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## IMAGINED DALMATIA: LOCALITY IN THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The Internet representations of local Dalmatian identity are considered in this article. They differ primarily in the tourism-motivated representation of the Dalmatian coastal towns and the representations on the Web that are shaped by the largely emigrated local communities from the Dalmatian hinterland.

Keywords: identity, Internet, Dalmatia

As Stuart Hall once observed, identity is not "what (we) get up in the morning and feel like being". Rather, he explained, it is something that is always and constantly in a state of decomposition and coming together, a dynamic system of relations and conceptions.<sup>1</sup> Still, "until recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of 'possible lives', and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special persons or domains, restricted to special moments or places" (Appadurai 1991:198). However, as early as during the mid-1980s, anthropologists were drawing attention to the transnational political, economic and cultural forces which participate in the formation of local contexts, making cultures less "solid" (Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford 1988).<sup>2</sup> They added that ethnography should find ways to step back from locally and regionally conceived research, to "modernise" itself, and, after a hundred years of "observation with participation", confront the "global ethnoscares": "the landscapes of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and persons", who "constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of

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<sup>1</sup> *A Conversation with Stuart Hall*; <http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/journal/vol7no1/Hall.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Although, as was also widely noted, the idea of the coherence of earlier cultures is quite doubtful, their limitations are more likely to have been manufactured than found in the field.

and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree" (Appadurai 1991:192). Consequently, ethnography must confront the changing social, territorial and cultural reproduction of group identity: "As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic 'projects', the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality" (ibid.:191). Arjun Appadurai dated these changes as having taken place in the 1970s since when, as he claims, the mass media<sup>3</sup> have monitored the deterritorialisation of people, images and ideas, offering a constantly growing and always changeable selection of possible lives, and possible conceptions of individual and group identities. If they wish to ensure the significance of their voices in the transnational, deterritorialised world, ethnographers "can no longer simply be content with the 'thickness' they bring to the local and the particular, nor can they assume that as they approach the local, they approach something more elementary, more contingent, and thus more 'real' than life seen in larger-scale perspectives" (Appadurai 1991:197-200).

The "information age" has made identities more flexible, but "less secure" – even though they are subject to the ongoing "games" of history, culture and power (and are not always anchored in some cleansed past). That is not the only reason although definitely an important one for the "blossoming of collective identities", and their accumulation on the scales, with the weight of globalisation on the other side. The answer has still not been given to the question as to the extent of the role of the most transnational/most deterritorialised of the media, the medium that contains a much broader offer of possible lives/identities than those of all the older mass media – the Internet. In the meantime, the bibliography of scholarly papers following this trend is being marked by a large number of ethnographic (anthropological) contributions, so many, in fact, that one already finds the term Cyberethnography/ Cyberanthropology.<sup>4</sup>

### **Imagining tradition**

The Internet is a medium that opens up the possibility for its users to "play with identity". It is that very fact that has become a particularly intriguing subject of Cyberanthropology. Primarily, this involves research of Internet

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<sup>3</sup> The recent history of the social sciences has been marked by many well-argued objections in connection with the implications of this term but, while anticipating a better one, this one remains a welcome alternative.

<sup>4</sup> Here one should definitely add thinking about the validity of differentiating the "real", offline world and the virtual, online world, just that line of thought that speaks of the credibility of the idea of twofold and/or "extended" reality. For all those to whom that idea seems plausible, the recently institutionalised terms Cyberethnology and Cyberanthropology will be a mere metatheoretical surplus.

forums and chatrooms. Here, as some researchers say, identities become more fluid. Others claim that identity is more simply, less painfully and less finally constructed with the aid of the Internet. And there are those who note that the Internet gives its users the courage to "present themselves falsely" in both image and word. It also makes it possible for them to reveal a hidden "part of themselves" without any danger of the consequences that would befall them if they did so in life "outside the Net". Nevertheless, other Internet pages that do not provide the possibility of Internet communication within its group of users and visitors do offer the possibility of "checking (positioning) their own identity". I was guided by that assumption in my search for Internet representations of Dalmatian identity. First of all, I wanted to check how Dalmatian identity was understood on the Internet pages of individual Dalmatian towns: on their title pages, sub-pages, and in their forums. However, I selected only those representations of Dalmatian identity that referred to Dalmatian "traditional culture", while I understood the term "traditional culture" in the way that ethnography "traditionally" understands it, just as it adopted it at its beginnings as its own, disciplinary preserve. In so doing, I had in mind the fact that Internet pages are created according to many diverse criteria and for many diverse reasons, and that people of diverse "profiles" participate in their creation or formation, although most frequently only those who are more "Internet educated", those who have attached themselves to "the information age" and wish to capitalise on it. Still, for that very reason, it is possible to see worthwhile narrators among the creators of the Internet pages that I have selected for analysis, while the traditional culture that is presented on those pages as valuable material is something that the ethnologically uneducated have recognised as being (their own and) characteristic, something that they can and should be proud of and something (not at all unimportantly) that can and should be presented.

### **The Internet pages of the Dalmatian coastal towns and the islands**

The content of the majority of Dalmatian town Internet pages does not differ from the content of the Internet pages of other European tourist destinations: the most frequent element in what they offer is information on sightseeing in the towns, the museums, the restaurants, accommodation in hotels and pensions, schedules of ferry, bus and air transport, weather conditions and various special events. Many pages are given over to photo-albums with a series of pictures showing the landscape, and beaches and stone structures, while some of them are also available as electronic postcards. Almost all the pages I visited also offered rich textual and pictorial sections on local history, with particular emphasis on architectural heritage.

Similarly to the selection from the history of Dalmatian architecture, painting, literature, and science, "traditional culture", too, is placed in the

service of tourism to add zest to the sun and sea atmosphere. It is shown on some pages by the occasional photograph of an older woman or man whose appearance is, undoubtedly, primarily a photographically representative mode of appealing for understanding (a reading) within the code of an onerous but proud life of privation, a day-labourer life on ungiving land, exhausted by the unmerciless nature of Dalmatian history. Those photographs are found, as a rule, inserted into the representative collage of sun and sea on the title pages of the Dalmatian towns' Internet pages. They are less "conceptual" than some of the pages that present Dalmatian "games of chivalry" (the *moreška*, the *kumpanija*, and the *Alka* jousting tournament) or than various festivities such as, for example, the "Sali Customs", while they are usually part of summer tourist events (the "Sali Cultural Summer", the "Supetar Cultural Summer", the "Makarska Cultural Summer", the "Iž Festival", the "Blato Summer", the „Vela Luka Festivities“...).<sup>5</sup> In such cases, the Internet is nothing other than a welcome medium for providing a condensed offer of local tradition (alongside other information) to a possible visitor:

Blato's rich history, the struggle of its inhabitants to save the island from the pirates and invaders, is shown in very attractive knight play "kumpanija". A Sword dance that shows proud people defending their island takes place in the square in front of the Church every week during summer.<sup>6</sup>

The offer of Dalmatian "traditional culture" on the Internet only follows and condenses the summer presentations *in situ*. Here, too, the selection from tradition is seen and proudly presented as something unique, autochthonic and ancient. This is definitely an attempt at construction and marketing of appropriate (attractive) identity, identity that will add a category that the Anthropology of Tourism calls "ethnic tourism" to the offer of sun and sea. Ethnic tourism is usually defined as an activity that tourists choose in order to experience, "at first hand", the attraction of the cultural practice of other, "native" culture. Together with "cultural tourism", it is just that "heritage tourism" – the sometimes used and somewhat less pejorative term for ethnic tourism – that has been registering the greatest growth in interest on the tourism markets for more than a decade now (Zeppel and Hall 1991). The swelling anthropological discussion of this phenomenon is sometimes observed through the concepts of post-colonialism and Orientalism. Although these discussions usually entail analyses of the position of the tourists and the tourism agencies that take tourists to their holiday destination, this examination will also show itself to be useful in the analysis of the positions of the hosts, the ones who want to bring the tourists to their thresholds. One such contribution to the discussion in question is the one made by Jess Olsen.

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<sup>5</sup> Very often they are written in English or German.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.blato.hr/turizam/index.htm>

The interest of this author has been drawn to the tourism brochures, the material that precedes the Internet advertising of the tourism offer, whose genre particularities have merely moved into a new medium over recent years. Olsen sees the tourism brochure as a postmodern product, a pastiche of "diverse" images and concepts that simultaneously compress both time and space (Olsen 1998). However, regardless of how diverse they may be, those images and conceptions are, at the same time, stereotypical and expected within the dominating cultural framework. This is probably most obvious precisely when "traditional culture" is being presented: it is displayed in relation to the assumed expectations of visitors, expectations that are shaped by the media dictates of trends. However, the "natives" – including the Dalmatians – are usually presented as "the unfamiliar Other", as symbols of domestic ethnicity, symbols that will inform the visitor about the atmosphere of the destination in which it will be possible to spend "a successful holiday". It should also be pointed out that the idea of the existence of a pure, homogenous, authentic traditional culture that it is intended to present by these stereotyped images, by which the gullible tourist will be "taken in", is equally as deluding and nostalgic as the attempt at simulation that follows it outside the Net. These are, in fact, reflections of an almost modernistic position, of a desire to immortalise (non-existent) "classical", "traditional" and "authentic" identities. For its part, that desire is based on the assumption that the "natives" are ready to "sacrifice" themselves so as to become a valid element of the guests' typisation; that they shall, in a word, allow the tourists to make them the object into which they will inscribe their notions, that they will be promoted within a particular version of authenticity, in the manner in which they are recognisable in the (often Orientalised, post-colonial) imagination of the tourists.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the stereotyped representation of "traditional culture" becomes the reality that the tourist expects, "concurrent" with the actual lived experience of the natives (ibid.).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It should still be said that the view of the host – the non-Westerner – as a victim, a mere object to which western imaginings are ascribed, is, in fact, just one more modernistic assumption. Desiring to discontinue this, the West tried to enlighten Westerners going on vacation outside the borders of the developed world. These efforts resulted in the introduction of different forms of tourist "demand" such as, for example, "Green Tourism", tourism that is marked by minimal penetration of the tourist/consumer into the infrastructure of the host's society. However, this was shown to make happy only the guests, who could then see themselves as being generous and advanced and enlightened; and not the hosts for whom such new forms of tourism generated far less income and deprived them of additional, seasonal jobs (Bowman 1996:83).

<sup>8</sup> However, this is only one side of the coin. It should be added that the "natives" in that story are often actually "post-natives", equipped with the possibility of constructing illusionary realities that, in return, lead them to "positions of power" (Olsen 1998).

### **Narrating tradition to its heirs**

Only a few Internet pages of the Dalmatian towns inform readers about "traditional culture" in a manner differing from the above, also offering information on the historical dynamics of tradition along with including the influences of the historical Others. The heirs to such multi-layered tradition rarely elaborate it on the Internet pages of the Dalmatian towns. Instead, this is done by experts: articles are commissioned from them, quotations from their papers are cited or the pages are linked to their articles already available on the Internet. For example, the <http://imota.net/> Internet page offers articles by the ethnomusicologist, Joško Čaleta ("Trends and Processes in the Music Culture of the Dalmatian Hinterland")<sup>9</sup> and Svanibor Pettan ("The Croats and the question of their Mediterranean musical identity"),<sup>10</sup> as well as several professional articles about "popular creativity in the Imotski region" by Anđelko Mijatović (*Ganga* [The *Ganga*-song]), Nikola Buble (*Ganga u kontekstu svekolike autohtone folklorne glazbe Dalmatinske zagore i zapadne Hercegovine* [The *Ganga* in the Context of the Overall Autochthonic Folklore Music of Dalmatian Zagora and Western Herzegovina]), Ivan Juroš (*Samosvojnost narodnog stvaralaštva Imotske krajine na primjeru lirske narodne pjesme, a posebno gange* [The Distinctive Nature of the Folk Creativity of the Imotski Region on the Example of Lyrical Folk Songs and, Particularly, the *Ganga*]), Ivan Glibotić (*Naše ojkanje i ganganje* [Our Oj-Singing and *Ganga* Singing]), Petar Oreč (*Ganga – narodno pjevanje* [The *Ganga* – Popular Singing]) or Jozo Balić (*Postojbinom gange* [Through the Native Place of the *Ganga*]). In an attempt to reconstruct the *Staro bure, novo dno* [Old Barrel, New Base] *kolo* [circle-dance], the Zagvozd pages<sup>11</sup> give the transcription of three songs that were recorded in Zagvozd in 1964 by the ethnomusicologist Ivan Ivančan (in Stjepan Stepanov's transcription), while the Sinj Alka<sup>12</sup> page carries a historical article from Valentin Laga's book *Memorie sulla Dalmazia* (1870), and an article by Šime Jurić entitled *Rječnik tuđica, dijalektizama i najvažnijih stručnih izraza koji su povezani sa Sinjskom alkom* [A Dictionary of Borrowed Words, Dialectisms and the Most Important Professional Terms Linked with the Sinj Alka].

### **The Internet pages of towns in the Dalmatian hinterland**

The most numerous among the attempts at Internet "reconstruction, recording and preservation of tradition" are various "local dictionaries". Some of them,

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.muspe.unibo.it/period/ma/index/number6/caleta/jos\\_0.htm](http://www.muspe.unibo.it/period/ma/index/number6/caleta/jos_0.htm)

<sup>10</sup> <http://research.umbc.edu/eol/3/pettan/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://castra.net/zagvozd/kola.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://free-st.hinet.hr/Sinj/sinjskaalka.html>

such as Šime Jurić's Sinj Alka dictionary mentioned above, or the Imotski „Dictionary of Localisms”<sup>13</sup> – where some extracts of Silvestar Kutleša's book *Život i običaji u Imočkoj krajini* [Life and Customs in the Imotski Region] are given – are limited to the author's selection from "local lexis". In other places, these dictionaries are open to contributions from Internet users: they are called on to "send in old domestic words", suggesting that they be narrators.<sup>14</sup> The response to these calls is testified to by the expressions of thanks by the eleven authors of the Drniš dictionary on [www.drnis.com](http://www.drnis.com): namely, with the help of visitors, the dictionary "has grown fivefold in a very short time". However, the co-operation of these narrators sometimes exceeds the task of noting lexic variations from the standard: other identity categories often join in the Internet forums. For example, user enquiries such as the following are sometimes found in the "Internet gossip" on the [www.kninski-rjecnik.com](http://www.kninski-rjecnik.com) page:

The games we played as children. Do you remember: *trlje*, taking the field, let him fight, robbers and gendarmes, electricity, *klik-klak*, coffee or rotten mare, overlaps, border guards, Emperor, Emperor, what time is it, shut your eyes...<sup>15</sup>

Although this Knin page uses the dictionary notion in its title, in fact it represents an attempt to form a Knin lexicon "from the 1980s until just before the war". Its authors were not interested in "when the Slavs came to the Balkans, when the national hero Constantine Porphyrogenitus first mentioned us here, or anything similar". Instead of being informed about such things, the visitor to the page will learn that the most popular comic in Knin "until the war" was *Alan Ford* and that Savka Dabčević Kučar,<sup>16</sup> addressing the people of Bukovac in 1971, said: "Comrades, you gave your sheep, pigs, cows and other livestock to the Revolution". They will also learn about "the alternative sports of the Knin region": stamping down hay in the shed, slaughtering pigs for the 29th<sup>17</sup> (which was not "only a cult sport but an important identity ritual

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.imotski.hr/lokalizmi.htm>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.drnis.com/home/rjecnik/rjecnik-a.htm#a>

<sup>15</sup> All the quotations from the Internet pages are given in their English translation.

<sup>16</sup> Savka Dabčević-Kučar came into the public spotlight in the late 1960s as a member of a younger and more reformist generation of Communist Party of Yugoslavia leaders. She became one of the leaders of the Croatian Communist Party, that adopted the new course, demanding greater autonomy for Croatia within Yugoslavia. This policy, propagated mostly through mass rallies, became a movement later called the Croatian Spring. In December 1971 Josip Broz Tito held a party leadership conference in Karađorđevo, Serbia, and publicly turned against the Croatian Spring. This led to Dabčević-Kučar being expelled from the Party and, ultimately, from public life.

<sup>17</sup> At the Second Session of the Anti-fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ), held in Jajce, Bosnia-Herzegovina on November 29th 1943, Yugoslavia was

and gourmet affinity of the Knin area"), or chopping wood to the music of Radio Knin. They will learn about the *bevanda* (red wine with water), and *briškula* (a card game), and what *zagledačina* (when the young man was introduced to his girl's parents or vice versa) is, about the standard formulas for courting among the older Knin generations, but also about "the famous educator" of the Knin secondary school, Savo Bjelanović-Badžo. In short, this page is conceived as a meeting-place and reminder for those who were "born (...)" in Knin, "lived" there and "went away to live in some other place".<sup>18</sup> Many of them would probably agree with the message addressed to the administrator, Mister No:

You have no idea how much this site means to me. Whenever I am overcome with overwhelming homesickness, I drop in here. And something else. Living in America, my kids are slowly but surely losing sight of Knin, but this page slows that down considerably.

The [www.kninskirjecnik.com](http://www.kninskirjecnik.com) page was put up in the summer of 1999, and was boasting as early as November 7 of that year that it had had more than 10 000 visitors. "Knin Netizens", "short biographies of Knin people from all over the world" speaks about those visitors: some of them live in Canada, the others in America, Australia, England, Germany or Belgrade... Thus, this is a virtual meeting-place for the Knin transnational community, a place where fragments of its past can be entered and upon which its future is starting to be built, a place, primarily, that wants to be a haven and a source of Knin identity. What brings them together is a commonly conceived homeland: its history, landscapes, language, and spiritual and material culture.

A similar page to the Knin site is <http://www.benkovac.org.yu/>, where displaced Benkovac has lived since January, 2001.<sup>19</sup> The note on the title page reads:

They say that Benkovac is located at the place  
at which the gentle fields of Ravni Kotari join  
the harsh karst of Bukovica.

We do not know  
whether it is still there;  
we only know  
that wherever we go

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designed as a federation of five nations and six federal units. This date later became the state's national holiday and was inscribed on the Yugoslav coat of arms.

<sup>18</sup> This comment relates primarily to the emigration of the majority of the ethnic Serbian population from the area of the so-called Republic of Srpska (Krajina) (from December 19, 1991 it was a self-proclaimed, entity in Croatia, never given international recognition), after the military campaign called *Oluja* (Storm) undertaken by the Croatian Army forces in August, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the foregoing footnote.



Benkovac is within us,  
in our hearts!

This is the story of Benkovac...

The statistics on visits to the page<sup>20</sup> prove that the transnational community really lives. In October, 2003 there were 296 361 visitors, most of them (26 673) from Canada, Croatia (25 672), Serbia-Montenegro (24 833), Austria (16 257), Australia (14 787) and The Netherlands (10 252), while the forum contains more than 4 000 contributions. The rate of visits to these pages, the active participation of its visitors, and the scope itself of the pages makes it possible to deal with as an issue the question which Piet Bakker, an associate of the Amsterdam School of Communications Research and instigator of the "Virtu@l N@tions. Nationalism & Diaspora"<sup>21</sup> project, also thought to be particularly interesting and important. That was the question of how displaced ethnic and national communities – for whom the Internet has enabled organisation and more simple communication – "see their identity".

A list of themes from the title page speaks of little else. The first theme is the one called "Of the area and the people". Here one finds information about "the Serbian [Christian] Orthodox Church in Dalmatia", "Serbian surnames in Dalmatia" (visitors are called on to send in "amendments and supplementations" since "the purpose of this review is not merely to show the colourful range of surnames in our region, but also, that they not be forgotten") and about the prominent personalities of the former Benkovac. There is talk of *Hajduks*, water-mills, falcons, migrations, and about the Benkovac ice-cream for Franz Joseph. Site visitors are also invited "to test their knowledge of Benkovac" in a special quiz. Various customs make up a special themes "on the region and on people": *prelo* (a gathering of young people), *prponoše* (rain-makers), *vučari* (wolf-hunting customs), *maškare* (masquerades), *revena* (common meals), *moba* (communal labour), *zdravica* (toasts), *solidarnost* (neighbourly solidarity), *pobratimstvo* (blood-brother and -sister customs) and *obrana od krupe* (defence against hail storms). Some forty adages and sayings are also given. This Internet page, too, like several of those that have already been mentioned, contains a "Dictionary" that, along with suggestions and comments from the page visitors, also lists "translations" of words "typical for the region of northern Dalmatia".

A separate sub-page has been given over to creativity: prose, poetry, historiography, books and periodicals, music, painting, comics and ethnography. The Gallery offers pictorial contributions: "rare and interesting photographs of people and events connected with our region" and "beautiful panoramas of our region", where it is possible "to download the odd desktop theme that will embellish the beginning of your surfing on our site".

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<sup>20</sup> Webalizer Version 2.01

<sup>21</sup> <http://users.fmg.uva.nl/pbakker/vn/>

The contributions gathered under the title "Gossip" speak of the former everyday life of Benkovac, whether pre-war or during the war. However, there are many more such contributions in the forum on the <http://www.benkovac.org.yu/> page. The forum is entitled the *Benkovačko guvno*, or Benkovac threshing-floor, while the visitors largely communicate within a section called *Virtualni Trg male guze*, or "The Virtual Square of the Small Bottom". The description itself strongly exudes nostalgia:

There is a Square in Benkovac which reminds one of everything except a square. It has no rows of flowers, noble trees or luxuriant fountains. No statues of famous personalities are placed there, no sculptures by respected artists. There is one wild chestnut tree, a news-stand, a few wobbly benches and that is all. But still, that square is the centre of everything that happens in Benkovac, its heart, that part of Benkovac that can exist on its own and be sufficient unto itself. If by any chance Benkovac were to disappear, the Square would be enough for a new town to spring up from it, the new Benkovac. Because that Square knows everything. There is nothing that it has not overseen and nothing that it will not oversee... The people of Benkovac are extremely fond of their Square. If you ask them why, they will simply answer "Because we love it". There are some people and some squares whose simple existence is enough for us to love them. Our simple, small and dear Square is just such a one.

However, it should also be pointed out that the Benkovac community that comes together in this forum is aware of the implications of its "virtuality". It is reasonable to assume that it was for that very reason that they chose the Square (a forum) to be their meeting place and that, by its description, they liken it to their "lost reality".

### **The Virtual Square of the Small Bottom**

The mayor of the virtual town of Benkovac is an unregistered visitor called „Mrgud”, whom the other visitors call „the host” or the „elder of the household”. One of his early contributions dating from March, 2001 announces in an almost programmatic fashion both when he will be contacting them again, along with a large number of contributions from other visitors/participants:

Dear Fellow Benkovacers!

Thanks to this box and the wonders of technics, I am here with you for the first time in this way, and I am really happy that it is at least so, when it can't be any other way.

Those to blame and the creators of our pleasure, yours and mine – Aca, Brux, Niksha, Giga, Vrach, Jovan, that is, the whole team from the B. Site – I have to give you a great deal of credit and my compliments for starting up this site of ours, because, if it had not been for them, who

knows how much time would still have passed before someone had such an idea. Thanks, mates (excuse me, if there are girls in the team, too). You have made it possible for us to be together again, along with reviving memories of our customs and our region. In the name of all the people from Benkovac in the Ottawa region in Canada, I wish you lots of success in your further work, with a wish that you pool the wisdom of the past with the dreams of the future, and lead us back successfully to our native place.

Well, things being as they are, and since I have the opportunity, I would like to say hello to all the Benkovacers, wherever they are, with a wish, first of all, that they are graced with good health and every happiness, and everything that goes with that, with a message: Remember, whatever side of the World we are on, we will always be Benkovacers.

(...) It's true that we are scattered now all over the world, where we have been obliged to accept some other customs, but that does not mean that we have to forget the old ones; and so, let's come to our native place through the B. Site and enrich it with what binds and connects us all, let's create and expand the records of memories of our customs, and prevent the dust of the past from covering them.

I sincerely hope that with each new day the book on our site will be thicker and thicker, and that each one of use will, in his/her own way, make a contribution to its development.

Many other contributions on the "Benkovac Threshing-Floor" show homesickness for pre-war Benkovac:

My brother received an unusual envelope this summer from a friend from Batajnica (...) we could not even have dreamt what it contained. My brother opened it, and "almonds, immortelle and stones", what a perfume that was, from the immortelle of course, woowwww, unbelievable, in a second "we found ourselves there", joy and sorrow. Who would have thought of it. I think my brother will guard it carefully all his life. His friend wrote, my mother went to the village with UNPROFOR, we knew that we would be able to send you something soon so I asked her to go to your house, to bring me from there something that would remind you of yourself.

The greatest part of the forum space is taken up by what Mrgud considers most important: "memories of (Benkovac) customs and the (Benkovac) area". The Forum invites displaced people from Benkovac to contribute to "The Humour of Our Region". "The Poetry of our Region", or "Riddles", "our lovely customary games" by which "grandfather and grandmother used (...) to gather their grandchildren about them" – all for the purpose of "their not being forgotten". It is not, of course, necessary to emphasise that this is a case of a "classical" ethnographic undertaking, a project collecting linguistic tradition. Still, it is not a question of the "classic" field, since the ethnologist who visits this page has an opportunity to experience a new research privilege: to remain

invisible, to be a quiet witness to meetings of a community whose participants are usually concealed behind their Internet pen-names. It is not only that this situation provides space in which "greater courage" is not subject to the sanctions of social life outside the Net; their contributions are also relieved of making the effort adequately to respond to the field expectations of the ethnologist, or simply to avoid the ethnologist since the subject does not wish to share his/her experience, because the ethnologist will not understand and will simply capitalise on it.

... if the young people will forgive me, there was a lot that could not be done without, while now nobody even mentions that any more and all of it is being forgotten.

I have resolved to make them a gift of memories, as unavoidable witnesses to that untranscended past time, since in any case all of that will fall into oblivion, whether we like it or not.

(...) Somewhere beside the western wall of the room in which large trunks were kept stood Grandma's secret chest, right beside the wooden steps that lead up to the loft. There was a colourful coverlet over it, which intensified the impression of it keeping something secret. Why did it seem so mysterious to me? Well, during my childhood and youth, and even later when I went away to university, I never managed to peek inside, and that's how it remained even later.

What was it that the chest hid under that lid apart from some odds and ends that Grandma put in or took out of it? I never found out, particularly since we had been taught when we were small that no-one was permitted to touch Grandma's chest. As my uncle would say, Grandma "went to the Lord to face the truth", and, after a while, Mate put the chest in the cellar of the new house. Admittedly, it was not locked any more and plants stood in it, and envelopes, and new sacks for the threshed wheat, which was no longer interesting to me, since what is not locked does not represent a mystery, and the chest was no longer Grandma's except for the name that it inherited. However, it was not just the matter of the key, but of the respect for Grandma and Grandpa, with which we grew up.

There were countless times when Grandma's hand took a quince out of it for me, or a round cake – there was nothing better with white coffee – an orange, an apple, a sorbus fruit, sweets, specially popular were the small egg-shaped ones in various colours, which we called birds' eggs... I was often right beside the chest as Grandma's hand slid under the lid, but it was open just enough for me not to be able to see inside. Unmistakably, she would slide her hand in and take out exactly what she intended, without ever feeling around for it.

I often saw Grandpa take her distaff and spindle out of the chest, and spin wool for socks, jumpers and warm waistcoats. I also saw the colourful oats-bags and small pouches decorated with folk embroidery which were taken out on market days and when going to buy pasta, sugar, salt, the odd bar of soap for dark clothes, oil and other goods.

On such occasions, various embroidered shirts and freshly pressed skirts would emerge from it.

It will seem as though I knew what was in the chest, but that was nowhere near enough to satisfy my curiosity, since I knew there must be something else, as if everything was removed from under the half-open lid. I also know that the intimacy of the chest definitely hid knee-length panties, and other underwear, but I never saw Grandma take it out."

Many of the contributions testify how much the forum means to its visitors "scattered all over the world":

You remember through a fog, however, that there was once a *kolo*-dance. There once was, it is mentioned now, and we danced again, we sang again, on our threshing floor, may it last forever.

Visitors to the Benkovac pages rarely reveal their identities. In this, they are no different to visitors/collaborators with other Internet virtual communities. However, they differ from the majority of such communities in their common experience of life in the "actual world". Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to hide behind their Internet nicknames.

I don't know, but you probably know me which I don't doubt if I have guessed who you are... but no more about that... I really do hope that those pine trees are still there but, as you say, it's unlikely that they sing there and dance the *kolo* there, but I want to keep on hoping – I have built a tower of memories and won't give them up but this distance and gloom which separates me from everything seems to want to cloud my memories. Never! What do you say, we have this threshing-floor where nobody can forbid us anything...

There is no doubt that virtual identity, the one that is presented throughout the <http://www.benkovac.org.yu/> site, is a construct, the result of the activities of the most active and most impressive visitors/participants in the Internet community. On the other hand, it is also the result of the acceptance of such activities: Mrgud's calls for participation have merely fallen on the fertile ground of homesickness, displaced Benkovac recognises them as something important, something that helps in its people finding themselves on their journey through an interrupted and altered everyday life, something that will help to make life less dislocated and less confusing, when they get up the next morning. In brief, this page, at least for a time, places its visitors „in front of themselves”, the way they themselves want to be, and the way they want to be when they drink their first morning coffee.

## Conclusion

Steven Jones is one of the rare individuals during the brief history of anthropological interest in the Internet, who has managed to adopt the prestigious qualification of being a classic in this field of scholarship. In his introduction to *Virtual Culture*, he emphasised that the question of identity is built in to the very description of the Internet. To Jones, the definition of communication given by John Brinckerhoff Jackson is also the possible description of the Internet: equally good, as he claims, as any other description he has encountered. Namely, Jackson compared communication with a highway, seeing it as an uninterrupted flow of traffic that is possibly aimless, in essence, nothing other than a search for a place or a person that will help us to reinforce our identity (Jones 1997:8).

So it is not at all unusual that anthropologists (ethnologists) show more interest "in the Net" in the phenomenon of the virtual community than in other places, in the "social aggregations" that, as Howard Rheingold defined them, "emerge from the Net when enough people carry on... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling".<sup>22</sup> Jones wrote that those who visit thematic forums on Usenet obtain proof of their belonging to a group, proof that those messages "belong to them". However, it seems to him that "an inversion of traditional community power and possession" occurs on the Internet: members of the group do not belong to the community but, rather, the community belongs to them. Their feeling of identity does not derive solely from their identification with the group, but also from their understanding of the identity of that group (ibid.:16).

Nevertheless, the question is whether Jones' comment will also hold for those virtual communities that do not bring together people of identical musical, film or sexual taste, of the same religious and ideological convictions. In other words, the Benkovac and Knin virtual communities that have taken up the major part of this article avail of the experience of a "traditional community", the experience of recent common life on the streets and squares of a small town in the Dalmatian hinterland. They are much more similar to virtual nations, communities whose Internet coming together was compared by Ananda Mitra with the way in which Anderson's imaginary community becomes a nation. As Mitra writes, the thinking that links members of one virtual nation is the memory of the same place of origin by the majority of its users. However, their feeling of community is also based

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<sup>22</sup> The many objections as to how justified it is to refer to all, or even one, of the "social aggregations" on the Net as communities are not without foundation. Still, Rheingold's definition of the virtual community is also quoted by those who would make an issue of the question of "enough people", "sufficient human feeling" and time "long enough" (cif. Stubbs 2001:202).

on a feeling of a new place, where the question of belonging is, as a rule, problematic, so that the Internet become a place of searching for the same company that was also physically approachable earlier (Mitra 1997:70). The electronic page has become the sole joint space of the Benkovac and Knin (mostly Serbian ethnic) community, while the loss of physical proximity has become the *raison d'être* for mobilisation in the Internet space. It is here that they make up for the lost space of their courtyards, streets and squares, re-creating that space and imagining it "on the Net". To come to life on the Net, both the Benkovac and Knin communities had, it seems, to reconstruct their history and once more configure their ethnic "projects". Hence the "narrations" – to which the ethnographer has an opportunity to be a mute and invisible witness – are some sort of product of "culture dealing" which is not intended this time to meet the ethnological ego, but rather the ego of the Internet community, a community which finds its escape from reality in a new identity that is being built up by sifting through tradition.

Despite the modest sample of the Internet pages, it would seem to be possible to allow the assumption that the amount of "traditional culture" on the pages that bring together the displaced ethnic groups – although the credit is largely given to those who conceived and designed the site, or those who stood out with the profile of their activities among the other participants in the forums – is inversely proportional to the possibility of visits to "common reality". In other words, the question is how strong the desire to "preserve tradition" would be if it were not for the homesickness, and how strong this nostalgia would be if a return to "common reality" seemed both possible and imminent.

However, "identity" is also entered on the Internet pages of the Dalmatian towns set apart from the category of "traditional culture". It would be much more precise to say that "traditional culture" is only its component, the one which, however presented, selected and constructed, bears the potential of anchoring in the past. Both individual and collective identity are charged with the present and oriented to the future, by which, in fact, each component of the Internet pages spoken of here become a possible point of recognition.

In addition to those differences in the amount of "traditional culture" presented on the pages, that have proved to be an important subject of differentiation between the virtual communities of the Dalmatian towns, one cannot but notice the difference in presenting tradition between the coastal Dalmatian tourist towns and the towns of the Dalmatian hinterland. The latter cannot count on income from tourism although they possibly have had just as many emigrants. The majority of the pages of the Dalmatian tourism towns, similarly to those of the hinterland towns, provide the possibility for the interactive communication of their users, even though the forums on these pages record far less visitors, as a rule: these pages are not a meeting-place for

the virtual communities. In addition, "traditional culture" flows from such pages primarily with the objective of contributing to the most highly profitable element of local identity: tourism. On the other hand, the Internet pages of the Dalmatian hinterland towns are open to an enclosed group of possible visitors, the citizens of these towns, whether they have stayed on in them or emigrated, and for their closest relatives. For that reason, these pages become reservoirs for instilling identity, along with "traditional culture".

Finally, though no less importantly, these orbits of identity should not be understood as being exclusive and unidirectional, but merely as being the prevailing ones. Namely, it is not possible to conceive of a situation in which the exported and targeted representations of identity, as they occur on the Internet pages of the Dalmatian tourist towns, could not, in some resultant steps, be infused into "matrix identity". In the same way, it is quite certain that a sufficient amount of the accumulated identity on the Internet pages of the Dalmatian hinterland towns – that is also a precondition of its "strength and steadfastness" – will be reflected, in this or that way and to a greater or lesser extent, in the external comprehension of such identity.

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## ZAMIŠLJANJE DALMACIJE: LOKALNOST U GLOBALNOJ PERSPEKTIVI

### SAŽETAK

Istraživanje identiteta je jedan od najčešćih povoda za ulazak znanstvenika čije se «matične znanosti» zanimaju za različite aspekte kultura «virtualnog» terena interneta. Ponajčešće se bave onim aktivnostima sudionika računalne komunikacije koje prepoznaju kao kreiranje «novih osoba u mrežnome svijetu», no bave se i drugim aspektima individualnog predstavljanja na internetu radi stvaranja skupne solidarnosti i skupnog identiteta. Postavi li se potonja tema unekoliko šire, pa se poduzme istraživanje računalno posredovane komunikacije u smislu razumijevanja i zamišljanja identitetskih kategorija koje ishode iz života prije i izvan međumrežja, ujedno se otvara put usporedbi dvaju «svjetova»: «stvarnog» i «virtualnog».

«Dalmatinske tradicijske identitete», kakvi se predstavljaju na internetskim stranicama što u svome naslovu nose imena pojedinih dalmatinskih gradova, moguće je ugrubo podijeliti u dvije skupine. Prvoj od njih pripadaju predstavljanja tradicijskih identiteta koja su namijenjena turistima, a osobitost su prije svega internetskih stranica dalmatinskih gradova na obali ili otocima. Takve su internetske stranice u stvari tek uporaba mogućnosti novog komunikacijskog medija kojima se nadomještava i proširuje potencijal turističkih brošura. U drugoj su skupini identitetske konstrukcije koje uglavnom okupljaju iseljene, transnacionalne zajednice čiji su pripadnici porijeklom iz gradova sjevernodalmatinskoga zaleđa. Za razliku od prvih, te su predstave lokalnih tradicijskih identiteta rezervoari sjećanja na domovinu koja je, smještena u prostor međumrežja, postala dostupnom i onima koji privremeno ili trajno borave drugdje.

Ključne riječi: identitet, međumrežje (internet), Dalmacija