

Andrew Hodges (Great Britain)

V ETNOFILM FESTIVAL (Rovinj, Republic of Croatia, 24-27.4.2013)

Over the past four days, around 1000 people came together for the fifth Etno-film Festival in Rovinj, Croatia, to watch, discuss and debate a selection of films ranging from the professional ethnographic to television productions dealing with anthropological themes. The festival opened with the charming *Comrade Ferlin*, a film with an overwhelmingly biographical and narrative focus, tracing the activities and engagements of a former “partizan”, as he retraced his footsteps revisiting the factory where he used to work and contemporary engagements keeping the tradition alive, including organising a visit to Kumrovec, the birthplace of Tito. Whilst the film was not produced by filmmakers with anthropological training, it had an ethnographic feel to it throughout, in focusing on conveying the life world of *Comrade Ferlin* from his perspective.

As a non-visual anthropologist, I was unable to critically analyse the techniques used to put the films together, but was clearly able to get a sense of the variety of anthropological themes and approaches that many the films dealt with, straddling classical questions in the discipline. One particular tension present was that between films which focused on ‘displaying culture’ – often with a narrative or argument made. This was the case with *The Gorgeous of the Evening*, a film that discussed and displayed how folk carnival in Ruščica, Slavonia, a carnival in which traditional gender roles are inverted through costume, had adapted to modern times. On other occasions, the narrative or argument made was less obvious, which posed questions for what popular audiences unfamiliar with anthropology might draw from it – indeed many locals in Rovinj enthusiastically attended the festival. Other films made ideological arguments more explicitly, such as the TV production *New Zealand Stories*, which tracked the activities of a group of Croatian settlers in New Zealand, discussing their development of a “spiritual bond” with the Maori “people”. Whilst this film was interesting in tracking the activities of settlers, it did not discuss the opinions or perspectives of immigrants who resisted identification as Croatian upon arrival, or who did not see such issues of identity as important. For me, this highlighted the issue of whether the films were to be viewed as ethnographic texts, with critical analysis and interpretation to be conducted by the audience – a feat that requires a certain amount of education in social anthropological themes, or whether the films might be viewed as combinations of texts and critical analysis, through which the audience could educate themselves. In the case of television productions and films designed for a non-expert audience, the latter seems more appropriate.

A substantial number of the films shown participated in a film competition, for which there were several authors present. There were four categories of film: films by professional ethnologists/anthropologists; films by professional ethnologists/anthropologists for TV production; films by students of ethnology/anthropology and films made by authors who are not professional ethnologists/anthropologists. The first and last cat-

egories were each awarded joint prizes to two authors. The winners of the first category were Andrei Mihai Leaha, for his movie *Babaluda Luda Looking at Themselves* - awarded for the development of traditional culture using visual methods - and Peter Biella for his movie *Chairman and the Lions*, which was given the award for the punctuality of anthropological observation and use of expert knowledge. The winners of the last category were Tobias Lindner with *Orania*, for a scary depiction of colonialism heritage and a subtle framing of false peace, and Ram Devineni and Cano Rojas, whose film *The Human Tower* followed a particular practice – human tower competitions at carnivals – in a variety of locations the world over. Finally, the second and third category winners were Ivo Kuzmanić for the film *Harvest Ethnofictional* for original cooperation with the community and for the depiction of work as a cohesive element of the society, and finally the student prize went to Ben Cheetham's film *Moving Forward* for taking a compassionate approach in portraying inequality between people.

Besides the films, several other events also took place at the festival. An exhibition called *Photography: Between Ethnology and Exoticisation*, raised the importance of appreciating combinations of picture and text as a whole. It was interesting to compare comments in the guest book from visitors who had clearly taken a cursory glance at the pictures, seeing in them relationships of colonial exploitation and the sexualisation of “natives”, compared to those who had read the accompanying text and thought about the problems of representation that the exhibition had been designed to stimulate in the visitor. Besides the exhibition, a particular highlight was the master class I attended a class organised by Peter Biella, Director of the Program of Visual Anthropology at San Francisco State University. Biella, who had conducted fieldwork amongst the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania spanning over a period of over twenty years, organised two workshops: a series on hypermedia and a later workshop which dealt with Trigger films as a teaching tool. Trigger films start from the premise that changing people's ways of thinking and behaving concerning issues such as sexual practices and gender relations is not always necessarily best achieved through conveying a message in an authoritarian manner, as is often the case in public information videos. Instead, they are designed to stimulate a discussion, which, in the right context, will stimulate the audience to rethink and question their opinions or approach towards certain way of acting. During the master class, we learnt more about the technique, the contexts in which it worked most and least successfully, and learnt about how it is used in social activism.

The sun shined for the full three days of the festival and, after the awards ceremony on the final evening, the festival ended on a high note with live music and drinks.