

Lopičić, Vesna

Serbian memes in the Canadian diaspora: a case of cultural compromise

The Central European journal of Canadian studies. 2014, vol. 9, iss. [1], pp. 123-136

ISBN 978-80-210-7732-4

ISSN 1213-7715 (print); ISSN 2336-4556 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/134385>

Access Date: 29. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.



Serbian Memes in the Canadian Diaspora: A Case of Cultural Compromise¹

Les mèmes serbes dans la diaspora canadienne: Un
compromis culturel

Vesna Lopičić

Abstract

As one of the most constant propagators of Darwin's theory of evolution in our times, Richard Dawkins claims that we are the only species capable of cultural transmission of information in such a way that it can give rise to a form of evolution. This is how Dawkins introduces the meme as a unit of cultural transmission and as the agent of cultural evolution. The survival of the meme depends on its psychological appeal, and a new meme will replicate itself whenever favourable conditions arise. Any given diaspora makes for such a replication-inducing environment for the memes originating in the homeland. Commonly known as cultural traits, such memes can be found in diaspora literature. The aim of this article is to identify the memes that are described in the literature of Canadian authors of Serbian origin and compare that meme pool with typical Canadian values. Synchronic digraphia, 'inat,' and 'slava' are three uniquely Serbian units of culture that are explored in the cultural environment of Canada.

Keywords: Canadian culture, Richard Dawkins, memes, Serbian diaspora

Résumé

Un des propagateurs les plus constants de la théorie darwinienne de l'évolution, Richard Dawkins, affirme que nous sommes les seules espèces capables d'effectuer la transmission culturelle de l'information de façon à provoquer une forme d'évolution. Dawkins invente le concept de mème comme étant l'unité de la transmission culturelle et l'agent de l'évolution culturelle. La survie du mème dépend de son importance psychologique; le nouveau mème se reproduit à l'identique toutes les fois que les conditions sont favorables. Toute diaspora constitue un bon environnement pour la réplication des mèmes provenant du pays d'origine. On peut trouver ces mèmes, reconnus comme traits culturels, dans la littérature de la diaspora. Cet article se propose d'examiner les mèmes qui sont décrits dans les œuvres d'auteurs canadiens d'origine serbe tels que, par exemple, « digraphia synchronique », « inat » ou

1) This research was supported by the project 178014 granted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.



« slava », des éléments culturels typiquement serbes, en les envisageant dans le contexte des valeurs canadiennes.

Mots-clés : culture canadienne, Richard Dawkins, mèmes, diaspora serbe

Introduction: Genes and memes

The aim of this article is to identify some memes found in the meme pool of the Serbian diaspora in Canada and to show how they are compromised in a changed cultural environment. The examples are taken from the works of Canadian authors of Serbian origin, and compared with similar cultural traits comprising the meme pool of Canadian culture. For this purpose it is necessary to refer to the findings of the dual inheritance theory.

Dual inheritance theory, or gene-culture coevolution theory, holds that “parallel mechanisms for inheritance, mutation, selection, and drift act on culture as they do on genes” (Shennan 3175). It is now a fact confirmed by science that what is universal to all life forms are DNA codes of genetic information that are capable of self-replication. Richard Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene* 1976) is among the first scientists to explain that the genes making up chromosomes have the same general characteristics in all living creatures, whether animal or plant. They propagate, mutate, and respond to selective pressures, thus becoming the driving force of biological evolution. Man as a species is exceptional in only one regard: culture. We are the only species capable of cultural transmission of information in such a way that it can give rise to a form of evolution. Though aware of the examples of birds and monkeys demonstrating some ability to learn by imitating the activity of some other member of the same species, Dawkins claims they are just “interesting oddities.” Only human culture can truly evolve:

Language is one example out of many. Fashions in dress and diet, ceremonies and customs, art and architecture, engineering and technology, all evolve in historical time in a way that looks like highly speeded up genetic evolution, but has really nothing to do with genetic evolution. (Dawkins 1989, 190)

This is how Dawkins throws out the gene as the sole basis of evolution and introduces the meme as a unit of cultural transmission and the agent of cultural evolution. Cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission because “just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to



brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation” (Dawkins 1989, 192). Using the type of metaphor which earned him the label of philosopher rather than scientist, Dawkins continues that the old gene-selected evolution, by making brains, provided the ‘soup’ in which the first memes arose. This is how genes and memes are related. Just as genes live in chromosomes, memes live in human brains. Similar to genes, they are characterised by (relative) longevity, fecundity, and copying-fidelity, and they are subject to mutation, and blending.

Further, memes are as selfish as genes (as Dawkins explains in the 30th anniversary edition of his famous book, “selfishness” means survival efficiency of an entity). The unit that survives as a consequence of natural selection is by definition selfish because it has to compete for survival with rival units. If we talk about genes, they are alleles, rivals for the same chromosomal slot. If we talk about memes, they compete against other memes for our time, library shelf-space, newspaper column-inches, billboard space, radio and television time (Dawkins 1989, 197), internet, or SMS space. Just like with genes, selection favours memes that are most adaptable, that can best manage change, in the Darwinian sense. With other selected memes they create the meme pool that characterises a certain society. The meme pool is in fact the culture where new memes have to struggle for selection. If they prevail due to their psychological appeal, they can affect the course of evolution of that or some other culture. The survival of the meme depends on its psychological appeal, and a new meme will replicate itself whenever favourable conditions arise.

Here is an example of a meme in the form of a Spanish phrase that became a catch phrase in popular culture: “Hasta la vista, baby.” Besides being in everyday use in Spanish-speaking countries, it reached a wider public through Jody Watley’s single “Looking for a New Love”² in 1987 and the Tone Loc single “Wild Thing” in 1988, only to reach world-wide fame with the blockbuster “Terminator 2” in 1991. After the film, the phrase further penetrated pop culture and the jargon of the young, the world of politics, music, film, literature, either in the original, in translation, or even variation. Typically for pop-culture memes, “Hasta la vista, baby” became immensely popular but proved short-lived in line with what Dawkins says: “Some memes, like some genes, achieve brilliant short-term success in spreading rapidly, but do not last long in the meme pool” (Dawkins 1989, 194). It is exactly the same with some cultural traits which evolve in historical time only to quickly disappear with changed social circumstances.

2) “*Looking for a New Love*”
 My love was true
 Still you threw it all away
 But now you’re like the rest
 Unworthy of my best
 Hasta la vista, baby

“*Wild Thing*”
 Say what
 Yo love you must be kidding
 You’re walkin’ babe
 Just break out of here
 Hasta la vista baby



Memes are similar to genes because they can appear to be altruistic, just as genes may assist their own replicas, seemingly altruistically, in other kindred bodies. Genes do that for their own preservation and continuation, and memes have exactly the same selfish mechanism. For example, certain religious sects may offer help to the followers for the sole purpose of attracting them to the sect so that the number of meme propagators increases through imitation, and with it the replication success of the religious meme.

Dawkins also notices that although memes and genes may reinforce each other, they can sometimes come into opposition. He gives a very illustrative example of celibacy. In a gene pool it would quickly disappear, while in the meme pool it has been self-replicating for centuries.

Memes in the Context of Diaspora

At the same time as Dawkins, evolutionary archaeologists interested in cultural transmission proposed different units equivalent to memes (e.g. Dunnell 1971, 1986; Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman 1981; Boyd & Richerson 1985; Lipo et al. 1997; O'Brien & Lyman 2000, 2002; Lipo & Madsen 2001; Rogers & Ehrlich 2008).³ Time will show which of the terms for these units will prevail by becoming widely accepted, and whether 'memes' will substitute the commonly used term 'cultural traits.' Also, O'Brien (et al) in their article *Cultural Traits as Units of Analysis* (2010), confirm the significance of innovations for the evolution of memes constituting a culture, noticed in a much older study by Schumpeter (1934):

Cultural traits are units of transmission that permit diffusion and create traditions – patterned ways of doing things that exist in identifiable form over extended periods of time. As with genes, cultural traits are subject to recombination, copying error, and the like and thus can be the foundation for the production of new traits. In other words, cultural traits can be both inventions – new creations – and innovations – inventions that successfully spread. (O'Brien, 3797)

The suggested relationship between cultural traits and the creation of tradition is especially interesting in the context of the diaspora. The diaspora makes for a good replication-inducing environment for the memes originating in the homeland. Tradition is always related to the home country, and it can be defined according to O'Brien

3) "A number of different names attempted for the parts of culture testify to the seriousness of the problem. Chick makes a whole list of them: ideas, beliefs, values, rules, principles, symbols, concepts, elements, culturgens, traits, etc., operational at lower levels, while themes, configurations, schemes, complexes and patterns are applicable to high levels of culture" (Lopičić 2008).



as patterned ways of doing things. However fixed, tradition is yet inevitably subject to change, in the environment of the home country and particularly so when uprooted and re-planted in the environment of a foreign society. The complete meme pool of one culture can never be transplanted to another place, and even individual memes undergo the process of recombination and suffer from copying error. Thus the customs and traditions of the mother country metamorphose into different forms despite the conscious effort on the part of immigrants to have them preserved and inviolate. This accounts for the differences between the memes of the original and diaspora communities resulting from imperfect cultural transmission and constituting the evolution of a culture.

Therefore, the entire cultural heritage of a nation consists of changing memes transmitted horizontally through cultures and vertically through families in ever new ways which either die out after some time or become part of tradition and the agents of its evolution. O'Brien (et al) confirms what Dawkins has been claiming:

Cultural traits have long been used in anthropology as units of transmission that ostensibly reflect behavioural characteristics of the individuals or groups exhibiting the traits. After they are transmitted, cultural traits serve as units of replication in that they can be modified as part of an individual's cultural repertoire through processes such as recombination, loss or partial alteration within an individual's mind. Cultural traits are analogous to genes in that organisms replicate them, but they are also replicators in their own right. No one has ever seen a unit of transmission, either behavioural or genetic, although we can observe the effects of transmission.⁴ (O'Brien, 3797)

In line with this, Stuart Hall in his article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" also emphasises the issue of transformation: "The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall, 401-402).

It is interesting to observe some memes in this process of synchronic and diachronic transmission, replication and modification, and the effects of transmission and transformation in diasporic circumstances as described in literary works.

4) O'Brien rounds up this idea in a purely anthropological fashion: "Fortunately, such units are manifest in artefacts, features and other components of the archaeological record, and they serve as proxies for studying the transmission (and modification) of cultural traits, provided there is analytical clarity over how to define and measure the units that underlie this inheritance process" (O'Brien, 3797).



Serbian memes

It is impossible to pull out a few memes out of the meme pool of one culture as most representative, and equally difficult to find those that make that culture unique. Regarding Serbian culture, there are nevertheless a few memes that stand out as probably unique. For example, synchronic digraphia, meaning that in Serbia people use both the Serbian Cyrillic alphabet (1814) and Gaj's Latin alphabet (1835). Both scripts are studied in elementary school as obligatory within the Serbian language courses so that most speakers of Serbian can read and write both scripts. In this sense, Serbian is the only European language with active digraphia. However, after the civil wars (1991-1999) and the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, there has been a noticeable tendency to promote and favour the Cyrillic script as a repository of national identity threatened by foreign influences, meaning that this meme of Serbian culture is undergoing a transformation. Its transmission to Canada is also marked by insistence on the Cyrillic script for the sake of its preservation in an environment where only the Latin script is used. Most Serbian authors at home and abroad prefer writing in the Cyrillic, and David Albahari, probably the best Canadian author of Serbian origin writing exclusively in Serbian, has just published a collection of short fiction *Learning Cyrillic* (translated into English) as if to prove its significance for the Serbian diaspora. The digraphia meme is evidently challenged in Canadian diaspora since the Serbian newspapers in Canada are published mainly in the Cyrillic script (*Kišobran/Кишобран* Vancouver, *Novine/Новине* Toronto). The reductive transformation of this meme is closely related to the phenomenon of rising patriotism and the feeling of threatened national identity, so that a new meme "Use Cyrillic!" now becomes dominant. In accordance with Cawley (2006), such a phenomenon qualifies as a meme because a) it includes instructions for carrying out a specific action; b) it is stored in our brain as an impulse; and c) it is passed to other (Serbian) brains through the process of demonstration, observation and imitation.

Another meme which belongs in the meme pool of Serbian culture, and one which is found on the site of "WWWord Untranslatable," is 'inat.' As an abstract concept, it also seems to be uniquely Serbian, though it should not be to the pride of the Serbian people to practice it. There is even a saying that 'Inat is a bad advisor' ('Inat je loš zanať'), well-known by all Serbs but seldom heeded. The word 'inat' is approximated by the words obstinacy, persistence, tenacity, though these are not adequate translation equivalents. Despite being an expert on Serbian mentality, Misha Glenny is still puzzled by this word. He writes the following on "WWWord Untranslatable":

To my knowledge, there is only one language that succeeds in reducing a complex chain of concepts to one four-letter word. The word is *inat*; the language is Serbian.



Serbs themselves will sometimes engage in extended discussions when trying to define the idea of *inat*. Probably the least wordy English version of the word is “deliberately cutting off your nose to spite your face,” although a more elegant definition I have seen is “defiance for the sake of defiance rather than to achieve a long-term goal.” (Untranslatable)

In his article on “inat,” Misha Glenny traces the origin of this word and concludes that it is part of considerable Ottoman heritage still very much alive in the Serbian vocabulary and general culture. From the original Turkish meaning ‘persistence’ this word developed in the 19th century into a meme for the unreasonable defiance and persistency which probably helped the Serbs to be the first Balkan nation to win their independence from the Turkish occupiers.

Glenny specialised in reporting on the Yugoslav wars and wrote *The Fall of Yugoslavia* (1992), which makes him a rather reliable source of information concerning Serbian national characteristics. He claims that “*Inat* is specifically associated with Serbs, and is often qualified as *srpski* or Serbian *inat*, meaning that it is largely (although not wholly) absent from the Croatian or Bosnian variants of the language that used to be called Serbo-Croat.” Glenny further proposes that internalised ‘inat’ can explain the attitude of the Serbs during the Yugoslav wars, their irrational defiance manifested as sitting on bridges under shell fire, or running a five kilometer race during an air raid. He also suggests that the Serbian people may have been manipulated by their political elite, who reinforced the idea of ‘inat’ as a valuable part of their intrinsic character and led the nation to self-destructive behaviour.

When transmitted to Canada, the ‘inat’ meme should by the nature of memetics self-replicate, and continue to spread. However, though the diaspora is generally a good self-replicating environment for the memes reaching it from the home country, this does not happen, due to significant cultural differences. Defining Canadian culture is as difficult as defining any culture, but Kyle Carsten Wyatt, as a Canadian, takes a hint from Northrop Frye’s famous concept of garrison mentality. It is probably not well-known that Frye in an 1989 speech explained that the garrison mentality, “which was social but not creative,” had been replaced by “the condominium mentality, which is neither social nor creative, and which forces the cultural energies of the country into forming a kind of counter-environment” (Wyatt 2012). When an immigrant moves to one of Canadian metropolises, as they are prone to do, they are supposed to meet “one of the most highly urbanized people in the world,” but they often do not, because of the condominium mentality. In order to clarify this phenomenon, Wyatt describes the life in his condominium:

Unlike a garrison, which Frye saw as a social unit, my building offers the *illusion* of community while cultivating insularity. We take the elevator to the lobby or the underground parking garage, fiddling with our iPhones instead of visiting with the person standing next



to us. We post complaints about our neighbours' barking dog on "community-building" Facebook pages, rather than knocking on their door and having an actual conversation. We threaten to call the cops when our neighbours enjoy their balconies, instead of joining them for a beer. We flip our units as soon as we can afford a better one in a better building, or as soon as our view is destroyed by a rival development down the street. We're all alone with our high-speed Internet and embarrassment of social networks, as concrete walls mute the existence of our real neighbours. (Wyatt 2012)

In such an alienating social environment, the Serbian 'inat' cannot thrive because for its full effect it needs the Other as the point of reference. What is the use of spiting oneself stubbornly if there is no witness? For its replication the meme naturally needs an audience of imitators who will catch up this mental virus and spread it further. Canadians, however, are people who mind their own business, nice and polite but mainly indifferent to their neighbours and their quirks, such as parking in front of a fire hydrant out of spite ('za inat'), or back-biting within their boss's hearing though aware of the consequences ('za inat'). For law-abiding and reasonable Canadians, such irrational behaviour is psychologically not appealing, and the 'inat' meme cannot survive even within small Serbian immigrant communities. It cannot meet the three laws of memetics, as defined by Cawley (2006):

1. The Law of Intention: Memes replicate for their reasons, not ours.
2. The Law of Propagation: A meme thrives only through a frequent cycle of demonstration, observation and imitation.
3. The Law of Gravitation: A meme tends to move from the cultural fringe toward the cultural center.

The process of acculturation is merciless, and the social/behavioural patterns of Canadian culture prove to have better survival value, and are consequently adopted by immigrants sooner or later.

Authors of Serbian origin in Canada very often write about the problems that immigrants encounter when faced with cultural differences that confuse and eventually deculturate. Obstinate insistence on old patterns brings only ridicule or indifference as Nebojsa Milosavljevic (2005) shows in his stories. In one of them, "The Silence of the Piglets," his narrator sticks to the Serbian tradition of serving a roasted piglet for Christmas dinner against the North American tradition of using turkey for that occasion. He offers the example of a Serb who has been for thirty years smuggling a small piglet from an Amish farm to Richmond Hill in Toronto where in his back yard he would, according to the Serbian custom, slaughter⁵ and roast the piglet. He has been so persistent

5) It should be noted that slaughtering and serving piglets for Christmas dinner does not have the elements of religious ritual nor is it part of Orthodox religion in any way. It is probably the most delicious way of breaking a 40 day fast preceding Christmas.



that the neighbours finally stopped calling the police and the animal protection society. However, this is a solitary example and just like the ‘inat’ meme, the home-slaughtered roast piglet meme in Canada is compromised by the use of turkey. At the beginning of his story, Milosavljevic openly declares his resistance to the Canadian custom of serving turkey by saying “No passaran,” and thereby giving tremendous weight to his patriotic attitude. The humour of this scene arises from the incongruity of the historical reference and the trivial situation to which it is applied. The famous cry of La Passionaria against Fascism is used as a battle cry against turkey. The narrator claims that he has made many compromises of Serbian cultural memes in a Canadian environment, such as accepting to live in a country without the fragrance of linden trees, where soccer is not a national sport, where for half the year the temperature is below zero. Still, the line has to be drawn somewhere, and in his case it is the issue of Christmas dinner. Turkey will not pass, he says, and in this parody of national pride, the enemy he has to defend his position against is a simple bird which he sees as an attack on his integrity and national identity. Yet, underlying the humour, there is a serious overtone worth considering. Milosavljevic implies that the turkey has become the Trojan horse of the New World Order, of transnational capitalism and globalisation’s tendency to standardise even the menus. The vast variety and richness of national cuisines are challenged by the memes of the dominant Anglo-American culture, or rather by the economic interests of mega-corporations like McDonald’s. The author fears that reducing this culinary variety by imposing a uniform global menu becomes a symptom of thought control and restriction on freedom. Regardless of this view, immigrant communities and individuals are evidently and inevitably exposed to the influence of all the memes of the host culture, which must be competing with some memes brought from the old homeland. In this everlasting battle of memes which constitutes cultural evolution, the host memes usually win.

The third illustration of meme transmission and their replication in the diaspora is another uniquely Serbian cultural unit, known as ‘slava’ (Thanksgiving or Glory-giving), a spiritual birthday of the Serbian family. It has been part of Serbian tradition since the conversion to Christianity of the Serbian tribes in the 9th century. “Because Krsna Slava is regarded as the anniversary of the baptism of the family into Christianity, it is an annual reaffirmation of the family to its baptismal vows and the renewal of its ties to the Orthodox faith and church” (Bizic). It is interesting that ‘slava’ is a custom exclusively of the Serbian people among all Slavs and Orthodox Christians. While the whole nation, especially children, celebrate the day of St. Sava, similar to the Irish celebrating St. Patrick, each family has their own patron saint who is venerated by throwing a feast on a particular day.⁶ The head of the household passes the ‘slava’ to

6) Popular ‘slava’ dates include St. Nicholas (December 19th), St. George (May 6th), St. John the Baptist (January 20th), St. Stephen (January 9th), St. Archangel Michael (November 21st) and St. Demetrius (November 18th), St. Trifun (February 14th), etc.



his son or daughter (if she remains in his home) who is in that manner connected to the first baptised ancestor thus linking generations and preserving the values of the faith in Christ:

The Mother church blessed this practice and proclaimed Krsna Slava a Christian institution. According to the words of St. Paul (Phil. 1:2), every Christian family is a small church, and, just as churches are dedicated to one saint who is celebrated as the protector of the church, so Serbian families place themselves under the protection of the saint on whose holiday they became Christians and to whom they refer as their intercessor to God Almighty. (Bizic)

The whole family gathers and entertains many visitors who come to venerate the saint and feast with the family.

The memetic 'slava' is a memeplex, "a combination of memes that work better in unison than they do separately" (Cawley). All the elements of 'slava' mentioned above are separate memes that constitute the 'slava' memeplex. There are many more that can be listed here, but only the religious aspects of 'slava' will be briefly described. Barbara Rolek refers to a special 'slava' bread, boiled wheat with honey and walnuts, red wine, and a special beeswax candle (Rolek 2008). The bread is blessed by a priest and it symbolically represents Jesus as the Bread of Life, while the cross cut in the bread by the priest reminds us of his crucifixion. The wheat represents the death and resurrection of Christ, so the red wine stands for his blood. The candle, which the head of the family lights in the morning, proclaims Christ as the light of the world, and it should be left burning throughout the day. It also means that one should not permit the flame of their Krsna Slava ever to be extinguished. As a meme-complex, Serbian 'slava' evidently contains a whole set of ideas that have evolved together and that reinforce each other, as all other religious memes do. How important it is to the Serbs, both in the homeland and in diaspora, is proven, for example, by the words at the beginning and at the end of the web-site *American Serb History 101 with Baba Mim....*: "This site is dedicated to those who voluntarily desire to learn more about the wonderful American Serbian Orthodox heritage, responsibly empowering them to go on and pass their knowledge on to others ... Do not fail to keep this ancient and honorable Serbian Orthodox tradition and to pass it on to your children." This imperative to spread is the basic characteristic of memes, and 'slava' has a high survival value as a memeplex because it uses all the seven modes of spreading: fertility, tradition, advocacy, resistance, sabotage, reason, and motivation (Cawley). It is amusing to see how some Serbian authors describe its evolution in contact with Canadian culture, what transformation it suffers in the process of transition, and how it replicates.



In most households of Canadian Serbs, 'slava' or the patron saint's day becomes an important event even if it has not been that ardently observed at home in the old country. Severed from their homeland, many immigrants crave to mentally reunite with it by going back to their roots and resuming this sometimes neglected custom. As a meme, it becomes psychologically very appealing, which explains the proliferation of 'slava' celebrations in diasporic environments. However, from a private gathering of relatives honoured by the visit of the 'kum' (godfather), the patron saint's day celebration often becomes a public party. Nebojsa Milosavljevic, in his short story "Slava," identifies two types of celebration: formal and informal.

Formal celebrations are very solemn, attended by successful immigrants, and organised by likewise successful Serbian families mainly to show off their wealth. All the necessary paraphernalia are there: the icon of the saint, bread, ground wheat, and a candle, but the candle has to be of the most expensive and massive kind, and the priest is always abundantly rewarded for his services. The gathering is polite, the table set perfectly, and the food served is international in character, rather than traditionally Serbian. The guests talk business and politics, praise everything and leave early. On the other hand, Milosavljevic continues his parody, informal celebrations are simply parties, where the guests show up leisurely dressed, where not even the candle is indispensable, and where everybody has fun, the hosts included. The saint may even be forgotten, but the guests will eat well and stay until the small hours of the morning. Yet, what these celebrations have in common is the basic purpose of this religious custom, i.e. the preservation of family values and continuation of Serbian tradition.

In terms of memetics, all the modes of spreading are active:

1. Fertility, in the sense that all the children of the family are raised in contact with the meme. They are always present at the patron saint's celebration, feeling their own importance as the hosts to all the guests.
2. Tradition, in the sense of its maintaining by guiding and training the young at their formative stage through exposure and participation in the ritual.
3. Advocacy, in the sense that the meme is actively spread through ritual, iconography and communication.
4. Resistance, in the sense of avoiding contact with competing memes, such as ethnic customs of other immigrants.
5. Sabotage, in the sense that other memes, like Canadian national holidays, are never given precedence over the 'slava' meme.
6. Reason, in the sense that the celebration of the family saint appeals to the prospect's emotions, desires, and experiences promising a rewarding evening in the company of his kindred, good food, and entertainment.



7. Motivation, in the sense that practicing and spreading the meme will improve the quality of the prospect's life by fostering the sense of belonging and the possibility for social networking.

Momo Kapor, a famous Serbian author, wrote another short story dedicated to this custom. "Happy Patron Saint's Day" addresses a foreigner who may be puzzled with the passion and zeal invested in the preparation of the family 'slava,' and the eagerness of the guests to visit all the celebrating households. Besides, the transformations this memplex has recently undergone and noticed by Kapor may be also perceived in Canada. First, there is a tendency to extend the celebration over a few days rather than having it on the day of the saint in question. Then, in Canada especially, the celebration is conveniently moved to the nearest weekend regardless of the saint's day. Further, the customs regarding food are not strictly respected and ground wheat is sometimes served decorated with whipped cream. Also, even if the patron saint's day happens to be in autumn during the pre-Christmas fast, not rarely is the festive table loaded with roast pig or lamb and Russian salad.⁷ Another form of deviation from the original custom is a common practice to have politics as the main topic during dinner instead of celebrating the saint and God. The intimate atmosphere of the family celebration is also being lost since it often turns into a grand party. Weather permitting, a garden party with a band will be thrown, where some of the guests will not even manage to get to the hosts to wish them good health. Finally, a growing number of families hold the celebration of the patron saint at a restaurant, owing to a small apartment, lack of time for preparations, less stress, etc. This is a far cry from the original Serbian custom of inviting only the godfather, who brings a red apple as a token of health and a lot of good wishes to the family. That said, all these changes will definitely raise the survival value of the slava-memplex and ensure its replication success in Canada.

Conclusion

The three main examples of cultural traits discussed above and their transformation among the Serbian immigrants in Canada prove the words of Richard Dawkins: "Cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission in that, although basically conservative, it can give rise to a form of evolution" (Dawkins 1976: 203). Synchronic

7) For the sake of culinary clarity a definition of Russian salad is in order: the chef boils potatoes, chops them into small cubes, along with carrots, then mixes them with peas, mayonnaise and cubed ham. The smaller the cubes, the more appreciated this salad traditionally served at Christmas will be. Russian salad is a starter or harbinger of treats to come – that is, of the soup and the main meal of sour cabbage rolls, roast meat etc.



digraphia, ‘inat,’ and ‘slava’ are three units of culture that make the Serbian meme pool unique. For that reason, it would be preferable to keep them unchanged and conserved for all time, if such were possible. However, synchronic and diachronic cultural transmissions even within the home country inevitably give rise to change, manifested as a form of cultural evolution. In diaspora, this process is more complex. On the one hand, the immigrants tend to preserve the national customs in their original form, often puristically insisting on the ‘old ways’ in their hopeless endeavour to maintain the bond with the homeland. On the other hand, the changed social environment necessitates many compromises and adjustments leading to the transformation of the original cultural units. If the celebration of the household saint is shifted to the weekend, it is for good reason: as venerable as an ethnic tradition may be, and as culturally tolerant as Canadian society tends to be, few employers will tolerate recalcitrant employees.

Therefore, the replication of Serbian memes in Canadian diaspora meets all the three criteria of gene replication. First, when memes are passed on from Serbia to Canada, even those unique memes that many Serbs are proud of, inevitably the copying is often imperfect. The memplexes, like patron saint’s day celebrations, pose a great challenge because of the host of memes they comprise. For example, lighting the candle: when is it exactly done (at dawn, before or after the priest arrives, when the first guest comes, when the bread is cut, at noon, or...), and who does it (the priest or the head of the family)? Due to these uncertainties, there are as many variations that happen in the process of replication as there are uncertainties. Further, some memes of Serbian culture are accepted and spread, while some are ignored. This process of meme selection is more than natural in an environment that is not always replication-friendly. Slaughtering a piglet in a backyard surpasses the limits of Canadian tolerance so this and many other peculiar memes had to be discarded in diaspora. Finally, and most importantly, even when the original meme is transformed in the process of cultural transmission, meaning that copying fidelity is not absolute, its basic elements are retained. Retention allows for the continuity of tradition so that, regardless of its many variations, the observing of Serbian ‘slava’ proves the old saying: “Where there is a Slava, there is a Serb.” To conclude, following the tenets of the dual inheritance theory, for adaptive evolution (compromise) of cultural memes, the existence of an embodied genome (capable of compromise) seems to be a necessary prerequisite.



Works cited

- Albahari, David. *Learning Cyrillic*. Beograd: Geopoetika, 2012.
- Bizic, M. "Slava." *American Serb History 101 with Baba Mim....* . N.p. N.d. Web. 11 January 2013. (<http://babamim.com/slava>)
- Cawley, Rusty. "The Big Think." *What are the Three Laws of Memetics?* 4 July 2006. Web. 16 February 2013. (<http://thebigthink.blogspot.sk>).
- Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Glenny, Misha. *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War*. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
- . "Inat." *WWWord untranslatable*. N.p. N.d. Web. 17 December 2012. (<http://wwwword.com/2685/words/untranslatable/inat>).
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Williams, Patrick & Chrisman, Laura (eds.). *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993: 392-403.
- Kapor, Momo. *A Guide to the Serbian Mentality*. Beograd: Dereta, 2007.
- Lopičić, Vesna. "Superimposition of Cultural Structures: Mara Between Canada and Serbia." Kovacevic, Milos (ed.). *Radovi Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Istočnom Sarajevu, Filološke nauke*, br. 10, knj. 1 (2008): 297-309.
- Milosavljevic, Nebojsa. *Uh, Kanada. Price iz obecane zemlje*. Toronto: PrintMan Inc Toronto, 2005.
- O'Brien, Michael J., R. Lee Lyman, Alex Mesoudi, and Todd L. VanPool. "Cultural Traits as Units of Analysis." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 365 (2010): 3797-3806.
- Rolek, Barbara. "Krsna Slava (Serbian Patron Saint Day)." *About.com*. 2008. N.p. N.d. Web. 26 February 213. (<http://easteuropeanfood.about.com>).
- Shennan, S. J. "Canoes and cultural evolution." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 105 no. 9 (2008): 3175-3176.
- Wyatt, Kyle Carsten. "Of Culture and Condos." *The Walrus*. The Walrus Foundation, May 2012. Web. 25 December 2012. (<http://walrusmagazine.com>).

VESNA LOPIČIĆ / a Professor at the Faculty of Arts, University of Niš, Serbia. She teaches English literature and British and Canadian Studies courses, with a particular teaching and research interest in the Serbian diaspora in Canada. She recently edited the volume *Migrating Memories: Central Europe in Canada*, an anthology that includes many works of literature by authors born in Central Europe. Among her other studies are *Fall into Culture: Human Nature in the Work of William Golding and Margaret Atwood* (2002), collections of essays on Canadian literature, and the co-edited volumes *Identity Issues: Literary and Linguistic Landscapes* (2010) and *Challenging Change: Literary and Linguistic Responses* (2012).

Address: Vesna Lopičić, English Department, Faculty of Arts, University of Niš,
Cirila i Metodija 2, 18000 Niš, Serbia. [e-mail: lovevuk@gmail.com]