

The Nationalization of Culture, Orvar Löfgren

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This paper gives an overview of main ideas about nation building processes in social sciences. Firstly, author offers a short description of papers presented in the volume, then he emphasizes two points in study of nationalism – the importance of comparative perspective, and of interdisciplinary borrowings and exchange.

The author explains that the idea of nation as imagined community opened a possibility to understand nationalism as some type of false consciousness. He suggests that it is an expected and necessary phase in research. However, it implies that, once people understand the abstract and imagined nature of national belongings, they will be able to abandon them. However, some other anthropologists, (Navaro Yashin, f.eg.) have shown that even though persons are aware of the abstract nature of nation-state, they often do not want to abandon the concept. Löfgren suggests that this phase of research is not very fruitful anymore.

Nations which are usually described as “new” are being born into the same 19th century paradigm as the “old nations” – the process of nation building requires production of certain conceptions from a “check-list”, such as common language, common past and destiny, national folk culture, national character/mentality, national values, national tastes, national landscape, etc.

The author then gives an overview of the importance of national culture. National culture is being produced through similar processes as national identity, and they are mutually constitutive, but Löfgren claims that they should not be understood as the same. National culture is a kind of is “normative cultural capital: what every Frenchman should know” (pp 9), and national identity is a type of classification, or division which, in Löfgren’s words, gradually can become more important than other types of division.

Löfgren then describes how nation building requires integration and standardization which are being done through national institutions. Public discourse is being turned into a national discourse through newspapers, schools, radio broadcasting, and he argues that scientists should study nationalizing media, agents, institutions and arenas. 19th century

brought the idea of the land with fixed borders, where exists population which can be counted, and which should have common past and common future – which are at the same time different from the past and the future of other populations. Hence, schools, media, newspapers produced common topics for conversation, shared understanding of history, and of national goals for the future.

Löfgren introduces three terms. By *international cultural grammar of nationhood* he understands processes which are common for all nation building projects – this term refers to the “check-list” which he has previously described. This ‘international thesaurus’ is transformed into a specific *national lexicon*. National lexicon refers to local forms of cultural expression, or historical and cultural specificities of nation building projects. The third term, *dialect vocabulary* describes divisions inside of a nation; it emphasizes existence of difference within the nation – various groups which use national arguments and accuse the other group of the “vulgar nationalism”.

Author also suggests that nation is reproduced in everyday life, in “daily referendums”, and that more attention should be directed to practices of national identity.