

RECONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND THE ROLE OF NATIONAL ETHNOLOGY: DETACHED OBSERVATION OR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

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*Imagine there's no countries/It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for/And no religion too
Imagine all the people/Living life in peace...*

John Lennon, "Imagine" (1971)

With the onset of belligerent nationalist propaganda in Serbia while it was still one of the ex-Yugoslavian republics, the process of reconstructing from above collective and, by extension, individual identities, was also initiated. Under the guidance of the new totalitarian ideology, this time of nationalist provenience and thorough and exclusive to the extreme, propagated by the same group of people formerly loyal to the communist doctrine, the process was all-pervasive and aggressive, devoid of any tolerance or understanding for the different. Ethnology, conceived a century ago and cherished ever since as a national discipline, at least among some of its "disciples", was facing yet another challenge. Based on her own experience, the author is rethinking once again the role of ethnology/anthropology at times when the discipline is expected to have its say.

The incident which has once again inspired me, this time under very real, immediate and serious pressure from the society at large, to rethink - both in terms of history and future orientations - the position, perspective, role, and goals of ethnology/anthropology, the discipline that has been my profession for over twenty years now, happened just before the turn of the decade. It was a time when it was evident that the long-smoldering, all-pervasive, and at times devastating "Yugoslav crisis" was nearing its end, but when it was still not entirely clear, to the majority of ordinary citizens and social scientists alike (cf. Bolčić 1992:11—16) what form its final resolution would take. With the temporary, illusionary or real economic recovery (1989—1991), accompanied by the onset of the much needed processes of democratization, seemed to have ended "the lethargic 80s" and closed channels of communications between the republics. However, they were still open and functioning outside the official circles; and there was still some hope left that the art of compromising and negotiating might lead to a peaceful settlement of differences, whatever it might have been. But, it was also the time of fierce verbal and political "media civil wars", initiated as early as 1986 with the coverage of the first non-Albanian delegation from Kosovo demanding a hearing before the federal parliament, and in full swing by 1988, when different interpretations of the same events were creating a kaleidoscope of virtual realities, with one common denominator, however: dichotomization into "We, the imperiled victims" and "They, the horrendous victimizers". There is no doubt that there were many tangible instances when the actions of one center of power - in terms of covert or overt intentions - provoked real fear and resentment among the others (cf. Denich 1993:55—56). These led to protective reaction which in turn set off a new wave of provocation, and "proof" that the "initiator" was right all along. It is also fair to say that the republic/state-run media, the ultimate authority in creating public opinion - and not just their newscasts but entire programs/contents - had a huge and important share in shaping the new realities, in imparting the desired messages primarily to their own audiences. "Special effects", achieved through careful *bricolage*, accentuation, repetition or variation of the same theme in different discourses (informative or pseudo-informative, political or pseudo-political, scientific or pseudo-scientific, economic or pseudo-economic, neofolkloric and other trivial *paroles* of popular entertainment), and other techniques, were designed not to inform or enlighten but to instill a particular world view and value system, to inculcate a special state of mind, to arouse definite emotions. And they were extremely successful in achieving their goal. With the operationalization of the meticulously designed framework for the "data processing", that follows ideological binary logic, with Manichean polarization into the "good" and the "bad" paradigms (communist

repertoire being substituted this time by a nationalistic one), every piece of information was refracted through its prism, the "colors of the rainbow" now conveniently converted into a black-and-white projection. Without the controlled media it would have been extremely difficult to present abstract and distant ideas as "the people's will", or to achieve over a brief period of time such a rapid change of ethnic identities, "from a latent category to the eruption of nationalism that mobilized different identities against each other" (Denich 1993:52). By performing the assigned role the media indeed became highly instrumental in "forging war" throughout the former Yugoslavia (cf. Thompson 1995).

My intention is not, however, to confront and compare performances of different power and media centers. Instead, I am merely focusing on one such powerful center of ideological propaganda, the one in Belgrade that I had experienced first hand, which also happened to be the originator of the campaign soon to be followed, *mutatis mutandis*, by others (Ibid.:51ff). Its state-run media, and especially television, the omnipotent "magic box", were not only the sole reference for "politically correct" reasoning and behavior, but seem to have themselves been the very creators of life and thought. Nothing seemed to have really happened unless it had received proper media coverage. Many a time I have witnessed people hurrying home from an event they had actively participated in (a political rally, demonstration, signing a petition, etc.) to see its televised representation and find out what had "really happened". What counted were not the events as such, but their media reinterpretation.¹ And the media knew well how to take advantage of this mass "television addiction". Numerous events were deliberately staged so that their footage would impart a message favorable for *cosa nostra*, while those which were spontaneous, undesirable, or enacted by the opposition, were interpreted in a discrediting way. For the same scheme developed to distinguish the Nation and its Enemies - in the case of Serbia the latter category included almost the entire world population - was also applied "inside" the Nation, differentiating the True from the False, the "patriots" from the "traitors".

In such an atmosphere any public act or statement could have easily been abused in the "differentiating process" or in building "our case". That is why the invitation I received in a telephone call from a well-known

¹ The theme of the state-controlled media and ideological instigation was a popular cartoon topic in the independent and opposition press. For example, in the cartoon "Picture in picture" by Predrag Koraksić-Corax a man is represented seated comfortably in his armchair in front of the TV set, calmly watching a missile approaching a house. What he does not realize is that this time it is not happening somewhere else but that it is his own house that is about to be destroyed (Corax 1992, s.p.).

documentary film-maker - and I have no reason whatsoever to believe that his intentions were anything but genuine and sincere - not only startled me, but also started a train of thought about my own profession under new and ever so different circumstances. The gentleman in question was initiating a campaign by collecting signatures from individuals of "public esteem and merit" in support of a demand to exhume the victims of the World War II genocide from their unmarked burial place, located in some cave in the Krajina region, known only to the local population. The initiator believed that with the Communist conspiratorial, hushful policy about the past interethnic hostilities in the name of "brotherhood and unity" finally being over, it was time to undo the historic injustice, recognize the victims and give them a decent public religious funeral, and consequently turn the place into a shrine worthy of pilgrimage. Under different circumstances, the proposal would certainly deserve consideration. For, although some historic events may be temporally submerged, even erased from memory or reinterpreted to suit the current political and ideological goals, they never entirely vanish. They still remain as facts and there is always a possibility that they may hauntingly reappear in the future. After all, it would be a pledge to democracy and liberalism and a healthy, unburdened new start to deal with the "ghosts of the past"; to accept the responsibility for the horrendous deeds committed by one section of the population during war years, just as Chancellor Helmut Kohl had done in his speech celebrating the unification of Germany in 1990 (Marcrdis 1992:197). But, if it were to lead to a genuine act of forgiveness it would have to be initiated by the "guilty party", not demanded by the "victimized side". In addition, equally important, it would also require the readiness of the latter side to admit without reservations that civilians belonging to other ethnic groups did also fall victim to its own extremists, and to refrain from playing the "numbers game", considerably exaggerating its World War II losses as if realistic estimates were not bad enough. (Equally deceiving and pointless, of course, was the deliberate decreasing of the same numbers by the opposite side). Instead, its own losses, together with deliberate emphasis only on the history of conflicts and hostilities in the common overall historic experience, had become "the central theme of contemporary Serbian nationalism" (Djilas 1996:24).

On the other hand, a call for a religious ceremony in the given time frame and context had additional, similar connotations and therefore also advised caution. As soon as the pressure of public religious expression had been released, had not religious affiliations already been made instrumental in national homogenization processes, and religious differences exploited in demarcating ethnicities and arousing animosities

among them?² Seen from this perspective, the combination of Nation, victims, territories marked by graves and memories, tradition and religion, all part and parcel of traditional nationalism and corresponding building of collective ethnic identity, the proposal was all wrong.

In addition, my inviter informed me, as an intended flattery and a strong argument in favor of my consent, that my name had been chosen from so many candidates because I was an *ethnologist*, a *woman* and a *mother* (in fact, all the signatories were to be *women*). Paradoxically, although I had lived and worked in a socialist country, this was the very first time that I had been asked to perform a "public duty" because of my profession, and as incredible as it may sound, because of my gender and confirmed procreative capability. For, although it goes without saying that even under the former Yugoslav "soft" version of socialism, some restrictions imposed from "above" or resulting from self-censorship did apply to ethnological research as well (cf. Rihtman-Auguštin 1992:81–89),³ there were no strict directions to follow, or prescribed "duties to perform" outside those imposed by professional ethics. As in all other spheres of public life, the sole restriction was for "national science" to stay away from the taboo issues of ethnic nationalism. (Let us not forget the trouble some foreign researchers had to face during the 1970s, arousing suspicion simply because they worked in tri-ethnic regions such as Bosnia). This was the road to follow only if one desired to join the ranks of "dissidents", as many intellectuals and politicians were "labeled", some of whom were even prosecuted and expelled from the Party and fired

² Andrej Šimić has even quoted "two seemingly innocuous events" dating from the early 1980s - the appearance of the Holy Virgin near Međugorje, and, after almost half a century, continuance of the work on the completion of the St. Sava, the largest Eastern Orthodox Church in Europe, located in the center of Belgrade - as "portents of the future, harbingers of the current Yugoslav chaos" (Šimić 1993:16).

³ Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin focused her analysis on Croatian ethnology, but it is fair to say that many of her conclusions are also valid for ethnology/anthropology in Serbia, although they grew from different "schools" (the ethnology of Antun Radić as opposed to the folklore of V. Stefanović-Karadžić and the ethnogeography and mentality studies of Jovan Cvijić), and in some respects followed different research interests. For instance, contrary to Croatian ethnology, ethnogenesis was one of the popular topics in Serbia, but it was conceived as a replica of the Soviet ethnic theories which did not really help in illuminating either past or current ethnic processes. Actually, general theories were schematically applied to describe processes spanning centuries. These were no serious "ethnogenetic" empirical research conducted for decades after World War II. Therefore, I strongly agree with D. Rihtman-Auguštin's criticism and caution regarding such an approach to ethnic studies expressed in the same. In the mid-80s, however, when it became evident that ethnicity is not an antiquated category belonging to pre-modern times, but an important factor in current socio-political reality, researchers "rediscovered" ethnic studies as their *par excellence* domain. Western theories combined with extensive fieldwork are now the alternative orientation to the "old-style" ethnogenesis.

from their jobs and positions. Otherwise, in all fairness, ethnologists were free to pursue their chosen topics, theoretical orientations and research methods which resulted in pronounced eclecticism. This was especially true from the early 1970s on, when in the era of general liberalization and opening up of the country to various influences - the nationalism of the 70s was also a "child" of liberalism - there was a growing number of intellectuals of Marxist and other orientations, well informed about contemporary ideas, trends, movements and processes in the West, who in a remarkably open way articulated their knowledge as criticism of the existing social system. This was the rebellion of the "educated minority" against all "great totalitarian ideologies".

The younger generation of ethnologists, socialized and educated under very different circumstances from those that prevailed in the postwar years, began its own professional "emancipation" at about the same time by challenging practically everything within the scope of the traditional discipline. Influenced by western literature, contacts with foreign anthropologists and their work, and by other far more theoretically advanced social sciences in their own milieu,⁴ they could not have been satisfied with the atheoretical, atemporal description of the vague category of "folk", the quintessence of national ethnology. Instead, this more or less successfully self-reeducated generation chose to explore entirely new paradigms of research, theoretically grounded and focused on culture, its meanings and functions, processes, dynamics of change, on real life that could be experienced either first hand while conducting field work, or from the relevant sources dating from the relevant time period.⁵

⁴ Although many foreign anthropologists have conducted research in Serbia since World War II, the contacts established with domestic ethnologists never really exceeded casual collegial relations. Contrary to Croatia, there were no joint research projects or publications or any other forms of formal collaboration. The reason for this "parallel existence" with paths rarely crossing each other lies in the very wide gap that had existed between the two disciplines. Ethnologists, entrapped in the conservatism and traditionalism of their discipline still ruled by the XIX century Romanticism, were obsessed with the past and the necessity to register all those aspects of the "folk life", still believed to originate from "times immemorial", doomed to perish in face of the advent of modernization. Reconstruction of the image of idealized village life was the ultimate goal. Therefore, they were constantly and painstakingly in search of the new data confirming the old assumptions. Cultural and social processes that were evolving right before their eyes were only sporadically and partially of any interest to them. It was believed that such topics should be covered by sociology, while their role was to preserve the by-gones. It is no wonder then that foreign anthropologists relied more on their communication and collaboration with the sociologists than with the "old style" ethnologists (Prošić-Dvornić 1993:43–48).

⁵ The work of Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, her insightful research and discussions on contemporary culture, stressing that there are ethnologically relevant phenomena everywhere around us not only in pre-modern village life, her criticism of the cultural-

Confrontational attitudes about the "right way of doing ethnology", and discrepancies between these two orientations were so deep that they actually came to represent two different disciplines or subdisciplines, originating from two different socio-cultural, political and intellectual traditions, Central/Eastern European and Western, respectively (cf. e.g. Halpern, Hammel 1969): "archo-ethnology" (Sklevicky 1991), on the one side, and modern ethnology or cultural anthropology, on the other. The reason for renaming the Department of Ethnology into the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Belgrade in 1990 was conditioned by this duality of paradigms, the existence of which was in fact legitimized in this way.

This "revolution" within the discipline would not have been possible had there been any serious grip or control, which itself testifies to the existence of a considerable degree of intellectual freedom after the late 60s and early 70s. However, if a battle had been won and a truce signed inside the discipline, it still did not mean that modern ethnology was also victorious in the war for its affirmation, respect and influence in the society at large. The colloquial perception of ethnology as the "science about the folk"⁶ has barely changed (anthropology was more associated with literary criticism, sociology, psychology). Ethnologists were still seen as experts on the Folk, Tradition, and every single detail of antiquated village life. At the time of "national revival", "return to one's own roots" and "natural order", presented as the "remedy to all evils", ethnology could have experienced an inversion of its status. Its subject matter and its approach to traditional culture were regarded as irrelevant, impractical, archaic, anachronous, or "exotic" at best, by "progressive scientific socialism". The latter was hostile to all traditions existing before its advent to power, and prone to retrogressive reinterpretation of history as means of its own legitimization ("*avant nous le déluge*"). This resulted in ethnology's marginal both scientific and social positions, but could the re-inauguration of "national values" mean a privileged place for the old-style "folk science" as well? Its vast body of meticulous descriptions of customs,

-historical ethnology, and her careful reading and sharing of comments on literature not yet discovered at home, were quite influential and inspirational in Serbia as well.

⁶ The analysis of two independent sources of information, essays written by candidates for enrollment at the Department as part of their classifying exams, and responses to a poll taken from freshmen to senior year students, reveal that the majority of the candidates (73.7%) still bore the colloquial concept of ethnology and gave descriptive definitions enumerating topics covered by the discipline (customs and beliefs, magic, religion, folklore, kinship and social structure, material culture, origin and evolution of cultures, ethnic groups, nations, ethnic characteristics of communities). Later on their opinions change, become more elaborate, but they still reflect duality of orientations as well as some confusion as to the discipline's basic concepts (Prošić-Dvornić 1992:256, 261–262).

folklore, costumes, and all other aspects of folk culture, perceived as vitally important yet regrettably forgotten, could serve as a "repository" of cultural knowledge, as ready-made models of thought, behavior, even complete life styles that could be easily revitalized. More importantly, its knowledge of migrations, spatial ethnic distributions, ethnogenetic processes and ethnic history could provide proof and justification for the new border re-demarcation of the aspired, greater nation-state. And last but certainly not least, the key concepts on which the ethnological research paradigm is based, such as "*ethnos*" or "folk", "tradition", "ethno/national identity", were suddenly both sacred and common words abundantly used in everyday life, and heavily abused in politico-nationalistic ideological discourse.

One of the great advantages of these key concepts for propagandistic ends is that they are all very general, vague, polyvalent, fluid, and opaque notions, neutral in themselves yet often ideologized. However, these very qualities make them susceptible to numerous manipulations of their meanings outside of scientific discourse, by any social group or movement powerful enough to "pour" and force into acceptance their own myths and values as these notions' content, in the process of transposing them from abstract to more concrete ideas (cf. Hobsbawm 1990:6). The problem with this procedure is that these notions are never concretized in science and elsewhere, as they should be, as a series of transient historic realities materialized and valid in certain specific time-space frameworks, and as the expression of a particular *Zeitgeist*. An example would be the meaning of the *Volk* in German Romanticism and its subsequent transformations, or definition of ethnicity as a static primordial and "divine" category, as opposed to its perception as a dynamic, contextualized process, etc. Instead, they represent an ideological construction built on a biased selection of elements from the entirety in question and proclaimed to be ultimate truths. In addition, they can all be easily emotionally charged and triggered off to produce the desired mood.

This new Truth, combining all these notions and others of the same order, was the Truth of the new wave of nationalism (or chauvinistic nationalism). As an ideology, it represents a continuation of past nationalistic movements, specifically, in the case of Serbia, of traditional nationalism "that sought its source in the past and was portrayed as a natural phenomenon, not an act of political will" (Marcrdis 1992:196). The latter was the case with liberal nationalism responsible for nationally heterogeneous *Grossstatenbildung* motivated by economic profitability. The former, to the contrary, in the Rousseauistic and Herderian manner, stresses the emotional and spiritual unity of the community of people - the

existence of which is willed by God, and hence of divine origin - who share the same ancestors (blood ties), religion, language, cultural tradition, historic experience, territory. According to the same ideology, each of these traits is worthy of living or dying for, and their protection, for the sake of the entity's well-being without which there is no individual, is the sacred duty of every member of the community. In times of overwhelming crises and pending total disaster, or of attempts to recover what had been formerly lost, or, rephrased, of aspired expansionism and subsequent unification, the notion may become arrogantly extreme and militant, demanding maximal gains. The desired territories become all those lands that used to be conquered by the state at the most glorious periods of its history. Also included are those territories in its vicinity inhabited by the Nation's emigrants and where they have been or still are the majority, the evidence of which is the existence of their graves, other cultural remains and memories (historic and ethnic claims combined and condensed in the latest slogan "All Serbs in a single state"). As a concession to boosting confidence and morale - much needed in depressing times of crises - the entity is further presented not as an equal but as superior to all others which are, in addition, blamed for all wrongs within the Nation. Their recognition as "sinful and evil" justifies their destruction, and ultimately, a "healthy" Nation, is an "ethnically clean" Nation.

Once the notion of Nation (ethnicity, folk, ethnic identity) was chosen, the content of Tradition was also "filled" accordingly. Again, borrowing from the previous phase of nation-building (that of the XIX century) and its profusive patriotic rhetoric and extensive mythology - there were in fact ready-made templates that could be reactivated. They centered around the elaborate (in terms of general ideology, eschatology, ethics, motivation, role models, etc.), sacred but also rather macabre legend of the Battle of Kosovo, that was transmitted in folkloric form from one generation to another, even during the socialist period, in private if not to the fullest in the public sphere (cf. Popović 1976; Trebješnjanić 1989:113–117; Čolović 1993:93ff.). Yet Tradition was still very different in form, content and especially context. For, this time, the scheme was further reduced, mythologized, neofolklorized, emphasizing primarily the heroic patriarchal ethos, and as a net result, bringing about reactionary archaism, megalomania, xenophobia, isolationism and violence (war subculture) as the predominating components of world view (Dragičević-Šešić 1994:183ff; Prošić-Dvornić 1996). In this newly evaluated, reconstructed instrumentalized and "retouched" version of Tradition, all its other faces opposing or denying its simplistic nature, were, naturally, erased. There was no mention of the constant and tenacious struggle for

democracy, modernization, cosmopolitanism, a respectable place in the family of nations, all simultaneously existing during the XIX century, as opposed to populism (*narodnjaštvo*), of high culture following the trends of the epoch, or emancipated urban ways contrasting the patriarchal model. Even the once highly favored ideas of Yugoslavism were now pinned to someone else, again as an act of conspiracy against the Serbian being. The multi-national unity within a democratic federation, that counter-balanced the idea of Greater Serbia, resurrected again after the dream of restoring a communist, Yugoslavia centralized and dominated by a Serbian leader had turned into a nightmare. And finally, the international political context was very different. While ideas of creating greater states (irredentism) were flourishing in many parts of XIX century Europe, today's rules of the game have considerably changed. In contemporary Europe after the fall of Communism, guided by ethnonationalism, the Wilsonian principle of self-determination and statehood is being applied there where it had left off after the World War I and the breakdown of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. Germany being the only exception, all other new states were created through separatism (multiplication of number instead of aggrandizement of the few), and although there were demands for border changes, only former interior demarcations have been recognized and legalized by the international community. Where that had not been the case, the answer was war for "blood and territory".

It is not hard to deduce why this particular and extremely powerful ideology, state-run and populist at the same time, was chosen as a response to the overwhelming crisis in Serbia at the end of the century. From the regime's point of view it provided more advantages than it entailed dangers. The atemporal mythical model of thought and action, based on stereotypes, clichés and prejudices, which shifted politics into myth and history, into "Tradition", simple, comprehensive, and compensating for the deficiencies of reality, was spread like a net over the reigning chaos creating the illusion of ordered world. The group and its leader, potent enough to create such an illusion, no matter how temporary, could also hope for its quick legitimization and mass homogenization loyally and unconditionally to back its goals. From the totalitarian point of view, substituting nationalist ideology for that of class, was also an advantage. For again it was based on collective identity, demanding sacrifice "from all for all", which conveniently meant that all individual interests and civil rights could be indefinitely postponed. Anyone asking for them was nothing but a traitor. And finally, nationalism proved to be extremely instrumental in pivoting into calmer, controllable waters serious social discontent and protest of the mid-80s which demanded radical reforms

and even entire change of the system. The ambivalent features of the "anti-bureaucratic" revolution, social and nationalist at the same time, again staged "from above" by the victorious faction of the Communist (later renamed the Socialist) Party of Serbia in response to the unrest "from below", were the liminal phase of the political ritual, designed to *prevent* change of the system and its ruling nomenclature, rather than promote its transition. Nationalism also proved to be a "smart choice" as a medium for ideological persuasion. In addition to all the mentioned advantages, among a people restricted or forbidden from expressing national cultural identity and "remembering" its history during socialism proper, it appeared to be a substantiation of regained freedom.

Within the given framework, read from the only appropriate nationalistic key, the invitation I have received reveals its full meaning. Not only as a professional dealing with ethnicity, national identity and traditional cultural content, but also as a mother, my public appeal for a duty to be performed would additionally invest the proposal with ostensible authority. My participation as an ethnologist would verify the legitimacy of the concepts and deeds, and my *personal* and *private* identities, all of a sudden turned into a *public* issue, mingled and juxtaposed in a novel and uncomfortable way stemming from nationalistic and patriarchal world view and definition of gender roles, would also be there to prove a point. The subordinate female was expected anew unconditionally to support the system by performing her traditional roles and duties, this time additionally justified as being for the good of the Nation (cf. A. Milić 1994): looking after the home and family, bearing and raising children, especially sons, caring for the weak, the sick, the old, and the dead (public grief and private bereavement, as well as the funeral and post funeral rituals in Serbian traditional culture are, *par excellence*, the woman's domain) or, in specific situations for the wounded, refugees and orphans of war. In other words, her public duty was seen as the extension of her traditional private domain. As a match to the heroic men of her culture, she also had to be brave, and ready for sacrifice and suffering as part of her destiny, for no price is high to pay for the Fatherland, for the defense of its sacred soil.⁷

⁷ Contrary to these pathetic proclamations presented as "recipes" for good behavior (several role models were created and media-promoted - woman-mother, woman-warrior, etc.), women and their real sufferings in life have been terribly abused and manipulated, as for example, the politicization of the rape issue (it is always Our women who are raped, and the rapists are always from Their ranks). Instances of domestic violence, tremendously increasing since the beginning of the war, were, on the other hand, conveniently hushed up. Equally hypocritical was the changed attitude towards a woman's autonomous right to bear or not to bear a child. As a consequence of the monstrous conviction that all problems would be easier to solve if the nation exhibited

The irony was that when the subjects covered by ethnology finally received publicity, bringing it out of decades long anonymity, it could not feel triumphant and rejoice in the fact, but rather had to face new challenges. Could it afford to stay neutral at a time of aggressive politicking of its basic concepts, mutilated by reduction, oversimplification and tendentious interpretation, although engaging in polemics would mean consenting to the "double register" discussion: politico-propagandistic as opposed to scientific discourse? At times of roaring passion, the calm voice of reason would only fall on deaf ears. Basically it had two choices. It could again chose to refrain from studying the actual processes that could be witnessed by participant observation and dedicate itself to the research of some "neutral" topics from the past (e.g. types of footwear or pottery, or spring ritual cycle in some localized area). Thus, it could hope to avoid either a confrontational or apologetic relation with the authorities (now, after the new wave of etatism, also acting as employers and financiers). The other and only option, according to the majority, was to "take arms against the sea of trouble" and meticulously monitor, register and interpret the current phenomena and ongoing processes. Ethnology could finally take the responsibility of making a positive contribution by informing the community about itself in a critical, unbiased way. And reliable information is the only sound substance that can counter-balance the euphoric warmongering in the name of Nation and Tradition, and fill in the void that will be left after yet another ideology is used up.

Serious research, theoretically founded and based on reliable sources of information, should continue to be simultaneously conducted at different time segments. The only way to demystify vague concepts liable to ideologization, and hence to manipulation and instrumentalization, is to fill them in with real, historically datable, and spatially defined contents from relevant time periods. Instead of reconstructing timeless images of

sufficient biological growth, increase in natality has become a deep concern of the "conscious" part of the society. At inordinate times even outrageous proposals for the birth rate increase can receive public attention. Namely, the well-known artist, Milić Stanković (od Mačve), a "genuine" nationalist from the early 1960s, then pleading for "national artistic expression" and now also a mystic, poet (he authored versed "Curse of America"), activist (his latest endeavor is the Committee for the Defense of Serbs from the Hague Tribunal), not only supports "natality policy" but also claims that he has discovered a formula which enables even women well beyond menopause to have children. "I estimated that in five-and-a half years, in three cycles of mass procreation, we could have a 7.5 million population increase... After that... we will need a greater territory to live on, and here is our chance to regain the land seized from us by the Atlantic Pact (NIN, Weekly Informative Magazine, no. 2377, June 17, '96, 19). The same artist has ventured into ethnogenetic analyses. According to his theory, Serbs (Sorabs) originate from the Central Danubian Plain and the Balkans, and they represent the initial tribe from which all others have stemmed. They are the Navel of the Planet, The Poker of the World, *Catena Mundi!*

the idealized past, efforts should be directed towards unveiling inserts of real life, constantly experiencing, besides the processes of long duration, those of discontinuity and transition, of conflict and anxiety, along with harmony and security. Paradoxically, the old-style ethnology has created its picture of ideal village life based mainly on the material dating from the latter half of the XIX and the first half of the XX centuries, the time span characterized by intensive, radical and rapid transformations, which did indeed deeply affect the peasants as well (formation of the independent nation-state, market economy, property laws, taxation, political divisions, national liberation wars, compulsory schooling, etc.). Ethnology is therefore obliged not only to reinterpret and contextualize the collected data, but also to reveal its own past ideological delusions (Romanticism, populism, nationalism), not as deliberate manipulations but as the reflection of socialization under specific *Zeitgeist*.

The historical anthropological studies that I am pleading for, are however, only one side of the coin. The other is reserved for the research of the complex present. All of Eastern Europe, and the Balkans in particular, have recently become a living laboratory offering what is probably an unprecedented plenitude of topics for anthropological investigation. Living and observing under present conditions also has a retroactive benefit: it helps one to realize the full complexity of processes in the past as well, and to reformulate questions and focus attention on a wider variety of events while rereading historic sources. On the other hand, knowledge of past activities or similar processes in other socio-cultural systems, as a "control sample", provides better insights into current events and enables a researcher to detect a pattern within the overwhelming, speedily evolving reality. However, it is also true that many of these events can be "perceived, traced and interpreted only afterwards" (Rihtman-Auguštin 1992a:41).

In the meantime, the work of observing and data collecting has to be seriously undertaken. Of course every ethnologist/anthropologist will find his/her own topic and angle of perception, but some themes seem to impose themselves, demanding thorough and urgent attention. National/ethnic identity, with its radical change over the past decade, is certainly one of them. How was such a change involving intolerance, intense hatred, the urge for destruction, proneness to atrocious behavior, at all possible? Was it because the "historic animosities" that have been kept firmly under cover during authoritarian socialist rule had gained extraordinary power while latent and then exploded with unpredictable force once the grip was released? Was it the necessary by-product of democratization, or did it, to the contrary, erupt because of its very lack or fragility in the early phases? Personally, I am more inclined to believe that

national indoctrination of the particular type, together with its Manichean world view and the perception and acceptance of The Leader as an all-mighty patriarch, was successful at least not only because of the power of the newly released ethnic sentiments, but rather because of the continuation and persistence of thinking within the framework of binary logic (cf. Benovska-Subkova 1995:173). Not only can the dichotomization into WE (positive ascription - divination) and THEY (negative description - demonization) be attributed to the traditional (magico-religious) way of thinking, but also to conspiratorial communist ideology. In other words, the minds of the recipients were conditioned over the last fifty years to ideological, ready-made, simplified explanations. The aftereffect of conforming to the paternalistic attitudes is social (political, economic) infantilism: "suppression of each spontaneous initiative of the individual who thereby becomes incapable of independent action expecting someone else to take over the care and responsibility for him" (Ibid.:166). If such were the case, there would be no simpler and more effective procedure than to substitute one ideology for another.

Building-up (or reconfirming) ethnic identity and ethnic boundaries in interaction with other such groups, and transposing politico-socio-economic claims into ethnic grievances is a self-evident process calling for close anthropological monitoring. However, inter-ethnic relations among Serbs from different parts of the former Yugoslavia also deserve full attention. Are they really one ethnic group with the same aspirations and loyalties, ready to live in one state, or do they not only considerably differ from one another but also exhibit opposing, confrontational views? We know of the adaptation problems the "colonists" experienced after moving from the Dinaric regions to Serbia Proper and its former autonomous provinces. We are also aware of the cultural differences that caused misunderstandings in the past, and that the "autochthonous" population was often resentful because of the colonists' privileges and aggressive imposition of their own ways. The Serbs from Bosnia have expressed their disgust with the people from Serbia because of their reluctant attitudes towards fighting the war for the Fatherland (failed mobilizations etc.). As for the authorities, while the Serbs in the diaspora were very "*bons à énumérer*", they were not as welcome once they had changed their status to refugees in the homeland.

The economy and social structure represent further realms of interest for anthropological research. After all, a total collapse of the economy does not happen all that often in history. We have seen the thriving of the black market, the gray economy, criminalization of export-import trading brought about by both external (UN Security Council Resolution 757 on Yugoslavia) and internal sanctions, war profiteering, but

also state executed "relocation of resources", to put it euphemistically, through a series of machinations. The prolonged period of shortages and deprivation, followed by pathological social stratification, were also favorable for the novel wave of flourishing of alternative social structures based on ascriptive and personal relationships, and the accompanying forms of traditional reciprocity, as an existential necessity. Ethnologists can not even complain that their "classic topics" have disappeared from life, or that the study of everyday living has lost its attraction.

And finally, there is still one key concept left to be filled with proper meaning: the notion of "Folk". If the notion is to apply to the majority of the population, the vast category of peasant-urbanites who had flooded the cities after World War II, as well as that of partially urbanized villagers - a blend between the neofolkloric adherents and *hommo sovieticus* ("passivity, waiting for state handouts, loose labor discipline, little respect for the law, etc." - Mokrzycki 1992:134) - can we really claim that we understand them, that we are truly familiar with their value systems and that we can predict their actions? While in the past, professionals have exhausted their interest by either rebuking their culture as a "distortion, degradation and contamination of the 'pure' traditional culture", or by generously recognizing its existence guided by the postmodern appraisal of the "different", they have grown into a powerful and numerous group that has overwhelmed all other cultural (social, political) expressions. For, it was "the folk" that was most susceptible to "nationalization", most eager to promote and celebrate the new reality, as well as to turn ideas into deeds and to gain profits out of its "kitsch patriotism" (cf. M. Dragičević-Šešić 183–207).

Although the field is so rich for anthropological investigation and for insightful learning about so many important issues, it should not be expected, contrary to sociology or psychology, to provide practical solutions to specific problems. An anthropologist/ethnologist is not really fit to perform "*le rôle du conseiller du prince*"; being "*le fou du roi*" is more in his line. If he/she cannot offer readily applicable expertise to particularities, he/she, a student of myth and symbol, more than compensates that deficiency by being able to unveil the myths and power invested in authorities. "*Pour l'éthnologie, en définitive, le défi de l'indépendance n'est que celui de son existence*" (Gossiaux 1992:220). Therefore, there is no reason whatsoever for ethnologists to feel "powerless" because they have not been - but for a few examples - consulted in designing and carrying out national(istic) propaganda, or actively participated as "applied ethnologists" in solving current problems. Their "power" actually stems from that very abstinence.

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REKONSTRUKCIJA IDENTITETA I ULOGA NACIONALNE ETNOLOGIJE: PROMATRANJE IZDALEKA ILI AKTIVNO SUDJELOVANJE

SAŽETAK

Pojavom nacionalističke i militantne propagande u Srbiji, u doba dok je još bila jedna od republika bivše Jugoslavije, počeo je i proces rekonstrukcije skupnog, a i individualnih identiteta. Vođen novom totalitarističkom ideologijom, ovoga puta nacionalističkoga podrijetla, do krajnosti posvemašnje i isključive, a propagirane od istih ljudi koji su prethodno bili odani komunističkoj doktrini, proces je bio sveobuhvatan i agresivan, lišen ikakve snošljivosti ili razumijevanja drukčijega. Etnologija, začeta prije jednoga stoljeća i otad čuvana barem od nekih svojih "učenika", stavljena je kao nacionalna disciplina pred novi izazov. Bi li trebala slijediti svoju vlastitu tradiciju sudjelovanja u stvaranju nacije, ovaj puta prema pravilima koje donosi trenutni poredak, ili bi umjesto toga trebala imati hrabrosti "plivati uz rijeku" i promatrati, bilježiti i interpretirati procese u tijeku s položaja "neutralne znanosti"? Za one koji nisu morali ponijeti teret svoje vlastite ideologizirane struke ili rada u totalitarističkome okružju ovo nikako neće predstavljati dvojbu stoga što bi za njih posljednji izbor bio i jedini. Međutim, u doba euforije kad je sve polarizirano između krajnosti, "rodoljublja" i "izdaje", izbor se može učiniti mnogo složenijim. Autorica na osnovi vlastitoga iskustva još jednom promišlja ulogu etnologije/antropologije u vremenima kad se od nje očekuje da preuzme riječ.