

# “EMPLACED” TRADITION

## THE CONTINUITY OF FOLK TRADITION IN THE LANDSCAPE

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*Since the expulsion of “folk” from the academic discourse the research of folk traditions seems inappropriate for a modern ethnologist. However, the landscapes are endowed with collective memory and meaning, given by the tradition. In the “emplaced” tradition can be discerned some continuity by which continuity includes change. Moreover, the aim of the paper is to show new dimensions of research and meanings, if the tradition is researched from the space-place perspective.*

*Keywords: folk tradition, continuity, landscape, memory, Karst.*

*Od izгона “ljudskega” iz akademskega diskurza se zdi raziskovanja ljudskega izročila za današnjega etnologa nekako neprimerno. Vendar, v pokrajino so vtisnjeni kolektivni spomin in pomen, ki ga ji daje tradicija. V tradiciji v kraju je mogoče zaznati kontinuiteto, ki vsebuje spremembe. Namen članka je pokazati nove razsežnosti raziskovanja in pomenov, če tradicijo raziskujemo iz prostorsko-krajevnega vidika.*

*Ključne besede: ljudsko izročilo, kontinuiteta, pokrajina, spomin, Kras.*

In the paper I intend to discuss the folk tradition, which is linked to landscape. In contrast with the general research tendencies in ethnology and anthropology I would like to show that the exploration of “folk” in ethnology gives excellent research results still nowadays. It represents a big research potential, which is today unfortunately neglected.

The aim of the article is to show three main points:

1. The landscape, which is endowed by meaning to a local community, is the reflection of their past and collective memory.
2. In the tradition which is connected to a certain place, which can be called “emplaced” tradition, besides changes some continuity, even very archaic elements can be discerned.
3. The research through the perspective of space, i.e. landscape, opens new understandings of the tradition.

As Ullrich Kockel notes, since the expulsion of “folk” from the academic discourse from the 1960s on the research of folk traditions seems inappropriate for a modern ethnologist. Any positive evaluation of the past and continuity of tradition is taken as emotionally regressive because of the contemporary trend demonstrating the falsehood, invention of tradition and the forms of hegemony, inclusion/exclusion, which that tradition enables. The contemporary cultural analysts are obsessed with change, taking the change and tradition as fundamental opposites (Kockel 2008: 5–20). But what they overlook is that “continuity ... (is) not synonymous with perennial sameness, and change is a condition of continuity” (Kockel 2008: 12). The expulsion of the folk went hand in hand with the destruction of landscapes of Native Americans who manifested their spirituality and moral implications. In academic discourses, places were substituted by spaces in this way neglecting people’s ecological relationships (Kockel 2008: 16–17).

## TRADITION AND MEMORY IN THE LANDSCAPE

However, the landscapes are endowed with meaning, given by the tradition. Already in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Maurice Halbwachs noted that the landscape has embodied the tradition of the ancestors which gives support to the community identity and a “stable” material basis for collective memory. Memories of things past survive only if they adhere to the material milieu from which they originate (Halbwachs 1971: 130; 2001: 143–177). He found out that collective identities are structured on time-space references, which strengthen the memory of a common past (Halbwachs 1971; Jonker 1995: 17; Fabietti and Matera 1999: 35).

Landscape acts as a “memory bank, both storing and losing features through time, so human inhabitants, intimately acquainted with their landscapes through tradition and experience, provide the long-term memory” (Wilkinson 2004: 9). It has been shown many times that space is a social construct, its conceptualisations resulting from the changing historical contexts and cultural specificities (Descola and Pálson 1996). Since each community creates, shapes, transforms, and employs space according to its representational system, space presents itself as a manifestation or expression of a community (Geertz 1972; Cadoret 2007).

According to Pierre Bourdieu (1969), it is social practice that activates spatial meanings so that they are not fixed in space. Ways of functioning in an environment are leveled with ways of its perception, which disagrees with the opposition between the naturalist and culturalist perspective, between the practical-technical interaction with environment and its mythical-religious or cosmological construction (Ingold 2000). As is the case with hunters-gatherers the act of remembering is equivalent to the movement of a person through the landscape. The practice of remembering is embedded in the perception of the environment (Ingold 2000: 148).

The majority of traditional peoples, like the Apache, learn about their mythical ancestors and moral principles through their symbolic embodiments in the landscape (Basso 2002: 105–149). For this activity Keith H. Basso has invented a term “sensing of place”, which expresses “the ordinary way of engaging one’s surroundings and finding them significant” (2002: 143). The sensing of place is fuelled by sentiments of inclusion, belonging, and connectedness to the past, rooting the individuals in the social and cultural soils from which they originate, sharing the common identity. It presents a localised version of self-hood (2002: 144–145). The power of gathering, typical of places in their phenomenological sense, is obvious in the landscape of aboriginal Australia, which holds ancestral memories of the Dreaming. Places in general accumulate various animate and inanimate entities, experiences and histories, even languages, thoughts and memories, discovered by a person who returns to a familiar place (Casey 1996: 24–26).

Anthropologists have for long interpreted the representations of the past of “primitive communities,” therefore, communities “without history,” as the manifestations of “mythical thinking.” The memory of these communities was thus reduced to mythical

ideas, non-history, which was contrary to history, understood as "scientific" memory of past events of the developed, "rational" communities, the masters of the concept of linear time. However, the memory, even though there understood as myth and as history here, has in the process of identity formation always the same meaning and function: to provide an answer to the needs of the present. The memory is a selective form of remembering. In relation to its constitutive forms of identity are established (Nora 1989; Lowenthal 1995: 197–198, 210; Fabietti and Matera 1999: 13–14).

As Ullrich Kockel notes by emphasising spaces and flows in the contemporary constructivist approach the importance of place in the construction of identity has been overlooked (Kockel 2008: 16–20).

However, the research of the perception of the remote past in the Karst region in Slovenia showed that collective memory is embedded in the landscape as much as by the non-Western communities. When speaking of the community's past people tend to rely on spatial aspects of sources: they speak about the oldest part of the village or about community's continuity with the inhabitants from the nearby ruins, usually *ajdi*. Community perceives itself as autochthonous, as being in this space "since the beginnings," precisely through spatial continuity with the neighbouring settlements, thereby abandoning those elements which do not contribute to its identification with the place it inhabits (Hrobat 2007: 35–38). Inhabitants of the ruins, *ajdi*, can on the one hand be recognized as mythical representations of primordial creatures with supernatural traits, presumably the creators of the world, while on the other hand these representations blended with a blurred collective memory of contacts with the aborigines, the "others". In perception of the past, *ajdi* represent the beginning of time, the time prior to Christianity, before the emergence of "our" society (Hrobat 2010a: 46–49, 59–60). Identification of village communities with Christianity can be recognized also in traditions which account for the emergence of the village with the setting up of a church. It seems that beside the spatial role of the sacred centre at the cosmological level (Eliade 1987; Risteski 2001) a church does not present only a *lieu de mémoire* of "ancient times" (Brumen 2001: 196–197). Tradition shows that at the level of local community the setting up of a church symbolises a temporal category, marking the beginning of "our time", the time of Christianity. Traditional perception of the past holds that the antagonism to "our" time is represented by the Turks, the representatives of the dangerous and the chaotic. It is only after their withdrawal that the village is constituted; landscape is transformed from chaos to cosmos, to an organized and orderly world. Different treasures, left behind scattered throughout the landscape by the Turks, have a similar function as the Turks themselves, both coming from "the other world." Beside the Turks, folk traditions about the past commonly appropriate other historical elements, such as the Knights Templar and the French, through which local community remains connected to the narratives about the past of the wider community (Hrobat 2010a: 35–59, 288–289).

In traditional thought, space is not an abstract category but a concrete givenness. Numerous funny and teasing narratives reveal that it was God who created Karst, that

saints performed their miracles in the concrete landscape of Karst, not only at the level of abstraction but in almost each particular village landscape. With this, the territory of every village community was also consecrated. In the landscape of Karst, history is brought out also in traditions about Attila's treasures, which borrow this historic personality to integrate the supernatural in the home environment, thus taming the supernatural elements (Hrobat 2010a: 35–59).

What is shared by all traditions about distant past is the fact that time past is presented as an aspect of space, of landscape. The actual depth of temporal “roots” has no meaning for the people, because they recognize them in their local landscape. The landscape and its materiality give an illusion of eternal continuation. Community creates its topographical continuity through narratives about ancestors from neighbouring ruins. In a rather similar way Christian collective memory assured its own with its “spatialisation” in the Holy Land, that is with its inscription into the places of the Holy Land procuring in this way an illusion of stability, continuity (Halbwachs 1971). Similarly Françoise Zonabend found out that the villagers have no memories on the time between the formation of the village and the recent past. But they do have the memory of the beginnings of the village. People tend to perceive time “out of History, out of chronological time, but it inscribes into the space. ... The memory is fresh because it is written into the soil” (Zonabend 1993: 16). In folk tradition the link with the landscape is understood as history (Champion and Cooney 1999: 204). The memory is in fact *topophile*. It is anchored in the landscapes; therefore, places are used as signs for memory (Candau 2005: 153).

That memory depends on place can be seen in instances where the memory of a living space and of its “emplaced” traditions is lost because of moving to other locations. An example of this kind can be seen in the case of the lost of traditions of the Bororo people of Brazil. Their conceptualized topography was embedded in the complex circular village structure, in which the entire symbolic system of social, cult, and belief aspects of the community was “emplaced”. When people moved to a village with an altogether different layout, i.e. horizontal, they lost contact with their traditions, which they maintained precisely through a spatial scheme, which ultimately resulted in their conversion to Christianity (Lévi-Strauss 1989; 2004: 207–214).

Spatialisation of time is always already in-built in our system of perception, which can be concluded from the co-dependency of time and space in language. When something happens, it is expressed in connection to space, place, namely, the event *took place*, or fr. *il a eu lieu*, it. *a avuto luogo* (Ricoeur after Candau 2005: 153).

The research on the perception of the past in Karst villages has shown that the traditional thinking does not perceive time as an abstract category, but it makes it concrete in the local landscape. Therefore a research of past time or collective memory of a village community is corresponding to the research of local landscape. Past time is in fact subordinated to space, since the memory of remote past presents only an aspect of place, landscape (Hrobat 2010a: 35–59).

## THE CONTINUITY OF "EMPLACED" TRADITIONS: THE CASE OF PRE-CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

It seems that the spatial component is the key for the persistence of memory. Within the specific knowledge of the local landscape certain collective memory elements and with them the meaning of certain traditions can be preserved for a very long time (Halbwachs 1971, 2001; Thompson 2004, forthcoming). The awareness of the meaning of the traditions within the communities that generate, innovate and repeat them (Candau 2005: 151) is one of the positive post-modern reflections within the re-questioning of anthropological concepts. The stereotype of tradition being passed through generations in order to preserve some deeper meaning (that is important and known to the entire society) has been refuted. For example, the knowledge of a Christian theologian does not overlap with the traditions shared by parishioners practicing Sunday liturgy. A similar example of tradition being recognised not through the observation of practices, but rather through the interviewing of the knowledge bearers is known in Africa (Lenclud 2004: 127–129).

However, as long as people will live with their own specific landscape, they will be able to preserve and renovate their "emplaced" traditions, most of them known just to the specific local community.

A striking case of the continuity of "emplaced" traditions from archaic times is the recently revealed pre-Christian traditional beliefs from the villages of Prelože and Lokev in the Karst region (Čok 2012; Hrobat Virloget 2012). These are records that could render every archaeologist or ethnologist speechless, realizing that pre-Christian tradition survived until last century, due to the fact that old-faith practices were still secretly performed. These traditional beliefs in pre-Christian deities have been unveiled by a villager, to whom people close to him, grandmothers, grandfathers and villagers confided their secret beliefs and rituals just because he was a part of their community, somebody they could rely on. From the research perspective the question is raised as to the level of trust an outsider researcher (ethnologist, archaeologist) who comes into a community and asks too intimate questions about the inhabitants' personal beliefs can induce. Reading the first-hand records it becomes clear that most of the archaic beliefs and rituals were told to the author of the book while walking through the landscape in the vicinity of the cult places. In other cases people used to tell the meaning behind some toponyms revealing what kind of rituals were performed in that specific place.

An interesting case study is the cave of Triglavca, where the villagers practised fertility rituals dedicated to the Slavic deity of Triglav (literal translation "Three-headed") and the goddess Deva. The Church tried to domesticate the pagan fertility ritual and in order to christianise it, a shrine was built in front of the church, dedicated to St. Francis of Paula, a saint who supposedly helped with the same kind of fertility troubles (Čok 2012: 23; Hrobat Virloget 2012). Here it is noteworthy the Halbwachs's thesis that a religion has to be symbolically transformed into the spatial dimension to ensure its survival. Religion has to be immobilized into the 'stability of material things'. That is why obliteration of memories

about abandoned cults is successful only if the altars of the old gods are physically demolished and their temples torn down, therefore when the site of religious practice is physically destroyed (Halbwachs 1971: 117–164; 2001: 172–173). In the above mentioned case the memory of the ritual practices in the cave of Triglavca was not interrupted, because the censorship of Church just mislead some believers to other locations, i.e. the new shrine, but it did not physically destroy the place of cult. This happened to another cult place in the vicinity, Gluha dolina, where the Christians thorn down three cult stones, but the place has still evoked the memory of the ancient ritual place to the local population (Čok 2012; Hrobat Virloget 2012). The research of the use of oral tradition in archaeology in fact showed that in important sites where their destruction in the landscape is not likely, for instance natural phenomena like caves, stone monoliths or water springs, a certain preservation of the ancient meaning of the site can be expected to occur (Hrobat 2007).

The continuity of archaic elements is evident in the case of the traditions concerning the toponyms and stone monoliths called *Baba*. Folk tales concerning the toponym of Baba was recorded in Lokev, but more over there are many stone monoliths called Baba in the wider Karst region and the surroundings (Hrobat 2010a: 183–224).

Research has shown that *baba*, who has given her name to monoliths, hills and parts of landscape throughout the Slavic world, can be identified as an archaic female mythic character. Baba has given her name to manifold phenomena in all Slavic languages: bread, the last sheaf of grain, constellations, periods of the year, parts of architecture, tools, etc. On one hand it denotes exhausted and infertile features, and on the other hand vital, fertile, key features (Piškur 1965). Baba is most frequently connected with water – either through names for different types of precipitation – e.g. *babje pšeno* (snow pellets) – and through forecasting them (clouds above the places with the name Baba), or through adjectives describing her (snotty, muddy). A legend from the village of Rodik says that Baba's urine turns into rain, her fart into wind and when she raises her skirt this brings nice weather.

Stone (Velebit, near the river Soča, etc.) or imaginary babas (Velika Planina) are included into rituals and offerings. In specific *tridan* (lit. translated “three-days”) solstice ritual in Golac, Baba was offered water, earth, and ashes – fire. The word baba is most frequently connected with a mountain or with parts of a mountain, which implies the Euro-Asian idea that a mountain is earth and mother earth (Čausidis 2008: 275–277). In the Slovenian Karst region and the Italian Liguria, if a child fell on the floor, people would say that it kissed the snooty baba / old woman – which indicates that snotty baba can only be the earth itself. In the Slovenian Primorska region, in Kvarner in Croatia, in France, and in Italy, children were teased that when they go to a nearby place for the first time, they would have to kiss the snooty, muddy baba / an old woman, her buttocks, etc. (Delavigne 1982; Vince-Pallua 1995/96; Bracchi 2009: 335–337; Hrobat 2010a: 183–225). This custom might indicate the remainder of an archaic initiation ceremony, a rite of passage, known all over Europe. In all the places mentioned, people used places, ridges, hills with the name Baba to forecast weather.

Baba is an ambivalent mythical character. On one hand, it symbolizes fertility and vitality, especially in relation to her emphasised female attributes, her power over water, her character that connects the three basic elements of nature, etc. On the other hand, her degraded aspect can be recognised when children are scared with the old, ugly, snotty baba, in her connections with sudden chills, etc. In the Karst region, the yearly cycle ended with the burning of the last sheaf of grain, which was called Baba. Baba dies in order to be reborn in the following year. What provides the basis for life, constructions, macro and microcosm, also represents the end of life. In the traditions about Baba in all the Slavic world, and the old woman in the Romance world, the remains of an archaic pan European goddess can be recognised, the mistress of all the forces of nature, who retained her role in the Slavic divine pantheon (Šmitek 2004: 192, 219–240, 238, 2008: 21–23; Čausidis 2008; Pleterški 2009; Hrobat 2010a: 183–224, 2012, forthcoming (b); etc.).

In the above mentioned traditions about Baba and pre-Christian religious practices, which are mostly connected to concrete places in the landscape, a certain continuity of belief tradition from archaic times can be discerned.

As Tok Thompsons argues, is not that the traditions associated with the monuments do not change over time, but these changes often incorporate earlier material. The research has showed that the traditions of *s'z* spirits living in the megaliths in Ireland are intimately connected with the dead in this way preserving the same cultural idea of the connection between landscape, i.e. megaliths and the dead from neolithic times (Thompson 2004: 363). Other researches of Karst traditions and elsewhere have shown that in the tradition, anchored in the landscape, fragments of collective memory persist, written into the everyday engagement of the local population with the landscape (Hrobat 2007; Hrobat and Štular 2010; cf. Pleterški 2009; Hrobat 2010a: 13–17).

#### UNDERSTANDING TRADITION THROUGH LANDSCAPE: THE CASE OF VILLAGE BOUNDARIES

The type of folklore research which does not focus on the motifs and topics of oral tradition in its general and comparative sense (Slapšak and Hrobat 2005: 301; Hrobat 2007: 34), but rather strives to comprehend the folklore within its specific spatial context – the landscape can reveal new meanings of folklore. As the above mentioned researches of folklore within the landscape show they can be of special interest to archaeologists searching for data from the past for specific places in the landscape (Pleterški 1996; Thompson 2004; Hrobat 2007). Moreover the research of folklore in the context of its landscape can bring totally new understandings of tradition from an ethnological or anthropological point of view as also the following case study shows.

One of the findings of the research of the perception of space through oral tradition in the Karst landscape showed that village boundaries functioned as special places in the

landscape. In the folklore the village boundaries (for instance of Rodik) are defined by tales about contacts with the supernatural, that is by apparitions, sacrifices, and burials of creatures, which inhabit the world in-between (about *bloody leg*, *vedamec*, blacksmith, the impure dead, foreigners, serpents, horses, etc.). Here it needs to be stressed that the people who have told these narratives did not know that they were located at community border lines. It was only after spatial analysis of the traditions, i.e. positioning of narratives into concrete landscape with regard to the locus of an event, was applied that the overlapping of communal boundaries with traditions about the supernatural became evident (Hrobat 2009, 2010a: 62–106).

The special status of community limits is reflected also from a ritual perspective, in the phenomenon of dead resting sites (*mrtva počivala*). These are ritual places in which funeral processions stopped, prayed, pallbearers exchanged, and the coffin / the deceased was placed on the ground. Dead resting sites are not arbitrary places; on the contrary, the majority of them are situated precisely at or along cadastral boundaries (Hrobat 2010b, forthcoming (a)). Few exceptions can be found by the water, which was considered the mediator with the world beyond (Mencej 1997), probably similarly as community boundaries. These findings reveal why it was precisely in these places that ritual activities took place, namely as rituals of passage, *rites de passage*, which are, according to van Gennepe's theory, part of the traditional concept of boundaries (van Gennepe 1977). Both the folklore narratives about the supernatural and the ritual aspect in dead resting places indicate that community borders traditionally functioned as places of special importance, at the contact of the worlds (Hrobat 2010a: 62–138). As folklorists showed, beliefs in supernatural forces and rituals reflect the social landscape of peasant communities (Löfgren 1981: 31).

The above mentioned cases reinforce the argument that from the point of the methodology space or the concrete landscape as an analytical category opens up new dimensions for research, in relation to which the traditional subject matter of ethnological research can be revealed in an entirely different light (Hrobat 2010a). The discussion adds additional arguments in favour of Kockel's criticism of the contemporary academic constant demonstration of false consciousness of tradition, denying any positive evaluation of the past, continuity and people's ecological relationships (Kockel 2008). The traditions presented here are still folk traditions nowadays, they have certainly some continuity from the past even though including change, and they exist still today because they are part of the folks constant relation to their own environment, the local landscape.

Within the knowledge of the local landscape certain continuity of tradition or collective memory elements can be preserved for a very long time (Halbwachs 1971, 2001; Thompson 2004, forthcoming). The memory and with it the meaning are embedded in the specific local landscape (Thompson 2004, forthcoming) and they are activated with the movement through the landscape (Bourdieu 1969; Ingold 2000; Basso 2002). It seems that the place component is one of the keys for the persistence of traditions. As long as people live with their own landscape, they will be able to unveil the meanings known just



to local communities and there will not exist any base for the academic deconstruction of folk tradition.

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## TRADICIJA V KRAJU. KONTINUITETA LJUDSKEGA IZROČILA V POKRAJINI

*V nasprotju s splošno usmeritvijo v antropologiji/etnologiji članek govori o ljudskem izročilu v klasičnem smislu. Kakor je opozoril Ullrich Kockel (2008), je sodobni akademski diskurz obseden z neavtentičnostjo tradicije, pri čemer so spregledana človekova ekološka razmerja, ki se kažejo prek tradicije.*

*Vendar je pokrajina, pomembna za lokalno skupnost, odsev njene preteklosti in kolektivnega spomina. Uteleša izročilo prednikov, ki krepi skupnost in je »trdna« osnova za kolektivni spomin.*

*Pomen pokrajine v ohranjanju tradicij je razviden v primerih, ko je bila v kraj vtisnjena tradicija prekinjena, ker se je skupnost premaknila iz lokalnega okolja (npr. Lévi-Strauss 2004). Spomin, ki opredeljuje identiteto, je »topofilen« (Candau 2005). Kakor je pokazala raziskava percepcije časa v ustnem izročilu na Krasu, je daljna preteklost v tradicionalni misli predstavljena kot vidik pokrajine. Dejanska globina čarovnih »korenin« za ljudi ni pomembna, ker jih v lokalni pokrajini vedno znova reorganizirajo (Hrobat 2010a).*

*Prostorska, krajevna sestavina je eden ključev trdoživosti spomina. V v kraj vtisnjenem izročilu je opazna kontinuiteta (Halbwachs 1971, 2001; Thompson 2009), ki vsebuje spremembe (Lencud 1987; Kockel 2008). Nekateri elementi kolektivnega spomina in z njimi pomen določenih izročil se lahko zelo dolgo ohranijo v posebnem znanju o domači pokrajini (Halbwachs 1971, 2001; Thompson 2004, v tisku). Takšen primer so v vaseh Lokev in Prelože predkrščanska verovanja, ki se izražajo v okoliški krajini. Verovanja o predkrščanskih božanstvih je razkril vaščan, kateremu so ljudje v bližini zaupali skrivna verovanja in obrede prav zaradi tega, ker je bil del njihove skupnosti. Ob tem se iz raziskovalčeve perspektive postavlja vprašanje o zaupanju zunanjemu raziskovalcu (etnologu, arheologu), ki pride v skupnost in sprašuje o preiintimnih zadevah osebnih verovanj.*

*Kontinuiteta mitičnih arhaičnih elementov je očitna tudi v primeru izročil o toponimih in kamnitih monolitih – B/babah –, ki so povezani s konkretnimi kraji v pokrajini vsepovsod po Evropi. Halbwachs je menil, da je mogoče učinkovito uničiti spomine o opučenih kultih le, če so kraji verskih praks fizično uničeni (Halbwachs 1971: 117–164, 2001: 172–173). Kjer uničenja ni, npr. pri naravnih danostih (jame, kamnitni monoliti, vodni izviri), je mogoče pričakovati ohranjenost starodavnih pomenov.*

*Poleg ohranjanja izročil in spomina v (znanju o) pokrajini je namen tega članka pokazati nove razsežnosti raziskav in pomenov, kolče tradicijo raziskujemo iz prostorsko-krajevnega vidika. Primer takšne raziskave je bila prostorska analiza folklorne o stikih z nadnaravnim, tj. s postavitvijo pripovedi v konkretno pokrajino glede na kraj dogodka. Prekrivanje mej skupnosti z izročilom o nadnaravnem (počivala oz. mirila) je pokazalo na različna razumevanja meja vasi in krajev posebnega pomena na stiku svetov.*

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