

SLOVENIAN PRIESTS IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND VERNACULAR CULTURE BETWEEN RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

In the nineteenth century, the Habsburg Monarchy and its many (predominantly Slavic) peoples went through various, conflicting processes: at the economic and political levels, the state pursued developments inherited from the period of Maria Theresa and Joseph II towards a centralized state, administration, and registration. A very important development was the beginning of industrialization and the construction of railways. Many ethnic groups (the Hungarians, Italians, various Slavic peoples, and others) demanded greater autonomy. The March Revolution of 1848 introduced changes to economic conditions in the countryside, and the events at the Frankfurt Parliament laid bare the differences between the liberal, largely German, and the conservative, largely Slavic, parts of the Austrian state, which expected Vienna to positively address the ethnic issue. The relations between the various ethnic groups further worsened when the state was divided into an Austrian and a Hungarian part with the introduction of dualism in 1867.¹

This period was characterized by a number of conceptual movements, which either started as reactions to the developments in central Europe or developed independently; they had a crucial impact on the development of the perception of *vernacular* culture. The first one was Enlightenment thought, which was largely characterized by Josephinism combined with a reduced and delayed reception of Jansenism, which was popular in Slovenian ethnic territory from 1750 to 1830.² At the theological level, these two were opposed by ultramontanism, represented especially by the Slovenian bishop Anton Martin Slomšek.³ The last period in nineteenth century is characterized by the ardency of theological thought and the differentiation of mindsets, which is best illustrated in the work of the priest, later bishop Anton Mahnič.⁴ Throughout, this involved the basic oppositions between Catholicism and freethought at the cognitive level, and towards the end of the nineteenth century also between clericalism and liberalism. At the same time, this period is characterized by an increasing orientation towards Slovenian ethnicity, perceived either as a tribe within the framework of the great Slavic family or as an independent ethnic group; to a great extent, the Habsburg Monarchy was the basic horizon beyond which the Slovenian nation could not exist. The influence of reforms was so great that Slovenian priests – regardless of their affiliation with various conceptual currents – essentially agreed that the Slovenian rural population had to improve their lives. The basic characteristic of the processes taking place in Slovenian ethnic territory was the fact that the differentiation of mindsets, which was the strongest at the end of the nineteenth century, meant that this differentiation largely relied upon very clear oppositions and that in

¹ cf. Cvirn 2001; Moritsch 2001.

² Kos 1996. 62.

³ Anton Martin Slomšek (1800–1862) author, poet.

⁴ Anton Mahnič (1850–1920) bishop, philosopher.

this way it largely hindered the spread of thought that would have ensured more flexible and appropriate responses to the challenges of that time.

In studying the relationship between priests and vernacular culture in the nineteenth century, one must first examine how the Slovenian clergy received Slovenian literary, scholarly, and popular production, and to what extent they made it possible. The interest and role of the clergy in the Slovenian production of information is thus clearly testified or exemplified by the subscriber lists of various newspapers, such as the first regularly issued Slovenian newspaper, *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* (Farmers' and Craftsmen's News, 1843–1892). Priests accounted for nearly six hundred of the nearly one thousand regular subscribers. Priests also accounted for more than half of all writers of various material,⁵ they also published a catholic weekly *Zgodnja Danica* (1849–1902). In addition, in examining the Slovenian intelligentsia that dealt with the vernacular culture, one can establish that the clergy wrote the most about the people and their culture, primarily through discourse that is today characterized as layman's or semiprofessional writing.

In the nineteenth century, the reception and production of knowledge about the vernacular culture involved several processes. With regard to priests, two contradictory and opposing processes were probably most typical; to some extent they can be chronologically delimited by the year 1869.

In the first half of the nineteenth century (i.e. until the 1860s), priests headed and taught church-sponsored lessons on Sundays, and at the same time developed the educational system and acted as representatives of secular authorities because they were members of the supervisory boards at schools and in other government bodies. Within this context, they significantly determined the curricula of teaching and educational programs. In addition, at that time, theology was more or less the only option for talented rural children to receive an education and achieve social success and higher social status. Thus many children decided to become priests and so the breadth of selecting candidates for new priests was incomparably greater; even young people with a less conservative mindset chose to study theology.⁶

However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, this repertoire widened significantly; examples from the first half of the nineteenth century⁷ and the opportunity to study in Graz and Vienna also showed other options and so the priesthood was taken up primarily by those that had a greater desire to work as priests, dedicated themselves more to this profession and pastoral work, and were usually also more conservative.

However, up to the First World War, the parents and other close relatives of talented rural boys considered the priesthood the first choice or option for social suc-

⁵ cf. Fikfak 1988.

⁶ e.g. Friderik Baraga (1797–1868) missionary, bishop, grammarian, ethnographer, Matija Majar (1809–1892) priest, political activist, ethnographer, publicist, Anton Janežič (1828–1869) philologist, editor, literary historian, and Jakob Volčič (1815–1888) priest, folklorist.

⁷ e.g. France Prešeren (1800–1849) lawyer and most important Slovenian poet and Matija Čop (1797–1835) linguist, literary historian and critic.

cess and better status. Nearly all important scholars⁸ were candidates for the priesthood and some of them even spent several years studying theology.⁹

The question is whether this intellectual, who came from the rural area and was raised in the other world, was still able to understand “peasants”, or the “non-intelligentsia.” At which level the priests were even able and knew how to receive vernacular culture and then also reproduce and transmit it further. To what extent is the written image purified or cleansed of unpleasant and inappropriate content and thus different from the actual one? Moreover, if ethnology almost always presents an image of the Other, how did the clergy understand this Other and interpret its culture?

Stanko Vraz (1810–1851), the poet promoting the idea of Illyrism (South-slavic mutuality), was the first to write in a well-thought-out manner about what the intelligentsia thought about themselves, their education, the difference between their culture and folk culture, and the methods of communication between them. He wrote a letter to the priest Jožef Muršec (1807–1895) in 1837, in which he first talked about the insurmountable difference between the intelligentsia, the bourgeoisie or the middle class as the potential audience for his, Prešeren’s, and other writers’ works on the one hand, and the “peasant” on the other, who is too “simpleminded” to be able to understand an educated man’s thoughts. He found it especially important to emphasize the essential difference in the life of both of these classes, and the status of intelligentsia, who live a different kind of culture because *“our way of thinking is bound to the custom governing the towns.”* In this, it is impossible for the writer to step out of this framework, to truly approach the desired public, and to “make a fool of oneself.” An educated man is thus a stranger in the countryside, the “simple” peasant is the Other, and there is a great gap between them. The root of the misunderstanding or disagreement does not lie primarily in the difference between social classes.¹⁰ According to Stanko Vraz, educated people and peasants experience the world differently. The attempts of the intelligentsia to come closer to the less-educated public are usually merely apparent because they can no longer grasp the rural world.

Is the role of a priest easier in this case? Can a priest be closer to the Other? Carinthian priest Matija Majar (1809–1892), cofounder of the idea of United Slovenia in 1848, provides an answer to this in his letter to Stanko Vraz, in which he describes the difficult position of a stranger, especially a priest, in collecting folk traditions: *“It is hard for a priest to collect folk songs – people don’t know why and wonder; it would be easier if people were familiar with me.”*¹¹ This is one of the reasons why the songs and tales are selected, because the information a priest had access to depended on his position and the way informants viewed him; successful collecting requires a good relationship with the informant.

There are other difficulties that are typical of a collector or researcher of the objectifications of folk culture in the nineteenth century. There are psychological difficulties of an internal nature, in which the researcher replaces the image of his childhood, of primary socialization, with that of his secondary socialization, the period

⁸ e.g. founder of Slavic department in Graz, Gregor Krek (1840–1905)

⁹ e.g. historian and geographer Simon Rutar (1851–1903)

¹⁰ i.e., the bourgeois and the rural class because the difference is primarily one of culture and lifestyle. Elias–Scotson 1993; Baumgart–Eichener 1991.

¹¹ 30 Jan. 1843.

when doubt is inevitable.¹² There are also psychological difficulties of an external nature, in which the world where primary socialization occurred was one environment. For its definition we can paraphrase Jeffrey J. Arnett's statement "*Cultures with narrow socialization encourage obedience and conformity.*" For the world of secondary socialization, the world of a different social and cultural environment we can say with Arnett "*in cultures characterized by broad socialization, socialization is intended to promote independence, individualism, and self-expression.*"¹³ The significant "others" are no longer people from the environment of primary socialization. On the other hand the world of vernacular culture represents especially for the intellectuals raised in the rural world "the forever lost world of childhood".

Moreover, here as well, precisely because of the relatively low initial status, quandaries and problems in the reception of vernacular culture can be observed on the one hand, and delays in the reception of foreign currents on the other.

Another very important interference is education, which Majar saw as a category that obstructed collecting. Stanko Vraz wrote about the insurmountable contrast between townspeople and rural people. Majar's informants saw him as a priest and therefore he could not collect love songs.

One nineteenth-century characteristic is the regular, we can describe it as an utilitarian discourse about what people should improve in their lives and how to do so, and how one could contribute to the development of the Slovenian nation; this was also the period when the relation to vernacular culture was extremely ambivalent.

The intellectuals (more appropriate than the Slovenian term *razsvetljenci* "Enlightenment-era figures") understood their position such that they expressed their dissatisfaction with the state of the people's ignorance and tried to help them become more cultured by writing essays as well as in other ways. In these ambivalent conditions, the priests played an especially important role because they engaged in religious, moral, and state-appropriate education of their believers. The majority of essays on the relation to dance, Carnival, and song were published in the newspaper *Zgodnja danica*, relatively fewer were published at a different level in *Novice*, *Vedež*, and *Šolski prijatelj*, and not many were published in other newspapers; there were also many lamentations, especially in individual volumes of the series *Zgodovina fará* (Parish Histories), about how the dress culture was changing in the countryside and how the existing hierarchy could no longer be discerned.

Writers such as Ivan Navratil¹⁴ and Peter Hicinger,¹⁵ the writers of parish histories, and others show that their greatest fear was that of world turned upside-down, a world in which one could no longer distinguish between a servant and a master, a peasant and a townsman, a priest and a secular individual. In this way, a concrete element of vernacular culture such as Carnival had the same effect or functioned as a strong inversion of fixed or desired values in the existing hierarchy.

When one reads about the quality of old styles of dress in the parish histories¹⁶ there are two frequent remarks: that the clothing was durable and inexpensive. In

¹² Berger-Luckmann 1988. 121–136.

¹³ Arnett 1995. 617.

¹⁴ Ivan Navratil (1825–1896) linguist, editor, ethnographer, journalist and civil servant.

¹⁵ Peter Hicinger (1812–1867) priest, publicist, historian.

¹⁶ Janez Volčič (1825–1887) priest and writer; Jože Lavrenčič (1890–1952) priest.

contrast, the townsfolk, who belonged to a different social circle, would be ashamed to wear such clothes because they would have thus renounced their distinctness. With descriptions formed this way, the authors also imply respect for the existing differences and hierarchy.

Growing industrialization introduced new hierarchies into settlements, and the authors' fear of anything new is actually a fear of leveling or losing the fixed or defined difference, which is often combined with the fear of the impoverished countryside. The consequences of these changes also included changed laws; for example, those regarding who could get married. Vrhovnik describes this in the following way: "*according to the pernicious law, every swindler can get married, and of course there are too many poor people, the majority of whom are burdened with debt.*"¹⁷

Navratil and Hicinger were devoted supporters of the system;¹⁸ in the 1840s and 1850s, they were still characterized by a mindset according to which land was the greatest value. In addition, respect for authority, both the church and secular, was also an important value. Socialization within the first mindset demanded the observance of certain important dates such as Ash Wednesday as a strictly Lenten and non-Carnival day. One had to repent for everything done during Carnival and all of one's excess enjoyment. Allowing oneself to "forget" or "slip up" during the fast was permitted, but only if this was explicitly stated. Both the dance and Carnival place the innocence of the young, ignorant people at the disposal of "impure" forces; they both possess something demonic and thus one should fight against them.¹⁹

The goal of the majority of essays is to cultivate people or turn ordinary people into cultivated and civilized beings. An implicit goal is also to individualize destinies; according to the Johannes Fabian, the new form of socialization entails preparation for work and production.²⁰ The nineteenth-century socialization that was carried out in the countryside through more thorough and systematic intervention of the state and its apparatus in the everyday life of the population – especially through education, obligatory military service, and the Church – to a great extent also helped shape and change the later image of vernacular culture; it was largely cleansed of "sinful" and twisted elements, laughter and ridicule, and was sufficiently socialized in order to prepare the countryside to accept new forms of culture, shaping less collective and more individual forms of accepting and experiencing the world. The language used by the "folk" in the written texts is cleansed of "trash" or dialect words that would point to an origin in a different language; the faith this folk is learning and practicing is cleansed of all the pagan elements. As a relatively independent cultural structure, vernacular culture definitely experienced a significant shock in the civilizing process (in Norbert Elias' sense) in the nineteenth century because the school and the Church considerably contributed to the fact that some elements, especially as part of folk belief and celebrations or rituals, and primarily at the manifest level, were cleansed of many syncretic, magical, and other influences. The writers of educational and ethnographic texts also contributed their share to this. At the end of the century, the clean-

¹⁷ Vrhovnik 1885b

¹⁸ Hicinger as a member of the clergy, and Navratil as a member of the imperial court, although he also studied theology for a while.

¹⁹ e.g. Navratil 1847.

²⁰ Fabian 1983.

sing of inappropriate content and Puritanism became a constituent part of the view on and reception of vernacular culture.

The difference described between the culture and lifestyle of both classes remained: it ultimately did not merely point to the great gap between these two layers, but was also productive because it made it possible to study folk culture. However, what were the reasons for describing folk culture?

When establishing the basic features of the relationship towards folk culture in Slovenia, at the same time one can paradoxically say that in the zeal and necessity to discover Slovenian identity and the wealth of its own cultural heritage, the differences between the elite and folk culture were suppressed or overlooked.

Who created the folk culture image and its definition? According to Vraz and his letters, especially those he wrote to Muršec and Majar, it can be established that writers (i.e., the intelligentsia) belonged to non-folk culture. However, when they wrote about folk culture and their elements, they forgot about the difference between them and their largely new and higher status on the one hand, and the lower social layers on the other, for the following reasons:

- They largely came from these layers themselves and so this culture was a component part of their childhood (Vraz, Majar, and others); this is especially evident from the information on the place of their birth, education, and death, as well as their profession, and from the biographies of individual collectors and researchers in the *Slovenski biografski leksikon* (Encyclopedia of Slovenian Biography);
- The priests in particular wanted to see a pure and innocent image in these layers²¹ and Peter Hicinger in the catholic church's newspaper *Zgodnja danica*; Franc Hubad²² in facts in his debate in the book by Friedrich Salomon Krauss²³; this is also testified by the censorship and interruption of printing of Janez Trdina's²⁴ essays in the newspaper *Novice*;²⁵
- They regarded (or wanted to regard) folk culture as the source of Slovenian identity; for example, Davorin Trstenjak²⁶ with his epistemological attempts and proofs, or Gregor Krek in his essay on the importance of the Fireworks (Kres), and so on.

Despite all of these reasons (or precisely because of them), it is possible to claim that even with regard to ethnographers this had to do with typical Eurocentrism or, more precisely, elitism, which supports and provides the framework for the reasons for research and interpretation, and does not end with a "primitive individual" in a distant society. Its limits can be defined as the elitism of the educated, bourgeois society; the limit was the researcher's local, town door. The researcher problems encountered by Vraz and others with informants in the field can be ascribed precisely to this kind of perspective – elitism.

Similar to how the Europeans want the Greeks to feel themselves to be living successors or living witnesses of the cradle of European civilization,²⁷ ethnographers

²¹ e.g., Luka Jeran (1818–1896) writer, editor of *Zgodnja danica*, priest.

²² Franc Hubad (1849–1916) writer, teacher.

²³ Salomon Krauss (1859–1938) ethnographer, folklorist, slavist.

²⁴ Janez Trdina (1830–1905) writer, historian.

²⁵ e.g. "Kranjci na Hrvaškem" ("Carniolans in Croatia")

²⁶ Davorin Trstenjak (1817–1890) priest, writer, historian.

²⁷ Herzfeld 1993. 19.

want the locals in the countryside to feel themselves to be living successors of the national folk heritage.

The general term used with regard to the relationship to non-European peoples is Eurocentrism. The scholarly discipline originating in Europe cannot avoid the Eurocentric character of its comparisons.²⁸ This has to do with a sense of Europe's moral and cultural superiority over the entire world.²⁹ In this case, it has to do with expressing the moral, religious, and lifestyle superiority of the intelligentsia over the countryside, and the elite culture over folk culture. As part of a potential discussion about various research contents, subjects, and principles within the Enlightenment and Romanticism, it is important to note the fact that it is impossible to perceive any significant differences between the status and relation of an "Enlightenment" and a "Romantic" collector or researcher of the folk or folk culture. Regardless of whether they recorded "Land und Leute" (the country and the people) or an individual folk song or custom, the representatives of both directions always secured a difference between themselves in terms of their status and culture.

The general status can be described as a double hierarchy or a probably "double bind" (Bateson): the European intellectual was superior to the villager or peasant, but at the same time a European peasant meant more to a researcher than a representative of an exotic people.³⁰

In order to explain the perception of the Other in 19th century Slovenia, Fabian's schemes can be used with minor corrections.³¹ The first basic difference between the "Other in Slovenia" and "savages" is their affiliation or non-affiliation with the Christian faith; the second difference is their spatial location. "The Other in Slovenia" is *here*, among us, whereas the "savages" are *over there*. In general, these relations involve the questions of the civilizing process (in Norbert Elias' sense), which must first be internalized or interiorized at home, where folk heritage was under the influence of intense domestication and internalization of higher standards and civilization.

What researchers of folk culture (mainly priests) looked for most in the nineteenth century was primarily the culture and society that never existed.³² This illusion was supposed to show them as being different from the ones they studied. A nineteenth-century scholar required a double mirror or image. He identified himself in this mirror as a member of a specific ethnic group from which he had also originated; at the same time, he established and defined his position on a specific social ladder that was best reflected by the metaphor of an ethnic group as a living organism or a tree.³³ People needed vernacular culture both as a base and a dividing line through which they could identify their ethnic interests, and their identity as educated and civilized people, and so on, also in comparison to other ethnic groups. On the other side of the mirror, the researcher had to distance himself from these people, especially at the levels at which he could not agree with them considering his clearly Enlightenment-

²⁸ Herzfeld 1993. 18.

²⁹ Herzfeld 1993. 10.

³⁰ Herzfeld 1993. 10.

³¹ Fabian 1983.27.

³² cf. Kupper 1988; commented in Portis-Winner 1994. 19–20.

³³ Majar 1858.

oriented (modern) way of thinking (e.g., concerning superstitions, religion, and so on), as well as his special status and education, through which he had acquired different lifestyle habits and thus distanced himself from his roots.

All of this time, this researcher led a double life, dealing with two opposing feelings: on the one hand, he perceived this ethnic group's products and production as the most sacred heritage left from the past and, as such, as proof of the Slovenian nation's true age; but, on the other hand, he believed that the deviations in this group harmed and hindered its general progress.

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