

First publication

1 Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* London: Verso 1991.

2 According to Mays, Michael: *A nation once again? The dislocations and displacements of Irish national memory. Nineteenth-century contexts 2* (June 2005), p. 122.

3 This statement could be proved by many examples. Let's mention the initiative of the *Srpska pravoslavna crkvena opština u Beču* (Serbian Orthodox Church Community in Vienna), from May 1908, when the main topic of one of the regular meetings was »The festivity of the birthday of His Excellence the Emperor and King Franz Joseph I«. Nobleman Todor plemeniti Stefanović Vilovski, the secretary, received the task to organize the festivity, and it was decided to have a solemn liturgy in the emperor's honor, then a banquet, as well as to establish a relief fund for poor members of the *Srpska pravoslavna crkvena opština u Beču*, under the emperor's name. Cf.: Izvod iz zapisnika sednice glavnog odbora Srpske pravoslavne crkvene opštine, držane u Beču 16-29. maja 1908, Arhiv Srpske crkvene pravoslavne opštine Sveti Sava u Beču [Protocol of the Main Board of the Serbian Orthodox Church Community in Vienna, May 16-29, 1908].

4 Milisavac, Živan (Ed.): *Ujedinjena omladina srpska*. Novi Sad, Beograd: Matica srpska, Istorijski institut 1968, p. 13.

5 International, that is, Slavic (in all countries, members of these societies were exclusively Slavs) movement *Sokol* (Falcon), were founded in Bohemia, in Prague, in 1862 by Miroslav Tyrš. Later on, the societies were established also in Moravia (1862), then in Ljubljana (1863), the U.S. (1866), Russia (1870), Zagreb (1874), Germany (1890), Belgrade (1891). Beside gymnastics, the *Sokol* was patriotic organization of Slavic people in Austro-Hungary. It is worth saying that this movement, actually, started in Serbia even before the official establishment: Steva Todorović founded the *Prvo srpsko društvo za gimnastiku i borenje* (The First Serbian Society for Gymnastics and Fighting, 1857), and later, when *Beogradsko građansko društvo za gimnastiku i borenje* (The Belgrade

Accepting Benedict Anderson's suggestion that memory is the central point in the studies of nationalism,¹ it might be said that Serbian national memory is an »archive of loss«, since the sense of loss and the need for recovery have been signified by »the long and tragic legacy of emigrants«.² It is in fact the intellectuals emigrants who have made the biggest contribution to Serbian national culture, established the national language, that is, constituted a national identity, in spite of the often expressed lack of support in their own country. Establishing a national culture in the diaspora was characteristic not only for the Serbian community, but also for other Slavic peoples living in the Habsburg Monarchy, thanks to Dositej Obradović and Vuk Karadžić, Jozef Šafárik, Ljudevit Gaj, Valentin Vodnik, France Prešern, Jan Kolár, Jernej Kopitar.

On the map of 19th century Europe, there dominated two empires of rather different political and economical orders and of quite different cultural profiles, but similar multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural concepts – the Austrian (later, Austro-Hungarian) Empire and the Ottoman Empire. In the very centre of the map, divided between two empires, there was a territory settled by Serbian citizens, the border line was passing throughout. Moreover, the borderline was changeable, depending on the results of the battles between Austrian, Russian and Ottoman armies. From the end of the 17th century, very extensive migrations of Serbs began, caused by the Ottoman conquest of the southern Serbian territories. Retreating from the Ottoman army, Serbian citizens settled in the territories of the Habsburg Monarchy north of the rivers Sava and Danube.

Since the Serbian people were divided between the two very different empires, it was necessary not only to have additional strategies of national networking to surmount the state borders, but there were also different standpoints in Serbian attitudes to the national identity itself. Namely, Serbian citizens of the Habsburg Monarchy – especially noblemen and officers in the royal army, but also representatives of the intelligentsia – regarded the emperor as their ruler and respected him, not considering loyalty to him as an obstacle to encouraging the development of Serbian culture.³ Serbs from Serbia expressed their patriotism as a struggle excluding such compromises. Both kinds of patriotism and attitudes toward the national issue had been reflected in musical life, the profile of determined music institutions, and in the repertory of (Serbian) choral societies, which acted as political units in the 19th century.

It seems that those who were most farsighted and successful in surmounting the division of the Serbian people and in achieving their union were the members of the liberal Serbian youth. Together with Vladimir Jovanović, the leader of the Liberal party, they established »one of the biggest organizations in recent Serbian and Yugoslav history«,⁴ the *Ujedinjena omladina srpska* (United Serbian Youth), exactly in Vojvodina, in Novi Sad. Moreover, their annual assemblies were held in the multi-ethnic Vojvodina cities (Novi Sad, Kikinda, Vršac), so that the Constitution of the *Ujedinjena omladina srpska* was published in both Serbian and Hungarian languages. This organization included sixteen institutions most appropriate for a very wide process of networking – literary and choral societies, later in collaboration with the *sokolska* (gymnastic) societies.⁵ The entire activities of the United Serbian Youth were aimed at the education of the Serbian people in order to make the struggle for national unity widely accepted and to preserve it in the multi-ethnic communities in Vojvodina or, more widely speaking, in the Habsburg Monarchy.

Therefore, it is understandable that the choral societies were firstly founded in the territory of Vojvodina. They formed a very wide institutional network by increasing their number and occupying a gradually wider and wider territory: although the existing list of all places where choral societies were working is certainly not concluded yet, it very much confirms a wide spread of this cultural, socio-political, and artistic network.⁶

Certain political circumstances, such as the lack of national unification, reflected in cultural and musical life, resulted in a focus on a similarity to the political-cultural strategy of the German students several decades earlier:

from surroundings, 1011 from other countries in the Monarchy, 122 from foreign countries, 666 foreign women from the surroundings, 681 from other countries in the monarchy, 43 from foreign countries. Among them, there were 9,678 Orthodox citizens, 42 Armenian Orthodox, 5,528 Catholic, 11 Greek Catholic, 1,212 Lutheran, 220 Reformist, 4 Unitarian, 193 Jewish. Cf.: *Pančevac* 38 (May 3, 1870).

15 Kinsky, Nadežda: Language and education in the multi-ethnic context. Group conflict and nation building. <http://www.kakanien.ac.at/beitr/theorie/NKinsky1.pdf> v. 30.3.2005.

16 *Pančevac* 2 (January 4, 1870).

17 Tutorov, Milan: Banatska rapsodija: Istorija Zrenjanina i Banata [A Banat Rapsody: History of Zrenjanin and Banat]. Novi Sad: Aurora 2001, p. 406/407.

18 *Pančevac* 66 (August 15, 1871).

19 Without that, a choral society wouldn't be allowed to work officially. In spite of that, many choral societies were active without official permission, although illegal gathering and performing *besedas* could cause certain police restrictions. The practice of working without license can be proved, for instance, by the fact that *Srpska crkvena pevačka zadruga iz Zemuna* (Serbian Church Choral Society in Zemun), established about 1855, and its activity is officially confirmed in September 15, 1866. Cf.: *Pristupnica Srpske crkvene pevačke zadruge iz Zemuna Savezu srpskih pevačkih društava* [Application Form of the Serbian Church Choral Society in Zemun to the Association of Serbian Choral Societies]. 11. April 1911, Fond 42, Istorijski arhiv Sombora, 42.33.

guaranteed by the state law, on the contrary even, they see that their ethnicity is not recognized and is under more and more pressure. [...] When Serbs want to establish only a single own theatre, where their nationality could always find shelter, the Hungarian government puts different obstacles in their way in order to prevent Serbs from having even the almost single institution where their language and nationality could develop. When in a town, where Serbs make up the absolute majority comparing with the citizens of other nationalities, and where there is the centre of our literary and educational work, the smallest attempt and work at education is immediately followed by suspicion that there are some hidden political aims against the state, and commissioners are sent [...]»¹⁶

The same bordering of national spaces was obvious regarding education. Namely, there were different kinds of schools in Pančevo (grammar schools, citizens' schools for boys and girls, *Gymnasium*, school for apprentices, female labour school, evening school of the merchant youth). Similar to that, in the second half of the 19th century eight grammar schools were established in Veliki Bečkerek – three Serbian ones, two German ones, and one Slovakian, Hungarian, and Jewish school respectively;¹⁷ besides, some schools were founded in churches. It is also worth mentioning there were three Serbian reading societies: *Ratarska čitaonica* (Farmers' reading-room, 1892), *Srpska čitaonica* (Serbian reading-room, 1895), *Zanatlijska čitaonica* (Craftsmen's reading-room, 1919), as well as a German reading-room, *Deutscher Leseverein* (1903).

A protest similar to the one mentioned above, this time against the process of Germanization, was expressed in Pančevo where German teachers intended to organize the *Grenzlehrertag* in the *Realna škola*, including Serbian representatives also. However, one of the selected representatives, Konstantin Pejčić, an agent of the Serbian Choral Society from Pančevo, expressed Serbian discontent caused by the threat of introducing the German instead of the Serbian language the official school language, »that disagrees not only with our honour, but also with development of our language. Here, at the German school, there are German teachers, who have been teaching the Serbian youth for years, live in Pančevo and don't speak the Serbian language at all.«¹⁸

The national languages were cultivated in the media too, meaning the local periodicals; it was a usual practice of several national journals, representing each individual ethnic group. The middle of the century witnessed the appearance of the first journals in Veliki Bečkerek, starting with the German *Groß-Beckereker Wochenblatt* (1851), *Hungarian Torontál* (1872), and Serbian *Glas* (Voice, 1887). German media were more open to other national groups, so that *Wochenblatt* provided the most detailed information about Serbian concerts or theatre plays, for instance. These articles seem to be the most valuable source of information on choral societies, theatre companies and opera troupes. In Pančevo there were the *Pancsovaer Wochenblatt* (1868), *Pančevac* (1869), *Neues Pancsovaer Wochenblatt* (1870) and the *Banater Post* (1872).

Similarly to other spheres, cultural and musical societies saw the foundation of institutions that had a national, religious and class orientation. The most important ones were the choral societies. Choral societies were political, social, educational, cultural institutions, providing a place of gathering for Serbian citizens. They were often established in orthodox churches, for an administrative procedure – assuming defined published and confirmed rules of the work, including the aims and planned activities of a society – was necessary for the beginning of public official work of a choral society.¹⁹ Besides, choral societies had their own recognizable signs such as a flag, stamp and an anthem.

Since they had a very powerful political and social role in the process of nation-building, which was more significant than the cultural and artistic one, it is not surprising that there were as many as fourteen active choral societies in Veliki Bečkerek during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of 20th century, although many of them occasionally stopped working or were active in a shorter period of time. It is illustrative that their names, apart from indicating the performing structure or social class, contained an indication of belonging to a certain nation, although only Serbian ones did so in an explicit way. The Serbian community had the longest tradition of choral singing, with the *Srpsko pevačko društvo* (Serbian Choral Society) being active from the 1840s until World War I. Among Pančevo choral societies, undoubtedly the most significant and active one was *Pančevačko srpsko crkveno*

20 If they worked with Serbian choral societies in Serbia itself, it is even more obvious, since it was necessary to accept officially Orthodox religion and Serbian citizenship in order to apply for a job position. Nevertheless, they were never assimilated, and in nineteenth-century Serbian periodicals as well as in later music literature, it was always stressed there were Czech composers who worked in Serbia.

pevačko društvo, and there were two more Serbian choral societies (*Venac/Wreath* and *Zanatlijsko pevačko društvo/Craftsmen' choral society*), as well as three German choral societies: *Deutscher Männergesangverein* (1863), *Deutscher Gewerbegesangverein* (1886), *Evangelischer Kirchengesangverein* (1883). The conductors of the Serbian societies were Czech, German and Serbian musicians, who wrote compositions to the verses of Serbian poetry. However, when it came to membership, equal tolerance did not exist. Obviously, German and Hungarian choral societies collaborated much more, compared with Serbian ones, which is understandable regarding their common religions. Serbian amateur musicians participated only in the work of Serbian societies. One article of the *Srpsko zanatsko pevačko društvo* (Serbian Craftsmen Choral Society) regulation book stated that craftsmen could join the society »regardless of their religion or nationality«, but the Serbian journal *Glas* published a sharp critique saying that »it would then no longer be a Serbian choral society«, and expressed doubt whether »decent craftsmen« would be joining such a society at all.

The above-mentioned national-political mission of the choral societies was also embodied in their repertoire. The programs of choral societies were created in accordance with the general orientation and defined or implicit aims of society. German choral societies sang in German language only, mainly works by German/Austrian composers, that is, a so-called international repertoire. Hungarian and Serbian societies (in the multi-ethnic towns, not in Serbia itself) also had partly international programs and, understandably, fostered their national repertoire/s, presented both by arrangements of folk melodies and choral music of the national composers. Actually, »national« composers in this sense assumed – especially in the multi-ethnic towns – musicians who composed part-songs according to the poems in a given national language. Bearing in mind the fact that Czech musicians worked all over the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy, including the Vojvodina cities too, as conductors of the choral societies, they also worked with certain Serbian choral societies, spoke the Serbian language and were included among Serbian national composers.²⁰ However, the choral society of the Serbian merchant youth from Veliki Bečkerek was, for example, oriented solely towards a national and partly a South Slavic repertoire. Similarly, the Hungarian choral society *Harmony* from the same city cherished a repertoire that was almost limited to Hungarian folklore tunes and their arrangements, as well as to the works of Karoly Huber.

On special, rare opportunities due first of all to certain political circumstances, a closer collaboration between the societies of the different nationalities was possible. For instance, after Janoš Beran became the new conductor of the German-Hungarian choral society, *Groß-Becskekerer Citizens Choral Society* in 1900, for the first time in the entire concert practice of Veliki Bečkerek as it is known so far, one German-Hungarian choral society performed a song by a Serbian composer – it was *Jezerce* (A little lake) by Dimitrije Topalović, the popular conductor of the famous Serbian Church Choral Society in Pančevo.

Therefore, the concept of the repertoire reflects different attitudes to nationalism: while Serbian societies manifested their strategy in national identity building as a way of insitently keeping their own tradition, excluding foreign influences and cultural colonization, the Hungarian ones expressed expansive nationalism, tending to occupy other national spaces. The activities of German choral societies were not dedicated toward national promotion in such an emphasized way as the Serbian or Hungarian ones, regarding it as a universal European culture. Choral societies, therefore, had obviously a very significant role in national identity building especially through their political (e.g., repertoire concept), social (enabling the gathering of numerous members of a given nationality), cultural and artistic (singing poems in national language) activities.

Mapping the above-mentioned strategies in national identity building thus confirms Benedict Anderson's opinion that the nation is generated through forms of thinking itself, of social self-representation. In 19th century Serbian self-representation, the choral societies had undoubtedly a very significant role, especially in the multi-ethnic environment of the Vojvodina. Therefore the extensive migrations to the Habsburg Monarchy territories affirmed themselves as one of the myths of the origin of Serbian people, one of the key myths in the process of establishing the Serbian state and nation.

