an expression of cultural revitalization, an essentially Postcolonial need to recover notions of self. This theoretical underpinning will serve as a baseline from which to apply the ethnographic findings of my trips to these locations.

Keywords: postcolonialism, colonialism, culture, nationalism, social constructions.

Introduction

In some countries, nationalism is expressed as opposition to colonization. Walking around Skopje and Yerevan, one notes various patriotic symbols, statues, structures, and vandalism, sometimes taking the form of graffiti. In Skopje, there are many statues of heroes and patriots controversially claimed by Greece and Bulgaria. One statue is labeled “an equestrian warrior” (Marusic, 2012) due to Greek pressure and was

designed to be Alexander the Great. People still refer to the statue as Alexander, a testament to the persistence of nationalist beliefs. In Yerevan, the Mother Armenia statue looks upon Mount Ararat in modern day Turkey. She wields a sword, as if to say “it’s not over”. The government of Armenia wants people to forget Ararat and other mountains considered sacred, yet the people reject those calls (Pashinyan, 2024). The same might be said about the graffiti in both states as both are heavily nationalistic in nature.

This article discusses the centrality of statues in nationalism, and considers the persistence of national traumatic memories experienced by the collective. Similarly, nationalist graffiti is prolific. In Skopje, graffiti is splashed onto identification plaques that render any explanation useless. In Armenia, graffiti features Greater Armenia, including the idea that Artsakh is sovereign Armenian territory. These acts of graffiti/vandalism communicate a message of disorder and dissatisfaction against the state. This message is nationalistic in nature as it communicates a political message. These official and unofficial nationalist sentiments are expressed because of the need to recover, in North Macedonia's case, a long suppressed sense of national identity, and in the Armenian sense, a nationalism under attack. Nationalism in this sense is an expression of cultural revitalization, an essentially Postcolonial need to recover notions of self. This article thus uses a Postcolonial approach to better understand the political situation in North Macedonia and Armenia. Both these states underwent socialism, a political system that suppresses nationalism for class conflict. Like any colonial and/or imperial experience that undermines the indigenous population, the culture of the imperial power, in these cases Marxist-Leninism, seeks to 'civilize' the local population by eradicating the local culture by replacing it with a foreign one. The colonized people, after removing that foreign power, will then seek to remember itself through a process of gradual cultural recovery that will serve to increase collective self-worth and self-confidence. While many would scoff at these efforts, statues and graffiti/vandalism serves to strengthen the collective identity after foreign influence, for, as the Foucauldian argument goes, wherever there is power, there is resistance. This article's theoretical Postcolonial underpinning will serve as a baseline from which to apply the ethnographic findings of my trips to these locations.

Postcolonialism and Ethnography: Examining Nationalism after Colonialism

Postcolonialism is the study of European colonialism on the formerly colonized peoples globally, and specifically their fight against that power (Drebes, 2016; Young, 2016). Edward Said's *Orientalism* was among the first books to discuss

the effects of colonialism in this manner. Said himself states that "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 11). As a perspective, it seeks to unravel race discourse that constructs power structures shaping life and living for people in the global south (Geeta & Nair, 2013, p. 8). Significantly, epistemic violence facilitates these constructions, by establishing a superior-inferior cultural dichotomy (Spivak, 1988, p. 280). Culture is the center of analysis as Postcolonialism "...bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 71). Under colonialism, indigenous cultures are suppressed and dehumanized while the colonial power is glorified as superior. The main focus for this paper is not to describe epistemic violence of North Macedonians and Armenians, but rather to look at the process and praxis of cultural revitalization through the study of statues and graffiti/vandalism, and its nationalist expression. In these countries, nationalism adopts a rejection of colonialism, and might best be explained using a Postcolonial framework.

Defined, cultural revitalization as a "conscious and deliberately orchestrated process of restoring a cultural experience that has been lost, disrupted or diminished" (Shea et al., 2019, 553). Cultural revitalization describes the transmission of memories, cultural beliefs, practices, and other important symbols of cultural identification from one generation to the other (Shea et al., 2019, Merton, 1949; Wallace, 1956). An often studied vehicle for the transfer of this knowledge is Native American tribes as discussed by Shea et al. (2019). However, I submit that this process may be present anywhere a culture has been suppressed by another, foreign culture.

To Postcolonial scholars, nationalism is seen as a European idea, 'foreign' to the political experience of people living in the global south (Lazarus, 1999). However, there are some elements, including nationalism, that have made their way, or migrated, into the makeup of global south countries. People there enjoy European sports

like cricket and football, but also various cultural practices of the so-called ‘western’ world (Lazarus, 1999). This is because of the European experience. Many European elements can now be found in the global south because of the forces of colonialism. Most important of these is the acceptance of the state as a political unit of governance. The Arab nationalist movement dominated politics of the middle east for much of the twentieth century (Martin, 2014). Indeed, there are many non-western ethnic groups that seek statehood: the Palestinians, the Kurds, the Western Saharans, among others, all see their survival as tied to statehood. There are also growing nationalist movements in parts of Africa and Asia, such as the Omora, Tigray, E Timor nationalism. States like India, Bangladesh, and more recently South Sudan were all created out of national belief systems. Thus, nationalism can no longer be considered a western ideal; it is clear that nationalism, like other western practices such as sport, music, movies, and other vehicles of art, culture, and identity, has been transplanted into the global south (Martin, 2014).

Essentially then, the nation-state is a vehicle for self-rule as people seek to keep their cultures and traditions alive (Khandy & Şengül, 2022). While this may seem as foreign to the experience of the global south, many peoples act in accordance with this idea of preserving national identity through the nation-state. This works within the Postcolonial perspective as it is centered around maintaining and recovering lost identity (Shea et al., 2019). Identity, what was now cultural identity, might now be incorporated into national identity. Nationalism is a construction of knowledge used to create myths, forming an identity to convince others to follow. It requires cultural revitalization, a process of recovering and remembering the past.

It is debatable whether or not North Macedonia and Armenia truly qualify as ‘western’ as these states are not part of the geographical western Europe nor are they culturally part of western Europe. Once part of the Ottoman Empire experience, these nations have a different cultural development than western Europe. These nations also have no real experience of independence. There were independence movements in both states in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but these efforts were part of a growing, global political trend (Pinson, 1975). These nations had

to create and shape their nationalist identity through a socially constructed process described by Anderson (2016), Prohuber (2009) and Wimmer (2018). Indeed, nationalism started in France with the idea of brotherhood and fraternity and enveloped the world, whether through an active development or as a legacy of colonialism (Hastings, 2018). Nationalism today is present throughout the international system as a major organizing principle. Understanding these expressions within the public sphere, whether unofficially through graffiti and vandalism, or officially through statues, will help us better understand the forces that drive political outcomes.

Methodology: Combining Ethnography and Comparative Historical Case Study Analysis

Since, as Said argues, “no one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society” (Said, 1978, p. 10), it becomes important for scholars to engage in ethnographic studies to understand the political situation. Even though there is no method as Said stated, we still seek to understand the world. Like Carol Cohn (1987) and other scholars with that curious mindset (Enloe, 1990), we all have preconceived notions that inhibit that understanding. The immersive experience of ethnography may help in that effort (Harrison, 2018).

In 2024, I spent 10 days in Armenia and 13 days in North Macedonia. There, I carried out an ethnographic study (withheld for anonymity). I engaged in observation, noting public spaces, their composition, and the graffiti/vandalism that defined the space. I noticed that like many spaces, there are expressions of official nationalism like statues. However, what intrigued me most, was the prevalence of graffiti. In my other travels such as to Athens, Greece, I noted left-wing anarchist graffiti. In Armenia and North Macedonia, nationalist graffiti/vandalism stood out. What was interesting is that in these countries, nationalism is couched in terms of past experiences with colonialism. In Armenia, Turkey was and is the colonial power that continues to undermine the Armenian state and national identity, especially after the loss of Artsakh. Nationalism was the response against Turkish colonialism.

Hence, Armenians fight colonialism through national identity. Similarly, North Macedonia is fighting both Greece and Bulgaria to keep what people see as their identity. The country had to change its name because an outside force, Greece, demanded it (Neofotistos, 2021). From the North Macedonian position, Bulgarians are demanding North Macedonians recognize that they are Bulgarian (Brunnbauer, 2022, p. 725). This again is perceived as a form of colonialism, as an outside influence is trying to shape and destroy cultural beliefs and identities of another group. Thus, in both cases, Postcolonialism presents an excellent framework to analyze nationalism.

In Armenia and North Macedonia, I had the pleasure to observe and speak to my contacts and other citizens about nationalism relating to experiences of colonialism. One left-wing activist from Armenia responded that a pure left-wing is altogether non-existent in Armenia. Any left-wing intellectualism is grounded in Armenian nationalism. For instance, when it comes to conflict with Azerbaijan, the idea is that since Armenians are the indigenous peoples, they deserve the land. Hence, in Armenia, nationalist fervor is grounded in Postcolonialism. In North Macedonia, I found a country fighting to retain its identity. People were adamant that the name “Macedonia” was the correct and only name, that the prefix “North” was imposed upon it by Greece. Anger also turned toward Bulgaria, as Bulgarians deny the very existence of a separate Macedonian identity. Rather interesting is the fact that, in order to have any success electorally, the Socialist Party has to ally itself with the nationalist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity Party (VMRO-DPMNE) (see sobranie.mk, accessed October 1, 2024). This paper will discuss both these issues together as it defines the continued relevance of nationalism in these countries.

Alongside ethnography, comparative historical case study analysis will also be conducted. Using primary and secondary sources, this paper hopes to provide insight into manifestations of nationalism in the public space. The Skopje 2014 project and the history of the Mother Armenia monument provides for us unique insight to nationalism in colonized states. However, another intriguing aspect is that both states underwent a

similar experience with socialism: Armenia was a member of the Soviet Union, and North Macedonia, a part of Socialist Yugoslavia. Thus, both these countries had to go through two rounds of colonialism, with the Ottoman Empire being a mutually shared experience and then socialism although in different forms (Rajak, 2011).

Like many other cultures in countries such as Cambodia and Maoist China, Armenians and North Macedonians suffered under colonial masters in socialist form under the Soviet and Tito influences, respectively. When free, many tend to go to great lengths to achieve cultural revitalization. Culture is at the center of nationalism, as Smith (1991) defines a nation to be “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (Smith, 1991, p. 14). Since nationalism as defined by culture informs behavior, nationalism, especially in former colonies, becomes central (Heller, 2011). Essentially, nationalism is “the ultimate source of political legitimacy as a readily available cognitive and discursive frame, as the taken for granted context of everyday life” (Özkirimli, 2010, p. 2). To study nationalism is to study culture; and to study culture, we must engage in ethnography.

As said, Armenians and North Macedonians experienced a surge of nationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not unlike many other non-western states like Egypt that were influenced by the French Revolution (Gerges, 2018, p. 35). However, these nationalist movements were interrupted by an external force. For the Armenians, Soviet forces destroyed the First Republic of Armenia, a state that lasted two years from 1918-1920 (Zolyan, 2024). Armenian nationalism was undercut until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Zolyan, 2024). North Macedonia never quite existed as an independent state. After World War I, the nation found itself absorbed into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and then Socialist Yugoslavia. However, during this time, Macedonians enjoyed some autonomy under the formed Socialist Republic of Macedonia. For this reason, Josip Broz Tito has a complicated history (Crvenkovska, 2020). Some remember him for first giving “Macedonians their state” as a member of the VMRO-DPMNE said to me during my time there.

While different nationally, historically, culturally, geographically, and linguistically, these two nations have an Orthodox Christian majority, but also experienced socialism for a number of decades; Armenia for a few more decades than North Macedonia. Typically, churches and other religious institutions serve as a threat to the monopoly of power and control of socialist regimes. As a result, they are forced into the state as part and parcel of the socialist ideology. In many instances, the church serves in opposition to socialism such as the experience of the Polish People's Republic, the Solidarity Movement and Pope John Paul II (Kraszewski, 2012). These identities managed to survive the experience. As will be discussed, national identities in socialist spaces went through a complicated historical era.

The Socialist Experience

Nationalism is supposedly suppressed by socialist ideologies but it can also be tolerated by it. Goff (2021) cites the *Atlas of the Peoples of the World*, published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1964 as an example that nationalism has been: "...solved on the basis of Leninist national policies that proclaimed the principle of full equality for all nations and their right to self-determination. In the big - family of Soviet republics, representatives of all nations, large and small, live, work, and successfully develop their own culture together. They are united by common interests in life and one goal - communism" (Goff, 2021, p. 2). Communism was to suppress nationalist identity as an evil, uniting diverse people under a new identification, socializing all peoples into a completely new political identity with common socialist goals. Following this was the statement "in contrast with the socialist countries, the majority of capitalist countries have no national equality" (Ibid). On paper, there were no nationalist conflicts in the Soviet Union. The reality of the situation was completely different. Shcherbak (2015) discusses the explosions of nationalist movements across diverse ethnic regions by the end of the 1980s. However, these movements did not just spontaneously explode out of a vacuum but were just resting dormant, waiting for an opportune time.

Socialists tend to believe that nationalism is an ideology created by the bourgeoisie class to divide the working class across nation states

(Martin, 2001). Any cultural identity would soon be superseded by class identity, as one ideology would be replaced by another. However, the Soviet Union would soon understand that any Soviet Union would be perceived as an extension of Russian chauvinism (Martin, 2001). Thus, initially the Soviet Union became a melting pot of sorts, subsuming various nationalisms and also tolerating native languages and cultural practices (Shcherbak, 2015, p. 873). This changed around 1930, with Bolsheviks understanding Russian and the "ethnic glue of the USSR" (Shcherbak, 2015). During this time, Stalin began the implementation of Russification, and many ethnicities were accused of helping Nazi Germany such as the Chechens, Tartars, and among others (Hajda, 1993, p. 220). These experiences did not eradicate nationalism, only sent it into incubation to seemingly return stronger, creating grievances that exacerbated nationalist conflict given specific economic and political circumstances.

Armenia's experience with socialism was similar to North Macedonia's. Socialist Yugoslavia. Around 2008, I asked my then Serbian neighbor what life was like in Tito's Yugoslavia. I recall the following response that life was good. He then added "if anyone stepped out of line..." moving his thumb from left to right across his neck. The Yugoslavian experience was similar to the Soviet one, as there was a Pan-Yugoslav identity shaped by Tito's cult of personality. The concept of 'brotherhood and unity' encouraged unity (Perica, 2004, pp. 94-94). Said differently, there was a recognition of difference between the republics. This explains why each republic enjoyed some degree of autonomy within Yugoslavia. Such unity is based not completely on force, but by consent also. During my visit to North Macedonia, I asked someone if North Macedonians still admired Tito. This response followed: "everyone loves him, 2-3% may not, but "he was a big visionary and in his time we got our country...without him we would still be fighting, and he was a cosmopolitan, a unifying figure...in his essence, he was an aristocrat, communism one of his faces". The idea that 'we got our country' is important, as without Tito and Yugoslavia, many believe that an independent North Macedonia or Bosnia would not exist without that experience of autonomy during the Tito years (Perica, 2004, p. 76).

What is also unique to both Armenia and

North Macedonia is both nations also suffered periods of great tragedy. The Armenians experienced one of the worst disasters to befall any society or collective group: the Armenian Genocide (Akcem, 2012). 1.6 million Armenians were killed with many more people being traumatized by the experience. This trauma has been passed down generationally (Muti & Gurpinar 2023) and is simply a fundamental part of the Armenian national identity and consciousness. Armenia's current losses are joined to the memory of the genocide (Avedian, 2019). The North Macedonians also experienced ethnic cleansing in its history by the Greeks and Bulgarians during and after World War II (Rossos & Evans, 1991). Like Armenians, North Macedonians recall these experiences and connect it to today's political climate. Within this context of interrupted national sovereignty, genocide, and Orthodox Christendom that we find these two nations comparable. The next section will discuss the statues and graffiti/vandalism as official and unofficial expressions of nationalism, a force still very relevant in today's international political system.

Official and Unofficial Nationalism: Statues and Graffiti/Vandalism in North Macedonia and Armenia

In North Macedonia, the city center is defined by its statues, European style buildings, and history (Grcheva, 2019). As an open-air museum, the city-center hopes to teach citizens and visitors of North Macedonian national experience, the importance of their historical figures, and their historical experience. The buildings also hide the much older and brutalist architecture of the socialist period. This paper argues that these statues act as an attempt at cultural revitalization, recovering a lost identity long suppressed by the Yugoslavian experience. In Armenia, statues and public spaces are defined by war. Statues of people who communicate strength and valor in the face of overwhelming odds, are at the forefront. There is also a major religious element, and an ancientness. Public spaces are an expression of the nation and the state and (Cherkes & Hernik, 2022; Volchevska, 2021). Cherkes and Hernik (2022) argue that:

The properties of city center public

spaces, particularly in capital cities, reflect the changes in political, social, and economic conditions and factors that have been occurring in them and are also a materialized expression of a country's long historical development. History shows that the long period of shaping public space of city centers is closely related to the ideological and political changes in society (Cherkes & Hernik, 2022, 1).

Expressions of nationalism often manifest in the public space after colonialism. Even before the end of colonialism, nationalist expressions exploded in public spaces similar to other manifestations of independence desires (Pugach, 2016). The following section will discuss my experiences discovering and observing official expressions of nationalism, specifically the role of statues in constructing, furnishing, and protecting national identity.

North Macedonia

On my first day in Skopje, I explored my hotel neighborhood. It was in a suburb about 30 minutes away from the city center. I was expecting to see some graffiti/vandalism. I saw a poster of a map of Greater Bulgaria, including North Macedonia, but it was a giant red "X" through it. I also saw a spray-painted stencil of a man who I learned to be a national hero: Gotse Delchev. Delchev is fought over by Bulgaria (Heil, 2023). Bulgaria has been vetoing North Macedonia's European Union accession talks since 2019 (Todorov, 2022). I did not expect to see nationalist graffiti/vandalism, especially anti-Bulgarian sentiments. Yet it was a reflection of the time as part of the ongoing Bulgarian interference with North Macedonia's entry into the European Union (Brunnbauer, 2022).

On the same day, I also saw some vandalism with the words 'animal rights now' which is interesting because it was in English. I saw plenty of English anti-tourist graffiti in Greece which led me to conclude that either the graffiti was written by a tourist or for a tourist audience. If it were for a local audience, most likely it would be in the indigenous language. In Greece, the graffiti conveyed left-wing phrases in support of migrants such as "Tourists Go Home! Greek State Kills" and "Tourists Enjoy Your Stay in the Cemetery of Europe" (for other examples, visit

Charlie, 2024). There is a deep distaste for nationalism in Greece and many western European states. North Macedonian and Armenian graffiti and vandalism in general, from what I saw, was not left-wing but rather nationalist in nature. At any rate, the anti-Bulgarian vandalism I saw was indicative of the particular time that North Macedonia was undergoing; and this theme continued throughout my visit.

The second day, I planned to visit the old Ottoman bazaar. In early 2024, before my trip to Skopje, my colleague informed me of the great many statues as part of the wider Skopje 2014 project. On the way, I saw several massive statues. The words ‘overkill’ and ‘overcompensation’ came to my mind as they were sort of out of place, sometimes placed haphazardly around the city. My map took me straight to the Ottoman market where I saw tourists milling about. I wondered my way through, finally coming to an opening where I saw something unexpected: Macedonia Square. I was not familiar with the size and scope of two major statues: “Warrior with accompanying elements” and parallel to it across the beautiful Stone Bridge: “an equestrian warrior” (Marusic, 2012). These are the official names. The unofficial names that local people use are Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great, respectively (Marusic, 2012). The reason for this difference is due to Greek’s objection. Yet, when the statue was placed upon its pedestal, the local government (Skopje’s Centar Municipality) used the unofficial name, stating in fact: “Philip’s 13-meter statue was placed on top of a 16-meter pedestal” (Marusic, 2012). I watched as tourists took pictures with the statues, thoroughly impressed with the enormous size of both statues. I met my first contact who was a member of the Conservative party, a foodie, and a citizen, under the “Warrior with accompanying elements” statue, but I referred to it as “Philip”. The individual was happy I did that. The person was also happy to hear that I liked the statues, and how other tourists seem to enjoy them. Also, the person had the original plan to start from the statues and go to the Old Bazaar “to see the different traditions”. Although a nationalist, the person was proud of North Macedonia’s diversity, comparing the country to a “Macedonia salad” a “salad with everything in it” (NoNoJulia, 2014).

After spending a few days in Skopje, I began to notice that the new buildings, and the statues,

were hiding much uglier, older, and brutalist type architectures (Babić, 2024). The new, classical European style hid the ugly and old. For example, The Mother Teresa House hides the ugly Ministry of Defense building. In the city center, just across from the “an equestrian warrior” statue, was a new building but just behind it revealed a decrepit building that seemed to be falling apart. I asked my first contact about this at our final meeting, whether the new buildings were intentionally hiding the old, ugly, brutalist architecture of the Yugoslavian past. The response was straightforward: “that was the goal”; why would I come here to be depressed?” The central idea was to transform Skopje from ‘depressing’ to a place that celebrates Macedonian history, culture, and politics: it is a nationalist space. Of course, in the beginning, the project was opposed. I met someone involved in the Social Democratic Party who opposed the project initially, but then saw the joy it brought to people and to tourists. These and many more statues and classical style buildings were quickly built up in the past decade to beautify the downtown area. Museums, concert halls, hotels, among other buildings, now hide much uglier, brutalist style buildings of the former communist period.

North Macedonia’s use of its city center to celebrate nationalism shows the great priority for the North Macedonian state. Cherkes and Hernik quotes a declarative statement from the XXI World Congress of Architecture held in Berlin, Germany (2002) which says: “the goal of modern architecture is to achieve the maximum adaptive capacity without losing national identity” (quoted by Cherkes & Hernik, 2022, p. 2). It is clear that the Skopje 2014 project intended to reassert a long suppressed Macedonian identity long hidden by the Ottoman Empire and Socialist Yugoslavia. Not only that, Macedonians want locals and visitors alike to know their culture, history, and national experience through the open-air museum that is the city center. Even the museums are located there to enhance the utility or function of the site. However, I noticed there was some awful vandalism aimed at obscuring the placards that described the statues and monuments.

The plaques explaining the statues were defaced so that no one could read them. I was told that this began after the signing of the Prepsa agreement. The Macedonian government had to

acknowledge that some statues, especially the central ones depicting the warriors, had Hellenic roots on the placards. As a form of protest, some people vandalized the placards. Hence, there was a clear rejection of the Prespa agreement and the altering of what many saw as the truth of the nation's history. In North Macedonia, it is quite common to find the word "North" scratched out. I managed to visit the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After some convincing, I was led to carry out an informal style interview. As I walked the halls, I noted that all posters or plaques that had the 'North' in North Macedonia scratched out. I asked about it with extreme curiosity, and the response was that someone scratched it out as a 'joke'. The truth is, however, that many people reject outsiders trying to shape or mold the national beliefs and identities of the nation. Some see this as a form of colonialism. I mentioned this to one of the persons interviewed, and the person acknowledged it describing the official/unofficial status of Macedonian national symbols. The unofficial is manifested through individual beliefs and freedoms, that there are ways to keep the old symbols and that nationalism always finds a way.

The use of the public space in Skopje illustrates the importance of national identity to the people (Cherkes & Hernik, 2022). Postcolonial mechanisms of cultural revitalization through artistic expressions of statues, vandalism/graffiti, architecture and so on, represents the recovery of a long-thought lost sense of self. It says "here are our heroes, here are our artists, we exist, recognize us". It is an act of resistance against the state and the government by citizens and members of government to preserve their cultural and hence national identity. This was a common theme during my interviews, with two people stating "we exist" when I try to bring up the changes to national symbols like the country name and flag. North Macedonians see their country as under attack, part of a wider historical narrative passed down generation to generation. This process was also clear in Armenia.

Armenia

Nationalism in the Soviet space manifested itself on several occasions such as the Hungarian Revolution (1956), the so-called "reform communism" of Imre Nagy. Nagy argued for Hun-

garian solutions to Hungarian problems (Nagy, 1996, p. 87). Another event was called the Prague Spring, where there were calls for the Czechoslovakians to come together and fuse communist ideals with the state, creating a "pluralist society for which there is at present no real analogy among the socialist states" (Mlynář, 1996, p. 124). Developing a pluralist system was thought to be the best choice for Czechoslovakia, signifying a split from the Marxist-Leninist framework of the Warsaw Pact. This was also the case in Armenia but in a concealed sense as shall be discussed.

I arrived in Yerevan at 2am. The city was dark and my hotel was surrounded by large, imposing buildings. My second day was dedicated to the Mother Armenia monument. I trekked up a vast hill focused on safely arriving at my destination. After I cleared the buildings, I looked to my right to behold Mount Ararat. Like the warrior statues in Skopje, I let out an audible gasp as I was not expecting such beauty to suddenly appear. During my visit, I realized that the Mountain did follow you around the city; wherever you went, you could see at least some part of the mountain. It felt like an eternal spirit, which ultimately describes the nature of Armenian nationalism, specifically their identity as represented by national symbols and narrative. I asked about the significance of Mount Ararat, and one interviewee described its centrality to the Armenian identity: "we considered ourselves to be chosen people, and the first nation in the world to accept Christianity...represents religion, pride, history, and exceptionalism. It is a symbol of Armenia". The person was referring to the belief that Noah landed there after the flood. This represents the beginning of humanity after its destruction. The mountain represents renewal and recovery, giving the people a sense of meaning after tragedy. This is why one person commented "I will never leave my mountains" given its deep cultural, even existential meaning shaping national identity.

My second visit to the Mother Armenia monument was even more interesting. As I walked from the Cascade to the Mother Armenia Monument, I saw a lot of vandalism and graffiti, even more than in Skopje. There happened to be a tunnel under the street that you could use to cross to get to the monument. In the tunnel, there was a sign that said "Armenia fights for you" stenciled

on the wall. There was a flag that was spray painted along the wall. The colors of the Armenian flag represent the struggle for survival. Struggle is central to the Armenian identity; it seems to be always present. Specifically, the red represents struggle and the Armenian highlands. There are also several maps of a united Armenia, such of which includes Western Armenia (in modern day Turkey). On the walls surrounding the monument's "Victory Park" to celebrate World War II, there was even more graffiti, this time of the Artsakh flag. The Artsakh flag was a common theme, decorating the city of Yerevan, sometimes featuring young men killed in the most recent wars. To see this graffiti and vandalism in a public space such as this initially seemed disrespectful. Eventually, I understood that the official position of the current Pashinyan government was defying the will of the people as expressed in vandalism. The focus for me was on preserving the sanctity of an important monument. However, vandalism within the contemporary political context is nationalist expression done in support, not against, the very meaning of the monument.

The history of the Mother Armenia monument is best explained by Postcolonialism, and the rejection of foreign influence of Soviet style socialism. The monument was built to celebrate the Soviet victory over Nazism in World War II. However, the statue that stood on the pedestal was not the one we see today, but of Josef Stalin. An explanation from a famed Armenian blog the "Armenian Explorer" highlights the history:

The current statue of Mother Armenia replaced a monumental statue of General Secretary Joseph Stalin that was created as a victory memorial for World War II. The statue was considered a masterpiece by the sculptor Sergey Merkurov. The pedestal was designed by architect Rafayel Israyelian. Realizing that occupying a pedestal can be a short-term honor, Israyelian designed the pedestal to resemble a three-nave basilica Armenian church. As he confessed many years later, 'Knowing that the glory of dictators is temporary, I have built a simple three-nave Armenian basilica' (Armenian Explorer, accessed October 4, 2024).

There are two important notions to consider here. In 1962, the statue of Stalin was removed,

replaced by the Mother Armenia statue in 1967. The person designing the pedestal understood that Stalin and the Soviets were not going to be there for long, and so it was built in the spirit of national resistance to foreign occupation. The Mother Armenia statue now stands, sword in hand facing Mount Ararat, and Turkey. She is surrounded by Armenian motifs: grapes and spirals. The grapes represent the vineyard planted by Noah after the flood. It signifies the ancientness of the Armenian people. The spiral is the country's national symbol representing the longevity and survival of the Armenian nation and the national identity of the people. The Spiral icons on the monuments, crosses and church doors. Taken together, these are national symbols of Armenia communicating the eternal and everlasting nature of the cultural identity. Taken together, I understand that many Armenians feel "we are not done yet", and the fight will continue.

Joining the graffiti and vandalism with the monuments, that is the official with the unofficial, it is clear that public spaces are dedicated to the memory of the national spirit. Like the examples in Skopje, it serves to remind the governing forces of the national identity. This force was felt throughout the city of Yerevan as well. As mentioned, I arrived in Yerevan during a very difficult time. Like many times throughout its history, the city opened itself to Armenian refugees, this time from Artsakh. Further, the Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, was advocating for normalization of relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan. I saw posters, graffiti, and vandalism rejecting the effort, instead focusing on one man: Gargin Nzhdeh.

Gargin Nzhdeh was a military strategist and ideologist. He was a proponent of restoring the First Armenian Republic and remains a giant in the mind of nationalists (Davtyan 2021; Sharon 2016). Posters and graffiti of him were found all around Yerevan, along with phrases such as "Read Nzhdeh-Save the Motherland"; "To forgive the Turks for one crime means to give them the right for two new ones"; and "our problem is not that there are Turks, but that there are Turk-like Armenians." This final one is an attempt to link Pashinyan as a traitor, a Turk-like Armenian, because many refer to him as "Nikol Pasha" with Pasha being a Turkish title of status. The problem for Pashinyan is simple: he is trying to con-

vince Armenians to forget the past struggles with Turkey to embrace the status quo, something that is exceedingly difficult for any Armenian to do. He states:

We must stop the searches of a homeland, because we have found that homeland, our Promised Land, where milk and honey flow. For us, the commemoration of the martyrs of the Meds Yeghern should not symbolize the lost homeland, but the found and real homeland, in the person of the Republic of Armenia, whose competitive, legitimate, thoughtful and creative policies can exclude a repetition. Never again. We should not say this to others, but to ourselves. And this is not an accusation against us at all, but a point of view where we, only we, are responsible and the director of our destiny and we are obliged to have enough mind, will, depth and knowledge to carry that responsibility in the domain of our sovereign decisions and perceptions (Pashinyan, 2024).

Armenians facing difficult times reject this message. Many now refer to Pashinyan, as Judas Iscariot, the fallen apostle who betrayed Christ for 30 pieces of silver; sold Artsakh for 30 pieces of silver (Pashinyan, 2024). The context of all this boils down to Turkey-Armenian relations (Ter. Matevosyan, 2021). Armenia's identity is tied into its history with Turkey, the genocide, and the wars with Azerbaijan. Hence, for many Armenians, it is important to remember the heroes of old and for them it is Nzhdeh especially when juxtaposed to Pashinyan.

I was not planning on studying statues or open spaces, but I think it is completely necessary to "measure" and understand the atmosphere in North Macedonia and Armenia. The use of limited public space in these countries expresses deep held desires for the future of the nation. Statues and graffiti/vandalism illustrate the discourse expressed by the government and the people through official and unofficial expressions. By the expressed discourse (statues and vandalism/graffiti), it is clear that national pride is still relevant, and that outside interference is to blame for any interruption in self-actualization and ultimately jouissance; the self is compromised by outside interference. Armenia is surrounded by two enemy states: Turkey and Azerbaijan. There is a debate now in Armenia to put

aside nationalism and the historical memory of land in Turkey and Azerbaijan in order to have better relations with these countries for prosperity's sake. Similarly, to join NATO, North Macedonia had to compromise its name and national symbols, basically submitting to the requirements placed upon it by Greece, the very nation that ethnically cleansed Aegean Macedonians. It seems that further demands are being placed upon it by Bulgaria to join the European Union. Defending the cultural existence of states is a central organizing principle of the international system. By examining this phenomena, it is a clear measure of the impact nationalism will have on the international order.

Conclusions

Connecting ethnography to the historical cases, and applying Postcolonialism, it is clear that nationalism is not only relevant, but an ideological belief system that has incredible power to shape the behavior of citizens. Armenia and North Macedonia are both democracies. Therefore, if enough citizens are convinced of the power of their national identity over other issues such as global integration, especially because in both cases, global integration requires the subversion of its national identity. It is therefore clear why right-wing populism seems to be growing throughout the international system (Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2017). An essential part of this movement is a nationalist backlash against globalization. Nationalism's resilience is due to the political identification of people culturally. Since globalization is seen as the manifestation of outside influence and the homogenization of indigenous culture, nationalism becomes an organizing principle from which people might organize to 'save' or 'take-back' their country for their nation. Such a movement cannot be written-off as a bunch of racist or crazy people, but rather a force that seems to be gaining strength (Khandy & Şengül, 2022). As a result, there may be serious changes to the international order. But how might we know that nationalism is still important? Election results in Germany and France in recent years point to growing nationalist fervor. Studying public spaces and their use may help us better understand two major things. First, nationalism and patriotism remain fundamental to identity.

People cannot separate their existence from their identity; both forces are intertwined. Any attack on identity is understood as an attack against the people. After all, nations and nationalism is not simply a set of ideas, but a belief system that organizes individuals together (Özkırmı, 2010) to survive in an anarchical international system (Waltz, 2010). Second, studying graffiti/vandalism may help us better understand change or desired change that may take place in the future. Defacing a monument, statue or its placard, signifies the beginnings of discussion as it sets the agenda, particularly the possibilities of setting the future political agenda (Lopez, 2023, p. 144).

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PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS OF GREGORY OF NAREK REGARDING THE CONTINUOUS SELF-IMPROVEMENT OF MAN

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Abstract: This report is an attempt to reveal the humanistic concept of human self-improvement developed by the 11th century Armenian philosopher, poet, songwriter, and Christian priest, Saint Grigor Narekatsi, canonized by the Catholic Church. The philosophical ideas of a Christian clergyman with a religious worldview regarding the relationship between the human soul, man and society, and man and God are revealed. In his poem “The Book of Lamentations”, the way of realizing the human dream of reaching divine perfection is discussed from the point of view of religious philosophy. His ecological views on the harmonious relationship between rational living matter, man, and nature deserve special attention. It is widely accepted that the psychoanalytical experience of Grigor Narekatsi enriched the universal word culture. From this point of view, Grigor Narekatsi’s multifaceted spiritual legacy has not yet been studied and needs further research.

Keywords: self-improvement, living matter, information, reason, values, humanism, religious philosophy, harmony.

Living matter, as a system that preserves information and transmits it through reproduction, was born and developed due to the formation of biological systems formed by the special regularity of inanimate matter. These systems have been separated from the initial environments of their formation.

Due to their signal transduction and other biochemical characteristics, species of living matter have continuously tried to adapt to environments with certain characteristics and to take a superior position over other forms of life. Their feature of storing and transmitting information by biochemical and biophysical means, biological heredity played a special role in these processes. During the development of living matter,

the emergence of language as a means of interpersonal information exchange among different forms of life and its further conscious development has become a particularly important stage.

Thanks to consciousness, the social form of life has emerged in parallel with biological heredity. Living matter, handed over to Homo Sapiens, turned into a rational phenomenon. If before this stage of development, the living matter was developing on a purely biological level, perfecting its purely biological characteristics, then thanks to logic man began to socially manage the continuous improvement of the personal and public moral profile. We believe that this phenomenon is a new quality of self-improvement of living intelligent matter.

In the presented study, by self-improvement we mean such a process of developing in harmony with the Universe, logically carried out by living intelligent matter, the purpose of which is the formation of personal healthy sexual and public moral and intellectual abilities of self-preservation.

The phenomenon of self-improvement has been in the field of human interest since time immemorial. It was reflected first in mythological stories and then in religious philosophy.

The issues of self-improvement of the human soul were discussed in a new way by many intellectuals in the Christian era.

Gr. Narekatsi (951-1003 AD) is a medieval intellectual who made an original contribution to the development of Armenian and world philosophical thought. He was born in the village of Narek in the Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan, which is now located in the territory of the Turkish Republic. He is venerated as a saint in the Armenian Apostolic Churches. In 2015, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Pope Francis declared St. Grigor Narekatsi a Doctor of the Church, for his theologically sound writings.

Gr. Narekatsi lived and created a thousand years after the birth of Jesus Christ, on the threshold of the new millennium. Such a period was invoked among Christian believers with the idea of "Doomsday". In the given period, the question of how people will face the terrible judgment, the judgment of God, dominated in the public consciousness. Master Gr. Narekatsi wrote poems on religious themes and preached hymns to be sung for certain holidays. He authored a research paper dedicated to Solomon's "Song of Songs".

Nerses Lambronatsi, the 12th century statesman of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, writes that the young man Gr. Narekatsi was blessed with God and had the body of an angel (Nerses Lambronatsi, 1838, p. 157). Appreciating Gr. Narekatsi, who dared to grasp the secrets of Existence, Fortune, and the Universe with the eyes of reason, Mezhlaitis writes that Gr. Narekatsi dared to include the secrets of Being and the Universe with the eyes of reason based on self-criticism (Mezhlaitis, 1982, p. 52). It is interesting from the point of view of philosophy to examine the works of an intellectual involved in conversation with God Almighty.

Gr. Narekatsi in his work "Interpreting Solomon's Song of Songs" illuminates and emphasizes such values of universal significance as family, love, and knowledge. Analyzing the songs reflecting intra-family relationships that are part of the Bible, he concludes: "Therefore, whoever defiles marriage with filthy debauchery and evil deeds, defiles the sacrament of the church and dishonors Christ, who is the example of this" (St. Grigor Narekatsi, 2007, p. 25). In this work of Narekatsi, the family is seen as a cradle for the development of the strategy of building a self-improving person.

In the some poems dedicated to the birth Narekatsi emphasizes the important social role of women and their nurturing role. "Even now, to honor women, men respect the edification of women" (Grigor Narekatsi, 2007, p. 28). As a philosopher, he draws attention to the infinity of science: "Because as much as a person reaches science, it becomes the basis of higher science" (Grigor Narekatsi, 2007, p. 73). With his interpretation of Solomon's songs of a spiritual nature Gr. Narekatsi logically reveals the goal of a person to achieve perfection and the means to achieve it. "Therefore, see, first of all, the body of sins must be put to death, and Christ's body must be put to death, and the purity of Christ must be equated with fragrant behavior..." (Grigor Narekatsi, 2007, p. 76). Christ is seen as the ideal of self-improvement.

Among Narekatsi's works, the philosophical poem "Book of Lamentations" stands out for its logical structure, in which the humanist intellectual discusses the relationship between man and God. In that poem, Narekatsi continued to develop universal humanitarian traditions from the depths of the human heart. Being deeply concerned about the disharmony of the lifestyles of the individual and humanity, he does not blame the Creator for the robbery, delusions, or miseries of people, he does not argue with him, but he explains these phenomena with the poverty of the human spiritual world, the low level of consciousness.

"For the man who sinned and did not repent.

Who was corrupted and was not ashamed...

Who committed iniquity and did not throw stones at his conscience.

Who saw the slave in his greatness and did not condole" (Grigor Narekatsi, 1960, p. 127).

Individual freedom through spiritual self-

improvement for Grigor Narekatsi is a target value. To be a believer does not mean to be a perfect, a person must be able to free himself from shackles thanks to his faith. For the freedom of man, the philosopher turns to God as a parent

“Take me out of prison, Dissolve me from my fetters, strip me free from convulsing chains, Free from worries, destroy from irons” (Grigor Narekatsi, 1960, p. 360).

For a philosopher, the only perfect phenomenon is God, and it is logical that he considers the visible goal of self-improvement to spiritually reach God, who created living rational matter.

His prophecy about human powers is admirable.

“And what he said is terrible...

Can we even be God, chosen with graces?

And connect with your creator ...” (Grigor Narekatsi, 1960, p. 225).

Prophet of humanity, Gr. Narekatsi directs man on the path of universal freedom and divine perfection. Through his poem, he imparts knowledge about self-improvement to the reader. The poem does not reflect a primitive sermon but contains a series of ideas with a solid structure, a message to man and humanity. We believe that “The Book of Lamentations” is a universal self-improvement program.

Being an Armenian by nationality and a Christian believer, the philanthropic author of the poem “The Book of Lamentations” does not distinguish people according to ethnicity or religion. In the universe of Narekatsi’s world perception, there are two phenomena: God and humanity created by him. Man, as a part of humanity, cannot be happy outside the universal cultural sphere, every person is responsible for society. In “Book of Lamentations”, an individual’s life is intertwined with humanity’s life, a person’s self-improvement process is conditioned by the improvement of all humanity. The biophilosophy of human self-improvement rises from the national to the universal level. In his dialogue, Narekatsi courageously takes on his shoulders the burden of humanity’s responsibility before God. We see such a philosophical abstraction moving from the personal to the universal in the German philosopher-pedagogue A. Disterweg’s views. “My name is human, my nickname is German” (Disterweg, 1963, p. 435).

A person reading Narekatsi’s poem “Book of Lamentations” can find not only the path of physical self-preservation but also the path of self-improvement in dialogue with God. It can be assumed that this is one of the reasons that this work by Narekatsi has turned into a monument of humanitarian religious philosophy.

From the point of view of philosophy, the psychoanalytical experience reflected in Narekatsi’s works and the ideas of self-realization, freedom, and humanity have nourished human self-awareness for centuries and are still nourishing the self-awareness of all members of society, “Old or child, virgin or young...” celebrate humanity, regulation of passions, education of will, growing generation. of uplifting self-improvement guides with “cheerful sweetness” (Grigor Narekatsi, 1960, p. 384). Man’s salvation is not determined by blind faith in religion but by the desire for self-improvement caused by the desire to be like God.

Man’s mission is considered not in going to God with passive prayer, but with God-pleasing life activity. Choosing such a lifestyle implies a transformation of the soul in the biological form (body, instincts).

Narekatsi believes that self-improvement should develop according to a certain logic. According to him, a person should understand what he wants, for what purpose he is trying to build his spiritual abilities, and with what vocabulary he formulates his dream of reaching God. Where is he trying to go? To evil or to good? Narekatsi, unlike prophets developing passive doctrines, is a philosopher fighting for the salvation of the human soul. However, he does not come to terms with the material reality, but with the image of the human soul that is deceived by the caress of the devil in that reality. Humanist Grigor Narekatsi is against the adaptation of man to purely biological realities. He tries to tilt the balance of human behavioral motives and raise them towards God through logic and reason.

God created man in his likeness, but that, according to Gr. Narekatsi is still not a sufficient condition to be eligible for heaven. A person who strives for a perfect way of life can go to heaven. Improving yourself is a difficult but solvable problem. In order to solve the problem of achieving harmony with God and the Universe, a person must first know his own perso-

nality, learn to control his behavior and develop positive human qualities, taking God's image as an example. J.P. Sartre also emphasizes the role of behavior suggesting that a person is the totality of his actions (Nitsche et al., 1990, p. 334). Gr. Narekatsi sows the seeds of a humanitarian value system in the consciousness of society through religion. Due to the reality of worship and observance of rituals, religion is characterized by dogmatism. And here religious philosophy comes to Narekatsi's aid as a means of understanding the relationship between man and God.

It can be concluded that Gr. Narekatsi equips a person with determination and self-confidence to fight and win in difficult situations. The basis of the process of self-improvement is the family, love, and respect for parents and people.

Conclusion

Through the cause-and-effect relationships revealed during the discussion of the human-God relationship, Gr. Narekatsi tries to logically develop the idea that a person can unite with God thanks to continuous self-improvement. It is noteworthy that he does not discuss people according to ethno-religious affiliation. There are two active characters in his poem: man and God. The philosopher, not dividing humanity according to religious characteristics (Jews, Christians, Muslims, Brahmins, etc.), thus tries to unite all humans around the idea of God. Italian Dante Alighieri, Austrian Stefan Zweig, Persian Nizami, French Jean-Paul Sartre, and others followed a similar path. From this point of view, kaizen is also a remarkable phenomenon, as a Japanese philosophy on human self-improvement.

Today, the question of what kind of spiritual profile tomorrow's man will have is topical. This is important because the bio-social evolution of intelligent matter has resulted in Homo sapiens not only adapting to the environment around it

but also successfully trying to transform its cradle, the planet Earth, and the Universe. From this point of view, humanistic philosophy remains not only a means of understanding nature but also a means of continuous self-improvement of man.

God can be reached by opening the eyes of consciousness, not by blind faith. A person who has created a humanistic philosophical culture over the millennia must be able to maintain the harmony of *human - universe* relation by effectively using digitized information and artificial intelligence.

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 (Atkinson, 2007, Chapter 8)
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