

Angelina Banovic-Markovska,
“Ss.Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje, Macedonia

Racin and the Significance of a National Culture

Abstract: In the text RACIN and the Significance of a National Culture I'll speak further on Racin's publications, namely, his political reflections, which apart from their notable social dimension also possess an explicitly national and moral dimension. Along those lines, I'll see to a contextualization of the same, in the span of seventy years, as the world order had undergone momentous changes, not only in terms of political and ideological shifts, but rather through a change in the class-based and race-bound paradigms. This, in turn, allows me to draw a parallel between our Kosta Racin, a progressive people's thinker, a revolutionary and a socialist, a poet and a journalist stemming from the realm of the old Yugoslavia, on the one hand, and the Franco-based existential humanist, the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, the progenitor of the anti-colonial movement in the countries of the Third World, on the other. Even though the parallel between Racin and Fanon may seem a bit far-fetched, the fact remains that both were involved with socially-centered, nationally-bound and revolutionary-focused questions, thus emphasizing, first and foremost, the significance of a national culture amidst the conditions of political, economic and spiritual enslavement. As proponents of socialist ideas and Marxist ideology, as revolutionaries and fighters for national and human rights who had experienced the turmoil of war, both men exhibited a higher consciousness when it came to matters related to the state of the national culture with the enslaved colonized peoples, with one difference in mind, namely, that in the case of Racin, the emphasis was placed on the class-related national aspect, whereas with Fanon, the emphasis was placed on the race-related national aspect.

Key words: *Racin, Fanon, national culture, nationalism, national consciousness, decolonization*

I received the invitation to take part in this year's Racin Meetings (2011) on the same day, when in the offices of MANU (The Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts) we had just finished with the Macedonian launching of the book *Identity.Text.Nation* (in the Croatian original, *Identitet. Tekst. Nacija*) by His Excellency, Dr. Zlatko Kramarić, the current ambassador of the Republic of Croatia in Macedonia. Initially, due to personal family reasons, I had to decline my participation; however, in due time, coming to the profound realization that this promotional study about the Macedonian identity, language and culture, was now being honored with the prestigious Racin Award, I became compelled by a sense of personal responsibility, and a kind of a personal debt, which indeed served as the additional motivators for my going to Veles, for the Meetings. Although, as a matter of fact, insofar I have taken part in these traditional proceedings on three separate occasions (once even as the moderator of the scientific symposium which is a part of the Meetings' frameworks, however on an entirely different topic of discussion), not until now have I publically spoken or written about the legacy of our very own Kosta Solev Racin (Коста Солев Рацин). Thus, I decided to accept the invitation; by placing together the two occasions I would indeed rectify the injustice and make it a point to speak further on Racin's publications, namely, his political reflections, which

apart from their notable social dimension also possess an explicitly national and moral dimension. Along those lines, I'll see to a contextualization of the same, in the span of seventy years, as the world order had undergone momentous changes, not only in terms of political and ideological shifts, but rather through a change in the class-based and race-bound paradigms. This, in turn, allows me to draw a parallel between our Kosta Racin, a progressive people's thinker, a revolutionary and a socialist, a poet and a journalist stemming from the realm of the old Yugoslavia, on the one hand, and the Franco-based existential humanist, the psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, the progenitor of the anti-colonial movement in the countries of the Third World, on the other. For this, I have ample support also through Professor Kramarić's book, whence he says: "...in Croatia, we (and the following is also true for Macedonia) shy away from describing the conditions in our society as postcolonial. We act as if the state of colonization was (and has remained) particular only to the 'person of color', 'the uncivilized', 'the marginalized' of the world..., but the Croatian and the Macedonian modern histories, to a great extent, correspond to those of the modern histories of the Third World...Namely, we speak here of ever present themes that follow every period of transition. That which all transitions find in common is their sick incompleteness and ambiguity..." (Kramarić, 2009: 72-73;

my italics). Even though the parallel between Racin and Fanon may seem a bit far-fetched, the fact remains that both were involved with socially-centered, nationally-bound and revolutionary-focused questions, thus emphasizing, first and foremost, the significance of a national culture amidst the conditions of political, economic and spiritual enslavement. Much like Terry Eagleton, a Marxist literary theorist and cultural critic, who has examined the significance of this phenomenon with enslaved and colonized peoples. “Imperialism is not only the exploitation of cheap labor-power... – Eagleton writes – but the uprooting of languages and customs – not just the imposition of foreign armies, but of alien ways of experiencing...In such situations,...culture is so vitally bound up with one’s common identity that there is no need to argue for its relation to political struggle” (Eagleton, 1983, 2008: 187; my italics).

Let us go back to 1959, to The Second Congress of the Black Writers and Artists in Rome, when Frantz Fanon posed several key questions concerning the countries of the Third World. One of these opens up the dilemma about the national struggle and the process of decolonization as a cultural phenomenon, whereas another one brings together the political (and armed!) forms of struggle and the culture of the colonized peoples, thus coming to the following realization, that colonial domination calls to a halt the national culture, in all

of its fields, concluding: “because it is total and tends to over-simplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people – adding further that – every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture..., to recognize the unreality of his “nation”, and, in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure” (Fanon, 1963: 236; my italics). Henceforth, any conscious and organized undertaking on the behalf of the colonized aimed at re-establishing the sovereignty of his own nation, for Fanon¹ becomes “the most complete and obvious cultural manifestation that exists.” (Fanon, 1963: 245).

Twenty years prior to this speech (and the publication of Fanon’s now anthological text *Les Damnés de la Terre* (in English: *The Wretched of the Earth*)², both published in 1961), in the

¹ As a psychiatrist and a neurologist, Frantz Fanon researched also the psychological effect colonization had as a borderline implication which in turn instigated the anti-colonial movements in the world. He took on an active role in the Algerian Revolution, set against the French Colonial Rule, but did not love to see the day of independence in 1962.

² The title in the original of Fanon’s last work is an allusion to the beginning verses of the communist *Internationale*. In the Former Yugoslavia, the book was first translated by Croatian publishers, as following, *Prezreni na svijetu* (Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1973).

Balkans, I suppose against the background of severed relations with the then leadership of the KPJ (The Communist Party of Yugoslavia) in Macedonia (I am referring to the events around September 8th, 1940, when during the Territorial Conference of the KPM (The Communist Party of Macedonia) Racin was boycotted and unanimously excommunicated from the Party) the text “The National Question in Macedonia” comes to light.³ With it, Kosta Solev joins the ranks of the most esteemed Macedonian intellectuals, right next to Krste Misirkov (Крсте Мисирков) and his *On Macedonian Matters* (in the Macedonian original, *За Македонските работи*)⁴. Amidst his other conclusions, in this text Racin claims the following: “The struggle

³ “The National Question in Macedonia” (in the original Macedonian: „Националното прашање во Македонија“) is a fragment from the overall text of the manuscript collection found in the possession of the Faculty of Philology “Blazhe Koneski” in Skopje (more specifically, The Department of Macedonian and South-Slavic Literatures), which was published for the first time in *Verses and Prose* (in the original Macedonian, *Стихови и проза* (Skopje: Kultura, 1966), and thus found in the collection *Prose and Journalistic Articles* (in the original Macedonian, *Проза и публицистика* (Skopje: Nasha Kniga, 1987)).

⁴ Namely, a Template-Program on the Macedonian national and liberation movement, which discloses the assimilation practices of the neighboring states as directed towards the Macedonian people, i.e., towards its linguistic, cultural and ethnic identity.

of the oppressed national and minority groups within the borders of an imperialist state, the struggle for a national independence, for national rights and democratic freedoms without a doubt gains strength when fighting against the imperialist bourgeoisie which subjugates and exploits them in a colonial manner, without a doubt stands against the entire ‘world system of a financial enslavement’ and the colonial looting, and thus, becomes a part of the main forces which fight for the change of this system, becomes part of the struggles of the new socially-progressive class, the proletariat... The real and rightful solution to the national question can only be realized through the revolutionary efforts of the masses, the subjugated and disenfranchised masses at the hands of imperialism. These revolutionary efforts of theirs are doubtlessly part of the revolutionary efforts of the world’s proletariat, which in turn helps create an unified world-based revolutionary front where all the oppressed and exploited masses fight against the common devil – the world imperialist order. This is why to the committed Marxist-Leninists the national question is a revolution-centered and international question, and as such, it represents ‘a part of the general questions that the proletariat revolution concerns itself with, a part of the question about the dictatorship of the proletariat’” (Racin, 1987: 174-176; my italics).

I'd like to remind us, though we may all be familiar that as a young man (in 1924, at the age of sixteen), during the colonization of the Macedonian lands at the hands of the ruling bourgeoisie and the monarchy of the old Yugoslavia, the son of the potter Apostol Solev (Апостол Солев), inspired by Garibaldi's revolutionary ideas, joined the ranks of SKOJ (The Union of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia). At about the same time, in fact, just a year later (in 1925), on the Caribbean island of Martinique (then a French colony) Frantz Fanon was born, a descendent of former African slaves. Racin's and Fanon's respective life's journeys did not come into converge – perhaps only in 1943, when, on his way back to Skopje, Racin decided to join the Partisan brigade “Korab”, whereas Fanon joined the Allied powers in their fight against fascism. And while the former tragically lost his life, the latter gets wounded and subsequently decorated with a medal for bravery which in turn grants him a scholarship to the Sorbonne where he is to study medicine and literature, and philosophy with Maurice Merleau-Ponty. After graduating in 1952, he publishes the essay “North African Syndrome”, so that in the same year, his book *Peau noire, masques blancs* (in English: *Black Skin, White Masks*) is published by Éditions du Seuil (Paris, France), which he bases on the Hegelian dialectic binary, the master-slave one, and derives his own binary: white colonizer –

black colonized. Unlike him, our very own self-taught Racin comes into contact with the ideas of Hegel, Marx and Lenin, during his time spent in prison, in Sremska Mitrovica, which he uses to further his studies. Namely, with his political cohorts, Racin translates *The Communist Manifesto*, studies the history of the Macedonian people from a class-centered and nationally-bound perspective, attempts to compile a dictionary of the Macedonian language, publishes a few articles and studies in the field of literary criticism, philosophy and history, hence becomes known, in the lands of the old Yugoslavia, as a progressive thinker amidst the Macedonian intelligentsia. What sort of a political and social line of thinking and action he may have pursued had he lived longer, provided that he would withstand the ideological pressures of the times, we can only speculate over, similarly to the case of Fanon, who like Racin himself, lost his life quite early on, at the age of 35, to leukemia. But one thing remains certain, the fact that as proponents of socialist ideas and Marxist ideology, as revolutionaries and fighters for national and human rights who had experienced the turmoil of war, both men exhibited a higher consciousness when it came to matters related to the state of the national culture with the enslaved colonized peoples, with one difference in mind, namely, that in the case of Racin, the emphasis was placed on the class-related national aspect, whereas with

Fanon, the emphasis was placed on the race-related national aspect.

For example, this is how Frantz Fanon examines the situation in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He states: "A frequent mistake, and one which is moreover hardly justifiable, is to try to find cultural expressions for and to give new values to native culture within the framework of colonial domination. This is why we arrive at a proposition which at first sight seems paradoxical: the fact that in a colonized country the most elementary, most savage, and the most undifferentiated nationalism is the most fervent and efficient means of defending national culture" (Fanon, 1963: 244). Although aware that nationalism and the national consciousness – which as the most developed form of culture allows for conditions that in turn bring about also an international consciousness – should not be equated, Fanon adds: "If man is known by his acts, then we will say that the most urgent thing today for the intellectual is to build up his nation... by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values. Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history" (Fanon, 1963: 247).

We can encounter a similar line of thinking with our own Racin. Namely, imbued by the ideas of the communist Internationale, he

claims that the history of the Macedonian national-liberation struggles stands in a strange causality with the politics of the Balkan imperialist forces, thus dependent on "the struggles of the ripe...imperialist bourgeoisie from the leading European countries, which since the demise of the Ottoman Empire, develops an interest in taking over the basis and spheres of influence in the Balkans" (Racin, 1987: 177), furthering this claim with an analysis of the territorial aspirations of Macedonia's neighboring nations towards Macedonia, for which he writes: "To this end, the bourgeoisie mobilizes an army of scholars and charlatans, which then create 'a theory' about the national belonging and the right of their bourgeoisie to annex a piece of land or an entire county. If the land in question were a colony, then the annexation came alongside a 'civilizing' mission, whereas if the appetites went towards a 'link' from the rival's chain, then all of the historical remnants would get falsified, hyperbolized, transformed beyond recognition, all with one single purpose, to prove the 'historical', 'bloody', 'heritage' right of their bourgeoisie to rule over those lands...And all of the theories about the 'blood-line' belonging of those lands to a certain imperialist state, about the 'historical' mission of that state, and other fabrications would objectively serve the reactionary goals...Due to these reasons, Macedonia became 'the bone

of contention' between the Serbian and the Bulgarian bourgeoisie, to which both camps directed their predatory eyes and could not come to any terms. Due to these reasons, came the interfering of the Serbian and the Bulgarian imperialists in the Macedonian national-liberation fight, which in turn had a fatal impact on the Macedonian people and the process of their national awakening" (Racin, 1987: 174-175-179; my italics).

It stands as fact that such progressive and bold statements by Kosta Solev created difficulties for the hegemonic-holistic structures which held together, in a colonial dependency, each articulation of spirit and ethnicity, all in the name of one "unified" national history and culture. The events in Lopushnik (Лопушник) in 1943 are thus a symptomatic occurrence which to this day remains as neither fully disclosed nor openly discussed (or for that matter, problematized) by our own political public. Certainly, this is not the question to which I could offer a succinct answer, but what I find intriguing is the knowledge that comes as a result from these events – namely, that every speech, every discussion on the topic of cultural diversity in this space expands the political realm of action. That is to say, although the discursive constituting of the Macedonian nation in the works of Racin took place under the veil of the Communist Party, namely,

through the ideological prism of the Lumpen-proletariat that Kosta Solev was a member of, its emancipating and at the time forbidden ideological consciousness clearly defied the present, established, fortified as such, powerful hegemony which feared Racin's influence with the people, particularly his ideas regarding the Macedonian identity, that many others revered and supported.

Similar observations, but due to a different ideological and theoretical motivation, are made by the author of the book *Text.Nation.Identity: The Interpretation of the Black Mires of the Macedonian History*. He, among the rest, writes the following: "...I'll start with the claim that both Croatian and Macedonian history were in the position of subjugated subjects. Namely, within the political borders of the Hapsburg and the Ottoman Empires, there were a multitude of territorially interlinked cultures without the necessary political protection. This unfortunate fact asked that the Croatian, as well as the Macedonian nationalism, carry out simultaneously two difficult tasks. The first task was the creation of 'high culture' (I'd like to remind us that this could not have been made possible without an élite...the role of the intelligentsia was paramount due to the fact that the nation state had not yet been created)...The second task was to create a sovereign state" (Kramarić, 2009: 67-68). "In the case of

Croatia and Macedonia – Kramarić adds – since they belonged to multi-ethnic empires, there were exceptional individuals/engaged intellectuals, who...practiced nationalism calling upon the right to adhere to a differentiated cultural identity and a political autonomy” (Kramarić, 2009: 73; my italics). Kramarić further develops this observation in one of the many footnotes which can be found in this important book about Macedonia and the Macedonian identity, as he references Anthony Smith and Ramachandra Guha which view identity as more of a cultural form rather than a political doctrine (Kramarić, 2009: 69). Certainly, here he refers to the positive nationalist occurrences, namely the classical ethnic nationalism, which disregarding whether found in the Hapsburg or the Ottoman or the Romanov or the Karadjordje Empire, came as an answer to the imperialist nationalism that had instigated the political and ethnic self-awareness of the colonized peoples. Unfortunately, neither Racin lived long enough to witness Macedonia’s sovereignty nor did Fanon live long enough to witness the decolonization of the countries of the Third World. And here are some of Fanon’s thoughts on the subject: “The nation is not only the condition of culture, its fruitfulness, its continuous renewal, and its deepening. It is also a necessity. It is the fight for national existence which sets culture moving and opens to it the doors

of creation...The first necessity is the re-establishment of the nation in order to give life to national culture in the strictly biological sense of the phrase”(Fanon, 1963: 244-245).

Earlier on in the text I mentioned that the journalistic work of Racin stands as a specific way of observing and interpreting history and tradition. His varied essays may not represent a stirring intellectual challenge as those by Fanon; they are more akin to a medium which served as a conduit for Racin to transmit his views on language, nationhood and culture. Through them, Racin dealt with the significant aspects of society, with the interpretation of history, with the problems of power, with the hopes for the future, since there is no letter freed from the weight of ideology, which we are not always aware of serving or partaking. Terry Eagleton is right when he says that we always label as ideological the interests of others, and never our own ones, underlining that: “I am not going to argue, then, for a ‘political criticism’ which would read literary texts in light of certain values which are related to political beliefs and actions; all criticism does this...The difference between a ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ criticism is just the difference between the prime minister and the monarch...”(Eagleton, 2008: 182).

This kind of reasoning finds its place also in the critical work produced by Racin, which

seemingly concerns itself with literary whereas in fact it deals with significant social and national questions. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Gane Todorovski (Гане Тодоровски) would describe Racin in the following way: “Racin was a force of time and nature, an affecter of change. He spoke in the name of the people and the art and the class, leaving behind him the imprints of Krale Marko’s spirit in the history of a time. He had the honor to lead a movement, to outspread his wings, and while still alive, the foresight to look to the future, a powerful legacy which lasts forever, so as to transform itself into a lasting drive towards unification, and as such to become the spiritual ground for the enlightened spaces of Freedom” (Todorovski, 1985: 242-243). To be “a force of time and nature, and an affecter of change” is the trademark of public intellectuals, like Kosta Racin himself, who through words and action had built himself into the Macedonian national history, literature and culture.

Seventy-plus years after Racin’s and Fanon’s observations, the author of *Text.Nation.Identity*, by closing the chapter on certain key issues regarding the nation and identity, as a true “post-Marxist” literary critic (with great respect towards this ideology which proclaims the dialectic materialism), concludes with the following words which most aptly reflect the thesis of this study. He states: “In this book we

showed that the idea about a political homeland was developed by the intellectuals: the politicians, the literati, the writers of history, the lawyers, the philosophers, “the promoters” of a national consciousness. It was formed in the speeches, in the theories about public law and in the theories about the past. In the songs, the political pamphlets and the national anthems, they had created the place and the role of the nation, while through the schools, the media, the newspapers and the books, this line of thinking become communal and shared by the masses. This, without question, confirms that the constituting of a nation, on the one hand, and its radical modernization, on the other, are only a couple of complementary processes” (Kramarić, 2009: 18-19; my italics).

Guided by his cosmopolitan spirit and by the intellectual observations made about the Macedonian national question, about the Macedonian literature and culture, Kosta Solev Racin builds on what his predecessors had initiated (Misirkov-Мисирков, Чуповски-Чуповски ...), leaving a permanent bequest in the national consciousness of the Macedonian intelligentsia, which, even today, fights the same battles in the field of the world’s diplomacy. Each reflection on Racin stands as a humble contribution in that direction.

(изворен научен труд)

Literature:

Eagleton, Terry. "Conclusion: Political Criticism", in: *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. into English by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963.

Kramarić, Zlatko. *Identitet. Tekst. Nacija: interpretacije crnila makedonske Povijesti*. Zagreb: Ljevak, 2009.

Racin, Kosta. *Проза и публицистика* (in English: *Prose and Journalistic Articles*). Skopje: Nasha Kniga, 1987.

Todorovski, Gane. *Со збор кон зборот* (in English: *With Words For Words*). Skopje: Nasha Kniga, 1985.

Ангелина Бановиќ-Марковска

Рацин и значењето на националната култура

Резиме: Во текстот Рацин и значењето на националната култура се занимавам со публицистиката на Рацин, заправо со неговата политичка мисла која освен социјална има и експлицитно национална и морална димензија. Ке се обидам да ја контекстуализирам во временски распон од 70 години кога светскиот поредок доживеал бурни промени, не само во политичка и идеолошка, туку и во класна и расна распределба на силите. Тоа ми допушта да направам аналогија меѓу нашиот Коста Рацин, прогресивен народен мислител, револуционер и социјалист, поет и публицист од просторите на стара Југославија, и францускиот егзистенцијален хуманист, психијатарот Франц Фанон, инспираторот на антиколонијалното движење во земјите од Третиот свет. Иако врската меѓу Рацин и Фанон може да ви се стори предимензионирана, факт е дека и двајцата се занимавале со социјални, национални и револуционерни прашања потенцирајќи го, пред сè, значењето на националната култура во услови на политичко, економско и духовно ропство. Како приврзаници на социјалните идеи и марксистичката идеологија, како револуционери и борци за национални и човекови права кои проживеале бурни години – и двајцата покажале висока свест за важноста на националната култура кај поробените/колонизирани народи, со таа разлика што кај Рацин акцентот е ставен на класно-националниот, а кај Фанон на расно-националниот аспект.

Клучни зборови: *Рацин, Фанон, национална култура, национализам, национална свест, деколонизација*