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Article of the Month: April
Orvar Löfgren: The Nationalization of Culture

Orvar Löfgren's article "The Nationalization of Culture" offers the reader another face of nationalism, i. e. the cultural perspective which is embodied in everyday life practices. Compared to Brubaker's article (article of the month in February), who emphasizes nationalism as a merely political project which is rationally administrated by the political elite and serves its political interests, Löfgren offers a complement to this, by throwing light on the importance of the grassroots cultural practices in everyday life. Those become then contextualized or located in a nationalist project.

What I have viewed as a too simplistic top-down interpretation in Brubaker's article regarding nationalism, is actually completed in Löfgren's explanatory model. By stressing the cultural aspect in nationalism, a more dialectical approach is established, according to which everyday practices of ordinary people become an important constitutive force in the national-culture-building process. A nationalist project, thus, calls not only for an ideological and political meaning, but has to be endowed with cultural content, in order to be attractive and to survive. This necessity for content might explain also the phantasm of origins and myths about which Ivy has been wondering in her article on identity-building in modern times.

In fact, for Brubaker the main subject of interest is the nation-ness as an ideological construction and an instrument for political goals (his main question in the text is "What does the national category stand for?") while in Löfgren's view mechanisms of building a "national subject" build the ostensible locus of interests. Putting it in Paul Piccone's words, Löfgren's analytical lenses concentrate more on the pre-categorical cultural dimension and the mechanisms which it become politically structured as a national experience.¹ The combination of those two authors and their approaches seems to be a proper explanatory model, which is suitable for the field of interests in our project.

By interpreting culture as a substantive mode of national identity, Löfgren creates a more conceptual rather than contingent logic of nation-building. National identity, culture,

¹ Paul Piccone, "The Tribulations of Left Social Criticism: Reply to Palti," in *Telos* 107 (1996), p. 163.

mentality, heritage serve therefore as his main analytical concepts, which according to him still lack a proper academic definition. However those concepts understood also as national culture capital Löfgren sees as selective bodies, in which only certain cultural practices are elevated as performative moments of the nation-ness standing for a nation-wide level. This so-called performative moment of nation-ness, or cultural practices, defines the condition of possibility of the nationalist discourse. As I understand Löfgren, the moment of constructivity does not therefore begin with the content as such, but with the implementation of a particularistic local practice on a national level, thus repressing the heterogeneity and plurality within the nationalist tensions.² The illusion of homogeneity is where the construction starts, while the given cultural content actually is part of an anterior space of cultural practices whose existence dates prior to the nationalization project.

The process of selecting, defining and officialising the normative shared national knowledge Löfgren connects to the concept of hegemony and political contestation.

However, the question who has the power of defining *la Grande Culture*³ and marginalizing other cultural practices in the domain of localism, remains open. Löfgren does not offer a theoretical model for defining those groups or individuals but pays attention to the tools of communicating the standardized national culture version via television, national broadcasting, creating a national rhythm etc. If those, who are empowered to standardize and officialize are the intellectuals, politicians, or another social powerful group, might probably depend on the specific case study. In regard to Sweden as Löfgren's subject of interest, it was temporally contingent and shifted from the social democrats to the conservatives and back to the social-democrats.

Here we arrive at the third point and that is the mutability of the national culture articulation and its popular perception. The temporal dimension and the variability of national culture-building stresses fluidity of the narrations and their dependence not only on the political context, but also on the popular main cultural trends, which also modify the nation-ness' discourse. This constant redefinition of national culture and its changeability (in Löfgren's article) defined through the frequency of a generation, illuminates the dynamic process of negotiating and renegotiating the cultural content of the nation-ness. In contrast to the

² Löfgren's approach might be interpreted as an antidote to Eric Hobsbawm's "Invention of Tradition", according to whom the moment of invention is already given in the content as such.

³ Orvar Löfgren, "The Nationalization of Culture," in, *Ethnologia Europaea* 19, p. 15.

narratives, which represent the nation-ness as a static old entity, the reproduction of the content makes the nation, in Bhabha's words, "[...] becoming the symptom of an ethnography of the "contemporary" within culture."⁴

Starting with this aspect of temporality, I think that it will be very crucial for our Bosnian team since Dzenita, Admir and I analyze different periods of national narration(s) that were representing the Bosniak national culture. Thus, although it is not employable to my single case study, it is definitely important if we look through a prism that unifies all three projects on Bosnian Muslims/Bosniaks. Employing the scale of temporal comparison and elaborating the concept of national identity within social and political change, the variations of the narrations might be well traced. Although we deal here with a continuity of the intellectuals' generation that are the invaluable in the refashioning of a national narrative (Gramsci), the change of the political contexts might be viewed as one explanation of the narrative transformation.

An interesting question, is how the different generations' interpretations coexist at a time of cultural performance. I think here of Ajvatovica, which Dzenita analyzes, and the simultaneity of several generations among which there are people who remember Ajvatovica also from the 50s. How do they view the contemporary cultural performance, which has been structured as a national experience? Do they see any discontinuities? If so where and why? Are there any collisions of interpretations between the young and elder people who participate in Ajvatovica?

In regard to the concept of hegemony and the elevation of the cultural national capital, I will employ it (adding Gramsci's concept) in my analysis of the national narrations, which appeared in form of historical books on the Bosnian Muslims articulated by intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s. Interestingly, in 1974 two books with the same aim to represent the national narration of Bosnian Muslims were published, however only one of them got the seal of the official culture representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, i. e. Hadzizahic's book "Od tradicije do identiteta".⁵ Smail Balic's opus under the title "Historija Bosnjaka [!]" (note the difference in the nomenclature) did not experience the official approbation and therefore was published in Vienna⁶. Thus, the selection process of what should constitute the shared

⁴ Homi Bhabha, *DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation*, p. 297.

⁵ Muhamed Hadzizahic, *Od tradicije do identiteta*, Sarajevo 1974.

⁶ Smail Balic, *Historija Bosnjaka*, Wien 1974.

knowledge about Bosnian Muslims will be at stake in my analysis of the intellectuals as the articulators of national identities. This will lead me to the politicians' influences on the accreditation of (national) expertise in the case of Bosnian Muslims. By analyzing the individual authors I will also analyze the differences of the content in their narratives and the points of interceptions and contestations. Thus, my employment of the concept of hegemony will not focus so much on the contestation within different local cultural practices but on the different intellectually formed narratives. Instead of cultural performances my subjects of interest are the identity makers and the way how they are made to be the ones who link the community with aspects of culture, history, and shared customs.