

## **“Nationalization of Culture” by Orvar Löfgren**

In the preface to the collection of papers of his Swedish and Hungarian colleagues he edited in 1989, dr Löfgren argues for a “historical anthropology of national cultures, focusing on some of the processes which develop, reproduce and change national identity and culture” (p. 21). In his approach to the subject the author reminds us that the pioneer attempts of European ethnology actually salvaged and assembled national folk culture for the ideological purposes. Later generations - the author continues - had to critically deconstruct these initiative attempts. As much as his paper is a continuation of this deconstructing work especially on notions how national cultures were made and re-made (or even broken) concealing differentiations based on many divergent interests, Löfgren also calls for another re-thinking of how the national culture is today an indisputable phenomenon which needs a field of study on its own. Nevertheless, the main body of Löfgren’s text discusses how the elusive trait of terms such as “national” or (in author’s case) “Swedish” were defined or redefined in different historical settings, how are these (in the words of Benedict Anderson) imagined communities shaped and held together over time, how is the social and political space of the nation transformed also into a cultural space and a common culture.

After briefly sketching the shared symbolic capital which the nationalism sees as crucial to the “proper” existence of a nation and the influence of nationalism on forming the national cultures, the author stresses that national identity and national culture should not be identified, roughly defining the latter as a “collective sharing on a national level or within a national cultural space”. Reflecting further on the subject, a very important passage in Löfgren’s text marks the dual and interactive process of the forming of the national identity, “a task which calls for internal and external communication”, i.e. creating of national markers within the national arena in order to achieve a sense of belonging and loyalty, but also approving of this identity by the “others” as crucially different. The first task calls for “‘correct’, authorized and timeless” version of folk culture produced through the process of selection, categorization and “freezing”, the second for the marketing of the identity to the outside world to be seen as “national otherness”.

The next emphasis in Löfgren's paper is laid on the often overseen distinction between "the National culture" - the authorized public culture as disseminated in the schools, and the everyday sharing of memories – shared smells, sounds and visions, "a structure of feelings". He boldly argues that the most important aspects of this national sharing are anchored in sharing trivialities of everyday life and go so far to the point that it is important to note not only what people talk about but also the way of talking. Thus author goes further from the notion of the "check list" of what every nation should have, which he mentions at the start of the text, and moves to a more wider field where everything from national landscape series to one-channel TV have enormous integrating impact on everyday life. In the end the author proposes the mode in which the national project cannot survive as a mere ideological construction but must exist as a cultural praxis in everyday life in a sort of "daily referendums". Concluding, the author states that the national identity has and is constantly redefined as every new generation produces its own national-sharing selecting items from the symbolic estates of earlier generations. In the end Löfgren calls for a broad comparative study of how nations are transformed into cultural formations, that is how culture is nationalized. To answer this he poses two questions on which the study should be based: 1) how are the cultural elements turned into symbols of national rhetoric? 2) how cultural flows are contained, organized and transformed, how national space becomes cultural space?

Though the insisting on "class interests" and "cultural hegemony" may sound unusual or too underlined for this particular subject, it surely posts a frame in which there is a lot to be discussed, especially in the light of post WWII flourishing of "state folklorism" in the communist block. The notion that nationalism (in contrast to patriotism) "contains political dynamite" is undoubtedly true for late 18<sup>th</sup> and the whole of 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the view of nationalism as being used "both to mask class interests" and (to a lesser degree) "to fight them" is typical for west Europe and hardly adaptable to the historical development in the east of the Continent. On the whole Löfgren's discussions opens up important questions and sheds light on details which should not be omitted from a study in the rise of Montenegrin national identity in socialist Yugoslavia. Here, the insisting on a cultural differentiation from the Serbs/Serbians is one of the pillars of forming a national culture. Perpetual contrasting of Montenegrin as a language of its own different from Serbian, the differences in "national character and mentality" is further broadened with claims on a different set

of what all Montenegrins know and the Serbs/Serbians don't. This list has been increasingly broadened with the propagation of shared knowledge needed to take the part in public discourses with the introduction of state newspaper "Pobjeda", state TV (1976) and then with the promotion of figures of political life or popular culture known only within the state borders. The process through which the Montenegro reached the state of modern nation as a cultural paradigm is surely an almost singular case which shares a limited scope of similarities only with the process which shaped the Muslim Bosniak nationhood.

Löfgren's reassuring notion that "it is not the nation that is falling apart but rather an older version of the national ideal" is by all means true but bears the mark of a position where nations can be made but not re-made. Though empirically correct as no nation has yet, and probably will never completely disappear from the face of the world, the author seems to have undermined the realization of how far a mix between different cultures can go and what important changes this brings into the life of a nation. To an extent a nation can absorb international influences by (as Löfgren puts it) nationalization into a local context but in the light of ever advancing and aggressive globalization all national cultures become "diluted" with a common set of habits, likes and dislikes, memories and so on. The author marks this in his notion that the symbolic capital of nations is diminishing even though they are more homogenous than before and later also adds that the national identity is not always and overriding loyalty - a statement which is due to be reaffirmed again as we move further from the "classical age" of nation states.

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