

Full Length Research Paper

“Nation is a non-existent notion”: Greek students determine the term “nation”

*Paraskevi Golia¹, Stella Kassidou², Konstantinos Sechidis³

¹University of Western Macedonia, Florina, Greece

²University of Western Macedonia, Florina, Greece

³University of Western Macedonia, Florina, Greece

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In the current conversation about the formation of states, globalization and the multiculturalism of social structures, the notion of “nation” holds a central part. Nation has been transformed to a symbolically enriched collective morpheme, which even in extremis has been reduced to being the main structural component of the very existence of the state and obviously of the global community. The new historic speech detaches itself from dominance and law and dedicates itself to the construction of “we” through an endless contradistinction to the “others”. That way, “national” identities are being restructured from the start and it is sought to find the method in which the notion of “power” will be founded and composed ideologically. The notion of “nation” is the nest-egg for the current state structure and the filter for the social creation. Still, it remains a hazy notion and, for some, mystagogic. In our paper, we attempt to record, through the method of quantitative and qualitative analysis of content, the ways in which the young perceive the notion of nation. The thematic categories showed parameters which have to do mainly with stereotypic perceptions of the notion of nation.

Keywords: Nation; globalization; national identity; stereotype; cultural elements.

INTRODUCTION

In the conjunctures of globalization, internationalization of cultural life and economy, the nation – state tends to lose an important part of its old institutional functions. Nation – state either adjust or are absorbed by the supranational reconstruction of the globe (Myrray, 1992; Welsh, 1993, Featherstone, 1990). Nation is a new symbolically enriched collective being, whose structural constitution exceeds the rational structural constitution of the people on the level of interpreting the political phenomena and on the level of historical rebirth. This is based on studying the deep new section, which the presence of the historical stabilization of nations caused (Tsoukalas, 1999). Even though the national dimension is a reference which today has greatly transformed, it remains fundamental for the construction of a person’s identity and it is primary for their social existence, despite the fact that the social mobility, the stabilization of democratic

institutions, the recognition of the rights of the individual, the promotion and acceptance of disparity and relativity in the cultural sector, lead to the birth of a new “post national” identity (Alybranti - Maratou et al., 2000). In the case of the Greek society which is characterized by an early birth of nation in the 19th century, there is a consensus about the superiority of the Greek people in the Balkans due to their descent from the ancient years. National ideology tends to exceed the three dimensions of the historical time (Dimaras, 1994; Kokkinos, 1998), either by pointing out the perpetual nature of some typical characteristics of the Greek nation, or by elevating its historical or cultural achievements to the level of a national model (Herzfeld, 2002). Especially in cases of nations with a rich and glorious past, even if the present of the nation does not correspond to what this nation used to be in the past, national ideology strives to prove the connection and the identity of the national past and present and connect these two with a worthy national future (Korovinis, et al.,1988). The description and judgment on the identity of Greeks (Kirtatas, 2002) and orthodoxy (Lipovats, 1993) has been studied in the axis

*Corresponding author’s email: goliap@yahoo.gr,
pgolia@uowm.gr. Tel. 00302385045233, Fax 00302385022261

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by sex

Sex	N (%)
Male	50 (44,2)
Female	63 (55,8)
Total	113 (100,0)

Table 2. Distribution of the sample by university department

University department	N (%)
Primary Education	16 (14,15)
Pedagogic department of Pre-school Education	16 (14,15)
Department of Balkan Studies	81 (71,7)
Total	113 (100,0)

of uniqueness, since the beginning of the century in the field of macro historical conditions (Vakalopoulos, 1983; Tsoukalas, 1993; Demertzis, 1994; Daniilidis, 1985; Ziakas, 1993). The researchers agree that “characteristics of the race” (Vakalopoulos, 1994) were incorporated into the new ways of institutional organization and authority in Greek society (Paparizos, 1999). The goal of idealization and construction of the past is pursued mainly through the nation – language tradition (Van Horn, 1987; Fishman, 1972; Frangoudaki, 1987), the narration of history, the collective cultural recollections (Kozma, 1992), with basic aspiration the strengthening of the national identity and the collective oblivion, since the “others” are either barely present or are presented in a stereotypical perspective (Miller, 1995).

We are now called to confront the challenge of the rising of multiculturalism and the transition from the national individual centered to the new hyper collective identity. The procedure of forming the identity is not just an inner procedure isolated from the external elements of individuality but a venture, which is also fighting and dialogical since it presupposes the “other”, constituting this way a symbolic claim within the limits of a community symbolic fight with the “others”. We accept the “others” either as an element of differential for the development of “we” or as part of “we”, as “receivers” of the common inner cultural identity, the national culture which “is expressed through new witticisms of homogeneity, integrity and the inner national and cultural heteronomy of the individuals” (Tsoukalas, 1999).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of this research is to point out the definition of the notion of nation, as it is expressed by the Greek university students. What is

being researched is the ability of these students to describe this specific notion.

The sample of the research was selected by random sampling (The use of random sampling aims to the segregation of the present sampling from the reviews that are based on the “convenient” sampling, which, according to Louis Cohen and Lawrence Manion is also called “random sampling”, according to this sampling the researchers selects people that are close to them and this procedure continues until they have the necessary size of sample) and it is composed 113 student of the University of Western Macedonia (Pedagogic department of Primary Education, Pedagogic department of Pre-school Education, Department of Balkan Studies) (Cohen and Manion, 2000). The selection of the particular age of the sample has to do with the fact that during this age a higher level of conscious choices starts to develop both in an ideological level and in the everyday social life.

The subjects of the sample were asked to develop their views of the matter of: *What is nation?* in the form of an essay. The students' texts were analyzed according to the principles of Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis (De Sola Pool, 1959; Palmquist, 1990; Weber, 1990; Moscovici, 1970; Mucchieli, 1988; Veron, 1981; Bardin, 1977; Grawitz, 1981; Curley, 1990), using the subject as the basic unit of analysis.

RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 presents the distribution of the sample by sex and university department.

The text analysis showed 422 references which were listed in four (4) thematic categories (Percentage of agreement of the 3 judges $v = 98.58\%$. There was no agreement in 6 references). Table 3 shows the distribution of the references by thematic.

1st Thematic: Geographical dimension

In this category we incorporate the opinions which have the element of the geographical space (67, 15.9%). The answers of this thematic focus on the relation between nation and geographical space and they point out that “nation” is a group of people who live in a particular and marked out region. Some answers even though they put greater importance to geographical boundaries; they differentiate and try to incorporate into the nation people, who do not live in the specific area. It is stated characteristically that: “people can live in specific geographical boundaries, but there is a chance to be scattered all over the world with a certain geographical slot as the inception of the nation” or “... nation is a group of people who live in a specific geographical region, but it is possible for a nation to be scattered in other regions in the world, as for example, with the immigrant Greeks living in America, Germany and elsewhere” or that “nation is a group of people who live within the same borders or even in small groups abroad (of the same descent) and have the same identity, values, ideals, beliefs and history. Within this marked out area “the nation is a solid, safe and recognized territory with cohesion and brotherhood

Table 3. Distribution of the references by thematic

Thematic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Geographical dimension	95	22,7
Notional characteristics of the term "nation"	136	32,2
Political dimension of the term "nation"	69	16,3
National identity and collectiveness	122	28,9
Total	422	100,0

which has the right, though to enforce its power, its subordination and its obedience to the citizens and which can function as a means for the creation of borders, identities and ideologies. And as another student points out: "even though a nation is a group of people with common cultural elements, who live in a certain geographical area, the notion of nation does not exist today, but it is just a forced grouping to serve political procedures and sometimes goes as far as serving authority".

The students write down that "nation is the group of people with common historical origin. Nation includes immigrants, who live in different states" and they point out that those who are part of minorities in conscience "do not feel as part of the nation" and that "the common characteristics that the people of a nation share, allow them to separate themselves from other groups, such as minorities, for instance". The students incorporate the Greeks living abroad into the nation: "nation is the group of people who reside not in a necessarily specific geographical area and share common elements like language, manners, customs and religions" stating explicitly that "the minorities that live in Greece are a different nation".

2nd Thematic: Notional characteristics of the term "nation"

In this thematic we incorporate the views that converge regarding the common characteristics like "language, religion, history, culture, civilization". Most of the students (136, 32,2%) give a definition of the nation based on "the axis of the common characteristics of large group of people". They believe that "nation is the group of people whose beliefs about religion, language and culture are the same". In fact, several times these characteristics are evaluated and rated with the "common language" to have the most important part, because "in order for a nation to exist these must be the imposition of a dominant language. Through this language we have national identity and national awareness and thus we have a nation". Some students believe that the "main characteristics of a nation is its historical tradition" and others point out as common characteristics "a common

descent, common historical awareness, the same manners and customs, common civilization/ culture" while "a common religion" is an element which unifies and identifies a nation". A third year student states that "the most important characteristic is the realization that they belong to this nation, the realization of being a member of the group of the nation" while a second year student adds that "when we talk about a nation we talk about common descent, about the union of people and the achievement of national completion and marking of borders". They also state that "in order for a nation to exist some or a combination of these characteristics must exist. All of them though are the linking element for the continuity of the nation". These characteristics sometimes lose their self-existence and become "obligations to the homeland", which come from "emotional bonds, the love for homeland and common customs". These common characteristics, according to a fourth year student, "are based on a national ideology and express the nation". Even students who accept "nation as a recent creation", believe that the people who consist a nation have common historical and cultural evolution, common language and religion, they behave and function in the same way but despite that, they have all kinds of juxtapositions among them, like their political awareness for instance". Finally, some place the origin of a nation to "the fusion of races or groups of people, who in time and after an exchange of cultural and economic elements consist a nation with common element, which they have to use not in a competitive way towards other nations but to coexist and go along with each other with respect".

3rd Thematic: Political dimension of the term "nation"

Some students (43, 10.2%) drew a political dimension of the notion of nation: "every nation is unique and original. It holds state power and a form of politics that is based on a massive participation.... you have an identity and a feeling of belonging somewhere". They believe that "a nation is a system of political and economic structure which has economic exchanges and relations of power as common ground "and they point out the dominating power of a nation: "a nation is a dominating institution

and an economic one as well, which organizes the production and consuming within the context of the national economy". The nation is a "a collective mechanism which consist of bureaucratic instruments that govern and legislate in the name of the nation, the result of a conscious political and cultural equation" and vice versa "the political procedures that are assimilated and incorporated lead to the creation of the nation". The most radical view, though, is expressed by a third year student: "nation is a non existing notion – now attached to the brains of some conservatives. Everybody believes that are being united by some common characteristics, such as language, religion and common history. I, on the other hand, believe that through the years they have been altered and huge gaps have been created in society due to mercenary events that have taken place".

Some refer to the legal dimension of the term: "a nation is the group of people who compose a country along with the laws, the manners and customs that apply". At the same time, though they attempt to separate the term from the state: "the nation is different from the state as the latter has geographical boundaries, while the nation has not". On the other hand, confusion cannot be avoided as it is pointed out that "the nation is a collective mechanism that consists of bureaucratic instruments that govern and legislate in the name of the nation". For some students the legal meaning of the nation is expressed as "a common system of regulations, within which you can act and decide freely". Even though they think that "nation is the residents of a country who have common characteristics such as language, manners and customs, religion" they point out that the people who belong to national minorities "...do not feel as members of the majority of the nation of the country they reside in because the legal texts do not allow them to". Some equate the terms nation and people. At least the confusion that exists from the use of the terms is obvious: "the term nation is a contradictory notion and anyone can perceive it the way they want. Frequently the nation identities with the notion of people, or "...nation is a group of people who are linked together by common elements like manners and customs" or even "...nation is the tendency that the states have to create groups and identities with people." On the other hand, there are views who stand that "...nation is the group of people who are linked together by some common elements such as language, manners and customs, tradition, history, the nation not necessarily related to the notion of state and people" and that "...the nation as a notion does not exist today. However, the people of a state do not necessarily identify with the existence of a nation.

Finally, some views about identification and political unity are stated, in relation to the nation: "the nation is the result of a conscious political and cultural identification and that when we talk about a nation, we talk about identification and population unity, about groups of people who feel that they belong to the nations they

represent".

4th Thematic: National identity and collectiveness

In this thematic we incorporate the reports which include the terms national and historical awareness and identity. According to the views of the students "nation is a group of people who share common ideals, such as religious and racial identity, common conscience and awareness of the past". The students point out that "nation is a group that are possessed by the feeling that they all belong in the same group and that the people of this group have the same expectation about the future and according to these expectations, they define and organize their present, their visions and their future". As for the Greeks "since their national awareness is deeply developed, it urges them to their successful grouping in their effort to protect themselves, heading off, a lot of times, any enemy or threat". A four year student points out that "the persons of a nation are linked together both mentally and spiritually. The awareness that someone belongs to a nation and the desire to preserve and develop the special national characteristics is called nationalism and it is a correct and reasonable form of nationalism" and comes in comparison with the view that a third year student expresses, who thinks that "nation is a group of people with common descent and in accordance with this phrase all people belong to a nation. This nation is the Greek nation which is scientifically proven that it is the primary one from which all the other nations except the Semitic one, come from. That means that the Greek and Semitic nations are the only primary nations and that is why they are rivals. However, even though there is a difficulty in defining the term nation, the common characteristics along with traditional identity and awareness give an answer: "How do you define nation? it is a difficult question to answer since the term involves other similar terms such as state, groups of people with common binding elements such as national awareness, manners and customs, religion, traditions, which are well analyzed according to a social and anthropologic research...They are people who share the knowledge that they belong to the same nation, the same community and thus they have common goals in regard with their course and their aspirations in the international political field". It is pin pointed that legally "the notion of nation involves two criteria, the objectives ones and the subjective ones. The objective ones are language, religion, race etc. A subjective criterion is national awareness".

With regard to common ideals, visions and goals in connection with the nation we read: "nation is the group of people who have the same visions and ideals concerning the state". It is clarified that "the term nation defines a particular group of people who not only have a common past and history but also common goals and future. So, in order for the nation and its longevity to

exist, the common past is not enough but it is also necessary for people to have common historical goals to survive and confirm the continuity of its existence”.

Finally it is pointed out that “the term nation is a contradictory notion and anyone could perceive as they wish. Nevertheless, the nation is a ‘fruit’ that involves other terms like homeland, religion, culture. According to the opinion of a fourth year student “we should not perceive the term as we like, for example to refer to extreme nationalism. The nation is a term which exists in each and everyone and expresses ideals and beliefs. Concisely though, the nation is a group that could involve more terms than the already mentioned above”.

DISCUSSION

In our research, we notice a diffusion of the term “nation”, which has no social class barriers and has to express the “relation” of the members of the race in a fictitious level (Kassidou, 2008). The lead in of this story is given by the creation (which is renewed with new material every period) of the twin categories of the inside enemy and the internal exclusion, as it is taught in Greek educational system (Golia, 2006). Perhaps all the above seem self-evident in a way, when we do not take into consideration the specific historical, geopolitical and ideological conjunctures and the decisive part the educational system have in the forming and reproduction of a national identity. Even though the effectiveness of education in regard with the productive function and ideological incorporation is generally questioned the gradual evolution of the Greek society into a multicultural one and the general developments in the global society have started to form new fact and conjunctures for the social life and the educational practices.

Obviously, within this particular conjuncture the role of school must be redefined and, at the same time with the procedure of readjustment of the educational goals we must also redefine the usage of the means of achieving them and finally we must choose the ones that will correspond to the nature and essence of the goals and also to the current social reality. If school finally redefines its goals, then a question is raised whether it will succeed in coping with ideological inscriptions of a “national recollection” and of nation centred tendencies, which are produced and reproduced within specific procedures of constructing and reconstructing reality and national history? (Tsoukalas, 1999; Gillis, 1994; Avdela, 1998). Is there really the maturity which will help the subversive dynamic of the new prospective which the trait of a “global citizen” promises?

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