

SERBS, ALBANIANS, AND THOSE IN BETWEEN: THE GRADATION OF OTHERNESS AND IDENTITY MANAGEMENT IN THE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Serbs, Albanians, and Those In Between: The Gradation of Otherness and Identity Management in the Nation-Building Process

The article outlines the attitude of the Serbian nation, whose identity is to a great extent built on the belonging to Orthodox Christendom, towards Muslims – both towards Albanians, who are perceived as “undeniably other,” as well as those who are perceived as “less other,” such as the Gorani in Kosovo and the Bosniaks in the region of Sandžak and Kosovo. While this gradation is based on two relatively stable (at least at the synchronic level) categories – language and religion, the ethnic/national category often reveals itself as subject to negotiation, change, convergence and divergence. These processes engage both majority communities – i.e. those engaged in the nation-building process, and minority communities, i.e. those who negotiate their own status and position in this process driven by others.

KEYWORDS: Serbs, Albanians, Muslims, Other, identity, nation-building

IZVLEČEK

Srbi, Albanci in tisti vmes: Stopnjevanje drugosti in identitetne strategije v kontekstu procesa oblikovanja nacij

Prispevek opisuje odnos Srbov, katerih nacionalna identiteta v veliki meri temelji na pripadnosti pravoslavnem krščanstvu, do muslimanov – tako Albancev, ki se v srbskem nacionalnem imaginariju doživljajo kot »nedvomni drugi«, kot do Gorancev in Bošnjakov – skupin, katerih »drugost« je manjše stopnje. Stopnjevanje »drugosti« temelji na dveh (vsaj na sinhroni ravni) stabilnih kategorijah, jeziku in veri, medtem ko je kategorija etničnega/nacionalnega pogosto podvržena procesom zagovarjanja, spreminjanja, konvergence/divergence. Omenjenih procesov so deležne tako večinske skupnosti, ki so nosilke procesa oblikovanja nacij, kot manjšinske skupnosti, ki so v procesu oblikovanja nacij prisiljene zagovarjati lastne interese.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Srbi, Albanci, muslimani, »drugi«, identiteta, oblikovanje nacij

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INTRODUCTION: THE GRADATION OF *OTHERNESS* AND THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITY IN THE BALKANS

The concepts of the *Other* and *otherness* have become a constant in anthropological discourse during recent decades. They help to understand processes of negotiation of collective identities and roles and statuses ascribed to or taken by various social groups in the contemporary world. Extensive research conducted on discourses through which the other is imagined and perceived in Western European societies² teaches us that imagining the other tells much more about the one who imagines than about the imagined. This research has shaped two related and to a great extent complementary paradigms: *orientalism* and *balkanism*. The former was developed by Edward Said (1996) and refers to “pervasive patterns of representation of cultures and societies that privilege a self-confidently ‘progressive,’ ‘modern’ and ‘rational’ Europe over ‘the putatively ‘stagnant,’ ‘backward,’ ‘traditional’ and ‘mystical’ societies of the Orient (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992: 1; Said 1996). Said stresses that “for Europe, the Orient is one of deepest and most present images of the Other,” which “helped defining Europe (i.e. the West) as an image, an idea, a person, or an experience, which is clearly different from it” (Said 1996: 12). According to Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden (1992: 2), “in the post-colonial world, the language of orientalism still maintains its rhetorical force as a powerful set of categories with which to stigmatize societies that are not ‘western-style’ democracies.” *Balkanism*, on the other hand, is a concept developed by Maria Todorova, which differs from orientalism principally in the fact that the Orient is the indisputable Other, while “the Balkans are Europe, are part of Europe, although, admittedly, for the past several centuries its provincial part or periphery (...) Unlike orientalism, which is a discourse about an imputed opposition, balkanism is a discourse about imputed ambiguity” (Todorova 1997: 17).

Discourses on the other and images of the other are universal mechanisms for negotiation of collective identities. We also find these mechanisms within the European periphery, where every society construes its “other,” and this reproduction of otherness is, as a rule, shifted towards the east. This reproduction and gradation of “Orient” was labelled *nesting orientalism* by Milica Bakić-Hayden in her seminal article (Bakić-Hayden 1995). It is a pattern in which “Asia is more ‘East’ or ‘other’ than eastern Europe; within eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most ‘eastern’; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies” (ibid.: 918).

In this article I will try to show the gradation of *otherness* which is present within a single Balkan society, namely in the Republic of Serbia, and describe the dynamics of the identity politics that is influenced by this gradation. The conditions for such internal gradation are not so much geographical (based on an east – west dichotomy), but have to do with the Ottoman historical legacy which is shared by Balkan societies. Bakić-Hayden points out the fact that “many Balkan self-identities have been constructed in direct op-

² Larry Wolff 1992, 1994, Maria Todorova 1997, Vesna Goldsworthy 1998, Ania Loomba 1998.

position to an actual oriental other, i.e. Ottoman Turks who conquered the region from the east.” These self-identities however had to deal with another *other* or *half-other*, who resulted from the long lasting presence of Ottomans in the area, that is, the parts of Balkan population that have been subject to Islamization. I will outline the attitude of the Serbian nation, whose identity is to a great extent built on belonging to Orthodox Christendom, towards Muslims in Serbia – both those perceived as “undeniably other” as well as those who are perceived as “less other,” such as the Gorani in Kosovo and Bosniaks in the Sandžak region and Kosovo. While this gradation is based on two relatively stable (at least at the synchronic level) categories – language and religion, the ethnic/national category often reveals itself as a subject to negotiation, change, convergence and divergence. These processes engage both majority communities – i.e. those engaged in the nation-building process, and minority communities, i.e. those who negotiate their own status and position in this process driven by others. The actions of both are deeply related and may be understood only if observed in a broader context.

THE MUSLIM *OTHER* AND COLLECTIVE IMAGERY IN EUROPE AND IN THE BALKANS

It is well known that the construction of European identity is to a great extent based on the opposition between Christendom and Islam. As Tomaž Mastnak (1997) argues, a strong common consciousness of “Europeanism” did not exist before the 15th century, when “‘Europe’ started to gain more articulated emotional connotations and mobilization power, and became a notion that started functioning as a holder of common political consciousness of the West” (Mastnak 1997: 16). Europe was essentially construed as an “active community of Christians,” and such perception of Europe was most clearly shaped after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 (ibid: 17). “Europe as a political community was shaped in a holy war against ‘Turks,’ who became a symbolic representation of hostile Muslims during the Renaissance” (ibid.: 24). Defending Europe from Muslims is *locus communis* in European historiographical and political discourses. *Antemurale Christianitatis* is also a metaphor that serves as a discursive means for proving the Europeanness of numerous nations on the continent. It is particularly pervasive in the Balkans, which are traditionally perceived as the European periphery, European non-Europe, the European internal Other (Todorova 1997; Hammond 2004, 2006; Mastnak 1997). This metaphor was extensively employed in the process of redefinition of national identities in the former Yugoslav lands in the late 1980s and 1990s: as Slavoj Žižek (1993: 21) points out, in the former Yugoslavia “every participant ... tries to legitimize their place ‘inside’ by presenting themselves as the last bastion of European civilization ... in the face of Oriental barbarism.” At his Gazimestan speech on the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo on June 28, 1989, the then president of Serbia Slobodan Milošević stressed that

Six centuries ago, Serbia heroically defended itself on the Kosovo Plain, but it also

defended Europe. Serbia was at that time the bastion that defended European culture, religion, and European society in general.

The same metaphor was repeated several years later, in the 1990s, but then it referred to the contemporary situation in Europe and to a need to protect the continent from an “Islamic onslaught”. Dragoš Kalajić, a Serbian journalist and painter stated that

The fact of Islamic onslaught on Western Europe by peaceful means, by means of mass immigrations, threatening to turn European nations into national minorities within their own states, only accentuates the importance of the Serbian struggle for the overall defense of Europe, European culture and civilization (Kalajić 1994, as cited in Bakić-Hayden 1995: 925).

Although this statement strongly resembles the discourse of western European extreme nationalist parties’ representatives, it actually refers to a different context, since in Serbia and elsewhere in the Balkans, the Muslim presence is of a different nature. Reference to the western European situation is an attempt to justify ethnic violence towards Muslims that hides behind the formulation “the Serbian struggle”. A similar borrowing of “more universal” discursive patterns is observable in the discourse of terrorism with reference to Muslims in Serbia, particularly Albanians in Kosovo and Bosniaks in Sandžak. In the last few years, the Serbian media have applied such discourse when writing about the Vehabi in Sandžak. This discourse shares many similarities with Western media reporting and political discourse on Islamist fanaticism and threats of Muslim terrorism. (cf. Karanović 2007)

In line with Münkler (1991), Mastnak (1997: 15) points out that “Europe is an exclusivist notion that includes only by excluding”. Due to the long-lasting Ottoman presence in the Balkans, the inclusion/exclusion pattern based on the Christian/Muslim opposition was not unambiguous as it was for a large part of the rest of Europe. The Ottoman legacy caused non-correspondence of ethnic, linguistic and confessional categories, to which Western European travellers, journalists and administrators reacted with confusion and disturbance. Irvine and Gal (1999) give several illustrations of such attitudes: German geographer Karl von Östreich wrote about the Balkans in the beginning of the 20th century:

Instead of racially pure Turks and Albanians we find people who are racially mixed ... and whose multilingualism misleads us about their origins, so that they can be counted sometimes as Greeks, sometimes as Bulgarians, sometimes as Wallachians. (Von Östreich 1905: 270)

Another traveller from the same period, Lucy Garnett, describes the Balkan “confusion” in the following way: in Macedonia, she notes,

a Greek-speaking community may prove to be Wallachian, Albanian or even Bul-

garian, and the inhabitants of a Slav-speaking village may claim to be of Greek origin... All these various ethnical elements are, in many country districts of Macedonia, as well as in the towns, so helplessly fused and intermingled. (Garnett 1904: 234–235)

Ehrenpreis (1928: 12) describes “the Levantine type in the areas between the Balkans and Mediterranean” as “psychologically and socially, truly a ‘wavering form,’ a composite of Easterner and Westerner, multilingual ... superficial and unreliable.” Such a medley of people, religions, and languages became a “trademark” of the Balkans, and was at the same time seen as the most salient difference between this region and rest of Europe, ethnically relatively homogenous, where “the ideal political order of one nation, speaking one language, ruled by one state, within one bounded territory” was the prerequisite for achieving the highest European values of technological progress, economic development, and civilization (Irvine and Gal 1999: 63).

The process of Islamization was the most intensive in those parts of the Balkans that were peripheral and in contact zones between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, i.e. in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, parts of Macedonia and Albania. While in areas with weak church structures such as Bosnia conversion to Islam was an easier and to a relatively high degree voluntary process, in Kosovo the urban population was first subject to conversion, while the rural population was subject to Islamization as late as the 17th century, and this wave of Islamization was forced.³ This simultaneously caused the emergence of religious syncretism and heterodoxy to a much greater extent than in Bosnia. It took several generations for families to fully adopt Islam in Kosovo and Albania, while in certain areas there are still ambiguous religious identities (Dejzings 2005: 29–31; cf. Kressing 2007). As Zirojević (2003: 91) points out, “the Islamization process of the Balkan domicile population as well as the domicile population of other parts of the Ottoman Empire figured to be neither prompt nor plain.” As a consequence, a plethora of ‘intermediary’ and unstable religious identities emerged, known in literature as CryptoChristianity, bireligiousness, and “unfinished Islamization”. While Zirojević (2003) provides an overview of socio-cultural processes that indicate religious syncretism in the South Slavic lands, Dejzings (2005) points to a particular Albanian case of crypto-Catholicism in the village of Stubla in Kosovo. In the winter of 1845-1846, the local Ottoman pasha initiated the deportation of 25 Albanian families from this village to Anatolia because they publicly denied Islam and (re)converted to their “original” and “authentic” religion, Catholicism (Dejzings 2005: 122).⁴

³ Todorova (2004: 141–142) stresses that while “it is widely accepted nowadays that the vast majority of the Balkan conversions were individual ones, (...) this particular point, whether the conversions were the result of a centrally planned and systematically implemented policy of assimilations or, on the other hand, whether they were an individually initiated policy of social, political and religious adaptation, was itself the object of internal debates within Bulgarian historiography”.

⁴ For more about Islamization in the Balkans cf. also Vryonis 1972; Barjaktarović 1950; Zirojević 2001; Lopasic 1994; Todorova 2004.

While individual conversions to Islam were made with the intention of full “integration into the new religious and social milieu” and thus were accompanied with a subsequent loss of the native language,

the exceptions were the cases where these conversions occurred en masse in larger or smaller groups, irrespective of whether they were voluntary or enforced: Bosnia, Albania, the Rhodopes (the Pomaks), Macedonia (the Torbesh), Serbia (the Gorani) (Todorova 2004: 142).

The Ottoman legacy reflected in the non-correspondence of ethnic, religious and linguistic categories caused the emergence of a number of small ethnic groups that do not fit into the model composed of nations and national minorities, which is a result of the modern nation-building process. These “hidden” minorities (cf. Sikimić 2004) are institutionally unrecognized, publicly invisible and absent from policy-making institutions. Their members share an idea of common origin and of importance of that origin for their identity. Within the framework of such development and from the historical viewpoint, minority communities may be observed as groups which failed to complete the shaping of a distinctive ethnic identity in the nation-building process (Promitzer 2004: 13–14). The relationship between these minority groups and the state in which they live is ambiguous and subject to change and negotiation: state policy may vary from recognition and support to assimilation, while minorities may adopt some of the existing national identities, develop their own national identity, or remain invisible. One also must not overlook the importance of the relationship between the majority and minority population: the minority is perceived as different by the majority and in certain cases the identification of the minority with the majority (“voluntary” assimilation) is not possible because of this perceived difference. For example, there is a common tendency of the Roma population to “hide” their ethnic origin by adopting a more prestigious identity that gives them better chances for survival and prosperity – a strategy that was labelled *ethnic mimicry* by some Yugoslav ethnologists. It seems, however, that this mimicry is almost never complete and successful, since those whose identity is Roma try to adopt and maintain a distance towards them (Dejzings 2005: 200, f. 22). So the Orthodox, Serbian-speaking Roma in Kosovo consider themselves Serbs, but the social distance between the two communities reveals itself in the absence of intermarriages and the fact that the Serbs call them *Serbian Gypsies* (*srpski Cigani*) (Mladenović 2004). Similarly, Albanian-speaking Roma who try to adopt Albanian identity are called *Albanian Gypsies* by Albanians (Dejzings 2005: 192).

The redefinition of collective identities in the Balkans from local to ethnic and national is closely related to the nation-building process in this part of Europe: to quote Maria Todorova (1997),

the Balkans were becoming European by shedding the last residue of an imperial legacy, widely considered as anomaly at the time, and by assuming and emulating

the homogeneous European nation-state as the normative form of social organization. It may well be that what we are witnessing today, wrongly attributed to some Balkan essence, is the ultimate Europeization of the Balkans. If the Balkans are, as I think they are, tantamount to their Ottoman legacy, this is an advanced stage of the end of the Balkans.

The nation-building process of the western European type that took part in the Balkan states after their liberation from Ottoman rule led to increasing ethnic homogenization. As a consequence, the identity strategies chosen by members of minority groups were either convergent or divergent towards the dominant (national) identity. The direction of strategy towards convergence or divergence depends as a rule on current political circumstances and the distribution of power.

ALBANIANS: THE SERBIAN INDISPUTABLE *OTHER*

The presence of Islam in the Balkan Peninsula combined with various linguistic identities made possible the development of the whole plethora of identity strategies. For the identity of the Serbian majority, Orthodox Christianity is the essential ingredient, which became particularly obvious in the last few decades with the escalation of Serbian nationalism and the strengthening of the political role of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its affirmation as “the national church.” The Battle of Kosovo and the sacredness of the Kosovo land, where numerous Orthodox sanctuaries are situated, are central elements that constitute the Serbian national myth. While all other (non-Orthodox) religious communities became stigmatized (and also frequently subject to violence) as Serbian nationalism increased, Muslims continued to play the role of the radical, indisputable Other in the Serbian collective imagery. This Otherness is most radically ascribed to the Kosovo Albanians, the community which also represents the linguistic Other. In the 1980s, the conflict between Serbs and Albanians was presented in Serbian political and public discourse as a “clash of civilizations,” a new battle between Christianity and Islam (Dejzings 2005: 139). The perception of Albanians as Others was strengthened through the production and maintenance of stereotypes of Albanians as savages that need to be civilized, barbarians and intruders characterized by violent and deviant sexual behaviour, as people who “reproduce like animals” and who “destroy Orthodox churches and other sanctuaries” (Marković 2003). Since the imagining of the Other is always characterized by ambiguity, these stereotypes are complemented with the positive stereotyping of Albanians as people with high moral codes, who preserve the social solidarity, biological vitality, patriarchal warrior ethos, a natural wisdom – i.e. all that the Serbs lost in the process of Westernization and modernization.⁵

The linguistic and cultural isolation of Albanians from the other peoples in the former

⁵ Marković (2003) provides a historical overview of stereotypes that Serbs use regarding Albanians.

Yugoslavia resulted in their self-perception as “a non-Slavic people trapped in a South Slav state” (Berg 1983: 56, as cited in Bakić-Hayden 1995: 926). Despite the high degree of Islamization of the Albanian population in Kosovo, they retained a strong sense of the Albanian identity and there was not a significant convergence between them and Slavophone Muslims in the former Yugoslavia. This was so partly because of the fact that Albanians are divided into three religious groups: Muslims, Catholics and a significantly numerous community of the Shiite dervish Sufi order of Bektashis (Dejzings 2005: 24). In addition,

the common Islamic heritage is not so homogenous as it may appear (...) Albanian Islamic religious activity has long been influenced by the numerous Sufi orders and intertwined with practices derived from Albanian national custom and, as such, is quite different from the more orthodox, ‘pure’ Islamic tradition of Slavic Muslims (Berg 1983, as cited in Bakić-Hayden 1995: 925–926, f. 38).

For these reasons, Albanian nationalism was secular to a great extent and not closely connected to religion, in opposition to Serbian nationalism, which is characterized by the intermingling of ethnic and religious identities (Dejzings 2005: 212). Despite the secular character of Albanian national ideology, it was often presented in religious terms by the Serbian side: As Milica Bakić Hayden (1995: 926) points out, “from Serbian perspectives of the 1970s and 1980s, the Albanians from Kosovo were experiencing an Islamic revival.” She provides an example of media discourse from *Duga* magazine reflecting such attitude:

The truth about Kosovo and Metohia has not changed much over time, so that even today Muslim fundamentalism, persistently knocking at the door of Kosovo and Metohia, is trying to approach Europe. It is hard to believe that Europe is not aware of this. Even those in Europe who do not hold Serbia close to their hearts know very well that this old Balkan state represents the last barrier to the ongoing onslaught and aggression of Islam (Saric 1990).

Although Albanians and Serbs were “indisputable” others for each other, this does not mean that there have not been attempts to question the “authenticity” of the identity of the other ethnic group. From the Serbian side, such attempts were articulated in academic discourse, as the so-called *Arnautashi* thesis. Serbian historians, ethnographers and geographers claimed that numerous Serbs in Kosovo converted to Islam but managed to keep their Serbian language and customs for a long time, but eventually adopted Albanian identity within several generations (Bataković 1997, 2007). Such a thesis implies that many Albanians are in fact not ‘real’ Albanians, but converted Serbs. Albanians, on the other hand, claimed that numerous Serbs are actually Albanians who converted to Orthodox Christianity in the Serbian medieval kingdom and consequently adopted Serbian identity.⁶

⁶ Both of these claims are not without historical truth, as pointed out by Dejzings (2005: 33–34).

BETWEEN SERBS AND ALBANIANS: NON-ALBANIAN MUSLIMS IN SERBIA AND THE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

State-driven assimilation policies

To understand the identity-related processes that are currently taking place in the societies of Serbia and Kosovo, apart from the Ottoman legacy, one must consider another legacy that is shared by ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia, namely the legacy of Yugoslav socialism. The nationally pluralistic “*Bratstvo i jedinstvo*” (“Brotherhood and Unity”) in Tito’s Yugoslavia, attempting to create a new supraethnic identity, in reality forced the ethnification of the six Yugoslav nations (“*narodi*”) when it ascribed a fixed linguistic and territorial identity to them as well as to the smaller ethnic groups (the so-called nationalities, “*narodnosti*”) (cf. Grandits this volume).

Yugoslav quota system, which was set to guarantee equal representation of all nations and nationalities in governing institutions and equal access to the labour market, prompted members of small ethnic groups to assimilate into the ethnic groups with whom they shared most of their identity features (language and/or religion). This tendency was clearly shown in the census data, where the figures were much lower than the actual number of Roma, Jews, and other small ethnic groups (cf. Dejzings 2005: 204). The “simplification” of complex ethnic relations in some areas was even directly carried out by the state institutions, as in the case of the Muslim Slavophone population of Gora and Sredačka Župa and other Muslim and non-Albanian speaking groups. After the Second World War, in 1945, they were ascribed Albanian ethnic identity and Albanian names by state decree (Mladenović 2004: 253). Comparable with such a policy of the Yugoslav socialist authorities is the practice of classification of ethnic groups in present-day Kosovo by UNMIK authorities, who lump Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians into a single group designated by the abbreviation RAE, ignoring the self-perceptions of these groups and the identity strategies chosen by them (see Vah, this volume).

From Invisibility to Visibility

Ethnic groups which do not fit into the dominant nation-state model “can easily be attacked on the basis of the primary nation-state categories and semiotic codes that express ethnic identities. These essentially relate to languages, names, religion and traditions.” (Konstantinov 1997: 34). While such groups most often evolve “an identity-sustaining strategy which relies on less visible categories that are connected with demographic behaviour: residential patterns, family and kinship structure, and employment patterns,” as Konstantinov (ibid.) argues in case of the Pomaks in Bulgaria, they may also opt for visibility within the national state context, adopting some existing national identity or reinterpreting their local identity as a national one.

The process of the national identity formation among Bosnian Muslims, which was

another result of the Yugoslav legacy and which took its final shape during the violent ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, significantly affected the identity strategies of non-Albanian Muslims in the Serbia, particularly in the Sandžak region, which borders Bosnia. In the beginning of the 1990s, the Muslim leadership in Sandžak

hopes that ultimately their region will be reunited with the ‘motherland’ which, it claims, is Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sandžak and Muslim leaders also maintain that there are strong linguistic and cultural links between their communities. The Sandžak Muslims, according to their intellectuals, are neither Turks nor Serbs who have converted to Islam, but Muslims who speak neither Albanian nor a pure Eka-vian (the dialect spoken by the majority of Serbia’s citizens). (Andrejevich 1997: 174–175)⁷

Such discourse is an illustrative example of what Konstantinov (1997: 36) labels the ‘vernacular academy.’ It is an “important minority-centred layer of reaction against the nation-state monopoly over identity affairs.” As the author further points out, “the vernacular academy borrows exclusively from the official nation-state academic discourse in terms of general categories and analytical tools, reinterpreting these for its own needs.” Both the vernacular and the nation-state academic discourses share “the premise that the ethnic identity is a matter of unbroken genetic lineage rather than cultural event or choice” (ibid.).

An Albanian speaking Muslim community claimed to have Egyptian identity and established their organizations in Kosovo and Macedonia in 1990 (Dejzings 2005: 190). Although often identified with Roma, the members of this community deny that they are of Roma origin and emphasize their social status, which is much higher than that of the Roma in Kosovo. At the same time, such strategy aimed at distancing from Albanians at a moment when identification with them was not perceived as strategically good policy. Both Macedonians and Serbs supported this identity change and saw it as a way to lessen Albanian political influence. In this process, the discourse of the “vernacular academy,” which offered proofs for the community’s relations with Egypt, was re-employed by the representatives of Serbian national academia: Serbian scholars went a step further, claiming that Macedonian and Kosovo Egyptians are in fact Christian Copts, and their Muslim

⁷ Although the argument of differentiation on the basis of language is frequent in this kind of discourse, it most frequently does not correspond to the facts, at least when areas where Serbo-Croatian used to be spoken are concerned: as the American linguist Victor Friedman (Friedman 1997: 5; cf. also. Greenberg 1995, 2004: 34–35) points out, “in an ethnically mixed village or region, all the inhabitants will speak the same dialect, i.e. ethnically based dialects do not really exist.” Ranko Bugarski (2002–2003: 72) writes similarly about linguistic situation in pre-war multiethnic Sarajevo: “Naturally, there were individual differences in vocabulary range. Style of expression and level of language culture related to education, social status, profession, etc. But the point is that there existed no recognizable “ethnolects” to cut across such difference: the belief that local urban Serbs, Croats, and Moslems spoke and wrote differently depending on ethnonational affiliation is a myth” (for more on these issues see Petrović 2008).

identity is thus inauthentic and secondary. According to the German journal *Der Spiegel*, Slobodan Milošević supported the Kosovo Egyptians' demands, and maintained that half of the Albanian population there are Egyptians who were forced to give up their identity (Dejzings 2005: 192). Milošević's inclusion of a Roma and an Egyptian in the Serbian delegation to the Rambouillet negotiations over Kosovo's autonomy in 1999, as well as his concern for the status of the Gorani in Kosovo and his insistence that any representative of minority groups in the Kosovo parliament is allowed to block any decision that is contrary to the group interests, should be understood in the same light, as a result of "a concern with the potential costs to the state of the political mobilization by the republic's largest ethnic minority" (Friedman 2007: 682).

The relatively isolated community of Gorani in Kosovo's south-west today numbers around 10,000 people. The nation-building processes that took part in the former Yugoslavia from the 1990s on resulted in intense frictions within this community, whose members chose various strategies attempting to survive in circumstances that were unfavourable in many ways. In 1999 the Gorani expressed loyalty to the Serbian state authorities in the Kosovo conflict, which led them to bad relations with the Albanians. While part of the community still insists on loyalty to the Serbs and on a separate Gorani identity, the other part maintains that the best option for the community is to take Bosniak national identity, to integrate into Bosniak organizations in Kosovo and take an active part in political life and Kosovo institutions (Stojanović 2006: 35). Most community members share the feeling that this is the worst time that the Gorani have ever experienced: "Whenever other bigger nations were in conflict, we had to bear severe consequences. Neutrality was never among the available options, we always had to choose sides," says one of them (*ibid.*: 34).

The Gorani are traditionally an emigrant population (Hasani 2007), a significant number of whom live in Serbia proper, where they usually own sweetshops. Because of their Albanian-sounding names, many of them were targets of violence after the Kosovo Albanians proclaimed independence in February 2008 (Zejneli 2008).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article I have tried to outline the dynamics of the discourses and strategies that are being used for identity negotiation in a period of intensified nation-building processes in Serbian society, particularly in relation to ethnic processes in Kosovo, the area which has a central place in the Serbian national imagery. While Albanians are perceived and discursively construed as a Serbian indisputable Other, the attitude of the Serbian majority and its political elites towards other Muslim groups such as the Gorani, Egyptians, Turks, and Bosniaks, is ambiguous and depends on current political circumstances and distribution of power. While the Serbian politicians and academics engaged in the "national project" support the efforts of these groups to resist Albanian assimilation, these groups, being Muslim, are not separated from Albanians in the dominant nationalist discourse in Serbia, which is characterized by the opposition between Orthodox Christianity and

Islam. Ambiguity of similar kind is observable in the attitude towards Islam as a specifically Balkan (Ottoman) legacy: In the internal Balkan context the attitude towards the Slavophone Muslims is characterized by ambiguity due to what Milica Bakić-Hayden calls a “betrayal syndrome” (Bakić-Hayden 1995: 927). However, the other two discourses that function in a broader European and international context are also used with reference to the Balkan Muslims, namely, *Antemurale Christianitatis* discourse and discourse of Islamist extremism and terrorism.⁸ All these discourses are intended to negotiate the interests of the dominant group in the nation-building process and to justify the means through which these interests are achieved.

The process of nation building in the former Yugoslavia presented the members of small ethnic groups with a quite difficult choice: they had to manage to maintain good relations with both larger ethnic groups on the local level and the ruling elites on the national level, and simultaneously to protect their own interests. Striking a successful balance between the three is proving to be a nearly impossible task.

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⁸ Erjavec and Volčič (2007) show how young intellectuals in Serbia appropriate 'war on terrorism' discourse in order to legitimize violence against Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo.

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POVZETEK

SRBI, ALBANCI IN TISTI VMES: STOPNJEVANJE DRUGOSTI
IN IDENTITETNE STRATEGIJE V KONTEKSTU PROCESA
OBLIKOVANJA NACIJ

Tanja Petrović

V prispevku poskušam očrtati dinamiko med diskurzi in strategijami, ki se uporabljajo za zagovarjanje identitet v stopnjevanju procesa oblikovanja nacij v srbski družbi s posebnim poudarkom na etničnih procesih na Kosovu, ki mu pripada centralno mesto v nacionalnem imaginariju Srbov. V prevladajočih diskurzih se kot glavni element srbske nacionalne identitete izpostavlja pravoslavna veroizpoved. Ta identiteta se oblikuje predvsem v nasprotju do islama. Medtem ko se v tem procesu Albanci doživljajo kot nedvomni drugi, je odnos srbske večine do ostalih muslimanskih skupnosti na Kosovu, kot so Gorani, Turki, Egipčani, Bošnjaki, dvoumen in odvisen od trenutnih političnih okoliščin in odnosov moči. Srbska politična elita in pripadniki akademske sfere, ki so angažirani na "nacionalnem projektu", podpirajo prizadevanja omenjenih skupin, da bi oblikovale posebno etnično identiteto in se s tem zoperstavile albanizaciji. Po drugi strani pa se v prevladujočem nacionalističnem diskursu, ki ga označuje nasprotje med pravoslavljem in islamom, omenjene skupine zaradi verske pripadnosti islamu ne ločijo od Albancev. Podobno dvoumnost najdemo v odnosu do islama kot dela specifično balkanske (otomanske) dediščine: v notranjem, balkanskem kontekstu se odnos do muslimanov, ki so govorcev slovanskih jezikov, lahko označi kot »sindrom izdajstva«, vendar pa se ta odnos oblikuje še skozi diskurza, ki funkcionirata tudi v širšem evropskem in svetovnem kontekstu: to sta diskurz *Antemurale Christianitatis* in diskurz o muslimanih kot teroristih in grožnji za svetovno varnost. Ne glede na ta širši kontekst sta omenjena diskurza v bistvu nacionalna in služita zagovarjanju interesov in pozicij posameznih nacionalnih skupnosti; srbska nacionalna skupnost pri tem ni izjema.

Pripadniki manjšinskih skupnosti na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije, kot so slovansko govoreči muslimani, so v procesu oblikovanja nacij soočeni s težko izbiro: morajo vzdrževati dobre odnose tako na lokalni ravni z večjimi skupnostmi, ki so nosilke procesa oblikovanja nacij, kot na nacionalni ravni s predstavniki vladajočih elit, hkrati pa morajo zaščititi interese lastne skupine. To se največkrat pokaže kot nemogoča naloga.