

SHORT REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH PROJECT

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Theoretical-methodological framework

Nation understood as imagined, created and constructed entity is nowadays a common object of study in anthropology¹. Anderson's view is still very important especially in challenging predominant views which view nation as a universal, natural and given community that cannot be either changed or redefined. Anthropologists have indeed relied on this concept significantly and have used it to develop many further questions about national identity.

Fredrik Barth suggested that ethnicity is more relational than essential category². In other words, he showed that in creating ethnical identity who "we are" is less important than who "we are not". The similarity is the most strongly produced through the difference. Barth showed that boundaries are the key elements for creation of an ethnic identity – neighboring "other" is constitutive element of "us". The difference "we/they" can not be actualized if there is no contact between "us" and "them". Identity is communicated, negotiated, re-defined between "us" and the "significant other". "Accordingly, the source of ethnicity is not in cultural difference but in cultural communication which, using symbols understandable to both *insiders* and *outsiders*, permits creation of boundaries among some groups"³. National and ethnic identities are produced through the same basic logic (we/they), and therefore, theoretically could be analyzed as different expressions of the same group logic. Although their relationship is historically and politically conditioned and differs from one example to another, as Jenkins (2001) suggest – we should rethink both ethnic and national identity as inseparable from issues of power, categorization and identification⁴.

I believe that Montenegro is a case where Barth's views could be somewhat altered. It seems to me that in Montenegro "we" and "they" are part of one group that now lives in one national state. It is not quite clear who "we" are, nor who are "they", or, at least, without casting multiple answers to this question. I think that in Montenegro, national identity was not constructed as opposed to one "significant other". And, I presume it is much better to talk about national identities (in plural) of/in Montenegro.

How a person becomes capable of saying and thinking "I am Montenegrin/Serbian/Croatian..."? I think that identity conceptualized as stable, fixed entity that is occasionally revived (e.g. during political rituals, national holidays etc.), cannot offer satisfying explanation of its strength. For some people, the feeling of belonging to a national group can be the most important element for defining themselves.

¹ Anderson, B. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso

² Fredrik B. Etničke grupe i njihove granice, in: Filip Putinja, Žoslin Stref-Fenar. 1997. *Teorije o etnicitetu*. Beograd: XX vek

³ *ibid*, 138

⁴ Dženkins, R. 2001. *Etnicitet u novom ključu*. Beograd: XX vek

I presume that if researcher understands identity as a process that is repeatedly occurring, he/she will be able to understand how it can be so powerful and how it can have so overwhelming influence on lives and narrations of people.

Researches of national identity analyzed levels of its production. They demonstrated the multiplicity of those levels – national identity is constructed at the level of the state, through media, national institutions (e.g. museums, educational system, etc.), through art, science, but also on the level of an individual. He/she internalizes and re-produces differences structured as we/they through everyday experience. Michael Herzfeld developed a concept of cultural intimacy⁵ as an analytic tool that enables anthropologists to look for everyday, trivial stories and practices that create a feeling of belonging.

An interesting question is whether a person passively reproduces or actively shapes national identity – does he/she have the space for individual action, in what forms, with what strength? It seems to me that people in Montenegro have been living in the middle of various national discourses, and that their active role can be observed in the choices they made. I think that many of them have chosen not one coherent story about who they are and where they should be going, but different elements from various national narratives present in Montenegro, in order to make their actions and beliefs meaningful. I would like to see how they do it, what is the logic of their choice, what meanings they ascribe to ambiguous terms like “Montenegrin”, “Serbian”, “our”, etc.

Research objectives

I want to explore the discourse of national identity that led to independence of Montenegro. I do not think it is coherent, omnipresent and without problems, but rather ambiguous, strongly opposed and still struggling with other narratives and feelings of belonging. I want to discern what points are uncertain – what objects, practices or stories can not be determined uniformly, but whose meaning must be looked for intersection and relation of two or more narrations.

I want to address how did identity markers such as „being Montenegrin“ or „being Serbian“ change meanings in Montenegro. During period of Yugoslavia, meanings of national identities were different from today, and I want to see how people remember them. At the beginning of the nineties, during the war, meanings of those phrases were changed. In last 5-10 years, they again attained new meanings. I argue that changes at the level of states deeply influence people’s lives and my primary concern will be to determine how men and women gave meanings to those changes.

In Montenegro, among the rest, live people who classify themselves as Montenegrins, as Serbs, as Montenegrin Serbs, as Serbs from Montenegro, and all of them have diverse explanation of events of last twenty years, of their opponents, origin, future rights, etc.

I want to question transformation of those identity markers in order to grasp how nation was constructed on the level of the individual, how people negotiated and redefined their

⁵ I will not elaborate how I understand the concept of cultural intimacy here. I just have to emphasize that stories people tell each other with sympathy, if they identify themselves as members of the same group (the same stories create discomfort and anxiety if told in the presence of those who are recognized as strangers) can be understood as a powerful tool for production of national feelings. Herzfeld, M. 1997. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. New York: Routledge

positions, beliefs and actions, and how they found the way to make their lives meaningful in the middle of the “discursive battle”.

Susan Wright writes that anthropologists should understand culture as the contest over who has the power to define/give meaning: “Merry's is a good example of the new idea of culture as a contested process of meaning-making. The contest is over the meaning of key terms and concepts. How are these concepts used and contested by differently positioned actors (...) In a flow of events, who has the power to define? How do they prevent other ways of thinking about these concepts from being heard? How do they manage to make their meanings stick, and use institutions to make their meanings authoritative? With what material outcomes?”⁶. It seems to me that in Montenegro, national identity can also be understood as a contest over meanings.

Hence, I would like to explore how people without the power to intervene on institutional levels, have given meanings, have marked and categorized their world, themselves and neighboring others.

Models of expression

I intend to conduct numerous interviews and oral narrations. These will be the primary methods of conducting my research.

In addition to interviews, I would like to follow with more depth few families or persons, to talk to them repeatedly, to “live” with them, in order to see do they and in what way create their national identity in their everyday life, usual behavior, common and trivial actions and narrations.

I also would like to do a research of internet blogs that appeared before referendum about the independence of Montenegro. Mostly young people wrote a large number of blogs that were dedicated to history of Montenegro. They argued, debated, elaborated known and unknown “historical facts”, in order to re-articulate the question of who they are. I would like to explore how they did it, what were the main points of arguing, and what do those “origin stories” meant to them.

Also, I plan to analyze letters of newspapers readers. I would examine the newspapers published in one city during certain period of time (e.g. one month, or similar) to see whether articles appear that focus on national identity. I think print media is the place that is able to move personal narrations, opinions, wishes and emotions into the “public” sphere, and so becomes interesting for research.

I intend to keep a field diary.

Themes of interviews

I what meanings do terms like “Montenegrin”, “Serbian”, “Yugoslavian”, “Croatian” have for interviewees now? What changes do people feel in the meanings of those terms over time?

II gender – what is the “good Montenegrin/Serbian (...) woman/man”? How do interviewees see the purpose and role of man and women in past events, what are they expected to do now?⁷

⁶ Wright S. *Politicization of Culture*. At: <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/rai/AnthToday/wright.html>

⁷ I plan to use Nira Yuval Davis’s conceptualization of gendered aspects of national projects. She offered three models of national unity, described gender categorization implicitly present in the models, and I

III war and dissolution of Yugoslavia – how do interviewees understand it, what happened than in their opinion, what did “Montenegrin”, “Serbian”, “Yugoslavian” ... meant at the time?

IV referendum – Do they conceptualize referendum as the question about independence or about separation? How do they conceptualize the parallel existence of Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox Church? How do they understand and value the language – should it be called Montenegrin or Serbian, and why?

V origin stories – who are „we“, where do „we“ come from, where are „we“ going? (By „we“ I mean the identification interviewee choose)

VI what stories “activate” cultural intimacy? When are they told, and to whom?

I intend to talk to “ordinary people”. In other words, I will select interviews who do not have professional links with the politics, decisions on national level, etc. I will pay spatial attention to gender balance and choose approximately 50% men and 50% women. I will try to do as many interviews as possible with members of a same family. Thus, I could get the best insights into “gendered” aspects of narrations they told.

Considering my identity markers – gender and age, I presume I will be able to make the most satisfying interviews with both man and women aged 15-45. I could also achieve the necessary level of trust with women above 45 years, but I do not think that I could do the same with man above 45. It seems to me that age boundaries are obvious in Montenegro. I sincerely think that most of man aged 50 or 60 would not feel comfortable talking about sensitive personal issues with a young researcher.

Fieldsite description

I plan to do my one-year fieldwork in Podgorica, Kolašin, and Tivat. Podgorica is the capital of Montenegro. With approximately 150 000 inhabitants it is the largest city in Montenegro. Referendum about the independence of Montenegro showed that a little more than half of its population was for, and the other part was against the independence⁸. Podgorica is the important city where the large number of main events occurs.

Kolašin is placed northern from Podgorica. In the imagination of people who live in Montenegro, northern places are “more brutal”, “primitive”, “peasant-like”, etc. and southern places like Tivat have “Mediterranean mentality”, which assumes “culture”, “wild beauty”, “progress”, etc. In Kolašin 58% voted against the independence, and 42% voted for. In Tivat the situation was almost reversed. I have chosen the place “from the north” and “from the south” because of their imaginative oppositional status.

Tivat is inhabited mainly by representatives of Croatian minority, so here might exist not two, but three vague terms for self-explanation. How did people who live there

would like to see whether Montenegro can be seen through her analytical frame, and in what way. Nira, Yuval Davis. 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage Publications

⁸ Although it is not a reliable mark, I use data from referendum as the rough indicator of a national choice, because I could not find any research of Montenegro that could help me to determine the number relations of people with different national choices. I will not use those data anywhere else, but I needed them in order to determine where to do parts of fieldwork.

conceptualized processes in Montenegro, how were they able to link diverse national narratives and to find meanings at the borders of those discourses, in order to explain themselves?⁹. Brunnbauer's study of Pomaks' identity in Bulgaria shows logics of outside ascription of identification markers, and importance of how the group sees and understands itself. Pomaks were marked as Bulgarians (on a basis of language), as Turks (on a basis of religion) and as distinctive group – Pomaks. The important notion is that in all cases ethnic identity is represented as the only one, excluding all other possibilities. Croatian minority in Tivat has similar options for identification. Do they mark themselves as Croatians, Serbs, Montenegrins or something else? And what is the logic of their choice?

Not unimportant reason for my choices is the fact that I have friends who live in Kolašin and Tivat, and I live in Podgorica. Therefore, it will be more convenient for me to do the research there, then in some other city.

Time plan

Fieldwork: July 2007-July 2008.

April, May, June: 15 preliminary interviews. Letters of newspaper's readers.

July-August: Kolašin – 30 interviews.

September, October, November, December: Podgorica – 50 interviews. Study of blogs.

January, February, March: Podgorica – 35 interviews.

April: Kolašin – 15 interviews.

May, June: Tivat – 30 interviews.

⁹ Brunnbauer Ulf. 1998. *Histories and Identities: Nation-state and Minority Discourses. The Case of the Bulgarian Pomaks*. At: http://www-gewi.kfunigraz.ac.at/csbsc/ulf/pomak_identities.htm