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SANTA CLAUS IN TRANSITION

DUNJA RIHTMAN-AUGUŠTIN
Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb

The increase of folk piety, the question of both the national character of Christmas rituals and contemporary controversies on individual Christmas customs - the re-naming of the Christmas gift-giver, shooting on Christmas and New Year's Eve - are interpreted as features of mentality, but also as indicators of political processes in contemporary post-socialist transition in the Croatian fashion. The component of power relations is introduced into the ethnological discourse on Christmas.

"Academic analysis should... strive to achieve the same effect as Christmas itself. That is to recognise that the apparently parochial and local rites are actually significant materials for understanding the articulation between key components of contemporary life - religious and secular moralities, the role of contemporary families, and the threat posed by the sheer scale of materialism." (Miller 1993:34). This conclusion in the introductory part of the inspiring and already well-read book "Unwrapping Christmas" seems, from our - perhaps Balkan - but nonetheless south-east *European* perspective, to be somewhat defective. Namely, Christmas offers at least one more possibility for evolving theories. Those of us living here in south-eastern Europe at the end of the second millennium since Christ's birth cannot afford the luxury of observing cultural phenomena as being something apart from power relationships. Everyday life obliges us - both as individuals and researchers - to act in this way. "Apparently parochial and local rites" can, in other words, be applied to higher levels of global society, can be exploited by those who have economic or political power. On the other hand these rites may acquire new meanings, and become symbols of political and national identification, even at a personal level. The fact that we find them outside of local settings, the favourite field of research for ethnology and anthropology, cannot be taken to mean they do not make up "key components of contemporary life", less important than the others mentioned in the introductory quotation.

During the Nineties, controversies concerning Christmas rituals have been unfolding in the public eye in Croatia. The context of these controversies is not only the war and its after-effects but also transition i.e. the state in society in which its economic and political structures and the relations between the authorities and the people fundamentally change.

In post-Communist Croatia, traditional Christmas piety has been revitalised, and many traditional habits have been partly restored with certain objectives in view. This two-way process has occurred because of different motives. After half a century of repudiation of Christmas, people are experiencing the celebration of that holiday, and the whole cycle of holidays and customs which accompany it, as an implementation of both their religious and human rights. In addition, Christmas has become a symbol of national identity. In these new circumstances, the Catholic Church has become very active: after half a century of silence, its priests publicly and authoritatively interpret the Bible legend on the divine incarnation and spread the Christmas message of peace, not only from the pulpit but also in the press, and on radio and television. With the help of the mood surrounding the holiday of peace, the faltering Croatian economy on its part, together with the new, enterprising private stores, is endeavouring to extract what is perhaps the last available spending money from the weakened purchasing power - an euphemism for general impoverishment - of the country's citizens.

On the political stage, the post-socialist authorities are restoring and adapting Christmas customs to their own purposes. Within the framework of general efforts - but also pressures - to re-establish the foundations of Croatian culture, the Party in power tries to have the last say in defining the *meaning of the Croatian* Christmas. Among others, the state media suggestively "propose" how to celebrate the individual phases of the Christmas holiday cycle, the symbols and other paraphernalia to be used, and what they should be called.

The politics of Christmas

As elsewhere, the modern Croatian Christmas does not subsist only on a religious but also on a lay level; both within the family and outside it, in regional or local communities, Christmas is not only an individual or intimate experience but also a national, state spectacle, a political act. Similarly to the majority of customs which we call *popular* (narodni), the folklore of Christmas often chronicles a reflection of historic processes and also of political pressures. What the Church nowadays recognises as enculturation was once the subject of harsh censure: the educated and god-fearing claimed that the rituals surrounding the Yule log (Badnjak) - - when people gave it food and drink - were manifestations of primitivism, the decoration of houses with greenery and the giving of gifts, pagan (being known as early as the Roman Calends), not to mention the comparison of the Christmas feasts with

sacrilege.[1] In fact, historic research shows numerous examples of how the pre-Christian folk traditions were Christianised (Blaumeiser, Blimlinger 1993:285) and gave force and legitimacy to the celebration of the birth of the young God. Consequently, in calling into question Christmas customs, not only the religious concept of the celebration of Christmas was queried; analysis of the social context of individual prohibitions usually uncovers political motives. The determination of the date itself of Christ's birth was the product of a political or ideological compromise of sorts due to the ascendancy of the celebration of the birth of the God-Child - in the western part of the Mediterranean at that time - or his baptism - in its eastern part. It is also known that there were oscillations in the dates of Christmas and the New Year in the Christian past. Therefore, some scholars think that the two holidays should be observed as a pair and that their functions are supplemental.

In the article "The new New Year" published in 1988 by the late Croatian ethno-anthropologist Lydia Sklevicky, that writer showed that the Yugoslavian and Croatian communist authorities followed a well conceived plan in transferring the symbols of Christmas to the New Year, a celebration which was once again intended to replace the religious and traditional customs connected with Christmas.

The result of that ideological effort and/or concrete political pressure could only be called successful in part. The historically familiar resistance offered by folk culture was active once again. People continued to celebrate Christmas, but surreptitiously, privately, in a truly family fashion at home, and attendance at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve was often a more or less covert sign of protest. But, nonetheless, it should also be said that those same people i.e. all of us, tolerated the celebration of New Year, and that we even consciously or unconsciously participated in the transfer of Christmas symbols to the later holiday. In addition, the New Year holiday was accompanied by a number of days off work, and in that time of relative prosperity, this meant a more lavish celebration could be enjoyed.

It is a commonplace when I say that the modern post-socialist generations in Croatia, from the middle down to the younger generation, are lacking in religious education. Here I am not referring to religious education *strictu senso*, but to the fact that ecclesiastical history and the Bible as one of the foundations of European culture remained unfamiliar, or barely familiar, to a number of generations. At the same time, contemporaries have little knowledge of regional folk traditions. Memory of own heritage has been erased. The cause of this has been systematic repudiation of ritual - to use

[1] In my *Book About Christmas* (1992) I presented examples of diverse controversies and the questioning of Christmas folk customs, noted down in the past on Croatian territory by domestic and foreign writers (e.g. Valvasor p. 54, Šižgorić p. 33).

Peter Burke's syntagm (1987) - which was practiced by the former ruling ideology and system of power. However, the migration of the population too, the disintegration of local communities and the social process known to historians as modernisation - - often in a very drastic form in socialism - hurried along the process of ignoring, and then the gradual falling into oblivion of tradition, followed by a certain disorientation and failure to adapt. That natural, almost physical, and mainly oral order of transmission of tradition from generation to generation was very often interrupted - both intentionally and spontaneously - over the past half century.

The breakdown of socialism and the question of identity

The disintegration of socialism and the easing of dogmatic pressures started an avalanche of sometimes very personal questions on tradition and identity. Identity has been shown not to be a constant value: it is subject to change. Although nationalism stimulates the search for identity, identity does not expend itself in the national consciousness. It is contained in social status and, I would say, in *sub*-national categories i.e. in the culture of a community, and regional and local traditions. Therefore, there is a strengthening of desire among contemporaries to comprehend exactly which of their traditions are connected with their place of origin, or with life today. I would accept the concept of Michel Vovelle (1982:190) that people value more highly just those traditions which they themselves have formed.

Over the last five or six years (1989—1994), at the same time years of war in Croatia and years of transition, the offer of *old*, *Croatian* - and also certain new traditions - and their interpretation has been growing. This appears in the mass media in the form of professional articles by historians or ethnologists, as the already mentioned theological discourse, but also in more or less qualified compilations or even as para-scientific conjectures.

What is the individual citizen to do in the concrete case? How can one be sure that what one is doing is good, something by which one can belong as an individual to a certain community, which will be part of his personality and security, of the childhood of his descendants and their future identity? This is not merely a question of a nationalist challenge; the question is put in everyday life concerning seemingly small, almost unimportant things. For example, should children receive their presents on St Nicholas Day or will Little Jesus bring the gifts on Christmas Eve, or will St Lucia visit us and bring presents? But, in any case, there is not enough money available in contemporary household budgets to cover all these occasions. And what about Grandfather Frost?

Was Grandfather Frost a communist?

Croatian pre-Christian tradition had no conception of the mythical figure of a male person who brought gifts. It was traditional in individual Croatian regions for children to receive presents from Lucia, who has both a Christian and non-Christian connotations (see Kretzenbacher 1952), and in others from Nicholas, but gift-giving on a wide scale did not become the custom among the Croatian villagers, nor in urban centres - until the middle of this century. Apart from these figures, Croatian folk culture is familiar with the processions of children and young people moving from house to house at Christmas time, on which occasion the members of the procession were also given gifts.

The fashion for wide-scale gift-giving is a phenomenon linked to modernisation, to the bourgeois classes and the bourgeoisisation of Christmas and to the commercialisation of life which Christmas did not manage to avoid, even in socialism, all this contributing to the production of the figure of an old man with a white beard, a red costume and cap with white fur edging. This figure, on its part, is contaminated with St Nicholas. In western European countries and in the Anglo-Saxon language region, his name is shortened from San Nicolaus to Santa Claus. In their reformistic zeal during the distant 16th century, Protestants lashed out at the saint called Nicholas and introduced the child, Little Jesus (*Christkindlein*) as the gift-giver. Croatian village tradition is acquainted, among other Christmas customs, with the procession of children dressed in white; for example, there is the notation of the custom among the Burgenland Croatians "... 'Little Jesus' who goes from house to house and carries a Christmas tree and presents for children who have been good. These 'Little Jesuses' are usually little girls or girls covered by a white veil. They do not say anything, or just a word or two calling [those present] to pray" (Horvat 1973:129). It is not difficult to explain this custom, if one bears in mind the pressures exerted on the Croatian villagers by the Burgenland feudal lords to accept Protestantism. But people continued to have a need for an adult gift-giver. In Germany therefore, the trails of St Nicholas were followed by *Weihnachtsmann* (see Spamer 1937:62—71).

The history of the Christmas gift-giver abounds with modern episodes. In 1951, when there was growing resistance in France to the post-war Americanisation of everyday life, the result of the corresponding inflow into Europe of American capital, priests in Dijon publicly burnt yet one more Nicholas alternative - Père Noël - as a sign of opposition to what was, in their opinion, pagan pressure on their economic life and civilisation. This event would long have been forgotten if it had not activated Claude Lévi-Strauss (1993/1952) to write an essay called "Father Christmas Executed', about the giving of gifts to children as an expression of the universal human desire - in that very same fashion every year - - again to celebrate life.

One recalls that in former Yugoslavia the figure of the gift-giver in a cape with a cap or a hood appeared after World War II as a surrogate which communist ideology invented under the name *Djed Mraz* (Grandfather Frost). But the figure of the Christmas gift-giver in the form of *Djed Božić* (Grandfather Christmas), or *Božić Bata* (Little Christmas Brother) in the eastern variant of the first Yugoslavia, had been present in urban centres and in advertisements in this part of the world even before World War II. *Little Christmas Brother*, it would seem, is an old tradition of the Serbian Borderland population.[2] It should also be said that Communism cannot lay exclusive claim to the invention of Grandfather Frost, as this figure was obviously contaminated by Santa Claus i.e. a transformed St Nicholas.

The figure of the Christmas gift-giver in modern societies is closely connected with political processes in individual countries. Testimony to this fact was provided in equal measure by Christel Lane (1981:137) who showed the history of the ban on Christmas and the establishment of the Communist surrogate in the former Soviet Union, and by Eric Wolf (1964:149—151) who drew attention to the meaning of Santa Claus in American national integration. Therefore, it is not surprising that the controversy about the name of the Christmas gift-giver has acquired political connotations in Croatia.

Whether it suits the purposes of former fans or current critics of Grandfather Frost or not, this Communist invention here too was permeated with the old strata of traditions, such as St Nicholas and Grandfather Christmas.[3] Independently of ideology, this character became part of the childhood of many contemporary generations of children and adults, because - and here we will agree with Levi-Strauss - the figure of the Christmas gift-giver simultaneously divides and links two generations: the one which believes in him and the other which knows the secret. At the same time, it allows adults to give gifts by the aid of which they show how good they are, and how they have faith in life.

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[2] At the end of the last century, N. Begović (1887/1986, 12) noted verses in the town of Korenica in Lika about the *Little Christmas Brother* who carries a posy of gold to gild the doors and the entire house...

[3] In the interest of truth, it should be said that Grandfather Frost did not have much more luck in the socialist system. Firstly, after the break between the Yugoslavian communists and the Informbureau in Moscow, he was reproached for being a Stalinist and it was said that he should be eliminated (see Sklevicky 1990). Later, in the Seventies, there were recurring waves of discussion on how he was still not sufficiently effective in replacing the Christian symbols, and did not offer resistance to kitsch and commercialisation (see, for example *Vjesnik* Jan 1, 1979).

Invention of a tradition: replacing the replacement

The personal, bourgeois dilemmas of parents regarding gift-giving were deepened in public in Croatia with polemics about Grandfather *Božićnjak* and Grandfather Frost. It began on the main "News" programme on Croatian state television on Sunday, December 20, 1992. Denis Latin, the anchor at that time who was being given a lot of space in the media, suggested - in an ostensibly unbinding manner that instead of *Grandfather Frost* (Mraz), we should call him *Grandfather Božićnjak* from now on. Due to the fact that this message came from a medium which holds both a monopoly and power - this was understood as a directive (which in fact it was). But instead of the renaming of the Christmas gift-giver proceeding smoothly, it provoked reactions.

In a letter to the editor of the daily newspaper *Večernji list* (Nikola Bićanić, *There are no "grandfathers" for Christmas!* December 20, 1993) the writer voiced his objections to the imposition through the media of Grandfather *Božićnjak*. He identified this newly-invented figure as a neo-liberal surrogate for the Communist Grandfather Frost and interceded for the Catholic (!) tradition of Little Jesus from Bethlehem. The satirical independent weekly *Feral Tribune* reacted immediately (December 21, 1993) with a note commemorating the passing of Grandfather *Mraz* and mentioning "the newly-composed Grandfather *Božićnjak*". And the most highly placed Roman Catholic dignitary in Croatia, similarly to the French clerics around the mid-century, rejected the figure of the Christmas gift-giver as a pagan concoction. He reiterated this stance in a more forceful form for Christmas, 1994.

I could make comment on the invention of the state TV medium - - on the name Grandfather *Božićnjak* - it is not particularly ingenious and does not testify to its being knowledgeable.[4] The term božićnjak is known in Croatian legal history as "a toll, which the serf had to give to his terrestrial lord, a hog at Christmas time" (Mažuranić 1908). In Petar Skok's *Etymological Dictionary* (1971), *božitnjak* is a large Christmas bread loaf. Numerous Croatian ethnologists who have studied folk customs, particularly Milovan Gavazzi, testify to božićnjak having been the name of the Christmas loaf in many Croatian regions.

Consequently, it was fairly clumsy to impose an invention of new/old tradition, as it was in fact difficult - and was it at all necessary? - to relinquish the figure of the gift-giver called Grandfather Frost. In Croatian, the name itself of the holiday - *Božić* - is a diminutive of the word for god, *Bog*; *Božić*

[4] In my opinion, the name *youlupukki* invented in Finland for the Christmas gift-giver has a much sounder foundation, as it derives from a traditional carnival figure (see Karjalainen 1994:113).

means little god. Therefore, the name of Grandfather Frost cannot be simply replaced by the term Grandfather Christmas, similarly as in Italian or French. Skok's dictionary mentioned above tells us that "in Dalmatia, the name *Božićko* was created from the personal name *Natalis*", and that would certainly be a more fitting name for the Christmas gift-giver, if he has to be renamed at all. But state television, because of its monopoly and its Party tinge, has a tendency to put itself up as an authority on what will be celebrated, in what manner, and under which name. So it happened that in 1993, hardly any other name was heard in media than the one which originally meant a toll or tax, a pig or even a bread loaf.[5] In 1994, the situation was somewhat different. Among others, state television organised a panel discussion on the name of the Christmas gift-giver in which the disparate approaches of the professionals present were more than obvious: the Roman Catholic priest spoke for the religious character of gift-giving and the figures of St Nicholas and Little Jesus; two well-known and respected linguists - both eminent members of the Party in power - categorically supported the thesis that Grandfather Frost was a Communist invention imposed by force which should definitely be ejected from usage and from our memories, while professionals without Party affiliations - among others, the writer of these lines - were of the opinion that the name and personage of the gift-giver - the figure is, in any case, one and the same in the capitalist and in the Communist systems - should not be prescribed for the public, but that they should be allowed to choose for themselves.

[5] Grandfather Frost was still, as late as 1993, taking pity on some refugee child in Istria and in Rijeka, where there were two reasons for which the newly-invented Grandfather *Božićnjak* had a harder time penetrating from Croatian Radio-Television. Božićnjak in those regions was the traditional name for the decorative Christmas evergreen, and a probable additional factor was the fact that opposition political parties were in power there!

The construction of the Croatian Christmas

The meaning of traditional Christmas customs lies precisely in the fact that people demonstrated their piety at Christmas time - even when it was not permitted - in numerous inspired variations: regional, local right up to the family... It is these very variations, their small, at first glance, insignificant diversities which differentiate "us" from "others" and comprise individual identity. However during the Nineties, primarily denoted by war in Croatia, national identity is a constant challenge to both national politics and personal identification.[6]

A creative feature of folklore and popular culture lies in the fact that symbols, motifs and ceremonial behaviour are never merely repetitive in the manner of a true pattern: each local performance expresses the peculiarity of its environment, its time and its contacts with neighbouring cultures and diverse social strata. Consequently, Croatian ethnology - - neither historically nor the anthropolgically oriented - did not deal with the question of the national colouring of folk customs. Despite how paradoxical it may seem, that almost supersedes the competence of the disciplines which study traditions at their historical source or at the place in which they function i.e. are repeated, altered, enriched by outside influences, and endure in this way. And this is all to be found in family and local communities, in the sphere of oral communication and transmission of knowledge. Research into the origins of customs which was long the focus of Croatian culturo-historical ethnology, could have to say only indirectly about national characteristics. But such research usually reaches out to Slavic or other roots, which still says little about the symbols of the contemporary nation.

From the culturo-anthropological view, *local or regional communities* are not the ones in which symbols of a nation and national identity are formed. National integration is implemented at a level which surpasses the local and, in certain periods, even suppresses it. National identity is constructed at the level of national ideology, which usually selects individual symbols from tradition and offers them, or imposes them, on the national community by the vigour of its political movements or the potency of its secured power.

From the aspect of political anthropology on its part, discourses on Christmas customs and inventions of their denotations in Croatia - - something which at this stage in politics and the war would seem to be utterly

[6] When my "Book About Christmas. An Ethnological Review of Christmas and Christmas Customs in Croatian Popular Culture" came out just before Christmas, 1992 the most frequent question from journalists was: which Christmas customs are expressly Croatian, the most Croatian? One well-known female journalist even reproached me for the regional detail of the customs described and the lack of a review of the holiday at a national level.

marginal and non-essential, and which in fact draws attention away from questions of life and death - are obviously in the function of the construction of renewed national ideologies.

A peasant or bourgeois Christmas?

Here I would like to add the following. When one speaks of Croatian folk customs - associated with Christmas in this case - one regularly identifies them with peasant culture. The greater part, not to say all, of ethnological and folklore material on customs, and consequently Christmas customs, derives from rural environments. Croatian ethnology has only begun to study not only urban customs but also bourgeois rituals. And the tone of the Croatian Christmas is not given solely by the village but even more - - by the bourgeois family. Although depleted, although suppressed and deprived of identity in the foregoing period, the bourgeois class and its culture were not without influence, and it is precisely that class which was the medium for transmission of European influences into the Croatian environment. Researchers of Christmas customs in Germany noted they were increasingly given a bourgeois flavour in the second half of the last century and during this century. Protestant traditions such as Little Jesus and the Advent Wreath, components of bourgeois culture, penetrated from the Protestant north to the Roman Catholic South of the German-speaking and cultural regions. And from there it is but a step to the Croatian bourgeois environment... Bourgeois influences have long since entered Croatia precisely from the Germanic Middle-European regions. So it was that the Christmas tree made its way from the upper social classes to the Croatian bourgeoisie, witnessed to by the customary term, *krizbam* (= Christbaum), and then also to the villages. Admittedly, the acceptance of the bland Christmas atmosphere, the etiquette and good manners, together with the fine, sweet-smelling *baeckerei*, a Viennese culinary specialty - in place of the large village bread loaves - moved at different paces and followed winding roads. Here is an example: in a pre-war edition, *The Golden Book of Cookery* by Mira Vučetić, the bi-lingual title of the chapter "Christmas Cakes (Weihnachtsbaeckereien)" offers 42 recipes for such small cakes. The bi-lingual title speaks for itself concerning cultural currents. Post-war, socialist editions of the same book omitted, of course, the Christmas and German title of the chapter, but the same recipes appeared under the title "Dry Cakes" and "Tea Cakes" and thus, smuggled in the Middle-European bourgeois Christmas style.

The paedogogical function of the Advent Wreath has penetrated into Croatia only during the last few Christmas seasons, when four candles have shone from the TV screen while the politicians talk and negotiate. Generally, the Advent Wreath is of more recent tradition. According to Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann (1978:42—45), it appeared in bourgeois families in

Germany at the turn of the century, and later in offices, supported by religious paedagogy and as part of the mentioned bourgeoisisation of Christmas customs, probably not without the influence of the florists and large scale flower production. Recently, with the openness of the country and growing import of various goods, the previously completely unknown children's Advent calendars have been appearing in Croatia.

So much about the bourgeois components of the Croatian Christmas.

Tradition or frustration?

Contemporary analysis of the Croatian Christmas cannot omit what is literally a burning phenomenon, also not devoid of nationally tinged controversies: the shooting. Two days after Christmas, 1992 the highest circulation Croatian daily newspaper, *Večernji list*, published a framed comment which gave an excellent picture of the atmosphere of a war-time Zagreb Christmas, although it erred in interpretation. The author Anton Kollak was, at that time, the Croatian Television correspondent in Bonn, who had found himself in Zagreb during the holidays. Briefly, the journalist was disgusted with the Christmas and New Year's Eve shooting which echoed through Zagreb and other towns in Croatia in what was still one of the war years. Not without a dose of political malice, he attributed the custom to the Eastern part of former Yugoslavia, whence, in any case, all evil had come. Unfortunately, Mr Kollak's claim on the origins of the firing of guns at holiday time is not correct, although the most ominous echoes of shooting at New Year - and also at Christmas time in Zagreb, but in January and not December on the date of the Eastern Orthodox Christmas Eve - in the years following the "Croatian Spring" had resounded from buildings in which officers of the JNA (Yugoslavian People's Army) lived.[7] The custom of shooting on diverse occasions, particularly on Christmas and New Year's Eve, is an old Croatian habit, noted in many regions and even in the Zagreb suburbs.[8]

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[7] In 1971, Croatian Communists made demands that the position of Croatia be redefined - in the economic, cultural and political sense - within former Yugoslavia and received powerful mass support. The movement which is called the "Croatian Spring" was brutally suppressed in the winter of 1971, and many students and prominent Croatian intellectuals were arrested.

[8] For example, in 1896 I. Ujević described how when the Yule log was lit in the evening in the Imotski region, people fired from a number of rifles; at the same time they called out to their neighbours, extending them good wishes for Christmas Eve. He also noted that the custom of shooting began to disappear "when the authorities started disarming the villages". Before than time, in 1879, a famous chronicler of the city of Zagreb, the well-known Croatian writer August Šenoa wrote in *Vijenac*, a Zagreb paper for culture and politics: "Our people love to sing and shoot, whenever there is some sort of celebration, church festival, christening or when members of a wedding party gather in procession. The most shooting takes place at Christmas time, and that on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day itself...".

A common sense comment on the contemporary shooting is self-evident. There is so much weaponry and violence in circulation, so many vital questions are being "solved" by guns, that ritual taking up of weapons is not at all surprising. Nonetheless, I was horrified, listening in my flat in New Zagreb to the successive volleys on New Year's Eve in 1993, and last year in 1994. There was intermittent firing throughout the evening, which culminated around midnight in shooting from various weapons and devices which lasted almost an hour. There is no doubt that this custom, or even ritual act, is completely inappropriate to life in today's cities. In any case, those firing away on New Year's Eve probably are not aware of the concept of the driving out of evil spirits.[9] Or perhaps they are, and are not merely showing their good spirits but are really driving out their enemies? Is there not a measure of war-time and post-war frustration?

Holiday and mentality

As an ethnologist, my "conceptions are disturbed" whenever an individual symbol, custom or ritual emerges - or seems to me to have emerged - from the distant, or not so distant, past - certain spiritual structures which belong to the past and which bear "meaning" in a different manner in the present. Origins are not what interest me, but the meaning of its contemporary emergence: I ask myself about its functions and symbolics in the world in which we live, but also what such a phenomenon tells about the people with whom I live. When customs and holidays are in question, I know that they do not have static duration throughout history. Only those which change survive; from the historical viewpoint, they are mobile.[10] Each age produces a corresponding context to the holiday; consequently, the celebration of a holiday comprises information about world-view and mentality.

With the introduction of its holidays during the cycle of the year or the re-semantisation of old holidays which were Christian in spirit, Socialism tried to de-sacralise human life or, more precisely, to establish a new sanctity, as Michel Vovelle demonstrated to have occurred during the French

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Šenoa wrote in the context of political conditions in what was then Austro-Hungary and defended the right of the common people to practice their ritual shooting. As we can see, folk customs always occur at a set political time, and that time endows them their peculiar charge.

[9] Quite some years ago, Sir James Frazer (1937/1922:674) expressed the opinion that noise had the ritual function of casting out evil. I ask myself what the noble gentleman would have to say about the corresponding activity of my urban contemporaries?

[10] "Il nous apprend à rejeter, en ce domain aussi, le mythe commode de l'immobilité: pas qu'il n'y a d'histoire immobile, il n'y a de fête immobile. La fête de longue durée, telle qu'on peut l'analyser sur des siècles, est non une structure figée mais un continuum de mutations, glissements, ajdonctions, d'une main, abandons de l'autre..." (Vovelle 1982:198)

Revolution. With the change in the political powers-that-be and the corresponding climate, that sanctity was not of itself revoked. Thus one has the polemics about Grandfather *Mraz* alias Grandfather *Božićnjak*, joined by discussions and admonitions about shooting, although, as we have seen, shooting on New Year's Eve has already outlived a number of modern political systems, not to mention more deeply-seated, saturnalistic traditions.

Probably more in Croatia than elsewhere in the socialist and post-socialist world, that great holiday of traditional culture - Christmas - - has been and has remained a barometre of our mentality and our politics. In the first years following World War II, the socialist regime in Croatia continued publicly to celebrate Christmas. As early as the early Fifties repression and the process of re-semantisation began and signs and symbols of Christmas were gradually transferred to the New Year, as has already been mentioned. But, in a way, the discourse on democracy also began, at the end of the Eighties, with polemics on public well-wishing and celebration of Christmas. In Croatia, Christmas was repressed just because this Roman Catholic holiday and the folk customs which accompanied it, were adjoined to symbols of Croatian national identity. As the Serbian Orthodox Church never accepted the Gregorian calendar, Christmas - along with some other holidays - is seen as a boundary marker, not only for the two confessions, but also for the two nations.[11] Therefore, the post-socialist, Roman Catholic, Croatian Christmas can be understood as an expression of feelings and release. In addition to all this, socialist "sanctity" did not automatically withdraw. An interesting illustration of this can be seen in the musical programmes of the first post-socialist Zagreb Christmas concerts. In 1989, when such concerts were held for the first time, the musical programme was, in fact, a New Year's programme. Christmas popular piety was only gradually returning to public life. And the first Christmas Eve celebrations on Zagreb's main square (Jelačić Square) were rowdy and quite contrary to the model of the intimate, family celebration (see Bezić 1993).

However, it immediately became obvious that the Christmas of the Nineties was much more strongly coloured with Croatian symbols that had been customary in folk culture. The Croatian tri-colour has completely eliminated the traditional red ribbon against spells and is mandatorily tied around the Christmas wheat; Christmas candles in churches and homes are also mainly in the hues of the tri-colour. The midnight mass on Christmas Eve in Zagreb Cathedral is a national gathering attended by members of the political nomenclature. It is broadcast by state television. Decorations on the

[11] Roman Catholics celebrate Christmas on December 25 and members of the Eastern Orthodox church on January 7; the new Croatian state's formulation of the calendar of public holidays is not quite clear, and every year around January 6 (Theophany, Twelfth Night) and January 7 (Christmas according to the Orthodox calendar), the authorities again make public pronouncements on which days are working days and which holidays.

facades of important and eminent city buildings speak not only of Christmas but also of the Croatian state and its power. Even the formulae of the greetings endeavour to be "more Croatian" than previously.

So what is the message to us from Christmas rituals and the discourse about them in the time of transition? The profusion of Christmas symbols and the figure of the gift-giver along with the host of old and new, newly invented traditions and those imported into Croatia at the beginning of the Nineties, invoke not only a continual oscillation in public opinion but also personal dilemmas. What is in question is a vacillation between Christian observances, folk agrarian tradition, but also former socialist "sanctity"; and further, vacillation concerning former and future bourgeois values, and equally concerning consumerism and national politics. The introduction of national Christmas symbols along with the thunderous, often dangerous shooting on Christmas and New Year's Eve, with their multiple meanings tell the Christmas story of Croata's tragic end to the millennium in which the themes of war and survival still dominate, while the outcome of the struggle for democracy is far from being completely certain. "Father Christmas Executed" - now also renamed - becomes a sign of the Croatian variant of transition.

(Translated by Nina H. Antoljak)

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