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"EXPERIMENTAL" ETHNICITY: MEETINGS IN THE DIASPORA

Methodological pragmatism is more often than not employed in ethnographic enterprises, but not often discussed. Claiming that methodological discussions are most fruitful when referring to concrete research topics and the researcher's dilemmas in the field, the author discusses pragmatic uses of her own self in *constructing the field*. Referring primarily to the shared ethnicity as the "experimental arena", she proposes an evaluation of the heuristic potentials of her meetings with people in diasporic contexts, and reveals some of the fieldwork situations important for gaining ethnological insights.

Keywords: ethnography, fieldwork, diaspora, ethnicity

Introduction

Anthropologists and ethnologists of today do not need to discuss the naivety of a positivist attitude to fieldwork, the one which remains insensitive to the (re)active force of the fieldworker's presence in the field and to the choices made at all levels of research and writing.[1] Themes such as ethnographic authority, politics, rhetoric and power, the limitations of representation and the partiality and temporality of knowledge, have now become part and parcel of good research. Questions about the location of otherness, the adequacies of writing strategies and personal motives for writing, help in framing morally sensitive thinking about the conditions and implications of different positions, and in confronting what Vincent

[1] I use the terms *anthropology* and *ethnology* to denote disciplines as institutionally defined in the United States and Europe. The terms *ethnography* and *ethnographer* refer to writing culture as defined in Clifford and Marcus 1986, and ethnographic method is seen as central to both ethnology and social anthropology. Therefore, I deliberately shift between statements about "anthropologists", "ethnologists" and "ethnographers", especially when the terms appear in quotations.

Crapanzano (1990) summarized as ambiguity, illusory stability and vulnerability of the ethnographer's vantage point.

This article focuses on the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, which are defined, alluded to, or sensed in fieldwork encounters. They are based on the acknowledgement of self-consciousness as a useful learning device through which we test our perceptions of people, for – to use Anthony Cohen's succinct formulation – "by its very nature, ethnography is an ethnographer-focused art" (Cohen 1992:225).[2]

In 1992, Kirsten Hastrup summarised the up-to-date literature on writing ethnography, claiming that the condition of fieldwork is fundamentally confrontational and only superficially observational, that self and other, subject and object are categories of thought, not discrete entities, and that fieldwork is always situated between autobiography and anthropology (cf. Hastrup 1992:117). The anthropologists' texts that illustrate and analyse these claims are now abundant (see, e.g., Okely 1996, Fortier 1996, Halstead 2001 as well as all contributions to Okely and Callaway 1992, and to Amit 2000a). They show that writing ethnography is not reducible to method (cf. Clifford 1986) and explain that it is the personal, authorial moment that makes the writing as well as the reading of ethnographies so exciting.

Fieldwork is an intersubjective mode of objectivisation. Ethnographies present "the intersubjective world of fieldwork" (Hastrup 1992:119); it is the "world" induced by the ethnographer's presence, while at the same time being the object of analysis. In that "world" the ethnographer is transformed from spectator to seer, and knowledge is transformed from observation to insight (cf. ibid.). Hence, the paradigm that emphasizes the dichotomy between outsider and insider scholars is not of great value when it comes to explaining and judging the implications of researchers' positions for the outcomes of their work.

About the project: the vantage points

If names can hint at people's possible positions, the researchers with "hybridised" or "hyphenated" backgrounds are strikingly present in the body research on diasporas and "transnationalism from below" (Guarnizo and Smith 1998; see the literature on transnationalism referred to in Povrzanović Frykman 2001a and 2001c). There is a number of ways in which classical boundaries between "native" and "non-native" anthropologists have been blurred, but the researcher's "hybrid" identity may be also seen as a reason for being "stuck between" the "inside" and the

[2] "As an anthropologist, I cannot escape myself; nor should I try to. In studying others I do not regard myself as merely studying myself; but rather, as using myself to study others" (Cohen 1992:224).

"outside" – whether imagined or practically experienced – in the context of research.[3]

This article is about *diasporic meetings* in a monoethnic context. In particular it is about a Croatian ethnologist who has lived in Sweden for four years, has met the Croats who came to Sweden as labour migrants in the 1960's and 1970's and as refugees in the 1990's, and is researching the patterns of difference in their war-affected conceptualising of ethnicity,[4] nation and homeland.[5]

Steven Vertovec (1997) outlined three general meanings of "diaspora" which have emerged in recent literature.[6] These refer to what might be called "diaspora" as social form, "diaspora" as a type of consciousness, and "diaspora" as a mode of cultural production. Each of these meanings can be focused upon when discussing the ethnographer's insider and outsider-positions. Here I refer to all three, since I see them as being interconnected and interdependent.[7] After all, the analysis of war-

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[3] That was suggested by the organisers of the panel "Stuck between inside and outside – – Hybrid identities and anthropological methodology" (7th EASA conference, Copenhagen, 14-17 August 2002), at which a version of this article was presented.

[4] *Ethnicity* "refers to the sense of difference and the image presented to the outsider and may be either repressed or elaborated" (Okely 1996:60), while *ethnic identity* rests on group self-ascription in theory and in practice. In this article, *ethnicity* is equated with *ethnic affiliation*.

[5] "Seeds of war: Narrative Construction of Identities in Diaspora and Exile" (financed by the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences in 2000 and 2001) is an ethnological project assessing narration on war as creating symbolic spaces and collective images of belonging which are salient to the historical memory of the wars, which divided, confronted and victimized people on the basis of their ethnic affiliation. It questions some aspects of the common "ethnic conflict" explanation of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, namely the generalised notion of ideological (nationalist) homogenisation along ethnic lines. It aims to show the manifold differences and divisions among the people of the same ethnic affiliation living in Sweden. The central hypothesis concerns their radically different lived experiences of war, but also of the quotidian life in the diaspora and in the homeland as the reason for differences in strategies of imagining home, homeland and nation. The main research interest is who deploys nationality or transnationality, "authenticity" or "hybridity" against whom, and with what relative power (cf. Clifford 1997).

[6] See also the literature quoted in Povrzanović Frykman 2001a and 2001c. For the considerations on the theoretical benefits of using that concept in ethnology, see Povrzanović Frykman 2004.

[7] See Pnina Werbner's (2000) critique of Steven Vertovec's (1997) article as one of the overviews of literature that list approaches to diaspora according to whether their stress is on the empirical realities of ethno-transnational connections or on questions of diasporic consciousness and subjectivity. Such typologizing "separates analytically what needs to be read as mutually constitutive" (Werbner 2000:7). I believe that ethnology as a discipline, and particularly ethnological efforts to describe and explain identity formation processes in today's multicultural European contexts, would benefit most not by searching for "diasporas" with the goal of defining their social perimeters, but by investigating the experiences, discourses and practices of people living in what I call *diasporic conditions* (cf. Povrzanović Frykman 2004). The phrase "in the diaspora" is used in this article for it is common in the Croats' everyday speech as well as in the

-related narrative construction of identities in diaspora and exile is only meaningful in the context of mutually constitutive relationships in diasporic everyday life, subjective consciousness, public presentations of "Croatian culture" and the transnational political engagements of Croats living in Sweden.

In this article, I attempt to show why it is hardly possible to talk about any generalised, pre-defined, "inside" or "outside", position in my research beyond the obvious basic insideness defined by sharing the language, ethnic background, and the experience of life in former Yugoslavia.

"Inside" and "outside" positions, more refined than those obvious, basic, ones (and therefore also more relevant), are re-established in every fieldwork encounter, even in relation to different topics discussed with the same interview partner.

This means that I am definitely not "stuck between" fixed positions. I would rather conceptualise my situation as encompassing a wide, albeit limited, range of possible situationally defined "stops" from which meaning is created in fieldwork and other diasporic encounters. It implies simultaneously possible options in a continuum ranging from feelings of "sameness" to feelings of estrangement, from the recognition of togetherness to the recognition of disagreement and detachment. Indeed, one might argue whether the terms "inside" and "outside" should be kept at all – since they are reductive in comparison to the continuum-metaphor – – it could be called a simultaneous *insider-and-outsider* position.

While the "sameness" with the Croats I meet in Sweden is based on a common language, togetherness is based on the common knowledge of and on similar emotional reactions to certain people, places, events and symbols. The "you know" effect is a powerful inducer of togetherness, based on remembering the same songs, jokes, the homeland's media and personalities, knowing the same places or even sharing the experience of living in the same place and participating in the same events in the homeland.[8]

The estrangement in fieldwork encounters is based primarily on educational, or class difference.[9] It includes differences in one's taste of

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scholarly literature. However, it does not refer to particular social formations, but to diasporic conditions, circumstances and contexts.

[8] Although I have no direct experience of life in pre-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, "the experience of living in the same place" mentioned above can be understood in broad terms. On some occasions, the quotidian life in the economically troubled Yugoslav socialism in the 1980s can be seen as an important ground for mutual recognition of togetherness (found in the common lived history) with the refugees from Bosnia--Herzegovina who come from urban settings.

[9] I see it as more important than the difference of our social statuses in a Swedish context, since the ethnic framing of the meetings is defined as being most relevant by the scope of my research. So, e.g., the fact that I am included in the Swedish academic system, while some of my university educated informants have under-qualified jobs, is not

poetry or the visual arts, music and dance, as well as my embarrassment for things I regard as kitsch, such as the use of national symbols in pictures, on cakes, candles or clothes. The difference is also displayed in the need to be openly positioned in ethnic/national terms (like the inclination to "wave the flag", metaphorically speaking; cf. Povrzanović Frykman 2001b, 2002a and 2002b). Detachment may be provoked by homeland-oriented actions in the political arena by some individuals and groups in diasporic contexts. Yet, defying the idea of a possibility of "free floating in-between" people and situations, *the fieldwork encounters are social encounters in which my positions are not freely chosen, but rather defined by the people I am meeting: they position me on their own terms*.[10]

The basic insideness: epistemology and emotions

Differences between the ethnographer and the people making "the field" can be "disguised by similarities and lost in the commonplace" (Okely 1996:4). But in the case of my research, its very "ethnocentric" character bears potential methodological benefits.[11] Namely, the "commonplace" of shared ethnicity is the very arena within which articulations of ethnicity are developed into a research topic.[12]

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relevant: we recognise each other as "educated people" against the homeland social background and the shared nuances of habitus.

[10] The *easiest* fieldwork is done when my interview partners (or "participant-informants", cf. Halstead 2001) visit me in the office in order to be interviewed (in relation to footnote 9, I have the feeling that some really like to do so). Such circumstances also imply the least problematic researcher-informant relationship. However, that is more an exception than a standard way of doing fieldwork. Especially when carried out in the form of participant observation in ethnic clubs, it takes place on the informants' territory and under their conditions. See Halstead 2001 for a detailed analysis of how the "participant-informants" position the ethnographer. "Importantly, the anthropologist as other or insider cannot be seen only as a matter of positioning within the academic domain. This issue is bound with the concerns of those being studied" (Halstead 2001:320).

[11] Anthony Cohen points out "our ingrained and correct fear of ethnocentrism which inhibits us from recognising qualitative similarities between the self of the anthropologist and that of the anthropologist's 'subject'" (Cohen 1992:225). He refers to ethnocentrism of Eurocentric (or "West-centric") kind. In my research, precisely the opposite is at work: I explore the deeper layers of the qualitative similarities between me and the people I write about as *the very ground* of research. There is no danger of attempting a "dogmatic segregation of Self and Other" (Cohen 1992:224), by constituting myself as qualitatively different from the Other, and depicting this qualitative difference in terms of my complexity and uniqueness, and *their* simplicity and generalisability (cf. ibid.).

[12] In the framework of the project presented in this article, I meet and interview not only Croats (immigrants and refugees from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) in the Malmö area, but also some Bosniak and Serbian refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina. I consider this necessary for putting my research in the perspective of the manifold interrelatedness of almost all war-related processes, not only in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina but also

My *informants*, *acquaintances, friends* and I share ethnic affiliation.[13] Nevertheless, practically everything about (or within) this belonging – the content of this frame, shell and label – remains uncertain. How is it enacted and symbolised in everyday life and in the public situations of "being ethnic" in the context of multicultural policies? How does it organise – emotionally, socially and politically – groups formed in diasporic contexts? What does it mean to individuals who prefer to stay out of ethnicity-based and ethnicity-oriented groups?

I share the basic insiders' premises with my informants and with the people I observe at ethnic public gatherings or whose remarks I overhear in the public spaces of ethnic clubs. They range from a common mother tongue and the shared norms of (gendered, generational, public vs. private) behaviour,[14] to being informed in detail about the current political happenings in Croatia through the same transnationally available media and personal contacts with people living there. Precisely because of that, I can detect, in recorded personal narratives as well as in occasional spontaneous remarks, subtle indications of difference between people of the same ethnic affiliation who have diverse (long or short, labour migrancy or exile-based, education-, generation- and gender-dependent) diasporic experiences and diverse strategies of identification. Furthermore, I can also use my own ethnic affiliation-related surprise, disagreement or "feeling at home", as hermeneutical tools. In a research project that

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in all post-Yugoslav countries. The focus, however, is on articulations of Croatian ethnic affiliation.

[13] Due to my long-term stay – indeed, life – in the location of research, I can clearly differentiate between *informants*, *acquaintances* and *friends*. I interviewed informants once only, and have not developed any further contact with them. Acquaintances are those whom I meet more often, either as a mutual wish to meet or by chance, while living in the same town or visiting the same ethnic club. I know more about their lives and families, and they know about mine. A few friends, acquired through fieldwork, remain a source of research insights, but there is a reciprocity that reaches far beyond fieldwork contacts.

[14] My age and gender has affected fieldwork in expected – positive – ways. I have not detected any diaspora-related differences in the ways people treat me in Sweden than in the fieldwork situations in Croatia. Unlike Anne-Marie Fortier (1996), for whom being gendered by the people she met produced "troubles in the field", I can rely on the familiarity of the (patriarchal) patterns. I am aware that being a mother, sometimes taking my children along and deliberately mentioning their experiences in Sweden (e.g., at school), have helped to start relationships in the field. It has also helped several initial contacts not only with women, but also with men, both older and younger. In being classified as a mother, I am, by definition, not jeopardising the local gender order, in which *every* female person regularly attending ethnic clubs is someone's daughter, sister, wife, or mother.

Another gendered way of acting is related to my choice of clothes. At festive occasions in the ethnic clubs, I have paid respect to the local meaning of the occasions by dressing elegantly – although an elegant outfit seldom suits the function of carrying a camera, films, and notebooks!

questions the understanding of ethnic *belonging*[15] as going-without-saying and sometimes the most important identity-defining category,[16] these subtle aspects of intra-ethnic meetings in the diaspora facilitate access to the micro-levels of identity-formation processes.

I would argue that the basic "native insideness" is a precondition for the insights at those levels. However, the kind of reflexivity that matters with regard to this insideness is not personal but conceptual (Strathern 1987).[17]

This basic insideness also bears a dimension of emotional involvement, sometimes experienced as a happy "feeling at home", sometimes as a burden. It is not the involvement in the immediate social relationships that I observe and can choose to stay out of, but the *emotional involvement* in the entire current national identity-defining processes in Croatia and among the Croats in diaspora that are deeply marked by the war in the 1990's.

In fieldwork situations, the fact that I have sometimes felt a kind of *self-pity* for dealing professionally with what then seemed as too emotionally demanding topics (mostly when exposed to the crude nationalist rhetoric adopted by *my own* people, as well as when being hurt by kitschy aesthetics of some public presentations of Croathood), points to the level at which my insideness is not negotiable and possible to escape from. On the one hand, insights into how the long-term impact of the historical circumstances the nation I feel as *mine* has been through, actually works in diasporic contexts, often makes me feel helpless. I can understand the logic, but cannot affect it. On the other hand, moments of "self-pity" are a consequence of the impossibility of *stepping out* of the field in a standard way.[18]

I *understand* why some texts, utterances, acts and public presentations of Croathood in Sweden have their actual forms. I am *sorry* for the overwhelming obsession with history and symbolic boundaries *imposed* on people by the current political uses of unsettled historical matters that perpetuate the feeling of victimisation widespread in the

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[15] *Ethnic belonging* is an apt translation of the most commonly used Croatian notion *etnička pripadnost*, which implies the given, pre-set quality of ethnicity.

[16] It is often seen as such from within the institutionalised Croatian community in Sweden as well as from the position of "immigrant-ethnifying" institutions of a proclaimed multicultural society.

[17] Generally speaking, questions about discourse, difference, and subjectivity, as well as about what counts as experience and who makes that determination, "enable us to historicize experience, and to reflect critically on the history we write about, rather than to premise our history on it" (Scott 1991:790).

[18] Although I do "live in the field", this impossibility of leaving the field is not to be taken literally. It is about the emotional burden of the basic insideness mentioned above.

diaspora as well as in the homeland.[19] I thus attempt to communicate that understanding and that sorrow, and not *dissect* nationalism in a distanced way (like, e.g., Richard Handler does when analysing the politics of culture in Quebec; cf. Handler 1988). Neither can I conclude that I "had exhausted this time and place", and decide on the "moment of departure" (as, e.g., Dona Kolar-Panov, who researched the war-time use of videos from Croatia among the Croats in Australia; cf. Kolar-Panov 1997).

I am not socially, emotionally, or financially dependent on any person or group belonging to the institutional Croatian community in Sweden, but I do want to stay in touch with several people and support some of their ethnicity-related efforts, such as, e.g. reviewing books in the local Croatian journal or organising cultural events different from those prevalent today (cf. Povrzanović Frykman 2002b). I want my children to attend mother-tongue classes, to have Croatian acquaintances in Sweden, and to be familiar with Croatian literature and music, including folklore. However, I did not want my son to greet the Swedish Prime Minister wearing Croatian folk costume (at the international day of languages, when children from Lund addressed him in more than thirty languages). I did not want him to wear the socks with the Croatian coat of arms either, which he won as a prize at a small-scale quiz at the Croatian Home in Malmö. And I do not want my children to recite poems about "how difficult it is to live in a foreign land", like children born and living in Sweden do at the Festivals of Croatian Culture (cf. Povrzanović Frykman 2002b).

As suggested by Judith Okely (1996:3), ambiguity of boundary can be found between the subject selected for study and the cultural identity of the anthropologist. My perspectives, on which ethnographic writing is based and ethnological knowledge attempted, are in a constant dialogue and juxtaposition with the perspectives of Croats I meet in Swedish diasporic contexts. My personal cultural and social history is *the very ground* on which knowledge, in the frames of the project, is produced.

Meetings in the diaspora: "experimental" ethnicity

My own emergent diasporic position entails both methodological advantages and predicaments. From the local diasporic point of view, in the period from 1998 to 2001, my position has changed from being one of *persona grata* for the very fact of coming from Croatia, to that of a marginal, or just potential member of the local diasporic community, who observes rather than participates. In this process, the shared mother-tongue,

[19] As "trouble in the field" (Fortier 1996), these emotions can be used as a source of knowledge: they must be related to the (national) victimisation discourse. On different levels, both refer to a struggle with the surplus of History in our lives. My professional engagement since the beginning of the 1990's has also been a project of "writing my way into understanding" (Arvastson 2001) of the broader historical dynamics that I happen to be affected by due to ethnic affiliation. The personal and the political are, indeed, related (and often equated) in many ways.

Croathood understood as cultural identity, political attitudes and acts, everyday life in Croatia and formerly in Yugoslavia, education and involvement in Croatian and Swedish academic contexts as well as everyday life in Sweden, have provided the frames of reference in which people I meet in fieldwork situations position me as an insider or outsider.[20]

With regard to the methodological questions focused upon here, I regard all my diasporic meetings – whether formal or informal, professional or personal, with my co-ethnics as well as with Swedes and others – as significantly facilitating my fieldwork access to certain topics as well as my insights and interpretations. I do not claim that interpretations "from the inside" are *better* than those "from the outside" (here referring to the basic "in" and "out" of a shared ethnic affiliation); they are just different. However, in this research project, I do claim that many of my personal diasporic experiences (including the emotional significance and all the active efforts of keeping transnational links with people and places in the homeland) help me towards a much better understanding of the personal narratives and attitudes of the people I write about but of which I knew very little about before coming to Sweden.

Also, in the course of four years of life in Sweden, situations have been created – within the context of the shared ethnicity, which at the same time is my research focus – that I choose to call "experimental".[21] These are first and foremost situations in which my presence clearly initiated change: in provoking a statement, inviting a reflection on some aspect of the other person's own diasporic position, or a spontaneous comment on my (multiple privileged) position inasmuch as it is different from the diasporic "standards".

Education, status, habitus

Most importantly, these "experimental" situations refer to education, status, and habitus. For example, in the Croatian language the polite plural "you" (*vi* in Croatian; *Sie* in German) is used to mark *social distance*. Paradoxically, using that particular form of "you" is a way of actively articulating *togetherness* in my meetings with educated Croats and other

[20] Sharing the mother-tongue is the most powerful ground for feelings of commonality and community (cf. Povrzanović Frykman 2002b). In numerous situations, the central importance of language for identity-creation of people in diaspora has been confirmed, including the mutual perception of at least some aspects of insideness in my meetings.

[21] I relate them to Östen Wahlbeck's statement that "field research covers several different methods and the researcher has to be a *methodological pragmatist* and must use every possible method which can furnish more knowledge" (Wahlbeck 1999:192; emphasis added). Ethnographic and interpretive documents are not and cannot be independent of their authors' experiences and convictions, but, as Anthony Cohen put it, anthropology is an essentially interpretive exercise, and interpretation "must use all the resources of sense-making that are available to us" (Cohen 1992:223).

people from former Yugoslavia. The prevalent trend is to dismiss the polite form and thus evoke the "*usness of the folk*" (defined by ethnicity). In diasporic circumstances, it may at the same time evoke people's equality at the subaltern immigrant level. In relation to people of lower or almost no formal education, the new, ethnicity-related "sameness" with the researcher is relevant, not the old, homeland-related social status. Yet, there are ways of establishing reciprocity and equality related to education, status and habitus.

"I read my own conduct and life in one set of terms; they construct them in another" (Cohen 1992:224). The refugee status in Sweden obliterated people's self-definitions, but also all the social definitions embedded in their life in the homeland before the war. For reasons that belong to the "standard" refugee experience, only a few people with university degrees who came to Sweden as refugees at a mature age, have fully re-established their social status by relying on education. The others – engineers, economists, professors of South Slavic literature and psychologists in their hometowns – have become taxi or bus-drivers, nursery school teachers, old-people's wardens, or are unemployed.

For some of them, meeting me provides a welcome, emotionally beneficial insideness. I can *see* them against the background of our common pre-diasporic normality. Most importantly, I immensely enjoy having interview partners with whom I can discuss my personal experiences and some of my research insights as well as ask them for their opinion and advice. We *treat* each other according to the common pre--diasporic normality also when exchanging books (including the ones to which I contributed), commenting on recently produced Yugoslav films, or presenting each other flowers. Indeed, a book of (Croatian) poetry that I bought in Croatia as an unexpected present for a friend in Sweden was received with great enthusiasm. I sensed gratefulness, too, related to my recognition of her old, "true" (meaning chosen), pre-refugee self.[22]

On several occasions, one of my key-informants and friend, a university-degree holding refugee-immigrant, *told me* how much he enjoys talking to me and, as the Croatian phrase has it, "ease his soul" (feel better for being able to narrate about his refugee experience). I am the one who understands his jokes and comments. I am the one to whom he, on his own initiative, lends books he believes I'll be interested in.

Out of embarrassment, a friend I met through fieldwork – a university-educated refugee – was reluctant to tell me on the phone about having become a bus driver; he waited for a face-to-face meeting to

[22] "People's knowledge of themselves is of critical importance to us for without it we misunderstand them. Its availability does certainly present us with profound methodological difficulties, for which we may have only the very imperfect device of our own experience – and here I hasten to distance myself from any suggestion that anthropology should be 'about the anthropologist's self': rather, it must be informed by it" (Cohen 1992:230).

"confess" it. Six months later, he told me that, in fact, he was satisfied, for he was using all the pauses for reading, and "the days pass so quickly" (unlike during the period when he was out of work). "However", he added, "perhaps I am just deluding myself". This addition, as the former confession of the social fall, was made on the grounds of our educational, and former Yugoslav, status equality. My presence induces a self-reflection that takes the contexts prior to the diasporic ones into consideration. In this example, then, my presence is less "therapeutic". It forces a distanced gaze upon the newly acquired embeddedness in the diasporic existence, the one that is bound to produce dissatisfaction.

Two anecdotes reveal the readiness to adopt by identification my non-standard ("non-standard" for a Croat or a person from former Yugoslavia!) social status in the Swedish context.

The first was when the local organisers of the Swedish part of the beauty contest "Miss of the Diaspora" (the winner further competed in Croatia) asked me to act as a member of the jury. They presumed that it was not "my style" – that's why they were almost apologetic about asking for such a *favour*. During the contest (in which I agreed to participate), I was publicly presented as "doctor" (a PhD), the title implying social prestige and thus "gentrifying" the occasion.

The second anecdote was when I was lecturing, in English, to a small group of Swedish students. Among them was a young Muslim woman who came to Sweden as a refugee from Bosnia. Immediately after the lecture, she introduced herself and eagerly told me how *proud* she was of *my* fluency in English, "so that *they* see how well *we* can speak English"! *They* referred to the Swedish students, but also to *the Swedes* as a basic category differentiating *them* from *us*, *non-Swedes*. The *usness* perceived by the young woman was an instance of satisfaction or even momentary superiority, because a Croatian person was the teacher and the Swedes in the classroom were the students, because her own English was worse than that of her Swedish peers, and also because she had to cope with the entire education in Swedish – the language she had started to learn only a few years earlier. Her spontaneous identification had obviously a lot to do with her own (post)refugee frustrations, but what does it actually say about ethnicity? In that very situation, *coming from former Yugoslavia* was the identification frame, rather than a particular ethnicity. However, concerning the local war history of the place she fled from, I doubt that she would have identified so easily with a Serbian lecturer. Life in former Yugoslavia can be a common ground for the recognition of "usness" only if a more emotionally charged ground does not interfere, like that of the lived experience of violence in which the perpetrators had an ethnic label.

Utterances, objects, feelings

The *narrative* elements of such stories are easily turned into "research material". Unlike those, the many moments in which my acquaintances and friends have asked me for help in the form of bringing some *things* from Croatia to Sweden or vice versa, are not directly related to the focus of my project. However, they do inform my knowledge about significant objects, as well as the significant relations kept, confirmed or established according to the hidden maps of "transnationalism from below" mentioned above. Knowing the reasons why I was asked to bring someone's cash to Zagreb and then forward it to an account in a Bosnian bank, provides me with contextual insights into structural situations and experiences that people do not narrate about in interviews aimed at accessing their identity creation in the diaspora.[23] They provide ethnographic material that is complementary to the material that can be gained through interviews, but also suggest that a phenomenological approach (cf. Frykman and Gilje 2003) may be crucial for understanding some identification processes intransnational social spaces (cf. Povrzanović Frykman 2001c).[24]

I was asked to buy a certain cooking pot in Croatia and bring it to Sweden(!), as well as to repeatedly bring cash from Sweden to Croatia in order to pay off the debt for some other cooking pots. Cooking-kitchen--hearth-home forms a line that points to the centrality of home-making processes – in this case for the refugees – in which the continuity of objects is of paramount emotional, rather than practical, importance.

I was also asked to buy and bring a digital code-card that allows visitors to the Croatian Home in Malmö to watch the entire transmission of Croatian Television (the TV-set is always on in the club, although often with no sound). On the one hand, it points to the revolutionary changes in the very character of living in the diaspora: only a decade ago and for the first time in history, people had the possibility of continuous contact with the homeland through the transnational media. But, on the other hand, that card could just as easily have been ordered by post: it is thus an ethnographic example of the primacy of and the trust invested in personal contacts rather than institutions. At the same time, it shows how local circles of kindness, friendship and the obligation to help, are carried on in transnational contexts. After all, I have the recurrent bodily experience of

[23] The researcher must *know* about the existence of such traffic in order to be able to formulate questions about it and try to see and understand the patterns. That is *not* the kind of "knowing what you are looking for" Orvar Löfgren (1990) warned about!

[24] As proposed by Michael Jackson (1983), practical mimesis – here, e.g., engaging in the same family-oriented transnational practices as the informants – forms the grounds of an emphatic understanding. "For by using one's body in the same way as others in the same environment, one finds oneself informed by an understanding which may then be interpreted according to one's own custom or bent, yet which remains grounded in a field of practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those among whom one has lived" (Jackson 1983:340-341).

carrying back and forth luggage overloaded with presents and all kinds of things old and new, that I consider as being *needed* either in Zagreb or Lund.

Beside these trans-migratory themes, the *reactive* quality of ethnicity was also made clear to me through a personal experience in the diaspora. In May 1998, reading the news on the web late at night, I became aware of the fact that from the following day onwards, because of being a Croatian citizen, I needed a Danish visa in order to reach the nearby airport when travelling *home* (to Croatia) or when taking my children to their favourite museum in Copenhagen – only an hour away from our Swedish home. I could not help feeling personally hit (unhappy, offended, angry) for the very impersonal character of the visa regime (not to mention the time and the money needed for obtaining visas). Moreover, I could not help but feel connected to all other people holding Croatian passports (see also Povrzanović Frykman 2001c). In that context, we were made into "one" and "the same" – a group with perfectly clear, non-negotiable boundaries. My gut-reaction, which I remember vividly because it surprised me, was one of *pride and obstinacy*: "I don't need to stand this (humiliation); I'll go *home* (to *my* country)!"

For me, "going home" was, and remains, a realistic option. Most refugees, however, do not have such an option. Many people who have established their entire lives in Sweden do not have it either. What about their possibilities of re-working such frustration, and coping with the feeling of helplessness? The emotional benefits of meeting co-ethnics in a club that evokes one's *own* "ethnic territory", might be better understood if considered in terms of linear vs. reactive ethnicity (Portes 1999:465--466).[25]

These, and many other examples of personal experience and of my presence being an active factor in the creation of situations useful in/as fieldwork, open up insights to which other fieldwork material must be added, but which nevertheless reveal significant lines of research.

Nevertheless, there are also another kinds of "experimental situations", which – to my surprise – remain unaffected by my presence. Most importantly, such are the situations in which (strong) opinions on the current political situation in Croatia are voiced (which since the political

[25] Only fieldwork can provide a solid foundation for understanding *how* the insiders' perceptions of their ethnic belonging depend on social and political contexts. Financially supporting ethnic clubs and offering mother-tongue tuition, the Swedish state has done much to keep the immigrants' ethnicities "linear" quality characteristic for non-conflict circumstances. In those circumstances, ethnic belonging and the emotional attachment it bears are not a basis of political mobilization related to Sweden. "Reactive ethnicity" – in the sense of heightened significance of ethnicity as a mechanism of self--defence and collective reaffirmation against discrimination in the host country – might not be of primary relevance for most immigrants to Sweden. Yet, it was the pattern for, e.g., Croats in Sweden who tried to be visible as non-Yugoslavs (or anti-Yugoslavs) until Croatia has been recognized as an independent state in 1992.

changes in 2000, have been fiercely against the post-Tuđman President and Prime Minister). I have *never* been asked what I think. I interpret this being "invisible", "melted into the inside", first and foremost as indicating that it is assumed that I share the political attitudes argued for, and that the people in question perceive them as the only acceptable ones for "good", "real", or "true" Croats, as the popular expression has it. But it can also mean that I am perceived as a benign person whose opinion or writing about someone else's political stance cannot do any harm. Or perhaps it only confirms the upper hand that people – especially the community members whose prominent status is grounded in the local history of anti-Yugoslav political engagement – have in their *own*, diasporic, *territories*.[26]

Heuristic value of "experimental" ethnicity

In interview situations (or "ethnographic dialogues"), the informants do not tell "cultural truths", but respond to the ethnographer's presence and questioning. Constructed as "others", they speak from the liminal space of the cultural encounter (cf. Hastrup 1992:121). The "Do-It-Yourself" approach in fieldwork (and in the researcher's diasporic life) offers another venue of ethnographic enterprise (illustrated in, e.g., Fortier 1996, Norman 2000, Strauss 2000, Povrzanović Frykman 2001c). There is a useful difference in the character of insight that one gets when asking a person to list the objects that he or she prefers or plans to take to or receive from Croatia, and when carrying those objects in one's own suitcase, and (most importantly) meeting the donors and the recipients on both sides of a transnational social field.[27]

Of course, the situations described here are experimental in a metaphorical sense only; they can neither be controlled nor systematically repeated. However, I believe in the ethnographer's personal-*cum*-professional sensitivity, and in *post festum* heuristic benefits. Precisely because of coming out of the *shared experience* of personal meetings, participating in the same social events, and of living in the same diasporic contexts, they also allow insights into matters never before narrated.

To put it in fieldworkers' jargon: the best quotes come when the tape-recorder is switched off. And some of the most telling events happen

[26] This should be understood in connection to their experience of being persecuted by the Yugoslav secret police until Croatia was internationally recognised as an independent state in 1992. Documentary and testimonial literature on these matters has been published in Croatia during the last couple of years (see, e.g., Kušan 2000).

[27] In research focusing on transnational connections, but also with regard to most other research topics in the present global context of mobility of people, products and information, it is obvious that a field *site* can no longer be seen merely as a geographical location. It should rather be viewed as "an intersection between people, practices and shifting terrains, both physical and virtual. The ability to observe ideas, images and practices, and pursue a network of personal and institutional leads turns any location into 'the field'" (Strauss 2000:172).

when one least expects them, or – as in my case of blurred boundaries between fieldwork and "learning by doing" about what it means to be a Croat in Sweden – when one does not set out to do fieldwork in the first place.[28]

Like, for instance, what happened some twenty minutes after meeting a refugee from Bosnia for the very first time. I hadn't even started the interview when suddenly, she *kissed* the Croatian passport which she was proudly showing to me. I had neither mentioned nor asked to see the passport; but it seemed that my very presence provoked that sudden grabbing and swinging it up for a happy kiss. Two seconds was all it took.

No tape-recorder or photo-camera could fully capture that gesture – – momentary, loaded with meaning, and, indeed, happening *because of my presence*. On the sole basis of shared ethnicity, I was defined as an insider. I was presumed not only to understand the meaning of that passport (in the context of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the subsequent relations of Bosnian Croats with Croatian state that granted them citizenship), but also her emotions.

Several "old" and "new" diaspora Croats have showed me their Croatian passports, as – in my interpretation – a kind of privately owned proof that Yugoslavia ceased to exist, and as a proof of where they still (in spite of living elsewhere) *belong*. But no one else kissed their passport.

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[28] Since I cannot avoid having an ethnographer's eye open all the time, ethical concerns are appropriate when it comes to using quotes in the text that were not offered to me as "research material", but came about in, e.g., a friendly chat on the phone. So far, I believe that there are both clever and fair ways of dealing with such "information" without being abusive or neglecting the cultural and emotional expectations around friendship. Asking for permission to publish the text, in which the person in question is exposed, is the best way of being on the ethically safe side in dubious situations (and when publishing the entire transcription of a personal narrative is intended). That, however, can hardly become a general rule; the need for such "extreme" precosciousness should be judged according to the sensitivity of topics, since ethnology already has standard strategies regarding the informants' identity protection. My former research experience shows that most informants are not interested in reading scientific texts (see also Ronström 1992:49, who notices this in relation to his key-informants from Yugoslav clubs in Sweden). On the other hand, it confirms Anthony Cohen's (1992) remark as common, that informants do not recognise themselves in the text. In the case of my research in Sweden (here I refer to the results published in Povrzanović Frykman 2001b, which I asked some informants to read), it happens not only because the "self--knowledge and social knowledge of people are incongruent" (Cohen 1992:222), but also because ethnographic writing creates a new context in which I am not "after" (or "telling on") people, but after interpretations about a certain attitude or behaviour. I write about them in relation to *my* interest, and not, e.g., in relation to current gossip, arguments or individual animosities. However, Cohen's subsequent warning is important, about anthropologists tending to privilege social knowledge over self--knowledge. That is why personal narratives provide indispensable ethnographic material when "identity formation in diaspora and exile" is concerned. That is also why the personal diasporic insider-insights of the researcher can and should be used as equally valuable material.

Does that diminish the heuristic value of the "experimental" situation described above?[29]

Conclusion

In the examples offered above, the ethnographer's presence affects situations in the ways relevant for research. In an "experimental" manner, it makes visible "the inside" of ethnicity in concrete diasporic circumstances. It also points to the contexts in which ethnicity is of secondary importance, while, e.g., the refugees' problems or the shared educational background come to the fore. The ethnographer's presence thus reveals the heterogeneity of "own" cultural spaces (cf. Okely 1996:1), and the ambiguity of boundaries of inclusion within a shared ethnic "belonging". *Ethnicity is marked by shifting boundaries based on situated experiences and local definitions.*

The credibility of any research cannot *depend* on the ethnographer's experiential knowledge alone (cf. Strauss 2000:188) – but that knowledge is vital for reaching some layers of meaning. Its production cannot be fully controlled and systematically employed. However, if common ethnicity is seen as the meeting ground or the frame mutually defined as being most significant in the diaspora, any kind of contact that I have with the Croats in Sweden has a potential ethnographic value. After all, research *is* personal, and we are always moving in and out of the boundaries established in fieldwork situations, which are defined by ourselves as well by others.[30]

Every researcher and every research project may be unique, but ethnographic fieldwork situations have much in common, especially with regard to the inevitable social (sometimes also emotional) involvement as a *sine qua non* of fieldwork. "(S)truggling to understand other people's complexities, we are brought face-to-face with our own" (Cohen 1992:223). Therefore, there is yet another aspect of "usefulness" of the researcher's personal experience in the anthropological/ethnological text.

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[29] The answer, perhaps, is given by Marilyn Strathern (in a book review quoted in *Altamira and Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Anthropology 2002* catalogue), who says that "significant observation does not require a vast canvas – it requires, simply but rigorously, the capacity to make what one observes signify".

[30] As formulated by Vered Amit (2000b:16-17): "(…) we are always chasing context but never squaring it off. This open-endedness is further heightened by the social nature of ethnography, which makes it fundamentally *ad hoc*, sense making as the poetics of the possible and negotiated, equal measures of serendipity and deliberate enterprise. Where, when, how, and whom we encounter can never be subject to our firm control. (…) To overdeterminate fieldwork practices is (…) to undermine the very strength of ethnography, the way in which it deliberately leaves openings for unanticipated discoveries and directions. If in cleaving to a methodological orthodoxy, anthropologists a priori limit rather than leave open the scope of circumstances to be studied, they will be operating at epistemological cross purposes with their own disciplinary objectives".

For those readers who are disciplinary insiders themselves, it creates a potential identification ground from which the production of knowledge can be better understood. It enables the reflection on one's own professional enterprises from a comparative perspective. In that regard, Judith Okely's (1996) book and Vered Amit's (2000a) edited collection, offer me support in not being troubled by the blurring of private life and fieldwork, and in exposing some personal feelings as ethnographic material. Exposing and exploring the subjectivity of the researcher is always an authorial choice, but in the frames of the research described here, it is almost as a must. The scholars contributing to these two books proved that it is possible to cope with it in creative ways.

The point is to make the best out of circumstances or "the best out of the possible", provided that the "possible" is not pre-limited by the fear of personal involvement or by the fear of using one's own experience as ethnographic material. What matters is the final result: the ability to show how the research was generated and to present the ethnographic basis on which conclusions are made and interpretations attempted.

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"EKSPERIMENTALNA" ETNIČNOST: SUSRETI U DIJASPORI

SAŽETAK

Danas je antropologe i etnologe suvišno podsjećati na naivnost pozitivističkog pristupa etnografskom istraživanju. Svijest o političkom kontekstu svekolikog znanstvenog rada, o promjenjivom etnografskom autoritetu, o retorici i moći, te o ograničenjima etnografskih prikaza, postala je preduvjetom vrsnih etnografija, posebno onih koje se bave suvremenim pojavama i iskustvima. Jasno je da istraživač nije neutralan promatrač, već da svojim interakcijama s ljudima o kojima piše, pa i samom svojom prisutnošću u situacijama koje opisuje, utječe na takozvanu "građu". U ovome se radu raspravlja o situacijama u kojima je prisutnost istraživača ključni elemenat *konstrukcije terena*. Pritom je pojam *konstrukcije terena* (iz naslova zbornika urednice Vered Amit, u kojemu je iscrpno obrazložen) smatran dobrodošlom korekcijom etnološkog žargona prema kojemu etnolog "odlazi na teren".

Iako je temeljem brojnih etnoloških radova, o metodološkom se pragmatizmu rijetko piše. Smatrajući da je metodološke diskusije najumjesnije voditi oko konkretnih tema istraživanja i dvojbi tijekom terenskog rada, autorica na primjerima razlaže uporabu

svojih osobnih iskustava u dolaženju do istraživačkih uvida i pisanju etnografskog teksta. Prikazujući etničku pripadnost koju dijeli s ljudima čije stavove i aktivnosti istražuje kao "eksperimentalnu arenu", vrednuje heurističke potencijale svojih susreta s ljudima u dijaspori. Pokazuje zašto je u njezinu istraživanju među Hrvatima u Švedskoj terenski rad "intersubjektivni modus objektivizacije", kako ga definira Kirsten Hastrup, te zašto je etnografski tekst "prikaz intersubjektivnog svijeta terenskog rada" induciran prisutnošću istraživača.

Prema toj paradigmi istraživač nije onaj koji *promatra*, već onaj koji *vidi*. Znanje ne počiva na *opservaciji*, nego na *uvidu*. Etnografski je rad naime bitno obilježen sučeljavanjem, a tek površno promatranjem. Zato tekst pisan na temelju terenskog rada nužno implicira i autobiografske momente. Autorica smatra da etnografsko pismo nije svodivo na metodu; upravo autorski značaj i oslanjanje na osobno iskustvo čine i pisanje i čitanje etnografskih tekstova posebno zanimljivima. To nastoji potkrijepiti prikazom terenskih situacija koje koristi za promišljanje promjenjivih pozicija *insider*-a i *outsider*-a – u istraživačkom, ali i u širem kontekstu etničke pripadnosti.

Ključne riječi: etnografija, terenski rad, dijaspora, etničnost