

disparity in his treatment of the history of Slovene ethnography, the publication of his portraits and studies in one volume (at least, in this reviewer's opinion) is justifiable for two reasons: first, because it reflects Novak's interests and inclinations in Slovene ethnographic research, and second, because its publication in a very timely way brings into focus the nature and direction of this research in recent times. Thus, Vilko Novak's book, attractive in its broad conception and its lively, thoroughly enjoyable presentation (if not in novelty of content nor in completeness of coverage), may result in a broader popular interest in Slovene ethnography and folklore research, and may provide pressure for its return to the fold of its older scholarly tradition.

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Robert Gary Minnich. *The Homemade World of Zagaj: An Interpretation of the 'Practical Life' among Traditional Peasant-Farmers in West Haloze, Slovenia, Yugoslavia*. [= Occasional Papers, No. 18]. Bergen: University of Bergen, 1979. 249 pp.

What is the world view of an ethnic segment or a cultural unit, and how is it communicated? This elusive problem has tantalized ethnologists who have searched for some methodology that escapes mere intuition or ethnocentric evaluations. Is such a perspective deducible from the 'thick description' which Geertz applies to symbolic behavior enacted in focal events, or can we achieve a more exact methodology where the results can be at least partially replicated, without however sacrificing the phenomenological wholeness of the action as interpreted by the observer? These are the questions with which symbolic and semiotic anthropology must be concerned. In the study under review we have an attempt to elucidate underlying structures formative of world-view and their 'logico-integration' from information gained by focussing on what the author advances as a highly symbolic event and as a 'manuscript' that can be read (pp. 3-5), namely the *furež* (or *kolina*), the slaughtering of pigs and the associated feasting and reciprocal help and gift-giving that this institution entails. How this ritual, known throughout wide areas in Europe, is enacted in a small parish containing dispersed households in Eastern Slovenia is the subject of this study. Minnich grounds his approach, as is implied in the subtitle, in the rapprochement of the technical-pragmatic and ritual-symbolic spheres. Such an interpretation is assumed in much of contemporary anthropology and has not been limited in its application to pre-industrial society; (thus there are the works of Goffman, Bateson, Margaret Mead and others who have looked at complex societies in such a holistic way). We need not compare the results of this study to those of the "Cockfight," the notable example of 'thick

description' by Geertz which is the model the author apparently upholds for himself. In his own words, in a paper emerging from this study (1981:6), Minnich writes:

“. . . paraphrasing Clifford Geertz in his comments on the Balinese Cockfight, 'Pigsticking becomes for the Halozani a story about themselves which they tell themselves.' As Geertz asserts, its function is interpretive—it enables Halozani to fathom their position vis-à-vis one another, greater society and an overarching system of symbols which give order to their lives (Geertz, 1975).”

Rather than compare, we need to know how successful this study is in imparting the kind of information it attempts to uncover.

The study of Zagaj (a pseudonym for the parish examined) in West Haloze in hilly Eastern Slovenia, is based on fieldwork in 1974-75 and 1977. Originally a doctoral dissertation for the University of Bergen, it is now revised. We learn that the area of the parish is isolated and impoverished, that settlements are not nucleated but dispersed, and that accordingly household self-sufficiency in food production is not strongly modified by trade, production for the market, or significant dependence on outside employment. There is a relative absence of supra-household institutions such as voluntary organizations, cooperative work practices, etc. Indeed, there is no trace of the corporate village. Rather, families are tied to the larger society by the dyadic patron-client relationships, with élites who reside outside the community. Even the office of village headman (*župan*) disappeared in the Haloze district in the 1500s, while we know that it remained viable until after the second World War in many traditional villages in Slovenia. In Zagaj, however, contiguous neighbourhoods, even farmsteads, were historically under bondage to different landlords. Minnich evokes both ecological and historical factors to explain the particular dispersed pattern of this area which discouraged all the cooperative institutions well-known elsewhere in Slovenia, such as (apart from the *župan*) the village council, common pasture lands, local markets, and communal crop rotating systems. Also lacking are traditions expressing a common historical origin by leading families, as enshrined in legend which invokes the early enlarged family, the *zadruga*, based on joint and later equal inheritance of brothers. I have found all the above centripetal patterns, which are absent in Zagaj, in the nucleated village of Žerovnica in Notranjsko, a village typical of many areas in Slovenia (Winner 1971).

It does not seem surprising that the author looked to the institution of the *furež* for a point of integration in the impoverished landscape of West Haloze. It seems that, apart from the minimal *domača gruda*, or family farm, the *furež* was the only unifying agent that was evident. The question is: does the description of the *furež* give credence to the claim that the symbolic dimensions of this institution inform us about many aspects of the culture, including interpersonal relationships, conceptions of the supernatural, categories of classification of reality, and in general “what life is about in West Haloze” (p. 102)?

The following seems evident. In West Haloze the *furež*, an annual ritual, required interaction and positive reinforcements between at least two families who would cooperate in such activities as slaughtering the pig and preparing it for consumption and in other work tasks, and who marked the occasion by feasting, celebration, drinking and exchanging gifts over a period of one day, and formerly three days. Clearly sexual, phallic, funerary, kinship and social symbols of all kinds can be read into many aspects of these practices. Women avoid the actual slaughtering rite, and male and female activities are clearly differentiated throughout the festive period. The pig is killed according to ritual procedures. The blood and meat sausage preparations are accompanied by taboos and joking

behavior, and the sausages are suggestive of natural symbols. Godfathers, brothers, and friends have special ritualistic roles. The individual designated as the head butcher is not the host but a guest, suggesting to Minnich a reversal of social roles. Thus the celebration acts to emphasize rules as well as to provide liminal releases, and accordingly it functions to cement social and kin ties, imparting feelings of solidarity. However, it is not clear from this study that symbols of the supernatural are conveyed unless the rite is seen as an echo of sacrifice; nor is it clear that categories of classification of reality are inscribed in this event in a more marked way than would be expected of all such major events. Finally, it is not clear that the *furež* provides an integrative world view which significantly helps us to see what the culture is really all about.

These difficulties may be attributable to various factors such as the following: the decline of some of the polysemic and multifunctional dimensions of the rite itself; the separation, in this work, of theoretical discussion of approach and methodology from the descriptive material; and the tendency by the author to generalize rather than particularize the actual observations, which distracts from the immediate vitality of the material. On the other hand, one can only welcome ethnographic treatments of Eastern European folk materials which depart from the particularistic, descriptive methodologies predominant for decades and longer, a situation which is partly due to Eastern European national traditions and partly due to the obvious fact that folk societies or peasantries are not characterized by the so-called homogeneous traditions of tribes which can be more easily cast into integrated symbolic moulds. Clearly, in the study of peasantries the task today is to go beyond descriptions formulated in universal categories, and to strive for new methods to enable us to conceptualize differences. What are the meanings of the various distinctive features of an ethnic unit and how are they structured and communicated? Such an obligation is becoming all the more urgent in a world in which ethnic variations are less and less understood, as uniformities are impressed upon humankind. If we achieve, as I think we do, a richer perception of the peasantry of West Haloze through interpretations of the rituals embedded in the *domača gruda* and the *furež*, rituals which symbolically impart the value and meanings of family and ceremony within the world view of these people, we have an added insight that a symbolic approach can uniquely provide.

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Aleksij Pregarc, *jedra - nuclei - kerne - jezgra - magvak - les noyaux - nuclei*. Trieste, 1987. Pp. 261.

This is a selection from the previously-published poems of Aleksij Pregarc, furnished with translations into six languages. The book actually requires two reviews: one, for its multilingual intent; the other, for the realization of that intent. The present notice fulfils both duties, and therefore falls into two distinct parts. Firstly it praises the imagination,