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Is it possible to talk about citizenship among young Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo?

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This paper reports a developmental project about citizenship education among young Serbs and Albanians in the city of Mitrovica, Kosovo. This is a cooperative project between three Danish Colleges of Education in Vejle county, aiming to develop citizenship through interaction and knowledge, motivating young Serbs and Albanians to change their beliefs and practices towards each other, and in this process identify the difficulties which limit their inter-ethnic relations.

Working with young Serbs and Albanians to become co-creators of their own future and ensure the social and cultural coherence of their locality is slow and difficult. Special attention must be given to those who have grown up in hostile and fearful environments. These young people's need for citizenship education is necessary for the eventual development of a democratic Kosovo, but how are these ideas integrated? What kind of citizenship is our aim? This paper discusses the concept of citizenship in a historical and cultural context and asks what it means to be a young citizen in a multicultural setting such as Kosovo?

A historic perspective on citizenship in Kosovo

One might be tempted to begin with Shakespeare: 'To be or not to be, that is the question'. This is precisely the question for many inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula. The history of the area is complex story of being torn apart, mainly by external factors,[1] each of which has in contributed to push the inhabitants into what could be called an 'existential' crisis. (This section is based on Glenny (1996, 1999); Burg & Shoup (1999); Malcolm (1996).

The core problem in Kosovo is the friction between the Serbs and the Albanians. Since the dramatic battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 between the Ottoman army and the Serbs, Kosovo has been regarded as the cradle of Serbia (that the Serbs lost the battle has little or no influence on the power of the myth). Sacred items from this war are still cherished and safeguarded by Serbs, and before the 1992 confrontations these were sent on a propaganda journey through the Serbian countryside. Kosovo is also the birthplace of origin of Slobodan Milosevic – and his political career and ambitions. In a famous speech to the Serbian minority in Kosovo he promised that no Serb there hand would ever be hurt again.

Kosovo is equally important to the Albanians: uniting it with the northern parts of Montenegro and Albania would form a greater Albanian state with a Muslim majority.[2] Understanding and interpreting this cultural inheritance makes a challenging environment in which to work with the notion of citizenship. Is it possible, or an idealistic project doomed to failure?

[1] External factors include the Ottoman Empire, the Austria/Hungarian Empire, World Wars, the Soviet incursion, and communist rule.
[2] Military master plans in Serbia, Croatia, Yugoslavia and Albania all proposed gaining absolute regional supremacy.

Confused cultural identities stem from different external factors influencing the area (Christensen, 1999). The people of the Balkan peninsula had to adopt to the occupying overlord: under the Muslim Turks, they had to obey the Sharia[3]: under the Austria/Hungarians, the emperor's laws. In praxis this constant change of ethnic markers and cultural breaks had a severe impact on people in terms of religion, ethnicity and history, raising such questions as 'Who am I?',' What is my background?',' Why am I different or worth less?',' What does it mean to be a citizen in Kosovo?' Danes might be seen as yet another overlord, trying to force a 'better' understanding of citizenship and the right way to live. We had to handle this possibility without alienating the young people in the project, and this was a significant problem working in Kosovo.

Since the religious supremacy of the Bogulomistic movement in the 13th and 14th centuries the Balkan people have had to adapt, politically and religiously, to political power - now the UN KFOR mandate[4]. This forced ethnic and religious diversity has created serious socio-economical differences amongst the major ethnic groups, particularly under Tito's communist regime. The Muslims are a good example: until 1973 no census contained the category 'Muslim', which can only be interpreted as lack of recognition from the state, which simply did not recognise its Muslim population alongside the Croatians, Serbs, Slovenes, Albanians, etc. Muslims 'appeared' in census returns as of 'other ethnic origin', an humiliating and demoralising situation. Official recognition from the Republic of Yugoslavia, just before the 1973 national census, was a leap towards independence for Muslims after several hundred years of suppression and humiliation. Tito afterwards granted political autonomy to the province of Vojvodina and Kosovo.[5]

After Tito's death in 1980 a series of leaders tried rule Yugoslavia with little success[6]. Slobodan Milosevic's ultra-nationalist group took over the communist party in the late 1980s, and Serbs again began to use socio-economic propaganda[7]. Milosevic illegitimately removed the Muslim-dominated autonomous government of Kosovo, claiming the population and its leaders were mistreating the Serb minority. Acts of Serbian aggression drove a wedge of mistrust between the two populations, now a part of the legacy. While this mutual mistrust continues unchallenged it is impossible to work on citizenship on a larger scale in the area.

The second assault came only three years after the Dayton Peace Agreements[8]. The Former Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) under Milosevic attacked Kosovo and carried out ethnic cleansing and genocide, equal to the Serb campaigns in Bosnia during the 1992-1995 war. But this was not, as the public were led to believe by international leaders and

[3] Sharia: Orthodox religious Muslim law
[4] Bogulomism: Dualistic religion, related to Christianity, in which Satan and God are considered equal.
[5] Vojvodina and Kosovo had the largest Muslim population outside Bosnia.
[6] Yugoslavia was close to bankruptcy after the two oil crises: banking law prohibited overseas investment, so all state investment was in local branches of multinationals, who withdrew their investments after the oil crises.
[7] Muslims have historically dominated educational and economic systems in the Balkan peninsula.
[8] Peace Agreements ending the war in Bosnia between Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia in 1995.

the press, simply unprovoked aggression: the Albanians (or at least the militia) had tried to realise their master plan for a 'Great Albania'. The Serbian aggression was followed by an immediate international reaction: for the first time a state was attacked without a UN resolution. A NATO taskforce began a campaign supposed to only last a few weeks[9], but the result of the year-long bombing campaign was a country once again torn apart by civil war, hunger, hatred, racism and death.

The reaction of the international community was to deploy a security force (KFOR) in Kosovo. This UN Security Force still operates with a UN mandate to keep Serbs and Albanians from clashing. An important partner in our citizenship project in Mitrovica is the Danish battalion. Both the KFOR and the international community want the situation to improve. One tool that might prove very effective in trying to normalise the situation in the area may be the work with citizenship among the younger generations in Kosovo.

Citizenship is a difficult topic in Balkans and particularly Kosovo, since the territory is not recognised as a state by the international community. Kosovo is an autonomous part of Serbia, or what is known as the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. This has a deep impact on those living there about roots, national feelings, cultural inheritance and religion. This is not simply a problem of the recent wars, but one which has existed and been nourished by history for the last 700 years. The question is not only how to deal with the problems young people are experiencing now, but also of changing attitudes to religion, territory, ethnicity and, most importantly, citizenship of Mitrovica Kosovo.

Citizenship can be understood in many different ways, and the thin line between humanitarian intervention and war today challenges our understanding and interpretation. The war against terrorism (and particularly the war in Iraq) is in intention a defence of political and juridical understanding, to do with both the Iraqi population and the population of the world. It is concerned with safety and basic rights, but simultaneously violates those rights for citizens of a sovereign state. A number of states are considered not to have behaved legitimately over western interpretation of human rights and to have unacceptable state behaviour: this interpretation has also led to the international mandate in Kosovo. Perhaps the West needs to rephrase its understanding of citizenship? This we now attempt.

Citizenship in a multi-cultural context

Citizenship and citizenship education can be regarded as contested, rather than fixed, concepts. They inevitably involve discussion about framework and perspective. Citizenship involves fundamental questions about relations between citizens, and between citizens and the state. The concept has a long history, but we start with Marshall’s definition of citizenship as ensuring everyone is treated as a full and equal member of a society which guarantees civil, political and social rights to all members. This post-war concept has been challenged because of its close relationship to the nation-state. Migration and considerations of ethnic and cultural rights have challenged this relationship, accentuated by increasing social and cultural pluralism in Europe.

[9] Russia and China vetoed the intervention in the UN Security Council. The resolutions concerning UN use of force in Iraq since 1991 are also questionable under international law and the rules of humanitarian intervention.

In our project, national homogeneity could not be assumed and citizenship was minimally linked to territory. In Kosovo the Albanians, Serbs, Romany and other ethnic and religious groups coexist but feel excluded from any common culture – although formally with equal rights - because of their socio-economic status or their socio-cultural identity. In a multi-cultural society should citizenship should be based on the politics of difference or on spaces of belonging?

One approach to citizenship, represented in the 'Diaspora discourse' (Young, 1989; Kymlicka and Norman, 1994), focuses on the politics of differences. Kymlicka suggests 'differentiated citizenship', based on differences: groups have different positional possibilities and are given different rights and entitlements as a group. The distribution of citizenship rights is based upon three kinds of group rights:

1. special representation rights (advocacy for disadvantaged groups);
2. multi-cultural rights (for immigrants, refugees and religious groups) and
3. self-government rights (for national minorities like the Serbs, Romany etc.) (Kymlicka, 1996).

This policy of difference is connected to the obligation to maintain 'our basic democratic values' and might be a way to realise inclusion and participation. However, it could also undermine the aim of an integrated society, resulting in social fragmentation. Young people could turn inwards and focus on their differences (racial, ethnic, religious or other), confirming prejudice and hatred for each other[10]. We do not agree with the essentialist cultural thinking concerning the construction of ethnical identities (Tøsse, 2001). People negotiate culture in specific situations like Ramadan and Christmas. To *practice* culture is rather different to being *defined by* a culture. If citizenship is to function in the Kosovan context we advocate a culturally complex perspective, coupled with identities that are dynamic and ever-changing. In this way culture refers to the construction of meaning, significance and representation, articulated and negotiated in a variety of forms[11]. Contemporary post-national forms of citizenship expedite new forms of membership, so citizenship practice can be multiple and changeable. One can be a local citizen as well as a national, European or global citizen. Citizenship is thus a diversified and complex phenomenon crossing the borders of the nation-state.

But multiculturalism is not a fully satisfactory theory, because it does not define plurality and reciprocity within citizenship. Democratic citizenship is a political term involving access to and participation in society. It aims at people's rights and social obligations, as

[10] One answer may be the presentation of a universal understanding of citizenship, but as Kymlicka and Norman (1994) point out, attempts will not solve the problem but will more often reinforce the privileges of the privileged while failing to integrate the minority groups into society, politically or socially.

[11] Multi-culturalism or creolisation are disputed notions inspired by Hannertz (1989) and Appadurai (1990). Their research into migration and transmigration has shown that ethnic identities cannot be bound to territories, but go across space and nation states. The notion of multiculturalism expresses the complex cultural processes where new cultural expressions are constantly developed.

well as social equality and cultural plurality. The practice of citizenship involves engagement in (social, cultural or political) activities in voluntary organisations or arrangements. We do not thus see citizenship as reflecting a neutral or essential criteria of what it is to be a good citizen, but see it rather as a special kind of constructed (political, social and cultural) identity, which demands the individual thinks from the perspective of the community: in this project, a multicultural community. This view of democracy is of methods or principles, and not as an inherited culturally-defined value or lifestyle. The ability of young Albanians and Serbs to identify with these democratic principles is the aim of the project.

From this perspective we can construct and deconstruct ethnical identities. We can point to differences or look at spaces that allow unity, a common sense of belonging and citizenship across ethnic groups. This does not neglect the importance of ethnic representation, cultural and self-governmental rights, the local history or power relations. However, we find it necessary to focus on the spaces of belonging, based on the idea that humans are able to imagine and understand each other despite cultural differences, and that dialogue constitutes the basis of democracy. The Kosovo project is based upon the creation of new spaces in which young Serbs and Albanians can interact, guided by interest and curiosity. In these spaces new narrative constructions of meaning are created - a possibly Utopia project, but a necessary step towards democracy.

This brings the next question: how is it possible to conduct citizenship education among young Serbs and Albanians?

Implications of multi-cultural citizenship education

The following example comes from a coffee party in the town Mitrovica. Serbs and Albanians in the town live in separated and strictly divided enclaves on each side of a river. The Danish Productions School also has two different school sites, one Albanian and one Serb. In November 2002 the school arranged, on behalf of the Serbian catering teacher, a cake-and-coffee party for students and teachers at both schools, to be held at the local Danish military camp. Despite general mistrust, the idea was accepted by both Serbs and Albanians, and in the days before the party both groups baked many ethnic cookies for the party. Teachers were nervous, but the students showed they could act together in a relaxed and informal way: despite the difficulties it was a successful meeting. A new narrative space was created about ‘the coffee party at the Danish military camp’.

Citizenship education is usually directed towards political education, in which educators inspire and encourage pupils to become participative and critical citizens through teaching and workshops. Our project aims at informal settings rather than scholastic activity. The experimental and creative dimension of citizenship is the focus, and the workshops have the role of change agents. The aesthetic workshops are mediums through which young Serbs and Albanians can discover circumstances where they are motivated and open-minded. The space for opportunities and reflection becomes a meeting point for expressions, impressions and externalisation, based on the creation of new spaces for non-formal artistic activities, drama, music and environmental workshops as the centre of attention.

We chose this learning strategy for several reasons. Firstly, cultural canons about ethnicity must be challenged by experience of individual and embodied knowledge. These are

motivating learning processes involving agency, practice, cooperation and dialogue. Artistic works catalyses the generation of new understandings and insights into different ways of doing. Secondly, these processes develop *oeuvres*, as Bruner (1998) proposes. A coffee party, a sculpture, poetry or drawing are works (*oeuvres*) that create identity, pride and a sense of belonging among participants. During the process the group is inspired to externalise its mental representations based upon negotiation and debate. It is the beginning of an 'invented tradition', as Bruner would say. These processes lead to new narrative constructions – 'Do you remember when we went to the coffee party' - or to artistic documentation. However, we need to remember that these young people carry a traumatic history, and that change will be slow and difficult.

Our ultimate hope is that the project will create new insights among the young Serbs and Albanians. In this we are inspired by Aristotle's thesis about phroenesis, from which Gleerup (2003) writes that new radical knowledge is created or emerges through the spaces between human beings. New insight emerges only if none of the participants' preconceptions can encapsulate this new knowledge. Through the confrontation between the not-known or not-yet-documented experience both problems and possibilities occur. Mistrust and uncertainty will be a partner in this process, but it is a space in which new knowledge or new cultural relationships slowly emerge from the gap between the small narratives which the agents bring to these spaces. In this way the creation of citizenship among young Serbs and Albanians should not be associated with Shakespeare's 'To be or not to be', but rather should be thought of as a slow development of dialogical spaces of belonging.

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