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Nationalism and Ethnicization of History in a Serbian Festival

Waldemar Kuligowski

Looking at the political situation in the world at the beginning of the 20th century, the immediate impression is that most of all serious armed conflicts have had also a national or ethnic dimension, in the sense that many of those conflicts have concerned political independence and/or control over territories. On the other hand, ethnicity does not necessarily entail conflict or competition – it may be also expressed in less dramatic ways – namely, through image management, religious cults, civic festivities, and other peaceful forms.

As the British historian Eric J. Hobsbawm stated, the "national question" (as Marxists would call it) should not be considered in separation from its extra-political context. Specifically, the national question emerges today at the intersection of technology, administration, economics, and other social phenomena of critical importance. Furthermore, Hobsbawm argues, national identities are "constructed essentially from above, but … they cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below," that is in terms of the "assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist" (1990: 10). Hobsbawm's views certainly fit within the important, 20th-century tendency to analyze nationalism in a way that questions the precedence of ethnicity. Authors such as Ernest Gellner (1983), Carlton J. H. Hayes (1966), or John Comaroff (1991) convincingly argue that the aspect of ethnicity does not suffice to explain the problem, and they challenge the statements on ancient, original ethnic identities that gave way to national iden-

tities. Instead, these scholars point to the role of certain "modern" phenomena, such as industrialization and the interrelated political interests as well as the idea of sovereignty, in the process of nation building. Similarly, the more recent anthropological studies on ethnicity abandoned the "primordial" paradigm altogether for the sake of assorted versions of constructivism and instrumentalism (Vermeulen and Govers 1997). These methodological remarks are the starting point to examining the relation between a music genre that constitutes part of the Serbian "traditional culture," but which became subsequently appropriated to express nationalistic attitudes of what Hobsbawm terms "ordinary people."

Nationalism and Music

Tim Edensor (2002) argues that the affective force of tradition and the persuasive practices connected with the concept of "nation" is currently supplemented, and to an increasing degree replaced by meanings, actions, and images taken from popular culture. I concur with this perspective as it also accounts for the importance of what is commonly termed "traditional culture." Edensor supported his thesis with the example of the movie "Braveheart," viewing it as a part of the broader process of redefinition of Scottish identity that is currently taking place through sports events and "national performances" occurring in various areas of public sphere. In my earlier research, I also pursued this type of analysis of "enhanced ethnicity," taking as the case in point certain "immigrated" music genres, such as Japanese visual *kei*, Palestinian and Israeli rap, Jamaican reggae, Algerian *rai*, Cuban salsa, Punjabi *bhangra* (Kuligowski 2007), as well as the Serbian turbo-folk (Kuligowski 2008).

Music events, be it a dance party or playing a CD, powerfully evoke and organize social memory and current experience. Music builds specific "places," creates differences, enhances social boundaries, moral hierarchies, and political order. The musical aspects of street parades held in Northern Ireland are a compelling case in point (Chapman 1997). The largest and most important parade takes place on July 12, in Belfast. The parades include speeches, marches, and performances by music bands. Interestingly, Protestant bands favor such instruments as flutes, pipes, and lambskin drums. It is a meaningful choice, however, as drums function as symbols of vitality and British rule. The route leads through the streets inhabited by Catholics, where the loud sound of drums is meant to mark Protestant dominance. In this case, the difference between Irish and British (in fact English) music constitutes an element of political strife – just as bomb attacks and bloody shoot-outs.

According to Susanne Langer, music is even far better equipped than discourse to convey emotional content. Emotions, Langer argues, can be viewed as "possible ingredients of rationality" that are expressed symbolically (1957: 100). In other words, one of the purposes of music is not to stimulate emotions but rather to offer logical representations of "emotions, moods, mental tension, and resolutions." From this point of view, the meaning of musical pieces is purely connotative, and hence there is no "dictionary meaning" of musical tones, instruments, or different musical genres. Finally, Langer concludes, music does not derive from emotions either, but rather it is *about* them (1957: 218). Moreover, the debate about free jazz as the voice of the Black Power movement and about the political sense of reggae always points to music's symbolical meaning that expresses also social emotions. According to Denis-Constant Martin (2005: 33), social functions of music can be best studied in the following locations: (1) places where music is created (e.g. recording studios); (2) places where music is played directly (concert halls, clubs, festivals, raves, streets, subway stations); (3) places where music is consumed (dancing halls, disco clubs, private apartments); (4) virtual network used to share music.

Case Study

The territory of former Yugoslavia, having been a place of dramatic political events, provides an excellent opportunity for analyzing connections between nationality, ethnicity, and music. The role of music in the process of inventing and constructing ethnic and national identity in that part of Europe has been recognized by several authors.[1] It is because, as Martin Stokes (1997: 5) observes, "musical performance, as well as the acts of listening, dancing, arguing, discussing, thinking and writing about music, provide the means by which ethnicities and identities are constructed and mobilized." The purpose of this article is to examine how the current nationalistic reality and the sense of national identification are reflected in, and spread through popular culture.[2] The analysis presented here addresses a certain periodical event that is taking place in the

1 Stokes (1997); Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000); Marković (2008).

2 The Polish original text was published in 2011 in *Antropologija* (Kuligowski 2011).

Republic of Serbia – namely, the Dragačevski Sabor Trubača, an annual brass band festival held in the town of Guča. This Serbian festival provides a valuable and unique opportunity to study multiple relations between ethnicity, nationality, and (traditional) music. The co-presence of elements of tradition that are important for more than a single ethnic/national group and of many persuasive instruments used in popular culture makes the festival yet another field of battle for culture, and an arena of cultural politics. In what follows, I cover the cultural-political history of an instrument (a trumpet), of a music style (brass bands), and of the festival in Guča as such. The article is based in part on secondary literature, which – as far as the festival itself is concerned – proved to be rather scarce. Apart from numerous websites and press articles, I did not find any single anthropological analysis of the *sabor* festival in Guča, although two Serbian books on this festival contain interesting material for analysis (Vujovič 2004; Bogabac 2007). Only the historian Timotijević (2005) and the ethnomusicologist Marković (2008) provided methodologically more rigorous studies of that event. Ethnographic fieldwork contributed further data. It was conducted from August 18–23, 2010, in Guča, during the 50th edition of the festival, by a large group of students (30 participants) from the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. The on-site research was followed by lectures and lessons on Serbian culture, history of the Guča festival, and the meaning of modern music. The basic methodological tool was a questionnaire written in Serbian and used during non-structured interviews. Over 80 interviews were collected. These included conversations with citizens from Czech Republic, Poland, Greece, Switzerland, France, Canada, and the USA. However, this article draws on answers obtained only from Serbian citizens. Observation in situ as well as photographs and video recordings further enhanced the empirical data about that event.

The research material collected allowed us to isolate three identifiable discourses functioning as legitimizing narratives of the festival, of the music genre, and of the existing tradition as such. Following Teun van Dijk (1993), I assume here that the idea of discourse usually applies to spoken public performances which divulgate certain concepts and ideas. In other words, discourse contains a set of utterances that both make statements about the condition of things, and are particular interpretations of this condition. As such, they express the "native point of view," to put it in the language of classical anthropology. As for the festival in Guča, three such discourses have been identified: (1) the official discourse on the festival supported by Serbian authorities that consider it as an important element of cultural, historical, and ethnic policies; (2) the unofficial "minor," or "petty" discourse of the Roma people that defies the Serbian character of the festival; (3) and the perspective of the external researcher who intends to grasp contradictions and cracks in the meanings bestowed upon the festival by the first two discourses.

Festival

The first performance of Dragačevski Sabor Trubača ("Dragačevo assembly of trumpet players") took place in the town of Guča, on Saturday, October 14, 1961, on the feast of Saint Mary the Advocate (Vujovič 2004: 18–25). The town is located in the region of Dragačevo, in the southwestern part of what is today the Republic of Serbia. It is bordered by other historical regions of Serbia, such as Šumadija and Stari Vlah, on one side, and the rivers Moravica and West Morava, on the other. The region's name possibly derives either from the river Dragačica or from the name of the landowner Dragaš, a liege of Tsar Stefan Dušan of Serbia. Just like almost all other Serbian lands, Dragačevo was under Turkish rule from 1459 until 1830. The current population is estimated at 40,000 inhabitants, living in 48 villages and 2 small towns, Guča and Lučani. The region is most famous for its ancient monasteries and Orthodox churches, but it also attracts attention because of its characteristic gravestones. Apart from their commemorative function, the gravestones also illustrate the last 200 years of Serbian history. Guča has been a town since the beginning of 19th century and was once the administrative capital of the Dragačevo district.

The first *sabor* festival was rather modest, as only four local players performed in the yard at the Orthodox Church of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel. Apart from the concert, there were also other events, such as sport competitions, a contest about the most traditional woman's attire and skills in traditional crafts. The "Great *Sabor*" lasted only one day at that time, but certain elements of its original structure survived until today. For example, the skills of competitors are being evaluated by a jury that includes a professor of the Belgrade Music Conservatory, a presenter of the Belgrade radio station, a soloist performing for a Belgrade radio station, and a representative of the local authorities.

In the following years there were already six participating bands, and in 1963 even sixteen. Year by

year the festival's popularity was growing. The local event eventually became the largest, regular festival for brass bands, not only in Serbia or the Balkans but also throughout Europe. It soon became necessary to conduct qualification rounds, as the event now attracted dozens of ensembles. Similarly, the audience was also increasing; the number of viewers reached 800,000 by the year 2010. In the same year, about 2,000 musicians from 14 countries arrived to perform at the festival. *Politika*, a high-circulation Belgrade newspaper, and the oldest in Serbia, even called that edition of the festival "the largest gathering of people in Serbia's history" (Ostašević 2010).

The Serbian Discourse

Within the official narrative, the past and the present of the festival reflect the history and culture of the Serbs. Coincidentally, the creation of the first Serbian brass band that gave rise to the new music genre dates back to the time when Turkish rule was overthrown and the rebirth of the Serbian statehood took place. The band was founded in 1831, in Kragujevac, at the court of Miloš Obrenović I, Prince of Serbia, under the name "Knjaževsko-srbska banda." Its founder was Josif Šlezinger (1794–1870), a professional musician (Randel 1986: 771). Another brass band was established in the year 1876, in the region of Dragačevo, during the war between Serbia and Turkey. Its roots can be traced to a recruiting unit that was frequently marched through the streets of Čačak in the company of a military brass band (Vujovič 2004: 42–47). The local cemetery is also a site of commemoration of numerous soldiers-trumpeters who died between 1876 and World War I. It is worth to mention that a band from the village of Dljin won the first competition for trumpeters in Guča. Trumpets appeared in that village only after World War I, brought by soldiers returning home from the campaign in Greece. The instrument, called *vojka* by the people who live in the Dragačevo region, was a military-style thin and elongated metal trumpet. The veterans quickly started a local orchestra that performed at private and state ceremonies (Vujovič 2004: 54–57).

Interestingly, since its very first edition, the festival has always begun with the piece entitled "Sa Ovčara i Kablara," played by all participating trumpeters, while the entire audience rises to their feet. The title refers to the hills called Ovčar and Kablar located near the town of Čačak, and separated by the valley of the West Morava River. The song has a long tradition and its first version dates back to the 19th century. Although its melody line remains almost without changes, the lyrics were modified several times: first, they spoke about Prince Milan Obrenović's soldiers (1893), then about the soldiers fighting against Germans and Hungarians in World War I, and still later about comrade Tito's guerillas (Vujovič 2004: 90–95).

The commentary that accompanied the documentary film on the festival, produced under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, can help to explain the relation between the brass band trumpeter and Serbia's heroic past: "Regardless from where you've come from to Dragačevski Sabor, you will see monuments and signs. These signs command you to stop and remember. Overgrown with moss, turning black with each passing day, they still tell the story about the Balkan wars, and about World War I against Austria-Hungary. They tell a story about the people of Dragačevo who died during numerous uprisings, fighting for 'The Holy Cross and the Golden Freedom.' The pages of the stone books also tell about trumpeters. They would hold a rifle in one hand and a trumpet in the other."

The music played by brass bands is not only about the national and military history. Its development over time is currently interpreted in the context of evolution of Serbian ethnic culture. Prior to the Guča festival, now an established event, trumpeters would gather on a much smaller scale in other towns and places. It is assumed that first cases of competition between bands from neighboring villages took place after World War I. These usually were spontaneous events, and the bands would provide music background for singers. Although such musical "duels" were held in several places (Vujovič 2004: 113–117), the *sabor* in Guča is the only one which was given an official form.

When Yugoslavia still existed, the festival in Guča was a purely local event that responded to the official policy of promoting the folklore of federated nations. Still, it was treated with distrust by state authorities. The principal conflicting issue was the geographical location of Guča in the area that during World War II was controlled by the Chetniks – the military organization that fought against communist guerillas of Tito. Consequently, when people wore Serbian folk costume during the *sabor*, it was viewed as a demonstration of Serbian chauvinism aimed at challenging Yugoslavia's political system. To diminish the impact of national symbolism, the festival was given a "politically correct" form, such as displaying portraits of Tito and inviting bands from other regions of former Yugoslavia. Similarly, between Tito's death in 1980 and the beginning

of political collapse of Yugoslavia in 1989, the program entitled titled "Comrade Tito, We Vow to You" was presented during the festival in order to glorify the Marshal and support his political program (Timotijević 2005: 164–171).

The situation changed dramatically in the early 1990s. Yugoslavia broke up into a number of states, an open conflict between the Serbs and Kosovar Albanians was escalating, and the festival in Guča, a town on the border of "Old Serbia," now became an element of ethnic conflict. The "national" evolution of the festival was reflected, for instance, in the following statement of Dragoljub D. Jovašević: Guča is a "temple, where a due sacrifice is offered in the struggle for our national heritage. A temple where the liturgy is held by the trumpet, and the national past is the communion" (Timotijević 2005: 166). Similarly, Branko V. Radičević, one of the most famous organizers of the festival, said: "Our *sabor* is the feast of pilgrims flocking to the sanctuary of national tradition" (Zatežić and Illić 2007: 16). Furthermore, the *sabor* in Dragačevo began to be even considered the most prominent expression of the "essence" of Serbian national culture. Obviously, the now Serbian authorities in Belgrade would strongly support that process of national redefinition. On the one hand, large amount of money was provided to finance the subsequent editions of the festival. For example, the list of sponsors who supported the festival in 2010 contains the names of the most important industrial companies of the country, such as Naftna Industrija Srbije, Jelen Pivo, Dunav Osiguranje, Telecom Serbia Belgrade, Western Union Belgrade, as well as prominent representatives of the press, TV, and the banking sector. On the other hand, senior government officials personally appeared at the Guča festival. In 2007, the festival was held under the patronage of the Minister of Infrastructure, Velimir Ilić, who also authorized the disbursement of 100 million dinars. By comparison, Exit,[3] another international festival, with dozens of bands, film projections, and theater pieces, received three times less. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Milorad Dodik and another VIP, Vojislav Koštunica, were present at the 2007 edition of the festival. Dodik expressed the government's support for the event by declaring: "if you love Serbia, you must also love Guča – the most important town of the whole country during the festival" (Mikeska 2007: 28).

The governmental policies met with a positive response of people, which, in turn, brought measurable profits – both economic and political. Thus, during the *sabor*, shop owners sold large amounts of T-shirts with images of Slobodan Milošević, Dragoljub (Draža) Mihailović, leader of Chetnik guerillas during World War II, Radovan Karadžić, president of Bosnian Serbs, and General Ratko Mladić – all bearing the motto "Serbian Hero." Apart from this, flags and emblems of Serbia and various banners with inscriptions calling for an immediate return of Kosovo to the Homeland were also offered for sale. Other popular items were Orthodox symbols, such as crosses, icons, rosaries, and candlesticks. Furthermore, each edition of the festival officially begins with a morning mass held in the local Orthodox church, the very same around which bands were performing in 1961. The host welcomes the festival guests with the traditional greeting: "All good health to you, dear guests! May your stable and homestead be always full, may your sacks of grain be full as well! May luck never leave you! May your sons bring you daughters-in-law and let liquor flow freely! Let us drink, in God's name! May all your kin stay under one roof! May you be healthy and fortunate this year and in the future! Cheers!" The host then makes the sign of the cross and takes a sip from an ornate cup. This is followed by the song "Sa Ovčara i Kablara" while the Serbian flag is being hoisted. Similarly, symbols referring to national history, such as headgear worn during World War II by Chetnicks, were also very popular among the visitors. It symbolizes the continuity of Serbia as a nation, just like Chetnik troops remained loyal to King Petar II Karađorđević and to the government in exile. It also conveys the Serbian opposition against Croatians and their wartime "Independent State of Croatia," founded by Ante Pavelić. Finally, it also contains the element of resistance toward the communist tradition (Chetniks fought against Tito's guerillas), s well as against the historical policies of confederate Yugoslavia, where it was forbidden to officially remember Chetniks.

Alexander Kiossev argues that some music genres and festivals held in Balkan countries developed as a psychological consequence of being stigmatized: "The stigma they bear combines the stigmas of the South and of the East, both Slavdom and Turkish taint." The result – according to Kiossev – is the emergence of a "tricksterlike" music, whose dominant feature is "minstrelization" rather than expressions of historical trauma. In short, it "converts the stigma into a joyful consumption of pleasures forbidden by European taste and norms" (Kiossev 2005: 185–189).

3 The Exit festival was created by students from the university in Novi Sad who in order to express their disappointment with the fact that having been citizens of Serbia they could not go to such festivals abroad. Nonetheless, the initiative enjoyed little support from the government.

Not surprisingly, therefore, statements collected during our fieldwork convey a more relaxed view in comparison with the one officially presented by the Serbian government. The question of what in particular attracts guests to the *sabor* was given similar answers, which can be divided into 4 groups:

(1) "a huge party," "cool people," "special atmosphere," "chance to meet other people," "fun with no stress," "freedom," "leisure time;"
(2) "sex," "free sex," "girls," "pleasure;"
(3) "entertainment," "food," "beer," "*rakija*;"
(4) "music."

Still, the ludic component of the festival did not prevent most of the respondents from expressing their national feelings by connecting the *sabor* in Guča with traditional Serbian culture:

> Guča is Serbia … This is the most important festival promoting Serbia, the symbol of fun and happiness … the festival brings people together and that is why there are visitors from all over the world (24-year-old male, Banja Luka).
>
> I come here to see the folklore and folk customs (52-year-old male).
>
> This festival promotes Serbian culture because the brass bands play our national music … We can be proud of this festival, as it is the most famous festival in the whole Europe (26-year-old male).
>
> By means of music, this festival tells the history of our nation (36-year-old man, Belgrade).
>
> We have it all here: the trumpet is our national instrument and *rakija* is our national drink (24-year-old female, Kraljevo).
>
> The festival promotes Serbian identity, particularly through music and fun, so characteristic of our tradition and stemming from it … The festival increases our prestige throughout Europe (42-year-old male).

In other words, people view the special value of the festival in that it expresses Serbian culture and tradition, particularly through music. I see here an interesting contribution to the notion of nation as an "imagined community" as formulated by Benedict Anderson (1983). His emphasis on the imaginary aspect of nationalism points to national components in art and folklore, in styles of consumption, in mass media, festivals and other mass events (comp. Foster 1991).

Other respondents would often emphasize the visibility of the festival in Europe, which, in turn, is perceived as a source of pride:

> This festival is awesome. People come here from all over the world, and this speaks for itself (70-year-old male, near Guča).

Other advantages of the festival were also emphasized:

> It is a place where people can forget about the war … Many people face hardships due to the new political system and the current crisis, and for them the festival means few days free from stress … The Serbs have a problem with their culture, and this is the only place where national unity can be demonstrated (42-year-old male, Belgrade).
>
> Everyone is united here, apart from Albanians and Croatians, because they hate us (19-year-old male, Šabac).
>
> People come here not only to take pictures, just like in Paris, but to experience music (46-year-old male, Belgrade).

Still, a number of negative opinions were also expressed:

> I don't like this kind of music … This festival does not promote Serbian identity, we have many better festivals, e.g., Exit (22-year-old female).

The Roma Discourse

According to the census of 2002, there were about 108,000 Roma in the Republic of Serbia – that is, only 1.44% of the entire population (*Statistical Office* 2007). Several nongovernmental organizations, however, contest this figure as seriously miscalculated, and estimate the actual population of the Roma at about 450,000–500,000 people (6.2% of all citizens of Serbia). Regardless of the statistical data, the Roma are a very visible ethnic group participating in the Guča festival, where virtuoso Roma trumpeters have won numerous awards. When in the1990s, Goran Bregović popularized and globalized the music played in Guča by using certain Roma themes in soundtracks of movies directed by Emir Kusturica, a number of Serbian commentators criticized it as a "betrayal" of Serbia, and "derogation" of "purely" Serbian qualities of the festival and its music. On the other hand, as Marković said: "[c]oming from the Balkans and being called an 'ambassador of the Balkans,' Bregović is regarded as an authority in what 'genuine' Balkan music is" (2005: 12). He is, therefore, in the position to (re)construct and (re)invent the image of the Balkan region along its geographical, cultural, historical, and musical traits. Bregović made also authoritative statements about Roma musicians and highly

valued his cooperation with them. He pointed to two important issues. First, the Roma are a nomad nation that is free from constraints of the modern (European and Serbian) way of life. Furthermore, in his opinion, Roma culture preserved what he terms the "Balkan soul," in the sense that they are "more natural" and more "authentic" than other nations living in the region. "They steal music in a way it was being stolen five hundred years ago, without any shame. They take the harmony from one song, the melody from another, the rhythm from a third one, and they simply like to play it, and it becomes their music" (Bregović, quoted in Marković 2005: 20). Undoubtedly, the success of Bregović's music in Kosturica's movies considerably contributed to the popularity that the Guča festival enjoys abroad (Golemović 2006: 241). Interestingly, as Mattijs van de Port observed, many Serbs may dislike the Roma as an ethnic group but they appreciate their music, even the Serbian folk music played by Romani musicians as more "authentic" (1999: 297).

The presence of the Roma at the Guča festival has already become a part of tradition, and Roma musicians make an important contribution to the artistic dimension of the event. On the other hand, their presence is not always accepted, and it may even generate tensions. Thus, one participant, when asked whether the "Dragačevski Sabor Trubača" promotes Serbian identity disagreed with that and stated that the festival actually promotes "Gypsy identity." Similarly, a 25-year-old Serbian man from Belgrade said; "This festival has nothing to do with Serbian identity. 90% of true Serbs do not identify with the *sabor* … Serbia is white."

Ethnohistorical Analysis (Researcher's Discourse)

In what follows I present an analysis of the *sabor* in Guča, beginning with the history of its characteristic music genre. There is no doubt that the history of Serbian brass bands is closely connected to the history of the region, indeed of entire Serbia. The concept and the form of brass bands emerged in the Balkans during the Ottoman reign. Such bands were part of Janissary units – the elite military formation established by Sultan Murad I who came to power in 1361 and died in the Battle of Kosovo Polje, in 1389. *Mehter* bands (or *mehterhane* in Persian, a "gathering of *mehters*" or musicians) existed within Janissary units as early as the 14th century. Understandably, they played mostly military marches. Although Janissaries were disbanded in 1826 by Sultan Mahmud II (Kinross 1977: 456 f.), the *mehter* bands survived and continued to exist by performing at secular and religious ceremonies, such as funerals, weddings, etc. As for the modern Serbian trumpet bands, historians of music identify their distinct cultural affinity with *mehter* bands that existed in Turkey, in the course of the 19th century. The standard set of instruments in those ensembles consisted of large and small drums, a kettledrum, dulcimer, bells, and various types of trumpets. The most important instrument, however, was the trumpet. When three valves were introduced to the trumpet in the course of the 19th century, the instrument achieved a certain chromatic scale and became a standard component of professional orchestras (Śledziński 1968).

As previously stated, the first Serbian brass band was founded in 1831, in Kragujevac, at the court of Prince Miloš Obrenović I. This happened only 5 years after the Janissaries were disbanded and their music bands turned "civilian." Although the band was founded by Josif Šlezinger, its actual director was "Oberlautar" Mustafa (most likely a Turk), who played violin and *zurna*, a wooden wind instrument that is usually accompanied by a bass drum in Anatolian folk music. When Mustafa failed to find talented musicians at the court, he requested Prince Miloš' assistance, and subsequently the prince decreed that each region should delegate five young men to the orchestra. At that time, Kragujevac was the capital city of the newly formed Principality of Serbia, and the center of the developing Serbian music. Interestingly, Šlezinger not only founded the orchestra but also the "The Royal Serbian Theatre" in 1834. Both institutions performed music on various social occasions: marches, dances, and even operas by Mozart, Bellini, and Donizetti (Milanović 2009: 18).

Obviously, the traditional Serbian brass band underwent a long process of evolution, in which also the Roma played an important role. In fact, they were the first to adopt the new instruments, in particular the trumpet, and to promote this form of music when wandering around the Balkans (Schuman 2004: 104). Soldiers coming home from war were still other agents of diffusion. A genealogy of modern Serbian brass bands, therefore, must take into account a number of factors: (1) the music of Janissary military bands; (2) the intermediary role of the Roma; (3) and finally, the Serbian folk music traditions that incorporated those external elements and redefined them in their own, culturally-specific way. The outcome of that process of multiple borrowings is a brand new music genre that eventually became the distinctive feature of the Guča festival.

Contemporary Serbian trumpeter bands usually consist of about ten musicians: one soloist bass

trumpet, three or four B-flat trumpets, three helicons, one large bass drum, and one smaller drum. The repertoire mostly covers instrumental pieces that are occasionally accompanied by singing. The most frequently played compositions are local versions of the lively *kolo* dance and the oriental rhythmic *čoček* dance. The songs are usually based on double cadence, and their structure covers from four to five tones. It has been established that the music played by Dragačev trumpeters eventually evolved into three main local styles associated with particular musicians: eastern (Raka Kostić), southern (Bakij Bakić), and western Serbia (Radovan Babić). Raka Kostić used to play traditional music from his own region – and specifically the so-called *vlaska kolo* – strongly influenced by the Romani artistic tradition. Its distinguishing feature is a quick tempo and the accentuated, strong beating. Still, the trumpets as well as the small and large drums are crucial for the specific sound of Kostić's style in general. Bakij Bakić's band, in turn, became famous for its performance of a lively, temperamental *čoček*. The most specific feature of that dance is its irregular cadence of 9/8 (2-2-2-3 or 2-2-3-2). The third musician, Radovan Babić, a virtuoso trumpet player from western Serbia, was actually one of the very few formally trained musicians. His orchestra became famous for its memorable performance of *kolo* (*moravac*).

The previously mentioned *čoček* deserves perhaps a special attention. This music and dance style was already performed by Janissary military bands stationed in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania, and as such it is yet another example of Turkish, or "oriental" influence upon the Balkan music. The name of this dance comes from Köçek – a young male dancer who, dressed in female garments, used to perform erotically charged dances at the Ottoman court (Hanna 1988: 57). Between the 17th and the 19th century, the performances by *köçeks* were among the favorite pastimes in palaces and harems of Ottoman officials. Later, the practice became part of urban culture in the Ottoman Empire. Around the year 1805, for instance, there were approximately 600 *köçek* dancers performing in taverns of the Turkish capital (Beşiroğlu n. d.). *Köçek* dancers came mostly from the subjected non-Muslim nations of the Turkish Empire, such as Armenians, Greeks, and other inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula. On the other hand, the lively music that accompanied their performance originated from Anatolian and from Sufi traditions. One important element of a *köçek* performance was a special drum whose one side was covered with goatskin and the other with sheepskin, which allowed the performer to produce different tones. The decline of the *köçek* culture came along with the waning popularity of harems toward the end of the 19th century. Still, the tradition survives in two forms: the popular "belly dance" – one of the main tourist attractions in Turkey – and as *čoček*, a music style and the dance popular in the Balkans, which is also considered as an element of the Serbian cultural heritage.

Equally interesting is the cultural history of the festival itself. A new chapter in the history of the *sabor* began in 1993, when it became a truly mass event, with newly defined cultural, historical, and ethnic dimensions. What triggered that change were certain momentous historical shifts, in the first place the collapse of the Yugoslavian Federation and the emergence of the so-called 3rd Yugoslavia in 1992, with Serbia and Montenegro as its components. Another crucial factor was the intensive revitalization of the Serbian national myth based on a specific historical event – namely, the Battle of Kosovo Polje (1389). A turning point in the process of reviving the Kosovar myth was the 600th anniversary of the battle. The official, state-sponsored commemoration of that event took place on July 28, 1989, in the fields of Gazimestan (near Priština), where over a million people gathered. It was the largest political ritual to take place in modern Serbia. More importantly, the gathering was appropriated for political purposes, as it was officially presented as a sign of unity of the nation, of the government, and of the Orthodox Church, thus marking the return of religion to the national discourse (Prelić 1995: 195). The so-called "Kosovo problem" became an element of the Yugoslavian, in fact Serbian public debate in 1981, during the mass demonstrations of Albanian citizens who demanded a broader autonomy within the province or its secession, just in the time when Serbs became a minority there. The phrases commonly used in the accompanying political discourse, such as "national awakening" and "returning the nation's dignity" were styled as "vox populi" by the Serbian media. Similarly, the celebration of Vuk Karadžić's birthday in the year 1987 was yet another occasion to proclaim the "homogeneity" of the Serbian nation. A side effect of that revival, however, was a "neo-folk culture" and a "trash-patriotism" (Dragićević-Šešić 1994) and what Ivan Čolovič, a Belgrade ethnologist, termed, somewhat imprecisely, a Serbian "Kulturkampf" (2008: 26) – that is, "ethnicization" and nationalization of Serbian history in a strict opposition to "the others" – namely the Croatians, the Bosnians, and the Roma. This phenomenon became particularly relevant in the context of the civil war that followed the collapse of Yugoslavia. The Guča festival became an

element of that policy as well, particularly after the rise of Slobodan Milošević to power, which also coincided with the 300th anniversary of the so-called "Great Serb Migration."[4]

The attitude of the Serbian Orthodox Church towards the *sabor* in Guča has also evolved over the last decades. Since the year 2000, the representatives of the Orthodox Church have officially given their support to the festival. A celebration called *predsaborsko bdenje* (pre-*sabor* matins), in which Orthodox choir participate, is usually organized before the actual event begins. Indeed, certain folklorized expressions of faith are typical for Orthodox religiosity in Serbia, and these can be also observed at the Guča festival (Gil 2009: 114). That is why Miodrag Dukić, the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, declared Guča to be the "heart of Serbian culture," which is deemed Orthodox as well (Vučković 2002).

Conclusion

The historical process of development of the festival itself, including the emergence of the associated music genre and the incorporation of brass bands into Serbian national culture, possesses all features of Hobsbawm's and Ranger's (1983) "invented tradition." Like in numerous other cases in Europe, folklore played an important role in the process of formation of national identity. "The intensive folkloric studies," Kiš says, commenting on the role of ethnography in national movements, "should be attributed to nationalism rather than anthropology. Even the propagation of *couleur locale* is a sign of nationalism, unless artistically justified" (1997: 3). Similarly, the styling of the *sabor* in Guča into a festival of Serbian culture and a show of Serbian identity is in itself a demonstration of such "banal nationalism," as Michael Billig put it (1995). In this way, Billig intended to differentiate between the everyday, popular nationalism from its extreme, political variants. He further observes that the academic and journalistic focus on extreme nationalism, independence movements, and ethnic conflicts obscured our understanding of modern nationalism. In fact, the "hidden," everyday nature of nationalism is what makes it at the same time a very powerful political ideology. Furthermore, Billig continues, nationality is constantly being "reminded of," even in modern states, through such channels as the media, political discourse, music, etc., and consequently nobody perceives its intricate working upon memory and identity. Other examples of such "hidden" or "banal" nationalism include the use of flags in everyday settings, national songs, symbolism on money, sport events, festivals, idiomatic expressions in everyday language, and patriotic clubs. In other words, the "banal nationalism" is not only a flag hoisted by national extremists but also a flag printed on a T-shirt purchased by visitors of a "national" festival; not only a loud battle song but also a joyous rhythm inviting people to have fun with music played by a friendly band of trumpeters. In short, as stated at the beginning of this article, ethnicity and nationalism usually manifest themselves in undramatic, peaceful ways. One of them is the *sabor* in Guča. During the 1990s the festival was criticized by the Serbian opposition that was calling for more "European" events and viewed the *sabor* as a show of chauvinism. As Aleksandra Marković said, "In their eyes, the festival constructed a distorted version of Serbian identity, a version that many Serbs did not identify with" (2008: 81). Still, in 1992, the Ministry of Culture for the first time supported the festival as a part of the Serbian cultural heritage that must be preserved. The ethnicization of tradition – that is, the claim laid by an ethnic group to certain elements of culture – occurs both at "the upper" and at "the lower" tier of social space, in the sense that it is being pursued by the political elite and by common people. Obviously, modern Europe offers many more of such banal nationalisms, invented traditions, and instances of their ethnic appropriation. For students of modern culture, the Dragačevski Sabor Trubača and its inherent discourses is an interesting example of that phenomenon.

4 This is a reference to the removal of the Serbs from Kosovo by the Habsburg rulers, during the period 1688–1690. The abandoned villages and towns were subsequently populated by Albanians, which gradually altered the ethnic structure of the province.

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The Religious Dimension of Christmas Eve Folk Rituals in the Opoczno Region of Poland: Tradition and Modernity

Zdzisław Kupisiński

There are very few households in Poland where the twenty-fourth of December does not find the family celebrating the traditional Christmas Eve (*wigilia*), with a ceremonial vigil table covered with a white tablecloth, festive tableware, traditional dishes, and the blessed wafer (*opłatek*). On this evening the family and relatives sit by the Christmas tree, singing Christmas carols. Christmas Eve, with the old custom of abstaining from meat dishes at the vigil supper, is one of the special days among the annual folk rituals in many countries. It is also the central part of the celebration of Christmas. In Poland, this celebration acquired the characteristics of the phenomenon of something holy, of the sacred; this is a phenomenon not found in other countries, and it has its unique and special place in the annual folk calendar. Folk tradition has equipped Christmas Eve with distinctive customs, rituals, and beliefs. According to the customs and procedures of this day, along with the religious elements there were also practices to ensure success in one's personal life, getting to know other people's destinies, magical acts designed to protect the family and household against nature's adversities and a whole range of practices related to health, life, fertility, and the weather (Kupsiński 1997: 67–69). In folk beliefs characteristic of this day, there occurs a unique blending of the sacred and of the secular, not only in the liturgy but also in the life of the faithful. Christmas Eve is marked by a variety of customs, rituals, and beliefs. The origins of some of them date back to ancient times, others have their roots in Slavic culture, and there are also customs and beliefs which have arisen from Christian traditions of other nations. The presence of these elements of different provenance on Christmas Eve is conditioned by their function and the meaning they had in past epochs and cultures. Throughout history, humans nurtured the cultural heritage of their forefathers and developed it at the same time, reflecting their own experiences and spiritual values. Christmas Eve is one of those days when tradition manages time, determines the day's activities, and outlines the steps to be taken.[1]

In this short article, I concentrate on the customs, rituals, and beliefs of Christmas Eve practiced in the first half of the twentieth century in the Opoczno region, which lies in south-central Poland. I further focus on rituals of that region at the turn of the twentieth and twenty first centuries. I also attempt to identify how the Church incorporated the old customs and beliefs of the people into the festive atmosphere of the day, which marks the end of Advent and the beginning of the Christmas season. The article is based on data collected during my own ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the years 1980–1983, 1990–1993 and 2008–2010. It lasted a total of 290 days. Literature pertinent to the discussed subject was also used, which enabled a comparison of the older customs and rituals with the new ones.

1 Christmas Eve in the Polish Folk Tradition

The Christmas Eve Vigil has a unique place in the tradition and mentality of the Polish people. This

1 Kupisiński 1997: 56–58; See also: Z. Górnicki 1980: 60–62; Zadrożyńska 2000: 51.