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Generation W: From the Young People's Perspective

Abstract: This paper discusses the position of young people in Serbia after October 5th 2000, as can be inferred from the evidence collected in the study 'Politics and everyday life: Serbia 1999-2002'. The author identifies amongst young people four basic modes of self-positioning within the current social context, as described by the following labels: 'B92 generation', 'provincials', 'fundamentalists' and 'guests'. These views encompass politics, their own social and political engagement, views of the future, and their own selves.

Key words: young people, Serbia, generation X, generation W, social change.

In the periods of wider system changes, like the Serbian society experienced in recent past, the research of content of social and political practices, wishes, fantasies and different 'realities' (material and virtual ones) within its society members live could offer a new perspective in theoretical conceptualization of the process of social change and its possible future direction(s). In that sense we believe that the perspective which situated the research of social change into the field of political understand as encountering place of public and private, could offer a new insights in different societal levels that are involve into the process of social change. Starting from the idea that the sphere of political could be a field of conflict, place of overlapping or polygon for negotiation of different multiple realities within which members of certain society, social and/or subcultural group live, we concentrate our research process onto unique and particular personal experience and its actual interpretations because we believe that such strategy could help us to reconstruct *collective reflections* of everyday experiences that interact with different levels of social structure(s) and realities of its protagonists. These everyday experiences create, through the process of interaction between individual and society and/or social/subcultural group, further influence social and political life in the accordance with their collective reflections about it.

In quest of theoretical explanation of complicated and often inconsistent character of political practices and from them derivated (personal and social)

political decisions and reasons that lead citizens in making these decisions, we start from a few basic theoretical presumptions:

1. Every social change, before it happens in real space and time, have to be conceptualized first on the level of idea and materialized in certain idea's *concept of reality* that, determine decisions and way of thinking of individuals/members of observed society – even if they are not necessarily aware of that influence (what is a relatively common case). In elaboration of this thesis Gramsci's theoretical concept of *hegemony* help us the most.

The concept of hegemony, one of the most significant contributions to twentieth-century Marxist thought, was invented by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), famous Italian marxist. Unfortunately, he was unable to elaborate the theory of hegemony in a systematic way before his early death in 1937. The theory¹ lies fragmented and dispersed throughout his well-known *Prison Notebooks* (*Quaderni del carcere*), the 3000 pages long collection of his notes and letters from prison, which he wrote between 1929 and 1935.

The basic presumption of the theory of hegemony is rather simple: '*man is not ruled by force alone, but also by ideas*' (Bates 1975:351). Varying this presumption in deliberation about different social topics, which concerned his attention during his imprisonment, and applying it on the concept of class struggle (central concept within Marxist philosophy) Gramsci reconstruct imaginary path that any class should pass in order to achieve and preserve hegemonic position within particular social system. In his notes published under the title *Historical Materialism (Il materialismo storico)* he says:

Critical understanding of oneself ... comes through the struggle of political 'hegemonies', of opposing directions, first in the field of ethics, then of politics, culminating in a higher elaboration of one's own conception of reality. The awareness of being part of a definite hegemonic force ... is the first step towards a progressively higher self-consciousness, in which theory and practice finally unite (Gramsci 1948:11).

According to Gramsci the change has always happening first in the sphere of ideas, through the conflict of antagonistic/or opposing class political positions, which are articulating through different interpretations of ethic norms, political strategies and finally class-specific *conception of reality*. Class that succeed, in given historical moment, to construct *conception of reality* which is compatible with spiritual needs of the time and been recognized as a part of the personal experience by the majority of society members, has the best prospects to occupy hegemonic position within class

¹ Or as Kolakovski says '*an embryo of theory of foggy shape*' (Kolakovski 1985:249).

order and to establish stable political government. Without the unity of idea's conception of reality and political actions there is no societal stability.

Privilege classes conquered hegemonic position spiritually also, besides the fact that they have already politically subordinated to them exploited ones, moreover, spiritual government is a condition for political government. (Kolakovski 1985:273).

Central topic of Gramsci's interest was how new class (in his case working class) could take over social life and organize its own culture. The main issue on that way is how to reach *cultural hegemony* before gaining political power. Cultural hegemony, for Gramsci, means establishment of selected opinions, values and norms that will be accepted for the majority members of society, in order to secure long-term future of new government. This is preceding condition for gaining political power and the indispensable condition of its preservation.

Although, Gramsci deliberated about theoretical concept of hegemony, and particularity cultural hegemony, within, in many ways, different societal context, his theoretical insights could be apply in deliberation and understanding of dynamics and process of social change in contemporary social context, but, of course, with certain theoretical moves from the original theoretical conceptualization. It is important to say that in contemporary social context, it is almost impossible to talk about hegemonic ideology of Society as such, because of the process of defragmentation of attention/focus and experiences of its members. In such a changed social context focus of analysis should be moved toward more elemental levels of social life, such as social groups and/or subcultural groups whose members share certain fragments/elements of everyday reality around which they build their fantasies - about the way how they live, what they wish to change in their lives, how they wish that their lives look in near and farer future ... without the fantasy about revolution that involves dramatic change of current system of economic or any other relations within social system. In changed circumstances the expected intervention through which Society should pass is fragmented as well in comparison with the original Gramsci's, because it is coming from the perspective of one, or more different, social and/or subcultural groups. But, it should not be forgotten/neglected the cumulative effect of quantity of these particular/fragmented experiences and from them derived different hegemonic conceptions of reality that could, in a certain moment of social exaltation, partially overlap and put a door ajar to fragile and short-lived possibility for fast, powerful and/or violent revolutionary intervention into the social reality. Something similar happened in Eastern European societies at the beginning of the process of societal transition/transformation. In these various transitional/transformational

societal settings, the process of change start, as Gramsci predicted, from the sphere of ideas/ideologies by changing the content of various hegemonic system of values and fantasies, which brought to the fragmentary overlappings among these different systems of values and fantasies and their perception/interpretation of certain topics. Consequently, these changes restructured everyday practices of the citizens in accordance with newly produced ideological consensus.

In this process of change among many different simultaneously existing forms of practices, discourses and systems of values, certain establish themselves as culturally exalted ones in particular historical moment. These changeable², culturally exalted model(s) of behavior may be possibly defined as hegemonic ones within certain culture, subculture or particular cultural practices. They represent a configuration of performance/practice that embodies the currently socially accepted answer to the given societal (economic, political, social) circumstances and challenges, which corresponds with actual societal and personal needs and wishes of the members of observed society or social/subcultural group. In spite of the fact that it is very difficult or even impossible to find a person who lives and think in total accordance with this hegemonic ideal-type model, it is important to emphasize that all members of certain society, social/subcultural group are in constant internal and/or external dialog with that hegemonic model, no matter do they accept it or they are in conflict with values and norms which that hegemonic model promotes.

2. That/these hegemonic concept(s) of reality, that could be reconstructed from the everyday practices and contents of their interpretations in the interviewees' narratives, influence on our idea of political. On the unconscious level they (hegemonic concepts of reality) imprint/impress meanings that are not their peculiarity *per se*, outside that in advance given hegemonic value coordinate system that tight us with the collective. Because, as Alfred Schutz state:

Meaning [...] is not a quality inherent in certain experiences emerging within our stream of consciousness but the result of an interpretation of a past experience looked at from the present Now with a reflective attitude. (Schutz 1962: 210).

And I would add: – always in certain accordance with actual hegemonic idea's concept of reality that shapes our thoughts and perceptions, forming particular coordinate system of 'meanings' that makes us more sensitive for certain everyday practices, topics and phenomena, but in the same time less sensitive or even blinde for others.

² In diferent historical moments different kinds of practices, ideas and discourses established themselves as hegemonic ones (Connel 1996).

3. When we deliberate about different social events and phenomena taking into consideration their temporal dimension we could approach them into at least two different ways. We could arrange events by chronological order like they happen in the '*time of the outer world*' (Schutz 1962: 219). or follow the course of interviewee³'s thoughts who, through his/her interpretation of the same events, impress in them meanings that change their temporal dimension exposing it to certain *subjective distortion*. Under the influence of this subjective distortion certain moments receive overdimensioned meanings in temporal and symbolic sense, while others have been totally neglected or even forgotten. Following that course of '*inner time*' (Schutz 1962: 219) through narrative of every particular interviewee, that is frequently oppose/antagonize to the 'external' one, it is possible to reconstruct fragments of course and content of different/multiple realities that refract in life of every particular interviewee, and their real and symbolic influence on social dynamic of observed society, social or subcultural group in which interviewee lives.

4. No matter about which topic interviewees choose to talk about, it is possible to follow in their narratives the dynamic of 'shifting'/moving from one to another layer of reality, in different moments equally real for them, and consequently real for society to which they belong. Because

Each world whilst it is attended to is real after its own fashion; only the reality lapses with the attention. (James 1990: 293)

According to William James words it is possible to say that every particular world, while we focus our attention to it, is real on its own unique way; but in the moment when we withdraw our attention its reality disappears. During our lives we are constantly exposed to that process of shifting from one reality to another and the 'triggers' on that way are so called *shock experiences*. (Schutz 1962: 231) Our research presumption is that it is possible to reconstruct these different strata of reality among which the individual/interviewees moving and forming/structuring their narratives, and charting certain social events that producing or have already produced the effect of shock.

5. No matter how at the first sight logically sound the statements of certain interviewees, it is important to say that in all of them always exist certain *internal logic*. This logic could be understood and decoded through reconstruction of multiple realities and their mutual relations in and among

³ 'Articulating his thought, while speaking, in phases [...] does not merely experience what he actually utters; a complicated mechanism of retentions and anticipations connects within his stream of consciousness one element of his speech with what preceded and what follows to the unity of the thought he wants to convey. All these experiences belong to his inner time.' (Schutz 1962: 219).

which interviewees live. We could socially contextualized meanings of certain events (experienced and constructed) and understand their real influence on social reality of society to which we belong only through constant comparison with and relating to different multiple realities (personal and social ones).

6. Having in mind that every social change is internally complex structure where a number of different logics are superimposed it is possible to presume that simple instrument which follows linear logic could not offer a empirical data that are capable to provide a proper understanding of the phenomenon of social change(s) in certain societal context. It is important to say that every particular social change is in the same time positioned in a number of different social structures, which may be following different historical trajectories. And it is, in the same time, intersects and interacts with other social changes and social structures with/within which it/they interact. It is important to incorporate that knowledge into its/their analysis, too. In other words, the only way of exploring/understanding social change(s) is to constantly go beyond it, through the analysis of its place and its role in different social structures and processes.

Because of all mentioned above we choose to collect the empirical data related to the topic of our research with the methodological technique of *in-depth interview*. These technique means that we will performed interviews which will not be strictly structured in advance in order to avoid common trap of perfectly designed empirical researches. We believed that research strategy which defined in advance what it looking for in reality rarely could offer more than in advance developed theoretical matrix which should be as the result of research illustrated with adequate empirical data collected and interpreted through the research process. Contrary to this we will try to collect empirical data related to certain topics/themes/areas of interest by following the internal logic of every particular interviewee and different societal and structural layers/strata within his/her narrative related to various social experiences, practices, opinions or beliefs. Throughout the analysis of collected data and constant interaction among their different aspects we believe that our research will result with new discursively constructed theoretical matrix that could be capable to explain complicated and sometimes inconsistent character of social change.

Following analysis is based on three hundred in-depth interviews that are performed within project of the Institute of Philosophy and Social Theory in Belgrade - Politics and Everyday Life in sixteen towns in Serbia without Kosovo (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Bor, Čačak, Kikinda, Kragujevac, Kruševac, Novi Pazar, Pančevo, Paraćin, Požarevac, Subotica, Šabac, Užice, Valjevo). One hundred interviews with 'younger' interviewees were in particular interest of this research.

The Comparative Case Study of Two Generations and Their Reality Settings

From peace to war - The road from Generation X to Generation W

In the mid-1990s, the cultural public of Serbia was immersed in a polemic which was triggered directly by the book *Generation X* by the cult Canadian writer Douglas Coupland. The axis of the polemic revolved around the question of whether there is a Generation X in Serbia and, if there is, whether and in what way its members differ from their Canadian counterparts as described by Coupland. Is belonging to a certain age group a more important determining factor than the environment or culture within which we are socialised and live? Where are the borders of the culture to which we belong? In what culture do members of this generation live?

In his book, Coupland defines Generation X as disappointed youth, without ideas, condemned in the time of recession to torpor and stagnation. On one hand they live in and are accustomed to relative stability and an organised society which they do not want to change while, on the other, they have the feeling that they have no place in that society and that because of this they are unable, on an individual level, to be part of that stability. This creates, at the level of the generation, an unrecognised phenomenon of fear for their own future, producing a constant feeling of latent dissatisfaction and frustration and prevents any collective social action. Thus the strategy of the generation becomes the refusal to confront matters. They enrich and decompose the uninspiring and colourless present by recycling history⁴, both actual and constructed, in an attempt to overcome the sickening feeling of insecurity. Unconvinced of any possibility of realising a phantasm of their own future, they blend into the regime of getting drunk and doing the "McJob".⁵ A poor job and a good education thus become the hallmark of a whole generation reared in the stability of middle class families and a lifestyle they are either not able or not willing to continue after leaving their parents' home. On an individual and generation level this results in the syndrome of withdrawal and unpredictable behaviour. They have nothing on which to focus their anger and nothing to dispel their fears; they have no culture which would replace their dismay.

⁴ Her hair was "Totally 1950's Indiana Woolworth perfume clerk"; her dress "Early '60's Aeroflot stewardess"; her make-up "Perfect '70's Mary Quant". She is described as having really "Caught the sadness - she was the hippest person there. Totally." (Coupland 1997:1).

⁵ McJob: A low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low-benefit, no-future job in the service sector. Frequently considered a satisfying career choice by people who have never had one. (Coupland 1997:5).

Their only sanctuary is their well-protected inner universe which keeps them safe from the frustrations produced by a society which offers no future to young people.

Many involved in this polemic, themselves members of the marked generation born between 1961 and 1971, recognised their own personal and social dilemmas in Coupland's literary creation. There is nothing strange about this, because the first edition of the book was published in 1991, which means that Coupland based his own observations on the period before the 1990s, when life in this country resembled that in Canada in many aspects. During that period, a trip to a foreign country was not an exotic phantasm but a standard available, if not to all, then to a large majority of the population, and the feeling of belonging on a global level was the direct opposite of the feeling of isolation and rejection which characterised the following period. The members of this generation, thanks to fortunate historical coincidences, was socialised in such a way as to allow them to relatively easily decide to leave the country immediately the wars began in the former Yugoslavia.

A relatively good education system and knowledge of foreign languages, experience in travelling and sojourning abroad from their childhood and youth, helped many opt for a change of residence without qualms. Departing for a foreign country, especially by educated young people with university degrees, thus became a phenomenon which characterised Generation X in the former Yugoslavia.

The 1990s radically changed the lives of people in the former Yugoslavia. The national conflicts and wars which emerged trimmed the borders of the former Yugoslav state and with them the education system and political institutions, together with the social life and habits of the population. The chaos of war spread uncontrollably, producing massive material, emotional, cultural and institutional destruction in all the countries of the former Yugoslav region. It seems, however, that according to the endurance of the destructive trend and the domination of the feeling of isolation and lack of a future, in public discourse and the opinions of the population, Serbia deserves a special place, because it was directly or indirectly involved in almost all the conflicts in the region. Social isolation and sanctions resulted in a relatively autarchic atmosphere, a feeling significantly different from the feeling of participation in global events which had distinguished the social reality of the period preceding the 1990s. After the initial, virtually constructed autarchy, once sanctions were introduced, social autarchy became real, with enormous consequences for the economic system. Large state-owned production systems, designed according to the measure of the larger Yugoslavia, at first worked at reduced capacity with the idea of overcoming the problem of reduced markets and inherited production capacities with export. After sanctions were introduced, they quickly ran to ruin. Involuntary leave and lack of employment

became a reality for the majority of the population. On an individual level this resulted in a widespread feeling of anxiety and depression brought on by the inability to survive on one hand while, on the other, the ability to satisfy other social and emotional needs vanished overnight. Dissatisfaction and disappointment moved from the individual to the social plane, resulting in numerous strikes which led to further destruction of the formerly valid value system, together with social disorientation and erosion of the institutions. In this disturbing entropic environment there emerged a new generation of young people from the previous decade with a social experience which was significantly different from that which marked the future of Generation X at the same age.

They grew up amid wars, destruction and a lack of attention from parents immersed in the problems of survival. At school they had reduced school classes and extended holidays because of the strikes, bombing and lack of heating, a chaotic rearing in an unstable and often hostile environment. Unlike the members of Generation X, they were not offered a solid education by society because they were in a school system on the brink of collapse, the majority spoke no foreign languages or spoke them poorly. They have not travelled because they had no money nor the opportunity to get a visa. Their only social experience is of their own country and it is not surprising that the majority of respondents do not see a life and future abroad for themselves.

Male, aged 28, Music Academy, unemployed, Pirot

... I haven't travelled abroad, although I know people who have and who told me the way Serbs are treated in other countries.

... I will always stay here ... because this is my country. People here speak my language and all my friends are here.

They do not remember any state other than one of emergency. For the purpose of this analysis we will call them Generation W (the war generation).

In the 1990s, the departure of the then young members of Generation X to foreign countries became an important social and political issue because of the extent to which it occurred. For this reason it is not surprising that many young members of Generation W express their opinion on the issue in the form of a political position.

Female, aged 26, Languages Faculty, unemployed, Užice

... I have never thought that young, educated, especially educated, people should leave this country.

As the crisis intensified, members of Generation X made a generational decision not to fight for changes but to win as individuals the right to the life they wanted for themselves, or could tolerate, by changing their individual

place of residence. They did not feel capable of staying and investing themselves into an uncertain project of changing the unsatisfactory status quo, feeling that the only obstacle to the life they dreamt about was the border of the state and it was not a problem to cross this.

Unlike them, Generation W has not been in a position to make this choice. During the time when they were growing up, the state border became a serious obstacle and crossing it became an exhausting project with an uncertain outcome. On the other side of the border, from their perspective, there was no friendly environment in which the rules of the game were familiar, but an unknown parallel reality existed of which they had no direct experience.

Male, aged 28, chemical engineer, Pančevo

If someone asks me my nationality I say that I am an American Negro, or an African American. I realised this when I saw lower class Germans at the Formula 1 races. Because I got the worst seats, the cheapest tickets, where the poorest Germans were, I saw the same animals I see at the worst weddings I've been to. They're the same people.

The intensity of emotions which comes with the first encounter with the Others who live outside the borders of this country, together with the consequences of those encounters, both real and virtual, on the personal life and the content of the respondent's social life speak touchingly about the time of isolation and lockout from the outer world during which these young people were socialised.

Female, aged 26, Language Faculty, unemployed, Užice

I have never been to Croatia ... I have only been to Jasenovac and Plitvice in Croatia on a school excursion ... and I don't have a developed opinion about Croats because I don't even know them. But the interesting thing is that I've always felt drawn to Zagreb as a city... despite everything, I find Croats extremely likeable. I'm not thinking about Mesic and his associates but people as people. It is the people I know from television. They are somehow different from us.

Their only memory corresponds to the reality in which they live. They live "normally" because a state of social chaos is the only state they know. They use the term "normally" with no clear idea of its real content, taking it from public discourse as something self-explanatory. When interviewers insisted on them explaining what they meant by this term they generally spoke about their own phantastic mosaic construction recycled from fragments of various sources they had encountered. A very popular source was statements from politicians and political parties which became a specific cultural phenomenon and a favourite theme of conversation among close friends in Serbia during the 1990s. One surprising fact was that in only one interview did I find the

statement that the respondent most frequently speaks to close friends about girls, but there is no single interview in which politics is not mentioned as the most frequent topic of conversation.

Who Are the Members of Generation W?

We defined as the members of Generation W all people of less than thirty years of age, those born between 1971 and 1984, when our youngest respondent was born. These are young people who finished secondary school from 1990 through to the end of that decade. Before reaching the age of consenting adults they felt the destruction of the social and political crisis engulfing the territory of former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Of course this generation is not monolithic within itself. On the basis of the empirical material collected it is possible to define a number of subgroups, which we shall present here in order to differentiate them more clearly theoretically in the form of ideal types (Weber). In the interview and replies from particular subjects it is possible to identify traits of more than one type, or respondents who may even be "borderline" which, in our opinion, does not diminish the theoretical value of this typology. The basic theoretical purpose of this classification was an attempt to dissect the types and mechanisms of reactions of young people to the unstable environment in which they lived.

The **B92 Generation** is a subgroup of Generation W that is characterised by trust in certain media such as B92 and *Vreme*. Its members are mostly "urban" young people (they themselves often use the term to describe themselves), mostly coming from the cities. They show a degree of antipathy towards the imagined rural life which in their phantasm represents the opposite of what they are or would like to see themselves as. They are enthusiastic about the mechanism of the market and the principles of liberal economy. They believe in transition. "They favour private property, individual over state interests; they advocate soft borders and are opposed to isolationism." (Pantić 2002: 87). The imagined standard for all things is the West. They are very much interested in specific political and social changes and the ways of achieving them.

Male, aged 28, chemical engineer, Pančevo.

I believe mainly in the positions of people from Vreme and B92. They've earned a reputation among us.

People always talk about their rights, but I don't see their dedication to work ... A man comes casually to work in order to rest. Because he comes from a village, he expects to be able to take sick leave whenever he pleases ... I think that working habits should change. I support change. I think things will be much better in a few years.

The world they live in, or at least try to achieve, may be called global. Motivated by the desire to stay in touch with "the world", they follow "world" trends and take part in global events via the Internet, cable and by reading foreign magazines and books.

The members of this subgroup are politically active and believe in the possibility of social and political change through personal initiative and commitment. They often take part in the work of the NGO sector and grassroots initiatives. They fantasise about living in a market economy regulated on liberal principles, with clearly defined private property rights, rights and obligations for the citizens who take part in it, a country in which expertise will be valued. They are prepared to make sacrifices. Reforms suit them. They have great expectations of them.

Provincials. A subgroup of Generation W. Usually young people from the provinces who have studied in major centres, although not necessarily. Their specific difference is that they have a strong feeling of isolation from the mainstream. They identify their place of residence as the periphery of the imagined centre. However, unlike the previous group which may also experience this feeling, the knowledge of it paralyses them and makes them passive, rather than motivating them for action and change. They go with the flow, believing that the province or periphery or local community operates according to an immutable internal logic and that the individual is impotent in this situation. Changes are possible only if they are imposed repressively from the centre (the state, certain institutions and so on). They think about problems from a safe distance.

Female, aged 26, Language Faculty, unemployed, Užice

Extract from a discussion about young people going out late at night and returning home in the morning:

Personally, I don't support it. I have become part of it but I don't support it. No one would support it but we all do it – how can I go out at 7.00 p.m. and sit around by myself when, this way, everyone goes out when I do.

Interviewer: How can you overcome this problem?

Only by limiting opening hours.

Interviewer: So there are no internal mechanisms by which people can make their own decisions about this, and instead they need repression from above, the state and the local community should issue a regulation?

Yes. I think that would be best.

(Conformism. She expects someone else to resolve it for her, institutions or the state. Rejection of responsibility.)

The world in which they live is bordered both territorially and psychologically by the local community from which they cast longing glances towards

the imagined centre. That centre is defined differently according to individual experience. It could be "the West", Belgrade or the nearest large town. The common characteristic of all "centres" is that they offer a better opportunity to satisfy needs (realistic, expected, virtual, constructed, whatever), which the respondents are unable to satisfy in their particular place of residence.

Female, aged 29, Higher Business School, clerk, Bor

It's enough to go to Zaječar and see people going for a walk; at any time of the day the streets are full of people, they are always smiling, in a good mood. Here in Bor, when it comes to social life, it's really awful.

They go with the flow, frequently using expressions such as "qué será será".

They fantasise about living in a safe environment which won't result in more changes for the worse. They are prepared to suffer, but only to a certain extent. Social justice is an important topic in their discourse. They are critical of the current reforms, saying that not enough care is taken of endangered groups in the population.

Female, aged 29, Higher Business School, clerk, Bor

Nothing has changed, society remains corrupt. But there is no more free medical care and medicines, which only leaves people's pockets even more empty.

Male, 25, civil engineering student, Niš

... it's a western system when in a single day you sack as many workers as you please, without asking anyone, not even the union. That's the new laws for you.

Fundamentalists. Religious, church-oriented, traditional, party-oriented, patriotic, nationalist, subcultural and whatever. Their common characteristic is that they think within a closed system of rules and values in which they have decided to believe and which, in their opinion, relieves them of the need to think and face reality. They often deny or doubt the existence of empirical data which contradicts the carefully constructed system or reality in which they live. Their lives are controlled by fears of which they are often not aware. They read papers and media which support their view of the world (party newspapers and the like).

The reality in which they move could be called a "group trip" of a certain number of likeminded people. This helps them to restore harmony with the environment and a feeling of control over their lives on an individual level. For example: I am not satisfied with my life and the opportunities offered by society. I don't know how to overcome the situation and I am frustrated by this. I have no strength or will to truly fathom why society and I as a member of it, are in such a situation. That is why I will make up my own party which will offer a simple solution for problems.

Male, 25, civil engineering student, Niš

Together with my friends I have founded a party which is not yet registered, and I am planning to take part in the political life of our country. The reason for this is that there is no one to vote for: they are all disgusting. My political party has never been involved either with the authorities or the opposition. It is called the Serbian National Alliance, the name says it all, it's about returning to Serbhood. Not as a nationalistic party, but as a nationalist one.

They exhibit a tendency to radicalism and phantasms about radical and rapid solutions to problems.

They fantasise about living in a world in which their political and other options will prevail.

Guests. They are visitors in their own lives and thoughts. Life has landed them in a geographical location which demands political activity and they are either not capable of this or not ready for it. Their only strategy is escape. They do not read newspapers or follow political events. Unlike the previous group, the guests live in a parallel universe critically determined by the respondent's "personal trip", which often arises from feelings of complete social frustration and the inability to overcome this feeling. For example: Music is everything to me.

Male, aged 28, Music Academy, unemployed, Pirot

I don't work anywhere. I worked for a year in Pirot in Lower Music School. I was a teacher, I had two students. I found only two students in all Pirot who were interested in playing the clarinet. I went from school to school, trying to interest children in the fifth and sixth grades, playing the clarinet in music classes.

... I would work anywhere else ... but not at weddings or parties.

Interviewer: Would you do something else not connected to your profession, if you were able?

No. Music is everything to me.

... I try not to pay attention to politics because the more peaceful I am inside the better my music is.

Although they share a geographical location, the members of these four subgroups of Generation W live in different social and individual realities within which they face the same life problems. They react similarly to these problems when it comes to emotions, but in practice they resolve them with various mechanisms for overcoming tension, dissatisfaction and the feeling of being denied something. While dissatisfaction with the way they live inspires the first group (B92) to action, it makes the second group (provincials) terrified and passive, the third (fundamentalists) aggressive and rigid and the fourth (guests) destabilised and paralysed.

Primarily because of their age, all them have justifiably high expectations of life and the society they live in, and of the changes occurring around them. What they share is that they want to live in a world better than the one they grew up in or are at present in. Of course, each of the groups has a different definition of what is better. What they have in common is the will to survive and establish order in the environment in which they found themselves by no choice of their own.

The Turning Point

October 5, 2000, and the period immediately preceding it is for Generation W the moment which corresponds with the beginning of war in the former Yugoslavia for Generation X. The wars and destruction which engulfed former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s symbolized the end of the safe world in which Generation X grew up and saw its future. The pain and suffering, even if not experienced, which entered the lives of the luckier members of Generation X only through the media, were enough to push them into an uncoordinated and unenlightened collective act of escape, actual for some (emigration) and psychological for others (creating their own parallel, imaginary reality), away from the brutality of the moments that they were unable to face and take part in. Members of this generation were unable to politically articulate their own social interest.

Unlike Generation X which grew up in relative political stability and welfare, Generation R was much more brutally reared. The conditions in which they grew up could hardly be described as protected. From their earliest childhood, the members of Generation W experienced poverty, social instability, the consequences of life in the vicinity of combat, the pain and suffering of refugees from war torn areas who first entered their lives as faces in newspaper photographs, people in media reports about the consequences of war, and later as people with a different accent whom they met in shops, on the street, as friends of friends and as family friends who needed help, relatives who had nowhere to go, new classmates with memories they avoided talking about. The degree of pain around them, which increased with each new war, raised their tolerance threshold in comparison with that for personal and social suffering. The strategies and mechanisms used to create a space in which they were able to live and function in a way appropriate to their age has already been discussed here. A virtually constructed reality enabled them to individually annul or neutralise instability, poverty, social entropy and the constant unpredictability of the future which comes out of it and establish or remove, or at least attempt to, create an emotional space for their own individual needs. This is the way in which a fragile psychotic balance has been established between a society in the process of self-destruction and young people

who, in order to preserve their wish for life, as it may be realized in the youthful expectancy of the future, decided to deny the disintegrating reality.

Male, aged 28, postman, Belgrade

... while the war was going on in the region, everything seemed as though it had been happening on the other side of the world, the war was all around us, but we...

Interviewer: You mean Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo... ?

Yes, Bosnia. Kosovo as well. We mostly didn't feel that war on our skin.

Interviewer: We're talking about the period before 1999?

Yes, before the bombing of Yugoslavia started we hadn't directly felt the war on our skin...

... And then, when the ground began shaking under our own feet, I believe we began looking at it a bit differently.

It seems that only the bombing of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999 managed to shake up the collective psychotic project of stimulation (Baudrillard 1985). The intensity of experiencing direct contact with the war and the threat to life in the most direct and painful sense confronted these young people with a reality which violently intruded overnight into every aspect of their lives. It was the moment at which it became obvious that the situation would not change spontaneously for the better but it was also a confrontation with the unbearable moment which had lasted almost a decade. The collective escapism and imagined life of Generation W had been interrupted by the sobering suspicion that there may be no future for them in the society in which they lived, to which they linked their future life. It seems that this realisation, even at the level of a suspicion, managed to produce a certain feeling of belonging among members of society in a similar social situation, creating between the members of a particular age group, the young, a relatively homogeneous interest group which was keen to change its own social position. In just such a moment in society there emerged *Otpor*, which managed to politically articulate the long suppressed and now released energy and will for change.

Female, aged 18, student, Paraćin

Our future is at stake, our everything is at stake. We had to do something about it. We and those a little bit older than us ... because we had to fight against old men ... we couldn't win in the elections. That's how we ... made our contribution, although we were not able to vote.

I joined the protest spontaneously ... together with my friends. Absolutely every one of us was boiling with ... the same ideas, we matched. That hopelessness ... not yet having the right to vote ... we had to make up for that. And then we spontaneously ... joined. And we are proud of ourselves.

Long-suppressed wishes, hopes, fantasies of a "normal life", together with dissatisfaction, a feeling of inhibition, social and individual frustration and isolation mobilised even apolitical young people and prompted them to social action.

Male, aged 27, student, employed as computing programmer, Leskovac, daily participant in the protests.

I simply realised that only young people could make such a change in this country. Of course I was dissatisfied with the situation and I found a group of like minded people – the general student protest – and I joined them.

I took part in many Otpor protests but I was never a member. I'm not one today, just as I don't want to be a member of any political organisation, but I frequently took part in their protests.

A large number of respondents confirmed their feeling of responsibility and obligation to take part in the protests, as well as some kind of cathartic effect from the October 5 revolution.

Male, aged 28 postman, Belgrade

... I felt something revolutionary was happening, regardless of what would happen afterwards, that it was the moment of revolution I should take part in

... it did not feel right to leave, because it just seemed to me that I should stay

... After so many years and so much effort, after so many failures, you simply feel the right thing is happening, you simply feel sorry, you feel responsible for it all. I simply saw myself as part of all those events. And then, there simply comes a moment to crown the career of a demonstrator...

... I felt totally born again.

The majority recognised October 5 in one way or another as a turning point in their lives, after which they began to see life and certain personal and social dilemmas differently, recognising it as the beginning of the future they were hoping for.

Male, 28, chemical technician, Pančevo

... I wouldn't move. I feel better here. I dreamt of going to America. I still do, but I don't know. I'm content. I have certain ties here, friendships, I wouldn't leave ... it's a question of whether, if I was given entry to America, I would dare do something like that. A year or two ago I would have, but at this moment, no. Both because of my job and my friends ... I have put down roots. It's an okay environment.

I wouldn't leave now. I was trying to leave until the changes. For young people it's better to stay in Serbia now.

However the consequences of more than a decade of social destruction had left a deep mark on the lives and opinions of the respondents. October 5 did,

primarily in some symbolic way, halt the continued trend of social and institutional destruction but could not fully annul its devastating consequences.

Male, 28, postman, Belgrade

Interviewer: When you think about your generation do you think that the last ten or thirteen years, the period during which the former regime was in power, left marks?

Of course it did ... we won't be cured of it for the next fifty years. Something seeped into us.

... We should embark on all those changes, beginning with ourselves ...

... this regime has taken away the best years of our lives. The crises, wars and other nonsense began when I was seventeen or eighteen and lasted until a couple of years ago, when I was 26. I think this is a period of life when a man should experience some things. We've simply been denied all that, but I think these people will happily make sure that these things never happen again.

Whether Serbia after October 5 really met the expectations, stated and unstated, of the young members of Generation W who had invested a great part of themselves – energy, enthusiasm and faith in a different life they had not experienced first hand – in the project of change remains to be seen. One thing is certain: for them, October 5 will remain a symbolic turning point on the generational chronometer in which one generation's chaotic choice of an imagined life was changed in favour of politically articulated collective action and the conscious decision of a generation to take responsibility for their own future.

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Isidora Jarić

Generacija R: iz perspektive mladih

Tekst razmatra poziciju mlade generacije u postpetoootobarskoj Srbiji, onako kako se ona može iščitati iz empirijskog materijala prikupljenog studijom 'Politika i svakodnevni život : Srbija 1999-2002'. Autorka izdvaja četiri osnovna načina samopozicioniranja mladih, pripadnika generacije R, u odnosu na aktuelni društveni kontekst: 'B92 generacija', 'provincijalci', 'fundamentalisti' i 'gosti', pomoću kojih prati promene u stavovima mladih prema politici, sopstvenom socijalnom i političkom angažmanu, pogledu u budućnost, doživljaju samih sebe i socijalne promene kojoj su svedočili ili u njoj participirali.

Ključne reči: mladi, Srbija, generacija X, generacija R, socijalna promena.

Isidora Jarić

Génération G: de la perspective des jeunes

Le texte analyse la position de la jeune génération dans la Serbie d'après octobre 2000, à partir de données empiriques recueillies par l'étude 'Politique et vie quotidienne: Serbie 1999-2002'. L'auteure distingue quatre modalités fondamentales de prise de position des jeunes, membres de la génération G, par rapport au contexte social actuel: 'génération B92', 'provinciaux', 'fondamentalistes' et 'étrangers'. Ces modalités l'aident à suivre les changements survenus dans la position des jeunes face à la politique, à leur propre engagement social et politique, à leur vision de l'avenir, à leur perception d'eux-mêmes et enfin face aux changements sociaux dont ils ont été témoins ou auquel ils ont eux-même participé.

Mots-clés: les jeunes, Serbie, génération X, génération G, changement social.