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Marko Živković. *Serbian Dreambook: National Imaginary in the Time of Milošević.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. xi + 318 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-35623-9; $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-22306-7.

Reviewed by Ivana Bajic-Hajdukovic (University College London)

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Commissioned by Catherine Baker (University of Hull)

The dissolution of Yugoslavia and the consequences of ensuing wars in its former territories has attracted much scholarly attention from various disciplines.[1] The latest contribution to understanding the situation in post-1990 Serbia, *Serbian Dreambook*, comes from anthropologist Marko Å½ivkoviÄ in which he analyzes the "stories Serbs tell themselves (and others) about themselves" (p. 4). Å½ivkoviÄ draws a parallel between the Serbs as a "people of the Kosovo Dreaming" and Australian Aborigines, alluding to the significance of (the myth of) Kosovo in the Serbian national imaginary (p. 5). Despite these anthropological references, the book is more of a historical account of the Slobodan MiloÅ¡eviÄ and pre-MiloÅ¡eviÄ years in Serbia.[2]

The positive side to this volume is that it brings together a number of well-known and frequently researched themes in the study of Serbian society (such as the Kosovo myth or the discursive opposition between "highlander" and "lowlander" identities) and, as such, will be a very useful reference for anyone interested in the recent history of Serbia. However, by relying mostly on literature and the media as primary sources, the book lacks the authenticity and depth typical of anthropological monographs. In fact, what is presented as the core of the book's ethnographic evidence consists of books, newspaper articles, and a discourse analysis of the media. Å½ivkoviÄ is an anthropologist native to the country he is studying, and his introduction discusses his position in relation to his informants during the fieldwork he carried out. Later in the book, however, it turns out that he uses interviews, participant observation, and other traditional ethnographic methods only anecdotally and that the core "ethnographic" evidence is actually based on the media and printed materials. While we learn a lot about the media, elite discourse, and cultural production, there is very little hard ethnographic evidence to support the grand theory of Serbs as the people of the Kosovo Dreaming.

The book consists of ten chapters organized like essays in a compendium of Serbian ethno-political mythology. The style of these essays varies significantly, and their sequencing and the choice of topics covered are never explained. The reader is expected to second-guess, for example, how one chapter on highlanders and lowlanders is connected to the following chapter about gangsters. The advantage of this organization is that the book can be used as a reference tool for particular topics and does not have to be read as a whole. It will therefore be useful in teaching courses on the recent history of former Yugoslavia, political science, nationalism, and war

studies, though its relevance for memory studies is less certain.

The opening chapter starts with an ethnographic description of Belgrade, paying careful attention to key figures and elements in the social and physical landscape of the "Capital of Serbian Imaginary" (p. 14). The authorâs cinematic gaze meanders through the areas of central Belgrade, sketching out the symbolic meanings of urbanite city dwellers (as opposed to arrivistes from the countryside); asphalt (as opposed to cobblestone); vernacular architecture (such as kiosks); coffee shops (the *kafana*, a place where men sift through politics in conversation); and the new forms of "city types" or personalities that emerged in the early 1990s, such as criminals and so-called sponsored girls (young women financially supported by rich male partners). As we follow the author on this journey through Belgrade, he takes us back and forth through history and explains which streets, squares, and parts of the city played important roles in public events.

Chapter 2, "Serbia's Position in European Geopolitical Imaginings," discusses, as its title suggests, Serbia's "in-between" status vis-Ã -vis Europe. Serbia appears as neither quite Central European in a geographical or cultural sense, yet not really properly Balkan either (since Macedonia, to the south, is "more Balkan" than Serbia). Å½ivkoviÄ uses the term "gradient of depreciation" to explain the mechanism of creating hierarchies and (self-) positioning in Serbia (p. 64).[3] In chapter 3, "Highlanders and Lowlanders," Å½ivkoviÄ meticulously analyzes the sets of moral values and traits associated with these two character types. For more than two hundred years, a discourse about feisty barbarian highlanders and sophisticated civilized lowlanders has recurred in writings and descriptions of the Balkans and Serbia, starting with the eighteenth-century travelogue of the Venetian Alberto Fortis. This typology has been appropriated by both local and foreign writers, journalists, and academics, and has even been used to explain the last war in the Balkans. Cultural determinism pervades even the more recent academic writings, thus exposing the vulnerability of the social sciences to demagogy and political exploitation. It also reveals local elites' love affair with stereotypes and these elites' attempts to displace the blame for the turmoil of the 1990s onto *doÄoÅ¡i* (that is, on highlanders who descended onto Serbian towns), thereby removing any responsibility from themselves.

The next chapter, "Tender-Hearted Criminals and the Reverse Pygmalion," describes the rise of gangster culture and gangsters' celebrity status in 1990s Serbia. Å½ivkoviÄ does this by matching certain real-life personalities with fictional characters from films made in the same period. The line between reality and fiction is blurred in this analysis: he uses fiction films as material for an analysis of gender relations in Serbia, more specifically, of the emasculated macho male's position before the "female gaze" of the international community. This position, where a female (whether the characters of foreign women in the films he analyzes or as the "female gaze" of the international community) stands superior to the ruffian macho Serb, represents a trope that Å½ivkoviÄ terms the "Reverse Pygmalion," inverting the myth where a male creator brings a refined female into being.

Three following chapters–"Serbian Jeremiads," "Glorious Pasts and Imagined Continuities," and "Narrative Cycles"–all place the impact of elites and high culture in 1990s Serbia at their core. Å½ivkoviÄ is not the first scholar whose analysis of MiloÅ¡eviÄ's Serbia has been focused on elites, such as nationalistic poets and writers and the academics of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. He is, however, the first anthropologist to write a full-length ethnography of this period without including what anthropology does better than any other social science, that is, a rich and nuanced analysis of the everyday lives of "ordinary people." This would be the only way to assess the actual impact that elites and their cultural production had on Serbian society. One is left to wonder how many people in Serbia had actually read or seen the novels of Vuk DraÅ¡koviÄ ([1946-], a politician who briefly served as deputy prime minister of the rump Yugoslavia in 1999 and is also known for his 1982 historical novel *NoÅ¾* [*The Knife*] about Serb suffering in World War II); the poems of Matija BeÄkoviÄ (1939-) or Rajko Petrov Nogo (1945-); or the paintings of MiliÄ of Macva ([1934-2000], a Serbian painter known for paintings with mystical and religious themes); not to mention the eponymous memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (a document prepared by the academy in 1986 that listed Serb historical and political grievances against Tito's Yugoslav regime)–which most people have only heard of but have never actually read. As an anthropologist, Å½ivkoviÄ had an excellent opportunity to offer a fresh perspective by observing and commenting on how these ideas were received by the people of Serbia in the 1990s. Instead, he focuses on high-level messages promoted in museums and literary fiction, which have at best limited impact on the lives of the small proportion of the population who actually came into contact with those works. It is unfortunate that his work fails to make such a

vital link that would help to unlock the meanings of the crucial events in Serbia. As important as these cultural texts may have been in shaping nationalistic discourse in 1990s Serbia, their direct impact on Serbs' everyday lives is highly questionable without hard ethnographic evidence.

Chapter 8, " 'The Wish to Be a Jew'; or, The Power of the Jewish Trope," analyzes how, in 1990s Serbia, the suffering of the Jews was appropriated and compared to the suffering of the Serbs in recent history. This analysis is informative and includes much detail about the Jewish community in Serbia and its attempts at political mobilization. However, it misses an opportunity to broach ethnographically the very serious issue of victimhood among the Serbs (the discourse of Serbian nationalism has portrayed the Serbs as victims of inimical nations throughout history). Again, this is exactly where ethnography could provide a much-needed understanding of how a sense of victimhood has led to an unwillingness to accept responsibility for the wars in former Yugoslavia on the part of many Serbs.

The penultimate chapter, "Garbled Genres," discusses the difficulties Serbian people faced in comprehending the tremendous changes that were taking place during the MiloÅ¡eviÄ period. Conspiracy theories, according to Å½ivkoviÄ, proliferated in this period as people tried to make sense of the incomprehensible events that spilled over from the public and political sphere into their everyday lives. The last chapter, "Mille vs. Transition," analyzes a post-MiloÅ¡eviÄ Serbian television show that portrays the frustrations of an "ordinary" Serb named Mile who struggles to adapt to the changes brought on by the transition from socialism. Å½ivkoviÄ uses Mile (whose name he transcribes as "Mille" to avoid Anglophone readers confusing it with the unit of measurement) as a metaphor for this "ordinary" man of todayâs Serbia, torn between the lost hopes of the post-MiloÅ¡eviÄ era and frustrations about not being European, Western, or modern enough. This final chapter ends the book with a rather bleak picture of Serbia, ending with an apocalyptic note of permanent doom and gloom to which the country is (pre-)destined.

Serbian Dreambook ends with the statement that "it has all been about an exaggerated, larger-than-life, megalomaniacal story of Serbian innocent victimhood" that "helped the Serbian authorities legitimate the violence in Croatia, Bosnia, and, finally, in Kosovo itself, at least to their own population" (p. 249). As valid as this conclusion is for the material presented in the book, that is, for an analysis of political and elite narrative discourses under MiloÅ¡eviÄ, it is not supported by ethnographic evidence from the ground, unless one counts sporadic anecdotal episodes as such. The voices of the "common people" (meaning not elites but ordinary citizens) who took to the streets in mass protests against MiloÅ¡eviÄ in 1991, 1996, 1997, and 2000 are absent; even references to other anthropological works that explain dissent among common people are missing.[4] *Serbian Dreambook* thus represents the discourse of the elites and their "Kosovo Dreaming," not of the Serbian people. Kosovo has been a very powerful idiom in Serbian politics over the last two decades, and it still is; it has served many an electoral campaign, and Serbian politicians are all too aware of this fact. However, to compare this operation of ideology to the Australian Aboriginal Dreaming is, to say the least, misplaced. The comparison seriously overestimates Kosovo's significance in the everyday life of people in Serbia and does no justice to the sacred Aboriginal Dreamtime either. The contribution of this book to memory studies is limited for the same reasons: while it demonstrates the (ab)use of memory for political and ideological purposes, it fails to make a connection between public and private memory. As such, it defies its own title. The reader learns very little about private memory among the Serbs, while learning a disproportionate amount about elites and "official" public memory.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, Jasna DragoviÄ-Soso, *Saviors of the Nation: Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Rise of Nationalism* (London: Hurst, 2002); Sabrina P. Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to the Fall of Milosevic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002); Zlatko SkrbiÅ¡, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands, and Identities* (Sydney: Ashgate, 1999); and Susan L. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[2]. Milosevic dominated the political scene in Serbia from the late 1980s until October 5, 2000, when he was forced from office. During his years in power, the country entered socioeconomic turmoil as a result of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia.

[3]. For comparison, see, for example, Milica BakiÄ-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 917-931; Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New

York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[4]. See, for example, Stef Jansen, "The Streets of Beograd: Urban Space and Protest Identities in Serbia," *Political Geography* 20, no. 1 (2000): 35-55; Stef Jansen, "Victims, Underdogs and Rebels: Discursive Practices of Resistance in Serbian Protest," *Critique of Anthropology* 20, no. 4 (2000): 393-420; and Stef Jansen, *Antinacionalizam: etnografija otpora u Zagrebu i Beogradu* (Belgrade: Biblioteka XX Vek, 2005).