

Irena Stefoska

O. Löfgren, “The Nationalization of Culture”, *Ethnologia Europaea*, 19/1989, 5-23.

The author of the article focuses on the problem of creating and recreating national identity and culture as an arena of competing interests among various social groups using examples from the history of Sweden and other Scandinavian countries as well. According to 19 national nation-building ideologies each nation must not only share a common language and history, but also national folklore, national character/mentality, national values, symbols (flag, anthem, etc.), national myths, heroes, writings, etc. This set of values, dated mostly from the 19th century, has been developed in the 20th. National identity might be considered a distinct form of collective identity. Nationalism often employs ethnicity as the foundation of constructing national culture, but one might also claim that ethnic identity is the byproduct of the nation-building process.

The examples offered by the author on the Norwegian case indicate that national identity has always been defined as opposed to other nations. Norwegian national identity separated despite the centuries of Danish rule leading up to the Union between Norway and Sweden in 1814. Constructing the Finnish national culture was at the hands of the Swedish-speaking intellectual elite, which in this process became much more Finnish than the villagers themselves. The modes of nationalizing folk culture (in various countries) illustrate the processes in which versions of national folklore were produced by selecting, categorizing, relocating and “freezing”. In order to produce a symbolic community, the identity marker must be created within the national arena, inciting a feeling of affiliation and loyalty to the national project while labelling the outside world as the national Other.

Löfgren pays special attention to little details or trivia representing central ideas and behaviour models. Concepts such as Swedishness or Englishness imply the existence of distinct cultural practices within national borders. Thus Swedishness denotes not so much what people say about it, but how they say it.

Creating a nation, according to the author, is a process of integration and standardization, language being a perfect example – a medium for creating national cohesion and affiliation. Nationalization of culture, however, was far more associated

with creating a public sphere by the elites/bourgeoisie, founding the new information and debate arenas and media. Hence, the author suggests, it would prove useful to study the manners in which this public discourse has been transformed into a national discourse.

In the 20th century, mass media have clearly taken part in creating the new national traditions, such as, for instance, the New Year's celebration in Sweden. Even in the pluralist world of mass media of today, however, Löfgren deems, we need to trace the manners in which international influences are being nationalized in local contexts. Soap operas of the *Dallas* and *Dynasty* variety, or Disney characters, for instance, play different parts in different national milieus. Nevertheless, consumer culture might equally be an internationalizing, as a nationalizing force.

Analyzing the national disintegration discourse, Löfgren claims it often disregards that national culture is constantly redefined. That each generation produces its own national communions and frames of reference, selecting the items from the symbolic resources of previous generations. Communion is greater today than in the past, as well as different. "France of today is culturally more homogeneous than in the 19th century, but the national, symbolic capital, as, for instance, patriotic textbooks on culture are far in the past."

While the concept of nationalism is primarily defined as a political ideology, national culture is a phrase combining of normative and descriptive elements. In studying the modes of nationalizing culture, therefore, Löfgren suggests distinguishing two processes. The one in which cultural elements transform into symbols, or the national rhetoric symbolizing the essence of a nation; and the other, in which cultural courses are organized and transformed within national borders.

Finally, according to Löfgren, the national project cannot endure as a sheer ideological construction; it must be the cultural practice of people in their everyday lives. Hence it is particularly important to study this mode of national communion – the one produced and reproduced daily; its depth, length and diffusion in certain times and various social milieus in accordance with generational changes.