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Review

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An ethnological, anthropological and cultural portrait of Southeastern Europe²

Abstract

This text presents the contents of the book. The importance of conclusions and significance of the book for the people of Southeast Europe on their way to the European Union integration were commented on.

Keywords: *socialism, post-socialism, everyday life, culture, integration.*

Contemporary ethnologists outside of Serbia are increasingly focused on researching prospects and conditions of life, work and behavior... of men, of people, and their communities throughout the history, especially so in the modern period (the 20th and the 21st centuries). Considerable knowledge (findings, explanations, perspective assessment) highlights Klaus Roth³, whose book we are analyzing here.

In the introduction, the author states the following: “*Twenty years ago... my book **Images in Heads** was published. That was a period of dramatic changes in the Southeast Europe which was undergoing a transition from socialism towards democracy and market economy...*

Today... the conditions in Southeast Europe are relatively stable and calm, but they are not easier...

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² Klaus Roth: *From Socialism to the European Union – Experiments in Southeast European Everyday life*, Belgrade: “Krug”, 2002.

³ Klaus Roth (born 1939.) is a “*Professor emeritus in European Ethnology at Munich University and the editor-in-chief of the journal **Ethnologia Balkanica**... He published a significant amount of research, books and collections of papers about everyday culture, socialism and post-socialism*” (taken from the cover of his book).

I am convinced that the true task of European ethnology, that is, anthropology, is to carefully keep track of these social processes and processes of everyday culture, and to discover their causes and effects...

Among those processes is the hasty rise of social and local disparities, which is reflected, for example, in the increasing discrepancy between capital cities and abandoned inland regions...

The consequences of such developments are, among other things, the increasingly ambivalent, surprisingly negative attitude towards the EU as well as the actual problems in practicing its norms...

I've chosen texts that deal with those topics of everyday culture that I believe are especially relevant to understanding the society and culture of this region"⁴.

The contents are distributed across 17 chapters.

For Serbia, and accordingly the Republika Srpska, the importance of this book is even greater because it contains connotations which are relevant to our socialism and the way towards the EU accession.

Klaus Roth firstly explains the utility of cultural studies, and the tasks and perspectives of ethnological research in Southeast Europe. He found that: *"The social significance of cultural studies, in both their wider and narrower sense, has significantly declined in recent years; on one hand due to the fact that strong emphasis is placed on natural sciences and engineering, and that they are encouraged, and on the other hand because the globalization and the coming together of Europe have made economics and the science of politics more relevant than researching culture..."*

Precisely because of the aforementioned global and European processes, cultural research is needed more than ever...

Ethnographic and ethnological research of Southeast Europe, which should be up to the standards of the modern age, cannot be contained to describing folk rituals, describing folk games and folk music and noting down stories and songs. Considering the problems which exist in today's societies, a modern approach to scientific research of cultures in Southeast Europe can only be a critical analysis of a culture which is trying to contribute to the solution, or at least a mitigation, of those social problems – and which, accordingly, above anything else cannot take its attention away from "regular people" and their everyday life..."⁵. It seems that there is nothing to be added or excluded from this. There remains only to accept and acknowledge of these realizations.

At the begging of the chapter titled **Researching socialistic and post-socialistic everyday culture**, Roth explains: *"The subject of this text is neither socialistic nor post-socialistic everyday culture as such, but rather the way in which foreign ethnographers, folklorists, ethnologists and anthropologists re-*

⁴ Op. cit. pp. 5-8.

⁵ Op. cit. pp. 9-12.

searched and still research that culture. More so than researchers in other areas, ethnographers need to consider what they are doing, that is, to consider the questions of what they are (as researchers), who, what, and from what perspective are they researching, and—above all—for what reason are they researching everyday behavior of people, as well as what is the interest that drives them towards that...⁶ Next, he presented the characteristics of the research in question, according to time periods: before and after the year 1990, along with both “inside and outside” viewpoints. Especially important is his following remark: “Socialist regime of everyday life was truly an integral part of lives of millions of people—including the researchers themselves. For many ethnologists, that deep involvement meant a whole array of epistemological and, above others, ethical problems”.⁷ Those of us who lived in that regime know well enough that those problems were conditioned by ideological and political (communist) influences, reasons...

In the third chapter, the basic meaning of the term **region** is explained along with the specific characteristics of Southeast Europe region, which is “somewhere between globalization, EU integrations and marginalization”. Special importance is placed on the explanation of the four kinds of regions: **small, medium, large and global**, along with the following classifications of regions: **given, created and formal** and: **administrative, economic, social and cultural**.

To us, to our people, the following critique this ethnographer made is especially significant: “Socialist countries (with the exception of Yugoslavia) have put even more effort into creating and reorganizing official territorial units, while ignoring traditional, unofficial regions, and that was the direct result of intentional, politically motivated efforts of communist regimes to decentralize the government and maintain full control in all regards. Therefore, it was completely natural that those administrative regions never took hold and that they remained meaningless for the majority of the citizens.”⁸ In Yugoslavia those regions existed mainly through the label of statuses: republic and autonomous province. Unfortunately, that way of life (somehow) existed only in the SFRY, in the so-called Tito’s Yugoslavia. And we know how it ended: with civil wars, especially in Croatia and in BH...

Also significant are the findings (evaluations, etc.) about ethnological research of the cities, especially ethnographic ones in Southeast Europe. Some follow: “Ethnologic research began in the 19th century, in an era which is characterized by processes as dramatic as modernization and urbanization, therefore, by processes which initiated great demographic and social changes: millions

⁶ Op. cit. p. 27.

⁷ Op. cit. p. 31.

⁸ Op. cit. p. 61.

of people fled from their village lives and escaped to great cities and industrial constructs, and lost the connection with their roots. In the 19th century the great contrast between “the city” and “the village”, as well as the “social question” which came about due to the leaving of the villages, were central questions of not only social politics, but of social and scientific discourse as well...

During the last 20 years the center of interest of European ethnology had changed so much that we can now talk about utter dominance of “city-worlds” research”.⁹

While discussing the complex, delicate... problems of group life in multi-ethnic societies (in the V chapter) the author determined that: “There is no doubt that the Balkan Peninsula is a region which, when compared to the entire European continent, contains the most diversity with regard to the number of countries, peoples, ethnical groups, languages, religions and cultures...

If there is something that can be learned from the countries of Southeastern Europe, then that rather has to do with the level of everyday praxes. What are the praxes of this co-existence and on what model are they relying? Generally speaking, in the relatively recent history and in the modern age, there exist 4 different strategies for these relationships and they can be described as 4 different models: 1. the model of harmony, 2. the model of co-existence, 3. the model of segregation, and 4. the model of conflict...

All four of these strategies can be seen in Southeast Europe—along with their combinations”.¹⁰ History has shown that the fourth model is more prominent than the first one! The so called “historic myths” also played a role in that matter... That is precisely the topic of discussion in the VI chapter of this incredible, not solely ethnological book. There is also the opinion that “In Serbia, memories, which also constitute national self-understanding, are focused primarily on the myth of the Battle of Kosovo, that is, the myth of the sacrifice”.¹¹

In their own way, also important are the author’s considerations of the following: the symbols, prejudices, stereotypes and similar characteristics of Southeast Europe’s peoples... (chapters VII, VIII), along with the question of diet (IX)...

In the following chapters (X—XVI) are discussed extremely complex, current and delicate questions, primarily from the domains of **economics** and **politics**: the relationship between the domain of work and domain of life; the domain of life under transition; the work day and the holiday, crisis management, civil society, the trust in institutions (countries), social capital... All of these, highly significant, key problems are dealt with in the context of the

⁹ Op. cit. pp. 84-100.

¹⁰ Op. cit. pp. 102-105.

¹¹ Op. cit. pp. 120.

way of those countries (peoples and states) of Southeast Europe towards the European Union. All of this is implied by the following views and evaluations of Klaus Roth:

“Considering globalization and the enlargement of the EU, any public discussion “about work” these days is mainly characterized by terms such as “flexibilization”, “instability”, “minimal wage”, “mobility”, “relocating work sites”, “differentiating life and work”...

In the West, the modern world of labor was turned into a post-modern one, and in Eastern Europe there was a jump from the world of labor, which had been utterly marked by socialism and economic thoughts of the 19th century into a post-modern world of labor of the 21st century, which, however, in this concrete manifestation had some aspects of early capitalism.

This sudden transition from a planned economy to a market economy, from a socialistic to a capitalistic business, as one of the consequences, led to significant deconstruction and discontinuity, forcing millions of workers to meet new domains of labor and new ways of labor, especially in numerous new businesses and organizations coming from the West. Additionally, after the ruined and unprofitable socialist businesses were closed, a large amount of people became unemployed; for many of them, emigrating to the West was their only real chance of survival...

Twenty years after the downfall of communism and political turnovers, we can now say that the transition has also brought a swift change and, often surprising, continuities; additionally, for all of those who are employed, it brought a large amount of new knowledge and a chance to keep their old ways. Even though many new domains of labor have been created, it seems that until this day no new culture of labor and the way of organizing it had been created. More so than in the Middle and Western Europe, where “the system” is, rather than not, allowed to penetrate into the domain of life and shape its form, in Southeast Europe it can be noted that, both in the time of socialism and post-socialism, the domain of life breaks into the domain of labor, and often even manages to usurp it”.¹²

These attitudes, evaluations and other points—in accord with our knowledge and experience—can be chiefly and mainly applied to countries (states) of the so called “real socialism” (SSSR and its “satellites”), while somewhat less so with regards to Yugoslavia (SFRY).

In socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1980) labor (organized, executed, controlled, evaluated...) was based on the ideology of communism. However, due to the very fact that Yugoslavian communists understood and propagated that idea as an **atheistic, socialistic** (as opposed to capitalistic) they—during the his-

¹² Op. cit. pp. 223-236.

toric period through which “KPJ” (Communist Party of Yugoslavia) - “SKJ” (League of Communists of Yugoslavia) was active—not only discarded the **Christian** (theistic-religious) understanding of the value of labor (along with any behavior of that kind), but they, through various means, banned it.

Communists of Yugoslavia developed two types of socialism: 1. state socialism (as did SSSR) and 2. self-governing socialism (as no-one else did). During the self-governing socialism (1950-1989), in the domain of labor, free economy based on money and goods was increasingly developed (instead of the previous one, the so-called **planned economy**); more freedom was given to the people (work-force) with regards to going abroad to work, along with a quasi-consoling political parole “to do temporary jobs”. The time showed that those jobs were (chiefly concerning the domains of economics and value) better and that they were (that they became) regular, lasting for an unlimited time period.

Through that, Yugoslavia had—in a way—begun what is today called “European integrations”. At least in the domain of labor. However, was that the case in the domains of politics and culture?!

Elementary parts of the topic on “the world of labor” are the “work day and holiday”. Concerning that, the eminent ethnologist asserts: “*The system of socialist holidays and rituals was designed in a broad manner and it was supposed to encompass all the aspects of individual and mutual life. Scientists and state bodies tried, more than once, to classify holidays and rituals...*”¹³

Today’s globalized market economy, with its competitiveness, truly does not allow for that “culture of holidaying”. The number of holidays which the today’s employees celebrate is, as a rule, only a fraction of the former myriad of holidays; the employees need to shine out their competitors, which means that they truly don’t have the time to do much reveling, neither in the work place nor in their private lives...

*Concerning the period after the year 1990, we can, thus, conclude that in the domains of holidays and celebrations—at first glance—there is a closing of the gap between West and East Europe, in spite of the fact that the aspects of economics and politics in those two parts of Europe are still quite different.”(pp. 242-258).*¹⁴

Thus, the author draws a parallel between the capitalist and the socialist system of labor and holidaying. One could say that he also shows-proves that the capitalist one (at least concerning economics) is the better one, more efficient... However, they both have something in common: the increase in consumption for the needs of society, and for their so-called mass culture.

¹³ Op. cit. p. 259.

¹⁴ Op. cit. pp. 242-258.

Through that consumption (in an ideologically-political way) the systems compete, achieve indoctrination of their citizens... At the same time, they slow down and prevent the development of truly valuable culture (such as art) which should achieve emancipation of society and of an individual (his personality) from inhumane forms and patterns of life, both in the “domain of labor” and in the “domain of rest”= free time, leisure...

These problems are—to a certain extent—also present when discussing the topic of **Crisis management**. His initial viewpoint is: “The *question of connection between modernization and the crisis in Southeast Europe points towards deep and current economic and political problems which are—marked by crises of finance economics—exceptionally relevant, not only to individual countries, but to the whole European Union. Scientists of politics and economics are not the only ones who should be answering that question, it is also a challenge for scientists dealing with society and culture, due to the fact that it is now obvious that economic activities of a society are closely related to the socio-cultural praxes of that society and to what it experienced through history.*”¹⁵

Simultaneously, this indicates that we live in a time of an all-encompassing **crisis of values** (economic, political, cultural, moral= essentially-existential). In that context, we should remember the prognosis (diagnosis) which Andre Marlaux made, about the three centuries: 19th=the century of science, 20th=the century of technology, 21st= “will either be the century of values, or it will not exist”. To this day, the 21st century is still moving on, but through a great crisis of meaningful human existence, along with the danger of an—apocalypse. Are the processes of: neo-liberal capitalism, totalization, and “new world order” leading us towards self-destruction?

Starting with the understanding and acting of the so-called **civil society**, ethnologist Klaus Roth further (deeper and wider) discusses problems of not only Southeast Europe, Europe, the West, but of humanity. Here is how:

“The civil society” which is understood as “society of all citizens of age”, became a nearly magic phrase: the civil society was attributed a power to remove the consequences of a multi-decade long socialistic totalitarianism and to activate the forces of anti-totalitarianism, further, to remove autonomy, establish parliamentary democracy, free the market forces, strengthen families, awake the virtues and values of a republic, and to lead the way to many other positive events”.

He then focuses on countries of post-socialism and transition (towards capitalism), and writes: “*After nearly two decades of experience in building structures of the civil society in transitional countries, today we can deduce that there exists a visible disillusionment, but also collectedness...*

¹⁵ Op. cit. p. 259.

Societies of Southeast Europe are still very far from their ideals and from the civil society which are parts of everyday life in West Europe, and in which there rule the spirit of citizenship and a specific view of the relationship a country has with its society; many citizens are active in the spirit of community, and the universalistic attitude is prevalent, which has interests of the whole in its view”.

As can be seen from these attitudes and remarks, Klaus Roth points not only at the condition and ways of action of “the civil society” but at the urgent need of his ethnological research, not only with the aim of entering the EU, but for essential (scientific and anthropological) reasons.

Because: through gaining firm scientific knowledge, knowledge about **trust in institutions** and personas is also increased. The following is said precisely about that: “*Southeast Europe is on a difficult road towards the EU*”. Arguments for that statement are as follows: “*In that part of Europe the citizens have incredibly little trust in the justice system; so little that they are at times ready to discard it, and they have a thoroughly skeptical attitude towards the state and laws...*

The destruction of faith in institutions and the encouragement of trusting personas are, long-term wise, the most severe consequences of socialism. Twenty years after socialism ended, it can be seen that, despite great changes in nearly all areas of life, the importance of personal networks in the transitional countries has remained immeasurably great...

Decreasing the dominance of faith in personalities and strengthening of the trust in institutions are the elementary necessities needed to create the structures and institutions of the civil society which the EU demands”.

With that in mind, it is instructive to recall (take into consideration) our own (Yugoslavian) socialistic and post-socialistic experiences. During the first period (1945-1950) the trust was immense (nearly boundless), and was demonstrated through meticulous labor (both mandatory and, so-called voluntary...) with great enthusiasm. During the second period (1950-1980) the trust waned, though the citizens=“self-governors” had increasingly large say in the governing of society. No matter how much Yugoslavian communists struggled to persevere the faith in the socialistic **self-governing system** (they enacted many economic and other reforms) that system was nearing its end as the very life of its leader—Josip Broz Tito—was nearing its end. Communists buried their leader with a hope for further development of society, and under the parole: “And after Tito—Tito!” Development did not continue along the paved road, it rather went through the forest of not easily conquered social (economic, political, nationalistic...) problems. The result is well known: “Tito’s socialism” was destroyed through wars, and so was the trust in him as the Leader...

By the way, on the subject of “the book of topics”, Klaus Roth further argues about “**How are trust and social capital connected to the European Union?**” and states his “Observations about the enlargement of EU towards East”. He clarifies: “*Societies of the southeastern periphery of the EU “Europize” themselves in order to look similar to “Europe” and get near it...*”

Europe is now growing together, as was never before the case throughout the whole conflict filled history of this continent. Europe is turning into a political union, into a mutual private space, into a single market—with all the variety of cultures, it will grow into a single cultural space... A question arises from that for Southeast Europe, is the culture truly and deeply accepted, or is it adopted merely in a formal way, being that accepting it is seen as a loss of cultural autonomy.

We can conclude that social trust and social capital, as root elements of the way society functions, are equally present in societies of “older” EU member states and in Southeast Europe.

We consider that this clarification is both scientific and argued...but still, pessimistic. The title of the following (final, concluding) chapter also points the pessimism out: “**They dream of Europe—“Europe” and the EU as seen by people of Southeast Europe**”

The final chapter (XVII) is not only ethnologically, but also on the grounds of economics, politics, and culturology, very important and interesting, mostly because of the following statements this German scientist made about the peoples of whole Europe, and especially of Southeast Europe: “*Current discussion in Southeast Europe about accessing the EU has roots, as mentioned, in its long pre-history. Each segment of that pre-history is filled with a high amount of sentimentality and ambivalence towards the relationship between that which one owns, and that which belongs to others...*”

That deeply interiorized “Europe syndrome” was somewhat repressed during the socialist period, and somewhat strengthened; thus, after the end of communism the factors nearly identical to those present a century ago made the image of Europe quite unclear and filled with prejudices, even though thanks to political pluralism and the freedom of press all kinds of objective information about other European countries became available to everyone...

As far as the memory of recent history reaches, “Europe” is always present in the minds and emotions of people of Southeast Europe...

It remains for us to hope that residents of Southeast Europe will not only “dream of Europe” but also understand, take seriously, and as much as possible accept the European Union, with its principles and requests”.¹⁶

¹⁶ Op. cit. pp. 316-332.

In essence, this book is an incredibly important synthetic piece of research (an ethnological, anthropological and culturological one), with great significance for the Serbian people as well, and especially for its integrations into the European Union.