

## ETHNOLOGY BETWEEN ETHNIC AND NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

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*In a paper published after the political changes swept our part of the world in the early nineties I questioned the resistance of the ethnology to political pressures during socialism and the nature of taboos in ethnological research. It came out that ethnicity along with the ethnic identification have been the neglected themes. Therefore it seems necessary to introduce the question of the ethnology into the discourse on ethnic and national identification.*

When and how did people in this country which is composed of diverse regions and ethnic groups started to feel and think of themselves as Croats? Croatian regions are geographically very disparate. Historically they did have different developments and some of them even now (or particularly now) claim to some kind of autonomy.

Integration of a nation is a complex and lengthy process. Croatian historian Mirjana Gross described it as a procedure in the course of which localisms and regionalisms of the ethnic communities are gradually overwhelmed, a new political community is created and economic concentration is developing along with the cultural homogenization of the nation. In this process, according to Gross (1981) national ideologies, myths, national values and identities are emerging. Historical research of the Croatian national integration shows that this process occurred in the second half of the 19th century. Historians offer insight into various phases of the process as they uncover opinions, endeavours, activity of the higher strata of the society and the construction of the national idea. What one lacks most is the evidence of the 'ethnic' or national feelings of the lower strata, the people. Could ethnology help clarify this topic?

Modern South Slavic ethnologies were born simultaneously with the emerging of national movements. Political movements that initiated national integration needed symbols. National ideologies in the 19th century claimed that genuine symbols of national culture were accumulated by the folk, Volk, narod. Many of the promoters of national ideas went to the people in search of 'genuine' national values. Many of them organized collecting of material about popular culture: poems and tales, proverbs, folk art, customs and rituals, natural law, ways of life... It was a well known widespread process in European culture nicknamed by Peter Burke 'the discovery of the people'.

A glance at the development of our science in Croatia may show a kind of personal union

between national politics and modern ethnologists. For example:

\* Some twenty years before Croatian National Revival Movement the highly influential Zagreb' bishop Maksimilijan Vrhovac sent a letter (in Latin) to the priests of his province, inviting them to collect 'products of Croatian Slavonic dialect' (June 1813).

\* Ljudevit Gaj (1809-1872), the leading personality of Croatian National Revival Movement used to collect folk poems and proverbs but also occasionally invented national myths.

\* Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski (1816-1889), Croatian statesman - the first one to address the Croatian Parliament in vernacular in 1843 - published the first questionnaire aimed at collecting material on Croatian popular culture and folklore.

\* The first published paper of the most important Croatian radical politician and spiritual leader, the 'father of the nation' Ante Starčević dealt with the wedding customs and rituals in his native region of Lika (published in "Danica Ilirska", 1845).

\* Antun Radić, founder of modern Croatian ethnology and brother of Stjepan Radić, the charismatic leader of Croatian Peasant Party at the turn of the century and during the First Yugoslavia (assassinated in Belgrade Parliament) has been also politically very active. He contributed in many ways to the creation of the ideology of Croatian Peasant Party. The same Antun Radić initiated the most important and even today very relevant inquiry into the Croatian popular culture (1897).

This brief review of the relationship between people engaged in politics and people acting as ethnologists seems to offer a very simple judgment. The affinity between the ethnologist's approach and the construction of Croatian national idea seems to be more than obvious.

But how did this affinity materialize? In which manner Croatian ethnologists did or did not help the construction of national symbols? Before trying to answer this question one should examine the situation in the field, among the folk/narod so diligently visited by ethnologists and folklorists?

We have scarce positive knowledge and written documentation of real ethnic or national feelings of narod, the 'simple' people. By those who used to study the 'people' and the 'popular culture' narod was considered as a repository of national values and marks. Early ethnographers (and/or politicians) 'knew' who 'narod' was, what people felt and what peoplehood was. They only had to pay a visit to the field and identify the supposed 'genuine national traits'.

In fact in the 18th century in various Croatian regions peasants did only vaguely feel as belonging to a nation, namely Croatian. Even among higher strata there have been regional distinctions and cultural and linguistic differences between Croats of the central, non military Croatia and Dalmatian towns and hinterland or people from Slavonia. And in regions with mixed population people in their everyday speech were referring to their neighbours or to themselves as: Šokci, Bunjevci, even Kranjci for Croats and Vlasi, Rkaći for Serbs, Kranjci, Štajerci for Slovenes and Turks or Balije for people in Bosnia who accepted Muslim religion... An extensive list of local and regional ethnic names could be compiled; up to our days some of them are functional in different ways.

In addition until the second half of the twentieth century in many regions with mixed Croatian and Serbian population the religious attribute was used as boundary making instead of ethnic

names. Peasants did not speak of people not belonging to the same ethnic group in their or in neighbouring villages as Serbs or Croats but as Orthodox or Catholics. Many citizens of Serbian origin in Croatia would consider themselves just orthodox - pravoslavci... It was during the second part of our century that because of the restrictive policy of the socialist regime and pressure against religion - people more and more avoided to speak of themselves as followers of a religion and started to differentiate as Serbs and Croats. In the course of time old ethnic names gave way to national names. It may be stated that the socialist repression of religion contributed to the final national integration of Serbs and Croats in what is contemporary Krajina, the region under Serbian control which claims independence from Croatia!

On the level of local groups the ethnic identification (not national) was observed by the researchers of Croatian popular culture and folklore since their early writings. Some forty years ago in the early fifties, immediately after the WW 2 a group of scholars of the Institute for Folk Art in Zagreb (now Institute for Ethnology and Folklore) undertook a very fruitful field research in the region of Banija, inhabited by mixed population. An interesting recent study of ethnic names by Renata Jambrešić (1993), based on the material collected by that group, shows the relations in the field where mainly ethnic names of small local groups have been used. The situation could be defined as previous to national, although it might be also explained as the mimicry of the population who suffered during WW 2 and wished to avoid national identification, thus turned back to traditional names.

From the methodological point of view it is important to note that the information on ethnic names which have been used by local population has not been included into the ethnographic (folklore) material collected, edited and saved *lege artis* in the Documentation of the Institute. The information which we nowadays consider highly relevant can be found scattered among the introductory notes where mainly travel occurrences and some minor observations have been reported. Which leads to a conclusion that this kind of information was not considered essential or pertinent to ethnography/ethnology or the study of folklore...

Little or marginal reference to national or ethnic character of popular culture by Croatian ethnology, lack of description of folk life and customs as explicitly national phenomena inspired Jasna Čapo (1991) to argue that Croatian ethnology did not explore *narod/peoplehood* but was mainly interested in the study of culture.

In fact, modern Croatian ethnology, since the foundation of Zagreb University teaching course in 1924, inspired by the personality of Milovan Gavazzi, was concerned with the study of culture. Such orientation resulted in a series of descriptions of cultural traits and patterns of various cultural regions in Croatia, but without explicit indication of their belonging to a national or ethnic group. The study of culture in anthropology and ethnology, although so many definitions of the concept have been recorded, was and is mainly concerned with the 'complex whole' as defined by E. Tylor. The aim of the research was and still is to discover the specific ordering of cultural traits as a more or less autonomous process.

Eric Wolf recently (1994) expressed an unusual criticism of the well-known concept, so precious to anthropologists and ethnologists:

"I suspect that cultural ordering requires leadership, control, influence and power, but the phenomena of power wielding in the cognitive and symbolic sphere are poorly theorized, and

thinking on these topics usually proceeds quite separately from inquiries into cultural meaning”.

Obviously the case of Croatian ethnology is quite a good example of neglecting or ignoring or deliberately omitting power relations ‘in the cognitive and symbolic sphere’, i.e. when researching culture.

Here we are confronted with a paradox:

Croatian ethnology - following the ideas of Antun Radić - should have developed as a science which should discover genuine, peasant values of Croatian people. According to Radić’s political writings and personal engagement the peasant culture was hiding the roots of the Croatian nation. Speaking of political strategy as a politician and not as an ethnologist in 1914 Antun Radić explicitly discussed the ways to make... intelligentsia to be Croats as we do make peasants into Croats...<sup>1</sup>

In fact Croatian ethnology did not teach and did not publish results which might be directly used in the construction of Croatian national ideology. It is true that a part of our science was and still is engaged in discovering the roots. Search of origins was directed towards detection of Slavic or Balkan or Mediterranean roots. But you never can tell whether a Slavic or old Slavic root represented Croatian, Yugoslav or a Serbo-Croatian element, as leading Serbian ethnologist Jovan Cvijić used to say - meaning Serbian.

Nevertheless, what does it mean if we find traces of supposed common Slavic traits? Does it mean that we still stick to the Pan-Slavic ideology which was functional at the beginning of the century during national tensions in the Habsburg empire? Identification marks and symbols change with time, and we have to admit that in contemporary boundary making strategies Slavic origin of the culture lost its former glamour and relevance.

Another type of ethnological concern was directed towards construction of regional but not necessarily national cultural patterns. Gavazzi’s (1957, 1978) cultural areas are still *sine qua non* in our science.

It was only during late thirties, immediately before the WW 2, when Croatian question in the first Yugoslavia has been ‘resolved’ by establishing ‘Banovina Hrvatska’ that for a short period ethnology accepted the invitation to take part in the production of national symbolism. Leading ethnologists of the time - Milovan Gavazzi and Branimir Bratanić - participated in educational programs of the Croatian Peasant Party. They have been among the most diligent organizers of the well-known festivals of the peasant folklore. Bratanić even wrote a guidebook for the peasants who wished to participate to the Smotra, and this is the first and maybe the only written document on the ethnological conception or construction of Croatian national traits and symbols originating from the popular culture. One could affirm that the model of the presentation of Croatian folklore and popular culture has not been changed since those days (Bratanić 1941).

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<sup>1</sup> “Nakon ilirskog pokreta, koji je zahvatio više staleže, nego li obični “demos”, nakon pedesetih godina, moramo danas priznati, da je naša inteligencija nazadovala u nacionalnom osjećaju. A zašto? Zato, jer mi mislimo, da se naša inteligencija daje nacionalizovati samo političkim sredstvima, koja su širokoj masi pristupačna, ali koja se različito prosudjuju u inteligenciji, ili zato, jer mislimo naše najviše slojeve učiniti Hrvatima kao i seljaka što činimo Hrvatom” (Radić (1914)1938:195).

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It is evident that I was not interested in the relationship between ethnic and national identification in the field only. My concern was: how Croatian ethnology did perceive, investigate, manage and theorize ethnic and national identification? Rethinking our ethnological endeavours during the socialist era in terms of what we did not do, we had to admit that we abstained to research ethnic and national differences. Noninvolvement in the study of particular ethnic boundaries was due to political pressure in the first and second Yugoslavia (Rihtman-Auguštin 1992). But it might be attributed also to the holistic concept of culture and to the lack or avoidance or even fear to consider power relations in culture processes.

On the other side, as I tried to demonstrate, there was an underlying reason for ethnology not to discuss the national character of cultural phenomena. For a long time in the course of national integration the feeling of national identity in the field did not evolve and ethnic identification of the small local groups was the dominant reference point. National identity has been constructed a posteriori by higher strata of the society, by political, intellectual and economic elites.

What we really do not know today is: what are the genuine ethnic and national differences between Croatian and Serbian popular culture in Croatia. This seems illogical and untrue.

It really is not true because knowledge of the differences and boundaries exists on various levels: scattered in ethnological texts lacking system and theory, and in political and other less than scientific discourse on cultural differences and mentality between Croatian and Serbian popular culture, with exaggerations and trespassing on both sides.

At this point a presumption might be introduced of the existence of oral tradition among Croatian ethnologists which existed side by side with ethnological writing. There have been traits and phenomena in the popular culture considered national which have not been discussed in a manner which we call academic. In spite of that those traits and phenomena have been common among specialists probably by oral transmission. As until late seventies only scarce publishing activity persisted within Croatian ethnology this oral transmission (mainly lectures of prof. Gavazzi and Bratanić) could be treated as an influential part in the development of our science.

Therefore one could speak of the hidden hypothesis about national traits which characterize Croatian national identification or differentiate Croatian from other, e.g. from Serbian popular culture. Being hidden the hypothesis was barely academically questioned, although there have been polemics and there exists a literature or paraliterature dealing with mentality, national mythology and national character, not to speak about subjects such as: who was Kraljević Marko? A hero or a Turkish vassal, a knight or a drunkard, a Serbian or a Croat... Or to take another example: *Hasanaginica*, a ballad of great literary value and international reputation. Although Muslim by origin the poem was first recorded in a Croatian setting. The same ballad has been included by Vuk Karadžić in his '*Mala prstonarodna pjesnarica*' (published 1814) and was used as a symbol of Serbian popular culture.

But that is another story concerning ethnological theory that opens most interesting questions: of the quantity and quality of boundary markers, of their intermingling and changing positions in the turbulent Balkan area (or on its borders) and of the strategies or policies that

help transform a cultural trait belonging to a small group into a national marker; of the relationship between ethnological theory and paraliterature, that cannot be ignored because of its effects; of folklorism, which although a fake highly instills symbolic meaning.

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What kind of prospects does the questioning of the role of ethnology between ethnicity and nation offer?

Integration of a nation is a political process. In the emerging national ideology culture or cultural traits and symbols are included. Although on the level of political elites and higher social strata Croatian national integration was completed previously to the twentieth century the self identification of the peasant 'people' was still in many parts regional and sub national.

It was an unwritten rule in Croatian postwar ethnology that any allusion to power relations should be banned from ethnological thinking and writing. Such attitude helped Croatian ethnology to stay away of the political arena. On the other hand the analysis of a very important part of cultural process was omitted, and we did pretend not to see some pertinent influences and pressures. Accepting Wolf's challenge to ethnology I believe an approach to ethnic and national identification that would include past and contemporary power relations, which means politics on the global as well as on local levels, might offer a new type of research, interpretation and understanding in ethnology.

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## ETNOLOGIJA IZMEĐU ETNIČKE I NACIONALNE IDENTIFIKACIJE

### Sažetak

Iako je hrvatska etnologija nastala na poticaj nacionalnoga preporodnoga pokreta, pa su mnogi pioniri skupljanja etnografske i folklorne građe bili poznati hrvatski političari, ona se nije bavila etničkom ili nacionalnom identifikacijom. Pod time mislim na istraživanje kulturnih crta i značajki po kojima bi se hrvatska narodna kultura razlikovala od drugih srodnih, bliskih ili daljih narodnih kultura, ponajprije srpske, pa zatim i ostalih europskih.

Pokušavam istražiti zašto se to dogodilo. Odgovor je na prvi pogled jasan i jednostavan: politički su pritisci za vrijeme socijalizma ograničavali istraživanje etniciteta i etničkih razlika, pogotovu na području hrvatskih i srpskih odnosa. Bile su to tabu teme koje se nismo usuđivali dirnuti.

Pa ipak, postojala su znanja o kulturnim pojavama ili detaljima u običajima, nošnji, usmenoj književnosti, folklornoj glazbi za koje se znalo da su 'hrvatski'. No to nije bilo eksplicite navedeno. Stoga uvodim hipotezu o usmenoj predaji u hrvatskoj etnologiji koju potvrđuje i činjenica da je sve do kraja sedamdesetih godina etnološke radove objavljivalo relativno malo autora, i da se izbjegavalo teorijsko promišljanje kulturnih fenomena. Većina pozitivističkoga znanja bila je u Gavazzijevim predavanjima i raspršenim člancima. Jedino je uoči Drugog svjetskog rata Branimir Bratanić u uputama za održavanje smotri hrvatske narodne kulture pokušao ponuditi modele hrvatskoga folklora koji se su zapravo održali sve do današnjih dana.

Hrvatska se etnologija međutim bavila istraživanjem korijena i izvora. No ni tu nije dolazila do konačnoga odgovora na pitanje o nacionalnom identitetu jer se najčešće utvrđivalo da su korijeni balkanski, mediteranski, panonski, ili slavenski. No što u nacionalnom smislu znači to da je podrijetlo nekoj pojavi slavensko? Ono isto tako može biti podlogom za hrvatsku ali i za srpsku ili neku drugu nacionalnu identifikaciju.

Nisu postojale teorijske pretpostavke za istraživanje etničke identifikacije. Najnovije istraživanje Renate Jambrešić koja se poslužila zapisima suradnika Instituta za narodnu umjetnost (sada Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku) iz pedesetih godina na Baniji pokazuje da su građu koja govori o etnonimima i o njihovoj funkciji istraživači smatrali redundantnom; nisu je bilježili u okviru lege artis sastavljenih zbirki nego pretežno u uvodima toj građi kao dio putnih zabilješki.

Sadašnje čitanje te građe pokazuje međutim kako se u tom kraju miješanoga stanovništva još sredinom ovoga stoljeća ljudi nisu identificirali kao Hrvati ili Srbi nego su najbliže susjede ili stanovnike obližnjih sela nazivali lokalnim etnonimima ili prema vjerskoj pripadnosti.

Polazeći od definicije iz pera Mirjane Gross o nacionalnoj integraciji kao složenom procesu možemo pretpostavljati da iako je taj proces doživio svoje vrhunce u prošlom stoljeću ili na prijelazu stoljeća, on još uvijek nije bio završen u narodu, na terenu koji etnolozi istražuju.

To bi mogao biti drugi razlog zbog kojega hrvatska (pozitivistička) etnologija nije istraživala etničku odnosno nacionalnu identifikaciju (jer je na terenu nije nalazila).

Treći je razlog posve teorijske prirode. Nedavno je na njega upozorio Eric Wolf. Naime, kultura kao predmet etnologije najčešće se definira kao kompleksna cjelina, tj. skladan poredak pojava koje zovemo kulturnim. Wolf dokazuje kako se kultura kao poredak ne ostvaruje bez nekog vodstva, upravljanja, utjecaja i moći, što znači da moć, tj. politički odnosi utječu na kulturu. No to je, po Wolfovu mišljenju slabo teorijski razrađeno pa se najčešće kulturne procese istražuje odvojeno od političkih. Kod nas je Jasna Čapo pokazala kako je hrvatska etnologija u temelju svojih istraživanja imala baš kulturu koncipiranu u klasičnom smislu. Moguće je zaključiti da je takva polazna pretpostavka također ograničavala etnologiju i sprečavala da kulturne procese u isto vrijeme prepozna kao etničke, tj. političke.

Tri razloga koja sam navela: politički pritisak bivšega sustava, nedefiniranost etničke identifikacije na terenu i ograničenja u poimanju kulture mogu objasniti položaj hrvatske etnologije između etniciteta i nacije. To saznanje može također biti poticajem promjenama u suvremenim istraživanjima.