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Challenges of a New Europe – Chances in Crisis

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*Cultural Violence as an Obstacle to Social Inclusion in the Western  
Balkans*

*- Ethnic Stereotypes and National Myths –*

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## Introduction

The main goal of this paper is to show that social inclusion/exclusion can be discussed using different theories, categories and terms of Peace Studies discipline. General hypothesis is that social exclusion is a form of social and political conflict that can be solved by Peace Studies' methods and techniques, such as reconciliation and conflict transformation.

The Western Balkans is a post-conflict area with very strong lines of social division and high conflict potential. Peace building processes that began at the end of the nineties are probably the most sensible approach to these social problems.

We will start with the definition of peace, and then we will list and describe three basic types of violence. In the third part, we will address ethnic stereotypes and national myths, and in fourth, we will try to explain relation between social exclusion, social crisis and cultural violence (stereotypes and myths). In the last part, we will suggest ways of dealing with the social exclusion.

## Two Faces of Peace

Today, most of people agree that one of the basic ideals and values of European civilization is (or should be) peace. Without peace, freedom, tolerance, democracy, or any other principle or value that modern Europe is based upon would be impossible. The whole concept of European integration is actually a concept of peace (it all began with coal and steel, as the most important war resources). However, should we take peace for granted? After all, what is peace? How do we define it?

For instance, theorists and practitioners of Realpolitik and power politics usually define peace as balance of power of weapons (or balance of terror), which is on the whole always measured in destructive terms: the quantity, types and technical quality of the weapons, and military expenditures, etc. The classical problem of these paradigms is that definition of this equilibrium is always subjective - when A thinks that there is a balance, B normally feels that A

is superior, and vice versa (Oberg 2006). During the Cold War both NATO and Warsaw Pact knew that if one side fired nuclear missiles to the other, the latter, after this first strike, would have enough nuclear weapons stockpiled in its silos, on its aircraft and submarines for a retaliation strike. Therefore, for political realists nuclear weapons were (and still are) important guarantee of peace.

Peace theorists (Galtung, Burton, Oberg, etc.) completely decline realist peace theory as subjective and shallow and propose two approaches to peace: positive and negative.

Positive peace implies the satisfaction of basic human needs (survival, prosperity, freedom and identity), substitution of repression and exploitation with freedom and equality, and intensification of social dialogue, participation, integration and solidarity, etc. (Galtung 2009). Definition of negative peace is widespread and well known: peace is the absence of violence of any kind. Negative peace is a precondition and a first step towards positive peace. However, in order to understand the definition of negative peace, we must first define violence.

## Three Types of Violence

Violence is not only aggressive and coercive behavior. It is a very complex social phenomenon and it can take many forms. Johan Galtung, one of the founders of the modern Peace Studies, has developed theory about three basic types of violence: direct, structural and cultural.

Direct violence is visible as behavior, deliberate, performed by individuals acting alone or in groups. It can be physical and verbal, performed by body, mind or spirit. In its classic (physical) form, it involves the use of physical force, like killing or torture, rape and sexual assault, and beatings. Verbal violence, such as humiliation or put downs, is also becoming more widely recognised as violence.

Galtung describes direct violence as the 'avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or life which makes it impossible or difficult for people to meet their needs or achieve their full potential. Threat to use force is also recognised as violence.' (Galtung 2009: 54)

Nevertheless, human action does not come out of nowhere, there are roots. Two roots are indicated: a culture of violence (heroic, patriotic, patriarchic, etc.), and a social structure itself that is violent by being too repressive, exploitative or alienating.

Structural (indirect) violence can be political (oppressive) and economic (exploitative); it is supported by socially structural penetration, segmentation, fragmentation and marginalization. Besides that, there is also a horizontal structural violence. This form of violence is a consequence of excessively tight or loose social correlation (very hierarchical or horizontal social structures).

Indirect violence exists when some groups, classes, genders, nationalities, etc. are assumed to have, and in fact do have, more access to goods, resources, and opportunities than other groups, classes, genders, nationalities, etc, and this unequal advantage is built into the very social, political and economic systems that govern societies, states and the world (Galtung 2009). These tendencies may be overt such as Apartheid or more subtle such as traditions or tendency to award some group's privileges over another.

Cultural violence does not kill or maim like direct violence, but it is in the very basis of it. Galtung defines cultural violence as any aspect of a culture that we use to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form (Galtung 2009). Parts of our religions, sciences, arts, languages ("hate speech") that glorify, record and report wars and military victories rather than people's nonviolent rebellions or the triumphs of connections and collaboration are cultural violence. The most important agents of cultural violence are schools, universities and media.

## Ethnic Stereotypes and National Myths

Significant parts of every culture are stereotypes and myths. They are attitudes and beliefs that we have been taught since childhood and that surround us in daily life. When they become discriminative and intolerant towards other social groups, they actually become culturally violent.

As social psychologist Henri Tajfel argues, stereotypes are over-simplified mental images of some category of person, institution or event. Their main function is to simplify or systematize the abundance and complexity of the information received from its environment by the human organism. However, stereotypes can become social if large number of people within social

groups or entities share them (Tajfel 1981). Ethnic stereotypes are over-simplified mental images of different ethnic groups and their members. They are commonly, but not necessarily, accompanied by prejudice, i.e. by a favorable or unfavorable predisposition towards any of the category in question.

Works and researches of various social psychologists, like Rothbart, Hamilton and Gifford, draw our attention to one particular aspect of the functions of social stereotyping. This has to do with the subjective inflation or exaggeration of the significance of social events that either occur or co-occur with low frequency in the social environment (this also refers to the national myths).

Rothbart's research is concerned with the fact that impressions of social groups are affected by the way in which data on some individual members of these groups are organized in memory. Extreme events or extreme individuals are more accessible to memory retrieval than are more average instances. Tversky and Kahnemann also argue that this affects judgment in the sense that those instances from a class of events that are most available for retrieval serve as a cue for judging the frequency general occurrence in the class as a whole. In this way, negative behavior of members of minority groups is likely to be over-represented in memory and judgment.

In their research report, Hamilton and Gifford wrote about 'illusory correlations'. Later that concept was introduced by Chapman who defined it as 'the report by observers of a correlation between two classes of events which, in reality, a) are not correlated, or b) are correlated to a lesser extent than reported' (Tajfel 1981). Experiments (conducted by Hamilton and Gifford) showed that this kind of processing of information directly relates to the formation of stereotypes about minority groups.

Main social functions of ethnic stereotypes are: first, their role in contributing to the creation and maintenance of group ideologies explaining or justifying a variety of social actions (especially violent ones); second, their role in helping to preserve or create positively valued differentiations of a group from other social groups (Tajfel 1981; Schneider 2004).

Many of the social categorizations and stereotypes that apply to objects in the physical environment are neutral; they are not associated with the 'good'/'bad' categories. However,

usually that is not the case with the categorizations about social groups. It is very important to distinguish between 'neutral' and 'value-loaded' classifications and categorizations.

A neutral social categorization means that certain stereotyped traits may apply to certain social groups ('Montenegrins are tall') without having positive or negative value connotation. However, the story is very different when social categorization is endowed with a strong value differential. For example, 'Albanians/Serbs are murderers' is a very negative social categorization and it can be used as a legitimization for discrimination and even violent actions against members of Albanian/Serbian ethnic group.

The maintenance of a system of social categories acquires an importance that goes far beyond the simple function of ordering and systematizing the environment. Social categorization represents a powerful protection of the existing system of social values, which can be very discriminative against other social groups ('outsiders').

Closely related to ethnic stereotypes are national myths. National myths (as a form of social myth) explain to us why we are what we are and why are we where we are. They provide us with our common (national) goals, the causes of conflicts and our successes and rationalization of our failures. For example, both Albanian and Serbian founding myths include Kosovo, but exclude Serbs/Albanians.

National myths give us our joint codes for communication and coordination of group activities, define our inter-group boundaries, provide a demarcation line between us and them, and what is more important they justify existence of these immutable and impermeable lines of separation. At last, they offer us formulas for conflict resolution (violent or nonviolent).

We all want to know where we come from. However, since our earliest beginnings cover mist of prehistory, we have created myths about our ancestors, which are not historical, but help us to explain our current attitudes about our environment, neighbors and customs. The most important national myths are myth of the chosen people, myth of the promised land, myth of the enemy, myth of death and myth of the savior. Through the national cultures these myths were (and are) widespread and genuinely accepted.

## The Western Balkans Crisis

Population of the Western Balkans was, in the years of the general crisis that have occurred after the collapse of the communism, roughly manipulated by their national(ist) elites. This manipulation was based on more or less imaginative stories from the 'glorious' past that describe events, which have never occurred, known as (national) myths.

In time of crisis it was (and is) very difficult for people to think and act rationally. It is much easier to believe in stereotypes and myths served by political and social elites and media. During the 1990s, in the Balkans we had a real symbolic battleground that existed along with the real battleground. Most of Albanians, Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs perceived each other as intruders and outsiders. In a short time, this culturally based social exclusion escalated into open (violent) conflict.

All residents of the Western Balkans were witnesses of brutal and arbitrary changes of national collective memory carried out by the political elites. Goals of this 'new history' were ethnic demarcation and promotion of own nation as culturally superior. Two largest ex-Yugoslav nations, both Serbs and Croats, have myths about their historical sacrifices and for centuries long missions as defenders of European civilization (myth of chosen people).

A common myth among Serbs is that they were defenders of the whole Christian Europe (against Ottomans) for many centuries. In addition, there are a few myths about Croats. First, they are seen as Catholic Serbs (renegades of the nation and fate). The whole 'catholization' is just part of anti-Orthodox and anti-Serb campaign conducted by the West. Second, many Serbs equal Croats with Ustashas (Croatian World War II Nazi organization). This is so called Jasenovac myth (combination of two myths, myth of the death and myth of the enemy). Jasenovac is the name of the most infamous World War II death camp in Croatia. During the 1941-1944 period, Ustashas executed many Serbs, Jews, Romas and other 'enemies' of the Nazi regime.<sup>1</sup>

On the other side, Croat myths are also as discriminative as Serbian. For instance, there is a popular belief among Croats that they are not of a Slavic origin and that they do not belong to the barbaric Balkans. Even some Croatian historians claim that they (Croats) are Aryans whose origins are in today's Afghanistan and Iran ('the cradle of Indo-European civilization').

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<sup>1</sup> An accurate number of victims might not ever be known but current estimates range between 49,600 to 600,000.

According to that, Slavs (especially Serbs) are inferior to them. Croats also have a myth of chosen people, as defenders of Europe.

Both Serbian and Croatian myths perceive Bosniaks (Moslems) as Islamized Serbs/Croats and decline their premise that they are indigenous Balkan nation. Conversely, Bosniak founding myth determines Serbs and Croats as intruders and conquerors.

There is also a 'mythical conflict' between Serbs and Albanians from Kosovo. Serbs claim that Kosovo is a territory where they established their first state and church (historical facts confirm that). For Serbs Kosovo is a 'holy land', a symbol of faith, unity, sacrifice and freedom; and Albanians are only colonists that came with the Ottomans. On the contrary, Albanian national myth presents Serbs as newcomers and claims that Kosovo has been an Albanian territory for centuries. Kosovo myth<sup>2</sup> is the central myth in Serbian-Albanian and Serbian-Bosniak relations (relations between Serbs and Moslems, generally).

We may say that stereotypes are fairy tales with simplified roles: good characters are on the one side, and evil are on the other. Balkan nations have shared their roles so that the

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<sup>2</sup> On 28 June 1389, Kosovo was the scene of battle between the Turks who were penetrating the Balkans, and Serbs, whose medieval state was located there. According to all evidences, the battle was very violent, and both rulers perished in it, as well as many soldiers on both sides. During the history, Serbs were considered as having lost the battle. It is now believed that it was a tie, since both armies withdrew after the battle. However, there are those who claim that the victory was on the Serbian side, because the Turks did not completely conquer Serbia until 70 years later (in 1459). Whatever the outcome was, it had significant consequences for incomparably weaker Serbia, because the loss of an entire generation and economic collapse marked the decline of the Serbian state, its gradual crumbling, fragmentation and ultimate breakdown.

The death of the last great Serbian ruler there and the fact that after that battle the Serbian state started to collapse, were conducive for the emergence of the cult. Thus, over the centuries Kosovo became synonymous with the state's downfall and subsequent slavery. Through chronicles, notes and oral tradition the legend gradually evolved, over time greatly exceeded the significance of the battle and its consequences and spread throughout the territories populated by Serbs, and even among some neighboring nations. At the time of national romanticism this long-developed legend became an important element of ethnic feeling, something that united Serbs, and at the same time distinguished them from other peoples and played an important role in the process of their integration. The presence of this legend was particularly conspicuous during the 19th century, in the process of emergence of the new Serbian state, when it acted as factor of political and cultural homogenization.

difference between ‘good and bad guys’ is just like in the fairy tales: members of our nation are good, and the others are evil.

According to different psychological researches of the six nations in the Western Balkan region, the stereotypes of Serbs towards Albanians are the most negative. According to Serbian examinees, Albanians are uncivilized, uncultured and dishonest. On the other hand, in a study from Kosovo where they queried Albanians, Serbs were described as people that ‘hate other nations’, as insidious and ‘jostlers’. The Serbs, in contrast, described themselves as friendly, proud, emotional and brave. Other nations also consider themselves superlative. This social psychological phenomenon is known as ethnic narcissism.

Ethnic stereotypes are generally based on the division to civilized nations on, the one side and barbaric and primitive, on the other. Even so, virtually everyone is trying to prove him or herself that belong to the civilized world, and those others to uncivilized. Breakup of Yugoslavia, during the nineties, revived stereotypical division. In the struggle for their representation all, the nations of the former Yugoslavia used the symbolic geography, based on Western European Orientalism, which assumed superiority of the Western culture to the Eastern (Popadic and Biro 1998). Every ethnic group of the former Yugoslavia claimed that is superior to its neighbors in the south and east. They all proclaimed themselves the Europeans, but they denied that right to their neighbors. Slovenes therefore suggested (in 1994), ‘the resolution of the Central European character of Slovenia, while for all variations of Croatian nationalism in the nineties the Balkans was the supreme negative ‘other’’ (Popadic and Biro 1998). Or as Croatian philosopher Boris Buden wrote, Croatian nationalism was anti-essentialist: ‘We are Croats, because we are not Serbs, and because we do not belong to the Balkans.’ (Popadic and Biro 1998)

## Conclusions

Ethnic stereotypes, prejudices and myths frequently lead to ghettoization and exclusion of different social groups. Furthermore, they are probably the most important forms of social exclusion because they legitimize and give ground to all other forms. Some form of violence always follows social exclusion: direct, structural or cultural.

As Galtung argues, solution to this problem, in principle, is a promotion of positive peace, which implies a change of legitimization of violence with a legitimization of peace; in religion, law and ideology; in language; in art and science; in schools, universities and media; construction of culture of (positive) peace. In inner sphere, in every one of us, this means openness (without suppression) to a variety of human preferences and abilities (Galtung 2009: 76).

In the reality of post-conflict Western Balkan societies, this means reconciliation between some ethnic groups and transformation of existing latent interethnic conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

Conflicts have always existed in human societies, but so have reconciliations. In every society, particular ways of settling have been developed and they often include processes for reconciling the antagonists and restoring social relations. These developments persist as cultural traditions and often include rituals to overcome the recurrent raptures in relationships (Kriesberg 2004).

There are four primary dimensions of reconciliation and conflict transformation – truth, justice, regard and security – and the actions that move antagonistic parties toward their reconciliation along these dimensions (Kriesberg 2004).

Truths are an important part of reconciliation, since people on different sides of a conflict or an oppressive relationship have different experiences and understandings. Many people on each side generally hold beliefs that attribute blame to the members of the opposite side for injustice they have suffered. These partial truths generally justify anger, hostility and vengeance. This produces resentments that fuel new eruptions of conflict. In order to prevent this states and civil societies can undertake different actions, such as commissions of inquiry, truth commissions, special tribunals, citizen peace initiatives, curricular materials for primary and secondary schools (that are not based on the ‘truth’ of only one side), etc.

Some people stress the attainment as the primary component of reconciliation. Indeed, the sense that they are suffering injustice is often what drives the parties in a conflict. Reducing the sense of injustice is essential to removing the basis for many conflicts. However, justice is

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<sup>3</sup> Social exclusion itself is a form of social and political conflict. It implies only cultural and structural violence than it is a latent conflict. When exclusion becomes directly violent than we have a real, explicit conflict.

not an easily agreed-upon matter; sides are likely to disagree about who is acting unjustly towards whom. Justice can be understood to mean punishment of those who had previously inflicted sufferings and as correcting the unjust conditions (discriminatory and oppressive practices). There are three groups of activities that can enhance justice: criminal trials, restitution and compensation and policies and institutional arrangements that will end and prevent future injustice.

Louis Kriesberg uses the term regard to include the expressions that recognize the humanity and identity of the other people (Kriesberg 2004). Activities promoting regard include making apologies and expressing forgiveness, respectful recognition of the other, friendly social interaction, dialogue groups, informal interactions and intimate relations.

Security in the context of reconciliation and conflict transformation implies safety from physical injury by the other side, but also the absence of structural violence and the attainment of positive peace. Confidence-building measures, cultural exchanges, economic activities and systems of power sharing are just the examples of activities that promote social security.

Use of methods of the reconciliation and conflict transformation is limited to the post-conflict societies, but with minor changes, these methods can be applied to every society; because all societies have their conflicts, latent or manifest.

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