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THE SOCIAL ORIGINS AND POLITICAL
USES OF POPULAR NARRATIVES
ON SERBIAN DISUNITY

Abstract: *The text offers an examination of socio-political bases, modes of functioning, and of the consequences of political instrumentalisation of popular narratives on Serbian disunity. The first section of the paper deals with what is being expressed and what is being done socially when narratives on Serbian disunity are invoked in everyday discourses. The next section investigates what political actors attempt to do by referring in their addresses to popular narratives on Serbian disunity, by publicly replicating them, or by basing their speeches on key words of those narratives. The narratives on Serbian disunity are then related to their historical and social contexts, and to various forms of identity politics with which they share common traits. The nineteenth century wars over political and cultural identity, intensified by the struggle between 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. Next, addressed are the unintended consequences of popular and political "disunitology". Because of unintentionally solidifying or misinterpreting really existing social problems (in the case of some popular narratives on disunity), or because of intentionally exploiting popular perceptions of such problems (in the case of most political meta-narratives), the constructive potential related to existing social conflicts and splits can be completely wasted. What results is a deep feeling of frustration, and the diminishing of popular trust in the political elites and the political process in general. The contemporary hyper-production of narratives on disunity and disaccord in Serbia seems to be directly related to the incapacity of the party system, and of the political system in general, to responsibly address, and eventually resolve historical and contemporary clashes of interest and identity-splits. If this vicious circle in which the consequences of social realities are turned into their causes is to be prevented, 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 popular narratives on splits and disunity. Most important of all, the practice of political instrumentalisation of popular narratives on disunity and disaccord has to be gradually abandoned.*

Key words: *popular narratives on Serbian disunity, political instrumentalisation of popular narratives, rethorical strategies, quasi-ethnic identity splits, political and party cleavages, manipulative politics.*

1. Introduction[1]

In the introduction to his policy brief that marks the beginning of a long term IDEA project of policy tracking in South East Europe, economist Vladimir Gligorov highlighted the well known, but at times conveniently forgotten fact that popular perceptions of reality also represent a form of social reality. Because they are widely believed to be true, popular conceptions of reality can significantly influence the behaviour of individuals and/or social groups, and can therefore have real consequences. The same is true of popular expectations. Based on widely distributed ideas of what is possible and desirable, popular expectations induce, or contribute to the apparition of new realities.[2] Towards the end of his paper, after having contrasted regional economic and political realities, popular perceptions of these realities, and regional policies, Gligorov puts forward a conclusion that should incite both scholars and policy makers to some soul searching. Namely, he states that policy agendas in the region have very little, if anything at all, to do with the issues that people actually care about.[3] The underlying morale of his conclusion seems to be rather clear: policies risk failure if they disregard popular expectations and perceptions of reality.

This paper starts from the assumption that the future of the Balkans/South East Europe as a region depends to a significant extent on the self-perceptions and expectations of the local popula-

[2] Gligorov's *Policy Brief* (March 2002) can be downloaded from: http://www.idea.int/balkans/policy_brief_balkans.pdf.

[3] V. Gligorov 2002, p. 10.

tions, 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, as well as to popular expectations are held here to be vital preconditions for sustainable political development in the region. As Pierre Bourdieu[4] would say, political action is possible because actors who are a part of the social world posses knowledge of that world, and because one can act upon the social world by affecting the actors' knowledge of it.

Focused in this paper is 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 socio-political bases, modes of functioning, and political consequences. 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. This complex and dynamic set of deep-rooted self-perceptions and self-descriptions for that reason occupies a privileged place among what the anthropologist Marko Živkovi , paraphrasing Clifford Geertz, has termed as "stories Serbs tell themselves and others about themselves"[5], or what, addressing a different context, Nancy Ries has named "the world of Russian talk".[6]

Narratives of Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting national splits and conflicts have had a very long and 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 discourses even during those more tranquil times. They were instru-

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[4]   Pierre Bourdieu, "Opisivanje i propisivanje: uvjeti ostvarljivosti politi ke djelotvornosti i njezine granice", in: *Što zna i govoriti. Ekonomija jezi nih razmjena*, Zagreb: Naprijed, 1992, p. 127 (Croatian translation of *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques*, Paris: Fayard, 1989).

[5]   Marko Živkovi , *Serbian Stories of Identity and Destiny*, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 2001.

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

mental in the waging of cultural wars that paved the path of Serbia's modernisation and Europeanisation[7], 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 become most destructive when they are 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 in the community are in this type of discursive strategy instrumentalised into becoming the constitutive symbols of radically differing entities, which are 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 in the frame of such discursive strategies into powerful rhetorical tools for the en-

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[7] For a penetrating and highly original research on 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, and have their repercussions even today, see: Miroslav Jovanovi , *Jezik i društvena istorija. Društvenoistorijski okviri polemike o srpskom književnom jeziku*, Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 2002.

forcement 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* can, and did become instruments of constructive social and cultural criticism, and symbolic vehicles for the enhancement of profound social transformation. Unfortunately, as will become obvious from what follows, political actors in Serbia have often found it hard to resist the temptation to instrumentalise popular narratives on disunity in order to extirpate their opponents from the body politic, instead of starting from them and painstakingly engineering mutually acceptable compromises that could eventually resolve both the social divides and the narratives that stem from, and feed on them.

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

If we do take popular narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits as real indicators of publicly perceived problems, then we should investigate what it is 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 in detail, we 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*.[8] What is stressed in this way are four basic features of such stereotypes: a) that they are publicly shared, b) oversimplified mental images c) that a certain type of social group creates and upholds about itself, or others d) in order to differentiate itself from other groups, thus upholding a sense of

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[8] For a recent original discussion of the characteristics of ethnic stereotypes, which also offers a brief historical overview of approaches to the study of stereotypes see: Predrag J. Markovi , *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.

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 would see in the narratives on Serbian disunity the interiorized gaze of the Occidental significant Other, in other words the highly specific practice of constructing self-orientalizing images. In an even more precise phrasing, such narratives could be described as the Serbian version of a regional propensity for auto-balkanisation. Here, the grain of the image is getting still finer, as we differentiate phenomena like the textual projections of power relations, the constitutive agency of the significant other, and the work of imaginative geography in the construction of collective identities in the region.[9] A further refinement could include the specification of various social contexts of discourse production, for example the idea that in the societies that are suffering political repression, or are undergoing the crises of transition, people recur to the *narrativisation of everyday life* as a discursive strategy of coping with its 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

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[9] Milica Baki -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 Baki -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 Živkovi , "Nešto izme u: simboli ka geografija Srbije", *Filozofija i društvo* XVIII, 2001, pp. 73-110; Dušan I. Bjeli and Obrad Savi , eds., *Balkan as Metaphor. Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2002.

suppressing cultural identities".[10] 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.[11] However, the themes of disunity, disaccord and resulting splits are also heavily represented in *public discourses*, literary production and a number of scholarly works, principally, but not exclusively in the outdated works on national characterology. The discourse analysis approach would therefore lead to the construction of more complex typologies of discursive practices in Serbia, the analysis of narrative genres and context related rhetorical strategies, and further on. We could then differentiate between various dimensions of narrative – and speak of ontological, public, conceptual, and 'meta' narrativity.[12] In sum, and using a slightly different theoretical language, we would be moving towards developing an integral economy of popular linguistic exchanges in Serbia in the frame of which various themes would be defined according to their specific structural position in that economy.[13]

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[10] Quoted after N. Ries 1997, p. 20.

[11] A thought provoking application of discourse analysis to everyday discursive practices on national identity in contemporary Serbia is offered by Gordana eri , "Svakodnevne diskurzivne prakse o osobinama naroda i važnosti nacionalnog identiteta", in: Zagorka Golubovi , Ivana Spasi , or e Pavi evi , 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.

[12] See Margaret R. Somers and Gloria D. Gibson, "Reclaiming the Epistemological 'Other': 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.

[13] When writing somewhat metaphorically about 'the forming of prices' and 'the anticipation of gain' in the overall 'economy of linguistic exchanges', Pierre Bourdieu in fact underwrites the importance of the contexts in which such exchanges take place, in particular for the social functioning of what John L. Austin would term as 'performative utterances'. By pointing to the centrality of what was labeled as 'market', as well as to the dialectical relationship between the language that is instituting the social group and is instituted by the group, and the group itself, which is instituted by language and in turn institutes it, Bourdieu criticised Austin's rather formalistic interest for the purely linguistic bases of the 'performative power' of utterances. This study owes much to Burdieu's dynamic approach to discourse analysis. See in particular Bourdieu 1992, pp. 89-103 and pp. 127-138.

The task of this paper – understanding the historical and social bases, as well as the political consequences of uses and misuses of narratives on Serbian disunity – does not necessitate the full range of options offered by discourse analysis and narrative studies. The focus is on what is being expressed and what is being done socially and politically when narratives on Serbian disunity are invoked. For the purposes of this study it suffices *to differentiate various existing narratives on the criterion of the status accorded to their central concept,* in our case the concept of *Serbian disunity.* If this is done, then three elementary possibilities become apparent.

First, Serbian disunity can be perceived and presented in popular discourses 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 tackle each other." A presumed social fact or reality is plainly or, eventually, contrastingly presented in these remarks. Simultaneously, what is put forward is also the perception of a dominant trait of Serbian social or cultural identity, in the form of self-perception. "We are disunited". Things are as they are. If something is wrong, "reality" is to be blamed. 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 somehow attaining perlocutionary force (the capacity to cause effects in others by uttering words).[14] Second, Serbian disunity can be presented in 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 was lost, according to

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[14] 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-Constative", 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 m me 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.

popular interpretations based principally on oral literature, because of "Serbian disunity and treason". Or, the present economic and political hardships can be, and are often 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 laments, or, eventually, with more 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 using their bare hands. But look where our disunity has brought us. Now we are being treated as if we were some African tribe". In the most 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-Miloševi period), during which Serbia equalled, or even surpassed all of its rivals;

2) The blissful state of things was later on corrupted by intense infighting leading to total disunity, and opening up the space for various anti-Serbian conspiracies to brood, thus leading to a *Serbian Historical Fall* (the Battle of Kosovo, or Tito's era, or the era of Miloševi), after which Serbia reached its historical lowest;

3) Serbia will rise again from the terrible depths to which it has sunken, owing to the resoluteness of a valiant *Saviour* (Kara or e, Tito, Miloševi , Koštunica, Djindji) who will de-mask and defuse the numerous anti-Serbian conspiracies, and 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.[15]

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[15] 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

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 *group-specific but highly problematic form of social reality* that urgently needs to be explained, giving rise to elaborate ethnoexplications – to what has recently been termed as "popular disunitology",[16] as well as to numerous quasi-scholarly treatises and political litanies. Disunity is here perceived not as a "natural" state of things like in the first case, but rather as the undesired *consequence* of a single, or of a whole set of factors. The most frequent explanations of the supposed Serbian proneness for divisions invoke:

a) *Complex cultural factors* (Slavic culture, Serbian culture, Balkan culture, Southern/Eastern culture, peasant culture considered as having an inadequate potential for social integration in conditions of rapid modernisation);

b) *Intra-religious factors* (poor organisation, factions and rifts inside the Serbian Orthodox Church);

c) *Inter-religious factors* (division of national body because of religious conversions of its parts to Islam or Catholicism);

d) *Generalised geopolitical factors* expressed in the widespread beliefs that "Serbs have built their house on the crossroad of continents", or, alternatively, "on the frontier of empires", which resulted in the fragmentation of their body politic and in almost insurmountable obstacles to their unification;

e) *Particular mentality traits* like the supposed strongly developed "Serbian propensity for envy", or the lingering on of a supposed "Serbian primitive mentality" (which, like in the Hobbesian pre-contractual state of war, is believed to be guided by the motto "into me, onto me, and under me"), or "Serbian *inat*";

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Renewal", pp. 36-59. For the Serbian context, see Ivan   olovi , *Politika simbola. Ogledi o politi koj antropologiji*, Beograd: Radio B92, 1997, in particular "Srpski politi ki etnomit", pp. 9-84, and "Iz istorije srpske politi ke mitologije", pp. 87-118.

[16] This telling label was proposed by Gordana   eri , "Svakodnevne diskurzivne prakse o osobinama naroda i važnosti nacionalnog identiteta" (p. 192), in: Zagorka Golubovi , Ivana Spasi ,   or e Pavi evi , eds., *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999-2002*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2003, pp. 175-210.

f) The divisive consequences of *regional differences in Serbian mentality* (Vojvodina Serbs vs. Serbs from Serbia proper vs. Serbs from Croatia vs. Serbs from Bosnia and Herzegovina vs. Serbs from Kosovo);

g) *Genetic factors*, expressed in sayings like "disunity is in our blood", or "in our nature";

h) *Supernatural explanations*, expressed in sayings like "what can we do, we were created like this" or "God is punishing us for our vain thoughts and deeds, like in the Biblical story of Babel";

i) Particularly interesting, and certainly the most dangerous politically, are explanations that rely on the *supposed conspiracy of the malevolent Other* – thus we learn of Habsburg, Vatican, Comintern, or other historical conspiracies, which all supposedly relied on the ancient strategy of *divide et impera* (exploiting previously existing, and deliberately inducing novel splits), as well as of more recent presumed German, British or US attempts to secure victory against the Serbs by bribing them into political divisions, or by pitting Montenegrins against Serbs from Serbia proper, and, finally, the conspiracies of the proponents of one of the two or more politically existing Serbias against the virtuous and innocent true Serbs.

In all the listed "explanations", the underlying claim is that the Serbs are disunited because something or somebody has made them to be so. If this is not to their satisfaction, then somebody or something partially (a bad part of them, or of their culture), or totally external to them (their enemies or corrupting foreign influences) is to be blamed. Serbs are, therefore, the victims of something, or, even more probably, of somebody.

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.[17] In a relatively

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

restricted sense, it could even be said that narratives on disunity and disaccord represent a mild form of "weapons of the weak".[18] 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

As has been demonstrated in the previous section, there are quite a few things that can be done with words such as *disunity*, in particular if they are organised into coherent stories or elaborate myths.

I will now investigate what a particular class of people, loosely designated as *political actors*, can do or attempt to do by referring in their addresses to popular narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits, or 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. In all of the stated cases, we are dealing with *political meta-discourses* based on popular discourses; with *parasitical usages*, so to say. In that sense, a political actor envisages to do things of his own liking by referring to the ways in which ordinary people are doing things with words. [19]

If we restrict our analysis of things that can be done with popular narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits (by referring to them, or publicly replicating them, or by using their key words or symbols which establish a relation to the fund of meanings deposited in the narratives) only to the most elementary political level, we can note three basic possibilities.[20] Applying a modified

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

[19] 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.

[20] Recent contributions to the investigation of the problem, even if somewhat rudimentary, can be found in: Milan Mati , *Srpska politi ka tradicija*, Beograd: Institut

version of Handelman's analysis of the role of rituals in public life, it can be suggested that narratives of disunity can principally be used as *mirrors*, *models* and *veils*. [21]

When politically used as *mirrors,* the discourses are nominally intended to put supposedly existing realities to the benefit of the sender of the message, or to eventually create a desired contrast between him and the realities. There are several options that "looking into the mirror" of popular discourses opens up for those who are sending the message.

A) They say that the Serbs are divided and disunited. And I will tell you, yes we are! It is a curse! It is our nature!

B) Serbs are divided and disunited, they say. Well, this is reality, this is who you really are. Therefore, it has nothing to do with what I did. Disunity and disaccord were there before I came!

C) They say that the Serbs are divided and disunited. Unfortunately, things are as they are, and we are who we are, so there's nothing one can do about it! I couldn't unite you, because nobody can!

D) You Serbs complain all the time about being disunited, but you still trick and betray each other whenever you can! You are all such hypocrites!

E) Yes, we Serbs seem divided, but this is so only because some of us have the interest of dividing us in order to rule over us more effectively.

The political use of narratives on disunity and disaccord as *mirrors* confirms existing perceptions, and raises the 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 some-

za politi ke studje, 1998, in particular pp. 92-103 and pp. 373-384; Olivera Milosavljevi , *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; Vidomir Veljkovi , *Politi ki moral Srba od Nemanji a do Miloševi a*, Niš: Prosveta, 2001, in particular pp. 170-186; or e Pavi evi and Ivana Spasi , "Shvatanja politike", pp. 67-73 and Gordana eri , "Svakodnevne diskurzivne prakse o osobinama naroda i važnosti nacionalnog identiteta", pp. 175-210, in: Zagorka Golubovi , Ivana Spasi , or e Pavi evi , eds., *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999-2002*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2003.

[21] 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.

thing, or because of not doing something), they can spread fatalism among the audience, they can disassociate the actor from the audience, or from some part of the whole group he refers to, or they can allocate blame on the audience, or some part of the referred group. The expected political outcome is basically the presentation of a supposed reality, and resulting preservation of the political and social *status quo*, understandably to the gain of the actor, or, when used contrastively, the opening up of the prospects for a better future by exposing the sick and decadent segments of group identity.

When used as *models* (*inciters* would perhaps be a more precise expression) the discourses are intended to mobilise the audiences in a desired political direction. 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.

A) They say that we are divided, and indeed we are, so choose sides! Be on the side of Good! Let us finish off with those among us who are not worthy of carrying our name!

B) They say that we are divided, but I will save us from our fate! Follow me to final unity!

C) They say that we are divided, but I tell you it's (whoever) cunning scheme! They have been exploiting our naiveté and dividing us! Let us resist / get them for what they did to us!

D) They say Serbia is divided, and indeed it is! There are two Serbias![22]

D1) There is a Serbia true to its history, to its traditions, to its Church, to its heroes, to its ancestors, and to its future. This is our Serbia, this is the true 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 bunch of lackeys, weaklings, cowards and traitors, of scum that will sell their fathers and fatherland for a handful of dollars, and turn us all into slaves. But, if we stay united, we will wipe out this treacherous

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[22] 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.

weed, and Serbia will once again be true to its roots, it will once again be Great.

D2) There is a Serbia of lies, deceptions, myths, hatred, and death. It is a rural, patriarchal, collectivistic, clerical, anti-Western and anti-modern Serbia. It is also Serbia manipulated by cynical leaders who exploit its primitiveness 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! This is our Serbia! This other Serbia is the only possible future for all of us! We will work hard together with our neighbours and foreign friends to reform Serbia and make it worthy of the European future that awaits it. This future is there for us only if we can discard Serbia's ugly past, the spectre of Greater 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 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 of one 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 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.

A) Our brothers now say that we are not brothers any more, that we are not the same blood any more, that they want to split. And look at what they are doing to us on the way! But let us turn the other cheek, even after all the disgusting things that they did, and are still doing to us! Let us abstain, even though we all know that punishing the traitor is a holy duty! Let us do what the international community

asks, even though we all know that they are once again trying to trick us into defeat and death!

B) Our political partners declare that we are not in the same co-alition any more, and indeed behave accordingly. Once again, we are disunited and split. But, by so doing they have betrayed both the vote of the people, and the path of democracy and reforms! However, let us disregard their treason; let us not do to them what they do to us. Let us continue on the same democratic path, for the sake of the people, for the sake of reforms, for the sake of our European future.

There is a profound ambiguity in both types of message: the sender might want the audience to believe that he is sincerely for peace, cooperation or political unity against all odds, or he might want the audience to understand his double-talk, and unite with him in re-sisting what they together despise, while remaining protected from di-rect accusations of belligerence/political separatism, and the political sanctions that go with such accusations. The sender can use additional elements (tone of voice, choice of epithets, mimicking…) to make the message more transparent to the public, or can decide to keep it as am-biguous as possible, and leave the interpretation fully to the audience.

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 politi-cal capital while evading the predictable political costs, without any sincere attempt to influence social perceptions in order to transform existing social problems.

What becomes clear when the level of reflection is turned from what can be done to what is actually being done in contempo-rary Serbia is that the most frequent association noted by the public is the one between the political use of discourses on disunity and what can be called *manipulative politics*, in the frame of which what is being said and done has as its principal, if not unique goal the ac-cumulation of some form of political capital.[23] The association

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[23] In their analysis of contemporary popular conceptions of politics in Serbia, or e Pavi evi and Ivana Spasi 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. or e Pavi evi and Ivana Spasi , "Shvatanja politike", in:

between *performative politics*, which is centred on the solving of practical problems and the attaining of public goals, and the direct addressing of the issue of public perceptions of divisions and splits has been noted only quite rarely in the contemporary Serbian political context.

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, while contemporary popular and political uses of these narratives certainly contribute to their preservation, and can be considered as the principal agents of their change, they have little to add to the understanding of how the narratives came into being.

If one wants to understand how and why these narratives originated, and to some extent also why they are as omnipresent as indeed they are, one must relate them to their *social and historical contexts, and to various forms of identity politics with which they share common traits.*

I have said that narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits represent a highly specific sub-genre of *identity discourses*, one of the dominant genres of *everyday discursive practices* in Serbia. Identity discourses are socially conditioned and accepted forms of expressing, questioning, and upholding personal and group identifications. While it is beyond reasonable doubt that various practices of self-identification and social categorisation are constitutive of the social life of humans, regardless of cultural differences and historical periods, the continuous questioning of selfhood seems to be the central feature of the intellectual and cultural crisis that manifested itself during the late eighteenth, and all along the nineteenth century. This *crisis of modernity* was experienced in the form of dissolution of the ultimate markers of certainty, in other

Zagorka Golubovi , Ivana Spasi , or e Pavi evi , eds., *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999-2002*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2003, pp. 67-73.

words 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 their own social identities and roles now and again. It was a song of liberty and of things to come. On the other side, at least in some types of society, it was a merciless and traumatic process: various 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 a world in rapid transformation. The practices of constructing, challenging, and publicly debating models of individual and group identity became the principal markers of modernity.[24] 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 century by modernisation latecomers in the Balkans and elsewhere, created paradoxical social situations that could ignite veritable wars over cultural and/or national identity.[25] The most fundamental clash seems to have been related to what can be termed as the *identity paradox of modernisa-*

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[24] 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.

[25] Herman Lebovics develops an elaborate frame for the analysis of a ferocious cultural war in his book *True France. The Wars over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992.

tion.[26] 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". In this exclusivist perspective, for some becoming modern meant loosing one's own soul (tradition, culture, identity…), while for others preserving one's own soul meant parting with the dazzling prospects that modernity opened up. This *impossible choice* managed to split local political and intellectual elites into bitterly opposed camps, and to initiate heated public exchanges.[27] On the one hand, these 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

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[26] 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, of which more will be said on the pages that follow.

[27] 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 (previously published in: *The Southeast European Yearbook* 1992, Athens 1993, pp. 75-81), or Diana Mishkova, "Modernization and Political Elites in the Balkans before the First World War", *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Winter 1995. 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 Antoni 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 politi ka misao*:

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 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"*. Other, ideologically quite interesting, but politically rather marginal options also emerged. One of them attempted to develop the idea of an original *third way*, combining a number of elements from the two larger political options in a somewhat utopian hope that their *synthesis* would radically transcend both the *thesis* and the *antithesis*. Once established, these orientations became the political nuclei out of which all 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 Kara or e Petrovi , and later by Prince Miloš Obrenovi , as well as by monarchs from the dynasties that they founded), *oligarchic* (represented first by the vojvode from the First Serbian Insurrection, and later by leading statesmen, political and military figures), and *constitutional-popu-*

lar (represented by the popular assemblies).[28] Issues of culture became symbolic arms in the clash of the three claims to power and authority. To this should be added the effects of periodic *reversals of position* (entry into power – exit into opposition), 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.[29]

The established frame of the political life in Serbia became the field of fervent contestations on three principal levels.[30] 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 *quan-*

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[28] See Bojan Mitrovi , "Taming the Assembly: National Representation in Serbia (1815-1859)", *East European Quarterly*, XXXVII, No. 1, March 2003, pp. 51-66.

[29] 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 Mentalites: Power and Ideology*, New Rochelle, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1995, pp. 111-138. See also his view of "The Pattern of Serbian Intellectual Evolution, 1830-1880", in: *Between East and West: The Balkan and Mediterranean Worlds, Vol. 4: Material Culture and Mentalites: 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 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 Antoni , "Strana ki 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.

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

titative 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 can not 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" "Pre ani" Serbs and the "Srbijanci", or Serbs from territories that were once a part of Ottoman 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 turns to the *logic of the construction of modern Serbian national identity,* which is considered here to have particular impor-

tance for the development of narratives on Serbian disunity, then one can start from the general hypothesis that the *best way to understand collective identifications like ethnic and national ones is to place them in a relational and interactive optic*.[31] In other words, collective identifications depend on the "internal-external dialectic of identification".[32] 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*.[33] 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. 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 is under the constant threat of potential *identity-splits*, the most intense of which take the form of *quasi-ethnic identity-splits*.[34] In this frame, each particular *act of identification*,[35] depending on the stimuli that have caused it, induces a specific re-interpretation of the perceived position of *Us* in the integral *relational nexus*.[36] In that sense, how *We*

[31] Rogers Brubacker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

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

[33] M. Baki -Hayden 1995, M. Todorova 1997.

[34] éa îâ, Ë ë í Ä ·aîíâ, í í Ä îâ, et. al., *Í ö îí ëí ä í ÷îî â ó ö · í îä: î ÷ ó , îô ·: Ô ëî îô ôîíä ö · í â*, 1995/96, in particular pp. 294.

[35] For a reevaluation of the concept of identity, and for interesting suggestions on alternative concepts see: Rogers Brubacker 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.

[36] The expression *relational nexus* is taken over from R. Brubacker 1996.

appear to ourselves largely depends on whom we are comparing with, or confronting to.

The described interactive flux created a permanent state of uncertainty, and the need to adapt, amend, change, discard or reaffirm elements of what once seemed to be stable, essential identities.[37] On the other hand, traditionalist and conservative social actors and institutions fervently opposed these trends, attempting to re-establish a presumed state when identities were as yet unchanged and unchangeable. It is often neglected that forces of *historical continuity* and *social categorisation* were and are constantly at work against the modern trends of identity-flux.[38] The clash of those whose identifications were on the way to becoming modern, and of the angry and bitter reactions of those unsatisfied by the "sad new state of things", also became the source of popular narratives on Serbian disunity, disaccord and resulting splits.

An even more powerful source 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 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.[39] 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

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[37] For a well argumented criticism of the excesses of "modernist" approaches to issues of nationalism and national identity see: Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, London and New York: Routlege, 1998, as well as his *National Identity*, London: Penguin Books, 1991.

[38] Richard Jenkins, "Categorization: Identity, Social Process and Epistemology", *Current Sociology*, Vol. 48, Issue 3, 2000, pp. 7-25.

[39] 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 (first published in *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, I, 1980, pp. 54-67), pp. 23-35, and in particular pp. 31-35.

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*.

The political turmoil in Serbia during the nineties offers telling examples of such *identity conflicts*.[40] They were related to the

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[40] 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 Miloševi* , Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001; Robert Thomas, *Serbia under Miloševi . Politics in the 1990's*, London: Hurst, 1999; or Jasna Dragovi -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 Jovi , *Jugoslavija – država koja je odumrla. Uspon, kriza i pad etvrte Jugoslavije*, Zagreb: Prometej and Beograd:

bitter struggle between the 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. The "Auto-
chthonous", "Authentic", "Historical", "Patriotic" and "National",
but at times also "Heavenly" and "Orthodox" Serbia was confronted
by the "Anti-Nationalist", "Pacifist", "Modern", "European", "Cos-
mopolitan", "Civil", and "Liberal" Serbia. "Patriotic" Serbs ex-
plained the "cowardly treason", of which "Civil" Serbs were
presumably guilty in times when "the future of the nation was endan-
gered", by their "well hidden non-Serbian origins", or their "pro-
found identity crisis", or by their corrupted materialism. On the other
side, "European" Serbs retorted that the "nationalist folly", demon-
strated by their opponents, came from their "Montagnard", "Kraji-
šnik", "gusle-fiddling", and "rural mentality". "Patriotic Serbs"
resolutely defended the ongoing military activities on the ground
that they were a just response to genocidal intentions of the enemies
of the Nation, and tirelessly supplied evidence of crimes committed
against Serbs and their cultural and spiritual heritage in Croatia,
Bosnia and Kosovo. Conversely, the "Other Serbia" considered that
Croats, Muslims, or Albanians should deal with their crimes them-
selves, and in an uncontroversial manner accused the Serbian side of
the crimes it had committed itself. The "Other Serbia" incessantly
criticised the Serbian regime and the whole of First Serbia for being
responsible of policies leading to the victimisation of civilians, and
sent delegations to express their shame, pity and condolences to the
victims of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia. Thus, each group became
the other's "radical other".

  This unintentionally auto-ironic Serbian contribution to the
Balkan wars of Balkanising opposites was further complicated by
feverish political dilemmas like the explosive pro vs. contra
Miloševi divide (which did not overlap completely with the divi-

Samizdat B92, 2003; Slobodan Antoni , *Zarobljena zemlja. Srbija za vlade Slobo-
dana Miloševi a*, Beograd: Otkrovenje, 2002; Ivana Spasi and Milan Suboti , eds.,
R/evolucija i poredak. O dinamici promena u Srbiji, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i
društvenu teoriju, 2001; *Srbija posle Miloševi a*, Nova srpska politi ka misao,
Posebno izdanje 1, Beograd, 2001; Vladimir N. Cvetkovi , ed., *Rekonstrukcija
institucija. Godina dana tranzicije u Srbiji*, Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu
teoriju, 2002.

sion between the "two Serbias" in the sense that some of those belonging to the "First Serbia" were also vehemently against Miloševi), as well as by other historically rooted divides like those between Serbianism and Yugoslavism, monarchism and republicanism, etniks 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 loosing strength until 1995, when they were replaced by ferocious anti-opposition campaigns.[41] 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 Miloševi 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", or by demonising them as Nazis or 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 amongst Miloševi 's political goals 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. It might even be speculated that Miloševi 's failed forced unification project replicated the failure of King Aleksandar Karadjordjevi "The Unifyer" and of his project of "integral Yugoslavism" based on the myth of Kosovo and on Serbian monarchic and military traditions. Namely, as was proven by both examples, in a multiethnic/multinational and multi-confessional so-

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[41] See Veljko Vuja i , "Historical legacies, nationalist mobilization, and political outcomes in Russia and Serbia: A Weberian view", *Theory and Society* 25, 1996, pp. 763-801.

ciety 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. Out of that reason, conflicting national and ethnic interests were in both cases 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*.[42]

However, to stick only to the second example, 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.[43] 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. Next, *regional animosities*, both along the center-peryphery axis (Belgrade-provincial areas), as well as the already mentioned one between

[42] See Veljko Vujacic: "Serbian Nationalism, Slobodan Milosevic and the Origins of the Yugoslav War", *The Harriman Review*, December 1995, pp. 25-34.

[43] Vladimir N. Cvetkovic has defended the thesis that the most important of those splits was the Serb-Yugoslav one, or, as he would put it, " …the basic watershed of the Serb identity, and hence political organization, goes along the lines of acceptance or rejection of the Yugoslav identity", see his paper "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.

the *Srbijanci* (Serbs from Serbia) and the *Prečani* Serbs (coming 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 *starosedeoci* (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 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.[44] 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.[45] Symbols, like words and narratives, are indicators and activators. They point to social realities and help in their establishment and eventual destruction, but they cannot replace these

[44] For an introduction to 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 Serbia need not produce *šljivovica*, the traditional plum brandy, but should rather focus on "new technologies".

[45] 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.

realities, neither can they substitute workable solutions for existing social, economical and political problems.

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 Miloševi '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 Miloševi regime, only to be reinvented as the deepening cleavage between Vojislav Koštunica's moderately pro-traditionalist and gradualist *legalism* and the late Zoran Djindji 's restless pro-modernist *pragmatism*.[46] This split in the 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 Djindji 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 Djindji 's modernist pro-European legacy.[47] 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

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[46] See Miloš Kneževi , "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.

[47] The appropriation of reforms as a rhetorical strategy was initiated by Djindji 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 successors, who saw in it the best, if not the only popularly acceptable tool for preserving their political positions once he was gone. See: Slobodan Antoni , interview for *Blicnews*, December 18, 2001, " in i je uspostavio monopol na reforme".

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).[48] 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 now reframed into one between *legitimists* and *legalists*. Because of such attitudes, the widening rift[49] among the once united anti-Miloševi coalition was reformulated again, this time as the paradoxical and profoundly disturbing divide between *reformists* (also posing as legitimists) and *democrats* (dubbing as legalists).[50]

Instances of bitter political feuding among the closest political allies lead directly 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 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,

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[48] See, for example, Slobodan Divjak, "Tiranija ve ine i odgovornost postoje e srpske vlasti", posted on the site of *Nova srpska politi ka misao*: http://www.nspm.org.yu/komentari.htm.

[49] The feuding between former allies became so profoundly disturbing that Dragoljub Mi unovi , 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." He also stated that, while having the support of the DOS, he wanted to be the president of all the citizens of Serbia, thus hinting that his mission would be that of reconciliation and reintegration of a deeply divided population. Transcript and translation BETA News Agency, October 20, 2003.

[50] Milorad Belan i : "Demokratija ili reforma?", posted on the site of *Nova srpska politi ka misao*, http://www.nspm.org.yu/debata.htm.

as well as of demonstrable popular will to understand the causes of such splits, and to counter them in public and private discourse – the only means seemingly accessible to ordinary citizens.

As can be noted, national identity-splits, and quasi-ethnic identity-splits in particular, very much resemble *deep-rooted conflicts*.[51] Deep-rooted conflicts, which are at present surpassing inter-state conflicts as the globally dominant form of armed conflict, result from the combination of powerful *identity-based factors* (ethnicity, religion, race, language…) with perceptions of economic and social injustice. Cases where the identity and distributive issues are combined, or piled-up, also provide the opportunity for exploitation and manipulation by opportunistic leaders, as well as for external involvement. The resulting potential for conflict can be enormous. The basic difference between quasi-ethnic identity-splits and deep-rooted conflicts lies in the fact that in the first case political, social, economic or cultural differences that develop inside a single group result in the political exclusion of a faction and the virtual splitting up of the whole group, while in the second case two or more previously existing groups inside an encompassing political entity (state) clash over resources, status and identity. They share two important characteristics: a) both are *identity-based conflicts*, the least appeaseable form of social conflict - harder to reconcile than both conflicts of *interest* and conflicts of *ideology*, and b) they can, and usually do mobilise and integrate the other two forms of conflict.

Indeed, quasi-ethnic identity-splits and deep-rooted conflicts can establish a mutually reinforcing nexus, as the recent wars over Yugoslav succession have tragically demonstrated. While Serbs were successively engaged in armed conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, the described political war between proponents of the "two Serbias" was simultaneously raging inside Serbia. Unfortunately, things can get even worse, as was again testified by the example of former Yugoslavia. One or more external powers can enter the nexus, acting on behalf of one, or of several local actors, both at

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[51] For an in-depth, but policy-friendly treatment of the problem of deep-rooted conflicts and of democratic options for their solution, or appeasement see: Peter Harris and Ben Reilly, eds., *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators*, Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2001. The volume is also available online at: http://www.idea.int/publications/democracy_and_deep_rooted_conflict/home.htm.

the inter-group (in our case on behalf of Croats, Bosniaks, and Kosovars) and the intra-group level (on behalf of various actors, institutions, and groups representing the "Other Serbia", DOS or other coalitions, parties, or influential individuals). In such cases clear-cut lines between friend and foe vanish, and one's closest neighbour might become more of a threat than the bombs of a distant enemy.

Conflicts like those manage to crush and split not only groups and group identities, but individual identities as well, quite unlike classical international conflicts that pit one national state against another, and where a clear distinction between *Us* and *Them*, between *Friend* and *Enemy*, and legitimate feelings of patriotism and solidarity can be preserved most of the time. In that sense it can be said that the fragmentation of the sense of selfhood and the resulting profound individual identity crises that develop during such conflicts are potent factors that induce the production of, and continuing social presence of discourses of Serbian disunity, disaccord and splits.

5. *From Intended to Unintended Consequences of Popular and Political "Disunitology"*

In the preceding sections, when discussing the things that can be done with popular narratives on Serbian disunity, as well as their possible political usages, I pointed to some of the intended political consequences of those narratives. I will now recapitulate the more important points, and shall then proceed to investigate their unintended political consequences.

I distinguished between what ordinary people do when they publicly talk about Serbian disunity, and what political actors attempt to accomplish by referring in their discourses to the ways in which ordinary people are doing various things with words. Public, but also "kitchen" talk of ordinary people a) supplies simplified descriptions of social reality, that is, expresses the shared perception that Serbian society is profoundly divided; b) points to the presumed consequences of this apparent reality, namely of the fact that Serbian society is divided; and c) presents imaginative explanations of the apparent social reality, that is, lists supposed causes of Serbian disunity However, if one looks at the consequences of these speech acts, one can note that by affecting both the consciousness of the narrators themselves and of

their audiences, the narratives on Serbian disunity, apart from 1) describing perceived realities, also can 2) contribute to the consolidation of realities (by making them seem bearable, or even legitimate), and 3) can contribute to the eventual change of these realities (by stressing their illegitimate status and unbearable effects). Inasmuch as the narrators are not aware of such possible effects, these can be considered as unintended consequences of their speech acts.

While the logic of their functioning differs considerably, some of the possible consequences of popular narratives on Serbian disunity are comparable to those of meta-narratives presented in the speech acts of political actors. As was demonstrated, these gains result from the strategic use of discourses on disunity as mirrors, models and veils. While the actors have a clear idea of the set of consequences that they expect will result from their speech acts, these expectations are much more complex than those of ordinary narrators. All of these expected consequences have to do with anticipated political gains, whether for the actor himself, or for the wider community, or for both. Roughly speaking, they can preserve the *status quo*, introduce changes into the existing realities, and eventually mask the real political intentions. The first can be accomplished by: dislocating the blame from a political actor both for his action and for his inaction (thus preserving threatened legitimacy); by passivising the audience (principally by demonstrating the "naturalness" of existing divides); by disassociating the actor from the audience, or from some part of the whole group he refers to (thus preserving the "uninfected" parts of a "contaminated" political body); or by directly allocating blame on the audience, or some part of the referred group (shaming it into compliance, or discarding incorrigible segments). The introduction of changes can result: from insisting on existing splits and tying one segment or faction to the actor, cutting off support to his rivals, and thus opening up the political space for appropriation of prized assets; from attempting to unite the divided population under the leadership of the actor by castigating disunion as the state of things; from exposing supposed conspiracies, and from mobilising the population into action against the supposed malefactors. Finally, when the veiling of political realities is the desired outcome, the popular discourses on Serbian disunity are intended to confuse the audience as to the real motives of the sender of the message. This is accomplished primarily by exploiting the am-

biguous form of the message, which intentionally opens up the space for competing, and eventually confusing interpretations.

Because of unintentionally solidifying or misinterpreting really existing social problems (in the case of some popular narratives on disunity), or because of intentionally exploiting popular perceptions of such problems (in the case of most political meta-narratives), the constructive potential related to existing social conflicts and splits can be completely wasted. This wasted potential is the first unintended consequence of popular discourses on disunity and of their political appropriation and instrumentalisation. Namely, social conflict should be seen as "the interaction of different and opposing aspirations and goals in which disputes are processed, but not definitively resolved".[52] In that sense, conflict is "a necessary part of healthy democratic debate and dialogue, provided it remains within the boundaries of the commonly accepted 'rules of the democratic game'".[53] Conflict, if dealt with in a constructive way, can become the point of departure for improvement, renewal, and substantial social change. On the other hand, if the opportunities for the positive and constructive handling of difference and divergence are missed, conflicts can escalate and become violent and destructive, as has been demonstrated in the previous sections by the cases of quasi-ethnic identity-splits and deep-rooted conflicts.[54] From that moment onwards, it becomes difficult to evade the perilous destiny of democracy in divided societies.[55]

[52] Peter Harris and Ben Reilly, eds., *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators*, Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), 2001.

[53] Peter Harris and Ben Reilly, eds., 2001.

[54] For what is now a classic analysis of the social consequences of conflicts see Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, London: The Free Press of Glencoe, Collier-Macmillan Ltd, 1956, and his *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict*, New York and London: The Free Press, Collier-Macmillan, 1967.

[55] As an introduction to the prospects of democracy in divided societies see, for example, how the ideas of Chantal Mouffe are developed in a recent research paper by John S. Dryzek "Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies: Alternatives to Agonism and Analgesia", April 2003. The classic work on the topic, of course, is: Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977. See also Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism", *Political Science Series*, No. 72, Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2000; or Benjamin Reilly, *Democracy in Divided Societies: Electoral Engineering for Conflict Management,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Failed opportunities for the resolution of social splits and conflicts, apart from creating or strengthening divisions in society, can also result in the accumulation of feelings of dissatisfaction, anger and frustration. The rising number of frustrated individuals then leads, or at least can lead, to what can be termed as *frustrated societies*. Namely, if the majority of individuals in contemporary Serbia perceive disunity, disaccord and social splits as a serious social malaise, if they furthermore perceive that political elites evade the issue, or deliberately manipulate it, and if they become aware that their multiplying narratives on disunity produce no positive effect, then there is a heightened probability that they will feel hopeless and frustrated. The feeling of profound discontent can then lead to the loss of trust in, and credibility of political institutions and processes. The loss of credibility of political and state institutions widens the gap between citizens and political elites, and results in the paralysis of the institutions, and thus in more frustration for the citizens. Here we are entering the spiral of dissatisfaction and frustration, with all its perverse and dangerous effects. Paralysed institutions in the longer run have as their consequence an *inefficient and weak state*. The weakness and inefficiency of the state in return add to the frustration of the citizens, and result in the disintegration of any traces of remaining trust.

The state of profound political crisis that develops in the described way, if perpetuated long enough, can have two interconnected consequences, both of them very grave. On the one hand, the deep and continuing feeling of frustration *radicalises those social strata that are most suffering from the consequences of a dysfunctional state*. On the other hand, the diminishing social trust results in *the crisis of democracy*, the latter seen as the dominant socially accepted regulatory rule of political action. When present together, the radicalisation of society and the loss of confidence in democracy both as a set of practical procedures, and as the central social and political value, create the preconditions for the *destabilisation of democratic regimes*, let alone for the *breakdown of unconsolidated democracies*. Such a state of affairs then raises the prospects for exclusivist solutions, that is, for the apparition of authoritarian self proclaimed saviours, who promise to eradicate multiplying social evils at all costs, and restore the craved for "organic unity of society".

Here, we are entering once again the dangerous realm of what Vladimir Tismaneanu has aptly termed as the "fantasies of salvation".[56]

6. 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.[57] One should perhaps be reminded of the fact that democracy is

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[56] Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation. Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998.

[57] In a piece that has already acquired the status of a classic, Bartolini and Mair propose that political cleavages should be envisaged as incorporating three distinct elements: an empirical element which identifies the empirical referent of the concept and which we can define in sociostructural terms; a normative element, that is, the set

the unique system of government that permits disputes to arise, be addressed, openly debated and reacted to, though not necessarily resolved in any permanent form, while at the same time preserving the necessary frame for continuing and future debates. In principle, as well as in practice, a democratic political system should allow for grievances to be expressed freely, and should also supply the necessary means of responding to them. One should profit from the fact that democracy has the potential to operate very much like a system for the prevention, management and resolution of various types of conflict. Of key importance for the sustaining of such a potential is the preservation of the active relation between the existing or emerging social and political divides and the political frames for their renegotiation. This obviously is not the case in contemporary Serbia. However, if left unaddressed, both the popular discourses and the existing splits will continue their perverse logic of mutual reinforcement. If this vicious circle is to be prevented, 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, there is a danger of excluding from the social dialogue those whose interpretations of social reality seem to rely on myths and mystifications. This, however,

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of values and beliefs that provides a sense of identity and role to the empirical element and reflects the self-awareness of the social group(s) involved; and an organizational/behavioural element, that is, the set of individual interactions, institutions, and organizations, such as political parties, that develop, as part of the cleavage (Bartolini, 2000, pp. 16-17; see also Bartolini and Mair, 1990, p. 215). In that sense, political cleavages represent persistent lines of conflict in a society around which mass organizations can be formed, *leading to the possibility, but not necessarily the inevitability of negotiating the basic set of issues around which the conflict initially started*.

is a self defeating strategy. 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.[58]

Slobodan Naumovi

DRUšTVENE OSNOVE I POLITI KE UPOTREBE NARODSKIH PRI A O SRPSKOM NEJEDINSTVU

Sažetak

U radu se istražuju istorijske i društvene osnove narodskih pri a o srpskom nejedinstvu i neslozi, kao i posledice njihove politi ke instrumentalizacije. Pažnja se prvo usmerava na ono što se narodskim pri ama o srpskom nejedinstvu i neslozi naj eš e postiže u svakodnevnoj komunikaciji. Narodskim pri ama se, pre svega, ukazuje na pretpostavljeno *nepromenljivo svojstvo srpskog identiteta* (nesloga kao stvarno stanje). Njima se odredjuje i *glavni uzrok poraza ili neuspeha*, u kom slu aju one neretko prerastaju u jeremijade nad istorijskom sudbinom Srba (nesloga kao uzrok). Najzad, nesloga se može predstaviti i kao *posledica jednog, ili itavog niza faktora*, od mentaliteta ili kulture Srba, pa do tu inske zavere (nesloga kao posledica). U slede em segmentu rada, istražuju se vidovi politi kog instrumentalizovanja narodskih pri a o neslozi i nejedinstvu Srba, odnosno njihova upotreba kao *ogledala*, *modela* i *velova*. U prvom slu aju, politi ki akter narodsko vi enje stanja stvari koristi kao izgovor za svoje neuspehe, ili kako bi naglasio razlike izme u sebe, svojih takmaca i

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[58] 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.

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pobornika. Narativi o neslozi omogućuju akteru i da usmerava publiku na željeni način, bilo da želi da unese nove podele u grupu, zaoštrava sukob već postojećih frakcija i povezuje se sa nekom od njih, ili da uspostavlja izgubljeno jedinstvo grupe. Obe prethodne mogućnosti akter može iskoristiti da bi obezbedio retorički veo kojim će prikriti svoje prave namere. Analiza se potom pomera ka ispitivanju istorijskih i društvenih osnova priča o srpskom nejedinstvu. Ratovi oko političkog identiteta iz sredine i druge polovine devetnaestog veka, pojačani trvenjima između rivalskih pretenzija na politički autoritet, dodatno ušančeni razvojem stranačkog sistema, i radikalizovani novim oblicima sukoba između interesa, vrednosti i identiteta na početku dvadesetog veka, zajedno su uslovili razvoj narativa o srpskom nejedinstvu i rascepima. Na takvu osnovu su se potom nadovezivali rascepi izazvani dinastičkim, konfesionalnim ili nacionalnim razlikama, svi zajedno zacementirani iskustvima ratova i revolucija. Analiza se najzad pomera ka nenameravanim posledicama narodskih priča o srpskom nejedinstvu i različitih oblika njihove političke instrumentalizacije. Zbog pogrešnog predstavljanja ili objašnjavanja stvarnih problema, karakterističnog za narodske priče, a pogotovu zbog političke zloupotrebe narodskih priča o tim problemima, konstruktivni potencijal vezan za društvene konflikte i njihovu narativizaciju biva ozbiljno ugrožen. Sledi duboki osećaj frustracije i opadanje poverenja u političke elite i politički proces uopšte. U zaključku se skreće pažnja na činjenicu da je savremeno umnožavanje narodskih priča o srpskom nejedinstvu, kao i prakse njihove političke instrumentalizacije, povezano sa nesposobnošću srpskog partijskog sistema i političkog sistema uopšte da se odgovorno suoči sa, a pogotovu da razreši splet istorijskih i savremenih sukoba interesa i identitetskih rascepa koji su izvorište narodskih priča.

Ključne reči: narodske priče o srpskom nejedinstvu, politička instrumentalizacija narodskih priča, retoričke strategije, kvazietnički identitetski rascepi, politički i stranački rascepi, manipulativna politika.

SLOBODAN NAUMOVI

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