



first publication

in cooperation with the *Institute for Strengthening Democracy in BiH / Presentation at the Seventh International Seminar Democracy and Human Rights in Multiethnic Societies, Panel Media of and in Nation-Building: Markers and Scenarios of Identity*

There are different conceptual frameworks for the managing of identities, like tradition, modernity etc. Our panel will try to focus on the multi-layered issue of nation building as approached from different perspectives: cultures and their transfers, language(s) and media, identity construction and strategies of networking.

Language has long been recognized as a powerful marker of national identity. It has been a medium of identity arising out of national communities themselves as well as acting as a powerful tool particularly during the processes vaguely termed »nation-building«. Language as a barrier, both real and created, between communities who have come to share a territory – maybe against their will – can be overlooked or exaggerated, depending on the two communities' stance towards each other. Language preference becomes a symbol towards the international community at a time when the West likes to pressure the East as to their future plans and towards the immediate community in a time when borders are being drawn and defined anew. Further yet, language is not only spoken and written word – even its representational system, the alphabet, entrenched in cultural implications, has been used to mark new paths chosen by a community, a nation rebuilt in new letters and new symbols. Language can be used to communicate nationality through its function as marker and symbol.

Media take on a similar role, although they are not officially employed in the same manner. They can fulfil a dual purpose: On the one hand, media very much do contribute to shaping the varying forms of identity formation as well as of so-called »nation-building« (by their very nature, even), on the other hand, they also present some of the most important channels of communication for communities and societies. Media create patterns, which are categorised for the sake of efficiency and the »reduction of complexity«. These patterns are not isolated, they gain relevancy through their being embedded in existing entities – also for and in their own organisation's cultural memory patterns.

Further discussion points will not only include the role played by symbolisms of Power and Rule (or Oppression or territorial Integrity), but also how far the process of nation-building is growing increasingly complex, is maybe even being undermined, by the continuous separation (or shift) of the concept of nation into societies and communities. (These do not necessarily have to react subversively to a »nation-building« of whichever kind, nor do they even have to want to undermine it, however, the communal ties that have grown out of their formation processes can in the long run prove stronger and more lasting.)

Our perspectives and questions should lead to a discussion of the effects brought about by such developments and their interplay. Examples and analyses from different states, regions and also theoretical viewpoints shall support a discussion on the similarities and contradictions – maybe also arising out of the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

#### **National Frameworks vs. Community-Building: Collective Remembering, Cultural Memory and Media-Sets**

My contribution will focus on presenting the multi-layered problem of nation building from a media and cultural studies point of view, touching on exemplary questions of cultural transfer via media networks and the resulting forms of cultural perception and reproduction in the form of memory and remembrance (where the complex problems of cultural networking play an important role).

I would not assume to be able to say something about the Bosnian reality, or to make any suggestions what could be improved, etc. This is not my place. I will merely present a theoretical sketch and put it for discussion.

Media take on a similar role to that of cultural transfer via languages, but are not officially put forward in the same manner and can fulfill a double function: On the one hand they very much do influence the different forms of identity formation and processes of nation building, on the other hand they also represent the most important forms of communication for communities and societies.

1 Cf. Medialität und Gedächtnis. Interdisziplinäre Beiträge zur kulturellen Verarbeitung europäischer Krisen. Ed. by Vittoria Borsò, Gerd Krumeich and Bernd Witte. Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler 2001.

2 Cf. a.o. Assmann, Aleida: Zur Metaphorik der Erinnerung. Ein Rundgang durchs historische Museum der Imagination. In: Fischer, Ernst Peter: Neue Horizonte 97/98: Gedächtnis und Erinnerung. München: Piper 1998, pp. 111-164; Esposito, Elena: Soziales Vergessen. Formen und Medien des Gedächtnisses der Gesellschaft. With an Epilogue by Jan Assmann. Transl. by Alessandra Corti. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 2002.

3 Cf. a.o.: Bachelard, Gaston: Poetik des Raumes. Transl. by Kurt Leonhard. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer 1987 (Fischer Wissenschaft 7396); Haverkamp, Anselm/Lachmann, Renate (Eds.): Gedächtniskunst. Raum – Bild – Schrift. Studien zur Mnemotechnik. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1991; Haverkamp, A./Lachmann, R. (Eds.): Memoria. Vergessen und Erinnern. München: Fink 1993 (Poetik und Hermeneutik 15); Yates, Frances A.: Gedächtnis und Erinnern. Mnemonik von Aristoteles bis Shakespeare. Weinheim: VCH 21991 (Acta humaniora).

4 For the French historiography, cf. e.g. Nora, Pierre: Zwischen Geschichte und Gedächtnis. Transl. by Wolfgang Kaiser. Berlin: Wagenbach 1990; on aspects of Jewish memory and its roots, cf. Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim: Zachor: Erinnere Dich! Jüdische Geschichte und jüdisches Gedächtnis. Transl. by Wolfgang Heuss. Berlin: Wagenbach 1996.

One needs to reiterate not only the question of power and rule, but – on a wider level – also the question of the materiality of the media,<sup>1</sup> i.e. the conditions of communication and its constructions.<sup>2</sup> Hence, criteria of space and time and the related questions of sounding, selective and finally ordering perception (the »gaze«) play an elementary role.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is also a matter of exclusion, order and selection, and further also of identity construction or authentication.<sup>4</sup> The media's relation to factual events and experiences is complex; they are contextualized culturally, socially and situationally both when they are encoded and when they are called up, and in any case emotionally valued.

### Nation and medial subject constitution

To Benedict Anderson, nation means among other things that a social group is generated through forms of thinking itself, of social self-representation in the space and time structures of modernity (hence it can also be marked). The imagined common *topos*, the fictional space, emerges as a narratively directed technique of symbolism to surpass pre-modern local structures and to construct a kind of super-community. As long as territorial ideas (explications and utopias of home, geographical symbolism, mythic-poetical universes) and historical-chronological concepts (tradition) can remain connected with the help of these patterns, nation works.

A complementary idea, which is not an alternative but is becoming more and more popular, is that of a transnational civil society and social networks that are generated by borders and territorial designation and are based on clear ideas of purpose and aim and hence have implications of a consciousness that can only limitedly be found in national sentiments. The resulting problems emerge primarily from two developments: On the one hand, the more or less trained operative possibilities in the context of so-called modernity do not work any longer – or rather, have to be developed further. On the other hand, the multi-layered question of – this is a decisive thesis – nation building becomes far more complex if it is not undermined altogether as a result of the differentiation of the former concept of nation into societies and communities. Transnational civil societies make temporary arrangements that are either renewed or changed – unless they dissolve and create new bases for communication.

Against this background, one ought to also reject the idea of a European public space as one-dimensional and inflexible, being formed aside of the historical, economic, cultural-political and social questions on power and discourse domination. The influences accompanying the developments and processes touched on here can now be analyzed at hand of medial aspects and questions – among others – from the point of view of current network research. I will look at the theoretical approaches that will help us in our focus on the role of media, the transformation of their contents and the question of media networks and their networking and conditions. Simply put, in the realm of media there arises the question how one can talk about them, being electronic, without falling into the usual »discourse traps« (technology and media determinism, technological artifact/positioning in the absolute of the independence of the medium vs. the subject's free decision making powers; hence subject/object constitution). To stay with the question of subject and media: what are culture and media? – from the point of view of subject constitution:

- *Model 1:* conservative view of subject constitution: subjects are *per se* good or bad; there is no such thing as a »sick« subject or they have to be categorized, they have to be protected or educated – or excluded from the use of media/technology. In other words, the technological artifact or the positioning in the absolute of the medium's independence is juxtaposed with the free decision-making facility of the subject to use media and technology.
- *Model 2:* Subject constitution in the sense of »cultural studies«: Subjects undergo processes in their identity and ability of action, diverse powers are differently at work and the subject is only constituted in the moment in which it is spoken to. Thereof arise such questions as whether the subject has to be »spoken to« in order to exist at all, whether foreign definition plays a role and how far it is intertwined with self-definition, and which medial and social process factors are moreover at work.
- *Model 3:* Socio-technological subject constitution: here the relationship between foreign definition and self-definition is looked at more closely, having taken a step back from dis-



course models *à la* »culture as semiotic operation« and instead redistributing body, materiality, etc., i.e., different entities, in the interest of a more complex field of agency and its limits.

5 Ginzburg, Carlo: Spurensicherung. Die Wissenschaft auf der Suche nach sich selbst. Transl. by Gisela Bonz and Karl F. Hauber. Berlin: Wagenbach 1995, pp. 7-44, here p. 20.

### Mediality, Collective Remembering, Culturally Formatted Memory

Only when one questions the mediality – meaning the materiality and alterity of the channels of communication – of such collectively franchised »histories«, does one reach the connection between history and memory. It is only then that one can determine that history is not a finished narrative (thus far this has remained purely an assumption). Such forms of discourse are open and cannot even be closed off with patronizing interpretations. They are a part of the societal confrontation with cultural hegemony. The given perceptions of the »past« are constructed in discourse, and hence they are also alterable and dynamic, they present social processes.

Even if the historian is sometimes obliged to refer back, explicitly or implicitly, to a sequence of comparable phenomena, the cognitive strategy, as well as the codes by which he expresses himself, remain intrinsically individualizing (although the individual case may be a social group or an entire society). In this respect the historian is like the physician who uses nosographical tables to analyze the specific sickness in a patient. As with the physician's, historical knowledge is indirect, presumptive, conjectural.<sup>5</sup>

Maybe we can clarify this at this point with a further differentiation, that between collective remembering and culturally formatted memory.

In my opinion, the constitution and the functioning of (national) ideologies and mythologies rest on these two structural models. Their possible forms overlap and stretch from public celebrations with »national« character and exhibitions of state achievements, via commissions in the areas of architecture, painting and sculpture, the media, public entertainment and the personal incentive to publicly remember up to the apparently private realm of autobiographical writings.

I suggest, therefore, to examine the official and non-official »storage spaces« of so-called »collectives«. Which of these are opened to the public, how are they »established« and which are created by individuals? This question is also tied to the problem of how subversive remembrance work can be continued in the background or »underground« – and which metamorphoses it undergoes there. It seems certain that the safeguarding of the space of remembrance – even if sometimes it is only one of appearance – is understood *vis-à-vis* an uncertain presence as a long-term provision of the empirically experientable or imaginable possibilities of a time-span.

Beginning with Walter Benjamin's thoughts on materiality, Roland Barthes' concept of »écriture« and Niklas Luhmann's identification of systems and environmental referrals, we can arrive at a fruitful concept (which stands in opposition to the one placed on a very straightforward search for identity). A fundamental question that comes into focus here is that of alterity and the conditions of medial contingency processing. The problem of mediality, the processes of transformation embedded therein and the emerging functions for the construction of memory has to be met to a large extent with a reference to materiality: The »remembered« can never be called up under the conditions under which it was constructed, rather environments and contexts (including social ones) of the moment of consumption play a decisive role. On the other hand, there is talk that media can be storage spaces, which idea is well-nigh exclusively shaped by thoughts emerging from older rhetoric, with no consideration of the given specific phenomena, their filters and forms of reception.

»Stores« are thus flexible and their »contents« are not only medial but also tied to the situation of reception. One has to consider also the conditions of the »data carrier«: i.e., also the aspects of the selection, one of the central problems of societies operating in a networked situation: What was decided by what or by whom for which »save« in favor of which perspectives? And: How does the transmission work? This question after the reduction of complexity and the conditionality of such processes and forms of discourse asks the nature of communication functions, of texts and the symbolic systems of order generated thereby as well as questioning what the material conditions are.

6 Cf. Halbwachs, Maurice: Das kollektive Gedächtnis. Transl. by Holde Lhoest-Offermann. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer 1985.

7 With regard to a new network theory, meaning a paradigmatic change going beyond the purely rhetorical use of the term »network« with reference to questions of remembrance or memory functions, cf. a.o. Barabási, Albert-László: Linked. The New Science of Networks. Cambridge/Mass.: Perseus 2002; for the Question of Surfaces and Interfaces cf. Manovich, Lev: The Language of New Media. Cambridge/Mass. et al.: MIT Press 2001.

8 Cf. Barabási 2002; Buchanan, Mark: Nexus. Small Worlds and the Groundbreaking Science of Networks. New York: W.W. Norton 2002.; Manovich 2001; Watts, Duncan J.: Six Degrees. The Science of a Connected Age. New York: W.W. Norton 2003. Cf. further and from a viewpoint less motivated by a context of natural sciences, Weber, Stefan: Medien, Systeme, Netze. Elemente einer Theorie der Cyber-Netzwerke. Bielefeld: Transcript 2001.

9 Barabási found the key to understanding natural networks when he attempted to define the typical number of connections belonging to a given node, i.e., the so-called »scale« of the network. The result was: There is no such scale, because it is subject to a mathematical law, according to which there are few nodes with a very high amount of connections – the »centers« – and a growing number of nodes with increasingly fewer connections. This is the free-scaleness of natural networks.

10 An interesting experiment in many respects was started by sociologists in Hungary with <http://www.wiw.hu>: Access is exclusive in the sense that it can only be granted via invitation by a person who is already a part of this »net«. If one has access oneself, one can search for acquaintances among the registered persons (who themselves also have to confirm the acquaintance, after having been selected),

Not only ruling ideologies and discourses are »engraved« in media and stores, but also traces of an »Other«, of differences and alterities, of confrontation with the alien and of traumata that have not successfully been dealt with. The reason for this is a heterogeneity of cultures, which are already each for themselves proving to be complex processes of forgetting, suppressing and recalling of alien as well as own elements, even more so in their interlocking ties and storage activities. Finally, it would be important to recognize the contradiction of the »Other« in the medial substrata of writing or the diversified forms of »culture«-meaning.

One cannot deny that there is such a thing as »storage«, however, to place these in the process of remembering, as reconstruction or interpretation and hence to see them as a »process« poses a semantic problem. Apparently, it is about the recognition of what is going on in terms of politics, aesthetics and society. But the formatting (and its trigger/s) cannot be entirely understood if one fails to differentiate sufficiently between the (not examinable, hence assumed, moreover in its structure hardly comprehensible) material and the process of its conditioning. In this context, one would have to question again such valuable terminology as Maurice Halbwachs' »collective memory«<sup>6</sup> pointedly with reference to its functionality (since from the point of view of the ruler, the idea is the goal-oriented connection of individual ways of dealing with the past). Collective identities and their apparent »memories« are social constructs and are given out in the form of communicated attributions.

We can only gain a limited insight from both the *loci memoriae* and the *imagines agentes* of ancient rhetoric and Nora's lieux de mémoires. However, – next to the debate on material – another issue has in recent times come into play, the discussion of which has only tentatively begun: The question of the applicability and the concept of the »network« (for linguistic-terminological arrangements as well as for methodological approaches). Memory work then means the conscious, preferably concise building of a new network, not necessarily smaller, but maybe more comprehensible.<sup>7</sup>

### Nets, Noise, Networks

Production, distribution, and reception – the boundaries of which need to be drawn more clearly – are delimited (if there even remain any limits they could have stuck to). Producers receive, produce and distribute. Distributors receive and format contents, and thus produce themselves, receivers close the circle in which contents are caught, they absorb contents and pass them on, etc. Thus we are after all dealing with new forms of networks, which work with different triggers in different channels – which nevertheless have commonalities. The more different persons are included via media and are thus active and the more they move in the same media networks, i.e., the more crossover and alleged competition there is between areas that were once seen as separated, the more the capacities are challenged and the more intensive becomes the background noise, the noise (which itself can be productive). The advantage here is in the analysis: it is only made possible by background noise and disruption.


According to the current level of research on the complex of networks<sup>8</sup> these do not only come about randomized, but following certain exactly definable power laws, i.e., it is most of all about free-scale-networks.<sup>9</sup> The conclusion that is decisive from our viewpoint here states that networks are neither democratic nor anarchic, meaning: to play a role in such complex systems and processes, to make these one's subject even, demands new efforts, which will certainly also be decided by the networks themselves.



Networks with their hubs and links, aside of any idea of defendable centralization meet the subject of media networks at the latest at this point and suddenly there arises again the challenge to the human, social and cultural sciences (the social sciences already participate far more intensively in these developments<sup>10</sup>), since these can talk about those aspects and diversify those positions of interest which those from the natural sciences can often only speak on with difficulty: power, capital, elites.

Important topics (whether from the point of view of nation-, community- or society-buildings) will not only be media networks themselves, but also links, nodes and channels, steering mechanisms, filters, noise<sup>11</sup> functioning and defective stores and general dysfunctions. Added to this are the challenges arising out of such selections of perception and the realization that our alphabet is a technical medium *per se*. Noise occurs not only here, though, growing attention will have to be paid to the function of pictures and their specific problems.



one can invite new participants, one can have the various personal constellations and degrees of acquaintance represented graphically, exchange views on various topics via an online-forum, send emails internally, etc. Most interesting is the programming of the application (only on the basis of which personal networks can be traced) and the possibility of representing different degrees of networking. Other online attempts to raise a kind of social networking are less exclusive (and often also not necessarily relevant in the sense of an advance network thinking), such as, e.g., <http://www.orkut.com>, <http://www.friendster.com>, <http://www.matchmaker.com> etc. Here the mere point of acquaintance itself is in the foreground, which is not that new in itself.

  
<sup>11</sup> An aside reference related purely to the material would be that currently the production of storage chips hits a so-called »thermal wall«, meaning that »Moore's Law«, according to which every 18 months processors with twice the power become available is for the first time no longer applicable given the current state of technology. Although it is still possible to place increasingly more transistors increasingly tightly onto a chip, this »tuned« silicon (one of the »mineral memories« at least considered in the metaphors by Ecos) becomes too hot and these products are thus notably slower than their predecessors. The technology of the future will thus have to be cooled down certainly in the realm of first-class performance taking account of the materials employed: this is a circumstance that will make the cultural sciences glad.

**Peter Plener**, born 1968, studied German literature and language and History in Vienna. Lecturer at the German literature and language institute at the University of Vienna since 1993, at the German Inst. at the ELTE Univ. in Budapest from 1993-1997. 1998-1999 civil service at the Documentary Archive of Austrian Resistance. He attained his PhD from the Univ. of Vienna in 1999. 1999-2000 Project Manager at EDVg and t-systems. Since 2001 he has been editor in charge of the Internet platform *Kakanien revisited*. He has been a member of the Working group *Cultural Studies* at the University of Vienna since 2002. Currently he works in the Austrian parliament.

Contact: [editor@kakanien.ac.at](mailto:editor@kakanien.ac.at)