UDC 316.774:39(497.11)"2001/2007"
32.019.5:39(497.11)"2001/2007"

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Ethnology, Media and Transitional Serbia

The transfer of knowledge and messages in large scale human communities are being broadcast via numerous institutionalized channels of communication and socialization. Nevertheless, in spite of their general availability and democratic impression of accessibility in the 21st century, the knowledge and information are still being made and transferred by a limited number of creators and mediators. Public communication within modern society is still not being made into a two way street, hence, mass communication and public speech are mostly carried out in the forms of messages and knowledge passed down from social elites toward the masses; using such public communication, the elite is able to constitute the public opinion that reflects the maintenance of social hierarchy in a given community.[1] This kind of socially directed communication is transferred through a number of social and cultural institutions, from religious organization to educational systems, mass media being perhaps the most important ones today. Media, as carriers of cultural and other messages of different social and cultural elites, mold not only public opinion but also, more and more, everyday life and way of life of a members of a given society. This mediator function given to media also entails their role: media are not only communicating the pictured image of reality but also present a highly selective and socially constructed presentation of a given reality. Hence, the nature of the mass media implies that they cannot automatically reflect world and reality- on the contrary.[2] The nature of information and reality disseminated through media to a given society is, in this way, dependable of socio-cultural structure of a given society. Systems of mass communication and their content could not be expressed for the most part, outside the designated frameworks marked sharply by elite of a given society. At the beginning of the new millennia, post-industrial, developed countries are trying hard to present themselves as "societies of knowledge", where the most significant national resources are knowledge, education and science. However, the question is, does this public effort (often even auto-representation), observed also in less developed countries, correspond with the world being presented through media in forms of messages and information? That is, could the media culture, along with the world reflected through it, be at the same time "the world of science"? This essay will address several characteristics of the emergence of "the scientific information" and the world of science, with a special emphasis on ethnology/anthropology; in addition, the essay will discuss media scope in transitional Serbia, presence of researchers of

[1] Dubravko Škiljan, *Javni jezik,* XX vek, Beograd 1998, 110.

[2] Phillipe Schlesinger, *Putting Reality Together*, London: Constable 1978.

the Institute of Ethnography, SASA and the results presented in media in the past several years.

The transitional character of the Serbian society reveals still undefined affairs in media sphere. Internet remains without law regulative, while the same process functions more or less successfully in printed and other electronic media. Many printed media (journals and periodicals) are transiting from the state to the private ownership, making themselves vulnerable to the market laws, and the same is expected among radio and television emitters, both locally and regionally. The public intervention is evident in socially controlled share of radio and television channels, considered to be public good. Also, there are public radio and television services of the Republic and autonomous region of Vojvodina. However, the sharing is not being directed according to the model that many European counties[3] already adopted: there are no conditions that would regulate emissions of obligatory contents such as educational, cultural or scientific. The fact is, the private radio and television enterprises have considerable freedom in their emissions scheme. Besides, all public radio and televisions, even though they finance themselves partially through pre-paid system, are faced with the market game, forcing them to produce and distribute more commercial and entertainment contents. On the other hand, state televisions in socialistic period or in the western states, televisions with a monopoly of national state emitters are past tense. These broadcasters systematically disseminated programs with cultural contents (documentary and scientific programs, cultural debates, adaptations of literary works and so on), with an aim to raise and deepen the level of education and good taste; such concept, when the television was openly "cultural"[4] is gone, especially so in the transitional states.[5] Therefore, there is an obvious tendency among Serbia's media (printed and electronic) to participate in the re-structuring of media space by promoting entertainment and commercial contents, according to the principles of market.[6]

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[3] *Europe 2000: What Kind of Television*, European Cultural Foundation – European Institute for the Media, Manchester 1988, 41-45.

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, The New Press, New York 1998, 48

[5] Public television broadcasters that produced and broadcasted contents of informative, educational and cultural programs were an exception and not the rule, and they are present in a limited number of states, U.S.A. among others (*Public Broadcasting Service*) – Stan Le Roy Wilson, *Mass Media/Mass Culture*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1993, 267.

[6] Expenses in printed and electronic media dictate more commercial programs, which are not in the domain of science and culture. On the other hand, Internet is much more flexible on this matter, since the expenses in creating web pages are much less (in spite of its complexity) than in the case of classical media. Also, Internet is more democratic since the authorship and creation of web pages is assessable to almost anyone plugged into global network. This wide accessibility has a dark side: lack of segmented national and thematic markets, which in turn, makes cyber space into an unlimited space, reachable only through targeted search and surfing. The set-up of the large quantities of information, more and more parts of human cultural creation, and replication of contents taken from classical media into internet, makes this communication base even more important source of information for the classical media. In Serbia though, this wide accessibility to internet is still not achieved, and it is very questionable when this will be reached. Estimations on the Serbian population internet accessibility vary from source to source: 8,1% according to the

In the second phase of transition, Serbia's media are getting transformed according to the establishment of media market: media houses, with their own editions/programs become players on a competitive market for an auditorium (public electronic services are though in a special position). In this situation, dictated by a profit as the leading motif for broadcasting, it is reasonable to assume that scientific information and production of scientific programs are not the most attractive attribute for a wide audience (viewers and readers). Authorized or scientific programs that ones had their own place in socialist televisions are fading away, and it is not very likely that this situation will change in the new conditions.[7] How then will scientific information and production make a break-through into media presentation dictated by market, profit and commercialism? As far as ethnology and anthropology are concerned, they were never, nor in the socialist period or transitional phase one, presented properly in media, with the exception of reporting on traditional culture. Still, the expertise in media of these two sister sciences became gradually wider, including their influence on other areas of culture and society. This was most evident from the appearances of Ivan Colovic (printed texts and professional consultation) in quality, non-sensationalistic prints such as daily papers Danas, Nasa Borba etc., and weekly Vreme. Media, both printed and electronic, with a considerable tradition in serious journalism – i.e., reporting on cultural and scientific events and discoveries (such as Politika, Danas, Nin), along with public services (RTS, RTV) are the most attentive for publishing issues in ethnology. This comes as a regular practice of the Third Program, Radio Belgrade (the results of ethnological research are being broadcast on the radio, and printed in their periodicals), while there are case that some other media report on the issues as well (for example, parts of scientific books turned into columns, see Miroslava Malesevic in Danas, March 29-18, 2005, *Didara: a story of a woman from Prizren*). On the other hand, the discourse of scientific research and discourse of tabloids/sensational reporting in tabloids and commercial media have almost nothing in common; integral or partial reporting of professional ethnological articles is not a very likely occurrence. In contrast, in more quality media, there is a place for reporting on professional activities of our scientific institutions (Politika and Danas regularly report on Serbian-Bulgarian ethnological conferences, new editions and publications of the Institute of Ethnography, and book promotions). And although not of a primarily media interest, the Institute was in the spotlight thanks to numerous interviews by the Director of the Institute, Dr. Radojicic, given to several media (Politika Ekspres, front page, says "heritage without qualification", November 8, 2002, Bazar, Radio Belgrade and so on).

Internet World Stats, or 13,3% (research of ЦЕСИД-ordered by Telecom Serbia)in 2005, which is far less than an avergae 50% in Western Europe – see Група аутора, *Мрежа у развоју,* Београдска отворена школа, Београд 2005, 59.

[7] This is evident from the actual state of the affairs in media today – huge prints and popularity are becoming the characteristics of tabloids, with an emphasis on sensationalism (report by the Council for media, Media Centre, Досије о медијима 19, НУНС, Београд 2006). At the same time, television broadcasters with national coverage broadcast more and more entertainment and commercial programs, the most obvious example being B92TV and RTS).

The results of scientific research are foremost dedicated to the scientific community, and rarely, they are a part of media addressing the wider audience; nevertheless, media could serve also to promote ethnology if they are to report on the various activities of our ethnologists (ethnologists Sanja Zlatanovic in TV Belgrade, Metropolis, March 2004, addressing her latest book). Such promotion of the discipline and the institution is possible through not only cultural programs but also informative. In commercial media sphere there could also be a place for reporting on ethnology (for instance, Miroslav Niskanovic in Pink, Nacionalni Dnevnik, 2006).[8] Informative programs report also on museum exhibitions, issues and film festivals, since they are a much more interesting subjects for media than for instance, book promotions and scientific research; hence, these events serve to promote both science and scientists.[9] This served as an opportunity for Ljiljana Gavrilovic to attend and address the openings of several museum exhibitions in Serbia and to promote at the same time, the work of the Institute at several locations, all reported by media: Novi Sad, Leskovac, Smederevo. In fact, local media could serve as an important means to promote ethnology through their cultural and informative programs, since they regularly report on all cultural and scientific events within their own local areas/regions.[10] In foreign media the Serbian ethnology is sporadically represented, mostly in public programs with cultural and scientific contents (for example, the report on book promotions, guest lectures and visit of our researchers in Sofia, and the interview of Zorica Divac on the contemporary ethnological issues, in cooperation with the Bulgarian colleagues at the Bulgarian National radio in 2007).[11]

While the number of media that report on results and issues of ethnology is limited, a professional expertise of ethnologists/anthropologists for media is more present. Certain subjects exploited by media require ethnological consulting (in the form of an interview, conversation, articles, essays, or selective citations and even misuse of citations). Most of the time, ethnologists are consulted in the matters of traditional life and culture. Also, media tend to identify ethnology with traditional culture and its maintenance, folklore creation and parallel and pseudo-scientific research of culture and so on. Even when they do succeed in avoiding traps of folklorism and pseudo- science, media in general do not show a continuous interest in folk

[8] The structure of daily television and radio news contains news from culture and science, following the scheme: news from the country- world-society- culture-sports-weather forecast, which represents a traditional outline taken from the period of monopoly of national RTV stations from socialist period. The structure of informative programs in the cradles of electronic media (U.S.A. and Great Britain) is somewhat different: politics-industry-world news-society-various packages-sports-see John Fiske, *Television Culture,* London – New York: Routledge 1987, 286.

[9] The ethnological/documentary film on Serbian Roma by PhD Jelena Cvorovic was awarded at 13th Festival of Ethnological Film in 2004, and this was also an opportunity for a public promotion of ethnology and the Institute.

[11] The promotion of the discipline and institute is possible through many different means: the text by Biljana Milenkovic Vukovic "Народне ношње на маркама" published in journal *JAT Airways, New Rview* 2003/3, allowed thousands of passengers to receive a messaage on ethnology and the work of the Institute with the, 55 year old tradition.

culture – this is easily observe but the lack of special team for folk culture and customs in public service of RTS.[12] This non-systematic interest of media corresponds with customary calendar in Serbia- ethnologists are often being called to contribute with articles and TV pieces in times of holidays – the last being Djurdjevdan, when Ivica Todorovic gave interview for NIN ("Да ли је свети Ђорђе убио аждају" – *НИН* no. 2940, May 3, 2007).[13] So, even though ethnology as a science is recognized as a discipline with an authority in the questions of traditional and foilk culture, the science's impact and achievements in the domain of ethnicity and ethnic questions are not appreciated, especially so in the domestic media. In foreing media, there are appearances of Serbian ethnologists such as Mladena Prelic in Austrian state Radio *Ö1-ÖRF „Diagonal"* 2003, and Gordana Blagojevic on the Greek state televison with the subject emigration in Greece and Serbia, Odyssey, *ET1* May 18, 2007. Still, there appears that ethnology is likely to make a biger break through in media, and not only as consultant in traditional cuture; such are the cases of the festivals in Guca and EXIT, the new Serbian brands, followed by a professional comments by Miroslava Lukic-Krstanovic in *Вечерње новости* – „Није све у кајмаку и труби" – April 9, 2006, and several interview at Radio Belgrade, as well as presentation of Ivan Djordjevic's work on Eurosong (*Политка* May 19, 2007. „Политика лаких нота"). Hence, ethnologists as scientists and professionals can contribute to the cultural everyday life: the text on cultural values in transitional society, inspired by a concert in Belgrade by Aleksandra Pavicevic „О веселој удовици" – *Данас,* June 29-30. 2002 clearly illustrates this.

The presence of ethnology and ethnologists in media recently is being finalized in many different ways (by publications of ethnological articles, presence of the institution in media, reporting on results of ethnological studies, professional expertize and authorized texts), but mostly concerning the subjects from the traditional culture and less so in other areas of ethnoogical studies. This is aided by public angagement of sceintists from other disciplines, even amateurs and fans, instead of the professional ethnologists. When ethnology is present in media, it is done so by more serious printed and electronic services, whose programs contain cultutal and scientific education and public information (such as *Политика, Данас, Време, НИН, Република* and so on*)*.

This group of media is a natural allies of the scientific world (not solely ethnology), when it comes to the presence of science and expertize outside the scientific community. Media with this kind of profile are doing twofold job: they satisfy a need for information and education and certain profit (unlike most media

[12] some national broadcasters do have these kind of teams: Croatian RTV has *Одсјек емисија пучке и предајне културе* унутар *Програма за културу*, although with a vanishing interest, see Aleksej Pavlovsky, *Tradicijska kultura u programu HRT*, Predstavljanje tradicijske kulture na sceni i u medijima, HED – Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku – Međunarodna smotra folklora, Zagreb 2006.

[13] Religious holidays and customs and spiritual culture in general are being presented by ethnologists in media more often than some other segments of the traditional culture, for example, a conversation with Milina Ivanovic Barisic in *Вечерње новости,* December 14, 2006. – „Без невоље нема богомоље").

that are solely guided by profit) – media discourse that produces cold report instead infotainment, professional commentaries and appropriate arguments instad tacky reporting of events and individuals. At the same time, this kind of discourse is the closest to the discourse and aim of science.[14] On the other hand, the editorial approach of a more commerical broadcasters most often do not assume borrowings or replication of information and results of scientific research, and even when this is the case, the quality and context of such presentation are doubious. This brings up the question: does presence of any science in media contribute at all to the promotion of a given scientific discipline?

Nevertheless, there is a need for proper ethnology presentation in media, regardless of programes competition, since a proportion of audience requires scientifically based information; there are media with editorial approach, where cooperation with scientific world is wellcome and is being paid off. Of course, the presence of ethnology in media cannot have more of an impact than the sceince has in the general society as a whole, but certain improvements are possible. Just as media market takes time to be formed and molded, the market of sciences takes time to establish as well: ethnology and ethnologists will have to taken on and keep their respective positions in speheres of culture research and society, which are at the same time the spheres of studies of various other social and humanistic disciplines. This would create, in turn, an easier access toward public sphere in general. Therefore, it is of a crucial importance that ethnology is recognized, along with all its perspectives and approaches, in media and society as such. The fact is, ethnology and ethnologists are being left out from many media mediators not just because there is no interest for such subjects, but on the contrary: this is also conditioned by serious weaknesses of the discipline itself. The problem of public and media recognition of ethnology is first and foremost the problem of the existing ethnologists, not so much of media and public per se. This desired recognition of ethnology as a discipline is difficult to achieve even with the top scientific results or public success of important individuals, or even with the promotion of the Institute of Ethnography by itself; this has to be achieved by an organized action of the whole profession. The prominence of a discipline in public, which reluctantly recognizes complex socio-cultural systems, even in the case of media and professional communities, are only possible through an organization that actively supports and defends a discipline's interest within a scientific community, and promotes, at the same time, its science to the general public.

Revival of the activities and work of Serbian Ethnological Society would contribute mostly to the recognition of ethnology as a relevant field of cultural expertise, among media and mediators of communication in general; furthermore, the revival could serve to mark new segments of social reality as important and needed to be explained by ethnologists, and also as a defense against other similar disciplines and individuals outside the scientific community.

[14] Jirgen Habermas, *Javno dobro koje država treba da štiti*, Danas 16-17. June 2007, VI.

With a good organization, ethnology has a possibility to be appropriately presented in media, which in turn would help to promote the discipline itself with an aim of a public engagement, desired so because of the possibility for science and scientists, in collaboration with media and other parts of professional public opinion, to influence the social and cultural reality of Serbia in the process of an intensive transformation.