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Nationalism and Sarajevo's Organic Solidarity

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Nationalist discourses and political agendas often announce an objective of returning to a homogenous, self-contained society. Emile Durkheim's concept of mechanical and organic solidarity provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding the binary oppositions that are advanced under the agendas and by the policies of nationalist political regimes. Nationalist programs strive to forcibly produce the homogeneity that Emile Durkheim characterizes as mechanical solidarity. "The social molecules which can be coherent in this way can act together only in the measure that they have no actions of their own, as the molecules of inorganic bodies," (Durkheim, 40). Nationalism reclaims this condition. To do so, nationalist leaders oppose globalization and diffusion, forces that create organic solidarity. Durkheim says of organic solidarity, "The unity of the organism is as great as the individuation of the parts is more marked" (Durkheim, 40 & 41). Nationalists see organic solidarity as a threat to national identity and cohesion because it alienates members of the community from each other. The lifelong involvement and the sense of being born into a way of life suits nationalist values of loyalty and patriotism. Under a nationalist regime, not only must people, ideas, and influence be prevented from diffusing into a broader culture, but conversely the people of that nation must be prevented, as much as possible, from engaging with others outside the nationalist community. Alternative ways of understanding and being in the world are a threat to the nationalist efforts to engineer a state and populace.

Maintaining a state of mechanical solidarity in a community is always a struggle because the forces of globalization and the mixing of cultures that typifies the urban experience exert a gravitational force toward diffusion, eclecticism, and organic solidarity. Sarajevo as a site of the mixing of cultures, sensibilities, and individuals is emblematic of organic solidarity. The sense of cultural eclecticism is accompanied by a greater sense of individuality that is made possible by the constant exposure of individuals in an urban setting to different cultures, attitudes, opinions, and subjectivities. The conditions of organic solidarity make an unambiguous and uncritical embrace of nationalist sentiment and political agendas nigh impossible.

The conditions of organic and mechanical solidarity are not mutually exclusive. A sense of community, typical of mechanical solidarity, remains a feature in the lives of those in urban settings, but it is something which is participated in electively. An individual may feel a distinct closeness toward friends he or she grew up with. There

may be a microcosm of community in an enclave in the city, particularly if that community is isolated from the rest of the city. This type of mechanical solidarity is not the forced imperative that it would be under a nationalist regime.

The stories in Miljenko Jergović's *Sarajevo Marlboro* depict the mix of organic and mechanical solidarity that characterizes urban life in Sarajevo. The story "Muslim Doll" illustrates one of the effects of organic solidarity and the cultural mixing that accompanies it. Amid the destruction and carnage of the siege, the main character of the story, Ćipo, finds himself inexplicably attracted to the young Muslim girl. He allows her to live in his aunt's apartment: "Somehow the girl from Foča had gotten under his skin, like an omen prophesying dire and painful calamity. He wanted to touch her, and yet he had begun to feel that event the slightest physical contact would expose him to irreparable loss and drive him over the edge into madness and suicide" (54). His experience is the product of a disturbing frisson from the intimate contact between unfamiliar people. "Often, at bedtime, he would stare at the crucifix on the wall and repeat over and over again, 'I'm here, God, but I'm no use to myself or to her. Help us!' He liked to think his speech had the makings of a prayer."

In the story "The Letter" the narrator is a refugee from Sarajevo. He is given letters from those who have relatives in Sarajevo. They hope that he will be able to deliver them somehow, even though as he states, "The city I left is no longer visited by postmen or carrier pigeons" (Jergović 178). One day the narrator is given a letter that is addressed to a man who he already knows to be dead. He hides the letter in a drawer, until one day he decides to read it. The narrative in the letter serves to illustrate the tension between Sarajevo as an eclectic mix of organic solidarity with pockets of elective mechanical solidarity, and the imposing and aggressive mechanical solidarity that is promoted by nationalists:

> Bosnians could hate for a long time, persistently and with gusto, but there was no order in it. Somebody else had to provide the mortars, shells, tanks, and planes in order to organize the hatred. . . . In this country, the rocks are fastened to the ground by ice, and dogs are let off their leads, but until today, nobody was ever attacked by the dogs in packs. Just by one. For the whole pack to come after you, there has to be something else at stake, something impersonal–a system of government, perhaps, or a circle of hell–to give the crimes an ideological motive and to justify hundreds of empty stories, including the ones about fastened rocks and unfastened dogs. (Jergović 180-181)

The writer of the letter illustrates that nationalism organizes the sparks of prejudice that occur normally in a heterogeneous urban environment and channels them, magnifying their destructive capabilities. This story illustrates how nationalist aggression disrupts the delicate balance between organic and mechanical solidarity in a diverse urban setting like Sarajevo.

Works Cited

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