INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMATIC SECTION

THE "WESTERN BALKANS": LEGACIES, PRACTICES, POLICIES AND IDENTITY STRATEGIES VIS-À-VIS THE PROCESS OF NATION BUILDING

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The thematic section *The "Western Balkans": Legacies, Practices, Policies and Identity Strategies vis-à-vis the Process of Nation Building* resulted from a need of researchers from the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts who are participating in the project *The Impact of Inter-Ethnic and Inter-Religious Factors on Peace and Stability in the Western Balkans* (target research programme "Science for Peace and Security 2006–2010") to articulate basic theoretical postulates that enable consistent and ideologically unburdened reflection on processes that are going on the in the "Western Balkans".[2]

The dissolution of Social Federative Yugoslavia and the emerging of new borders, new nation states and new national identities have intensified discourses of Balkanism (Todorova 1997) that maintain an image of the Balkans as a problematic, conflict-ridden, underdeveloped region populated by ethnic groups whose behaviour is motivated by mutual hatred and irrationality. The process of nation building, which lies at the root of developments in the Balkans in recent decades, is however essentially a Western European phenomenon. As Todorova (1997) argues, what happened in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s is not an expression of some violent Balkan essence, but actually the end of the Balkans (in the sense of its Ottoman legacy) and the final Europeization of this region.

The characteristics of the emerging, restructuring, and negotiation of national identities in the Balkans are to be explained with help of the historical legacies shared by

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[2] In the political discourse, especially referring to the EU enlargement processes, the Western Balkans most often includes Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia (and Kosovo), Montenegro, and Albania – i.e. the countries that are still not members of the European Union and are at different stages of accession to the EU. I accept this term only technically and thus use it within quotation marks to indicate that it is problematic from a historical and anthropological point of view, since it is characterized by an empty, or negative content: it tells what the countries included are not – namely EU members – and not what they have in common, and thus disregards categories of common historical legacy, which, following Todorova (2004, 2005) I consider crucially important in dealing with national and cultural identities in the Balkans and elsewhere.

the Balkan societies – the Ottoman legacy, the Yugoslav legacy for the former Yugoslav republics and the Socialist legacy that includes Albania as a member of this group.

The nature of the supra-national Yugoslav identity and the dynamic of the national and the supra-national in the former Yugoslavia is discussed in the article by Hannes Grandits, who chooses a historical perspective to explain the reasons for nation-building activities during socialism in Yugoslavia, and shows that despite the presence of the supra-national ideology of Yugoslavism and the rhetoric to the "class question", in which ethnic issues were supposed to become obsolete, national identities were in some cases established (Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia), and in others supported (Montenegro) and strengthened (Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia) under the "roof" of Yugoslav federation. Comparing the Yugoslav and Soviet socialist systems, Grandits shows that rather than being resolved politically, "national problems" were simply transformed into new frameworks. Surprisingly enough, Yugoslavism as an ideology does not represent a constant in Yugoslav socialism: while supported in the 1950s by the high ranking politicians, this trend was replaced by the "nationalization" of the six constituent republics in 1960s. This process of nationalization was intensified by the 1974 constitution, when competences were transferred from the federal level to the level of the republics and autonomous provinces. We may argue that this process took its final shape with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, through ethnic conflicts that led to emergence of new states, new borders, new national languages and parallel processes of ethnic homogenization and cultural heterogenization that were conducted through voluntary and forced migrations that became a "trademark" for the demographic situation in the former Yugoslav lands.[3]

Most of articles in this thematic section deal with Kosovo – a fact that comes as no surprise, not only because Kosovo is a hot issue on the political agenda right now, and an emerging state where nation-building activities and policies may be observed "in vivo", but also because of the complex and multidirectional ethnic processes that took part in this region. Although the perception of the situation in Kosovo has for a long time been reduced to a conflict between Serbs and Albanians, the region is characterized by a multitude and heterogeneity of ethnic and cultural identities. As argued by Ger Duijzings, who did extensive research in Kosovo, during the last few decades the society has experienced "long-term shifts in identification processes, from predominantly localized religious identities towards predominantly ethnic and national identities, as well as the shift from cultural complexity towards homogenization and the emerging of clear boundaries" (Dejzings 2005: 6). These shifts are intrinsically related to the nation-building process.

Mojca Vah addresses another, recently introduced model of nation-building in the Balkans – the one conducted by the international community through its institutions, and by applying models of governance and policies without paying considerable respect to local circumstances, relations and existing practices. Vah provides a broader context

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[3] The complementary processes of ethnic homogenization and cultural heterogenization related to forced migrations in the former Yugoslavia are discussed in detail in Čapo-Žmegač (2002) and Petrović (2006).

for the activities of the international community in areas with ethnic conflicts, pointing out insufficiencies of proposed measures in the most recent case – the UNMIK mission in Kosovo conducted in cooperation with the EU, OSCE and KFOR.

Since Barth's seminal work (1969), students of ethnicity and nationalism have been aware of the importance of boundaries and delimiting *us* from *others* for the formation of national and other collective identities. These boundaries and mechanisms of delimitation are, however, by no means stable and unchangeable. We may thus speak of a gradation of otherness as an important means of negotiation of one's local and/or national identity. Discourses on otherness are the focus of the articles by Tanja Petrović and Biljana Sikimić.

Petrović's article deals with those groups in Kosovo which do not fit into the two available nation-building models – the Serbian and the Albanian – and outlines the dynamics between the discourses articulated by the Serbian political and academic elites engaged in the nation-building and the identity strategies of the members of these communities. The article by Biljana Sikimić provides a complementary picture, offering an analysis of images of the other formed at the local level, by Serbs living in the Prilužje enclave. She illustrates the importance of traditional culture in understanding identity processes and shows that the gradation of otherness is present not only in the discourse that ideologically shapes national identity, but also in the domain of traditional culture, on the local and everyday level. Here, this gradation underlies the logic of the functioning of traditional culture and in social norms (such as role of the other in traditional rituals and customs, presence/absence of intermarriage etc.).

The articles by Petrović and Sikimić both underscore the importance of historical memory, on the national and local level respectively. While on the local level the historical memory of the Battle of Kosovo is used to explain relations between "the clans" and justify the cultural patterns used (restriction of intermarriage etc.), transferred to the national level, the same historical memory becomes the foundation of the Serbian national identity (cf. Bakić-Hayden 2004; Dejzings 2005) and functions as "a principal tool of explanation, legitimation and mobilisation" in the nation-building process (Todorova 2004: 3). This parallel functioning of the same historical memory by no means implies that the nation-building process does not affect local relations and realities: it will suffice to mention the demographic situation in Kosovo, which changed dramatically in 1980s and 1990s. Ethnic violence not only caused forced movements of Serbs and Albanians, but numerous ethnic groups left the region, being unable to identify with the available national identities at the moment the pressure to identify nationally was high. A curious example of this kind is the resettlement of the Circassians (*Čerkezi*) from Kosovo to the Russian republic of Adigya (Sikimić 2004). The resettlement of Croats from the town of Janjevo (*Janjevci*) and from Letnica in the early 1990s is related both to the processes of ethnic homogenization in Kosovo and to ethnic processes in the broader framework of the former Yugoslavia: the *Janjevci* were settled in Zagreb and the inhabitants of Letnica moved into houses left by Serbs in Slavonia (cf. Šiljković and Glamuzina 2004; Dejzings 2005). A significant number of Roma and the Gorani also left Kosovo during the last two decades. Such drastic reduction of ethnic diversity in Kosovo has had an important

impact on people's everyday lives and practices in the sphere of the traditional culture. The ethnic stratification of Kosovo was followed by professional stratification: members of particular ethnic groups were assigned particular trades (the *Janjevci* were craftsmen producing jewellery, the inhabitants of Sirinića Župa were builders etc.). Members of other ethnic groups were important agents in religious rituals, and the religious life in Kosovo was characterized by a high extent of mutuality and interaction: people belonging to different religions visited both Orthodox and Catholic sanctuaries and worshiped the same saints (Dejzings 2005). Significant changes on the local level also appear as a consequence of ignoring local relations and cultural patterns in the process of nation-building imposed "from above" by the institutions of the international community, as Mojca Vah points out in her article.

Nataša Gregorič-Bon also examines the dialectics between various levels of identification. In her article, the relationship between local and national is complicated by two additional levels – regional and supra-national, the latter relating to the context of the EU. The inhabitants of the village of Dhërmi/Drimades in southern Albania articulate local discourses in which they map their space in relation to regional, national and supra-national frameworks. The constant renegotiation of social and spatial boundaries is to a certain extent conditioned by the high mobility of the villagers (many of them temporarily work in Greece and elsewhere in the EU) and double – Greek and Albanian – tools of identity management which they have at their disposal (such as Special Identity Cards of Greek origin that enable them unrestricted movement in the EU countries, Greek pensions and health insurance).

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