H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Capo Zmegac, Jasna, Reinhard Johler, Sanja Kalapos, Herbert Nikitsch, eds.
Kroatische Volkskunde/Ethnologie in den Neunzigern. Vienna: Institut fÖ¼r EuropÖ¤ische Ethnologie, 2001. 491 pp. EUR 21.80 (paper), ISBN 978-3-902029-05-8.

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Published on H-SAE (November, 2001)

Croatian Ethnology–Past, Present and Future

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Two scholars each from the Institute of European Ethnology in Vienna and the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb combined forces to produce this impressive anthology of recent work in Croatian ethnology. Though oriented toward a German readership the editors' intend this volume also as a contribution to transnational European ethnology; such a project requires both acknowledgment and transcendence of the enormous linguistic and historical differences between different national research traditions (p. 20-21). Together with the editors six additional authors present a total of 23 translated essays from this very active ethnological research tradition–the labor that went into this production is palpable. Most of the essays appeared first in Narodna Umjetnost, Etnoloska Tribuna, or Studia Ethnologica Croatica; a few of them appeared in English, all of them were written and/or orally presented in the 1990s.

A first scan of the contents reveals both influences upon and preeminent emphases of recent Croatian scholarship. The first section, History and Theory, displays strong engagement with both Anglo-American and French anthropological theory, particularly in Ines Prica's lead essay "To be here–to publish there: Regarding the Situation of a Small European Ethnology" (an essay that appeared first in English in Narodna Umjetnost 32/1, 1995, pp. 7-23). Section two focuses on "Transformations and Political Symbols," and section three tackles what surely is one of the most problematic and urgent historiographic and theoretical tasks for Croatian ethnologists, namely, "Ethnicities, Pluralities, Identities." Section four is devoted to "War Ethnography," and contains two essays familiar to English language readers from the volume Fear, Death and Resistance: An Ethnography of War in Croatia, 1991-92 (Zagreb, 1993) as well as a deeply probing follow-up essay by Maja Povrzanovic-Frykman, "Time of Suffering and Spaces of Belonging."

The final fifth section assembles case studies from material culture research that partly reassess older bodies of data or seek to evaluate them from present-day methodological and theoretical precepts. The topics here are spinning, sacred architecture, folk art, rural conceptions of life and space as reflected in ritual, vernacular markers of sites of deadly accidents, as well as an essay on literature as a source on everyday life in 16h century Dubrovnik. The editors explicitly excluded some very productive branches of Croatian scholarship, such as work on oral tradition and theater, folk music and vernacular beliefs. But these and numerous other topics are included in a comprehensive, more broadly conceptualized bibliography of Croatian ethnological scholarship that concludes the work. The bibliography spans from 1986 to the present and with many entries in French, English and German it further demonstrates the participation of Croatian ethnologists in the international scholarly community.

The editors introduce the volume with a historical sketch of the complex interrelationship between a Ger-

manic (or imperial) and a national, philologically-based ethnological research tradition. These were initially situated within one state, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and taught in competing departments at the University of Vienna, paradigmatically characterized through the figures of Friedrich Salomon Krauss and Vatroslav Jagic. They both taught in Vienna, but mobilized their research interests and associated audiences in different ways, and employed rather different research standards as well. The role of the Slavic regions was a crucial foundation for a growing Austrian ethnology within a declining empire. And due to the long history of their political and administrative interconnectedness these regions continued to hold a crucial place in Austrian research. "The Balkans" were a foundational component of Austrian ethnology in the 1880s and were exoticized in different ways than in the growing ethnologies of other German speaking countries.

The rapid growth of what the editors call the small national ethnologies within divergent Slavic nations in the Balkan region did not keep Austrian ethnologists from continuing their explorations of the "south Slavs" and Serbo-Croatian ethnology long after the collapse of the empire; they laid the foundation for what the Viennese ethnologist AndrÃ© Gingrich has identified as a special brand of colonial ethnology and frontier Orientalism (p. 18).

After more than a century and following tremendous political transformations, it is more than timely to confront German-language researchers, particularly in Austria, with a history of Croatian ethnologists' "indigenous" research (surveyed in an essay by Vitomir Belaj) and their contributions to ethnological questions of relevance "at home" as well as in the broader realm of international ethnological discourse.

In this regard, Jasna Capo Zmegac's assessment of historical and anthropological research on the perhaps not so typical Balkan extended family, the zadruga, is particularly poignant. Under the title "The Gaze from the Outside: Croatia and the Model of the 'Balkan family'. An Ethnological Commentary from the Native Perspective," Capo Zmegac criticizes generalizations that have been drawn regarding the so-called "Balkan" family, emphasizing their role in culturally legitimating certain war crimes. By presenting differentiated ethnographic data on family organization within the region and different ethnic subgroups she rejects such a stereotypification of the Balkans as a whole. In this regard work on the Balkan family by the Austrian historian Karl Kaser is particularly under fire. After Capo Zmegac first presented her critique Kaser published a more differentiated work which she also acknowledges in her article. But her point remains well taken since the wars accompanying the break-up of former Yugoslavia were moments when ethnological knowledge was mobilized to understand a situation that was tough to comprehend in the greater world witnessing this violence.

Perhaps the most influential voice in Croatian ethnology since WWII, Dunja Rihtman-Augustin (one of the more influential teachers of many of the younger and also predominantly female contributors to this volume) explains in her two essays why the contours of this research took the shape they did in Croatia. Both essays deal with the political nature of the field, a topic she repeatedly addressed long before 1989. In an essay subtitled "Concerning the Political Engagement of Folklore Studies" she launches into reflection about her own days of studying toward a degree. Even today, she remembers the "almost physical discomfort" which hampered her teachers from engaging in the question "whether ethnologists might or even should consider the political contexts and the influences of their research topic" (p. 117). Perhaps the experience of this discomfort and the reflexivity engendered by it led her to make this very question one that informed a great deal of her scholarship and teaching.

The three central themes of the volume on political symbolism, ethnicity, and war reflect this preeminent engagement in topics of a political nature. In her essay "Folklore Studies during Socialism and after," Rihtman-Augustin explains, in perhaps more poignant terms than some of the early Croatian war ethnology publications could, why these themes became all consuming for ethnologists practicing within Croatia. Reflecting on the situation of all post-socialist ethnologies, she argues that one means to come to terms with the intellectual production of the socialist era is to examine "which phenomena were, under the given political circumstances of the time, not treated, be this for reasons of supposed repression, simple forgetfulness, or self-censorship.... I am certain that some themes and research areas were negated not only by Croatian ethnologists but also by researchers from other European countries and the USA who undertook fieldwork [in Croatia]. All scholars hesitated to tackle issues which the regime at the time might have perceived as critique and which thus might have jeopardized the safety of the researcher" (p. 148).

Among the negated or simply bypassed themes, she enumerates the systematic suppression of tradition, man-

ifestations of nationality and ethnicity (because they would have undermined the collective or pan-Slavic needs of a Yugoslav state), the political nuances in the folklorization of tradition, theories of ethnicity, and the secularization of folk culture. Yet the break-up of former Yugoslavia did not bring a peaceful transition where such historiographic reflection on socialist ethnological knowledge production could have taken place. Some of these issues were taken up, as various contributions in this volume illustrate. But, as Rihtman-Augustin explains, under conditions of war, ethnology cannot be carried out as a "discipline in which the cultural processes within smaller entities are studied within the framework of a larger system, as it is those cultural processes that are bringing about the dissolution of the entire system. When one begins to think about the role of ethnology in politics, one cannot help the feeling to have gotten stuck under a millstone which nearly crushes one or which at the very least does not let one escape." Of the two choices open to the ethnologist caught under this millstone–a position of avoiding or adopting a political ethnology–she clearly chose the latter: political ritual, the transformation of symbols and mentalities must be studied, the questions of national and ethnic identities must be fore-grounded, and young Croation ethnologists must be trained "who can participate in the international scholarly discourse, and who no longer have to flee from 'hot' topics" (p. 155).

One cannot judge solely by this volume the extent to which Croatian ethnology is succeeding in this program, but the evidence assembled here is promising. Essays reevaluating pre-socialist scholarship, for instance, contribute to the history of the discipline beyond Croatia, and historical research on the construction of socialist holidays, or more complex and volatile, on the historical layers of discourse surrounding the ethnic belonging of particular subgroups, are instructive for Croatia, for the German language readers of this volume, and for a broader anthropology of Europe.

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Citation: Regina Bendix. Review of Zmegac, Capo; Jasna; Johler, Reinhard; Kalapos, Sanja; Nikitsch, Herbert, eds., *Kroatische Volkskunde/Ethnologie in den Neunzigern.* H-SAE, H-Net Reviews. November, 2001.

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