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SLOBODAN NAUMOVIC

**ON 'US' AS 'THEM':
UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORICAL BASES
AND POLITICAL USES OF POPULAR NARRATIVES
ON SERBIAN DISUNITY**

1. Introduction¹

This paper starts from the assumption that the European future of Balkan/South East European countries depends to a significant extent on the self-perceptions and expectations of the local populations, as well as on the identities that they are yet to imagine and construct. The proper understanding of, and adequate response to, popular self-perceptions, perceptions of encompassing social realities, and expectations are held here to be vital preconditions for sustainable political development in each of the countries that constitute the region, as well as for their prospects for EU Accession. As Pierre Bourdieu² would say, political action is possible because actors who are a part of the social world possess knowledge of that world, and because one can act upon the social world by influencing the actors' knowledge of it. However, in order to control and change an actor's knowledge of the world, one first has to invest some effort in understanding it.

This paper focuses on one particular thread in the tightly knit web of popular Serbian self-perceptions, that is, the set of *narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits*. The paper will offer an examination of their

- 1 This text is a shortened and modified version of a larger study prepared in the frame of the NEXUS Project (for details see: <http://www.ceu.hu/cps/bluebird/index.htm>). I would like to express my profound gratitude to all colleagues and friends joined together by the NEXUS Project, whose tireless inquisitiveness, vast knowledge, and constructive criticism will continue to be a source of inspiration for me. I am also truly grateful to the friends at the Centre of Advanced Studies in Sofia and the CAS Library for their kindness and helpfulness. Finally, I am greatly indebted to Milan Subotić, whose perceptive and benevolent criticism has helped me reformulate some of the arguments presented here.
- 2 Pierre Bourdieu, "Opisivanje i propisivanje: uvjeti ostvarljivosti političke djelotvornosti i njezine granice", in: *Što znači govoriti. Ekonomija jezičnih razmjena*, Zagreb: Naprijed, 1992, p. 127 (Croatian translation of *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris: Fayard, 1989).

socio-political bases, modes of functioning, as well as of consequences of their political instrumentalisation. Disunity and disaccord have acquired in the Serbian popular imaginary a notorious, quasi-demiurgic status. They are often perceived as being the chief malefactors in Serbian history, causing political or military defeats, and threatening to tear Serbian society completely apart. Out of that reason, the complex set of deep-rooted self-perceptions and self-descriptions occupies a privileged place amongst what the anthropologist Marko Živković, paraphrasing Clifford Geertz, has termed as “stories Serbs tell themselves and others about themselves”³, or what, addressing a different context, Nancy Ries has named “the world of Russian talk”⁴.

Narratives of Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting national splits and conflicts have had a complex social and political life in modern Serbian history. They have flourished in periods of radical social change, political crisis and war, loosing their intensity in those all too short intervals of relative peace and prosperity, but never really disappearing from the sphere of public discourse. They were instrumental in the waging of cultural wars that paved the path of Serbia’s modernisation and Europeanisation⁵, but also played their part in the more ferocious social dramas of dynastic overthrows, regime-changes, revolutions and state-building. They were lending their imagery to the rhetoric of “new beginnings”, only to reappear in new and often inversed disguises as political charismas were being routinised, and as the banality of everyday life and the ever re-emerging corruption were eating up the political enthusiasm of the masses. On the way, they have changed registers, appearing in everyday interpersonal casual exchanges, being transferred to the public sphere and political discourses, entering various forms of literary production, and returning back to the public space, distilled and empowered, to become master-narratives of the day. Depending on the authority of the narrator, on the historical and political context in which they were disseminated, on the characteristics of the audiences that were targeted, and other factors, these narratives exerted everything from a fairly negligible to a decisive influence on the popular interpretations of ongoing political processes, and thus also on their outcomes.

However, narratives of Serbian disunity became most destructive when they were turned into the tools for the intentional enforcement and/or strengthening of radically exclusive political and social splits and divides. The social, cultural, political or other differences and divides that really exist

3 Marko Živković, *Serbian Stories of Identity and Destiny*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 2001.

4 Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk. Culture and Conversation during Perestroika*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 15.

5 For a penetrating analysis of the social and historical contexts of one of the key polemics (on the standardization of Serbian literary language) that fuelled cultural wars in Serbia during the first half of 19th century see: Miroslav Jovanović, *Jezik i društvena istorija. Društvenoistorijski okviri polemike o srpskom književnom jeziku*, Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 2002.

in the community become in this type of discursive strategy the constitutive symbols of radically differing entities, constructed in such a way as to fully exclude from the integral social community all those who do not comply with the ideological premises of the political actors who disperse such narratives and take on themselves the right to define “who we ought to be”. Instead of remaining spontaneous popular laments over the perils of existing divides, or becoming rational means of describing and overcoming real problems, the various disunity related tropes turn the frame of such discursive strategies into powerful rhetorical tools for the enforcement of social exclusion and segregation, and the construction of *quasi-ethnic identity splits* in the Serbian society. On the other hand, in more benign, but ostensibly rarer cases, rhetorical practices of *internal quasi-ethnic othering* became instruments of radical but constructive social and cultural criticism, and symbolic vehicles of profound social transformation.

2. Genres, Myths and Realities: What do Serbs Mean (and Do) When They Speak of Disunity, Disaccord and National Splits?

If one does take popular narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits as indicators of publicly perceived problems, then one should investigate what is it that they reveal about the social and political contexts in which they develop, and are used or misused. However, before being in the position to reflect on the *revelatory* or *instrumental* dimensions of such discursive practices, one must first resolve the issue of what it is that we are really dealing with.

One of the ways of resolving the issue would be to define popular narratives on Serbian disunity as *ethnic self-stereotypes*, a sub-category of *ethnic stereotypes*.⁶ What is stressed in this way are four basic features that narratives on disunity have in common with such stereotypes: a) they are publicly shared, b) oversimplified mental images c) that a social group creates about itself, d) in order to differentiate itself from other groups, thus e) upholding a sense of self-sameness and continuity. Differently phrased, popular narratives on disunity and disaccord could be considered as somewhat peculiar instances of the practice of *social categorisation* that have complex and at times controversial consequences. However, there are other options. *Imagological approaches*

6 For a recent original discussion of the characteristics of ethnic stereotypes in the region, which also offers a brief overview of approaches to the study of stereotypes see: Predrag J. Marković, *Ethnic Stereotypes: ubiquitous, local or migrating phenomena? The Serb-Albanian case*, Southeast European Minorities Network, Bonn: Michael-Zikic-Stiftung, 2003. See also the stimulating study of the ways in which Czechs stereotypically think and narrate about themselves: Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. National identity and the post-communist transformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

would see in the narratives on Serbian disunity the internalised gaze of the Occidental significant Other, in other words the highly specific practice of constructing self-orientalising images.⁷ Alternatively, but in the same vein, such narratives could be described as Serbian variations of the regional propensity for auto-balkanisation. A further refinement could include the specification of various social contexts of discourse production, for example the idea that in societies, which suffer from political repression, and/or are undergoing the crises of transition, people recur to the *narrativisation of everyday life* as a discursive strategy of coping with their hardships. In this frame, as Peter Burke would argue: “speaking is a form of doing... language is an active force in society, a means for individuals and groups to control others or to resist such control, for changing society or for blocking change, for affirming or suppressing cultural identities.”⁸ The frames of discourse analysis can therefore be used to define narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits as a highly specific sub-genre of *identity discourses*, one of the dominant genres of *everyday discursive practices* in Serbia.⁹ However, the themes of disunity, disaccord and resulting splits are also heavily represented in *public discourses*, various forms of literary production and a number of scholarly works, principally, but not exclusively in the outdated works on national characterology. The discourse analysis approach could then lead to the construction of more complex typologies of discursive practices in Serbia, the analysis of narrative genres and context related rhetorical strategies, rhetorical identity formation, and further on.¹⁰ However, the task of this paper

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- 7 Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 51 No. 1, Spring 1992, pp. 1-15; Philip Longworth, *The Making of Eastern Europe*, London: Macmillan, 1994; Maria Todorova, “The Balkans: from discovery to invention”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53 No. 2, 1994, pp. 453-482; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994; Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54 No. 4, Winter 1995, pp. 917-931; Kiril Petkov, “England and the Balkan Slavs 1354-1583: An Outline of a Late-Medieval and Renaissance Image”, *Slavic and East European Review*, 75/1, 1997, pp. 86-117; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*, New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1998; David Norris, *In the Wake of the Balkan Myth: Questions of Identity and Modernity*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999; Kathryn E. Fleming, “Orientalism, the Balkans and Balkan Historiography”, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 105 No. 4, October 2000, pp. 1218-1233; Marko Živković, “Nešto između: simbolička geografija Srbije”, *Filozofija i društvo XVIII*, 2001, pp. 73-110; Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić, eds., *Balkan as Metaphor. Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2002.
- 8 Quoted after N. Ries 1997, p. 20.
- 9 An application of discourse analysis to everyday discursive practices on national identity in contemporary Serbia is offered by Gordana Đerić, “Svakodnevne diskurzivne prakse o osobinama naroda i važnosti nacionalnog identiteta”, in: Zagorka Golubović, Ivana Spasić, Đorđe Pavićević, eds., *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999-2002*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2003, pp. 175-210. See also: Stef Jansen, “Victims, rebels, underdogs: discursive practices of resistance in Serbian protest”, *Critique of Anthropology*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 289-315.
- 10 See Margaret R. Somers and Gloria D. Gibson, “Reclaiming the Epistemological ‘Other’:

– understanding the historical and social bases, as well as the contemporary political consequences of uses and misuses of narratives on Serbian disunity
– does not necessitate the full range of options offered by discourse analysis. For the purpose of this study it suffices to differentiate various existing narratives on the criterion of what is being expressed and what is being done politically when the central concept of Serbian disunity is invoked. Thus, three elementary possibilities become apparent.

First, Serbian disunity can be presented in popular narratives as a *basic and uncontested form of social reality*. This is expressed by statements like: “We Serbs are, and have always been disunited”; “There is no accord among us. We can’t reach consensus on anything”; “They (whichever group) care for themselves, but we Serbs don’t. We pull each other down.” A presumed social reality is plainly or, eventually, contrastingly presented in these remarks. Simultaneously, what is put forward is also the self-perception of a dominant trait of Serbian social or cultural identity. “We are disunited”. A supposedly existing reality is therefore presented, confirmed, and, in a certain sense sustained, by its simple proclamation. In this usage the illocutionary speech act (the act of saying) appears as if unintentionally attaining perlocutionary force (the capacity to cause effects in others by uttering words).¹¹

Second, Serbian disunity can be presented in popular narratives as a *cause of social realities*. Most specifically, Serbian disunity can function as the explanation for particular historical events or processes. For example, the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 was lost, according to popular interpretations, because of “Serbian disunity and treason”. The present economic and political hardships are also presented as a consequence of Serbian disunity and incapacity to cooperate. In a more general sense, disunity can be invoked as the most important, or eventually the single cause of “the tragic historical destiny of the Serbs”. Here, we are dealing with elaborate jeremiads over the general sad state of things Serbian, for which disunity is to be blamed: “Once our kings were eating with golden forks, while the uncivilised Westerners knew of nothing better than their fingers. But look where our disunity has brought us. Now we are being treated as if we were some African tribe”. In the most

Narrative and the Social Construction of Identity”, in: Craig Calhoun, ed., *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, pp. 37-99. See also Margaret R. Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach”, *Theory and Society* 23, 1994, pp. 605- 49.

11 For these at present somewhat neglected distinctions (performative vs. constative utterances; locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, etc.) and the opportunities that they open for the understanding of the consequences of various speech acts see: John L. Austin, “Performative-Constate”, in: J. R. Searle, ed., *The Philosophy of Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (1971) 1974, pp. 13-22, as well as *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962. The most comprehensive relatively recent reflection on the identity-related consequences of narratives was offered by Paul Ricoeur in his penetrating study *Soi même comme un autre*, Paris Editions du Seuil, 1990, and in particular in chapters “L’identité personnelle et l’identité narrative”, pp. 137-165, and “Le soi et l’identité narrative”, pp. 167-198.

elaborate cases, the narratives on Serbian disunity as a cause evolve into full-bodied political myths. These complex *destiny myths* generally incorporate some or all of the following sequences:

- 1) In the mists of time, or eventually in more recent times, there existed a *Serbian Golden Age* (in various interpretations the medieval empire of Tzar Dušan, or the short period between 1903 and 1914, or the post-Milošević period), during which Serbia equalled, or even surpassed all its rivals;
- 2) The blissful state of things was corrupted by intense infighting leading to total disunity and treason, which together induced defeat by the enemy and *Historical Fall* (the Battle of Kosovo, or Tito's era, or the era of Milošević), during which Serbia reached its lowest historical position;
- 3) Serbia will rise again from the terrible depths it has sunken to, owing to the resoluteness of a valiant *Saviour* (Karadjordje, King Aleksandar Karadjordjević, Tito, Milošević, Djindjić, Koštunica...) who will restore the long-lost Unity among the Serbs, leading Serbs into victories once again;
- 4) Thus will become possible the long-awaited *Serbian Renewal*, and the glory of the distant, or not so distant past will be restored once again.¹²

In all the stated cases, the underlying claim of the narratives is that “our” disunity has made of “us” what “we” now are. If things are not as they should be, disunity is to be blamed. “We” are the victims of “our” own malaise, that is, in the absence of a saviour who should bring us back to the original unity of the golden age.

Third, Serbian disunity can be presented in the popular narratives as a malady, a *highly problematic form of social reality that urgently needs to be explained*, giving rise to elaborate ethno-explanations – to what has recently been termed as “popular disunitology”,¹³ as well as to numerous quasi-scholarly treatises¹⁴ and political litanies. Disunity is here perceived not as a “natural” state of

12 For an introduction to the topic of political mythologies, and in particular the myths of Unity, Conspiracy, Saviour, and Golden Age, all of which can be recognized as motifs in the more elaborate versions of narratives on Serbian disunity and disaccord, see: Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques*, Paris: Seuil, 1986, and Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin, eds., *Myths and Nationhood*, London: Hurst, 1997, in particular Anthony Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, pp. 36-59. For the Serbian context, see Ivan Čolović, *Politika simbola. Ogledi o političkoj antropologiji*, Beograd: Radio B92, 1997, in particular “Srpski politički etnomit”, pp. 9-84, and “Iz istorije srpske političke mitologije”, pp. 87-118.

13 This telling label was proposed by Gordana Đerić, “Svakodnevne diskurzivne prakse o osobinama naroda i važnosti nacionalnog identiteta” (p. 192), in: Zagorka Golubović, Ivana Spasić, Đorđe Pavićević, eds., *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999-2002*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2003, pp. 175-210.

14 An indicative example of such an approach is offered by the historian Vasilije Dj. Krestić in an essay that sets out to explain the internal and external roots of Serbian “spiritual disunity”: *Duhovni problemi srpskog naroda. O uzrocima naših razdora*, Haš dom/L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne/Paris/Belgrade, n.d.

things like in the first case, nor as a cause of historical events like in the second, but rather as an undesired *consequence* of a single, or of a whole set of factors. The most frequent popular explanations of the supposed Serbian proneness for divisions invoke:

a) *Cultural factors* (Slavic culture, Serbian culture, Balkan culture, Southern/Eastern culture, or peasant culture are often considered as having an inadequate potential for social integration in conditions of rapid modernisation; *regional cultural differences* are considered to have profoundly divisive consequences (pitting Vojvodina Serbs, Serbs from Serbia proper, Serbs from Croatia, Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbs from Kosovo against each other);

b) *Social factors* (“historical resetting” – the periodic wiping out of social and political elites that is believed to have hindered the “organic” development of Serbian society, as well as blocked local development of feudalism or capitalism that created a diffuse society incapable of negotiating the conflicting interests that arise inside of it);

c) *Religious factors* (eclectic and contradictory mixture of paganism and Christianity characterising “popular Orthodoxy”, poor organisation, factions and rifts inside the Serbian Orthodox Church, Communist de-Christianisation, division of national body because of religious conversions to Islam or Catholicism, and the threat of new forms of Protestant proselytism are all considered to have divisive effects);

d) *Generalised geopolitical factors* expressed in sayings that “Serbs have built their house on the crossroad of continents”, or “on the frontier of empires”, are believed to have caused constant fragmentation of their body politic and insurmountable obstacles to their national unification;

e) *Particular mentality traits* like the supposed “Serbian propensity for envy”, or “Serbian primitive mentality” (which is believed to be guided by the motto “into me, onto me, and underneath me”), or the “Serbian *inat*” – self-destructive stubbornness, are believed to have blocked cooperation and unity;

f) Finally, explanations that invoke the supposed *conspiracy of the malevolent Other* – of Habsburg, Vatican, Comintern, or other historical conspiracies, which all supposedly relied on exploiting previously existing, and deliberately inducing novel splits among the Serbs, further enhanced by more recent examples of presumed German, British or US attempts to secure political and military victory against the Serbs by bribing them into political divisions, or by pitting Montenegrins against Serbs from Serbia proper, present Serbian history as a sad tale written in advance by foreign authors.

In all the listed “explanations”, the underlying claim is that the Serbs are disunited because something or somebody partially (a bad part of them, or of

their culture), or totally external to them (their enemies or corrupting foreign influences) has made them so. In other words, Serbs are, in the frame of such “explanations”, the victims of culture, religion, history or genetics, and, even more probably, of some external personalised and malevolent will.

Popular narratives on Serbian disunity and disaccord can thus supply simplified descriptions of reality, provide presumed causes of apparent realities, and present problems in search of an imaginative explanation. They can express realities, consolidate realities, or attempt to change realities. Arguably even more important is the fact that such narratives supply those who disperse and consume them with “myths we live by”, in other words, with accounts of reality that transform that very reality into an understandable and thus liveable or at least tolerable social and political surrounding.¹⁵ It could even be hypothesised that narratives on disunity and disaccord represent a verbal form of “weapons of the weak”.¹⁶ In all the cases these narratives simultaneously express and reaffirm *a specific idea of Serbian national destiny and/or identity as burdened or menaced by splits and disunity*. In that sense the popular narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits represent both cognitive and socio-political tools with which one can do various things, and identity patterns with the help of which one can become, or continue being a certain type of person.

3. Doing Things with Words: on the Political Uses of Narratives on Serbian Disunity, Disaccord and Resulting Splits

In this section, I will investigate what various *political actors* can do or attempt to do by referring in their addresses to popular narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits, by publicly replicating them, or by basing their speeches on key words or symbols that establish a relation to the pool of meanings deposited in those narratives.¹⁷ It is important to stress that I will be dealing only with political *meta-discourses* based on popular discourses; with *parasitical usages*, and not with cases in which political actors simply replicate popular narratives on disunity. If the analysis is restricted only to the meta-discourses, three basic possibilities can be noted.¹⁸ Starting from a

15 Raphael Samuel and P. Thompson, eds., *The Myths We Live By*, London: Routledge, 1990.

16 James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1985.

17 For such an approach, see Robert Paine, ed., *Politically Speaking*, Philadelphia, 1981, and in particular R. Paine “When Saying is Doing”, pp. 9-23, and F. G. Bailey “Dimensions of Rhetoric in Conditions of Uncertainty”, pp. 25-38.

18 Recent contributions to the investigation of the problem, even if somewhat rudimentary, can be found in: Milan Matić, *Srpska politička tradicija*, Beograd: Institut za političke studje, 1998, in particular pp. 92-103 and pp. 373-384; Olivera Milosavljević, *U tradiciji nacionalizma ili stereotipi srpskih intelektualaca XX veka o “nama” i “drugima”*, Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2002, in particular pp. 161-183;

modified version of Handelman's analysis of the role of rituals in public life, it can be suggested that popular narratives of disunity can principally be used by political actors as *mirrors*, *models* and *veils*.¹⁹

When politically used as *mirrors*, excerpts from popular discourses are used to put popular beliefs to the benefit of the sender of the message, or eventually to create a desired contrast between the holders of such beliefs and the political actor. The political use of narratives on disunity and disaccord as *mirrors* either intentionally confirms existing popular perceptions (here the accent is on agreement with the "people" and not with reality itself), or deliberately creates a gap between the "primitive beliefs of the plebs" and the self-styled civilised, rational and knowledgeable political actor. The mirror mode also raises issues of group identity, political legitimacy, political participation, and the (im)possibility of political action. The narratives used in such a manner can dislocate the blame from a political actor (because of doing something, or because of not doing something), they can spread fatalism among the audience, they can unite or disassociate the political actor from the audience, or from some part of the whole group he refers to, or can allocate blame and shame on the audience, or some part of the referred group, understandably to the gain of the political actor.

When used as *models* (*inciters* would perhaps be an even more fitting expression) the discourses are intended to mobilise the audiences in a desired political direction. Here, Austin's constatives are turned into performatives. If a group believes it is divided, a political actor can either attempt to profit from the fact by mobilising the factions in various ways, or try to amend the collective perception and thus eventually change the reality behind it. Here, the most important example is set by contrasting political discourses on the differences between the "two Serbias":²⁰

D1) There is a Serbia true to its history, to its traditions, to its Church, to its heroes, to its ancestors, and to its descendants. This is our Serbia, this is the true Serbia, this is the only possible Serbia. This is a proud Serbia, Serbia that will not bend to any pressures. And there is another Serbia, which is a disgrace to the name that it bears. It is represented by a motley crew

Vidomir Veljković, *Politički moral Srba od Nemanjića do Miloševića*, Niš: Prosveta, 2001, in particular pp. 170-186; Đorđe Pavićević and Ivana Spasić, "Shvatanja politike", pp. 67-73 and Gordana Đerić, "Svakodnevne diskurzivne prakse o osobinama naroda i važnosti nacionalnog identiteta", pp. 175-210, in: Zagorka Golubović, Ivana Spasić, Đorđe Pavićević, eds., *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999-2002*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2003.

19 Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors. Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 1998 (orig. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), in particular pp. x-liv and pp. 22-62.

20 For the political contexts of the development of narratives on the "two Serbias" in the early nineties, as well as a representative collection of critical narratives on the "First Serbia" produced by the "Second Serbia", see: *Druga Srbija deset godina posle 1992-2002* (The Second Serbia Ten Years After), Beograd: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2002.

of lackeys, cowards, renegades and ill-disguised non-Serbs that will sell our heroes and liberty for a handful of dollars, and turn us willingly into slaves. But, if we resist, if we stay united and true to our fatherland, their malice will drop off like spit from the face of the just one, and Serbia will once again be Great and free.

D2) There is a Serbia of lies, deceptions, myths and hatred. It is a rural, patriarchal, collectivistic, clerical, anti-Western and anti-modern Serbia. It is a Serbia manipulated by cynical leaders who exploit its primitiveness, ignorance and stupidity. Whenever this Serbia had its say, it brought death to others, and misery to itself. But, there is another Serbia, urban, modern, pacifist, cosmopolitan, liberal, democratic and European! Modern and European Serbia offers the only possible future for all of us, there can be no alternatives! We will work hard together with our neighbours and foreign friends to reform the present Serbia and make it worthy of the European future that awaits it. But this future is there for us only if we can discard Serbia's ugly face, the spectre of First Serbia, the nightmare of Great Serbia.

The use of narratives on disunity and disaccord as *models* raises the issues of political participation, political mobilisation, political change, and political allocation of blame. A political actor can insist on existing social and political splits and thus tie one segment or faction to himself, cutting off support to his rivals; he can attempt to unite the divided population under his leadership; he can allocate blame, and mobilise the population into action against the supposed malefactors. The expected political outcome is partial or substantial political change, primarily to the benefit of the actor, and eventually, but not necessarily, of the group or some of its factions.

However, both when used as mirrors and as models, the narratives on disunity can be turned into *veils*, into rhetorical devices that are intended to confuse the audience as to the real motives of the sender of the message. Here the actor speaks about Serbian disunity roughly as he would do in the mirror or the model mode, but he aims at different goals. The basic ground for manoeuvre is provided by the ambiguous form of the message, which opens up the space for different interpretations. When popular discourses of disunity and disaccord are used as political veils, the principal result is political manipulation. The expected political outcome lies purely in the accumulation of political capital while evading the predictable political costs, without any sincere attempt to influence social perceptions in order to transform existing social problems.²¹

21 In their analysis of contemporary popular conceptions of politics in Serbia, Đorđe Pavićević and Ivana Spasić point to the fact that ordinary citizens perceive political parties as the principal instigators of social conflicts and splits instead of being representatives of, and mediators between differing social interests. Because of their excessive partisanship, and continuous production of "political affairs" the parties are seen as one of the major causes of unprincipled social splits, and of social fragmentation in general. Đorđe

4. Towards an Explanation: Historical, Social and Political Bases of Popular Narratives on Serbian Disunity, Disaccord and Resulting Splits

I have been discussing up to now the formal characteristics, communicative potential and possible political uses of popular narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting identity splits. However, even though contemporary popular and political uses of these narratives contribute to their preservation, and eventual change, they have little to add to the understanding of how the narratives came into being.

While various practices of self-identification and social categorisation seem to be constitutive of the social life of the human species as a whole, the continuous questioning of individual and group selfhood, also visible in narratives on disunity, appears to be the central feature of the intellectual and cultural crisis that manifested itself during the late eighteenth, and all along the nineteenth century. The *crisis of modernity* was experienced in the form of dissolution of the ultimate markers of certainty, as the questioning of all foundations of social life. On the one side, the positive one, it was a rebellion against fate, fixed authority and ascription, a revolution that introduced the fundamentally novel idea that humans can, and indeed should construct and re-construct anew their own social identities and roles. On the other side, it was also a merciless and traumatic process: some social strata were forcefully uprooted from their cultural, social and economic milieus in modernising offensives enforced by elites driven by a new type of missionary zeal, and thrown into the uncertainty of rapid transformation. The practices of constructing, challenging, and publicly debating models of individual and group identity became the principal markers of modernity.²² Thus, contemporary Serbian identity discourses can be considered as belonging to the repertoire of ultimately modern practices, in the sense in which public forms of identity questioning and reconstructing are the signs of modernity. They are a part of what can, rather paradoxically, be termed as the European tradition of modernity.

However, Serbian identity discourses, and in particular their constitutive element – the narratives of disunity and disaccord – also belong to a particular social tradition that was born in reaction to the darker side of challenges introduced by the project of modernity. Namely, “transitional historical moments”, like those experienced during the second half of the nineteenth

Pavićević and Ivana Spasić, “Shvatanja politike”, in: Zagorka Golubović, Ivana Spasić, Đorđe Pavićević, eds., *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999-2002*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2003, pp. 67-73.

22 For various frames of discussing the interrelationship of modernity and identity see: Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity, 1990; Peter Wagner, *A Sociology of Modernity. Liberty and Discipline*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, in particular pp. 154-171; Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, eds., *Modernity and Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

century by modernisation latecomers in the Balkans and elsewhere, created paradoxical social situations that could ignite veritable wars over cultural and/or national identity.²³ The most fundamental clash was related to the *identity paradox of modernisation*.²⁴ Namely, the more a society in transition strived to import novel values and practices considered as necessary by some, the less it could preserve cultural traits and traditions that were believed by others to express its “true essence”. For some becoming modern meant losing one’s own “soul” (tradition, culture, identity...), while for others preserving that very soul meant remaining deprived of the dazzling prospects that modernity opened up. This *impossible choice* managed to split local political and intellectual elites into bitterly opposed camps.²⁵ On the one hand, the resulting heated debates opened up the necessary space for the questioning of existing societal, political and economic models, and for the search for viable alternatives. On the other hand, the ferocity with which they were waged often reduced the prospects for social consensus, rational policy-making, and the successful application of acceptable solutions.

In that sense, the turbulent political and social processes that transformed the former “Pashalik of Belgrade” into “the Piedmont of the Balkans” in less than a single century had complex and often paradoxical consequences. Of considerable importance for the understanding of the social and political bases of narratives on Serbian disunity was the formation of various traditionalist movements, and later of political parties that incorporated more or less coherent traditionalist ideas in their programmes and political rhetoric. These

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- 23 Herman Lebovics develops an elaborate frame for the analysis of ferocious, identity-splitting cultural wars in his book *True France. The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- 24 Because of its triangular conflictual nexus, in which two mutually exclusive options inside a group gradually develop opposed identities on the basis of their differing approaches to a third, external, and overpowering party, what was here termed as the identity paradox of modernity, can easily develop into a very virulent form of intra-group conflict – designated in this paper as quasi-ethnic identity-split.
- 25 For a general introduction to the question of political responses to modernity in the Balkan context see: Roumen Daskalov, “Ideas about, and Reactions to Modernization in the Balkans”, *East European Quarterly*, XXXI, No. 2, June 1997, pp. 141-180. See also: Paschalis M. Kitromilides “Modernization as an ideological dilemma in south-eastern Europe: from national revival to liberal reconstruction”, Chapter X in *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy. Studies in the culture and political thought of south-eastern Europe*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1994. For a more detailed account of the logic of semi-peripheral modernization see: Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis. Central and Eastern Europe before World War II*, Berkeley / Los Angeles / London: University of California Press, 2001 (1998). Slobodan Antonić has provided an inspiring introduction to the Serbian case of *unfinished modernisation*: “Modernizacija u Srbiji: tri nedovršena talasa...”, available on the site of *Nova srpska politička misao*: <http://www.nspm.org.yu/clanci%20sl%20antonic%20modernizacija.htm>. See also the volumes of collected papers: *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima XX veka*, Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1994, and *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 19. i 20. veka. 3. Uloga elita*, Beograd: Izdanje autora, 2003. For more detailed accounts of the modernisation of a Balkan capital, and Serbian and Yugoslav society in general see Peđa J. Marković, *Beograd i Evropa 1918-1941. Evropski uticaji na proces modernizacije Beograda*, Beograd: Savremena administracija, 1992, and Predrag J. Marković, *Beograd između Istoka i Zapada: 1948-1965*, Beograd: Službeni list, 1996.

movements expressed the ambivalent, but predominantly negative emotions experienced by the more passive social strata thrown into the processes of rapid change. Such emotions were caused by the uprooting of the traditional patriarchal order and the introduction of values, institutions, and forms of behaviour considered as “foreign”, “inappropriate”, or even “unnatural” – processes that pushed those incapable or unwilling to adapt to them toward the very margins of social life. Any actor pretending to play an important role in Serbian politics could not afford to ignore these social realities. They largely influenced the political rhetoric in Serbia in the last two centuries, roughly dividing the body politic into *traditionalist*, *etatistic*, *nationalist*, and at times authoritarian “Populists” and *modernist*, *liberal*, and generally, but not necessarily *antitraditionalist* “Westerners”. Once established, these orientations became the political nuclei out of which most of the ideological options championed by Serbian political parties evolved. However, the deep ideological dividing lines transgressed many conventional political distinctions like the one between *the left* and *the right*, and influenced the creation of a number of internally inconsistent ideological formulas in Serbian political life. These rifts also created preconditions for a lasting *intra-national conflict of competing political and cultural identities*.

In order to understand the complexity of the political field in nineteenth century Serbia, one must add to the presented sketch the clash between three rapidly developing models of authority: *proto-monarchical* (represented first by Karađorđe Petrović, and later by Prince Miloš Obrenović, as well as by monarchs from the dynasties that they founded), *oligarchic* (represented first by the vojvode, military leaders from the First Serbian Insurrection, and later by leading statesmen, political and military figures), and *constitutional-popular* (represented by the popular assemblies).²⁶ Issues of culture became symbolic armaments in the clash of the three claims to power and authority. To this should be added the effects of repeated *reversals of position*, which resulted in radical changes of strategy, and brought about non-conventional, not to say unnatural affinities between political actors, political ideologies and conceptions of cultural identity. The gradual development of *party politics* out of the described *triangle of competing authorities* finalised the establishment of a relatively permanent frame of political life in Serbia, and with it the partial institutionalisation of social splits into party cleavages.²⁷

26 See Bojan Mitrović, “Taming the Assembly: National Representation in Serbia (1815-1859)”, *East European Quarterly*, XXXVII, No. 1, March 2003, pp. 51-66.

27 Traian Stoianovich draws a broad sketch of “The Social Foundations of Balkan Politics, 1750-1941”, in: *Between East and West: The Balkan and Mediterranean Worlds, Vol. 3: Material Culture and Mentalities: Power and Ideology*, New Rochelle, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1995, pp. 111-138. See also his “The Pattern of Serbian Intellectual Evolution, 1830-1880”, in: *Between East and West: The Balkan and Mediterranean Worlds, Vol. 4: Material Culture and Mentalities: Land, Sea and Destiny*, New Rochelle, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1995, pp. 15-37. Gale Stokes offers an insight into the beginnings of institutionalized political life in Serbia in: *Politics as Development: the Emergence of*

The established frame of the political life in Serbia became the field of fervent contestations on three principal levels.²⁸ On the first level, we can note *conflicts of interests*, whether political or economic, or their various combinations. While this type of conflict can become very intense, it is amenable to solutions in the form of quantitative compromise, as a result of bargaining and mutual concessions. On the second level, we can note *conflicts of values and ideology*. These conflicts offer less opportunity for compromise, but complex political procedures to make all sides relatively satisfied do exist. Finally, *conflicts of identity* (ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial...) represent the most difficult case, for at least three reasons. First, the contending sides often consider the complete elimination of their rivals as the only possible solution. Out of this reason, these conflicts can, at their worst, become a matter of life and death. Second, conflicts of identity easily attract other emotionally salient issues, like historical grievances, issues of honour and prestige, or material deprivations, and thus easily acquire a cumulative logic. Finally, such conflicts resist quantitative compromises, and are not easily translatable into the language of procedural solutions.

Therefore, it might be said that the nineteenth century wars over political and cultural identity, intensified by the struggle between three contesting claims to political authority, further channelled by the development of party politics in Serbia and radicalised by conflicts of interest and ideology together provided the initial reasons for the apparition of modern discourses on Serbian disunity and disaccord.

However, while the raging political and cultural wars and party politics offer an explanation of the emergence of the narratives on Serbian disunity, these wars cannot be the only explanation of the elaborateness, or fluctuating intensity of the narratives. What must also be included is the particular logic of the construction of modern Serbian national identity; the considerable state building efforts and the resulting exaggerated role of the state; the effects of the social and ethnic structure of the population and the resulting clashes of interest and power (the most noted case in 19th century Serbia being the rift between the better educated and “Europeanised” “Prečani” Serbs and the “Srbijanci”, or Serbs from territories that were once a part of Ottoman

Political Parties in Nineteenth-Century Serbia, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990. For a comprehensive treatment of the historical development and relatively recent reappearance of social splits and party cleavages in Serbia see: Slobodan Antonić, “Stranački i društveni rascepi u Srbiji (Party and Social Cleavages in Serbia)”, *Sociologija*, Vol. LX, No. 3, Juli-Septembar 1998, pp. 323-356. The effects of political reversals of position are clearly visible in the concluding chart (covering the period from 1830 to 2000), p. 351. Namely, there seems to be a demonstrable tendency of some parties belonging to the libertarian-democratic camp to develop a liking for statist-authoritarian approaches as soon as they come into power.

28 For the tripartite classification of social conflicts see: “Consolidation and the cleavages of ideology and identity”, in: Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich K. Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies. Rebuilding the Ship at Sea*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 247-270.

Empire), as well as of its transformations during the preceding two centuries; the rivalries between Serbian, Montenegrin and Yugoslav statehood projects and interests, the resulting identity conflicts and confusions; and numerous other factors of lesser importance. If one therefore turns to the logic of the construction of modern Serbian national identity, then one can start from placing collective identifications like ethnic and national ones in a *relational* and *interactive* optic.²⁹ In other words, collective identifications depend on the “internal-external dialectic of identification”.³⁰ In Serbia, and probably in other Balkan countries as well, a collective national *We* was, and still is, simultaneously opposed to the *significant other*, as well as to the *rivalling neighbours*. The significant other (represented by Europe, or the West in general) was either envied or despised, or both at the same time, with each option resulting in paradoxical consequences for self-identification. The rivalling Balkan neighbours engaged, and still engage each other in games of mutual balkanisation.³¹ However, each Balkan national *We* is further fragmented into *hierarchic sub-identities*, arching from the larger regions in the state (which compete for resources and prestige, mobilising loyalties on the way) all the way to the local level. Here, the Serbian case was complicated by the issue of Yugoslav identity, which could also be considered as a form of national identity, resulting in the splitting of national loyalties among the Serbs. Finally, differences of ethnicity, class, gender, age, or education have to be taken into account. Out of the listed reasons, the collectively upheld sense of Serbian national identity was, and is under the constant threat of potential *identity-splits*, the most intense of which take the form of *quasi-ethnic identity-splits*.³² In this frame, each particular *act of identification*,³³ depending on the stimuli that have caused it, induces a specific re-interpretation of the perceived position of *Us* in the integral *relational nexus*. How we appear to ourselves largely depends on whom we are comparing with, or confronting to.

In that sense, one of the most powerful sources of narratives on Serbian disunity were, and still are *national identity-splits*. National identity-splits are considered here to be internal symbolic rifts (generally, but not necessarily of a binary character) that are principally, but not exclusively provoked by

29 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

30 Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 20.

31 M. Bakić-Hayden 1995, M. Todorova 1997.

32 For a similar analysis of the phenomenon of quasi-ethnic identity splits in the frame of which a national body is split into entities which treat each other as if belonging to different ethnicities: Майа Грекова, Лиляна Деянова, Снежана Димитрова, et. al., Националната идентичност в ситуация на преход: исторически ресурси, София: Философска фондация Минерва, 1995/96, in particular p. 294.

33 For a reevaluation of the concept of identity, and for interesting suggestions on alternative concepts see: Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’”, *Theory and Society* 29, 2000, pp. 1-47. See also David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation. The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998, and in particular the introductory piece “A Theory of Political Identities”, pp. 3-35.

internal differences in reactions to various forms of external challenge or pressure, due to which the military, economic, political, cultural, and/or ethical inferiority of the group under threat becomes unmasked.³⁴ Because they open up the space for conflicting ideas of who we really are, and what should we do in the situation in which we currently are, they clearly belong to the most difficult type of conflict – to *identity conflicts*. As was demonstrated, identity-splits can be associated with economic and political modernisation latecomers, but they are not necessarily restricted to this broad social and political category. The external political and economic pressures, and related internal dilemmas and clashes instigate *political splits* which, if combined with *material interests*, and in particular with issues of *competing imaginings of identities*, can take the form of *quasi-ethnic identity-splits*. The proponents of competing political programs (related to questions of development strategies, political processes, geopolitical alliances, demographic, or territorial issues, as well as to problems of ethnic and national traditions and identities, all of which are interconnected with issues of power and prestige), when pressured by factors or actors beyond their control, tend in their strife to exclude from the ethnic group or nation, defined according to their conceptions of politically desirable identity, those whose political ideas differ. In other words, every attempt to politically redefine an ethnic or national ideal can produce “outcasts” who would otherwise “naturally” belong to the group, but out of a number of reasons can not, or do not want to belong to a newly defined collective *We*. In a number of cases, accumulated differences are transformed into quasi-ethnic identity-splits, and those among *Us* who differ politically become socially excluded, and reallocated to *Them*. The approaching of an overpowering *Enemy*, or the emergence of an apparently insolvable political, economic or social problem, opens up the hunting season on *Others*, and in particular on the supposed *Traitors* among *Us*, who either work for *Them*, or have managed to hide their true *Otherness*.

The political turmoil in Serbia during the nineties offers telling examples of such *identity conflicts*.³⁵ They were related to the bitter struggle between the

34 The internal-external relational frame that influences the build-up of quasi-ethnic identity-splits is penetratingly analysed by Gale Stokes, “Dependency and the Rise of Nationalism in Southeastern Europe”, in his *Three Eras of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 23-35, and in particular pp. 31-35.

35 The necessary socio-historical contextualization for the understanding of the “Serbian case” is provided by: John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: twice there was a country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 and John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, London: Hurst, 2000. Good introductions to the Yugoslav and Serbian political turmoil of the eighties, nineties and after are offered by Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy – Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995; Lenard J. Cohen, *Broken Bonds. The Disintegration of Yugoslavia*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993 and *Serpent in the Bosom: The Rise and Fall of Slobodan Milošević*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001; Robert Thomas, *Serbia under Milošević. Politics in the 1990's*, London: Hurst, 1999; or Jasna Dragović-Soso, ‘Saviours of the Nation’. *Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism*, London: Hurst, 2002. The most comprehensive introductions in Serbian/Serbocroatian are: Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija –*

previously mentioned “Two Serbias”. Each of the two Serbias was defining its symbolical boundaries in much the same way as “real” ethnic groups do, excluding members of the other Serbia from its imagined community of *Us*. The “Autochthonous”, “Authentic”, “Historical”, “Patriotic” and “National”, but at times also “Heavenly” and “Orthodox” Serbia was confronted by the “Anti-Nationalist”, “Pacifist”, “Modern”, “European”, “Cosmopolitan”, “Civil”, and “Liberal” Serbia. “Patriotic” Serbs explained the “cowardly treason”, of which the “Cosmopolitans” or “Mundialists” were presumably guilty in times when “the future of the nation was endangered”, by their “well hidden non-Serbian origins”, or their “profound identity crisis”, or by the “selling of their souls for a handful of dollars”. On the other side, “European” Serbs retorted that the “nationalist folly” demonstrated by their opponents came from their utterly uncivilised “Montagnard”, “Krajišnik”, “gusle-fiddling”, “rural mentality”. Thus, each group became the other’s “radical other”. This Serbian contribution to the Balkan wars of Balkanising opposites was further complicated by feverish political dilemmas like the pro vs. contra Milošević divide (which did not overlap completely with the division between the “two Serbias” in the sense that some of those belonging to the “First Serbia” were also vehemently against Milošević), as well as by other historically rooted divides like those between Serbianism and Yugoslavism, monarchism and republicanism, Četniks and Partisans, or Orthodox culture and lay culture. Thus, continuing clashes over some of the issues around which were constituted the initial “two Serbias”, and their widening to introduce new topics, at times provoked the construction of other conceptions of Serbia and their inclusion into the conflictual nexus. The Serbian public arena was made even more complex by practices or events that brought about the simultaneous radicalisation of the public and its further fragmentation into bitterly opposed segments. Leading this process were war-related fervent nationalist mobilisation campaigns by the state controlled media, at their peak from 1991 to 1993, and gradually losing strength until 1995, when they were replaced by ferocious anti-opposition campaigns.³⁶ They reappeared in the second half of 1998 and during 1999, as the Kosovo crisis escalated, and NATO unleashed its undeclared war against Yugoslavia. Their destructive potential reached its peak in 2000, when the pathological tendency of the Milošević regime to enforce quasi-ethnic identity splits as a means of eliminating political adversaries (by hinting at their non-Serbian ethnic origins, by “unveiling” their “foreign mentors and financiers”,

država koja je odumrla. Uspom, kriza i pad Četvrtje Jugoslavije, Zagreb: Prometej and Beograd: Samizdat B92, 2003; Slobodan Antonić, *Zarobljena zemlja. Srbija za vlade Slobodana Miloševića*, Beograd: Otkrovenje, 2002; Ivana Spasić and Milan Subotić, eds., *R/evolucija i poredak. O dinamični promena u Srbiji*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2001; *Srbija posle Miloševića*, Nova srpska politička misao, Posebno izdanje 1, Beograd, 2001; Vladimir N. Cvetković, ed., *Rekonstrukcija institucija. Godina dana tranzicije u Srbiji*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2002.

36 See Veljko Vujačić, “Historical legacies, nationalist mobilization, and political outcomes in Russia and Serbia: A Weberian view”, *Theory and Society* 25, 1996, pp. 763-801.

or by demonising them as Nazis or willing members of the Hitler Jugend) was radicalised by the certainty that the endgame was rapidly approaching.

While it is beyond doubt that one of the most important political goals for Milošević was the enforcement of various forms of “unity” (national and ideological ones being of primary importance) onto the population of Serbia, it is more than obvious that his policies backfired. Namely, in a multiethnic/multinational and multi-confessional society any attempt to enforce an encompassing identity politics on the basis of symbols publicly perceived as belonging to the tradition or religion of the dominant nation will almost automatically alienate all other populations, who will interpret the policy as a manoeuvre masking an attempted majorisation. For that reason, conflicting national and ethnic interests were given a combat cause, and could intensify instead of being appeased. They formed the content of publicly more and more visible cleavages pitting various versions of *Yugoslavism* against *Serbism*, and *federalism* against *centralism*.³⁷

However, the supposedly unifying identity politics that relied heavily on neo-traditionalist symbolism did not alienate only the non-Serbian populations. After a brief “unity” phase during the late eighties, the official instrumentalisation of traditional symbolism and its incorporation into an elaborate nationalist rhetoric reactivated a number of unresolved ideological and historical cleavages. Of most importance were the partially overlapping *Partisan – Chetnik*, *Republican – Monarchist*, *Socialist – Anti-communist*, *internationalist/cosmopolitan – nationalist* and *Serb – Yugoslav* divides.³⁸ Once reinvigorated, these ideological cleavages became an obstacle to the democratic bargaining and consensus building processes, further intensifying clashes of economic and other more “substantial” interests.

Apart from reinforcing ethnic/national and ideological divides, the use of traditional symbolism backfired because of reactivating numerous other social and “modernisational” cleavages. Differing attitudes related to various elements of tradition re-enforced class, generational, educational, professional, and even gender divisions.³⁹ Next, *regional animosities*, both along the centre-periphery axis (Belgrade-provincial areas), as well as the already mentioned one between the *Srbijanci* (Serbs from Serbia) and the *Prečani* Serbs (coming

37 See Veljko Vujačić: “Serbian Nationalism, Slobodan Milosevic and the Origins of the Yugoslav War”, *The Harriman Review*, December 1995, pp. 25-34.

38 The sociologist Vladimir N. Cvetković has defended the thesis that the most important of those splits was the Serb-Yugoslav one: “...the basic watershed of the Serb identity, and hence political organization, goes along the lines of acceptance or rejection of the Yugoslav identity”, in: “Self-Cognition and Political Projection: European and National Identities – the Serb Perspective”, *Serbian Studies*, Journal of The North American Society for Serbian Studies, Vol. 12, 1998, No. 1, pp. 27-41.

39 For the gendered aspect of political splits in Serbia, and in particular the fervently anti-nationalist activity of various feminist organisations see: Stef Jansen, “Antinacionalizam: slučaj feminističkog aktivizma”, in: *Antinacionalizam*, XX Vek, Beograd, 2005, pp. 61-108.

from territories once controlled by the Habsburgs), with their differing cultural, economic and political backgrounds, found a way to be expressed through diverging attitudes towards traditional symbolism. The same could be said of clashes of interests between the *starosedeooci* (old residents) and the *dodjoši* (newcomers) resulting from economic migrations. The older rivalries between *urban* and *peasant* populations, between the once well settled old *bourgeoisie* and the aspiring *parvenu-s*, and more recently, between *urbanite autochthonous elites* and *rural and provincial refugees of war* sparked verbal and symbolical, but also economic, and even physical clashes. While the intensive political usage of traditional symbolism seems to have been of paramount importance for the reinvigorating of the mentioned national, ethnic, ideological, social, cultural and other splits, it is very important not to reify it as the cause of all these cleavages.⁴⁰ Correspondingly, the expectation that by simply eliminating traditional symbolism from the domain of public and political communication all the existing cleavages between traditionalists and modernists will vanish is equally flawed.⁴¹

The particularised splits described up to now were often subsumed by generalising, overarching cleavages, like those between *traditionalists* and *modernisers*, or *nationalists* and *cosmopolitans*. The fact that these overarching cleavages proved more stable than the seemingly central cleavage caused by Milošević's personality and policies is considered here to be of crucial importance as it is a telling witness of the historical continuity of cleavage structure in Serbia. Thus, to the bewilderment of many analysts and political prophets, these overarching splits survived the "revolution" that brought down the Milošević regime, only to be reinvented as the deepening cleavage between Vojislav Koštunica's moderately pro-traditionalist and gradualist *legalism* and the late Zoran Djindjić's restless pro-modernist *pragmatism*.⁴² This split in the

40 For various uses of tradition in Serbian politics see Slobodan Naumović, "Od ideje obnove do prakse upotrebe: ogled o odnosu politike i tradicije na primeru savremene Srbije", *Od mita do folka, Liceum*, Beograd-Kragujevac, 1996, pp. 109-145. For an analysis of the logic of political instrumentalisation of tradition in the early years of Milošević's regime, see Slobodan Naumović, "Instrumentalised Tradition: Traditionalist Rhetoric, Nationalism and Political Transition in Serbia, 1987-1990", in: Miroslav Jovanović, Karl Kaser, Slobodan Naumović, eds., *Between the Archives and the Field. A Dialogue on Historical Anthropology of the Balkans*, Zur Kunde Südosteuropas - Band II/24, Udruženje za društvenu istoriju - Posebna izdanja / Teorija I/1, Belgrade-Graz, 1999, pp. 179-217. Traditional symbolism remained an important ideological demarcation line even after the ouster of Milošević. For example, the late Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić used to stress that modern, reformist Serbia should stop caring about *šljivovica*, the traditional plum brandy, and should rather focus on "new technologies".

41 For an analysis of the uses and misuses of tradition as a political symbol and value in political discourses and debates in contemporary Serbia see: Gordana Đerić, "Tradicija u 'obredu prelaza'. 'Pravila' mistifikacije polemičkog diskursa i strategije 'ujednačavanja' u retorici nacionalizma i kosmopolitizma", in: Mile Savić, ed., *Integracija i tradicija*, Beograd: Istitut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2003, pp. 141-161.

42 See Miloš Knežević, "Legalisti protiv pragmatista. Moralna akustika u ponorima dnevne politike", posted on the site of *Nova srpska politicka misao*: http://www.nspm.org.yu/druga_verzija_m_knezevic.htm

original DOS (Democratic Opposition of Serbia) coalition was soon rhetorically reinvented as the cleavage between *anti-reformists* and *reformists*, whereby a disassociation of Koštunica from the aura of reformism was attempted. After the tragic assassination of Djindjić in 2003, this cleavage was cemented by the political strategy of exclusive appropriation of the symbolically charged reformist agenda by the self-proclaimed guardians of Djindjić's modernist pro-European legacy.⁴³ Even before that, as the power struggle between former allies deepened, procedural issues related to the establishment of a stable parliamentary majority came to the fore, and the divide separating two blocks came to be reinterpreted as one between *legitimists* (those parties from the DOS claiming to represent the parliament majority, and thus having the right to exclusively control the process of reforms) and *legalists* (those pointing to the breaches of legal procedures both in the securing of parliamentary majority by their opponents, and in the overall direction of reforms in Serbia, mainly members of Koštunica's DSS).⁴⁴ On the way, the self proclaimed exclusive *reformists*, freshly refurbished as *legitimists*, demonstrated an utter disrespect for democratic procedures and legal frames, which according to them were unnecessarily slowing down and complicating the business of reforms. The clash was then reframed into one between *legitimists* and *legalists*. Finally, the widening rift⁴⁵ inside the anti-Milošević coalition was reformulated once more, this time as the paradoxical and profoundly disturbing divide between *reformists* (also posing as legitimists) and *democrats* (dubbing as legalists).⁴⁶

Instances of bitter political feuding among the closest political allies lead back into the heart of the darkness of Serbian *disunity* – into *quasi-ethnic identity splits*. As was previously stated, quasi-ethnic identity-splits are considered here to be the gravest conflicts that can happen inside a nation or an ethnic group. They have the potential to spark off and fuel civil wars, and they can bring about the political, cultural, and even physical disappearance of whole subgroups or factions of a given population. Therefore, it can be hypothesized

43 The appropriation of the reformist agenda as a rhetorical strategy was initiated by Djindjić himself, who had a liking for promoting himself as the sole political operator capable of “forcing Serbia”, as he preferred to say, into the EU. The rhetorical strategy was taken over and given additional boost by some of his less charismatic successors, who saw in it the only popularly acceptable means for preserving their political positions once he was gone. See: Slobodan Antonić, interview for *Blicnews*, December 18, 2001, “Đinđić je uspostavio monopol na reforme”.

44 See, for example, Slobodan Divjak, “Tiranija većine i odgovornost postojeće srpske vlasti”, posted on the site of *Nova srpska politička misao*: <http://www.nspm.org.yu/komentari.htm>

45 The feuding between former allies became so profoundly disturbing that Dragoljub Mićunović, Democratic Center leader and Democratic Opposition of Serbia candidate at the Serbian presidential elections of November 2003, had to start his campaign with the following statement: “I am doing this for the future of Serbia. Serbia is again treading the path of division, hatred, and lack of understanding. I will do all I can to elevate Serbia's interests above all party interests.” Transcript and translation *BETA News Agency*, October 20, 2003.

46 Milorad Belančić: “Demokratija ili reforma?”, posted on the site of *Nova srpska politička misao*, <http://www.nspm.org.yu/debata.htm> .

that *social and psychological traumas resulting from quasi-ethnic identity-splits bear most of the responsibility for the endurance and intensity of narratives of Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits*. The abundance of such narratives can be considered as a positive indicator of the existence of such splits, as well as of popular will to understand their causes, and to counter them in the only way seemingly accessible to ordinary citizens.

5. Conclusion

As has hopefully been demonstrated up to now, apart from being a highly visible form of social reality in Serbia, narratives on disunity, disaccord and resulting splits are also producers or reproducers of social and political realities, whether directly, through the effects that they have on popular ways of thinking and doing, or indirectly, through intended and unintended consequences of their political instrumentalisation. The narratives are phrased and operate at the intermediary level between *the sphere of already existing, and newly emerging social splits*, in which various interest groups and identity formulas compete and clash, and *the sphere of party politics* as a formalised system for the political resolution of such conflicts. In the Serbian case, the party system still does not seem to be fully capable of balancing and resolving the competing interests and identity politics in a satisfactory manner. The hyper-production of narratives on disunity and disaccord in Serbia seems to be directly related to this incapacity of the party system, and of the political system in general, to address and eventually resolve existing clashes of interest and identity-splits. In that sense, far from being some irrational local cultural characteristic, mentality trait, or a legacy of pre-modern times, the popular narratives on disunity and disaccord can be considered simultaneously as indicators of existing unresolved divides, symptoms of political dysfunction, and as primitive regulatory mechanisms and political security valves. If this incapacity of the Serbian political system is to be transcended, splits and clashes based on interests and competing identifications must be retranslated again into political cleavages in the strict meaning of the concept, into persistent lines of conflict around which mass organizations can be formed, leading to the possibility of negotiating the basic set of issues around which the conflict initially started. On the other hand, if left unaddressed, both the popular discourses and the existing splits will continue their perverse logic of mutual reinforcement. In order to prevent this vicious circle, conflicts of interest must be discursively disassociated from ideological conflicts, as well as from identity-based conflicts, and all of them have to be disentangled from narratives on splits and disunity. Each of those components has to be addressed on its own level. The mystical knot of Serbian disunity has to be presented to the public for what it is – a complex interwoven bundle

of conflicting, mutually reinforcing interests, identifications and narratives that can hardly be appeased without the adequate political framework and the readiness of all engaged sides for substantial compromise. Obviously, difficult, painful, and lengthy negotiations over precisely defined interests and openly and clearly presented identifications are one thing, while fatalistic laments over an unchangeable Serbian Destiny of Disunity are quite another. Precisely out of that reason, the danger of excluding from the social dialogue those whose interpretations of social reality seem to rely on myths and mystifications should be avoided at all costs. The point, rather, is to convince all of the parties engaged in the political process and public dialogue that the ideal of negotiation over clashing interests and identities on the one hand, and the subjective perception of Serbian Disunity as Serbian Destiny, on the other, are not based on two mutually exclusive visions of social and political realities, but rather that the second one is a symbolical means of pointing to the flaws in the first one. Only by listening to the second one attentively, and thus by taking it for what it is, can the first one become more amenable to agreement, compromise, and can eventually raise the chances for individual and collective gains of all those concerned.⁴⁷

47 An interesting proposition for the extra-electoral negotiation of interests in democratic states with permanent and rigid cleavages (based on a principle suggested by the British economist Nicholas Kaldor in 1939) is offered by James S. Coleman in his paper "Democracy in Permanently Divided Systems", in: Gary Marks and Larry Diamond, eds., *Reexamining Democracy. Essays in Honor of Seymour Martin Lipset*, Newbury Park, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992, pp. 17-26.