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THE TEETH OF CADMUS

The destiny of the languages in the area of former Yugoslavia is really sad. Speech, that first and primordial device of understanding, has become the main protagonist of misunderstandings and differences. The languages of the ethnic groups here are subjugated to the function of ethnic and cultural isolation. All ethnic groups are withdrawing into their narrow language codes, into *their own* language as into a well-protected and unconquerable fortress. It is clear that language is not only dependent on but also supports the political context in its use. This phenomenon can be easily seen on an exogenous level when these new spiritual fortifications are compared. For now, changes can be clearly noted on this level. Naturally, endogenous fermentation within ethnic groups and their languages is taking place simultaneously. But it is less visible. There will be less analysis regarding these movements, though they should not be neglected or left unresearched.

Changing languages from a means of acquaintance to an instrument of settling accounts and estrangement begins with destroying individual identities. In the chauvinist's town there is no place for celebrating the richness of variety (Konrad, 1991). To know each other better, different fighting groups put the same uniforms on their members. The individual is treated as a constitutive part of "we", no matter how he feels or wishes to express his own personality, as "I".

The penetration of "we" into "I" is a difficult process of transplanting the past into the future, tradition into actuality, and souvenirs into reason.

In the area of former Yugoslavia this difficult process started long before open clashes took place. The most symptomatic was each ethnic groups's searching for its past, but a *particular* past, searching for founding

myths not common roots. Let us remember the feverish proclamations of different origins and different traditions of the present ethnic groups, derived from the Venetis, Illyrians, Goths or Khazars. So, distinguishing today's "we" from the others entailed replacing a shady past with a "useful prejudice". This means that turning our backs on the other "we's" will return things to their unshakable historical order - "as it has always been".

The second step of this face lift of the languages in this area was the magical revitalization of ethnic myths. They were given the role of the ferment in ethnic cultures in order to establish tyranny over language. Ethnic myths are being recycled in our ethnic cultures' vocabularies. The elements of these myths are constituent parts of the "ruling language" which should restrain the untamable "I" into an immovable "we". This process is taking place in an industrial way through popular or mass culture. The final products are modern, since they use popular music, video tapes, cassettes, cartoons and movies (Čolović, 1993). The context of recycled myths, however is not identical to the original, since "who knows whether it really happened that way". They inevitably consist of traditionally used and useful facts. The selection is very simple. Only useful mythological passages will be revived - the more useful the better. This is how contemporary speech concerning itself and the others, continues to become more radical. There is no fear of too harsh a word, of stereotype, fanaticism and prejudice. Even if the desirable "we" lacks authority it does no matter. There is always reserve authority to replace the missing one. Even though contemporary history is working immanently against ethnocentrism, it is not applicable here in the Balkans.

The leading languages have a terrifying power of immobilization. Their swamps, treacherous quicksand and power to incite the masses (Canetti, 1984) only withdraw when they have their victim. They absorb all individual identities as symbols of differences and distinctions. This incorporation is very instrumental. In so doing, the individual identity ("I") is placed in a kind of cordon on our side of the dichotomy of "we" and "they" which is absolutely Manichaean. These two sides should be the watershed between absolutely good and absolute-

ly evil, between the justification of all our actions in advance and the unmerited existence of all "others". In the daily roll call of lost personal identities the main spiritus movens can be public discourse relating to mass media of communication. They not only spread the recycled myths of popular culture but also constitute their ruling language which sounds very attractive in mostly empty heads.

Cultures and languages are so closed and so provincial among our ethnic groups that is to say so divided into "camps", due to the fact that my community, "we", extends only as far as the sound of my church's bells.

However, today's television lights up instead of bells and sounds so loud it may break the loudspeakers of "my" media.

Ethnic excitement has deprived languages of the function of people understanding each other in this area. In this way, ethnic feelings do not appear from the unconscious, but spurt with all the external illusion of free choice and free decision making. Naturally, the perfection or imperfection of this illusion depends on the density of the ruling language, that invisible veil covering all Balkan communities, those in secession and those that are frustrated. In order for this veil to be as thick as possible, the language is washed by pragmatic and political influences. The newborn languages "by the masses and for the masses" are much closer to Orwell's newspeak or "duckspeak" (speech from the throat, not the brain) than to the reasonable sounds of historical subjects concerning their destiny. Only rare, lonely individuals, lonely "I's" (are these the intellectuals?) refuse to accept this dictate. More or less. But their lonely lights cannot disperse the invisibility of the ruling language which is a curbing as well as a curbed factor. Therefore, we have yet to see what will happen in the Balkan area after this veil is lifted.

What is sure is that there will be countless victims of this perverted, unfriendly language. Legend says that writing spread all over the world made of different letters just as the teeth of Cadmus which were transformed into warriors. Words and letters made people quarrel. Here in the Balkans they fight event with "cannon fod-

der". The language of violence and differences has brought misery among the people.

First of all, the individual ("I") immersed deeply in the aggressive community is a victim. He is asked only one question by the ruling language. Don't tell me your name, tell me what you are: Serb, Croat, Muslim or Slovene?

Secondly, freedom has been removed as a characteristic of the individual. Both communities, those in secession and those that are frustrated, want their own freedom, above all freedom for "themselves", for their group and against the others.

Thirdly, all small groups that are part of the territory, culture and consciousness of dominating nations, lack freedom. All these remaining oases of differences disturb the purity of the myths, the uniformity of ethnic members, the homogeneity of the large groups - nations that have been divided in a Manichean-like manner.

Fourthly, entire new generations are castigated to learn "overnight" the newly-made, recycled myths, the newspeak, and how to hate "the others".

Concerning the ad hoc built up circumstances, coming generations are expected "to walk backwards".

Fifth...

The, destiny of language from its own point of view is illuminated by the destiny of the former Yugoslavia. It is torn into pieces in favor of small but pure economically exhausted states which are arrogant and blown out of context. Each of them is now celebrating its "liberation"-minded cleansing.

It seems to me, however, that all external observers as well as Mr. Finkelkraut himself, are confused thinking that the above mentioned attitude regards only one quarreling side. At this moment, the predominant opinion says that only the Serbs are guilty and only that nation is the "demolishing factor". The error would be nothing less or more justified if any other *particular* Nation in the area of the former Yugoslavia had been condemned. Without an apposition, without "the others" none of these enraged nations would have recovered and become homogenized that fast. Their simultaneously threatening

and destructive "we" will be fed by victims, the individuals inside and the collectives outside themselves.

Paradoxically, without these strangers on the other side, it would not be possible to realize the predominance of "we" over "I". It would not be possible to withdraw into *one's own* language as in an impregnable fortress. Without these "other" retarded remainings of political languages would appear in their glamorous isolation and baseness. The best example is perhaps the creation of the "new Croatian language". Its protagonist are trying hard to separate this language from the that of the "others" which arose from the same sources. Any new lexical item is followed by the shadow of being understood by others, the very, ones from whom they want to distance themselves. And you can neither run away from some "ancient deep language structures", nor from your own shadow.

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