

Fields of Existence vs. Fields of Battle

Bringing people to live in close proximity with one another will lead to increased understanding and empathy between them

There are those who find this fuss about using the presence of integration to distinguish between the multiethnic and the plural monoethnic society to be beside the point when it comes to discussions about Kosovo. In their eyes, Kosovo is the archetype for a multiethnic society. This dismissal is not so easy, however. If those critics want to dismiss this distinction on reasonable grounds, then they have three options



from which to choose: (1) dismiss the notion of plural monoethnic society altogether; (2) reject the claim that there is little, if any, integration between the different peoples in Kosovo; or (3) choose (1) and (2). Unfortunately for them, finding that the concept of plural monoethnic lacks merit is not all that easy. They would most likely opt for discrediting the concept's extension or the things to which it applies in the world by saying that it has none. To say this, however, would mean not only that there is no diversity of peoples in a place like Kosovo, which there is; but it would require them to address the issue of integration, which would mean that they would also have to choose (2) and, thus, (3). The problem with (2) is that the onus

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is on them to prove otherwise, i.e., that there is plenty of integration between peoples in Kosovo. Unfortunately for the naysayers, there is more than sufficient evidence to prove them wrong. Where do the Serbs live? Where do they work? Who do they befriend? The answers to these questions are obvious to those who know Kosovo. The truth is that the vast majority of Serbs are living, working, and befriending in enclaves with little, if any (meaningful) interaction with Albanians. Those few who work along side Albanians do so within a very different setting than most Serbs can envision themselves being in, i.e., being employed by the UN, EU, an embassy, a NGO, or an international aid or development organization. Those settings often bring different peoples together, but they are the exception.

Being Different

This is not all. It may even be more disturbing to many Albanians to admit the flipside of this view, which is to say that they too live in an enclave, albeit a much larger one. How could it be otherwise? The minority groups within Kosovo, as well as the Albanian majority, describe each other as being different from them. More to the point, members of each group view members of other groups as "other," which has the strategic connotation of an unequal distribution of power. By pointing to the other, one emphasizes what differentiates instead of what connects. For a Serb to point to an Albanian is to point to a member of a group that has much power, and for an Albanian to point to a Serb is to point to a member of a group that does not have much power. So it is not only that the Serbs are disconnected from Albanians, but Albanians are disconnected from Serbs. If separation and otherness are defining features of enclave living, the Albanians in Kosovo are enclave dwellers as well.

Of course, those same naysayers could argue that there is nothing wrong with enclave dwelling, and that the value of integration has been overstated insofar as a peaceful, harmonious, and democratic society can be achieved without it. I find this to be a bit unreasonable. It is not that the critics are forsaking reason altogether; rather they are relying on weak, defective, and arbitrary reasoning. It is reasoning that is more apt to be prejudicial along ethnic lines.

Perhaps the British philosopher J.S. Mill had it right in his essay *On Liberty* when he wrote of the importance of expressing dissenting opinions. Not only might the dissenters be correct, in which case people have "the opportunity of exchanging error for truth," but if they are wrong, there is a "clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."

However, Mill was quick to note a third advantage to a diversity of opinion, one that is just as important for those living in Kosovo: since the "prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied." This is a message for those who Amartya Sen writes of in his most recent book, *The Idea of Justice*, when he states that "some people are easily over-convinced by their own reasoning, and ignore counter-arguments and other grounds that may yield the opposite conclusion."

This is not to say that there will never be contrary positions that survive intense scrutiny and that cannot be reduced to one definitive truth. It means that we should not shortchange reasoned encounter and its intimate connection to impartiality with its openness to other positions, views, and evidence. The end result is a more robust understanding of a situation, an issue, a problem.

Exchange of Ideas

Part of what makes this so important for those living in Kosovo (and, for that matter, anywhere in the world) is that eventually peace, harmony, and democ-

racy are predicated on a continuing exchange of ideas, without which increasing amounts of uncertainty and mistrust are created that push peoples farther and farther apart. It is not only ideas, but emotions as well that are important, for it is emotions, particularly empathy, which allow us to develop an appreciation of how another person experiences his or her situation. An effective way for this to take place is through people having face-to-face contact with others so that their worlds collide. So the more a society is composed of discrete ethnic groups, some of which have a long history of antagonism with one another, the more there is a need, perhaps even a demand, for integration. Within a plural monoethnic society like Kosovo, then, the way to a peaceful, harmonious, and democratic society for the people of Kosovo is for them to become the beneficiaries of confidence building measures so that they eventually find themselves in a multiethnic society. It is, in a sense, part of the bottom-up component of the pedagogy of forging a humane democracy.

We began with the familiar and acceptable, and where it might have become increasingly strange and undesirable to some, lines of argument were provided

to dissuade them that these views were at least reasonable. But the plan was eventually to bring the reader face-to-face with an outrageous conclusion. So where is that bombshell?

That conclusion comes in the form of the way in which this multiethnic society is to unfold through the creation of an environment that is more about inclusivity and fraternity than about exclusivity and enmity. How is this to be done? It is in part accomplished through a reduction or elimination of public evocative objects that are likely to be divisive along ethnic lines. The Albanian flags being displayed throughout Prishtina and the Serbian flags on hilltops surrounding Mitrovica are such objects. Removing them would go some way to making these places more hospitable to members of all ethnic groups. Getting people to agree to this, however, would mean persuading them to fly the flag of their own country and not that of another, which is also an important way to get them all to identify with the country of their citizenship.

Although it is unlikely that there will be droves of Albanians moving to Mitrovica or Serbs in mass taking up residence in Prishtina, the conditions for an eventual migration of members of different ethnic groups between the var-

ious enclaves, particularly urban sites, to live and/or work need to be promoted. Bringing people to live in close proximity with one another will lead to increased understanding and empathy between them. In addition, living and working together will lead to the creation of evocative objects for shared experiences, which will help bring people together. The market place will take on new meaning for some Albanians and Serbs, perhaps replacing enemy images with friendly images.

This in no way will bring about a multiethnic society in one or two generations, but it is one more way to create fields of existence rather than sustaining fields of battle. It is hoped that at some point changing the physical landscape will allow more and more people to be in the same domain of dwelling, feeling at home with one another in much deeper ways than could have been ever realistically hoped for by both Albanians and Serbs when the Albanian-led government declared independence in 2007. Many will not be in favor of this sort of makeover of their cityscapes, but sometimes strong measures need to be contemplated and adopted for progress to be achieved; which, in this case, is a multiethnic democratic society in Kosovo.

Balkan Bloodshed Is a Blank for Young Serbs

Total amnesia about the Balkans wars is all too common in Serbia - but some youngsters are breaking through the wall of silence

"Srebrenica? I've heard of it, but I'm not really sure what happened there."

Standing in front of his high school in the centre of Belgrade, smoking a cigarette, wearing Nike shoes and a black jacket, Dejan looks much like any other 17-year-old in Europe. However, in some way, he is different: he grew up while Yugoslavia was falling part and he was six years old when NATO bombed Serbia.

Today, he rarely mentions the events that marked his childhood. "I don't discuss these times with my friends much. We try to put those times behind us and be just like any other European teenagers, enjoying life and looking for fun", Dejan explains.

Dejan belongs to a generation that is split between those who aren't interested in facing the past, those who still feel hate towards other ethnic groups, and those who are trying to overcome the past by finding out more about neighbor-

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ing countries.

However, none of these groups appear well informed about what happened during the Nineties, when the Balkan region went through a number of wars that led to the fall of Yugoslavia.

Media Silence

A 2009 survey conducted by IPSOS, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and the OSCE, demonstrates how little young Serbs know about the past. According to this survey, roughly 50 per cent of 16-23-year-old Serbs were aware that Serbian snipers killed many civilians in the siege of Sarajevo and only 27 per cent knew about the rape of women by Serbian forces in Foca, eastern Bosnia, in 1992.

Almost a quarter of the same age group

had never heard of the massacre in Srebrenica in July 1995, even though this remains one of the most notorious events of the Balkan wars.

Srebrenica is remembered for the massacre that took place on July 11, 1995 when Bosnian Serb troops killed over 8,000 Muslim men and boys, throwing their bodies into mass graves.

Media silence and poor history education is behind the lack of knowledge, experts say. Andrej Nosov, head of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, worries that young Serbs "have almost no idea of what happened in the Western Balkans in the 1990s".

Too young to truly understand what was happening during the wars, youngsters today don't learn much about this terrible decade, and the educational system seems partly responsible for this.

Sixteen-year-old Nikola explains that little contemporary history is taught in school. "We learn almost nothing about