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## **Current Attitudes Towards the US and their Interplay with Nationalist and Anti-Nationalist Trends in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### **Topic of Research and Countries visited**

The topic of my research regards the attitudes towards the US as seen in the cultural manifestations of both popular and “high” culture in the recent times, and the ways in which these attitudes interact with what could broadly be called the nationalist and anti-nationalist trends. I already started the field research on this topic two years ago, but there were still many resources I needed to look at in the area in order to complete this research properly, including the recent film production, additional literary publications, and other cultural artifacts. The countries I visited in the summer of 2005 were Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **Relevance and Contribution to the Field**

This cultural studies research is important to the field because it looks beyond the narrow sphere of official day-to-day politics and engages broader and more persistent popular and cultural trends. Also, this research engages the symbolic level on which the culture works, which is often the level which at some point directly influences the factual politics or behavior of the people. The cultural sphere can give some indications of how the US is perceived in the region, and that awareness is in turn important for both the academic field and the US policies.

### **Approach and Research Methodology**

My research consisted of three approaches. They included:

- Working in the main libraries, researching the most current offerings of independent book-stores such as Sarajevo’s Buybook (has its own publishing branch), or Zagreb’s Algoritam (also has its publishing branch)
- Talking to a number of contacts in the area inside and outside of academia
- Researching media production unavailable to me in the US

### **Summary of Research Findings and Preliminary Conclusions**

I primarily looked at what is exactly meant by the name “USA” in different cases, in order to find out what is actually approved of or opposed to. For example, it was surprising for me to find out in preparation of this research that both fiercely nationalist Croatian pop singer Thompson, and Serbian anti-nationalist singer/songwriter Balasevic, himself very popular in both Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are considered to be in some ways pro-American (despite Balasevic’s outspoken opposition to NATO bombing of Serbia). Looking closer, however, one finds out that Thompson, sporting an acquired “Anglo” name and often looking like an American G.I., glorifies American militarism and what is perceived as superior American military power. This brand of “pro-Americanism,” mostly reduced to merely affiliation with American militarism, is in nationalist discourse often connected with the cult of the leader and denigration of democracy, the cult of power which does not need any ethical or legal justification, and chauvinistic nationalism. On

the other hand, the anti-nationalist Balasevic's pro-Americanism chooses other aspects of "Americana" for its own appreciation, mentioning in his songs many American popular icons (e.g., Bogi--Humphrey Bogart), and implying in his statements positive aspects of American democracy. The anti-nationalist pro-Americanism is attracted to the American values of civil liberty, protection of different opinions and the right of speech, and the promise of a tolerant society with the full acceptance of different ethnic and religious groups. Similarly to pro-Americanism, the anti-Americanism is also internally diversified, depending on what exactly the nationalist and anti-nationalist elements see and oppose either in the real American presence or the symbolic perception of "America."

Looking at the cultural artifacts and events this summer, my first impression was that there seemed to be a massive shift in cultural interest away from the USA and towards Europe and, interestingly enough, towards the other Yugoslav Successor states. The goal of getting into the European Union makes Europe an important and interesting place, and that translates to cultural things as well; for example, there was a lot of discussion in both Croatian and Bosnian press about the German writer Peter Handke's continual apologia of Milosevic, and about the influence this may have in European "highbrow" circles, and the festivals of film, theater, and nonverbal theater in the two countries all displayed a variety of European works. What seems like a renewed interest in the other Yugoslav Successor States showed itself in various ways as well: the biggest mass cultural event of the summer in Zagreb and Sarajevo (and Belgrade) was the concert of the most popular Yugoslav-era group Bijelo dugme [White Button] from Sarajevo, which got reunited for this occasion only and drew enormous audiences; a renown Pula Film festival in Croatia showed a veteran Serbian director Goran Paskaljevic's film *San zimske noci* [A Winter Night's Dream], which was very well received by the audience; Sarajevo's news magazine *Dani* featured an interview with Džoni Stulić, former frontman of a cult Zagreb band Azra, etc.

My initial impression that there was a new "low" of the cultural interest in things American has gradually changed over the course of a couple of months, as I saw that there was both a lukewarm interest in mainstream American exports (e.g., Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*), and criticism towards the aspects of the American handling of things seen in some of the summer news items (e.g., chaos in Iraq, desecration of Koran in Guantanamo prison) expressed by people on one hand, and a growing and enthusiastic interest in what can broadly be called the American "alternative" on the other hand. For example, the films and books of Michael Moore (the maker of *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*) are very popular and well regarded, as are many American books dealing with the aspects of a corporate control of public goods--for instance, there was a lot of interest in critical American books on the "pushing onto public" of the genetically modified foods. Also, sheer logistics of the American civil society raise a lot of interest: a Rutgers university professor organized workshops about different kinds of civil society projects at the Zagreb University Department of Political Science, and got a lot of public and media exposure.

In connection with my initial question, one may say that, firstly, nationalism and anti-nationalism themselves have morphed significantly in the last few years, and while there are still strong remnants of the "nineties'-era" nationalisms, there seems to be a move towards nationalism being either an anti-European force (against getting into the EU), or else a more protective cultural force against the homogenized and global market-produced culture, with anti-nationalism being more pro-Europe and/or pro-globalization. In this new context, the obsession with Europe gets the US out of main focus, but there is still a lot of interest in the popular culture for what the US symbolically represents--globalization, weaker government involvement (in comparison to the EU) into the main aspects of life (food, environment, etc.), strong pro-

corporate culture--and especially for the American books or people that give an insider and critical take on these issues. It seems that regardless of where one stands regarding new nationalism and anti-nationalism issues, there is an overall positive attitude towards these alternative American things that for many people represent the other side of the US. The situation in Bosnia has some added complications because of Bosnia's own internal divisions, one of them being between those Bosnians who are more "Bosnian" and want to preserve a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identity of their country, with religion separated from government and a matter of one's privacy, and those who are more "Muslim" and want more of the presence of religion in public sphere, and more connections with the other Muslim countries. The cultural expressions of the two groups are different, and so are their attitudes towards the US, which can very broadly be described as more positive in the first group and more negative in the second.

### **Suggestions for Future Research Agendas**

My main recommendation for future research is continuing to look into the cultural sphere on its numerous levels, and seeing its changing attitude(s) towards the US.

### **Recommendations for the US Policy Community**

Being connected with the academia as it looks into what the cultural sphere shows about the changing attitudes towards the US in the region, and about how those attitudes relate to the region's own changing and politically important trends of nationalism and anti-nationalism.