

Article received on 1st June 2010

Article accepted on 7th June 2010

UDC 781.7(497.11)(049.3)

Miško Šuvaković*

University of Arts in Belgrade

Interdisciplinary Studies

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND SEMIOLOGY

The book *Obredne pesme zimskog polugođa – sistemi zvučnih znakova u tradiciji jugoistočne Srbije* [*The Ritual Songs of the Winter Semester – the System of Sound Signs in the South-Eastern Serbian Tradition*] by Mirjana Zakić, PhD, is based on the doctoral thesis she successfully defended in 2007. It was published within the edition *Etnomuzikološke studije – disertacije* [*Ethnomusicological Studies – Theses*] by the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, in 2009. The volume contains 340 pages of text with sheet music examples, charts and an index.

The book *Obredne pesme zimskog polugođa – sistemi zvučnih znakova u tradiciji jugoistočne Srbije* by Mirjana Zakić, PhD, is conceived in a theoretically clear and factually well laid-out way. The character of her descriptions, expositions and interpretations is determined by an interdisciplinary methodology based upon an analytical and critical combination of the approaches of ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology, eth-

nology and culture theory with the analyses of ethnomusicological case studies from the aspects of communicology, socio-linguistics, semiotics and semiology. Such a methodological framework for the research enabled the ethnomusicological scientific approaches to be directed towards studying the role of the creation of meaning and, certainly, to the role of communication in ritual folk practices. Thus, the ethnomusicological discourse is naturalized by the views of contemporary cultural analytics belonging to the so-called *language* or *linguistic turn*.

Mirjana Zakić based her thoughts about ritual songs upon the following transparent theoretical procedure. She postulated the notion of “genre” and then she derived it from the organization of everyday life within popular tradition, i.e. the division of the year into two semesters regarding the “calendar rituality”. She then identified the geographic-cultural area of research: South-Eastern Serbia. Based upon the demonstrated assumptions and contextualizations, she presented her choice of material: transcriptions and analyses of numerous examples. The problematic feature of her work was establishing the ritual song as a musical, i.e. musical-poetical phenomenon, which uses its own system of signs while manifesting the appropriate idea of the ritual. Interpreting a ritual as a system of signs, Mirjana Zakić established and scientifically interpreted “ritualistic processuality” as a communication practice and, more precisely, a representation of “other”. Introducing the communication and semiotic viewpoint is an important innovative ethnomusicological-poetical aspect of this scientific work. In the introductory chapter the author stresses:

* Author contact information:
suvakovic@beocity.net

Problemsko polazište ove studije jeste određivanje obredne pesme kao muzičkog, odnosno muzičko-poetskog fenomena, koji raspolaže sopstvenim sistemom znakova u manifestovanju odgovarajuće ideje obreda.¹ (p. 2)

For the first time in Serbian musicology, Mirjana Zakić established and consequently performed the semiotic naturalization of the traditional ethnomusicological discourse, thus emphasizing the importance of the role of the analysis and interpretation of communication, production, exchange and reception of meaning in the ritual practices, as well as in the everyday life of people in South-Eastern Serbia. Her main thesis therefore is:

Postavljanje hipoteze da stilistika kalendarskih pesama (izražena u osobenostima stiha i napeva) pokazuje ne samo usklađenost sa određenim vremenom godine, već, pre svega, uslovljenost magijskom motivacijom konkretnog obrednog delovanja, zahtevaće, najpre, određivanje stepena međuzanrovske prožimanja na razmatranom prostoru. Takvim uvidom omogućiće se intertekstualni pristup na nivou obrednog sistema (čiji sintetički koncept nema uzora u dosadašnjoj srpskoj etnomuzikološkoj literaturi). Ovaj pristup, dakle, predstavlja pokušaj uspostavljanja

veze između različitih tipova diskursa, čijom sinergijom se produkuje jedinstvena ekspresija svakog obreda, kao direktan izraz ideje obredne procesualnosti.²

The fundamental scientific requirement for ethnomusicological studies proved to be the one directed towards the four-degree structuralization of a scientific work, which the author achieved in all the segments:

- theoretical-empirical work on collecting the samples;
- ethnomusicological processing of the samples collected;
- application of semiotic, cultural and musical analysis to the collected, processed and presented samples and their contextualizations, and
- meta-scientific discussion of the essential relationships between the concrete objects of the research and the methodological models of science.

Such a requirement in the particular research problem made it possible for this treatise to establish, explicitly and transparently, a complex intertextual and interdisciplinary approach to the musical sys-

2 Establishing the hypothesis that the stylistics of calendar songs (expressed by the characteristics of verse and melody) is not only coordinated with a particular time of the year but, above all, conditioned by the magical motivation of the concrete ritualistic action, will require, first and foremost, the assessment of the degree of intergenre permeation in the considered area. Such an insight will allow for an intertextual approach at the level of the ritual system (whose synthetic concept is unprecedented in Serbian ethnomusicological literature, so far). Therefore, this approach is an attempt at establishing the link between various types of discourse, whose synergy produces the unique idiom of each ritual as the direct expression of the idea of ritual processuality.

1 The problematic feature of this work is establishing the ritual song as a musical, i.e. musical-poetical phenomenon, which uses its own system of signs while manifesting the appropriate idea of the ritual.

tem of the rituals of the winter semester in South-Eastern Serbia. The chapters of the book contain a detailed analytic-synthetic overview of characteristic music examples and their geographical and cultural contextualizations with respect to ritual texts and events in the formal, musical, ritualistic and mythic sense. This means that ethnomusicological science has explained its development from descriptive-transcriptive-analytical to interpretative-analytical-synthetical work, which presents ritual music in the structural totalities of the phenomena of functional meaning and event. The author, precisely and elaborately, pointed to the relationships of text and the system, text and the context, text and meta-text, by which she opened the way for research and debate on the musical and the extramusical in folk culture.

She showed explicitly how it is possible to connect the traditional, i.e. modernistic, ethnomusicological research methodology with contemporary ethnomusicological and semiotic epistemology, aiming at the interpretation of the interdisciplinary structurality of concrete ritual systems of a particular geographical and cultural area.

In her conclusions, the author critically stressed and debated the issues of synthesising aspects of musical semiosis ("Intertekstualnost na nivou muzičkog sistema" ["Intertextuality at the Level of Musical System"]) and ritual semiosis ("Intertekstualnost na nivou obrednog sistema" ["Intertextuality at the Level of Ritual System"]), i.e. musical-ritual system. Because of the complexity of the analyzed "samples" of ritual systems, the focus was moved from the modelling of a sign to the modelling of texts and textual relationships. By means of intertextual discussion, the fundamental problem of "articulation" and "articulativ-

ity" of a cultural system and its ritual and musical presentations was located. This enabled establishing comparative analyses of various case studies at the level of:

- comparison of the "works" of various genres (Christmas songs, songs with ritual swinging, St. Lazarus Day songs, St. George Day songs);
- comparison of the spatial and temporal organization of a work;
- comparison of the co-dependence of the musical and temporal system in calendar ritualistics;
- comparison of local and "more global" areas or cultural subsystems in Serbia.

Thus, the musical dimension of calendar rituals was analytically presented in relation to the ethnological cultural models. For example, in the chapter "Intertekstualnost na nivou obrednog sistema" ["Intertextuality at the Level of the Ritual System"], attention was paid to the problem of the ritual "message", by pointing to the complex interconnections of the poetical, musical and ritual-behavioural constitution of communication relationships within the observed models of local folk cultures.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović