

Imagining Roma culture / Umišljanje romske kulture

20. – 23. maj 2007, Ljubljana

Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo

POVZETKI

Alenka Janko Spreizer

Talking Gypsies: Discourse on Romani culture in Slovenia

The intention of this paper is to follow the recent proposition for a re-evaluation of central analytical concept in anthropology as that of “culture” and “cultural difference” in the case of Romanies in Slovenia. Special attention will be paid to the anthropological analysis of those discourses on Romanies, which are expressed in the supposed isomorphism of culture and society, as well as of certain places and territories. Also analysed will be discourses by representatives of civil initiatives that aim at community displacement. The ethnography of particularities (Abu-Lughod, 1992) will focus on discussion around several examples of political violence: First, the discourse of educational experts on salvage the problems in primary school Bršljin that has led to the segregation of Romani pupils two years ago is going to be analyzed. Second, displacement of Strojjan family will additionally shed light on the construction of Romanies as the Other or as Different within academic debate on Slovenian racism. The conclusion will present the differences as well as similarities of the manner in which new anti-Romani racisms are expressed also in academic or expert discussions on Romanies and how Romani antivists respond on the debate.

Marek Jakoubek

Inventing of (high, national) 'Roma culture'. Typology of Roma national myths.

In recent years a great number of remarkable articles on myth creating mechanisms attending the formation of different national ideologies has been published. These articles have become a part of the extensive discussion on problems connected with nationalism, which is the central subject of the socio-scientific discourse of the last two decades. Dozens of monographs mapping the forming processes of particular nations (European or non-European, governmental or nongovernmental) have been annually issued and even much greater number of essays has been dedicated to general processes of the national myth-creation. This kind of analytical hammer of the national deconstructivists has perhaps stricken every group that have ever had the idea to proclaim oneself a nation. However, one of them has almost remained unhit so far ... the Roma.

The construction of a nation is founded on national ideology, which is created by the various myths about the nation in question. Although these myths appear to be national histories, their substance is more formed by shared ideas than historically verified truths. Myths are also instruments of the transformation and formation of collective identity; they establish a self-definition by means of determining the boundaries between the (potential) followers of the given system of myths, and the others. The myths thus set out the rules for membership and in particular a specific view of the world, which is reflected in them. They offer to the given community a new homogeneous collective identity which cuts across any internal conflicts and differences; an identity that supplants the old identities and plays a key role in the formation of the (new) group.

The aim of my contribution is to apply general typological pattern of national mythology developed by George Schöpflin to the specific case of the process of constructing Roma national mythology, the creation of which we can currently observe in the Czech and the Slovak Republics, and which forms one of the key components of inventing the high (in Gellner's sense) national Roma culture.

Sinead ni Shuinear

Creation, Invention, Discovery

Creation means making something out of nothing, while discovery means becoming aware of something which objectively exists. Invention lies between the two: transforming that which already exists into something which, prior to our input, did not. Since this is the very essence of the human endeavour, all cultures are both invented and constantly inventing. In what sense is the invention associated with Roma culture different enough to merit a conference? Who invents it and why? And can it be discovered rather than invented?

Lenka Budilová

Inventing of 'Roma culture'. The case of kinship

In my paper I would like to approach the problem of inventing and representing the concept of 'Roma culture' as a culture that is 'other' and differs in many aspects from the culture of the 'majority society'. I will concentrate on the domain of academic writing in the field of kinship, where the alleged differences and divergences of 'our' and 'their' culture are often stressed by pointing out to specific kinship and marriage patterns of the 'Roma/Gypsies'. The scholars often emphasize similarities between different Roma/Gypsy groups in different European countries and so contribute to creation of an idea of the trans-national 'Roma culture' that is different from (and opposed to) the trans-national 'non-Roma culture'.

My paper will be based on empirical material from one 'Gypsy' kin group (living in the Czech and the Slovak Republic) and one 'non-Gypsy' group (a religious emigrant community of the Czechs in Bulgaria) and on the comparison of the two with respect to kinship and marriage patterns. I would like to show that these two materials are in many aspects similar and show many analogous features. These empirical case studies may have further consequences on the concept of 'Roma culture' as markedly different from the 'non-Roma' culture. It indicates the need to place 'the Roma' in the wider context of European cultural patterns, instead of excluding them from it by assuming them as different. I will try to demonstrate that some particular kinship and marriage patterns, which are often represented as specific for 'Roma culture', are rather patterns characteristic for any group placed in a specific position and situation, and not patterns essentially inherent to 'Roma culture'.

Judith Okely

Constructing culture through shared location, bricolage and exchange: the case of Gypsies and Roma

This presentation is a critique of culture as resting on isolation which has influenced notions of authenticity. Instead, objects are transformed as cultural artefacts through opposition and encounters with the 'Other'. The Gypsies are a prime example of selective creativity. It has been asserted that the Gypsies' culture has been undermined by increasing contact, industrialisation and modernity. However, Gypsies have for centuries lived within a larger dominant society and economy.

The Gypsies are brilliant bricoleurs (cf. Levi-Strauss') and demonstrate unique creativity linked to their position.. They select and create objects for transactions with non-Gypsies, whom they label gorgios/gadjes. The latter seek exoticism from a once nomadic group who are credited with mysterious powers. The Gypsies survive by learning and fulfilling various needs of the sedentary population. While the Gypsies recycle the gorgios' rubbish they also recycle the larger society's mass produced objects as personalised and 'hand made Gypsified' objects. Many of these hawked goods are not valued within the group itself

While non-Gypsies are sold such 'real' Gypsy objects, the Gypsies select and commission from the larger society alternatively valued material objects which they transform into symbols of separate ethnicity. Thus on each side of the ethnic divide there are contrasting uses and interpretations of material objects. They are elevated into near art form, replete with symbolic and aesthetic significance. This alternative use and re-creation of seemingly banal objects into heavily laden symbols on either side has been rendered invisible, at least to non-Gypsies.

Svetlana Ćirković

Being hidden in a refugee camp: Djorgovci from Kosovo

This presentation aims at shading additional light to the recently raised question of the ethnic origin of the Christian Orthodox *Djorgovci*, ascribed as Roma, whose mother tongue is Serbian. Djorgovci are spread over southern Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija and Macedonia in small communities. Research into the identity of the Djorgovci was prompted by the difference emphasized by other non-Djorgovci dwellers of the collective refugee centre where we started our field work. While examining the linguistic means by which an individual demonstrates membership of a certain ethnic group, particular attention was drawn to answers to a question on the celebration of St. Atanas, a strong Serbian identity marker.

The second part of the presentation will analyze the research procedure applied in the interviews on traditional culture, where leading questions attempt to uncover traces of a Roma culture. Field research compared with available ethnographies show that this task of reconstruction is extremely complex and that the initial hypothesis of a supposed hidden Roma identity marker - the dying of the hair with henna for a wedding - was not easy to prove. However, the gathered material shows that Roma ethnic reconstruction issue is far more complex than it first seemed: the initial question of the informants' Roma identity has grown into a question of their previous Muslim religion.

Rajko Muršič

Ambivalent perception of Roma musicians in Europe: various faces of latent racism and cultural policy

The author will discuss - based on some music examples - adoration of Roma music and musicians as genuine, pristine, uncorrupted and excellent. He will critically examine claims that only Roma musicians, being "naturally born" musicians, can play "true" Roma music - and are predestined to play music.

The author will expose such statements as symptoms of latent racism. Racism is not necessarily apparently stereotypical "negative" prejudice - it can as well display seemingly "positive" inclination. Both are threatening.

Coming to the issues of cultural policy in European countries, the most problematic way of dealing with "Roma culture" - whatever it may be - is to patronise their "genuine" musicianship with stimulation of "their" recently standardised "folklore" traditions.

If the European countries are stimulating cultural production of their minorities, the only solution in stimulation of non-racist music production is radical non-differentiation between groups of people as producers of music: if music is a creation of human beings, then there is no "race" or "ethnic" music. What may be urgent is improvement of desperate living and social conditions among many musicians as "marginal men".

Jaka Repič

Imagining Roma culture: Intercultural dialogue and social exclusion

Roma people are generally perceived as culturally significantly different from others and are thus often stigmatised as incompatible with the surrounding society. They are even regarded as aliens or even 'guest' in a 'host' society, their ambiguous status implying firm conceptual boundaries and social marginalisation. Such an exclusivist position, expressed with prejudices and stereotypes about life and culture of Roma people, is apparent in the national and media discourses as well as on the local levels, and too often results in either negative, paternalistic (patronizing) or discriminatory attitude toward Roma people. In this contribution I will focus on the interactions between Roma people and Slovenes in southern Slovenia and show how Roma culture is imagined as a distinguishing attribute and used in exclusivist rhetoric of modern culturalism.

Miha Zadnikar

Year 1987, Miren near Nova Gorica. On November 1, Catholic All Saints Day, infamous film director Emir Kusturica intends to shoot 2 minutes of illegal crossing of the state border for the purposes of his new work *Time of the Gypsies/Dom za vešanje*. Local cemetery that has been departed into Yugoslav and Italian side after WW2 seems just »perfect« time-location. The crew consists of Roma people acting Roma migrants. The locals try to forbid filming using variety of »cultural« arguments and victimized historical positioning of both themselves and their cemetery. One follows the colourful media coverage of the struggle: Discrimination? Anti-Yugoslav direct action? Attack on artistic freedom? »Border-line syndrom«? Nevertheless, where – in this »visionary« game forecasting the fall of Yugoslavia – can one still find some Roma participants?

In certain periods on certain places one cannot differ between the local conception of the nation and the national one. One observes how local »culture« is represented mostly as religion only – as such it is based purely on remembrance of some symbols. Both local myths and national ones seem national ones.

Kosovo Through the Eyes of Local Rom (Gypsy) Musicians

A film by Svanibor Pettan

Edited by: Gregor Belušič, Tom Gomizelj, Marjan Stanič.

Studio: Society of Allies of Soft Landing

Krško, Slovenia (1999)

Duration: 23 minutes

This documentary provides a view of the Balkan province of Kosovo that sharply contrasts the usual media coverage locked in the projection of mutually conflicting interests of ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbs. It was the Rom musicians who until the 1990s, due to their ability and willingness to perform a wide variety of musics, enjoyed the status of superior specialists in Kosovo. They successfully adapted to the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-lingual reality of Kosovo and served various audiences in both rural and urban settings. The film presents five characteristic types of Rom ensembles in Kosovo, four sources of the musical repertoire of a single semi-nomadic Rom community, creative localization of a selected tune of foreign origin (Lambada) by various Kosovo Rom ensembles, and the response of Rom musicians to the challenge of increasing political tensions in Kosovo in the early 1990s. The footage was filmed by the author in the course of his fieldwork in the period 1984-1991.