

## BOOK REVIEW

### MEDITERRANEAN ETHNOLOGICAL SUMMER SCHOOL

(Piran/Pirano, Slovenia 2003 and 2004) Volume 6. Bostjan Kravanja and Matej Vranjes, (eds.) Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo.

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Volume 6 of the amusingly titled *MESS*, the proceedings of the Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School held each September in the Slovene coastal town of Piran, evidences the continued vibrancy of this annual meeting (simultaneously school and symposium) of senior anthropologists and students. Launched in 1993, *MESS* brings together scholars and Slovene anthropology students for intensive discussion (as well as socializing) and, ideally, what editors Bostjan Kravanja and Matej Vranjes deem “the creation of anthropological and ethnological knowledge on the spot” (7). In the early years of Slovene independence, the Piran summer school also signaled the launching of a Slovene anthropological tradition distinct from its Yugoslav predecessors and in sustained dialogue with the international anthropological community. The school literally brought the international community to Slovenia and, in turn, introduced many foreign scholars to anthropologists in Slovenia and the ethnographic realities of Slovenia, in particular the mixed border region of Istria.

In its origins, the summer school and subsequent *MESS* volumes devoted considerable attention to scholarship on Istria and the wider “Balkans” region (including, of course, debates about the construction of the image of the Balkans and attendant questions of Orientalism, frontier Orientalism, and Balkanism). Volume 6, which contains papers given at the 2003 and 2004 meetings, offers a much broader spread of geographical and topical coverage. With contributions arranged according to four themes—the anthropology of corruption; maritime anthropology; body, mind and the ‘authentic’ self; and views of religion and art—only Natasa Rogelja’s piece focuses on Istria and the imaginings of the Slovene sea by “local” and “regional” photographers. Galia Valtchinova’s actor-oriented analysis of religious transformations in postsocialist Bulgaria represents the only other contribution focused on the wider Balkans region. The other articles

cover a range of places and topics, including the Sicilian mafia and what Jane and Peter Schneider characterize as the “predatory business elites” who ran Enron; deep sea fishers (studied by Reginald Byron); the avant-garde art exhibition *Documenta* held in Kassel, Germany (examined by Thomas Fillitz); the Muhajir Quami Movement in Pakistan (in Marcin Brocki’s article); and interactions between humans and ghosts/non-human subjects among Amerindians belonging to the Jivaroan language group (the topic of Elke Mader’s work). The articles also range from more extensive reviews of theoretical and topical areas (such as Rob van Ginkel’s “Maritime Anthropology: Achievements and Agendas” and Marcin Brocki’s “The Clash of Metaphysics and Contemporary Discourse of the Body”) to exploratory pieces (such as the Schneiders’ “The Middle Ground: Intersections between High-Level and Low-Level Corruption”) in which the anthropologists develop a strand of their ongoing research.

This mix sometimes makes for an uneven feel to the volume and may disappoint those scholars of the region (Southeastern Europe/the Balkans/Eastern Europe, however defined) who would appreciate more work that takes advantage of the school’s setting in Piran and delves into local and regional realities. The diversity of contributions, however, reflects the nature of the school/symposium format. The contributions of Jane and Peter Schneider on the relationships between elite formations and corruption explicitly cite and build upon the work of their own graduate students, reflecting the kind of dialogue between students and senior scholars that also takes place at the Piran meetings.

The broad range of contributions also reflects the realization on the part of the *MESS* organizers that the project needs to address explicitly the increasing tendency of European-based anthropologists to work “at home.” On one level, this has meant expanding the range of contributions to go well beyond the immediate

regional frame. On another level, this has also meant going beyond the “Europeanist” frame. As the editors acknowledge in their introduction, “Within ‘Fortress Europe’ there is little dialogue with ‘non-European’ potentials and creative voices, apart from the fact that the distinctions between the two are at least as much provisional as the distinction between East and West (Europe) is turning out to be” (13). In reality, only two of the ten articles (those by Mader and Brocki) in Volume 6 deal with “non-Western” societies but they do signal a growing awareness among the MESS organizers and European anthropologists more generally of the dangers of retreating to an anthropology that exclusively works “at home.”

The experimental nature of the meetings and the resultant volumes offer a rich snapshot of current debates and trends in European anthropology and beyond. Many of the articles represent early articulations of arguments that challenge scholarly thinking on a range of topics. The work of the Schneiders, for example, pushes readers to consider what business elites like those at Enron have in common with the mafia and to focus attention to a little-explored middle

ground between high-level and low-level forms of corruption which, they argue, “interact and nourish each other through locally based extortionist groups or mafias” (29). Rob van Ginkel likewise highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the subfield of maritime anthropology, pointing to the need for more work on social structure (such as kinship) and in under-studied areas such as the European postsocialist states. Oskar Verkaaik and Galia Valtchinova argue against views of religious “revival” in Islamic societies and Bulgaria, respectively, which read these trends as a return of tradition and thereby neglect the key role played by modernity and secularization.

Volume 6 of the MESS should hold interest for anthropologists working in a range of geographical and topical areas. More importantly, it stands as a testament to the value of the school/symposium format. Hopefully, more such venues will be created (and funding secured for them), particularly in those postsocialist societies whose anthropological disciplines have undergone dramatic transformations in the last decade and a half.

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