Discourse Analysis and Nation-building. Greek policies applied in W. Thrace (1945-1967)¹

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What I will try to do in this paper is to apply the vocabulary of discourse analysis, (as it was developed by E. Laclau and Ch. Mouffe) to nationalist ideologies and nation-building projects, in the cases where antagonistic national constructions challenge the domination of a nation-state. Thus, in cases where a minority nationalism contest for ‘space’ while the nation-state tries to ‘eliminate’ that space and to expand its hegemony in all the aspects of the social and political life.

The situation in Greek Thrace during the period from 1945 to 1967 is a good example which demonstrates how the minority nationalism promoted an ‘identity crises’ to the Greek administration, as well the state’s efforts to correspond and overcome this crisis expanding its hegemony and eliminating the space that the minority rights had create.

I want to argue that what defines the policies in Thrace regarding the minority is a kind of antagonistic relation; antagonistic relation not only between the two states as political entities, but also between ‘Greece’ and ‘Turkey’ as concepts, as abstract categories. This is why in this relation the biggest problem for the Greek administration was the Turkish identity of the minority and its expression.

This as the main factor together with the minority rights and the Turkish nationalism, promoted an ‘identity crises’ to the Greek discourse and as a result was blamed for its failure to hegemonize both the conceptual and political ‘space’. This is why almost all the range of the Greek hegemonic efforts was focused in these aspects².

In the methodological level, I study the minority policies in a *genealogical* (in the Foucauldian sense) way. This means that I study the origins of the today policies, the emergence of things. Genealogy is a tool in order to give some order to history, focusing in the way that things emerge and arise as a result of interaction and struggle of different forces against each other (Foucault 1984: 148-149). History in that sense tries to avoid the categories of continuity, teleology, and destiny. Instead, “becomes effective to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being” (quote. Mahon: p. 113).

² I am focusing more the way that the Greek side perceived this antagonistic relation, both because there are available data to do so, but also that it seems that the Greek side was the one which in a minor position, and so it experienced the antagonism in a more intense and traumatic way.
Genealogy will help us to give emphasis on the relations and conflicts of power\(^3\), studying the power relations in our case in a way that will not make judgments about right or wrong but it will search for the origins and the functions of certain political actions. Genealogical approach will help us too, to describe those functions and the statements as an ongoing process, highlighting the possibilities that were excluded.

**Antagonism** is that which prevents the constitution of objectivity itself. It prevents a part to become the absolute dominant. It prevents a nation-state to achieve full homogenization of its territory and become an ‘objective’ power into that territory. This view of antagonism includes the concept of ‘constitutive outside’. This is an ‘outside’ which blocks the identity of the ‘inside’; it is an alternative national construction which blocs the dominant one from being an ‘absolute’ dominant without any resistance. As Laclau puts it, with antagonism denial does not originate from ‘inside’ of identity itself, but in its most radical sense, *from outside* (Laclau 1990: 17).

The antagonizing force fulfils two crucial and contradictory roles at the same time. On the one hand it ‘blocks’ the full constitution of the identity to which it is opposed, so there is something that a nation-state will always blame for its weakness to be totally sovereign. For example in Thrace the Turkish nationalism blocks the full constitution of a ‘Muslim minority’ or the identity of a Pomak as the Greek state tried to construct, in the same way the minority rights bloc the full expansion of the state institutions into the minority affairs.

But on the other hand given that this latter identity like all identities is merely rational and would therefore not be what it is outside the relationship with the force antagonizing it, the latter (the force antagonizing it), this ‘outside’ (the Turkish nationalism etc.) is also part of the conditions of existence of that identity, formulates that identity (Laclau 1990: 21).

So, if we consider ‘**Nation-building**’ as the nationalist project of states which aim to hold on to their hegemony (both political and conceptual) over the nodal point ‘nation’, sub state challenges to the constitutional status quo use the same ideological principles, but adapt them to an alternative national construct. The outcome is an *identity crisis* which is a sign of antagonistic discourses battling to rearticulate the contested concept of ‘nation’ and what competing ideologies would have as the ‘common sense’ understanding (Sutherland 2005: 195). The prize is conceptual and political hegemony.

In the above approach antagonism is a *relation* (HSC, 125), since it is founded on the ‘relational moment’ between social identities. This antagonistic *relation* occurs from the impossibility of constitution of full totalities or full identities\(^4\). This impossibility results the construction of an enemy who is considered and blamed for this failure.

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\(^3\) Power is not what someone ‘have’ and exercise it to others, but a dispersed force, a force that it can be found everywhere, and that is why in order to study about ‘power’ (in singular) someone need to see it as ‘a relation’ and not as a single force (Shiner: 389).

\(^4\) Since every identity has an impossibility of closure, since it is a continuous movement of differences which make the identity unstable, Antagonism is the ‘experience’ of the limit of all objectivity (HSC, 122), but also they constitute the ‘limits of society’, thus the latter’s impossibility of fully constituting itself. (HSC, 125).
This relational character of the antagonisms drives to my final theoretical point. Between states that are host of an ethnic identity (home states), the minorities and the ‘external homelands’, there is a triangular relation developed. As Brubaker has argued (Brubaker 1996) in such cases there is a relational nexus between those three parts and their national ideologies are connected and interact with each other.\(^5\)

This is as I argue a typical manifestation and application with the notion of antagonism as Laclau (and Mouffe) have developed.

As in any antagonistic relation, the three parts (home state, minority and kin-state) are not considered as close categories with some essence but planes in continuous progress. So, the triangular relation between those fields is at the same time a relation inside each field, leading to a relational approach to the national question, with the perceptions, the representations, the preoccupations and the misconceptions about each other to become the primary field for study (Brubaker: 67-68).

States as well as any other collective formation do not have a social identity before interaction, and whether or not states have egoistic or cooperative identities depends on the nature of interaction with others. States in that framework do not have fixed preferences or interests. Depending on interaction with others they define and redefine their identities and base their interests in the new definitions of their identities. (Bozdaglioglou: 159, 166).

Furthermore, the outcome of such antagonistic relations is not something pre-given but contingent and a result of social constructions. This means that in the example of the Greek-Turkish antagonism in the case of Thrace there is not something which has some special ‘nature’ because of the history, the Balkan environment, the character of the populations and so it could not be avoided or could only result like it is today. On the contrary, it was a product of certain decisions, mistakes, major events, interplay etc.

The above theoretical framework applied in the policies regarding the minority in Thrace can provide us some useful remarks.

It is since Lausanne peace treaty which ‘fixed’ the different communities in the region as one (Muslim) minority and resulted their (partial) unification, what resulted the ‘lack’ of the minority for an ethnic identification during a period that the national ideology was expanded in the Balkan area and the ethnic identification was prevailed against the religious one. This lack, which was supplemented by the Greek policy and especially by its denial to recognize the ethnic character of the minority, was filled with the ideas of Turkish nationalism. Turkish nationalism in that case functioned as the ‘nodal point’, the crucial factor around which the minority was unified and constructed a logic of division (‘equivalential logic’) against the Greek majority in the same way that the Greek nationalism had constructed the same logic.

\(^5\) In that case the nationalism of a home-state is formulated around a dominant ethnic ‘core’ which perceives itself as the legitimized “owner” of the state, at the time when the nationalism of the kin-state challenges directly the home-state nationalism since it asserts a right to control, support and promote his co-nationals abroad against in possible assimilation policies of the home state. Finally the minority and their nationalism is between the two antagonistic nationalisms. Of course, those three parts are not considered as closed and fixed categories but as relational entities which are transformed continuously.
But what interests us here more is that the ‘minority rights’ as they derived from the treaty, constructed a ‘space’ where the Greek state couldn’t enter expanding its hegemony. It was this space that became the contested element between the two states after the increased influence of the Turkish nationalism in the region.

The raising of the Turkish nationalism among the minority members troubles increasingly the local administration since its re-establishment in the region in 1945 (mainly in Komotini at that time). This Turkish influence and ‘propaganda’ (as it is called) is regarded as the most important issue and as a negative proportion in the relation between the Greek state and the minority; the strongest the relation of the minority with the Kemalist reforms, the weakest its relation with the Greek state. This perception had as result the approach of the minority as an issue of ‘National security’ during the 60’s.

This is the starting point from which the request for more strict policy derives. Turkey through its consultant was presented as the one who had the power in the region and this is what provoked and legitimized all the decisions for the strengthening of the repressive and restriction measures. This is also the starting point for the efforts to restrict the minority autonomy (especially in education and in administration) which was blamed for the expansion of the Turkish influence.

As long as Turkey could apply reprisal measures in Istanbul against the Greek-Orthodox minority, the Greek state could not be directly been involved in the region restricting the activity of the modernists. This is why behind the scenes supported the conservatives. With the support of the conservatives and the perception of the minority issue as one of ‘national security’ the Greek state tried to impose a border inside minority (a ‘logic of equivalence’ in our terminology), and to include on that all those who co-operated with the Greek administration, or they simply didn’t follow the Kemalist reforms. Thus, a border based in the negation of an identity, supporting something more like a ‘negative’ identity than a ‘positive’ one.

This is why Turkish nationalism in the region functioned as a ‘constitutive outside’ for the Greek nationalism and this is why as I argued in the beginning we have this antagonistic relation between the two nationalisms. This negation of the identity (which took place from both sides) is exactly what gives rise to antagonisms, since the hegemonic force (Greece) which is responsible for the negation of an individual or collective identity will tend to con-

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6 The failure of the Greek policy to avoid the spreading of the Kemalist reforms leads the local administration to blame the Turkish consultant. In such extend that the responsible for the Greek policy in the region states: «In Thrace, Ankara is the one who has the power and governs».


8 Identity has an impossibility of closure (a fundamental lack) and the reason for that is something which always prevents it, an ‘outsider’ which blocks the full identity of the object. Laclau and Mouffe argue that this ‘outside’ or ‘negativity’ which prevents an identity of fully constitute itself, it is thus ‘constitutive’ of the identity. Blocking the identity constitutes it. So, the negativity is part of any identity and identities are relational fields which are formulated with a continuous interplay between ‘themselves’ and the ‘outside’. (Laclau-Mouffe 1985: 107, 111 and Laclau 1990: 4). This constitutive outside is inherent to any antagonistic relationship (Laclau 1990: 9).
This antagonistic relation in Thrace was based on and produced an antagonistic fixity between the political frontiers, implying the ‘total’ exclusion of the other in a way that no articulation, no communication between the two parts was possible. The relation between the two groups (those who were defined with the Greek state and those who were defined with the Turkish) could only be one of a potential war. In such a situation only the disappearance of the other could have provided the possibility of a stable resolution of the socio-political division, something which partially has happened with the disappearance of the conservative group.

The above together with the national ideology and the specific historical formation of the nation-states in the Balkan area led to the application of policies of exclusion, assimilation or expulsion regarding the historical ethnic minorities.