

TRANSNATIONAL LIVES: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE NEGOTIATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

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This article follows the life history of a Croatian-Greek family of four, whose members have spent their lifetime across multiple nation states. Through data collected during a four-month ethnographic fieldwork period in the city of Zagreb, issues of mobility, national identification, and a sense of belonging within the transnational social field are examined. Having been influenced by more than one nation state, the narrations of each of the interlocutors encompass diverse national discourses, reflecting their hybrid national identities. The findings mentioned in this paper underline, first and foremost, the persistent power of the nation state and raise considerable questions about the significance of boundaries and processes of othering in contemporary societies.

Keywords: Transnational mobility, National Identity, Southeast Europe, Belonging and Othering

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores issues of mobility, national identity, and a sense of belonging by following the life history of a Croatian-Greek family of four through their biographical narrations. My first contact with the interlocutors was during a visit to a Greek restaurant

in the city of Zagreb, owned by the eldest son of the family. During my four-month stay in the capital of Croatia,¹ I met and interviewed each of the family members – Ana, Tomislav, and their two sons, Stjepan and Nikola.² All members of the family have spent their lifetime across multiple national territories and three of them are recognized as citizens of more than one nation-state. The family members have witnessed some of the most significant events that marked the contemporary history of Southeast Europe, and their mobility has crucially been determined by them. Concurrently, their transnational experiences were equally affected by transformations encountered in the current phase of globalization. Thus, through examining the data collected during the fieldwork, this paper seeks to discuss how the members of the family (re)construct and negotiate their hybrid national identities by considering the continuous transnational mobility they were faced with, as well as the socio-political changes of the past decades.

Before analysing national identity, it is essential to define the concept of the nation state, which is, against common belief, nothing more than a recent historical product. Indeed, member states of the United Nations that claim their existence before 1945 are, in fact, clearly less in number than we tend to assume, indicating that the establishment of the nation state comes before the creation of nationhood and not the other way round (Balibar and Wallerstein 2017:127). In Benedict Anderson's classic definition (Anderson 2006), the nation is defined as an imagined community because it exists first and foremost in the minds of those who perceive themselves as part of it. On that basis, in this article, the nation is considered to be socially constructed in the sense that it exists because it is imagined by its members as a unique unity over time and space.

In a similar vein, Marxist philosopher Étienne Balibar illustrates that the history of nations depends on the delusion of a subjective continuity. This is firmly established in the belief that generations follow one another in a specific territory with a shared name, essence, and destiny (Balibar and Wallerstein 2017:137). Balibar draws attention to the capability of nation states to achieve the full affiliation of individuals of all social classes as citizens through their institutions (ibid.:145–160). From a different perspective, Antony Smith uses an ethnosymbolist approach to underline the significance of cultural elements, such as myths, values, rituals, and traditions, in achieving social coherence and cultivating a sense of national continuity (Smith 2009:25). Therefore, based on the above considerations, in this paper it is argued that the formation of national identity takes place in two different areas. As Andreouli and Howarth (2012) affirm, national identities

¹ This ethnographic research was conducted during my internship (3/2019 – 6/2019) at the Institute for Anthropological Research (Institut za antropologiju) – Zagreb, Croatia. Considering her contribution in the research design and theoretical framework of the current research paper, my former supervisor, Morana Jarec, was included as a co-author.

² With a view to preserving anonymity, all the names used in this article are pseudonyms.

are constructed both in the reified sphere of political institutions and the consensual sphere of everyday experience. The representations enacted in these two spheres are situated in constant interaction and relate to recognition from social groups, a necessary condition for the construction of each identity (ibid.:2–3).

Furthermore, with a view to discussing the material selected during the fieldwork, the Social Identity Theory constitutes a useful analytical tool. This approach attributes the formation of every social identity to an internal–external dialectic of identification (Cooley 1962; Mead 1934). According to this perspective, collective identities are based upon the constructed similarity of the members of each group. This is not at the expense of difference, however, since inclusion goes hand in hand with exclusion (Jenkins 1996:78). Nevertheless, the current analysis of national identity as a variant of social identity does not entail an individualistic approach. On the contrary, individual and collective identities should be considered as social products, constructed through symbolization and always implicated within each other, sharing the same social space and time, and therefore existing only within the social context (ibid.:19–27). In this light, it is argued that their historical contextualization is of crucial importance.

Another equally important dimension of the formation of national identity that has vividly emerged during the research is the construction and the maintenance of boundaries. According to social anthropologist Fredrik Barth, the persistence of boundaries among groups does not result from an absence of mobility and social interaction, but rather entails “social processes of exclusion and incorporation” that lead to the construction of discrete categories, regardless of the experiences of individuals (Barth 1969:9–10). Social anthropologist Antony Cohen, from a different standpoint, offers an equally sophisticated approach, arguing that interaction is not as important as symbolization for collective identification since communities are constructed through “thinking” about them (Cohen 1985:98). Following Cohen’s account of how stereotypes provide the members of each community with a “vocabulary of values” for understanding their social world (ibid.:114), in this paper stereotypes are considered to have an important role in the processes of identification as well as distinction. In this regard, it is significant to mention that my own biography made the research participants perceive me as a member of the Greek national community, leading to different outcomes depending on their national identity. Therefore, the relation between the ethnographer and his/her interlocutors should be taken into consideration given that inclusion or exclusion from a certain group entail different results in terms of intimacy and, consequently, interaction.

Finally, the global structure of neoliberalism and its exercise of power beyond national borders should be considered when analysing national identity in the current state of global restructuring. Nation states are constantly transformed, and national borders are often eroded, as highlighted by the free transfer of labour, goods, and money

(Billig 1995:142). Moving away from methodological nationalism, a term that is used to critique the tendency of identifying the nation state with the concept of society, in this research the concept of “transnational space” (Faist 2000) is used with a view to taking into consideration the social relations maintained among the research participants across national borders as well as the construction of their hybrid national identities within this context. In this line, this paper draws on recent work by Glick Schiller and Levitt (2004), which reconceives, within the transnational framework, the concept of the “social field”, originally introduced by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1985), in order to show how social relations are structured by power. Building on Bourdieu’s thesis, Glick Schiller and Levitt describe “transnational social fields” as those fields that connect actors across national borders through direct and indirect relations (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2004:1008–1009). Thus, this conceptual framing enables us to explore how the members of this Greek-Croatian family are influenced by multiple structures of power that are not confined within the borders of a single nation state.

This paper’s research questions were explored by employing qualitative ethnographic methods: semi-structured interviews and participant observation. However, the research has elements of “short-term theoretically informed ethnography” (Pink and Morgan 2013) and “focused ethnography” (Wall 2015) in which conventional ethnographic methodological tools are used in somewhat unconventional ways. These innovative methodological strategies emerged to enable contemporary research while preserving the essential nature of ethnography. Accordingly, this research is characterized by short-term visits and intensive excursions into research participants’ lives and an ongoing ethnographic-analytical-theoretical dialog (Wall 2015:4–5; Pink and Morgan 2013:351–353). With a clear view of what this research paper would set out to examine, during the interviews I focused on details and asked questions that the interlocutors might have considered irrelevant. Following the preference of the interlocutors, the Greek language was used to communicate. Moreover, participant observation, a basic ethnographic method that is conceptualized as a long-term engagement with the researched community, is not always viable in contemporary contexts, as Pink notes: “it may be impractical and inappropriate for researchers to live long periods with research participants” (Pink 2015:6). Nevertheless, as a way of obtaining experiential and embodied knowledge through a specific research focus (Murchison 2010:86), participant observation was employed during the interviews to register perspectives, reactions, and emotions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION - EXPLORING NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN THE TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELD: BELONGING AND OTHERING

The paradigm of transnationalism indicates, firstly, that migration and re-emigration may not be definite and, secondly, that strong transnational links are frequently maintained even by migrants and refugees who have spent a considerable time outside their country of origin (Guarnizo and Smith 1998:18). These arguments are quite clear in the case of Ana's parents and in the way she grew up. Ana was born in the town of Zgorzelec in south-western Poland. Her parents, because of their communist beliefs and their participation in the Democratic Army of Greece, were secretly transferred to Poland during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). The Greek refugees developed a strong community in the area and their population amounted to approximately 14,000 people until the late 1970s. Maintaining family ties and preserving contact with their relatives back home was an important aspect of the refugees' lives. The Greek Association in the area played a central role in shaping their everyday activities and, in general, the Greek community organized its life in Poland with an eventual aim of returning to Greece. For most of the refugees, their desire became a reality after the fall of the military junta in Greece (1974). Ana's parents returned to their homeland at the earliest opportunity and remained there for the rest of their lifetimes.

Ana, however, moved to the city of Skopje in the former socialist Yugoslavia,³ today's North Macedonia, to study as soon as she finished high school in Poland. During her university years she met Tomislav, a young Croatian student, who was born in Mostar, a city located in southern Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴ After Tomislav's graduation, they got married and some months later Ana returned to Poland to give birth to their older son, Stjepan. After the completion of Tomislav's military obligations, the family moved to Prijedor, a city located in the north of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where their second child, Nikola, was born. Tomislav began a job as a teacher in the local school and Ana started her own clothing enterprise to supplement their household income. The economic crisis in Yugoslavia during the 1980s, however, forced Tomislav to resign, and he, along with his wife, started to work in the tourism sector in Greece

³ The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was a federated country consisting of six socialist republics: today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. The country disintegrated in 1992.

⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country that, even today, is characterized by diversity. The population of the country mainly consists of Bosnians, Croatians, and Serbians, while the most widespread religion is Islam, followed by Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism. Tomislav notes: "Bosnia is a mixture. It used to be a small-scale Yugoslavia and it remained like that."

during the summer seasons. It was not only Ana's national origin and knowledge of the Greek language that facilitated this decision, but also their transnational family relations. Tomislav's sister in Yugoslavia and Ana's parents in Greece helped them by taking care of their young children so that they could spend the year across the two national territories. For four years, they spent the summer season in Greece and returned to Yugoslavia for the winter season.

In the meantime, Tito's death and the decline of Soviet power led to the revival of nationalism throughout Yugoslavia, followed by a series of bloody wars and the final dissolution of the country, which collapsed into its national components (Hall 2014:84–339). Ana remembers:

“In September, in 1990, when the children had to return to school, his [Tomislav's] sister called us and told me: ‘No way am I coming back! No way! My brother is going to lose his head!’ (...) they created an atmosphere of war!” (Ana)

In the area of Prijedor, many Croats, but mostly Muslims, were killed during the campaign of ethnic cleansing. Tomislav survived, but the family was forced to leave their home in Prijedor and migrate to Greece, where they were faced with financial struggles.

A few years later, Tomislav started his own business, and the family overcame its financial problems. Travelling worldwide was a necessary part of his work since he developed his business activity in 27 countries. He and Ana spent more than 20 years in Greece before moving to the city of Zagreb, in Croatia, where they are currently living.

Their youngest son, Nikola, was involved in high-level tennis during his adolescence as a member of the Greek national team and, because of this, he travelled abroad from a young age. After some severe injuries that forced him to end his athletic career, he moved to Zagreb to study at university. Despite the numerous opportunities for studying overseas, Nikola decided to move to his father's country of origin, Croatia. Transnational ties from below⁵ played a central role in Nikola's decision to settle down in Zagreb:

“(...) I could have also chosen to go to Germany or to England, but I decided to come here (...) I knew the language and I had family here, so adjusting would be easier.” (Nikola)

Soon after his migration to Croatia, Nikola, in collaboration with his father, started his own enterprise and married a Croatian woman, with whom he has two children.

⁵ “Transnationalism from below” refers to the conceptual shift among scholars in giving prominence to transnational migrants instead of non-state transnational actors, such as multinational enterprises, in contrast with the emphasis of previous studies on “transnationalism from above” (Faist 2000:17).

Some decades later, transnational family ties and the knowledge of the Croatian language facilitated the eldest son of the family Stjepan's migration to Zagreb. Stjepan has spent the majority of his life in Greece, but the Greek financial crisis of 2008 and its resulting economic difficulties and insecurity forced him to leave. Nowadays, along with other business activities, he owns a Greek restaurant in the city of Zagreb, and he is engaged to a Croatian woman. Today, all four of the interlocutors intend to remain in the capital of Croatia. The case of Nikola and Stjepan can be characterized as a "counter-diaspora" (King and Christou 2010), as they returned to both their mother's and father's homeland at different stages of their lives.⁶ Following the experiences of this Greek-Croatian family, it becomes apparent that although transnational mobility is not a new phenomenon, the end of the 20th century marked a period of intensive global restructuring during which transnational ties were again visible and made even more significant (Glick Schiller 2003:103). There are two notable points to be made in terms of understanding the contemporary transnational reality. The first relates to the impact of technological progress on transforming transnational space and time. In the current phase of globalization, travelling is affordable and less time-consuming. As a result, the family members can visit their countries of origin and previous countries of residence several times a year to meet friends and relatives. In addition, technologies of communication enable the cultivation of everyday intimacy with those left behind and the maintenance of ties with people and places beyond national borders (Velayutham and Wise 2017:125). For instance, Ana has three hundred Facebook friends across Poland, Greece, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with whom she often keeps in touch through her personal account.

The second key point that emerged during the interviews concerns the issue of labour within the global neoliberal framework. The family members developed their business activity across different countries, and they have partially experienced transnational mobility because of that. It is important to note, however, that while transnational practices by migrant entrepreneurs are usually depicted as efforts to escape control "from the above", one should not ignore the fact that financial dependency on foreign investment has significantly increased, especially for less industrialized countries (Guarnizo and Smith 1998:5–8). To take the case of Zagreb, most Greek migrants in the city are senior company executives, working for multinational corporations. Stjepan's restaurant is their main meeting point and where they occasionally organize social

⁶Counter-diaspora is a term that King and Christou (2010) use to describe the second-generation return of subjects to the birth-country of their parents as a new perspective that addresses dimensions of mobility, return, visits, and definite settlement, as well as migrants' complex and ambiguous views of home, place, belonging, and identity.

events. It should therefore be kept in mind that transnational migration is not free from the context of late capitalism and that transnational processes may benefit the neoliberal project.

Furthermore, considering the continuous transnational mobility experienced by the family members, it becomes evident that their hybrid national identities have been constructed while being strongly influenced by more than one nation state. In brief, Ana has Polish, Greek, and Croatian citizenships, her husband has Croatian, and their children both Greek and Croatian. Nevertheless, it is important to illustrate that their self-determination may differ from their institutional recognition.

As indicated earlier, nation-building occurs in everyday life, and national identity should be understood as a form of life and a way of being established in the embodied habits of social life (Billig 1995:65–69). An important element of this everyday manifestation of national identity is the use of national languages. Although Ana was born in Poland, her maternal language is Greek. She and her parents also learnt Polish, but they spoke Greek in the privacy of their own home. For the family of four, however, Croatian was the language they used to communicate, since Tomislav did not speak Greek before his migration. Their children started to learn Greek during their summer vacations, but it was not until the family moved permanently to Greece that Stjepan and Nikola started to speak it on a daily basis with Ana, while continuing to use the Croatian language with Tomislav.

As all the interviews were conducted in the Greek language, parts of the identities of the interlocutors, both local and national, could be noticed as incarnated in the language. As feminist post-structuralist scholar Christine Weedon argues, language constitutes the site where both forms of social organization and subjectivity are constructed (Weedon 1987:21). Small details, such as the accent of their native language, the choice of words and language idioms, reflected the life experiences of the family members. For instance, Tomislav had the strongest Croatian accent compared to the others. In addition, while interviewing Ana and Stjepan, I noticed the use of idioms originating from the region of Thessaloniki, in Greece, where the members of the family have spent a big part of their lives. In another example, because of Nikola's familiarization with English during his experiences abroad, he was replacing Greek words with English ones. In Ana's case, this was not possible, since it was forbidden to learn English in Poland due to the socialist regime, and, as a result, Greek is the one language that we both spoke.

This paragraph should be as follows:

Nikola described his family environment as the "world as one" and he considers himself to be broad-minded when it comes to issues of national tradition. When it comes to his Greek national origin, he is willing to teach the Greek language to his children born

in Croatia, as well as some Greek traditions. In addition, he named his children Filippos and Franjo, choosing one Greek and one Croatian name respectively. Nonetheless, despite Nikola's background, with a lifetime spent across national territories, the choice of the name Filippos associates with Greek ethnic pride since it relates to Greek history, a key factor in the construction of national continuity:

“Filippos was given more as a Greek name, from the father of Alexander the Great (...) But, because the name Alexandros is a Serbian name, and it is not in use [in Croatia], I decided to name him Filippos.” (Nikola)

Concurrently, Nikola's statement manifests his Croatian national identity and illustrates the significance of language as one of the main factors that contributes to national distinction within the Balkan area,⁷ especially when it comes to the countries of former Yugoslavia.⁸

Another fundamental distinguishing characteristic among communities in the Balkan Peninsula is religion (Hammel 1993:42). While the Greeks in Poland, including Ana's parents, were primarily Orthodox Christians, it was forbidden for them to enter any church because of their communist ideals. For this reason, Ana was not baptized during her childhood. However, the Greek Community followed Christian traditions and engaged in Orthodox religious practices. It was not until Ana met Tomislav that she was baptized in a Catholic church for the purposes of their marriage.⁹ A few years later, their children were baptized as Catholics. During their stay in Greece, the family mostly visited the Catholic church, even though the official religion of Greece is dominated by the Greek Orthodox Church.

More than that, the reproduction of nationhood can also be traced in the unconscious sphere to everyday practices that may seem minor and insignificant. Practices and habits related to food is such a case. Food activities establish a familiar

⁷ In another example that shows the importance of linguistic distinction, during our discussion, all the interlocutors, except Tomislav, referred to North Macedonia as Skopje. The longstanding Macedonian name dispute between the countries of Greece and North Macedonia still causes political conflicts and nationalist protests. The insistence on this name-related issue lies in the significance of imagining each national territory as a unique place, separated physically and metaphorically from others and with a distinctive label that proclaims its national uniqueness (Billig 1995:73–75).

⁸ In the aftermath of the fall of the socialist regime, claiming linguistic authenticity was a fundamental narration in Croatia's attempt to enter the world of nations, followed by various propaganda strategies that stressed the differences between the Croatian and Serbian languages (Bellamy 2003:141–138).

⁹ Tomislav's parents would have preferred for him to have had a Croatian wife, but they eventually accepted Ana because religion was more fundamental for them than nationality.

sense of time, space, and being, and food culture relates to imagining the nation as well as establishing food-related boundaries (Ichijo and Ranta 2016:7). This argument could explain why Ana often argues with her Croatian friends about whether the coffee should be named Greek or Turkish. It is also noteworthy that, in the current state of globalization, we are encountering an increasing manifestation of banal nationalism in food (ibid.:6). For instance, restaurants such as Stjepan's are often related to a particular nation, emphasizing national authenticity in recipes and choice of ingredients.

In addition to this, the practice of cooking is an illustrative example of how sensorial experiences associate with migrants' history and national origin. Bodily senses are interlinked with the experience of migration and displacement (Chapman and Wise 2005:1–2) and practices that involve the senses appear to be emotionally charged. It is important to note that Ana cooks dishes originating from Poland, Greece, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, countries in which she has spent important parts of her life and that she relates to. Another equally important example that indicates that sensory inputs relate to national identity is musical experiences. Music enables the maintenance of transnational ties with one's country of origin and plays a prominent role in evoking memories and triggering nostalgia (Barret et al. 2010). For instance, a young Stjepan living in Zagreb and feeling homesick remembers listening to a typical genre of popular Greek folk music.

Furthermore, another significant aspect of nation-building that emerged during the interviews is the key role of sports. In the context of globalization, athletes may represent more than one nation during their career since rules of nationality have become increasingly flexible (Bairner 2008:48). However, sports events remain major rituals in popular culture during which the nation is performed, and emotional nationalism emerges (Brentin and Cooley 2015:1–5). Nikola explains that because of his dual national identity, representing either Greece or Croatia in tennis championships would make no difference to him, but the same cannot be said about Bosnia and Herzegovina, where he was born:

“I don't mind which flag is going to be next to me, either the Croatian or the Greek, it's the same thing for me. (...) Because I was born in Bosnia, I could also play for Bosnia (...) but I don't feel like a Bosnian at all.” (Nikola)

There is no denying that there is a strong correlation between sports and nationhood. The rise of football as a mass spectacle in interwar Europe triggered an important discussion; Eric Hobsbawm notes: “The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people” (Hobsbawm 1992:143). While Tomislav and Nikola are supporters of the Greek football team of Panathinaikos, a popular team in Croatia because of its Croatian player during the 1980s, Stjepan

supports the team of PAOK.¹⁰ This team originates from the area of Thessaloniki, where Stjepan grew up, and is strongly associated with the local identity, representing the most popular football team in northern Greece. Tomislav notes:

“Stjepan supports the team PAOK (...), he is more Greek than a Greek! (laughing).” (Tomislav)

In addition, in the case of Ana it is important to bear in mind the major influence of the Greek community in Poland within which she grew up. The activities organized by the Greek Association of the region give an illustrative example of how nationality, meaning the category of belonging without granting full citizenship rights and duties (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2004:1019), is cultivated. Activities such as Greek language and history courses promoted the endurance of transnational links with Greece and strengthened the sense of national belonging. Therefore, we should not be surprised by the fact that Ana identifies as Greek even though she did not visit the country for the first time until a later age.

As far as Tomislav is concerned, he had been officially recognized as a citizen of former Yugoslavia. However, even before the dissolution of the country, he defined himself as Croatian.¹¹ After Yugoslavia disintegrated into its national components, Tomislav obtained Croatian citizenship, along with the rest of his family. During the period of transition in the 1990s, obtaining Croatian citizenship was an easy bureaucratic procedure for the family of four, but the same does not apply to Greek citizenship. Through the repatriation process, Ana and her eldest son were recognized as Greek citizens by providing evidence of their Greek origin, but Nikola only managed to be officially recognized as Greek after several years. It was the bureaucratic complexity of these processes that also discouraged Tomislav from obtaining Greek citizenship after his migration.

As mentioned before, citizenship involves specific duties and rights. There has been a lot of discussion about the significance of military service for the construction of national consciousness, the origins of which may be traced back to the roots of the modern Western state (Chambers II and Moskos 1993:3). Even to this day, military service remains compulsory in many states. This is the case in Greece, where Stjepan performed his service as a young man. In addition, in the context of globalization, we notice a reformulation of the nation state and the development of a range of policies

¹⁰ Panthessalonian Athletic Club of Constantinopolitans.

¹¹ The supranational Yugoslav identity did not eliminate national identification. The Communist Party institutionalized national diversity within Yugoslav territory, with six constituent nations: Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians, and from the late 1960s Bosnian Muslims (Troch 2013:782).

that redefine each state's members as well as their rights and obligations (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2004:1018–1019). A prominent example is transnational voting. For instance, Ana has the right to vote in Croatia, Greece, and Poland. She chooses, however, to vote only in Greece, which is her self-identified place of origin. It is significant to point out that voting is possible from abroad in the Embassy of Greece in Zagreb.

Furthermore, attention needs to be paid to the self-determination of Nikola and Stjepan, who hold dual national citizenship in Croatia and Greece. They could also have chosen to obtain the citizenship of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, in the case of Stjepan, Polish citizenship, since he was born there. However, both illustrated the fact that they do not feel any kind of connection with these countries due to “not having any roots there”, as Stjepan commented. Such a view raises questions about the importance of the notion of blood in the process of nation-building. For the Balkan area and, especially, for Greece and those countries that have succeeded Yugoslavia, the construction of nationhood was based on the idea that national identity is a “natural” feature related to blood (Herzfeld 2016:261). Thus, the two brothers justified their decision to obtain only Croatian and the Greek citizenship according to the national origin of their parents, implying a “natural” dimension of their choice. Stjepan notes about his future children:

“I really love Greece, (...) and I don't want my children to move away from their roots, because they will have 25 per cent Greek blood.” (Stjepan)

Another important point is that despite their dual national citizenship, Stjepan defines himself as Greek, while Nikola primarily as Croatian. Stjepan spent the biggest part of his life in the city of Thessaloniki, Greece, where he grew up and developed some of his closest personal relationships. On the contrary, Nikola has experienced intense transnational mobility because of his tennis career, and, as a result, he defined himself in a later stage of his life, after his migration to Zagreb and his marriage to his Croatian wife. Therefore, personal relationships should not be neglected in our attempt to analyse identity construction and a sense of belonging.

Thus, while Ana and Stjepan define themselves as Greek, Tomislav and Nikola define themselves primarily as Croatian. Stjepan remembers:

“Two or three years ago, Eurobasket took place here in Zagreb, and Greece was competing against Croatia. My mother and I with the Greek colours, my brother with my father with the Croatian!” (Stjepan)

It is important to consider that processes of distinguishing ‘them’ from ‘us’ play a vital role in processes of national identification. As Billig affirms, if nationalism can be defined as an ideology of the first person plural, then it is also an ideology of the third person: defining who “we” are is not possible without “them” (Billig 1995:78). During

the fieldwork, Ana and her sons described Croatian people as “cold”, “disciplined”, and “like Germans” in comparison with Greek people, whom they described as “warm” and “hospitable”. Stereotypes are of great importance in view of these homogenized representations. Projecting a particular essence onto the members of the ingroup, as well as onto the members of the outgroup, is an important part of nation-building. Hence, naturalization and entitativity are achieved for each national group, whose members are represented as having the same immutable attributes (Holtz et al. 2009:19–27).

In addition, it should be noted that stereotypes are not limited to characteristics that describe national groups only within national borders. In many cases, homogeneity is constructed for larger territories. Mediterranean cultural unity provides a fruitful example of such a case. Stjepan notes:

“I have more of a Greek temperament (...) I'm 'warmer' than Croatians, I'm more Mediterranean (...) so I fit in better with Greeks.” (Stjepan)

At the core of this alleged Mediterranean ‘culture’ lies the notion of hospitality, which plays a major role in the collective identification of the region, especially for Greece, where hospitality is considered one of the main national traits. Furthermore, in a similar way to any other imagined unity, the Mediterranean’s borders are fluid and flexible. For instance, Croatia’s regional diversity often raises questions of classification. All the four interlocutors classified the area of the Dalmatian coast as part of the Mediterranean world:

“Croatia has two different mentalities. There is the Dalmatian mentality, which is similar to the Italian and the Greek. There is also continental Croatia, where they have more of a German-Austrian mentality.”¹² (Nikola)

This classification, rather than being a simple geographical issue, implies a geopolitical division between ‘the North’ and ‘the South’, followed by essentialized assumptions for the residents of each area that could be particularly problematic. Social anthropologist Michael Herzfeld points out that the tendency to generalize Mediterranean characteristics “has banished those areas to the world’s political and cultural periphery” (Herzfeld 1984:440). In addition, through exoticism and by attributing an “undisciplined” essence onto Mediterranean people, the “disciplined”, and as commonly implicated more “civilized”, essence of the members of Northern Europe is reconfirmed.

Furthermore, it is significant to note that stereotypes make sense in specific contexts,

¹² This distinction among continental Croatia and the Dalmatian coast echoes the historical division between the two areas during the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918) when they constituted two different kingdoms, the Kingdom of Dalmatia and the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia.

since they are based on specific sets of knowledge (Brown and Theodossopoulos 2004:12). As mentioned before, my Greek nationality had significant implications throughout the course of my fieldwork. Here are two illustrative examples. The first relates to the phenomenon of exclusion and the classification of me as an outsider. During my conversation with Nikola, I asked if he believes that Croatian people have conservative views. The friendly atmosphere of our conversation was suddenly transformed, and Nikola rushed to defend Croatia's reputation, especially the association of the Independent State of Croatia with Nazi Germany during World War II:¹³

"Nowadays, they call us Nazis! (...) Europe has the perception that Croatia is a more racist country than Greece, but I don't believe this is true (...)." (Nikola)

The second example that demonstrates the importance of inclusion and exclusion took place during Stjepan's interview. The oldest son of the family identifies as Greek and thereby perceived me as a member of his national group. Throughout our conversation, Stjepan did not only express himself as at ease with negative stereotypes of Greek people, but he also claimed that laziness, undisciplined behaviour, and political corruption are key features of the Greek essence. The "confession" of those negative traits may not be possible if I were perceived as an outsider. Moreover, through the theoretical lens of "cultural intimacy",¹⁴ it becomes apparent that the negative aspects of the national Self are of equal importance to the positive ones and also contribute to the cultivation of national belonging.

Concurrently, one cannot fail to notice that stereotypes operate as statements about Otherness.¹⁵ The processes of othering are based on the construction of difference among the Self or the in-group and the Other or the out-group by attributing relative inferiority and alienness to the latter (Brons 2015:86). Migration itself is a case study of othering. In a world based on the concept of the nation state, migrants are those that are typically perceived as the Others within national territories.¹⁶ Thus, the experience of

¹³ The Independent State of Croatia encompassed regions of the occupied Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It was established in 1941 and existed until 1945 as a puppet state of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

¹⁴ The concept of 'cultural intimacy' was introduced by Herzfeld to describe the tendency among a nation's members to manifest negative national stereotypes of themselves that seemingly appear to be at their expense (Herzfeld 2016:26).

¹⁵ This notion has Hegelian roots (Hegel 2018) and it has been used to great extent in feminist and post-colonial theory.

¹⁶ As Julia Kristeva argues, defining foreignness in the modern era correlates with the establishment of nation states: "the foreigner is the one who does not belong to the state in which we are, the one who does not have the same nationality" (Kristeva 1991:96).

migration involves, by definition, sentiments of foreignness and alienation:

“Here (in Zagreb), I was always something exotic. In Greece, (...) my friends always called me by my name (...). Here, as a student but also nowadays my nickname is ‘the Greek’.” (Stjepan)

As a constant process of “re-invention and re-definition”, migration constitutes one of the most dramatic identity alterations and is strongly associated with social marginalization (Van Houtoum and Van Naerssen 2002:132–133). However, migration consists of complex processes and, as such, involves heterogeneous experiences. In comparison, Nikola takes an entirely opposite view to his brother:

“Here, in Croatia, it is totally different. They call me ‘the Greek’, but I don’t feel that they say it in a bad way. In Greece, when they call you ‘the Croat’ (...) you can feel it, they say it in a bad way (...).” (Nikola)

Ana and her sons’ migration story suggests, moreover, a more complex approach to the issue. Even though they have been institutionally recognized as citizens of Greece before their permanent migration, they have experienced the feelings of being a foreigner. Foreign accents and names were not the only contributing factors in causing prejudice against them. The fact that the family originates from former socialist republics was not of little importance in the context of Greek society at the beginning of the 1990s:

“(...) in Greece, they perceived me as a Yugoslav, but I wasn’t! (...) Especially during the war period, they believed that Yugoslavia was something like a third world country.” (Stjepan)

Slavic identities, in particular, were identified with communist beliefs, and leftist politicians were characterised as “Slavs” regardless of their ethnic origin (Agnew 2007:407). Several decades later, Stjepan and Nikola endured the impact of this long-lasting legacy in the Greek region. Accordingly, their mother encountered prejudice after her return to Greece because of her parent’s communist ideals:

“You know, the true problem was that they treated us as the children of communists. And back then, in Greece, communism was treated like... (...).” (Ana)

Maintaining boundaries among national groups and establishing the idea of a native-born nation would not be possible without the construction of the Other (Houtoum and Naerssen 2002:133–135). By attributing a negative and inferior essence onto the national Others, opportunities for comparison are given. For instance, Nikola compares Croatian and Serbian people in reference to religion. The classification of Croatians with

Catholicism and Serbians with Orthodoxy emerged during the 18th century with the absolutism of the Habsburgs (Hammel 1993:42). For Nikola, this religious differentiation implies certain characteristics for the residents of each country:

“They are open-minded [Croatsians], it’s a different model (...). In Serbia, (...) religion does not allow you to work, to grow as a person, also as a country, to achieve something good for science.” (Nikola)

There has been extensive discussion about the relationship between Serbian and Croatian people and the continual effort for distinction and national self-determination, a tendency that characterized all nations of former Yugoslavia during the post-war period. In fact, the geography of the entire Balkan Peninsula was demarcated by the concept of the neighbour-opponent (Kedrotis 2015:48). By the end of the 20th century, the revival of hostile discourses in former Yugoslavia provided justification for the upcoming violent conflicts and the final dissolution of the country. Traumatic war experience is undoubtedly an important factor in perpetuating the image of the neighbour-other. Ana comments:

“I am more modest in my feelings towards Serbia, due to my experience. (...) I used to have some Serbian friends, but they turned out to be the wrong kind of people. In this war, it became clear who the real human beings are!” (Ana)

At the same time, it is significant to note that an apparent contradiction arises when examining the continuous effort to distinguish among Balkan nations compared to the way the Balkan region is externally perceived. While the Balkans are often represented as a cultural and political entity with a common established identity, Balkan geographic space has always been treated as a threat to national authenticity by local nationalisms (Kiossev 2002:177–165). In this regard, Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova, echoing the work of Edward Said (1996),¹⁷ coined the concept of “Balkanism” with a view to discussing the Balkan construct. Todorova notes: “As in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ and the ‘West’ has been constructed” (Todorova 2009:188). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that, unlike the case of the Mediterranean, Balkan identity seems to be unwanted for the residents of the peninsula. This could be explained by the fact that the Mediterranean

¹⁷ Said’s polemic work suggests that the East, under the prism of “Orientalism”, constitutes a notion that derives from Western discourse about the Orient in view of its ideological and political subjugation.

construct involves romanticism, whereas, as Kiossev (2002) points out, belonging to the Balkans is first and foremost fraught with social and political stigmatization.

For instance, while interviewing Tomislav and Ana, I witnessed their intense disagreement about whether or not Croatia belongs to the Balkans:

Tomislav: "We were never in the Balkans!"

Ana: "Do you mean you're superior to the Balkans?"

Tomislav: "(...) It's not about that! (...) Croatians say that, from a historical point of view, we are on the border of Christianity; we didn't allow Turks to invade. (...) Balkan is a word connected with Turks (...) we've struggled for anyone to not become Balkan."

Ana: "Why? (upset)".

Tomislav: "(...) because, for Balkans, they always said they are 'bure baruta'."¹⁸

Apart from being politically marked as a place of instability and violence, a world of "bure baruta", as Tomislav puts it, the Balkan construct also encompasses the Occidental–Oriental dichotomy. The Orient is classified in two ways. The first, which relates to Western perspectives on the Balkans, classifies the area as Europe's 'Eastern' part. Following Ottoman expansion, Europe 'proper' is distinguished from the part of Europe under Ottoman rule, which is therefore associated with the East (Bakić-Hayden 1995:920–921). The second type refers to national rhetoric within the Balkan countries, according to which the identity of each country's neighbours is recognized as being more Orient and, hence, more Balkan. In this process of distinction, the two most significant factors are past foreign rule and religion. Thus, citizens of regions formerly ruled by the Habsburg Monarchy, as in the case of Tomislav, identify themselves as being more European than those in areas formerly belonging to the Ottoman Empire (ibid.:922).

The peculiar case of Greece, moreover, is another prominent example of the multiple and often contradictory ways of identification within the Balkan region. The idea of Hellenism has been used by Europeans as a model for Western civilization before Greeks themselves used it for the construction of their modern national identity (Herzfeld 2002:21–23). As a result, Greece was historically subjected to a long-standing antinomy in terms of finding its symbolic place. Greeks both accept and reject their European identity, depending on the circumstances, while the Oriental side of their national character maintains a strong position in local auto-narratives. Stjepan comments:

¹⁸ Barrel of gunpowder.

“Greek people are also a mixture of the Oriental and the Mediterranean,¹⁹ something in-between. They are Mediterranean people but with a great Eastern influence.” (Stjepan)

As can be seen from the findings of this research, denying or accepting the legacy of the Orient is one of the most controversial themes for residents of the Balkan Peninsula, and national narratives often seem contradictory to one another. Nonetheless, manifestations of Orientalism in a purely Saidian sense are to be found in discourses on the Islamic Orient. Said notices a shift in Western discourse in the aftermath of World War II and, especially, after the Arab-Israeli wars regarding the negative perception of Arabs (Said 1996:342–344). During our conversation, Tomislav expressed his thoughts about the Muslim residents of Bosnia-Herzegovina, affirming this disquieting shift in perceiving the Orient:

“They were Slavs, they were different before the war. During the war period, Arabs also arrived (...). Nowadays, when I visit Bosnia, I notice a lot of differences (...) they arrive from the East and most of them are Jihad (...) this is a serious problem for us because we have them at our borders.” (Tomislav)

Despite centuries of Islamic presence in the Balkans, national rhetoric that marginalizes Muslim identities contributes significantly to processes of nation-building. Turks and Muslims have been the main enemies in the mythological constructs of Balkan nationalism (Aretov 2014:95), serving the key role of the symbolic enemy. In regard to Greek territory, Muslims have been systematically faced with a series of hostile state policies. For instance, even though Muslims of Western Thrace²⁰ are officially recognized as a minority with established collective rights, they experience a continuous violation of their liberties (Hüseyinoğlu 2014:173–182) as well as prejudice and discrimination against them. Ana notes:

“When Turks came here [to former Yugoslavia], they tried to make everyone Muslim (...) They have tried the same thing in Greece, but they didn't achieve their goal. They only achieved it in Thrace!” (Ana)

¹⁹ Based on Stjepan's words, one can also note that distinguishing oneself from the Balkans is not an issue of little importance for Greek people.

²⁰ The Greek state's political agenda did not include the assimilation of non-Christian populations, and, as a result of World War I, under the Treaty of Lausanne, the Muslim population of Greece was exchanged for the Greek speaking population of Turkey (Haksöz 2017:34). The Greek Orthodox Christian minority of Istanbul and the Muslim Turkish minority of Western Thrace were the only two communities that were not included in this process of population exchange.

The findings mentioned above indicate that, despite the socioeconomic shifts of the emerging globalized world, processes of othering and boundary construction remain crucial for the formation of national identities within the transnational social field. In addition, it becomes evident that migration is at the centre of this. It is significant to note, however, that discrimination does not occur to the same extent for all incomers. The phenomenon of “selective openness of the borders” refers to the differentiated state policies towards skilled migrants and those without significant economic resources (Houtum and Naerssen 2002:128–129). By following the lives of this Croatian-Greek family, it is apparent that their integration was strongly connected to their economic status. Their experiences of migrating to Greece during the violent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia sharply contrast with the fact that Tomislav and his sons were welcomed in several countries as foreign entrepreneurs – and, in the case of Nikola, also as a foreign athlete – some decades later.

CONCLUSION

Through the analysis of the biographical narrations of this Greek-Croatian family of four, this paper sought to contribute to our understanding of the ways in which national identities are constructed within the transnational social field. As historical subjects influenced by more than one nation state, the family members have constructed their hybrid national identities through complex processes. As the findings of this research demonstrate, in recent times mobility across national borders has nonetheless been intensified, and it can be inferred that nation states have not lost their prominent role in constructing subjectivity.

As can be seen from the narrations of the family members, the construction of national identity occurs both in the sphere of everyday experience as well as through institutionalized processes that may extend beyond national borders. Concurrently, this research has shown that transnational social networks play a decisive role in affecting transnational mobility and, simultaneously, in cultivating migrants’ national sense of belonging. Furthermore, the findings suggest that essentializing assumptions and processes of othering are of crucial importance for the construction of national identities within contemporary societies. Thus, attention needs to be paid to the maintenance of boundaries among national groups as well as to the establishment of geopolitical entities with an essentialized meaning despite the influence of increasing globalization. In general, therefore, it seems that the study of national identity in relation to transnational mobility are some of the research areas that can significantly enrich the discipline of anthropology.

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Transnacionalni životi: antropološki pristup pregovaranju nacionalnoga identiteta

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Morana Jarec

Članak prati životne priče četveročlane hrvatsko-grčke obitelji čiji su članovi svoj život proveli u nekoliko nacionalnih država. Kroz podatke prikupljene tijekom četveromjesečnoga etnografskoga terenskoga istraživanja u Zagrebu razmatraju se pitanja mobilnosti, nacionalne identifikacije i osjećaja pripadnosti unutar transnacionalnoga društvenoga prostora. Naracije svakoga od sugovornika, pod utjecajem više od jedne nacionalne države, obuhvaćaju različite nacionalne diskurse odražavajući njihove hibridne nacionalne identitete. Rezultati ovoga istraživanja naglašavaju, prije svega, moć nacionalnih država te postavljaju značajna pitanja o važnosti granica i procesa proizvodnje drugosti u suvremenim društvima.

Ključne riječi: *transnacionalna mobilnost, nacionalni identitet, Jugoistočna Europa, pripadnost i drugost*



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