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SHRINES AND  
PILGRIMAGE IN THE  
MODERN WORLD

*New Itineraries into the Sacred*

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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# Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World New Itineraries into the Sacred

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Cover: Kok Korpershoek, Amsterdam

Illustration: based on Christ giving his blessing by Hans Memling, ca 1478

Lay-out: ProGrafici, Goes

ISBN 978 90 8964 0 116

NUR 728 / 741

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## Chapter 3

### 'I'm not religious, but Tito is a God': Tito, Kumrovec, and the New Pilgrims

*Marijana Belaj*

*'Are we witnessing a rejuvenation of imagery from Dracula, as the seeming dead arise from the grave, some for the severalth time?'* (Verdery 1999: 21)

Kumrovec, a small village in northwestern Croatia, is a real and visible place, in part politically marked, and with its own linear history; it is not therefore a mythical space. In recent times, however, due to the presence of the statue of Josip Broz Tito and related historical objects, it has been designated a kind of sacred place, primarily by those participating in the lively celebration of the *Day of Youth*.

The Day of Youth, celebrated on May 25, was a state holiday in former Yugoslavia and served officially to commemorate Tito's birthday (although V. Dedijer, Tito's biographer, claims that his actual birthday was May 7). The last time this holiday was officially celebrated in Yugoslavia was in 1988. With the subsequent break-up of Yugoslavia and the change of regime in 1991, the holiday was abolished in Croatia, although only officially. Admirers of Tito still gather in Kumrovec to celebrate the Day of Youth. Therefore, there is no doubt that in today's political climate, Kumrovec has been imbued with new meanings which define it as a place of pilgrimage for the approximately 10,000 people from all over former Yugoslavia who come to visit it on that day. Since the persona of Josip Broz Tito is the focal point of these events, my research centers on the events surrounding his statue, in an attempt to grasp at least some of the new meanings. By heeding the assertion 'to go to things as they are and to the places in order to see how nature and the material influence people's ideas and actions much more than what they themselves are able to project into them' (Frykman and Gilje 2003: 14), I was interested in observing what was happening around the statue, and how it influenced those *using* it.

## Kumrovec

Kumrovec is the birthplace of Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980), president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia between 1953 and 1980. For this reason, the place was given special protection and meaning, thereby becoming a resource for the production of social memory. In the period before World War Two and for the next 30 years, the old village center of Kumrovec was filled with new buildings and old, restored houses from other areas. These buildings had a dual meaning. One group, the monuments, was designed to function as a resource for the dissemination of socialist principles and programs, based on the idea of following the path of Tito's life and work. These monuments were Villa Kumrovec (Tito's former residence), the Political School, the Home of Fighters and Youth, and the Museum of the Revolution. The second group, mainly historical and traditional houses and barns, was arranged around Tito's birth house to show the rural way of life from the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and 'to serve (...) only and exclusively as a representation of that ambience, the basis of which is in its main and central object, which is the Birth House of Marshal Tito,<sup>1</sup>' the building which also exhibits in part the process in which Tito became an international statesman. The latter group of houses is at the same time an open air museum, the first of its type in former Yugoslavia, created along the lines of the Scandinavian *skansen*. Judging by the documentation that has been preserved, this museum, which opened in 1953, was the result of a skilful manipulation of the political climate; it was an exceptionally ambitious project for the time. Marija Gušić, the project architect, made use of the prevailing socialist rhetoric to systematically present Kumrovec as an important political place (Kristić 2006: 103-105, 115-117). In this specific case, it is the rhetoric about the burdensome life of a peasant who rebels, leaving his poor home in order to find a more just and happier future: 'One of these *poletarac* [a person just starting in life, a career, etc.] has succeeded in standing at the head of the world struggle for peace, for the future of humanity.'<sup>2</sup>

This combined program turned Kumrovec primarily into a political and educational but also a tourist destination, a character that it retained until the end of the 1980s. Since then, the strong political and ideological turmoil and change in this part of Europe has been marked, amongst other things, by

processes in which some of the factors making up the Yugoslavian idea of nation-building have been deliberately forgotten. Celebrations, holidays, heroes and other monuments of the Yugoslav era were systematically erased from the collective memory and replaced by the symbols of the new system, as is the case whenever political systems change (cf. Connerton 1989). As the result of these processes, the buildings in Kumrovec, once erected as breeding grounds for socialist ideas and socialist generations, have become silent witnesses to that period (cf. Mathiesen Hjemdahl 2006: 53-55), and the Museum of Kumrovec shifted the focus of its presentation exclusively to the monuments relating to rural life. In this process of forgetting, making taboo and concealing, Kumrovec was erased from the political map.

However, in spite of all attempts to remove traces of Yugoslavian nation-building symbolism which had been sedimenting for years, once a year Kumrovec turns into a destination for several thousand Tito admirers from all over former Yugoslavia, who go there to celebrate the Day of Youth.



*Celebration of the Day of Youth in Kumrovec, 2004.*

*Photo: M. Belaj.*

## An Ordinary Man with an Extraordinary Life

The period of Tito's statehood (1953 – 1980) is often labeled Yugoslavian socialism, communism or Titoism; moreover, Tito is identified with Yugoslavia, communist ideology, the Communist Party, Socialist Revolution, the People's Liberation Struggle, etc. He stands at the center of the Yugoslavian symbolic opus, as its savior and liberator, and a fighter for its welfare and progress. Many identity markers of former Yugoslavia have found their personification in Tito.

I belong to a generation that was at primary school during the final years of Tito's life. Tito's presence in our everyday lives was intensive and diverse. And I am not referring only to the schools, streets, squares, bridges and towns that were named after him, nor to his statues which adorned each and every town in the former state, or the numerous instances of Tito's name in relief, sited on hills so that they could be seen from the air. I am also referring to school lessons overflowing with stories about his childhood in the countryside, his arduous struggles as a worker, his heroic and uncompromising achievements during and after World War Two. During class we were constantly watched over by his picture on the classroom wall, a mandatory part of school and office inventories. At home we were watched from television screens, where he would mainly appear in a white suit or a marshal's uniform.

In the first class at primary school, on the *Day of the Republic* (29 November), we joined *Tito's Pioneers* (an organization of children aged 7 to 14). In our hundreds, dressed in pioneer uniforms with red neckerchiefs and blue caps with a red star (the *Titovka* – Tito's Star), we recited in unison the initiation oath which bound us to pursue moral values like 'diligence' and 'good comradeship,' as well as to respect everyone who 'strives for liberty and peace.' But the same oath also bound us (though we were unable to fully comprehend it) 'to love the self-managing homeland and to develop brotherhood and unity and ideas Tito [had] fought for.' Admission to the pioneers was a symbolic separation from political innocence and neutrality, marking the first step in the state care of children's education as part of the process of developing their political socialization, a sense of belonging to an ideological collective: 'It was the first of a series of initiations which had to produce a fully acculturated member of a socialist community.'<sup>3</sup>

In the seventh grade of primary school, we were admitted into the Socialist Youth Alliance. By receiving the red booklets, a little larger than the Pioneer ones, on the Day of Youth (25 May), we became *Tito's omladinci* (Tito's youth). Every year this state holiday would culminate in the stadium of the Yugoslavian People's Army in Belgrade (Serbia). Besides the spectacular *slet*, a massive gymnastic display performed in the stadium, Tito would be given a baton containing a congratulatory message, which had been relayed for months across Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup>

At my school, a ritual event would take place each year on the Day of Youth, the content of which remained unchanged for years. There were also sport events. The school and its courtyard were decorated with stars, state flags and the Party's flags, and framed banners that shouted at us, reminding us that Tito 'is all of us,' that he was 'a white violet,' and that we should 'swear' to him not to 'deviate from his path.'<sup>5</sup> The same messages were repeated in songs played over the sound system, which were more combative. However, because such iconography was inherent to all important events, it is difficult today to determine whether, in terms of décor and music, this was characteristic of the Day of Youth or some other state holiday.

When I was admitted into the *omladinci*, Tito had already been dead for three years. However, up until the late 1980s, schoolchildren would still write letters to Tito on the Day of Youth, plant schoolyards with 88 rosebushes or trees for Tito<sup>6</sup>, and on special occasions greet each other with the learned phrase: 'For the homeland with Tito.' The last Baton of Youth was relayed in 1987, and the last admission into the Pioneers took place in 1989. In 1985, five years after Tito died, the largest banknote (5,000 dinars), featuring Tito, was put into circulation.<sup>7</sup> Although he was no longer amongst the living, the law sanctioning acts of impiety against his character and work was still effective. This is illustrated by what happened in 1984, when members of the rock band *Zabranjeno pušenje* were subjected, like enemies of the state, to police oppression (interviews, home searches, telephone tapping) because of an 'incident' involving their lead singer at a concert in Rijeka. When their amplifier, made by the Marshall Amplification company, broke down, the band's frontman sadly announced to the audience: 'Hey folks, the marshal's dropped dead'

(*Raja, crko maršal*), referring to Tito by his rank of marshal. This, and many other examples, illustrates the use of Tito as a source of legitimacy in ideological efforts after his death. Tito was used as a fulcrum to maintain unity and stability. American historian Nina Tumarkin writes: 'A regime that derives its legitimacy from a single ruler risks instability upon his death. But if after death that ruler becomes the object of a cult predicated on his continuing living power, then the cult can serve as a stabilizing force' (Tumarkin 1997: 165).

Although there can be no doubt that Tito was turned into a kind of instrument of communist rule after he died, he has also retained an important place – as an ideal, a friend, a guardian – in the private spheres of life for many individuals. Commenting on communist versions of Tito's biographies, Croatian historian Maja Brkljačić perceives two different aspects: on the one hand, biographers emphasize Tito's poor background and his craft of locksmith (also presented in Tito's birth house in Kumrovec), which tie in perfectly with the 'glorious' history of the proletarian movement in Yugoslavia; on the other hand, they present a struggle for humanity in different periods of Tito's life embedded in events in Yugoslavian history. 'If combined, these two empha-



*Groups of Croatian and Slovenian visitors in front of Tito's statue, September 2006.  
Photo: P.J. Margry.*

ses tell a story of an ordinary man with an extraordinary life (...). In a sense, what was pictured was a perversion of the "American dream": he was quite a normal guy with a very suspicious background, and he did become president and the most celebrated figure of the country during all its existence, but you cannot even dream to come close to his fame, because he was after all very extraordinary in all his "ordinariness" (Brkljačić 2001). Brkljačić also observes that Tito is never portrayed as cold or aloof, but is often called a 'teacher,' 'guardian' and 'friend.' In addition, his biographers insisted on elements of intimacy and friendship. In letters written to Tito by Yugoslavian Socialist Youth, just before he died, we find a similar discourse to that used when religious people describe their feelings about their patron saints. Brkljačić concludes that it is this kind of portrayal of Tito as a friend and protector that made him so close to the masses, without disturbing his position of power: 'One was supposed to believe him not on the grounds of fear but love' (Brkljačić 2001).

The fact that people have continued to speak of the role of Tito's life within their lives after 1980 has led Brkljačić to name the final chapter of her work on symbolization connected to Tito's funeral *Dead Man Walking*: 'In a sense, Tito remained roaming around like a good spirit, a vampire of a sort – not alive, but not completely dead either' (Brkljačić 2001).

A lively and non-institutional veneration of Tito after his death can be seen in occasional actions of citizens of former Yugoslavia, such as the banner saying 'This is Marshal Tito Street' (*Ovo je ulica Maršala Tita*) in the main street of Sarajevo. This banner was erected by citizens of Sarajevo in response to an attempt by the authorities to change the name to Alija Izetbegovic Street, in honor of the first president of the independent state. Tito's name, based on the symbolization contained within it, is often recognized and offered as a 'saving solution' in problematical situations. For example, a 33-meter-high cross illuminated by six spotlights was erected on Hum, a hill in Mostar, to mark the occasion of the 2,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christ's birth. One sector of multi-denominational Mostar saw it as provocation against Muslims.<sup>8</sup> A citizen proposed the following as a possible solution to the problem: 'They should pull down the cross and write TITO [...] or all those symbols, but that the star is adopted as a valid atheist symbol and that it becomes constitutive as if it were a reli-

gion, that is, a personal conviction (...) therefore, knock down everything and in big bold letters write TITO.<sup>9</sup>

Expressions of direct and personal attachment to Tito give an especially vivid account of his life after death, usually referring to communication with him and the need to bring him closer and make him more familiar. There are many such expressions, for example on 'Tito's official page' <http://www.tito-ville.com/> (*Tito's Tribune*).<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, it is worth noting that the homepage of this Internet site says: 'Josip Broz – TITO (Kumrovec, 7. 5. 1892 – Ljubljana, 4. 5. 1980 – Internet, 22. 7. 1994).' As the postings on these pages show, the practice of writing letters to Tito – albeit now in digital form – has never been abandoned. The authors of these messages congratulate him on his birthday,<sup>11</sup> they are ashamed of their forgetfulness, and they send requests,<sup>12</sup> they evoke a friendship,<sup>13</sup> they express intimacy and comment on ideology,<sup>14</sup> and they curse him.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, even fifteen years after his death, Tito's portrait, already removed from public spaces, still occupies a special place in many private houses (Bringa 2003: 153). Some people now regret removing them from their walls and throwing them away. For example, during my research on beliefs in patron saints in the North Velebit region, an informant showed me pictures of patron saints hanging on the walls of her home, and said: 'I have St. Anne and St. Anthony. I also had Tito, and I'm always sorry I threw it away.'<sup>16</sup> Tito was placed in a similar context by another informant I talked to in Gračišće in Istria: 'When it's tough, when you're ill, when facing difficulties, you'll believe everyone – Tito and a monk and the Pope.'<sup>17</sup> This quotation makes it clear that Tito is invoked in the same way as Catholic saints in order to bring relief or help.

Having examined this kind of personal communication with Tito, I will now attempt to present contemporary events in Kumrovec which take place once a year – at the celebration of the Day of Youth. As these events seem to show, not only has the Day of Youth continued in spite of its official abolition, it also survives as a focal point in the calendars of many of Tito's admirers. The central element in this celebration is the statue of Josip Broz, situated beside his birth house.

## The Day of Youth and the Statue of Josip Broz in Kumrovec

Statues are dead people cast in bronze or carved stone. They symbolize a specific famous person while in sense also being the body of that person. By arresting the process of that person's bodily decay, a statue alters the temporality associated with the person, bringing him into the realm of the timeless or the sacred, like an icon. For this reason, desecrating a statue partakes of the larger history of iconoclasm (Verdery 1999: 5).

The statue of Josip Broz at his birth house in Kumrovec was made by the Croatian sculptor Antun Augustinčić and was erected in the courtyard of Tito's birth house in 1948. Today this statue can be viewed as a stage on which dialogue or, to be more precise, conflicts between different collective memories take place.

Several times in the last few years the statue has been the 'victim' in a conflict between the two dominant political factions in Croatia – those who respect the Yugoslav past and those who condemn it – about their differing interpretations of history. At the very end of 2004, the latter group placed explosives beneath the statue, which was seriously damaged and had to undergo restoration. This event was a major story on the national news service. Since it was about Josip Broz Tito, a person whose portrayal ranges from 'the greatest son and teacher of our peoples' to 'a butcher, criminal, and a dictator,' it is obvious that these attributes, characteristic of a real person, are often – and certainly in the above-mentioned conflicts – attributed to the statue representing him. For some of the opponents, the statue represents something untouchable, 'sacred' and, at the same time, intrusions are seen as 'sacrilege.' To others, the very existence of the monument is 'sacrilege.'

Such phenomena are not a distinctive feature of Croatian society, and nothing would seem out of the ordinary<sup>18</sup> were it not for the fact that Tito and his admirers and followers, in line with Marxist ideology, publicly renounced religion. Moreover, religion was not even mentioned, apart from the sense of *das Opium des Volks*. This therefore raises an important question: how can an admirer of Tito perceive his statue as the real person, without this experience



*Touching the statue of Josip Broz Tito in Kumrovec, 2004.*

*Photo: M. Belaj.*

being in a certain way religious? Does Tito's statue arouse anything religious in the experience of a visiting admirer? It is the celebration of the Day of Youth in Kumrovec that has proven to serve as the perfect training ground for this kind of political imagery. 'Identities are not at first hand a question of ideas but of ordinary practice – the tactile, sensual and practical relationship to the natural and humanly created environment' (Frykman and Gilje 2003: 11). In this context, instead of discussing what the statue of Tito in Kumrovec represents, it seems more interesting to deal with what happens around it, and with its impact on those *using* it. What kind of a dialogue takes place between the statue and participants in the Day of Youth celebration, or in other words, how does the statue affect the participant, and how in turn does the participant bring the statue to life?

Celebrations of the Day of Youth in Kumrovec are organized by the Josip Broz Tito Society in Zagreb.<sup>19</sup> As their president Tomislav Badovinac points out, the Society's intention is not to create a personality cult<sup>20</sup> because 'he is dead, he's gone,' but to draw attention to the *life and work* of Josip Broz. Explaining the essence of the notion of Tito's work, the Society's president lists five historic moves by Josip Broz: (1) the uprising against the Germans and the Quisling government in Croatia, (2) independence, freedom and justice, especially in contrast to the Stalin regime, (3) self-government, (4) communal property, and (5) the Non-Alignment Movement. Delegations of other societies that admire Tito's life and work attend the celebrations as well.

In honoring Tito, society members seem to follow a strict protocol. For example, a delegation from one of the societies formed a line with almost military precision and advanced towards the statue in a few, apparently choreographed movements. It was prearranged who was to bring the flowers and who to lay them down. In their procession towards the statue, they looked at each other to avoid making a mistake in the protocol. They laid the flowers and stood in silence in front of the statue. After about a minute, the leader of the delegation said: 'Glory be to comrade Tito!' Everyone replied firmly: 'Glory!' – it sounded as if they had been rehearsing it on the way to Kumrovec. In fact, they have probably had many rehearsals at all the commemorations and memorial gatherings over the years. What added to the distinctiveness of this

protocol was the vocabulary and gestures used by the delegation members to pay their respects – greetings like ‘Death to Fascism!’ or ‘With Tito into the future!’ sometimes accompanied by the Communist military salute (pressing the fist to the temple).<sup>21</sup> This, one could almost say ritual, vocabulary was particularly instrumental in creating an impression of authenticity.

This strict adherence to the protocol characterized every delegation. On completion of the protocol, the groups would disband, so it seems that for most delegations laying down the flowers and paying their respects before the



*Saluting the statue of Josip Broz Tito, 2004.*

*Photo: M. Belaj.*

statue was the climax of their formal involvement in the visit to Kumrovec.

The paying of respect was nothing but an acknowledgement of the *life and work* of Josip Broz Tito, as the phrase went. In fact, when Tito died, a number of his sympathizers and followers actually *vowed* to continue his work. For example, the end of the proclamation issued jointly by the Presidency of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist League and the Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the day of Tito's death, 4 May 1980, reads: 'The generations of today and those to come owe profound gratitude to comrade Tito and will continue his immortal work.'<sup>22</sup> A similar note echoes in newspaper articles of the day: 'And in all the written vows, words and thousands of signatures, there is found one common message: that the magnificent work of President Tito should be the guiding star of our future, that we should follow in his steps and thoughts'; 'We have before us today a great moral obligation to continue this great work.'<sup>23</sup>

The recognition of Tito's *life and work* had a more powerful effect on all members of the delegations than any personal experience of the statue – it was, judging from Badovinac's words, programmatic. However, only about a dozen delegations performed such protocols in front of the statue that day. The overwhelming majority of those who came to see the statue were individuals who experienced and expressed their encounter with the statue in a very personal way. They talked to it, saluted it, cried while looking at it, and touched it. Were they thinking of *Tito's work*, or was their experience of the statue of a totally different kind?

I was standing very close to one lady who picked a small branch of lilac in order to have her picture taken beside the statue. Then she laid the branch beneath the statue, and kissed and stroked it. She then looked at me and said very gently: 'You were his Pioneer.' I do not know whether she was trying to advise or encourage me, but that is not all that important. What matters is her open and intimate contact with me. It was not hard to approach her or the others. They addressed each other very openly, sometimes even euphorically, as if they knew each other very well. They addressed me as well, not for one moment imagining I had some other reason for coming – for them, the fact I was standing there was enough to consider me 'one of them.' Moreover, my

comparatively young age seemed to make me particularly welcome and to bring great joy to these, mostly elderly, people. It reminded them of their own past as a youth pioneer.

A lady from Križ (born in 1928) looked at the statue in tears, but she said she was happy and explained how in ‘those days’ people had different values. She told me about her personal experience of the time, of her own emancipation and starting a family, of a morality marked by family values and solidarity instead of materialism. As she emphasized, Josip Broz deserves credit for this, and therefore ‘his feet should be kissed for it. (...) Not just the feet, we should kiss the pedestal itself. Because what he did... for man...’ There were no great historical facts in her story, nothing about the *life and work* of Josip Broz. She shared her memories in a warm and direct manner, often entering into moral instructions with an almost religious tinge. It is difficult to believe that a statue can evoke these memories and, occasionally, even instructive narrations. I was sure that she saw a real person – Josip Broz himself.

She carries this experience to her home as a memory, and it encourages her to come again, as the following dialogue points out:

Q: ‘You’ll go back home, the statue will stay here. Do you know how you’ll feel?’

A: ‘Relaxed. Relaxed. I’m glad. I come here every year. (...) Because this is who we are and we can’t be any different. We can’t. Even if I wanted to, I couldn’t. Because it’s in me. This is how I raise my children (...).’

Q: ‘Do you make special preparations for coming here? Do you think about it in advance?’

A: ‘Yes – yes, yes. To us it is an extension of life. An extension of a duty we’d performed. You understand me? (...) To us it, I mean it extends our life. I’m an old woman, born in 1928. I guess this is my fourth country, you know (...) But there is something within you which carries you, which no one will ever destroy. And can’t. This is how I raise my children. And we are all like this. And I have grandchildren, and they also... I’m saying that for as long as I can, I’m, you know, my soul is at peace.’

Many participants in the Day of Youth, mostly women, approached the statue, kissed it, stroked it, touched the hand at the back, some in awe, some completely calm. 'Hey there, Stari,<sup>24</sup> if you only knew what happened to us,' a man said to the statue, after bowing and crossing himself.

One lady ran excitedly into the courtyard, making her way to the statue. She stroked it several times, saying at every stroke, 'This is for Radenković, this is for Majda...,' and she kept listing names of her friends and relatives. After that, she kissed Tito's coat, and then withdrew several steps, content, and stayed close to the statue.

There were groups of women who circled around the statue touching it, while some would simply touch it and cross themselves. Others spoke to the statue or simply saluted it. Many lit a candle beneath the pedestal.

On that day hundreds of people expressed their experience of the statue in similar ways.



*Lighting candles in front of the statue of Josip Broz Tito, 2004.*

*Photo: M. Belaj.*

The religious domain is often revealed in small talk, for example, while queuing to be photographed with the statue. While we were standing in line, one man from Varaždin (northwestern Croatia), watching the people taking pictures, said: 'He was too gracious.' When I drew his attention to the people touching the statue, he explained: 'Well you see, he was a god. He is a god. And we will touch him.' When our turn came, we placed our palms on Tito's coat, and he added: 'Now we're close.' If he had touched a random statue, wouldn't he have felt only the coldness of the material instead of this experience of being close to Tito?

During the four to five hours of the event, thousands of photographs were taken of visitors touching Tito's coat, his feet, the statue's pedestal, or leaning on it, or posing alongside it, saluting. Almost everyone had a camera, and those who did not exchanged addresses to have the photos sent to them. To have a photograph of themselves with the statue of Josip Broz was so important that they were also willing to pay for it. The encounter with the statue of Josip Broz represents one of those events worth recording and preserving, and sharing with those to whom they will show the photograph.

However, conversations overheard in the streets of Kumrovec during the celebration also suggest a certain religious experience of the whole event, not just the statue:

'I'll tell you why I'm here – Tito is a god! I'm not religious, but Tito is a god' (an Istrian man in his early 20s).

['Is there any other day in the year that is so important to you?'] 'Yes, Easter is important, and Christmas too' (a woman in her early 20s from Kumrovec).

['Which part of the celebration was the most important to you?'] 'Look, everything is important. First we went to Tito's monument. I talked to him and kissed him. I do that every time' (a woman in her mid-40s, from Varaždin, northwestern Croatia).

'When I tried to organize a visit to Kumrovec, someone said "I've already been". And I replied: "My friend, my dear mother has never said to me, I've already been to church. She goes again and again. That's how I do this – again and again"' (a 65-year-old man from Zagreb).

We read similar comments in the guest book ('In my heart you remain immortal; Blessed is the one who lives forever'), on banners ('Tito lived, Tito is alive, Tito will live'<sup>25</sup>), and even in a speech that opened with a personal address to Tito, who is seemingly *present*: 'Tito, our comrade! I am speaking to you on behalf of...'

## New Perspectives on Tito and Kumrovec

The experiences of the visitors to Kumrovec when encountering Tito's statue point on the one hand to the presence of the past in that time and place – the past relating to the period of personal development, starting a family, bringing up children, etc. The evoking of memories reflects nostalgia, but not – as is generally believed – for a political creation, but for one's own youth. The visitors connect the creative and prosperous period of their lives with their then leader, 'the greatest son of these lands,' Josip Broz, who in their eyes achieved what is elsewhere called the *American Dream*. He is perceived by the participants in the celebration as the embodiment of exemplariness and of ideals.

The statue of Tito also invites special gestures, actions and emotions which, in turn, transform the statue into the person it represents. Many of these actions and gestures are not simply suggestive of the religious, but are in fact taken from religious practice – expressions of experience of Tito's statue are similar to forms of religiosity found in the worshipping of saints. Above all, I am thinking here of people touching and kissing the statue, walking around it, talking to it, lighting candles and laying flowers at its feet, and especially the gesture of crossing themselves in front of the statue.

For most of these participants, the very meeting with the statue represented the culmination of their visit to Kumrovec – a visit motivated primarily by their need to pay respect to Josip Broz, who was in their eyes exemplary

and ideal and, indirectly, to thank him for the creative and successful period of their lives. The visit triggers powerful emotions, great affection, and sometimes even euphoria, which is manifested in laughter accompanied by tears and in unrestrained behavior in general. The atmosphere is one of feeling connected with the other participants, so that communication is direct and often intimate. But being in Kumrovec on the Day of Youth does not end when the participants arrive home. They still have a photo of their encounter with the statue, or a memory of the experience, which demands a revisit; it is even a *duty*, as the lady from Križ said.

All this indicates a special kind of journey, the ultimate aim of which is to meet Tito's statue – a pilgrimage, as explained by the Croatian ethnologist Vitomir Belaj (1991). He discusses crucial features of a pilgrimage which distinguish it from other visits to sacred places. Among other things, he mentions the following elements of a pilgrimage:

- the motivation that starts the pilgrimage, which is a specially close contact with the sacred in order, for instance, to show reverence or express gratitude;
- an anticipated beneficial effect of the pilgrimage, such as a material effect or spiritual grace given by the divinity;
- the goal, which could be a picture or a statue and which presents an embodiment of exemplariness and ideals;
- forms of piety, such as touching, kissing, talking to the statue or picture, walking around it, etc.;
- remembrance of the pilgrimage, supported by a photograph or a memorized experience, and also the preservation of the need for further pilgrimages, in which word of mouth plays an important role.

In Kumrovec, it would seem, a process has happened involving the 'spatialization of charisma.' Anthropologists John Eade and Michael Sallnow, discussing a particular kind of Christian places of pilgrimage, paraphrase Weber in their use of this term: "'spatialization of charisma": the power of the living person is sedimented and preserved after his death in the power of place.' In other



*Slovenian women from the city of Koečevje, which is near the Croatian border, singing Tito's favorite folk song (Pleničke je prala pri mrzlem studenc), September 2006.*

*Photo: P.J. Margry.*

words, as the authors state, we are dealing with loci of supernatural power or rather of 'place-centred sacredness' (Eade and Sallnow 1991b: 8). In this context, Kumrovec can be viewed as a place of pilgrimage, but primarily for participants who come there in order to make close contact with Josip Broz. However, the other participants, who pay respect to Tito's *life and work* with actions predetermined by protocol, do not *a priori* show characteristics of religiosity in their attitude towards the statue and their motivation.

Nevertheless, the encounter with the statue represents the culmination of the visit to Kumrovec for them too, and the strictness of the protocol suggests that its performance leaves no room for error, thus pointing to some common characteristics of a ritual act (cf. Belaj 1998: 30). In this regard, Eade and Sallnow state the following: 'A pilgrimage shrine is also – sometimes predominantly – an arena for the interplay of a variety of imported perceptions and understandings, in some cases finely differentiated from one another, in others radically polarized' (Eade and Sallnow 1991b: 10). Sacred places are

given the characteristic of a universality which is not constituted by discourse unification, but rather by the potential of the cult to support and maintain plurality (Eade and Sallnow 1991b: 15-16).

Even more intriguing is the translation of a form of behavior from one domain into another, or rather the presence of popular piety in the context of the celebration of a secular – indeed, communist – holiday such as the Day of Youth. It is important to note that twenty years ago allegiance to Josip Broz was not publicly displayed in forms of popular religiosity. Furthermore, the Day of Youth, which was introduced as a political holiday, ceased to be a state holiday about fifteen years ago when political changes occurred. Among those still firmly upholding communist values, this historical distance resulted in the disintegration of the anti-religious barrier and was thus able to produce a previously unimaginable commingling of world views, without anyone being held responsible. In addition, the event itself, as a temporary break with everyday life, leads to emotional and mental excitement that in turn encourages analogous changes in physical behavior. The break with everyday life and the common environment 'lays people open to possibilities of behavior which they embody but ordinarily are not inclined to express' (Jackson 1983: 334–335). I do not wish to judge the extent to which popular religiosity was present in the daily lives of those participating in the festivities. What I have in mind is the celebration of the Day of Youth and the living cult of Josip Broz, which today are not only far removed from everyday experience, but are often relegated to the margins and sometimes even perceived as 'ridiculous.'

Kumrovec continues to be a place of pilgrimage, at least on this one day of the year. Of course, it is not so in and of itself. It is made 'sacred' by the participants in the Day of Youth festivities. McKewitt notes: 'The sacred is not a given or something fixed, but must be constantly created and recreated. A conscious effort is required on the part of the pilgrim to use the appropriate symbols, myths, and rituals in order to vivify the experience of pilgrimage and to make real the sacredness of place' (McKewitt 1991: 79). Nowadays, the initial idea that placed Kumrovec on the political map of the time is dead, and therefore meaningless. Participants in the celebration of the Day of Youth, as far as activities involving the statue are concerned, have replaced it with an-

other, completely different idea. They come to pay their respects to the person embodied in the statue, which is why they touch it, greet it, talk to it, and light candles at its feet. There is no doubt that the marginalization of communist ideology, present in contemporary society, as well as the freedom of thinking (and speaking) about Tito as the bearer of this ideology have strengthened individuality and the variety of behavior at the celebration in Kumrovec, thereby creating the basis for the development of a new form of devotion. Surely it does not come from the initial ideological framework in which Kumrovec was created, nor does it have anything to do with the official creed of the church. It is a newly created cultus which, due to its expressions, represents a form of popular religiosity.

In order to complete the picture of the visitors to Kumrovec, I wish to present at the end of this article a particular group of visitors to the Kumrovec statue. I am referring here to those who do not visit Kumrovec on the Day of Youth and who cannot be considered tourists, but who from time to time remember the statue or pay a visit. They address it with insults and threats, behave aggressively towards it, and leave explosive devices instead of candles and flowers. We could therefore conclude that for them, too, this statue represents a person, the only difference being the way in which the statue is experienced and the kind of needs they seek to satisfy in encountering it.

Finally, I would like to justify the research I conducted in Kumrovec in relation to an observation by Mary I. O'Connor. Dealing with the subject of pilgrimages, she has noted that anthropologists tend to research only certain aspects of a pilgrimage (religious, social, political, and economic), rather than viewing it as a whole (O'Connor 1999: 369). In spite of her criticism, I have focused in this study almost exclusively on a single aspect of a pilgrimage, the religious one, in order to draw attention to it in the context of a single event – not just non-religious but also anti-religious. Apart from that, the research was conducted in one sitting, thus leaving many particulars unrecorded, especially those which would point in detail to other aspects of a pilgrimage. However, familiarity with one aspect opens up opportunities to research others during a subsequent visit, and it would take all of them to make the picture complete.

## Notes

1 From material held in the Croatian State Archives, quoted in Kristić 2006: 111: Program ure enja Starog sela Kumrovec, Institute of Ethnology at the Yugoslavian Academy of Sciences and Arts, May 1973. Croatian State Archives, box 4: 9-10

2 From material held in the Croatian State Archives, quoted in Kristić 2006: 103-104: Selo Kumrovec povijesni spomenik, Croatian State Archives, box 4:1

3 '*Bila je to prva u nizu inicijacija koje su kao ishod trebale da imaju potpuno akulturalizovanog člana socijalističke zajednice,*' see Erdei 2006: 209.

4 Every May 25 between 1945 and 1987, mass youth relay races were organized throughout Yugoslavia. The runners would carry batons containing a congratulatory birthday message for Tito. The first Youth Relay Race set off from Kumrovec in 1945. Each subsequent year, it would start in a different Yugoslav republic, with the batons carried along stipulated routes throughout the country. Every day the media would inform the Yugoslav public about the relay's progress and its top participants.

5 'Comrade Tito, we swear to you that we shall not deviate from your path' (*Druže Tito mi ti se kunemo da sa toga puta ne skrećemo*) is a verse which generations of Yugoslavian citizens used to sing at every major event. The song is an important part of the collective memory concerning the soccer tournament between Hajduk and Crvena zvezda at the stadium in Split. The match was stopped at the moment of the official announcement of Tito's death. Many players fell to their knees in tears, and the whole stadium spontaneously started singing this song.

6 The number 88 refers to Tito's age at the time of his death.

7 It is worth mentioning that this banknote bore an obvious printing error when it entered circulation: 1930 instead of 1980 (the year that Tito died). Four percent of the total of 14 million banknotes contained this error. The banknote was not withdrawn from circulation although international laws on banknote production oblige a state to withdraw such notes if more than 1% are faulty (<http://hrvatskanumizmatika.blog.hr/arhiva-2006-02.html>, last accessed on March 1, 2007).

8 Cf. Ko je prekrstio Mostar? at <http://drzava.blogger.ba/arhiva/2006/01/31>.

9 From: tataratira; written: 25/08/2005 11:45; <http://www.sarajevo-x.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=17786&sid=a576930a58da0cc92670b1a5e9536a04>; last accessed on February 3, 2007).

10 The page is maintained by two young Slovenians, Matija Marolt (Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Computer and Information Science in Ljubljana) and Martin Srebotnjak (a director from Ljubljana).

11 From: TMN; date: Mon, May 24, 2004 16:36:11 -0400; subject: Happy Birthday 'Dear Mr. Broz, I wish you a happy birthday. Hope you will have a good party as you used to have. Regards, TMN' (<http://www.titoville.com/tribune2004.html>, last accessed on February 12, 2007).

12 From: 'Diana Petronio'; date: Sat, May 15, 2004 16:36:58 +0200; subject: danes, ko postajam pionir... 'dear Tito! I've forgotten the pioneer oath (shameful, I know), but I'd like to refresh my memory. I look forward to receiving your reply and thank you in advance for your help. [What could this abbreviation refer to?] death to fascism! Diana PS. I'm happy you've returned among us! (*dragi Tito! zal sem pozabila pionirsko prisego (sramotno, vem) sedaj pa bi rada osvezila znanje. vnaprej se ti zahvaljujem za kakršnokoli pomoc. smrt fasizmu! Diana p.s. me veseli, da si se vrnil med nas!*; *ibid*).

13 From: Bogdan Milanovic; date: Sat, Feb 12, 2005 17:47:05 +0100; subject: none 'Dear comrade Tito, I'm turning 15 this year. [...] I won't call you by name, don't think that I'm uneducated ☺. I only want it to seem as if comrade Tito was closer to me [...] Well, that would be all from me... I'll keep in touch. Bogdan' (*ibid*).

14 From: 'Danko Drasko'; date: Fri, Aug 6, 2004 22:04:11 -0400; subject: Hvala 'Comrade Tito,

thank you for everything, when I need peace and nice memories I just come to your site and pay you a visit so that my mind's at peace [...] PS. If Religion-ideology is the opium of the masses, you have certainly fattened us with cocaine' (Ibid).

15 From: Tatjana Novakovic Ostojic; date: Thu, Jan 15, 2004 14:29:07 -0800; subject: anatema 'You're never going to drop dead, are you?' (Ibid).

16 Quoted from transcripts of my unpublished research Belief in patron saints, Krasno, 2005.

17 Quoted from transcripts of my unpublished research Belief in patron saints, Istra, 2002.

18 By destroying statues of former rulers and dictators, supporters of the new order not only avenge certain injuries and washing away the sins, but also unequivocally mark the boundary between the past and the present. 'To pass judgement on the practices of the old regime is the constitutive act of the new order' (Connerton 1989: 7).

19 The society, a member of the Association of Josip Broz Tito Societies, was founded in 1996.

20 The term personality cult was popularized by Nikita Khrushchev in a 1955 address. Implicitly referring to Stalin, he used the term to describe excessive adoration and uncritical praise of any individual as well as blind submission to his will (Klaić 1990: 765). According to Christian beliefs, personality cults in contemporary totalitarian societies constitute a form of modern idolatry (Rebi 2002: 493).

21 I collected this data, as well as the data later in the text, during the 2004 celebration.

22 *Samoborske novine*, May 15, 1980, no. 10; ed. XXX, *Samobor Samoborske novine* 1980, no. 10: 2–3; *Vikend*, a family magazine, May 9, 1980, no. 624; *Zagreb. Vikend* 1980, no. 624: 5–8.

23 *Samoborske novine* 1980, no. 10: 8 and 14.

24 Stari was Tito's nickname; it means 'old man,' with age symbolizing authority.

25 Once again, this construction seems to link Tito with Lenin. The same sentence, but with Lenin's name, appears in *Komsomolskaya* (1924), written by Vladimir Vladimirovich Majkovsky.

