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## Ritual on Stage: Folkloric Performance as Symbolic Action

Folkloric performances have enjoyed a kind of renaissance in Jugoslavija in the last fifteen years. While some performing groups, especially in Croatia, have histories of nearly 100 years, there have been ebbs and surges in the level of activity of institutionalized amateur groups presenting local expressive culture — dance, song and customs — on stage. In southeastern Slavonija, in northern Croatia, the establishment of annual folklore festivals in the last fifteen years<sup>2</sup> has both stimulated and been a result of increasing interest and activity in the preservation and presentation of folklore, especially in the villages. The regional organizers of these cultural performances are also strongly motivated to promote domestic and foreign tourism with folkloric attractions.

This touristic component: the fact that cultural performance is both stimulated by funds from and exploited as an attraction for 'tourists' has led some analysts to essentially write off these groups and their activities. They are seen as no longer "authentic" — as no longer springing from the well of anonymous collective cultural creativity. Today's performances are criticized as "staged" events, as if to imply that they are somehow "false": hollow shells of cultural form without meaning, a mimicing of expressive culture ripped from its 'traditional' village context and trotted out like a dancing bear to amuse and entertain the public.

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<sup>2</sup> In the four counties or općine in the area of field research, annual festivals of county-wide (or broader) scope were established as follows: Slavonski Brod — 1964, Vinkovci — 1966, Đakovo — 1967, and Zupanja — 1968. Also, the re-establishment of the Zagreb folklore festival in 1966 has had an influence on folkloric performance in the area, as it did both before and just after WWII.

At the same time, many older participants in folklore groups say something similar: the "real" folklore is dead. It has "died out" (*izumro*), and what they are now doing is only a "momento" (*uspomena*) of what once was.

Running through both of these critiques, the professional's and the performer's, is a common strand of interpretation which links these perspectives and has its source in both a folk theory of folk-art and an ethnological one. Both of these see the kinds of songs, dances, and re-enacted customs performed today as primarily belonging to a disappeared context. For both groups of critics, this is often an a-historical past — a "traditional" era — which is seldom concretely delineated or internally differentiated. The expressive folklore of that era — its cultural performances — are seen to be linked with specific past social and economic circumstances and a different style and tempo of life, one which existed before some historical watershed. The character of that former life, though, is often romanticized: and the turning point in history is seldom specified. An additional aspect of this former folklore's alleged authenticity or *izvornost* is the presumption that these dances, songs, and customs are the collective creation of the people (*narod*), part of their Durkheimian *conscience collective*. While dance and music ethnographers certainly recognize cross-cultural influence and historically changing fashions (as do some older participants), there persists an underlying assumption that an oldest level exists, often at the mythical depth, in village parlance, of 100 years. This oldest 'autochthonous' level is often treated in academic as well as village dialogue as the product of a collective artistry whose motives and 'true' meaning lie buried with the proto-Slavs.<sup>3</sup> However, the processes of creation and reproduction of consciousness in contemporary folkloric performance in its relation to the modern social and cultural world of performers is largely unexplored in Balkan and east European ethnography.

This paper argues against such a relegation of meaning solely to the archaeology of customs, and for an examination of modern folkloric performance as symbolic action: meaningful, motivated human activity interpretable within its modern (albeit historically developed) context. Rather than discarding performances as meaningless because they seem at first glance to present bits of yesterday's life in an incongruous theatre, we can examine these pieces as the work of groups of actors: people who communicate and interact, manipulating folklore to "say something of something."<sup>4</sup> They present a living text of action<sup>5</sup> and a texture of meanings to be interpreted. Both the actors and their enactments have a specific history which impinges on them — or histories, rather, since groups of actors share different sets of significant experiences. Not only do these histories shape their actions, but the differences in actors' experiences make performing and performances mean different things to different groups of participants (as well as to different publics). Why, after all, do villagers get dressed up in antique clothing, do old-fashioned dances, and sing songs that, even for older singers, had often fallen out of popularity in their youth. This paper attempts to illuminate the meaning of performance in terms of the histories of groups of participants and the contradictions in their

<sup>3</sup> Croatian ethnography was born in the struggle to identify and preserve the uniqueness of a national heritage, and to differentiate it from that of other ethnic groups. In this attempt, much emphasis was placed on reconstructions of earlier cultural 'forms' before the Croats came under the political domination of other ethnic groups. In this process, ethnographers tended to ignore activities which they assessed as being of 'foreign' cultural origin.

<sup>4</sup> From C. Geertz, 1973, *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur and Taylor.

present social and cultural milieu. The process of performance itself is interpreted as an arena for the manipulation of key symbols surrounding the problems of aging in this rural agricultural area.<sup>6</sup>

We begin our analysis with a recent performance of what is, no doubt, an ancient custom. "*filipovčice*": a barefoot procession on the eve of Mayday by *cure* (marriageable-aged girls) carrying green boughs and singing a plea for rain. On this occasion, the custom was presented on stage during a longer performance by the "Dalekovci"<sup>7</sup> village folklore group at the Vinkovci annual folklore festival in 1979. Two distinct age groups of participants performed separate repertoires of song, dance, and the ritual<sup>8</sup> *filipovčice*. In the contemporary performance, the difference in what is enacted and its style and ambience, between the two age-cohorts<sup>9</sup> parts of the performance is striking. The older group sings, dances, and enacts *filipovčice*; while the younger group only dances, occasionally accompanying themselves in song. (Both groups, while dancing, are accompanied by a string band of *tambure*.)<sup>10</sup> Their styles of dancing and singing are different, as well as their costumes (in part); and only the older people enact the custom.

This radical visual and textual division in the performances parallels a social division in the group of performers, but it also reflects a division in the understanding of the folkloric performance by the two halves of the group. To perform *šokački*<sup>11</sup> village folklore means something different to each separate cohort. These meanings are created through the different histories of interaction within the two sub-groups of participants. Each cohort has a set of accumulated common experiences of the music, dance, and ritual(s) presented in folkloric performance; and each also has a history of interaction based on social-structural ties within the cohort quite different from that of the other group.

After an initial look at part of the performance itself, we will examine who the cohorts are – what distinguishes them as social sub-groups. Then we will look at the difference in the symbolic action of such contemporary cultural performance which maintains this separation and acts on it. To understand this enacted division, we will briefly examine the different histories of experience and the formation of understanding

<sup>6</sup> This is only one of several possible readings of this text in performance. It can also be read as ethnicity maintenance, or in its political-historical context of the pre-war Peasants' Union (Seljačka Sloga), or in terms of the interplay of religious practice and folkloric performance and symbolism, or as a modern political symbol of "brotherhood and unity" (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*), and simply as the recreational activity of people who enjoy music-making and dance in the company of friends. All of these readings mutually inform one another and are considered in the dissertation (in progress) of which this article is a part.

<sup>7</sup> "Dalekovci" is a pseudonym for the village, meaning "far-off" or "far-out", used to protect the identity of my informants.

<sup>8</sup> The villagers call it their *običaj*, which is usually translated as "custom"; while *obred* (ritual) is used strictly for the rites of the church. In the text, however, I use "ritual" in its broader anthropological sense of patterned cultural activity which may be either secular or religious.

<sup>9</sup> The terminology "cohort" is from the work of R. Rosaldo.

<sup>10</sup> *tambure* are any of a number of stringed instruments with frets, played with a *pleknum*, which are played in ensembles of 4–20 or so instruments of grades sizes from bass to something smaller than a mandolin. Four to eight such instruments make up most village bands.

<sup>11</sup> – the folklore of the *šokci* (– pl., *šokaci* – s.). "Just who is a *šokac*?" is a vexed question. For the purposes of this paper, *šokci* are the old-settler stock Croatian inhabitants of this area in south-eastern Slavonia. (There are *šokci* spread broadly throughout Slavonija, Baranja, part of the Vojvodina, and in Hungarian Bačka.)

in the two groups which have led to the present dichotomy. The cultural performance as whole will be interpreted, then, as a text of two conflicting meanings of folklore turning around the opposition of two generations.

The *filipovčice* performance:

On an outdoor wooden stage in Vinkovci at the annual county folklore festival "Vinkovačke jeseni", the Dalekovci *folklorasi*<sup>12</sup> perform their Mayday ritual under artificial lights and a cloudy sky which has threatened rain all evening. Nine women, two by two, enter the stage dressed all in white, from kerchiefs to skirts, carrying green boughs of hornbeam (*grabovina*) over their heads. Walking slowly barefoot, they circle the stage followed by seven men dressed in the 'summer' folk costume, the whole group singing a series of three ritual songs which plead for rain. One of the women begins each line, and she is then accompanied by all the other participants in singing:

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|--|--|
| <p>1) Blago tebi zelena šumice, ej<br/>blago tebi, lane, zelena šumic'<br/>Ti se mladiš svake godinice, ej,<br/>ti se mladiš, lane, svake godinic'<br/>A ja sada i više nikada, ej,<br/>a ja sada, lane, i više nikad'</p>   | <p>Lucky you (blessed art thou)<br/>Little greenwood, ej, ...<br/>You're young (rejuvenate yourself)<br/>every year, ej, ...<br/>But I (am young) now and<br/>never again, ej, ...</p>   |
| <p>2) Bile vile di ste bile?<br/>Mi smo goru olomile.<br/>Mi smo goru olomile<br/>i vama smo ostavile<br/>kleto drvo topolovo<br/>i još glogovo.<br/>Filipova mila majko<br/>je l' Filip doma?<br/>Otišo je goru lomiti'<br/>još na Ivandan,<sup>13</sup><br/>pa ga eto kući nema<br/>već godinu dana.</p> | <p>White 'fairies' where have you been?<br/>We were breaking off branches in the<br/>forest ... (2x)<br/>and we have left you<br/>the cursed poplar wood<br/>and also hawthorne.<br/>Oh dear mother of Phillip<br/>is Phillip home?<br/>He left to break off branches<br/>already on St. John's Day<br/>and so, well, he's not been home<br/>for a year already.</p> |
| <p>3) Filipovčice, jakobovčice<br/>drvce zeleno, drvce zeleno<br/><br/>Filip i Jakob goru lomili<br/>drvce zeleno ...<br/>goru lomili, boga molili<br/>da nam bog dade da kiša pada</p>  | <p>Filipovčice, jakobovčice<br/>greenwood, greenwood (refrain after<br/>each line)<br/>Phillip and Jacob broke off branches ...<br/>(refrain)<br/>broke off branches, prayed of God<br/>that God grant us that rain falls</p>  |

<sup>12</sup> People who perform in organized folklore groups are, in common parlance, *folklorasi*.

<sup>13</sup> An informant who has been in *filipovčice* before the First World War sang this line as: "još na Đurđev dan", (... St. George's)

da kiša pada da trava raste  
da trava raste da paun pase<sup>14</sup>

da paun pase da perje raste

da perje raste da se mi kitimo.

that rain falls so that grass grows  
that grass grows so that the peacock  
pastures

that the peacock pastures so  
that the feathers grow

that the feathers grow so that we can  
decorate ourselves.

Returning our gaze to the stage, the women are the center of attention. They lead the slow-walking procession dressed in pure white: multiple-pleated skirts (*skute*), aprons (*pregače*), and blouses (*oplećići*) and the kerchiefs over their shoulders and covering their heads (*marama*) are all of white cotton or linen. The borders and decorations are of cut-work (*šlinge*) or single- and double-needlework (*rasplit* and *priplit*), with none of the extravagant gold or silken embroidery which characterizes festive Slavonian costumes, nor even the older style woolen *vez* (embroidery). The wearers are humbly praying for rain, and their dress is appropriately simpler and more sober folk costumes (*mrkije nošnje*).

The most striking thing about this stage ritual performance of *filipovčice*, especially to other villagers, is the age of the women performers. These *filipovčice*<sup>15</sup> are not the marriageable-aged girls they 'should be' at all, but older women (*starije žene*); some are even real *babe* (grandmothers) — and some villagers rag all of them as such. The 'real' girls, by age and status, in the folklore group don't perform the ritual at all. When it was still annually practiced (which it was, at least sporadically, until the late 1950's), it was conducted by eligible unmarried girls: from those just over the border into puberty to those *starije djevojke* (older girls) who were perhaps over 18 or 19 years of age but not yet married. By contrast, today's *filipovčice* are mostly in their mid to late 40's and are married or widowed. The first song of the ritual cycle thus contains the irony: the women sing to the greenwood that it can be renewed from year to year, but that *they* are only young once. But the singers, in fact, re-enact or renew in their middle years events of their youth — a ritual which, by rights, belongs to the young.

While *filipovčice* is a ritual which should be conducted by youth, the young people of the folklore group (half its membership) do not participate in the ritual's performance. In this concert, the younger cohort didn't even appear on stage until the others had 'processed', danced, and sung. There is a complete division between the two cohorts on stage; and neither performs items from the other's repertoire (even though they may know the dances, for instance). The older participants, for the most part, tend to jealously guard their exclusive right to perform 'their' pieces of the repertoire on the grounds that only *they* can perform them 'authentically'. (They also sometimes put it as: "We are authentic.") At the same time, the youth are eager to expand their repertoire to include dances (in particular) from other regions of Croatia and even farther afield.

<sup>14</sup> The same informant (note 13) added the line: „da trava raste, da stado pase” — “that the grass grows so that the herd pastures”. This evidence (13 & 14) corroborates the suggestion of Dr. M. Gavazzi that the Mayday and St. George's Day rituals in Croatia are often cognate, and also suggests that the character of the day as dedicated to stock herders and stock is accurate. (M. Gavazzi, 1939, *Godina Dana Hrvatskih Narodnih Običaja I. Od Poklada do Jeseni*, Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska.)

<sup>15</sup> “Filipovčice” may refer to the ritual, its performance, or the actors (usually the female ones) involved.

The incongruity of the age of the *filipovčice* on stage is a dramatized commentary on the inability and/or unwillingness of these two cohorts of *folklorasi* to combine in performance.

#### Cohorts in the performing group:

The two distinct cohorts within the village folklore ensemble differ in a number of parameters which affect their consciousness of folkloric performance. These include age, marital status, amount of schooling, ethnicity, and mode of living or employment (where comparable). Since the age separation is great, and it marks the difference in the shared historical experience of the cohorts (leading to some of the other differences), it will be a center of attention. At the same time, "age" is a bone of contention among the participants: it is the hub around which criticisms of one cohort by the other revolve; it is evoked as an explanation for the faults, lacks, and inferiority of one cohort by the other or for a group's own positive accomplishments. Age differences, as "youth" or "oldness", catch up a symbolic nexus which the performers comment and otherwise act upon both in performance and in their everyday lives. Age disparity between the cohorts is seen as radical; the cohorts see themselves as opposed. At the same time, these two generations of people are caught up in a social dialectic which threatens to leave the village full of only the older generation, when their children leave for the cities and the "better life" their parents worked so hard to make possible for them.

The male cadre of the older cohort consists almost exclusively of men born before the Liberation War (World War II), but too young to be combatants. The female members of this cohort are mostly married to these men, and are of the same age or slightly younger.<sup>16</sup> In Dalekovi, all men born in 1928 or later escaped military service in WWII; and of the seven performing in Vinkovci, four were born 1928–1933, two others before the war, and one during it. Most of these men, then, and many of their wives had been old enough to experience and remember something of life in 'stara' Jugoslavija, before the great changes of the War and revolution. In fact, many people reckon the beginning of the war as 1943 or 1944, when the first large-scale military hostilities took place in the area. Of the nine women, five were born 1929–1934, two during the war, one after; and the *počimajlja* who starts the verses is the oldest, born in 1923. Of the four married couples performing, all were wed after the men's military service in the post-war period.

All but four of the older cohort are related to one another through some common ancestor no more than three generations back. (There are also some kin ties with a few of the younger cohort.) In fact, aside from marriage, the most common relationship among them is to have grandparents who were siblings. Many of these people were personally 'recruited' by one participant (couple, actually) to reform the group in mid-1979 after several years' hiatus. Formally, the group is open to any village resident; but few are attracted that way. In recruiting members, one doesn't just knock on gates in order down the lane; but rather one goes to those houses where one is sure of a wel-

<sup>16</sup> The make-up of the performing group varies (by about 20%) from performance to performance, but its social characteristics remain virtually the same. Membership is drawn from a pool of similar potential participants. The following data in this paper refer to participants in one performance, but the character of the older cohort's composition (and likewise that of the younger cohort) did not significantly change over 2 years. Similar such cohorts dominate the membership of many of the performing groups in this area.

come — houses where one is not a stranger. This turns out to be largely one's nearer and farther relatives (in both male and female lines and nearer in-laws), close neighbors, and a few friends from other village voluntary social organizations; and it is just such a collection of people who make up this cohort. One of them even said, "We're all just a single family", in characterizing the group. One additional outcome of this familiarization is that all but one of the cohort are *šokci*, and all but one<sup>17</sup> of those are from old Dalekovci families, even though more than half the village's 2500 people are from families which immigrated from Bosnia, Dalmatia, and Lika during the Depression or after WWII.

Except for one woman (the village mid-wife/nurse), all of the older cohort are full-time private agriculturalists and stockraisers. Nearly all went to primary school for 4 1/2 years, then stayed in the village to work their family holdings. They produce grain, vegetables, fruit, and meat for subsistence needs, and meat and grain (sometimes in considerable quantity) for the market. Their agricultural methods are mechanized; they sow hybrid crops and keep modern breeds of stock, the cattle of which are stall fed. As private farmers, they are 15 years into the era of new agricultural technology: tractors, combines, harvesters, and the like (which the socially owned farms in Slavonia obtained earlier); and electric power was introduced in 1960–61. But as younger men, they all worked with the horse-drawn plow and more primitive technology in agriculture. They also have direct experience of the *filipovčice* ritual, in which most of them participated as youths, and of the village *kolo* (round dance) and of village-style two-part singing as a common aspect of sociality and recreation — all of which activities ceased or began to be substantially superseded about 20 years ago.

The younger cohort of *folkloriši*, by contrast, are almost all born in the early 1960's. They include no girls born before 1963, and only two males born before 1960; and three quarters of the cohort were born 1963–1965. All of them have finished at least eight years of primary schooling in the village, and three quarters of the girls and about half the boys go (or went) to high-school or technical school in Vinkovci for 2–4 years. The girls, all born in 1963 or '64, nearly all came into the folklore group from the village's primary school folklore section (run as an extramural school activity). They were, in fact, the main lobbying force persuading the teacher running the school group to renew the village folklore group so that they'd have a place to continue folk-dancing after leaving the village school. The boys include a slightly wider age spread, and the half of them who are not presently in school are employed full-time for wages (mostly in the local forest industry). By contrast with the older cohort, none of these youth are planning to become private farmers, even if they stay in the village.

None of the members of the younger cohort is married; and the vast majority were recruited through school ties, not kinship ones. The school folklore group provided (and still provides) an opportunity for the youth to learn folkloric dances in an entirely different medium from that of the older cohort. Dances from all over continental Croatia and beyond are in the repertoire which children here, as in many other villages, learn as *školski plesovi* — "school dances". Often, the youth are not really sure where the dances originated, or can make only a rough guess. For most of them, the dancing, performing, and company of their age-mates are more important enticements to participate than any expression of village (or broader) ethnicity or sense of nostalgia for a past village cultural and social life.

<sup>17</sup> an in-marrying woman from the next nearest village.

All of this cohort grew up in an environment where radio, television, and gramophones have become common. Their musical experience has been strongly influenced by "slick" commercial recordings of folk music, by pop-music and rock 'n' roll, and by the media of mechanical reproduction of music, where machines play to passive listeners (rather than, as earlier, people more commonly making their own music). While none of these youths are old enough to have even seen the village *kolo* after Sunday mass, all of them have seen (and appreciate) the polished, high-stepping, semi-acrobatic and highly choreographed stage presentations of professional (and polished amateur) folklore groups (especially from other Republics) shown on TV.

"Folklore", as the youth have learned it, is not an activity intimately tied to or broadly 'practised' in village sociality, nor is it any longer an expression of village identity. While, in their parents' generation, the differences in dance and song style and repertoire were still fairly marked from village to village, today's youth have learned many of the same dances taught in schools all over Croatia as "folk dance". In the performing group, they have also learned some of the dances formerly popular in their own village; but they tend to dance with bigger and higher steps than villagers used to use; and they find it difficult to do the tiny, rapid *cupkanje* -- 'bounces' that characterize dances from this region. The importance of village-specific heritage has lessened in their generation considerably from that of their parents for yet another reason: While all of the youth were born in Dalekovci,<sup>18</sup> more than half of them are from families newly settled in the area since WWII. In the 1950's and early 1960's, a great wave of migration into the village took place, as it did all over the rich agricultural areas of Slavonija and the Vojvodina. The majority of immigrants to Dalekovci came from three neighboring villages in Bosnia near Sarajevo: Kisljak, Busovača, and Fojnica, and later from bosanska Posavina near Brčko.<sup>19</sup> Both the social group of school-children and the folkloric dances they learn in school are of mixed origins. Their common experiences in school and in village-wide youth organizations, however, has brought them together as 'friends' or 'comrades' much closer than their parents' generation. (Common affiliation of all villagers with the Roman Catholic Church also has some unifying influence.) The folklore group provides youth with an opportunity to socialize outside the home and maintain close social ties with primary-school friends (especially of the same sex) from whom they have been separated into different secondary schools or classes in Vinkovci. At the same time, the dancing and performing themselves are an attraction, as well as concomittent travelling for performances (which is also a strong draw for the older cohort).

Filipovčice in the youth of the older cohort:

"You lucky greenwood, you turn young again every year; but I'm only young now, and never again." The irony of the older women singing these lines is not lost on either the older performers or their village-mates. The women, in fact, would not perform the ritual on stage in their own village partly because they were embarrassed and suspected that others would reproach or make fun of them for "not acting their age". Their performance, however, does recall for them their youth; it is an *uspomena* -- a remembrance,

<sup>18</sup> except for one girl, whose family immigrated from Bosna in the mid-1970's.

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication, prof. Pero Zužak. Prof. Zužak did demographic survey work in the village in question.



something which calls to mind or evokes an earlier and valued era for them. In the song which the men sing after the ritual, they first praise the beauty of the plum orchard, trysting spot and source of plum brandy:

Ej, al' je lipo u šljiviku diko ... (each line is repeated once)  
Ej, dole trava, gore šljiva plava ...  
Hey, it's lovely in the plum orchard, sweetheart ...  
Hey, grass below, blue plums above ...

then they lament the passing of their youth when they were free to enjoy such pleasures:

Ej, oj mladosti, al' mi te je žao ...  
Ej, sve što imam za tebe bi dao ...  
Hey, oh youth, how I sorrow for you ...  
Hey, all I own I would give for you ...

The whole performance evokes for them not just the past event of going, in their youth, as *filipovčice*, but a whole nexus of images of their younger days. On the one hand, they recall and evoke with nostalgia their own physical youth and status as unmarrieds, freer to play, flirt, love, and 'carry on'. On the other, a style of life, recreation, and sociality are evoked which most of them agree died out about 20 years ago (if not before). This included dancing the *kolo* under the linden trees outside the churchyard after Sunday afternoon mass, informal *kolo* dancing on street-corners in the five village neighborhoods or on winter evenings in peoples' homes, singing on the streets and in the fields at or after labor, and the Sunday and Holy Day's evening strolls which filled the central lane of the village with youth and their elders. It also included the practise of a number of annual customs or rituals, both secular and religious, *filipovčice* among them.

The majority of the older cohort were ripe to participate in *filipovčice* just after WWII, and most of them did. On the eve of May 1st, the saints' day of Filip and Jakob by the Roman Catholic calendar until 15–20 years ago,<sup>20</sup> girls from each of the five lanes of the village gathered to go with the neighborhood lads and cut branches for the ritual. Essentially the affair was an all-day picnic: each group went to its particular section of the outlying forest, 2–3 km from the village, and spent the whole day playing, singing, dancing, and enjoying (now and then) the opportunity for sexual encounters away from adult supervision. One of my older informants described the day thus:

...onda se skupimo cure i momci... nakraj sela i svi skupa u livade. Kad dojdemo u livade onda... piva se, skroz se piva do livade... zafrkavamo se... (piva se) bečarske pisme, livadske pisme, kom' šta pade na pamet, vijamo se – ma svašta je bilo (smijeh) – šta nije! (smijeh)... poneseemo cicuke (usne harmonike) i onda igramo po livadi, sviraju nam... onda ajmo igrat' "vražjeg točka"... ...i tako do pridveče igramo se... i koji momak i cura se vole, pa ajd' malo za trnje, izljuše se, ajd' opet u društvo...

<sup>20</sup> May 1st is now the day of Sv. Josip – Radnik, St. Joseph the Worker; and the day of Sts. Phillip and Jacob has been moved to May 3rd.

...then the girls and boys gather... at the edge of the village and all (go) together to the meadows. When we come to the meadows, then,... there's singing, singing all the way to the meadows... we joke around with each other... (and sing) *bečarac* songs, 'meadow' songs, whatever pops into someone's head; we chase each other around – why, everything went on! (laughter) – what didn't?! (laughter)... we brought mouth harps (harmonicas)... and then we danced in the meadow (while) they played for us... then "let's go play 'crack-the-whip'!"... ..and so on 'til evening we played... and whichever boy and girl love each other, well, off behind the bushes to make love, then back into company...

Somewhere in the midst of this afternoon reverly the boys managed to cut the branches of *grabovina* (hombear wood) for the girls to carry; and by evening they headed home, singing whatever songs 'popped into their heads' – be they *bečarac* verses sung to various arias or lyric songs.

As the groups entered the village from different directions, they walked two by two, girls in front with their branches and boys bringing up the rear carrying such *tambure* and axes as they had had in the fields. Mothers sometimes brought their little girls out of their houses, dressed in white like little *filipovčice*, to join in at the front of the procession walking to the church; and other villagers came out to watch the procession of village beauties pass. Walking barefoot down the middle of the lane, they sing the *filipovčice* ritual song cycle, repeating it all the way to the churchyard. Entering the churchyard singing, they circle the church three times (each group separately), kneel and pray,<sup>21</sup> then hurry off to join the *kolo* which has already started *pod lipama* – "under the linden trees" just outside the churchyard. They unceremoniously dump their branches in a heap and run to join the *kolo*. The branches will later be stuck in the top of their courtyard gate as a decoration and sign that a girl from that house has gone in *filipovčice*.<sup>22</sup>

The two most significant aspects of *filipovčice*, as the older people recount it, are the song text itself – the *sine qua none* of the ritual, and the revel in the fields that preceded it. The delights of good, fun-loving company on an outing are very much alive in their memories. These meadows near the forest edge, though, were also the scene of many days of herding stock on the commons in similar (if more predominantly masculine) company. Almost all boys of that generation spent the three or four years from the end of their schooling (at age 11 or 12 years) until mid-puberty (or until marriage or military service intervened) tending swine or cattle. In fact, many of the men of the older cohort tended stock regularly for several more years, or still do. Girls less frequently tended cattle or geese there, but were often in neighboring fields hoeing. Among

<sup>21</sup> The precise actions here varied from year to year and from lane to lane within the village. Most groups seem to have gone counter-clockwise around the church (to the right or *desno* as one enters the churchyard), but some went clockwise (still to the right as one leaves the church). Some groups knelt and prayed in the churchyard, then in the church, some only in the yard. The prayers also varied, but always include "Oče Naš" and "Anđeo Gospodnji".

<sup>22</sup> All informants, by the way, deny that the ritual has any particular connection with rain-making. There was a custom called "dojdole", where in this village (as in others in the area), in the case of drought, gypsy children went about, one dressed head to toe in leaves, singing a plea for rain. The household head would douse the child with water (a bucketfull) and give small gifts of money or food to the accompanying group. There are also special prayers which can be said in church for rain.

themselves and with other older herdsmen, the boys whiled away hours playing games, telling stories, singing — and in *rendez-vous* with girls, since their task was not constantly taxing. They sang with just such a voice and style of delivery as the men sing today in their stage performance: a long, drawn-out, almost free-metered melody line full of grace-notes, turns, and embellishments, and a more or less obligato accompaniment in thirds below, ending with a final fifth on the second degree. The slow, stretched out style of singing is seen by them as part of a slower pace of life — before mechanization and hurried life by clock time. The aria they sang is indeed called *livadski glas* — “meadow voice”, and to it one can sing any number of two line couplets on the theme of one’s choice.

That style of life, viewed in retrospect, and the style of musicality in singing — both in the *filipovčice* songs and the men’s *livadski glas*, resonate with one another. Singing itself, they say, lightens the heart; and this kind of singing evokes both the images and their associated affective states — the enjoyments of their youth, which are lost to the older cohort... except as *uspomena*. But these *uspomena* are not just the shades of the past, but a living, immediate act and experience which they create and recreate through the stage performance. In that special context, they can assemble both the props and the social circle necessary to produce both the text and the ambience of those experiences of youth again. If only for 20 minutes of ‘full dress’ performance (if not also in the endless rehearsals preceding it), the *filipovčice* are once again, somehow, young. They dress themselves in the symbolic garb of Mayday maids, retrace the barefoot steps of their youth in procession, toss their branches into a heap, and join the *kolo*. The songs they later sing are of young love and its pitfalls (the women) and a pean to the pastoral life (the men); but most of all, these verses evoke the teasing, loving, playing, and carrying-on of youths with their senses tuned to the opposite sex:

Ej, volim s milom leći na iverje... (sung to ‘livadski glas’)  
ej, već s nemilom na mekano perje...

Hey, I like to lie with my sweetheart (even) on woodchips...  
hey, better than with the one I don’t like on soft feathers...

Volim Katu milovat’ po vratu... (sung to ‘bečarac’ aria)  
alaj (i) Ivku po milome licu...

I love caressing Kata on the neck...  
but also Ivka on her sweet face...

U zoru je slatko milovanje... (sung to ‘bečarac’ aria)  
kad se dika sprema na oranje...

At dawn, there’s sweet caressing...  
when my sweetheart gets ready for plowing...

The whole performance is an opportunity to be transformed into temporary youth, to evoke the experience of those halcyon (in recollection at least) younger days, and to come away flushed with excitement (and sometimes a little *rakija* — plum brandy), in a fine mood, and usually ready to continue partying in the same vein for several more hours.

\* \* \*

The loss of youth has yet another meaning in the modern village context: the loss to the older villagers of their sons and daughters. People in their 20's who have remained in the village as private farmers represent only about 5-10% of their school classes. Youth move massively out of the village to take employment, do advanced schooling, or just because the ambience of urban centers attracts them. The problem of aging farm households with no prospect of youthful hands to replace older ones is an obvious and acknowledged dilemma both in official political circles and in every village home. Parents value education for their children, and so give them every opportunity to "advance". This same "advancement", though, actually prepares the children to leave the family farm rather than staying to later run the 'enterprise' and care for their aging parents. At the same time, it implicitly devalues the life-choice of being a private farmer and the village 'mentality' and culture associated with that choice. The older cohort is just at the age where their children will be making (or have made) that choice of whether or not to stay as farmers - and few have stayed. The presence of the 'real' youth in the folklore group, so different from the youth of the older cohort's past experience, are a constant reminder of the passing of their way of life; and it may be part of why they insist on a radical separation in performance from the younger dancers.

At the same time, in the musical and dance spheres, the younger cohort (even if a few of them do appreciate the older styles of song and dance) are largely enamoured of disco, punk rock, pop music, and fast rhythmic orchestrations of whatever music - be it *tambure* or electric guitars. They like fast moving *kolos*, and are very catholic in their preferences for lively dances from other regions. The older people perceive them as having poor taste in music (especially *in re* "rock" music) and no ear for singing. The elders say that the youth hurry everything to an even beat and don't know how to sing the 'traditional' accompaniment to Slavonian melodies. In fact the youth have had difficulty learning to sing in key with the tamburica band while dancing, don't sing the accompaniment in thirds, and had trouble singing *out* of regular rhythm while trying to learn the ritual songs for the *kraljice*,<sup>23</sup> which they hoped to perform. For their part, the youth criticize the dancing of the older cohort: the aesthetic of (most of) the young leans toward the 'flashier' high-stepping, fast-turning, stage choreographed dance presentation they see in mass media models, rather than the tiny steps, fine gestures, and almost imperceptibly small and rapid bounce motions which were once characteristic of Dalckovci dancing. Each group thus criticizes the other for either its taste, the inappropriateness of its stylistics, or the quality of its execution.

Performing in the same group with the youth brings the older cohort face to face with problems and threats symbolized in the youths' presence and performance. There is a clash of evaluation of the performing styles and repertoire in which the youth are seen as denigrating the indigenous music and dance in favor of the 'foreign' (*tudi*) or the modern (equally foreign), and hence threatening the face<sup>24</sup> of the older performers

<sup>23</sup> See Gavazzi, *op. cit.*, and Lovretić for fuller descriptions of this and other rituals from a neighboring village. (Lovretić, 1897, Otok: Narodni život i običaji, in Zbornik za Narodni Život i Običaje Južnih Slavena, Zagreb.)

<sup>24</sup> Yugoslavs use *obraz* - cheek or face - in a very Goffmanesque fashion.

via the valuation of their performance. The cultural difference of these 'real' youth from their elders challenges the image of youth and its value presented by the older cohort. At the same time, these contemporary youth are just those who will, in all likelihood, reject the farmer's life for jobs or school in the towns or abroad. They are living examples of the dilemma which already faces the older cohort as they age and become less capable of effectively running their farms, and as their children leave them behind to grow old alone. There is, thus, a doubly sad note to the nostalgia of enacting the rituals of youth: not only has the actors' youth passed, but the youth to whom they should expect to pass on their cultural wealth rejects it.

But the performance itself is certainly *not* sad. The conflicts above are a background to the performance, a part of everyday experience and consciousness. But performance is a special event, out of the ordinary. On stage, a scene is set outside the everyday world, a special theatre of action where some of the rules of everyday reality and understanding are suspended so that an image or situation can be dramatized – cast in a different light. In this dramatization or acting-out, the older cohort recalls in words (in song) – filling the scene with richer images than can be otherwise 'manufactured' on stage – and creates in action (ritual, dance and song) a lived and living experience of themselves as youth. In their day as youth, this expressive culture was positively valued – and as symbolic youth, they surround themselves with an aura of that approval. Approval arises from social groups in communication, and it is just such a like-minded social group, an even familial group, that they gather in to perform – their cohort. In singing the songs of that prior era, they recreate the social environment of gaiety, light-hearted fun, sexuality, and playfulness that stimulates their personal enjoyment of getting up on stage to perform. They love it, they say so, and it shows. (...and it shows sometimes in rehearsals, too.)

What the whole folklore group presents on stage – both young and old – can be read as a commentary on this clash of cultures between generations, as well as a text on the struggle of the older generation to maintain their cultural values. At the same time, the performance is, for the older cohort, a symbolic 'solution', if an ephemeral one, to the dilemmas of growing old without the prospect of assistance or inheritors on the farmstead. It creates a real opportunity for them to evoke the images and affects which they interpret themselves as having enjoyed in the happy days of their youth. The tenuousness of this symbolic action is obvious to them, and is apparent in their fear of its being shattered by accusations of acting inappropriately for their age and in their refusal to perform in Dalekovci itself. Still, when they can distance themselves just a bit further – to slightly 'foreign' stage – they can safely enact a complete imaged exercise in rejuvenation, putting the lie to the very verse they sing: like the May branches, they too can be young again.

Far from a meaningless exercise, this folkloric performance turns around some of the crucial social and cultural dilemmas facing today's villagers. Certainly, enacting one's youth on the stage doesn't immediately change the social situation (though human action always, eventually, influences it). Youth will still leave the village, as many of the elder cohort's sons and daughters already have; mass media and schools will continue to have a strong influence on the musical taste of future generations; and the old will still grow older. In the wider social arena, however, the willingness of the older cohort to present their version of expressive culture in public may contribute to a growing acceptability of their kind of life choice in others' eyes, and thus also contribute to

a social and political climate to the performers' well-being. But most directly, in this enactment, performers can experience a reversal of the sense of devaluation of their cultural world. They create for themselves a feeling of well-being which lifts their mood and affects their experience of accomplishment, worth, and health. They liken singing, especially, to a tonic for ill health or poor spirits which lifts them up and stimulates them to appreciate their life through this cultural medium. In enacting *filipovčice* and performing "folklore", they clothe themselves in symbols of their youth and enter the extraordinary age-reversed world of the stage<sup>25</sup> to enact the ritual prerogatives of the young and embellish this enactment with secular and recreational ones through song and dance. They turn the positive experience of their youth into a symbolic weapon against the steady march of age and the overturning of their prized cultural forms of entertainment and enjoyment. By cloaking themselves in the verbal and actual mantle of youth they not only wield a weapon in the public arena of cultural conflict, but evoke and create those affective experiences in cultural performance which rejuvenate their interest in and stimulate them to continue performing.

<sup>25</sup> An analysis could also be made of the preparations for an enactment of this 'folklore' on stage in British structuralist terms, à la Turner and Douglas, which would further illuminate the processes in actual performance of the reinforcement of the connection of meaning and affect.