

Book Review

SERBIAN DREAMBOOK: NATIONAL IMAGINARY IN THE TIME OF MILOŠEVIĆ. By Marko Živković. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. 318 pp. Softbound, \$27.95.

Serbian Dreambook: National Imaginary in the Time of Milošević is a fascinating addition to Indiana University Press's series on "New Anthropologies of Europe," as well as a contribution to the broader academic literature related to the decline of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Unlike most studies of this period, which focus on the larger ethnonationalist, political, and historical processes that divided Yugoslavia under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević, Živković draws attention to the private narratives that Serbian civilians used to make sense of their shifting roles and social realities in the new Serbia. In doing so, Živković reveals a complex matrix of ethnonationalist mythologies that were revised and reinvented by Serbian civilians in their efforts to come to terms with the lived experiences of political upheaval, war, and mass atrocities.

Živković begins by outlining the theoretical framework that informs his study. Drawing upon the work of Ross Chambers, he offers the term "imaginarium" as a means of highlighting "the repertory of items (or images) that define what, for a given individual or collective subjectivity, it is possible to imagine" (3). He then analyzes the resulting "glossary of commonplaces" for shared and often interrelated tropes, plots, and grammars, revealing "a morphology of the Serbian imaginary" (4). Upon realizing that the emerging morphology was often "bizarre, outlandish, and strange," Živković then suggests that Serbian civilians interpreted the decline of the former Yugoslavia as "a species of dream experience—most often, and predictably, as a nightmare" (4, 5). Živković's observations mesh neatly with the work of Stathis Gourgouris, who promotes an understanding of modern nations as dreams rather than realities (e.g., *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece*, Stanford, 1996), in order to better express their complexity and the cultural, historical, and political revisionism that makes their existence possible. Thus, Živković concludes that social theorists should use the dream metaphor more widely as a "machine for thinking" about our social world (6).

Having articulated his theoretical framework, Živković then introduces the setting for his ethnography: the Serbian capital, Belgrade. His description of Belgrade shifts quickly from media moguls and local understandings of what

constitutes a neighborhood to examples of dark humor and myth that infiltrate the everyday lives of the people who live there. His writing style in this instance is best characterized as a series of ironic and even humorous snapshots, interspersing his own observations and experiences of Belgrade's main sights with those of prominent Serbian writers, organized much in the same way a newcomer might encounter the city on foot or by bus. The outcome is not a comprehensive overview of Belgrade but one that nonetheless sets the stage well for the subsequent analysis.

Živković's analysis begins in chapter 2 with his summary of Serbia's imagined position within European symbolic geography: Serbia is caught between a desire to be treated as an equal Westernizing nation within Europe and a European (and perhaps international) perception of it as a Turkish or "Gypsy"—and therefore more primitive—Balkan state. In the succeeding chapters, Živković argues that the Serbian people internalize and invoke this latter perception using several important narrative tropes, which he labels: highlanders and lowlanders; tender-hearted criminals and the reverse Pygmalion; Serbian Jeremiads; the most ancient peoples; from Kosovo to Jadovno; the Jewish trope; the poetics of opacity; and mille vs. transition. Recalling an exchange with a bank clerk from Belgrade, Živković notes:

We Slavs are between Germans and Gypsies. . . . But this is not interesting to the Metropolis, or so the Balkan author imagines. So if the Metropolis likes to see us as Gypsies, we'll give them Gypsies, and if they see us as wallowing in blood and mud, we'll give them blood and mud, while privately we sip our Turkish coffee and Capucinos (75).

The outcome is a complex overview of the political, historical, cultural, and social phenomena through which Serbian national identities were reinforced and reproduced during the decline of the former Yugoslavia.

Though distinctly anthropological, Živković's analysis is informed by an impressive array of academic sources, including a large number of works by Balkan intellectuals from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as Balkan literature, folklore, songs, and films. Conversations with Serbian intellectuals, artists, and academics are used to supplement his conclusions. As a result, he resists creating an overly simplistic grand narrative, privileging instead the complex and often contradictory ways in which his sources and participants made sense of the decline of the former Yugoslavia and the birth of modern Serbia. From an oral history perspective, Živković's contribution is made more accessible by his combined use of ethnographic observation, historical familiarity, and cultural insight. This is particularly evident in his discussion of Kosovo and the Jadovno concentration camp, together with the discourse of Serbian victimization that surrounds these historically charged places in the Serbian imaginary.

However, oral historians will likely criticize Živković's work for having overwhelmed the voices of the Serbian people he seeks to represent with the voices of "social commentators who picked up things that were 'in the air' and encapsulated them in deft turns of phrase or poignant anecdotes" (12). In fact, Živković's analysis relies almost entirely upon the varied positions of Balkan anthropologists, historians, media spokespersons, psychologists, musicologists, and artists, who, for example, "were as immersed in everyday life as anyone else in Serbia, but also, in their professional role, capable of detachment and the kind of reflection that is enabled by a more synoptic view of the situation" (12). He provides no model for explaining how the voices of these Serbian elites—those he implies are responsible for shaping the Serbian imaginarium—might accurately represent the experiences and interpretations of the Serbian public, more generally, surrounding the decline of the former Yugoslavia and the birth of modern Serbia. This raises the provocative question of the extent to which Serbian civilians have internalized Živković's Serbian dreambook and the symbolism it encodes.

Erin Jessee

*The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada*

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