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FOOD AS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE— THE ČESNICA AMONG SERBS IN ROMANIA*

Svetlana Ćirković

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003)** shifted the focus away from material culture to living cultural practice and events that form the foundation of group identity and collective memory. “The ‘intangible cultural heritage’ means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—along with the associated instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”.

UNESCO’s list of the elements of intangible cultural heritage attracted worldwide attention and the number of candidates for inclusion has increased.

Food appeared for the first time on UNESCO’s world heritage list of world heritage in 2010 with two culinary practices and one product: the French gastronomic meal, traditional Mexican cuisine—ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacan paradigm¹—and gingerbread craft from Northern Croatia. The Mediterranean diet has been included on the List for 2013. Susan Terrio believes that UNESCO’s List poses central questions concerning the policy of culture and authenticity of heritage (Terrio 2014: 176). With the ratification of UNESCO’s Convention in the member countries of Latin America and Western Europe, food became a key factor of intangible culture as well as of tourist imagination, so

¹ On Mexican pre-Hispanic cuisine as an element of intangible cultural heritage on UNESCO’s list, see more in: Brulotte, Starkman 2014.

that these countries began to develop an inventory of culinary practices, which also constructs a systematic narrative about them (Di Giovine, Brulotte 2014: 13).

Heritage cuisine is becoming a subject of research for many anthropologists who point out that it is a dominant feature even in remote, impoverished regions, connecting individuals through time and place with the discourse of heritage.² Anthropologist Michael A. Di Giovine believes that traditional cuisine, like other forms of heritage, gives the impression of “preserving tradition” which must be protected from the transience of time, particularly in situations where it faces modernisation and risk to the integrity of the ethnic group.³ When the objective is to pass

² Psyche Williams-Forsen believes that food maintains group cohesion, binding individuals to a group, and that it not only connects members of distant or close communities but also individuals through time and place (Williams-Forsen 2014: 100).

³ A group of Spanish anthropologists sees food as an instrument of social differentiation and identity building (García-Fuentes, Guàrdia Bassols i Oyon Bañales 2014: 159).

it on to future generations, traditional cuisine is frequently defined in opposition to new and modern cuisine (Di Giovine 2014: 77). The same author believes that traditional cuisine is important for the revitalisation of small communities (Di Giovine 2014: 88–89). Eva Leticia Brito Benitez and Heajoo Chung see the preservation of traditional preparation of ritual foods—a segment of posthumous rituals in the Mexican Maya community—as a form of “cultural resistance” by which one community distinguishes itself from another, following a tradition passed on from generation to generation for four centuries (Benitez, Chung 2015: 82).

“Reinventing food”, as Christina Grasseni points out, rests on a new understanding of the culture of taste and on the idea of typicality which implies close-knit connections between local products and the surrounding region. Local products which have acquired the status of “typical food items” become desirable goods, consumed because of their supposed origin. The result is that local food is presented as the mark of a particular area at festivals and in the media presentation of certain regions, thereby also directing attention to the local identity (Grasseni 2014: 55–56). The sale of local culinary products and the media representation of culinary practices with reference to tradition is how this segment becomes included in the tourist resources of a community and are called “edible souvenirs” (Di Giovine 2014: 85).

Serbian academics do not approach food or culinary knowledge and skills in order to register this segment and protect the intangible cultural heritage. Conventional ethnographic research only broaches the topic as a registered element of the subject culture or community, and so it is included in standard ethnographic descriptions of the community or region.

The culture of nutrition, however, is a subject which rallies ethnologists and linguists in Serbia; their articles are to be found in a collection entitled *Ritual Practice—“In Words about Food”*. On material from the Serbian speeches of Vojvodina, ed. Sofija Miloradović (2014). The result of field research is part of a project called *Culture of Diet through Ritual Practice: The Linguistic and Ethnological Aspect*;⁴ the articles focus on the ethno-

graphic and linguistic aspects of food, culinary practices, traditional cuisine and its elements, along with their accompanying knowledge and skills. With no ambition to protect food as an intangible cultural heritage, both the individual papers and the collection as a whole provide a basis for further research in this area, and also for the possible separation of elements of intangible cultural heritage from the culinary field and the national cuisine.⁵

However, the Centre for the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia⁶ has listed three traditional specialty-type meals together with the requisite knowledge for their preparation, which the committee that decides on inclusion in the register deems worth protecting on the list of Serbia’s intangible cultural heritage. These are: *belmuž*, “the ritual and daily meal of Balkan cattle-breeders, prepared from young sheep’s cheese and maize flour. It represents a unique heritage of the cattle-breeding communities of eastern Serbia and is part of the social customs, rituals and festive events taking place around Knjaževac, Svrlijig, Sokobanja, Zaječar and Niš”;⁷ *pirotski kačkavalj*, “a traditional product made from sheep’s milk in the Stara Planina area”;⁸ and *pazarska mantija*, “a traditional specialty whose preparation requires much effort and time, typically consisting of small cubes of filo pastry filled with minced meat, onion and pepper”.⁹ By including traditional specialties in the list of elements of Serbia’s intangible cultural heritage, recognition is accorded to food, culinary knowledge and skills, a model is formed for their protection and conditions set in place for scholars to consider the relevance of their field research and the engagement of local institutions in identifying elements of the intangible cultural heritage.

As this work is based on field research among the Serbian communities in one part of Romania (Arad County), especially traditional culture, and the identification of those elements that are part of the living tradition, we must also say something

Serbia—Aleksandra Terzić, Željko Bjeljac, Nevena Čurčić (Terzić, Bjeljac and Čurčić 2015).

⁵ A collection of papers on culinary practice in the Balkans was published in Berlin in 2015: *Culinaria Balcanica* (Kahl, Kreuter and Vogel eds., 2015)

⁶ <http://nkns.rs/cyr>

⁷ <http://nkns.rs/cyr/popis-nkns/belmuzh>

⁸ <http://nkns.rs/cyr/popis-nkns/izrada-pirotskog-kackavalja>

⁹ <http://nkns.rs/cyr/popis-nkns/pazarske-mantije-tradicionalni-nachin-pripreme>

⁴ This was a Matica Srpska project; for the period 2009–2012, it was financed by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development. Culinary practice, as a new Serbian brand, was addressed by a group of researchers from

about the principles of protecting and preserving intangible cultural heritage in the Republic of Romania. The Ministry of Culture and Natural Heritage (Ministerul culturii, cultelor și patrimoniului național, România), in a decree “Ordinul 2236” of 12 April 2008, laid down the ground rules for the National Committee for the Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Comisia Națională pentru Salvagardarea Patrimoniului Cultural Imaterial). The experts composing this body were appointed from the ranks of academic research, higher education and museums. Its aim is to identify areas for inclusion in the assets of the intangible heritage. In view of the diversity and complexity of traditional culture, which covers all spheres of human life and its relation to the environment, it was decided to divide the repertoire of intangible cultural heritage into thematic chapters contained in three volumes. Volume I covers the dominant artistic forms of words and verbal expression of traditional folk music, folklore, children’s and young people’s games, holidays, customs, rituals, traditional practices for the prevention, control and treatment of illnesses, crafts, decoration, traditional food and language. Volume II envisages chapters on occupations, crafts, building techniques, meteorology, etc., while Volume III is to cover the intangible cultural heritage of minority communities in Romania (Ispas 2009: 6). The National Commission for the Preservation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Romania has to date (2016) published the first volume in its entirety and part of the second. Although the Commission will in future dedicate itself to the intangible cultural heritage of national minorities including the Serbs, it is important to note that it is mindful of food as an element of the intangible cultural heritage.

Field research by a team of the SASA Institute for Balkan Studies among Serbs in the region (mainly Hungary and Romania) establishes the existing situation in traditional culture, documents and archives material collected on the ground in order, as thoroughly as possible, to identify those elements which are in multicultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-confessional terms part of a living traditional culture. The registering of living elements of the traditional culture of Serbs in Romania was also one of the topics of research in the project *Serbs in Romania and Romanian-Yugoslav connections in the second half of the 20th century*, a co-project of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Romanian Academy of Sciences.

1. Anthropological and linguistic field research of Serbs in Arad County (Romania)

The international project *Serbs in Romania and Romanian-Yugoslav connections in the second half of the 20th century* lasted from 2013 to 2015. Its aim was to study the Serbian communities in Arad County, taking a methodological approach to history, anthropology, linguistics etc. The project plan was that the Romanian team would focus on the historical aspect of the proposed theme, while the Serbian team would carry out anthropological and linguistic research on the ground. Field research into rural and urban Serbi-

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** <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/convention>

Introductory picture:

Turnu, panorama of the village, 2013, source: Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, photo by Svetlana Ćirković

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Arad Gai, panorama of the village, 2013, source: Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, photo by Biljana Sikimić

an communities in Romania was planned, which would encompass the role of institutions (primary and secondary education in the Serbian language, the Serbian Orthodox Church, minority organisations), as well as the role of religion, multilingualism, migrations and mixed marriages in forming the culture and identity of Serbs in Romania. The situation in the field showed that the original plan of research should be amended, and so the interviews covered topics from both local and oral history, biographical stories and stories from daily life, traditional culture in the settlements, etc.¹⁰

¹⁰ About 40 hours of interviews are archived in the Digital archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA and are available on the SANU internal network. The audio material is accompanied by numerous photographs, also available through the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts' internal network.

1.1. Applied methodology of field research

Over the past fifteen years, i.e., for the duration of the research by the team from the SASA Institute for Balkan Studies, the methodology has undergone a series of transformations. Initially oriented towards the Russian school of ethnolinguistics and language documentation, now viewed as classic, with the use of a questionnaire by Ana Plotnikova (Плотникова 1996), in time this yielded place to acceptance of linguistic-anthropology and socio-linguistic premises and went on to include some oral history. Today, the research team uses the open interview, enabling the interviewee, as he or she chooses, to decide both the number and direction of digressions when answering questions from the questionnaire, while the researcher decides on-the-spot whether to discuss the traditional culture or something else. This method is particularly appropriate in work with small communities such as the Serbian community of Arad County, particularly in villages such as Munar (Serb. Munara) and Mănaștur (Serb. Monoștor). Thus, in individual cases, the interviewee was free to talk about any subject he/she wished, with no onus on the interviewer to record the oral material.¹¹

1.2. Serbs in Arad County

Arad County¹² was chosen as the area of research to offset disproportionate academic interest in Timiș County and Banatska Klisura, which—probably due to the high numbers of Serbs registered in the census in these places—had attracted far greater attention to date from Serbia,¹³ relegating Arad County with its small number of registered Serbs¹⁴ to the margins. The study of Serbian communities

¹¹ For more on how the research team at the SASA Institute for Balkan Studies developed the methodology they applied, as well as on the transformations referred to above and the use of this methodology for other research projects, see: Sikimić 2012, Bošnjaković, Sikimić 2013, Đorđević Belić 2013, Petrović 2013.

¹² Arad County is an administrative district of Romania. In historical and cultural terms, it belongs to a much broader zone—the Pomorišje. Part of the Pomorišje is Timiș County, not researched by our team. Here we use the administrative name for the zone to which our research points belong.

¹³ Extensive dialectological literature is given in Ćirković 2015. The bibliography of anthropology and ethnomusicology is considerably smaller and is by individual authors: an anthropology study of Serbs in Timișoara was undertaken by Mirjana Pavlović (Pavlović 2012), while Selena Rakočević (Rakočević 2012, 2013) writes on the ethnomusicological research of the Banatska Klisura.

¹⁴ In Arad County, according to the 2011 Romanian census, 849 Serbs were registered, of whom 625 stated that their first language (mother tongue) was Serbian.

in Arad County complements existing research into the Serbian community in Romania.¹⁵

The team chose seven villages in Arad County as research points, in which varying numbers of Serbs were registered according to the 2011 Romanian population census. Research proceeded in accordance with this, moving from the villages with the highest numbers of registered Serbs to those with the lowest. Thus, in the town of Arad, including the Arad Gai (Serb. Arad Gaj) settlement, there are 425 Serbs of whom 375 speak Serbian; the town of Pecica (Serb. Pečka), including Turnu village (Serb. Tornja), has 43 Serbs of whom 27 speak Serbian; the Felnac settlement (Serb. Felnak) has the Secusigiu (Serb. Sekusiđ) area, which includes the settlements of Satu Mare (Serb. Naćfala) and Munar (Serb. Munara), has 153 registered Serbs 162 Serbs of whom 88 are Serbian speakers; of whom 133 speak Serbian; and the settlement of Vinga (Serb. Vinga),¹⁶ which includes the Mănaştur (Serb. Monoštor) settlement, has 12 registered Serbs of whom 7 speak the Serbian language.¹⁷

¹⁵ Arad County borders on Hungary, where research of Serbian settlements (centred around Battonya) was carried out on several occasions by a team from the Institute for Balkan Studies in cooperation with the Ethnographic Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The results were published in many academic papers on sociolinguistics by author Marija Ilić, who synthesized her research in a voluminous study *Discourse and Ethnic identity: the Case of the Serbs of Hungary* (Ilić 2014). For twenty years now, Mladena Prelić has written from an anthropological angle on Serbs in Hungary; in addition to many scholarly papers, she has published two monographs: *Serbs in Lovra Village in the 20th Century* (in Serbian: *Srbi u selu Lovri u Mađarskoj tokom 20. veka*) (Prelić 1995) and *Neither Here nor There: Ethnic Identity among Serbs in Hungary in the late 20th Century* (in Serbian: *(N)i ovde (n) i tamo: etnički identitet Srba u Mađarskoj na kraju 20. veka*) (Prelić 2008). Studies by Biljana Sikimić (Sikimić 2003, 2004) analyse material gathered in the field from the ethno-linguistic perspective. These authors provide an overview of how the topic was researched, citing the areals and relevant literature. It should be noted that in studying the Serbian communities of Arad County, the same methodological approach was used as in the published research of Serbian communities in Hungary.

¹⁶ The Vinga settlement is predominantly inhabited by Banat Bulgarians and a very small number of Serbs. In the village of Mănaştur, only one family (three people) speak Serbian, so that the number of speakers (7) registered in the census is questionable. The situation is similar in Pecica: although the census registered 43 Serbs and 27 speakers, there is no one who speaks Serbian in the village, despite the fact that some of the inhabitants declare themselves as Serbs. It may be assumed that the registered number of speakers in the census refers to the village of Turnu.

¹⁷ For more on statistical analysis of the data on the number of Serbs in the 2011 Romanian census, see Stepanov: Lj.

As numbers on the ground frequently differ from official figures of citizens and language speakers, and since the census took place in 2010–2011 and the research in 2013–2015, it may be assumed that the numbers of Serbs and/or Serbian language speakers are considerably smaller than those given in the census.

1.3. Education in the Serbian language in Arad County

Not only does the number of Serbian language speakers registered in the 2011 census indicate a danger that the Serbian language may totally disappear from the county, but Serbian language educational institutions in Arad County and the way in which language is transmitted within the family give rise to concern as to the condition and status of the language.

Serbian schools in Romania exist in three counties: Timiș, Caraș-Severin, and Arad. In Timiș and Caraș-Severin, education in Serbian is available at all levels, from pre-school to university (the Serbian Language Departments at the West University of Timișoara and the University in Bucharest). Throughout Romania, there are six four-year schools (distributed among the three counties mentioned above), and the *Dositej Obradović* Theoretical High School in Timișoara. In Arad County there is only one school, in the Felnac¹⁸ settlement.

The research team was unable to obtain relevant data on the number of pupils attending classes in Felnac, or about the curriculum. In conversation with elderly interviewees from Felnac, we arrived at the unofficial information that the school formally exists, but has very few pupils.¹⁹ Bearing in mind that the Serbian department of the primary school in Felnac is the only educational institution in the Serbian language in Arad County and was

Stepanov, V. 2015.

¹⁸ All data taken from an article published in the weekly *Naša Reč*; for more information see: <http://en.calameo.com/read/002284784cd66db4d63f0>. Although this refers to the school year 2014/2015, it may be assumed that, at least as far as the number of school institutions is concerned, the situation has not changed in 2015/2016. Among the schools listed on the website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, there are no registered Serbian schools in the countries of the region, or in the diaspora.

¹⁹ Interviewees from Felnac settlement frequently expressed disappointment with how education was organized. A frequent comment was that only two or three Roma children attended the school in Felnac.



Mănăştur, Serbian
orthodox church, 2014,
source: Digital Archive
of the Institute for Balkan
Studies SASA,
photo by Annemarie
Sorescu Marinković

very active until a couple of years ago,²⁰ the impossibility of obtaining a more complete picture on education in Serbian language in this part of Romania may be put down to insufficient research, which remains a task to be completed.

Besides the Serbian class in the primary school in Felnac, there are informal classes in Serbian at weekends in Arad Gai, given by a female teacher who is a permanent member of staff at the Serbian school in Bottonya.²¹ The initiator is the Arad

²⁰ Up to 2006, the teacher of the Serbian class of the Primary school in Felnac settlement was Emilija Nikić, who—apart from her task in primary education—played a major role in the cultural life of the Serbian community. Following her premature death, she is remembered by the people of the settlement as a cultural activist. Her efforts for the entire community were mentioned in virtually every interview with them. Besides Felnac, there was a mention of her enthusiasm and care for Serbian culture in other settlements of Arad County. It is believed that, with her passing, Serbian language and culture in Arad County suffered an irretrievable loss of sustainability.

²¹ In June 2014, researchers of the SASA Institute for Balkan Studies monitored classes in Arad Gai. The teacher was interviewed about the education, working conditions, the pupils and the desire and enthusiasm on the part of the parents for their children to learn Serbian. Parents who bring children to these classes participate themselves. Apart from regular text-

branch of the Association of Serbs in Romania.²² Classes are attended by about twenty pupils of all ages, from the lower and higher grades of primary school through secondary school up to university level students who wish to learn their heritage language.

This improvised school, notwithstanding the effort invested by the Association of Serbs in Romania, lacks institutional status and without it, the condition of the Serbian language in Arad County will remain unchanged. Children mostly attend Romanian language schools, and it is not uncommon for them also to attend international schools where teaching is in one of the more widespread European languages—English, German or French. Through the initiative of the school in Arad Gai, an exchange of pupils and members of cultural and artistic societies took place between Arad County and the town of Bottanya in Hungary.

Although the activities of the Association of Serbs in Romania also include Serbian communities in Arad County, it seems that the lack of systematic education is threatening the survival of Serbian culture and language. An in-depth study of the Serbian communities in Arad County from the aspect of various disciplines in the humanities would contribute to this area sharing pride of place with other Romanian counties, home to Serbian communities which have managed to maintain their cultural identity.

2. Serbs and their traditional culture in Arad County

The field research of the Serbian communities in Arad County aimed at establishing the situation of traditional culture in a multiethnic and multi-confessional context. In ethnically mixed communities, permeation of traditional cultures

books such as primers and Serbian language grammars for primary school, they help to procure informal textbooks with a translation into Romanian, so that the children can grasp the basics of Serbian as quickly and painlessly as possible.

²² A weekly called *Naša reč* is published by the Association of Serbs in Romania in the edition *Arad kroz vreme*, as well as some monographs.

is to be expected, and such is the case in this type of community and those of the Banat—Serb as well as Romanian. We cannot with certainty distinguish the elements of traditional culture which belong exclusively to one ethnic community (Čirković 2012: 231–232).²³ It seems that it is not even necessary to place strict boundaries between the traditional cultures, especially in multicultural and multi-confessional contexts.

In a study of the living traditional culture of minorities in the Romanian-Hungarian border zone²⁴ including the Pomorišje, Rodica Colta believes that the Orthodox Church provides a vital touchstone for the identity of the Serbian community. Besides its religious role, it also plays an important part in the cultural life of this community (Colta 2010: 231). An equally important role in the creation and maintaining of identity is ascribed to “some customs from the national calendar”, among them Christmas, as cited by Colta, in addition to the celebration of St. Sava and St. Vitus’ Day. Colta believes that Christmas is a marker of Serbian identity in the Romanian-Hungarian borderline zone. Besides this feast, celebration of church and family patron saints’ days also falls within the framework of national identity.²⁵

3. The *česnica*—a living tradition among the Serbs of Arad County

Field research into Serbian communities in Arad County has shown that Serbs in Romania no longer constitute a complex system of traditional culture, only a few elements of which remain: Christmas, segments and elements of the Christmas ritual and occasional rituals such as pig slaughtering, are part of the living tradition. A favourite topic of interview is the remembrance of how Christmas used to be celebrated as compared to current practices.²⁶ The Christmas ritual with

all its segments is clearly part of the living tradition of the Serbs in this zone. As there are not too many elements of traditional culture that are part and parcel of contemporary traditional culture, the *česnica* would seem to merit the status of an element of intangible cultural heritage, worthy of institutional protection.

Examination of Serbian communities in Arad County in 2013 and 2014 produced a body of interviews on the topic of Christmas and Christmas rituals, with special reference to the *česnica* and how it is made.²⁷ In her study of annual customs among the Serbs in Vojvodina (Serbia), distinguished ethnologist Mila Bosić provides a complete description of making the cake, its function and significance in Christmas customs (Bosić 1996: 57–62):

“... an important ritual cake is the česnica. It is mixed from white wheat flour, water and fat, without yeast. The dough is stretched into thin layers and placed in a circular or square pan... In



Munar, panorama of the village, 2014, source: Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, photo by Annemarie Sorescu Marinković

²³ Cf. eg. Sikimić 2001, Sikimić 2005, Čirković 2005, 2005a.

²⁴ In addition to examining the traditional culture, Rodica Colta also addressed historical circumstances, migratory movements and the demographic characteristics of the Romanian-Hungarian border zone.

²⁵ The study of the ethnic identity of Serbs in the Romanian-Hungarian border zone is only part of more extensive research into the intangible heritage of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Dunăre-Criș-Mureș-Tisa region, to which Arad County belongs (Colta 2010, Martin, Colta and Csobai 2008).

²⁶ A frequent narrative practice in field interviews is to differentiate and evaluate former and current ritual practices and social values, whereby the former is judged affirmatively while the current situation in traditional culture and way of life is seen as being negative. Cf. e.g. Čirković 2012a: 133.

²⁷ This was selected for a study on the discourse of instructions and continues research already initiated in this area, cf. Čirković 2014.

all households, it was obligatory to insert coins in the česnica. Often they had to be of silver... the česnica was ritually broken apart... As the česnica was broken, people looked to see which part would contain the money... Of all ritual cakes, the česnica has lasted the longest. To find money in the česnica would mean happiness for the entire year."

Even though Mila Bosić bases her description on a study of the traditional culture of Serbs in Vojvodina, the following fragments show that the process of making the *česnica* and its role and significance in the Serbian communities in Arad County are virtually identical.

Example 1:

(And tell me, do you remember how the *česnica* was kneaded?). Well, it was kneaded. (How?) I dried it. Back then the dough used to be stretched... (Yes.) Yes, it was stretched. Now we buy it readymade dry. But it isn't like the one we used to make. As I say, back then, two-three tables, we'd heat the room to make it warm, then it dries, and we get the *česnica*. Walnuts, raisins, that is what were put into it. And on top we spread honey, and now everyone makes it. Sheets of pastry are bought, and [...] ²⁸ it is dry, only, I don't know. The *česnica* is not what it used to be. The wife of my husband's brother, the priest's wife, she used to make such a *česnica*, what can I tell you, it was so pretty. And again she dried it, mine never turned out like hers. [NAČFALA2SĆ_27.11.2013]²⁹

Example 2:

(And when do you make the *česnica*?) Well, the *česnica* used to be made on Christmas Eve. (And how is the *česnica* made?) The *česnica*.... with dough. (This is stretched, how?) It's stretched out on the table, it's spread over, it's folded up, walnuts are put on it, *bančići*, money, whoever found it, we children always ate it to find the money. (And who puts in these, these *bančići*?) The one who made the *česnica*, the mother, the one who made it. And then they cut it. And they sprinkled it with sugar syrup, it was baked. [TORNJAI SĆ_29.11.2013.]

²⁸ [...] marks those parts of the interview where, due to technical problems, the statement is not coherent, or if several speakers are present and all talk at once, so that it is impossible to separate their statements.

²⁹ Each example is accompanied by the sign denoting the audio-recording which may be found in the digital archive of the SASA Institute for Balkan Studies.

Example 3:

(The *česnica* is something else, aha, good.) It's just a cake, it's kneaded on the morning of Christmas Eve. The *česnica* is made on the first day of Christmas, in the morning, only for a time we did not make it on the first day, later we made it on Christmas Eve, because there is a lot to do. When you grow old, you're not so fresh any more. (Yes, yes.) Then you have to make it earlier. (And how do you make a *česnica*?) Well, it's kneaded with flour, you add a little fat, with water. It all depends.—When you can't, I bought sheets of pastry.—When there are, sheets of pastry. (Yes, yes, but back in the time?) Then you make as much as you think, four-five round lumps, so, you stretch it out with a rolling pin, as they say, earlier [...] on a towel, with a bottle, somewhere. [...] Then you fold up the ends so, one end nicely, the other. You put it in the baking pan. You put one, two [sheets] on the bottom like so, you put in the walnuts [...] and so on like that, on each you put a few walnuts, if you want to put [them] on two, you put more walnuts. And in the middle you place about one *lej* like so. So, you put in the *lejka* like that, you cut out a piece, and there you are. (And this coin, what is it called? The one that's placed in the *česnica*?) Fifty *banji*. (You don't call it *belac*?) No. [NAČFALA3SĆ_27.11.2013.]

Example 4:

The *česnica* is made. (Aha, the *česnica*.) And the *česnica*, and— (And how is the *česnica* made?) Well, the *česnica* is always made without fat, it's made only with water and flour, a little salt, then it's stretched to the size of the table, it's big, then walnuts are placed on it, one lump, the thing that is mixed with the flour. (This dough, like.) That dough, yes the dough, then walnuts again, and you make it whatever way you like, and three fingers thin, and so on, as thick as you want it to be. And you can also use poppy seeds, I mostly made it with walnuts. And then, well, afterwards it's eaten. (And do you put some coins inside, some money?) Well, money and money is put in, but we used to put in more for New Year, we put them in the pie, we made it with pumpkin. [FELNAK1SĆ_28.11.2013.]

A reading of the above fragments shows that, apart from the actual procedure of making the *česnica* (*it was kneaded, I dried it, the dough used to be stretched, it dries* (Example 1), *it's stretched out on the table* (Example 2), *it's kneaded..., you make*



Satu Mare, Serbian orthodox church, 2013, source: Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, photo by Svetlana Ćirković

as much as you think, four-five round lumps (Example 3), the *česnica* is always made without fat... it's stretched to the size of the table..., and you make it whatever way you like, and three fingers thin (Example 4)), there is listing of the basic ingredients: with flour, you add a little fat, with water (Example 3), only with water and flour, a little salt (Example 4), and also other details concerning the actual procedure of making the *česnica* and other ingredients used besides the main one: Walnuts, raisins, that is what were put into it. And on top we spread honey (Example 1), it's folded up, walnuts are put on it... And then they cut it... And they sprinkled it with sugar syrup, it was baked (Example 2). Then you fold up the ends so, one end nicely, the other... You put one, two [sheets] on the bottom like so, you put in the walnuts [...] on each you put a few walnuts, if you want to put [them] on two, you put more walnuts (Example 3), then walnuts are placed on it... then walnuts again... And you can also use poppy seeds, I mostly made it with walnuts. (Example 4).

Besides the segments describing the process and both the main and additional ingredients, fragments of the interview also contain details concerning the money which is placed in the *česnica*: *bančići*, money, whoever found it, we children always ate it to find the money (Example 2), And in the middle you place about one lej like so. So, you put in the lejlike that, you cut out a piece, and there you are (Example 3), Well, money and money is put in (Example 4).

An important piece of information mentioned in the interviews is the time of making the *česnica*—Christmas Eve, or Christmas morning: Well, the *česnica* used to be made on Christmas Eve (Example 2), it's kneaded on the morning of Christmas Eve. The *česnica* is made on the first day of Christmas, in the morning, only for a time we did not make it on the first day, later we made it on Christmas Eve (Example 3).

A reading of the above excerpts shows the usual communicative situation in which the answer



Felnac, Serbian orthodox church, 2013, source: Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, photo by Svetlana Ćirković

contains part of the question. The language points to the making of the *česnica* as a collective activity, with rare but very important underlining of the role of the individual in this ritual. Selecting the making the *česnica* from the whole complex of Christmas customs of the Serbian minority could serve as a model for further research into the protection of the intangible cultural heritage of the Serbs in Romania (Ćirković 2015a: 170).

3.1. Transformation of the ritual

Although Christmas and the making of the *česnica* as an element of Christmas customs are part of the living traditional culture of the Serbs in Arad County, one can gather from the interviews that in practice a certain transformation has occurred. This is expressed by explicitly citing the differences between one-time practice and the current one, verbalised by the time adverbs *now/then* and by comparisons: *Now* we buy it readymade dry. But it isn't like the one we used to make. As I say, back then, two-three tables, we'd heat the room to make it warm, then it dries, and we get the *česnica*. (Example 1).³⁰

³⁰ Transformations occurring on the broadly social level and reflected in traditional culture are a frequent topic of inter-

The transformation of the custom or one of its segments is also suggested by the switch of the linguistic medium through which instructions are given—the second person singular in the present tense, and the use of the first person singular (past or present):

Well, it's kneaded with flour, *you add* a little fat, with water. It all depends—*When you can't, I bought sheets of pastry*.—When there are, sheets of pastry (Yes, yes, but back in the time?) (Example 3).

Although instructions in narratives on the subject of traditional culture can be given for different technological procedures, even ones no longer practised, in Example 3 the statement *When you can't, I bought sheets of pastry* directs attention to the transformation of the technological proce-

views in the field. From her studies in Vranje, anthropologist Sanja Zlatanović points to transformations of the wedding ritual (Zlatanović 2003); Svetlana Ćirković, examining the traditional culture of displaced persons from Kosovo, records transformations in daily life and traditional culture (Ćirković 2004: 88–91, Ćirković 2012a: 138); Laura Spăriosu has arrived at virtually identical conclusions in studying the family history of Romanians in Mali Torak (Banat, Vojvodina) (Spăriosu 2006).

ture—the complex procedure has been replaced by the purchase of a finished product.

The past is also marked by the underlining of childhood as a part of the life cycle in which traditional culture used to be different from the one practiced today: *We children* always ate it to find the money (Example 2).³¹

3.2. Cultural Realia

The transcribed fragments of field interviews show that in addition to syntax, the influence of the majority language, Romanian, on the Serbian minority language may also be observed in the lexis, even in situations where the subject of conversation is traditional culture (or segments thereof), when the terminology may be assumed to be fixed and unlikely to change under the influence of other languages. From the terminological aspect, the lexemes marking the procedure of making the *česnica* belong to the Serbian language, while those used to denote the Romanian currency are the exception: It's stretched out on the table, it's spread on it, it's folded up, walnuts are put on it, *bančići*, money, whoever found it, we children always ate it to find the money (Example 2); And in the middle you place about one *lej*, like so. So, you put in the *lejka* like that, you cut out a piece, and there you are (And this coin, what is it called? The one that's placed in the *česnica*?) Fifty *banji*. (You don't call it *belac*?). No (Example 3).

In both of these examples, Romanian realia are used for the money traditionally placed in the Christmas cake along with their Romanian lexemes, *lej*, *banji* (Romanian *leu* and *bani*). However, the Serbian derivational suffix for the diminutive form—*bani/bančići*, *lej/lejku* and combinations of Serbian and Romanian lexemes have been used in the syntagma underlined here: (And this coin, what is it called? The one which is placed in the *česnica*?) Fifty *banji*. (Example 3)

The use of the diminutives *bančići* and *lejku* in the examples is to point out that this is not big money, important for use, but only of symbolical value. In Example 2: walnuts are put on it, *bančići*, money, whoever who finds it... The female interviewee first uses a Romanian term for the currency and then gives its equivalent in Serbian. This “translating” is not uncommon in field interviews;

it frequently arises during interviews with people who speak a dialect at a remove from standard Serbian (e.g. the Kosovo-Resava and Prizren-Timok dialects), and with bilingual interviewees in places where the dominant or majority language is Romanian; however, it also arises in cases when the talk turns to the subject of crafts, where interviewees tend to use special expert terms which they intuitively feel they should translate for the researcher, or at least explain the meaning. (cf. Sikimić 2004a: 39)

4. Concluding Remarks

In accordance with the principles of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Centre for the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia and the National Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Romania, all include food in the inventory of elements of intangible heritage along with culinary products and specialties, together with the skilled knowledge required to produce them. In this way, the intangible cultural heritage can be institutionally protected from transformation and/or disappearance under the influence of global tendencies.

From 2013 to 2015, the Institute for Balkan Studies, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts undertook to examine seven settlements in Arad County (Romania)—Arad Gai, Felnac, Satu Mare, Turnu, Pecica, Munar, and Mănăștur. The objective was to take cognizance of the state of the Serbian language and culture in these communities. Field research shows that in addition to the anticipated disappearance of elements and segments of traditional culture as they are gradually assimilated into that of the Romanian majority, or the elimination of the specificity of any one tradition affected by global culture and modernisation, the Serbian language spoken by the minority has suffered serious changes which may lead to its disappearance. One of the basic causes of this situation is an overall lack of education in Serbian in this part of Romania. While in Timiș County the Serbian language is present at all levels of education, in Arad County it is taught only in the settlement of Felnac and only to the lower grades of primary school. Study in higher primary school grades, secondary school or institutes of higher education is possible only in Romanian.

While searching for vestiges of Serbian traditional culture still being practised—elements

³¹ A frequent strategy in field research when the researcher directs the interviewee to the former status of the traditional culture is to ask a question in which the past is marked as the other's childhood or youth (Čirković 2012a: 138–139).

of a living tradition in Serbian communities in this part of Romania—it was noted that the array of Christmas customs is a rare survivor into the present day and of these, the most prominent was the making of the *česnica*, an important ritual cake.

A fundamental step in protecting a specific element of intangible cultural heritage is to gather the fullest possible documentation both on the ground and from other sources. Serbs in Romania have the institutional support of the Association of Serbs in Romania, an umbrella organisation responsible for the preservation and promotion of Serbian language and culture.

The field team of the SASA Institute for Balkan Studies has a large collection of interviews on the subject of making the *česnica*, although unaccompanied by video or photographic material which would have documented the process.

An analysis of the body of interviews (the present paper cites only four fragments) from the perspective of linguistic anthropology shows that the process of making the *česnica* and its role and importance among the Serbian communities of Romania are virtually identical to those registered in the Serbian part of the Banat (Vojvodina), demonstrating a continuity throughout the Serbian and Romanian sides of the Banat. The interviews highlighted the collective activity aspect of making the *česnica*, but the speakers also remarked on transformations, which are most conspicuous in this very process. The original complex procedure is frequently replaced by the purchase of a finished product. Furthermore, transformation is also noticeable at lexical or terminological level. Terminologically, the lexemes marking the procedure of making the *česnica* belong to the Serbian language, while exceptionally, and most unexpectedly, lexemes are used to mark the Romanian monetary system: *bančići*, *lej*, *lejku*, *banji* (from “leu” and “bani”).

The research carried out in the Serbian communities of Arad County in Romania identifies key topics which may be examined today in these communities. Of the Serbian traditional culture, only fragments remain. These must be fully documented and the risk to, or sustainability of, certain elements of traditional culture assessed. The Centre for Research and the Culture of Serbs in Romania plans to gather ethnographic and language material from the Serbian communities in Romania. Bearing in mind the experience of the field

team of the SASA Institute of Balkan Studies, the Centre particularly envisages gathering material on Christmas and Christmas customs. It is to be expected, therefore, that complete documentation will be provided in order to protect the *česnica* as an element of the intangible cultural heritage of Serbs in Romania. ■

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SUMMARY & KEYWORDS

Food as intangible cultural heritage—česnica among Serbs in Romania

In this study the attention of the scientific discussion is directed towards food viewed as intangible cultural heritage. In accordance with the UNESCO World Heritage List and UNESCO's propositions for protection of intangible cultural heritage there are three traditional dishes registered on the List of Elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Republic of Serbia. Furthermore, National Commission for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Romania introduces food as intangible cultural heritage and envisions a registry of intangible cultural heritage of minority communities in Romania.

Anthropological and linguistic research of Serbian communities in the field in Arad County shows that traditional culture of Serbs in this county is under the impact of a strong process of transformation and modernization. Having in mind the small population of Serbs registered in a census in Arad, who are considered to be the bearers of Serbian traditional culture, the leveling of Serbian traditional culture with Romanian majority on the one hand, as well as with the global culture on the other, apparently leads to the extinction of minority culture, or at least to the loss of those elements that are considered to be important in the existing rituals of traditional culture. In this study, after an analysis of fieldwork data, there have been distinguished practices and elements of Christmas rituals that represent the living tradition of Serbs in Arad County in Romania.

In this study, after the analysis of the fieldwork data, some elements and practices within Christmas rituals were selected that represent the living tradition of Serbs in Arad County in Romania, while at the same time drawing attention to the processes of transformation and modernization of the rituals. Special focus has been put on česnica—an important Christmas cake. Emphasis has been put to the possibility of its protection as an element of intangible cultural heritage of Serbs in Romania.

► Serbs in Romania, Česnica, Christmas customs, protection of intangible cultural heritage, food as intangible cultural heritage