

ELEMENTS OF ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION OF THE SERBS

UDC 17.035.3(=163.41) 342.814(=163.41)(091)

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Abstract. *The issues of ethnic identity of the Serbs, the time of its forming, its borders, present emotional legitimacy, have been, especially recently, very well researched problems. Numerous answers have been offered from different scientific and other standpoints; however, these issues are still highly challenging and open for consideration. This study deals with the question of the origin of ethnic identity of the Serbian people, its maintenance in the long period of slavery (referring to the slavery under the Turks), as well as the alternation of some attributes of the identification. Even though many "traditions" are of relatively new origin, this study asserts that ethnical identification of the Serbs from its beginning (prior to the enslavement by the Turks) to the present day has survived in its essential form, in spite of great changes which it underwent in the time of slavery and as such it is the basis of the Serbian **national** identification.*

Key words: *ethnic identity, national identity, defining ethnic borders, ethnic characteristics, mythic homeland.*

"The idea that waging wars is something that destiny has assigned to the Serbs as the most significant duty and most profound meaning of their existence was close and dear to the generations of our great-grandfathers and grandfathers" (Ćirković, Sima, 1997:348). The attribute of a warlike nation is part of the Serbian national identity, significant both for self-identification and for identification of the Serbs by other nations. The Serb "warlike nation", the Serb "nation victim", the Serb "criminal nation", these are the extremes between which there is a range of qualities ascribed to the Serbs not only by others, but also by the Serbs themselves. In the time of the downfall of the Marxist ideology, a fertile ground for the revitalization of the collective consciousness, based on the factual or mythic past, was opened. Different elements of the tradition have been given importance; specific contents have been presented and, on the basis of their manifestly or latently accepted rules, proclaimed as the values which symbolize the continuity with the past. The intention of this study is to determine the positive elements of the Serbian ethnic directives in the past, the "holy history" and "holy geography" of the Serbian people, without

passing any value judgments.¹ Our intention was to show which elements of the ethnic identification of the Serbs are the product of the continuity with the past. This is because one of possible ways of creating a nation is its development from premodern ethnic cores. Ethnic origin guaranteed a greater possibility for the survival of the nation due to the developed mythology and symbolism of the social and cultural community. Having studied the references on this subject matter (A.D. Smith, 1998; F. Putinja and J. Stref-Fenar, 1997; Frederic Bartes, 1967), we determined the points which are unavoidable when doing a research on ethnicity, regardless of the approach:

1. The issue of self-naming by the participants of identification and naming by other ethnic communities
2. The issue of borders of a group
3. The issue of recording identity symbols upon which the belief in common origin is based
4. The issue of emphasizing ethnic characteristics in social interaction

1. NAMING

"The name 'Serbian' is the flower of nationality; a language does not determine a nationality; a nationality does not walk upon a country or country's name; a nationality is not marked by faith itself." (Blagojević, N., 1986: 186)

Even though there are certain exceptions, the analysis of the written sources indicates that the name 'Serb' as an ethnic mark was accepted in self-identification, as well as in the identification by the neighboring countries and nations that the Serbs came in contact with, during the enslavement period. For the requirements of this study we have selected a few instances of self-identification and identification in the analyzed works so that we could verify the thesis of continuous self-naming and naming as the index of identification.

1.1. In the Original Homeland

The name 'Serbs', according to the claims of historian Miloš Blagojević (1993), had been created in the original homeland, before the arrival in the Balkans, which suffices to include them in the group of ancient European nations. This idea of his is based upon the tradition and "other sources", which weren't recorded until the mid 10th century, in the work of Constantine VII Porfirogenit, "Book of Nations". According to these writings, the

¹ This work presents the results of a research of a wider scope, which included the identification and integration of the Serbian community in the past based on the analysis of the written sources (literary, historical, ethnographic...) of the collective consciousness of the Serbs. The analysis of the written sources of mostly "illiterate" societies has some limitations to it, but it is inevitable in the sociological study of the past. Literary sources include written and oral literature. Spoken literature can be perceived more clearly from the 17th and 18th centuries onwards when poems of long verse were recorded in the written form. The beginning of gathering ethnographic sources is associated with the work of Vuk Karadžić. The analysis includes the ethnographic, ethnologic and historiographic findings of Vuk Karadžić, Valtazar Bogišić, Milan Miličević, Stojan Novaković, Feliks Kanic, A.F. Giljferding, Tihomir Đorđević, Jiriček, Radonjić, S. Stanojević as well as periodicals: *Glasnik etnografskog muzeja u Beogradu*, *Bosanska Vila*, *Delo*, *Javor*, *Karadžić*, *Letopis matice srpske*, *Prilozi za istoriju, jezik i folklor*, *Glasnik srpskog učenog društva*...epic, lyric and written literature.

Serbs are the descendants of unchristened Serbs, also called the White Serbs. Pavle Josif Šafarik discovered two testimonies of a wide-spread usage of the name 'Serbs' in 9th and 10th century. Vuk Karadžić also claims that the Serbs have been known in Europe from 6th century under this name. What can be added to this thesis is the script of a Byzantine writer Prokopius Cezarec from 6th century who mentions in his book *De bello Gothico* a nation named 'Spores' for whom a large number of linguists agrees that this is just another name for the Serbs (Petrović, S. 1997). Petar Vlahović (1984) also points out that the name 'Serbs', as an ethnic mark, was known in the ancient Serbian homeland. One of the arguments is the existence of the Lusatians (Sorbs) in eastern Germany. The origin of the name 'Serbs' is not utterly clear, although numerous attempts have been made in trying to determine the etymology of this term. Vlahović cites one possible interpretation: the name 'Serbs' was derived from the Lezghian word "sur" meaning 'man', which, together with the suffix "bi", means 'men', 'people'. According to the Greek sources, this name is used for the tribes that inhabited the area from the river Cetina in the west, to the river Ibar in the east, and Boka Kotorska to the south-east. The territory inhabited by these people was known as "christened" or "unchristened" Serbia. The Romans living in coastal towns called them 'Sklavus', 'Slavus', and the Albanians 'Skje', meaning 'Slav'. In the interior, under the influence of the bishopric of the town Ras, people adopted the name Rasians.

1.2. After the Arrival in the Balkans

After the Serbs arrived in the Balkans, what followed was a period of regional separation which did not weaken the sense of belonging to a single nation. Significant novelties which would also have an effect on the ethnic identity of the Serbs in the new homeland were the establishing of Feudalism and Christianization. What is also important for the early ethnic history of the Serbs was the appearance of two centers- Zeta and Raška. During this period the Serbs took up different confessions, which led to the separation of Bosnia and Serbia, with the border on the river Drina. Bosnia wasn't controlled by a Serbian district-prefect, it was an integral entity. The Serbian language was used at that time; therefore, the inhabitants regarded themselves as the Serbs, notwithstanding whether they belonged to the Catholic, Orthodox or "heretical" Bosnian church. In time, however, the name 'Serb' would more and more be associated with the Orthodox church. Orthodoxy, with its autocephalous church, was one of the essential traits of the Serbian people. Radovan Samardžić also indicates that the name 'Serb' is the heritage of the Middle Ages when this people entered slavery.

In Serbian medieval sources many nations are mentioned, most frequently the neighboring nations. Foreign peoples are mentioned in these scripts as "ini languages" or "ino-tribesmen". When the neighboring nations are concerned, these writings speak of the Greeks, Hungarians, Bulgarians and Latins, and other nations with which the Serbs had contacts: the French (Fruzi), Alemagnes, Tatars, Kumans, Turks, Russians, Czechs, etc. These results are based not only on medieval scripts, but also on some other proveniences (epic poetry, for example). "Mentioning names of various peoples in written sources or other literary works at the same time represents a simple warning that there is a difference among them, especially because each nation is defined by its name" (Blagojević, Miloš, 1993:21). The existence, transmission and preservice of a nation's name indirectly verify

that there are strong internal relations, a common language, customs, religion and social relationships existing in a nation.

Danilo Senior (beginning of 14th c.) speaks about Belgrade as "Serbian Belgrade", using the adjective 'Serbian' as a part of the name. In 13th century Pandeh emphasizes the Serbian name with pride: "A Serb...His name has extolled among those who live around him" (Pandeh, 13th century). Atanasi Dascal placed, next to his name, his ethnic origin, which was a custom of medieval artists – Teophan the Greek, for example, but also Pahomij the Serb, Lazar the Serb, Filolog the Serb.

Political borders of the state of the Nemanjić dynasty also represented the borders between which the name 'Serbs' was spread. After being enslaved by the Turks, that is, due to the migrations caused by the Turks, the name 'Serbs' extended over a wider area. Vladeta Jerotić concludes, when discussing the Serbian people "taking root and being up-rooted", that there is no doubt that the Serbs gained their independence in the Middle Ages by establishing a state and Orthodox church, which was a materialization of their unique identity.

1.3. In the Time of Slavery

In the manuscript of Constantine Mihailović from Ostrovica (Janissary's Memories), we find a testimony that "The Rasians or Serbs, who were part of Emperor Bajazit's army, begged for the body of the Prince Lazar". In the time of slavery a name 'Vlach' appears, which, in some cases, also signifies the Serbs. Explaining the meaning of the word 'Vlach' in the Serbs, Tihomir Đorđević points to the already mentioned fact that the name 'Vlach' didn't only refer to genuine Vlachs, but also to cattle breeders in general. Jiriček also verifies this. Stojan Novaković in his study "Village" writes that clergymen were divided into merophe (ploughmen) and Vlachs (cattle breeders). A travel writer, Benedikt Kuripešić, talks about the Serbs, also called the Vlachs, who are the members of the Orthodox church. Tihomir Đorđević mentions the letter of Emperor Ferdinand, sent on November 6, 1538, to a Croatian ban Petar Keglević, in which he wrote about "captains and dukes of the Rasians, or the Serbs, or the Vlachs, who usually call themselves the Serbs". In this letter we see the Serbs being named by others, and in this particular case, by the Croats. Refugee Serbs were called "Vlachs" in Croatia. The expression 'Morlachs' was also used for them. In the disquisition called "About the Vlachs" (1806), a metropolitan Stevan Stratimirović states that Roman Catholics from Croatia and Slavonija scornfully used the name 'Vlach' for "the Slovenians and Serbs, who are of our, eastern confession", and that "the Turks in Bosnia and Serbia also call every Bosnian or Serbian christian a Vlach (T. Đorđević, 1984:110). That the name 'Vlach' used to signify the Serbs is testified by Vuk Karadžić as well, who quotes the poem sang by Turkish women: "A couple of Vlachs came passing by, with powder in their pumpkins". In "Serbian Dictionary" itself, under the word 'Vlach', the above mentioned assertion is confirmed, as well as in many other proverbs recorded by Vuk. The name 'Vlach' was used instead of 'Serb' with scorn and mockery. On the other hand, the Serbs made a clear distinction between their own ethnic community and the Vlachs. This is exemplified in proverbs such as "Oh, Turk, the conspirer of trouble! And you, Vlach, a blood brother imposed by others!" Another proverb says: "Eat with a Vlach from the same bowl until you eat half of it, and then you hit him on the head with it!"

In an epic song written before the Kosovo battle Emperor Lazar bitterly curses: "Who is a **Serb** and of **Serbian** origin,/ who is of **Serbian** blood and kinship,/ and does not come to the Kosovo battle,/ let him have no offspring,/ nether masculine nor feminine". Speaking through the mouth of Emperor Lazar, the writer clearly marks the boundaries of moral responsibility shared by all Serbs. In the period of slavery individuals and the entire nation returned to a somewhat outgrown phase of pagan-mythical perspective, and other traits of barbarism appeared as well. Various themes emerged, like the connection of the Serbian heroes with supernatural beings, which are remnants of pagan beliefs in the collective consciousness: "No matter how many Serbian heroes there are,/ they were all raised by fairies,/ and many were given birth by dragons".

Vuk estimated that there were approximately 5 million Serbs in the second half of 18th century. Out of that number only 3 million were called the Serbs, whereas there was a million of Moslems who were called the Turks, "although not one person out of a thousand knows Turkish", and Catholics were given names after regions they lived in – Slavonians, Dalmatians, Dubrovčani, or Ikavians, or Bunjevčani.

2. BORDERS BETWEEN US – THEM; RELATIONS WITH OTHER PEOPLES

In the analyzed material we find testimonies that the Serbs were fully aware of the differences existing between themselves and their neighboring nations, as well as of the differences between them and the peoples with whom they had contacts through trade.

Even before coming under the Turkish rule, there were many foreigners employed in Serbia. Most of them were "Venetians, Dubrovčani, Greeks and Turks". Until the disintegration of the Serbian domain of the Despot, they had performed very important duties at the courts of the Despot and of landowners.

During his travels, Evlija Čelebija wrote the following about Užice: "There are three districts inhabited by non-Moslem subjects paying the tax. There is one for the Jews, Armenians, Venetians. No Hungarians or Greeks. Most of them are the Latins (Dubrovčani), Serbs and Bulgarians". Most frequently moral judgments referred to the Turks and rarely were made against members of other nations. As members of the conquering nation, the Turks were quite unpopular and were usually assigned moral deficiency. Our people called every Moslem a Turk. Giljferding records in his travels an observation that for the Serbs nationality lies, to a great extent, in a religion rather than in a nation itself. Identical language, origin and customs are of lesser importance than the difference in religious affiliation. He further claims that this is not just a hypothesis, but that the people he talked to confirmed that and thus he arrived at a conclusion that depending on whether a man professes Orthodoxy, Catholicism or Islam, he is regarded as a member of the Orthodox, Catholic or Turkish nation. Members of the Orthodox church consider the Latins to be part of a completely separate social entity (and vice versa), not just in religious, but in "lay, national" sense as well. When asked what nation they belong to, these people tell you their religious affiliation. A common Serb can separate himself from a Greek or Bulgarian, but the feeling he is imbued with and which makes him a member of human society is not the feeling of nationality, but religious consciousness, as Giljferding indicates. We realize that religious and ethnic identifications are intermingled in the collective consciousness of the Serbs. On the basis of the sources available to him, Čajkanović puts

forward a belief of our people that the Turks and Arnauts originated from the devil. "A Turk was given by God...because of our sins. He should be called the prophetic devil", Čajkanović quotes. Furthermore, he speaks of a link between the Turks and snakes; namely, there was a belief that the Turks were born in "snakes' nests". In our nation a snake is considered to be the most demonic of all animals. By connecting the Turks with snakes, Serbian people, Čajkanović believes, ascribed a mythic character to their battle with the Turks, thus creating conditions in which these battles could be transformed into an epic. He even finds similarities with the Indian epic stories, as well as to the Babylon's "Epic of Gilgamesh". The Turks, like demons, became a weapon of an enraged deity, so the Serbs lost the battle of Kosovo, and in the epic describing this event one can find resignation, awareness of guilt and predestination of defeat. In the epic poem "Sekula has turned into a snake" we find this motive: *"But said ban despot Djuro:/ Don't you know, Sibirjanin Janko,/ That we originate from falcons' nests,/ And that the Turks are from snakes' nests?"* Banović Strahinja addresses an old dervish whom he recognized in the Turkish camp: *"You who enslaved me, you Turkish snake"*. The Arabs were even more odious than the Turks. In a gradation of evil they were its culmination and embodiment. This can especially be seen in the poems dealing with a vassal position of Marko Kraljević, where he calls the Turkish sultan a foster father and in an epic poem "Marko Kraljević and the Arab" even defends his daughter against an Arab. The Arabs are always dark. Explaining the meaning of the adjective 'dark' in the Serbian mythology, Čajkanović defines it as the color of deities and demons of the underworld.

The Serbian people always linked the attribute "cunning" to the Latins (inhabitants of Dubrovnik and Kotor). Besides that, they were "old cheats". All the motives we find in the analyzed poems base their plots on attempts of the Latins to deceive the Serbs, which they avoid with the help of their national virtues – strength and courage. (This motive is repeated in many epic poems—"Wedding of Đurađ Smederevac", "Wedding of Popović Stojan", "Wedding of Zmaj-Despot Vuk").

The Bulgarians, as the neighboring nation, found their place in Serbian epics, but with a different treatment. In the poem "Radul-bey and Bulgarian King Šišman", their king is represented as a fraud, and in the song "Dušan's Wedding", Miloš Vojinović disguises himself as "a young Bulgarian". Throughout the entire poem, wedding guests look down on the Bulgarian. (*"Get out of here, you dark Bulgarian!/ If you had brought your own glass,/ I would have poured you some wine;/ Golden glasses are not meant for you"*). In his analyses Cvijić very often makes a parallel between the Bulgarians and the Serbs, as the peoples who lived near each other, who belonged to the Orthodox church and who were enslaved. Speaking about the institution of Slava (Serbian family feast for its patron saint) which is related to the cult of ancestors, he points to the fact that the Bulgarians do not have a recollection of their ancestors, do not have Slavos and always take last names from their fathers. The appearance of great national creations Cvijić associates with the nations living in the Dinaric area: churches, epic poems, establishing and enlarging of Serbia itself. He assigns these people the aptitude for high culture on the basis of their moral and intellectual capacities. Greatest minds of the Serbian people originate from the Dinaric area: Karadjordje, Miloš, Vuk Karadžić, Njegoš, as Cvijić notices. How distinguishing, Cvijić adds, this Dinaric talent is can be seen when compared to the Bulgarians, who produced none of the above mentioned creations and who didn't have such great figures and self-taught persons like Serbia did.

The poem "Death of Duke Kaica" describes a friendly meeting between the Serbs and Hungarians, who compete in different knightly skills. When Sibirjanin Janko (Janjoš Hunjadi) suggests to Đurađ Branković to exchange soldiers, he replies: *Brother Janko, don't be a fool!// Have you ever heard, have you remembered,/ That someone has exchanged corn bread for wheat?*" Of the neighboring nations in our epic poems the Arnauts are also mentioned, who are always "fierce", which doesn't have to have a negative connotation.

The Serbs made a distinction between themselves and the Gypsies. T. Đorđević notes that "it was not bad" for the Gypsies to live among the Serbs. The Serbs gave them alms, accepted their craft skills and traded their cattle. Nevertheless, the Gypsies were regarded as beneath the Serbs in their status. They were allowed to sit only in separate places in houses, reserved for beggars and poor people. "The Serbs think that the Gypsies stink. They sometimes say that the Gypsies stink because they are dirty; sometimes they stink because they are unchristian, so their soul stinks and sometimes they even say that their flash is spoiled". (T. Đorđević, 1984:122). Generally speaking, the Serbs thought that unbaptized people stank. The Gypsies were for them people of no great value. In spring when the Serbs tasted some of their first fruit, they would usually say: "For life and health, and blight for the Gypsies". Nevertheless, some magical features were ascribed to the Gypsies.

At this level of social development kinship played an important role in conceiving the idea of community. An interesting thing is that the Serbs, although aware of ethnic differences, still approved of establishing non-blood relations² with members of other ethnic communities, and even with those who they were at strife with. In the poem "Marko Kraljević and Alil-aga", a Turk fraternizes with Kraljević Marko and offers him his wealth and wife. Marko Kraljević explains the norms of fraternization with the Serbs: *"Oh, Turk, damn you!// You are giving me your wife and asking me to be your brother,/ I don't need your wife,/ With our people it's not the same as with yours,/ a sister-in-law is regarded as a sister"*. Violations of non-blood relations, as we have already mentioned, were present among the Serbs as well; however, establishing this kind of relation with the Turks aroused suspicion. This is justified in the poem "Rade falcon and Ašin-bey" from Vuk's third book of poems: *"Have you heard me, my faithful wife!// I'll cut my blood brother's throat,/ What is a bushranger doing at my court?"* In the poem from book four of poems a suspicion about "having faith" in the Turks is confirmed in the following verses: *"Let God kill every Christian,/ Who has faith in a Turk!// Ah, Jacob, my beloved brother,/ Do not trust the Turks,/ But wherever you can, fight them."* A marriage between a Serb and a Turkish woman didn't have negative moral sanctions. By marrying a Serb, a Turkish woman would be converted to Orthodoxy. One of the examples of this is in the poem "The Wedding of Ivo Golotrb", in which Ivo Golotrb swore to God that he would marry neither a Latin nor a Serbian woman, but a Turkish one, a daughter of Glumac Osman-aga: *"Ivan took the girl to the church,/ Converted her and then married her,/ Took her to his magnificent courts,/ Where he kisses her whenever he wakes up"*. The same motive is repeated in the poem "The Wedding of Janković Stojan", in which Janković Stojan is offered, by a girl called Hajkuna, to become a Moslem and share his wealth with

² Spiritual relation, not blood-based

her. He responds: *"Don't be foolish, Hajkuna! My God is my witness that I would not become a Turk, Even if I was given Lika and Udbinja"*³. The poem ends by Hajkuna being christianized. Children born in a marriage with a Turkish woman were not exposed to any moral judgment, whereas this was not the case if a Serbian woman gave birth to a Turkish child. In the poem "Plundered Courts of the Jakšićs", their imprisoned sister gave birth to a child with an Arab and begs her brother to spare the child's life, to which he answers: *"Let there be no offspring from bad seeds, Let there be no puppies from a mean bitch"*. The Serbs incorporated themselves with the communities where they migrated.

In the analyzed material we have seen the existence of the awareness in the Serbian ethnic community about its distinctiveness with respect to other nations, the neighbors and those who they had contact with.

3. BELIEF IN COMMON ORIGIN

The analyzed material, ethnographic, historic and literary data point to the fact that the Serbs have well-developed sentiments and ideas about their common origin, which is highly appreciated by others.

3.1. The Cult of Ancestors in the Serbs

Analyses show that the idea of common origin of the Serbs was preserved despite long-lasting slavery. The belief in common origin of the Serbian people is not something that was later created for political or other reasons, but this belief was originally created shortly after the Serbian arrival in the Balkans, and it was preserved through the period of slavery when it represented a driving force in the process of liberation from the Turks. This issue leads us to examine the Serbian mythology whose concepts we have encountered in the analysis of epic poetry. The question of kinship of members of an ethnic community comes from the belief in the common origin. Incest was prohibited among the Serbs. There was a norm according to which all those who have similar Slavonic names should not get married, because they were believed to be related in some way, that is, they originated from the same ancestor. While building up an image of the Serbian supreme deity, Čajkanović finds its reflections in Saint Jovan and Saint Arandjel, who are the patron saints of blood brotherhood, kinship and godfathers. A supreme deity can be a patron saint of kinship, only if "he is related to us, that is, only if he is an ancestor of our entire nation, the mythic founder of our nation" (Čajkanović, 1973:340). Being a godfather is something of great significance to the Serbian people, an institution which has been preserved to the present day. A godfather had a very important role in the domestic cult. In numerous rites of transition, i.e. rites of the shift from chthonic to profane, a godfather performed the role of an intermediary between members of a family and their ancestors. A godfather's curse was of special significance. "A godfather can put a curse on somebody; God acknowledges his curse rather than the father's or the mother's. Whoever is cursed by a godfather, there is no luck for him" (Čajkanović, 1973:163). Factual origination from a common ancestor is not essential for the recognition of ethnic identification, unlike a be-

³ Areas in Croatia

lief in the common origin. The institution of non-blood relation was widely spread among the Serbs. Besides the already mentioned importance of godfathers, there were some other forms of relations as well: blood brotherhood, adoption, kinship by milk, last name, Slava, date of birth. Examples of the violation of non-blood relation were very rare among the Serbs. This kind of relation was considered to be "more serious" and people rarely disrespected it in our nation. "Although some cases of adultery between those who are related in this way are mentioned, adultery is regarded as a grave sin, and even the very thought of it is prohibited" (T.Đorđević:166). (*My godfather, doge of Venice,/ Ground below us will shake,/ And the sky above us will burst,/ If you kiss the wife of your godfather!*). The relevant issues for the feeling of ethnic identification are the fictitious origin and supposed ancestors, and not the facts about ancestors. Anthony Smith points out that the answer to the question: "Who are our ancestors?" is as well the answer to another question: "Who are we?", which is the essence of Parson's constitutive symbolism. Without the myths of origin, it's difficult to imagine a survival of an ethnic community. The theme of origin of the Serbian people and the reference to the ancestors can be clearly seen in the second book of Vuk's poems, that is to say in the poems from "the earliest times". The Serbs cherish "the cult of heroic patriotism". Its representatives are the Serbian heroes who owe their immense physical and spiritual strength to the mythic beings they originate from. Miloš Obilić⁴, in the poem "Obilić Dragon's Son", is presented as a son of a dragon. This is where the secret of his and the Serbian heroism in general lies. The descendents of a dragon were also Marko Kraljević, Relja Krilatica, Ljutica Bogdan, Banović Strahinja, Zmaj-despot Vuk, Banović Sekula, Visoki Stefan, Sibirjanin Janko, Janković Stojan⁵. One of the main functions of the National deity was to preserve peace among its people, that is to avoid brotherly bloodshed. "God's peace" is obligatory around Christmas, which Čajkanović recognizes (due to numerous traditional details which are the result of syncretism) as the festival of the National deity, the mythic founder of the Serbian nation. Serbia's two most significant church festivals, Christmas and Slava, are, according to Čajkanović, related to the festivals of ancestors, whose "representative" in the advance of the national consciousness towards monotheism was the National deity. In the epic poem the mother of Marko Kraljević forces him to take an oath ("*His mother makes him swear on his honor,/ That he won't shed blood today,/ Because today is his Patron Saint's day*"⁶.)

3.2. Mythic Homeland

Kanic emphasizes, when describing Serbia, that Kosovo is particularly significant for the Serbs. By analyzing the importance of Kosovo for the Serbs we have perceived many misuses of this myth. At the moment when Kosovo stopped being the factual homeland of Serbian people (when the Turks came), it became their mythic homeland. Smith mentions that the devotion to the particular territories is of mythic and subjective origin, and that it is precisely this devotion and attachment that confirms the existence of the ethnic identification, and not the settlement or possession of the territories themselves. Kosovo is the

⁴ One of the greatest Serbian heroes who killed Emperor Murat at the battle of Kosovo

⁵ Serbian heroes who fought for the liberation from the Turks

⁶ Slava

holy land, "the land of our forefathers, our legislators, our kings and sages, poets and priests, which makes it our homeland".⁷

Traveling around Serbia, Giljferding notices that the story of Kosovo is preserved, almost in its entirety, in the chronicle of monastery Tronoša, written at the end of 18th century. It is based on the memories of the people. The motive of betrayal of Vuk Branković is clearly emphasized in it, which is not the case with the earlier accounts of the Kosovo battle. Giljferding cites, as an example, a passage from one of those accounts from the end of 14th and beginning of 15th century, which does mention the betrayal, but doesn't specify the betrayer: "I don't know for sure whether he was betrayed by his younger ones or whether it was the decision of God". The motive of betrayal has been added later to the Kosovo myth and it is, according to some opinions, a consequence of a range of individual "betraying and reconcilable" attitudes. In the collective consciousness of the Serbs Vuk Branković was not guilty for the defeat from the very beginning; however, betrayal was assigned to him later and this accusation was an alleged reason for the Serbian defeat in this battle. It was more favorable and acceptable for the national pride to claim that the Turks had been helped by a brother, a Serb. The next step in the growth of this pride is seen in the poem in which Mother Mary places a choice before Lazar between victory and earthly kingdom or death and heavenly kingdom, and Lazar chooses the latter. A part of the Kosovo myth is the cult of Miloš Obilić. He had two blood brothers who were not historical figures (Ivan Kosačić and Toplica Milan). In epic poems a recurring motive is the one of devotion of the Serbian heroes to the idea of going to the battle of Kosovo. Even in those cases in which they could avoid this duty ("Emperor Lazar and Empress Milica", "Sekula has turned into a snake", "Musić Stefan"), they do not use this possibility, because they are bound by patriotic emotions and the curse: "Who is a Serb and of the Serbian origin...". These poems were narrated in the period of slavery, and they were written down in their entirety by Vuk Karadžić. In the whole period of slavery they represented an exemplary model. "An epic poem had been fighting the battle of Kosovo for five centuries, with the help of gusle."⁸ For a poem (and a story too) nullified the reality of slavery and it became not only a substitute of reality, but also a heavy fist of vengeance" (Zirojević, Olga, 1996:208). The proof of the active ethnic identity is the Serbian rebellion at the beginning of 19th century. The rebels, according to Miodrag Popović (1998), were archaic people, the members of an archaic society, who were characterized, like all archaic men, by "circular thinking" with the basis in the absolute beginning. The Serbs were not asking for a new system, but for a return to the old state of affairs; they were fighting to regain the freedom they had had before the battle of Kosovo, with a "cross-like ancestor" as their leader. "Those rebels from the beginning of 19th century were presented as the revivers of the Serbian battle against the Ottoman Empire which had begun at the end of 14th century" (Gleni, Miša, 2001:27). Epic poems are the indicators of the "vital continuity" with the romanticizing past and they represent "a means to claim the right for the disputed territory" (Gleni, 2001:27). In the poems about waging war for freedom ("The Beginning of the Rebellion against Turkish Governors"), the rebels remember the defeat at the Kosovo field and they move on "to revenge their el-

⁷ This is how A.D. Smith defines a mythic homeland, p. 43

⁸ A Balkan musical instrument

ders". In 1857, while traveling across Ancient Serbia, Giljferding notes that "an Orthodox Serb, wherever he might live – in Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Hungary, Principality of Serbia – has, besides a church, one great homeland, Serbian land, which is, to tell the truth, divided among many masters, but it exists as an ideal, as the land of the unified Orthodox Serbian nation. He has his own oral tradition, folklore; he knows about Serbian Saint Sava, Serbian Emperor Dušan, Serbian martyr Lazar, hero Kraljević Marko. His current life rests upon the foundations of his nation and it is permeated with the previous historical life of the nation". In the Kosovo myth we discover the indicators that lead us to recognize Kosovo as the holy place of the Serbs and to acknowledge its mythic heroes (Saint Sava, Princ Lazar, Miloš Obilić, Kraljević Marko) as sacred figures of the Serbian nation. "These divine individualities and religious geniuses have to be similar not only to God, but to the people as well, or otherwise the people would never acknowledge them as their own: the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the nation resides in them" (Šušnjić, 1998:249). Alfred Webber in his book "Tragic and History" points out that such figures appear in the times of downfalls and dangers, when people are looking for new strength. "He emerges in such conditions in which society can't be organized according to some rational principles, that is, when he is in the position to become a symbol of unity due to the lack of rational doctrine...and he sets off on a crucial, Christian, critical and circular journey: for the holy cross and golden freedom!" (Šušnjić, 1998:257) On the basis of the data acquired through the analysis of the material, the frequency of motives and different ways of representing them, **Kosovo became a national homeland of the Serbs in the centuries of slavery after the battle of Kosovo and it remained so to the days of entering a decisive battle with the Turks for the final liberation.**

4. AN EMPHASIS OF ETHNIC CHARACTERISTICS

Objective indicators, "cultural marks" gain their strength only when they play the role of "border mechanisms", when they help us distinguish between ethnic groups. "By conjoining these separate attributes and by intensifying and emphasizing them, the feeling of ethnic identity, and with it the feeling of ethnic community, is intensified and emphasized" (A. D. Smith, 1998:44). In a social situation in which it is possible to distinguish between different kinds of identification, the use of ethnic marks points to the existence of ethnic belonging. External indicators are unreliable and easily manipulated. In epic poems we come across a whole range of disguises and instances of behavior that conform to the stereotypes about other peoples (young Bulgarian, for instance).

4.1. An Emphasis of External Marks of Ethnic Identity

Until the very liberation from the Turks, the national costume was present among the Serbian people. Only after the liberation some more significant changes occurred. "Before gaining their freedom from the Turks, all people in it (in Serbia – D.G.) wore the national costume" (T. Đorđević: 60). National costume was an expression of a national taste, but also a means to "show national individuality". "Apart from different ethnic characteristics, the Slavs and Moslems, who were mostly Turks, were easily recognizable by the way they dressed" (M. Gleni, 2001:25). Outward signs were explicitly used as a means of ethnic distinctness. The members of the Orthodox church were forbidden to wear light-colored

clothes, to ride horses or carry weapons. "In order to defy these regulations bushrangers started to wear green or black dolmans decorated with silver ducats" (M. Gleni, 2001:25). We encounter this motive in the poem "Marko drinks wine during the Ramadan", where Kraljević Marko defies the Turkish regulations by stressing that his faith and ethnic belonging allow him to behave in that manner. There were some other external indicators of the ethnic identity. At the beginning of 19th century all people in Serbia had pigtailed. Tihomir Đorđević states that in the "old times" cutting hair was a sign of slavery. As an example, he mentions frescoes in which "common" people were represented with long hair. Travel-writers attest that the Serbs had long hair, which they either let down (as was the custom of older townsmen in Serbia) or shaped it in various ways. In Southern Serbia hair was usually shaped into a tale. Bushrangers had braids, tresses, feathers. Peasants in Serbia had braids (called 'pletenica' in our language and thus the surnames Pletikosa, Pletikosić). First "systematic" cuttings of pigtailed were at the beginning of 19th century when a special decree was issued. T. Đorđević quotes the examples when this had to be done with the help of "cops". "People were returning home ashamed, each carrying his own pigtail, thick as a horse tail. When we, their wives, saw what had been done, we started crying as if somebody had died". Weapons and horses were the signs of chieftdom, honor and ethnic dignity for the Serbs. Sharing weapons and horses with someone meant that you were very close with that person. On the other hand, an enemy must not get into the possession of these things. "When Marko Kraljević realized that he was dying, he made sure that the signs of his honor would not get disgraced after his death. That's why he 'cuts the throat of his horse Šarac with a saber, so as not to do any favors for the Turks; then he brakes his sharp saber into four, so as not to be taken by a Turk, and finally he breaks his battle spear into seven pieces and throws it into a fir forest...'" (T. Đorđević, 1984:106). A weapon and a horse meant honor, and a woman too was related to them in the sense that she "meant neither position, nor rank, but honor and honor only". In the poem "Death of Duke Prijezda", a Turkish Emperor Mehmed wants Prijezda to send him his saber, horse and wife. Prijezda brakes his saber, cuts off the head of his horse, and his wife wants to jump into the river Morava with him. The Turks also regarded horses and weapons as the signs of chieftdom. The Serbs had to differ from the Turks in the way they dressed because only a Turk could greet another Turk by saying "salem". Common people of the Serbian origin were not allowed to wear green color, pretty dresses, shawls around their heads, clothes embroidered with silver or gold. They were forbidden to carry sabers and guns and it was unacceptable that they ride a horse when passing by a Turk. The Turks and Serbs also differed in the choice of crafts they learned; namely, there were some dignified crafts reserved solely for the Turks. A Serb, for example, could not become "nalbanta" – a person who shoes a horse, nor "tabak", nor leather craftsman, and it was even difficult to become a barber or a shoemaker. "Therefore, it was not appropriate for common Serbs to have nice houses, like the Turks had, or to have good and graceful horses, and even natural gifts, such as a pretty face or long beautiful moustache were not gladly accepted in common people" (Vuk, 1987:14). The Serbs often disguised themselves as the Turks since the outward marks were quite clear, despite the fact that it was not a typical war situation: *"Hear me all,/ Put turbans on your heads,/ Hold sabers as Turks do,/ Make your horses dance the way the Turkish ones do,/ So as not to be recognized by them..."*

4.2. An Emphasis of Ethnic Sentiments

An emphasis of ethnic belonging, manifestation of ethnic sentiments is also an indicator of ethnic identification, besides transparent external marks. The examples of this kind are most frequently found in epic poems (a recurring motive in epic poems is the motive of grief for the destruction of the Serbian state, the ruining of landowners, dead heroes). The most transparent instance of such ethnic sentiments we find in the poem "Girl Margita and Duke Rajko" (third book – the poems of mid-times), in which both kill themselves because of the sorrow they feel for dead Serbian heroes. This is just one of many examples of altruistic suicides among the Serbs, which are clear indicators of the supreme position of social community in the consciousness of the people in the period of slavery. Women are also devoted to the ethnic idea and in the moments when they decide "to jump into water or hang themselves", it is because they don't want to "kiss their foes". By the number of found motives, ethnic sentiment is high on the ladder of values, and judging by the poem "Emperor Lazar and Empress Milica", it is the highest duty as well. The motive we encounter in numerous poems: "For the holy cross we shall shed our own blood/ and for the faith we shall die, together with our brothers" is actually the supreme norm and an indicator of strong ethnic sentiment which is based on common faith. "Brothers" refers not just to the family of Jugović, but to the Serbs in general. Apart from a programmatic emphasis of brotherly love that the Serbs feel for each other and for their country, in our poetry there is also a motive of discord, conflict among the Serbs that can't be settled, sins of the Serbs committed against their own people (although such cases are usually related to people of other nations offending the Serbs – the Latins, for example). Even in the cases like these, there exists a clear awareness of common ethnic origin, but it is not a motive strong enough to prevent conflicts.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing abundant material – written sources, we can assert that the basis of the Serbian nation is in the ethnic community of the Serbs whose identification was completed before the enslavement and this identification was preserved through many years of slavery. If we are to use the words of Anthony D. Smith, we would say that "an ethnic core" was organized in the Serbian community. Name, religion, language, customs, the myth of common origin, of a holy dynasty, of the holy land are the things that make the borders of the ethnic community more recognizable. A combination of these attributes and their emphases in social interaction is what makes ethnic identity. In the period of slavery all major elements that comprise the identity corpus were created – Kosovo as the mythic homeland above all, as well as the cult of Prince Lazar, Miloš Obilić, the motive of Vuk Branković's betrayal. Myths and memories of the homeland of an "imaginary" ethnic community carry ethnic title-deeds with them. **"That is why there are so many conflicts, even today, about cut-off parts of an ethnic homeland – in Armenia, Kosovo, Israel and Palestine, Ogaden and elsewhere"** (A.D.Smith, 1998:68)

If we use the words of Hobsbaum (1996), we would claim that there is no reason to deny proto-national feelings of the Serbs before 19th century. Even though there is a strong interweave of religious and ethnic identity of the Serbs, we can recognize the parts of identifying attributes, which distinguish the Serbs from other Orthodox nations.

The greatest shortcoming of the results of this study is the fact that we have tried to discover collective feelings of illiterate people by tracking notes about them, written by a small group of literate people.

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ELEMENTI ETNIČKE IDENTIFIKACIJE KOD SRBA

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Pitanje etničkog identiteta kod Srba, vremena njegovog nastanka, granica, današnjeg emocionalnog legitimiteta, jeste, naročito u poslednje vreme mnogo promišljan problem. Mnogi su se odgovori nudili iz različitih naučnih i onih drugih vizura, ali su ova pitanja i dalje veoma izazovna i otvorena. Ovaj rad se bavi pitanjem nastanka etničkog identiteta kod Srba, njegovog održavanja u vremenu dugogodišnjeg ropstva (misli se na ropstvo pod Turcima), kao i menjanjem pojedinih atributa identifikacije. Iako su mnoge »tradicije« relativno novog porekla, u radu se tvrdi da je etnička identifikacija kod Srba od svog nastanka pre ropstva pod Turcima do danas u osnovi opstala, uprkos velikim promenama koje je pretrpela u vreme ropstva, i kao takva čini osnovu srpske nacionalne identifikacije.