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Position Paper

Lofgren, Orvar 1989: The Nationalization of Culture. In: *Ethnologia Europea* XIX: 5-23.

Through this article, the author provides some methodological suggestions for the further research on the relation between nation, culture and everyday life and practices. The nationalization of culture is framed within the temporal dimension (i.e. generational change), and it is regarded as a battle arena, where the contestation and negotiation between different actors and groups take place. Based on these, to define the national culture as rhetoric and practice, he distinguishes between “*international cultural grammar* of nationhood”, which is transformed then into “specific national lexicon”, which subsequently has different divisions within the nation, i.e. “dialect vocabulary”(21-23).

Drawing on Anderson’s “imagined communities”, the author insists that the construction of national identities “calls for internal and external communication. In order to create a symbolic community, identity markers have to be created *within* the national arena in order to achieve a sense of belonging and loyalty to the national project, but this identity also has to be marked to the outside world as a national otherness.” (12) However, I am not convinced that it is possible to draw the differentiation between the internal and external realms of national identity formation as sharply as it is proposed here. The borders between “within” and “without” are not easily traceable if we contextualize the identity construction, national in our case, within the history of transfers of ideas, transnational history, or history of migration and diasporas, just to mention few of them.

It seems that the key word for Lofgren, is “sharing”. Truly, indeed, he is urging to address the questions of what and how is shared on a national level, as compared to the everyday national sharing of memories, symbols and knowledge, to quote the article itself: “the most important aspects of this national sharing are anchored in the trivialities of everyday life, in the ways in which we can talk about Swedish routines and habits”.

I find both interesting and challenging this relation between “sharing” and “national culture”. It is interesting to see how at different scales of analysis and in different periods, certain symbols, rites and knowledge are being shared by different groups. What is challenging, is to find an answer to how much “shared” symbols, rites and knowledge (simply culture) should be, so that they become nationalized. It seems to me that this is not as easy to answer as the author implies in some parts of the article. He claims that it is not only about

visibility of certain cultural elements, but also about sensual and emotional quality. Thus, “the common national memories and understandings are sometimes more strongly articulated in non-verbal forms, in shared smells, sound, tastes and visions. [...] in this sense, some feelings are more national than others, i.e. they have a stronger symbolic charge”(15). The question is how to identify the “national” in the both verbal and non-verbal forms of the everyday? Could we derive the “national” from anything which is shared? To me, although the article proves to be thought-provoking, it does not give the sufficient guidance to tackle these issues.