

Exposé:
Construction of exclusive ethno-national identities
in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina:
Representation of ethno-nationalist symbols in divided communities

Abstract

In general, the project will examine two nation-building processes in South-eastern Europe from inter-disciplinary perspective: the Macedonian and Bosniak (Bosnian) case.

In particular, it will be focused on the appropriation and representation of public symbols in private spaces combining two level of analysis:

- 1) a macro-perspective on the strategies for construction of exclusive ethno-national identities in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina by means of public symbols;
- 2) a gender-sensitive micro-perspective on the practical consequences of ethno-national identity politics (symbolic aspects) in the everyday life of “ordinary” people.

Theoretical assumptions

Ethno-national identity “politics” vs. “the political” of ethno-national identities

By virtue of Mouffe’s distinction between "the political" and "politics" as an explanatory tool, the broader subject of the present study could be described as an exploration of the *potential* and *actual* relationships between:

- a) the ethno-national identity “politics” (as an *ensemble* of practices, discourses, and institutions related to or relevant for the construction and control of ethno-national identities), and
- b) “the political” of ethno-national identities, referring to the dimension of social antagonism that is inherent in human societies (in our case in divided societies) - "antagonism that can take many different forms and can emerge in diverse social relations". (Mouffe 1997)¹.

Nationalism as a discourse and an ideology

The main theoretical assumptions of the research study:

Nation-building is an ideological “enterprise” in which ethno-national symbols are used as discursive and ideological elements in the social construction of ethno-national identities.

"Nationalism" as a theoretical concept will be assumed:

- "in terms of discourse in general and ideology in particular" (Sutherland 2005)²;
- as a discourse and an ideology used in the process of political mobilisation of collective identities;
- as a system of ideas used by the activists of nation-building in the discursive process of justification of national identity politics;
- as expressed in everyday 'social reality' through "symbolic markers of belonging to a 'nation-state'" (Sutherland 2005).

Research questions

¹ Mouffe, Chantal (1997): Democratic Identity and Pluralist Politics. In: Roontekoe and Marietta Stepaniants (ed.): Justice and Democracy: Cross-cultural Perspectives. University of Hawai'i Press, 381-394.

² Sutherland, Claire (2005): Nation-building Through Discourse Theory. In: Nations and Nationalism 11:2, 185-202.

The project is intended as inter-disciplinary research focused on the following general questions:

What are the "identities and differences" in the processes of construction of ethno-national identities in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina following the break-up of SFRY?

In which extent of the SFRY' identity politics had influenced the processes of construction of exclusive ethno-national identities in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina?

In which ways the dramatic change in the patterns of representation of ethno-nationalist symbols was reflected in the urban and rural divided communities?

How the ethno-nationalist symbols are traversing the public/private dichotomy in divided communities?

What is the role of the media in the representation and appropriation of public symbols in private spaces?

Are perception and representation of public ethno-nationalist symbols in private spaces different in man and women, in urban and rural communities?

Are there any meeting points between ethno-nationalist public symbols and religious public symbols and are they reflected in private spaces?

What are the implicit and explicit intersections between ethno-nationalist public symbols (as representations of "national identity") and private memories and experiences related to "national belonging"?

Is the sense of pride toward ethno-national symbols different between men and women, between educated and non-educated people, between religious and non-religious people, between heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals?

Are ethno-national symbols perceived as symbols of inclusion or as symbols of exclusion? How they are perceived among the citizens with non-stable ethnic identities or among the citizens who prefer their civic belonging? Is it possible to construct an inclusive national consciousness in the exclusive ethno-national political setting?

Research problems

I) The "macro-level"

1) Institutional framework and activists of nation-building

The role of the national academies in inventing tradition and construction of exclusive ethno-national identities in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Comparative analysis of the role of Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences (MANU - established in 1967) and Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ANUBIH - founded in 1951))

The focus will be on the change of the role of the national academies in the creation of symbolic boundaries of the nation vis-à-vis others after the break up of SFRY. The mission in the period after their establishment will be analysed with a special emphasis on their role during the armed conflicts as well as on the current projects for editing the "Macedonian Encyclopaedia" and the "Encyclopaedia of Bosnia and Herzegovina".

(Archival research and personal interviews with academicians involved in nation-building processes during April 2007.)

2. Contents and rhetoric of national identity:

2.1. The role of the state symbols in the expression of official identity politics

- Historical analysis of the processes of construction of state symbols in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (name of the state, flags, national anthem, national emblem).
- Archival research about the symbolic aspects of identity politics in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina before the break-up of SFRY.
- Discourse analysis of the effects of the naming dispute between Greece and Macedonia over the name of the state (including nationality, and official language) on the official rhetoric of national identity.

2.2 Macedonian poetry as a hallmark of national identity and as an instrument for the invention of tradition

The educational role of poetry as a mechanism of “imagining” the nation as a community will be analysed, with particular emphasis on the role of poetry critics in re-inventing the ancient myths and creating the symbolic boundaries.

In particular, the influence and controversies related to "Struga Poetry Evenings" festival will be examined, which started in 1962 in honour of the two brothers, Konstantin and Dimitar Miladinov, born in Struga in the early 19th century.

(Library research, curricula analysis, and personal interviews with organizers and poets during "Struga Poetry Evenings" in August 2007.)

2.3 The role of national cinematography in creating representations of nation

On one hand, the focus will be on the change of the role of the national cinematography in the re-creation of national mythology after the break up of SFRY. On the other, the role of cinematography as a mechanism of facing with traumatic past&present conflicts will be studied, taking into account the reception of the Milcho Mancheski movies "Before the Rain" (awarded with Golden Lion) and "Dust" as well as Jasmila Zbanic movie "Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams" (awarded with Golden Bear).

(Discourse analyses of national film criticism, personal interviews with film makers and film critics)

II) The "micro-level" perspective

The "micro-level" perspective will be focused on the effects of ethno-national identity politics on the daily realities of people living in divided communities, in particular on:

1) The symbolic influence of "Ohrid Framework Agreement" and "Dayton Agreement" in the construction of exclusive ethno-national identities in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina;

(discourse analysis of the official documents and articles in printed and electronic media; personal interviews, focus group discussions)

2) The representation of public state symbols in the private places as well as in the private memories and experiences related to "national belonging" (name of the state, flags, national anthem, national emblem);

(Home visits, personal interviews, archival research)

3) The role of ethno-national monuments and religious symbols in the creation of national identities in a multiethnic environment: identifying the points of convergence and divergence between the public ethno-nationalist and religious symbols.

(Archival research, personal interviews, comparative analysis of the debates on the topics of ethno-national monuments and religious symbols on Macedonian and Bosnian Blogs).

Field-site description

The fieldwork will be accomplished in these social contexts:

- a) among the traditional craftsmen and workers in "Turkish Bazar - Turska Carsija" (Skopje) and "Old Turkish Bazar - Bascarsija" (Sarajevo) - personal interviews;
- b) among the villagers of Ljubance and Ljuboten near Skopje (with particular attention to the reception of the trial of "Ljuboten" case in front of the Hague Tribunal (in spring 2007) and the way it affects the individual experiences related to the armed conflict in 2001) - personal interviews;
- c) among the high-school students of "Pance Arsovski" School in Gostivar (with particular attention to memories related to the violent incidents from 1997, provoked by the unauthorized flowing of ethnic Albanian flags) - focus group discussions with a questionnaire prepared in advance;
- d) among the university students of South East European University in Tetovo and "St. Cirily and Methodius" University in Skopje (comparative study on their reaction to ethno-nationalist student protests from 1997, related to the use of Albanian language in higher education) - focus group discussions with a questionnaire prepared in advance;
- e) among the tourist workers in Ohrid and Struga (focusing on the use of national symbols in the promotion of tourism) - personal interviews;
- f) among the rural population in Strumica region near Bulgarian border (focusing on the phenomenon of change of "nationality" fostered by Bulgarian national policy as well as the process of EU integration - introducing of Bulgarian visa for Macedonian citizens) - personal interviews.

Methodology

Discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews, archival research, focus group discussions, library research, curricula analysis, comparative data analysis, gender analysis of quantitative and qualitative results.

Time plan

January & February 2007:

- research in library and archives & working on the methodology plan

Mart 2007 -

- workshop and stay in Graz & revising the methodology plan;

April 2007 -

- archival research about the symbolic aspects of identity politics in Macedonia;
- 20 interviews with traditional craftsmen and workers in "Turkish Bazar - Turska Carsija" (Skopje);
- archival research in MANU;
- 10 personal interviews with members of MANU and other scientists involved in nation-building processes;
- preparation of a questionnaire for focus groups;

May 2007 -

- field-work in Ljubance and Ljuboten (20 personal interviews with villagers of Ljubance and Ljuboten and home visits);
- four focus group discussions with high-school students of "Pance Arsovski" School in Gostivar;
- two focus group discussions with university students of South East European University in Tetovo;

- two focus group discussions with university students of "St. Cirilys and Methodius" University in Skopje.

June 2007 -

- archival research in ANUBIH; personal interviews with members and other scientists involved in nation-building processes;
- archival research about the symbolic aspects of identity politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- research about the processes of construction of state symbols and about the symbolic influence of "Dayton Agreement" in the construction of exclusive ethno-national identities Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- 20 interviews with traditional craftsmen and workers in "Old Turkish Bazar - Bascarsija" (Sarajevo);
- 5 personal interviews with film makers and film critics.

July 2007

- field-work in Ohrid and Struga (20 interviews with tourist workers);
- discourse analysis of the effects of the naming dispute between Greece and Macedonia.

August 2007

- field-work in Strumica region (20 personal interviews and home visits);
- library research& curricula analysis about the educational role of poetry as a mechanism of "imagining" the nation as a community;
- field-work in Struga (10 personal interviews with organizers and poets during "Struga Poetry Evenings").

September 2007

- discourse analyses of national film criticism,
- 10 personal interviews with film makers and film critics from Macedonia;
- reasearch and analysis of controversial debates relating to ethno-national symbols on Macedonian and Bosnian blogs.

October-December 2007

- research about the the symbolic influence of "Ohrid Framework Agreement" in the construction of exclusive ethno-national identities in Macedonia
- research about the role of ethno-national monuments and religious symbols in the creation of national identities in a multiethnic environment;
- transcription of the interviews;
- preparing the final versions of focus group reports;
- gender analysis of the data;

2008-2009

- Analysis and evaluation of the data
- Writing up research results
- Drafting the thesis