

APPROACHES AND TREATMENT OF LANGUAGES IN MULTIETHNIC SOCIETIES. CASE STUDY: REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Abstract

Multiculturalism is a doctrine under which several cultures interact in a common context. In these societies each group differentiates for its civilization, mentality and language. However, the definition of multiculturalism depends mainly on the social, political, cultural and sociolinguistic context. In multicultural societies it is expected that there are social groups which carry out their cultural values such as the language. However, are the multicultural societies always multilingual, too? The insistence of building a monolingual ideology in a multicultural and multiethnic country will always fail because the role of the language in these societies is not only to establish mutual communication but to save national identity, too. The approaches to languages where they interact two or more languages is of a great importance. In different geopolitical contexts, when there are two languages in contact, it often happens one of them to be considered of a first category and it is expected from the other to obey the first one. This approach leads to the feeling of a lack of confidence and loss of identity for individuals who belong to one of these category groups. This paper aims to reflect on the loss of collective identity in multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual societies. Republic of Macedonia is a country created in the '90s of the last century, which in the political aspect is faced with a denial of identity and existence, whereas with the interior politics it hardly accepts the existence of other languages and cultures. It is a multicultural society where cultural and lingual diversity instead of representing values, they are understood and experienced as a clash of cultures.

Key words: *language, culture, multiculturalism, multilingualism, identity*

Introduction

Multiculturalism is closely related to societies containing various cultures. As a term, it is related to ideologies that support this multiplicity. According to Kenan, M (2006):

Such ideologies or policies vary widely, including country to country, ranging from the advocacy of equal respect to the various cultures in a society, to a policy of promoting the maintenance of cultural diversity, to policies in which people of various ethnic and religious groups are addressed by the authorities as defined by the group they belong to.

However, two main different and apparently contradictory strategies have developed through different Government policies and strategies. The first focuses on interaction and communication between different cultures, while the second centers on diversity and cultural individuality. According to Anne-Marie Mooney Cotter:

Cultural isolation can protect the uniqueness of the local culture of a nation or area and also contribute to global cultural diversity. A common aspect of many policies following the second approach is that they avoid presenting any specific ethnic, religious, or cultural community values as central.

Burgess, Ann Carroll; Burgess, Tom even state that 'Multiculturalism is often contrasted with the concepts of assimilationism and has been described as a "salad bowl" or "cultural mosaic" rather than a "melting pot.'

The Republic of Macedonia is multicultural and multiethnic country. The majority population is Macedonian, whereas the second is the Albanian. In the absence of updated data about the exact numbers, this study will refer to the last census of 2002, where 64.2% are Macedonians, 25.2% are Albanians, and Turks, Serbians, Vlachs, Bosnian, Roma, make 10.6% of the whole population. With this cultural diversity Macedonia could serve as a model for a place where cultures would lead toward a society with mutual respect.

Independence of Macedonia

Macedonia's Declaration of Independence was the first political act of historical importance for Macedonia as an independent state, after the first plural elections. The Declaration was adopted by the Assembly of Macedonia, January 25, 1991. It was the 'Declaration on the Sovereignty of the Republic, by which, among other things, the Republic of Macedonia was defined as a sovereign state, which, in conformity with its own interests, would decide independently about its future relations with the states of the other peoples of Yugoslavia.' (Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts Skopje, 1993). This act was an important first step towards political independence of Macedonia. On its grounds were built all subsequent acts of the new independent state in the Balkans.

After the Referendum of September 8, 1991, the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia adopted a Declaration, legalizing the results of the referendum. The Declaration states that:

The Republic of Macedonia as a sovereign and independent state will strive for consistent observance of the generally accepted principles of international relations contained in the Charter and other documents of the United Nations Organization, the CSCE Final Act from Helsinki and the CSCE Paris Charter, and that it will base its activity in international relations on the observance of international standards and, in particular, on the principles of respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, strengthening of mutual respect and confidence and comprehensive cooperation with all countries and peoples (Declaration of independence, Article 2).

Since the first days of the independence, Macedonian political establishment began to spread the newly established platform for ethnic Macedonian state. The Macedonian national platform was not in line with the aspirations and expectations of other ethnic groups in Macedonia. In the multicultural society the newly established country made the first steps toward a liberal state. Moore (1998) points out that *'almost all liberal states have a dominant culture and value system, from which some national minorities feel marginalized'*

The armed conflict of 2001

The common goal of all ethnic Albanian political parties was to improve the political and cultural rights of the ethnic Albanians. In reality however, the implementation of the rights was viewed by many as being unsatisfactory and too slow. This served as the basis for the mobilization of ethnic Albanians and in February 2001 it started the armed rebellion against Macedonian authorities. It started in villages found in the borderline with Kosovo, and continued in Tetovo, second largest city in Macedonia but at the same time a center of Macedonia Albanians.

From the very beginning of independence, due to their exclusion from the political institutions, Albanians in Macedonia were organizers of different protests. These protests were mainly emotional expression of their dissatisfaction with the reforms in the state apparatus in terms of its attitudes towards the Albanian population which was the second in number. The State University of Tetovo was established in 1994 but until 2004, when it officially was recognized by the Macedonian government, its function depended on the financial support by the Albanian population in Macedonia and mainly by the Albanians who worked in the Western European countries. The first university founded for the Albanian needs was the South East European University in Tetovo, established in 2001, soon after the conflict. Due to the fact that Macedonian government did not recognize any university in other languages but Macedonian, this university had to be recognized as trilingual university supported and financed by the international community. However, at the same time the Tetovo University was still functioning 'illegally'. The progress was slow and at the same time the dissatisfaction of the Albanian population was raising. In line with it, "Gabric (2006), states that: 'Reforms require a certain amount of time before they achieve their full effect, more so in less-developed countries, and sections of the ethnic Albanian population were evidently dissatisfied with the pace at which their status was improving'. (as cited in Wanis & Grizold, 2001)

Position of languages in the Republic of Macedonia

In multicultural societies there are different social and cultural groups and it is expected these groups to carry out their cultural values such as it is the language of a given group. However, are all the multicultural societies multilingual at the same time? Investment on monolingual ideology in a multicultural society is determined to fail since the role of languages in these societies apart from its prime role of establishing communication, is to perceive national identity of the ethnic groups. In post communist countries, including Macedonia as a former Yugoslav republic, it often happens one of the languages to be considered as a first hand language and all the other languages have to comply with it.

'Membership in a cultural community is a matter of personal choice, but this does not imply that members have chosen to be a minority. This status is imposed on them and could be seen as supplying a reason to support their chances of leading a meaningful and worthwhile life without having to renounce their cultural commitments' (Tamir, 1993)

The Republic of Macedonia, as a new independent country, in the political sphere it has a contested identity, whereas with its interior politics it systematically ignores other languages and cultures. Language policy and the right to use the mother tongue implies equal treatment of languages in the state institutions.

With the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, known as Barcelona Declaration (1996):

The rights of all the language communities are equal and independent of their legal status as official, regional or minority languages. Terms such as regional or minority languages are not used in this Declaration, because, though in certain cases the recognition of regional or minority languages can facilitate the exercise of certain rights, these and other modifiers are frequently used to restrict the rights of language communities. (Article 5)

In multiethnic and multicultural societies it is obvious that apart from mixture of cultures it occurs a mixture of languages, therefore the population is usually at least bilingual, being fluent with their mother tongue as well as with the language of surrounding. In this regard, Macedonian case is unique. As stated above, the Albanian population in Macedonia lives mainly in the Western part of the country, neighboring Albania and Kosovo. Some of the cities with majority Albanian population are Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar as well as some municipalities in Skopje. However, the only language in everyday use remains only Macedonian. According to the theory of language learning, the second language is the language of surrounding and it is the language where we are exposed. Exposure to the second language is larger than to the foreign language; however the Macedonian permanent refusal to learn Albanian and at the same time their ability to speak English is inconsistent with all the theories of language learning.

The readiness to learn and use the languages of surrounding is closely related to the state policy. The treatment and approaches toward the Albanian language in Macedonia has gone through different periods, with the more restrictive ones in terms of the language use, and continuing with the periods when it was proclaimed integration of languages in a single society. In the '80s,

there were implemented project of integrated education in secondary level, in the first sight seen as integration of different sides in one, however with this project there were totally ignored the minority languages since the only language practiced in the classes was the Macedonian language. The consequences of this integration were hundreds of non-Macedonian teachers left outside the school buildings.

The last attempt for integration was the project of implementation of Macedonian language for the first graders, age 6. Due to the heavy resistance by the non-Macedonian parents, the project was rejected by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia.

According to Merriam Webster dictionary the term social integration is defined as inclusion of the equals in a society. As far as the majority population in Macedonia continues with the same mentality, there will be only one population that will not be required to change whereas all the others will be expected to give their continuous efforts in making Macedonia an integrated society.

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