

SERBIAN CHORAL SOCIETIES IN THE MULTI-ETHNIC CONTEXT OF 19TH—CENTURY VOJVODINA

Tatjana Marković (Belgrade)

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 fond 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", they established 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. 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:



SERBIAN CHORAL SOCITIES IN THE MULTI-ETHNIC CONTEXT OF 19TH-CENTURY VOJVODINA by Tatjana Marković (Belgrade)

Citizens' Society for Gymnastics and Fighting) was established, 1882, he was elected for the vice-president. društva. Cf.: Kusovac, Nikola/Vrbaški, Milena/Grujić, Vera/Kraut, Vanja: Stevan Todorović 1823-1925. Transl. by Tamara Rodwell-Jovanović, Beograd, Novi Sad: Narodni muzej/National Museum, Galerija Matice srpske/Gallery of the Matica srpska 2002, pp 259/260 (bilingual edition).

6 Thus the following choral societies were established in these decades: 1820-1830: Novi Sad; 1830-1840: Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Budimpešta, Vršac, Kotor; 1840-1850: Arad, Temišvar, Jegra, Veliki Bečkerek, Segedin, Zemun, Osijek; 1850-1860: Beograd, Negotin, Beč; 1860-1870: Novi Sad, Čakovo, Veliki Bečkerek, Ruma, Ada, Subotica, Sremska Mitrovica, Šabac, Vukovar, banatsko Novo Selo, Smederevska Palanka, Zaječar, Zemun, Bela Crkva, Kovin, Požarevac, Čurug, Požega; 1870-1880: Trstenik, Kruševac, Bavanište, Sombor, Negotin, Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Senmarton, Dubrovnik, kikinda, Arad, Zagreb, Niš, Stari Bečej, Zaječar; 1880-1890: Niš, Dalj, Veliko Gradište, Vranje, Užice, Aranđelovac, Kragujevac, Veliki Senmikluš, Sremski Karlovci, Smederevo, Vršac, Melenci, Šid, Foča, Pavliš, Jagodina, Leskovac, Vinkovci, Kraljevo, Tuzla, Loznica, Aleksinac, Tomaševac, Prijedor, Pirot, Deliblato, Dolovo, Sarajevo. Cf.: Pejović, Roksanda: Srpsko muzičko izvođaštvo roman-tičarskog doba Beograd:Univerzitet umetnosti 1991, p. 21/22.

7 Brinkman, James M.: The German male chorus of the early nineteenth century. In: Journal of research in music education 1 (Spring 1970), p. 17. Obviously, the author, however, is not right when he claims that "the growth and development of German male singing in the early nineteenth century represents a unique historical phenomenon", bearing in mind the tradition of Serbian (male) choral singing. Ibid., p. 16.

8 Ibid., p. 16. This can be confirmed by recent research of German male choral societies, made by Balázs Mikusi (Budapest/Ithaca, NY). Cf.: Mikusi, Balázs: >Stvorena tradicijac za >Imaginarno društvoc: Muški horovi u Nemačkoj u devetnaestom veku [An 'Invented tradition' for an 'Imagined community': Male choral singing in nineteenthcentury Germany], transl. by Tatjana Marković. In: Novi zvuk 28 (2006) [forthcoming].

9 The program of the festivity: »Schedule for the festivity of the consecration of the Vršačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo's flag, on In the War of Liberation of 1813, the German nation rose to preserve its pride and ancient traditions, to squelch the advance of Napoleon, and to avenge its earlier defeats at Jena and Auerstädt in 1806. From 1806 to 1813 the spirit of Germany had begun to rebuild. Johann Fichte found the answer to German problems in national education, using Pestalozzi's ideas of a culture of the intellect, practicality, and patriotism. The famous *Turnvater* Jahn organized students at German universities into a patriotic national force through his work in gymnastics. The fiery poet, Ernst Arndt, placed the greatest value of a nation in its common language and common descent. [...] From 1806 on, the social and national growth of the German nation was simultaneous with the growth of the male chorus.7

In other words, as might also be said about the Serbian male choral societies, "the German male chorus became both the symbol of a united Germany through the bond of German song, and an agent of social and political change«.8 Not only the same aim, but also the awareness of this similarity, were expressed by members and collaborators of the United Serbian Youth. Thus, on June 9-10, 1869, the festivity of the consecration of the Vršačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo's (Serbian church choral society from Vršac) flag took place, including the meeting of several Serbian choral societies from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Timisoara, and Vršac.9 Next to the festive concert part of the manifestation, there was also an official meeting attended by the chosen president of the assembly, politician Vladimir Jovanović, the vice president, conductor of the Vršac society, Vojtěch Hlaváč, the author Aleksandar Sandić, and others. Comparing Serbian choral societies with the ones from Germany, one member of the assembly, Milan Jovanović from Belgrade, said that choral societies

came closer and closer to their task, since they have accepted the real Serbian ideas. Thus it was in Germany: shorter songs were united into one long one that became a song for freedom. We need the song for freedom too and, in order to achieve that, it is necessary to call the people to support already existing choral societies as well as to establish new ones.¹⁰

Consequently, being the main way of citizens' gathering, choral and reading societies were highly numerous and very significant in the process of national networking, especially in multi-ethnic environments such as the towns in the Habsburg Monarchy, especially in the Banat, in Veliki Bečkerek (Germ. Groß-Betschkerek, Hung. Nagy Becskerek) and Pančevo (Germ. Pantschowa, Hung. Pancsova).

After around 165 years of Ottoman occupation, Veliki Bečkerek became a part of Austria in 1718, which led to the establishment of Tamiš Banat, with certain privileges granted to the Serbian population. After the war between Austria and Russia and the Ottoman Empire began in 1737, the second extensive migration of Serbs north of the rivers Sava and Danube all the way to Buda and Szent Andre took place, and over five thousand inhabitants settled in the Banat. After this war, Austria lost Belgrade and ceded to the Ottoman Empire all of Serbia up to the rivers Danube and Sava, but kept the Tamiš Banat with a new border on the Danube. A new wave of colonization of the Banat was organized, settling by 1788 around three thousand German families and causing many Slovak families to flee the area.

In 1779 the Torontal district was established with a seat in Veliki Bečkerek, uniting Serbian and German municipalities into a joint Serbian—German town administration and senate with a Serbian majority, while its presidents were selected alternately from the two national communities. Since out of about 320,000 inhabitants of the Banat, more than 270,000 were orthodox, the Serbs put forward, at the 1790 Timisoara assembly, requests to Leopold II to grant them the Tamiš Banat as an independent unit, to forbid the interference of the Catholic Church into the affairs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, to guarantee the right for schooling in the mother tongue, to establish scholarships for education and for orthodox youth, as well as to give them one half of the representatives in the main administration of free cities (Novi Sad, Sombor, Timisoara). The Emperor responded favourably to most requests.

Owing to developed trade, primarily on the river Begej, as well as to the existence of town institutions like the brewery, salt plant, pharmacy and others, Veliki Bečkerek was one of the richest towns in the Vojvodina region. After the revolutionary upheavals, the Austrian Crown Region of the Serbian Vojvodina and Tamiš Banat were formed in 1849, with the capital in



SERBIAN CHORAL SOCITIES IN THE MULTI-ETHNIC CONTEXT OF 19TH-CENTURY VOJVODINA by Tatjana Marković (Belgrade)

Pentecost, 9 June 1869 I. The First Day 1. At 8 o'clock in the morning the procession with the flag from the music school, through the market, the royal street, to the cathedral, where the flag will be, after the liturgy, consecrated. Afterwards: a) The president's speech; b) Beating the nails; c) The speech of the godmother during the giving the flag to the president; d) The speech of the flagbearer while receving the flag from the president; e) Ne dajmo se (Let's not give up) sung by all choral societies. 2. At two o'clock in the afternoon there will be a banquet. 3. At 8 o'clock in the evening: >Beseda< II. The Second Day 1. At 7 o'clock in the morning there will be the assembly of the singers, including discussion about the following topics: a) The ways in which the basis for the fellowships for the students of music would be established; and b) about the needs of Serbian music art and the ways to fulfil them. 2. At 8.30 o'clock in the evening: San

10 *Pančevac*, nedeljni list za prosvetne i materijalne interese 11, (June 22, 1869).

na javi (A dream in the reality) by

attend the festivity can, with the

identification paper of our choral society, travel by ship or train in

both directions for half the price of

the ticket. In Vršac. The Committee«.

Everyone who would like to

J. Subotić i *Lek od punica*, a theater play in the honor of the celebrators.

11 »Inner description«, archival document no. 547/1851, according to: Mileker, Srećko: Istorija gradova i gradskog razvića u Banatu [History of Towns and Their Development in Banat]. Pančevo: Istorijski arhiv u Pančevu 2004, p. 63.

12 This term (now meaning 'speech') in the 19th century assumed concerts with mixed programs, including not only music numbers, but also reciting poetry, gymnastics exercises, lectures.

13 One of the most voluminous Festschrifts of Serbian choral societies is dedicated exactly to the work of the Pančevo society. Cf.: Tomandl, Mihovil: Spomenica Pančevačkog srpskog crkvenog pevačkog društva 1838–1938 [Memorial of the Pančevo Society 1838-1938].
Pančevo: Napredak, 1938.

14 Ibid., p. 64. It is interesting to compare these data with ones published twenty years later, when 14,523 resident citizens of different origin lived in Pančevo. As it was stated, there were 6443 men from Pančevo, 6965 women from Pančevo, 867 foreign men Veliki Bečkerek. Apart from the three main national groups – Serbs, Germans and Hungarians – Romanians, Slovaks, and Croats also lived in the town. The national differences, together with the religious ones, were often the dividing criteria. The crown land of the Serbian Vojvodina and Tamiš Banat was abolished in 1860 by a decree of emperor Franz Joseph and was incorporated into the Habsburg Kingdom of Hungary, within which it stayed during the time of the Austro–Hungarian Empire up to 1918.

A census from the end of the 18th century, taken in Veliki Bečkerek, shows a multi-ethnic picture, Serbs, Hungarians, Germans, Slovaks, Jews and others living in the area. Among them were citizens of Orthodox (10,542), Catholic (approx. 5,000), Evangelist (approx. 800) and Jewish (almost 450) religions.

Since 1794 Pančevo was a »military border community, the central place of the German-Banat regiment«.¹¹ It is precisely here, in Pančevo, where one of the oldest choral societies was established, *Pančevačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo* (Serbian church choral society from Pančevo, 1838). Undoubtedly not accidentally, this society was clearly determined in its name by national (Serbian) as well as religious (church, orthodox) aspects. This shows several facts: the association of the members of the same nationality in the multi-ethnic context of Pančevo (and also in other places in Banat) was more significant in its political, social and cultural than in its artistic role; afterwards, the connection with the orthodox church, where the Society sang at the service, was stressed, but the main line of activity took place outside of the church, at the *besede*¹² both in Pančevo and other places where Serbs lived. This Society also developed early on one more activity: the theatre company was founded making guest performances in the Belgrade theatre *Kod Jelena* with plays with very popular songs such as *Ustaj*, *ustaj*, *Srbine* (Arise, arise, Serb) by Nikola Đurković and Josif Šlezinger, called the »Serbian Marseillaise«. Further, the conductor Nikola Đurković himself performed arias from Italian operas and a music school section was established also.¹³

In the context, defined by the above-mentioned geographical and military position of Pančevo, as well as the specific demographic picture, the activity of a Serbian choral society in the town had, understandably, a stressed political character. According to data from 1851, almost 11,000 citizens lived in Pančevo, and they were of different religions (Orthodox - 7,573, Catholic - 3,114, Protestant - 238, Jewish - 12) and nationalities (Slavic - 6,897, German - 3,097, Romanian - 819, Hungarian - 112).¹⁴

Every individual ethnic group defined their own national political and cultural space by the means of language, education and the establishment of certain institutions and media. Every one of those imaginary determined spaces was clearly marked in the first place by the language. Next to administrative Latin (official documents in the magistracies), i.e., the official German language, the cultural life of different national communities in numerous multi-ethnic Vojvodina cities assumed their national languages as a key signifier of national identities.

In multi-ethnic and multi-lingual communities confronted with the task of state-building in a multi-national environment, the way inter-communal differences such as language are interpreted or constructed becomes very important for the process undergone and its consequences for the state and population. The interplay between the role awarded to language and identity [...] attains special importance from a historical and political, anthropological and sociological standpoint. The issue of language and its relationship to nationhood and identity is present in all spheres of life, but is particularly salient in the educational context.¹⁵

This is apparent also in multi-ethnic towns where Serbs lived and was presented in numerous manifestos of Serbian institutions, such as those aimed at the youth or the choral societies. One example is the Serbian youth's letter to the Hungarian youth, protesting against the wide Hungarization. It was published in two Hungarian magazines, as well as in the Pančevo weekly newspaper *Pančevac*:

Brothers Hungarians!

- [...] In one, moreover the larger number of Hungarian periodicals, we often read attacks to our people living in these countries, as well as having been unjustifiably accused of being an enemy of our mutual fatherland. Recently, those attacks have appeared more and more often. [...]
- ... the people see that in these countries their survival and ethnic development is not

DOOD 11 | 2006



SERBIAN CHORAL SOCITIES IN THE MULTI-ETHNIC CONTEXT OF 19TH-CENTURY VOJVODINA by Tatjana Marković (Belgrade)

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 Socities]. 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-Becskereker 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. 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 Gewerbegesanverein (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-Becskereker 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.



Dr. Tatjana Marković is Assistant Professor at the Department of Musicology, Faculty of Music/University of Arts in Belgrade, and currently is a post-doctoral fellow in Vienna. She has collaborated also with universities in Helsinki, Paris, Bonn and New York. She has published on Serbian and European music of the 19th and 20th century, and on 19th-century opera in the context of cultural studies, regarding issues of national cultural identity and memory, nationalism, and ideology.

E-mail: tatjanam@EUnet.yu