

**Milica Jokovic Pantelic, PhD**

Research Associate, Centre for Political Research and Public Opinion

Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade, Serbia

## **IDENTITY AND STATEHOOD**

*- A CONTRIBUTION TO RESOLVING THE IDENTITY ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IN MULTIETHNIC AND MULTIRELIGIOUS STATES -*

**Abstract:** The 'I' identity is the fundamental and essential human identity. It is surrounded by numerous 'we' identities. An individual's identity is networked into group, i.e. collective identities. The networking of identities shows the depth of a person. It is essential that the 'I' identity is not cancelled by group identities. If 'we' is imposed over 'I', a person vanishes and becomes personless. Group, collective identities most often open problems and conflicts due to ideological action. When ideology interferes into identity, individual identities within a group are being cancelled, while the other group identities are being put in question. The ideologization of collective identities initiates intolerance towards all those who do not belong to our group. Intolerance-cum-exclusion leads to enmity and conflict. It is through the ideologisation of identity that prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination of others and the different are imposed. All those in my group who think differently are traitors, while all members of other groups are enemies. This is how the 'friend and enemy' pattern is established in the political field of state and society. The exit from this situation is the establishment of statehood identity within the state, under which all citizens – regardless of their ethnic and other identities – would be perceived in their collective identity of citizens. This, however, should not jeopardize their particular identities. Particular identities would belong to their privacy and should as such be legally guaranteed. Over time, a pattern of trust and respect would be established between different particular identities. Such approach to identity would preserve differences, but also find a similarity which would connect them within the state and society, thus bringing safety, stability, and normality into societal and political life.

Key words: identity, ethnic groups, political culture, statehood

Man's basic and essential identity is I-identity, that is: the identity of his person. The concept of identity denotes an important feature, or a set of important features of an individual or a group. In the structure of the personality identity, or I-identity, we find physical, mental, spiritual and moral features. It is after gaining these features that an individual is considered to have formed the personality identity, or to be formed as a person. I-identity is the maturity of a person. To gain or integrate it, it is necessary to grow up in time, but also to have certain conditions for the development related to the family someone grows up in, the groups someone is included subsequently, and the educational and socialization process. With the personality identity we get the impression that we differ from everyone in the surroundings in something that is characteristic only of us, but also that we have important

similarities that maintain us in the group and social life. "Identity is based on passionate relationships of individuals with 'others'" (Ruano-Borbalan, 2009, p. 6).

Experience shows that "we acquire self-awareness only in relationships with others – because in such relationships we get recognition or the feeling of endangerment or the image we have created about ourselves is destroyed" (Čupić and Joković, p. 12). To what extent I-identity is founded in the individual is particularly shown in the situations of endangerment arising with great social crises, especially the economic ones. In these situations it is seen whether I-identity is completely mature or if it is still incomplete and unstable in an individual. In crises, I-identity can often be lost, which shows that a person is no longer what he/she seemed to be before. For these reasons, three characteristics are relevant for identity: consistency, predictability and particularity. Consistency refers to some important strongholds for maintaining "I'm as well as a guarantee for the relationships established by "I" with "you" and "others". Chinese philosopher Lao Tze believed that "he who knows others is wise; he who knows himself can see clearly" (Šušnjić, 1998, p. 385). What is important in relation to consistency is that an individual always observes universal values, as well as special values that are not in conflict or opposition to universal values. In other words, consistency shows not only the strength of personal identity, but also the manner of fitting in within different forms of we-identity. Predictability refers to the behaviour of an individual in different life situations. An individual who will, regardless of situations, both good and bad ones, always act in the same manner is the indicator that personal identity is well-founded and that in social relationships individuals can rely on one another in a predictable manner. Personal particularity is the indicator that an individual is not easily led and cannot, particularly in formal forms, change in an attempt to change his/her physical appearance by some temporary models. Particularity shows the importance of an individual's physical integrity. Physical identification with temporary modes often disturbs the integrity of physical particularity.

In the beginning, the problem of identity regarding its research belonged exclusively to psychology. As the identity exploration progressed, its research included some other sciences, in particular anthropology and sociology. In the identity research, sociology became important, with the knowledge that identity was not only a matter of an individual, but it also had some broader meanings. Those meanings are related to different types of our affiliations within social groups, collectives, institutions and the society. The more the society develops, the more the number of group and collective identity increases. By living in the society, an individual gains special identities. Among group identities, two identities stand out. One is related to ethnic origin, while the other is related to religious affiliation, or religious environment in which an individual is born and grows up. These two identities accompany the development of personality identity from birth onwards.

In the developed society there are developed collective identities which, apart from the listed ones, also include the identities regarding sexual, gender, ideological, political and other affiliations. Accordingly, it can be stated

that I-identity, or the personality identity, is networked with the identities of our different affiliations.

The more developed our identities are, the more complex our identity is. What must not be forgotten is that I-identity is always in the centre, or in the heart of identity. All other identities deriving from external circumstances belong to we-identities. It is important to stress, that we-identity must never become so dominant, that is: be imposed over I-identity because, in case it happens, I-identity, or person, might disappear. Individuals who experience this will become impersonal. We-identities indisputably affect I-identity, but that effect can go to the extent that is acceptable. Changes in I-identity, or in the person, are acceptable. However, those changes can improve and strengthen I-identity without destroying and enslaving it. When we-identities overpower I-identity, the state of the undesired is reached, and that is the change in the personality. The changed personality is no longer what it used to be. We no longer recognize it. It is neither predictable nor consistent or special to us. There is a large number of examples in the times of crises and wars. Previously decent and pleasant people who used to be our neighbours and acquaintances become real beasts in their misdeeds in the circumstances of crises and war conflicts. That is exactly an example of a person changing to the point of being unrecognizable.

I-identity or personality identity, together with we-identities, affects the accretion of values, beliefs, convictions, attitudes, symbols, styles and patterns of life, which all together constitutes the culture of a personality. In other words, identities that do not dominate over others, but are largely networked around I-identity, raise the level of the culture of a person, and not only of the culture, but also orientation in everyday life. The best measure for all identities is universal values. Beliefs, convictions, attitudes and patterns of behaviour and action of individuals and groups should be chosen and accepted according to them. The acceptance of special values as dominant and orienting without their relationship with universal values most often ends up, speaking of identity, in the domination of we-identities, which leads to the loss of the individual identity. It is this very feature, when it comes to ideologies and policies, that through special values that are not in line with universal ones, that individual identities are destroyed, while group and collective ones are imposed. In ideological and political terms, this leads to the predominance of political orders in the countries.

Authoritarian political orders through very manipulation with collective identities create the state of submission and fear of expressing the personal identity. When the personal identity is prevented from being expressed, people lose their critical attitude to bad conditions in the society. In that manner it is possible to keep authoritarian ideologies and authoritarian political leaders in power. In modern societies, particularly in non-democratic societies as well as in populist democracies, political leaders most often manipulate ethnic and religious identities. Through them, they encourage internal conflicts, especially in multiethnic and multireligious and multiconfessional societies. Through them, they encourage internal conflicts, especially in multiethnic and multireligious and multiconfessional societies. Based on them, internal

tensions in the society are maintained, on one hand, while, on the other hand, ethnic and religious conflicts are encouraged and the members of the environments, that is: other countries are blamed for them. That is how hybrid ideologies are created and impose the feeling that it is necessary to support authoritarian political leaders who are demagogically proclaimed as stabilizing factors. They impose rule in stabilocracies. Namely, it is important to maintain peace without choosing the means. When it comes to identity, those means lead to I-identity being subdued by a dominant collective identity that is important for keeping political leaders in power.

This is characteristic of the countries in our region that were created after the breakup of Yugoslavia. In the majority of these countries, ideologies and policies imposed collective identities, in particular, the national one. With the aid of it, national leaders manipulate by declaring the members of other ethnic groups and nations as instability factors, or enemies. If they rebel, those who are within the ethnic or national identity are labelled as traitors. It was Voltaire who first indicated that each type of a partial relationship questions the universal relationship towards people. The same refers to ethnic identity. Voltaire believed that two loves were incompatible – love for fatherland and love for mankind. “It is sad that often in order to be a good patriot one is the enemy of the rest of mankind... Such then is the human state that to wish for one’s country’s greatness is to wish harm to one’s neighbours. He who should wish that his fatherland might never be greater, smaller, richer, poorer, would be the citizen of the world“ (Volter, 1973, p. 275). This example illustrates the opposition of ethnic identity to civil identity. When insisting on ethnic identity in the public sphere of man’s life, a nationalist ideology is developed. It is indisputable that the national sentiment, which can be developed in private life, is something that does not question civil identity. However, if the national sentiment enters public life, it is most frequently ideologized and turned into nationalism. As an ideology, nationalism is most often aggressive and expansionist. Such nationalism within the state is intolerable to all those that do not belong to the majority nation, i.e. the majority ethnic group because they are considered to be potential internal enemies. At the same time, due to the inability to resolve internal crises, primarily economic and social ones, nationalism attempts to find culprits in other countries, particularly the neighbouring ones. That is the enticement for its expansionist politics. First those countries are declared to be enemies, and prejudice and stereotypes about them are distributed, and then intervention begins. Nationalisms are the driving force of large conflicts and wars, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Wehler, 2005, p. 100). A nationalist in terms of identity is “a primitive, retarded, not-yet-formed human, and in himself yet-unrefined, inbuilt, internally hollow psyche and existence. That is why the socially and humanly *dangerous* type of an individual, for the simple reason that totally *diffuse collectivity* still acts in him, from which he has still not departed in order to become aware of himself as an individual worthy in itself, i.e. he has still not reached *self-awareness* as a reflection of his own existence, that is always an ‘ensemble of social and human relationships’. Therefore, he *does not recognize the other* except those from his ‘own pack’,

i.e. compatriots, fellow tribesmen or fellow countrymen exclusively by the kinship line“ (Kangrga, 2001, pp. 131-132).

To overcome this situation when it comes to the identity problem, it is important to make changes in the individual's conscience so that I-identity will be preserved, while we-identities will not be practised as super-determinants. “An individual has won and foreign policy is a continuation of internal affairs beyond national borders, and not vice versa. Individual consumption has replaced collective glory as the main topic of national life“ (Kuper, 2007, pp. 61-62).

Speaking of group identities at the global level, it transpires that national identity has come to the fore in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The domination of national identity is the consequence of the decolonization process in the countries liberated from colonial slavery, i.e. colonial subordination. In the developed countries, national identity was spread by intellectual, political and economic elites. It was a special attempt to protect national interests and national affiliation that was threatened by migration movements, in particular economic migrations, as well as by the feeling of superiority over the neighbouring countries or the countries dominated by the socialist system that spread internationalism and cosmopolitanism.

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, under the influence of globalization, fear began spreading of its domination, which was reflected primarily in technical-technological and economic superiority. The response to that fear did not strengthen national identity as much as religious identity, i.e. religious connection all over the planet. The domination of religious identity is the consequence of insecurity partly caused by globalization, and that identity as proved to be the one that became a refuge for comfort from oncoming problems and troubles (Huntington, 2008, p. 380). That equally affected both underdeveloped and developed countries. The underdeveloped countries are unable to resist the exploitation of their natural resources, while the developed ones are faced with the reduced employment opportunities because modern technologies reduce employment opportunities through robotization or open huge space for surplus time because working hours in those countries are abruptly shortened. Return to religion and religious identity is the current search of the meaning of survival and life.

In relation to collective identities, it is necessary for our countries, to build the civil identity that will be realized in practice in the form of the *statehood identity*. In this manner, ideologization of collective identities will be brought into question, and special identities will be prevented from being positioned in the form of intolerance, animosity towards all those who do not belong to our group or collective. With the passage of time, it is also a way of liberating ourselves from special identities imposing prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination against all those who are different in collective identity terms, but also against all those who are different (Eriksen, 2004, p. 48). Prejudice towards others and different ones are triggers for disputes and conflicts between various group identities – particularly ethnic, religious and cultural ones. It is the strong element that is difficult to change. Prejudice does not accept changes, but it easily begins conflicts, often to the point of

destruction. A prejudiced individual, a member of a group, shows love for it only at the moment of hatred towards the other group. Prejudiced affiliation to a group is conditioned by rejecting the other group, i.e. "an individual becomes aware of his affiliation to own group only after opposing another group. He evaluates badly each member of the other group because he sees that whole group as less worthy: an extremely bad opinion about others due to the excessively good opinion about oneself! Therefore, it is clear that prejudice does not refer only to 'some others', but also to ourselves: we are prejudiced towards ourselves as well! We are the best, but we just do not know in what exactly. The more favourable attitude of one group is about itself, the more unfavourable it will be regarding all other groups, with the tendency to accuse others of all the troubles of own group: hence a growing probability of a conflict with other groups, whereas every conflict further strengthens distrust and hatred" (Šušnjić, 2004, p. 102). That is a way of avoiding the establishment of patterns in political life – friends, enemies and traitors. In other words, a way out in our countries is to establish the statehood identity according to which all people, regardless of all ethnic and other group affiliations, would be labelled as citizens in collective identity terms. It would not question anyone's special identities, but it is through this identity that all particularities, differences and all other otherness would be guaranteed.

Unlike ethnic identity that is based on "blood and ground", i.e. on common origin, civil identity is formed on the basis of culture and state, i.e. it belongs to the "symbolic universe" that connects a person, or an individual, within a political community (Golubović, 2007, p. 569). A citizen is the subject of political life and, in that sense he is always an individual, i.e. individualized. By acting in the political community, he acquires citizenship and the citizen status. This shows that civil identity does need homogenization by ethnic origin. Civil identity does not question national affiliation, but it does not accept ethnic identification. Upon its formation, nation includes both individuals and ethnic group by separating ethnic groups from its umbilical cord to blood kinship and space in which it exists. This shows that a member of a nation can choose nationality, while it is unacceptable for a member of an ethnic group. Examples for choosing nationality are children born in mixed marriages. In other words, national affiliation does not have the power of an ethnic group when it comes to a person, or an individual. Apart from the state, an important place in forming civil identity is held by culture, i.e. cultural patterns in which a citizen is formed. For these reasons, civil identity is closest to state affiliation, i.e. the status of a citizen. Civil identity establishes and strengthens statehood identity. Statehood identity is the guarantee to all other collective identities through the protection of their rights.

The maintenance and development of civil identity is decisively affected by the democratic rule because it protects citizens from any potential abuse of power and, most importantly, it guarantees both single individual rights and all kinds of collective rights. The assumption for life in a community is the protection of freedom. Through the rule of law, the rights and freedoms of citizens are also protected. Without citizen rights, there is no autonomy, i.e. the right to personal freedom, as well as the equality of citizens before

law are brought to question. In order to be at the level of civil ethos, a citizen needs to have the complete feeling of a free being, but also of being ready and capable both for responsibility and for tolerating differences and the different ones. Gesine Schwan believes that civil ethos implies a citizen's extreme feeling for justice, trust, as well as cooperation, openness and empathy towards others (Golubović, 2007, p. 558). It is indisputable that "without identification, the other remains unknown to us; without manifesting diversities, we lose ourselves" (Todorov, 1994, p. 317). All this belongs to what democratic rule provides to civil identity, as well as to democratic identity – and that is democratic political culture.

Democratic political culture implies raising general culture among citizens, enabling citizens as literate people to be included in public life more easily. Moreover, it is of extreme importance for democratic political culture that it accepts universal values by which people are oriented and which become a measure of their behaviours and actions. In addition, democratic political culture implies respect for personality, i.e. that every man should experience himself as a dignified person, but also accept other people with the same feeling of dignity. In order to achieve this, good upbringing and a good educational system are necessary. These two instruments substantially affect autonomy, i.e. the freedom of person. The third instrument is socialization, particularly political socialization that instructs citizens to take active part in political life of the society and the state. Individual and collective rights should be internalized in every citizen. It is a process that should be encouraged and formed by democratic political culture. Through these rights, an exceptionally important universal idea for social and political life is satisfied – justice. Guaranteeing collective right ensures the networking of all other collective affiliations and collective identities within civil identity.

An extremely important element of political culture in the formation of civil and democratic identities is trust. Without trust there is no safe and good life in the society. Trust implies different levels and networks, from physical and emotional to professional and cultural trust. With trust, it is possible to accept the other and different, just as every kind of intolerance and discrimination is excluded by trust. Trust implies both trust among citizens themselves and between citizens and authorities, i.e. citizens and those who politically compete and who are given legitimacy in elections to organize life in the society and the state (Čupić, 2021, pp. 146-155). Responsibility of both citizens and authorities has an outstanding place in guaranteeing individual and collective rights through which a relationship towards identities, either individual or collective, is shown. Responsible individuals ensure a responsible society. In a responsible society, no one is neglected and all differences are accepted and respected, but also constitutionally and legally guaranteed. Responsible behaviour, in particular of those holding positions, reduces potential challenges, tensions and conflicts that may derive from identity matters and issues. It is through this element of democratic political culture that a high degree of consent is achieved among all actors in the political community (Joković, 2021, pp. 1000-1003).

Identity politics in postmodernist terms questions the association of group identities with special spaces. In the modernist period, group identities were associated with a certain space. While ethnic and national identities strived for creating separate national states, new group identities are not associated with a certain space (e.g. feminist, LGBT and others). Namely, new political identities gather spatially dispersed groups and place them in conceived joint interests. To them, citizenship identity is something guaranteeing identity diversity, as well as equality to them. A typical example of such identity politics is the United States of America (Billig, 2009, pp. 261-262).

In a well-organized order, all kinds of identities should be covered by the main law – the constitution. Citizens' will for the adoption of the constitution as the highest legal act, which stops all bad human feelings and conditions that most commonly end up in the failure to accept differences and the different ones, i.e. the other and others, questioning all kinds of identities. The will to have the constitution is the will for order and for statehood (Marković, 2021, p. 66). Statehood becomes the kind of identity that is legally formed and through which all other identities are guaranteed.

Special identities should be placed in the segment of life that is our privacy. The separation of public and private lives was insisted on by ancient Greek and classic liberal political thinkers (Bašić, 2018, p. 19). Naturally, privacy should be legally guaranteed. This is the way of creating a pattern of trust and respect among special or group and collective identities with the passage of time. This approach to identity matters and issues would preserve differences, but also find a similarity, in this case the statehood identity that would connect them into the society and the state. In that manner, security, stability and normality would be integrated in social and political lives. The feeling of security is relevant for individual identity, while stability and normality are relevant for good functioning of the society and the state. Institutions maintain the functioning of stability and normality in the society and the state. If institutions are more developed and less subject to changeable authorities, there will be greater guarantee that all identities are protected. Institutional protection of identity matters will also depend on the quality of constitutional and legal solutions. If legal regulations optimally covers all identities and problems that might arise among them, it is guaranteed that identity rights will not be questioned. What should be taken into account are the obligations assume by identities in order not to disturb the stability and normality of the society in the form of separatist aspirations.



## List of references

- Bašić, G. (2018). *Multikulturalizam i etnicitet* [Multiculturalism and Ethnicity]. Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka.
- Billig, M. (2009). *Banalni nacionalizam* [Banal Nationalism]. Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek.
- Eriksen, T. H. (2004). *Etnicitet i nacionalizam* [Ethnicity and Nationalism]. Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek.
- Golubović, Z. (2007). *Antropologija* [Anthropology]. Beograd: Službeni glasnik.
- Huntington, S. P. (2008). *Američki identitet* [American Identity]. Podgorica: CID.
- Joković, M. (2021). "Етика јавне службе у локалној самоуправи" ["Public Service Ethic in Local Self-Government"]. *Социолошки преглед*, 55(3), pp. 997-1017.
- Kangrga, M. (2001). *Šverceri vlastitog života* [Smugglers of Own Life]. Beograd: Republika.
- Kuper, R. (2007). *Raspad nacija* [The Breaking of Nations]. Beograd: Filip Višnjić.
- Marković, M. I. (2021). "Ustav i identitet" ["Constitution and Identity"]. In: Marković, M. I. (ed.) *Dijaspورا, identitet i migracije* [Diaspora, Identity and Migrations]. Podgorica: Fakultet političkih nauka, Univerzitet Crne Gore, pp. 63-107.
- Ruano-Borbalan, Ž. K. (2009). "Izgradnja identiteta" ["Building Identity"]. In: Halpern, C. and Ruano-Borbalan, Ž. K. (eds.), *Identitet(i)* [Identity(es)]. Beograd: Clio, pp. 5-16.
- Todorov, C. (1994). *Mi i drugi* [We and Others]. Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek.
- Volter. (1973). *Филозофски речник* [Philosophical Dictionary]. Нови Сад: Матица српска.
- Wehler, H. U. (2005). *Nacionalizam* [Nationalism]. Zagreb: Naklada Jesenski i Turk.
- Čupić, Č. (2021). *Politika i politička kultura* [Politics and Political Culture]. Podgorica: Humanističke studije, Univerzitet Donja Gorica.
- Čupić, Č. and Joković, M. (2015). "Političar i politički identitet" ["A Politician and Political Identity"]. In: Knežević-Predić, V. (ed.) *Politički identitet Srbije u globalnom i regionalnom kontekstu* [Political identity of Serbia in Global and Regional Context]. Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka Univerziteta u Beogradu, pp. 11-23.
- Šušnjić, Đ. (1998). *Religija I* [Religion I]. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.
- Šušnjić, Đ. (2004). *Drama razumevanja* [Drama of Understanding]. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.