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## The Return of the Ethnic? Multiculturalism from an Ethnic Minority Perspective

**Abstract** This article discusses theories of multiculturalism and ethnicity in light of the ethnic identification of minority youth. Namely, even though the primordialism vs. constructivism debate has led to an agreement about seeing ethnic identities as situational and strategic, often for members of ethnic minorities, including young people living in multiethnic environments, ethnic identities seem stable and salient. Relying on the case study of young Hungarian people in Serbia, the article argues that it is the minority status and the institutional setup building on ethnic divisions as the main social frame that make ethnic identities marked. Therefore I connect the case of Vojvodina Hungarian youth to more general debates on the multiethnicity, ethnic belonging and minority status.

**Key words:** multiculturalism, ethnicity, youth, ethnic minorities, Vojvodina, Hungarians

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### Multiculturalism as multiethnicity

Multiculturalism has received great attention and has become part of general discourse, not only in the academia but also in the wider public. The concept has been used greatly in various studies, research, analysis, political campaigns, with a private or a public agenda, yet, in scholarly circles the phenomenon of multiculturalism, and the place of ethnicity within multicultural theories, especially in South East Europe have lacked methodological investigation (Bašić 2006). The lack of adequate conceptualization of multiculturalism is even more visible when it comes to ethnic minorities' perspectives on it. The main dilemma when looking at multiculturalism from/in the direction of ethnic minority groups, is that in their case, the „multi-“ from the multiculturalism seems to be missing, and they tend to be seen as internally homogenous, traditional, and for them, ethnic identification as well seems less strategic but more culturally determined.

To define multiculturalism, one needs to start from the concept at its core: culture. Similarly to Geertz's semiotic view of culture, in this article it is defined as an intricate system of signs, „a context, something within which they [cultures] can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described“ (1973: 316). Also taking an interpretative approach, Parekh sees culture as the structure that individuals inhabit;

human beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world and organize their lives and social relations in terms of a culturally derived system of meaning and significance (1999: n.p.)

As an amalgam of these definitions, Eriksen believes culture to be the context that enables the understanding of situations and actions (1991).

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The two founding principles of multiculturalism being the recognition of difference and the recognition of identity (Bašić 2006), it does not come as a surprise that there is no univocal definition of it. Without the aim to mention all, a few of the classifications of multiculturalism are discussed briefly in the followings. One of the most often cited typologies of multiculturalism is according to its political orientation. It is common to differentiate conservative from liberal multiculturalism. The first orientation was born out of the colonial context and thus tries to construct a common culture of different ethnic and racial groups with an aim of assimilation (McLaren 1995). On the other hand, liberal multiculturalism was a response to the belief that it is individual rights that need to be protected, not group rights, and that ethnicity and religion are private matters in which the state does not have to and cannot interfere (Levey 2010). Liberal multiculturalism has become the dominant position of literature, and it is not debatable whether or not to accept the position but rather how to refine the theory on it (Kymlicka 1995). Yet, both strands can be criticized in relation to majority-minority relations: while conservative multiculturalism can be seen to pay only lip service to equality because it takes the majority as the invisible norm, strives for monoculturalism and thus propagates assimilation in the name of diversity, liberal multiculturalism is often accused of propagating an oppressively humanistic universalism that legitimizes the existing norms of ethnocentrism. When applying liberal multiculturalism to everyday dilemmas, individual rights very often cannot answer the needs of members of ethnic communities, especially those who live as ethnic minorities.

A criticism of liberal multiculturalism is related to its focus on individual rights rather than on collectivities. As voiced by Bauman (2011), it makes no room for autonomous and self-governing communities and free citizens and constrains individuals in the choice of groups where they want to belong. As an answer to some of these challenges, in his essay on recognition as a means of minority politics, Taylor extended the principle of liberal multiculturalists from equal respect to all individuals to equal respect to all cultures, just as he differentiates between equal dignity and equal respect, where the former addresses the common humanity of individuals, while the latter is about particular group identities and their collective interests (2012). Being a proponent of a liberal option of multiculturalism that focuses on groups

rather than individuals, Taylor's theory "provides an important corrective to the overly atomistic, individualistic, and Cartesian picture of the self that informs (implicitly or explicitly) much popular debate" (Blum 1996: 183). In his work, Taylor namely distinguished difference-blind multiculturalism from multiculturalism that recognizes difference, the first being focused on individual persons' rights and failing to see individuals as part of collectives, and the second respecting both what individuals have in common with others and what is distinctive to them. Relating this to the minority-majority distinction, it means that the bases of recognition shall be that the majority sees the minority as part of "us", which in turn prevents the minority from having an inferior self-image (Blum 1996), what Goffman calls "social stigma" (1963). Therefore Taylor sees liberal multiculturalism as a creed that requires more than the coexistence of different cultures and an effort from all segments of a society.

Liberal theories of multiculturalism do not have the aim of challenging the modern conception of the homogenous nation; on the contrary, they build on it. Liberal multiculturalism takes the nation state and a homogenous culture as the basic units of social and political theory, which is the second main strand of critique against it. Often cited criticisms of liberal multiculturalism are that it "essentially views cultures as static" (Hasan 2010:61), has an ahistoric approach to societies and therefore is resistant to account for cultural change (Goldberg 1994; Ivison 2010). In this fashion cultures are seen as bounded, cultural sameness is left intact, while in analytical terms the members of ethnic groups lose their agency for action. As Blum phrases it,

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placing too much emphasis on the self-enclosed, self-coherent, and differentness of each culture is an example of distance-promoting mode of presentation. Such a conception of cultures is intellectually deficient in not recognizing the diversity and tensions *within* each culture, a culture's changes over time, influences from other cultures, and (in most cases) values or elements it shares with other cultures. . . [this] can (in the absence of countervailing factors) serve to reinforce the we/they consciousness in members of group A *and* group B thus straining any sense of connection (1996: 199–200).

The discourse of multiculturalism is often totalizing, assuming that all members of a minority are subsumed within the cultural group (Hasan 2010).

Other than according to its political orientation, it is also possible to typify multiculturalism according to the amount and nature of interaction among members of various ethnic groups. Bauman (2011) calls "multicommunitarianism" a situation in which

[p]rofound or trifling, salient or hardly noticeable cultural differences are used as building materials in the frenzied construction of defensive walls and missile launching pads. 'Culture' becomes a synonym for a besieged

fortress, and in fortresses under siege the inhabitants are required to manifest their unswerving loyalty daily and to abstain from any hob-nobbing with outsiders. ‘Defence of the community’ must take precedence over all other commitments. Sitting at the same table with ‘the aliens’, rubbing shoulders while visiting the same places, not to mention falling in love and marrying across the community’s borders, are signs of treachery and reasons for ostracism and banishment. Communities so constructed become expedients aimed principally at the perpetuation of division, separation, isolation and estrangement (2011: 141–142).

Maybe not as pessimistically, Maclure (2010) defines “communitarian multiculturalism” similarly to Bauman’s multicomunitarianism, as a situation where a

society is a mosaic of cultural communities that relate with one another through institutions and representatives. Citizens largely live their lives within the parameters set forth by their cultural group and have limited interaction with members of the other groups (2011: 40).

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As opposed to this model, social interaction and the opportunity to learn from people of different origin is what interculturalism is about, and it strives for “developing more plural and cosmopolitan identities” (Cantle 2014: 315). The term “interculturalism” was coined in the 1970s France, as a response to the need of integrating immigrant children (Sarmiento 2014). Focusing mainly on the domain of education (see Kostović et al. 2010), interculturalism thus claims that identities are intersectional and develop through communication.

The transformation of the discourse of multiculturalism into an intercultural discourse reinforces principles that emphasize the historical interconnectedness of cultures. Societies have never been static throughout history, as they have always adapted and changed according to the stimuli received from other cultures (Sarmiento 2014: 612).

In Cantle’s view,

[i]nterculturalism recognises that people can have more than one identity at the same time and that these are not necessarily in opposition to each other; rather, they simply represent different aspects of human relations (2014: 316).

In Tylor’s understanding of interculturalism, “all citizens, of whatever identity, have a voice, and no-one’s input has a privileged status” (2012: 418). In general, interculturalism is more than mere co-existence of groups and less “groupist” (Brubaker 2004) in seeing communities as dynamic and more committed to a unity of diverse groups (Meer/Modood 2012; Modood 2014). There are however critiques of the interculturalist model as well, such as Levay’s (2010) who argues that similarly to multiculturalism, interculturalism

is about distinct homogenous cultures, and is therefore repeating rather than solving the problem of adequately theorizing multiethnicity. Another criticism of this model is that it focuses on an urban population and majority-minority relations that have been brought about as a result of migration (Ghorayshi 2010). For the non-Western European, non-North American and non-urban segments of society, interculturalism “is not an alternative to MC [multiculturalism], but a valuable complement to a communitarian” model (Modood 2014: 303).

### **Ethnic identification**

It is Kymlicka (1995) who links culture to ethnicity and nation: for him culture means an ethno-national culture that is a set of traditions, beliefs and immaterial goods that members of a given culture claim as part of their heritage. He introduced the notion of a “societal culture” that is territorially concentrated and based on a shared language, common memories, values, institutions and practices. In short, in Kymlicka’s conceptualization national cultures are cultures that belong to nations. Therefore, for conceptualizing culture(s) in relation to multiculturalism, it is crucial to define nation, a concept that is in turn linked to ethnicity. Nation is a general term: it includes ethnic, but also class, religious, legal, territorial, political, linguistic, cultural, historical (Putinja/Stref-Fenar 1997) and other membership categories, even though nations have usually been formed around ethnic cores (Smith 2004). Nationalism relies on ethnicity to fulfill its political program as ethnicity guarantees the historical continuity the feeling of “us”; yet, while nation is a political concept, ethnicity is sociological and anthropological (Hobsbawm/Kertzer 1992). For Gellner, a nation is a group that wishes to survive as a community (1983). In an attempt to define ethnicity, Smith (1991: 21) set up the following criteria for an ethnic group:

- (1) a collective proper name,
- (2) a myth of common ancestry,
- (3) shared historical memories,
- (4) one or more differentiating elements of a common culture,
- (5) an association with a specific “homeland”,
- (6) a sense of solidarity for a significant sectors of the population.

However, none of these criteria in themselves define an ethnic group, but they become ethnic attributes only when group members use them as markers of belonging (Putinja/Stref-Fenar 1997).

The study of ethnicity has been marked by the debate between the so-called primordialist and constructivist views. The debate started with Barth’s

publishing of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* in 1969, in which he explained ethnicity in terms of symbolic construction and maintenance of boundaries with other ethnic groups, instead of the until then prevalent view (later referred to as “essentialist” or “primordialist”) that claims that groups are determined by their characteristic cultural content. According to the constructivist view, cultures are not clearly separated from each other but the determining factor of the differences between them is the way in which cultural differences are socially organized (Feischmidt 1997). Constructivism sees cultures as dynamic, flowing, self-conflicting and inconsistent (Barth 1969). Until that point ethnicity, nation and culture were rather understood as given, stable, pre-determined, assigned at birth and dependent on the ethnic identity of one’s ancestors. However, with Barth’s influential text, a paradigm-shift came about, and it brought about a possibility to study phenomena such as tribalism in Nigeria, communalism in India or linguistic conflicts in Canada in a related fashion (Putinja/Stref-Fenar 1997).

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Speaking about nations, Anderson (1991) saw them as imagined communities for the lack of face-to-face interaction among all of its members, which nevertheless does not prevent members to see the ethnic group as a horizontal comradeship. Similarly, Smith (1983) defines nations based on cultural and historical content rather than on biological ties.

Any type of identity-construction is not a unidirectional process but involves both construction from above and from below.

[I]dentity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference. . . What is shocking about these developments, is not the inevitable dialectic of identity/difference that they display but rather the atavistic belief that identities can be maintained and secured only by eliminating difference and otherness (Benhabib 1996: 3).

Ethno-national identity formation is thus determined by how one sees the other: “my own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (Taylor 1992: 34; Bakhtin 1981; Feischmidt 1997; Lindstrom 2003). Defining the difference depends on what symbolic or material factors one takes into account: difference is a political, historical and cultural construct (McLaren 1995).

The understanding of the relationship between “self” and “other” has changed throughout the scholarship on identification. According to a view that draws on a poststructuralist understanding of difference, the “billiard ball” conception of cultures has seen them as separate and bounded and difference was external, while in their contemporary view otherness is internal to one’s own culture and identity (Tully 1995). Therefore according to a poststructuralist understanding of group identity, “[w]hat is proper to a culture is not to be

identical to itself. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say ‘me’ or ‘we’” (Derrida 1992: 9). In general, the underlying assumption of theories of identification in the postmodern era is that

identity formation reflects the postmodern tenets of being fluid, fragmented, and strategic in that individuals may negotiate multiple identities. Identity building, as it pertains to real or imaginary geopolitical areas, nevertheless is often based on the idea of *the other* (Petrunic 2005: 7).

In this sense, individual identification is never stable, just as cultures are unstable model entities with external and internal difference (Deleuze 1994). Theories of both ethnicity and multiculturalism thus aim at exploring this relationship between internal and external difference of ethnic groups, of minorities and majorities, immigrants and locals, newcomers and old settlers.

In view of the above, I am outlining four major strands of criticism of the conceptualizing of ethnic identities. First, a common criticism of studies exploring ethnic identification is that the lens through which social scientists see the social world is overly ethnically colored (Brubaker 2004), i.e. studying identity is done almost exclusively in terms of ethnicity and difference has been conceptualized mainly in terms of ethnic difference. Yet, whether or not ethnicity has been receiving too much scholarly attention does not change the fact that accepting that ethnic identities are constructed is not enough; an analysis of an ethno-cultural community also has to explain how identities are constructed within it and against other communities.

Second, ethnic identity is often used as a static concept even though it is dynamic, situated in the flow of time: there is no community that is made up of identical subjects, and there is no subject that does not change over time – the very notion of authenticity and authentic representatives of an ethnic group is criticized by Wodak et al. (2009). Milenković (2008) also calls attention to this in relation to Serbia, claiming that the concept of ethnic culture used in public discourses is essentialist and treats ethnic identities as natural and given. He calls for a more nuanced reading of culture and the inclusion of a multicultural perspective into anthropological theory.

Third, when speaking about ethnic membership and ethnicity in general, as Brubaker (2004) argues, it is important to distinguish between analytical and practical ethnic experience. His main argument against conflating “empirical tools” with “analytical data” (Smith 1993) or the “inclination to think the social world in substantialist manner” (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992: 228) is that the confusion of the two leads to perceiving ethnic groups as bounded and then taking these “bounded groups as fundamental unit of analysis (and basic constituents of the social world)”, or what is called “groupism” (Brubaker 2004). Yet Brubaker is not the first one to criticize the methodological fallacy

of conceiving ethnic groups as homogenous and bounded. Already Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries (1969) has been criticized for focusing exclusively on the boundaries and thus ignoring the cultural content, that, even though imagined, is seen as characteristic of the group (Prelić 2009) and for in deconstructing the concepts of culture and ethnicity the question of the meaning they have for the actors involved in interethnic relationships has been disregarded (Eriksen 1991). Problematizing the practice of social sciences in which communities are perceived as internally alike has been not only a founding argument of postmodernism but also one of the main lines of criticism of liberal multiculturalism (see Goldberg 1994; McLaren 1995).

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A forth, related problem in conceptualizing ethnicity is explaining the complexity and dynamism of ethno-national ties and their salience without seeing them as primordial and essential. Acknowledging the constructed nature of ethnic identification, Geertz (1993) reminds us however that for group-members, ethnic attachments seem to remain cultural givens and very real. Drawing on Anderson's conceptualization of ethnic cultures as being imaginary (1991), Jenkins claims that "[j]ust because the cultural stuff is imagined, doesn't mean that is imaginary" (1997: 123). Ethnicities and nations are not "fake or nonexistent, rather . . . their configuration is above all constructed in accordance with imaginary models" (Ilić 2014: 50). Once a nation is formed and established, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate it (Smith 1993) – not only physically but also analytically, because the bonds of language and culture are very strong for most people (Kymlicka 1995). I argue that these ties are even stronger in the case of individuals belonging to ethnic minorities.

### **Conceptualizing ethnic majorities and minorities**

Most of the definitions, categorizations and explorations of multiculturalism in different societies construct ethnicities to be majorities versus minorities, dominant versus subordinate. Yet, "[m]ajority and minority are not quantitative characteristics but refer to the relative position of the parties involved in relations of economic, political and institutional power" (Patton 2010:68). The radical criticism of liberal multiculturalism states that it does not really accommodate diversity but is open only to those groups that are willing to abide by its presumptions and (liberal) values (Levey 2010). In liberal multiculturalist policies, minorities are not expected to challenge the legitimacy of the state in which they live but to live up to the stereotypes of a "good immigrant" or a docile member of a national minority or indigenous population (Ivison 2010). Thus apart from the critique of multiculturalism that it promotes equality only declaratively (McLaren 1995), another one is that it re-subordinates marginal groups (Ivison 2010): even if in its policies

it strives for heterogeneity, this heterogeneity presupposes tolerating the different (Goldberg 1994), and tolerance in turn presupposes paternalism: a situation in which there is a group that accepts the other group but does not perceive it as equal to itself. According to Besch (2010), this conceptualization of tolerance is instrumentalist and asymmetrical because it grants acceptance with the aim of avoiding conflict and assumes the superiority of the tolerator. In this sense, multiculturalism remains a discourse that (re-)constructs the power relations of “us” and “them” (Kymlicka 2007; Ivison 2010).

In the logic of the constructivist paradigm, ethnic identity is to be understood in terms of inclusion and exclusion in the social practices. Especially in the case of an ethnic group that is a minority, according to the constructivist view the processes of ascription and also inclusion and exclusion are double: it is determined who is considered a minority and on which grounds both by the majority and the minority society. However, this raises two important issues that are in the core of the constructivist paradigm. I will call one the problem of the power to ascribe, while the other problem is termed by Kymlicka (1995) as the “right to exit”.

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Namely, it is important to see who has the power and the means to declare a group to be a minority and on what bases. Clearly, a minority is not determined by mere census figures but also a group’s difference in one or another cultural trait important in the social context, be it ethnicity, religion, language, sexual preference, etc. Conversely, more often than not, this is determined not by the minority but the majority society as it has the power and the institutional support to make and to keep a group separate. Yet, as Lyman and Douglas note, knowledge of their own ethnic culture and tradition also gives power to members of minorities to mobilize it and exercise control over the members of their group (1973). It follows that, as Bauman notes,

[b]y definition, though, ascription is not a matter of choice; and indeed, such choices as mediate the reproduction of ethnic minorities as communities are the product of enforcement rather than of freedom to choose (2011: 89).

He concludes that ethnic minorities are the products of enclosure from both outside and within.

Related to the question of power and the minority’s agency in the ascription of its own status is the question of not only whether or not a member of a minority group is included into the majority society, to what extent and through which institutions, but also how tied they are to the minority culture, how much “loyalty to culture” (Hasan 2010) they have and whether “those who might want to cut loose in the name of some individual goal or self-development” (Taylor 1992: 58) have the “right of exit” (Kymlicka 1995).

These are especially important questions when exploring the meaning of multiculturalism and of minority status within it, because minority group membership tends to be assumed as natural, while in reality communal ties often have such dynamics that they disable or make it risky for individuals from leaving the group to which they have been ascribed. When speaking about ethnic minorities thus, the choice of assimilation into the majority is made difficult both from inside (the minority community) and outside (the majority). Members of the minority group who wish to create novel modes of (non-ethnic) identities or to assimilate into the majority, face stigmatization due to their “alien” origin on one hand, and branding as being disloyal on the other hand. Because of this,

the choice between an earnest effort to assimilate and rejecting the offer and sticking to one’s own separate communal ways come what may was a gamble for the members of the dominated minorities (Bauman 2011: 93–94).

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It follows that what Bauman (2011) calls “communalism”, i.e. the maintaining of relatively solid boundaries between groups defined on the bases on ethnic difference, comes as a natural choice when group members are

denied the right to assimilation. They have been denied the choice – seeking shelter in the assumed ‘fraternity’ in the native group is their only option. Voluntarism, individual freedom, self-assertion are only synonyms of the emancipation from communal ties, of the capacity to disregard the inherited ascription – and this is precisely what they have been deprived of by the non-issuing or the withdrawal of the offer of assimilation. Members of ‘ethnic minorities’ are not ‘natural communalists’. Their ‘really existing communalism’ is power-assisted, the result of expropriation (Bauman 2011: 96).

Bauman’s work points to the agency of members of minority groups in constructing their own social identities. Even though by explaining the shortcomings of the constructivist views with regard to the agency of the members of minority groups, Bauman himself is also assigning them a passive role in the dynamics of membership (being constrained as much from within as from without), his critique is of crucial importance in understanding the process of constructing ethnic membership.

For the above reasons, for members of an ethnic minority, ethnic membership is a more salient fact than for persons belonging to majorities for whom their ethnicity is less marked. Minority youth, when they are outside of the family, are constantly reminded that their native language and culture are different (T. Mirnic 2001). Badis (2008) has set up a taxonomy of strategies individuals belonging to an ethnic minority use in their everyday social encounters:

- (1) Negativism – confrontation with those who are perceived as a threat.
- (2) Isolation – a passive strategy by which individuals reduce their interaction with members of other ethnic groups to a minimum. It is an escapist strategy and its aim is to avoid being refused.
- (3) Passing – following Goffman (1959), it is seen as a way of upwards social mobility in a way of concealing one's "true" identity and pretending to be a member of another, in this case the majority, group. In practice, it means assimilation into the majority ethnic group. This strategy is the most conscious of all.
- (4) Accepting threat – a strategy by which individuals accept their inferior position in the social structure ascribed to them by the majority and act accordingly.

Apart from the fact that these strategies are often mixed in being conscious or subconscious, strategic or automatic to different extents, they also entail a varying degree of the individual's agency in using them, i.e. how much the person chooses them or is forced to use them (by peer pressure, by the institutional setting, the social environment, etc.). In the following subchapter, I am exploring the modes of identification among young members of the Vojvodina Hungarian community, connecting them to the discussed theoretical debates on multiculturalism, ethnic identification and majority-minority conceptualizations.

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### **Ethnic identification of minority youth: Vojvodina Hungarian young people**

Youth is seen as a specific time of identity formation, a peculiar life period of great potentials and powers but also social constraints and impotence (Hall/Jefferson 1975; Brake 1980; Bennett/Kahn Harris 2004). This period of human life has a special cultural significance, and it is during youth when "social groups develop distinct patterns of life and give *expressive form* to their social and material life-experience" (Brake 1975: 10). On the other hand, looking at the great variety of youth cultures, be they defined in terms of taste, style, fashion, music, gender, ethnicity or other factors, there is a myriad possibilities for young people to express their identities.

New information technologies and media offer elements of multiculturalism and global interculturalism; they constantly inform young people of new cultures and lifestyles. All this results in a widening of young people's world and liberates them from traditional conservative cultural ties and patterns. But, on the other hand, this same world is particularizing and individualizing their common problems and offers only substitutes and not solutions to real-life dilemmas and problems (Ule 2012).

Thus young people are often seen as vessels into which cultural patterns, memories and national identities are infused top-down, and who have little agency in creating their own distinct norms, attitudes, beliefs, and identities. However, not only are they considered the safeguards of tradition, but also those who actively negotiate existing cultural patterns, resist them, and develop alternatives. Studying youth is therefore more than studying a specific generation. This age group has power both in creating new cultural patterns and reflecting the existing schemes of society: they are “a direct consequence of political modernization ... [and] ... also its mirror” (Ule 2012: 29).

On-the-ground exploration of young people’s identification suggests that for them, often “community is sought as a shelter from the gathering tides of global turbulence” (Bauman 2011: 142). In post-socialist Europe, global culture that would enable fluid group membership and negotiated identities does not always match the everyday realities of young people. Individualization has become economically difficult and insecure, which has led to a new “domestication” of youth (Ule 2012). For many young people thus

the suggestion that the collectivity in which they seek shelter and from which they expect protection has a more solid foundation than notoriously capricious and volatile individual choices is exactly the kind of news they want to hear (Bauman 2011: 100).

Minority youth in Serbia are in fact facing “a triple transition”: what Tomasić (2012) calls the “double transition” to adulthood as a generational experience for all youth worldwide and the consequences of the socio-economic transition of the South-East European countries, such as precarity, poverty, lack of job opportunities, scarce housing, inadequate social security, etc. are heightened by minority status.

Vojvodina is often seen as a textbook example of multiculturalism in a post-socialist state, highly heterogeneous in terms of ethnicities, with more than twenty national communities. Serbs are both the absolute and relative majority in the province: according to the 2011 census, 67 per cent of the inhabitants of Vojvodina declared themselves Serbs. People of other ethnic identities and those who did not declare themselves ethnically made up the other 33 per cent. Out of this, 13 per cent, or 253,899 individuals are Hungarians (Stanovništvo prema nacionalnoj pripadnosti i polu, po opštinama i gradovima, internet), who are still, despite the shrinking size of the community, the second largest ethnic group in the province and the most numerous ethnic minority (Đurić et al. 2014).

Vojvodina Hungarians are a national minority in Serbia with collectively ascribed rights. Because of their minority status, for many of them the concepts of citizenship and ethnicity are separate, and the home country does

not have such emotional value as to members of majority ethnicity, but rather becomes merely a geographical term (Badis 2008). Papp (2007) cites researches which found that instead of national, Vojvodina Hungarians rather have strong local identities (Hódi 2003; Komšić 2003). Even though having relatively strong ties with their kin-state, they are a specific ethnological-ethnic group which has its own conciseness of “us” and differentiates itself from other Hungarian communities. This “us consciousness” is present both in geographic and cultural terms and is explained by the effect of Serbian culture on the Hungarian communities (Papp 2007).

Strong communal ties among minority youth in Serbia are often neglected in the literature. Existing quantitative research on youth and ethnic identification focuses almost exclusively on the majority nation (see Radivojević/Vučević 2008; Tomanović 2012; Tomanović/Stanojević 2015), while studies on minority youth lack the contextualization of the population under study with relation to majorities (for instance the *Mozaik*, *Kárpát Panel* and *GeneZYs* research on Hungarian diaspora youth conducted in 2001, 2007, 2011 and 2015 by various institutions from Hungary and/or Serbia). Thus, in the former case, Hungarian youth in Vojvodina is an invisible minority in Serbia; in the latter, they are seen in a decontextualized and essentialist manner, denying their right of exit from the community. Both cases lock them in their minority status.

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What are usually seen as the major threats for the community in question are low birth rates, emigration and (linguistic) assimilation (Gábrityné Molnár 2007). While the first two are mainly related to the socio-economic situation, the third one, and a fourth issue that I find equally important as the above mentioned three, the spatial, social and cultural segregation of the community, are largely language-related. In settings in Vojvodina where Hungarians are a minority, language use is dominated by the state language because in nearly every situation when a group of people is together, there is at least one person who does not speak Hungarian, and for them, the entire group switches to Serbian. Hungarian as the native language is being pushed to the private sphere, leading to linguistic and in many cases also cultural assimilation.

For young people living in the north of Vojvodina, where Hungarians are in a relative majority, the importance of language is also large, however for them the main problem is not the knowledge of the mother tongue, but that of the state language. I argue that for them, not knowing Serbian is what prevents integration and participation in the society outside the “Hungarian world” (Brubaker et al. 2006). The lack of fluency and/or the confidence to speak the state language, I believe, confines one to this limited geographical and social space. This space, even though offers safety and the feeling of being within one’s comfort zone, is not large enough to cater for all the needs of

individuals who aim at participating in the mainstream society on equal footing with members of the majority ethnic group. As a result of this, I argue, a vicious circle is created: lack of language knowledge prevents participation in the society, and because of the lack of participation, no opportunities are provided for the acquisition of the state language. What a young person from an ethnic minority is therefore faced with is marginalization, and their strategies of dealing with it are segregation, self-victimization, negativism, isolation, seeing other ethnicities as threat (Badis 2008) or passing (Goffman 1959) as general strategies of behavior and discourse.

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Social actors are embedded in the institutional system. They “carve out” their own space and identity within it, while the institutional system also mobilizes them for its interests, which is the interest of the social elite. In Vojvodina, the ruling Hungarian political elite is in power only if it defines itself on ethnic bases, therefore its interests are to sustain the existing ethnic divisions. This suits the Serbian national elites and institutions as well: minorities are provided certain rights, kept at bay, and their management is left to the “ethnic worlds”: Vojvodina Hungarian politics, teachers of the Hungarian streams at school (which almost always coincide with ethnic identities), Hungarian cultural institutions, and families, also mainly ethnically homogenous.

There is little space for discourses outside the ethnic, and practices that transcend ascribed categories are scarce. As long as they are the “good minorities”, the existing order is not changed. The conceptualization of the ethnic remains seen as assigned at birth, stable, and the model of multiculturalism is rather conservative in supporting the coexistence of groups without actual interaction among them (Kymlicka 1995). The institutions such as the school, the family, the media, the workplace, political institutions, etc. build on these taken for granted identities. They channel young people into where they belong according to their ascribed identities: to the Hungarian stream at school, to a group of Hungarian friends, to watching TV in Hungarian, to reading in Hungarian, to dance Hungarian folk dances, to Hungarian past-time activities, into relationships with other Hungarians, into jobs that do not require language skills of Serbian, to universities in Hungary, etc. The places outside this “ethnic world” are where individuals are faced with ethnic Others, but also with the stigma of their own inferior position; therefore ethnic boundaries and ethnic identities become even more emphasized. The institutional system accentuates the unequal power relationship between majority and minority, and it is the constant experience of the minority position that makes ethnic identity salient for Hungarian youth in Vojvodina and in other places where autochthonous minorities are in a similar social situation.

Yet, young people living in a minority are not completely without agency in facing the institutional system. Their field of power lies within their local

environment, where they feel safe. They have strategies to assert themselves and the dominance of their ethnic group. Some of these are passing (Goffman 1959; Badis 2008), others use their ethnic identities more strategically, and self-segregation can also be seen as a resistance strategy. Most of these strategies still remain within the prescribed frame of ethnic identification. The one that challenges it is inverting minority status: minority status becomes relative (Patton 2010) when members of minorities are in their immediate communities, in the ethnically defined streams at school, cultural institutions, places for going out, etc. Minority individuals strengthen their positions locally by assigning negative stereotypes to the majority (and often other minorities) and by constructing an environment into which members of other groups are not allowed to. This way they avoid being faced with challenging their position. Yet, it is only until a certain limit that one can stay within their “ethnic world”. Leaving it, they are faced with their marginal position. Thus the complexities of demography, politics, economy and other factors are all to be taken into account when discussing the public and the private, the official and the everyday discourses and practices of multiculturalism.

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Kristina Rac

Povratak etničkog?

Multikulturalizam iz ugla pripadnika etničkih manjina

Apstrakt

Članak se bavi teorijama multikulturalizma i etniciteta u svetlu etničke identifikacije mladih pripadnika etničke manjine. Naime, iako je debata primordijalizma odn. konstruktivizma dovela do sporazuma da se etnička identifikacija posmatra kao strateška i određena situacijom, za pripadnike etničkih manjina, uključujući mlade koji žive u multietničkim sredinama, etnički identiteti se čine stabilnim i istaknutim. Oslanjajući se na studiju slučaja mladih mađarske nacionalnosti u Srbiji, članak tvrdi da manjinski status i institucionalna postava koja se zasniva na etničkim podelama čine etničke identitete označenim. Iz tog razloga povezujem slučaj vojvodanske mađarske omladine sa širim debatama o multietničnosti, etničkoj pripadnosti i manjinskom statusu.

**Ključne reči:** multikulturalizam, etnicitet, omladina, etničke manjine, Vojvodina, Mađari