

policy. According to the author himself, he made no subsequent alterations to his texts, as he wished them to reflect “the

level of scholarly achievement at the time of writing”.

TORAC. METODOLOGIA CERCETĂRII DE TEREN [TORAC. FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY],
 SERIES: FIELDWORK NOTES. ED. BY ANNEMARIE SORESCU MARINKOVIĆ.
 COORDINATING ED. COSTA C. ROȘU. NOVI SAD: THE ROMANIAN SOCIETY
 (FOUNDATION) FOR ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORE OF VOJVODINA, 2006. PP. 268.

Reviewed by Eleonora Sava*

This book, the first in a newly-launched series, results from a large-scale research project started by the Romanian Society (Foundation) for Ethnography and Folklore of Vojvodina. The goal of the project, which has engaged a large number of researchers from Romania and Serbia, is to carry out monographic research into the traditional life of the Romanians in the Serbian Banat at the beginning of the third millennium.

Five researchers of the multiethnic and interdisciplinary research team, members of prestigious institutions from Serbia and Romania, transcribed, analyzed and interpreted a part of the material recorded in 2004 and 2005 within the framework of the project. The result is the volume *Torac. Fieldwork methodology*, and the five authors are Otilia Hedeșan, ethnologist, professor at the University of the West, Timișoara; Biljana Sikimić, Svetlana Ćirković, and Annemarie Sorescu Marinković of the Institute for Balkan Studies, Belgrade; and Laura Spăriosu, lecturer at the Department for Romanian Language and Literature, Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad.

The aim of this first volume is twofold: on the one hand, the researchers have sought to reconstitute or reconstruct the spiritual culture of the Romanians from the Serbian Banat, centring on the settlement of Torac [Torak, present-day Begejci], and, on the other hand, to conduct an ethnological, ethnolinguistic and anthropological research based on modern methods, which in fact offers a

theoretical model of and a practical guide to applying a new methodology in field research, in transcribing, understanding and interpreting a culture. This twofold aim is obvious from the very cover of the book. The title *Torac* names the locality, a common thread connecting the five studies, while the subtitle *Fieldwork methodology* points both to the methodological aspect of the volume and to the concrete modality of work: observation of folk culture *in situ*, in its “life context”, *in the field*. Furthermore, a supplement to the title, *Fieldwork notes*, suggests that the volume is not intended as a monograph of Torac, but claims a more modest status: that of mere notes, though from diverse perspectives – of the ethnologist, the linguist, the anthropologist.

The first aim of the volume – to paint a picture of the Romanians in the Serbian Banat and their culture – may seem “weak” at first glance, because the region has already been the object of much ethnographic research. Looked at more closely, however, things change essentially, because this volume offers a *recent* image of the culture, it is focused on the *present*, which, of course, implies an intricate, permanent and delicate relationship with the *past*. This image is completely different, and the researcher’s responsibility is to record and scrutinize it, because today rural communities face a strong impact of globalization, and their cultural identity

* Faculty of Philology, “Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

is threatened. The volume is therefore the result of “emergency” research. Moreover, it is fundamentally different from anything that has so far been written about the Romanians from this region owing to its manifest and convincing change of perspective: from ethnographic description to cultural analysis or from ethnography to anthropology.

The second aim of the book is, in my view, fundamental. Its profound significance became obvious to me during my field research, soon after I had finished reading it. I was in a multiethnic Transylvanian village, as a member of a (similar) multiethnic and interdisciplinary research team. I went to a Saxon household where I found one of the few Saxons who had not left Romania, so I set to work. Coincidentally, another team member arrived at the same time, a very experienced researcher. Without giving it a thought, she began to answer my questions addressed to the elderly Saxon. With a lifetime work in the field of ethnography behind her, my colleague knew the bibliography of the problem under scrutiny well enough to make a quick recap and set to replying instead of my interlocutor. And that is not all: her tone clearly expressed her indignation at my ignorance; I did not know the answers and that was why I had to ask the Saxon all those questions! Who, in his turn, impressed with the ethnographer’s wisdom, said: “See? The lady knows better!” And, expectedly, did not want to answer any more questions. In her turn, the ethnographer said, with dissatisfaction: “As for this village, everything’s clear. I haven’t found anything here!” This is why *Torac. Fieldwork methodology* provides a useful model of modern scholarly research for those interested in investigating spiritual culture in general, not only that of the Romanians in the Serbian Banat. Unlike my senior colleague, the authors of this volume will certainly find something interesting wherever they do field research,

because they are ready to watch, to see, to listen, to perceive and to understand. They have the sense of wonder of the anthropologist aware that every folk culture phenomenon is not only interesting, but also provides access to one of the meanings of that particular culture. My story, unfortunately true, shows how welcome and necessary a change of perspective is. By giving their interlocutors equal rights, the authors of the volume openly disassociate themselves from old ethnography, where only the researcher had the right to speak. Their work is founded on the principle of postmodern anthropology that “the subjects of our interviews are as entitled to speak as we, researchers, are. By massively transcribing texts from our recordings, we hope to offer as direct a picture as possible of what the people from the Romanian communities of the Serbian Banat think and have to say at the beginning of the third millennium” (Otilia Hedeşan, *Foreword*, p. 26). Each of the five studies consists of two parts: one is the interview proper and the other is the researcher’s commentaries centred on the (integrally or nearly integrally) transcribed interviews; hence each study may be said to have two or more authors: the researcher and the interviewee(s).

Both the way of conducting interviews and the transcription method used exemplify a rigorous scientific model. The simplified phonetic transcription employed puts some postulates of the Russian ethnolinguistic school, linguistic geography in particular, to good use; the most important characteristics of the local idiom are preserved without burdening the readability of the texts. Thus, each study is both a linguistic document and an accessible and easily readable text. Furthermore, the researchers rely on the methodological guidelines of Western anthropological linguistics based on a careful contextualization of discourse. Consequently, each study contains information

about the spatial and temporal context of the interview, as well as the nonverbal level of communication, including the paralinguistic, kinetic and proxemic marks and tools used by the speakers.

The five studies are preceded by three introductory texts: *Preface*, signed by Costa Roșu, *Foreword* by Otilia Hedeșan, and *Introduction: from field to text* by Annemarie Sorescu Marinković, and each text is followed by a bibliography and a Serbian summary.

Otilia Hedeșan's 73-page study *Ethnological exercises* is based, from the methodological point of view, on directive and semi-directive interviews, which are integrally transcribed and analyzed in relation to the context of their production. The integral transcription of the interviews is indeed exemplary to all researchers of oral culture, because it can teach them how to build a good relationship with the informant, how, when and how much to talk, how to formulate and address a question, or what the optimum ratio of questions to answers is. Also, Hedeșan reproduces fragments of her fieldwork diary, whose significance is multiple: on the one hand, they ensure a rigorous contextualization of interviews regarded as acts of communication, which help establish interaction between researcher and interlocutor, which, in its turn, may influence – quantitatively and qualitatively – the discourse; on the other hand, they verify the postulate of postmodern anthropology about the relativity of any research and the subjectivity of the researcher's perspective. That is why – to quote the anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu – the author “leaves the kitchen door ajar” when inviting the guests to the cultural banquet he has prepared. “Following such a conception, the study intends to be a didacticizing presentation of the conditions of obtaining an ethnological document during field research. The author interprets the information she obtained and studies them

in their internal structure, with regard to their functions for the whole community and as a label of local identification, thus the resulting study also orientates towards the problem of ‘translating’ field data into ethnological text” (Annemarie Sorescu Marinkovic, *Introduction: from field to text*, p. 32). The first interview tackles the actualization of nuptial rituals in Torac, the system of social and family relations built around them, as well as the complicated system of rites of passage from one age to another, from one social status and role to another. The second interview focuses on the actualization of funeral rituals and on the narratives revolving round death. The transcribed interviews are framed by pages thick with information, with a theoretic, analytic and interpretative character. As in all of Otilia Hedeșan's studies, her analysis is lucid and exceptionally astute. Beyond the ethnographic description – which, however, is remarkably subtle and receptive to the context – she sees the meaning of a culture. Analyzing her interlocutors' discourses, she applies methods of postmodern cultural anthropology, moving from description to fundamental existential attitudes, more exactly to profound cultural meanings. The concluding part of the study relativizes the auctorial perspective. Transforming the text into an “open work” and thus allowing re-readings from any angle and perspective, it also testifies to the author's remarkable modesty.

The study of Annemarie Sorescu Marinković, *Torac via Clec: when biography prevails over ethnography*, also a substantial one (60 pages), transcribes and interprets the recorded material obtained from an interlocutor born in Clec [Klek] and living in Toracu-Mic [Mali Torak]. The field research methodology is based on a minimum of intervention in the course of interview, granting almost absolute freedom to the interlocutor; thus, the latter is free to express whatever she considers to

be the most important about her, about the community she belongs to, about her people. So the discourse develops as a life story, and the researcher perfectly adapts herself to the situation and gives up her initial plan, accepting and supporting the individuality, the unique personality of the interlocutor. Even if it might seem superficial, this approach requires a skilful researcher, ready to make on-the-spot decisions on the methodology to be used for each of the interlocutors. The interview is an exemplary application of the non-directive and semi-directive interview and the biographical method, very modern but hitherto rarely used in Romanian ethnology. This proves to be, once more, a precious tool for obtaining new information and for understanding the interlocutor's way of thinking. The biographical method allows the researcher to re-build a cultural segment to which traditional ethnography has not had access so far; this is why it "remains one of the most efficient methods for understanding the ways in which individuals perceive and apply different sets of norms, the ways in which their notion of people and life is articulated" (Sorescu Marinković, p. 115). The transcribed interview is preceded by a theoretical part, which is well documented, convincingly articulated and puts forward a consistent and penetrating analysis of the interlocutor's discourse. Problematizing and scrutinizing the relationship between interlocutor and researcher seen as a complex interaction involving a series of *power games*, the author also makes some sharp observations on the function of the ethnographic and biographic discourse, and their contamination. Furthermore, the study analyzes major topics in the discourse of the interlocutor, re-constructing an individual history, (Gruiescu) family history, the history of the Romanians from the Serbian Banat, the history of interethnic relations. Life story is most significant for defining

a cultural identity: "*Family* (Rom. *loaza, neamu*) is a fundamental concept which occurs in almost all autobiographic stories of the Romanians from Vojvodina and marks both their settling and their lasting in these regions, local identity construction being further based on the traditional moral categories: the concepts of kinship and honour" (p. 118).

Biljana Sikimić, linguist and ethno-linguist, is the author of the study *From Torac to Clec: the minimum field information*, which is complementary to the previous one in two respects. Firstly, because it analyzes the interview with an interlocutor born in Toracu-Mic, but living in Clec, thus being in an inverted biographic and spatial situation with the interlocutor of Annemarie Sorescu Marinković. Secondly, this text perfectly balances the former one because, at methodological level, it raises the question of the minimum as opposed to excess(ive) field information. As all the other studies in the volume, it is organized into two parts: a fully transcribed interview preceded by a substantial theoretical, analytical and interpretative section. In the first part, the author comments upon a series of modern methods – ethnolinguistics and Western linguistic anthropology – characteristic of the humanities and applied in the field research of the Romanian communities of the Serbian Banat; she also discusses some of the new methods of interdisciplinary qualitative discourse analysis. This contribution draws upon the most recent literature, intended to connect the ethnologic and ethnolinguistic Romanian and Serbian research with the Western one and to open the ethnographic document for interdisciplinary analysis. The topical problems the study addresses, of greatest interest in the humanities, such as the relativity of scientific knowledge and the use of qualitative discourse analysis, move the analytical emphasis towards the anthropological aspect of linguistics.

The researcher analyzes the concepts of solitude and old age as they appear in the interlocutor's discourse, as well as some of its ideological levels: *then* and *now*, *space* (concentrically built territoriality), *religiosity*, *oral history*. The ethnolinguistic fragments discussed by the author make reference to wedding and funerary customs and, from the annual calendar customs, to Christmas and Easter. Thus, the study presents a sketch of a feminine representation of the world, from the perspective of the interlocutor, completing the initial theoretizations of the concepts of old age and solitude.

Laura Spăriosu's article, *Notes on the way of life and some customs in Torac. Parallel between past and present*, has as its starting point an interview Otilia Hedeșan conducted with two interlocutors, husband and wife, in Toracu-Mic. The method is the semi-directive interview, which also makes use of the biographic method, and the discussion centred upon the story of their life, at two levels: ethnographic and biographic. During the interview, a parallel between the present and past ways of life has spontaneously developed. The author transcribed the interview integrally and analyzed the biographic story, using a linguistic and interdisciplinary method, and thus effecting a competent analysis of the way of life and customs in Torac from a diachronic perspective.

Last but not least, there is a study of Svetlana Ćirković, who has specialized in linguistic problems of multinational communities, refugees and enclaves. Eloquenty entitled *On the trust in the researcher: a Bosnian in Toracu-Mic*, the study draws upon an extensive bibliography, contains diverse information – historical (a brief history of the locality), sociological and demographic (information about migrations from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Vojvodina), and focuses on analysis of the discourse of the interlocutor born in Bosnia and settled, in the post-war period, in

Vojvodina, in Toracu-Mic. His life story sketches an intensely emotional image of Vojvodina in the 1950s. The semi-directive interview counterbalanced by the biographic method and the integrally transcribed conversation is prefaced by dense theoretical and analytical pages. The author's analysis uses the methodology of the Anglo-Saxon anthropolinguistic school. The result of this approach is fascinating, and the author succeeds in restituting not only the image of mid-twentieth century Vojvodina from the subjective perspective of the interlocutor, but also a detailed analysis of the way in which the trust in the researcher is manifested. Employing different methods of linguistic analysis, the study convincingly proves that one statement can be analyzed from different perspectives and serve as material for other disciplines.

The volume restitutes a complex and nuanced image of a spiritual culture in a given time and place. Furthermore, *Torac. Metodologia cercetării de teren* is the living proof of the paradigmatic change taking place in Romanian and Serbian ethnology: modern scientific methodology perfectly used and applied; shift of emphasis from ethnography towards anthropology; careful contextualization of discourse; opening of the field document to multi- and interdisciplinary analysis; relativization of perspective; synchronization with Western research trends – all this marks the maturation of Romanian and Serbian ethnology.