

Imagining and Doing Diaspora: Southeast European Perspectives



Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research
April 16th-17th, 2012, Zagreb, Croatia

PROGRAMME

Monday, 16th April, 2012

15.00-18.30

Opening by Ulf Brunnbauer and Jasna Čapo

Approaches and Limitations of Diaspora Studies

Chair: Jasna Čapo

Saša Božić

'Diaspora' Diaspora – Diaspora? From Simplified to Multidimensional Concepts for Complex Phenomena

Martin Sökefeld

Diaspora as Movement: Kashmiris in Britain and the Limits of Diasporic Mobilisation

Mirjam Milharčić Hladnik

How to Make Sense of the Singularity of the Concepts – Belonging, Diaspora, Imagined Community, Ethnic Identity?

Hariž Halilović

From 'Ethnically Cleansed' Villages to Trans-Local Cyber Villages: Bosnian Worldwide Diaspora in Real World and on the World Wide Web

DINNER

19.00

Tuesday, 17th April, 2012

10.00-13.30

**Southeast European Diaspora Politics
in a Historical Perspective**

Chair: Ulf Brunnbauer

Sarah Garding

Diaspora Dimensions of Domestic Politics: Transnational Party Organization in Postcommunist Croatia and Serbia

Daphne Winland

Connotations and Contradictions of Diaspora: Critical Reflections on Croatia and Croats

Senka Božić-Vrbanić

Maori/Croats in New Zealand

Sanja Đurin

Positive Immigrant Experiences – Croatian Diaspora in the Magallanes Region, Chile

LUNCH

13.30-15.00

15.00-19.00

Imagining and Returning Diasporas

Chair: Senka Božić-Vrbanić

Emilio Cocco

Being Locals in Different Ways. Returning Migrants, Old Diasporas and the Re-Making of an Adriatic Regional Identity

Jaka Repič

Exile, Roots and Return Mobility: The Case of Slovene Diasporic Community in Argentina

Karolina Novinščak

'Diaspora' in Life Narratives of Former Labour Migrants and the 'Second Generation' with German-Croatian Migration History

Jasna Čapo

Return as an Open-Ended Process: Discourses and Practices of Return

Imagining and Doing Diaspora: Southeast European Perspectives

‘Diaspora’ has become an increasingly squishy concept: various migrant groups claim to constitute diasporas, governments address diasporas, and scholars struggle to differentiate between ‘diaspora’ as an analytical and as a practical category. The concept of diaspora also faced similar criticism such as the related ideas of nation and ethnicity – that it is liable to the dangers of ‘groupism’ and essentialism. Yet, if we do not take ‘diasporas’ as givens, this concept can produce real analytical value. Beyond that, diasporas are a fact in the sense that there are people out there in the world who believe in their existence and behave as such.

This workshop, therefore, intends to capture the tension between diaspora as an imagined community and as the object of discursive ascriptions on the one hand, and the diaspora as a political and social practice of migrants but also governments on the other hand. The workshop aims at discussing the diaspora as an event and practice and as a discursive formation. We believe that such an approach will also highlight other important social and political debates, because discourses about diaspora are invariably linked with debates on citizenship and identity, on borders and the body of the nation, on inclusion and exclusion.

The workshop will focus on case studies from southeastern Europe (respectively, on southeastern European diasporas anywhere in the world). Such a perspective seems reasonable given the pertinence of discourses and practices of diaspora in the region, especially in recent decades. Another aim of the workshop, thus, is to ask what is new about recent ‘diasporas’? We also intend to address comparative issues, on epistemological, thematic and historical levels.

Saša Božić

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‘Diaspora’ Diaspora – Diaspora? From Simplified to Multidimensional Concepts for Complex Phenomena

Rogers Brubaker (2005) coined the term ‘diaspora’ diaspora to emphasize the proliferation and scattering of the meaning of the term diaspora and Ewa Morawska (2011) agreed with him that diaspora should be treated as more or less enduring perspectives or standpoints rather than entities. Diaspora is nevertheless a social phenomenon and as such it has its pure (ideal-typical) form and meaning. Neologisms such as ‘diaspora’ diaspora are probably precise in describing the dispersal of the meaning of the term but they are a conceptual and scientific nightmare along with the terms such as transnationalism, social capital, post-modernity, transnation etc. Instead of new definitions and invention of new terms this presentation will offer an overview of multidimensional variation of the diaspora phenomenon and it will avoid methodological groupism (another scientific neologism used by Brubaker (2002)) as well as methodological fluidism (used by Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2003)) and start with the elements of ‘pure sociological’ approach (Black, 2010 [1976]) without its orthodox ontology and epistemology. Diaspora is a social phenomenon which is constituted by discrepancy of home and homeland and which manifests itself through individual and collective feelings, thoughts and actions. The diaspora is variable phenomenon which is observable in several interconnected dimensions and their sub-dimensions:¹

- emotions (intensity of the feeling of displacement; direction: from negative ‘static’ emotions such as nostalgia to negative ‘dynamic’ emotions such as anger or hate; from mild positive emotions such as sympathy to strong positive emotions such as pride)
- identification (direction: ‘host’ society /locality, region, nation-state/, homeland /locality, region, nation-state, transnational regions, continent/ ; intensity: from latent and blurred to manifest and strong; complexity: single, double, multiple, hybrid)

¹ The variables listed here were inspired by Fred Riggs (1999) however they differ significantly from his descriptive 18 dimensions.

- space (size of the homeland; from micro such as villages to macro such as continents; number of attachments to homeland/s – one, double, multiple; political status of the homeland – locality, region, nation-state; realism: from utopic homelands to real places and spaces with boundaries; dispersal: from one locality or region to international and global)
- time (durability: from fleeting to durable, from one generation to multigenerational or permanent feature; continuity: from sporadic to continuous; intensity: from small amounts of time spent /feeling, thinking and doing/ to 24/7 dedication)
- action (direction: towards ‘host’ society, towards homeland/s, towards specific actors and institutions /locally, nationally, internationally, globally/, inverted – towards itself; content: cultural, social, economic, political, mixed; coercion: the level to which individuals are exposed to coercion and social control /in homeland and in spaces presently occupied/; causes for action: intrinsic /such as turmoil in homeland/ and extrinsic /such as discrimination in ‘host’ country/ intensity: from benign gatherings to radical political activism and terrorism)
- organisation (density or level of incorporation: from single individuals, through loose networks to associations, institutions and networks of institutions; scope: from local organization to national, international, transnational and global).

It will be argued that social scientists should not abandon their search for refutable claims and that they should at least trace tendencies and regularities in variations of the diaspora phenomenon. Based on variations within dimensions of the diaspora phenomenon the proposition will be offered: Diaspora is a matter of degree and the greater the tension between home and homeland the purer the diaspora in terms of high sense of displacement and emotional engagement, unilateral direction, politicization, radicalism of action, singular identification, high organisation etc.

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Maori/Croats in New Zealand

In the proposed paper I explore the complexity of the process of identity construction for Maori-Croatian descendants in New Zealand. Maori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, and Croats, one of the many minority groups who initially settled in New Zealand at the end of the nineteenth century, worked together on the gumfields of the Far North and established the relationship marked by a significant number of intermarriages. During the 1950s when the gumdigging industry stopped most Maori and Croatian gumdiggers left gumfields. Soon, Croats, who at the beginning of the century were seen as a threat to the stability of the colony came to be represented as honest industrious Yugoslavs due to their economic success in some industries. Under the pressure of assimilation some of them chose to 'forget' their relationship with Maori. Anxiety about the future reconstructed their memories and desires in relation to their position in society. But during the 1980s and 1990s the global concern with memory took other directions. In New Zealand a shift in the view of the past has also taken place: biculturalism (Maori/Pakeha) has been defined as a fundamental characteristic of New Zealand's heritage and identity. Some of these changes once again have led to a puzzling reconstruction of identity. But the question is how can we understand these shifts in construction of national identity in terms of Maori and Croats? In short here I am interested in how individuals of Maori-Croatian background constitute their own identity within the heterogeneous discursive practices that have operated in New Zealand over the time and how they experienced the hybridisation of identity and power relations.

Ulf Brunnbauer

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Southeast European Diaspora Politics in a Historical Perspective

In my short introductory note I want to address continuities in discourses about ‘Diasporas’ in Southeastern Europe since the early 20th century. Drawing on examples from the Habsburg Empire, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Greece, and socialist Yugoslavia I intend to identify the main trajectories of Diaspora politics in the region. This problem will serve to demonstrate that transnational policies and networks could serve nationalist agendas. On the other hand, the prominent role of ‘Diasporas’ in nation-building efforts in the region suggests that the nation, in Southeastern Europe, was always imagined in a kind of transterritorial way. At the same time, I will point to ambiguities and contradictions in state policies towards emigrés of the particular country because there often was a hidden agenda behind public propaganda.

Emilio Cocco

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Being Locals in Different Ways. Returning Migrants, Old Diasporas and the Re-Making of an Adriatic Regional Identity

The ambivalent inter-action of regional and national narratives is one of the specific feature of the modern Adriatic seascape. Antagonist and sometimes overlapping discourses of local, national and imperial identities generate intricate patterns of national homogenization and regional hybridity, whose contents shift from civic to ethnic allegiances depending on who, when and how is activating and exploiting them.

In this context, the issue of migration is usually a subordinate one because inter-regional, trans-regional and overseas migrations are usually forced into established pat-

terns of exchanges, dislocations and relocations, which shall be detrimental or beneficial to one or the other nation-state of the area.

However, such a nationally biased reading of migration is not enough to explain the ways regional identity is constructed and evolves in the Adriatic area. The presentation of some preliminary results of a research carried out in an Italian Adriatic sub-regional context (Abruzzo-Molise) shows how two different migration flows, the returning Italians from Venezuela-Argentina and the old Albanian and Croatian diaspora, in spite of their diversity, both contribute and are interconnected in the process of re-making of an Adriatic regional identity. The latter, thus, shall be interpreted as a multilevel and contradictory social construction that would serve a multiplicity of subjects and functions.

Jasna Čapo

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Return as an Open-Ended Process: Discourses and Practices of Return

Several of the defining characteristics of diaspora relate to the diasporic memory about the original homeland, viewed as the 'true, ideal home' to which diaspora people should or would eventually return; and to the commitment by the diaspora to the maintenance or restoration of the original homeland, which results in continual relations to it (Safran 1991). In this presentation I would like to revisit this implicit link between diaspora and return in the present moment in which distant geographical territories are connected in unprecedented ways via modern means of communication in a virtual and/or physical manner, linking members of a diaspora to their original homelands, enabling them to keep in close contact and touch with them and to go back and forth between their places of residence and origin. Together with the transnational migration scholars, one could argue that, in such circumstances, the notion of return has become devoid of its conventional meaning as a one-way move and definitive resettlement in the country or place of origin. This new transnational understanding of mobility stresses the processual, open and transterritorial links between people and their original and adopted homelands and allows for a view of return as an open-ended process. The paper will discuss these issues based on empirical research into Australian Croatians' discourses and practices of return.

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Positive Immigrant Experiences – Croatian Diaspora in the Magallanes Region, Chile

Although in many cases immigration from the island of Brač, Croatia, to the southernmost Chilean region Magallanes was a traumatic experience for economic immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, already the first generation of Croatian immigrants succeeded in converting this negative and traumatic experience into a social and economic success. Based on the narratives and preliminary data analyses, this paper explores some of the conditions which lead to the affirmation of Croatian diaspora in the Magallanes region and Chile. While some of these conditions are part of the local cultural heritage (like for example a special kind of communities Croats used to live in before they came to Chile), the others belong to the general and common knowledge (migrant history of the region) which influenced particular identity formation of Magallanes people in general as well as Croatian diaspora in this region.

Sarah Garding

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Diaspora Dimensions of Domestic Politics: Transnational Party Organization in Postcommunist Croatia and Serbia

The venue of 'domestic' politics is increasingly transnational. Homeland political candidates make campaign stops in diaspora communities, emigrants run for office in their homeland, and external citizens vote from around the world. Although there is a small interdisciplinary literature on these topics, there is almost no research on the ways in which political parties based in emigration states organize abroad. This is surprising, given that a growing number of political parties based in emigration states

have gone global, building chapters abroad and mobilizing emigrants to contribute resources, votes, and lobbying support.

In this paper, I develop a framework for conceptualizing and analyzing political party transnationalism. I then investigate why some parties are more successful in organizing in the diaspora than others. To answer this, I analyze the organization of Croatian and Serbian parties in diaspora communities during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and then look at party transnationalism in the contemporary period in both countries. The data on party-building in Croatia and Serbia comes from extensive fieldwork in both countries, as well as in diaspora communities in Germany, Canada, and the U.S.

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From ‘Ethnically Cleansed’ Villages to Trans-Local Cyber Villages: Bosnian Worldwide Diaspora in Real World and on the World Wide Web

In this paper I discuss how Bosnian refugee groups utilise digital technologies and new media in order to recreate, synchronise and sustain their identities and memories in the aftermath of the 1992–95 ‘ethnic cleansing’ and forced displacement. While the displaced groups – many of them now a part of the Bosnian worldwide diaspora – have tended to resettle in clusters based on the pre-war local and regional social networks, digital technologies have enabled them to negotiate their new diasporic realities beyond geography and real-time limitations, effectively creating a vibrant ‘digital diaspora’ that is providing its members with a sense of interconnectedness and communal continuity. Unlike the traditional understanding of diaspora, Bosnian ‘digital diaspora’ also enables individuals who remain in Bosnia to be part of ‘their own’ diaspora groups through participation in online forums, Skype, Facebook, websites and portals. As the paper describes, some of the places destroyed during the 1992–95 war now only exist in cyberspace and as a part of social relations of those who identify with the lost places. Such places recreated on the internet, or ‘cyber villages’, act as online shrines to the places lost, but also as social hubs for interactions and performances of distinct local identities and spatial practices.

In addition to discussing representations of displacement and emplacement in the ‘digital age’, the paper also aims to make a contribution to the understanding and application of digital ethnography as an emerging method of inquiry in anthropology and related social science disciplines. While some researchers see digital ethnography as an exclusively online-based research, I argue that it is critical to understand the online world in the context of the real world – made of real people, places and social relations.

Finally, while pointing to the applied potential of digital ethnography in teaching about refugee and human rights issues in higher education, the paper also raises some of the methodological, epistemological and ethical challenges of digital ethnography and other forms of online research.

Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik

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How to Make Sense of the Singularity of the Concepts – Belonging, Diaspora, Imagined Community, Ethnic Identity?

I will provide some questions from the migration history of the Slovenian ethnic territories and the places of destinations. Like:

- What was the ‘Slovenian’ diaspora in the USA before 1940? The narrator says: ‘You see, there were two kind of Slovenians in Cleveland, the church-goers and the non church-goers. And we did not mix.’ There was a deeply heterogenous community (one?) there: did it function as a diaspora (differences temporarily forgotten) in the years 1941–1945, helping the homeland under occupation?
- What was the ‘Slovenian’ diaspora in the USA after 1945? The narrator says that there was no communication between the old migrants and the new ones, political displaced persons, DP-s: ‘We did not mix, never.’ There was a deeply heterogenous community (still one?) there: did it function as a diaspora (differences temporarily forgotten) in the years 1991–1997, helping the homeland on the way to international recognition?

On July 1, 2011 there was a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the independence of Slovenia, one whole day of events on the streets of Ljubljana, titled ‘Welcome Home’. It was a traditional get together celebration of the Slovenian migrants and their de-

scendants from all over the world that has been going on each year during summer for many decades. However, last year, it broke up with tradition! For the first time, there was only one celebration at one place. All those years and decades before, there were always – two!

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‘Diaspora’ in Life Narratives of Former Labour Migrants and the ‘Second Generation’ with German-Croatian Migration History

During the German-Yugoslav labour migration process the temporariness of the stay of ‘Guestworkers’ in Germany was an assumption of the recruiting country Germany and the sending one, Yugoslavia, as well as of most labour migrants (for a while). The same generation of migrants experienced the collapse of the socialist Yugoslav state in the 1990s; since then the Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and later Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo had become independent states. New citizenships were granted and passports issued by the new governments also for fellow nationals living abroad. Further, new migration and diaspora policies have been formulated addressing not any more ‘Yugoslav workers temporarily employed abroad’ and their families but rather co-nationals, who since the 1990s have been commonly perceived or imagined as ‘national diasporas’ of the respective nation and nation-state. From a historical perspective I will demonstrate how the imagination of (labour-) migrant communities changed with the breakup of the socialist Yugoslav regime and political transition in Croatia in the 1990s. In my presentation I further aim to link the images of Diaspora in the states of origin to the self-perception of former labour migrants. In order to elaborate on these aspects, I will use case studies, life narratives of former labour-migrants and the ‘second generation’, who either live in Germany or relocated to Croatia and demonstrate if and how diaspora as a ‘social form’ or as a ‘type of consciousness’ (S. Vertovec 1997) is embedded within the biographical narratives of different generations.

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Exile, Roots and Return Mobility: The Case of Slovene Diasporic Community in Argentina

In the presentation I will explore causal interconnections between experiences and social memories of exile and displacement, the emic notions of roots and cultural de-territorialisation, and various forms of return mobilities to parental homeland, in the context of Slovene diasporic community in Argentina. Traumatic social memories of exile from Slovenia after the WWII have been essential in the construction of Slovene community in Argentina, specific diasporic identification, mythology on roots, as well as aspirations of eventual return to parental homeland.

After the Slovene independence in 1991 various forms of transnational connections and return mobilities started emerging, undertaken both by the original Slovene migrants in Argentina as well as by their descendants. Return mobilities to homeland that take form of tourism, travel or even pilgrimage to Slovenia, reconnecting with relatives, building social, economic and political transnational links, and even return migration, are not merely instrumental, but represent deeper importance on individual level as well as on the social level in the context of preservation of the diasporic community. 'Tracing roots' originates from and reasserts specific diasporic identity that was carefully established and maintained in the Slovene migrant community in Argentina. I will explore the analytical validity of the term diasporic in an attempt to understand return mobilities as both temporal and spatial movement that not only entails individual identifications, but also meshes relations between places and times – places of residence, places of origin and home-places; past as evoked in social memories and in imaginary of homeland, present in experiences of return, and future in aspirations and anticipations.

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Diaspora as *Movement*: Kashmiris in Britain and the Limits of Diasporic Mobilisation

The paper departs from a critique of conceptualising diaspora as community. While diaspora has become a popular concept in the social and cultural sciences because it promised to overcome reifications of 'cultures' or 'communities' as rooted in space and place this promise was only partially fulfilled. In fact, diaspora is mostly conceived as community rooted 'elsewhere', in some country of origin. It is suggested instead to conceptualise diaspora not simply as a result of spatial mobility/migration but of social movement and mobilisation. More often than not, diasporic mobilisation is contested; it may also be temporal and reversible. Focusing on political aspects of mobilisation and a campaign for the recognition of Kashmiri identity, the paper discusses the case of Kashmiris in Britain. While there has been relatively strong mobilisation in the 1980s and 1990s, it has become much weaker recently. The paper concludes by suggesting to distinguish different aspects of diasporic commitments in order to avoid essentialist conceptions that take activists' constructions of diaspora for granted.

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Connotations and Contradictions of Diaspora: Critical Reflections on Croatia and Croatians

This paper explores the conceptual implications of continually changing configurations and meanings of diaspora in understanding changing attachments to the homeland and each other. The contours of diaspora engagement have been typically conceived of as political and ideological due in large part to a tumultuous political history, spanning

imperial and fascist periods, socialism, the Wars of Succession and independence that have all but defined the lives of diaspora Croats for generations. This is reflected not only in the particularities of different migration trajectories, opportunity structures and other barometers of diaspora adaptation, but in the effects of major upheavals and transformations in the 'place of origin', variously defined as empire, nation, republic, region and/or 'domovina' (homeland). Diaspora Croats have been variously implicated in the state-building (*državotvorni*) program since well before independence was declared in 1992 and their multiple and varied engagements have been viewed almost exclusively through the prism of ethnic nationalism. By disaggregating diaspora from the frequent preoccupation with (ethno)politics and its corollaries (particularly in the Southeast European context), this presentation will address the connotative potential of diaspora to address contemporary questions on citizenship, belonging and subjectivity for Croats.

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