



“Visualizing Family, Gender Relations, and the Body: The Balkans, approx. 1860-1950”

Mag. Barbara Derler, Mag. Ana Djordjević, Dr. Anelia Kassabova

The production of knowledge in the disciplines of history, ethnology, and cultural anthropology is still primarily based on written and oral texts. The photograph is considered at its best as illustration. Although meanwhile the ‘pictorial turn’ is in full swing in social sciences, it is still rarely used as autochthonous historical source. This means that a whole set of primary documents has been neglected in historical, ethnological, and cultural-anthropological research. The Balkans belong to the regions in the world with a comparatively scarcity of written documents. This lack is even more tremendous in research fields such as historical family and gender relations as well as bodily representations, which are per se not easily to be reconstructed. The overall aim of the project, therefore, consists in the adoption of the photograph as primary source parallel to written sources in social sciences focussing on the Balkans.

The research questions are threefold: (1) Scrutinizing the representation and self-representation of family, gender relations, and the body. (2) The project’s contribution to historical knowledge consists in its research of modernization processes in the Balkans under the auspices of multiple or vernacular modernities. (3) Its original contribution to visual studies is related to the fundamental question whether or not images are constructed and perceived culturally different from the West in a pre-modern region with Orthodox and Muslim background.

The methodology is based on a combination of serial-iconographic method and in-depth-interpretation of single photographs and consists of two basic operations: (1) The work in photo archives and (2) the analysis and interpretation of the selection at home. The research project concentrates upon the corpora of “indigenous” photographers (from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Serbia) and two Austro-Hungarian ethnographers. The photo-

graphs serve as valuable records, for example, of subjects that are often poorly documented in early ethnographic sources such as the family, gender roles and the representation of the body. Relevant categories are photographs for private use (family portraits, wedding photographs, graveyard photographs) and public use (documentary photographs, cartes de visite, photo postcards).

The core of the dissemination strategy consists in the establishment of a photographic data base, which comprises analysed and interpreted photographs. This data base will be made accessible for the scientific community and other interested organizations. It is open for enlargement, supplied by other research projects aiming on the establishment of a Visual Archive of Southeastern Europe (VASE).

Gender, family, and body history are internationally growing disciplines. Therefore the project can benefit from already made experiences, on the one hand, but can, on the other hand, contribute to the knowledge already generated.

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