

SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

Changing Youth Values in Southeast Europe

Beyond Ethnicity

Edited by
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‘This insightful and wide-ranging book offers an original take on understanding youth subjectivities in Southeast Europe. In contrast to the dominant paradigms that insist on the pervasiveness of ethno-nationalist identifications in the region, this book demonstrates the full complexity of youth perceptions and behaviours in this part of the world. This is an excellent contribution based on comprehensive primary research.’

—*Professor Siniša Malešević University College, Dublin, Ireland*

‘As liberal democracy is being increasingly challenged by radical politics, sustained scholarly attention to ethnicity and nationalism is gaining renewed urgency. This excellent and timely volume tackles this crucial topic head-on, exploring both the complexities and limitations of an ethnocentric analytical lens. The collection challenges conventional wisdom regarding a particularly relevant demographic group: young people who will shape national politics in the coming decades and whose commitment to nationalist principles has come under increased empirical scrutiny. This is essential reading for anyone interested in the legacy of ethnic conflict in the Balkans and its implications for the future of the European project.’

—*Bart Bonikowski, Professor of Sociology,
Center for European Studies, Harvard University*

10 Out with the old

Youth solidarity and nationalism among young Kosovars and Serbs

Danilo Mandić

Introduction

Bertrand Russell is said to have remarked that, if love is blind, nationalism has lost all five senses. The danger of ‘allowing popular terminology to confuse our scientific efforts’ (Liebersson and Linn 2002: 15) is all the greater when such loaded concepts are discussed in Kosovo and Serbia. Through propagandistic textbooks, demagogic parties, and jingoistic media, young people in both societies are subjected to enormous nationalist indoctrination.

Its intentions, however, are much better understood than its actual *effects*. Do these young adults uncritically accept the indoctrination, losing all five senses? Youngsters from these societies are routinely categorized as nationalistic and intolerant (Taleski and Hoppe 2015), with less scholarly interest in contrary currents. Observers wonder if these ‘Black Box Youth’ (Schwartz and Winkel 2016: 16, 38) are doomed to repeat the regional cycle of ethnic discord, with little inquiry into consensus between them. While their non-ethnic and anti-nationalistic values have been neglected, the two ethnic categories have been studied in isolation from each other. How does youth solidarity – an age-based, generational sense of belonging – relate to nationalism for these young adults?

This chapter attempts a non-standard approach to youth from Kosovo and Serbia. Instead of rediscovering their nationalistic identities and values, I explore how they *relativize* and *substitute* them. Instead of studying each ethnic category separately, I ask what commonalities exist, assuming a relational approach. Through thirty in-depth conversations with young people from Priština and Belgrade Universities, I explore how they think about, talk about, and enact nationalism in relation to a generation-specific theme of *youth solidarity*. I argue that their undermining of nationalism through subthemes of (1) powerlessness, (2) youth culture, and (3) childhood trauma is considerable, contradicting accounts of their parochial ethnocentrism.

Context

I address two theoretical concerns. The first is the relevance of bottom-up, ‘everyday nationalism’ approaches (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008) to the mechanisms by

which ordinary people complicate ethno-national categories by enacting alterative identities; I suggest that young adults promote values of youth solidarity, undermining ethnocentrism in the process. The second is the absence of qualitative studies that seek non-nationalist consensus *across* the Serbian/Kosovar rift; I argue that despite – and often against – ethnic polarization, the youth are vigorously and unexpectedly enacting non-national youth categories.

Everyday youth solidarity vs. everyday nationalism

From classical statements (see review in Dawisha 2002) to ‘materialist post-structuralist’ approaches (Norval 2004), primordialist, constructivist, and instrumentalist theories of ethnicity and nation-ness have dominated approaches to nationalism. Bottom-up understandings of ethno-national categories by ordinary people were thus relegated to broader agendas of (dis)proving the alleged homogeneity of the nation, its causes, its modernity, its reactionary character, its elite creators, its role as means instead of ends of action, its cultural or economic character, etc. Young people have rarely been given their due as transmitters, gatekeepers or (re)creators of nationalism in such debates. This is troubling, given findings that British young people routinely maintain a sceptical distance from nationalism, while their attachments to national identity are often accompanied by antagonism or indifference (Fenton 2007).

As Bonikowski has noted, the scholarship conceptualizes nationalism either narrowly as an *ideology* (a set of ideas) or as a *practice* (a domain of meaningful social action) (2016: 429–30). I follow the ‘nationalism-as-practice’ approach in inquiring how nationalism is thought about, talked about, and enacted ‘through and with the nation’ (cf. Bonikowski 2016: 430, Calhoun 1997, Brubaker et al. 2006, Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, Goode and Stroup 2015). Building on Billig’s ‘banal nationalism’ framework (1995), everyday nationalism puts even greater emphasis on human agency in investigating the bottom-up, ordinary-experience and common-sense perceptions that construct ethnic categories. Accordingly, how ‘national identity is talked about, experienced and given meaning in different ways by the ordinary people it affects’ replaces preoccupations with elites and purely ideological processes (Knott 2016: 2, Bonikowski 2016). Below, I suggest that those ways include *relativizing* and *contradicting* national categories, if not replacing them with generational ones altogether.

I approach nationalism-talk in two senses. First, as folk sociology (‘objective’, impersonal); and second, as biography (‘subjective’, personal).

First, as an aspect of the subjects’ ‘folk sociology’ (Hirschfeld 2013): their ‘common-sense knowledge of the social world’ (Brubaker et al. 2006: 16) as it relates to ethnicity and nationalism. Through in-depth interviews, these are elicited directly. The folk sociology appears primarily as the subjects’ second-order understanding of nationalism as a concept they address as analysts, interpreters, and observers (*not* necessarily as agents, adherents, or critics). In principal, folk sociology talk need not be biographical. It is in this realm, crucially, that much of the relationality of Kosovar to Serbian youth emerges. I argue that their folk

sociology of nationalism is *inherently* inclined towards youth-specific understandings of who is a nationalist, what (s)he believes, how nationalism relates to their societies, and – crucially – why and when nationalism is *unimportant*. To be sure: folk sociological narratives about nationalism can be biographical, exclusionary, or xenophobic. But they also reveal remarkable assaults on the ‘legitimate criteria of national membership, national pride, and chauvinism’ that form the basis of nationalist cognition (Bonikowski 2016: 437).

The second aspect of nationalism-talk is the biographical role of ethnic and national categories: their salience, relevance, and value to the subjects’ own lives. Unlike the above, these appear *indirectly* during conversation when observing the unelicited ‘vernacular understanding’ of how and when ethno-national categories become noticeable in ‘common-sense knowledge, cult idioms, cognitive schemas, mental maps’ and the like (Brubaker et al. 2006: 6). Among Skey’s (2011) five dimensions of nationhood practice – spatial, temporal, cultural, political, and self/other – I focus especially on the last category. In enacting the ethnic or national self during interviews – verbally or nonverbally – the subject expresses identities and values that relate not only to nationalism, but to a variety of identification processes. ‘Youth identity’, I suggest, is integral to their ‘national identity’ and their nationalism-talk.

‘To assume that most people feel a sense of belonging to a single nation’, Bonikowski correctly noted, ‘is *itself* a nationalist fallacy’ (Bonikowski 2016: 441–2). To assume, furthermore, that folk sociological accounts of nationalism relate only to ethno-national categories is beyond fallacious. Recent work has underscored the centrality of youth solidarity in various contexts (Schwartz and Winkel 2016, Furlong 2009, Ruspini 2016). Accordingly, I propose a renewed emphasis on *everyday youth solidarity* in young adults’ ethno-national identification (Webster 2009, Cote 2009). Both as an impersonal talking point and an integral part of their biography, nationalism is felt, thought about, and enacted by young people with generational solidarity.

Seeking anti-nationalist consensus

Conflict societies are notoriously popular sites for studies of nationalism and ethnicity (Fearon and Laitin 2000, McGarry and O’Leary 2013, Horowitz 1985, Varshney 2001), the Balkans among them (Freyburg and Richter 2010, Roudometof and Robertson 2001, for an egregiously reductionist approach, see Kaplan 2005). Such approaches hesitate to explore the similarities in identification processes across the conflicting in-group and out-group. In particular, studies of *anti-nationalist* youth currents among Serbs and Kosovars are extremely rare (Kurze 2016, Steinberg 2004), some unpublished (Lecomte 2015, Chushak 2013, Krelina 2014). It is known that youth agency is a critical resource for peacebuilding and post-conflict reconciliation (Lopes Cardazo et al. 2015), but little is known about how Kosovar and Serbian youth can assume this role, let alone that they *already have* through youth solidarity.

The two constituencies are under extraordinary economic and demographic pressure compared to their European peers. Tomanović and Ignjatović (2006) estimated that Serbian young adults' life events signifying adulthood occur a full *ten* years after their peers' average in Western Europe. Kosovar youth are in effect penalized for their tender age by the 'horizontal inequalities' of their society (Stewart 2012). With pervasive corruption and criminal patrimonialism, young adults are increasingly at the mercy of an economy significantly reliant on diaspora remittances (Topxhiu and Xhelili 2016). Baleci and Heeman (2013) survey the devastating labour market inequality in 'Europe's youngest nation', where emigration is the youth's best defence (see Gashi 2016 for more recent migration dynamics). It is therefore unsurprising that we leap to the judgment that nationalism is prevalent among these young adults. These are fertile conditions.

Kosovar youth have been plagued by a preoccupation with their anomie conditions: the prevalence of violence among adolescents (Kadriu and Vuniqui 2012), the *kanun* and blood feud traditions that adolescents inherit (Littlewood 2002, Mangalakova 2004), the paramilitarization of youth life and *Ilegalja* underground groups (Schwandner-Sievers 2013), and organized criminal prevalence in the region (Arsovska 2015). So deep is the fascination with 'primitive' local customs of Kosovars and the 'European host countries' stereotypical imageries of Albanians as 'hav[ing] violent culture' that international agencies and public opinions come to expect 'migrant deviancy' from young Kosovar immigrants (Schwandner-Sievers 2008: 47, 60). In this, Kosovar youth are akin to their Serbian peers in the 'orientalism' they endure (Todorova 2009).

The recent discovery that Kosovo provided, after Bosnia-Herzegovina, the greatest per-capita contribution of youngsters from Europe joining ISIS (Shtuni 2015) fostered the 'brainwashed youth' hypothesis. Serbian nationalist circles eagerly promoted and distorted the fact, while a front-page story of the *New York Times* – the first on Kosovo since the 1999 war – bemoaned the Saudi radicalization of 'young, vulnerable people', stunned by how one of 'the most pro-American Muslim societies in the world' could now have 'radio and television talks shows urg[ing] young people to go [to support jihad in Syria]' (Gall 2016). More generally, Kosovo's youth are often studied as passive recipients of the international communities' benevolent yearning to include them in the political sphere (Feltes 2013), to empower them economically (Szolucha 2009), and to nation- and state-build in Kosovo (for a review of challenges, see Bieber 2011).

Analogously, young Serbs are considered proper subjects for case-studies in anti-Roma racism and 'nationalistic feelings' (Ljuljic et al. 2013), anti-LGBT 'religious nationalism' (Mikuš 2015), right-wing extremism and 'nationalist violence' (Correia 2010), and out-group ethnic stereotyping more broadly (Petrović and Šuvaković 2013, Putnik, Lauri and Grech 2011). In the diaspora, young ethnic Serbs are studied almost exclusively in relation to their nationalism. In Kosovo, they harbour 'national attachment' to their motherland with alarming correlates of authoritarianism and hostility to the outside world (Radović and Jaredić 2014). In Croatia, they mindlessly transmit the nationalist divisions of their elders:

minor ‘examples of questioning the status quo’ aside, the dominant ‘understanding among participants was that youth recreate the political messages to which they are exposed during interactions with agents of socialization’ such as parents, teachers, schools, and the media (Reidy et al. 2015:20). These political messages overwhelmingly ‘operated to preserve intergroup tensions and division’ (ibid.), the authors warned.

In contrast, empirical studies of non-ethnic, anti-nationalist perceptions, values, and identification processes are scarce. Yerkes (2004) surveys the Serbian youth’s ‘dealing with the past’, but stops short of checking if Kosovars have analogous coping strategies. Getto (2007) asks how Serbian youngsters deal *intellectually* with their societies’ bloody past, while Fanaj, Melonashi and Shkëmbi (2015) document the *emotional* coping of Kosovo’s youth with their post-conflict inheritance. Neither considers anti-nationalist currents. Major survey-based and statistical studies rarely seek commonalities of thought and value among Serbs and Kosovars, nor do they explore non-ethnic, anti-nationalist dimensions (see Introduction to this volume). Against convention, I propose that young Kosovars and Serbs are enacting youth solidarity to non-ethnic, anti-nationalist ends. Ethnic polarization is present, but is not *omnipresent*. International similarities in youth values and identification processes are just as notable as intra-national ones. We ignore them at our peril.

Methods

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with thirty students ($n = 30$) between 18 and 23 years of age; fifteen were from the University of Priština and fifteen from the University of Belgrade. I selected students from comprehensive undergraduate enrolment lists provided by informants at both institutions, with random sampling using a number generator, and chain-referral sampling when this failed. The Serbia half of the sample was interviewed in Serbian, the Kosovo subsample in English. In the latter, four students were unwilling or unavailable. Four substitutes were recommended by other interviewees and two by a university administrator. Follow-up interviews were conducted two to four months later to improve or recover data, and to elaborate on unclear themes. All subjects signed written consent forms, were debriefed, and were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.¹ Sample features referred to in the Results section are summarized in Tables 10.1 and 10.2.

Interviewing strategy

The overall atmosphere among students at both Universities is collegial and open, making sampling quite undemanding. The interviews lasted roughly 100 minutes, two-thirds of which were free-flowing question-and-answer, and the rest based on a 20-item questionnaire that served as a ‘skeleton’ for our conversations. The open-ended questions invited the respondent to reflect on her understanding of nationalism, nationalists, major life-events associated with national exclusion,

Table 10.1 Belgrade subsample

	<i>GH</i>	<i>CO</i>	<i>IO</i>	<i>SR</i>	<i>LK</i>	<i>OK</i>	<i>KR</i>	<i>FH</i>	<i>SM</i>	<i>MM</i>	<i>VC</i>	<i>AC</i>	<i>MV</i>	<i>MP</i>	<i>KB</i>
Sex	M	F	M	F	M	M	F	M	M	F	F	F	M	F	F
Age	20	20	22	20	22	18	23	23	21	19	22	21	21	18	22
# of years at university	1	2	3	2	3	1	4	2	3	2	3	3	3	1	4
In Belgrade during NATO war	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Has met at least one Albanian from Kosovo			X	X				X							
Has been to Kosovo			X					X						X	
Raised outside Belgrade			X					X					X		X

Table 10.2 Priština subsample

	<i>FG</i>	<i>HG</i>	<i>FK</i>	<i>BD</i>	<i>LD</i>	<i>KI</i>	<i>UC</i>	<i>BZ</i>	<i>GW</i>	<i>CC</i>	<i>IF</i>	<i>SB</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>FM</i>	<i>VV</i>
Sex	M	F	M	M	M	M	F	M	M	F	F	F	F	M	M
Age	23	23	21	18	18	20	22	22	21	20	19	21	21	23	18
# of years at university	4	5	3	1	1	2	3	4	3	3	1	3	2	5	1
In Kosovo during NATO war	X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	X			
Has met at least one Serb from Serbia								X				X			
Has been to Serbia								X							
Raised outside Priština					X			X					X		

experiences of ethnic prejudice and victimization, and perceptions of in-group and out-group ethnicities. Signpost questions included ‘Many people in our region talk about nationalism. What does nationalism mean to you?’ and ‘Can you tell me a personal story of when your ethnic identity was important to you?’, which would typically prompt a series of probing questions such as ‘When?’, ‘Why?’, ‘How?’, ‘Could you please explain?’, and the ubiquitously rewarding ‘Tell me more’. Each respondent was interviewed again in follow-up sessions at least once (several respondents had two follow-up interviews); these were conducted after preliminary review revealed themes that were underdeveloped or unclear. Follow-up interviews lasted 30–90 minutes.

Following Goffman (2005), I assumed that – far from rational, truth-telling information-exchangers – the interviewee and I were swimming in an ocean of

'blindnesses, half-truths, illusions, and rationalizations' (1997: 109). Interviewing carries particular risk in everyday nationalism research (see Goode and Stroup 2015). A semi-structured conversation is indeed *not* an ordinary naturalistic experience or environment in which to observe enactments of nationalism or youth solidarity.

Given the research question, however, I targeted their folk sociological understandings of nationalism directly while avoiding evocations of youth solidarity. Without imposing generational themes, I strictly adhered to open-ended questions about nationalism and ethnicity, their perceptions of them, and their impressions of others' perceptions of them. The stated purpose of the interviews was 'How people think about nationalism'. I completely avoided insinuating youth-specific meanings of the term, always following their lead to evoke their folk sociological understandings. Other than by my perceptible age, I did not indicate youth, young people, students, or related generational categories as a relevant point of reference. The subjects *themselves* evoked youth solidarity themes to address nationalism as a phenomenon. That, I would suggest, is itself an indicative discovery.

Coding

Though far from a 'narrative analysis', this study relied on Reismann's (1993) advice concerning the difficulty of transcribing subtle communication. The interviews were audio-recorded. Memorized details (about body language, interview surroundings, etc.) were written up only after the interview. Transcriptions were 'coded by ear', for reasons of both efficiency and quality. The researcher is often at the mercy of disinterested transcribers who, although saving precious time, would surely have disfigured some of the most intriguing cues that simple repetitive listening uncovered. Over seventy hours of recorded audio kept offering newer information (revealed in tone, pauses, emphases, vocal nuances) that I had overlooked. Many quotations below went through several, and sometimes half-a-dozen, revisions.

My coding strategy evolved as the study progressed, resulting ultimately in three themes of youth solidarity: powerlessness, youth culture, and trauma in childhood. I was conservative in identifying threads as constituting a theme. I include only those similarities in responses that: (1) were clearly common to numerous subjects; (2) appeared *across* the ethnic subsamples from more than three respondents on both sides; and (3) stood out in their non-ethnic specificity (i.e. could not reasonably be interpreted as being ethnic without youth/cohort/generation/age meanings). I excluded, for instance, the stress on religion (Islam or Christianity) because it was only found in three of the interviews, was mentioned only in passing, and remained undeveloped. On the other hand, when a solid eight respondents (five-three across the subsamples) devoted more than a minute's time each to the idea of youth music transcending national boundaries, I made sure to analyse it closely and relate the idea to neighbouring themes.

A note on positionality

My own Serbian background was an imposing issue in the power dynamic of the interviews. First, the Kosovo interviewees were compelled to speak in English – a disadvantage that they dealt with gracefully. Repeated apologies for ‘my bad English’ were pervasive. One subject even expressed regret that she agreed to the interview because of her supposedly poor English. In fact, all the conversations were at a high level of proficiency. Second, my nationality markers led to what Brubaker et al. called ‘interactional emergence of nationalism’ (2006: 375–9) during interviews in different ways for Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. Belgrade interviewees expressed subtle and overt appeals to our ethnic similarity more often. They presumably felt freer to express negative opinions about their counterparts. I took great care to avoid any hints at nationalist enactment – this included referring to ‘Kosova’ as opposed to ‘Kosovo’ to honour local pronunciation, eschewing ethnically loaded pronouns, and presenting myself as American to both groups. Every explicit reference to my Serbian-ness from Priština subjects was (without exception) sympathetic, often humorous, and revealing for the purpose at hand. Interviews included instances of respondents noticeably ‘reaching out’ across the ethnic divide, in visible contempt of it. A typical and memorable one was:

FM [concluding the interview]: You know, because of the [student organization] I talk to a million reporters and I can tell you *this* was the most interesting interview I had.

DM: [FM], you took the words from my mouth [FM], and . . .

FM: And this is stupid [short sigh] because of, uh, everything we said already. We had a much better interview than me and *Kosovar* reporters, or me and *Kosovar* researchers . . .

DM: But why is that stupid? I think it was . . .

FM: You know, Serbian guy and . . .

DM: . . . because you and me both wanted to listen to . . .

FM: Yes, yes, but . . . so, a Serbian guy and Kosovar guy listening, and this formula is more welcome and more interesting instead of two Kosovar guys talking.

On the other hand, there was *not a single* adverse or confrontational enactment of ethnicity: all the ‘interactional emergences’ were evoked to alleviate the power dynamic of a given moment in the discussion. Hence, my own ethnicity, though an obstacle in some sense, mostly proved to be a useful catalyst in conversations with the Priština subsample.

Articulate students and spontaneity

It is also worth emphasizing that the subjects are university students undergoing formal education. It was unsurprising to find differences between more official,

academic talk (reminiscent of an oral exam) and more casual, unsystematic talk (which merits greater attention). For instance, most subjects probably anticipated my asking such general questions as ‘What does nationalism mean to you?’ given how I introduced the purpose of the study. Like good pupils, many of them came with seemingly rehearsed statements that were delivered in near-publishable prose. One about the distinction between ‘nationalism’ and ‘patriotism’ was particularly popular, developed by as many as five subjects with remarkable similarity (after the third occasion, I suspected a common textbook or professor as the source of the idea). Statements like these included no ‘uh’s,’ pauses, or partial sentences. But it was the unrehearsed, spontaneous moments of the interviews that constitute the substantive themes.

Results: youth solidarity

I operationalize ‘youth solidarity’ as the diverse compilation of instances when subjects employed the thorny word ‘we’ to refer *not* to nations or peoples or families or ancestries, but to an imagined cohort of young people to which they belong, proudly or otherwise. As such, youth solidarity emerged consistently and ubiquitously during conversations without any allusions to it from the interviewer. Without exception, the respondents all engaged in unprompted discussion of issues relating to the youth *qua* youth, in various formulations. These expressions of generational unity emerged in the context of problematizing, relativizing, reinterpreting, and transcending nationalism or perceptions of it. The role of youth solidarity vis-à-vis nationalism is developed in the subthemes of (1) powerlessness, (2) youth culture, and (3) childhood trauma.

Powerlessness

‘Nationalism in Kosovo is about *influence*’, aspiring political leader KI explains, ‘and young people have no influence’. The dominant perceived characteristic of young people in the eyes of respondents is, broadly speaking, their relative powerlessness. Whether relative to the influence of older generations in society, to the social influence they deserve, or to the freedom of peers in what were repeatedly called ‘normal’ countries, subjects perceived youth impotence: young people are thought to be crippled by an inability to control their own lives, let alone their communities. Twenty-one respondents suggested that nationalism is nuanced along generational lines with an inequality of power between generations. Eighteen from both ethnic categories made distinctions of some sort between the nationalism of their parents’ cohort and their own to highlight a loss or gain of freedom from one age group to another. Two more developed dichotomies between the nationalism of ‘the old times’ or ‘previous centuries’ and that of living young adults, both believing that the latter are powerless. Sixteen expressed a feeling of cohesion among young people across the ethnic divide in regards to issues ranging from minor cultural preferences, such as clothing, to ostensibly more profound ones, such as ‘mentality and identity’ (GW). Finally, over half

of each subsample evoked youth-specific characteristics to explain the causes of nationalism or the causes of its perceived absence.

Perhaps the most poignant dimension of youth-specific powerlessness was a sense of forced acceptance of responsibility for conditions that the young are not responsible for creating. Against nationalist assumptions, this perceived powerlessness is repeatedly assigned a trans-ethnic meaning:

FH (K): All of it is unpleasant. It's a big burden. This burden of being young. We have to go with all the problems that *we* did not make. We did not start it. In this sense, I think there is no difference between Serbians and Kosovars and Albanians. The old generation is who is responsible for the wars, the problems. And the hardest problem is we have no way to change anything. We are like big children, they don't let us change or make anything.

DM: You mean young people?

FH: Yes.

Big children with equally big problems: unemployment (twelve mentions), underrepresentation (ten), negligence within the family (six), and a lack of opportunity to travel (five) were the primary issues mentioned. Even as the majority of the respondents had never encountered a representative of the 'other' side of the ethnic divide (see Tables 10.1 and 10.2 above), the typical attitude towards responsibility for these problems is generational:

CO (S): I have no problem with young people from Kosovo. They are not responsible, obviously. What do they know? They hate that they have no money. They can't travel. They have schools, the schools are terrible. Kosovo is worse than here. They just do what their families tell them to do. Like this, they have exactly the same problems we do. There are no opportunities for young people in this part of the world. That's how things are. But the older generation, you know, the people who humiliated and killed Serbs because they are Serbs, you can't forgive that.

In the same spirit, SB described a 'big gap' between 'us and our parents for the evils of nationalism', while LK recalls a struggle with his parents over whether a poster he put up in his room was 'anti-Serb' or not (after repeated attempts by his father to tear the poster down, LK proudly reported not giving in). IF, for her part, recalls being astounded at the poor turnout of youngsters at 'Albania events in my high school'. Kosovo's overwhelmingly young demography led IF to wonder '[w]here did they even *find* all those old guys?' Even self-proclaimed Serbian nationalist GH, who exhibited the most exclusionist attitudes about Kosovo Albanians, takes for granted that generational differences help explain nationalist attitudes:

GH (S): My dad, all right, he's an engineer. He was down [in Kosovo] years ago, a long time ago. He was in Prizren, he was in Mitrovica. And this is a time when Mitrovica had tens of thousands of Serbs, they were a majority back

then. And he helped build a factory, they built other buildings, roads, infrastructure. And then, all his life . . . even today he tells me about this, every time he hears about Kosovo or [the] Hague [Tribunal for War Crimes] he tells me about this – how, when he got his pay-check, a huge percentage is cut before he even picks up his money. This percentage went to Kosovo. Kosovo and *underdeveloped* regions. So this was Serbs financing the backward parts of Yugoslavia.

DM: This was when he worked in Serbia.

GH: Yes, yes. So, I want to say that this is not right. Something is wrong about that. It was communism – the rich regions gave to the poor areas. But you understand this feeling, if you are getting your money sent to some part of the country that you helped build, you paid to make it modern, and then these people spit in your face and want their own country. They come, they kill their neighbours. They come, they kick everybody who is Serbian out. So who is crazy? But, then, what is interesting here? What is *interesting* is that the kids in Kosovo, these young kids, they don't know anything about this. They never *heard* of this. Their parents don't tell them – so if you are younger than 40, you were too young when Yugoslavia fell apart – and nobody tells you, all they tell you is how evil Serbs are, of course you have no idea.

DM: So the younger people do not remember, in a sense. What about the older people?

GH: Well, yes, but no, no – the thing is, young *Serbs* don't know about this either! They don't know either.

DM: You know.

GH: *I* know, but this is because of my father. Most young people in Serbia don't know this at all. In this sense, they are like the Albanians. So, the Serbian young people have the Albanian story and *not* their parents' Serbian story.

Lest we think this was a note of optimism, GH proceeds to explain that this similarity was 'part of the problem'. Several notable observations emerged from the anecdote. Firstly, the sense of betrayal being described – an undeserved stab-in-the-back from a minority nationality that 'we' selflessly subsidized – is not a national trait, but a generational one. Indeed, the fact that this sense of betrayal is limited to older generations is why GH believes Serbian youth is in trouble. Furthermore, he himself admits to knowing the suppressed truth through his father – and seems to think of himself as an exception in this regard.

Secondly, we have a rather elaborate, albeit indirect, explanation of the very burden and undeserved responsibility that GH's peers also identified: namely, Serbs like himself learn from their fathers not unlike Albanians learn 'how evil Serbs are' from theirs. The former is naturally evaluated as positive, while the latter is considered so pernicious that even most Serbs have adopted an alien 'story' from an alien nationality. In the tug-of-war over the extent to which Serbs will become 'like the Albanians' or vice versa, young people are portrayed largely as instruments of parental control. In a sense, therefore, GH agrees perfectly with the perception of youth vis-à-vis nationalism offered by his less nationalist colleagues. Namely, he sees considerable similarity between young Serbs and young

Kosovo Albanians, though he disagrees strongly in evaluation (he sees the generational transfer of knowledge and the knowledge itself as harmful to *his* ethnic community).

Other respondents also proved that youth solidarity did not guarantee a lack of ethno-centrism. FK admits finding ‘the nationalist story stupid just because I am a young guy’, adding that ‘Serb young characters mostly find it stupid like me’. But there is an important qualification:

FK (K): But you also need, how do you say . . . , an open mind about your own generation. You need to say, OK. I am twenty-something years and I can make decisions for myself. Nationalists and older guys [!] can say something, but I decide what to believe and what to do. Who I am. In this sense, I think the problem is that *still* young Serbs are not as open as young Albanians.

When asked to elaborate, FK cited personal discussions with Serbian peers online, which he found ‘fun and surprising’ because of how similar their interests are; he also thought, however, that they were ‘much more naïve, next to my friends, about doing what others tell them’. Powerlessness is here thought to be shared generationally, but a failure of ‘their’ ethnic category to minimize it separates ‘us’ nonetheless.

Most comparisons of parents to ‘us’, young people, nevertheless crossed national lines without insinuations of superiority. SR, an overly courteous and cautious respondent who hardly displayed any emotional queues during her interviews (even as she touched on NATO and KLA ‘crimes’, among other sensitive subjects), lost her composure and raised her voice on a single occasion: when asked what her ‘generation’ thought about nationalism. After a compelling list of grievances concerning ‘what nationalism has spoiled for [my generation]’, SR continued in an audibly enraged tone:

SR (S): *Us*, of course, nobody asks about *anything*. In Kosovo, in Serbia, in Europe, anywhere. We don’t *matter*. . . . What are young normal people going to do, anyway? OK, they can join political parties and try to fool people, or they can sit and take it.

Echoing the sentiment was HG, who had first-hand experience with municipal politics and local elections in Kosovo:

HG (K): Still, we have no political party that is, how to say . . . interested in young people. Truly interested in young people.

DM: Why do you think this is?

HG: Well, some of them knew that. . . . Well, it is like this everywhere. It’s like this in Serbia too.

Indeed, most Kosovars expressed similar sentiments of marginality, particularly in relation to the corruption and inefficiency of bureaucracies. Respondents on both ‘sides’ expressed high degrees of contempt for political parties, several of

them directly attributing the parties' shortcomings to the underrepresentation of young people (FM called his preferred Kosovo party a 'club of pensioners', while AC objected to the dominance of 'the war generation' over parties in both Kosovo and Serbia). Belgrade native LK, furthermore, disagreed about the underrepresentation of young people. He insisted that Serbian parties go out of their ways to promote and incorporate youngsters in their activities; however, these representatives are said to be 'fools' and representative only in name. This respondent referred to 'young party activists' with contempt, portraying them as an obstacle to 'true' representation of the young in society. LK's palm even fell to the table, adding a telling thud to the comment 'the old nationalist team never had this problem'.

Powerlessness is, tautologically enough, expressed repeatedly as a problem of 'politics' and the over-'politicization' of Serbia and Kosovo. Not only is meaningful representation thought to be non-existent, but major political institutions (ranging from the police and government to universities and NGOs) are – as if to 'rub salt in the wound', as Belgrade's MP put it – forcing young people to be preoccupied by politics. Kosovo's FK could not agree more, and is aware of the implications of over-politicization for nationalism in both settings:

DM (K): You said Serbian kids too. Do you mean *in* Kosovo or?

FK: Yes. In Serbia too. In *Serbia* too . . . Let me give you example. On the internet, whenever there is anything about Kosova . . . like a tourism video, video commercial for tourists to come to Kosova for example, you have millions and millions and millions of posts about politics. Oh, you Serbs did this to us, you Serbs did that to us, you Šiptari [a derogatory ethnic slur] did this to us, Šiptari did that to us. [chuckles] And, wow! This is crazy. *Everything* is about politics. This is all young people, of course. No question. This is where I learn what the young people from Serbia think. Young Serbs.

The luxury of 'ignoring politics' or 'not giving a damn' about politics is, FK lamented, not allowed 'like in Europe'.

SB, one of the very few from Kosovo to have actually met – in the flesh – a youngster from Serbia, recounts the brief meeting at a bus station with great precision. When their exchange began, SB expected 'nationalist prejudices' and confesses being 'on defensive'. To her surprise, the two peers struck up a conversation about their shared lack of money, their failed plans to afford travelling to the seaside in the upcoming summer season, and their parents' unwillingness to invest in their hobbies. 'Suddenly', SB recalls, 'I forgot she was Serb' – an extraordinary formulation from a subject who calls herself 'a nationalist, yes, but not racist. Patriot'. Others stressed the similarity across the ethnic divide even more forcefully, generalizing well beyond the Serbia-Kosovo sphere:

OK (S): Nationalists are basically the same everywhere. It's like a disease, I think. I really think it's *sick*. So, if you are sick in the head, it doesn't matter if you are in Belgrade or Gračanica or Priština or Berlin or New York or Jupiter or the United Nations. But the sad side is that so many of these people are *young* people. So, when I see those Muslim terrorists . . . to me, it's basically the

same as in Belgrade or Kosovo or anywhere else. You always have those ten per cent of sick young people everywhere.

OK's harshest words, however, were reserved for 'older nationalists', for whom he 'see[s] no excuses or logic', declaring that 'our generation should never forgive them for that'. The forgiveness thread readily extended to 'Albanians', who were only said to be 'luckier' because 'they have more young people'. In a similar vein, CC prescribes a reversal of the powerlessness of young people. When asked what she thought would happen when 'the young people confused by nationalism' (her phrase) grow up, CC insisted it would not be pleasant: 'I just hope the majority manages to keep their sanity'. OK adds:

OK (S): It will take time, but the big hope is that we break down these barriers and make people realize that we are not that different. This is why our generation is so important. In Priština you have crazy war criminals in politics screwing young people over, and in Belgrade you have crazy war criminals in politics uh, or at least *some* of them, right, screwing us over here.

Indeed, it would appear that 'getting screwed' makes the youth category salient – in this instance, a more cogent category than nationality itself. The unfortunate combination of over-politicization and lack of political representation and meaningful power expands well beyond formal institutions:

KR (S): I think the biggest tragedy of being born in Belgrade, growing up here, is that everything in your life has to be political. You can't go to school without politics. You can't listen to music without politics. Singers sign for politicians. You can't talk to friends without politics. You can't *walk*. . . . OK, I understand they have to put up posters somewhere, but you can't *walk* along a street without being bombarded on all sides by Kosovo is Serbia! Go to Kosovo, come to Kosovo with us! And so, all these kids, I mean twelve-year-olds sometimes, they all think this is normal. That this is normal for young people to think about in their lives. But no normal person thinks about that!

Overall, the least common denominator is powerlessness at all levels: legal, economic, political, cultural. The spontaneous pairing of the issue of nationalism with the issue of powerlessness among young people was so consistent that even minor probing elicited expressions of both intra- and inter-ethnic solidarity along generational lines. Remarkably, even the self-proclaimed 'nationalists' in the sample expressed nuanced common perceptions and diagnoses of nationalism based on perceived age-specific factors that trump ethnicity.

Youth culture

'Sometimes, I can recognize who is nationalistic just seeing his head, the shape of his head. Or his T-shirt', CC remarks without a trace of frivolity. 'If it's, um, certain rock or rap style, he's normal [non-nationalistic]'. Out of a total of twenty-seven

respondents who brought up references to popular culture, art, music, books, games, or cyber-content, as many as eighteen (thirteen from Belgrade, the rest from Priština) named youth-specific cultural items: musical bands or genres, films (two American, one Yugoslav), a fashion trend, English-language TV shows, and, most commonly, sport teams and players. Crucially, these references serve almost exclusively to ‘build bridges’ within or between nations. With the exception of UC – who has been disturbed by Orthodox Christian bracelets (*‘brojanice’*) ever since she saw Serbian soldiers wearing them while ‘walking around me and calling me Šiptar’ and has evaluated people wearing them ever since – cultural points of reference were evoked when Serbian-Albanian unity was being explained or asserted. ‘The young’, ‘students’, ‘our generation’, ‘my age period’, ‘us kids’, and (ingeniously) ‘those of us who grew up listening to good stuff’, are said to be united by youth-specific cultural consumption. Nationalism is associated in counter-intuitive ways. For some, youth culture is elicited to illustrate values naturally opposed to nationalism as respondents see it. For others, it served as a digression from the topic of nationalism, as if the mere mention of a particular element of youth culture minimizes issues of nationality in favour of other allegiances.

CO offered a curious folk sociological explanation for the differences between young Serbs and Kosovo Albanians in regards to ‘traditions’, which she believes are disappearing ‘among young people’ in ‘all the Balkans because of Hollywood’. She brought up blood feuds as an illustration of Kosovo’s ‘primitiv[ism]’ and ‘violence’, features that she felt explained ‘what real Kosovo is’. But then:

CO(S): But, to tell you the truth, if young Serbs had the same custom, they would behave in exactly the same way. So I really think it’s about the environment, it has nothing to do with nationality or nationalism. Environment and how *old* you are, because that determines your responsibilities, your memories. And today, because of the internet and, how I can say, shows with gay couples, everybody is different, it is the *media* that *makes* the environment. Meaning, because young people watch the same things, listen to the same things, they become more and more similar [moves hands to the right] to each other, and [moves hands to the far left] less and less connected to their national traditions.

CO stopped short of suggesting that youngsters watching shows about homosexuals have little time for blood feuds. But the connection between youth culture and the waning of nationalism is clear. The opening remark, with its disclaimer-like clause ‘to tell you the truth’, had a confessional quality to it, as if CO is conveying an unexpected attitude about similarities across the ethnic divide.

SS presented herself as a concrete example of the process CO conjectured: ‘when I moved away from my parents to Priština [and gained access to WI-FI] and started watching movies with my roommate, I became much more open to [other nationalities]. I never saw anything like that’. Not only does the activity in question have a youthful dimension, but the ‘roommate’ contrasted with the older family setting where the Internet was unavailable, if not frowned upon.

Belgrade’s SR, an aspiring musician and frequent traveller through the Serbian NGO scene, reflected on the way she befriended Kosovar peers at a youth project

in the US, of all places – an occasion that she suspects her parents' generation would have approached quite differently:

SR (S): Huh, I told my [family] about your Serbian-Albanian project, uh, and my dad was a little suspicious . . . a little . . . one could tell that it was not *all the same* for him. But what can you do when people only hear what they want to hear? It's so nice when you come across great stories from Albanians. I know when I was in America I hung out with a few Kosovars precisely on the basis of [a common interest in] bands like Muse. And that puts things in a different perspective.

The evocation of *hearing* what one wants to is fitting. SR's encounter with Kosovo Albanians was facilitated by none other than a common listening experience. As many as eleven respondents brought up popular music references of one kind or another to illustrate a point about nationalism or about the worldview of young people (two Kosovo subjects referred to a memorable concert of American rapper '50 Cent' in Priština – an event signifying no less than 'a new beginning for Kosovo', one fan remarked). BD, a political science major with an academic interest in nationalism, remembers attending concerts with Serbs in Kosovo youth clubs playing 'heavy metal, hard-core, *whatever*'. Although there was not much interaction, he recalls 'standing side by side, but not together' with Serbs – a striking formulation of the ambivalent relation. His trips to Switzerland and France, among other places, led him to the realization that the easiest way to represent himself to curious but ignorant foreigners was through pop culture.

BD (S): They don't know where Kosovo is. I mean, they know but they just heard about the war . . . and everything. It sounds like an exotic place to them. Sometimes I get tired of explaining how we are and how we are also like the others and . . . that we had this war and bad things. But, you know . . . sometimes I get tired of explaining how we live, we listen to the *same music* and the same videos as every country. Every young peoples is the same. Depends on who is asking, but if it is young people, it is much easier, you know . . . in Serbia too. Young people understand more. We understand them. There is understanding.

During the 1999 war, LD recalls going with his two closest childhood friends, with whom he had been 'to every protest in Kosovo', for them to join the KLA. One friend joined while the other was declined because 'they didn't trust him'. When they returned after the war to a vastly transformed political landscape, LD recalls the increasing distance between himself and his two childhood friends that had gone through the war first-hand. It was manifested precisely through youth culture:

LD (K): I play a song. I'm trying to remember now. . . . I can't give any examples man, but they would say this song is *Serbian*, and I would say it's just a song. On this moment, I realized there is identity other than, uh, Albanian or Kosovar. There is how I love music, and maybe some Serbian kids love

the same music, but . . . so what? Who cares? I think this is good thing. My friend said *no*.

A Serbian counterpart of LD's could not agree more:

FH (S): Some nationalists think you should only watch series with a patriotic message. You should only watch movies in Cyrillic. To me, this is just idiotism. That's like burning books when you don't like what the book says.

Illustrations outside of the sphere of music and film were no less indicative:

FM (K): In normal countries, young guys carry around photos of girls in his wallet. In Kosova, they carry around [KLA war hero] in the wallet. . . . In Serbia too? [smiles] . . . you *know* what I am talking about? It's just crazy countries here.

Note that even carrying a loved one's picture is somewhat age-specific, as is the automatic recognition that Serbian 'young guys' are not altogether different in this regard: FM pauses, as if to realize mid-sentence that his example is relatable to my own experiences. Then, '*know*' is emphasized in lieu of any need to elaborate.

Finally, references to sports heroes abounded, always serving to encompass youngsters from the 'opposing' nationality. Dismissing what he calls 'hooligans', VV continues to believe in 'true athletes in our generation' who respect their opponents and understand that 'there are only [sports uniforms], no nationalities'. IF, a basketball enthusiast, recalls a friendly game with Serbian youngsters from Kosovo's north, where she enjoyed the fact that the language barrier between herself and a Serbian peer was overcome by mutual teaching of basketball tricks – 'we didn't have to talk even, it was beautiful'. KR, though not a keen follower of sports, was disgusted with what she called 'nationalists turning sport into politics'. When asked for examples, she recounted a football match between two local high school teams, one of which 'were called traitors' for collectively refusing to wear a t-shirt with the inscription 'Kosovo is Serbia'. 'Of course they refused', she said, 'it's like ancient history for us'. Neither of the teams, incidentally, was KR's own, making the 'us' all the more indicative of youth solidarity. Who was it that cried treachery and prepared the nationalist garments? '[T]hose dinosaurs', she exclaims,

KR (S): [. . .] who were training soldiers at the frontline yesterday, and now they are training kids in basketball. In their heads, it is still 1999. But the kids knew better. They just want to play the game, and I just want to watch. And I want to invite some friends from Kosovo, and watch the game together like normal people.

KI, preferring football, laments the fact that Serbia and Kosovo no longer have a common team to compete at the World Cup. 'Our [Kosovo] football is a joke', he complains: people who do not follow sports ('even my parents') glorify footballer Fadilj Vokri in Kosovo, but forget that his 'golden age' was during his play for

Yugoslavia as the sole Albanian player – and the best one in the whole national team, ‘better than the Serbian players’. ‘The truth is’, KI insists, ‘that he is *nothing* now, so he decides to scream about Kosova’s pride and play this nationalist story’. As far as KI is concerned, ‘Vokri was a symbol to be proud of, a hero for young people in *Serbia* also’, a status he is said to have ‘gave up’ for a far lesser fame in Kosovo alone. ‘Now, he is older and older, less and less popular, so now I’m ashamed of him on [Internet sports] forums’, where KI is happy to have encountered ‘true Serbian fans’ who share his views of the once-great icon of sportsmanship.

Childhood Trauma

‘Every . . . nationalist . . . that I know’, GW explains, waving his finger emphatically with every word, ‘had some bad, bad story when they were young’. What turned out to be one of the most fruitful interview questions (‘What do you think makes people become nationalists?’) led to very revealing opinions about the importance of childhood in the formation of nationalism. A dozen respondents told entire stories of at least several minutes (a few for over fifteen minutes) of childhood traumas from their own lives, testimonies from lives of their close ones, or second-hand accounts of people who are perceived as nationalists. A common structure to the narratives (virtually identical in Serbian and Kosovar interviews) involves an innocent youngster of the ethnic in-group subjected to violence or discrimination by multiple members of the out-group.

A preliminary irony in this regard had not been lost on many respondents. Namely, even though the Serbian-Albanian relation was clearly on everyone’s mind, almost none of the subjects had ever met members of the ethnic out-group. All but three of the subjects from the Serbia subsample had never been to Kosovo (one of whom visited when he was too young to remember), while the Kosovo subsample had, with only two exceptions, never encountered young Serbs from Serbia itself. Only one of the Priština interviewees had opportunities to visit Serbia, though most expressed a wish to do so. ‘The big joke’, SS remarked, ‘is that the nationalists at my [academic cohort] are filled with all this prejudice but do not even know the people they are hating’. The observation was shared by MV, a dedicated ‘hate[r]’ of nationalism from a rural community in Serbia:

MV (S): Just so we understand each other. Who has *been* to Kosovo? *Ever*? I don’t know anybody my age who has been to Kosovo. Maybe one person. But these young people demonstrating, throwing bombs, they don’t know anything about Kosovo. And those Albanians who are throwing rocks at Serbian students on the bus, they have never been to the Serbian enclaves, let alone to Belgrade or something. The whole thing is nonsense. Everybody just listens to their parents’ tragedy stories, which are made-up too . . . you know, like . . . and then you listen to all this horror and you grow up with all this nationalist brainwashing from small legs [from a very early age]. The younger you are, the more scars you get this way.

In exact accordance with ‘nationalist’ GH cited earlier, MV puts the role of parental indoctrination at the very centre of her understanding of nationalism – and takes the crucial difference between younger and older generations for granted. But notice the additional emphasis on ‘horror’, ‘tragedy stories’, and the vivid image of ‘scars’ acquired ‘from small legs’, as the expression has it. As ‘nonsensical’ and ‘made-up’ as these stories are, the traumatic experiences are highlighted as sources of nationalism in Serbia and Kosovo alike. Being indoctrinated at a tender age by ‘horror stories’, and even more by ‘horror’ itself, is thought to be such a formative experience that it alone can explain what SS identified as ‘joke’ and what MV called ‘nonsense’. Other folk sociological speculations wandered in similar directions:

FH (S): But nationalists are not born on trees, you know. Ok, I mean – I hate nationalism. But . . .

DM: [polite sarcasm] Oh, really?

FH: Yes [chuckle], so what else is new? But, you know – what is important? I hate them, but I have many friends who are nationalists and I respect them. And they respect me. Nationalists do not come out of nowhere. I think many people, like this is the [pro-Western, traditionally anti-Milošević radio-TV station] B92 story – nationalists are *crazy*, you know, like they are maybe *sick* or something. This is not how things are. All the nationalists I know are people who suffered all sorts of bad stuff when they were young. What do you expect from them? Let’s say your family is refugees from Kosovo, they *lost . . . everything*, they have *nothing* in life, and they come back to Belgrade to live in a refugee centre with no food. *No* help. Nobody cares. About them. The state does nothing. And then the kid grows up and becomes a nationalist. And then B92 says he is crazy nationalist. Come on! What do you expect?

KI would presumably expect the same:

KI (K): Many very nationalist people I know had somebody killed in their families, or they were in the war. Serbians burn his house, Serbians kills his brother. Then you go to KLA. Why not? So it’s very personal motivation, revenge, it is motivation of returning violence that you had . . . they kill your family, you want to kill their family. It’s simple. Nationalism is just result. But I think when it happens to you when you are young, then it’s very easy for you to become nationalist. If you have twelve years, and somebody is killing people in your village, you accept nationalism. It’s hard to forget. This is natural, I think.

By far the most startling story came from BZ, who witnessed a brutal traumatization of a childhood friend who later became an ‘mega-mega-nationalist’ and ‘the strongest nationalist I ever met’. BZ’s friend was only 10 when a sadistic schoolmate forced him, in front of BZ’s own eyes, ‘to swallow small razorblades’. He did so, for fear of getting beaten. BZ joined in my amazement at how the boy

managed without permanent injury. But an even more amazing dimension to the story emerged:

BZ (K): The big guy has his friends all around, and they hold and push me as well, and they were calling my friend a Serb. ‘Your mother is Serb’, ‘You Serb sh**’, and like that. [pause] Of course he wasn’t, but that didn’t matter. He had to put another razor and another razor in his mouth. He was crying. He was bleeding from the mouth. [pause] He tries to stop [simulates a slap with his hand in the air], he hits him to force him to go again and says ‘come on Serb’.

In a *dénouement* worthy of fiction, the tormented boy eventually became the epitome of nationalism in BZ’s eyes. ‘[He] fought in the war and everything’, he continues, ‘and he talks about this scene, he is not hiding it’. Indeed, BZ admits to being more distraught as a ‘mere’ witness than his friend is when describing his own torture. The two remained friends. ‘He was never again the same. Even [he] himself says he became a nationalist because of this’.

Less dramatic but analogous first-hand accounts were given by several ‘nationalists’ in the sample. One might suspect IO’s nationalist sympathies to give something other than violence the credit for what he calls ‘my philosophy’ and ‘political beliefs’, but his explanation is remarkably similar:

IO (S): In a sense, it’s easy for me. It’s easy for you and me to talk about this, but, what, if you are 18 now, and you were around nine years old during the [NATO] bombing. Let’s say my own brother, you know? He’s was a child and he had to take all . . .

DM: Your brother is the younger brother?

IO: Yeah, so he was eight in ’99. And he took all his toys, I’ll never forget, and he took them to the basement and cried every night from the bombs, the sirens, everything is shaking. He’s a child and he has to listen to that. Loud explosions, sirens, everybody scared. And he asks us, why are they bombing us? And we have to tell him about Albanians, and Bill Clinton. Now, I was big already then, so it was easier for me to understand what is going on. But when you are a child, you could never hurt anybody, so he grows up and learns to fight back. He learns to fight for his people [*narod*] very early.

IO proceeded to explain that both he and his brother are ‘reasonably’ nationalistic, and that his brother was one of the neighbourhood leaders of the anti-Kosovo independence protests in 2008. ‘He’s much stronger than I am’, IO confesses, almost with a trace of envy. IO’s age at the time was, incidentally, itself the age of a child; IO might as well be describing – via projection – the roots of his own nationalism.

Aspiring teacher KR, for her part, expanded at length on her interpretation of psychological views of childhood, particularly the importance of ‘violent events’ and ‘growing up without any family’ as a potential source of nationalism. In

contrast to KR's depersonalized account, BD took a more introspective approach, describing first-hand experience:

DM: When you say you were nationalist [. . .] How do you feel you came to that? Was this in the early period [you mentioned], '92, '95 . . .

BD (K): I mean, in early 90s. There were demonstrations. I was . . . how old I was? Eight, nine. And I was, I was so young and taking part in every demonstration. All the children. The highest point was, when actually, the Serbians, the Serbian army massacred the first family in Drenica. They killed around 80 people from the same family, relatives. They just killed them. You know. [sigh] One of them was the first guerrilla fighter, he was KLA. So the next day there was a big demonstration in Pristina, and *this* was the first day when, uh, we first physically fight with the police.

He went on to emphasize how this 'beginning' will never entirely leave him, no matter how much 'my nationalism has changed completely' to the point that '[nationalism] is no longer the main thing for me'.

Indicatively, these associations of violence and trauma with nationalism are never presented as unique to the respondents' own ethnic categories. Not a single description of violent events in childhood producing 'nationalists' is offered as implicit proof of advantage of one ethnicity over another (as many other statements readily did). No subjects claimed that their own people suffered more, for instance – an inference that would have been easy to make. Even more importantly, the trauma is routinely given a *generational* context which contradicts an ethnocentric perspective. Indeed, BD and SS explicitly emphasized the basic interchangeability of nationalities in the trauma-in-childhood logic. 'Kosovar or Serb, it doesn't matter', BD insists, 'because when you live through ethnic hatred as a child, you will do it. It's a circle'. SS agrees: 'All nationalisms are the same because they feed off young ones who have big memories of being victims of aggression'. IO finds this 'natural', asking me 'if some Albanian had to go through what I went through during the bombing [as a child], do you think he would be different?' Thus, even when such provocative memories are being summoned up, the selection of 'Albanian' for the hypothetical reveals a remarkable capacity for age-based, cross-ethnic empathy.

Conclusion

The Southeast European equivalent to Phinney's (1990) *Ethnic Identity in Adolescents and Adults* is sorely missing in the region. In the hopes that such a body of work materializes, this chapter has taken a preliminary step towards an inevitable task in this domain. Namely, one must *delimit* how far nationalism goes as source of identity and value for young adults. This small-N study is narrow in scope and method, but indicates that the prevailing orthodoxy about these constituencies is misleading. In lieu of definitive inferences or unwarranted generalizations, I end with a suggestion that inquiries into folk sociological understandings of nationalism among the youth must incorporate youth solidarity.

Folk sociology deserves a central place in our analysis of how nationalism is thought about, talked about, consumed, performed, and enacted, and how it ‘becomes real’ to the population of interest (for a justification of the concept, see Hirschfield 2013). I consider folk sociology, far from some peripheral concern to be avoided, to be inseparable from personal worldview and self-understanding. Few topics are as convenient as nationalism to evoke such a complex bundle, particularly in the former Yugoslav republics where ‘nationalism’ is a contender for the region’s most loaded word. Throughout our conversations, respondents moved effortlessly between the personal and the sociological, the individual and the collective, the concrete and the abstract. Many method instruments – including qualitative surveys – simply omit much of this nuance.

Studying nationalism and studying understandings of nationalism vis-à-vis youth solidarity should not be separate enterprises. As we saw above, the line between subjective understandings of arduous events associated with nationalism and supposedly objective, cool-headed evaluations of political or historical events is thin. The non-ethnic, anti-nationalist currents of thought, emotion, categorization, and identification are often what drive the subjects’ explanations. Scholars of youth solidarity might benefit from embracing the folk sociology of their subjects as an integral part (though certainly not a replacement) of investigations into nationalism. Whereas Brubaker et al. remain somewhat cautious about equating the value of folk sociology with analogous data in studies of elite nationalism (2006: 9), this study recommends that it can sharpen our analytic tools in addition to ‘belong[ing] to our data’ (ibid.).

Risks are inherent in such an approach. If one is merely complicating national categories like ‘Serb’ and ‘Kosovar’ to demonstrate their fictiveness, one is engaged in the very ‘clichéd constructivism’ that Cooper and Brubaker (2000: 11) dared us to move beyond. The task, rather, is to explore *how* these categories, and the accompanying views of nationalism, are constructed in relation to youth solidarity. The reasons they are ‘real’ in the minds of subjects cannot be understood without reference to youth-specific identification processes. With Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008), I agree that interviews have a unique potential to uncover such ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ by treating respondents as active, innovative manufacturers of nationalism and concepts associated with it. One such concept, I have argued, plays an important role in *undermining* nationalism itself.

Note

- 1 See companion piece Mandić (2017), which draws on the same interview data, for methods details.

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Conclusion

Danilo Mandić

For a variety of good and bad reasons (introspective nostalgia among them), scholars have held the distinction between young and old to be essential for society. In a classic textbook, sociologist and stratification theorist Melvin Tumin wrote:

It also seems to be unavoidable that in any society, no matter how literate its tradition, the older, wiser, and more experienced individuals who are charged with the enculturation and socialization of the young must have more power than the young, on the assumption that the task of effective socialization demands such differential power.

(Grusky 2008: 46)

The youth in Southeast Europe have been objects of such assumptions threefold. First, their ‘tradition’, given communist legacies and Yugoslavia’s bloody ruin, is assumed to be not only ‘illiterate’ but unusually violent, primitive, and nationalistic. The well-researched ‘orientalism’ that has captured the imagination of observers of the Balkans (Todorova 2009) has not spared the image of young adults. The axiomatic view is often that youngsters are passive, idle recipients of their parents’ identities and previous cohorts’ ethnic chauvinism. Furthermore, since the ‘older, wiser and more experienced individuals’ were unanimously thought to be patriarchal traditionalists (Halpern, Kaser and Wagner 1996), their offspring – the thought went – are especially vulnerable to being moulded in the image of their nationalistic ancestors. Finally, given the accentuated brain drain and aging population of Southeast Europe, the youth are thought to be an impotent minority, too outnumbered to meaningfully control its own ‘socialization’.

This collection has offered an alternative perspective. As studies of post-Soviet Eurasia have usefully emphasized (Afanasyeva 2011), we found that ‘young people are active participants in [their own] socialization process’ (Blum 2011: 158). Far from reflexive recipients of nationalist legacies, they are muddying, supplementing, and rejecting them.

We return here to three broad themes affirmed in this volume: (1) the inadequacy of exaggerating and essentializing ethnicity in this context; (2) the variety of youth values and identities among Southeast European youth; and (3) the value of bottom-up studies revealing youth as barometers of change.

Firstly, this volume has – as Imre Lakatos' (1976) dichotomy puts it – a 'degenerative' research project. Namely, we suggest that the *overemphasis and essentialization of ethnicity as a source of identity and values is unproductive*. As Brubaker and Cooper (2000) would have anticipated, groupist approaches to youth ethnic categories have taken on a life of their own. They have conflated identities that contradict each other, imposed symbolic boundaries where they may not exist, and concealed alternative categories that may take priority over ethno-national ones. In contrast, we have demonstrated the dynamism of ethnic meanings, experiences, and perspectives. Not only do young people enact and instrumentalize ethnicity in non-traditional ways, they even do so to undermine the very national boundaries that ethnicity implies. Baća finds that ethno-national *disidentification* characterized the political thrust of Montenegrin youth activists. Turjačanin and his colleagues found that, even when ethnic identification is visibly robust, it is being actively undermined in significant ways – problematizing an ethnocentric approach. Throughout, we have highlighted pivotal mechanisms of self-identification that could hardly be understood as 'ethnic' or 'national'.

Secondly, this volume affirms a Lakatosian 'progressive' research project: we have argued that *youth values and identities are diverse, hybrid, and counter-intuitive*. The interview-based and ethnographic contributions have surveyed a variety of practiced identification processes, discourses, and everyday routines. As Trošt revealed, class-based identification processes significantly complicate the allegedly intractable ethnic polarization between Croatian and Serbian youth. The Bosnian JMBG movement, as Alibegova argues, was a series of youth-based contentious actions that combined generational and civic identities to bypass state accusations of betrayal and disloyalty. Most astoundingly, Takševa's theoretically unique sample reveals that – even in the most ethnically tinted context imaginable – adolescents create hybrid identities and accompanying values that renegotiate implied burdens of victimhood, belonging and guilt.

Finally, we have argued that *youth in Southeast Europe are a barometer of social change*. We suggested that many rash studies – treating youth as a social problem, mindless rebellion, delinquency, or a resurgence of an ugly nationalist past – are at least incomplete, at most misleading. Many analysts begin with the (understandable) concern for an 'aging Europe', which seems irreparably declining compared to the rapidly-growing 'youth societies' of the developing world. Demographic realities have led some to discount the European youth – let alone youth at the European periphery – as meaningful agents of change. Furthermore, the alleged silence and apathy of young voters, the absence of a rejuvenated political class, and the apparent continuities of socialist-era elites with today's oligarchies, have all led to neglect of this group's agency.

We have suggested a different interpretation. In the case of Albania, data put forward by Jusufi and Zeka indicates that the youth are heavily engaged in politics, including transnational concerns of Albanian nationhood, which they are eager to inherit. Alibegova and Rác – in Croatia and Vojvodina, respectively – find that both titular ethnic majorities and minorities are actively undermining official doctrines (including European Union ones) governing symbolic boundaries

and cultural senses of belonging. Generally, we suggest that the marginalization (indeed, often outright hostility) of the traditional political and economic order towards the youth is superficial and temporary. These young people have the potential to redefine the region's ideological landscape by fundamentally renegotiating ethnic identities. Understanding their values is, we suggest, understanding future European trends.

Future research avenues

The topic we have tackled is intimidatingly broad and deep. This is at once a risk and an opportunity. It is risky because our in-depth, textured glimpses at the identities and values of these young adults may be generalized without justification, or taken for granted as representative of future necessities. It is an opportunity because it widens our research avenues: methodologically, by encouraging rich, textured in-depth interviews, ethnographies, targeted sampling of unique youth constituencies, etc. that shed light on neglected processes; and theoretically, because age itself can fruitfully be re-theorized to account for changing identification dynamics.

Social science has often conceptualized age as it relates to phases of pre-work, work, and post-work. Given Southeast European youth unemployment rates, the very markers of being a young adult are unlike those in Western societies. We saw in multiple chapters that uniquely bleak socio-economic conditions – which contrast to previous cohorts' – can *themselves* undermine and replace other identification with age-based, generational camaraderie. In his chapter, Mandić revealed that even such ethnically charged divisions as Serb vs. Albanian are not only undermined but superseded by age-based solidarity regarding economic hardship and shared perceptions of injustice. Similarly, theorization of age/cohort effects and aging as a process overwhelmingly carried a bias towards the elderly. Most approaches to social dimensions of age explore marginalization and discrimination against older people (even the very term 'ageism', in scholarly and colloquial usage alike, reflects this bias). As several authors have demonstrated here, the enactment of class, citizenship, cosmopolitanism, gender, and minority status by the young are deeply political acts: they, too, like marginalized older generations, are struggling against a moral order that denies them voice, a globalized economy that impoverishes them, political elites which take them for granted, and ideologies that marginalize their values. Future research, therefore, would do well to consider the remarkable political consciousness and activity embedded in what young people express as their values and identities. As Part II illustrated, these expressions take place against considerable opposition. The cliché that younger generations are apathetic and 'turned off' to traditional societal concerns is hardly adequate.

Indeed, targeted bottom-up investigations of youth politics could greatly inform constructive social policy in economic, cultural, and political realms (for an important critique of Europe-level 'youth polices', see Hamilton, Antonucci and Roberts 2014). Policymakers tend to restrict themselves to one of two indicators:

(a) superficial, quantitative survey data; and (b) voting rates and turnouts, which are – as in Western Europe – low, inconsistent across time, and biased towards urban youth. As discussed in the *Introduction* to this volume, these indicators are distorting. The rich, qualitative methods employed here reveal underlying motivations, perceptions, and behaviours of an otherwise-invisible generation. Their attitudes towards employment, life events, language policy, education, party politics (particularly nationalistic- and cultural-based), their society's history, and their desired civic roles are considerably more mature than the public policies designed to satisfy them.

Further, several chapters pointed to the importance of political involvement of young people, which is categorically different than that of previous generations. More than half of the proposals we received for this edited volume focused on the ways in which political participation of youth has affected or complicated generational identities, attesting to changing patterns of political involvement and its implication for mobilization efforts. In their study of youth, Schartz and Winkel (2016) similarly find that the activism of contemporary youth does not 'address governmental politics in a traditional left- or right-wing way known from western democracies' (11).

Finally, the theoretical significance of age-group values and identities is tremendous in relation to globalization (Suarez-Orozco 2004). One of the unfortunate effects of the overemphasis and essentialization of ethnicity has been the neglect of the globalization of Southeast Europe. Though regional European integration has not proceeded at a level that satisfies liberal elites, Balkan countries *have* undergone considerable cultural, economic, and political intermingling in the past few decades. Young adults in the region occupy many inter-societal networks in which acquaintance, friendship, intermarriage, information exchange, trade, political alliance, etc. across societies significantly affect the range of options within their communities. Their attachment to the Internet, their awareness of youth movements across national borders, and their reliance on transnational diaspora ties are just some examples of the globalized resources they routinely use to mould their identities.

As Part III has demonstrated, comparative studies are uniquely suitable for explaining how young people navigate these unprecedented globalized conditions. Assuming their parents' relatively parochial access to cultural goods, political views, and monolingual media outlets simply will not do. These young adults draw on much greater exposure to 'foreign' ideas, meanings, values, and ways of being. Their awareness of living in an interconnected world is notably higher than their predecessors': it empowers them to craft counter-intuitive perspectives on what it means to be a voter in a post-Cold War world; to be a national in a culturally diverse era; to adopt identities across inherited ethnic boundaries; to be a child of war; to be a child of communism; to be a nationalist; and, indeed, what it means to be young in an era of evolving understandings of what it means to grow old.

This volume is a modest first step in exploring these landscapes, which we merely surveyed. Southeast Europe is increasingly addressing same-sex marriages and affirmation of LGBT rights, issues which have surfaced from under

the rug. How will youth perceptions of parenthood, gender, and marriage adapt? With the March 2015 closure of the so-called Balkan Route, the region has only temporarily relieved the long-term pressures that increased migration and cultural heterogenization will bring to this generation. How will current processes of identification and value-formation evolve as migration de-Europeanizes their European settings? In June 2016, Brexit succeeded because of a referendum in which European youth identification played a prominent role. How will existing mechanisms of political mobilization among young adults resolve the polarization between exclusionary nationalist tendencies and further integration into the EU? Over the next fifty years, Europe is projected to either reposition itself in a multipolar world of Chinese ascent or suffer economic decline. How will changing labour markets and unemployment rates affect class-based youth solidarity? We trust that qualitative, bottom-up investigations into these questions can shed light not only on European but also global processes of generational change.

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