

***Masquerade and Postsocialism: Ritual and Cultural Dispossession in Bulgaria.* By Gerald W. Creed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. xi, 217pp. Notes. Works Cited. Photographs. Index. \$70.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.**

Heidi Bludau, Monmouth University

Masquerade and Postsocialism examines globalization and alternatives to modernity in post-socialism through the folk performance of *kukeri* (mumming). Masquerade in the form of mumming originates in Bulgarian ancient history, has survived Ottoman rule and socialism, and is thriving in post-socialism. Creed successfully argues that although largely neglected in post-socialist research, rural rituals provide the perfect site for inquiry into community, social networks and global processes. This analysis of mumming offers an alternative approach to a Euro-American vision of modernity, challenging the notion that pre-modern activities and rituals cannot represent modernity.

Cold War opposition set up a global postsocialism that creates barriers to local alternatives and the practical use of indigenous cultural resources. When foreign development plans fail, the blame is placed in the local context. Creed challenges this development-by-design assessment by suggesting that applying local, familiar alternatives to problems leads to greater potential for success. He uses *kukeri* to illustrate that the cultural options and alternatives available to rural Bulgarians are “eroded and reformed before they can even be recognized” and consequently utilized (4), what he calls “cultural dispossession.”

Creed bases this book on 20 years of ethnographic research in rural Bulgaria. His countrywide selection of 24 villages representing different regions provides a breadth of examples which allows the reader to see the local alternatives that create this national tradition. The Bulgarian case with its idiosyncratic elements also illustrates a development context familiar across the region. The ensuing discussion of productive alternatives to Western modernity and development enables comparison with other ritual traditions and makes the Bulgarian case part of a broader conversation on social relations.

Creed starts with a rich description of the mumming season (chapter 1). Related to the agricultural cycle, mumming activities typically take place in connection with the New Year or Lent. Traditional characters in the motley band include a central female transvestite virgin/bride figure, a priest, groom or other male escort, and an “‘*Arap*’—a darkly blackened figure” (43) glossed as a Gypsy or Middle Easterner. Mumming is locally perceived as distinctly Bulgarian and linked to one’s ancestral village. Motivations for mumming are identity-based and run like a thread from the local village to national representations of global modernity, but center on a personal desire, or need, for participation.

The most well-argued section of this book is Creed’s analysis of the ways mumming represents global frameworks of masculinity (chapter 2). Creed states that the engagement with mumming is more closely linked with male subjectivity than it is with ritual activity and

supernatural belief. Increased participation in global production emasculates men. While women work in hazardous factory conditions, men are largely unemployed and ashamed at their inability to fill the role as provider and protector. Mumming confirms masculinity through various elements of the mumming performance—the ability to carry heavy costumes, endure bitter cold, or drink heavily the entire day; costumes with phallic and scrotal representations; lewd or violent behavior.

Most interesting in Creed's analysis of gender is the paradox of female participation in mumming. As a rural activity, kukeri is a symbol of backwardness and including women is a sign of gender equality or progress in modernity. Realistically, migration has led to an insufficient number of men in the village. Creed also suggests that an increased awareness of the global gay culture has turned transvestism into a transgressive element. Men no longer want to play the transvestite with the fear of being labeled homosexual.

In chapter 3, Creed questions why ritual acts are not interpreted as civil society, stating that mumming fits almost all definitions of civil society while constituting the popular conceptualization of the term (110). Participation in kukeri creates a subset of villagers with common interests who work to maintain the activity over time. Other than 20 years during socialism when the state supported kukeri, it has been largely removed from the state. Finally, mumming acts as a "socioeconomic barometer" that shapes villager's political and economic experiences and provokes political action (121).

Creed next challenges the model of (post)socialist atomization, stating that the scholarly concentration on the lack of village cohesion and a fascination with informal networks misses the complexities of social networks in Bulgaria and obscures "a cultural resource that could have been exploited for a different constitution of democracy and political participation" (138). He uses the violent behavior in kukeri to demonstrate that conflict and tension are paramount to community relations and that despite atomization villages created workable communities. Mumming sheds light on alternative ideas of community where conflict and cooperation live together, a concept that is difficult to capture in western social models.

Mumming also heavily draws on negative Roma stereotypes, making their participation another paradox (chapter 5). Unlike women's participation as a form of modernity, Creed suggests that Roma participation is a demonstration of community. Even negative characterizations demonstrate that Roma are part of the community. Although Bulgarian-Roma racial tensions become conflated with American racial issues through a range of globalization processes, discourse surrounding the inclusion of Roma in mumming opens the door for improved ethnic relations. Creed concludes by urging the reader to consider the possibility of culturally grounded modernity (216), reminding us that socialism was an alternative to modernity that left multiple post-socialist options for modernity in its wake. He notes that kukeri is wanting in the poorest, de-developed regions of Bulgaria where villagers are not in dialogue with modernity.

In closing, this book is not merely an analysis of what contemporary rituals in rural Bulgaria can tell us about post-socialist life and studies. It is an innovative ethnography of

global processes in local context. In this regard, *Masquerade and Postsocialism* would be of interest to anyone in globalization or development studies, as well as European studies. Creed's emphasis on the role of ritual and performance broadens the audience. In a time when many anthropology departments are fighting to prove relevance in academic and public spheres, Creed demonstrates that ritual, a long-standing topic of anthropology, not only serves as a useful site of analysis but can also challenge teleological ideals of Western modernity.