

## **Cultural Identity, Learning and Social Prejudice**

The Politicization of Subjectivity in former Yugoslavia

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## 11. CULTURAL IDENTITY, LEARNING AND SOCIAL PREJUDICE

### *The Politicization of Subjectivity in Former Yugoslavia*

#### INTRODUCTION

Since 1999 The International Research Group for Psychosocietal Analysis has worked regularly at annual workshops in Dubrovnik, gradually developing a practice of deep-hermeneutic interpretation. The main ambition of the methodology is to track the societally unconscious subjective dynamics in different areas of everyday life by means of psychodynamic analysis applied on everyday life interaction. However, for work in this location, the experience of the war that followed in the wake of Yugoslavia's dissolution formed an overwhelmingly strong and an inevitable challenge for understanding the social psychology of those relatively abstract national and religious identities and differences that are the drivers in identity-based politics. So for this case the research group has departed from its usual terrain working to interpret the dynamics of the conflicts several times. Unlike the rest of our activity we have worked on the basis of secondary accounts and reports, which are however also abundant. This chapter will present some of the reflections on this work.

At the time, around the millennium, the extreme events in the conflict seemed predominantly pathological in the sense that they seemed entirely disconnected from people's previous everyday lives, socialization and identities. Without comparing directly, similar questions arose to those following the Second World War: How could extremism and endless cruelty happen in a modern civilized part of Europe? It became in itself a challenge to our interdisciplinary group of people from social and humanistic sciences to be able to understand the connections between ordinary people's everyday life and their readiness to take part in a civil war in the name of national (ethnic) and religious identity, and in many cases be direct actors in atrocities against former neighbours and members of the local community.

The interesting question was how the social, cultural, and political orientations are mediated through the (individual) subjective process of socialization, consciousness building and action. We wanted not only to understand which mechanisms empowered political leaders and were utilized by them in the deliberate attempts to politicize subjectivity, but also their 'background' processes of societal change and cultural development. We wished to investigate how subjective processes are part of social interaction, being the object of historical circumstances, while they

themselves provide fuel for political processes in one direction or another – which is a matter of political psychology.

#### SUBJECTIVITY BETWEEN LEARNING AND DEFENCE

We did also find interesting theoretical inspiration in psychoanalytically informed research of cultural identities that addressed these types of issues, and our aim was to situate these ‘mechanisms’ in a historical context of societal development and cultural encounters. One of the first central inspirations was V. Volkan’s concept of “large group identity”. His concept seems to address precisely the theme in question, where large groups constitute themselves through individuals’ affiliation to the group, and people act individually on behalf of the large group. While distancing himself from an individual psychological explanation of the significance of the group, e.g. in the form of a father figure or a motherly agency for caring, Volkan especially focuses on the significance of the large group identity for social relations within the group and for the engagement of group members in conflicts with other groups (Volkan, 2001, 2009). Volkan himself has a life history association with a nationality conflict, being born in the Turkish minority in Cyprus. He is now a prominent psychiatrist in the US, and has engaged in a number of initiatives for conflict resolution and dialogue between implacable groups around the world. His theory is in general that the belonging to a particular group, e.g. a nation, will remain a lifelong constitutive element in individual identity, while other elements of identity are added during the life course. He understands the constitution and significance of this group identity within the thinking of object relations theory. Within this conceptual framework, conflict behaviour of large groups is described as a reaction which defends group members or the group as such against humiliations or threats. This conflict behaviour is reparative, it is about defending the very identity, including its recognizable separation from other group identities. Volkan connects conflict behaviour with the psychodynamic level via the theory of socialization: while the child gradually develops tolerance of ambivalence, it will integrate some of the externalizations, or splittings, that characterize early childhood, but this integration will never be complete. The incompletely integrated elements then remain in the individual psyche as potential material for defensive reactions, and Volkan argues that group identification is psychodynamically based on these elements. Violations of the identity of the group or mere threats against it activate unconscious dynamics which shape particular current perceptions and reactions in a way which can only be understood as feelings of a general threat and a defence of the identity as such.

This context of understanding identity and culture has interesting implications for theoretical discussion, e.g. in sociological theory, and for ‘contemporary diagnosis’: What are the specifics of our contemporary society, where are we heading? In this discussion, the increasing significance of subjective orientations seems to be one of the few consensual aspects. Such a ‘holistic’ theoretical approach to the links between subjectivity and social action cuts across research topics such as peace and conflict,

political reorientations in a post-nation state setting, lifelong learning, migration and cultural integration, change processes in communities and organizations, which are all also interrelated fields. However, this approach is important for understanding identity as an emotional dynamics which organizes feelings, relations and consciousness; it may encompass aspects of learning as well as defensive rejections of certain insights and experiences, i.e. an ongoing process of identification(s).

In my own research, this concept of identity is empirically grounded in studies of the subjective aspects of wage labour and (un)employment and the subjective handling of changes in working life, which reveal crucial identity processes in everyday life (Salling Olesen, 2001, 2007; Salling Olesen & Weber, 2001). Work identity and professional identities inform and reflect the subjective meaning of work and of specific professional roles and practices. The study of identification processes offers fundamental contributions to the theory of learning. In this context, I also see the opposite possibility: a theory of learning (and resistance to learning) may help us to understand how the processing of the “raw materials of subjectivity” may enable the politicization of identity. Although different contexts and domains obviously have a different subjective status, I think this indicates the sense in connecting (comparing) the examination of those challenges to everyday life practice, which may or may not elicit epistemic processes and social experiences to form the basis of identity building and sudden strong new identifications – in extreme cases leading to hostility to others and violence.

In my learning theory framework identity appears as a product of and also an active element in the subjective process of experience building (Salling Olesen, 1989), or alternatively, the lifelong learning process of the individual, acquiring the social and cultural context through everyday life practices (1989). Rather than a stable coherence of self and social practices, once and for all established through socialization, and inscribed in a stable cultural framework, ‘identity’ refers to a temporary relationship between individual experience and social practices in which the individual is engaging, while learning is an intended or unintended and unrecognized dimension of this experiential process. At any one time, this relationship may provide a more or less contradictory framework for dealing with new challenges and knowledge and relating new practices to habitual ones. This identity is generally a dynamic and contradictory relationship because conditions are contradictory, as are the subjective driving forces.

Intercultural relations and cultural exchanges always challenge identity. In the best case, this implies learning and development for each party involved. But not necessarily. A fundamental point of departure is that everyday life experience is located in a field of tension between potentials for learning and the inclination towards defence. Intercultural relations occurring in this everyday life are interpreted within the consciousness building rooted in everyday life, and very often this means integrating them in patterns of recognition and routine which do not affect the consciousness of everyday life, which in itself is an active form of defence. The notion of ‘Alltagsbewusstsein’ (Leithäuser, 1976) illuminates the subjectively active

production of a stereotypical consciousness as a (collective) defensive reaction to handle overwhelming demands as well as life historical anxieties in everyday life. Automatic assumptions about unknown phenomena to which one relates by coincidence or through external circumstances occur all the time in everyday life. However, sometimes they engage more emotional energy and become a cognitively defined idea, a fixed orientation in relation to strangers and unknown realities. When it results in inability to recognize people or phenomena in a differentiated and realistic way, and to learn about them we call it a “social prejudice”.

The psychodynamic theory may help to understand the origins of social prejudice. The production and emotional charging and strengthening of specific cognitive patterns and ideas may be interpreted as a collective defensive action in order to handle the fragility and emotional burden of social life. The conception of the large group identity as a combination of a strong identification with one's own group and the application of specific attributes and intentions to a hostile picture of another group makes it understandable that this identification may solve problematic and challenging aspects in one's own identity process. The need for such a defence may have many reasons, combining social ruptures and contradictions and life historical subjective experiences. But focusing on the active nature of this mechanism also points out that there is an alternative way of handling these experiences and conditions which depends on alternative identifications – and the claim here is that this is the social psychology core of the political process. In this way of conceiving identity and identification, the fundamental alternative is between learning, i.e. understanding not only social reality but also your own subjectivity, and meeting challenges through the production of social prejudice.

#### THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

The power of identity politics depends on the ability to mobilize socially and collectively irritations and unresolved conflicts on different levels within an identification and possible social practice. A critical study of the subjectivity of cultural conflicts should examine the interrelations between experiences and conflicts between a level of individual life history and emotionality, a level of everyday social practice and moral orientation, and a societal/political level. Only by uncovering the channels of dislocating energies between these levels can we seek to distinguish between the manipulative use of identity politics and legitimate claims of recognition (Fukuyama, 2018).

The dissolution of former Yugoslavia and the very complex and rapid development of violent conflicts and hostilities is a thought-provoking exposition of the new relevance of the theme of interculturality. In a short span of time, we experienced dramatic (re)construction of cultural and political identities, largely defining themselves in opposition to each other. This did not happen spontaneously. There is hardly any doubt that this process was driven forward and the contradictions deliberately nurtured by some of the political forces in the region, and a political

science analysis might stop at examining these political forces and the interests behind them. This aspect involves important international geo-politics which I will leave aside here, and also socio-structural factors that I will partly return to. But the focus here will be on understanding the social and cultural circumstances and the level of everyday life which produced and enabled this political process and also developed a new political reality. Here we are not only interested in the identifications which seemed to reinterpret peoples' everyday lives, anxieties and life experiences. The atrocities committed in the name of cultural identity (ethnicity, religion), the killing of neighbours and ethnic cleansings, call strongly for all possible attempts to understand the psychological processes that fuel and create such simplistic, unique orientations out of complex life experiences. This seems to be an important adjustment to the ways of understanding and evaluating the process which appear in national(ist) history writing (itself one of the collective identity productions) as well as to the rationalistic manner of the 'international community' which finally condemns but basically does not care to understand the dynamics. We want to understand the conflicts in endogenous concepts, as a complex of historical rationalities and emotions that have been dislocated, partly deliberately, partly by the difficulty of most actors in understanding themselves and their own feelings. Democracy, tolerance and humanity depend on a better understanding of what happened: a practical piece of reconciliation, of 'never again ...'.

The political history of the Balkans is complicated but a broad overview of the cultural and social elements involved is necessary for understanding the identity politics. Yugoslavia was rather artificially constructed as a unified kingdom after World War I, composed of bits and pieces from the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Croatia, Slovenia and parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina) and the existing kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro. These kingdoms were not very old but had been under Ottoman rule, Bosnia as a genuine part and the others paying tribute. In spite of the absence or fragility of nation states, these affiliations have had some implications. The Austro-Hungarian parts seem to have been influenced by industrialization and modern infrastructure from the late 19th century. Religious affiliations differed: Austro-Hungarian parts were influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, Serbia and Montenegro were orthodox, whereas Bosnia was Muslim. The population was ethnically heterogeneous and there were various mixed regions. Beside Muslims, there were both Serbs and Croats in Bosnia, Slavonia around the Danube was a total mix of Serbs and Croats, Vojvodina was mainly inhabited by Hungarians, and Krajina in Croatia was inhabited by Serbian peasants who had been given a piece of land as a reward for their participation in the war against the Ottomans.

World War II activated many of the differences and contradictions in this patchwork country. But the successful resistance to the Nazi-German invasion established a new political leadership centred on the communist partisan movement. Right-wing nationalist movements in Croatia (Ustaša) discredited themselves by allying with the Axis powers. The base of the partisan movement went across ethnic, religious and other divides, and after the war a federal republic was established with

the intent of eradicating the many divisions by merging and bridging between the nations and religions, while also recognizing the problems involved, as can be seen from the many formal institutional arrangements to create and guarantee equality. A new Yugoslav national ideology emerged, later called Titoism because it projected this intention on the former partisan leader, later president, Marshall Tito. With the successful rejection of Stalinist domination from 1953, a leading role in the group of non-aligned countries, and an industrial development attempting to create a self-sufficient economy from military equipment to consumer goods, 'Jugoslavija' grew into a powerful unifying symbol both domestically and internationally. The economy was originally a typical state-directed command economy, but after the break with the Soviet Union a model combining market economy and socialist self-management was launched and formalized in a party decision in 1964. This gave a new momentum for the idea of Yugoslavia as a third way in the environment of cold war and systems competition, and both the economic and cultural modernization distinguished the country from the rest of the socialist world. During the process of modernization, free migration took place; the mixing of peoples accelerated and ethnic differences seemed to lose their importance. In Bosnia, which had the most mixed population, 25% of all marriages in the 80s were of mixed ethnicity. The public culture was generally secular. People were not very religious, neither in terms of beliefs nor practice. International influence on communications, culture and consumption was very strong. One never heard any significant reference to ethnicity, except as a historical element of regional origin within the nation state. Serbo-Croat was, until the late 80s, seen as *one* language, though written in two alphabets. However, the country also remained very heterogeneous, with strong regional differences in development, and as the authority of the partisan movement from the war faded away, it became more difficult for the communist party to maintain control. In everyday life there was an ambivalent relationship to the communist party and to centralism, which also included the usual resignation in socialist countries regarding hidden usurpation by the elite and the party. After a period of increasing wealth stimulated by loans, foreign debt was a heavy burden, and the ability of the regime to recover after Tito's death was low (Potts, 1996). In spite of ambitious attempts to create a new model of socialist self-management, the traditional party-controlled power structure also remained dominant. Nationalism was repressed, especially assumed remnants of the historical Ustaša fascism in Croatia and Serbian Chetnik royalism, but also ordinary democratic criticism was added to potential enemies of the new nation state. In the meantime modernized, quite international identities were developing, whereas Titoism with its patriotic, quite martial but also more fragile identification increasingly seemed to be 'the old system' and 'the identity of the former generation', de-legitimizing the regime and the federal state.

It seems clear that the unity of Yugoslavia was already being discussed in Croatia and Slovenia, by e.g. liberals, reform-oriented communists, technocrats of the well-developed industry, and of course by the right-wing nationalists. In 1970/1971 there was an uprising in Croatia which played out as a national resistance against Serbian



dominance. It was silenced by traditional repression. A dramatic shift took place in the late 80s. After Tito's death, critical voices seemed to be heard more openly, while at the same time the economy was worsening, inflation was accelerating, and the wish to leave Yugoslavia was growing in Slovenia and Croatia. A convergence between demands for democracy, liberation of the most competitive parts of business, and Croatian nationalism was challenging the regime and also the unity of the state. Nationalism started to flourish openly. The demand for democratization and modernization was converted into a demand for national independence in Slovenia and Croatia. In this situation Milošević 'played the nationalist card' in his great speech in 1989 in Kosovo Polje, which he declared to be core homeland of the Serbs. He shifted the focus of identification of the regime from its socialist history from partisans to modernized self-management, over to a Serbian leadership with a history dating back to the battle against the Ottomans. This was the trigger for the emerging nationalist will to dissolve Yugoslavia to come out into the open.

Before that, the regime had already met Albanian demands for minority rights by the inclusion of the province of Kosovo in the Serbian state, violating the constitution (the Albanians and Hungarians, unlike other nationalities, were not granted equal national rights in the institutional arrangement, but a specific regional autonomy). The repression of Kosovo, and especially Milošević' pointing out the special role of the Serbs in the defence of the Slavs against the Ottomans indicated the end of Titoist intercultural integration (or at least institutional multiculturalism). Milošević hit the nationalist key to justify Serbian rule in Kosovo, but he triggered off a nationalist wave in both Serbia and Croatia. The right wing in Croatia openly harassed people of Serbian origin in the republic of Croatia, and also campaigned against the 'left wing'. A new paramilitary republican police force in Croatia soon started to develop into an army parallel to the federal army, with weapons imported with the financial support of Croatian diaspora. In Serbia paramilitary militias were established, partly on the basis of Chetnik groups, partly by nationalist political leaders who recruited (often former) criminals in paramilitary gangs (Šešelj, Arkan). A circular mechanism of harassment, anxiety, preventive violence, and later ethnic cleansing started to work on local levels in the minority communities in Krajina and Slavonia, later in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo – but probably never really in the country as a whole (see e.g. Liversage, 1996; Vulliamy, 1994). People who had been friendly neighbours lived in fear of attack or even killed each other in the name of ethnicity and religion.

The political mechanism rests on the combination of strong identification (Croats seem today to be very Catholic, they go to church and confess) and the construction of complementary social prejudices about the other nations ('The Serbs are lazy warriors', 'The Croats are Ustašas', 'The Bosnians want to create an Islamic state'). These prejudices were justified by historical legacy: all the hatred was allegedly there from ancient times, and was never really reconciled. All the nationalist forces and mutual prejudices had been controlled by Tito and when he passed away they surfaced again. Suddenly everybody seemed to assume that the modernization of



the country had taken place without really influencing fundamental identities and without any 'civilizing' effect.

This historical explanation seems to be a reduction, which is itself part of the construction of prejudices. On the one hand, it makes sense to describe the political process and warfare in terms of a regression to conflicts and identities from before World War II, and also to describe Titoism in terms of a temporary, idealized construction which was bound to fade one day. But it seems unlikely that the intermediate process which relativized the ethnic and religious differences did not leave any effects. Besides the identity construction emerging from a collective war heroism, Yugoslavia, unlike the east European communist countries, went through a social and cultural modernization process which was similar to the rest of (southern) Europe. In spite of the authoritarian political structures, there was a demand within the communist party which urged for democratization of the political system during the 70s and 80s, more or less in line with liberal critics of the regime outside the party. There was the attempt to design a new version of socialism with worker self-management and market economy, and experiments with direct democracy in public affairs ("samodoprinos"), hardly comparable to later experiments in Porto Alegre and elsewhere, but still important. Yet the nationalist forces prevailed. Later in the conflict, external European policy obviously accepted the nationalist agenda of division; Germany promised recognition of Croatian independence without minority guarantees, followed by the EU, and a coalition of the regime and more or less criminal interests took over and accelerated the process, and as the conflicts developed it was a self-fuelling mechanism (war psychology). In general the identity politics, defining identity by ethnic, religious and national adherence, legitimized violence and built up social prejudices in an environment which was by and large in a modernization process, but also in a very fragile social situation. The challenging question is how and why the mass mobilization of nationalism and identity policies in the first place became the dynamics of the process: What are the emotional sources of social prejudice and identity politics? Could it possibly have developed differently? Such questions are in the focus of interest of the psychosocietal approach.

#### A PSYCHODYNAMIC INTERPRETATION OF IDENTITY POLITICS

In the mutual escalation of the Yugoslavian conflict in the second half of the 1980s, nationalist discourses played an increasing role, especially in Croatia and Serbia. In Croatia, this had been a political factor in the post-war period. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a strong call for independence in Croatia, which included left-wing criticism of the communist regime, democratic voices looking to the west and downright nationalist right-wing forces. Without neglecting this, it seems particularly interesting to investigate the Serbian identity dynamics in the 1980s. Volkan has contributed an incisive analysis of this (Volkan, 2001). In the following, I will discuss this analysis with the twofold interest of developing some aspects of

it, and of elaborating on the relation between psychodynamic and societal/historical perspectives.

Volkan has analysed the development of the Yugoslavian conflict and particularly Serbian nationalism, within his framework of large group identity (Volkan, 2001). Large group identity is activated when the group as such or group members are exposed to a violation or a threat; this situation is likely to produce a collective defensive reaction similar to splitting, in the form of prejudiced imaginations about other large groups and a reinforced identification with one's own group. Volkan applies this analysis to Serbian references to the famous battle of Kosovo Polje on 28 June 1389. The real history was that Serbs (and several other people from Bosnia, Romania and Bulgaria) were heroically fighting the Ottomans, the Serbs were defeated, but they were able to delay the consecutive surrender of Serbian kingdoms to the Ottomans. This battle is a myth in Serbian history, and the date of the battle (28 June) has been the occasion of the staging of significant later events: a secret treaty in 1876 with the Austro-Hungarian Empire about fighting the Ottomans, and more spectacularly, the assassination of Prince Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. Volkan argues that this myth in fact rearranges historical facts; the real battle and the heroic deeds which are celebrated were separated from the real surrender of Serbia under the Ottomans by some forty years. However, precisely the fact that they have been integrated into the construction of the myth colours our understanding of the social function of the myth: it epitomizes a Serbian self-understanding of being the real defenders of Christianity against Muslims and also the identity of being the heroic victims. Volkan names the story told in the myth a "chosen trauma" (Volkan, 2001). He argues that this trauma has been celebrated and told and trans-generationally reproduced over centuries, strengthening the large group identification of Serbs.

In the recent conflict it was deliberately used in the nurturing of Serbian nationalism. The central example is Milošević's speech on the 600-year anniversary of the nominated date of this battle, 28.06.1989. At this time the dissolution of Yugoslavia was lurking, and the federal leadership had already, contrary to the constitution, included Vojvodina and Kosovo in the federal state of Serbia. In Kosovo the conflict was between the majority of ethnic Albanians and a Serbian minority, and Milošević's message was clear: he pronounced Kosovo the heartland of Serbia with reference to the battle 600 years ago, and he spoke (for the first time I think) of using armed force to maintain the unity of Yugoslavia. This speech was highly relevant to the development of the conflict. In Croatia and Slovenia, it was perceived as a direct claim for the leadership in the name of Serbian nationalism rather than the communist party, the partisan movement, etc., as institutionalized in the federal state, and it pushed the desire for independence/separation forwards in a spiral: Milošević arguing in nationalist terms also justified Croatian nationalism.

The nationalist agenda was not entirely new, and there could of course be rational arguments and partial interests which questioned the sustainability of the federal republic. Yugoslavia was in deep economic crisis, the legitimacy of the communist party was declining, and the unity of the federal state had been questioned from several

sides. But the decisive dynamics that aroused the defensive strength of the “large group identity” was, according to Volkan’s analysis, the systematic communication of a connection between Muslim Bosnians and Turks/Muslims which recalled the historical colonization of the Slavic peoples by the Ottoman Empire. This narrative was being spread in many forms, feeding anxiety and aggression, suggesting but not stating explicitly (and thus open to debate) that a new contemporary conflict was approaching. In Volkan’s analysis, the main way of appealing to Serbian large group identity was the reference to the historical war against the Ottomans and the battle of Kosovo Polje. The propaganda followed the scheme of Roland Barthes’ theory of mythology on a semantic level (Barthes, 1957), in this case obviously activating unconscious identifications and projections.

Volkan places a strong emphasis on Milošević’s adoption of the Serbian national trauma. He refers to a psychological shift in Milošević’s appearance at a particular party conference in Kosovo in 1987, where the conflict between the Albanian majority and the Serbian minority had come to a head, describing his reaction as a kind of revelation: “Milosevic apparently came out of this experience a transformed person, clad in the ‘armor’ of Serbian nationalism” (Volkan, 2009). Suddenly overnight Milošević identified with the Serbian “chosen trauma” and drew the consequences in the form of a nationalist policy. This can be seen in line with Volkan’s more general analysis of the dialectic between the identification of members with the large group and the constraints it places on the leadership. Volkan has a long record of assisting in difficult arbitrations in fixed conflicts around the world, and he sees how the psychological carriage castle lays constraints on leaders who are forced to or are seeking to reach a liveable handling of hostile relations between two different large groups (Volkan, 2009). One might say that he implicitly applies a perspective of political leadership that may seek to mobilize the large group identity as a political tool, but may also come under pressure from it in the “diplomatic conflict resolution”. In the Serbian case, he sees Milošević as the leader igniting the identification.

As a consequence, Volkan assigns great importance to the individual psychodynamic process of Milošević. This analysis seems paradoxically confined to the individual psychological level. The analysis of Milošević’s individual psyche on the background of being a child of a dysfunctional family may well be correct, but it seems reasonable to interpret Milošević also as a bearer of a societal dynamics in the situation. He is a very skilled politician who, when (perhaps suddenly) in a quite dire situation, senses the power of the myth, and thereby the chance to shift his political base into Serbian nationalism. By activating the myth of the trauma from 1389 he ignites a fire, but the fuel for this fire is contemporary and societal.

If we see the trauma not as *caused by* the historical events and simply historically *remembered*, but as a reproduction of meaning in identity processes over centuries, we must seek to understand not only the psychodynamic mechanism of defensive identification which explains its effectiveness, but also the “needs” of “ordinary people” that were fulfilled by adopting it. We must analyse the shifting circumstances that have been subjectively mediated in it at any time in this transmission, including

the contemporary context. There is no doubt that Serbian nationalism also existed as an undercurrent in Serbian society in the days of Titoism, and this could be understood as an identification of limited groups in Serbia. Milošević gave it a new political range, and so far his individual conviction is important. But from a psychosocietal approach, the most interesting aspect of Milošević's individual conscious and unconscious motives is his role as the "medium" of a societal damburst, where national and religious identification could become all-pervasive. What were the societal circumstances that enabled the shift? And especially: What were the subjective experiences of these societal factors in the broad masses of the people to which he gave a political direction? And of course at the end of the day: Could they have been interpreted differently, leading to more a peaceful handling of the societal difficulties and the divisions in the population?

Why is the understanding of the subjective dynamics of ordinary people important? Because, on the one hand, it provides an understanding of the conditions for the social prejudices that the manipulative leader can work with. But also because the potential for alternatives to the development of social prejudices must reside in the same subjective experience.

#### MODERNIZATION, MASCULINITY AND DEFENSIVE IDENTITY BUILDING

I shall attempt a modest approach to some of the historical circumstances that may have been involved in some of the most emotional and extreme aspects of the identity politics, related with gender and sexuality.

The history of the western Balkans in the 19th and 20th centuries is, like that of many other European regions, a history of people tossed around by empires and attempts to construct or reconstruct states on the battlefield. The conglomerate state of the southern Slavs was born to accommodate many historical identities and it may seem plausible that the history of Yugoslavia is about the success and failure of this construction. The dissolution of Yugoslavia was implemented as a (re)construction of national and religious identities that allegedly had a background in history. Similarly to the Serbian identification with the chosen trauma, Croatian national history is claimed with reference to a short period of the Middle Ages when the area was an autonomous state or principality under Josip Jelačić, after whom the central square in Zagreb and many streets across the country have been renamed, and whose coat of arms is now part of the national flag. And this identification does not even have the same continuity as the Serbian one.

But the history of Yugoslavia is also a history of uneven European modernization. In spite of being a divided periphery and tossed around by the empires which contributed large numbers of poverty migrants worldwide, these countries also fostered early scientific contributions: Rudjer Bosković, now a Croatian national icon, was a precursor in atomic theory at a time when Croatia did not exist as a nation state, and Nicola Tesla, who competed with Edison concerning the electricity system in the USA (and won: AC became the dominant form of power network),

was born in the Serbian community under Austrian rule in the region that became later a controversial Serbian minority in Croatia. It seems that the Slavic part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire has to some extent been the experimental scene for early industrialization, whereas those regions that were under Ottoman rule until the Balkan wars in the early 20th century were left in peace as long as they paid tribute to the Sultan, and hence remained less affected by modernization.

The socialist republic established after World War II was part of the Eastern bloc in the first phase, but broke the bonds with Stalin even before the cold war divisions became all-pervasive. It was created on the basis of the communist partisan movement across all the divisions of ethnicity and religion, and the multicultural heterogeneity was carefully balanced in the institutional structure, respecting most ethnicities, religions, nationalities and languages. The historical remnants of the different past within the two empires left a certain difference between the northern and southern parts of the country, but the federal republic secured financing from the more wealthy parts of the country in the form of investments in the southern regions. Especially after the break with the Soviet Union, the new Yugoslavia underwent a modernization process, based on industrialization, a liberal market economy and western cultural influence. The ethnic and religious differences seemed to fade and were overshadowed by differences between industrialized urban and rural agricultural communities. This rapid modernization was similar to elsewhere in Europe and the communist power monopoly was hardly more totalitarian than the regimes in several southern European countries. Nevertheless, when confidence in a progressive unified Yugoslav state crumbled, it elicited national (and religious) identifications. We have seen similar situations where identifications with more or less real historical past events have become drivers of political processes, and this fits well with the theory of large group identity presented by V. Volkan: in crises, belonging to a large group produces stronger identification and reinforced delimitation and hostility with regard to others. The obvious political translation of this collective defence mechanism is the idea of ethnic cleansing and separation of people based on which large group they belong to. This mechanism remains active even at a relatively low level of conflict; recently attempts to finally settle the separation of Kosovo from Serbia are taking place as a negotiation about exchanging two regions so that each nation can get its nationals inside its own state, i.e. negotiated ethnic cleansing. There is probably an automatic vicious circle in a conflict: much of the mutual and accelerating ethnic violence can be seen as reactions to actual experiences of violence once the theme has been played out, or based in more or less rational anxieties which require self-defence. But it seems that the Yugoslav civil war was driven by a particular aggression, especially in Bosnia, an aspect of specific cruelty which pursued the annihilation of the other population, cf. the massacre in Srebrenica. Obviously it was rooted in very fundamental feelings, such as anxiety and a feeling of potential annihilation if action is not taken.

But which contemporary experiences make these events comprehensible? It seems that a focus on gender can be a key to understanding some of the emotional

dimensions of the forms of conflict. Especially in Bosnia, but also in the rest of the conflict, there were many sexual violations, including sexual humiliation of both women and men of the other side, systematic rape, and a deliberate aim at 'ethnic warfare' by making women pregnant. These phenomena go far beyond the level of all 'ordinary' war psychology phenomena of drunken and undisciplined soldiers in a civil, undeclared and lawless war, which is of course the general context. According to Volkan's analysis of the use of the "chosen trauma" for nurturing the ethnic conflict, there was a direct reference in Serbian propaganda to the reproductive capacity of the Bosnian Muslims – a rhetoric known from campaigns preceding genocide elsewhere but also from the general demonization of immigrant groups today.

To understand these phenomena it is especially interesting to bring in a historical context of masculine identity. On the one hand, some of the ideas of national and ethnic identity are closely related with masculine forms of identity building even in times of peace, most obviously in the Serbian nationalism of Chetniks, who identified themselves as soldiers or fighters. These groups formed and probably dominated the Serbian militias. But one might also see a masculinity identity of an agrarian society in the territorial forms of domination inherited in ethnic cleansing.

On the other hand, some of the forms of conflict have very clear sexual aspects of domination (in extreme cases, in systematic rapes and ideas about bio-warfare). It seems obvious to see these phenomena as indicators of a threatened masculinity which was not only reserved for subcultural social outcasts, and not only a particularly backward and under-civilized people. Rather it could be interpreted as a more durable and still maintained feeling as a consequence of the modernization process which undermines such traditional male roles.

With modernization, masculine identities go through a fundamental change. The detachment from means of production and the location (the land), internalization of the abstraction of time and instrumental action, wage labour as the form of social reproduction, etc. have to be learned, and have been learned with capitalist modernization (Vester, 1974; Willis, 1977). This process also took place in Yugoslavia, in a rapid development, but in different contexts – in some regions, especially in the south, the development was extremely uneven between industrial plants and cities, and backward agriculture. New gender relations also evolved, such as women entering the labour market, and the cultural gender relations rapidly modernizing, which was extremely different from e.g. Russia. In general, male identity is healed by adopting the role as breadwinner and wage labour – but when economic decline more broadly deprives people of this vision of a future, then it hits back. In this sense the modernization process may have paved the way for the regressive reaction to the economic and social decline. National identification and the accompanying social prejudices render legitimacy to a regressive masculinity, and maybe to a restauration of masculine identity as a 'solution' to many other identity problems, which had not been well accommodated in the previous years.

Many young men migrated to Germany, Scandinavia and elsewhere, and those who stayed were vulnerable. It seems as if the social base for Serbian militant



nationalism is an extremely regressive masculine culture, which found pride in the old Chetnik warrior traditions. This type of potentially violent masculinity was activated and legitimized, first in supporting their fellow Serbs in Krajina, then intervening in/creating a civil war in Slavonia and finally in escalating the violence in Bosnia (and later also in Kosovo). In a division of labour which the Federal Army – also dominated by Serbian officers, but for some time defending the federal state and maybe also faithful to the Titoist constitution – the militias performed the illegal and aggressive work that the army would not (openly) take. The militias, which were nothing but criminal gangs and frustrated but armed young men, played a significant role in creating anxiety and defining conflicts as nationalist conflicts.

Serbian nationalism has a certain mix of this archaic warrior culture and a peasant culture, which had a strong tradition of self-defence in relation to the Ottoman Empire, fostering a warrior ideology, which in its core is a territorial defensive ideology. But in this situation it became the spark that ignited the flames. I believe that the ethnic Serbs in Krajina were from the beginning just anxious about their situation in a possibly independent Croatia, because they already saw the nationalist nature of this new state. At the time of detaching Krajina within Croatia, all within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, harassment and repression by nationalists in Croatia was strong and visible. In this situation the Serbs regressed into territorial self-defence, easily recognized as peasants defending their land. But they then received more aggressive support from Serbian militia groups. The mechanism of large group identification explains how self-defence is converted into more active and aggressive agency by people who had previously been peaceful citizens.

I consider that the right wing in Croatia could, though a little more subtly, also be seen as a specific regression in gender relations: the restauration of authoritarianism went hand in hand with the strong confessional turn to Catholicism and the diaspora building national armed forces. I think the fuel of these cultural shifts could also be understood in the context of a blocked development of the wage labour masculinity; an economic crisis and unemployment found a satisfactory explanation in the idea that the (lazy and backward) southerners were receiving all the money with the help of a rotten regime in Belgrade, which had already even declared the Serbs to be the leading force of the country. Croatian mainstream nationalism contains a superior self-understanding in relation to Serbs and other Balkan peoples.

Troubled masculinity is not the only societal potential for the strong development of a large group identity in Volkan's sense, but it is clearly one of those vulnerabilities that can be reinterpreted by splitting and social prejudice, and it became also an automotive dynamics in accelerating the cruelty of the warfare.

## CONCLUSION

My intention is not to 'explain' the dynamics of a cultural conflict through the masculinity issue. But it provides an interesting 'window' into the link between psychodynamic processes and societal circumstances. Masculinity seems to illustrate



the crossroads of a historical learning process and those temporary subjective processes of dealing with one's own life that form the ground for politicization of subjectivity. The actual history was the activation of a particular psychodynamics in a specific historical situation. But had there not been a heritage of obsolete masculinity – out of phase with a modern, intercultural reality – that could be ignited as a power strategy, the crisis in Yugoslav society might have taken another turn. We can compare with e.g. Portugal, where the army with a hope for a democratic future overturned the dictatorship in 1974.

In the wider context of how to understand identity politics, it seems that Volkan's theory of collective defence mechanisms and the dynamics of large group identification in combination with an analysis of contemporary societal conditions and people's subjective handling of critical conditions may enable deeper understanding of a phenomenon which seems hardly understandable. The analysis that horrible identity politics have their background in changing gender relations and threatened masculinity as a consequence of modernization does not justify these politics. But it gives us an insight into the psychosocietal processes whereby ideas and practices that used to be limited to very marginal groups under certain circumstances can become mainstream identifications. It is also related to much less spectacular forms of defence: families are divided, and public rhetoric and consciousness become explicitly revanchist. The politicization of subjectivity is in no way bound to be such a murderous regression; understanding its dynamic genesis is however the first condition for reflecting on and integrating feelings that might otherwise become destructive.

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