

REVIEWS

STUDYING PEOPLES IN THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACIES II: SOCIALIST ERA ANTHROPOLOGY IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE. ED. BY VINTILĂ MIHĂILESCU, ILIA ILIEV AND SLOBODAN NAUMOVIĆ. BERLIN: LIT VERLAG, 2008, pp. 454

*Reviewed by Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković**

Titles can be deceiving. Those that catch the eye more often than not turn out to be an artful trick the authors use to attract readers, while the texts they announce lack substance. In our case, the opposite is true: behind an unattractive title a capital work hides. Even though the volume is conceived as a collection of studies, it can (and should) be read as a coherent overview of South-East European anthropology under communism. Rethinking/rewriting socialist-era anthropology is a most necessary task and the authors have embarked upon it with great courage. Through these “critical readings that did not happen”, to paraphrase one of the Bulgarian authors included in the volume, the contributors do not seek to give a historical overview of the subject, much as such an approach would be useful for each of the countries, but to place the subject in the context of *longue durée*. Being convinced that confining “anthropology during communism” to its communist context would be misleading, they choose to trace “anthropology” back to its “national” beginnings and to (re-)integrate “communist anthropology” into that history.

The volume is a follow-up to an earlier book on anthropology in socialist Eastern Europe from the same series (Halle

Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia), which was devoted to the former German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary and which has attracted much attention, and not only in the countries involved. This volume results from a conference held at the Max Planck Institute in June 2006 producing an eclectic mixture of contributions, ranging from historical overviews of particular institutions and individuals to personal reflections by influential actors to more distanced appraisals by a new generation of scholars. The major innovation of this volume in comparison with its predecessor is that we can hear the voices of some distinguished North-American anthropologists who interacted more or less closely with “local scholars” in the course of their field research during the socialist era.

Concerned with the history of anthropology in three South-East European countries, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, the editors, Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev and Slobodan Naumović, chose to approach the task ethnographically, i.e. to treat the local anthropologists as a kind of “communities” deserving a proper, first-hand ethnography. The central ques-

* Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade

tion uniting all contributions is how locally differing versions of a specific type of intellectual endeavour — national science — functioned under three formally internationalist, but in fact profoundly national, versions of socialism. As a result, encouraging reflection on how various aspects of three respective nations were researched under three national versions of communism, the book is structured into three case studies. But the editors also sought to supply a structure in which the thematic texts would communicate between themselves as intensively as possible, thereby providing clearly outlined and coherent units amenable to further comparison. Thus each case study follows its own inner logic and coherence, while remaining open to inter- and trans-national comparisons.

Compared with their West-European, “empire-building” colleagues, the South-East-European “nation-building” anthropologists had — and sometimes still have — a specific *existential position*. That is, they see themselves as belonging to the group they study, sharing its language, traditions, prevailing values and political interests. As a result, the anthropologist is not facing the famous, in this case anthropological, *distance*, which is supposed to be overcome by long-term participant observation. On the contrary, the anthropologist is from the very beginning supposed to share the “native’s point of view”, the problem being how to rise above this axiological and emotional proximity, how to distance himself/herself from his/her fellow informants rather than how to get closer to them in order better to understand them. The same “double insider syndrome” also explains the fact that in none of these Balkan countries has anthropology been subjected to a post-national critique similar to the post-colonial one in the West. While working on this volume, the editors had to handle this critical lack of previous research, especially in the case

of Romania and Bulgaria, and then they had to handle the authors’ different *existential positions* and their different ways of coming to terms with their “double insider syndrome”. A diversity resulting from a generation gap and from the authors’ different forms of institutional involvement is obvious: some papers are closer to critical reflexivity, others are a sort of personal insights into the state of the discipline. Some are careful overviews embracing almost the entire period of communism, and thus serving as opening chapters (Otilia Hedeşan, Ilia Iliev and Slobodan Naumović), some focus on representative figures of the discipline (Milena Benovska-Sabkova, Anelia Kasabova, Gordana Gorunović, Ivana Spasić), while others prefer to describe the discipline by focusing on emblematic institutions (Vintilă Mihăilescu, Corina Iosif, Vasil Garnizov, Marina Cvetković, Mladena Prelić).

The first part of the volume, *Romania*, consists of four studies dealing with Romanian “anthropology” under communism. Otilia Hedeşan’s contribution is a meticulous historical overview of fieldwork in Romania from the beginning of the twentieth century to the fall of communism in 1989. Hedeşan notes that many researchers made all kind of compromises with the regime in order to keep this central practice of Romanian ethnography and folklore studies alive even in the communist epoch. On the other hand, for the youngest researchers under the communist regime, fieldwork in rural environments was a kind of the rite of passage and, to some extent, a way of escaping urban and institutional daily life. But more importantly, in accordance with a long-lasting trend of the discipline in Romania, the main purpose of this fieldwork was to complete the national archives. Unfortunately, archives were to a large extent the endpoint of the discipline.

Vintilă Mihăilescu’s detailed study deals with a national festival known as

“Singing Romania”, designed and imposed by the Ceaușescuan brand of national communism, a phenomenon which, two decades since the fall of communism, still lacks real testimonies and research. Although belonging to a large family of national(ist) festivities intended to stage “traditional” peasant culture as a nation-building strategy, as well as to produce and stage a national genealogy of the communist “new man”, Singing Romania is quite distinctive because of its all-embracing scale and its lasting social impact: according to Mihăilescu, Romanian folk culture has never recovered from this vast social experiment. Constantin Eretescu’s contribution seeks to illustrate how folk studies in the 1950s became a collateral victim of the communist system installed in Romania in the latter half of the 1940s. There was no initial intention to subject this field of study to repression, as was the case with sociology, for instance; on the contrary, folk culture was effectively used for propaganda purposes by the new authorities, but only after imposing a decisive new orientation on it. Corina Iosif analyzes the practices of ethnological museology under communism. In that era, the research institutes of the Romanian Academy and ethnographic museums accumulated the greatest disciplinary and symbolic power and remained centres of major importance to the production of discourse on national identity and, simultaneously, laboratories for the patrimonial construction of the nation state.

The second part of the volume, *Bulgaria*, comprises five studies on Bulgarian “national science” in the socialist era. Ilia Iliev demonstrates that a major feature of Bulgarian ethnology from its very beginning in the early nineteenth century was the influence of its Russian counterpart, and thoroughly analyzes the local uses of three Soviet ethnographic concepts. He argues that the Bulgarian academic institutions and intellectual tools shaped after

the Russian model were creatively adapted to suit local needs, while preserving most of the formal characteristics of the original model. Even though local actors were unable to introduce any major change in the field, in the hierarchical structure of Soviet ethnography or in the priorities of the socialist state, they took the opportunities provided within the framework defined by the socialist state and ideology and, on some rare occasions, navigated between the clashing teams “to create relatively independent intellectual spaces outside the raging debates”.

Another valuable contribution is that of Vasil Garnizov, which takes a look at the debate unfolding between Bulgarian ethnographers and folklorists during the last decades of socialism and producing far-reaching consequences: the majority of scholars in the field of folklore studies took a liberal position in political terms and a critical position in scholarly terms and, to a large extent, applied their skills in practice when faced with the challenges posed to the individual under conditions of political, economic and social change, while scholars in the field of ethnography oriented themselves more towards studying communities, groups, minorities and their interrelations. Milena Benovska-Sabkova’s contribution analyzes the rather contradictory development of academic ethnography and folklore studies in socialist Bulgaria by looking at five leading figures of the period (Mihail Arnaudov, Hristo Vakarelski, Petar Dinekov, Stojan Genčev and Todor Ivanov Živkov) and their impact on the scientific paradigm and institutions. Asen Balikci offers a brief analysis of a *magnum opus*, the authoritative three-volume *Etnografija na Balgarija* [Ethnography of Bulgaria], published between 1980 and 1985 by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Anelia Kasabova’s contribution focuses on six life-history interviews with Bulgarian scholars, three men and three women of different gen-

erations and social backgrounds, all from the field of ethnography/ethnology and all having a professional career that unfolded, or at least started, under communism.

The third part, *Serbia*, encompasses six studies by Serbian authors, dealing with different aspects of “anthropology” under communism in this country. Slobodan Naumović, in one of the most comprehensive and most enlightening contributions in the entire volume, intends to turn the “lights” on the politics of Serbian ethnology and anthropology in the “interesting times” of Yugoslav socialism. Naumović contends that in more than a century of its institutionalized history Serbian ethnology functioned under a highly specific local brand of socialism half the time. During this period, “ethnology in Serbia was anything but ‘genuinely autonomous’ and just about as ‘inconstant’ as Geertz would expect it to be”. Naumović wittily says that before, during and after socialism, Serbian ethnology functioned as a “science of the natives, by the natives, and occasionally for the natives”. However, he does not imply that it has remained a national science from the time of its institutionalization and professionalization until today: Serbian ethnology stopped functioning as a national science quite a while ago and during the 1990s successfully resisted the “siren calls” enticing it into returning to its national mission. However, it has remained restricted by the “Own” in two ways: first, during the whole of its history, the study of geographically distant cultures was absolutely marginal, and second, because of that fact, long-term fieldwork itself remained marginal in it. Thus two key constitutive features of anthropological tradition were, and still are, external to the tradition of Serbian ethnology which has recently been renamed anthropology.

Mladena Prelić presents the way ethnology in Serbia was practised, while studying ethnic phenomena, through changes of the paradigm itself, and through the

work of the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. In the case of this institution, the orientation was towards applied research, studies of cultural changes of contemporary society and ethnology’s return to its own scholarly tradition. She also shows how ethnology is no longer understood as a *science of people*, but as a *science of culture*. Marina Cvetković, on the other hand, takes a look at the functioning of the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade during the period of socialism (1945–1990) and shows that most of its research and exhibition activities was focused on various aspects of folk culture, primarily that of the Serbian nation, and only marginally on the cultures of other Yugoslav nations and ethnic minorities. Gordana Gorunović’s contribution takes the example of a single author, Špiro Kulišić, to look at how Marxism was applied in Serbian/Yugoslav ethnology. The examination of Kulišić’s professional biography and institutional activity, ideological involvement and scholarly work reveals some fundamental properties of ethnology and the application of Marxism in the postwar period and within the political context of Yugoslav socialism. Ivana Spasić deals with another significant figure on the Serbian cultural scene, showing that there were in Serbia approaches to the study of man and culture other than institutionalized ethnology: socio-cultural anthropology, personified most prominently by Zagorka Golubović. Throughout the fifty years of her career, Golubović has argued with remarkable consistency for a specific vision of anthropology. Spasić demonstrates how the social history of this vision, both in its internal, theoretical, aspects, and in the external, political and institutional, ones, is representative of the peculiarities of Yugoslav socialism and the way it shaped the academic study of culture and society. Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić presents the Serbian village culture as the meeting point of American anthropology

and Serbian ethnology, recalling the research done by Joel and Barbara Halpern in Orašac (Šumadija), and her encounter with the American anthropologist in the summer of 1978.

The last part of the volume, *Views and approaches from the West*, is devoted to three interviews with Western anthropologists playing the role of the *representative Other*: David Kideckel, interviewed by Vintilă Mihăilescu; Carol Silverman, interviewed by Chris Hann; and Joel M. Halpern, interviewed by Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić. The volume is furnished with an appendix presenting the timelines for the history of Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria,

as well as for the development of their respective “national sciences”.

Writing about anthropology during communism in this part of Europe is a real challenge, not only because of the lack of a critical approach to the history of the discipline in general, but also because of the lack of a “trial of communism” and thus of the possibility of a critical approach to the discipline in the recent past. However, this challenge was skilfully mastered by all the authors of this volume, which can be without exaggeration considered one of the most important South-East European anthropology books of the decade.

MAGDALENA SLAVKOVA, *ЦИГАНИТЕ ЕВАНГЕЛИСТЕ В БЪЛГАРИЯ* [EVANGELICAL GYPSIES IN BULGARIA]. SOFIA: PARADIGMA, 2007, pp. 373

*Reviewed by Aleksandra Djurić-Milovanović**

The Evangelical movement has been spreading among various ethnic communities in different parts of the world since the early nineteenth century. In the Balkans the growth of Evangelical churches has significantly increased since the fall of Communism.

The recently published book of the Bulgarian ethnologist Magdalena Slavkova, *Evangelical Gypsies in Bulgaria*, can be seen as an introduction to a very important research topic, that of neo-Protestant religious communities and the spread of the Evangelical movement among the Roma in Bulgaria. Based on her field research conducted between 1999 and 2007, Slavkova comprehensively presents different groups of Evangelical Roma, structuring her book into three thematically organized chapters preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion and an appendix. The introduction very clearly defines the requirements and goals of the research. Given the heterogeneity of the Roma population in Bulgaria, Slavkova gives a detailed account

of the Roma groups that are members of Evangelical churches: former Orthodox Christians — *Vlaxički tsigani*, *Cucumani*, *Rešetari*, *Džorevci*, *Rudari*, *Lingurari* and *Kopanari*, and former Muslims (both old and recently converted prior to the latest conversion) — *Erlji*, *Kalajdži*, *Ajdii*, *Zagundžii*, *Tatarski tsigani*, *Daalari*, *Xoraxane Roma* and *Kamčibojlii*. In Bulgaria they belong to Charismatic or neo-Protestant churches such as Methodist, Congregationalist, Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal. The methods Slavkova uses in her research are participant observation, life-story interviews and the method of visual anthropology. Apart from that, audio and photo documentation, historical and archival sources, as well as reference books in the Romani language are also used.

The first chapter, entitled “Evangelical Gypsies in the course of history”, roughly

* Ministry of Science of the Republic of Serbia doctoral research scholarship holder on the project no. 148011 carried out by the Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade