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## Cultural Identity vs. Democracy/Mondialisation

**Abstract:** This text is designed as an introduction to the examination processes and practices that allow us to picture the contemporary system of national states as 'a family of nations'. This imagined international community is not some supranational or cosmopolitan world; on the contrary, it is an international world, a world in which a global connectedness is understood as something constituted by the inter-relations between the individual nations.

**Key words:** identity, nationalism, culture, politics, border/s

There is a prevailing opinion nowadays that processes, such as globalization and mondialisation (and the process of Europeanization – according to some, nothing else but one of the derivatives of these processes), will gradually help delete cultures as national identities. It has been also confirmed by some authorities<sup>1</sup>

that instead of having a homogenization of national cultures, we are constantly faced with a re-composition of “national cultures through the reproduction of the

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<sup>1</sup> I refer above all to the collection of texts, *Identity (ies), Individual, Group, Society* prepared by Halpern and Ruano-Borbalan (Belgrade: Clio, 2009), above all the text by Jean- Claude Ruano-Borbalan, “Creation of the Identity”, (5-16). In this text the author defines national identity as ‘making up’, a political strategy that can be directed against mondialisation and cosmopolitanism (he takes France as his example). At the same time, national identity can be the ideological ‘cover’ for different types of conflicts. In light of this, identities are not tradition and mentality; rather, they are exclusively

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the political strategies built by recent history, rationally managed by skillful actors on the political scene. These, in turn, activate them depending on the circumstances, and with a singular aim – to satisfy their (particular) interests. The thesis Todorova is quite intriguing, above all the notion to examine what we see these days in the Balkans in a geographical sense (the disappearance of the last traces of the empires’ heritage, the ethnic varieties, and the co-existence substituted by ethnically homogenous institutional units). It might be due to the Europeanization of this region, namely that it has come belatedly, and how it signals the end of the Balkans in the historical sense of the word. For further details see, Todorova, “Šta je istorijski region? – Premeravanje prostora u Evropi”, *Reč*, br. 73/2005: 81-96.

elements coming from the outside world” (J.F. Bayart, 2009: 384).

There are a few examples confirm that the things considered to be the autochthonous elements of a national culture (such as tea in the English national tradition, coffee in the Italian one or paprika in the Macedonian culture) are actually only ‘borrowed’ from some other culture/s. In that sense, we should read again Benedict Anderson, who saw identity as a ‘made up community’, or Cornelius Castoriadis, who sees nothing universal and/or constant in the interaction between the members of one society. In this interaction, Castoriadis recognizes, above all, the influence of social imagination.<sup>2</sup>

It is not wise to talk about the ‘eternity’ of national cultures, for this so-called ‘eternity’ is not older than the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the movement of cultural closure actually started, something which is in accordance with the ‘making up of tradition’ or, in other words, with the “tendency to reuse – instrumental or unconscious – fragments of the phantasmagoric past. This making up of tradition is not an anecdote process: it should have followed the social, political and cultural changes and the formation of the modern

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<sup>2</sup> Compare Anderson’s, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1991), and Castoriadis’s, *L’Institution imaginaire de la société* (Seoul, 1999). A similar point of view is also presented by Carpintero in his “Bolest našeg vremena: fragmentacija kolektivnih identiteta” (br.1-2/2006: 65-71). Namely, he thinks that it is very important to study carefully the power of fantasy and imagination in political life. Thus, politics seems to be, in our subjectivity, the field of contradiction, and conflicts and their consequences can be seen in the construction of the identity of the individual and the group.

state in the West, and later on, in some other parts of the world, as well. In England, for example, the exaggerated royal ritual was affirmed later on, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (386).

This making up of tradition<sup>3</sup> is also common for other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and it is mostly connected with the so-called national renaissance movements, typical for the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The thing in common for all of these ‘made-up traditions’ is a (successful) attempt undertaken by intellectuals-nationalists in order to create national identities deeply rooted in the now reshaped national cultures. “In order to do that they codified their traditions in a miniscule way,<sup>5</sup> namely the quite unusual folk arts,

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<sup>3</sup> Compare Hobsbawm’s “Uvod: kako se tradicije izmišljaju”, in *Izmišljanje tradicije*, edited by E. Hobsbawm and T. Renger (Belgrade, 2002: 5-25).

<sup>4</sup> Concerning Croatian national identity, see Ivana Žužul’s “Uloga tekstova hrvatskog narodnog preporoda u tvorbi nacionalnog identiteta”, Doctoral Dissertation (Zagreb, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> The Macedonian writer Kocho Racin refers in the same way to the Macedonian folk tradition. In my earlier texts about Racin, I took into consideration these relations, but at that ideological time was not brave enough to say that Racin was a par excellence Macedonian nationalist, for he was more than aware that only the modification of national tradition/culture may create the prerequisites for having it [national culture] closely connected to ethnicity, thus finally usher the awakening of national consciousness. These procedures of self-deceit and self-distortion are, according to Ernest Gellner, the unavoidable components of nationalism in the substitution of existing cultures with some high cultures: “Nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases the totality, of the population (...) Nationalism usually conquers in the name of a putative folk culture. Its symbolism is drawn from the healthy, pristine, vigorous life of the peasants, of the *Volk*, the *narod*. There is a certain element of truth in the nationalist

and thus confirmed their national character. This 'construction work' was also made due to the efforts to produce a standard language. At that period of the time, languages were elevated to the level of national languages, for language is an external and visible badge of those differences which distinguish one nation from another; it is the most important criterion by which a nation is recognized to exist, and thus has the right to form a state of its own (remark by Z.K.) Many national ideologists were in fact linguists.<sup>6</sup> This pro-

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self-presentation when the *narod* or *Volk* is ruled by officials of other, an alien high culture, whose oppression must be resisted first by a cultural revival and reaffirmation, and eventually by a war of national liberation. If the nationalism prospers it eliminates the alien high culture, but it does not then replace it by the old local low culture; it revives, or reinvents a local (literate, specialist-transmitted) culture of its own, though admittedly one which will have some links with the earlier local folk styles and dialects." (2006: 56).

<sup>6</sup> Elie Kedouire speaks about language as a necessary prerequisite for ethnicity: "The test, then, by which a nation is known to exist is that of language. A group speaking the same language is known as a nation, and a nation ought to constitute a state. It is not merely that a group of people speaking a certain language may claim the right to preserve its language; rather, such a group, which is a nation, will cease to be one (...); rather, such a group, which is nation, will cease to be one if it is not constituted into a state. Then says Fichte, 'it is bound to give up its language; and to coalesce with its conquerors, in order that there may be unity and internal peace and complete oblivion of relationships which no longer exist'. Such a group, absorbed in a foreign state, is doomed to death; its members become, in Fichte's eloquent metaphors, an appendix to the life which bestirred itself of its own accord before them or beside them; they are an echo resounding from the rock, an echo of a voice already silent; they are, considered as a people, outside the original people, and to the latter they are strangers and foreigners. Again, if a nation is a group of people speaking the same language, then the political frontiers separate the members of

cess which started at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have the tendency of strengthening up on the eve of the First World War, and continue in the period between the two [World] wars. It would reach its highest point of perfection during Stalinism [without this phenomena it is not possible to discuss seriously the genesis of Macedonian culture and identity – my remark]. It is quite often forgotten that Stalinism played a key role in the creation of 'national' cultures in Eastern Europe, and within the Soviet Union, based on a systematic evaluation of folklore's culture elements. Parallel to this process, the social groups retroactively react to this 'construction work' on the basis of their own values, their own cultures (...) The creation of national identities is inseparable from their 'formation' [Bayart borrows this distinction between creation and formation from two Kenyan historians from Kenya, Berman and Lonsdale. When they talk about creation, they refer to the conscious creation of the apparatus of political control by one social class or political party; and when they talk about formation, they refer to conflict, an unintentional and very unconscious process that leads to disorder, conflicts and compromises

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such a group, these frontiers are arbitrary, unnatural, unjust" (1993: 62). This homogenization of language is typical for all European countries, for this process represents a significant prerequisite for the realization of the nation as a social and cultural unit. "This process of language creation is connected with the phenomenon of national rights seeking, and it continues even today. It is precisely in action in new countries created after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia (the differences between the Serbian and Croatian language, which was formed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by erudites, as unique, and written in two alphabets, the proclamation of Macedonian as a national language different from Bulgarian) (Thiesse, 2009: 337).

where there are many no-name individuals – my remark]. This distinction is perfectly in accordance with the creation of national identity. At the same time, they are the result of the creation made through the dominant groups, or through the phases of social rise and formation, differently speaking, of complete alchemy formed in society.” (386-387). [When we talk about the Macedonian case, we refer to, above all, the prevailing influence of the Communist party, through different national prefixes, in different periods of time and in relation to other political ideas. One part of this creation process of the Macedonian national identity came to a close with the end of the Second World War, but all of the creation processes were not brought to a definite end. The 1990 showed that in the best possible way, for there were, besides the Communist tradition, some other traditions that were very alive and active, and had waited patiently for a favorable historic moment to become politically confirmed, socially established, and thus institutionalized, since belonging only to one’s own nation, during those years, had created favorable conditions for certain political formations, which until then had not participated in government, in order to win elections – my remark]. These demolition processes of one identity paradigm and the creation of another, new one, mark the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the region of ex-Yugoslavia. “Identity/identities is/are not a constant category; they are the result of cultural, political and ideological creation, namely, they are historical constructions. They stand for ‘identity strategy’, for rationally led actors that might be identified: the Serbian communist apparatus who transformed into ultranationalists (...), and iden-

tity dreams or nightmares that we are coming close to for we are enchanted or terrorized by them“ (388).

At the end of the 1980s, it was crucial to be ‘authentic’ in the region; and to be authentic meant to be quite different from the neighboring cultures. Everything that was significantly different had to be in every way possible, even the most radical one, excluded and eliminated, removed from his or her own self: everything different was considered to be the threat to our ‘authenticity’ – no one/the foreigner/the enemy had right to bring our borders into question. The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth wrote about the importance of borders. In the text “Ethnic Groups and their Borders” he showed that definitions and the borders of ethnical communities were built and renewed through the constant interaction between the different groups, and in accordance with the logic of inclusion/exclusion.

The well-known peace agreement in Bucharest in 1913 had the function to create new borders within the same national corpus; but with the re-mapping of these new borders within the same national unit nothing could be the same again – Krste Petkov Misirkov was more than aware of this fact and its far-reaching consequences. In some of his texts he almost anticipated the findings of the 1969 study by Barth. It is clear to Misirkov that the creation of new borders would cause a change in the political and other behavior of the involved individuals and groups. He was also aware of the fact that identity is one constant process: “(...) culture is not something that is given, it is a result with different contents. The ethnic group is not an entity by itself, it is one form of the organization

recognized by the contrasts between the cultural attributes and the crosswise expressions of the groups people belong to. Despite the etymology of the word 'identity', there is nothing introspective about the fact that such qualified social relations are defined by the connection of the same things. Quite the contrary, consciousness about one's own self is not separate from the mirror that reflects the stranger" (Formoso, 2009: 301, my own translation).

If we read the idea of nationalism from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, and if we follow the idea of the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, then we can say that national identification is "supported by the definition that the Nation is referred to as the Thing. This Nation-Thing relation is characterized by several contradictions. It is showed to us as 'our thing' [we might even say the *Cosa Nostra*], as something that is available only to/for us, as something that 'others' cannot reach. But, it is something that 'they' constantly endanger. It is something that gives our lives their fullness and strength, but the only way to define it is to search for different versions of the same empty tautology – the only thing that we might finally say about the Thing is that it is 'the real thing', 'the thing that it is about', etc. If they ask us how we can recognize the presence of the Thing, the only answer is that the Thing is present in an elusive entity called 'our way of life'. The only thing that we can do is list the fragments of ways our community organizes its activities, weddings, initiation celebrations – or in other words, all these details that make the community and its way of living visible" (1996: 11, my translation in English). Žižek provides a key argument since he questions

the deconstructive reading of nations as pure discursive constructions: "the pure discursive consequence doesn't have sufficient 'substance' in order to make the goal attractive. The only Lacanian term for this strange 'substance' that should be added if we want the goal to have its positive ontological consistency is substance as recognized by psychoanalysis – the pleasure (as it is unambiguously stated in *Encore* by Lacan). The nation exists as long as its specific pleasure is materialized into several social procedures and transferred through national myths that make the structure of these procedures. This deconstructionist pointing out, that the Nation is not a biological or a trans-historic fact but an invisible discursive construction, an over-determined result of textual procedures, is wrong: this pointing out does not take into consideration the real, un-discursive core of pleasure that simply must exist, so that the Nation as a discursive entity-consequence can reach its ontological consistency. (...) Nationalism represents the privileged area, whereas pleasure has been moved to the social area. Eventually, the national goal is nothing else but a way for the subject of a certain ethnic community organizes its own pleasure through the national myths" (1996: 13, my own translation).

Taking this into account, the nation is not only a language formation; it is also determined by the unseen/shown, non-language core of pleasure. This approach makes it easier to understand all the political and other social events in the 1980s – Yugoslavia disintegrated, amongst other things, at the moment when no community member could enjoy its myths any more: the myth of eternal 'brotherhood and equality'

of its distinct nations, the myth of the absolute moral purity of the National- Liberation War, the myth of the wisdom of the Party and its leader Josip Broz. Myths do not die because of their 'age'; they die but because there is no one left who feels the need to repeat them from time to time. And when there is no need to repeat a myth, it means that there is no pleasure in the ritual any more, that there isn't any more an 'emotionally influenced brotherhood'. If it [the myth] still exists, then these symbolic/ritual types of nationalism affect the feeling of individual identity. On the one hand, it will enliven the ethnic relations and ethnic identification, whereas, on the other hand, it will keep the memory of 'the ancestors' and fallen soldiers in every generation of the community.

Some earlier texts<sup>7</sup> showed that in 'made-up communities', and in the process of making up traditions we should not a priori possess exclusively negative connotations; these processes should not necessarily end up in the totalitarianism. (It does not mean that we were not aware of how nationalism in many cases

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<sup>7</sup> See my text "The Construction of Identity in Croatian and Macedonian Literature (examples from the novels by Jergović and Avirović)". In this text, I tried to refute the prevalent thesis of many Croatian theorists who are trying in every possible way to prove that the manifestation of the postmodern registering of identity in the texture of the imagined super community, Yugoslavia, is/was in every respect superior compared to the registering of (Croatian) identity, which does not tend to see any advantage of registering in some super community, even though it was imagined as part of a project about a 'common future'. However, all these theoretical concepts leave out the following, namely that this allegedly superior project of a 'common future' had its 'formative prehistory', which clearly shows that all participants in this project were not particularly delighted with all of its solutions right from the start.

pointed out the differences and created artificial obstacles for a common understanding, and that way, created the prerequisites for xenophobic feelings.<sup>8</sup> Taking into consideration Anthony D. Smith's postulates, we need to reflect on some of the effects of nationalism, such as: the defense of minority cultures, the protection of a lost tradition, the inspiration for a cultural renaissance, the salvation of the identity crisis, the creation of social solidarity, the resistance to the pressures of national sovereignty). All 'searches for identity', including those overtly nationalistic, are legitimate searches, and all these theoretical approaches, which in a somewhat naive way present the view that among these identity searches there are civilization differences, opting for one in favor the other, are wide of the mark. Ostensibly, my own political and theoretical life is marked by the movements in the imagological field of the idea of Yugoslavia, embodied in the texts and ideas of Josip Juraj Strossmayer and Miroslav Krleža. At the same time, at a certain historic moment, I also had nothing against the realization of my own theoretical projections and political preferences in that imagological field, determined by the Croato-centric idea. It is the idea that, amongst other things, represents the main determination of the

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<sup>8</sup> In his book *Eseji o Europi*, (parts from *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe*, 2005, published in Zagreb, 2008) Habermas warns us one more time about that which may lead the one nation idea (of its one folk interpretation) to a destructive exclusiveness, to the excommunication of the Reich's enemies and the persecutions of Jews, but if this idea is viewed through the prism of cultural interpretation, then we will see how it has contributed to the creation of a lasting relationship between individuals who previously were only strangers.

literary texts written by Antun Gustav Matoš and the political texts (re)constructed by Ante Starčević.

It is necessary to say that ethnocentrism in the 1980s did not enter the social vernacular as a well-developed and explicit ideology; it was, at that time, more of an implicit than an explicit concept with significant oscillations. No matter all these variable characteristics it had an unquestionable influence on the construction and reconstruction of the national identity in the former Yugoslav state. Furthermore, we should not ignore one important fact: the overall conceptual closeness between Communism and Nationalism: “both ideologies give to empirically non-existing groups the title of main subjects in the community” (Dimitrijević, 2000: 47, my translation).

As the matter of fact, I agree with Liah Greenfeld, who thinks that the time of nationalism is not over, namely that we are entering the phase of neo-nationalism, and that the process of Europeanization, no matter how hard it tries, cannot stop neo-nationalism in its tracks. Finally, there are many theoreticians (like Maria Todorova) who in these new processes of

homogenization and institutionalization of the ethnic communities in ex-Yugoslavia recognize European processes par excellence. This thesis of theirs might sound like a paradox, but the creation of some new borders may also create such political power that can overcome these same borders. In order to have it happen, Jürgen Habermas suggests the development of the political public and the common political culture throughout Europe. “Such communicational context, above the borders of national communities, may in turn create the idea of a common belonging as a result of common interests. (...) collective identities are in most cases, created, not found. But, they should not create just the unity of heterogenic individuals. Among the citizens of the same society/community everyone is the other one, and everyone has the right to stay the other one.” (Habermas, 2008: 26).

**NB. For the purposes of this paper, the author has been working with his own English translation of those sources which insofar have not been published in English.**

## Literature:

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**Златко Крамарик**

## Културниот идентитет наспроти демократијата/ мондиализацијата

Текстот е дизајниран како вовед во испитувањето на процеси и практики кои ни дозволуваат да го замислиме современиот систем на националните држави како „семејство на народите“. Оваа замислена меѓународна заедница не е некој наднационален или космополитски свет, напротив, тоа е меѓународен свет, свет во кој глобалната поврзаност се сфаќа како нешто конституирано од интер-релациите меѓу одделни земји.

**Клучни зборови:** идентитет, национализам, култура, политика, граница/и

