

INTER-ETHNICITY AND IRRATIONALITY

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Abstract: *The collapse of the nazi regime at the end of the II. World war was also the end of the most terrible "rebellion against civilization", the totalitarian ideology of fascism. In an attempt, to conceptualise the developmental process of extreme irrationality, many psychological theories were developed since 40's until 70's. But the rising of inter-ethnic conflicts all around the world contributed to the development of inter-ethnic theories, pushing back the relevance of the above mentioned psychological concepts. The Balkan conflict re-actualised the scientific and main stream (media) application of the term of fascism. The author presents the sociopsychological theories on fascism, developed by Horkheimer, Adorno and Theweleit, but the relevant theoretical concepts of inter-ethnicity also. A critical insight would be made on relevance of those theoretical concepts, regarding to the development of contemporary social systems, based on "rebellion against civilisation".*

KEYWORDS: fascism, inter-ethnicity, reality, conflict, Balkan

INTERETNIČNOST IN IRACIONALNOST

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Povzeteke: *Kolaps nacističnega režima ob koncu Druge svetovne vojne je predstavljal tudi konec "upora proti civilizaciji", torej totalitarne ideologije fašizma. Od 40. do 70. let našega stoletja se je pojavilo kar nekaj psiholoških teorij, z namenom tolmačenja procesa razvoja ekstremne iracionalnosti. Vendar, prebujanje interetničnih konfliktov po vsem svetu je vsekakor prispevalo k razvoju interetničnih teorij, ki so močno zmanjšali vpliv konceptov, ki so razlagali nastanek fašizma. Šele vojna na Balkanu je reaktualizirala znanstveno in vsakdanjo uporabo besede "fašizem". V članku se predstavljene social-psihološke teorije*

fašizma, ki so jih razvili Horkheimer, Adorno in Theweleit, kot tudi znanstveni koncepti interetničnosti. Autor članka poskuša pokazati tudi na pomanjkljivosti omenjenih konceptov iz aspekta razvoja sodobnih družbenih sistemov, ki temeljijo na "uporu proti civilizaciji".

KLJUČNE BESEDE: fašizem, interetničnost, stvarnost, konflikt, Balkan

In the former decades, theoretical achievements of psychological science in the field of inter-ethnicity contributed to the understanding of the relations between different groups, communities and societies. Many of scientific concepts, intending to interpret the inter-ethnic relations and conflicts were developed (Sheriff, 1966; Billig, 1976; Vamik, 1988; 1992). Almost all of those theoretical concepts were developed in the shadow of group theory fulfilling a clear pragmatic need for the understanding of persisting inter-ethnic conflicts (Sheriff, 1966; Billig, 1976; Tajfel, 1981).

The theoretical concepts, based on socio - psychological paradigm, reflects the same conclusions:

- Conflict is a natural and very typical phenomenon in every type of human relationships, at every level.
- Conflicts at every level have very significant common characteristics and dynamics.
- People get involved in conflicts because their interests or their values are challenged, or because their needs are not met.
- The conflicts will be resolved in many different ways, but sometimes the conflict still persists, without resolution.

It seems, that the above mentioned concepts were sufficient to interpret the surface of the phenomenon, but only the psychoanalytically based theory of Vamik Volkan met the need for a "deeper" understanding of the inter-ethnic relations, especially the problem of irrationality of social acting (Vamik, 1988; 1992). Through the past decades relevance of inter - ethnic theories became even more and more respectable, substituting the political and philosophical concepts, which existed before (actually, the theoretical concepts of fascism; Oravecz, 1999). But the picture in the last few years rapidly changed. Media professionals and humanitarian mission members, working in Bosnia, Croatia and in Kosovo, collected and transferred a tremendous amount of information about the nature of the so-called ethnic war. They pointed out the absurd suffering of civil population and the

irrationality of political decision making in the war torn former Yugoslav countries.

The media – presented globality and irrationality of the inter-ethnic violence was even more and more overwhelming for the average Western – Europe and USA citizen. The information, presented in the media, contributed to the confirmation of the individual suffering and the facts of ethnic cleansing. And at last, all this facts, observed and collected by the field workers, contributed to the perceivability of the irrelevance of the conclusions of inter-ethnic concepts, described above. In the face of this facts, it became even more clear, that the understanding of inter –ethnic relations and mechanisms, contributing to the actual Balkan war, is not possible just by the application of the existing concepts of inter-ethnicity.

Few weeks before the NATO bombing campaign, the term of "fascism" almost imperceptibly appeared in the vocabulary of the global news channels, like CNN and the western politicians also. Referring to the fact, that the media is reflecting the global social discourse, the change of vocabulary could be interpreted like a sign of paradigm shift in an attempt to modify the social representation on the Balkan conflict. Indubitably, the term of fascism has a trivial, politically exploitable meaning. But from the other hand, the phenomenon of fascism was after the II. World War in the focus of very important scientific activity and very consistent psychological theories on fascism were developed (Horkheimer, 1947; Horkheimer in Adorno, 1969; Adorno, 1981; Dolar, 1982).

It is well known, that the representatives of the Frankfurt Institute of Sociology (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse) were deeply involved into the scientific efforts to discover the psychological aspects of fascistic ideology (Horkheimer, 1947; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1969; Adorno, 1981). Adorno (1981) defined the fascism, like a "rebellion against the civilisation". He declared that the re-appearance of archaic contents in the fascistic societies is less relevant, than the reproduction of these elements in the contemporary civilization. Referring to Horkheimer (1947), the hostility against the civilisation cannot be understand through the irrational projections of disturbed individuals, but only through the understanding of the joy-reducing potentials of the bourgeois society.

The theoretical concepts of Horkheimer and Adorno clearly reflect the tradition of classic Freudian psychoanalysis. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Newitt Sanford (1950) pointed out the role of Ego in

supervising the reality. One of the most important Ego – functions is to take and maintain control over the relations between the Self and the world and Self and deeper psychic structures, and they stated, that this synthesis is in the case of authoritarian personality unsuccessful. Referring to the concepts of Horkheimer and Adorno (1969), the authoritarian person is unable to develop a consistent system of values, and that is perhaps the reason, he / she becomes engaged into a searching for some kind of organising – co-ordinating power.

Klaus Theweleit (cf. Dolar, 1982) developed his psychological concepts independently from the Frankfurt Institute of Sociology. He discovered the psychological presumptions of the fascism. He identified in the paramilitary organisations (Freikorps) voluntarily organised after the I. World war the core of the early development of German fascism. The theory of Theweleit pointed out the negative attitude of the "Freikorps " activists regarding to the sexuality and human body. In the centre of the negatively perceived image of joy is the fear of sexually liberated women. Their fear of castration was deeply connected with the fear of communism. Theweleit understood the psychological phenomenon of fascism like a preoedipal phenomenon, which had nothing to do with the psychological role of the father. Theweleit described also the way of fascistic reality building, which tends to the absolute unification of two components:

- the synthesis and
- the exclusion (excluding anything, what couldn't be integrated).

The logic of fascistic ideology seems very similar to the logic of paranoid psychosis (Dolar, 1982). It could be identified as a cognitive and behavioural trait of excluding everything, opposing to the fragile, irrationally built reality. Exclusion in this case automatically means elimination or extermination. And elimination (extermination) does not depend on any civilisational rules, but the elimination is "per definitionem" totalitarian and irrational. Theweleit's theory was very useful to interpret the German fascist's phobia of femine and of communism, but he was less successful in understanding the phenomenon of German anti-Semitism. Namely, he didn't recognise the important, intellectual function of European Jewish culture which originated in their "insider – outsider" position.

Dolar (1982) stated, that the paranoid attitude expressed against Jewish people was not motivated only by the well known economical reasons, but also by the irrational fear of "those, who possesses the knowledge". This

"knowledge" was connected to the unconscious fear of fascists of impotency and castration and they recognised it like a hidden power of Jews. Behind the irrationality, expressed in paranoia stands the secret. The secret of vulnerability and impotency (Dolar, 1982). However, the phenomenon of the fascism seems to be connected to the feelings of shame (Heller, 1985). The mechanism of exclusion and extermination of the "observer", (the "insider-outsider") could serve an unusual (but definitely successful) way of liberation from the feelings of shame. Referring to the above mentioned, the theoretical concepts of inter-ethnicity and the fascism are not exclusive, but complementary, because they approached two different, but often confluent phenomenon in different way.

Undoubtly, the phenomenon of German fascism was a great challenge for the belief-system of the western world. The totalitarian authority was recognised like a new, unique product of the 20. century (Adorno, 1950). The belief about the certainty of the rational mind was broken by the experience of global, totalitarian and irrational ideology and praxis of fascism.

Today, from the distance of two (three) generations, we assumed, that the experience of the II. World war, the Holocaust, the tremendous individual and collective pain and suffering caused a great impact on the matrix of European cultures (Virág, 1997). The global starvation and losses caused a modification of collective belief systems. The culture – modificative power of suffering depends on dysfunctional meaning – producing mechanisms, like denial and ignorance. The insufficient narrative integration causes a tabuisation of some non-integrated social contents (Oravec, 1999). Tabuisation and ignorance of the individual suffering (especially of the Jews) influenced the mystification of the meaning of "fascism" and the traumatogenic events (Virág, 1997).

In face of contextually based presuppositions of inter-ethnicity, the difference between "victims" and "perpetrators" disappeared. The "scale model" of interethnic relation introduces the thesis, "Nobody is innocent" (Fitzgerald, 1998). Inter-ethnic conflicts and inter-ethnic violence is recognised in the sense of usual consequences, determined by ordinary social rules (Sherif, 1966; Billig, 1976; Tajfel, 1981). The way, how the concepts of inter-ethnicity treats the problem of inter – ethnic violence contributes to the acceptance of the violence through the integration of the phenomenon into the global social discourse.

The research of inter-ethnicity focuses the "group" level. The "mass" becomes a peripheral term for the majority of researchers and the term of "trouble-maker" substitutes the idea of the "leader". The inter-ethnic concepts prefer the "group -" and "ethnicity -" based identity dimensions of individuals. Behavioural patterns of the "ethnically determined" persons are not explicated like unique and unusual, inspite the cruelty of inter-ethnic violence. Namely, this kind of behavior has a great predictability in inter-ethnic conflicts of our time (Billig, 1976; Tajfel, 1981). And it seems that the predictability is an important element of the rational logic and the so - called normality. So, this is the way, the violence becomes the part of social reality. From the other hand, the psychological concepts of fascism pointed out the crucial role of interaction between individually based meanings and the (leader oriented) mass. The psychological theories of fascism interpret the melting of the individual identity into the collective ideology, the problems of guilt, shame and the punishment (Dolar, 1982; Oravec, 1999).

Few decades ago, at the time of Horkheimer and Adorno, it seemed that the phenomenon of fascism is unique, determined by more or less clear socio-economical and cultural factors. But today, it becomes even more clear, that the totalitarian, irrational ideologies are like "dragons in the cave of humanity" which could appear (under certain conditions) everywhere, at any time. By some personal experiences, the irrational and totalitarian ideology, as an overwhelming social principle is very often observable not even at the level of global society, but in clinical and educational settings of large group also. Gál and Zalka (1994) stated that the large group is a specific discourse of the culture. The members of the large group are in specific "border-line" situation, showing at the same time processes and interactions specific to the level of family and small groups, but many characteristics of the cultural processes also. The dynamic of the large group, determined by a specific contextual system, is producing specific new meanings. This meaning-producing process depends on the same discursive rules, like the meanings, observed on the level of global society. But, the coherent meaning - production presupposed the presence of a stable sociocultural structure, which could be interpreted in the sense of institutionalised social reality. Culture, through the meaning - production mechanisms constitutes the place of integration of the past, present and future, but the individual narratives and the tradition also (Barresi, 1998).

Reality is structured in a discursive way (Bogdan, 1986). The mechanism of habituation contributes to the transparency of the coherent reality. Namely, the social reality is non-perceptible for all of individuals, impregnated by the

social discourse until it makes possible the non-problematic communication of the community members (Oravec, 1999).

So, the socio culturally constituted reality is coherent as long, as the virtual transparency is preserved. Only the madness, the transcultural identity and the critical philosophical reflection could contribute to the distortion of the above mentioned transparency, from the position of the "insider – outsider" (Gál and Zalka, 1994). Otherwise, the language and discursive reality undoubtedly impregnate the individual consciousness. The person is from this reason unable to reject the influence of social or ethnic environment, because the personal identity is strongly engaged with the social (ethnic) discourse. In certain circumstances, the individual identity is often overridden by the discursive logic of ethnicity and irrationality. If the socioculturally determined reality is subordinated to certain discursive rules, the tendencies of "rebellion against civilisation" are "coded" in similar way. The "circle of perception", described by Neisser (1984) could contribute to the understanding of the nature of mental representations. Namely, the still present mental representations influence in a selective way the interpretation of an actual event and the anticipations of future also ... The main criteria for successful representations is the historical continuity. So, in a situation of developing reality incoherence the relevance of mental representations is decreasing. That could contribute to the feelings of meaning - uncertainty and meaning unpredictability, which may cause the activation of some (less effective) cognitive traits. The product of a discourse, organised and presupposed in above-mentioned way is the phenomenon of irrationality, expressed in a paranoid way of thinking (Gál and Zalka, 1994; Oravec, 1999). The lack of stable way of meaning creation generates a strong need for the creation of a new, alternative reality, which eliminate the frustration, based on meaning incoherence. But, this kind of artificial reality creation is possible only under totalitarian circumstances. The paranoid discourse is cognitively disconnected from the rational (fact and logic based) reality, but practically from the civilisation also, because it is not able to accept the principles of common sense, based upon the facts. It seems that the reason of "rebellion against civilisation" is based on tendencies to eliminate the presence and availability of all possible alternative realities from the social space.

The large group discourse often manifests the fragmentation of reality by reducing the discourse perception to some kind of "keywords", which ignite the alternative way of cognition (Gál and Zalka, 1994). This phenomenon could be interpreted as a sign of a so-called meta-reality development, which reflect the state of discourse incoherence. The term of fascism is semantically

connected to a tradition, reflecting in the specific historic context of German nazi ideology and the Holocaust. That is the reason to look for a new term, for ideologies and authority systems, which shows the signs of

- totalitarianism,
- irrationality
- leader orientedness,
- paranoid cognition
- hostility against representatives of different realities (minorities, intellectuals, marginalized populations)

It seems that the term of **totalitarian irrationality** should substitute the term of fascism in denoting the above-mentioned social phenomenon. Namely, for today it is even clearer that such kind of phenomenon is connected to the process of social transition – transformation. It appears after the symbolic "loss of the father", connected to the perspective of threatening individualisation (Illyés, 1994). The symbolically interpreted "loss of authority" could be interpreted like a loss of meaning – coherence, and a consequent damage of discursive reality.

- The phenomenon, described above, differs from the phenomenon of interethnic conflicts.
- The phenomenon is definitely connected to the western – shaped civilisation of the 20. century.
- Referring to the historical facts, it is even clearer that the irrational, violent totalitarianism is a possible perspective for every human community. The inherent feedback and warning systems are almost always inefficient to change the direction of political movements.

The phenomenology of totalitarian irrationality in the contemporary societies under transition shows that previous positive social experiences of violent problem-solving could contribute to the development of irrational, violent totalitarianism (and the experience of negative sanctions could effect aversively). Namely, the elimination of the reality-disturbing elements (individuals, groups, ethnicities) is allways more simple than the continuous reality building, which always reflects the values of democracy and civil society.

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