

Tendencies after 5 October 2000

Milosevic used nationalism as a means of maintaining his power. The interests of the nation and fatherland were not only a means, but also a cover up for the criminal character of the former regime, marked with pillage, abductions, murders, death squads. After 5 October 2000, an 'authentic nationalist' came to power - Vojislav Kostunica. Not only did Kostunica fail to make a breach with the policy of war and war crimes of the previous regime, but, during his term in office (October 2000 - February 2003), nationalism was 'normalised', and even proclaimed to be one of the democratic attributes. Kostunica and his numerous followers created a spiritual and cultural climate of a normalised (i.e. anti-communist) nationalism, because one of the major objections against Milosevic was that his nationalism was of a 'communist and atheist' nature.

During that period, in order to achieve as high a degree of legitimacy as possible, 'nationalism without Milosevic' was embellished with a host of approving attributes: positive, democratic, civic, evangelistic, moderate, civilised, authentic, etc.

What are the main features of such an 'authentic nationalism'?

- Clerical nationalism: as early as December 2000, president Kostunica visited the monastery of Chillandary in his capacity as president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) - not as a private individual - thus marking yet another episode in the new wave of nationalism, where more and more political leaders are trying to win the favour of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC).
- Theocratisation of the state/de-secularisation of society: the political influence of the SPC has been on the rise; this brings into question the basic democratic principle and basis of the modern state - the separation of church and state. Many of the state's moves (e.g. the introduction of religious teachings in schools) are a direct consequence of the theocratisation of the state.
- Introduction of religious teaching in state schools as of the 2001/2 school year: from the formal point of view, this was an illegal move, because the church is separated from the state; from the spiritual and cultural aspect, this is devastating, because the Orthodox religion reproduces the pattern of submission of women, while the models of upbringing that are promulgated by the church draw a distinction between men and women. Besides, religious teachings emphasise ethnic divisions by favouring one church (the SPC) and discriminating against other denominations, especially the less numerous ones. Religious instruction is actually a training course in church rites and tenets, instead of disseminating knowledge about all religions. Apart from this, clerical-fascist organisations like *Obraz* (Face) and *Sveti Justin Filozof* (Saint Justin the Philosopher) hold panel discussions at the state university and - on the pretext of freedom of speech - propagate misogyny.
- Clericalisation of public life: religious rites are practised in state institutions: Milan St. Protic, FRY ambassador to the USA, had the embassy building consecrated, without consulting the competent ministry. Vladeta Jankovic, FRY ambassador to Great Britain, has put up a picture of the patriarch in the reception hall, the customary place for a picture of the head of state. Moreover, these officials represent only one denomination (the Orthodox Christian), thus pushing to the margins and insulting the members of

other denominations who live in this country, as well as the atheists. Nonetheless, the consecration of party premises, state buildings, schools and hospitals has, for a long time now, been regarded as a desirable 'democratic' ritual.

- Strengthening of clerical-fascist tendencies, with the support of one part of the SPC and the Yugoslav Army (VJ), but also of the State Security System (MUP), clerical-fascist organisations such as *Obraz*, *Krv i cast* (Blood and Honour), as well as numerous para-religious organisations, conduct their activities unimpeded. For example, late in 2002, Women in Black received several messages of an anti-semitic and fascist character, glorifying Hitler, Mladic, Karadzic and similar 'fighters for the purity of the white race and the Serbian nation'.
- The media cede much more space to the above mentioned tendencies than to their opponents; in this way, the media are boosting clerical-fascist and clerical-nationalist tendencies and, instead of diminishing the vilification of the 'others', it is being emphasised - in many communities the majority of citizens still regard the NGO sector as sects.
- The language of hatred and exclusion of others: many Democratic Opposition of Serbia politicians (the most clamorous being Velimir Ilic, whose party, *Nova Demokratija*, was until recently part of the coalition that took power after 5 October 2000) make note of people of a different national or religious affiliation, and attach less social value to them. Instead of deconstructing the language of war, it is being perpetuated.
- Revision of history: characterising as equivalent the World War 2 fascists and anti-fascists - the Chetniks and the Partisans - serves to relativise the crimes that were committed in the name of the entire Serbian nation during the 1991-99 wars.
- Religion is preached as the only form of spiritual culture: this tendency is becoming particularly alarming among the young, who are predominantly victims of various types of frustration and who, with no options before them, fall easy prey to the fanatics within the Orthodox church and para-religious organisations.

What is fundamentalism?

In order to understand the meaning of the tendencies that have been outlined here, drawing a parallel with Islamic fundamentalism seems to be justified. The analysis published by Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) will be used for that purpose.¹ WLUML is one of the largest and most powerful anti-fundamentalist networks; Women in Black are members of this network. WLUML opposes not only Islamic fundamentalism, but all other forms of religious fundamentalism. In its analysis of practices that abuse religion and cultural heritage with political aims, WLUML provides an up-to-date definition and valorisation of fundamentalism. Only some of the elements that we consider to be symptomatic of our situation will be mentioned here:

- the fundamentalist movement is an intertwined action of retrograde conservative rightist forces (the so-called shadow fundamentalism) and religious fundamentalist leaders (flagrant fundamentalists);
- it is based on the growing power of conservative forces in the world and their mounting influence on public policy (e.g. attacks against women in many Islamic countries and attacks against abortion clinics in the USA);
- retrograde forces exert a tremendous influence on public policy and public opinion;

- the interdependence and interconnectedness of fundamentalist tendencies: fundamentalism in one country is related to changes in another one;
- fundamentalists allegedly hate one another, but they form strategic alliances and coalitions, both on the international and the national plane: Islamic fundamentalists, Vatican hard-liners, Jewish fundamentalists, and so on, enter planetary strategic alliances against abortion and women's rights. In our country, the most radical currents of the Islamic community and the SPC have been quite convergent as their opposition to sexual and reproductive rights has gained momentum;
- some international non-governmental organisations support and legitimise fundamentalist projects: USAID, for example, is forced to implement the Law on Global Obstruction brought in by the Bush administration as soon as it took office (therefore, USAID is not allowed to fund any organisation or programme that commits itself to abortion as a right). Hidden behind some non-governmental organisations, the Islamic fundamentalist organisations (particularly those from Saudi Arabia) finance one of the most extremist fundamentalist tendencies, *Wahhabism*, in Bosnia-Herzegovina and also in Sandzak.

The fundamentalists' main objective is to gain political power in order to control women's lives. Not only Orthodox fundamentalists, but all the others as well, prefer to conduct their activities in the sphere of intimacy, morals, the family, sexuality and reproductive rights. Over the past two years, one of the spokesmen for the SPC, Ljubivoje Stojanovic, professor at the Department for Pastoral Theology of the Faculty of Theology of the SPC, editor in chief of *Pravoslavlje* (*Orthodoxy*), the publication of the Serbian patriarchate, has appeared relentlessly in all the media, printed and electronic, preaching strictly prescribed roles for women (as mothers and wives), pre-marital sexual abstinence, and denouncing adultery as the greatest sin, the equality of men and women as a manifestation of 'ideological obstruction', and so on.

The representatives of the Islamic community are waging a similar battle: 'The society is increasingly confronting its own impotence to solve the problems of marriage, family, morals, drug abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, sects and other deviations through its secular mechanisms. This is bound to open up space for religion'.²

Educational summer camps and the Mobile Cultural Container: Thorns in the eye of the guardians of chastity, virtue and morality ...

Within the framework of the reform of education that is being conducted by the Ministry of Education and Sport, programmes of interactive and participatory methods are being introduced in the form of summer camps. One of these camps was organised in Sremska Mitrovica in the summer of 2002. Unfortunately, some of the teachers, predominantly guardians of conservative morals, who were accompanying the students during their stay in the camp, expressed their 'astonishment at the methods aiming at breaking away from authority' and their bitterness over the 'sexual harassment' that 'our children' were exposed to. What did this 'harassment' consist of? 'Sexual harassment was contained in the fact that, during the game of breaking loose, two boys and a girl stripped their clothes briefly. No one had forced them or talked them into doing that', said Sanja Pejcin, director of the camp. But conservative teachers at the camp accused the education authorities of being

'sectarian', and asked that workshops on sexually transmitted diseases be discontinued and that educators from JAZAS (Yugoslav Anti-AIDS Association) be sent away. 133 of the students who were attending the camp in Sremska Mitrovica signed a petition threatening to leave if the JAZAS educators were removed.

These 'shadow fundamentalists' were joined by open fundamentalists from the SPC. After the 'shameless scandals' in the summer camps, the SPC synod made a public announcement on 1 September 2002: 'The modern education and the development of a new consciousness that is taking place in educational workshops is submitting the children to perfidious brainwashing ... We are witnessing, unfortunately, a marriage of post-communist atheism and western capitalist hedonism ... such a monstrous marriage can only foster monsters'. The synod asked the Ministry of Education, but above all, the parents of these children, 'not to allow anyone and on anyone's behalf to pervert the children's innocent souls, and therefore to bury the legendary dignity of the Serbian people [as if there had not been students of other religious and ethnic affiliations in the camp?!] ... And to stop undermining the spiritual and cultural values of their people', and so on and so forth.

For years, workshops and other participatory educational methods have served as crown evidence for fundamentalists of all hues that non-governmental organisations are a sect and part of the anti-Serb conspiracy. This is a permanent tendency, both in the church and in the para-religious, clerical-nationalist organisations. One of these organisations investigates the school syllabus under the rubric 'a mission to recover children's souls', spreading the belief that any psychological workshops and psycho-techniques used in schools are 'a form of manipulation in order to recruit victims of totalitarian and destructive sects'. For this organisation, the proof that this is all a conspiracy against the Serbian people lies in the fact that the author of the programme on non-violent communication for the subject called 'civic education' is of Jewish origin: 'Marshal Rosenberg is not Christian, which seems to be the most important fact'.³

An ethnocentric, xenophobic, paranoid and anti-semitic disposition is the chief element of clerical-fascist organisations and this can easily be perceived from their publications and demonstrations. All these organisations, both from the church or the para-religious ones, continually and unanimously demand the introduction of religious teaching in schools as the only way to fight against 'ape-like shamelessness and Satanist immorality',⁴ claiming that religious teachings are the only way for parents 'to save their children from atrocious desecration'.⁵

The Mobile Cultural Container

The case of the Mobile Cultural Container in Novi Pazar serves as an example of the practices of Islamic fundamentalists. The Mobile Cultural Container is a European Union project aimed at fostering inter-culturalism and establishing links among the young, especially in multi-ethnic communities. The project consists of acquiring knowledge in various areas: film direction, photography, journalism, creative activities, etc. It usually remains in one place for several weeks. It was installed in Novi Pazar on 12 October 2002, and the problems

began on 15 October, when condoms were being distributed following a panel discussion on AIDS, facilitated by JAZAS educators. MOK (the Muslim Youth Club), which works under the auspices of the Islamic community of Sandzak, denounced this action, and the entire project of the Mobile Cultural Container, as follows: 'The Mobile Cultural Container injects harmful ideologies into the subconscious of the youth in this area, while the distribution of condoms represents the legalisation of debauchery'.⁶ They said that the Container was 'contrary to the morals, religious principles and tradition of this people', because 'what Bosnian or Islamic elements can be found there?'. Such programmes and projects, they said, encourage 'lesbianism, homosexuality, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, pornography'. In their opinion, the workshops taught the young 'disrespect for their parents and repudiation of faith'.

MOK thus demonstrated that it is an instigator of cultural racism. Its president, Midhat Mujovic, said: 'The programmes brought by the Mobile Cultural Container are not for us, but for African tribes'. MOK kept making obstructions all the time, stirring up the young against it, so that some workshops that started with 70 participants ended up with no more than three, after the MOK offensive. MOK also organised the stoning of the Container on 12 November. After that incident, the Mobile Cultural Container was closed down in Novi Pazar. MOK's campaign was successful primarily because the *mufti* of the Islamic community of Sandzak, Muamer Zukorlic, is a declared enemy of the Container. Mufti Zukorlic has long been leading a campaign against those committed to inter-cultural and inter-ethnic solidarity and sexual education. URBAN-IN, an organisation which works with the young in Novi Pazar, has been the target of many attacks by the Islamic community: 'During prayers in several mosques in Novi Pazar, lies are being spread about the activities of our organisation and about the people who work in it. These lies range from the accusation that we are all Jewish and American mercenaries (which means enemies of all the Muslims) to claims that we are narco-dealers, drug-addicts and homosexuals'.

The fundamentalists resort to various strategies and mechanisms in order to disseminate their ideas. URBAN-IN reports: 'Unfortunately, the Sandzak mufti appears with a very tolerant attitude and uses his young well-instructed followers for exerting this type of influence. Besides, a large number of personal followers are involved in these perfidious games because they are privately connected with the private businesses of mufti Zukorlic and the Islamic community. The increasing numbers of Wahhabis, the most militant Islamic sect, are a cause of serious concern. It is through them that the leaflet of the Organisation of Active Islamic Youth (OAIYO) from Sarajevo, with pro-fascist contents, was distributed in our town.'

Mufti Zukorlic enjoys the support of the authorities for pragmatic reasons and with the aim of satisfying the need for multi-culturalism according to the models and needs of the worldwide centres of power. According to URBAN-IN, an even greater danger than the fact that organisations like OAIYO are lavishly financed by the most aggressive Islamic countries is the 'support that the Sandzak mufti is receiving from the highest representatives from the authorities of the Republic of Serbia and of FR Yugoslavia and from the representatives of important international institutions and diplomatic missions'. Aida Corovic, coordinator of

URBAN-IN, complains of 'the indifferent and restrictive attitude of international organisations and diplomatic missions towards us. I do not have in mind only financial support, but all kinds of public support for our efforts to create a civic society'.⁷

It is worth mentioning that mufti Zukorlic is also rector of the newly founded private university, which is strongly influenced by retrograde Islamic tendencies, and was also a member of the Serbian state delegation in a visit to Arab countries. All these various forms of support make it possible for the mufti, as well as other declared and undeclared fundamentalists, to succeed in expanding the circle of their influence. And, of course, similar tendencies in the Orthodox Church have never been in collision with the tendencies of the Islamic community (and vice versa). This confirms the thesis on strategic alliances.

Guardians of chastity, virtue and morality – rapists and paedophiles

Let us go back to the Serbian Orthodox Church! The crime of paedophilia has often been covered up by silence, but over the past few years, several cases have come to light. One of them troubled Serbia for months. In January 2003, a boy accused Bishop Pahomije of Vranje of sexual harassment. The bishop immediately pressed charges against the local newspaper *Vranjske novine*, claiming they were fabricating 'a sex scandal'. Two more boys appeared with the same accusations of sexual harassment by Bishop Pahomije and filed criminal charges against him. After a three-month investigation, in April 2003 the court in Vranje indicted the bishop for 'debauchery', which does not seem to be a source of concern for the SPC: far from distancing itself from the bishop, it has been showering him with praise. The latest instance of this was in the Easter epistle, in April 2003, i.e. after the bishop had been indicted, when it said support for him was a matter of principle. This is consistent with the SPC's actions during the 1991-99 wars, when the SPC invariably blessed Serbian patriots/warriors/murderers/rapists.

Conclusion

The influence of retrograde para-religious forces from the SPC and other religious communities has not diminished since 5 October 2000. On the contrary, they have been allowed more public space and are being treated - primarily the Serbian Orthodox Church - as equal political interlocutors, whose views must be taken into consideration. The church can try to win a monopoly over morals, and to exert influence on public opinion, but the civic authorities (the politicians and the institutions) are accountable for the adoption or rejection of such attempts and tendencies. If the separation of the church from the state is to be fully respected, church teachings must not have a bearing on public policy, on political processes and decision making. SPC and its representatives will continue to hold a monopoly over spiritual life, chastity, virtue and morality as long as the civilian authorities and the civic society in particular allow them to do so. They will continue to influence public affairs as long as they are given space. This space must not be provided for them, not only because they do not deserve it in the least, but because it is incompatible with the secular state and the principle of separation of church and state.

Endnotes

¹ WLUML document source.

² Mufti of the Islamic community in Sandzak, *Danas* newspaper, 7–8 July 2002.

³ *Blagovesnik Despot Stefan*, one of the countless para-religious organisations that are more than aggressive in their agitation and propaganda, leaflet, April 2003.

⁴ Statement by the synod of the SPC, September 2002.

⁵ *Blagovesnik Despot Stefan*, April 2003.

⁶ *Danas*, 16 October 2002.

⁷ *Danas*, 9 October 2002.