

From Dzhublyk to Medjugorje: The Virgin Mary as a transnational figure

Transnationalism and the nation state

by

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The argument presented in this article stems from the recurrent discussions on analytical and methodological applications of the concept of transnationalism in the context of the interdisciplinary research being conducted by the members of the project "Religious Tradition, Communism and Cultural Reevaluation: Transnationalism in Post-1989 East European Cultures of Remembrance" centred at the GWZO in Leipzig. The project team brings together researchers coming from the fields of history, art history, literature studies, cultural studies and social anthropology. I am the project team's social anthropologist and my task within the project is two-fold. First of all, I analyse how the processes, phenomena and discursive regimes investigated within the project are generated and/or transmitted by local actors. In order to do so, I conduct field research, which I introduce below. Moreover, I bring theoretical insights from my own discipline into the project.

From the very beginning the notion of "transnationalism" has been at the centre of the project's conceptual framework. In the initial description of the project, it has been underlined that, although in academic and popular writing "transnational" is often used hand in hand with such terms as supranational, trans-territorial, global, or cosmopolitan, the term has a specific meaning which should be retained and delineated. Consequently, it has been recommended to follow the notion which is present in historical studies (for example in a work by Jürgen Osterhammel¹) where the term is used with regard to those processes that, although they are per se not limited to given regions, societies, states or nations, retain the modern nation as a reference point. According to Kiran Patel's definition from 2004, transnational history is everything which, although lying outside the national, defines itself through the national – either it can feed itself on the national, or it can distance itself from it. In short, if a process or phenomenon is to be called "transnational" then the modern nation and/or the nation-state have to remain as a crucial reference point, in so far as that the nation-state or national identity sustains the central position for the transnational history². For those

¹ JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL: Transnationale Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Erweiterung oder Alternative?, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 27 (2001), pp. 464-479.

² KIRAN PATEL: Transnationale Geschichte – ein neues Paradigma?, in: geschichte.transnational (<http://geschichte-transnational.clio-online.net/forum/2005-02-001.pdf>).

processes and phenomena that do not refer to the national and do not define themselves through it, there should be other analytical concepts available, such as "global", "cosmopolitan", "transboundary" or others.

As it was stated in the introduction to this volume, our project investigates three themes (Virgin Mary, Antemurale and Cyrillo-Methodiana) with the hypothesis that they form transnational *topoi* with a strong and meaningful presence in Eastern/Central Europe. They may be regarded as transnational, if they both refer to national identities and ambitions, and, at the same time, go beyond them. The hypothesis is that they are present and instrumentalised in Eastern/Central Europe, both as driving forces behind national and other types of identities and mobilisations that definitely go beyond the borders and conceptions of the nation state. The constant fluctuations between national and non-national components of those phenomena, or rather the simultaneous presence of such components, would, in this case, make the notion of their transnational character a meaningful analytical term.

Within social science, although the notion of transnationalism is broadly used³, it is most often applied in the context of research on migration, especially within social anthropology. Secondly, research on transnationalism is often primarily theorised as research on ties and movements across borders. Stefan Vertovec writes: "To the extent that any single '-ism' might arguably exist, most social scientists working in the field may agree that 'transnationalism' broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states."⁴ In this formulation the nation-state is still of central concern, although the stress is explicitly laid on its borders. In the recent *Transnational Studies Reader* edited by Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt, the editors' introduction also starts with explicit focus on borders and border-crossings, with a hint given in the very first sentence that the national might not be that important for the transnational.⁵ This becomes clearer later in the texts, where the authors write: "thus, the terms 'transnational' and 'transnationalism' or 'transnationality' are partly misnomers, in that they imply that the only things we are interested in are dynamics across or beyond nations, states, or within the (nation-)state system. We also mean something else. By transnational, we propose an optic or gaze that begins with a world without borders, empirically examines the boundaries and borders that emerge at particular historical moments, and explores their relationship to unbounded arenas and processes. It does not take the existence of, or appropriateness of, the spatial unit of analysis for granted."⁶ With this formulation the authors disclose that the research that originated in

³ For the broad reference list see PEGGY LEVITT, SANJEEV KHAGRAM: *The Transnational Studies Reader: Interdisciplinary Intersections and Innovations*, New York 2008, p. 13.

⁴ STEFAN VERTOVEC: *Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism*, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (1999), 2, pp. 447-462.

⁵ LEVITT/ KHAGRAM (cf. footnote 3), p. 1.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

the studies of the practices related to and generated by migration has gradually shifted its focus from what goes beyond the nation-state but is inevitably conditioned by its existence, towards the focus on social life that "crosses, transcends and sometimes transforms borders and boundaries in many different ways"⁷. Although this is a valuable research agenda, as clearly the nation-state does not have to be the only reference point for the phenomena that cross borders, and the borders that are crossed do not have to be nation-state ones, there are good reasons for keeping the term "transnational" as an analytical tool for those phenomena that do not lose nation-state as a reference point. What the authors describe in their introduction seems to me an agenda for transboundary rather than for transnational studies or for other types of studies that do not take borders as a starting point at all.

Obviously this underlining of the border-crossing as constitutive for the field of transnational studies could be read as a reaction against the so-called methodological nationalism of the scholars who "not only take the boundaries of the nation-state for granted but also contribute to the reproduction of their state's projects"⁸. The critique of methodological nationalism is obviously a much needed one, as it challenges an approach that assumes that "nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world"⁹. Still, as Daniel Chernilo writes, the contemporary attempts at solving the problems raised by methodological nationalism could be read either as misplaced, or as reproducing a naturalistic image of nation-state¹⁰. Although the nation-state aimed at imagining itself as a natural, necessary and bounded form of society, it was, throughout its history, opaque, uncertain and normatively ambivalent, and those ambivalences were reflected in the large body of social theory. Chernilo's contribution is a call for continuing scholarly attention to a "position and legacy of the nation state in modernity"¹¹. The concept of transnationalism can help us to further this task. It can help us to see how in practice the nation-state was not what it claimed to be – it was never a solid, closed unit, a "natural" form of sociality in modernity. Anthropological research on transnational phenomena can help us to see how the symbols, practices and regimes that were, on one the hand, used for the creation of a national ideology, constantly undermine the alleged solidity of the national project.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 1.

⁸ NINA GLICK SCHILLER, AYSE CAGLAR, THADDEUS C. GULDBRANDSEN: Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality, and Born-again Incorporation, in: *American Ethnologist* 33 (2006), 4, pp. 612-633, here p. 613.

⁹ NINA GLICK SCHILLER, ANDREAS WIMMER: Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-state Building, Migration and the Social Sciences, in: *Global Networks* 2 (2002), 4, pp. 301-334, here p. 302.

¹⁰ DANIEL CHERNILO: Social Theory's Methodological Nationalism: Myth and Reality, in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 9/1 (2006), 1, pp. 5-22.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 6.

Virgin Mary as a transnational heroine

In the following part of this article it is shown how the Virgin Mary's apparitions that are sites of nation building and mobilisation, work simultaneously as powerful gates, through which networks going beyond national boundaries and identities are forged. It is argued that the multi-evocative symbolism of the Virgin Mary enables us to fruitfully analyse her apparition sites as sites of transnational processes that simultaneously both contribute to solidifying national identities and transcend them.

The observation that the Virgin Mary is frequently evoked as a national icon, especially in Catholic countries, is not new¹². The Virgin Mary has been repeatedly positioned as the mother of one nation or another; she saved countries from foreign invaders and was utilized in constructing females as powerful sites of reproduction of national identity. However, as Zlatko Skrbiš writes, the relationship between the cult of the Virgin Mary and nationalism has been noted rather than analysed¹³. Although the Virgin Mary is often adopted by exclusive nationalist ideologies as a patroness of their own nation, and her cult is instrumentalised in interethnic conflicts, little is written on the character of this embracement of Virgin Mary by national ideologies and the conditions which make it possible. Skrbiš begins to explore this relationship with regard to apparitions of the Virgin Mary and concludes that the idea of "chosenness" and "specialness" binds the two phenomena together. The presence of these two types of ideas both in national ideologies and in Marian apparitions cause "the relationship between national and religious discourses to be elevated to a completely new plane – a

¹² See for example: NICHOLAS PERRY, LORETTO ECHEVERRIA: *Under the Heel of Mary*, London – New York 1988; ERIC R. WOLF: *The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol*, in: *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. by MICHAEL LAMBEK, Malden 2002/1958, pp. 168-174; AGNIESZKA GAŚSIOR: *Die Gottesmutter. Marias Stellung in der religiösen und politischen Kultur Polens*, in: *Die Renaissance der Nationalpatrone. Erinnerungskulturen in Ostmitteleuropa im 20./21. Jahrhundert*, ed. by STEFAN SAMERSKI, Köln u.a. 2007, pp. 77-98; ANNA NIEDŹWIEDŹ: *Obraz i postać. Znaczenia wizerunku Matki Boskiej Częstochowskiej [The Image and the Figure. The Meanings of the Effigy of Our Lady of Częstochowa]*, Kraków 2005; MARY KAY VAUGHAM, STEPHEN E. LEWIS: *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, Durham 2006; GRZEGORZ SOKÓŁ: *Matka Boska Częstochowska jako polski symbol narodowy [Our Lady of Częstochowa as a Polish National Symbol]*, in: *Konteksty* 56/1-2 (2002), pp. 120-125; BOJAN ALEKSOV: *Marian Apparitions and the Yugoslav Crisis*, in: *Southeast European Politics V*, June (2004), 1, pp. 1-23; AGNIESZKA PASIEKA, MARTA WARAT, KINGA SEKERDEJ: *Popular Religion and Postsocialist Nostalgia. Licheń as a Polysemic Pilgrimage Centre in Poland*, in: *Polish Sociological Review*, 4/160 (2001), pp. 431-444.

¹³ ZLATKO SKRBIŠ: *The Apparitions of the Virgin Mary of Medjugorje: the Convergence of Croatian Nationalism and Her Apparitions*, in: *Nations and Nationalism* 11 (2005), 3, pp. 443-461.

plane of emotional intensity"¹⁴. However, while the ideas concerning "being chosen by Mary" and "being a chosen nation" could be interpreted as binding nationalist and apparitional discourses together, the "emotional plane" to which this relationship is elevated simultaneously provides a possibility for transcending the most exclusive national interpretation of the Virgin Mary's attention. The highly emotional encounters with the sacred which take place at the Virgin Mary's apparition sites that appeal to national feelings, can also attract people not belonging to a given national group. In contemporary religious practice the Virgin Mary, although definitely a welcome supporter for national causes, is also at the same time always a mother of love, peace and universal redemption. The apparition sites, where the meeting with Mary is based on personal, often highly emotional experience, are simultaneously sites of national struggles as well as sites of feelings of unity with the world and the sacred, giving an opportunity for the pilgrims to experience communion with the sacred and with each other, regardless of their national background. In this sense the Virgin Mary may be seen as a transnational heroine.

Finally, Sandra Zimdars-Swartz rightly comments that in academic works the Virgin Mary is too often analysed as a stronghold and promoter of conservative ideas, while in practice she is also an icon of progressive and counter-hierarchical ones¹⁵. Hence, if we take on board a distinction between transnationalism from below and transnationalism from above, as explicated by Sarah J. Mahler, the Virgin Mary apparition sites in the late 20th and in the early 21st centuries could be described as engendering transnational networks "from below" and hence generating "multiple and counter-hegemonic powers among non-elites"¹⁶. Although the Catholic Church could be envisaged in general as having "over-national ordering potential"¹⁷ and can be seen as a case of "transnationalism from above", contemporary apparitions of the Virgin Mary give space to "transnational grassroots politics"¹⁸.

¹⁴ SKRBIŠ (cf. footnote 13), p. 445.

¹⁵ SANDRA ZIMDARS-SWARTZ: *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje*. Princeton 1991, here p. 268. There are a few exceptions to this "conservative Virgin Mary" approach, e.g. a book by Terry Rey, who analyses the cult of Virgin Mary in Haiti in a context of class struggle. In this context, the apparitions of the Virgin Mary were embraced by the subjugated in a struggle against domination. See TERRY REY: *Our Lady of Class Struggle: The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Haiti*, Trenton 1999.

¹⁶ SARAH J. MAHLER: *Theoretical and Empirical Contributions Towards Research Agenda on Transnationalism*, in: *Transnationalism from Below*, ed. by MICHAEL PETER SMITH and EDUARDO GUARNIZO, New Brunswick 1998, here p. 67.

¹⁷ OSTERHAMMEL (cf. footnote 1), p. 473.

¹⁸ MICHAEL PETER SMITH: *Can you imagine? Transnational Migration and the Globalisation of Grassroots Politics*, in: *Social Text* 39 (2004), pp. 15-33.

From Dzhublyk to Medjugorje

In August 2007 I boarded a bus leaving from Uzhgorod, the capital of Ukrainian Transcarpathia (*Zakarpatska oblast*), taking a group of pilgrims to Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Our group was mainly composed of Greek Catholic believers from the Transcarpathia and Galicia (*Halychyna*) regions of the Ukraine, but there were also a few Russian people with us from Moscow and Tomsk, most of them Roman Catholic. In Medjugorje we were joined by another group of Russians, who arrived by plane. They were Orthodox believers. Most of the Ukrainians on the bus and also some Russians knew or at least had heard about Father Petro, a Greek Catholic priest from Transcarpathia who was travelling with us. I also knew Father Petro from my previous visits to the Ukraine when I had spent some time living in his house. Apart from the obligations of a parish priest, he is involved in various activities, in which he seems to have two, closely intertwined aims. On the one hand, he invests his time in promulgating a specific type of religiosity based on a combination of discipline and high emotional involvement. For example, he propagates frequent prayers that involve the repetition of exact phrases in an exact number of times and warns against diverting from such detailed prescriptions; he recommends frequent confessions¹⁹, preferably every day; and he is a fervent believer in and propagator of apparitions of the Virgin Mary with a special attention to apparitions at Fatima and their allegedly anti-Communist implications. He also prays over people (*molytsia nad liudmy*)²⁰ in order to help them to overcome illness and other problems that he conceives as effects of the Devil. Such prayers are long (longer than said by any other priest I know or have heard about in Transcarpathia²¹). On the other hand, he is an ardent Ukrainian patriot, taking part in local struggles for the use of the Ukrainian language in public life and expressing views concerning the beauty and importance of the Ukrainian history and culture.

¹⁹ I have talked to some people who made confessions with Father Petro and most of them admitted that it was a difficult and moving experience. I talked mainly to his admirers, who were moved by his attentiveness and detailed questions that helped them to see the sins which they were not aware of. However, I have also talked to people who regarded the way in which he conducts confession as too intrusive.

²⁰ I have discussed with Father Petro the question of whether his prayers can be regarded as exorcisms, with which he agreed. Still, people in Transcarpathian villages say that they see a difference between "prayer over people" (*molytva nad liudmy*) and "terrifying prayer" (*strashna molytva*). All priests, apart from Father Petro, with whom I discussed this matter considered "terrifying prayer" only to be a popular name for exorcism.

²¹ For the people I talked to, the most famous site of such prayer is located in Galicia in a monastery of Kolodiivka, see also VLAD NAUMESCU: *Modes of Religiosity in Eastern Christianity. Religious Processes and Social Change in Western Ukraine*, Berlin 2007 (Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, 15).

Also in internal church politics²² he is a well-known propagator of Zarvanytsia – a Marian pilgrimage and apparition site in the Ukraine – that was developed in the 1990s into the main national Greek Catholic pilgrimage site.

Hence, Father Petro's teachings and practices combine propagation of highly emotional religiosity with Ukrainian national feelings. Moreover, he is widely known as the father of one of the two visionaries who, since August 2002, have seen and talked to the Virgin Mary. Those apparitions began in a place called Dzhubylyk in Transcarpathian Ukraine. Most of the people in our pilgrimage group had visited Dzhubylyk before or had at least heard about the apparitions and read leaflets concerning the site.

a. Dzhubylyk

On the 27th August 2002 two girls, 9 and 10 years old, went to fetch water from a spring located between two villages, Nyzhne Bolotne and Vilkhivka in the Transcarpathian Ukraine. At the spring they saw a young, beautiful woman standing on a cloud hanging low above the ground and covered with flowers. The woman, dressed in bright white clothes with a blue belt, did not speak, but smiled at the girls. The girls, a little scared, returned to their homes and told their parents about their meeting. Father Petro, the father of one of the girls, instructed them to ask for the woman's name, if they saw her again. The girls saw the woman again the same day later in the afternoon and she identified herself as the Virgin Mary, who had come to help.²³

Since 2002 a lot has changed at the Ukrainian apparition site, which took its name from the small meadow on which the spring is located – Dzhubylyk. What used to be a small spring from which the inhabitants of two neighbouring villages took clean and tasty water, has become a building site. At the moment masses are conducted in a big chapel built next to the spring. The building of an enormous church in the nearby forest on the plan of an equilateral cross has already started. In the meantime cloister buildings for men and women have been erected, as well as a house for pilgrims and a large, roofed assembly square in front of the chapel, designed for common prayers. There are the Stations of the Cross leading to the top of the hill behind the chapel, a circle-shaped healing bath around the cross in the central location, and a long stairway leading to another cross put up as a place of prayer for a unity of all Christians. On the 27th of each month buses full of pilgrims arrive and on the 27th August each year the anniversary of the apparition, attracting thousands of people, is celebrated with fireworks. The

²² AGNIESZKA HALEMBA: *Virgin Mary and the Border: Identity Politics of the Greek Catholic Church at the Ukrainian / Slovak Borderland*, in: *Sociology. Slovak Sociological Review* 40 (2008), pp. 548-565.

²³ This description is based on the leaflets distributed at the apparition site, and also on the words of the visionaries themselves. *Istoriia Poiavy Presviatoi Rodyny u Dzhubylyku na Zakarpatti* [The History of the Holy Family's Apparition at Dzhubylyk in Transcarpathia], Lviv 2006.

pilgrims often come from quite far away – mainly from Ukrainian Galicia and also from neighbouring Slovakia. A few films have been made about the apparitions, leaflets and booklets have been prepared as well as an impressive number of religious artefacts: song books, poems, special rosary and Stations of the Cross prayers, pictures, calendars and so on.

The apparition site is located on the territory which in terms of the Greek Catholic Church administration belongs to the Eparchy of Mukachevo, covering the same area as the state administrative district of Transcarpathia (*Zakarpatska oblast*). Transcarpathia was included into Soviet Ukraine only after World War II, and in the previous centuries belonged to various states and empires of Central Europe, i.e. Austro-Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Slovakia. Because of its complicated history, the Ukrainian identity among the majority of its inhabitants is constantly under question. There is a strong transnational movement, led by Transcarpathian emigrants in Canada and the U.S., through which the so-called Ruthenian (or Rusyn) identity of local Slavic-speaking population is being supported. The discussions over ethnic identity of local population are also present within the Greek Catholic Church.

The present Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo has a *sui iuris* status and is directly supervised by Rome²⁴. Hence, the Greek Catholic Church in Transcarpathia is administratively separated from the rest of the Ukraine, which is under jurisdiction of the metropolite with a seat in Kiev. During Soviet times, the Greek Catholic Church had to go underground – it was forbidden in the Soviet Union. After its re-legalisation in the 1990s the issue of the administrative division of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine became a matter of a fierce debate. In brief, two basic options were considered for Transcarpathia: the *sui iuris* one and the Ukrainian-unity one. The supporters of both sides exchanged letters with the Vatican, with Lviv and Kiev, and with each other. The *sui iuris* option, with the future eparch Ivan Semedii as its leader, presented the Mukachevo eparchy as a multi-ethnic land, that – before World War II – had never been a part of Ukraine and also today should have separate church administration. Some of its supporters underlined the Ruthenian ethnic identity of Transcarpathian Slavic-speaking inhabitants, arguing that treating Ruthenians as a sub-group of Ukrainians was a part of Soviet policy. The Ukrainian option, with bishop Ivan Margitych as their leader, argued that Transcarpathia should be seen as an integral part of Ukraine and the Ruthenians as Rutheno-Ukrainians. Hence there would be no need for a separate church administration.

The Ukrainian-unity option has lost the battle; the Mukachevo eparchy is at present a *sui iuris* one. However, the present research shows that the option supporting the unity of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church remains strong, especially among those priests who co-operated or were educated during the

²⁴ I have analysed this situation in detail earlier. See HALEMBA (cf. footnote 22).

communist times by Ivan Margitych. At the present the eparchy is still a site of conflict between the two main options briefly introduced above. Presently, the highest hierarchs of the Eparchy prefer to underline the historical continuity between the present administrative unit and the much bigger pre-Second World War Eparchy of Mukachevo, which also included territories that at present belong to the neighbouring church administrative units in Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. Such arguments are supported by claims concerning the specificity of this territory as ethnically and historically distinct from the Ukrainian mainland. However, there is a strong fraction within the Church that would like to see Mukachevo Eparchy as a part of a Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church with seat in Kiev. Whatever the motivations of the supporters of this or that option might be, their arguments are often phrased in terms of nationalist discourses: one arguing that ethnically and historically Transcarpathia is an integral part of Ukraine, the other saying that it is not.

There is no doubt that the site of Dzubylyk apparitions has a firm place in these struggles. Some of the messages delivered by the Virgin Mary of Dzubylyk, decorations used at the site, the profile of the site manager Atanasii Chyipesh²⁵, the Ukrainian language of liturgies as well as a reception of the apparition among those priests²⁶ who are strongly involved on both sides of the conflict – all these show clearly that Dzubylyk is a site of Ukrainian national identity-building and the Ukrainian national movement. The most obvious symbol of the pro-Ukrainian aspirations of the apparition site is the Stations of the Cross built between the site and Lviv, linking Transcarpathia with the other side of the Carpathian Mountains. It was also an explicit wish of the Virgin Mary of Dzubylyk that the liturgies at the apparition site should be conducted in Ukrainian – the visionary stopped a priest, who conducted a liturgy in Old Slavonic and informed him that the Virgin Mary wished for the liturgy in Ukrainian. Besides, one of the three main messages of this apparition refers to a necessity to pray for the unity of all Christians. Taking into account still very tense relations between the Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate and the Greek Catholic Church in Transcarpathia, as well as a relative lack of ecumenical initiatives, one could interpret this as a request to overcome these differences and arguments. Still, a closer analysis of the interviews with the supporters of the apparition site reveals that the unity of all Christians does not refer primarily to the unity of various Christian denominations. Instead, it refers to a need for unity between

²⁵ Atanasii Chyipesh is a former Basilian monk, who used to be the head of one of the most important monasteries in Transcarpathia. Basilian monks openly support the pro-Ukrainian option (see e.g. Dobromilska reforma I vidrozdennia ukrainskoi tserkvy [Reform in Dobromil and a Revival of the Ukrainian Church], ed. by IOSAFAT ROMANYK, Lviv 2003).

²⁶ I have conducted interviews with many priests supporting both pro-Ukrainian and the other option.

the different administrative units of the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine. In this way, the Virgin Mary supports a vision for the future of the Greek Catholic Church which was put forward by bishop Ivan Margitych. The history of the Ukrainian struggle for Transcarpathia also figures in the apparitions. According to the booklet distributed among believers, on the 14th March 2003 Atanasii Chyipesh was with one of the visionaries near Krasnoe Pole, the site of a battle between the supporters of the Carpathian Ukraine and Hungarian troops on the 15th March 1939. The visionary saw that the field was covered with crosses and "at this moment father Atanazii understood that the child saw something unusual. He concluded that even today the memory of Sich fighters is commemorated here, at the place where they gave away their lives."²⁷

Despite the fact that the Virgin Mary has frequently been adopted in the national struggles all over Eastern Europe, there are probably only a few cases of such strong, explicitly national, components at the apparition site as in Dzhublyk. The Virgin Mary usually supports nations and political movements in more subtle ways, in particular through visual and other sensual means. This also happens in Dzhublyk, when, to take one example, the orange shawls, in which figures of the Virgin Mary are wrapped, remind the pilgrims of the time of Orange Revolution. Such ways of introducing national symbolism are present at the other apparition site which is introduced below. Moreover, there is an exchange of ideas, people, and material objects between these two national apparition sites.

b. Medjugorje

Medjugorje is located in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in an area which is mainly inhabited by Croats, as are large regions of this country. There are many publications on Medjugorje, and although the devotional texts obviously outnumber the academic ones, a great deal has been written about this site in comparison to other Marian apparition sites.²⁸ The apparitions there began in June 1981, when a group of four girls and two boys announced that they had

²⁷ Istorija (cf. footnote 23).

²⁸ Among others: SKRBIŠ (cf. footnote 13); ALEKSOV (cf. footnote 12); MART BAX: The Madonna of Medjugorje: Religious Rivalry and the Formation of a Devotional Movement in Yugoslavia, in: *Anthropological Quarterly* 63 (1990), 2, pp. 63-75; IDEM: Medjugorje: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Rural Bosnia, Amsterdam 1995; IDEM: Warlords, Priests and the Politics of Ethnic Cleansing: A Case Study from Rural Bosnia Herzegovina, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23 (2000), 1, pp. 16-36; JAMES M. JURKOVICH, WILBERT M. GESLER: Medjugorje: Finding Peace at the Heart of Conflict, in: *The Geographical Review* 87 (1997), 4, pp. 447-476; OSKAR GRUNEWALD: The Bridge to Eternity: Medjugorje and the Yugoslav Civil War, in: *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 8 (1996), 1, pp. 131-148; EDWARD BERRYMAN: Medjugorje's Living Icons: Making Spirit Matter (for Sociology), in: *Social Compass* 48 (2001), 4, pp. 593-610; SANDRA ZIMDARS-SWARTZ: *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje*, Princeton 1991.

seen and talked to the Virgin Mary on the Crnica Hill next to Medjugorje. As Bojan Aleksov writes, "soon after, Medjugorje became one of the world's major sites of Marian pilgrimage"²⁹, and the apparitions are still taking place. Medjugorje has become a site of pilgrimage and prayer, with many religious communities from all over the world establishing their branches or even their headquarters there. The pilgrims arriving there can practice their devotion in a variety of ways, starting from entering a monastery with a vow of silence for a prescribed time, through attending the apparitions (they are announced by the visionaries in advance), participating in mass adorations of the Cross or in recollections organised by Franciscan monks.

Still, despite the fact that Medjugorje is a site of international pilgrimage and tourist business and the fact that the Virgin Mary expresses herself through emotionally loaded messages calling for universal love, peace and conversion³⁰, even today it is easy to see that Medjugorje played an important role in the Yugoslav war, and especially in the conflict between Serbs and Croats. As Zlatko Skrbish writes, the Medjugorje events were clearly associated with mobilisation of Croatian Catholics during the war. He shows how the Medjugorje apparitions were co-opted into and circumscribed by Croatian nationalist discourse, and "the Virgin has been frequently used to legitimise and endorse Croatian military exploits in the region."³¹ While he agrees with Mart Bax's interpretation that the apparitions were initially inspired by the internal church conflict (between what Bax calls diocesan and monastic regimes)³², they have been very quickly appropriated by nationalist discourses, to the extent that the opponents of the apparition (and simultaneously of the Croatian national movement) call the Virgin Mary of Medjugorje an "Ustasha lady".

Also today, although Medjugorje with its souvenir shops with signs, booklets and prayers in dozens of world languages definitely has an international flair, Croatian national symbols still accompany the visionaries, sites of Croatian national martyrdom are included in pilgrimage routes, and references to Croatian history (with special attention to conflicts with the Orthodox Serbs and with Muslims) are made in the homilies given by local Franciscan monks. Although the Virgin Mary of Medjugorje does not herself give straightforward messages with a pro-Croatian national content, she is widely perceived as a "Croatian apparition" to the extent that people tend to forget that the site itself is located in Bosnia-Herzegovina³³.

Hence, on the one hand both apparition sites, the Ukrainian one and the Croatian one, can be analysed through the national lens. Both are instrumentalised in respective national struggles and aptly illustrate what Skrbish

²⁹ ALEKSOV (cf. footnote 12), p. 1.

³⁰ One can read the messages at: <http://www.medjugorje.ws/>

³¹ SKRBISH (cf. footnote 13), p. 454

³² BAX: Medjugorje (cf. footnote 28).

³³ SKRBISH (cf. footnote 13).

calls the convergence between nationalist discourse and the Marian apparitions. Still, it is useful to take one step further and look at the processes through which national sites and national Virgin Maries become portals for the development of transnational movements and identities.

c. Pilgrimage

The organiser of our pilgrimage was a Ukrainian woman called Maria, who had visited Medjugorje several times before. During our trip to Medjugorje, she moderated most of the singing and prayers. The prayers started immediately after boarding the bus, and they lasted all the way to Medjugorje, with a short break that allowed us to get some sleep. We started with prayers of the Greek Catholic tradition, sang songs with distinctively eastern melodies and prayed a rosary in its Greek Catholic form late into the night. However, in the early morning hours of the next day Maria started to teach us what she called “the prayers, the songs and the rosaries of Medjugorje”. She put on a tape with popular religious songs in Polish language, which could be easily understood by my Ukrainian co-travellers and which definitely did not have the eastern flavour of the songs we had sung the evening before. People started to ask me³⁴ to write down the texts, as they found the songs pleasant and emotionally moving. Maria also started to pray a rosary. She explained that people in Medjugorje pray a rosary differently from the people in Ukraine and she introduced “a rosary of Medjugorje”. To me, a person who was brought up as a Roman Catholic in Poland, it was just a Roman Catholic version of the most popular rosary, translated into Ukrainian, but many fellow pilgrims took it as a Medjugorje prayer and were surprised that I knew it so well, as I had not visited Medjugorje before. It was interesting to see how the people, who, at home, were so concerned about maintaining their Ukrainian and Greek Catholic identity, directed both against influences of the Orthodox as well as those of the Roman Catholic Church and who, in their daily lives devoted considerable effort to keeping the eastern religious tradition alive, became smoothly involved in practices embedded in the different religious tradition.

Later on we watched a film “Great Mystery of Water” in the bus, which was first shown on the Russian TV on 9th April 2006³⁵ and deals with the so-called phenomenon of “memory of water”. In short, the film claims that the molecular structure of water seems to “remember” all the influences it is exposed to. For example, it changes when you play classical music to it, and it changes again when you expose it to heavy metal music. A lot of examples in the film referred to various religious rituals from all over the world in

³⁴ Polish is my mother tongue.

³⁵ “Velikaia Taina Vody”, directed by ANASTAZIA POPOVA, produced by Telekanal “Rossiia”. For more information and links see: [http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Большая_тайна_воды_\(фильм\)](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Большая_тайна_воды_(фильм))

which the water was used. Buddhist mantras, Catholic rosaries, Muslims washing their faces before prayers, Orthodox practices of water blessing – all of those pointed to one conclusion – there is a scientific proof that religious people all over the world get things right – water which is handled properly, which is talked to in nice way, is beneficial for human organism. My fellow pilgrims were impressed by the film³⁶ and again, despite their involvement in inter-religious debates and conflicts at home, they did not seem to be disturbed by the ecumenical message of the film.

We arrived in Medjugorje in the morning of the next day, which itself was a deeply emotional event. People on the bus shared the stories of the difficulties they encountered before the trip: it seemed that many of them had almost not managed to come, but in the last moment, they gathered enough money or received a relevant phone call or their health improved, and in this way they were miraculously brought by the Virgin Mary to this exceptional place. They talked about the Virgin Mary as a mother who takes them by her hand and leads them with a gentle smile to those events, people and places that are beneficial for them. Then we also discussed details of our behaviour and worship. Should the women cover their heads with shawls while entering the church as is done in Greek Catholic churches at home? Should they kneel during the mass, which is not done in the eastern tradition? Would they be allowed to celebrate the mass in their own rite? It was decided that we should stop worrying because without doubt the Virgin Mary would lead us and inspire us in matters of appropriate behaviour. Slowly but surely people started to feel more at ease, fascinated by the place and all that was offered, starting from a full-day prayer programme and finishing with a huge range of devotional shops. We spent three eventful days in Medjugorje, participating in masses, rosaries, adorations. We witnessed an apparition of the Virgin Mary and climbed the Cross Hill praying the Stations of the Cross.

During this time my fellow pilgrims made numerous references to the messages the Virgin Mary had given in Medjugorje, most importantly, the message of peace. Medjugorje was seen by them as a peace oasis to which the atrocities of the Balkan war had not had access because of the Virgin Mary's protection. This, according to many works on Medjugorje, is not really the case. According to Mart Bax, Medjugorje and the surrounding area witnessed ethnic cleansing, bloody clan feuds and an extensive arms trade.³⁷ Even if I had not read his works before I went for the pilgrimage, I would have been

³⁶ The same film impressed people also at my other research fieldsite (in the Republic of Altai), which could provide an interesting starting point for an analysis of the significance of a scientific discourse in the former Soviet republics and former communist countries. Incidentally, the film was so popular all over Russia that the Russian Academy of Science decided to make an official statement and declared the film to be "false science" (*lzhenauka*), see E.P. KRUGLIAKOV: V zashchitu nauki [In Defence of Science], *Biuletin* 2, Moskva 2007.

³⁷ BAX: Medjugorje (cf. footnote 28).

surprised at the claims of my fellow pilgrims. Although in the very centre of Medjugorje there were few signs of war or Croatian national symbols to be seen, there were plenty of them on the roads leading into the village.

In the following days, we were taken to a new seminar house in Široki Brijeg where we spent three days with Father Jožo Zovko, who had been a parish priest in Medjugorje at the time of the apparitions. During some of his homilies and lectures Father Zovko made references to the Croatian national struggle and to the atrocities of war. Hence, I do not quite agree with Mart Bax that the issues of war and national struggle are hidden from the eyes and ears of the pilgrims. They are not in the foreground, because at the moment Medjugorje is being promoted as a site of peace and of universal Christendom, but still, they are not hidden. It is rather left up to the pilgrims to choose whether or not to pay attention to such signs. I discussed the issue of war and nationalism in relation to Medjugorje with some of my co-pilgrims and I found their responses interesting and surprising. While in the everyday exchanges and conversations they definitely contributed to imaging Medjugorje as a site of peace, those with whom I talked in private, told me that they did *notice* the signs of war – but they chose not to *see* them. For them Medjugorje *is* peace, and although they are aware that there is more in this place than a nationalism-free message of universal spirituality, they prefer to construct Medjugorje in a way that enables them to be included in its experience as full members. Hence, it is not only the matter of local strategies of presentation – in this case, the local agents and the pilgrims agree. The Yugoslav war and interethnic conflicts are there, and they are at times brought to the pilgrims' attention; still they should remain in the background and should not dominate the experience of spirituality and peacefulness. The pilgrims willingly agree to such an approach – the national struggles have been left at home and they move beyond them.

One of the most inspiring moments in Medjugorje which could stand for a transnational character of this place was a rosary prayer conducted in the main church in which we participated on the first day of our visit. The form of rosary prayed was the classic Roman Catholic one, with ten "Ave Maria" followed by "Pater noster" and "Glory to the Father". In each decade of the rosary the "Ave Maria" was started by a different person in different language, followed by a chorus of all people praying simultaneously, each in her/his own language, forming a rainbow of various languages unified through the rhythm of the prayer. I could see that my fellow pilgrims, especially those for whom it was the first trip to Medjugorje, were deeply moved by being included into this powerful example of the combination of religious and emotional unity with national difference.

Conclusion

Dzhublyk and Medjugorje are two Marian apparition sites that simultaneously forge national identities and go beyond them, forming powerful points at which transnational movements and identities are being moulded. They are

transnational, precisely in the sense of both keeping and transcending national identities. Susan Hoeber Rudolph writes in an introduction to her book "Transnational Religion and Fading States" that "religious communities are among the oldest of the transnationals: Sufi orders, Catholic missionaries and Buddhist monks carried word and praxis across vast spaces before those places became nation-states or even states."³⁸ It is doubtful that one could usefully apply the term "transnational" to such practices, as religion before the appearance of nation-state, and the one which developed in symbiosis with it, are two different phenomena. Peter van der Veer rightly writes (supporting earlier claims by Talal Asad) that: "Religion as a category and nationalism as an ideology emerge together in discourses of modernity in the 19th century. Theories that emphasize the universality of religion and the particular historicity of the nation underestimate the extent to which the national form is universalized in modern history and determines the location of religion."³⁹ If we accept that in the context of modernity the nation-state has been crucial in defining the meaning, scope and significance of religion, it would be interesting to see how such pre-shaped-by-nation religion can move beyond the nation. Is it still defined, however indirectly, through the nation?

The apparition sites can serve both as symbols of national struggle and as sites with a universal message. Zlatko Skrbiš writes that "the apparitional phenomenon is constantly caught up in the antagonistic tension between the universalistic Christian appeal of the Virgin Mary's messages and the possibility of its particularistic/local appropriations, such as in nationalism."⁴⁰ This seems a pretty accurate statement at first sight, but it can be suggested that it does not actually capture the nature of the relationship between the universal and the national. The relationship between the universal and the national aspects of the Virgin Mary's messages and her symbolism can be reversed. It is not the case that national ideologies and struggles appropriate the universalistic Christian appeal of the Virgin Mary's presence. Rather, national struggles and feelings often give an initial impetus to the apparitions – the national is where it all starts: the universal appropriation comes later. Often, the Virgin Mary comes to voice the concerns of the groups that feel threatened in their national rights. Later, she steps over national boundaries, the boundaries that she herself initially supports. In this sense, the term "transnational" can be used for the analysis of the significance of the Virgin Mary cult.

Moreover, although the temporal dimension has been hinted at in the previous sentence, this article has focused rather on a development from

³⁸ *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, ed. by SUSAN HOEBER RUDOLPH, Boulder 1997, here p. 1.

³⁹ PETER VAN DER VEER: *Transnational Religion*. Paper given to the conference on Transnational Migration: Comparative Perspectives. Princeton University, 30 June – 1 July 2001, here p. 1.

⁴⁰ SKRBIŠ (cf. footnote 13), p. 458.

national to transnational through space. The local Virgin Mary stays national – the one far away is universal. Travelling through space the pilgrims adopt new (to them) forms of worship and feel comfortable with them, but choose to ignore the signs of national struggles that are fought far away from home. It would be interesting to see if this also works through time: the question of the transnationalisation of the Virgin Mary for the believers at their local places of worship remains open for future research.

While at the moment in Medjugorje, attracting millions of pilgrims from various countries every year, the universal character prevails, and the Croatian national symbolism is slowly but surely moving to the background, Dzhublyk is still first and foremost a site of struggle for the Ukrainianness of Transcarpathia. However, even during my four visits⁴¹ to Dzhublyk there has been a noticeable shift towards introducing more elements of universal Catholic religiosity which do not always have to incorporate Ukrainian national symbols. After all, becoming “like Medjugorje” is an explicitly expressed aspiration among many of the apparition site’s supporters. The pilgrimages, such as the one described in this article, definitely contribute to the exchange of ideas between religious sites, changing them into forming points of transnational religious networks.

Both sites described in this article are not officially accepted as sites of apparitions by the Vatican, and sometimes they promote religious practices and views that can be difficult for the hierarchy of the Catholic Church to tolerate. Hence, they can be seen as forging a so-called “transnationalism from below”⁴² that, in my opinion, should be distinguished from the highly supervised transnational initiatives of the official Church. In the case of Marian apparition sites, such an official scheme can be exemplified by a European Marian Network⁴³, an initiative established in 2003, including twenty officially accepted Marian sanctuaries, most of which are based on the sites of apparitions or miracles. Many of them have also been sites of national identity building: such as Częstochowa in Poland, Zarvanitsia in Ukraine, or Mariazell in Austria. In August 2008, I visited one of the places included in the network, Lourdes in France, on another pilgrimage from the Ukraine organised officially by the Eparchy of Mukachevo. Subsequently, I discussed my impressions with some people, including priests, who have visited both Medjugorje and Lourdes. For many of them, these places evoked different emotions. For example, Father Petro, about whom I have written above, while appreciating the history, beauty and organisation of Lourdes said that Medju-

⁴¹ So far I conducted field research in and around Dzhublyk in August 2006, April-June 2007, August 2007 and July-September 2008.

⁴² MAHLER (cf. footnote 16).

⁴³ http://www.ausrosvartai.lt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=329&Itemid=339 (31.01.2009)
http://www.lourdes-france.org/index.php?goto_centre=ru&contexte=en&id=1007&id_rubrique=1007 (31.01.2009).

gorje can give an easier and deeper access to an emotional religious experience and more spiritual freedom. However, future researchers should look more closely into the question of the types of transnational identities, movements and networks which are instigated by the various kinds of exchanges between different types of Marian sites. There is no doubt that the Virgin Mary who has served as a national heroine for dozens of national movements throughout the world is at present a powerful and active promoter of transnational networks and identities.

Zusammenfassung

*Von Džublyk nach Međugorje
Die Jungfrau Maria als transnationale Figur*

Die Art und Weise, wie der Begriff Transnationalismus während der letzten Jahre in den Sozialwissenschaften verwendet wurde, lässt erkennen, dass der Nationalstaat als Hauptbezugspunkt bei der Erforschung so bezeichneter transnationaler Phänomene zunehmend aufgegeben wird. Wenngleich es ein lohnender Forschungsansatz sein kann, den Nationalstaat nicht als die bedeutendste gesellschaftliche Institution im Rahmen heutiger Identitätsbildungsprozesse zu betrachten, wird in vorliegendem Beitrag argumentiert, dass analytisch gesehen der Bedeutungsgehalt des Begriffs Transnationalismus gerade auf der Verbindung zum Begriff und Phänomen des Nationalstaats beruht.

Auf der Grundlage der Analyse einer Pilgerreise zwischen zwei zeitgenössischen Orten von Marienerscheinungen wird dargelegt, wie die Jungfrau Maria, die sowohl exkludierende nationale als auch inkludierende universelle Werte symbolisiert, als eine transnationale Figur betrachtet werden kann.