

Friendly and Enemy Images

The ethnic nationalist narratives of thought and feeling that are generated by evocative objects are powerful for all the peoples. They evoke friendly as well as enemy images depending upon whether the onlooker is an ethnic insider or outsider

There is, as some philosophers will tell you, an ideal form that a philosophical work should take, and that is for it to guide the reader down the road less traveled. Beginning with the familiar and acceptable, it slowly leads its reader to the strange and undesirable. The pace is intentionally slow, slow so that the reader is lured to give his or her assent to a set of propositions that few would question. Eventually the philosopher drops a bombshell in the form of propositions that few would accept. The hope is that this will force the reader to reflect on why the conclusion is so outrageous. What is presented here is just such a journey.

We surround ourselves with a variety of objects, things that often move when we push or kick them. Some are useful in our everyday lives, but most are just ordinary. We neither think nor feel anything special when we reach for the small red timer sitting on the kitchen counter next to the stove. The timer is simply an object embedded in a cooking routine. We grasp, wind, and wait for the ring. Our concern is not with the timer itself, but with cooking the musaka for the right length of time. The timer is just a tool. Of course, the timer may malfunction, in which case we would suddenly think of it as a broken timer, useless in our attempt to create a fine meal. We may even become upset with the timer's momentary glitch. Yet it remains ordinary, an object lacking much significance for us. But could an ordinary object, like a hand-cranked kitchen timer, make us think or feel in some peculiar way? Could a seemingly ordinary object be in some sense special or evocative to us? Could it be an important part of our lives as thinking and feeling beings, connecting us to people, ideas, events, and the like? The answer is that it most certainly could.

For example, the fact that my grandfather gave me a red kitchen timer as a gift and that it holds my affections for him does accord the timer a special place in

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my world. Catching a glimpse of the timer triggers in me a myriad of thoughts and feelings about my grandfather and the good times I had with him. The holding power of this object is strong for me because of the intellectual and emotional

nexus that it is a part of and how this object came into my life.

Of course, other ordinary objects with similar holding power exist for me. There is a pen given to me by a friend in Bosnia and

a tie that was undone from his neck and handed to me by a colleague at the University of Prishtina. There are many, many more such objects. In fact, any ordinary or everyday object in my immediate surrounding could be an evocative object for me. And not just for me, but for someone else or for some group of persons as well. It would depend on whether these objects figure into their intellectual and emotional nexus. Moreover, if one was observant enough, one could gather clues about my numerous identities, which would be helpful in better understanding me.

Publicly Displayed

The not so ordinary object is often an evocative object as well. For some it is a portrait of a spouse, a bouquet of flowers from a lover, or a wedding ring. These objects also make us have thoughts and feelings about someone or something. No doubt, they are expected to do so. In the case of the portrait, bouquet, and ring, the objects would likely evoke friendly rather than enemy images and pleasant rather than painful feelings. These objects could have evoked the negative, but in that case one would think that these objects either would have never made their way to their

respective places in the house or would have been quickly removed following some upsetting event. All this makes sense given that one's house is, more often than not, not just a place to inhabit or occupy (borrowing from Heidegger), but a place to dwell, a place where one feels at home physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

So far the objects said to be evocative have been those cognitively and conatively informing objects found within an individual's immediate home environment. Do they exist elsewhere, perhaps in settings that are more public? Do they form parts of cityscapes that inform only members of a certain group, such as Albanian or Serbian ethnic nationalist, and only in ways that are unique to members of those groups? The answer is that they most certainly do.

The preponderance of public objects in Kosovo's cities that carry different nationalist ideas and passions leaves no doubt that evocative objects can be publicly displayed so as to inform particular ethnic groups. That is not all, however. If one were unsure about the segregated and minimally interactive nature of Kosovo society, strolling through some of Kosovo's urban areas in search of objects that would likely be intellectual and emotional companions of Albanian or Serb nationalists would dispel any uncertainty. Some of the objects found in cityscapes are clear indicators of domains of ethnic dwelling.

Take, for example, Prishtina. The flag that is most displayed by its residents is the double-headed eagle Albanian flag and not the blue flag of Kosovo. And whenever there is a challenge to Kosovo's sovereignty and territorial integrity, you can be sure that the Albanian flag will be displayed in mass, as was the case in the fall of 2008 when the switch over from the transitional UN administration (UNMIK) to the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) was being negotiated between the UN, EU, and Belgrade, but not Prishtina. The throngs of people parading through the streets, waving Albanian flags, looked more like a scene from the streets of

Tirana than a city in Kosovo.

Or take the large Sports Complex in the central part of the capital. On the end facing downtown is an Albanian flag and below it is a large photo of Adem Jashari, an architect of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), who was killed during the unrest in 1998. He is dressed in full combat regalia for all to see. And if that is not enough, the international airport in the capital has been named after him.

The Albanians in Kosovo are not alone in their display of evocative objects that anchor nationalist narratives. Although the presence of objects of Serbian nationalism are few and far between in Prishtina (perhaps the unfinished Orthodox church at the university is the most obvious), crossing the River Ibar to the Serb enclave in Mitrovica brings one to come face-to-face with a different set of evocative objects.

There is no shortage of state and civil flags of Serbia. They can be seen hanging from light poles and university buildings, as well as on a hilltop billboard. And it is not uncommon to find photos of such people as Slobodan Milošević displayed in the business district. Visiting a downtown bakery can bring you up close to a calendar photo of the former president of Serbia. On top of that, the bakery and other businesses accept the Serbian dinar as the currency of transaction. The atmosphere is one of being in Serbia and not Kosovo.

It might be thought that these objects, Albanian and Serbian alike, have not much to do with the broader socio-political and economic contexts within Kosovo. A kitchen timer, photos of Jashari and Milosevic, and Albanian and Serbian flags are all the same, evocative objects for this person or that person. There is one significant difference, however. Whereas kitchen timers are found in households on both sides of the River Ibar, in homes of those living in Prishtina as well as in Gračanica, the different ethnic nationalist regalia are not. How could they when the presence of one excludes the presence of the other. Moreover, these nationalist objects not only reflect the boundaries that describe the fragmented nature of Kosovo society but they also maintain the plural monoethnic society that it is. There is a plurality of peoples in Kosovo. No one would dispute that. However, what separates a plural monoethnic society from one that is multiethnic is that the former exhibits

little, if any, integration (thus, interaction) of the peoples, whereas the latter does. Given this distinction, Kosovo is plural monoethnic and not multiethnic. The ethnic nationalist narratives of thought and feeling that are generated by these evocative objects are powerful for all the peoples. They evoke friendly as well as enemy images depending upon whether the onlooker is an ethnic insider or outsider.

Unwilling To Look Inward

On the one hand, the holding power of the evocative objects linked to Albanian nationalism is bound up with the events and circumstances surrounding the Albanian people's liberation from Serbian oppression, such as the withdrawal of Serbian forces in June 1999 and the declaration of independence in February 2007. The ever-present Albanian flag and the Jashari photo on Sports Complex stoke ethnic pride and patriotism in many Kosovo Albanians.

On the other hand, the holding power of those objects associated with Serbian ethnic nationalism is tied to events such as the NATO bombing campaign of March-June 1999 and the subsequent exodus of Serbs from Kosovo, and the large demonstrations in central Prishtina in the fall of 2008. Indeed, many Serbs in Gračanica, for example, who happened to be watching the nightly news coverage of those demonstrations were likely incensed by seeing the flag waving and the Jashari photo in the distant background.

Not surprisingly, the same objects that were seen as acceptable by many Albanians were taken to be unacceptable by much of the Serb community. Unfortunately, the process that leads to the same evocative objects generating opposing ideas and passions for different ethnic peoples also binds those ideas and passions with opposing images, including the beliefs that one group's take on what happened is "right" and that the other group is to blame for what happened. As a consequence, many from each group are unwilling to look inward for their own contribution to the current situation. This in turn perpetuates the xenophobia and chauvinism that exists on both sides, which sustains the plural monoethnic society that exists today in Kosovo.

Tomorrow: Fields of Existence vs. Fields of Battle

MACEDONIA

Faiths Unite against Same-Sex Marriage

The heads of the five dominant religions in Macedonia want the constitution changed to define marriage strictly as a union of one man and one woman and to prevent same-sex couples and single parents from adopting children. The heads of the five faiths unanimously supported the proposed changes to the constitution at a meeting this week in Skopje. Behind the proposition stand the heads of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Religious Community, the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church and the Jewish Community.

"No one should be afraid of traditional and correct views regarding marriage," the head of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Stefan, said. Koco Andonov, an activist from the Macedonian Helsinki Committee, said he opposed the changes as an assault on the constitutional principles concerning equality and the secular character of the state.

"They are imposing their own beliefs and way of life onto others," Andonov told Balkan Insight, referring to the clerics.

"The constitution guarantees freedom for all and should nurture differences. No one's right should jeopardize the rights of others".

At the moment, Macedonia's constitution does not address the issue of same-sex marriages. Article 40, which the clergy want changed, merely says that "legal relations in marriage, the family and non-marriage communities are regulated by law".

However, Macedonian law does not in fact allow same sex-marriages and does not allow same-sex couples to adopt children, either.

For the last three years, European Commission annual reports have taken Macedonia to task for failing to protect the rights of gays and lesbians. In 2010, the EU stepped up criticism after the centre-right VMRO DPMNE-led government failed to include different sexual orientation as a cause of discrimination in its new anti-discrimination law. Reacting to the cleric's proposed changes, the opposition Social Democrats said they suspected the campaign was being conducted in coordination with Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his VMRO DPMNE party, which has an absolute majority in parliament.