

ual studies, gives an overall and multi-perspective insight in the question of creating, intermediating and reception of the fear phenomena through media and pop-culture contents in Serbian ethnology/anthropology.

Srdan Radović

"Event Ethnography": a Modern Approach to Anthropological Research and Writing about Christmas

On the occasion of publishing Vesna Vučinić-Nešković, *Christmas in Boka Kotorska: anthropological essays of public firings of the Yule log in the time of post socialism*. The Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade and "Čigoja publishing". Belgrade 2008. 357 pages.

Christmas celebrations went through a specific revitalization and re-traditionalization in the time of post-socialism. Up to what extent and in which way it is celebrated in family circles or publicly in squares and churches, is a question Vesna Vučinić-Nešković, a professor at the Ethnology and anthropology department of the Philosophy faculty of Belgrade University, is facing in her new book.

The book entitled *Christmas in the Bay of Kotor: Anthropological Essays on the Public Burning of Yule Logs in the Time of Postsocialism*, is an extensive study of 357 pages in B5 format. The author is well known to both national and international scientific public as an expert in urban culture, city life styles and spatial behavior in the old town of Dubrovnik, the themes to which she dedicated her first book, *Spatial Behavior in Dubrovnik: An Anthropological Study of a City with Orthogonal Structure*,¹ but also as the

president of the International Association for Southeast European Anthropology, InASEA (2005-2007).

In order to satisfy her scientific curiosity and high standards of field work, which she set up for herself, Vesna Vučinić-Nešković collected comprehensive ethnographic material in the period between 1998 and 2008 in two urban centers, Kotor and Herceg Novi and their rural surroundings, Grbalj and Luštica. This book represents a testimony about anthropology in action, about how it should look like when it is practiced, a reminder to us all that a unique field work is what differentiates anthropology from other social sciences and humanities. There have been few such transparent and detailed monographs in national ethnology in the past twenty years, which in their structure, their approach to fieldwork, systematization, presentation, and analysis of the ethnographic material, represent an explicatory model for empirical research. The author was motivated, which she explicitly states in her introductory note (when making a critical retrospect on traditional and certain contemporary monographs), to apply in her research a methodological approach based on the reconstruction of events which have a precise timeline by creating a network of respondents and a very large sample questioned by a layered, detailed and clearly formulated questionnaire. Such demands required a systematic building and tending a highly diversified network of relevant institutions and respondents, who would, during ten years of research, give all the necessary information, but who would

with *Orthogonal Structure*, Department of Ethnology and Anthropology of the School of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Belgrade 1999 (330 pages).

¹ Vesna Vučinić, *Spatial Behavior in Dubrovnik: An Anthropological Study of a City*

also, in time, become aware of the significance of what the "lady ethnologist from Belgrade" (p. 81) is doing for their local community and for the research on tradition-in-making.

Ethnography, as given by Vesna Vučinić-Nešković, is characterized by a specific style of "recording" and creating "thick descriptions" in the tradition of Clifford Geertz (p. 18), particularly when it comes to "ethnography of events" on different locations, which the author explored and observed contextually, and which can further be compared with the similar events in other towns and villages, or societies in different time intervals. The activist approach to field research itself included the aptitude for an outstanding sense for details, the capability to pay attention to special circumstances and a large number of facts. At certain moments, while reading the detailed descriptions of events, I pictured that the author "armed" with a dictaphone and a video camera, was recording one activity and at the same time watching another action occurring on the opposite side of the scene.

The monographic study *Christmas in the Bay of Kotor* contains seven chapters, it is furnished with a geographic map of the region, and a large number of outstanding photographs which illustrate the ritual structure and atmosphere at celebrations in Kotor, Grbalj and Herceg Novi. For domestic circumstances, this is a luxurious edition, which can also attract readers with extraordinarily real photograph of a sparkly Christmas Eve fire on the cover.

In the introductory chapter, the author considers theoretical and methodological concepts, primarily relying on the concept of the "folk Orthodoxy" ("narodno pravoslavlje") which was phrased and developed through field

research in Serbia by Dušan Bandić. It refers to a complex communicative act of reception of religious messages and the interpretation of Orthodoxy by the broadest layers of society, which results in the construction of a specific faith conditioned by the social and cultural changes, and different political and economic circumstances, which have all contributed to the fact that the "folk Orthodoxy" often relies on an ideology different from that of church proclaimed Christianity.² Vesna Vučinić-Nešković has shown how ritual practice is constructed in concrete geographic space in different time sequences through intertwining of the church and folk religion. Her contribution is certainly seen through results ascertained on the basis of researches which are complimentary to those of Bandić, but as well, in a somewhat modified formulation of the term "folk Orthodoxy", which was made by adding the term "church (ecclesiastical)", thus ending up with "church-folk Orthodoxy" ("crkveno-narodno pravoslavlje"). Namely, in the context of her research this was almost necessary, since she has shown the role and influence of policy of the church as an institution in creating the ritual practice, whereby the church itself is not rigid (except when it comes to liturgies which are performed in churches) and it even allows, under the influence of folk elements of rituals and other political, social and cultural circumstances, various im-

² Lidija Radulović, *Dušan Bradić's Concepts: National Religion and National Orthodoxy in the Context of Research of Religion in Domestic Ethnology of the 20th Century*, Saša Nedeljković (ed.), *Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Serbian Genealogical Center and Department of Ethnology and Anthropology of the School of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Belgrade 2007:102-124.

provisations and in some cases a more casual manner of ritual performance.

Apart from that, some future research could also show and prove the legitimacy of using this conceptual construct in a different way, namely, through determining how church-wise the participants of a religious ritual are. This would mean finding an answer to the questions: to what extent and in which way the church takes part in their everyday life, whether they participate in the church structures, and to what extent the prescribed church model of belief, behavior and norms coincides with their personal attitudes. The author also questions the concept of tradition by debating with a familiar concept of "invented tradition" of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. In her work the concepts of "social drama" and "communitas", which were developed by Victor Turner, are used for better understanding of the process of Montenegrin postsocialist transition on the plane of integration and disintegration of the community by means of the use of religion, i.e., the way in which the political and social elite manipulatively use Christmas celebration in order to accomplish their political interests.

The second chapter leads us into a wider historic context of public burning of Yule logs in Serbia and Montenegro from the period of Yugoslav monarchy, via socialism, to postsocialism. It is also significant that within this chapter, the author emphasizes almost cyclical changes of shifting the ritual practice of Christmas celebration from private to a public space and vice versa, thanks to various interests which social groups and institutions saw in that process.

The third chapter shows in detail the Christmas Eve events on different levels of social and church organization in Grbalj. In this way the reader is enabled

to follow the author's analytical path, based on the previously established similarities and differences in the ritual structure of home and church events of burning the Yule logs, on the level of the entire area, villages and households. Through this, she determines which elements constitute the ritual core of the Christmas Eve celebration, and then makes conclusions about transferring the ritual practice from private to public domain, as well as to different levels of social and church organization. However, the author does not forget to single out the specifics of the home and church celebrations, to point out the meaning of the allocation of ritual roles, the positions of ritual officials in institutions or in the family structure, as well as the gender and age differences of the participants in a ritual, that also tell us about their different social status. While one part of this chapter is represented in the form of an ethnographic diary, in the final considerations the ways of creating the local (regional) identity based on the marking of space, time sequences, accepting different roles, prescribed activities and symbolic significance ascribed to the ritual objects are very thoroughly shown. No less important is the observation of layered meanings of church celebration of Christmas in Grbalj in relation to other areas in the Bay of Kotor (Boka Kotorska), as well as the firm connectedness with Orthodoxy and Serbia, i.e., the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, as opposed to the canonically unrecognized Montenegrin Orthodox Church.

Vesna Vučinić-Nešković sets up another task for herself that differentiates this book from all similar monographs, by representing the specific features of individual Christmas celebrations in Grbalj, Luštica, Kotor and Herceg Novi

through a specific writing style, choosing a particular literary form of presenting the ethnographic material for each individual case. What represents a challenge when it comes to writing a large-scale monograph, is keeping the reader's attention and bearing in mind those who are less patient. Thus, the author offered not just a few ways of reading this book, but also by choosing various literary forms she introduced a novelty in presenting the ethnographic material in the form of a dramatic text. In the fourth chapter, authentic material turned into a screenplay, has allowed the reader to hear the voices of main protagonists of events about the character and importance of the celebration for their local community, to discover, through the organization of the celebration and the casting of ritual roles, how the distribution of informal powers occurs within one "isolated" group of young people who are constructing the "new tradition" without the influence of a parish priest, and at the same time, passing it on to the next generation of youth. As a consequence of the lack of such official church influence, Christmas celebrations in Luštica resulted in accentuating the carnival-like character of the celebration and a general folk merry-making, which, within the areas of its influence, the Serbian Orthodox Church has managed to substitute with appropriate spiritual contents. Simultaneously, this way of dramatizing the ethnographic material enables the reader to grasp how difficult this task was and about the traps the ethnologist faces while conducting interactive interviews during which the same events are differently remembered and interpreted by different protagonists.

Serbian Orthodox Church in the municipality of Kotor has a special position in constructing and adjusting

Christmas celebration to the changed political circumstances and life needs of the citizens. It is not accidental that in this period, the Church increasingly insists on the Christianization according to theological and liturgical principles, for in this way it also confirms its legitimacy in this area, in relation to the Montenegrin Orthodox Church which is recognized by the official institutions of Montenegro as an equal religious community. Along with that, the institutional identity is being built in relation to the Catholic Church which has been present in the area for centuries. The author concludes that what is achieved (apart from what is already stated) by systematic Christianization and the substitution of folk (national) elements by those of the church, is higher control over the behavior of the ritual participants. I would also add that the worshipers are in a way educated in the direction of creating a so-called "church advocate", whereby particular attention is being paid to the education of children by burning the children's Yule logs in the churchyard and introducing the performance of the children's choir "Jedinstvo" that sings the fitting religious songs.

Each chapter apparently speaks about the same ritual, with more or less the same or similar elements in all the researched locations in the Bay of Kotor, but the monotony of repetition is avoided by singling out the particularities which to a great extent determine the character of celebration, as well as by finding a unique way of presenting ethnographic material in each chapter. Accordingly, the sixth chapter, describing the Christmas celebration in Herceg Novi, was written in the form of a transcript of interviews with the main organizers of the celebration. The displayed ethnographic material in this way enables us

to, with utmost transparency, follow how the author came up with the analytical comments about varied attention given to changing the place of celebration, different strategies of substitution and renaming the folk elements into church ones (such as the change in the number, appearance and symbolism of the church Yule logs), giving importance to religious procession, and other. Inclusion of non-government organizations along with church and local authorities in the organization of the Christmas celebration was recognized as another particularity of Herceg Novi.

In the seventh chapter, Vesna Vučinić-Nešković discusses the ritual changes in all four Christmas celebrations by bringing them into direct connection with social tensions in the period from 1991 to 2008, which influenced the formal changes as well as the changes in structure and symbolism of the ritual.

And finally, along with the already pointed out contributions in the empirical and methodological sense, I would like to highlight the modern approach to ethnographic research and narrative strategies of presenting the ethnographic material. Also, the beginning of the study itself leaves a strong impression, i.e. the author's prologue which implicitly tells us that what we must always have in mind is that we owe gratitude for our final product to a great number of people, that each stage of research and writing emerges to a great extent in the interaction with the respondents, students, colleagues, family and friends. Vesna Vučinić-Nešković started her research as an "anthropologist at home" and finished it as an "anthropologist in the neighborhood", in the newly founded state of Montenegro. As we find out in this rich ethnography, the presence of "lady ethnologist from Belgrade" in the

Bay of Kotor has left a mark not just on Christmas celebrations, but has also changed the perception the respondents had about ethnology as a discipline, dealing with only the "past lives and customs". The author also tells us about "how this book could be read" (p. 46), and what I am left to say in the end is that I recommend any of the mentioned ways of reading.

Lidija Radulović

Fashion, Difference and Identity in Serbian Socialism

On the occasion of publishing **Danijela Velimirović, Aleksandar Joksimović. *Moda i identitet***. Utopija. Beograd 2008.

Recently published book under the title "Aleksandar Joksimović – Fashion and Identity", written by Danijela Velimirović, was a long waited for study of the complex relations between fashion and social identity in socialist Yugoslavia and Serbia. The additional importance of this research lies in the fact that it has bridged the gap that has been existing, in the systematic investigation of the social and cultural dimensions of clothing, from the mid eighties, when the last study of the kind, dealing with the invention of national female costume during the 19th century national awakening process in Serbia, was conducted by Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić. Focusing on different historical, social and cultural contexts of the 20th century socialist modernist project, Danijela Velimirović puts in the centre of her research interest the phenomenon of the fashion design and the role of the fashion designer in the production and representation of national difference and uniqueness. While she shares the basic theoretical