Being “Hidden” within a Minority. The Adoption of Bulgarians into the Ethnic Group of Serbs in Hungary

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Serbs in Hungary

The majority of Serbs in Hungary live scattered in the south, in the region of Baranya, in the south-east, around the river Moris and in the environs of Budapest. Historians estimate that the migrations of Serbs to the territory of today’s Hungary occurred in the period from the beginning of the 15th until the end of the 17th century. The majority of Serbs left Hungary after the First World War to return to Yugoslavia. This advanced interdisciplinary research is based on the dialectological description of Serbian vernaculars by the dialectologist Pedrag Stepanović, which is also available in English, and several smaller dialectological studies and questionnaires of the Common Slavic Linguistic Atlas (“Oponentski lingvistički atlas”) from the villages of Lovra (Loëré), Medina (Medina) and Tükulja (Tököl). Access to the questionnaires is restricted at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade. Further impressive anthropological data on the Hungarian Serbs have been collected within a series of scientific publications and journals as well as in local newspapers such as the weekly “Srpske narodne novine” published in Budapest.

1 This paper is a part of scientific project No. 2167, supported by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Development of Serbia.
2 Serbian transcriptions are used for Hungarian terms.
6 The most important is the Budapest collection Enigmati Čubih Slovena u Mađarskoj, (“Ethnography of South Slavs in Hungary”), which was divided at the beginning of the 1980s into Enigmati Čubih Hrvata u Mađarskoj (“Ethnography of Croats in Hungary”) and Enigmati Čubih Srba u Mađarskoj (“Ethnography of Serbs in Hungary”). The Belgrade Academy of Sciences and Arts has published three volumes of Semantički zbornik (“Sent-Endre množenje”) Useful scientific data can be found on the internet page www.zavok.org.yu/iranko-hu. See also the anthropological study by Miroslav Perišić: Srbi i selu Lovri u Mađarskoj tokom dvadesetog veka, Budapest 1995.
Serbs on the Csepel Island

This paper is based on ethno-linguistic field research among Serbs and Bulgarians living on the Csepel Island. The research was completed in September 2001 in two neighbouring villages: the village of Lovra (Lórev) and Ćip (Szegetscép). The main goal of the research team was to acquire insights into lexicon and discourse of traditional Serb-Serbian culture. Interest for the Bulgarians arose spontaneously during the fieldwork. Applied linguistic and anthropological methodology enabled the collection of both dialectological and sociolinguistic data and, at the same time, the gaining of valuable insights into the contemporary anthropological situation and traditional culture.

In the village of Ćip, approximately one hundred Serbs are living together with Hungarians and Germans. The majority of the Serb population moved from this village to Yugoslavia in 1924 to settle in the village of Bački Brestovac. The village of Lovra, with three hundred inhabitants, is generally considered a unique, pure Serb village in Hungary. Not far to the north the Croat settlement of Tukulja (Tókoló) is to be found. A tradition of mutual weddings between these two geographically close villages existed as well as strong connections with Serbs from the villages of Medina in the South, three villages north of Budapest – Kalaz (Budaaláz), Pomaz (Pomzs) and Cobanac (Csohánka) – and the small town of Sent Endre (Szentesdombor). Serbs once also used to live in the small town of Kovin (Ráckeve), but today, only several immigrant Serb families can be found there. South of Budapest, very close to the island of Csepel, three Serb groups lived in the urban communities of


8 Serbs from Ćip consider “Jekavci”-speaking Roman Catholics from Tukulja ethnically as Rači; the plural form is Tukujali, the female serbic form Tukujalica. There is no evidence of mixed marriages with Orthodox Serbs. Inhabitants of the village of Tukulja consider themselves “Catholic Rači”, “Banjevci” and “Scholarzi”. They number around 1,000, have their own folklore group and club, a bilingual nursery and four years of elementary schooling in their mother tongue since 1984/85 (cf. Prelić, Srbi, p. 64). According to the previously mentioned anthropological research done in Lovra at the beginning of the 1990s, Serbs maintained the greatest ethnic distance toward the Roma; later the ethnic distance toward Croats increased, especially since Belgrade TV was available via satellite. In the middle of the 1990s, the majority of Serbs from Lovra declared that they would not like to marry Croats or live with them in the same neighbourhoods. Answers to questions asked previous to the collapse of Yugoslavia were quite different. This ethnic distance was maintained mainly vis-a-vis the abstract concept of “Croat”, not the Croats living in the neighbouring village (e.g. “With the people from Tukulja we always had good relations, we have friends [...]”, Prelić, Srbi, p. 136).

9 The Adoption of Bulgarians into the Serbs of Hungary

Aljašić (Răcalmăci), Pantelija (Dunău-jvaros) and Bata (Săzhalombatta). The Serbian communities of Aljašić and Pantelija are practically extinct today. Some of the remaining Serbian families in the settlement of Pantelija are considered “Tzintzuz” and therefore of Aromanian origin. This situation has yet to be studied.

10 Thanks to contemporary anthropologists, the linguistics identity of Serbs in Hungary is a seriously researched topic. The attitude towards Serbs coming from Serbia was described as ambiguous, because the standard Serbian language was in part not understandable for the Hungarian Serbs (“You do speak correctly, we do not speak the Serbian language correctly”). But differences in mentality exist as well. These can be compared with the results of sociolinguistic research on Croats in Hungary, where stagnation in language development, diglossy, early bilingualism, transformation of symmetric bilingualism into an asymmetric one favouring the Hungarian language and latent conflicts between the Croat dialect and standard language are considered important. But considering the difference between the Croat dialect spoken in Hungary and standard Croatian, comparison with the sociolinguistic data on Serbian dialects spoken in Hungary is only of limited value, because the Hungarian Serbian dialects are much closer to the Serb standard language. Even the influences within the local Serbian speeches favor the major dialect group (“Šumadijsko-vojvodanski”) and the small enclave of another dialect (“kosovsko-rasinski”) in Cobanac has changed completely today.

11 All Serbs participating in the study in both Serbian villages of Csepel were bilingual. According to the census data of 1900, 75% of the Serbs in Lovra also spoke Hungarian. This high percentage is questionable, since knowledge of Hungarian appears only to have existed on an elementary level at the time, particularly among women. From the transcriptions of the conversations presented in the appendix, it is evident that older Serbs remember their parents speaking Hungarian very poorly. The figures of the census of 1941 are even higher (95.1%), but the quality of the spoken Hungarian is also controversial.

12 In the village of Aljašić, which has to date not been studied, there are only two or three Serbian houses. Some traces of the Pantelija vernacular were described by Predrag Stepanović: Jekavski elementi u ekvavnom govorima Srba u Mađarskoj. Naučno-znanstveni listci SVET (2003), pp. 1103-1105, here 1106.


15 Prelić, Srbi, p. 135.


The adoption of Hungarians into the Serbs of Hungary

The results of recent anthropological research in Lovra in the 1990s show several levels of Serbian-Hungarian bilingualism. According to these data, the people from Lovra estimate their own language competence as follows: “We speak neither Serbian nor Hungarian correctly.”

Traditionally it was considered shameful to speak Hungarian in the local church, at home and the graveyard. The attitude was different during a local annual feast called büčura – even in the last century friends were invited from neighbouring villages.18 From a linguistic point of view, this “openness” of the village annual feast to non-Serbs is underlined by the use of the Hungarian term büčura instead of the Slavic seoska slava, or zavetina.

In the lexicon of both Lovra and Čip, a significant number of Hungarian and German loanwords appeared. Collected examples of linguistic calques based on the Hungarian language as a model are of the same type as described in the linguistic literature and are typical for all the Serbian vernaculars in Hungary. The establishment of linguistic micro-differentiation between the two Csép villages, Lovra and Čip,19 was also one of the goals of the research.

A great deal of data on traditional wedding and funeral customs and calendar feasts were collected. Serbs in both villages confirmed that the custom of the maypole, which is unknown among Serbs in Serbia, is still in use today. A summary overview of Serbian traditional customs in Hungary, given by the Belgrade ethnologist Dušan Držača, does not mention the maypole, although it stresses the recent penetration by Hungarian traditional culture.20 In comparison with the actual image of demons in the traditional spiritual culture in the Vojvodina, a region appropriate for the comparison with the Serbs in Hungary, a reduced demonic system was evidenced in the villages of Čip and Lovra: only the bosorka and tatof (both words are of Hungarian origin, the image of these demons as well) can be mentioned. The complete Slavic demonic corpus is missing, not to mention the widespread and still present belief in the existence of vampires. Such a reduced repertoire could be the result of the strong influence of the local Orthodox Church, but for the definite explanation of this phenomenon more serious historical research – above all in the archives of the local Orthodox churches – is needed.

Hungarian influence was very strong in the practice of several forms of handicrafts and trades such as the raising of pigeons, and the relevant terminology is based completely on the Hungarian. The herds of Serbs in Hungary differs in

18 Prešić, Srbi, pp. 145-146.
19 In these two Serbian villages on the Csép Island there was no exclusive specialization, there were only differences caused by different soil. In the village of Čip the soil has a lot of sand which forms the base for the vineyards there, while the inhabitants often had to buy cereals on the market – cf. Prešić, Srbi, p. 82.
20 Dušan Držača: Neke odlike narodnih običaja Srba u Mađarskoj. In: N. Čobelić et al. (eds.), Društvene nauke o Srbiima u Mađarskoj, Budapest 2003, pp. 89-100, this paper is based mainly on earlier published data.

Bulgarian gardeners on Csép Island

Before 1989, Bulgarians in Hungary were officially non-existent. The Hungarian Act on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities requires for the recognition of a “national or ethnic minority” at least one century of presence in Hungary. Today the Bulgarians are considered an official minority group, although they do not demand the right to use their language and culture. Their dispersion makes it impossible to define a geographical area or region where their language is used; Bulgarian is considered a “non-territorial” language.21

The minority data of the 1980 and 1990 Hungarian censuses show a significant number of Bulgarians. Based on mother tongue, 3,426 (1980) and 2,953 (1990) Serbs and 1,370 (1990) Bulgarians were registered; based on nationality, 2,805 (1980) and 2,905 (1990) Serbs lived in Hungary. No data for Bulgarians was collected. Hungary-based minority organisations estimated the number of Serbs at 5,000 and the number of Bulgarians at between 3,000 and 3,500 in 1990.22

According to the unofficial summary data from the 2001 census, Serbs is spoken as a mother tongue by 3,388 persons and Bulgarian by 1,299; 3,816 persons declared that they belong to the Serbian minority and 1,358 persons declared that they belong to the Bulgarian minority. 5,279 persons had ties with Serbian cultural values and traditions (Bulgarian: 1693) and 4,186 persons spoke Serbian in the family and with friends (Bulgarian: 1118).23

The largest part of the Bulgarian minority lives in and around Budapest. Collected field data and available ethnographic literature also revealed the presence of Orthodox Bulgarian gardeners in both Serbian villages on Csép Island. In 1905 the Orthodox priest of Lovra stated: “At Lovra there are 5 foreigners, 651 are Orthodox Serbs. In this number 1 have included 22 Bulgarians.

...they have their gardens close to Budapest, but they are married here, they have their permanent domicile, they speak good Serbian, and have the same family salt cult (slave) as we do.31 This Bulgarian group is now considered assimilated by marriage to Serbian women. The first Bulgarian-Serbian mixed marriage was attested in 1881, the last one in 1922.32 Another group of Bulgarian gardeners was assimilated among the Serbs from Bata (Száhalombatta) – an urban settlement on the other side of the Danube.33 The first generation of Bulgarian gardeners spoke Bulgarian among themselves but they quickly learned Serbian. This assimilation process involved negative ethnic stereotypical terms such as “nasty”, “black”, “unfaithful” for Bulgarians when talking about newcomers. Contrary to these common negative stereotypes, attitudes such as “They are the same as we, those who live among us do not differ at all” can be found in the anthropological literature on Lovra.34 The Bulgarians were sometimes considered “unreliable” and responsible for discord in the village; nevertheless, the current president of the village council, elected by secret ballot, is a descendant of Bulgarian immigrants.35 Only poor Serbian girls without dowry used to marry Bulgarians. The “pure” Serbs did not like to marry even the second generation of Bulgarians as they were considered of “lower” class. Before 1930 they were not accepted in the church community as equal members, and some Serbian priests changed Bulgarian names into Serbian.36 With the exception of three persons today, the descendants of the Bulgarians consider themselves Serbs; the other residents of Lovra are of the same opinion. The descendants of the Bulgarian gardeners in Lovra and Ćip are completely integrated into the community, their mother tongue is Serbian, but, on the other hand, they do not deny their Bulgarian origin. In Lovra we heard the story of one Bulgarian descendant, who even travelled to Bulgaria to search for his relatives, but did not succeed in finding them. No traces of Bulgarian traditional folk culture can be found in Lovra with the exception of one traditional dance, but it is not performed anymore. This can be explained by the dominantly male population of the Bulgarian gardeners.

Bulgarian language competence was not studied and we had no conversation in or recorded data of the Bulgarian language on Csepel Island. It is evident that the belonging to the South Slavic dialectological continuum eased a Serbian-Bulgarian communication and supported the process of assimilation. A statement from Ćip is typical: “I was in Bulgaria. Bulgarians were at my place. This

32 For details about Bulgarian gardeners in Lovra see at Prešić, Srb, pp. 77-78 where a list of local Bulgarian families with the names of their family saints is presented. See also Marija Kilić: Godišnji praznici kod Srba u Bati. Etnografska Srba u Mađarskoj i, (1997), pp. 13-23, here p. 19.
34 Prešić, Srb, p. 329.
35 The list of these new Serbian names is given in: Prešić, Srb, p. 107.
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church; in some extreme cases the Roman Catholics and other Christians are even considered "non-believers". It is possible that the Aromanians, who are not native speakers of Slavic languages, according to the example of the Bulgarians, passed through the same procedure of ethnic adoption within the ethnic group of Serbs easily and quickly, because they belonged to the Christian Orthodox religion.

Serbian anthropologists point out that the Serbian population in Hungary has not been "regenerated" by new immigrants from Serbia, pointing to the fact that the number of Serbs in Hungary is progressively decreasing by 1% a year. They use the terms "depopulated, marginalized, unable, rural minority group" or "dispersed dwarfish ethnic community" to describe this condition. They also describe the situation among the Serbs in Hungary as similar to the fragmented Jewish communities in today's Serbia, which consist to a high degree of persons with non-Jewish origins as secondary keepers of tradition.26

In conclusion we can state that the concept of 'hidden minorities' is appropriate for the description of those Bulgarian gardeners and Aromanian tradesmen that were adopted by the Serbs in Hungary during the 19th and 20th century.27

Appendix:

1. Conversation in Ćić with two older men, S1 and S2 (born in 1930 and 1929), on 18 September 2001; questions are reproduced in brackets.

S1: Bugarski i madarski, a svapski. Ja ne nemački znam, ja švapski. Tu su biti Švaphi poneviše. Tu madarski se nije zdravo razgoveario, i švapski žene su švapski, pošte u doban i tamo su iskale švapski. A Šeši su madari bili neg Švabi, jer Šeši su svi znali švapski, a Švabo nije znao, reklo je znao Švapho srpski. - Bulgarian and Hungarian, and Swabian. I do not speak German, I do speak Swabian. Here were mostly Swabians. We did not speak much Hungarian, and Serbian women spoke Swabian, they went to the store and asked in Swabian. But the Serbs were cleverer than the Swabians, because the Serbs all knew Swabian, but the Swabians did not, it was very rare that Swabians spoke Serbian.

[How do you speak? - Where did you learn Bulgarian?]

S1: Bio sam u Bugarskoj. Bugari bili kod mene. Ma to je, kažu, pokvorenj srpski. Sano one još okrije govore neg mi. Ne mogu ja razumeći. - I was in Bulgaria. Bulgarians were at my place. This is, one can say, spoiled Serb. But, they speak more rudely than we. I can't understand. [How do you speak? - Are there Bulgarians in the neighbouring villages?]

26 Drljača, Neke odlike, p. 98.
27 Although based on a small selected sample (50 Bulgarian families) the individual and group ethnic identification of members of Bulgarian minority in Hungary has been studied by Maria Homnisiova: "The research of the ethnic processes in the minority communities living in Hungary", www.sanku.hr/cau/4-2001/homnisiova.html
The Adoption of Hungarians into the Serbs of Hungary

SZ: Ovo je malo Jugoslovija. Šta da vam kažem, tu nema ništa, hatur. – This is a small Yugoslavia. What to say, there is nothing here at all.

B: Ako je bilo tri porodice mađarske, i oni su se portfolio, oni su tiši i u nade škole, pa bili su koji nisu ni znaли mađarski. Majdiši. Sad se ne može bekovati, to nekad nije bilo da se smelo, rečeno druga veza da se venča u našoj vezi. – There were only three Hungarian families, even they spoke Serbian, they attended our schools, some Hungarians even didn’t speak Hungarian. Now we have these mixed marriages; this was not allowed in old times that, for example an other faith marriage with our faith.

[...]

Bibliography


From a Majority to a Hidden Minority. The German-Speaking Population of the Abstall/Apače Basin (19th and Early 20th Centuries)

Edward G. Staudinger

The geographical setting

The term Abstaller Feld/Apaško polje – or Abstaller Becken/Apaško kotlina (Apače Basin), as it is often called in the primary sources and the literature – is an area up to four kilometres wide, south of the Mur River and north of the Windische Bühel/Slovenske gorice in the north-eastern corner of the Republic of Slovenia. From the Austrian side, the area can be accessed across the Mur via bridges in the towns of Mureck in the west and Bad Radkersburg in the east. Four ferries crossed the Mur until 1918, connecting the Apače Basin to the railroad between Spielfeld and Bad Radkersburg and markets for local agricultural production. The area, populated since the late middle ages by a primarily German-speaking population belonged to the principality of Styria until the end of the First World War. With the constitution of the political districts in 1868, the area became part of the district of Bad Radkersburg; in terms of judicial districts, the area was divided between Radkersburg and Mureck. The Peace Treaty of St. Germain, signed by Austria on 10 September 1919 stipulated in Part II, Art. 27 the new Austrian borders, including those with Yugoslavia as following the Mur River in the border sections IV and V. The Apače Basin fell to Yugoslavia as part of the district of Ljutomer/Lutenberg.

New parish delineations were not regulated in peace treaties following the First World War. The Parish of Abstall/Apaše was mentioned for the first time in 1420 as an offshoot of the Parish of Radkersburg, although with the exception of the Parish church, no additional church existed in the Parish until 1693. The borders of the Parish shifted repeatedly with the founding of new parishes but

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