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Politics of Peoplehood: the Birth of a New Nation?

Abstract The political legitimation of nation states traditionally tended to claim homogeneity requirements that often exclude large sections of population. Taking this account of the traditional correspondence between nationality and state as a backdrop, I will attempt to sketch a new conception of peoplehood not based on class, race or religious membership, but on the acceptance of manifold social differences and on the construction of new belonging models. Basically I will suggest the exploration of new avenues of political research about the future of the nation with the following main goals: a) to argue for the persistence of differences among the members of a society at a global scale as a positive feature able to remove deep prejudices and biased views about the others, b) to highlight the prejudices that the neoliberal frame of the EU has supposed in the West Balkans area and c) to criticize the ideological resistance stemming from the idea of a nation state that usually turns down the birth of new nations in history as the result of wrongly solved conflicts. My claim for a politics of peoplehood as a regular source of conflicts and demands, which shouldn't be viewed as a civil failure or breakdown, will be especially inspired by some texts from Seyla Benhabib, Slavoj Žižek and Lea Ypi focusing on the necessary updates that the conditions of membership and political participation ought to include in our current times.

Key words: Peoplehood, Partisanship, Populism, Republicanism, Orwell, Laclau; Ypi, Žižek, Benhabib

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The political legitimation of nation states traditionally claimed ethnic or religious homogeneity as a requirement that systematically condemned to exclusion large sections of the population.¹ Taking the aftermath of the traditional correspondence between the nation, people and the state as a backdrop, I shall attempt to sketch a new conception of peoplehood not based on class, race or religious membership, but rather on the acceptance of the interdependence among manifold social and cultural differences and on the framing of new membership models. Basically, I will attempt to explore new avenues of political research regarding the future of nation with the

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following goals: a) to argue for acknowledging differences as a positive action leading to the enhancement of local political membership on a global scale, b) to criticize the model that considers that the neoliberal state paves the way to political and social development, especially taking into account the Balkan peoples' protests against this message and c) to present a new conception of peoplehood as a hinge between society and partisan structures.

The Differences We Belong to

One of the most deeply rooted prejudices about the forging of a nation refers to national homogeneity and the feelings expressing cultural belonging, as if they were the aesthetic expression of a nation-embedded political demand. It is a matter of fact that the modern framework of the nation-state is based on powerful images of enmity that charge the nation-state with the task of defending itself from other homologous political entities or potential internal separatist agents. Therefore the murmur of warfare lies under the foundations of the modern nation, but the postmodern constellation did not succeed in creating and consolidating a new political order free from this burden. As an example of this, my own country, Spain, officially acknowledged four languages in the state aside Castilian with the advent of democracy, but no governmental measures were taken to spread the knowledge of all these languages in our high schools, whose exams do not take them into any account, condemning them to minority and local status. People of my age from Madrid were forced to learn Catalan by their own means for accessing the worldly appreciated literature in this language.

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According to this hegemonic point of view, far from the Kantian hymns in favour of the rule of law across the surface of the Earth as the key to solving our problems, ethnic, religious and political confrontations surround us everywhere we move. Based on the conviction that social and cultural differences design the backdrop of concrete politics, I suggest we appraise their political scope by reading accurately an excerpt of a survey that George Orwell carried out in the 1930s regarding mineworkers' groups and their families in England. It highlights that the heterogeneous ways of life adopted by the members of different social layers should not prevent them to give birth to a common political protest. On the contrary, these different uses are intended to lead them to the only path open to aggregating common forces with the aim of defending against shared enemies. Orwell does not hesitate to identify this enemy with the economic exploitation of all workers and with the on-going pressure of failure experienced by the called middle class:

“[I]f you are constantly bullying me about my 'bourgeois ideology', if you give me to understand that in some way I am an inferior person because I have never worked with my hands, you will only succeed in antagonizing

me. For you are telling me either that I am inherently useless or that I ought to alter myself in some way that is beyond my power. I cannot proletarianize my accent or certain of my tastes and beliefs, and I would not if I could. Why should I? I don't ask anybody else to speak my dialect; why should anybody else ask me to speak it? It would be far better to take those miserable class-stigmata for granted and emphasize them as little as possible. They are comparable to a race-difference, and experience shows that one *can* cooperate with foreigners, even with foreigners whom one dislikes, when it is really necessary. Economically, I am in the same boat with the miner, the navvy, and the farmhand: lay the emphasis on that and I will fight with them. Culturally, I am different from the miner, the navvy, and the farmhand: lay the emphasis on that and you may arm me against them. [...] The weakness of the middle class hitherto has lain in the fact that they have never learned to combine; but if you frighten them into combining *against* you, you may find that you have raised up a devil" (G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), Penguin Books, 1978, pp. 201-202).

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Here we have an example of a political union stemming from the acknowledgment of multiple related demands. Orwell forces the reader to acknowledge that behind every political strategic agreement lays a stubborn disagreement regarding the sources of value that each group considers part of their identity. Yet this should not discard an effective cooperation grounded on the basis of shared damages. This seems not very far from Ernesto Laclau's claims for making the notion of totality more a horizon than a ground previous to the emergence of a political project.² In this context I agree that removing the blindfold that prevents the subjects from noticing a common social suffering will help them discover unexpected political partners. Yet, I am not arguing for the retrieving of an alleged civic virtue such as tolerance to deal with the alleged negative effects that heterogeneity has for collective coexistence and cohabitation. Kant already spoke in his *What is Enlightenment*

2 "Not a Ground but a Horizon: An Interview with Ernesto Laclau, Brian Price and Meghan Sutherland", *World Picture* 1 (2008), http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_2/PDF%20Docs/LaclauPDF.pdf (viewed 1 September, 2016): "So the answer to this difficulty is to be found, in my view, in the notion of a particular object which, without ceasing to be particular, transforms its body through the process of representing (indeed, of constructing) that impossible object: the totality. The latter is, *stricto sensu*, incompatible with the particularity that incarnates it. This is the empty or hegemonic signifier. I have written that we are here in a situation comparable to that of the Kantian noumenon: an object that shows itself though the impossibility of its adequate representation. The obvious difference from Kant is that the noumenon has a precise identity, even if it is that of a Regulative Idea, and that the task that this Idea prescribes, although it is infinite, has a direction established from the beginning. However, in the case of the empty signifier there is no such unidirectionality: everything depends on the contingent process through which a certain particularity claims to be the locus of the universal. This particularity, in its universal role of representing the totality, works as the limit of what is representable in a certain space. Actually, it constitutes the latter; it is in this sense that it is a horizon and not a ground".

about “the presumptuous title of tolerance”, which Goethe and Mirabeau also viewed in the XIX century as an insult and a temporary attitude, that should evolve into a full recognition of the values of others. I share Brown’s misgivings about this virtue pervaded by a depoliticizing function, since it often fulfils a hegemonic judgment that does not need to be reviewed in turn through the process of toleration. Against Rainer Forst’s appraisal of toleration as a concrete practice of justice, which prevents the person who holds an objection from transforming it into a rejection, as it considers the rejection to be an unfair deed, Brown has denounced in a Foucauldian sense the hegemony grammar in action in this behaviour:

“How does tolerance discourse today recentre certain hegemonic norms? What hegemonic norm, for example, lurks in the formulation ‘I’m against gay marriage but I’m for tolerance’? What hegemonic norm is recentred when Europeans or Americans speak of being tolerant towards Arabs, Muslims, or immigrants? What norm of the ethnic nation is circulated by the ostensibly liberal and inclusive utterance? How does tolerance hide and sometimes even legitimate existing violence in the societies that it governs? In short, I’m concerned with the ways that contemporary discourses of tolerance comprise a set of normative operations that often hide themselves as such” (Blasi/Holzhey, 2014: 20).

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Instead of dwelling on the production of stigmatized, ‘non-normal’ identities – as the not-heterosexual or the not-nationalist – toleration, I find it more useful politically to fly as a banner the unknown ground that leads different people to an unexpected pragmatic and actual consensus. Even if I do not agree with all the features entailed by the “unchosen condition” which Butler has repeatedly argued for, I believe that social and political cooperation should not depend on emotional upheavals, but on the consciousness and perception of an insurmountable interdependency that inspires our actions regarding the public goods we share:

[I]t is not from pervasive love for humanity or a pure desire for peace that we strive to live together. We live together because we have no choice, and though we sometimes rail against that unchosen condition, we remain obligated to struggle to affirm the ultimate value of that unchosen social world, and affirmation that is not quite a choice, a struggle that makes itself known and felt precisely when we exercise freedom in a way that is necessarily committed to the equal value of lives (Butler, 2015: 122).

The context of the quoted text claims that the equal exposure to precarity and the consciousness of interdependency are preconditions for the good life and thus contribute to make possible the political appearance at a global scale. As Butler has repeatedly highlighted, the unsought *We* that we are determines our political subjectivity before we dispose of the tools able to scrutinize it. Popular protests could not be understood without first making the street a

house of the people, where the “I” discovers that she is also a “we” and thus that an unchosen plural condition precedes her and provides all her actions with a sound basis. Even if precarity stamps its hallmark on human bodies³, Butler asserts that it also enables an unexpected community to come into view by the means of a “pre-contractual interdependency” that guides the search of values for defending an equal life. Given this account of interdependency, it will not sound odd that the body fulfils in Butler an overriding role compared to the human discourse, a feature of this discourse that leads “towards alternative versions of universality that are wrought from the work of translation itself”.⁴ According to Butler, the language of a gathered population should not be confounded with or reduced to the language of autonomy and dominance. It should rather acknowledge the unfailing labour of translations and transactions as its unavoidable task. Thus, the discussion about the aesthetics of the *thereness* formed by a protesting assembly allows the drawing of the conclusion that the struggle for social and ethical recognition is always a contingent feature that should take distance from the constraints of an identitarian project and redistribute the terms established by the dominant discourse,⁵ since hegemonic social discourses usually condemn to oblivion those identities that do not meet the standard guidelines. An interesting point here hints at the borders of translation itself, t.i. at the limits of benefits stemming from the making of mutual comprehension a sacred social value. Diametrically opposed to transparency, real understanding at a psychological, social and political level should better admit that a background made of darkness, fuzziness and impotence from the point of view of modern autonomy patterns rules the whole process. Hence common commitments and participation should not lose their effectiveness for avowing their incapability to shape a universal subject which should overcome the manifold differences. On the contrary, I claim that the coming political projects have to overcome the traditional frame of class divisions without forgetting that it survives disguised in cultural and social heterogeneities. Without remembering this, we might take the risk of hurriedly building up a fetishized and filmy image of the community we really belong to.

The Neoliberal State has no Enemies? The Balkan Case.

As is well known, the advent of liberal capitalism in the former Yugoslavia did not solve poverty and underdevelopment problems. On the contrary, a deep dependency on foreign capital and waning sovereignty and democracy were the flipside of the economic and political liberalization coming after

3 See on this issue Lorey (2015).

4 Butler/Laclau/Žižek (2000: 179).

5 Butler/Laclau/Žižek (2000: 168).

the fall of the Yugoslav socialist model, as last decades have largely shown. This paradoxical phenomenon deserves an accurate analysis, which will also uncover the internal incoherencies of the EU political patterns and of the blames spread by the International Monetary Fund regarding the long crisis of most post-Yugoslav states. Furthermore, it should be accurately evaluated whether the current understanding of the nation state has become an exercise of a kind of populism without the people, charged with the task of preparing more and more people to passively abandon themselves to neoliberal anarchism. In this context I quite sympathize with the proposals for creating a Balkan federation⁶ – an ancient model exalted for especially sensitive areas even by the conservative Hannah Arendt –p strong enough to free the former Yugoslav region from external dependency and to exorcise the ghost of ancient Serbian hegemony, to maximize the welfare of its citizens and emancipate them politically. To give a clear example of the changes that this proposal would entail, nationalising banks and industry and giving back economic control to producers and local communities might grant the governments of the Balkan area the power to even internal inequalities and to foster development, a horizon currently discarded by the diligent advisors of the troika. Andrea Živković coined this path as the purpose “to make a transition from the transition”, t.i. to take a critical distance from the narration used to approach the development difficulties that the countries in this region are facing. Naturally, this picture has neither helped to strengthen the civil society there nor to give a response to neoliberal hegemony. Yet from Laclau’s and Mouffe’s contributions for assessing populist power we are conscious about the achievements that political ontology and its mobility may attain. The engagement of heterogeneous actors appears as a key point for overcoming a post-communist regime stage that has hindered since the ’90 any serious attempt to establish and make set in motion a real state of right, one that would not remain dead letter:

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“In order to understand the post-communist, eternal transitional predicament, and especially the current political and economic situation in the Balkans, we suggest that one has to go beyond the analysis of the state, its failures and weaknesses, and engage with the concept of regime. The post-socialist regime is a conglomerate grouping political elites, attaches businesses and their Western partners, media corporations, NGOs promoting the holy couple of electoral democracy and neoliberal economy, organised crime (itself intimately related to political and economic elites), predatory foreign-owned banks and, finally, a corrupt judiciary and controlled unions” (Igor Stiks and Srećko Horvat, “Radical Politics in the Desert of Transition”, in Id. (eds.), 2015: 16-17).

6 Vd. A. Živković/D. Plavšić (eds.) (2003).

7 A. Živković, “From the Market ... to the Market: The Debt Economy After Yugoslavia”, in Igor Stiks and Srećko Horvat (2015: 64).

As Stiks and Horvat argue in the above cited book, EU authorities seemed to focus their political role on encouraging the former Yugoslav countries to replace the former institutional and statist structures by an awful *regime*, without hesitating to reduce both discursively and empirically the region to the Pandora's box of mythical forces –nationalism, racism, xenophobia–, which they considered to have definitely erased from European social imaginaries. Yet scholars such as Tanja Petrović argued that, on the contrary, the EU suffers similar symptoms that it is not disposed to recognize as a common burden shared with Western Balkans.⁸ This kind of discourse hardly manages to conceal the European desire to keep its own threats outside its borders, which entails the propensity to leave the Balkans beyond them. This usual European appraisal has been rejected more than a decade ago by É. Balibar in the following terms:

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Either Europe will recognize in the Balkans situation not a monstrosity grafted to its breast, a pathological 'after effect' of underdevelopment or of communism, but rather an image or effect of its own history, and will undertake to confront it and resolve it and thus to put itself into question and transform itself. Only then will Europe probably begin to become *possible* again. Or else it will refuse to come face-to-face with itself and will continue to treat the problem as an exterior obstacle to be overcome through exterior means, including colonization (Balibar, 2004: 6).

Balibar's quote is as challenging as ever at the momento, since supervision and colonization have become in the new century the lure bringing the European 'future' to Balkan countries and thus a clear message conveyed to the actual or possible candidates for EU membership. Thus we have returned to a mixed narration that makes of European periphery the bulwark protecting Europe from barbaric enemies, but at the same time dreads the full reception of countries that fall outside the longed union and sees them as a part of the *no man's land* of the needful border. As Slavoj Žižek highlighted in the '90: "every actor [...] endeavours to legitimize her place "inside" [Europe] by presenting itself as the last bastion of European civilization [...] in the face of oriental barbarism".⁹ In this vein Herfried Münkler claimed in his book *Empires 10* that Europe, as every imperial power, would have borrowed from the imperial model the 'civilising' stage that should complete its expansion and consolidation using borders as one more military mean and thus condemning the Balkans to a kind of elusive inclusion. As Wendy Brown has pointed out, the multiplication of walls, imagined or factual, belongs to

8 Petrovic, "On the Way to Europe", in Horvat/Stiks (eds.) (2015: 119ss.)

9 Žižek, "Caught in Another's Dream in Bosnia", in (R. Ali/L. Lifschultz, 1993: 236). Cfr. The concept of 'nesting orientalisms' by Milica Bakić-Hayden (1995).

10 Münkler (2007: 167)

a conception of sovereignty where the discourse about national safety and the fear against a fuzzy enmity become key points:

Viewed as a form of national psychic defense, walls can be seen as an ideological disavowal of a set of unmanageable appetites, needs, and powers. They facilitate a set of metalepses in which the specter of invasion replaces internal need or desire and the specter of violent hostility replaces reckoning with colonial displacements and occupation. Through their ostentatious signification of sovereign power and definition of the nation, they also deflect anxieties about the disintegration of national identity and about the decline of state sovereignty (Brown, 2010: 130).

The fairy tales of an idealized discourse of transition, whose aftermath the Balkan people have in fact felt since the '90s became a mainstream narrative in post-socialist states of Eastern Europe undergoing transition with the purpose to leave out of the political market alternative paths to access the European Union. This narrative needed to discursively reduce the region into a place requiring permanent external support and supervision to get completely pacified and to get acquainted with democratic patterns. As the former and unforgettable EU enlargement commissioner, Oli Rehn, claimed in plain language, the painful measures taken in these countries should not lead its people to feel “as ‘takers’ of externally imposed conditions, but rather as ‘makers’ of their own future”.¹¹ In this context deregulation, unfettered markets, cuts of social spending and similar measures appeared in the Balkan public space as the most promising toolbox against the burden of ethnic and nationalist conflicts. Yet reality has proven how far from the truth was the mantra telling that liberalization of economic policies would adequately prepare the path of access to the EU. Actually, high unemployment, widespread corruption and low levels of trust in the political class depress a society that feels betrayed and heavily disappointed by the promises of a monitored transition.

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As is often the case in extreme crisis, this situation also reveals chances to build new counter-hegemonic political subjectivities through social upheavals, as some worker and student protests display. Thus groups of common people “learn – as Žižek has stressed – the art of recognizing, from an engaged subjective position, elements which are here, in our space, but whose time is the emancipated future”.¹² This will, in my view, open up new avenues to re-frame the nation state and attempt to stop the current global condition of the nation states being subjected to economic powers. As Igor Štiks

11 Rehn, 17 April 2008 (internet), available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/search-result.htm?sort=typed&page=1250&query=18&direction=ASC&locale=EN&size=50> (viewed 1 September, 2016)

12 Žižek (2012: 128).

and Srećko Horvat have highlighted in “The Future of Radical Politics in the Balkans – Protests, Plenums, Parties” (Verso, 2015: 261ss.), non-institutional forms of organization and action have replaced in all Europe the function of the motor of social and political development supposed to be fulfilled by the alleged EU institutional map and agenda. Both authors hint to the 2014 worker’s protests that started in Tuzla, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and quickly spread from there to other Bosnian cities, with the aim of demanding unpaid salaries and pensions, which quickly spread to include students and other professionals, focusing on the fact that

[m]ost canton governments resigned and the canton assemblies mostly accepted the main demands of the plenums – although their implementation remains another issue. After long deliberations open to all citizens, almost uniformly, although with some regional variety, they demanded the revision of privatisations, and end to politicians’ excessive benefits, and the formation of the new state-level and local governments made up of people with proven expertise and no record of corruption (Stiks/Horvat, 2015: 262).

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The plenum movement in Bosnia showed that spontaneous assemblies of a disappointed citizenship proved to be more effective in articulating popular demands and retrieving democratic control over people’s lives than the bulk of measures recommended by EU advisers. Moreover, the participants’ multilevel belonging of in such social phenomena deeply collided with the purposes of ethno-nationalist political elites, since they also proved that economic precariousness might bring about the firmest social cohesion. Naturally, the plenums could not last forever and they disbanded, as the most common political experience would have predicted. Yet they lasted long enough to redefine the public sphere and to influence the scheduled and supervised agenda devoted for the region, fulfilling the role that in the Enlightenment time Kant had assigned to the “historical sign” in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, t.i. a token capable to prove that history might evolve to more hopeful horizons. Thus between protests and plenums arises a connection comparable with Kantian intuitions and concepts, as – following Štiks and Horvat – “[w]ithout the protests, the plenums would lose their capacity to apply pressure, and without the plenums, the protests would lose their legitimacy and articulation” (2015: 263). Put differently, the theory’s normative ground should learn from contemporary social practices that put ordinary people in the centre of the visibility and the political agenda, ensuring that their voice matters. Yet, as Micah White, one of the founders of the *Occupy* movement stressed with respect to the above, people “get burned out”, so that political forces that aim to get into power ought to sing the unavoidable *carpe diem*:

You can't maintain that exponential growth forever; people get burned out [...] That sudden peaking has to somehow be locked in, some way of giving it a structure that is able to persist. Looking at where we need to go today in terms of social movements, we need to be able to combine the sudden peaking of a social movement with the ability to create structures that give it permanence. That's why I talk a lot about the hybridization between social movements and political parties.¹³

This perception of the simultaneously strong and vulnerable contingent nature of popular demonstrations should inspire political initiatives prepared to leave a more enduring impact in the Balkan societies and able to successfully take part in the polls, conscious that social movements offer a more reliable basis to coach partisanship for the complex dialectics of the present. Taking into account these examples of Balkan social movements, I shall devote the last section to the intersections between partisanship and peoplehood, a subject that Lea Ypi accurately dissected in last years.

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The State after the Neoliberal Collapse of Nation: the Politics of Peoplehood

As Judith Butler pointed out in last year's visit to the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory in Belgrade, it would be useful to remember in political theory that the "sovereign is not necessarily a figure of indivisible unity or a master figure. [...] Sovereignty can be divisible; it can even be dispersed".¹⁴ This claim reminds the politicians that the conditions of appearance precede the making of political agenda. It could be a good starting point for re-framing pluralism, understood as a form of cohabiting in ways that force the subjects to acknowledge difference, but also make them feel committed to the obligatory cohabitation with others. According to Butler, without sovereignty it is very hard to defend the very important concept of political self-determination that is needed in the struggle for decolonization and encouraging general political emancipation from external powers, but the sovereignty she is searching for diverges from ancient early modern patterns, as it moves from "a constitutive unfreedom"¹⁵ that reminds us of the inability to choose with whom we cohabit the earth. The ideal of sovereignty at stake here is no more a vertical one, but it is based on a radical horizontality. I will

13 "The Challenge of Protest in Our Time: Micah White on Social Change Movements, Theories of Revolution, and Moving on from Occupy Wall Street", *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 17 September 2015 (access 10th September 2016): <https://lareviewofbooks.org/interview/the-challenge-of-protest-in-our-time-micah-white-on-social-change-movements-theories-of-revolution-and-moving-on-from-occupy-wall-street/>.

14 Seminar on Judith Butler's "Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly", Responses to Athena Athanasiou, Adriana Zaharijević, Vedran Džihčić (2016: 89).

15 See Butler (2014: 176).

claim that the transition from a model of politics controlled by an oligarchy of parties to a partisanship responsive to the requirements and demands of peoplehood occupies the centre of the map of the new sovereignty that Europe is searching for. I am not claiming that institutional structures ought to be replaced by continuous plenums. Moreover it should be highlighted that the geography of the plenum movement strongly suggests that it in fact they did not transcend ethnic divisions, but remained mainly confined to the Muslim population. Even if Croatian population was involved in a lesser degree, the second largest community, that of the Serbs, was almost completely absent from these protests. It is not my aim to idealize the plenums formula, but rather to claim that the lack of communication among institutions, parties and society largely led to a political collapse in Europe, entailing a hard decreasing of legitimacy of institutional actors across the continent. I would like to take as a *leitmotiv* the claim raised by Rancière in his book *Disagreement: Philosophy and Politics*, where he explains that:

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There is politics from the moment there exists the sphere of appearance of a subject, *the people*, whose particular attribute is to be different from itself, internally divided. So, from the political point of view, the inscriptions of equality that figure in the Declaration of the Rights of Man or the preambles to the Codes and Constitutions, those that symbolize such and such an institution or are engraved on the pediments of their edifices, are not “forms” belied by their contents or “appearances” made to conceal reality. They are an effective mode of appearance of the people, the minimum of quality that is inscribed in the field of common experience. The problem is not to accentuate the difference between this existing quality and all that belies it. It is not to contradict appearances but, on the contrary, to confirm them. Wherever the part of those who have no part is inscribed, however fragile and fleeting these inscriptions may be, a sphere of appearance of the *demos* is created, an element of the *kratos*, the power of the people, exists. The problem is to extend the sphere of this appearance, to maximize this potential (Rancière, 1999: 87-88).

I agree with Rancière’s remark about the need to let the appearances to raise their claims, which confirms what I consider to be the key task of our time, especially in the European area, due to the historical contribution it yielded to the establishment of sound political frames, t.i. the integration of social movements criteria in the structures encompassing traditional partisanship. Actually partisanship is a long-term activity, requiring endurance and constancy, but the established parties’ organization seems to be more obedient to the powers that the constitutionalist Luigi Ferrajoli called savage than to their affiliated membership. I hold misgivings against the populist tendency to reduce a political party to a tool in search for hegemony, as I consider that such political agent ought to aspire to consciously influence and shape public opinion, instead of just mirroring the changeable moods of a social

group. In the words of a very stimulating article of Lea Ypi and Jonathan White: “The ‘median voter’, if there is such a thing, is not what a party must chase but what it must help to define”.¹⁶ The hope they show in relation to Corbyn’s Labour leadership and the attempted *Corbexit* suggests that a new politics of peoplehood is coming.¹⁷ A slew of symptoms confirm it decidedly. In a nutshell, traditional political structures will find it much more difficult to remain deaf before the voices of the street, which does not entail that spontaneity and common fight against a shared precarity might entirely replace the conventional political paths. Populist non conservative movements fulfil the function of reminding the states of the tenets of a welfare society and the large list of tasks they have abandoned for managing more profitable goals.

Beside this, I consider it useful to stress the difference between right and left populisms, since I claim that radical democracy is embedded in a deep emotional ambivalence. Briefly said, Laclau’s floating signifier would easily admit catchwords such as “clean institutions”, “safety” and “ethnic nationalism”, so that this wide range of possible mottos framing figures of the people should excite our reflection about the shortcomings of political movements based only on the work made at the street. This ambivalence also highlights that the real Otherness of the neoliberal state is not democracy, which otherwise it views as a reliable and pliable partner, but the republican modern European tradition starting with Kantian Enlightenment. This tradition shares with the contemporary reconstructions of Marxism the conception of a state as the outcome of a long-term chain of demands and struggles among social classes, according to Poulantzas’ words, as “a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as this is expressed within the State in a necessarily specific form”.¹⁸ Yet according to this view the state will not reduce itself to a mere mediator in class struggle, it will also demand the expansion of citizenship rights beyond ethnic or nationalist requirements. Hence we are claiming for a state committed to meet the goals of a cosmopolitanism for

16 White/Ypi (2016: 33).

17 White/Ypi (2016: 33): “What the process that brought to Corbyn to the head of the Labour Party did was question the model of parties as electoral machines and raise a larger set of issues about their democratic function. It gave reminder that a party properly understood is a community of principles, where people with broadly similar values, commitments and conceptions of justice make common decisions, take joint risks and distribute collective responsibility for how they want to shape future political life. Those who voted for Corbyn voted against the personalisation of politics, against a model of the party exclusively focused on the image and media appeal of the leader, and against an exclusive emphasis on how elections can be won. They voted to reappropriate the radical roots of the Labour party as an agent of social transformation, guided by a process where everyone, not just the leader, is understood to be responsible for the final outcome”.

18 Poulantzas (1978: 128-129).

de-colonized times. The republican tradition would not thus tolerate to see the public authority of the state reduced to one more agent encompassed by the global market, but would rather encourage the state to get autonomously involved in this all-pervading sphere of the global market to argue for the rights of people. If one understands democracy as a political system where everything is subjected to agreement, I have my doubts about the chances that a state ruled by right will have in the case it is forced to obtain the consensus of neoliberal powers¹⁹, since either that goal will never be attained or it will become real with heavy constraints.

Conclusions

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In this paper I argued for revising rooted frames of the nation as an homogenized whole that in my view yield no more benefits for a political actor committed to solve the problems of our present. According to my claims, the only differences that should concern a state are related to social and economic inequalities, but they do not stem at all from the fact that people speak different languages or practice different religions. On the contrary, ethnic and religious conflicts might become the best instruments for diverting people's attention from their real problems. Thus I claim for gaining a new conception of peoplehood, which should overcome the gap between recent radical-democratic conceptions of peoplehood (Laclau, Butler, Brown) that seem to fetishize to some extent attributes such as plurality, heterogeneity and populism, on the one hand, and the liberal or republican institutional frames that put too much emphasis on the homogeneity, rationality and transparency of political actors on the other. In my view, a republicanism conscious of the challenges of the XXIth Century should make of the politics made on the streets one of its best tools for grounding a sound civil culture, but always taking into account that these radical democratic strategies should not conceal nationalist or racist claims. Hence a politics of peoplehood committed with the boost of civil freedom should intend to remove the blindfold that prevents – as it happened in the countries of the European area through the enlargement process of EU – a clear perception of the forces that abducted and were disguised as a state of right. Unfortunately, the EU institutional frame did not choose the side of law and order, but it took the easier way to become an actor under the pressure of global economic powers. It is a matter of fact that most European society of today has difficulties to view the European institutions as the solution for their real problems. In this large context, some examples of politics on the streets

19 É. Balibar has tackled this issue in several works, see *Citizenship* (2015: 128): “We must return to the idea that a force or a political movement can only democratize society if it itself is fundamentally *more democratic* that the system it opposes, with respect both to its objectives and to its internal operation”.

made in different countries from the ex-Yugoslavia work as reminder of the tasks that need to be accomplished in order to improve the political maturity in the whole European area, but especially in the Balkans, which gave in the past great examples and formulas regarding the coexistence and cohesion of plural cultures and nations.

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Politike narodnosti: rađanje nove nacije?

Apstrakt

Politička legitimizacija nacionalnih država tradicionalno je imala tendenciju da propisuje uslove homogenosti koji često isključuju velike delove stanovništva. Uzevši u obzir ovu tradicionalnu korespondenciju između nacionalnosti i države kao podlogu, pokušaću da skiciram novu koncepciju narodnosti koja nije zasnovana na klasi, rasi i verskoj pripadnosti, već na prihvatanju mnogobrojnih društvenih razlika i konstrukciji novih modela pripadnosti. U suštini, ja ću predložiti ispitivanje novih staza političkih studija o budućnosti nacije sa sledećim glavnim ciljevima: a) kako bih izneo tvrdnju da je opstajanje razlika između članova društva na globalnoj skali pozitivno svojstvo sposobno da ukloni duboke predrasude i pristrasnost prema drugima, b) da bih podvukao kako neoliberalni okvir EU ispoljava izvesne predrasude prema prostoru Zapadnog Balkana i c) kako bih kritikovao ideološki otpor koji proizlazi iz ideje nacionalne države koja uglavnom odbacuje rođenje nove nacije u istoriji kao rezultat pogrešno razrešenog sukoba. Moje zalaganje za politiku narodnosti kao regularni izvor nasilja i zâhteva, koje ne treba videti kao neuspeh ili slom građanske opcije, biće posebno inspirisana nekim tekstovima Šejle Benhabib (Seyla Benhabib), Slavoj Žižeka (Slavoj Žižek) i Lee Epi (Lea Ypi) čiji je fokus na neophodnim osavremenjivanjima koja bi uslovi pripadnosti i političke participacije trebalo da uključe u današnjem vremenu.

Ključne reči: Narodnost, partizani, populizam, republikanizam, Orvel, Laklau, Jpi, Žižek, Benhabib