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PRESERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF ETHNOLOGICAL HERITAGE*

Abstract — In the perspective of future European integration, the author elucidates possible danger of the loss of ethnic identity caused by constant disregard of tradition and traditional values. Thus, he insists upon the preservation and revitalization of ethnological heritage and outlines some methods to achieve that goal.

At the time when Europe is on the threshold of political, economic and cultural integration, a very important question arises, namely: further survival of the ethnic values and cultural heritage of the peoples within integrated Europe.

It is only natural to expect that the very first step of entering European Community would be marked by gradual disappearance of traditional framework of every country, namely by abandoning of particular ethnic characteristics. The individual gives way to the universal and the melting pot gains its importance. That model is a very attractive one; however, every devotion to unity, every commitment to togetherness and integration might bring about disturbances. Expansive modern spirit replaces tradition aspiring to cosmopolitanism. The loss of ethnic identity leads to psychic crises, even to true human dramas. That is why the ethnic, linguistic and cultural features of every singular people must not be neglected. The only remedy for the alienation of an individual is a return to the roots of one's native soil and the promotion of ethnic heritage. In our opinion, the existence of ethnic diversity in integrated Europe cannot but enrich the overall European identity in cosmopolitan terms.

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Yugoslavia is renowned for its diversified and heterogeneous ethnological heritage which, for the most part, belongs to the cultural area of the Balkan peninsula. Over the centuries it has absorbed the classical, Byzantine, Slav, oriental and other cultural substrata, which have imparted a distinct entity to the material and spiritual folk culture, different from the cultures of neighbouring or more distant European countries. That is why one often finds it difficult to understand the Yugoslav ethnic space with its multitude of racial traits, mentalities, religions, customs and habits.

In the past few decades Yugoslavia has entered a new phase of ethnic, economic, social and cultural life. The changes which have taken place in rural areas under the impact of industrialization and urbanization have struck a blow to traditional (ethnic) heritage. Natural landscape has been submitted to the process of rapid industrialization, often being forcibly seized and destroyed. In the general climate of changes, ethnic cultural values and oral folk traditions are being rapidly abandoned and altered or laid aside. People possessing traditional mentality are confused and disturbed by the burst of line production culture and the aggressive diffusion of mass media. Man is increasingly exposed to the same music, the same melody, the same pictures, before which the authentic ethnological creation withdraws as an anachronism confronted with mass kitsch culture.

Such a state of affairs seriously raises the issue of both the preservation of the existing ethnological cultural values and of the revitalization of the abandoned and almost forgotten ones. There are different ways and means to preserve and revitalize ethnological heritage. One of them concerns the study of material objects kept in ethnographic museums or of cultural heritage, mostly within specialized research institutes. But, there is also the most refined wealth of folk art with highly aesthetic contents such as dance, song, music, narration, acting, etc., which are also under the strong impact of change. The preservation and protection of this type of folk creativity is a very delicate matter. It is true that the records can be provided by means of modern technological devices and put away into archives, but it is living matter which is not always repeated in the same way. A talented creator of that art always introduces something new and different, taking care not to impair the traditional style and ethnic colouring of the music or dance, within which the intertwined signs cannot be isolated as they form an inherited ancestral code through which the most beautiful traditional values have been handed down.

If we proceed from the fundamental anthropological postulate that folk culture changes and develops through the generations and, what is most important for us here, that it is *taught* by being handed down orally, then it becomes quite clear that its

further life and survival call for elder people as its transmitters and interpreters, while the younger ones are to be the recipients who directly learn how to dance, sing, act, etc. In the field we have often heard and recorded statements of older people to the effect that: »We would like young people to know about tradition, and to be in constant contact with it, i.e. with us, so as to keep our cultural heritage from being lost«.

The preservation of traditional songs and dances is best achieved through village ensembles composed of members of the oldest generation. They usually form a close-knit and highly disciplined group which may exist for a number of years directly transmitting traditional practice to the younger generations. Fine example seems to be the survival of some ritual dances the performance of which includes several generations.

Such way of preserving and revitalizing of folk dances was established in Sweden as early as the end of the 19th century, when Artur Hozelius founded the Swedish Association for Folk Dances and, in an ethnopark, the first folk group performed folk dances reconstructed on the basis of verbal descriptions.

The endeavour to preserve and revitalize oral folk treasure is far more successful if ethnic purity and authenticity of folk culture have been intact. Let us mention as an example that many hora and even masked dances still live in their natural milieu in Yugoslavia. The latter are of a particular scientific interest for the study of the genesis of the theatre since they, as we have undoubtedly established, contain germs of pre-theatre. Let us also mention that the Balkans have played an important and decisive role in the history of European theatre.

Another interesting example is the revival of epic songs. Performed to the accompaniment of a traditional instrument — the gusle — they are experiencing a genuine renaissance in these modern times. It is well known that Vuk Karadžić and the epic songs introduced Serbian people to the 19th century European literature. Epic poems are an extension of the traditional heritage representing an organic link between the stability of folk epics and the changes brought by modern way of life.

The incentive is as well an important component of the endeavour to preserve and revitalize folk culture. Its absence makes transmission of culture a difficult task. Therefore, if a man wants to embrace the past, his wish to learn will not be sufficient enough; strong will to accept ethnological heritage is also necessary.

Time is also an important factor in the survival or complete loss of an element withing traditional culture. The conception of *time* is expressed in terms of both the so-called *linear time* and *cyclic time*.

Linear time is understood as a linear progression from a point in the past to another in the present. By definition, this time is unrepeatable. Cyclic time is the opposite to linear time, events in this time being recurrent and absolutely predictable. Let us mention the cycle of the seasons, the life cycle of living world, where cultural phenomena find their natural place. Both times intertwine and interact not only in terms of progress but also of negation. The spiral of cyclic time includes traditional heritage implying certain continuity; in ontological terms, however, it takes us back to some ancient ethnological layers buried in the darkness of human psyche, which usually come to the light of day in times of personal or social troubles or in need of ethnic reintegration.

In that context, the return to the traditional past does not imply only the preservation of ethnic identity, but it means something more, namely, the necessity of simultaneous existence within human being of a realm of unknown expressing itself through predictable ethnological events which are recurrent and have a soothing effect on man. Naturally, the preservation and revitalization of ethnic cultural heritage should be approached with undivided professional attention and knowledge, but with special commitment as well.

Ethnic heritage may also be revitalized through school curricula or societies of folk tradition amateurs. Children are taught to sing and to play instruments relying on the traditional music of their people, or they learn dances at special courses.

We should say in the end that tradition offers valuable messages which might serve to determine some directions in the life of future united Europe, so as to prevent any man from being lost in it, either in terms of race, language, ethnics, religion or other. Building of a united Europe in which ethnic diversities and the whole range of different mentality features would be lost, in our opinion, would lead to the unforeseeable consequences.

ОЧУВАЊЕ И РЕВИТАЛИЗАЦИЈА ЕТНОЛОШКОГ НАСЛЕБА

Резиме

Аутор сматра да интеграциони процеси у Европи и општа тенденција ка потискивању традиције изискују озбиљно научно бављење питањем даљег опстанка етничког наслеба и вредности сваког појединог народа. Држећи да губљење етничког идентитета, са свим његовим слојевима, одалучујућим за успостављање вредносног система сваког појединца, може довести до трагичних индивидуалних и социјалних криза, аутор разматра потребу за очувањем и оживљавањем етнолошког наслеба указујући на могуће методе за остваривање тог задатка.