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REGIONALITY, FAMILY IDENTITY AND SOLIDARITY

At the very beginning of a paper it is common to set up working targets and the means of their realization. The title itself could lead to the idea that regional identity is the central topic, i.e. that the pillar of regional identity is sought in the family identity, but actually it is just the opposite: this is a debate on whether it is possible – and in which sense – to discuss family identity that would be “regionally” determined.

Regional and family identities are the terms which indicate the uniqueness of both families and regions – starting from their geographical, through historical to social and cultural characteristics. If the very category of identity implies the consistency of a phenomenon with itself – in other words its consistency during the period of development and change – then we need to face the question of how to relate these two distinctive phenomena (region and family), i.e. how to be able to establish the existence of some kind of a mutual identity which would be articulated in a concept “family – region”.

On one hand, the diversity inside the structure of national population is the circumstance which is favourable to the research on the complexity of correlation between regional and family identity. Since Vojvodina is a multinational area, the research on the correlation between regional identity and family on this territory directs the research towards searching for the mutual factor in the internal organization of a family in the whole region, as well as towards the possibility of discovering a coherent system of values which favours some particular family type within a smaller collectivity such as ethnic groups.

On the other hand, the circumstance that can make the situation more complex is the fact that a family belongs to the world of privacy, and that the existing lingual, national and religious barriers can make family life even more indiscernible than it would be in mono-national surroundings. The complexity of the situation could be slightly lessened by the fact that it is an area with extreme immigrations, on which there are ‘natural’ experimental situations, particularly convenient for application of comparative approach. Therefore, perceiving a family as a potential parameter of national differences has to be accompanied by analyzing the distance shown in the attitudes between the natives and the settlers – especially the displaced persons and refugees, who, against their own will, arrived in the last decade of 20th century.

Additional difficulties ensue from the fact that identity does not have only its objective aspect (identity “by itself”) but a subjective one, as well (identity “for itself”). While it is much easier to get objective features – especially if they happen to refer only to the usual indexes on size, structure and function of a family – family identity “for itself”, on the other hand, is not as tangible. Furthermore, family identity is also less provocative for researchers in social sciences – particularly for those who deal with global issues – since it cannot be expected that family identity directly generates the consequences such as: various requests for accepting diversities, tendencies towards independence, attempts of starting separatist processes, urges for changing state borders and so on. However, if family identity finds its stronghold in national affiliation, or if a family and national identity even overlap completely, then nationality (usually together with one’s confession) can become enchanting, potentially enhancing the significance of particularity and encouraging the forces that favour increasing the distance towards others.

In this way, the identity can reach an extreme form necessitating confirmation of itself not only in the spiritual and socio-cultural sphere, but also in political actions and legal-administrative spheres. Under certain circumstances, family identity can increase the distance between nations inside a region, i.e. serve as one of the excuses for overemphasising the importance of national and regional particularities; however, there is the other possibility that should not be neglected: that certain unifying processes at the level of a family have effects on a global plan. This particularly refers to the fact that the effects of the unifying processes – modernization, globalization and universalization – particularly evident in demographic statistics, began in Vojvodina somewhat earlier than in the other parts of Serbia. All in all, this indicates that there are good theoretical-methodological reasons to examine the relation between regional and family identity in this sociologically extremely interesting field.

Regarding family identity, it is hard to separate scientific acknowledgement from a social construction of reality. While with other social groups it is to a certain extent easy to discern “the truth” from what – as a saying goes – “people think of themselves to be true”, in the case of a family this is almost impossible. This is one of the reasons why the theory on family shows certain weaknesses – and certainly insufficient clarity and preciseness – when there is the issue of the identity of a family (each one individually), and family identity – of a family as such. Hence, this latter identity tends to be marked with various terms such as: “family atmosphere“ (l’atmosphère familiale), “family secret“ (le secret de famille), “family intimacy“ (l’intimité de famille), “family spirit“ (l’esprit de famille) (Attias-Donfut, 2002). It is not unusual then to have the impression that we are not dealing here with the same types of phenomena.

The identification of a person with a family is, by definition, strong, despite the fact that it changes its stronghold or that the theory fails to discern it clearly. A nation exhibits the same “identification attractiveness”, for one belongs to the both by the very act of existence or birth, without any particular merits or efforts and, consequently, without any responsibilities. In practice, these two identities are often inseparable. This is nicely substantiated by the fact that mono-national families are far more numerous compared to the multinational ones. However, as Vojvodina is a multinational area, it turned out that there are good reasons for setting the relation between national and family identities as the subject matter of the study within this regional unit, and that this relation is also a part of its overall regional identity. Thus, the analysis of the survey results indicates relative influence of national affiliation of respondents on their attitudes on family life of other ethnical groups. It was confirmed that the relation between national and family identity is in many ways unquestionable, making “correlative forces”, where the both identities intertwine and mutually condition each other. Furthermore, it is empirically proved that in a collective consciousness there is some kind of a mutual matrix for a family, at the universal level, without national differences. On the other hand, it is ascertained that there are certain specific determinants which are not conditioned by national affiliation, but by particularities of Vojvodina as an immigration area.

The research starts with a premise that each identity – including family identity – can be diagnosed at the manifestation level also by ascertaining the existence of respondents’ attitudes on particularities and differences; thus, it was examined whether it is possible to detect in the statements of Vojvodinian respondents something which represents a kind of self-assessment and self-identification which would refer to the characteristics of “our” family related to “their” family. Here is the analysis of the attitudes¹ which shows whether there are nationality-family related particularities and what they consist of:

Table 1

| Assessments of differences in family life – <i>financial status</i> | | | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| | Do not know | It is worse | It is the same | It is better | Total (%) |
| Serbs | 22.11 | 4.05 | 67.82 | 6.02 | 100 |
| Croats | 24.56 | 10.53 | 64.91 | 0.00 | 100 |
| Hungarians | 13.22 | 11.57 | 68.60 | 6.61 | 100 |
| Yugoslavs | 19.32 | 4.55 | 64.77 | 11.36 | 100 |

¹ Each of the offered characteristics of family life that was supposed to be related to national affiliation has shown sufficient statistical relevance in our sample, i.e. there is a basic interdependence between qualitative features of the respondents (nationalities, herein), with the stated family characteristics.

| Assessments of differences in family life – respect for a spouse | | | | | |
|---|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| | Do not know | It is worse | It is the same | It is greater | Total (%) |
| Serbs | 29.08 | 3.13 | 62.69 | 5.10 | 100 |
| Croats | 35.09 | 1.75 | 54.39 | 8.77 | 100 |
| Hungarians | 14.88 | 3.31 | 71.90 | 9.92 | 100 |
| Yugoslavs | 27.27 | 4.55 | 52.27 | 15.91 | 100 |
| Assessments of differences in family life – number of children | | | | | |
| | Do not know | It is worse | It is the same | It is bigger | Total (%) |
| Serbs | 18.54 | 11.59 | 64.89 | 4.98 | 100 |
| Croats | 22.81 | 15.79 | 59.65 | 1.75 | 100 |
| Hungarians | 6.61 | 14.88 | 75.21 | 3.31 | 100 |
| Yugoslavs | 18.18 | 15.91 | 62.50 | 3.41 | 100 |
| Assessments of differences in family life – family bonds | | | | | |
| | Do not know | They are worse | They are the same | They are stronger | Total (%) |
| Serbs | 24.54 | 6.94 | 55.21 | 13.31 | 100 |
| Croats | 33.33 | 5.26 | 47.37 | 14.04 | 100 |
| Hungarians | 12.40 | 10.74 | 72.73 | 4.13 | 100 |
| Yugoslavs | 22.73 | 11.36 | 55.68 | 10.23 | 100 |
| Assessments of differences in family life – respect towards older family members | | | | | |
| | Do not know | It is worse | It is the same | It is greater | Total (%) |
| Serbs | 25.72 | 3.94 | 60.49 | 9.85 | 100 |
| Croats | 31.58 | 1.75 | 49.12 | 17.54 | 100 |
| Hungarians | 8.26 | 4.96 | 79.34 | 7.44 | 100 |
| Yugoslavs | 17.05 | 4.55 | 63.64 | 14.77 | 100 |

The table above best illustrates what is observed in the overall basic sample, i.e. that “family bonds” is the characteristic by which the respondents – the largest percent of them – determine differences in family life. “Family bonds” is the characteristic which respondents regard to be more frequent with other nations compared to their own. In our sample, this attitude is not only confirmed, but it also achieves the highest frequency as an answer on the values scale which serves to emphasise differences. For the proposed option “They are bigger” this frequency is 12% and it is the largest “positive” difference which some family life feature got compared to other characteristics stated in this questionnaire.

On the other hand, the same (i.e. the highest frequency) of answers in the overall sample (12%) was acquired in the category of answers which indicate the feeling or assessment of deficiencies of one’s own nation regarding family life compared to others (in the column “it is less”). It indicates the negative difference, i.e. assessment that there is a deficiency which my family holds

compared to families of other ethnic groups, and this is the feature “number of children”. Therefore, all the respondents make assessment that the most significant feature which differentiate them from other nations is that they have a lower number of children than others. On the other hand, they consider that the greatest positive difference compared to others is manifested through the “family bonds”, as presumably these bonds can be found to be stronger in all other nations than among their own.

However, a significant percent of respondents could not answer this complex question (around 20%), and more than a half, depending on the feature of family life, considered the distribution of the specified features to be equal with all nationalities. The equivalence is noted most with respect to financial status of families – which the two thirds of respondents regard to be the same for all, while the equivalence is the lowest with the above mentioned issue of family bonds.

The data from Table 1 indicate that assessments of existence of family features have different frequency in degrees with regard to national affiliation of respondents and can be considered as statistically relevant. When the tables are observed together, it is possible to sum up the results for particular family features, which could present a part of the empiric representation of international relations in Vojvodina, when differences or similarities refer to a family.

Namely, the financial status of families – regardless of their nationality – is estimated by 2/3 of respondents to be the same for all. Perhaps, it could be said that, according to the tables above, the thing that is the same to the greatest extent in family life is a social status – understood, however, with broader meaning. According to our data, there are adequate reasons to claim that the relation between nationalities and classes is balanced on the entire territory of Vojvodina.

Far less international agreement appears in the categories which indicate the differences; the differences can be perceived in all the features, only with a different pre-modification or frequency in answers. For the Serbs the “positive” difference (it is found more with the others) is indicated in the issue of “family bonds”, with the Croats and Yugoslavs it is the “respect towards older family members”, and with the Hungarians it is “respect for a spouse”.

When it comes to “negative” differences (i.e. when differences are perceived as a deficiency of one’s own family compared to the families of other nations), for the Yugoslavs, Croats, Hungarians, as well as the Serbs, it is the feature “number of children”, with much the same frequency of answers for all these national groups.

According to our research, it is possible to make several conclusions regarding the relation between nationality and the attitudes on differences in family life: (1) only between one tenth and one fifth of respondents have a clear attitude on whether there are differences in family life due to one’s ethnici-

ty; the majority of them, regardless of the feature in question, either do not know that there are any differences or believe that they do not exist; (2) the least notable differences are found in assessments of family financial status, and the greatest differences are noted in the number of children and family bonds, but with the opposite pre-modification; (3) ethnicity influences the things that exhibit the differences, although it is not so evident through the intensity of differences, as through the varieties of features where these differences appear; (4) the previous finding leads to the assumption that personal family values were probably projected on the assessments of differences, thus the assessments of others are some kind of mirror reflection; (5) on the other hand, regarding the way of mutual assessments of nations, it is better to speak of structural similarities than of structural differences, and in that sense national affiliation is to be interpreted as a factor of family identity.

However, unlike nationalities, “displaced persons and refugees” provided a somewhat different picture of the connection between a family and a nation in their assessments. They perceive this interdependence as more intensive to some extent. Refugees and displaced persons notice the differences more prominently than the natives, either in a positive or in negative sense. In other words, refugees and displaced persons more than others estimate they are in worse financial situation and less bonded with their relatives than the others. In any case, it appears that nationality as a feature of respondents produces somewhat milder differences in observing family life than the fact that someone is a native or a settler, i.e. newcomer. This can be illustrated by the prominent data in the table below:

Table 2

| Assessment of differences in family life – financial status | | | | | |
|--|---------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|-----------|
| | Does not know | It is worse | It is the same | It is better | total % |
| Resident of Serbia | 21.05 | 4.55 | 68.47 | 5.93 | 100 |
| Displaced person or refugee | 22.22 | 18.06 | 50.00 | 9.72 | 100 |
| Assessment of differences in family life – the respect for a spouse | | | | | |
| | Do not know | It is worse | It is the same | It is greater | Total (%) |
| Resident of Serbia | 27.34 | 2.92 | 62.85 | 6.88 | 100 |
| Displaced person or refugee | 29.17 | 5.56 | 56.94 | 8.33 | 100 |
| Assessment of differences in family life – number of children | | | | | |
| | Do not know | It is worse | It is the same | It is bigger | Total (%) |
| Resident of Serbia | 17.38 | 11.70 | 66.35 | 4.56 | 100 |
| Displaced person or refugee | 19.44 | 19.44 | 56.94 | 4.17 | 100 |

| Assessment of differences in family life – family bonds | | | | | |
|--|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| | Do not know | They are worse | They are the same | They are stronger | Total (%) |
| Resident of Serbia | 23.63 | 7.56 | 57.73 | 11.08 | 100 |
| Displaced person or refugee | 20.83 | 5.56 | 45.83 | 27.78 | 100 |
| Assessment of differences in family life – respect towards older family members | | | | | |
| | Do not know | It is worse | It is the same | It is greater | Total (%) |
| Resident of Serbia | 23.04 | 3.87 | 63.03 | 10.06 | 100 |
| Displaced person or refugee | 26.39 | 1.39 | 51.39 | 20.83 | 100 |

This table shows that the group of displaced people and refugees estimate the financial status of their family to be different in comparison to other families. But, what is interesting to be compared here is that the assessments of the population who are not refugees are that those financial differences are less than in the case of the newcomers. When a sample of all the displaced people and refugees is created – regardless of whether they are with or without the citizenship – and when the frequency of their answers is compared to the frequency of the answers of people with the citizenship (i.e. the natives in the area), then it is possible to approximately establish the greatest differences. In this table these differences are distinctive. The estimates of refugees and the natives are not even closely the same regarding the financial status of the families – as it is the case when the respondents classified according to their nationality. In the latter case, the differences in financial status are indicated to be more prominent, and it is especially the financial status of one's own family that is evaluated as worse than the others. Namely, 18.06% of refugees assess the position of their family to be worse compared to other nations, while for the natives that percentage amounts 4.55%.

Table 2 also indicates the distinctive difference between the natives and the newcomers, with the prominent contrast “in favour of” the refugees who again see greater differences compared to the others regarding the number of children – having less children than the others. In the sample consisting of only refugees and displaced people that percent is 19.44% and it represents the highest reached frequency of this answer when compared with the answers of the members of different nations or the total number. On the other hand, “family bonds” is the only characteristic of family life which the refugees consider to have more than the others, and

to a really great extent, which is proved by relatively high frequency of 27.78% of affirmative answers.

According to the table above, the answer “respect for a spouse” here was responded by the highest percent of the answers “do not know” confirming that family life with regards to the relationship with a spouse remained under the veil of mystery more than other dimensions of family life.

Expressing opinion regarding “respect towards older family members” was aimed at revealing traditional values in family life of respondents. Their reaction quite confirmed that tradition is an element of a family system of values, in the way that it was being recognized to be greater and more present with the others. However, nationality was not expressed through some kind of mutual tendency; on the contrary, it is nationality that showed the greatest national contrasts within itself. The Serbs and Hungarians had similar frequency, and the contrasts between them on one hand, and the Croats and Yugoslavs (who were here much more similar) on the other hand, are approximately the same as the contrasts between the natives and the refugees (10.06% with the natives to 20.83% with the refugees).

However, as previously said, it is indisputably confirmed that *nationality – as a feature of respondents – produces less differences in observing the characteristics of family life than differences between the natives and the newcomers.*

In any case, the refugees’ state can be tracked on at least four mutually connected points of social, cultural and individual spheres, where social turbulences as well as both affinity and separation forces become evident: (1) within the social, political and cultural sphere of the country that has expelled them, here including the attitude of the part of the population in that state who consider them unwelcome and who instigate or support such measures of their country; (2) within the very refugee group, especially during exodus or in the shelters, concentration camps, refuges, refugee camps and improvised colonies where so-called “collective households” are created, in which there is the elementary organization of collective life; (3) at refugees’ destinations, i.e. in the places where the newcomers settle, and where they expect to find compassion, to acquire necessary protection and obtain more tolerable living conditions; (4) in the area of interaction between the country of eviction, the country of adoption and international factors which first try to remedy and then to gradually resolve a newly emerged situation, creating among other things adequate preconditions either for the integration of refugees into the new surroundings or for their return to their homes and re-acquisition of their previously lost rights and goods.

Although the discussion on all these four contexts about refugees would be relevant, we will bound ourselves only to the third burning point of the status of refugees. According to the attitudes of respondents – reconstructed by the means of a questionnaire research on the representative sample from the year 2002 – it was possible to attain interesting details indicating the

impact left on the collective consciousness by a sudden and abrupt advent of almost 300.000 refugees to the territory of Vojvodina in the last decade of the 20th century.

It was expected that – if we become aware of the attitudes of citizens – their readiness to accept and help the refugees will become clearer, i.e. their attitudes will become “a basis for consistent way of behaviour” (Rot, 1989: 292). In that case, our awareness of their attitudes could be a precondition for predicting practical attitude of domicile citizens towards refugees. For instance: are there predispositions for solidarity behaviour, what kind of direct help can be expected from the citizens apart from and out of the activity on the institutional macro-level (the state) and mezzo-level (the network of non-government and humanitarian organizations at a local level). Besides, it was important to recognize collective features of respondents (their confessions, nationality), i.e. the influence of their social-economic status on choosing the form of assistance.

In the collected answers there are all three dimensions of attitudes:

1. *Cognitive dimension of attitudes* became evident in the answers to the following question “In your opinion, who is considered a refugee?” Around a half of the respondents opted for the answer that refugees are people who escaped from war (51.9%) and people escaped from expelling (36.6%), while they opted for the other alternatives to a considerably less degree.

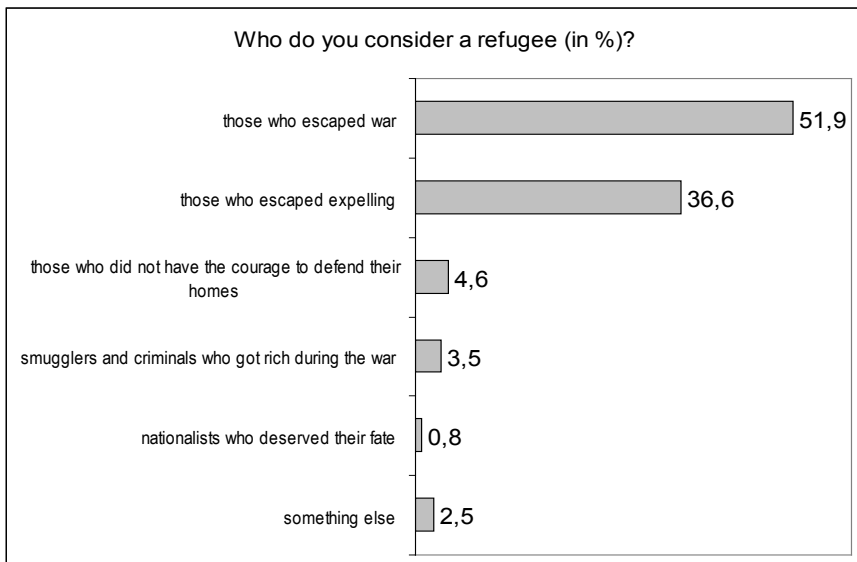
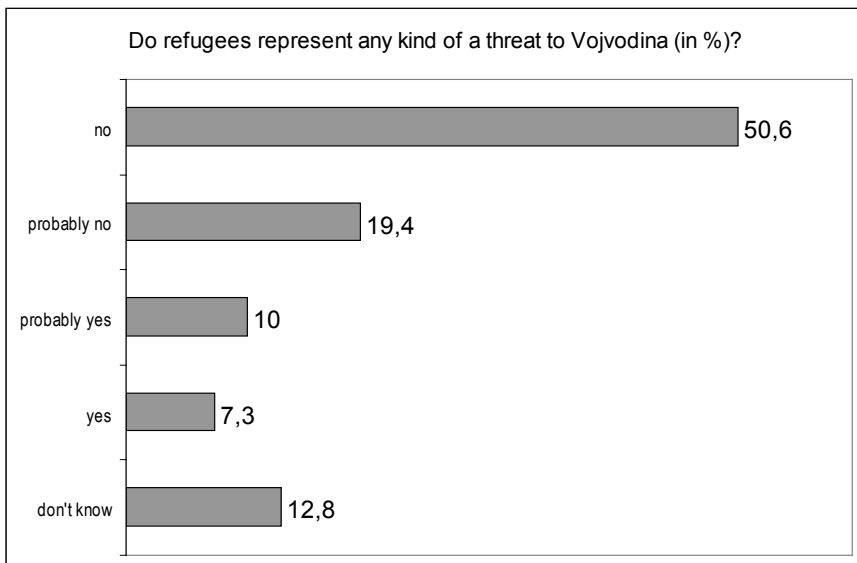


Chart 1

2. In the following question there is the *emotional dimension of the respondents' attitudes* and the answers indicate that less than a half of the total number of respondents believe that refugees are not a threat to Vojvodina, while nearly one fifth of them opted for the answer "probably not". It is interesting that comparing results on the grounds of sub-samples indicated that certain features of respondents (e.g. that they live in their birthplace or they have immigrated, or that they are citizens of Serbia-Montenegro or not) had statistically more significant impact on the answers for this question than any other characteristics (such as nationality or confession). Namely, the people who do not live in their birthplace or those who have not attained the citizenship yet, much more frequently opt for a negative answer to the posed question – which can be interpreted that their dislike towards refugees is less than with others or that they have more compassion for the status of refugees.

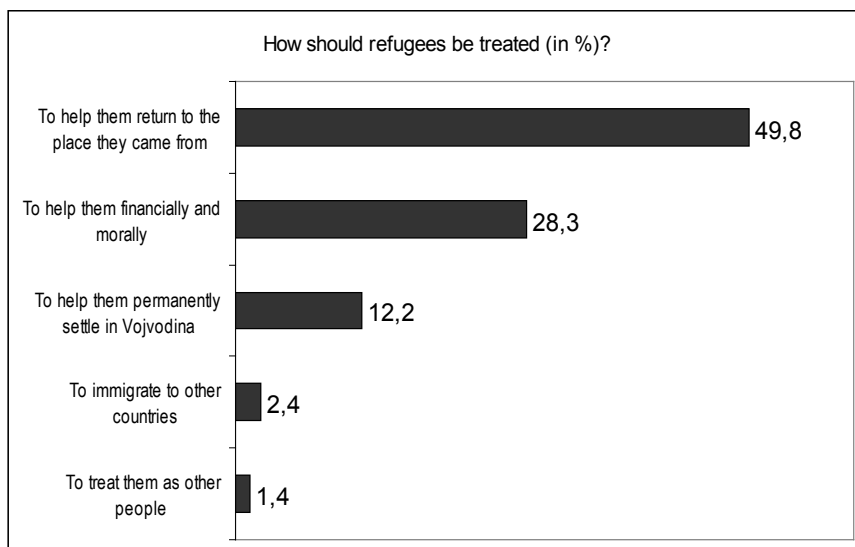
Chart 2



3. Finally, the readiness to help was examined with an intention to check the *conative (willing) dimension of attitudes* towards refugees. The respondents opted mostly for the possibility that the refugees return to the place they came from (around a half of respondents), then a third opted for the answer to help them both financially and morally, while slightly more than one tenth stated that they would be helped if permanent settled in Vojvodina. Other offered alternatives which suggested that one should treat the

refugees as other people or that they should be helped to immigrate to other countries, were favoured by a relatively small percentage of the polled population (Tripković, 2004).

Chart 3



In any case, it proved that refugees are a big social and cultural challenge for every society. Despite having different historical modalities, their very state has certain similarities regardless of the historical context since these are the people who – facing some kind of existential threat or due to some great life danger – deserted their habitations, country or home territory. Our research confirmed that the more developed and stable a country, territory or a settlement where refugees arrive, the easier it is to endure one's status as a refugee, and refugees cause less disturbance with their hosts. And reversely, the more burdened by personal problems a surrounding is, the harder it is both for them and for refugees – although such a basically correct finding has to be in a way modified due to the positive effect of the phenomena that could be named "the network of the basic solidarity", particularly evident in Vojvodina due to the specific influence of the immigrant population (Tripković, 2004).

Solidarity is examined here on the basis of attitudes; thus it was not possible to check what its real power would be like, measured by real actions of people who need to put away some earnings or time to resolve a certain case and provide accommodation or food for the refugees. However, even such

a narrow study of solidarity – through attitudes on how refugees should be helped, aiming at detecting some kind of proclaimed solidarity – provides an opportunity to anticipate and indicate the influence of social and cultural context on the form and power of the willingness to help others, in the case of refugees. For that purpose, tables were formed on the basis of sub-samples, and we present only the top-values for the most frequent answers hereto:

Table 3

| How should refugees be treated? | top-values |
|--|---------------------------------|
| to help them return to where they came from | Hungarians – 79.3% |
| | Catholics – 66.3% |
| | district of Northern Bačka– 60% |
| | pensioners – 59.2% |
| to help them both morally and financially | Croats – 33.3% |
| | district of Srem– 38.4% |
| | Supported persons – 41% |
| to help them permanently settle in Vojvodina | Montenegrins – 28.1% |
| | Orthodox – 14.3% |
| | district of Srem – 18.4% |

The table above represents only an attempt to illustrate the way collective features of respondents affect their choice of alternative answers such as “to return to where they came from”, then “to permanently settle in Vojvodina” and “to help them both morally and financially”. The acquired results indicate that this kind of “proclaimed” solidarity depends on “associational context” (C. Offe). In other words, solidarity towards refugees, at least to a certain extent, depends on nationality, religiousness or some standard aspects of the social status of respondents, such as employment, education or a place of residence. The illustrated instances indicate that these characteristics of respondents have influence on their opting for some of the answers offered, i.e. that these characteristics to a certain extent define and direct their cooperative and solidarity attitudes. This indicates that ambient for solidarity towards refugees, at least when such abrupt and mass exoduses are concerned, depends on the global socio-cultural context – the environment which accepts the refugees, and on the connections with the environment the exiled originate from.

Accordingly, the assumption is that small networks of basic solidarity – the ones concentrating around direct and everyday relationships of people, mostly connected with meeting one’s primary needs – are conditioned by a broader social context, whereby this context is in a certain way modified in almost each particular case. Regardless of this, it can generally be claimed that the more polarized the social structure is, the greater influence it will have through imposing restrictions, hindering or at least not instigating the universal moral action in people – the action which would be led by authen-

tic altruistic motifs. This, *inter alia*, is due to the significant socio-cultural separation which obliges people to loyalty to the groups which they themselves belong to rather than to solidarity towards those outside that socio-cultural circle. Furthermore, the fact that one's own status is in jeopardy is not a favourable ground for identifying with the troubled, whereas a more favourable personal social and economic status represents a better climate for helping the ones in need. Thus it can be supposed that the zone of micro-solidarity is predominantly restricted to family and its closest surroundings. In any case, a more complex research on the problem of refugees in our country would indicate that family, kinship and friends networks are the most permanent stronghold of immediate and efficient solidarity towards the troubled such as refugees, but that these networks are always conditioned and mediated by particularities such as socio-cultural environments, particularly evident in the circumstances of transition.

The common theoretical approaches from macro-sociological perspective widened and thus blurred the field of the research on the essence of modernity, out of which a family was ejected – even when these general, contemporary theoretical models are more or less forced to politically recognize and acknowledge micro-sociological problems such as needs, interests, values, norms and certain rights of minority groups. It is not recognized clearly enough that the problem thus goes back to the very beginning: into the family which is the source and shelter of multiculturalism, i.e. a field of life where it is most appropriately presented how the universal needs are answered by specific cultural responses.

Family is naturally and socio-culturally defined, but also individually mediated. It also provides the possibility of alternative answers, different choices, and various organizations of family life. Family is essentially multiculturally and regionally influenced, thus the problem of reorganization of a certain society – and thereby its regionalization, as well – affects also a family.

If the focus is on “micro-sociology” one of the possible questions is what regionalization means for a family – especially because a family always has its own territorial aspect, meaning that each change within political-territorial organization influences everyday life in families in a certain area.

Let's start with the issues that are indisputable. It can be claimed with certainty that an issue of regionalization (and/or regionalism) is a topic which nowadays (in our country, as well) is a part of a theoretical as well as of political context which has grown in the shadow of modern liberal and democratic ideas. It seems here that regionalization lately has been both the beginning and the end of the need for authentic expression and acknowledgement of differences of local, economic, cultural, ethnic and other identities. Does it bear that connotation even when it comes to expression of family identity, normative articulation of autonomous family needs, “bilateral

contract” between the private and the public sphere, the balance between a family and its social surroundings?

There is no simple answer, for the question posed in such a way leads to the problem which is – justifiably – the disputed issue in the theory on family: does a family identity exist and what is it based on, is it a mere mediating factor in creating other group identities, i.e. what makes a family identity different from – and perhaps opposed to – other identities?

Anyhow, “the identifying difference” is what regionalization and multiculturalism have in common. The identifying difference is frequently proved to be some kind of hypostatizing of the encounter with the other and something different, and it does not only come down to “understanding of the Other” (Dženkins, 2001: 10). This is why – when it comes to other forms of group or individual identity – emphasising of their difference is followed also by demands for political and legal acknowledgement of these identifying particularities: institutional benefits, right on political autonomy and self-government, human rights, etc.

This is not the case with a family. What is most striking is that the question of family identity does not carry such kind of political implications and tension, presumably because of the very different nature of the identity. Only in the studies which try to more carefully unravel the puzzle of different collective identities is it possible to track down the trace that leads to the explanation where the family actually disappeared in dialectics of the global and local, universal and specific, coexistence and conflict, union and divisions. If one lives in surroundings which constantly change both physical and spiritual boundaries, as well as social systems and political regimes, i.e. if our own “habitus” – perceived as “the unity of one systematic biography” (Burdije, 1999: 171) – contains disagreements and constant violent changes, the possibility of perceiving the influence of the idea and practice of regionalism on a family and vice versa is greater.

Regarding the topic of “family and regionality” – and bearing in mind all these preconditions – attention could be directed particularly towards speculations within the following three levels: (1) the influence of historical, cultural, economic and social particularities on forming a family on a certain region, which includes the question of whether a “modern family” can be referred to as a universal theoretical model and a key for research; (2) creation of the appropriate developed theoretical-methodological premises, in the best socio-anthropological tradition, which implies their operationalization and adjustment for research work on the field; (3) the possibility of misinterpretation of regionalization as regionalism as certain ideology and policy by which – by neglecting a family – specific regional needs/ features of a family are expressed distortedly and consequently hindered; this results in obstruction of self-development of a family, in the name of which regionalization is advocated in the first place.

Therefore, the attention of the researchers on the family issues in our country should go in two directions: on one hand, towards the processes of divergence and convergence between a modern family and our historical and regional particularities; on the other hand, towards the problem of multiculturalism and monoculturalism at the level of narrower regional units where more stable structures of bi-national and multinational families are formed. The answer to a question whether “modernity shock” missed the families in Vojvodina, or maybe to put it better, how they cope with it, is perhaps best illustrated by various problems that bi-national and nationally mixed families encounter, particularly in the periods of crisis and transition. Difficulties which spouses and other members of multi-confessional and multicultural families face can be a sign of creating and/or more rigid closing of cultural, national, confessional and regional borders.

Regionalization is an integral part of political *pragma*. However, it was not until recently that the relevance of elements of the detachment, distinguishing and maintaining of borders was recognized. This increasing interest in borders, detachments and conflicts can most explicitly be related to the political practice commonly called “Balkanization” which characterizes the end of 20th century, while terrorism and violence – in its new forms in this century – have just recently become more closely connected with the issues of identity (Asurmendi, 2002).

This very aspect – being neglected both in theory and social practice until recently – is relevant for the daily routine of family life, but it also has more lasting structural consequences on the organization of family life and its future. This is because the particularities of cultural, ethnic, local and other identities – if perceived through a certain prism – reflect only the connecting agent, the agent of “abundance of differences”, a prerequisite for true democracy, while through some other prism all this can be observed also as a bone of contention, a trigger for conflicts. Both aspects have specific reflex on a family. Perhaps this is due to the fact that a family is foundation of “primordial” identities (one’s descent, kinship, language, culture) which nowadays have the greatest, even the imperative influence on opinions, acts and behaviour of people, and thus also on the processes of their coming together or driving apart, misunderstandings and clashes. This raises the problem of how a family can remain stable when its core is destroyed by opposing forces-identities: with personal, professional, birth, generational, ethnic, class, territorial forces etc.

In this sense, regionalization can in the same time be perceived as determining the appropriate rules for that game, but also as their violent standardizing and finishing. Regionalization should be only one of the elements (not necessarily the most important one!) in complex (de)composing of various identities (ethnicity, race, sex, locality, professional and class identity and so on) which mutually both intertwine and clash, in this way turning the

family into a floating island without a coast and solid stronghold or centre, which strong civilisation streams – together with interests of economic and political whirls – which attach it to the coast violently without letting it find its own place in a spontaneous flow.

If we include here also the problem of solidarity – the problem which is by definition related to the level of micro and macro analysis – things are additionally complicated. This is because the family-kinship solidarity can be perceived as one of the crucial assumptions of social integrations – from the lowest, elementary level, to the highest, global one – and its phases have to be related to more general social changes both at the local and global plan.

We shall, however, limit ourselves here only to several notes related to family-kinship solidarity, bearing in mind that even in the contemporary society, a family – unlike all other groups – is particularly related to solidarity and this is not by chance. What could perhaps represent a certain novelty is the fact that both reaffirmation and metamorphoses of solidarity in the contemporary society can be recognized in some of their own primal forms also in a family and the closest social environment.

Micro-relations of solidarity are relations between particular people at the local level. They are not specified by content, they do not possess a strong structure and they frequently arise incidentally as responds to some unfavourable circumstances which jeopardize personal integrity, and sometimes even physical existence of people. They comprise a field of less institutionalized or non-institutionalized contacts, and they are of different character, very often even contrary to the expected and prescribed behaviours and relations, especially when it comes to some kind of segregated relations. It is about non-institutionalized contacts which compensate for the absence of institutional solutions. They find their most powerful stronghold in the already structured areas of neighbourhood, friendship, kinship and family, but differ from them for they do not have the degree of obligation which traditional neighbourhoods do, or the degree of closeness which a family, kinship and friendship relations have.

Family is one of the most reliable generators of the “network of basic solidarity” and a resource which is most frequently used in these asymmetrical relations (e.g. with nurturing of the elderly and children). Depending on particular cases, the network of solidarity relations can expand to people who are non the members of a family and other social groups who are treated as members, no matter if they are the closest group core, kinship or non-kinship, thus creating some kind of proto-family, proto-kinship, proto-neighbourhood or proto-friendship relations.

All these relations are characterized as temporary and casual, i.e. as highly inconsistent; however, they are recurrent. It can be said that they signalize decomposition of “family privacy” and that they indicate the tendency of losing an economic autarchy of a family household. In that sense, A. Milić

for example, notes that in contemporary societies “there is spreading of households onto several families which only with mutual financial and working resources manage to provide minimal existential conditions for their reproduction” (Milić, 2001: 79).

What is certain is that kinship has not completely lost its importance in the modern society, i.e. that social force of kinship relations in (post)modern society casts a new light both on the family and kinship and on the society. This particularly refers to keeping the contacts between generations, at least indirect and casual – which become the body of new, more numerous, multigenerational lines of connecting among kinsmen who can be very distant spatially.

The particularities of solidarity networks – that appear as an effect of a delayed transition in Serbia – would, therefore, be that they contain mostly informal solidarity relations which make one of the networks of manifold relations at the local levels, i.e. in micro-communities. They are not institutionalized and formalized, but they compensate for the absence, deficiencies or dysfunctions of country’s and other social institutions. Being mostly within the frames of customs, the networks of solidarity relations are not mere abstractions as class, religious or national relations, although they can be mediated by them. It would be even less accurate to say that there are unique networks of solidarity relations, especially if a society is extremely segregated into privileged and unprivileged layers.

New solidarity networks do not make a corporation (in the sense of labour or labour union corporations to which the term solidarity is historically attached) and they thus do not bear that kind of social tension. Those are informal relations between individuals in specific social situations, instigated by unfavourable external social circumstances. They coexist with institutionalized macro-relations, but they neither question nor significantly alter those relations. They consist of individual communications between people – based on some implicit rather than explicit mutual orientations in people’s “actions, thinking and feeling” and are concentrated around basic social units, such as family, kinship, neighbourhood and friendship groups.

This refers to occasional, casual and sporadic assistance – mutual help which occurs in the vacuum which occurs due to the absence of social consensus, or in the state of transition of one form of consensus to another when the old basis of social consensus is lost and the new one has not been found yet. This phenomenon should perhaps be marked by the term “the network of basic solidarity” – namely, by the phrase which would represent some kind of compilation of old solidarity of great political unities and spontaneous, self-arisen solidarity at the level of direct, networked relations among people. According to the level of generality, it is a form of interpersonal relations which at the same time have the characteristics of a category and a network, i.e. “cat-network” (Tili, 1997: 41-45). The network of basic solidarity refers to

the relations that have fluid structure and that can be either direct or indirect (as an example of indirect network relations Tilly states chain-connected creditors and people who borrowed money from one another and do not have to see or know each other). Furthermore, those relations and communication are not clearly restricted and do not completely accord with the structure of the household, family, neighbouring and friendship groups.

The cultural pattern which serves as the foundation for this kind of relation are the acquired forms of behaviour in traditional society and family (as previously it was the attachment to primary groups and devotion to collectivity), which also includes traditional forms of “natural” spiritual attachment (god-parenthood, sworn brotherhood or sworn sisterhood). This is why the anachronism of “returning to the past” is sometimes recognized nowadays in the network relations of basic solidarity. Yet, while some authors perceive only re-traditionalization and anti-modernism in reviving solidarity, Claus Offe – who has a very complex viewpoint on this matter – believes that the functional need of contemporary complex societies and their partial (sub) systems is actually expressed through the “new spirit of solidarity”. Since there are circumstances those societies cannot solve by a common use of the means of legal constraint and by money, it leaves space for the “ethics of responsibility”, “self-discipline” and “civilized self-control” (Ofe, 1999: 73).

Orientation towards responsibility – as perceived by C. Offe – differs both from traditional behaviour and from the influence that could in Weber’s typology be marked as target-rational. Unlike the traditional norms and everyday life based on them – which is characterized as an obligation; or on the other hand, unlike “the rules of rationality” which direct individuals towards obtaining privileges or towards avoiding inconveniences, the orientation towards responsibility, although also being normative, is not dictated by restraints or conducted by expectation of some kind of a prerogative, or a benefit. The very existence of the need to help people in need would be sufficient motivation for solidarity. In this way, Offe connects his concept of solidarity to functional needs of contemporary social systems, as well as to the individual motivation and the influence of values (Ofe, 1999: 80).

In that context there is the question of whether constant and formalized relations of help and participation (the state) or instant, sporadic forms activated and caused by sudden natural and social distresses and disasters at the mezzo-level, correlate with the evident and acute need to remove or lessen the “constitutive vulnerability of an individual” in contemporary social circumstances? It is evident that deficiencies of institutional forms of help give rise to self-help and solidarity at the micro-level, the stronghold of which they find in a certain pattern of behaviour.

The inclination towards self-sufficiency and auto-centric development inside the networks of basic solidarities should be perceived within the context of increasing dependence among people on the systems which are

irresponsibly conducted and the need for self-protection from unfavourable consequences of such processes, such as the unsuccessful and delayed transition in our country. Accordingly, reaffirmation of the community which is, it seems, emerging, should not be perceived only within the frames of the new “protesting and successful mobilizing topics within post-industrial left wing” but more as an extorted phenomenon with all the discrepancies of the social context which serves as the grounds and a potentially restrictive frame.

The network of solidarity relations and cooperation it is not a purpose for itself, but is the means for achieving the goal – elementary survival. In the Weberian’s sense, it is more the price which is necessarily and rationally paid in order to avoid the states of life jeopardy, than some a priori ultimate moral or aesthetical value (Ofe, 1999: 52). Likewise, this type of solidarity is to a less extent a “source of power and resistance”, the shape in which it appears within a tradition of working communities in a working class in the periods of early industrialization (in the West) – and is more one of the forms of contemporary individual and collective confronting the other (Linc, Stepan, 1998: 37).

This is confirmed also by the findings of our research on refuge and refugees, the status of whom we have at least partially tried to identify also through the relation towards solidarity – which can be interpreted as a reaction to the violation of the right to living.

Family, thus, has the role of insurance – it represents the reliance and establishes the reserve from which anyone can benefit in hard times (refuge, divorce, unemployment, health problems). Various forms of socio-cultural inequities among families, in its own ways, support the internal family cohesion and a feeling of being different compared to others. Likewise, social problems – especially if expressed through conflicts or poverty – are much the same as marriage disagreements and discontents, i.e. they have a tendency to weaken the exchange and human solidarity relationships in the long term, rather than to instigate them. In the family sphere, numerous external factors after all are not sufficient to explain the differences among families. There is one part of the variations remaining inexplicable by the external factors and characteristics, which confirms that common mutual helps are also instigated by immaterial causes – the micro-culture generated individually by each family (Attias-Donfut, 2002: 102-103). And this can hardly be examined completely by applying the common scientific methods, especially the quantitative ones.

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