

Ciril Zlobec
President of the Yugoslav
Association of Writers
Ljubljana, Yugoslavia

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UNITY IN DIVERSITY (REFLECTIONS OF A WRITER)*

In today's world of almost unlimited information potential, of the computer age, and of an ever-stronger philosophy of star wars, it is not difficult to be statistically cogent in calculating, defining, assessing virtually everything. The same can be claimed for predictions and for getting organized in planning behavioral patterns of the future. At first sight, life itself appears transformed into pure science, the embodiment of a universal organization that can be programmed, guided, transmuted. Fear of the population explosion, ecological disasters, fear of losing the job under the conditions of rampant unemployment, the ever-increasing belief that science and technology do not in themselves ensure worldwide progress and peace - all of these make the individual, nations, and states feel that our sole and all-embracing solution is an even more perfect and total organization which admittedly dehumanizes human beings but compensates for that by offering them social security. The world has already attained that level of organization when, faced by the more and more programmed nature of our lives we become aware, with regret, of recurrent disturbances supposed to simpler terms, who may have for a moment neglected to conform to his function of a thoroughly defined link in a certain work process, behavior, responsibility. "The human factor" therefore ought to be done away with, so that perfect reliability could be achieved in the functioning of programmed life. According to this reasoning, which admittedly has not been proposed and set forth by any philosopher but is nevertheless part of our everyday reality, the human race has to renounce man if it is to be kept in existence. This, only seemingly absurd logic used in our thinking impels us to strive for something that we fear most: we give up our essence in fear of losing our identity.

It is in the framework of this context, in which man's status is increasingly that of an undesirable, the intruding "human factor," that the question must be posed of what is the nation, national community, disparate ethnic groups deprived of statehood, differentness of human beings and - last but not least - that unit which is easiest to discern, viz. the individual with all of his so-called natural rights? Is it not true that all these forms of human existence are but an extension of the humanistic tradition, an intruding element that must be sooner or later abolished, attuned to the rhythm of the faultlessly functioning organization of tomorrow's world?

And yet we have decided this time to convene, with all the responsibility and conviction that what we are doing is

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meaningful, so as to offer our thoughts on these very categories set in the contemporary world: the nation, national minorities, the individual who is either resolute or confused in search of his own identity and his deeper existential substantiation grounded in his relation with the broader community, and who does find his deeper significance and identity in the community where he was born and which represents his national, social and cultural givenness.

Not long ago, at an international poetry festival I listened to a poet, German if I am not mistaken, who concluded one of his poems with the verses that went roughly like this:

Rockets were created by man
Man would like to live without rockets.

I believe that by using this aphoristic message, the poet described well our plight, which is the basic plight in the contemporary world. It appears that the ancient man, that lucky being as well as the victim of his own desires confronting and fighting with the forces of nature and clashing with the will of Gods, has left the Earth for good. The uncontrollable human craving for a better and freer life impels us to produce more and more material things and create such relations as subordinate our human dignity and our individual and common freedom to some new dependence which, on the one hand, logically results from our functioning in the world of today, while on the other hand it also embodies a universal threat that makes us feel increasingly powerless, ever so powerless because the war we wage incessantly in all the possible forms is all but hopeless, since in waging it we can no longer be - unlike the ancient man just mentioned - either heroes or victims, as this time we fight only with ourselves. Yet it is well-known that man is uncritically self-indulgent. We no longer sharpen and ennoble ourselves and our lives by "engaging nature and Gods;" we have already transcended the phase when we were masters of nature. We have instrumented it thoroughly by now, and all we do today is exploit it. We have replaced all types of Gods, including those of seemingly stable ideologies, by our own projections of the future which, however, can develop only as offered, or rather imposed, by laws of the social and technological evolution. Thus, I can paraphrase the poet's idea as follows: Man simply has to keep creating rockets, even though he fears them and would like to live without them. Our common fate, the fate of every one of us, thus becomes an increasingly moral question.

Is morality, whether social, political, scientific, or intimate, that is, any conceivable kind of morality, something that can really exist in our computer-dominated civilization? And what bearing, in this respect, can be given to such categories as nation, ethnic community, national minorities, national identity of the individual? Even though these are apparently outmoded or at least traditional forms of life, which nevertheless have survived into our age, are one of the most reliable correctives available for the soulless universalization of the technological development, as well as one of the most enduring hopes that "the human factor," conceived of as both an individual unit and the sum of various individual worlds, thus as the **unity in diversity**, might keep its momentum and influence in the years to come too.

It is quite true that the universalization of the technological development imposes also the universalization of political ideas on the world. The minds of the overpowering planners of the future have conjured up a picture of the world population characterized by identical reflexes, needs, and goals. Naturally, given this leveled vision of the future man, the existence of any nation, let alone national minorities and other types of communities, seems an unnecessary hitch in the wheels, an imperfect implementation of a great plan. Ever since the last war ended, we have been listening and reading - and often watching as a concrete instance - the confrontation between the two so-called blocs, a bipartite division of the world, which amounts to nothing but imposition, mental and factual, of a certain mentality according to which the world faces the imminent decisive battle that is supposed to lead to a universal way of life, hence also to one single nation or people. If it was not for the existence of the nations on all the continents and in all the systems, and also for national minorities within these nations and an ever-increasing number of the individuals who refuse to be divested of their basic natural rights or who are more and more firm in fighting for them, the uncontrolled and yet planned technological pattern of logic and the leveling-regulating totalitarian political thought would have already effected the fatal transformation of our "good old world." It appears, however, that nature - including human nature - has not yet been subjugated all down the line: every current is bound to encounter its countercurrent, thereafter never again regaining its original source of strength. "The human factor," subsuming both its individual and collective dimensions, has in this respect too proved to be stronger than it was thought, more unpredictable than the design stage would have had it.

The experience of the Second World War, when nations of the world were very clear and unequivocal in expressing themselves in the most evil and self-immolating manner, was momentous and remains momentous: the tragic experience of the confrontation of the nations in the most destructive enmity this world has ever seen had to be followed by the policy of reconciliation. People and nations felt the need for such a policy on a more genuine and deeper level than the political calculations would have it. The idea of the equality of nations irrespective of their biological, economic and military strength came to stand for the fundamental idea embodying justice and human dignity as well as the only form of international relations expected to preclude the outbreak of yet another world war.

Even though slogans calling for the equality of nations and for human rights remain but empty words in many places of the world, thus amounting to little more than propagandist delusion, a mere smokescreen, it is nevertheless possible to state that in the consciousness of modern man both of these desiderata have crystallized into truly inalienable natural rights of every single nation; moreover, in individuals too the awareness of human dignity has been increasing by leaps and bounds. Both of these ideas are very closely interrelated and interdependent: there is no free nation without the existence of individual freedom, just as there are no free people without the freedom of the nation to which the people concerned belong. Thus at least part of former conflicts between the nations "moved" within the

framework of the nation itself or the state incorporating several nations and nationalities. Never before have there been at the same time such a large number of revolts, fights, revolutions and counterrevolutions, coups d'état of all kinds, armed tribal fights and acts of terrorism also due to the dissatisfaction of the ethnic communities that believe their equality of rights to have been infringed. Force and violence are still the means of changing the existing conditions, and the old saying that the end justifies the means is still employed and exploited. True enough, there was hardly any sustained peace in the past as well, and local wars are the tragic regularity of our own time too.

Yet most of the present-day conflicts show qualitative changes in comparison with those belonging to the past: formerly, that is, up to and including the Second World War, the world predominantly showed the pattern of the rule of the stronger over the weaker, or the strongest themselves engaged in battles for leadership on a worldwide scale. Today, however, a comparable confrontation takes place especially in the fields of politics and economics (for instance, the USA versus the USSR, or the NATO countries versus the Warsaw Pact countries), although the presence of the "big ones" can be perceived in almost all of the local wars. Peculiar to the present age are also autochthonous and violent states of ferment within small - and the smallest - nations as well as within national minorities living within the confines of a single country. The ferment in question is normally the result of a desire for national emancipation, independence, identity. Unfortunately, however, the cases of striving for gaining supremacy over others are not infrequent, even though they may be veiled by the slogans calling for patriotism, loyalty to ideology or to a political bloc, to a given civilization or religion. Cases are not difficult to find where such things happen in virtually all the corners of the world: most of Africa, the Middle East (Lebanon, Cyprus, Iraq - Iran), the Indian subcontinent, Central and South America. Such developments can be found also in a number of European countries, occasionally in a less conspicuous form: Northern Ireland, the Basque Provinces, and Kosovo in Yugoslavia as well. Many a nation that got rid of the foreign rule - the rule of the stronger - has not yet mustered the strength to begin to live in freedom. After the Second World War, the process of decolonization has been in full swing, but the process of democratization has without doubt been much slower than was expected.

The truth must be told that many nations that had been decolonized or otherwise liberated in the postwar period, subsequently somehow "disappointed" the rest of the world and, what is worse, even failed to live up to their own expectations: many of them simply cannot find their own image and hence do not have their own identity which would reassure them, secure maturity and dignity, and qualify them for real equality, for the international dialogue. This certainly is one of the gravest tragedies in the contemporary world, because it is the lack of identity, that painful hovering in an empty space of history and civilization, which devalues the noble expectations of yesterday, their fight for freedom, and the victory itself. The fact remains that it proved that liberation is not necessarily also freedom, and in particular that it is not automatically also real independence. And yet, the experiences show that there is no

The inevitable misunderstandings sparked on this level, and the countless arguments as to what is primary, more natural and more ethical, only further corroborate the realization that this matter is a truly complicated problem that even optimum solutions cannot resolve in a wholly satisfactory manner; certain deficiencies are bound to linger on. Fully implemented national education, with state borders and mental limits being identical, is ultimately but a self-destructive provinciality that keeps undermining irrevocably and inexorably the very foundations of the autonomy of a nation. Similar in effect is also the fetishization of the state, taken to represent the sole possibility of meeting all the needs - and the only agency that should meet all the needs - of every single individual and of every single national community, which unavoidably shifts the very essence of education to the level of propaganda, indoctrination and sterile collective consciousness, and which in a multinational state symbolizes superficiality simplified all the way, shallowness, verbal awareness.

Is there any way out existing somewhere between these two extremes? Without doubt, it is to be sought only in the utter rejection of both the extremes, in a unity in diversity of some sort.

Can such a unity in diversity be actually attained? It is undoubtedly very difficult for anyone to reach, because it can only result from the deepest mutual understanding, respect, vital (rather than ideological, political) need for one another, and from the conviction that such a mutual enrichment does not undermine either the independence of any nation or the unity within a state community, but that on the contrary it strengthens both. And there must be no misunderstanding here: we must genuinely enrich each other, which can only be done along the lines of giving and accepting and never through taking or coercion. The category of "state" must not be and cannot be something that transcends nations and nationalities; instead, it must originate in the relations of the equality of rights established among the equals, in their common life. It is solely on this basis that such a fruitful education can be organized. The reason why a nation scoops out whatever it does from the well of another nation or nationality is not coercive law, political doctrine, the will and customary practice of the stronger, but rather the need for broadening the spiritual horizons through one's own openness, the curiosity also about the otherness, which is the natural consequence of the previous and complete condition of being fulfilled within oneself. What we have here is thus the natural need of accumulating only the best.

Such a physiognomy of culture and education can only be achieved in the context of an appropriate political, social, and cultural climate. Doing only as much as entertaining the notion that in the field of culture and education a multinational-community state has the same effects as a single-nation state, means committing a basic error, one whence most of the subsequent misunderstandings spring up. Even in the case of the countries to which the designation one nation - one state seems to apply fittingly, the reverse logic is often at work: the state symbolizing the majority nation subordinates to it all the other nations living within its borders, not to mention nationalities,

national minorities, these having long ago been ghettoized - at the most in terms of language and folklore activities in the field of culture.

Some of this - to my mind unacceptable - spirit of the political state rather than of the actual single-nation state is discernible to me even in the title of our seminar, viz. "Education in Multicultural Societies," where one can forebode the process tending to the most dangerous image - new image - of the world, one in which such a state is a mere intermediate link between independent nations enjoying equal rights and the denationalized unification of the world governed by internal logic of the technological development and political vision of one single proper way of life (American? Soviet?). As we have already pointed out above, this represents the worst type of impoverishment of man, his degradation from "the human" to the "production and consumer factor." In my view, this is the underlying question of modern man and of the contemporary post-industrial society dominated by computers and information science.

Proper education must have as its starting point the awareness that the nation within which it takes place accumulated during its past such an amount of spiritual heritage and today has in its possession all of that whence education is nurtured, that the corresponding level of the "culture" and "education" of its members is taken for granted, i.e. that they are, in short, qualified - if I may use the expression - for the spiritual and material reproduction of their own nation as well as for the dialogue conducted on an equal footing with any other nation. Of course, that this should be so is taken as a matter of course by any one nation - at least within Europe - that also has a state of its own, because it is the state that offers such an education, even stimulates it, organizes it, and furnishes the economic basis for its implementation.

The foregoing observations seem to indicate that a nation living in a multinational state must have its own statehood. But since many nations do not have it, their independence is curtailed, incomplete, which is why with them state education rather than national education asserts itself of necessity.

We have mentioned above that we will take a closer look at this area through the example of the Slovenes, a nation that in many ways is typical of such an analysis. To begin with, the comparison between Yugoslavia in the interwar years and the Yugoslavia of today is not uninteresting. Although the Kingdom of Yugoslavia recognized some nations (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), their special national rights were far from being complete. The political and demographic conditions were such that the country simply had to be multinational, but its constitution, legislation, and the actual implementation tended toward a single-nation form of state. For this reason, the Slovene fight for emancipation was taking place throughout the existence of that state, but in the most unfavourable times it could only take on the form of a fight for culture, the striving for the autonomy of the language and for its use in public life and in schools - yet the schools' curricula themselves were shaped by state interests and not national concerns. The new Yugoslavia, formed by the conscious participation of all our peoples and

nationalities in the National Liberation Struggle and in the Revolution, was organized anew as a constitutionally multinational state that recognized several previously ignored peoples and nationalities; enjoying full equality of rights regardless of numerical strength by the Constitution, these peoples and nationalities were also to have a democratic, federated state. With respect to the title of our seminar, the basic characteristic of this country is also that there is no single official language, because this function is constitutionally distributed among all the languages of the nations that enjoy equal rights: Serbo-Croatian/Croat-Serbian (the Serbian and Croatian varieties), Slovenian and Macedonian; on the territories populated by national minorities, thus in the ethnically mixed areas, the language of the ethnic minority in question has also the status of an equal rather than a second language. This applies to public use, public administration, the educational system, the judiciary, health service, etc. Finally, the education of each and every nation living in Yugoslavia is based on the national principle.

Like every other nation in Yugoslavia, then, so we Slovenes too have our statehood, and even the Constitution defines us as a state that together with others makes up the Federation and represents one of its constituents.

In constitutional terms, this is certainly the ideal and just solution, one against which no objection can possibly be made. And yet there are difficulties that arise in the course of everyday practice, when opportunism and vulgar economic profit considerations, coupled with the recent economic, political, and inter-nationality complications, with a renewed belief that the state as the highest ideal can solve even that which is insolvable, incite some people to the goal of trying to alter even the basic aims of education, showing clearly the tendency toward gradual nationalization of all public life. Each nation ought to contribute, in proportion to its total population figure, its share (e.g. to the economy, army recruitment) to some common fund of mental content that should be on its way to becoming a new reality, a new value. In simpler terms, elements of the national would - in the area that makes up the subject of our reflections - be relegated to marginal positions, whereas education would begin to feature prominently the mathematical sum of - true - all the peoples and nationalities of this country, but distributed in such a way that the larger, i.e. numerically superior ones, be also accorded a larger share, more weight in their activities and effects. And since majorization is a concrete matter, this would lead to spiritual, cultural, educational-instructional, national, and later by necessity also political domination of one single nation, its language, culture, and its way of life. In this way, the state would substitute for the nation in the latter's most delicate functions. This would also be a great blow to the independence of the national minorities which, in the wake of such a reorientation of values and aims, would have to loosen their ties with their parent nations living outside Yugoslavia, the ties that hitherto have been natural and firm enough.

Why, one might ask, such an emphasis, at an international meeting, on certain specifics that beyond our borders may be even

incomprehensible, or appear to some to be the only sensible, contemporary and - in today's world - inevitable development?

It would seem that in Yugoslavia the Slovenes are most firmly opposed to such tendencies. Our opposition originates not least in the cognitive principle which takes due account of the complete life value and function of a nation in the society of today, and proceeds from the assumption that democracy and equality of rights in a multinational state can only be actualized by giving full consideration to all the peoples and nationalities concerned, i.e., those that constitute the population of the state. In other words, democracy and equality of rights in a multinational state can only be attained through complete functionalization of the nation on all levels, because all the other tendencies - whether or not we keep closing our eyes to the fact - lead to such a single-state formation as necessarily represents a state of coercion, although against its own will, throughout its "transitional period" on the way through amalgamation and assimilation. Such instances of submitting to considerations of practicality, economy, strategic suitability, and the like, would force such state communities - according to the very same thread of logical reasoning - into another "transitional period" of the withering away of single-nation states as well, this time in favor of what has been referred to repeatedly in these reflections, namely, the unification and universalization of the world as the rule of a single idea, a single way of life, or two counterpoised socio-political systems constantly engaged in battle. I believe that the existence, the functioning, and the optimum perspective of every single nation are the best expedients warranting the nation to be free from the threatening dehumanization of the world.

The Slovene nation was lucky enough, perhaps in having been able to choose the lesser of two evils, to shape its own national soul and self-awareness and by fighting to gain at least the basic possibilities of functioning too as a nation, already in the period when it had neither a statehood nor a state of its own. It is for this reason that the Slovene nation is not willing under any condition, including warning and pressure, to give up its cohesion, its own identity.

Education founded on a national basis belongs among the essential ingredients and rights of any sovereign nation. The respect and consideration of the spiritual, existential, and political independence of the nation is from the viewpoint of vulgar economics an "expensive" affair to maintain: a complete network of day nurseries, kindergartens, primary, secondary and vocational education and universities, sciences that are both autonomous and qualified for cooperation with the world, an appropriate state and administrative structure, and participation of all these in the broader community - in the case of Yugoslavia at the level of the Federation. This represents a considerable economic burden, and hence fewer and fewer things are taken as a matter of course, inherited and preserved, thanks to the so-called natural laws; today, and even more so tomorrow, such things will necessitate conscious decisions, many-sided organization of the society, well-founded and promising developmental orientation. It is particularly with reference to a small nation that the single most important fact today - much more so than at any time in the past

- is the dictum: if you want to be a nation and to remain a nation, it is not only because you are convinced it is your right, but because you are convinced it is your advantage.

To discuss the nation, the danger of its disappearance, the possibilities of its survival, and even its thriving existence, means that we must also have clear-cut notions of education, that element which shapes both the individual and the national community.

Naturally, the whole world - and this is something encountered in Yugoslavia as well - teems with all the conceivable kinds of nationalism, including the dangerous varieties, but they must not be fought by seizing upon the idea of doing away with the nations and the national consciousness, for many a nationalism emerges out of unbearable frustration, emotional and physical restrictedness of an endangered or dominated nation or nationality. To eliminate misunderstandings and conflicts on this particular level represents also the task of education, one that education is able to tackle.

I have repeatedly stressed that education must be grounded on a national basis, but far removed from nationalism of any sort and from self-complacent introversion. Today, the world is a broad and open expanse wherein "the evil" and "the good" are increasingly difficult to delimit precisely; they exist here and there, within ourselves and within others, and any attempt at a generalization of the one or the other is doomed to failure and is in fact out of place; if carried on at the political level, it is even very dangerous. Unfortunately, we live in an unsettled and highly neurotic period, when perseverance, patience and tolerance have all but vanished from our everyday life, when all too often we are prone to pronounce inappropriate such matters as due to their inherently complicated nature occasion also difficulties, the matters we try to eliminate from our lives in the mistaken belief that everything will be easier then. This happens also in the field of inter-nationality relations within a common multinational state. By analogy, when various state nationalisms sparked (and still spark) wars of varying extent and duration, we try to find the reasons for disagreements, disputes, and in certain cases even hostilities among the peoples and nationalities of one and the same country in the very fact that these peoples and nationalities persist in keeping their present, given status they fought for. Yet it must be admitted that the reasons for these predicaments are often to be found elsewhere, most frequently in our own inability to set up and immediately assert genuine equality of rights enjoyed by the unequally strong, by the unequally developed, by the communities that live with disparate customs and foster different goals. It may be true that the multinational state, which apart from peoples almost as a rule contains also numerous minorities, is first and foremost givenness, a real entity, yet it is at the same time also a historical, political and moral obligation prohibiting the stronger (the numerically superior) from doing the weaker an injustice and from misusing the faith that all the community members contributed to the creation of their state.

The error of either type in the educational system, namely, close-knit nationalism which beyond its limits cannot find

anything good, let alone better than itself, or state indoctrination unfavorable to the positive national consciousness (mere verbal patriotism being the interlinking force), can be fatal to the existing circumstances and relations both within peoples and nationalities and in the framework of the state. The proper way in this respect is also the most arduous one, viz. that of parallel selection and synthesis of the highest and most stable values inherent in the nation as well as the state, together with full awareness of the essence and possibilities of the one and the other. However that may be, it is quite certain that in a multinational state comprising several languages, cultures, different currents of tradition and civilization as well as dissimilar natural developmental perspectives, education represents a highly delicate issue; it is the field where even the greatest case is not great enough, because the matter in question is not merely a profession but nothing less than the shaping of man who is to acquire a feeling and sense of conflictless coexistence in a multinational state, a feeling and sense also of his own intimate relationship with the nation he belongs to, and with the state that he shares with his nation - but not only with his nation.

Though neither a teacher nor a politician, I am convinced that this aspect too should not be ignored in reflecting upon life, whenever it is discussed in the light of our own experiences and those of others, and not least in the planning of education.