Research project *"Ambiguous Identities and Nation-state Building in Southeastern Europe"*

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On Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Moldova through Politics of Second World War Commemoration
(research proposal)

My intention to apply for the research project "Ambiguous Identities and Nation-state Building in Southeastern Europe" comes from my previous interest in national identities in post-Soviet space as reflected in Second World War commemorations. As a MA student at the Department of History, Central European University (Budapest), I worked on metamorphosis of Second World War commemorations in post – Soviet Moldova with the specific case study of the Memorial Complex "Capul de Pod Serpeni" (Moldova). Currently, being a PhD researcher at the Department of History and Civilization, European University Institute (Florence), I am working on how the Second World War history have been used in state legitimization and search for national unifying narratives in Soviet and post-Soviet Eastern Europe. This approach intends to illustrate at a more general level the searching for "knowledge and truth" in changed historical contexts, the importance of public struggle over the meanings and interpretations of the Soviet past and mechanisms of "coming to terms with the past" through national histories.

Taking into consideration my research interests, in the frame of the research project "Ambiguous Identities and Nation-state Building in Southeastern Europe", having as a reference point the commemorative practices of the Second World War, I will focus on the distinction between public history ("usable national history") and personal recalling(s) of the past in influencing organization of the social space for national imaginings.

As a starting point I will take Wlodek Weselowski's idea that "coming to terms with the past" is rooted deeply in the distinction between popular sentiments, dreams of intellectuals, and the manipulative practices of politicians. This brings me to the case of Moldova were the search for a national identity following the independence in 1991 has been reflected in at some extent dramatic struggles over the interpretations of the Soviet past. Lacking a pre-socialist cultural memory, the

Moldovan society sought to transform the Soviet past into "usable national history" and aiming to focus and mobilize public opinion, driven from the necessity to transmit a sense of continuity and coherence through meaningful historical contexts, in our particular case being Second World War. Thus, as Brian S. Osborne has argued, the elite groups and / or political authority have sought to organize public space to communicate to the public a particular kind of national consciousness, conformity to a particular public order.

The analysis will engage with two aspects of Second World War commemorations[1] in post-Soviet Moldova which are representative in the debates on nation-building in Moldova after the collapse of Soviet Union. The first refers the so called "nationalization" of the Second World War commemorative practices. An example could be the monuments and memorials of Second World War which were built during the Soviet period and (re)built after the collapse of Soviet Union, or the (re)established 'national' celebrations of the SWW (in the case of Moldova being 23 August, Liberation of Moldova from Fascist Occupation, which became an important event, in some cases shadowing the Victory Day). The second aspect, with which the research will engage is linked with the 'uncommemorated loss' of the Second World War, in this sense an example are the war veterans who fought on the side of the Romanian army and who have been excluded from the public commemorative practices. By bringing this aspect, I will focus on the issue of 'exclusive' character of the post-soviet nations.

For the public authorities the structures, meaning memorials, museums, archives, as well as rituals, meaning ceremonies, commemorations, cumulated with a singular sanctioned history are intended to generate social mobilization and search for the national unity, which Maria Bucur calls "usable national history". However, as Roger Brubaker and Margit Feischmidt emphasize, "while the 'search for a usable past' is chronic […], 'usable pasts' are not all that easily found or invented, and not all pasts are equally 'usable' for present purposes"[2]. Although the argument of the differences between official histories and public memories is too complex and multifaceted, controversies which arose from the accounts highlight the insecurities which "dealing with the recent past" might bring.

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[1] A useful account of the Second World War as a legitimizing myth is given, among others, by Nina Tumarkin in her *The Living and the Dead. The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, New York: BasicBooks, 1994; Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone. Death and Memory in twentieth century Russia*. London: Granta Books, 2000. Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War. Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006.
[2] Roger Brubaker and Margit Feischmidt, "1848 in 1998: The Politics of Commemoration in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia", *Society for Comparative Study and History* (2002), 702.

Referring to the war memorials, Reinhart Kosellek stresses that they do more than just keep alive the memory of the dead for whose sake they were first erected. The surviving observers are themselves put in the position were they are offered an identity.[3] It is the nature of the public reaction to monuments, Brian S. Osborne has argued, that determines whether or not they serve as passive visual statements contributing to social cohesion, or as active elements in a public discourse of redefinition[4]. He points that the elite groups and/or political authority have always sought to organize public space to communicate to the public a particular kind of national consciousness, a conformity to a particular public order. However, as Levinson argues, anyone can play the game of "identity politics" and "there is rarely a placid consensus" upon which the state may build.[5] Consequently, rather than being sites of consensus building, public space and its population of carefully selected monuments and statuary become contested terrains.[6]

The commemorative practices of the Second World War during the Soviet period have omitted the individual grief and mourning from official celebrations. The private recollections of the Second World War, however, were reflected in some other, silenced commemorative practices as religious rituals sites. After the collapse of Soviet Union, the official discourses of remembrance, even if "nationalized" the Second World War commemorations by attempts to radically break from Soviet tradition, remained, however highly politicized. In this context, by answering the question of whether and how is the past faced, reconstructed and reflected in relation to national idea and national identifications (in our particular case being Second World War commemorations), by looking at war monuments and memorials as well as at the "excluded" groups, will bring new insights in analyzing the nation-building process in Moldova.

This research will benefit from wide and diverse sources of material and methodologies, taking into the consideration its specificity and limits. The main souses of the research will combine oral history interviews and participant observation with archival materials, collections of National and local history museums.

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[3] Reinhart Kosellek, "War Memorials: Identity formation of the Survivors", *The Practice of Conceptual History spacing concepts* (Standford: Standford University Press, 2002) pp. 286-287
[4] Brian S. Osborne, *Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in Its Place (*draft) www.metropolis.net (Accessed on 5th May 2005).
[5] Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990).
[6] Brian S. Osborne, "Figuring Space, Marking Time: Contested Identities in Canada." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (1998), pp. 23-40.

Work plan

It should be mentioned that at this stage the work and time plan is very tentative. It will be completed, modified and adapted in accordance with the specific requirements of the project, as well as with the requirements of the PhD program from Department of History and Civilization, European University Institute.

activities/time schedule	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
2007												
Elaboration of research outlines and methodology plan	*	*										
Participation at the methodological workshop in Graz in order to discuss the methodological and theoretical frames of this project			*									
Revision of individual methodology plan				*								
Historical and ethnological research												
- research in Moldovan libraries and archives						*						
- preparation of interviews												
- ethnological fieldwork and interview taking						*	*					
- gathering of biographic information				*	*							
Progress Report 1							*					
Historical and ethnological research - research in Moldovan libraries and archives - ethnological fieldwork and interview taking								*	*			
Progress Report 2										*		

activities/time schedule	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
2008												
Progress Report 3	*											
Data evaluation and analysis		*	*									
Progress Report 4						*						
Historical and ethnological research - research in Moldovan libraries and archives - working with ethnological fieldwork and interviews materials						*	*	*				
Progress Report 5									*			
Final report on empirical report (of all country teams & full time researchers)												*

activities/time schedule	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
						2009						
Writing up research results - elaboration of the draft of the article	*	*	*	*								
Presentation of individual research results (draft of the PhD thesis with will reflect the results of the research) at the International conference in Chisinau					*							
Reviewing the article for publication Preparing PhD thesis for publication, if accepted						*	*	*				