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ETHNICITY AND CULTURE — PEOPLE OR NATION

If the above title is taken as a question, the answer will be: both people and nation. But not as identical concepts. On the contrary, the present paper assumes that the categories of people and nation can, and should, be discriminated.

How, then, is the kind of answer given in the first sentence at all possible? It is possible, first of all, because of a certain overlap of the contents of the two concepts in the elements singled out here (ethnicity and culture) from a whole range of elements that are traditionally linked with the definition of these concepts (including language, religion, territory, etc.). The principle of pluralism, derived from the principle of equality of peoples, is the highest value in the modern world. The interest in questions of ethnicity is very closely related to this.

Any theoretical approach necessitates clearly defined terms -- in discussions of ethnicity (which have been going on for some twenty years now) as much as in any other field. Even now, „ethnicity seems to be a new term“ (Glazer & Moynihan, 1976: 1). McKay and Lewins (1978) point out „the need for a conceptual clarification of some of the terminology used in discussing ethnicity“ (Martinelli, 1986: 197). „For example, Isajiw (1974) found twenty-seven definitions of ethnic group, and no doubt a few more have been added since his analysis.“ (Martinelli, 1986: 196).

Before stating how we shall use the term ethnicity in this paper, we shall first refer to some other authors and their uses of this clearly theoretically multifaceted and variously understood term. For some authors, ethnicity is identified with the ethnic community, as for Roger Martelli (Lerotić, 1984: 94). Others equate it with ethnic identity (Edwards and Doucette, 1987) or ethnic group (McLellan, 1987). For Talcott Parsons, „ethnicity is a primary focus of group identity, that is, the organization of plural persons into distinctive groups, and, second, of solidarity and the loyalties of individual members to such groups.“¹

Referring to the views of A. Smith, J. M. Leclerq, J. Bromley, M. Weber, and

1. T. Parsons. Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change of Ethnicity, 1976: 53.

others, Z. Lerotić defines ethnicity as that characteristic of a people or some other type of community which helps to distinguish it from others and on which the community builds its identity (Lerotić, 1984: 94). This is also the approach that we shall take in this text. Such a characteristic is typical of a people, and it is interesting to note that a nation, even when it begins as a political community (that is, when it does not grow out of a given people but is formed by some other processes), tends to form an ethnicity (Lerotić, 1984: 94).

People and nation are concepts involved in quite a serious terminological entanglement, and different views have been expressed on the signification of the two concepts. Sometimes, their synonymy is stressed: nation, state, government, people (Wright, 1964: 451); at other times, the superfluousness of the distinction between people and nation is noted (Rizman, 1987: 22–23; Lukić, 1983: 19–24); and there are those who claim that there is no generally valid definition of nation (Hudoletnjak, 1987: 251).

Authors who distinguish people and nation view a people as a product of a historic process which appears during the transition of the primitive community into class society. A people is a community inhabiting a particular territory and sharing a common culture, language and past. „Cultural complementarity is the most suitable material for the making of a people, since it carries in itself a very strong awareness of social continuity, of duration made possible by many complementary elements, such as similarities of language, same homeland, specific social relations, struggle for survival, etc.“ (Lerotić, 1984: 156).

This paper will not venture its own distinction of the concept of people and nation. The distinction is more or less consistently made in the literature (despite certain opposing views, such as those expressed by R. Rizman, 1987, R. Lukić, 1983, etc.) and is used here to show the pluralist structure of the nation (with respect to culture and ethnicity) in contrast to the views of national culture as a uniform phenomenon and of nation as an ethnically homogeneous entity.

As regards the concept of culture, we shall accept the definition which sees it as the totality of man's social activity (Čaldarović, 1967: 413), leaving aside the great variety of use of that concept.

The fact that the concept of culture is linked with the concepts of both nation and people needs no special mention.

Authors who recognize the linkage between the nation and bourgeois society (in Yugoslavia, they include Kardelj, Lerotić, Janjić, Šuvar, Ičević, Rakić, Pleterski, Koprivnjak, Perić, and others) all distinguish the concept of people and nation. Some even note that all serious attempts at defining the nation must start from this distinction (Lerotić, 1985: 50). D. Janjić recalls numerous definitions which followed the earliest theoretical attempt by Pascal Manzinni in 1851 (Janjić, 1987: 50).

We shall accept the definition of a nation as a historical, socio-economic and cultural-political community formed under particular conditions of social division of labour (Lerotić, 1985: 50). Put differently, „the nation is a result of social division of labour in the capitalist era, or a process of unification of people within a particular linguistic and cultural community in a struggle for their economic and cultural assertion, which is at the same time the struggle for such a distribution of the surplus product that will make possible the economic and thus also cultural establishment of the nation“ (Janjić, 1980: 225). A nation, notes Z. Lerotić, emerges as a community

which, unlike a people, carries the idea of the community as a value; it introduces into society the principle of unity, integrality and self-determination (Lerotić, 1985: 50).

Two points are important for our consideration and these can be stated as follows:

(a) a nation appears in the process of unification of people in a society which has overcome the pre-capitalist modes of production;

(b) a nation is characterized by the principle of unity.

The first of these points makes, as a rule, for a heterogeneous structure of the nation; the second reflects the homogenizing trend.

Many texts about the nation, be they theoretical, journalistic or political, characterize the nation by culture. Culture is recognized as one of the key factors of national preservation and identity. The special character of a nation, its colour as it is often called, is expressed by language and culture. The existence of different nations using the same language is an exception that does not invalidate the rule itself.

Of course, the nation cannot be reduced to a cultural construct. Similarly, it cannot be reduced to an ethnic community in which language or culture would be decisive criteria (Lerotić, 1984: 99). Still, it is generally agreed that a nation has a desire for the possession and development of its own (national) culture, unique and distinct from other national cultures. It is also implicitly accepted that a national culture is traditionally more or less preserved whole, transmitted to the nation in a form that is integral and untouched by time.

When a nation is threatened, its culture and language become crucial in the struggle against assimilation and for the preservation of national existence. In this situation, the vital importance of the national culture and language becomes most evident. The national culture is then most readily accepted and felt as an integral whole, an undivided and undifferentiated entity which belongs to all members of the nation and is possessed, or at least consciously felt, by all of them. Emotional ties with the nation, through the national culture (and language), can become the dominant feeling which shapes the attitudes, thinking and behaviour of individuals. Characteristically, individuals are ready to exalt the virtues of their nations with regard to specific qualities („the beauty of our language, our folk songs, our literature“), durability („our nation's millennial history“), exclusivity of the „national context“ („only this nation could have produced such a work“), rank („our way of life is superior“, „our customs are better“), personalities belonging to the nation („he is our poet, because he was born here, although he lived in a foreign country and wrote in a foreign language all his life“). This way of thinking reflects the view of national culture as a homogeneous whole, which it actually is to a high degree. That is why we find definitions of the nation in terms of (among other things) a shared culture (Wright, 1964: 451).

Culture stimulates the emergence and development of the nation; at the same time, it is a product of collective living in a national community (Janjić, 1980: 66). On the other hand, since a people is the structural mainstay of the nation, cultural differentiation must often be assumed.² Modern societies are, thus, characterized by

2.Z. Lerotić. „Pitanja polazišta teorijske rasprave o naciji“ in „Međunacionalni odnosi danas“, 1979: 47.

3.J. Steward. Teorija kulturne promene. 1981: 115.

new types of national patterns, embracing the nation as an entity while at the same time leaving room for extreme socio-cultural differentiations on the horizontal line.³ As noted by J. Steward, differences between subcultures have by no means been eliminated even in the United States, despite its highly developed communication media, high living standards, and comparatively high degree of socio-economic mobility. However, the process of levelling has gone so far, especially in the cities, that subcultural differences are easily underestimated and shared forms of behaviour on the national scale are overestimated.⁴

The nation thus appears as both the multiplicity of cultures and as a cultural individuality, an entity that has a distinct identity and is recognized as different from other entities.⁵ This dual and contrastive property of nations is frequently ignored, especially where the homogenizing efforts in society are very strong. The recognition of the heterogeneous character of the nation is one way to tap the wealth of differences. Studies of ethnicity in multiethnic communities are part of the effort in this direction. As Melvin L. Kohn notes, cross-cultural research „need not treat each nation as a homogeneous entity“,⁶ as nations do not exist in an international vacuum, or as Bornschier and Chase-Dunn (1985) put it, „we do not contend that nation-states are closed systems“. The nation lives, among other things, on achievements that are international, and today even universal and global.⁷

A theoretical attempt to solve the question of heterogeneity of nations, the relation between the dominant national entities and their segments, has been made by Robert Lafont (1968). His theory of the dialectics of national structures is based on the distinction between the primary nation (e. g., Bretagna) and the secondary nation (e. g., France, United States, etc.).⁸ Applying his concept of the level of socio-cultural integration to the internal structure of modern nations, Julian Steward takes the distinction between national patterns and socio-cultural segments as the most important criterion of internal differentiation.⁹ According to this approach, there are two main types of socio-cultural segments – the so-called vertical split, including ethnic minorities, and the so-called horizontal split, dividing segments in terms of occupational and class differences.¹⁰ Viewing the issue of culture and nation in the modern world in the perspective of the class structure of society, one cannot but agree with J. Steward that a higher class forms a distinct entity in many respects, particularly with respect to the way of life, which forms an international higher-class culture,¹¹ Similarities and affinities in the way of life are established without regard for the nationality and territory.

Processes of homogenization take place also within a given nation. There are three main sources of the common denominator of the national culture in Steward's view: main national institutions, common cultural heritage, and mass communication media. The most powerful of the three factors working towards the levelling of subcultural

4. J. Steward, *ibid.* 1981: 113.

5. Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1979: 47.

6. M. L. Kohn, „Cross-National Research as an Analytic Strategy“, 1987: 715.

7. Z. Lerotić, *Nacija*, 1984: 233.

8. R. Rizman, *Marksizam i nacionalno pitanje*, 1987: 6–7.

9. J. Steward, *ibid.* 1981: 111.

10. J. Steward, *ibid.* 1981: 114.

11. J. Steward, *ibid.* 1981: 123.

differences in the direction of uniformity are the mass media.¹² Steward mentions also the family (and patterns of upbringing of children) as a factor that many modern anthropologists regard as an important force for the formation of the so-called national character.¹³

Side by side with the processes of homogenization, we must consider also the respect for cultural specificities vs. insistence on uniformity. We must weigh the view that national homogenization produces the nation as a great achievement of social progress,¹⁴ as against the view that any totalization, including national, should be opposed. While the insistence of each nation on its national, including cultural, individuality vis-a-vis other nations is incontrovertible, the situation within the nation (regarding its own specific segments) is by no means as clear. From the perspective taken in this paper, it can be said that the nation appears at a particular level of historic development through processes of homogenization of its ethnic segments and that, in this sense, peoples are „nations of the future“. In other words, processes of national consolidation involve also a certain degree of ethnic and cultural homogenization. The statement to the effect that the national culture is an element that bears upon the emergence and development of a given nation and that at the same time that national culture is the product of that community appears contradictory at first sight. The first part of that statement seems to imply that national culture is something that historically precedes the nation and that the nation cannot be „responsible“ for the particular shape of the cultures of its ethnic segments or of the national culture at higher or lower levels of uniformity. The resolution of the contradiction is to be found in the second part of the statement, where the emergence of both the nation and culture is seen as a process. This is the reason why the notion of the building of a nation is ambiguous in most authors. It refers to the emergence and formation of a nation from an amorphous community of people, as well as to the emancipation of a nation through the development of a political, economic, cultural and social system of its own.¹⁵

An important contribution to the study of these processes in culture can come from ethnology and folklore studies. A new approach to folklore and tradition, as noted by the Yugoslav ethnologists, provides an insight into several historic layers of culture and into contacts and partial overlap of different cultures.¹⁶ In fact, quite a number of disciplines can contribute to this end.

From the standpoint from which we are considering this question, it can be said that the nation is, as a rule, a cultural plurality. The culture of „the contemporary heterogeneous societies is itself a heterogeneous culture“ (Bauman),¹⁸ but the tendency towards homogenization – which is a crucial tendency in a nation – often dismisses this characteristic of the national culture. It should be said that the use of

12. J. Steward, *ibid.* 1981: 126.

13. J. Steward, *ibid.* 1981: 131.

14. V. Koprivnjak, in „Nacionalno pitanje u jugoslavenskoj teoriji i praksi – doprinos E. Kardelja“, 1980: 657.

15. Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1984: 9.

16. D. Rihtman-Auguštin. „Istraživanja folkloru i kulturna praksa“. 1979: 18.

17. A. Flaker. „Suвременa hrvatska umjetnička kultura i nacionalna tradicija“. Forum, 1979, br. 12: 1161.

18. Z. Bauman. Kultura i društvo. 1966.

the term „national culture“ is justified by the existence of the national culture as a new entity. For national culture develops as an entity, totality, well-defined *novum* with its specific characteristics. It follows from this that the recognition of national specificities is actually a denial of ethnic, cultural and other types of uniformity on the supranational plane. National identities help to secure the richness of culture and promote counter-unification processes. But as already noted, the national principle can itself act in the direction of unification, levelling off the cultures of its different segments. Conversely, it can equally well open up possibilities for the expression of ethnic/cultural differences of its individual segments. If the national culture should grow out of the denial of the cultures of its ethnic segments, it would actually weed its roots and open the door to cultural colourlessness and indifference, which, depending on the „building material“ of the contemporary international culture (spread primarily through the mass media of the dominant nations and cultures), may in the last analysis lead to a situation in which nothing but the name of the particular national culture will survive.

Just as the denial of an individual nation means the destruction of its life, so also the denial of ethnic segments means totalization in the name of a „pure“ principle of nationhood, with very similar or identical „Saharan“ effects. Yugoslav ethnologists took a new approach to their discipline some ten years ago,¹⁹ presenting modern folklore as an element that could „oppose the equalizing tendencies of bureaucratic cultures“. As Bausinger puts it, folklore offers alternative forms of culture and life.²⁰

We take the view that it is by no means a mechanical linkage of capitalism and nationality to say that the „bourgeois society is a base without which, in Marx's and Engels's interpretation, the nation cannot develop its 'self-awareness' without economic concentration and unification, without the destruction of localism and regionalism, and, understandably, without a degree of cultural and spiritual homogenization, especially in the sphere of the standard language.“²²

Among the scholars of bourgeois orientations, we find a tendency to expand the meaning of the nation and to base it in the culturally and linguistically homogenized population within a given state.²³ This is the clearest and strongest theoretical expression of the homogenizing tendency. The history of modern nation-states shows that the centralist tendencies to achieve uniformity are the key elements of the contemporary practice.²⁴ Unification is carried out as the dispossessing of the subjected and peripheral parts of their history, „their depersonalization in all respects in which they differ from the centre (language, tradition, customs, way of life, value system, etc.).“ For Talcot Parsons, the existence of the religious, racial and ethnic pluralism within one and the same nation is self-evident,²⁶ but the nation is primary, and its ethnic segments with their characteristics are something that needs to be

19. I. Lozica, „Metateorija u folkloristici i filozofija umjetnosti“. 1979: 41.

20. D. Rihtman-Auguštin, *ibid.* 1979: 18.

21. B. Hudoletnjak, „Čovjek i nacija“. 1987: 257.

22. Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1984: 36.

23. Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1984: 67.

24. D. Janjić, *Država i nacija*. 1987: 210.

25. Ricardo Petrella, in D. Janjić, *ibid.* 1987: 210.

26. Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1984: 264.

27. T. Parsons, in Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1984: 73.

neutralized. One is therefore not surprised to read his statement: „There is an enormous benefit for society which derives from linguistic uniformity. . . Both of the twentieth-century ‘superpowers’ build their societal communities on a level far above the mere ethnic foundations and it is logical that they should have adopted unitary languages.“²⁷

The culture of each nation is a cultural complex,²⁸ while the nation needs to achieve also on the communicative and cultural level. A national culture, though itself a rounded entity in some way, owes its existence to the cultures of its ethnic segments, from which it grows and develops. Thus, the national culture is itself a plurality of cultures, and the only question that one must ask is whether a nation can afford this pluralism – and if it can, to what extent, in view of its political interest in being an entity, its economic interest in balancing the tension deriving from the economic sphere, and its cultural interest in maintaining, fostering and developing its specific national culture.

For most authors, „the building of the nation determines processes of internal democratization and strengthening of political integration of the economic and social forces of the nation and its cultural homogenization“.²⁹ The nation has the capability to give national unity to a number of peoples,³⁰ uniting them into one through the action of some factors which remain beyond our grasp (some of them being perhaps irrational), but what is important to note is that in most multiethnic communities the dominant political group imposes its cultural patterns on the other groups.³¹ From this, there follows the homogenization of society on the societal plane. Since cohesion is decisive for the functioning of the state, the state secures „state nationalism“, whose consequences are cultural and national unitarism.³² This unitarism strives to obliterate in the collective consciousness all traces of the process of creation of this type of unity. To illustrate this, Z. Lerotić quotes the French author Ernest Renan: „In the tenth century, in the first heroic poems which are such a perfect mirror of the times, all the inhabitants of France are Frenchmen. . . The idea that conquest was the key to all this does not even occur to anyone.“³³

The starting point of this paper, discrimination between the concepts of people and nation, has been developed here to highlight the tendency immanent to the nation, though not to the people, namely, the tendency to homogenization. Our approach has enabled us to view the national culture not only from the outside, in relation to other cultures (as commonly and justly viewed by many authors), but also from the inside, in relation to its constituent segments. It is then seen that the national culture is multi-layered and complex and that its relation to its ethnic segments is certainly not without significance. Quite the contrary, it is at least as significant as the preservation of the national cultural identity in relation to other cultures or to some dominant nation/culture. In this light, the pluralism of national cultures and the pluralism of the cultures of ethnic segments within a given nation

28.M. Čaldarević. „Društvena kultura i idejna nadgradnja“. 1967: 406.

29.Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1984: 9.

30.Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1984: 94.

31.Z. Lerotić. Načela federalizma i višenacionalne države. 1985: 140.

32.Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1985: 116.

33.Z. Lerotić, *ibid.* 1985: 47.

appear as elements of the struggle against uniform colourlessness and cultural insignificance.

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