

Scientific symposium

“Prejudices & Stereotypes are stimulating the racial discrimination”

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**“Differences of prejudices and collective blames toward to
the Balkan’s Egyptians community and their integration in
some Balkan’s states”**

Introduction

According to the newest scientific researches and thesis, the migration of population from Ancient Egypt in Balkan Peninsula is happened during the time of Pharaoh Ramesses the Second (1279-1213 BC)¹ or called by Herodotus "Sesostris"², as colonists for exploration of iron and gold mines from Balkans to Egypt. Some scholars, afro-centrist, have the position that migration of population from Egypt to Crete and Balkans (Greece) is happen as a consequence of the expansion of Hyksos in Middle East and Egypt, during the time of Amenemhat III, pharaoh of Middle Kingdom of Egypt in 18th century BC³. However, for the present of Egyptian population in Balkans we have a lot of archaeological traces in entire territory of the Balkans⁴. A big number of historical documents are exist as a witness for Egyptians present in Balkans during the Ancient time, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman period.

The Balkan Egyptians don't have their own and unify language. They are speaking the languages of the surrounding where they are living or from where they've immigrated inside the Balkan in a close past. They are speaking the Albanian, Macedonian, Serbian, Turkish etc. But, many Balkan's and other scientist (Gussepe Catapano, Martin Bernal, Nermin Vlora Falaschi, Skender Rizaj, Olga Lukovic Pjanovic, Tasko Belcev, Risto Ivanoski) are saying that in Balkan languages exist a lot of elements of Ancient Egyptians language.

The main traditional professions of Balkan Egyptians were: blacksmith profession, agro-culture, musicians, reed makers (cattail), pottery, birckmakers, coal workers etc. The blacksmith profession is with a great importance in the life of Balkan Egyptians, all the material, spiritual and social culture in some way is related with the blacksmith profession.

Balkan's Egyptians are living a stationary life, and they never in a history lived so called "wondering" or "nomadic" life. About old settlements from the oldest times of Balkan Egyptians we may find a lot historical documents and in the terrain a lot of toponymys and archaeological localities related with this community, which are dated from the neolith, ancient and middle age time. The quarts and the settlements of Balkan Egyptians mainly are in the centres of the towns (cities) or near to the old castles.

Traditional national cloths of Balkan Egyptians have a lot of variants depending of the life-place, preserving of the authentic elements, influence of the surrounding, natural-geographic conditions, profession, social status etc. The special Balkan-logic study has to be done that will cover all the variants of traditional national cloths of Balkan Egyptians.

Oral-folk creations of Balkan Egyptians is very reach, but at the same time and assimilated by the other communities. The customs related with the life cycle (customs on birth, weeding and death) have their characteristics that are special and endemic only within this community, but and have a lot of similarities with other communities from the surrounding where they live. Amongst the customs of Balkan Egyptians the scholars found some common elements with the some customs that are still present in Copt community in Egypt. When we are speaking about the customs from the life cycle is good to be mentioned that the marriages are mainly inside the community (endogenous marriages).

¹ Rubin Zemon, Balkan's Egyptians-historical and ethnographical aspects, PhD thesis, Ethnographical Institute with museum, Bulgarian Academy of Science, Sofia2005.

² Herodotus, Book II Euterpa, 102,103.

³ Martin Bernal, Black Athens, New York, 1986.

⁴ Petar Selem, Egyptian cults and their monuments in Roman Ilirik, PhD thesis Zagreb, 1969.

The customs related with the year cycle are very interesting among the Balkan Egyptians. Even that the biggest part of this population through Balkan are with the Islamic religion (they accept the Islamic religion during the Ottoman Rule), in the customs related with the year cycle we may find a lot elements of paganism, mythology believing and Christianity mixed in one perfect harmony. The Balkan Egyptians are celebrating the Islamic holidays (Bajram and Ramadan feast), but and some other pagan and Christian holiday that are celebrating and keeping like a cult (St. Atanasius, The day of Summer, St. George, St. Demetra, St. Erazmus, St. Naum, etc.)

Balkan Egyptians have three types of ethno-names (folk appellation):

a) The ethno-names that are related or point to the Egypt (Gjyp, Egjyp, Magjyp, Evgjit, Jevg- on Albanian language; Gjupci, Egjupci, Jupci, Ejupci, Ojupci- in Macedonia; Agupti- in Bulgaria; Kepti / K'pti/ Kiptijani, Misirli on Turkish language.

b) The ethno-names that are related with the profession: Kovaci (Blacksmith), Esnaf (guild), Ashkali (coal-maker).

c) Other ethno-names: Faraon, Firaon, Farvan (Pharaon), Airli (the old inhabitants, aborigine on Turksuh language), Gjivagjani, Latini, etc.

With some of these ethno-names (especially with the first group) in a European society but and in scientist bibliography are co-identified and the Roma community. It is very hard through the ethno-names to be made a determination and recognizing, is it worked for the people that are belonging to the Roma or Balkan Egyptians community. Why, how and when is done this confusion and co-identification with these ethno-names for these different communities is very hard to verify, but some hypothesis exist.

Our opinion is that the Egyptians, as we told before, were inhabited and integrated in Balkan and European society, much more before the Roma came in Middle Age. When the Roma came in Balkans and Europe, with their ethnic specifics (wondering life and their professions) they didn't were accepted well by the people. For these not accepting are existing a lot superstitions, folk stories and even some laws that were brought from some middle age states with discriminatory norms. Romas people with aim to overcome a lot of unpleasant situations and with the goal to be accepted by the population and integrated in the society, probably were "pushed" to identify themselves as Egyptians (people from Egypt- Gypsies), because somatically (by the colour of the skin) are similar with the Egyptians. These "usurpation" of ethno-names, ethnic mimicry and wrong identification, have their consequences until today in the society, science and finally in the politic of international community and particular states.

In this context is important to say that the ethno-names that are related with Egypt for the members of the Balkan Egyptians community are endo-names , but for the Roma people are egzo-names .

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People that are belonging to the community of Balkan's Egyptians are victims of racial discrimination as a consequence of different negative prejudices and negative stereotypes in society, as well as a consequence of states politics on relation with recognition of ethnic identity and implementation of international standards for enjoying of minority rights.

Roots of negative prejudices and stereotypes towards to the Balkan's Egyptians, in one way may to be find even in Ancient mythology in myths for

Theseus, Jason and Hephaestus. Changing of political influences in Balkans had the consequences in society and collective consciousness amongst the people. We have some indications that after the fight of Marko Antonio and Cleopatra against Octavian August, “in stage” was negative campaign against Egyptians and Egyptian culture in Roman Empire (including Balkans) with destroying of temples and statues which were in relation with Egypt and Egypt culture. Something similar was happen and during the time of Tiberius. However, the most powerful impact with negative prejudices stereotypes and against the Egyptians and Egyptian culture is made during the Byzantine Empire, especially after the Chalcedonic Church Council in 451 AD. During the Byzantine Empire, when the Greek language and culture, as well as the Christian religion gain the dominant role, the xenophobia against the Egyptians with political background, find its justification in Bible’s stories “that the Egyptians were against the God”. Even we may find a letter of one Archbishop from Ohrid with name Theophilact in 12 century, who described one person “with a name like Pharaoh, who is an evil”. The same Archbishop his travelling from Ohrid to Constantinople describe as travelling through “Egypt- a hard trip”.

The situation of xenophobia became worse with entering of Roma people from the East in Balkans. They started to be identified as “Egyptians” when they arrive in Balkans with a aim to be accepted in society, equal to the position of real Egyptians, because however, the social statues of Egyptians in Balkans was on higher level than their statues of eviction, killing, not accepting etc. With this confusion made by Roma people, the racial prejudice and stereotypes based on social statues and skin colour appeared in surface. The situation became more worse during the Ottoman Empire, which started very soon after the Roma entering in Balkans, when the ethnic identity wasn’t an import and was “pushed under the carpet” opposite to the religion identity and determination on Muslims and “Rum-millet” as a official state politic. In this situation the racial prejudices and stereotypes in society are much more stimulated because the colour of the skin can’t be putted “under the carpet”.

As a consequences of some mentioned political and historical background, as well as some ethno-cultural characteristics, today the Balkan’s Egyptians are facing with a lot of social prejudices like: “they are Roma”, “They are illiterate”, “they haven’t their culture”, “they are a people without historical and cultural values” etc.

Bearing in mind that these people are living in a Balkan context of prejudices and antagonism, they are a victims of collective blame as a consequence of political and ethnic confrontation between the bigger ethnic communities in Balkans. Like Hephaestus who choose a side in confrontation between Zeus and Hera and was throw out from Olympus, to the Balkan’s Egyptians is not aloud to mix in politics, and to participate in decision-making bodies, because than they will experience exodus, and nobody will not care for them, because they are the citizens of “lower class”.

Today in Balkan Peninsula are living more than a million people that are belonging to this ethnic community. In different states they have a different treatment of excluding from the political, social and public life. In this occasion we will just gave brief review and recommendations what have to be done to improve the situation with racial discrimination in particulars states:

Albanian authorities have to take the “Egyptian issue” in Albania very serious, with respecting the recommendations of various commissions and committees by the international organizations, especially bearing in mind that this group is biggest minority in Albania.

The authorities of Republic of Macedonia have to stop with a conscious discrimination and non equal opportunities for all the citizens especially for the

member of the communities that are not mentioned in Preamble of the Constitution of Republic of Macedonia, among which the greatest are Balkans Egyptians in Republic of Macedonia.

The Serbian and Montenegro authorities are “playing very similar game” as the Macedonian authorities on avoiding the commitments of international convention for minority rights when is an issue of Balkan’s Egyptians.

But, the situation of Balkan’s Egyptians in other Balkans states is worse than in mentioned before, like in Greece, Turkey, Bosnia where they even haven’t a possibility to declare their ethnic identity.

The Balkan’s Egyptians only in post-war Kosovo have their political representatives in state body, with thanks to the conscientious politics of international organizations and administration in Kosovo. In the last two parliaments of Kosovo Balkan Egyptians have by 2 MPs, as well as their representatives in Government and local municipalities’ bodies. However, a great problems of returning of refugees from this community is not solved yet, but and solution of this problem is going on very non-human way.

Conclusion: A situation of racial discrimination toward to the members of Balkan’s Egyptians community is a very complicated issue, bearing a mind their recognition of ethnic identity, social status, obstacles in educational system, participation in decision- making bodies, social marginalization etc. A racial discrimination toward to Balkan’s Egyptians is on base of ethnic origin, colour of the skin, and in some regions on a base of religion. Very often in one area all these three bases of discrimination are mixed, are acting in common. Roots of racial discrimination toward to the Balkan’s Egyptians are very deep in a history of Balkan society. For that reason the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination towards to this community is possible through programs and projects, that will be planned and implemented as a common work of authorities and representatives of victims of racial discrimination, with help and monitoring of international community, especially by the experts from the states that have a great experiences on combating the racial discrimination.