

**Research Project: New and Ambiguous Nation-Building Processes
in South-Eastern Europe**

Working Paper Series

**WE HAVE ALL GONE THROUGH THE SAME DIFFICULTIES:
FAMILY LIFE OF PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT NATIONS IN
MONTENEGRO**

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http://www.oei.fu-berlin.de/nation-building/resources/wp/brkovic_02

The project is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and the Austrian Science Fund (FWF).



We have all gone through the same difficulties: family life of people of different nations in Montenegro

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Key words: family, family history, national/state belongings, cultural intimacy, Montenegro

I Introduction

Few years ago, I have heard that there are two pubs called “At the Serb” and “At the Montenegrin” somewhere on the way from Podgorica to Podgorica’s airport. Pubs are located next to each other and the owners are brothers. Even though I did not manage to locate both of them when I was passing by, it is quite possible that they exist. Members of the same family who feel belonging to different nations are not uncommon in Montenegro.

„True Montenegrins“, „Serbs from Montenegro“, „disinterested persons“ are often members of one nuclear family. In this paper I will try to show that the very existence of such families can offer some interesting points of view of relations among nation, politics and state of Montenegro.

Firstly, I wanted to understand how individuals (whose parents/ children/ brothers/ sisters/ spouses feel belonging to different nations) understand their family and national belongings. Secondly, I wanted to see how they narrate their past and how they construct explanations of “the great events”. I think that shared life of those families can point to specificities of production of nation-state in Montenegro. Everyday emotive and conceptual investments in the idea of the state of family members can reveal some inter-

esting characteristics of the process of reproduction of Montenegro and feelings of national belonging¹.

I will suggest that the ambiguity of the notion of Montenegro, which appears in the private as well as in official spaces, enable individuals to establish intimate friendship and family relations with persons who feel that they belong to a different nation. At the same time, Montenegro endures because people pretend that Montenegro is a certain, unambiguous and stabile notion.

I have interviewed twelve persons who are members of six families. Since I have known many of my interlocutors for several years, I was able to follow their relationships in different contexts and at different times. Since I have identified my interlocutors mostly in the circle of my close acquaintances and friends, I think that families whose members feel belonging to different nations are not that uncommon in Montenegro.

In the following pages I will explain how I understand concepts of nation and of the state, then I will present research questions. After that, I will try to describe how members of two families talk about themselves, their past and their feelings of belonging. I will point to what I think are especially interesting features of those narrations: firstly, I think that national belonging can be vital and *at the same time* trivial, unimportant issue; secondly, while talking about themselves and their shared life, individuals have inscribed “family history” into a story about “the great events”. The result was a narration which became a referential frame for all other events. In the fifth part I will try to show what do ambiguities of personal and family narrations tell about the official production of national belongings in Montenegro, and then why the state endures and is reproduced, in spite of obvious multiplicity and instability of the state and of the national belongings. In the end, I suggest that ambiguities and uncertainties of feelings of national and state belongings should not be understood as characteristics of pre- or post- modernity.

¹ It is necessary to emphasize that I have followed only meanings of serbianness and montenegriness in this paper. National and state discourses in Montenegro construct a quite different relation toward Muslim, Roma, Albanian, or refugee persons.

II Theoretical-methodological framework

Wer aber ist die partei?

Sitzt die in einem haus mit telefonen?

Sind ihre gedanken geheim, ihre entschlüsse unbekannt?

Wer ist sie?

Wir sind sie.

Du und ich und ihr - wir alle.

In deinem anzug steckt sie, genosse, und denkt in deinem kopf.

Wo ich wohne, ist ihr haus, und wo du angegriffen wirst, da kämpft sie.

(continues...)

Bertolt Brecht, Wer aber ist die Partei?

The state, as one of possible ways to organize reality, as an idea, or as a fantasy in words of Navaro Yashin, is being reproduced and regenerated every day through institutional and individual narrations and actions. The state as „the greatest fetish of contemporary society“ (Navaro Yashin 2002: 157), is an abstract idea which requires continuous investments – just like Brecht’s Party, it is created on everyday level and in the most diverse spaces. Navaro Yashin writes:

“The state appears in many guises and constantly transfigures itself. If now it stands as a monument and symbol of the Republic in the garb of the statue of Ataturk erected in the middle of the public square; next it appears as a flash in the journalist’s camera. The state is represented in the police officers’ words of threat; it is there, as well, in the gazes of idling pedestrians. The state circulates in the political imaginations of consumers of news, sitting in their homes and watching TV. Events in public life are reflected and magnified within a culture of news, alarm, and sensation. Indeed, in this exemplary and emblematic public square, there is no space that is not arrested with one or another face of the state” (Navaro Yashin 2002: 2).

Multiple faces of the state are not some kind of secret – the state is continuously in danger, deconstructed, and reproduced. In other words, even though multiple faces of the state are obvious, and in even though people understand that the state is not natural and eternal entity, they act as if it is natural, eternal and real. Why does state endures as natural, eternal and unquestionable entity beyond which we cannot think about the world? Following Žižek, the author explains permanence of the state through cynicism - “doing as if one doesn’t know” (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 163). Subjects – citizens of the state – are perfectly aware of its abstractedness, uncertainty and constructedness, but:

«The state remains as long as ordinary people are able to pretend that it exists in their everyday practices of life ... A pretense to normality is coeval with a critical consciousness about state». (Navaro Yashin 2002: 179).

The idea of a state as an abstraction does not mean that the state does not exist, or that it is unimportant. On contrary. The state is a “fantasy with a teeth” (Green 2005: 125), “doer as much as signifier” (Navaro Yashin 2002: 186). The state has its own materiality and consequences of its actions are very real. The state exists through passports and waiting in visa queues, through electric power companies and electricity shortages, in the impossibility to buy books on the Internet because deliveries cannot be done in a certain state, and so on

In other words, citizens-subjects live in the thick net of places and situation in which the state is constantly reproduced. Navaro Yashin argues that the state is reproduced through everyday practices of the so-called “ordinary people”, through practices of state institutions, as well as through the materiality of consequences of those practices:

“The state endures as idea and reality (1) because significant numbers of ordinary people normalize the idea of the state through their habits of everyday life, (2) because statesmen, generals, mafia dealers, journalists, and other people with power are successfully able to produce the truth about the existence of the state through their bureaucratic practices, their undercover operations, and their influence over culture industries, and (3) because the materiality – force, economy, bureaucracy, technology, and so forth – that has been functioning in the name of the symbol of state is still intact”.

The idea that state exists as a fantasy reveals how much emotions are important for its endurance and reproduction. *The state as a fantasy* is a concept which suggests that political appears in many places and requires continuous investments. Even though subjects-citizens continuously criticize the state and know that it is not eternal, materially and emotionally, they cannot function without familiar and safe net of places and practices. Emotions also point to ruptures and anxieties present in allegedly homogenous conceptions like state, nation or national culture (Ivy 1995: 1-28).

Culture, nation, state

The national order of things² – the image of the world divided into discreet units (nations) which occupy certain space, in which people speak one language, practice one culture and have a unique political system – imputes almost biological linkage into relations of people, space and cultural practices. Processes of production of a nation, state and culture are being performed in similar places and in similar manners, but to simply equate them would make invisible complex relationships through which narratives of cultural purity are becoming the source of production of the nation-state (Ivy 1995: 1-28), problems inherent to any attempt to equalize national and state boundaries, or ways in which national conflicts are not always a consequence but the cause of creation of national groups (Brubaker 2006: 13-27).

Herzfeld writes: “Ultimately, the language of national or ethnic identity is indeed a language of morality. It is an encoded discourse about inclusion and exclusion” (Herzfeld 1997: 43).

Harmony that “national order of things” inscribes into a relation among nation, culture and state is a fantasy that endures through tensions and ambivalences. “Culturally pure”, politically stable and ethnically/nationally homogenous state was never a real phenomenon, but imaginative object of desire – a locus of cultural yearnings and desires.

Cultural desires (for purity, stability or homogeneity) reveal tensions present in the processes of production of feelings of belonging. Marilyn Ivy describes cultural anxiety as a feeling produced when hybrid reality of Japan is being framed into discourses of

² *National order of things* – term of Lisa Malkki (Malkki 1995).

cultural purity and isolation. Ivy shows that a variety of cultural practices is shaped by “the logic of fetish”: desired, but absent object is being replaced, but the very replacement reminds and announces the absence, which produces cultural anxiety. National culture, as well as folklore, ethnography and/or museum studies, literature, tourism can easily be shaped by this type of logic.

Describing cultural intimacy, Michael Herzfeld writes: “They are not simple falsehoods, however, but act out of a pervasive nostalgia for ‘real’ social relations” (Herzfeld 1997: 8).

We can understand cultural intimacy, that is “embarrassment, rueful self-recognition” (Herzfeld 1997: 6), as an articulation of those very tensions and ambivalences which appear in practices of feelings of belonging to a country, a nation, a state. Cultural intimacy means mocking and criticism of the state, through which the state – as something familiar, something that can be mocked and criticized – endures.

In other words, feeling of belonging to a nation and a state is being reproduced everyday, through certain practices which Herzfeld described as cultural intimacy. Cultural intimacy is a frame where ambiguities of process of production of belonging are not dangerous anymore – nostalgia for real social relations, for tradition as lived experience, the desire for cultural purity, even though obviously unrealizable, due to “acting”, to “pretense to normality”, acquire a frame where they can safely exist. And to always again reproduce feelings of belonging.

III Research Questions

Families whose members have lived for most of their life together in the same town, and who interpret their feelings of national belonging as mutually different, are not uncommon in Montenegro. Younger generations sometimes describe themselves as Serbs, sometimes as Montenegrins, sometimes they do not want to identify themselves nationally. In one of the families with whom I talked, parents and daughter feel they are Serbs, but the son feels as Montenegrin. In another, father and daughter are Montenegrins, mother and son are Serbs, and so on. There are many “combinations” and it does not seem that national differentiation follows some other “vector of power”, like gender or age.

This paper does not present a research about kinship in Montenegro – it tries to explore how it becomes not only possible and thinkable, but more or less usual, to be involved in multinational family collectives.

In other words, I tried to see how persons who feel belonging to different nations establish close family relations, in a country which was a part of Yugoslavian space, often described as “the Yugoslavian bundle of contradictions in the Balkans” (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2006: 213). How do family members talk about their past? Can the way these families function tell us something about the production of national belongings in Montenegro?

The idea that “kinship membership is the topos on which 'nationness' is mapped” (Borneman 1992: 19), and that “it is precisely around belonging to a nation that kinship and the state come together in a single frame» (Borneman 1992: 30), suggest that family, national and state belongings are tensely intertwined. It is visible not only in the usage of kinship and family metaphors in the official language, but also through usage of official language (state categories, classifications and metaphors) in describing oneself. Borneman emphasizes:

“In short, states are successful in nation-building when they re-create a unique group which retells its history in categories and periods congruent with those used by the state in its own accounts” (Borneman 1992: 32).

I wanted to understand a) which categories and periods do members of “Montenegro-Serbian” families use when they talk about themselves, b) whether their practices can be understood as somehow threatening to a national order of things, and c) do national/state belongings, which are being produced through individual narrations and talks, tell us something about the process of official production?

IV Ethnographic Description

Family, nation, Montenegro

Family relations have gone through significant and intensive changes during the second half of the 20th century.

Zorka Milić has interviewed 30 women who were more than 100 years old in the 1990. On the one hand, she tried to make their experience visible, and on the other, she wanted to describe the life in Montenegro one century ago. The reader might get the impression that Milić's interlocutors were describing "traditional patriarchal society" rather than their own lives. The topic of conversations was life of women in Montenegro – that is work, family, love, sexual relationships and encounters women made. Interviews are focused mostly on the period before the WWII, and Yugoslavia was not mentioned except in regard to state banning veil practices of Muslim women.

Karl Kaser emphasises that the Balkan family household (more or less described in the narrations of Milić's interlocutors as well) disappeared, except in several areas of the former Yugoslavia.

"People in Montenegro have developed a new attitude toward reproduction. While earlier dominant was the patriarchal rule according to which one should have as many children as possible, since the seventies there is a widespread belief that it is better to have fewer children whom parents can provide with good prospects for the future (...) In Montenegro, with the transformation process, the principle of Balkan family household, once strongly rooted in this area, disappeared suddenly and without any attempt of adapting, which is obviously the consequence of constant emigration" (Kazer 2002: 462).

Describing contemporary family relations in Montenegro, Lidija Vujačić writes:

"In spite of evident major changes in the "life" of a family, particularly from the mid XX century onwards, which affect mutual relations of family members as well as their attitude toward close kin and residential environment, in the sense of their personal and family independency, empirical researches show that family is not an isolated unity linked

solely to formal institutions, in those processes. On contrary, the family is still closely linked to wider kin group, which remains a very important source in the life of every individual". (Vujačić 2003: 252-253).

Family members define their mutual relations, as well as relations to a wider kin group, in the most diverse manner in contemporary Montenegro. All households which are focus of this paper consist of parents and children, and occasionally one or both parents' parents. Married daughters and sons live in new households. My interlocutors receive a more or less average monthly payment, and have degrees of higher, or secondary, education. Members of five out of six families, with whom I have talked to, have quite open and tender relations toward their family. However, not all of those families are "idyllic" places – some are divided by the disputes over land, or other, not less important, issues. In those cases, difference in national and political belongings follows other types of disputes.

On the following pages I will present how members of two families describe their own sense of belonging to a nation and a state, and then how they describe their lives during previous decades.

Jovanovići

Jovanović family – Ranka, Nikola, Minja and Zoran – live in its new apartment in Podgorica. Nikola and Minja are students and have been my friends for many years. Ranka and Zoran work in a telecommunication company. They were more than willing to tell me how they understand their own national feelings, national belongings of other family members, and to tell me about their lives during past decades.

Ranka Jovanović was born in Montenegro. She declares as a Serb. After graduation is Serbia, she came to work in Podgorica, where she met Zoran. Zoran's parents have had twelve children and were living in a family house in the inland Montenegro up until 1948. Zoran was born in Podgorica, but during his growing up he was often living in the family house.

After they married, during early eighties, Ranka and Zoran got an apartment from the state. However, after 1992, "the new state with the old name", or "an old, but trun-

cated state”, in Ranka’s words, took the apartment back. The apartment was a property of a Slovenian company for which they were working at the moment, and when the SFRY dissolved, the apartment was taken away from them and allocated to a new family. From 1992 until 1996 Jovanović were tenants in many apartments. After selling the family property and house where Zoran was born, in 2006, they have bought their own apartment. They have rather loose contact with other members of their families. Both of them have changed many jobs since 1992.

Their children are students – Minja studies in Podgorica, Nikola in Belgrade. Both Minja and Nikola say that they do not feel any national attachments. When I have asked Minja whether differences in national belongings occasionally lead to disputes in her family, she told me that, sometimes, all of them together “go crazy because of daddy’s outbursts, but that also, much more often, she perceives “both mum’s and daddy’s behavior” as “really cute”.

Zoran was member of the Liberal Union of Montenegro “since the beginning”, that is, since 1990. He says that his greatest love that comes right after his wife and children is Montenegro. “Former liberals”, “true Montenegrins”, or “proud 6,3%” signify the group of people which was gathered around the party that strongly opposed war in former Yugoslav republics, opposed the ruling party and supported separation of Montenegro from Serbia. Almost all of the “former liberals” know each other and even today help each other. They are still linked through that special kind of pride – which Herzfeld discusses when he describes the language of national belongings as, above all, morally coded language. In that narration, there are honest and moral Montenegrins, (more rarely) honest and moral Serbs, and all the others. This classification originated in the early 90’s, and is based on an opposition: “those who were against the war:those who were not against the war”.

Ranka described her sense of nationality:

“Serbia is my country as much as Montenegro is. As much as Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia once were... Those countries are not mine now, because of the war and everything, but I cannot say that I am a Montenegrin who would fight for independency. Partly because many of those who are now for independency have been directly involved

in attacks on Dubrovnik and destroying ex Yugoslavia, and now they get richer using the idea of independent Montenegro. Those like my husband would have never manage to bring independence on their own. And those others are criminals. There you go.”

Zoran has often harshly criticized Serbia and “the Serbs”, and one occasion I asked him how he manages to be a marital partner of a Serb woman. He replied: “*Well, it’s not the same!*”. Even though Ranka feels that she belongs to Serbia, she was against the war, too. While Zoran has often loudly commented political situation and “the relation between Serbs and Montenegrins”, Ranka did that rarely. Every member of the family had his/her own opinion, but Zoran was the person who has expressed it loudly and explicitly. Minja claims that infrequent arguments provoked “*by politics*” were quickly resolved because all four of them “*have gone through the same difficulties*”.

By this, Minja referred to problems her parents had during nineties regarding housing and employment. For Jovanovic family, talking about the country at the same time meant talking about the apartment. Place of living, space of belonging – was problematic notion for this family in a double sense. Loss of an apartment and frequent moving became intertwined with complicated and frequent changes of names and boundaries of what was created after dissolution of Yugoslavia. Members of Jovanovic family have marked the same events when they described their life during last two decades. Shortly, “fatal events” for this family happened in the following way:

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the beginning of the war, they lost their apartment. They were living in Zoran’s family house in Podgorica for a while, until they had a serious argument with Zoran’s brothers and sisters. After that, they were moving frequently, “up until the bombing”, that is until 1999. At that time, they moved into an apartment where they have stayed until 2006. They have bought their own apartment in the same year Montenegro gained its independence.

Simultaneity of private important events with the changes of state borders, statuses and names is a coincidence to a certain point. However, establishing narrative connection between those happenings is not a coincidence. And, as we will see, it is not characteristics of this family only.

Tomašević family

Tomašević family lives in Kolašin. Jasmina and Željko Tomašević are parents of my friend Itana, and her two brothers – Zoran and Petar – who are married and live in Serbia. Jasmina is a primary school teacher. Željko is retired. Itana's long term partner Goran also describes himself as the Serb from Montenegro. When we discussed how they perceive their belongings to different nations, the most frequent answer was that *«everyone has the right to an opinion, to selfdetermination»*. Željko said:

«there is this case in the family that my wife during census declared, normally, as Montenegrin, as well as my daughter, one son declared as Serb. Now, one of them was married, and he and the other one declared as Serbs, as well as my mother. So this family is a mixed marriage³ (laughs) ... So, during the census, right before the census we have... I have asked my children how they will declare, so that I do not, as a parent, impose upon them... and to affect their judgment, I mean, we are all selfconscious, adults, educated, went to faculties...»

Even though *«everyone has the right to an opinion, to selfdetermination»*, for Željko Montenegrines is also *«a new category. Since Second World War. It has been specially represented since these changes, since the Plush revolution»*

Željko has declared himself as a Montenegrin until 1991. After the talk with his grandfather, he started declaring as a Serb:

«However, now, since my grandfather explained me his attitudes, and then a bit of history, and this knowledge which I gained through education, it is normal that I have started to declare as a Serb. As my grandfather declared himself, and he even has shown me his birth certificate from 1889 – he was born in 1888, and the certificate is from 1889, from Morača Monastery, the parish was also written, I don't know, Morača parish, Serbian Orthodox Church, and then your data, among others – confession Orthodox, Serbian. So, ever since then I declare as a Serb, and I feel as a Serb, and I live in Montenegro...»

³ «Mixed marriage» (Mješoviti brak) is a name of a very popular TV show which was produced in Serbia and aired in Serbia and Montenegro. The show follows marriage and family relations of a husband who is Montenegrin and a wife who is Serbian, in Belgrade.

Željko thinks that Montenegrinhood means «...*belonging to a state*» – both Serbia and Montenegro are “*Serbian states*”. At the same time, Montenegrinhood is inscribed into a body and appearance of Montenegrins:

«anyhow, all of us who live in Montenegro are proud to be... to be entitled to live in one state and, after all, to be different from other Serbs. For example, there are Serbs in Republic of Srpska, there are Serbs in Macedonia, so territorially we are Montenegrins. And perhaps in some anthropological aspect we are somewhat different from other regions inhabited by Serbs. Those characteristics, now... this Dinaric type to which Montenegrins belong, they are a little, I mean not a little but highly different in psychological characteristics, physiognomy, and so on»

Both Željko and Jasmina were born in villages in the inland of Montenegro. Jasmina has three sisters and three brothers, and Željko a brother. Part of Jasmina’s family live in houses next to Jasmina’s. Jasmina’s great grandfather was a flagbearer for King Nikola, which Jasmina and Itana are very proud of. Right after talking about the great grandfather, Jasmina said with laughter that her grandfather was a chetnik, and that her brother was firstly a member of CPJ⁴ and then of DPS⁵.

Željko’s family owns an older and a new family house on their family property. Up until the war in Bosnia, “*all Tomašević’s*” – from Bosnia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro – used to come to the new family house. After the war, they filed lawsuits against each other because Željko, along with some other cousins, wants to sell the family property in order to help his children, but other cousins want to keep the property intact, “*even though they do not come here ever anymore*”, as Željko says.

When talking about the family property, Željko locates himself into a large clan of Tomašević⁶ – all the way to certain Staniša Lazarević after who followed ten generations of Tomašević. Jasmina and Itana do not know much about Tomašević family, but Jas-

⁴ Communist Party of Yugoslavia

⁵ Democratic Party of Socialists

⁶ Željko is quoted as one of people with the „good memory“ in the book about Tomasevic’s clan. „Monographies-genealogies“ which map the genealogy of the clan – from the oldest known ancestor to living male descendants – are frequently published in Montenegro. In this book, Tomasevic are unambiguously represented as the Serbs from Montenegro.

mina does know things about clan of her father. In spite of these differences, when talking about their lives, all three of them use very similar time pattern.

Tomašević family use early nineties as the first time marker. Since Željko was a war reservist of Yugoslavian National Army, the first “fatal” moment for them was his involvement in some actions during the war in Bosnia⁷. Even though they almost never talk about his involvement in the war, early nineties are the point “when all of this has started”. The next time marker is a wedding of the older son, which happened “in the same year as the bombing” – 1999. For this family, another important date was 2003 - that is the year when the first population census in Montenegro after 1991 happened. The three of them have explicitly stated “*who and what they are*” in front of each others, for the first time. The wedding of the second son, when all of them travelled to Serbia, occurred a couple of months after the separation of Montenegro from Serbia in 2006.

Jasmina has seen herself as Yugoslavian during early nineties, and she claims she is not sure when and how she started to define herself as Montenegrin. She does not have any doubt in her national choices and says that is the reason she actively participates in local boards of the ruling party. She is not interested in history, and she feels very proud of Montenegro, of being a Montenegrin and of her own political efforts and role during referendum. She has also vividly explained how Montenegrin people are very strange, how they do not appreciate right values and are envious. When I asked what she thinks about the national feelings of her husband and her sons, she told:

“It really doesn’t matter. Serbia and Montenegro... Serbs and Montenegrin are so much alike that it really does not matter. Do I feel I am Montenegrin – yes, and I am proud of that. If I wasn’t I would not be politically engaged and I would not openly tell everybody who and what I am. But my child cannot be something else from what I am. The fact that the whole political situation is complicated is another thing, but, in the end, who feels what is not important. Everybody has a right to their own choice”.

⁷ Arendt’s arguments about banality of evil, collective political responsibility, and power seem perfectly applicable here. (Arendt 2000, Arendt 2002). While talking about that period, Itana said: “No, look, I remember, I think at that time it was impossible to describe yourself differently – so, that’s it – you are being caled, you are going, and there is different opinion, there is no I want, I do not want. Either you go to jail, either you go to war. So, no one made any difference about it back then». Even though it is disputable whether the situation was that unavoidable, the fact that my interlocutors perceived it as such, tells enough.

When Itana talked about her life when she studied in Serbia, she explained to me that she have felt the most secure and protected in Montenegro, even though she still sees Serbia as her other country:

«I have never, not even today I do not see Serbia as some foreign country, as if I have gone to some distant land, or that there are some huge culture, or any other, religious, national differences. So huge that I would have to feel like a foreigner. Hence no, I see it as, I don't know, as my other country. As other country where... I feel the best and the most beautiful in Montenegro, the most safe, the most protected in every way. But it's not true that I do not love Serbia, far from that, or that I am not glad to go there and to be there».

Itana repeats the situation of her family in her intimate relationship. She has told me that her partner Goran, at the beginning, tried to negotiate her political and national choices with her, but soon they have stopped talking about it. She said that now, on some level, both of them expect from the other to change his/her choice, but she added with laughter that even if it does not happen “never mind, at least it is more interesting this way”.

Nation-state: perennial topic of conversation and that which should not be mentioned

All of my interlocutors have experiences certain ambiguities in their family and friendship relations. And in different situations, they have dealt with those ambiguities in different ways. Sometimes they would make implicit agreement that nation and politics will not be discussed, sometimes such agreements were open, and sometimes jokes and “poking” were a tool for expressing those ambiguities.

The most frequent answer to the question how they feel because some members of their family belong to a different nation, was: it is not important. My interlocutors have often used a statement which I have heard many times during my growing up in Podgorica: “*What's important is what kind of man he is, and not what nation, religion or race he belongs to*”. In other words, national belongings simply were not an issue of family talks. Feeling of national belonging, understood as a matter of personal choice, simply is not something people worry about too much.

However, at the same time, diverse ways of practicing feelings of national belonging are continuously discussed. Itana and Željko often watch basketball games together. Željko is a loyal fan of Partizan, and Itana is a passionate fan and a person which regularly watches sport games, but whom she will support depends on the context. Željko and Itana do not argue or fight during games, but tingling, poking, laughter, ridiculing is often part of joined game watching in their house.

The rest of my informants also used “poking” to articulate ambiguities of national belongings. Mirko is sometimes called “a little Montenegrin” in his family, in certain situations he calls his father Miloš Obilić or Radical, and he often sings to his mother “Serbian mother has given birth to meee”, until “she goes crazy”.

In family and friendship relationships, seemingly naive situations, poking or sideways comments, sometimes provoke serious feelings. These sudden outbursts of notion of Montenegro and of talk about national belongings remind that they are always present. In spite of all arrangements that they will not be discussed and that they will be considered irrelevant, they can appear at any situation, sometimes half-spoken, tacit, and veiled. Feelings of national belonging are the issue which shall not be discussed, a matter of personal choice, something which we agreed is irrelevant, as well as the source of deep discrepancies, a topic of poking, creator of moments which are hard to forget.

The importance of national attachments becomes obvious in those very, unexpected, transformations of seemingly naïve situations. Maja describes which issues suddenly became open and painful, through one sideways comment:

“How is it that I should feel, my friends remind me that I should feel fear because of what I am and who I am. Because I have really felt it at one point. (...) Anyone else, but people with whom I have grown up. And that thing has really irritated me, at that moment. Basically, we said, people – there will be no mentioning, it is not important who supports whom, and who and what and where, and I am really not interested in any of those issues, none of that, and don’t do such things to me. Because, it was awfully difficult for me because of both of them, that I cannot say anything in my own town... or that I should pay attention to what I should say, even though I did not think anything wrong, because someone will do something to me. On the other hand, this, this reminding... at the mo-

ment I have thought, I know I shouldn't have, but for a moment I did, like what, are they uncomfortable because they are sitting next to me, are they ashamed, are they frightened of what I might say to someone and that they will later have... Literally a bunch of some things I know are groundless, but they came into my head...".

People who have "always" been living in Podgorica and Kolašin do not feel any problems in creating professional, friendship, family relations with people who also have "always" been living in the same place but feel belonging to a different nation. It seems that national identity really is not that important. And yet, council of tenants in the building where I live in Podgorica has refused to introduce cable TV because many programs which their children would watch had subtitles in Serbian language⁸. Many examples show that national identity is also a problematical issue which regulates relations among people.

Family history vs. Great history

While talking about their experiences, my interlocutors have been making a "map" with "personal" events placed right next to "the great events". On the one hand, making of the specific time frame was used for time positioning of the "private" events. On the other hand, this "map" offered an explanation, it presented a context which could be used in order to fully understand "private" changes and events.

Narrated events were selected according to criteria highly resembling those used to establish a connection between "lesser" and "greater" history in the northern Greece, according to Vereni's. Vereni showed that feeling of national belonging in the northern Greece is not conceptualized as a given entity, but is an issue open for negotiations and rearticulations. Leonidas Khristopoulos, a farmer and a Macedonian of Greece, wrote five notebooks about the history of Macedonia, history of his family, politics and national issues. Vereni argues that not only Leonidas did inscribe story about his family into a wider historical context, but also placed it on a map of "greater" historical events, and through that, established a firm link between "greater" and "lesser" history and geography:

⁸ It should be noted that speakers of Montenegrin and Serbian language can perfectly understand each other.

“A family event is therefore retranslated into History through the form of an epic narrative, removed from individual memory to become collective heritage. Having claimed a ‘descent’ from Gatsos, Leonidas can, by hereditary right, style himself as belonging to that History of the ‘Macedonian State’ as declared in the title of N1: ‘History of the Macedonian State. Philip – Alexander King of Macedonians. And Story of My Mother’.

Even though narrative of my informants is not epic, nor detailed as Leonidas’s is – it establishes a link between the state and the family. “Great events” have directly caused moving, war actions, inflations, employment losses. And individuals experienced “the great events” in their own lives. The map where “great history” becomes intertwined with the “lesser history” in both families followed a similar pattern: war-late nineties⁹ (“bombing”) – referendum. I think that marking almost the same years was a result of more or less similar experiences.

Borneman repeats:

“Being at home is essentially being among kin, experiencing a particular set of lifecourse meanings that enable the individual to belong to a group demarcated from other groups. The state is successful in its nation-building only when it can legitimize itself as having re-created this unique group whose members will, in turn, reciprocate by retelling their histories in terms – categories and periods – congruent with those that the state uses in its accounts” (Borneman 1992: 287).

Not only members of two families about whom I wrote, but almost all of my interlocutors, were talking about last twenty years when asked about their past. The period of Yugoslavia was not mentioned, except when I would explicitly ask about it¹⁰. Previous

⁹ Late nineties represent the turbulent time in the political life of Montenegro – the first official separation from the politics of Serbian governing party occurs, and ambiguities of state relations between Serbia and Montenegro are becoming more obvious.

¹⁰ I think this is a result of an almost complete institutional silence which surrounds the period of socialism in Montenegro. Public talk about SFRY occurs in only one place – in the «General Consulate of SFRY» - a NGO based in Tivat. All activities of the Consulate can be seen as somewhere between parody and nostalgia. Beside this one, there is no institutional – positive or negative – narration about the socialism. An example of (lack of) this discursive practice is obvious in educational system: history teachers «skip» parts of textbook which are about SFRY, arguing that it is too early to have a critical approach toward this period. The absence of public articulations of this period creates an impression that it has never happened.

generations sometimes had their place in those narrations, but only as catalyzators of the key moments, such as birth, moving to the city, making a decision about national belongings. It seems that the silence that covers the socialist period is the consequence of the official relation of the state, and of almost all other public actors, toward that part of the history. In other words, it seems that the state successfully legitimizes itself through categories and periodizations used in retellings of personal stories. However, in the next part, I will try to show why I argue it is slightly more complicated to determine whether the state is successful in the production of national belonging.

V Analysis

Spaces of cultural intimacy

Multiple meanings of montenegrianness and serbness are colliding and/or being disregarded as not important everyday. Precisely those sensitive differences between different Montenegrins and Serbs reveal that discourse of national belongings is adaptable, “stretchable”, capable to include diverse meanings. And to reproduce ambiguities.

Following Abu Lughod’s suggestion – that resistance should not be romanticized, but understood as an integral part of existing power relations, as a tool for diagnostic of power – I think that multiple and colliding meanings of Montenegro and national belongings point to specificities of production of national in Montenegro. Abu Lughod writes:

“For at the heart of this widespread concern with unconventional forms of noncollective, or at least nonorganized, resistance is, I would argue, a growing disaffection with previ-

Persons which were born at the beginning of eighties – hence, those born too late to create their own memories of SFRY – do not know literally anything about history, political and economic relations, holidays, problems and changes in the former Yugoslavia. They often have heard about the «red passport» (that is, no-visa regime) and they are familiar with certain elements of pop-culture. However, they do not relate pop-culture to SFRY, but to «previous times». It seems that «previous times», because of lack of knowledge about historical and cultural context, is somehow diffused, nondefined and not quite clear period. «Previous times» might have been exciting in Belgrade, Sarajevo or Zagreb, but they were not so in Podgorica. The fact that Yugoslav pop-culture was not produced in Montenegro creates an impression that those were not **as much** «our» times. People who were living in former Yugoslavia, hence, those who have themselves experienced life in socialist Montenegro, describe that period as a «golden age» (see: Jansen 2005: 219-270), however, their descriptions are laconic. Very rarely they talked about life in Montenegro – most often, stories were placed during periods of studying, army service, etc. in Zagreb, Belgrade, or some other ex-Yugoslavian city.

ous ways we have understood power, and the most interesting thing to emerge from this work on resistance is a growing sense of complexity of the nature and forms of domination (...) I want to argue here for a small shift in perspective in the way we look at resistance – a small shift that will have serious analytical consequences. I want to suggest that we should use resistance as a diagnostic of power” (Abu-Lughod 1999: 41-42).

Practices which are opposing “the great narrations” do not need to be seen romantically, as possibilities for free and creative actions. Instead they can be understood as direct consequences of those very narrations. It seems to me that this perspective enables us to look at the more institutional level of productions of belonging in order to understand how individuals in Montenegro are “capable of living” with ambiguities.

Families with whom I have talked to suggest that there are *at least* two great narratives of national and state belongings in Montenegro. In Montenegro, orthodox churches, academies of sciences, non-governmental organizations, political parties, certain university departments¹¹ - are being defined primarily through the category of national identity. I think that this “dual” functioning of both “Montenegrin” and “Serbian” institutions shape public space in such a manner that cultural intimacy becomes the basic premise of political. Cultural intimacy – understood as an articulation of tensions present in processes of production of belongings – becomes **the characteristic of public space**, and not just of small, individual, private actions. Herzfeld emphasizes that the notion of cultural intimacy articulates dynamics, “the formal or coded tension between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection” (Herzfeld 1997: 14). I think that simultaneous functioning of at least two great narrations make the official representation of self ambiguous and uncertain. This claim requires analysis of discursive practices of certain institutions, and of inter-space formed in the dialogue and conflicts of different institutions. However, when we use ambiguities and uncertainties as practices of resistance and “use them strategically to tell us more about forms of power and how people are caught up in them” (Abu Lughod 1990: 42), one of possible conclu-

¹¹ There are many „pairs“ of nationally defined national institutions in Montenegro: Montenegrin orthodox church and Serbian orthodox church, Doclean Academy of Sciences and Arts (which openly supports independency of Montenegro) and Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts (whose activities are somewhat more ambivalent than activities of Doclean Academy, but whose many members were against the independence of Montenegro), since 2008 there are separate Departments for Montenegrin and for Serbian languages at the University of Montenegro, and so on.

sions is that there is no single and unambiguous discourse of national and state belongings in Montenegro.

In other words, I think that not only individual narrations and practices, but also the public space of institutional action are being shaped through cultural intimacy. I do not think that single institutions can lead to that „*rueful self-recognition*“, but that joined practices of mutually opposed actors create uncertainties about the very meaning of the self. If “they” – politicians, academicians, priests, professors, statesman – cannot reach an agreement about the meaning of basic terms, what else can we expect? In that manner, official representation of the self is being questioned. Not only is the state reproduced in everydayness – tensions and ambiguities of everydayness are being produced in spaces where one would expect coherent, precise and certain narratives. Essentiality and eternity of the nation-state are thus being seriously endangered. However, it does not seem that the state will disappear – on contrary, persons have decided that Montenegro should be an independent state two years ago. In the following pages I will try to explain how this can be understood.

Materiality of the state

The fact that all members of one family – both those who feel that they belong to Montenegrin, and those who feel that they belong to Serbian nation – have gone through “*the same difficulties*” sometimes indeed make national belongings to seem irrelevant. In other words, my interlocutors share an experience of living in the frame where there are no clear winners – feeling of loss is mixed with winnings, because everybody has won, and lost, something at some point. To some it seems that 1918 was happening again during 1992. To others that 1878 was repeated in 2006. Zoran has the impression that overarching property privatization and selling of the land will lead to yet another loss of the country, only this time it will “pass in hands of rich foreigners”.

There are many people in Montenegro who, like Ranka, Zoran, Željko or Jasmina, were born in old family houses, were brought up with many brothers and sisters, and later were part of creation “of the belief that it is better to have lesser number of children whom parents can provide with good prospects for the future” (Kazer 2002: 462). During

last decades, there are many lawsuits among brothers, and not so often, sisters¹², over those same family houses and properties where they were raised. Perhaps letting legal state system to decide over property issues can be understood as a strategy of resolving ambiguities which are being created when different concepts and ideas of good life, the future, and children's role are changing and colliding.

Feeling of national belonging is not that important for those conceptual changes, neither for a supposed final definition of winners and losers. In other words, many Montenegrins and Serbs have the same experiences – they were raised in large families, they moved from old family houses to apartments and houses in cities, they have gone through disputes and lawsuits over property, they have gone through a war in neighboring country, lived under economic sanctions, and so on. Those experiences are the result of living in Montenegro – whether it is defined as an independent national state, or as a region of a larger national space. Materiality of state effects reproduces the state.

“State-as-a-doer” (Navaro Jashin) creates a sense of stability and eternity of Montenegro. Persons clearly see arbitrariness and adaptability of the notion of Montenegro, but nevertheless, they treat it as stabile, certain and eternal notion. Individuals are perfectly aware of ambiguity and hybridity: as Navaro-Yashin writes, people have already deconstructed the state (and their feelings of belonging).

Persons involved in a reproduction of meanings and importance of the notion of Montenegro know that it is an abstract notion, but they behave *as if* they do not know that. Feeling state effects in your own everyday routine make fantasy real and present. Even though persons live in the middle of a “discursive explosion”¹³ of montegeriness, they behave as if Montenegro has a single and stabile meaning, as if it was always there, and as if it will always be there. Persons do not want, and cannot, conceptualize their existence without such a notion. In various situations – during elections, political celebrations, sport games or family holidays – persons are perfectly capable to see the different meanings of montenegriness/Montenegro and to articulate tensions among those meanings, but

¹² Legally, sisters have the equal right to inherit property, however, very often resign from this right in favour of their brothers.

¹³ Term of Aihwa Ong, Ong 2005: 202

at the same time, they keep being involved in the reproduction of the state as a certain, stabile and eternal category./

VI Discussion and conclusion: modernity of the Balkans/Montenegro

Sarah Green writes how contemporary hegemonic discourse about the Balkans does not allow the possibility to understand the Balkans as a space of modernity:

“In short, the contemporary Balkans end up appearing, to many contemporary commentators at least, as a monstrous miscenegenation between the premodern (“primitive savagery”) and the postmodern (deconstruction to the point of meaningless). What the Balkans definitely are not, within this discourse, is modern – that intellectual and political-economic space which continually attempts to separate itself from the premodern and postmodern” (Green 2005: 131).

In other words, it seems that in the Balkans (understood as geographic, political, and cultural space) everything becomes infinitely multiplied – it is not quite certain where the Balkans is¹⁴, meanings of key terms are numerous and mutually opposed, there are so many histories that it is impossible to make an agreement about what has happened (at any point), so Mestrovic’s words do not come up as surprise:

“What is needed is for someone to shout: ‘You’re never going to figure it out. It’s not a riddle. It’s a crime. You’re supposed to put a stop to it’”(Green 2005: 140).

However, Green argues that the very idea that it is impossible to understand the Balkans and its problems because it is either too complicated or meaningless, reproduces the Balkans as the space of horror for modernity. The urge to just “put a stop to it”, to silence numerous, more or less powerful, voices, in order to decide what is a beginning

¹⁴ Milica Bakić Hejdn mentions that the boundary between Europe and non-European Other keeps moving in regard to the position, in other words, that orientalism is constantly being reproduced inside the Balkans: „The gradations of ‘Orient’, that I call ‘nesting orientalisms’ is a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised. In this pattern, Asia is more ‘East’ or ‘other’ than eastern Europe; within eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as the most ‘eastern’; within Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies. I argue that the terms of definition of such dichotomous model eventually establish conditions for its own contradiction“ Bakić Hejdn 1995: 918

and what is an end, reproduces modernist desire for stability, hence, reproduces the (unstable) fantasy of the Balkans as chaotic, meaningless and dangerous space.

Hegemonic discourse represents the Balkans as the frightening fractal (Green 2005: 129-158) – the impossibility to clearly resolve and unambiguously name relations, make the Balkans appear “impossible”, in the modernistic frame.

“...the Balkans always seem to generate ambiguous and tense connections that ought, in modernist terms, to be clearly resolved separations” (Green 2005: 129).

However, this discourse does not characterize multiple and hybrid meanings of the region as creativity, but as something that produces fear – the Balkans is not the place where it is possible to play with terms of modernity:

„In the hegemonic concepts of the Balkans, the proliferation of hybrids, cast as problematic interrelations (fragmentation) is not regarded as ‘inventiveness’ at all” (Green 2005: 158).

The author denounce ontological status of this idea through emphasizing that the idea of the Balkans as a dangerous fractal is part of hegemonic discourse about the Balkans. However, we should not presume that because they are fantasies, certain concepts are not real. The Balkans as “*an ideologically mediated invention that affects how things are, whether or not people believe the invention*” (Green 2005: 158) is produced as fractal (with multiple meanings, impossible) and at the same time it produces fractality. In other words, fractality, impossibility, ambivalence, non-modernity of the Balkans is not its natural, ontological characteristic, but, at the same time, family, friendship, state, local, historical, geographical relations are visibly and unquestionably fractal and ambivalent.

Instead of trying to silence multiplicity of voices, or to “discover the essence of problems”, the author have chosen different approach, trying “*to switch to and fro between scales, to switch the sound off and switch it back on again repeatedly, to try to understand the relations between them, rather than the fragmentations*” (Green 2005: 141).

She tried to capture relations among different levels, to note and analyse “*socio-political commentaries, geomorphological accounts, anthropological accounts, and the accounts of people around the Kasidiaris*” (Green 141).

I think that refusing to understand the Balkans as “essentially” without any meaningful order is extremely useful in trying to somehow frame feelings of national belonging in Montenegro. I do not want to imply that multiplicity and ambiguity of national categories in Montenegro should be understood as a characteristic of pre-modern society which is about to “make a step” into modernity, nor that Montenegro is some kind of “undiscovered” post-modern society. On contrary, I think that ambiguity of national belongings directly points to the modernity of Montenegro. Despite serious ambiguities and at least two great explanations of what the “self” means, people continue to reproduce their feelings of belonging as unquestionable and certain. Cynism – doing as if one doesn’t know – creates a possibility to understand Montenegro as the state of modernity *par excellence*. In spite of tensions, uncertainties and ambivalences – obvious on every levels – the state continues to be reproduced as stable and unquestionable.

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