



Reverse Tullip Education

Balkan (Čefur) subculture in Slovenia

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Abstract

This article explores the phenomenon of so-called “Čefur” subculture in Slovenia. Čefur subculture is formed by mostly second-generation descendants of immigrants who moved to Slovenia from the other former Yugoslavian republics. In this, we can find associations with other subcultures whose members are later generations of immigrant parents such as German Turks. Some of these descendants are going through an identity crisis which is one of the driving forces that contributed to the formation of this subculture. To better understand the emergence of Čefur subculture and its specifications, we must know the historical, cultural and socio-economical background of the area, as well as psychology of immigration and second generation youth. This is what this article aims to display. It will answer the question of what is the “Čefur” phenomenon, and how it came to exist.

Keywords: Balkan subculture, “Čefur”, Slovenia, Yugoslavia, Immigration

Highlights

1. Reasons for emergence of the subculture
2. Specifications of the subculture
3. Integration of the subculture

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Introduction

A unique subculture developed in Slovenia after the separation from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This subculture consists mostly of young people who are descendants of immigrants from former Yugoslavia. The name for a member of this subculture is "Čefur" (read as 'Chefoor'), a word which will be explained more in the details later in this article.

The aim of the article is then to introduce and connect the knowledge about the subculture based on the familiar research, and as well to add new information and angles for perceiving the phenomenon. Čefur subculture is the first Slovenian autochthonous subculture according to sociologist Gregor Tomc, and therefore worthy of further research (Aleksić, 2009).

The word Balkan might at first seem inappropriate to describe this particular subculture, knowing that the Balkan area includes not only former Yugoslavian republics but also other countries. Besides that, the culture of Balkan or even former Yugoslavian nations is not homogenous (Kostrić, 2004: 18). However, it must be stated that the word Balkan in Slovenian society carries certain connotation, and it is most often used when talking about former Yugoslavian republics, their population, music etc. Therefore, the term came to the usage amongst both the members of the subculture as well as in professional circles when describing things related to the scene of Čefur subculture (ibid., 19).

Methods

There is not much academic research done yet on the phenomenon. Therefore the article will be based on the available literature from Slovenian academicians who published anything related to the topic, statistical data of the Slovenian Republic and corpus of sociological theories related to the phenomenon.

Type of research will be mainly descriptive using an inductive form of theory building based on collecting known data and theories related to the matter and developing them into the rounded informative whole.

In order to understand this subculture and its relation to the general culture in Slovenia however, it is important to be familiar with the historical and cultural background of the area that once was called the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. For this reason, the article will begin with a brief introduction to history, culture, language and religion of the local area.

MULTICULTURAL YUGOSLAVIA

Yugoslavia was a country that consisted of South Slavic nations who were united under one federal republic based on Communist one-party system. Its leader, Josip Broz Tito, was an important figure who was able to keep the spirit of brotherhood and unity among the nations that were before boiling with nationalism in the time of World Wars. For half of the century, these nations shared the country, army, cultural production and language.

The standard official language in every Yugoslavian republic was Serbo-Croatian. In Slovenia and Macedonia, official languages were also Slovenian and Macedonian. People in Slovenia who were educated in the times of Yugoslavia are therefore able to understand and can speak Serbo-Croatian. On the other side, young generations who were born after the second half of the 80s are not fluent in it. Their understanding is mostly based on the similarities of the Slavic languages and their personal experiences e.g. spending summer holidays in Croatia.

Yugoslavia was a mixture of different ethnicities and cultures, however, it can be noted that Slovenian culture, temperament and mentality stands especially different when compared to the culture and mentality of the rest of the Balkan (Baskar, 2003).

Yugoslavia was also a mixture of religions that included Catholic Christians (Slovenia, Croatia), Orthodox Christians (Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia) and Muslims (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo). Yet, in the case of Yugoslavia, these religions were peacefully coexisting for 46 years. The reason for this could be communism on one side, which suppressed the importance of religion, and the strong spirit of brotherhood on the other side. Still, in Slovenia today, even though the fear from Islam is present in a certain amount - same as it is the case in most of the other Christian European countries; it can be said that Bosnians and other Balkan Muslims are mostly taken out of this equation.

One of the reasons for that is their rather mild practice of the religion. And if we consider that the source of fear is often being lack of knowledge and familiarity, the chances of being afraid are therefore smaller, because Slovenians know Bosnians quite well. If we understand that, maybe it can be easier to understand why the subculture that developed in Slovenia is not focused only on members of a specific religion but rather it includes the wider specter of religions and ethnic origins. The social exclusion in the case of 'Čefur' subculture in Slovenia is more based on the cultural differences and differences in behaving, clothes style, language, etc.

Important to note here is that culture plays especially significant role in Slovenian national identity which could be one of the players in social exclusion. Throughout history, Slovenia was always overshadowed by stronger and wealthier neighboring countries and empires. Therefore Slovenia would not distinguish itself through power and wealth but it was the culture and language that had always been the heart of Slovenian national identity (Čopič & Tomc, 2010: 42).

At the same time, there are important distinctions between 'Mitteleuropean' identity and its opposite Balkan identity. First is mono-ethnic and mono-cultural while the former is considered poly-ethnic and multicultural. Most Slovenians like to call themselves Middle European and do not like to be identified with Balkan. They possess mentality and certain qualities which are, as they would say, closer to Austrian one – such as being disciplined, hard-working, civilized, etc. Sympathizers of more relaxed and open Balkan on the other side see the faults of this Central European "petty bourgeois" mentality such as purism, self-containment, and narrow-mindedness (Baskar, 2003; Repe, 1999: 305; Šabec, 2007: 113). Keeping this in mind further allows to a better understanding of relations between Slovenians and Čefur subculture.

THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD 'ČEFUR'

But where did the word 'Čefur' come from and what does it mean? The most common theory is that it comes from the Balkan word 'čifut' (read as 'cheefoot'), which has a Turkic origin and carries a negative connotation. However, there are two possible backgrounds of this word. First one is that the word comes from the Turkish word 'cühud' or 'yahud' which stands for a Jew and was negatively used in the past by the Muslims. The word carried a certain amount of hostility and despise towards people who didn't want to follow the Prophet Mohammed.

Secondly, the word was presumably formed in Serbia and it was used for the people living on čifluk (tr.: çiftlik) which was a system of land management in Ottoman Empire and it later carried a meaning of Turkish or Muslim land. Serbians took the word from Turkish but they used it to mark someone/something which is not Orthodox Christian, but a Muslim and therefore foreign.

Overall, this expression has always been used to mark something foreign and lesser of worth in the marker's eyes. Firstly it was used by Muslims towards Jewish, later by Serbians towards Muslims and now in Slovenia, it is used to mark someone who comes from other republics of former Yugoslavia (Patljak, 2010: 4).

MINORITIES WITH THE BACKGROUND FROM OTHER FORMER YUGOSLAVIAN REPUBLICS IN SLOVENIA

In the times of the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Slovenia was the most developed among the republics and therefore people were migrating to Slovenia for work. It was easy to migrate while living in a common country and the payment was better than in other republics. Workers were coming to work daily, weekly or for a longer period. Very often it were men who came to work in Slovenia while their families remained in their home countries. In some cases also the wives and children followed their husbands and they settled their life in Slovenia. The biggest immigrant wave, however, was recorded in the 1980s when Yugoslavia faced an economic crisis. The next big wave came with refugees who were fleeing the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s. Slovenia was at the same time opening working places and continuing with hiring labour workers from former Yugoslavia, mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Because of this reason, 90% of those immigrants had a very low education. The growth of immigrants in Slovenia after independence was three times higher than in the times of Yugoslavia. Nowadays almost 6% of Slovene population and 86% of all immigrants in Slovenia belongs to other former Yugoslavian nationalities, with the highest percentage of Serbians, Bosnians and Croatians (Malačič, 2008: 46-48; Patljak, 2010: 28-31; Razpotnik, 2018).

After the death of Tito in 1980 the intolerance towards the different culture of other Yugoslavian nations was rising. It grew even more after the independence of Slovenia and after massive immigration that followed as a result of wars in Balkan. People having immigrated had different customs, habits, lifestyle, language and financial standards than local Slovenians, and the prejudices and discrimination were rising. The times of the wars were especially sensitive as people who came had lived through traumatic events and carried a tension that led as well to more violent behaviour and criminal activities. Intolerance in the 1990s, led to marking people from former Yugoslavian republics who lived in Slovenia as 'Not-Slovenians'. They were given names such as "Balkanci" (Balkanians), "Bosanderosi" (referring to Bosnians), "Čefurji" (the word Čefur in plural), "Južnjaki" (referring to Southern ones), "Jugosi" (referring to Southern ones), "iči" (referring to the surname ending: "-ić" which is more common in other former Yugoslavian republics), etc. (Patljak, 2010: 23, 31).

In Slovenian discourse, the word Balkan became a synonym for disorder, fraudulence, laziness, savagery and other things that are opposite to civilized Europe (Pernuš, 2008: 6). This description is very close to the notion of orientalism as described by Edward Said (1977). Like our famous Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek said, the Balkan is an ideological category that represents the Others of Europe. And Slovenia, same as every other European country has their own Southern neighbour, their own Balkan which is the opposite of their civilized selves. (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2012). This perception about Balkan that could easily be called upon as neocolonial discourse about the Other became even more intense in Slovenia after joining the European Union (Šabec, 2007:115).

EMERGENCE OF "ČEFUR" SUBCULTURE IN SLOVENIA

Today expression "Čefur" is commonly used to describe specific subculture that was formed mainly by young descendants of immigrants from former Yugoslavian republics. However, one is not born Čefur but becomes one if he adapts certain behaviour and image (Patljak, 2010: 60).

This subculture forms its own patterns in behaving, style of clothes, language, hobbies, and other things that makes it distinctive from the general culture. To understand Čefur subculture better, we should look at the background that contributed to its formation.

Most of the youngsters from Čefur subculture are the second generation of the immigrants who were born in Slovenia. They have grown in Slovenian society, having their external socialization in Slovenian environment, but they are also facing certain differences between the external culture and the culture they are being raised in. Sometimes, they experience the resentment from the external culture, as well. All this contribute to some kind of identity crisis which is even more likely to occur at youngsters whose parents did not assimilate well to the external culture.

However, the important difference between generations that has to be considered is that the first generation, apart from the second, has already obtained positive identity about themselves. They know who they are, and where they are coming from. And even though they could face some resentment from the side of Slovenians, Slovenia was the opportunity to live a better life than back home for them. For their children on the other side, Slovenia is not a land of opportunity. More often they are disappointed by it as they feel their social-economic disadvantages. They were born in Slovenia, same as other Slovenians but yet they are sometimes treated as different from others. While their parents could form a positive identity of themselves, they face difficulties of living between two cultures, two languages, and two lifestyles without completely belonging to one. In Slovenia, they are not real Slovenians and in the country of their parents' origin, they are not real Bosnians, Serbians, etc. There, they are called upon as Slovenians or so-called "Janez" which is a distinct yet stereotypical name used for Slovenian man among the Western Balkan people.

When the individual does not feel like he belongs to somewhere, the need to develop his own and collective identity can emerge. If he feels the resentment from the side of the general culture, the individual can also develop a defense mechanism which makes him either deny one of his identities or emphasize his difference. The second can also lead to aggressiveness, and to different attempts to prove himself (Patljak, 2010: 17-19; Lesar, 1998: 8-9). Unfortunately, sometimes these attempts lead also to different criminal activities and criminal behaviours. However, this should be thought of as "a social problem rather than an individual pathological issue" (Nwalozie, 2015: 4).

THE EXPRESSION OF ČEFUR SUBCULTURE IDENTITY

The word "čefur" stands for a subculture that wasn't literally transferred from Balkan but is a unique urban formation that includes both Balkan and Slovenian features (Velikonja, 2002).

Čefur subculture carries its own style and codes which include behaving, language, clothes style, etc. People from other Yugoslavian republics are usually having darker physical attributes than Slovenians, which makes them stand out, however, this is not a rule (Lesar, 1998: 15). Also, not all the people who are having origins from other former Yugoslavian republics are part of the Čefur subculture. Many of them are well integrated and also successful.

Čefur carries a certain image and argot. As mentioned above, people who fall under this subculture usually come from working families of Yugoslavian immigrants. They have possibly faced certain obstacles (language problem in school, etc.) and some version of intolerance while growing up. For a young person who is disappointed by the environment and is confused about his identity, it is easy to grab the identity that the subculture offers. Because of the feeling of inadequacy, they are trying to prove their worth elsewhere and oppose the culture that resents them and pushing them to the margin. This is shown in specific behaving patterns such as listening to their ethnic music very loud in order to provoke the environment, refusing to speak Slovenian language or speaking it in a mixture of Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian, also stressing the hard letter L while talking which is used in Serbo-Croatian but not in Slovenian language.

Some of them also get involved in drugs, excessive consumption of alcohol, violent behaviour, participation in fights, smaller or bigger criminal acts, etc. (Lesar, 1998: 8, 13-15; Patljak, 2010: 49; Velikonja, 2002). There are as well some Slovenians who are trying to behave as a part of this subculture but they are given the name "Čapac" (read as 'Chapats').

One means of asserting identity is as well through specific music. Čefur subculture is showing their ethnic pride through listening to national music that originates from other republics of former Yugoslavia. Among these Turbo-Folk, a genre originating from Serbia is common but there are also many others (Jontez & Mež, 2009: 139). A name for the Balkan music mixture became "Balkanijada" which is played in many night clubs or bars in Ljubljana and other cities where the subculture is present. Rap and Hip Hop are as well popular genres that are close to this subculture. Challe Salle, Fudex and Cyam are some of the rap performers from Ljubljana representing the subculture. Usually, they sing in Slovenian language with čefur argot, sometimes as well in Serbo-Croatian. There are also other rappers from the subculture, such as Zlatko (Zlatan Čordić) who is more widely famous in Slovenia also among the general audience.

Slovenian culturologist Mitja Velikonja points out the difference between so-called Yugoslavian music and Balkan music. Here the negative connotation and ideological construction of the word Balkan comes to the spotlight again. The image of Balkanian 'Other' is more of a rural, backward, nationalist person who listens to Turbo-Folk or national music from any of the former Yugoslavian republics. On the other side, Yugoslavian 'Other' is thought to be a member of modern, non-nationalist society, wearing modern clothes and listening to Rock and Pop music (Velikonja, 2014).

The dress code of Čefur subculture, despite depending on the change in fashion, also carries certain features on its own. Often their clothes tend to be common brands (or imitations of them) e.g. Tommy Hilfiger, Adidas, Kappa, Yellow Cab, Nike sports shoes and sweat pants. They are usually combined with a tight T-shirt or undershirt and a bag that also belongs to a famous brand. Besides tracksuits, clothes of white colour are also popular, as well as polo shirts and fashion accessories such as big silver or gold watch, gold necklace or sometimes chain around the neck, diamond earring, etc. The hairstyle is usually short, side-shaved inspired by famous footballers, or shaped with hair gel. Overall, subculture gives importance to their looks and choice of clothes.

Girls of the subculture tend to dress in a way that attracts the opposite gender. They also distinguish themselves by wearing excessive make-up, wear brandy clothes and bags, and golden or gilded accessories (Lesar, 1998: 15-17; Jontez & Mež, 2009: 139; Kostrić, 2004: 29, 30). The similar patterns, however, are noticed in some other subcultures whose members come from the poorer background and the showing off the wealth in different forms is used to compensate for something they believe they lack. They tend to give importance to building their status in society, which they think looks down upon them.

Discussions

Lately, it has been spoken a lot about Čefur subculture in Slovenia. There are also many eminent artists and celebrities in Slovenia that confidently call themselves Čefur, sometimes also to make fun, which is adding to a more positive atmosphere related to the topic. Commonly the topic is used also in music, stand-ups, on stage comedies and other cultural events.

In the year 2008, Goran Vojnović wrote a novel Čefurji raus! or as titled in its later English version Southern Scum, Go Home! (Vojnović, 2012). The novel profoundly describes an inner world of the young second generation of Yugoslavian immigrants in Slovenia. This book was a huge success among the general public and among the Čefur subculture. It also received Kersnik Award for best novel of the year and Prešeren Fund Award, which is the most eminent award in Slovenia and offers a high acknowledgement in the field of artistic creation.

The novel was translated from Slovenian to 7 other languages (Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Swedish, Polish, Czech and Italian) and it was also followed by the film adaptation which was done in 2013 with the same name (Vojnović, 2013).

Cheese and Jam (2003) is another Slovenian film which refers to the Balkan minority in Slovenia. The film is a comedy-drama that speaks about relationship between a Bosnian man and a Slovenian woman. Through telling their story it also shows the stereotypical differences between the two cultures and the attitudes between them. Shot in 2003, this film was also very successful.

Culture is a living thing, and the same as Slovenian culture affects the culture of the immigrants who live in Slovenia and their children, they affect Slovenian culture in a way, as well. The topic has been grabbing more attention lately and is discussed more openly and as well more often by the academicians and also by other experts and artists.

The cultural creations have their own powerful way to reach out and affect the audience. If nothing else, all these different events can be the force that causes regular people to contemplate about the topic, and discuss it perhaps more objectively instead of staying distanced and hidden behind stereotyping. The attitude of the general culture, in the end, also participates in developing and affects the attitude of the subculture.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The phenomenon of Čefur subculture is hardly known above the borders of Slovenia. However, it is a case well worthy of a deeper examination. It has certain similarities with some of the other subcultures such as new generations of Turks born in Germany for example. Yet, the Čefur subculture also remains unique and specific due to its own unique cultural and historical circumstances which make it very interesting phenomenon on its own.

The above mentioned subculture of German Turks have certain common aspects with Čefur subculture such as: identity crisis of later generations who are born in Germany to Turkish immigrant parents, they are often born in the lower economy class families as their parents came to Germany as labour workers, their domestic culture is different from the culture of the environment where they grew up, etc. Interestingly though, the subculture of German Turks is more likely to expand also to third generation while Čefur subculture members are mostly children of first generation of immigrants. However, eventually the new generations of both are more assimilated, they struggle less and therefore they are less likely to have a need to identify themselves as the members of subculture.

There is more literature available about the Turks in Germany than it is about Čefur subculture. Perhaps doing a comparison study would provide additional perspective and new knowledge about both of the subcultures. There is a lot of Turkish and German literature available about the former. Slovenian authors and academicians mentioned in this article can be the source to lean on regarding the later - Čefur subculture.

Getting more research done can provide better introspection and understanding, not only of Čefur subculture but other immigrant subcultures, as well. With massive immigrations which we witness today, we can, without doubt, expect the emergence of new immigrant subcultures. There are obvious anti-immigrant tensions present among one part of European population. Therefore we should act now in order to be better prepared in the future. Hopefully, more research can provide answers that will help with better integration of immigrant subcultures into society, increased productivity and as well increased life satisfaction of its members as well.

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