

Aleksandra Pavićević

# FROM MYSTERY TO SPECTACLE

Essays on Death in Serbia  
from the 19<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> Century



ЕТНОГРАФСКИ  
ИНСТИТУТ  
СРПСКЕ АКАДЕМИЈЕ  
НАУКА И УМЕТНОСТИ

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**од 19-21. века**

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## About this book

It has been ten years since I have stepped in the field of thanatological researches. Primarily incited by certain events in my personal life and then by classical thanatological studies, I have started to leaf through pages about death which were written by history of civilization. Immense and endless “book of death” obliged me to make my own system, to summarize my own experience, to tame and reconcile my own feelings of limited duration and perceptible eternity. However, in order to avoid creating a book of autobiographical and confessional notes, or at least to avoid reducing this manuscript solely to that, I tried to let my intellectual and emotional experience through the sieve of the culture to which I belong. This is, after all, a task of a researcher, particularly obvious in topics which concern essential questions of human existence. Death and dying are certainly such topics. Furthermore, these topics inevitably and explicitly turn researcher into interpreter whose goal is to establish balance between personal and general/common, individual and collective, historical and meta-historical levels of interpretation.

Obviously, the title of this book was inspired by title of Philippe Aries influential study: “Essays on History of Death at the West” (“Essais sur l’histoire de la mort en Occident”). Approaches applied in this book encouraged me to design my study as a collection of more or less independent texts which were created during last decade and in which my attempt was to summarize what was the most important about death and dying in Serbian culture. Therefore, this book could be conditionally divided into two thematic parts: research results about ritual behaviors and attitudes towards death of common people, and analyses of different historical and cultural circumstances which influenced these comprehension and praxes. The other group of essays brings analyses of manifestations of death phenomenon in public spaces. These investigations revealed strong influences of cultural, political and religious ideas and ideologies on shaping public, collective image of death. However, they also point at the reverse



process – how thesaurus of symbols contained in “eternal mystery” determines content and messages of political praxes.

The basic texture of this manuscript rests on the fundamental hypotheses of classical thanato-anthropological researches, i.e. on ambivalent, synchronic and diachronic models which can be found there. One model represents modern societies as ones in which facts of suppressing speech on death in private sphere on one side and invasion of death and dying images in public space on the other are confronted. The other model is based on the idea that understanding of death follows fairly one-way evolutionary path between tradition and modernity.

However, a careful reader will notice that interpretative level of results constantly escapes compact structuring: silence about death in modern and neo-modern (term suggested by Walter) society is not an absolute category, while relation between tradition and modernity appears as multivalent, multi-way and full of deep mutual overlapping.

Interviews that were conducted during the research, acquaintances, conversations and familiarity with colleges which I met at conferences on thanatology, as well as ever-growing pile of death studies literature, inspired me to write essays in relatively “free style”, which seemed to me to be the best way for making my own cognitions readable and accessible to a wider readership.

Nevertheless, readers have in their hands a book about death and dying. Leafing through it, they can travel from rural to urban spaces, from traditional to contemporary ritual forms and ideological frames, from private to public discourses, from everyday life to political spheres, from mystery to spectacle and vice versa.

This book will not help us solve the mystery of death, but it may improve our understanding of some forms it takes in contemporary society.

# **In or out of Cultural and Historical Matrix?**

## **Researching Death in Serbian Ethnology during the Second Half of the 20th Century**

Main impulse for analytical intersection conducted in this article has been the question, if and in which way anthropological themes during the last fifty years reflected social and cultural reality, i.e. was the anthropological discourse about death only an immediate reflection of the cultural climate, or did anthropologists succeed in analyzing it from scientific distance? Aware that this question is very complex, I do not have any illusion that some definite answers can be offered at this moment. However, I hope that this analysis will be at least modest contribution to the further syntheses and evaluations of achievements in the frame of Serbian ethnology/anthropology, but also in the frames of developing thanatology as separate discipline.

It is well known and elaborated fact that the modern time brought the attitude towards death, which differs a lot from the one of the former epochs. From the phenomenon that in traditional society used to go “hand in hand” with its antipode – life, representing thus inseparable part of its all crucial and everyday manifestations, death in industrial era has become more and more suppressed towards the margins of reality, in the sphere of private, tacit, uncontrolled and unrecognized. Professionalization of the work related to death and the dead, propagating and popularization of cremation, building fences and hiding graveyards, as well as moving ill people and those who are dying far from the eyes of world, represent just details of the process, which, it is possible to say, has culminated during the second half of the 20th century (Thomas 1980; Čolović 1983; Marjanović-Dušanić 2004). Anticipated by Aldous Huxley’s visionary book *Brave new world*, persecution of death in this “cosmic era” turned into prohibition of its mentioning, even into prohibition of public mourning the dead. Trends in Serbia, at least when it goes about dead, did not differ a lot from the global ones. However, it is important to notice that the cults

related to death – if we compare this to the other customs from the life cycle – went through the least changes, at least formally. Reasons for this should be searched for in the complex phenomenon of death as eternal secret and inexhaustible inspiration of religious and magic way of thinking. Beside this, if we take a look in specific historical context of Socialistic Yugoslavia, there is the fact that atheistic ideology, as part of state politics after Second World War, used to be primary anti-Christian and anti-Church, while the rituals of pagan character were not perceived as ideologically too dangerous. This was beneficial for survival of complete complex of traditional funeral rituals all up to nowadays. This can probably be the reason for relatively great number of papers about death, which were, (concerning already mentioned trends), contrary to expectations, published in ethnological publications from the researched period.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning immense ethnological literature that was written during the relevant period, I have decided to limit and focus only on the most important publications: Bulletin of Ethnographic Institute (further GEI), Bulletin of Ethnographic Museum (further GEM), Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology (further EAP), Ethnological Volumes (further ES) and Ethnological Review (further EP), as well as on monographs and some texts of the authors from Serbia who are unavoidable for this topic.<sup>2</sup>

However, one of the initial question was – what does it mean to write about death? Namely, the fact is that ethnology of this period was above all a “science about rituals”. Those rituals are always more or less related to the system of beliefs, ideas and behavior that

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<sup>1</sup> I considered about seventy different papers and books. Citing all in the form of reference would be too ample for this text, so I will mention all titles in the complete bibliography of ethnological works with the theme of death that I am preparing. Such bibliography of works published until 1970 was prepared by Ljubomir Andrejić in GEM 34, 1971, so new bibliography will refer to the period after 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Here I refer to following books: I. Čolović, *Književnost na groblju*, Beograd, 1983; Слободан Зечевић, *Култ мртвих код Срба*, Београд 1982; Dušan Bandić, *Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko*, Beograd, 1990; Бојан Јовановић, *Српска књига мртвих*, Београд 1992; *Ibid*, *Тајна лапота*, Београд 1999.

is called traditional religion. Therefore, we could conclude that it is difficult to find any paper or work that, at least indirectly, does not deal with death. Religious-magic view of the world that used to pervade everyday life in traditional society meant also constant contact with “beyond”, so the studies about e.g. rituals of baptizing or wedding, may also be considered as studies about death. I have solved this methodological problem with help of L.V. Thomas understanding the whole culture as a way in which society controls, structures, imagines, and finally forgets death. So, also those modern approaches in Serbian ethnology, by which the authors tried to escape the cliché of “research about rituals”, were inspired by death. However, although attractive and precious for further reflection, this concept about anthropology as anthro-*thanatology*, does not seem to me appropriate and practical for answering questions that I raised in the beginning. That is why I have analyzed only those works that directly and explicitly deal with death, or at least touch on it.

One analytical review requires triage of works according to defined criteria. The most common differentiation of authors/works makes distinction between those that write about funeral rituals, and those who “read” them. The first group of authors is the most numerous, while their approach, although it belongs to the mentioned traditional concept of ethnology, is not completely abandoned today. However, the majority of these works was written until the 1980s. Rituals related to death appear here as a kind of *exotica* that challenges rationalism of the modern time, while the authors of these works leave the impression of people who are not personally interested in the theme of death. The main characteristic of these contributions is *descriptivism* that is meritorious for creating valuable ethnographic thesaurus. In anthropological sense, these contributions are almost completely irrelevant. The other group of authors consists of those who try to unzip the symbolism of death, to interpret it and to find out its messages, sense and meaning in the world of the living. In my opinion, one may say, without exaggeration that in this regarded period, only one author was completely devoted to such efforts, only one author was focused on dealing with basic anthropological questions initiated

by the phenomenon of death. It is Ivan Čolović. However, between mentioned extremes, appear also nuances.

As “shading” begins practically during the 1980s, it is also possible to divide works about death on those that were written from the 1950s till the 1980s, and those that were published during the last two decades of the last millennium. In this period, from 1952, when the first volume of GEI was published, until 1976, nine papers about death were published. In the following six publications/years, which means until 1983, this theme was completely omitted from the pages of the Bulletin. Concerning GEM, since 1957 until 1981, fourteen contributions were devoted to the last journey of human life. The only thing that one may notice as a difference between those publications probably has to do with the strategy of scientific-research work that existed in institutions which published these journals. Namely, the texts in GEM were usually part of monographic researches of certain regions, that referred to all segments of social life, including funeral rituals. Papers in GEI deal with certain phenomenon related to death, while funeral rituals of some regions are published independently, and not as a part of wider monographic investigations.<sup>3</sup> Descriptions of graveyards, graves, monuments and different fine arts motives appear in seven works (four in GEI and three in GEM). Due to the lack of effort to perceive these materialized echoes of death in a wider ethnological or anthropological context, they might be described as archeological or art history contributions.

Researches of death in both publications are based on more or less same structure, which means that they refer to description of behavior (and more rarely, believes) of the community on the occasion of death. Descriptions usually start with remark about preparation for death that used to begin while the person was still alive. Then follow enumeration

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<sup>3</sup> In the year of 1978 in the first volume of Ethnological Volumes, two papers dealing with death were published. In style they did not differ a lot from those mentioned above: Tomislav Živković, Običaj darovanja u sahranama u okolini Semperevske Palanke i nekim drugim krajevima Donje Šumadije, ES I, Beograd, 1978, 168-175; Slobodan Zečević, Grejanje pokojnika, ES I, Beograd, 1978, 109-113.

of omens of death and descriptions of following rituals: announcement of death, preparation of the corpse, rules of behaving in the procession, funeral, funeral feast, commemoration and All Souls Day. None of these papers includes either ethno-explication, or an effort of the author to explain certain acts, nor to relate them to the wider context. Rituals are represented as a petrified form that can never be changed. The lack of creativity of the authors from this period might be explained by certain parameters of their work. Very important factor here might be the age and origin of the authors: they were born in the society more similar to the one that they wrote about, than to the one they belonged as ethnologists. Maybe this was the reason why they were not able to make necessary analytical distance towards the object of their research. This is of course only assumption. The main reason for the problem mentioned should be searched for in the combination of socio-political climate and the corresponding attitude towards tradition, death and religion (these two themes were always automatically related), and in the mentioned concept of ethnology of the period. According to this, every social phenomenon was treated more or less the same – as a part of folk “tradition” that should be written down and thus saved from oblivion. And while transformation was “allowed” for some other segments of social reality, death was presented as independent cultural complex that resists all civilization streams (Jovanović M. 1976). Formally, death (in the rural communities) is such even today. However it is clear that under the veil of petrified forms exist essentially changed attitudes towards the last journey. Indication of this change gave Ivan Čolović as early as 1974, in the text “Introduction to the reading of newspaper obituaries” (Увод у анализу новинских читуља). The text was published in the journal “Kultura”, and in a certain way it was an announcement of the change of ethno-anthropological discourse about death.

From the papers that appeared in this period, it is necessary to single out one by Dušan Bandić, published in 1975 in GEI (“Traces of taboo in Serbian death ritual”). This work suggested a new methodological and structural approach treating religious phenomena, which would later single out this author as one of the most significant

and most quoted researchers of traditional religion.

However, as it is already said, 1980s, or more exactly 1980. was a turning point in historical, cultural, social and probably every other sense. The death of Josip Broz Tito, president of Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, marked the beginning of long-term transition in the region of Yugoslavia of the time. More or less indirectly the beginning of this process might be recognized in the changes of the scientific discourse, although I think that changes were caused also by the appearance of more complex anthropological perception in the worldwide context, although all innovations came to us with certain delay.

It is interesting, especially in the context of anthro- thanatological researches that the event of death was the one that opened the “the doors of perception”, as if the death of “the immortal one” (image of Tito was build upon that model) permitted to think about death again, and thus enabled its re-encounter with life. Thus, the religious revival, as it is often called the reactualization of religious world views in the last decades of 20th century, was not only the result of economic and social crisis and wars, but probably, above all, the need to find again the answer to the suppressed questions.

Five years after its publishing in Paris, in 1980, the huge study “Anthropology of Death” by Louis-Vincent Thomas was published in our country. A year later, in 1981, Yugoslav readership were able to get familiar with the work “Man and Death” by another French author – Edgar Morin. These immense studies offered detailed, multidisciplinary researches of the phenomenon of death, its biological, psychological, sociological, historical and philosophical dimensions. Considering different ways of death and dying, as well as their metaphors, comparing modern and “primitive” societies and the perception of man as a “creature-for-death” and of human culture as a creation essentially determined by “remembering” of this necessity represent even today the inspiration and call for “reading” death as an eloquent fact about life (Thomas I 1980: 23; Morin 1981:15, 29). Here, however, should be mentioned, that basic Marxist and biological determination towards life that pervade both monographs, lead both

authors to the final negation of reality of metaphysical dimension of death and in a certain way of death itself. But, all this does not reduce the importance of these capital works which could have influenced Serbian researchers.

Although the direct influence of thanatological views of the world was recognizable already in the work of Ivan Čolović, the reviews of “Anthropology of Death” published in 1982 and 1983 in GEM and GEI, together with a frequent quoting of Thomas and Morin by ethnologists who were writing about death, signify the initiation of Serbian ethnology into the “new” world of symbols and signs (Gavrilović 1980; Prica 1983).

In the period between 1980 and 2006, forty five papers devoted to death were published in ethnological journals. This number was duplicated comparing to the former period, probably because of the increased number of journals and periodicals that started to be published (Ethnological Volumes, Ethnological Review, Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology), but also because of increased interest of the authors in this topic. Furthermore, six monographs partly or completely related to the research of death were published in that period.<sup>4</sup> First of all, I would like to mention the study by Dušan Bandić about taboo in Serbian traditional culture, which includes very interesting chapter about taboo and regulations related to death (Bandić 1980). As it has already been said, Bandić was above all the researcher of traditional religion and his greatest merit was that he defined religious system marked with this term, pointing, among other things, to the layers of the believes of different origin inside it. His theoretical and methodological approach was also original and important mostly because it emphasized the multidimensional aspect of the investigated phenomena, but it also determined, and therefore limited anthropological range of his conclusions. Namely, Bandić perceived traditional religion and the complex of beliefs and rituals related to death in evolutionary and diachronically perspective, regarding them only as a phase of religious believes of Serbian people

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<sup>4</sup> These monographs were mentioned in footnote 2.



(Ibid 112). Insisting on the difference between pagan and Christian elements in the frame of taboo-regulations related to death, as well as on the dominant functionalist interpretation of their role (which cannot be refuted, but this does not exhaust all contents and meanings of cult), prevented this prolific author from entering more profoundly into anthropological dimensions of the meaning of death, not so much on social level, but primarily on the level of individual. But, it might be as well that this was his conscious decision to avoid this question.

In my opinion, the main contribution of Dušan Bandić to the research of death in Serbian ethnology is the concept of “post mortem dying”, which he patented in the paper with the same title, published in *Ethnological Review* in 1983. This concept is described as the process of separation and liberation of the dead from the connections with the living, but also – and this is more important – as the process by which social community regulates its attitude towards the particular deceased and towards the ancestors through the rituals in which fear from the dead and fear of death gradually become replaced by „peaceful coexistence “of the living and the dead, through the memory and respect of first towards the latter. This text is also published as a part of the study “Kingdom of Earth and Kingdom of Heaven“ („Carstvo zemaljsko i carstvo nebesko“) in 1990. I will write more about this book further in the text.

“Serbian Cult of the Dead („Kult mrtvih kod Srba”) is a book by Slobodan Zečević, published in 1982, and it certainly represents one of the unavoidable monographs devoted to the research about death in our region. The importance of this book is that it brought to the intellectual market a book that represents a very detailed synthesis of Serbian traditional customs and beliefs about death. Pointing out the constants elements of the dead cult, which, in the author’s opinion had not been essentially changed by the influence of Christianity, might represent an interesting starting point for contemporary research of the relations between religion and death.

It was in the same year, that the paper by Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić was published in the eighteenth volume of *Ethnological Review*. In this paper, on the example of funeral ritual, the author has pointed at

the variable structure of the rite of passage and the methodological deductions that the usage of the suggested Terence Turner's "geometric-matrix-model" might offer. And although, this model introduced vertical dimension of the structure of ritual reality, the conclusions of this text remained on the level of horizontal functionalist-structural interpretation of the phenomenon of death.

The importance of the contribution to the research of death that gave Ivan Čolović is evident from the mere fact that his name in this paper has already been mentioned several times. His book "Literature on the graveyard" („Književnost na groblju“) represents the most conclusive and, in anthropological sense, most important research of the phenomenon of death (Čolović 1983). The analyzed epitaphs from the tombstones of six graveyards in Belgrade and three suburban graveyards, and their comparison with traditional lamentation, were not for Čolović only a discovery of an interesting genre of "wild literature", nor did he use them as a means for pointing out the change/constant of human behavior towards death. This work primarily indicated the possibilities of "reading" numerous manifestations of this relationship and discovering the essential relation between life and death, crucial for understanding human society.

This book alongside with Čolović's previous books and the spirit of the epoch, has initiated a series of topics in the field of ethnological/anthropological research of death. In the same year, when "Literature on the Graveyard" was published, another important paper appeared in EP, written by Croatian anthropologist, Dunja Rihtman. It dealt with ethnological researches of the city in which she also mentions research of the newspaper obituaries.<sup>5</sup> Two years later, also in EP, Zorica Rajković wrote about legends related to tombstones of the victims of car accidents. In the year of 1985. one whole part section of ES was dedicated to the topic of "Culture and Death", and apart from papers that were dealing with traditional, although not so well

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<sup>5</sup> In 1988 the same author published monograph „Etnologija naše svakodnevice“ [Ethnology of Everyday Life], and devoted complete chapter to the research of newspaper obituaries. See: Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, Etnologija naše svakodnevice, Zagreb 1988.

known, costumes related to death, there were also those written in the “new” style. Here I refer to the results of the research of the socio-emphatic functions of tombstones in villages near Belgrade, conveyed by Ivan Kovačević and also to an interesting, but very short work about perception of death by polled Belgrade citizens, by Sofija Radonić. To this group belongs also a paper by Edit Petrović, published in ES in 1987, about funeral rituals among atheists. The elaboration of this topic at the time when atheism was still predominant might have made easier the interpretation of the process of revitalization of religious believes that happened during 1990s. However, this was never done.

As it is obvious, the focus during the mentioned period, from the beginning of 1980s until 1990s, was on the journals ES and EP. In the period from 1982 until 1988 fifteen papers were published. GEM in the same period, published five papers dealing with death, but their content did not differ from those that were published in the previous period. In the period from 1983 – 1990, GEI published also five texts – two in the ethnographic context – by Dušan Bandić and Nevena Čurčić (Bandić 1984; Čurčić 1988). Bandić researched the symbolism of mirror, while Nevena Čurčić wrote survey paper about religious as well as different theoretical concepts of interpretation of death.

The “circle” was symbolically closed by the same author who had initiated it, by Ivan Čolović with the text about transformation of newspaper obituaries, published in ES in 1988. One could not say that there were no interesting and innovative texts during 1990s, but the number of those significantly decreased, while ethnological research of death returned to the safe port of anthropological lack of ambition. I would like to mention here one more text, published in 1989 – not because I consider it particularly relevant for research on death, but because it seems to me that its appearance was the announcement and the mirror of the new attitude of society towards this life certainty. It is a contribution by archeologist, Živko Mikić in which he deals with anthropological details (it is about physical anthropology) of identification of body remains of Montenegrin king Nikola I, queen Milena and princesses Ksenija and Vera. Identification was performed just before their remains were carried from Italy to Montenegro. From

today's point of view, and from the point of view of that time, this text seems like an overture for "forensic era" in which digging out the dead has become a part of everyday life – the one of the film, media, politics or war.

However, new social trends and events were announced by, who else than, Ivan Čolović with his text about death of Belgrade's criminal, Ljuba Zemunac published in GEI (1988) and Dušan Bandić with his monograph "Kingdom of Earth and Kingdom of Heaven" (1990). Alongside with the sound of the "war trumpets" in 90ties these two authors lead us to the time of actualization of new/old myths and heroes, who were intensively used in political marketing, in the following period. Both studies reveal in a certain way the elements of new way in which the society does the "organizing" and "making sense" of death, "allowing" antiheroes and heroes to "die for us", giving legitimacy to the collective cathartic lament. In relation to this question an interesting text by Đurđica Petrović, was published in GEM in 1995 in which she pointed out the influence of important social/state institutions on the formation and suggestion of desirable forms of mourning the dead, as well as the desirable attitude to the moment of meeting of the individual and the collective with the *beyond*.

But, let us return to Bandić's *Kingdom*. Defining the symbolism of Kosovo oath as a certain "folk thanatology", in the mentioned monograph Bandić opened the question of the relation nation/religion/death, which is today, after evident rehabilitation of death as phenomenon of political manipulation, more than relevant (Bandić 1990:40). I think that this work of Bandić is particularly important because of his implicit and unexpected negation of evolutionist views, and interpretation of religious language as system complementary to the language of science. Those two languages according to Bandić "supplement one another...Each represents a cultural answer to the needs that its par might not fulfill" (Ibid:28). This knowledge (and confession) should be one of the basic perceptions and starting points of further anthropological researches of death, and the society in general.

Discovering of specific language of political thanatology is characteristic also for the text by Ivan Kovačević, published in 1996

in which he marks the grave (it is about the grave of Josip Broz Tito in the House of Flowers, his mausoleum) as a political place (*locus politicus*), trying to explain the increasing importance of the grave in Serbian politics. Unfortunately, the author did not elaborate this interesting theme, so the importance of this contribution is more in setting up the questions than in giving conclusions.

In this analytical review, it is obligatory to mention work by Bojan Jovanović “Serbian Book of the Dead” (“Srpska knjiga mrtvih”) (1992) and “Secret of Lapot” (*Tajna lapota*) (1999), above all because of specific esthetic quality that these syntheses bring. Namely, these two monographs were written in extremely beautiful literary-philosophical style that is appropriate for symbolic meaning of this, more or less, familiar reading. Particular importance of “Secret of Lapot” represents the effort of the author to requestion scientific dogma about killing old people, pointing out the symbolic dimension of this, unconfirmed legend.

In the year of 1997, the editorial board of the journal “Gradac” published the thematic number devoted to death (vol.124/125). However, there are no ethnological contributions in this journal. In the year of 2004, the whole volume of “Codes of Slovenian Culture” was devoted to this topic (vol.9). The authors were linguists and ethnologists, but what surprises us most is the lack of creativity in choosing topics and methodological framework as well as the lack of effort to regard the issue in the current context.

In the beginning of the new millennium when Serbian and I would say, Balkan ethnologist/anthropologists seriously and in great number became “obsessed” by constructivism and political anthropology, the interest in the private sphere is more and more a theme of historians who are revealing its inexhaustible sources of possibilities for interpretation of social reality in diachronic perspective. I do not claim that social history did not exist before, but such an interest has practically become a trend in the contemporary researches. This is testified also by the edition “History of private life” that first consisted of five volumes of translated French editions (2000-2004), appearing afterwards as “History of Private Life in Serbia” in four volumes (2004-2007). In

these publications, mostly historians are dealing with death, and only two contributions were written by ethnologist (Pavićević 2006a; Pavićević 2007).

The intensity of the interest for death as well as the quality of the research of this phenomenon was oscillating during the focused period. The influence of the global and local social and state ideas, ideologies and processes was mirrored also in the field of anthropological discourse. Critical situations for the society and certain researchers were reinforcing impulses for interest in death from time to time. However, this interest was constantly in inverse proportion with the increasing fear from the unknown. The closeness of war, as Morin concluded, brought some kind of weakening of the fear and one might explain the richness and diversity of ethnological production between 1980s and 1990s also by that (Morin 1981: 45). The war situation and the disintegration of the country apparently suggested the strategy of “admitting” only “certain” and “big” heroic deaths. Individual frustrations caused by the restriction of *potentially destructive* and above all uncontrolled intimate and private mourning the dead were replaced by intensive mythologization of events of national history and participation in the collective pain on the “exclusive” funerals of celebrities. In the pauses between deaths of *important* people, catharsis was provided by mass city religious processions and transfers of remains of the *old* dead from one place to another – phenomenon to which we dedicated one essay later in this book.

I believe that science, as a specific worldview appeared from the need to answer the basic question of human existence in time and eternity. Anthropology as a science about human should be, by definition, occupied by this issue to the largest extent. Or it should, at least, be based on the basic knowledge that human culture is conditioned by unavoidable human fate, both in its confirmation and negation through different types of oblivion. Having this in mind, (scientific) memory of death would be, at least, partially, tamed, and further research would be directed towards demystification and deconstruction of individual and social attitude to the end of this world existence. Of course, at the certain point, we will anyhow face dead end of our intellectual

range which may seem stultifying for our attempts. But if we cease to reach as far as we can, the question will always appear: if this wall of mystery will be the same as it would be if we didn't try to peek behind it?

# Death and Funeral in Serbia at the Beginning of third Millennium

## Attitudes and Rituals of Common People

If we take a look at history of death as well as at history of history of death, we may notice that they consistently confirm main discoveries of classics in thanato anthropology (Aries 1989; Thomas 1980; Gorer 1998). Through centuries and epochs, since first recorded evidences till modern times, death and dying phenomenon were slowly changed and moved from the center of human culture towards its margins, from conscious and mystical source of cult towards unconscious and irrational source of fear. So, after years of researching different ideas, notions, forms and manifestations that death and dying had in different cultural contexts and through different historical periods till present times, I found myself in front of the question: Is there anything left to be said about death, or we are just endlessly developing these basic observations and conclusions?<sup>1</sup>

On the other side if we have on mind what was done during last two decades, we will see plenty of new topics arising inside of death studies and more than this – there are authors who tried to turn things up side down, reassessing basic paradigms. Thus, Tony Walter in his “Revival of Death” revises thesis about marginalization and denial of death in “neo-modern” society, while recent authors such as Ilona Kempfinen and Adela Toplean reassess modernization and

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<sup>1</sup> In last six years I dealt with different aspects of death matters – common people dying, individual and personal attitudes towards death and dying phenomena, collective notions of death which we read from rituals – both privately and publicly performed, relation between death and politics and death and religion. Each of these topic are observed in the realms of tradition-modernity, rural-urban and local-global ambivalences and found their place inside of my book *Vreme (bez)smrti. Predstave o smrti u Srbiji 19–21 veka. (Time with or without Death. Notions of Death in Serbia 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> Century)*. Institute of Ethnography of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts: Special Editions 73, Belgrade, 2011.



secularization paradigms (Walter 1994; Kempfinen 2011; Toplean 2010).

And what amazes is that new hypotheses fit inside of death issue as good as previous ones. In a fact they do not appear as some particular discovering but just as one more fine thread within the enchanting texture that death makes in human life. Anyhow, this should not be surprising but confirming that death phenomenon is the core of all contradictions and ambivalences inbuilt in structure of human culture. It is in the same time constant and fluid, sacred and secularized, accepted and denied. It is the source of crucial symbolic capital in all societies and in all times. It is the last mystery and it is going to remain so, regardless to enormous progress of technology and medicine.

This partly resolves our initial inquiry: there is still need to research death and there will always be something left to explore about it... at least till the moment when we will (potentially) reach Brave New World, world in which metaphysics of death- life relations is going to recoil from physical act of dying. But, till then, lots of questions remain and one of them seems to me as very urgent: are we ourselves (death researchers) tracing the path towards such a future of death? Did we reach the moment when our interpretation begins to suppress our exploration? Do we create or research death-matrix? Are we inside or outside of the whirlpool?

Everyone will agree that this is tough question, without simple and unanimous response. It demands serious insider type of research with most probable response about our double position: we are participants and observers, researchers and creators... But the most prompt way to detect our position and to improve our analyses is to get always and always back to empirical researches and field work. There we can experience how people “really” die and what do they “really” think about death.

This is why for this occasion<sup>2</sup> I chose to present part of material

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<sup>2</sup> This paper was presented at Fifth edition of conference: “Death and Dying in 18<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe”. Alba Iulia, September 2012 and then published in collection of papers: Marius Rotar, Corina Rotar, Adriana Teodorescu, *Dying and Death in 18<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe*, Volume II, Cambridge Scholar Publishing 2013.

collected during my field work in 17 villages and 6 towns in Central and Western Serbia. Here I'll focus at funeral ritual and attitudes towards death.<sup>3</sup>

### **Talking and thinking (about) death**

Giving concise and brief explanation of relation that modern (Euro-American) man has towards death seems to be quite difficult task. Saying that he is not thinking about death, that he fears it or (intentionally) forgets it, would be just superficially describing consequences of one long lasting global historical process, whose present epilogue is extreme contradictory inside and outside of death and dying phenomenon.

Again, no matter how thorough contemplations, researching and analyses of this process are and were, we have to admit that they remain on the level of hypothesis which can never be finally and irreclaimably approved. These assumptions are wholesale based on interpretations of historiography material which shows how people in different epoch dealt with fear of death. So, means were different, more or less successful, more or less constructive, more or less accepting, more or less denying, but fear was (almost) the same/constant.

Probably the most adequate notion that describes relation that (post)modern man has towards his own death (so not necessarily as his *diferentia specifica*) is that he keeps silence about it. And this silence appears to be more complex than any kind of talk – whether direct or symbolic. The whist is both external and internal category. First, mentioning death violates rhythm and atmosphere of usual social communication, has negative implications on flow of conversation and provokes the felling of fear, narrowness and disquiet (Čolović 1983;

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<sup>3</sup> Research was conducted in the period 2006–2011, among 90 interlocutors, in 6 Serbian towns: Belgrade, Smederevo, Čačak, Arandjelovac, Sjenica and Prijepolje and in 17 villages in regions of Smederevska Jasenica, Smederevsko Podunavlje and Sjeničko-Pešterska Visoravan. I used semi structured interview and question pool. Beside this, I used observant participation method, participating in number of funerals during this period.

Radonjić 1985). The only allowed form of talking death is through black humor interpretations of life failings and this is the method that people quite often use to disperse anxiety provoked by pronouncing “forbidden words” (Čajkanović 1985; Stevanović 2009).

Second, interviews showed that my informants rarely think about death, particularly about their own. If such thoughts appear, majority of interviewed said that they try to repel them or to replace them with some other, less disturbing contemplations.

As it was expected, frequency of thinking about life finiteness is directly in proportion to age and religiosity of informants. Older and actively religious people think about death more often and with more rationality.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to mention that informants from villages and those from towns equally seldom think about death, but talking about death matters showed some more or less unexpected varieties. They remind on the fact that silence about death is not absolute and that it is differently expressed in different surroundings and in different social relations.

Thus, my urban informants talked about posed questions very open and readily. Some of them to whom I chose to give written question pool, asked to talk to me personally because they didn't feel well sitting alone and full filling it. Sometimes, interviews lasted for several hours and turned into mutual confession with cathartic tears and laugh.

Relation that villagers have towards their own death and death at whole, I would describe as quite simple and rational. They accept it reconcilably, with serene awareness that it is something that has to be, and “if it comes by order”, it is not considered as tragic event. But, villagers didn't show so much interest in talking about death. It was probably due to still partly present superstitious concerning

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<sup>4</sup> When I say *actively religious people* I have on mind believers whose religiosity is not of traditional kind, but who actively participate in church services and holy mysteries. Distinction between traditional and active believers is made by numerous Serbian anthropologists and sociologists of religion in order to classify different type of identities related to religious and confessional belonging and behaving in Serbia in last two decades.

mentioning the name of death, but much more due to the fact that I was outsider to whom “only the best” should have been presented. So, wedding customs, family celebrations, raising the kids, village festivities and other events of that kind were considered to be more representative than funeral rituals and attitudes towards death. On the other side, majority of conversations with older women opened the gate between this and other world showing that in their consciousness these two realities exist side by side. Talking about how she stopped singing when her nephew died in the car accident, one 80 years old lady (well known in that region as good performer of traditional songs) said:

“I can’t sing anymore. I think if I would let my voice go out, I would see her (nephew)”

From this as well as from rich ritual praxes, to which we’ll come later in the text, we can conclude that rationality does not exclude mystique and mystical thinking. But, while mystical thinking appears as kind of constructive mean for handling mystery, irrationality is manifested through permanently present fear with no explainable reason, so characteristic for contemporary world, particularly for people who lastingly broke connections with traditional social and environmental context.

Promise of immortality given to technologically, medically, scientifically and by all other means equipped (post)modern man, appeared to be so fragile that just a word or thought about death could endanger it.

### **When I say “death” I think on...**

Local tales about vampires were the first idea that rural informants had when they were asked about death and dying customs and believes. It is probably related to the fact that grate part of funeral rituals are (or were in the past) about preventing deceased’s aberration. Majority of my urban interlocutors linked notion of death primarily to images of disease and dying. This fact confirms both Philippe Aries’ thesis – that one of the most important features in creating notions of death in

modernity was changing the place for dying – from home to hospital and Tony Walter’s reflection that neo modern death is shaped by process of dying itself (Aries 1989:67,68; Walter 1994: 2).

## Hospital

And really, dying in hospital appears to be inevitable part of stillness about death, and even more than this – it represents the core of refusing this certainty. Long lasting and serious diseases as well as pictures of dying in hospital room provoke huger fear than death itself. But, in the base of this fear is not only the felling of complete desertion and solitude in front of eternity that opens its gate for dying person. More than this it is the fact that none his closest, nor medical staff do not mention imminent separation. In hospital environment, mystical signs of death are not recognized, patient’s dreams are not taken into consideration... shortly: any possibility for last travel preparation remains in the shadow of anamnesis and therapy lists.

It is true that introducing and developing end of life care may bring relief for a “patient” (who is able to afford it!), but in the same time, it represents step forward in deepening the gap between dying person and the rest of the world. The later can continue with everyday life without the remorse and, what is even more important, without facing death, since that now, the dying is in “safe hands”.

However, such an image of dying in hospital probably owe the most to the absence of any ritual through which dying and, later on, deceased would be send off. Confirmation that it is the ritual that connects death and life, fear and hope, we still find in researched rural regions.

In present times villagers die in hospital more often than before, but, after they are dead, their corps are returned home where ritual send off is prepared, the same as if they have died in the house. This is the possible reason why rural family, when talking about deceased and about death at whole, does not stress illness and pictures of hospital, but funeral ritual.

In the town, deceased and his family meet for the first and last

time after death, at the funeral. And even then, their contact is indirect. Namely, ritual procession around open coffin is real rarity, so, if they were not present at the corps identification – which is usually done by one family member – or if they didn't visit deceased in the mortgage – what happens only in some specific situations – relatives practically do not have any contacts with deceased after his death. Last memory of deceased is his picture in hospital room, image that remains indelibly carved in memories of descendents.

### **Sudden Death or Way I would like to die**

Horrifying images of solitary, alienated, professionalized and institutionalized dying are probably the reason why majority of my urban informants vote for sudden and quick death (in older age if possible).<sup>5</sup> But, this way of leaving the world seems desirable only when they talk about their own death. Eventual sudden death of close person would be completely shocking and paralyzing. Attitudes that villagers have about way and time for final departure are much less radical. Summary of different answers on this question can be found in words of one eighty years old farmer from Rajla village:

“...well, who was not born is not going to die. Who was born has to die. Everyone has his judgment day. No one should laugh to anyone. There is no reason to fear. Everyone should bide death joyful and in old age... hundred is our life span, but it is not good to live to see very old age. Life is nice any wise, but when you are old you can't ... [do] as you did before. When you are old you make bed impression...”

### **If I would know my Judgment day**

Part of interviewed from Belgrade think that it would be good if one would have time for some kind of preparation for death, so to be able to finish some important jobs. These jobs were: cleaning the house, throwing out unnecessary things, deposing and preparing some

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<sup>5</sup> One research conducted in Slovenia brought similar results (Mrevlje, Pistolnik, Župevc 2006:86–116)

intimate and personal documents, letters etc. Less practical informants wanted to spend last days at the sea side and some of them drinking in bars. Preparing clothes for funeral is still present among older people in the village while it is completely abandoned in the towns.

Where deceased is going to be buried is not particularly complex question in the village. There is village cemetery where every family has its place ever since. On the other hand, this task is quite problematic in towns, particularly in Belgrade, but regardless to variety of problems that should be solved about it, majority of my urban informants do not think and do not prepare their place for the eternal dream. I had impression that it was my question that provoked this thinking, so some of them expressed special wishes to be buried or scattered (after cremation) at some nice place in the nature: sea side, mountains, viewpoints etc. It is obvious that urban people often leave this problem to city authorities and regular procedures. They provide that deceased gets buried at the municipality cemetery closest to the place he lived in.<sup>6</sup>

### **First meeting with death**

Let us be back to hospital issue once again. Severely sick person leaves home not only in order to receive adequate care in hospital and prolongation of his life time, but, sometimes even primarily, in order to spare his housemates from witnessing his suffering and dying. Particular concern about protecting children from unpleasant scenes is characteristic for urban families. Kids are absent from all situations that are considered as possibly upsetting – from visiting ill relative in the hospital – to participating in the funeral ritual. In average village household, sending off the deceased imply presence of all its members.

Thus, interviews and question pools showed that age in which

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<sup>6</sup> If family has sepulcher on their own, they bury their members there, regardless to municipality they live in. Possibility to choose place for *eternal rest* is also greater if death body is cremated. In this case, urn can be placed at some of old and nice Belgrade's cemeteries which belong to "closed type" of cemeteries. This means that the territory they occupy can't be expanded.

my informants participated funeral for the first time depended on their geographic origin and place where they have spend childhood as well as on age generation they belonged. Those who were born in the village or in the province town as well as those born before 1965 faced real death in child ages (up to 10 years), much before those younger and born in Belgrade. Cases which do not fit into this rule can be explained by strong connections that exact family has with its rural relatives and by specific family styles of raising kids.

And so, while kids play death, and while it's imitating represents important part of games they were playing ever since, adults try to prevent every possible contact that kids could have with real death. Impossibility of giving convincible response for asking that this contact may provoke, is certainly upsetting, but it seems that it is so for the parents more than for the kids. Again, all my urban informants think that parents should talk to kids about this issues, but "carefully", "if they ask for it", "when time comes". Their parents mostly didn't talk about death with them and in some families this is still forbidden topic even though in the mean while kids grew up.

As said before, situation in rural environments is much different. Describing what was told to kids when their grandmother died, one householder from Udovice village said:

"Nothing! They have to know both for the good and for the bad in the house. I say to my grandson that I am going to die one day as well. He said he was not going to let me die. Then, we go to the graveyard... I arrange little bit around the grave, pull up the grass and he says that he is going to arrange my grave in the same way. Kid has to know that I am here temporary."

Death of closest as well as idea of possible final separation from them are always hardly acceptable. They are so particularly for the kids whose whole cosmos is build around their parents' figures. Eventual parents' departure seriously endangers harmony of children's world and leaves durable emotional scares and fears in every human creature. But, imperative of keeping silence, whether about death that happened or death as inseparable part of life, makes these events and facts even more difficult and more horrible, because it lingers process



of discharging sorrow, fear and pain.

Though their possibility to create constructive consciousness about whatever balance of life happenings is significantly impoverished, people (in Serbia) still have certain means which can mitigate their nakedness in front of death. These means are contained in still present archaic (but modern as well) forms of symbolic speech such as funeral ritual (Bandić 1990:104).

### Speaking death

Whist about death is temporarily stopped along with the beginning of post mortem ritual. It symbolically starts with public announcement of community member's death. In towns, announcement is in most cases published in newspapers obituaries while in villages, community is informed through personal invitations and church bells ringing.<sup>7</sup> In some villages (Ratari and Rajkovac), one bereaved family member, with towel around his left arm, goes through village, from house to house and informs neighbors, friends and relatives about sad event. Villagers say that in previous times, death was announced by loud mourning, performed by women in front yard of the house. In present times, this happens only if young man dies.

And while newspapers obituary is not only information about death, but also the compensation for fare well which was missed because he died in the hospital – most often without presence of his closest, village invitation gathers community which will directly and personally see off the deceased. As the matter of the fact, seeing off ritual begins at death bed by lightening candle in the moment of separation of dying person. If villager by some case died in the hospital, candle is lightened in his house, immediately after receiving news about event. By this act, kind of symbolic togetherness is established between deceased and his closest family. Some families take candle to the church, so that local priest can light it during Sunday liturgies. One informant from Smederevo said that he even went to mortgage in order to full fill this

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<sup>7</sup> People who are informed and invited to pay last respect to the deceased are called *uzov* or *zvanica*, the same as guests who visit family in other ritual occasions.

traditional obligation which was missed because his father have died in the hospital. People from villages say that it is important not to light candle before “it is time” because it can aggravate departure of dying. One collocutor from Rajla village described last moments that he has spend with his mother:

“... She was aware till very last moment. I saw somehow ... [that she was going to leave]. My son asked me to go to mow the clover, but I didn` t feel like going. We were sitting around her all night long. She was sick all the time. Daughter-in-law and my son went [to mow] and I went to feed the cattle. I told to my wife to look at her [mother] while she prepares lunch. Soon after she called me to see what was with mum. She grew pale, [her] breathing dropped off, [her] nails turned blue. I saw it was over. Candle was prepared, but hidden from her eyes. I didn` t want to disturb her. I disturbed my father and then we had horrible problems with him for 24 hours more. You mustn` t wail loudly, it is as you call him to come back.”

But there are witty tales about these situations as well. Thus, villagers from Rajkovac village told a story about a fellow to whom candle was light before the time, so “he got up from the bad, smoked cigarette and then lied down again and died.”

## **Body**

When dying finally parts with the soul, closest neighbors bath his body. In some villages, this is only symbolical act and dead body is just wiped with sponge, while in some other villages corps is really doused. Anyhow, when defunct is ready, his/her corps is laid in the open coffin, or at the table, around which wake takes part during following hours.

As mentioned, a series of acts related to dead body are missing from the process that urban defunct and his family go through. Last hug, by which closest part with dying or deceased, appears to be just a scene from idealized movie tale. Two hours after death in hospital bed, corps, covered with plastic cover and thus hidden from the eyes of the world, is removed into nospace and notime of hospital mortgage, to wait there for the funeral ceremony. Severe bans of approaching

and entering, stroked out at the entrance of mortgage, emphasize this terminal state. But, unlike terminal states in traditional customs, this one rather suggests denying than passage, rather nuisance than accepting. According to this, as it was expected, majority of my urban informants voted against exposing dead body in open coffin during funeral procession. This traditional custom they consider as “unnecessary”, “bizarre”, “inadequate”, as act that violates intimacy of deceased and his family. But, it is interesting to mention that less than 30 years ago, open coffin at funerals was not so unusual picture at Belgrade’s cemeteries.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to this, open coffin and direct contact with defunct, through kissing and waking around him, are still common part of funeral ritual in Serbian villages. Exceptions are made only in the cases when face or body of deceased are too deformed by illness or suffering. In such cases, bereaved family puts photo of deceased on the coffin. However, attitudes that village youth (those born after 1980) has about these questions, point at acceleration of changing relation towards death in rural areas as well. They very often express contempt towards traditional funeral customs, particularly towards kissing defunct and his exposing.

Regarding legal and common procedures in the towns, it isn’t possible to organize fare well from deceased in his home. As the matter of fact, fare well takes part at his home, but without deceased’s participation. While he is in mortgage, relatives, neighbors and friends visit his family, or express condolence by phone, by sending telegram or by newspapers obituary. Nevertheless, noisy and crowdie atmosphere in days before funeral is pretty much the same, both for the rural and for the urban bereaved family. Crucial difference is in opportunity that rural family has, and that is to take part in this last journey more directly and more gradually. It is whole community that

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to mention case of funeral of Patriarch Pavle, in 2009, to which separate text is dedicated in this book. He was send off with Christian ritual that implied, among other things, exposing his corps in open coffin in central Belgrade church. Few hundred thousand people stayed several hours in long queue, waiting to pass his death bed and to give last kiss to this favorite church leader.

travels to the gate of eternity and back, participating and consuming continuity of sacred time, without profane disturbances. Urban family mourns over the news about death, wakes over deceased's pictures, his personal things and memories of him, and remains tearless when suddenly meets with coffin. Bureaucratic procedures, limited time for funeral procession, professional undertakers and organizers, hygienic, emotional and social concerns etc. tear mystery into pieces, leaving the mourners with dull pain and abstract felling of emptiness.

### **Body of beloved or corps?**

Contact with dead body always implied particular behaving, established ritual and a number of taboos. As we know, these rules were ambiguous. Manifestly, they were aimed to prevent any possible aberration of deceased and to help his soul to reach the other world. Latently, structure and flow of ritual behaving enabled the family and whole community gradual separation from deceased – separation that should have tamed fact of death and loss and establish new kind of contact with dead family member. In traditional social environment, time needed for dead body of beloved person to turn into corps and thus to become strange and undesirable, is much longer than in modern context. It overlaps with already evolved decay process. Thus, one villager from Petrijevo village told us how his family has built the crypt, in order to entomb there remains of all close family members:

“I switched my wife in the crypt after a year [from her death], but, we didn't want to open the coffin! What could we see?! There is nothing to be seen!”

When degradation of matter is complete, body, as to, what is left of it, again, in certain way becomes close and accepted. The other informant to whom I posed the question about family crypt and way it was used put it this way:

“When I die I'll [be buried] where my grandpa is. His bones will be put in the sack. I am glad to lie near to him. I can hardly remember him.”

What is the force that accelerates this transformation process

in modern and neo modern environments? It is surely about lack or simplification of ritual, but it is not the only reason. This is just a consequence of other changes. More developed, or just different hygienic views? It is undisputed fact that changing these views through history, influences inversion of mystical fears and fears of bacteria and infection. During 18th and 19th century this caused demands for removing cemeteries out of cities, but which was opposed by strong need for continual commemoration. And though dead and alive continued to share living space, medical and hygienic discovering certainly contributed to developing kind of intrinsic antagonism towards corps as potential source of (physiological) impurity. It is also possible that, during second half of 20th century, horror movies industry played certain role in encouraging these feelings of disgust and fear, though there are no reliable researching that would prove this relation. Two British scholars noticed that change of relation towards dead body and towards death at whole was followed by change of texts in religious services dedicated to dead and it was as well visible in secular funeral orations which have been proposed from the side of local undertakers (Cook&Walter 2006).

I believe that, among these factors, esthetical views of the epoch played important role in creating relation that (neo)modern people have towards body. Significant materialistic principles of contemporary civilization unavoidably led to cultural transformation in status of body (particularly female body). It was more and more cherished, uncovered, exposed and adored, but only till it response to certain esthetic ideals, till it is young, beautiful and healthy. With its physiological degradation begins its cultural and social marginalization. It becomes invisible in public space and in private it is often source of insecurity.

Contempt that contemporary civilization feels towards aging and deteriorating body has its probably most extreme reflex in the modern cremation, custom through which shameful evidences of its (body) defeat should be irretrievably destroyed. On the other hand, beautifying, polishing, make up and even embalming corps, customs that are very widespread in North America and very well accepted from the side of Serbian emigrants who live there, reflect particular relation

that contemporary man has towards corporal aspects of his personal integrity (Blagojević 2005). Meaning of these procedures in modern context is different from those in traditional. Namely, while in later, posthumous toilette meant preparation of defunct for meeting the other world, its aim in contemporary funeral rituals is to represent deceased and his body in best light and in condition that is most acceptable for people who come to see him off.

When talking about these questions, it is interesting to mention one more thing. Namely, whatever was attitude that my urban informants had about afterlife existence or way they would have liked to be buried/incinerated, most of them opposed possibility of post mortem donating their body for educational purposes. Organ donation was acceptable idea, but dissection at anatomy classes was bearable thought just for one collocutor. Summary of their quite dubious feeling of nuisance might be found in one response:

“I don` t know [why I wouldn` t like this], but somehow, it is not esthetical.”

### **Ritual and opinion**

If there are moments and events in human life that are unthinkable without ritual, they are certainly those related to death and funeral. As noticed by Walter and Cook, it is probably so because of the fact that no one can depart from the close person by simply throwing him in the pit hole (Cook, Walter 2005: 365.366). The need for ritual fare well is probably one of crucial factors that influenced constancy of funeral rituals. It is well known that, comparing with other life cycle customs, post mortem procedures were changed least along modernization processes. Conducted interviews in villages showed that present funeral rituals evolve pretty much the same as hundred years ago. The rules of ritual behaving are transmitted from one generation to another and those related to death are best preserved.

Nevertheless, we find quite complex ritual forms in towns as well. It is true that, comparing with rural customs, they are more reduced, individualized and relativized, but, on the other hand they are quite

grounded when it is about necessity of their conduction.

The basic question that rises after analyses of contemporary ritual forms is about relation between ritual praxes and opinion. Namely, do contemporary funeral rituals talk about conceiving that neo modern man has towards death, or they represent just a reflex of his attachment to the form? Beside this, Cook and Walter pose the question if modernized, individualized and professionalized rituals, such as those that we find in urban environments, can be considered rituals? This doubt is particularly related to secularized ceremonies which evolve without consistent rules, confirmed by community through compulsory practice (Ibid: 367). According to cited authors, this is one of the crucial characteristics of ritual. On the end, question is if we can talk about secular, atheistic funeral ritual, or it always implies certain conviction about relation between this and the other world?

### **Vigil and farewell**

When deceased is bathed and dressed in his post mortem toilette, ceremony can start. In all researched villages there is custom to tight deceased's legs, arms and beard. Explanation of this act varies from mystical – it is done for preventing undesirable action of dead – to practical – it is done to prevent undesirable motions of dead body. Since that later explanation is also related to undesirable event, it is not surprising that this very act is ritualized.

In Udovice village, departed is tighten by a woman who, after the vigil is finished, should untie him and put the leash in the coffin. Beside this, many things that are believed that dead may need on his way to other world, are placed by him. Contains of this post mortem gifts varies from village to village. Thus, it is not unusual that, along with the corps, bunch of other things travel to eternity: corncob, soap, money, clock, glasses, towels, comb etc... And though this “equipment” is unavoidable part of fare well, responses that informants gave about it did not show some particular and consistent believe behind such a custom. One collocutor from Vranovo village explained it as expression of deep sorrow and inability:

“People put betwixt and between. They think it is good [for deceased]

to have... When one is in pain and sorrow, he doesn't know what to do.”

When entering the home of bereaved family, every guest first goes to room where deceased is exposed. There, visitor pays last respect by going around the coffin, lighting a candle and kissing the dead. After this ritual, new comer joins the rest of guests who are sitting around the coffin. Atmosphere at these vigils is not necessarily atmosphere of sadness and pain. Participants in vigil talk, drink coffee and spirit and very often evoke some particular moments or funny situations they had with dead person.

Loud mourning and lamenting, whose main performers in the past were women, is almost completely abandoned in present times. One female informant explained:

“Today, no one wails! When young man dies, people squeal. I wailed neither after my father nor after my mother. That is why I was going down [emotionally]. My mother used to scold me – how I was going to mourn after her? A told her – how to mourn? – I didn't know. She knew how to mourn, to count somehow. I didn't [know]. I think it was better that way – if you wail you can relief the pain. I had three more sisters. Out of four of us, only sister who stayed in parents home wailed a little. I just whispered... one morning I stood in front of her [grave] and whispered what was on my soul, what hurt me... I had to cry out. After this, I didn't go any more [to her grave].“

This saying seems to be particularly interesting. It discovers certain evolution of form through which emotions were and are expressed. It is obvious that the process of change perfectly fits into tendency of keeping silence about death. But, beside that, this little confession points at position that women have in village community. Strong patriarchal principles of rural environment are mirrored, even in limiting women's mourning after relatives who belong to family of their origin.

There is some kind of vigil in cities as well. It takes place in deceased's home, but without his presence and with flexible duration. Deceased's family, with help of friends and relatives starts with organizing fare well and funeral, very soon after receiving news about death. Closest relatives, neighbors and friends come to bereaved



home to condole and to spend there some time, usually talking about deceased's last days, illness or other occasions that influenced his departure. Urban way of life didn't significantly affect ties of solidarity, thus, bereaved family in town is never alone in crises, very much like one in the village. Some interviewed who lived to see loss of close person, even claimed that crowdie atmosphere during days before the funeral was a bit upsetting for them and that they have longed for piece of solitude. But, in the same time, they were aware that relatives and friends have created specific front line of most intensive social communication, behind which, bereaved family was "hidden". This way, activation of social relations network appears to be not only precious help in the sense of logistic support to bereaved family. It should be primary considered as process by which "ideal measure" of family's introspection and facing emotional emptiness is established.

In towns, the second part of vigil takes place in cemetery chapel, where defunct is exposed in closed coffin. Whole fare well ceremony lasts one hour, during which closest kin stand around the coffin and receive condolences from people who come to pay last respect to the deceased. There isn't some established ritual through which last goodbye is performed. In most cases, people stop near the coffin, touch it, or kiss it, some make sign of a cross, some kiss the wooden cross on the head of the catafalque, put the flowers and light the candle. The choice of acts depends on many things. It may reflect relation that people have towards death, religion and afterlife. Chosen behavior can be result of their superstitious and even their feeling of awkwardness, but most often we can say that it is the result of accepting current social and cultural patterns of behaving which appears to be the "safest" mode to establish certain contact with deceased and to control emotions while doing this.

Whether priest is going to be present and deceased fare welled with religious service, also depends on family's choice or on deceased's last will. It is interesting to mention that requiem is performed even above dead who are going to be cremated despite the fact that (Serbian)

Orthodox Church opposes this custom.<sup>9</sup> This suggests at least two things – one is related to the phenomenon of new religiosity which is characterized by lack of clear relation between religious act and personal conceiving and way of life and the other talks about probable insufficiencies of secular/atheistic funeral rite in offering comfort to mournful.

Nevertheless, whether it is about send off for the cremation or for the classical burial, religious service appears as ritual act which supplies “purchaser” with feelings of dignity and eminence and very often has nothing to do with his/her attitudes towards religion.

In most cases, modest branch is organized in front of the chapel. There, visitors can have water, juice, spirits and boiled wheat which is inseparable part of traditional dead cult. And though the function of drinking and eating in these cases is primarily practical and not ritual, most of guests pour few drops of spirit from their glasses “for the deceased’s soul to rest in peace”.

### **Death as exchange**

Event of death and whole complex of postmortem rituals appear as time of intensive social exchange which happens at several mutually interwoven levels: exchange between world of living and world of dead, exchange inside of world of living and even exchange inside of world of dead. At all these levels, specific rituals are performed by which society tries to influence the balance between two realities. First level suggests that it is about one way relation. Community sends off its dead member in “the land of ancestors”. Different kind of presents that deceased may need on his voyage are send with him, but, he also carries presents for community of dead which consists of relatives, friends and neighbors who have gone before him. Beside this, women who come to see off the dead, very often send greetings to their relatives through him. As soon as she enters the room with the coffin, a woman begins to mourn, that is to pronounce loudly names of dead to whom

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<sup>9</sup> More about this you can read in following chapter of the book.

she wants to send message.

In one village, people remember the case when one woman approached the coffin and started to enumerate endless list of dead kin names. The other woman interrupted this:

“Even if he would ride the horse, he wouldn’t make it!”

Particularly interesting is the custom of “handing down the dinner”. It represents aspiration and conviction that burden of death certainty can and should be equally distributed inside of community. So, in Vranovo village, one who have recently lost close person, comes to the mourning home to fare well deceased and to hand down the dinner. He brings two candles – one for previous and one for actual dead. When time for dinner comes, this person takes a sit at the forehead of the table, opposite of the place which is “reserved” for new deceased to whom dinner is dedicated. It is believed that, this way, guard in the world of dead is replaced – predecessor hands down guarding to newly arrived dead. This, as well as the other exchanges, however, turn out to be two-way communication: living get certain kind of guarantee and possibility of controlling borders between this and the other world as compensation for gifts they have send to dead.

Inside of world of living, exchange is performed between those who come to condole or to give a help and bereaved family. Namely, as soon as news about death is received, closest neighbors come to mourning home and take over most of tasks that should be done in the process of preparing fare well and funeral. In return, they can expect to receive the same kind of support in critical situations. Beside this, all helpers get presents from bereaved family: towels and skirts. Same present is given to people who carry the coffin and those who dig the grave.

Some villagers complained that, since people get a bit richer recently, funerals were slowly becoming to look like arena for competition – who was going to make more luxury and more expensive fare well. It means that instead of towels and skirts, presents consisted of jewelry, some expensive things or money. As one collocutor explained:

“People buy fiddlesticks! You can’t say what is more expensive – wedding or funeral?!”

## Death and Funeral in Serbia at the Beginning of third Millennia

In some villages local Church authorities reacted against this prodigality and refuse to conduct services at such the funerals.

Presents are given also from the side of people who come to condole to bereaved family. They bring towels, kerchiefs and money, but family doesn't keep it but spend for further giving. Money is used for covering increased expenses. In some villages, money that people put beside the deceased is taken by priest who performs the funeral requiem.

As mentioned before, direct contact with defunct, after he was taken into mortgage practically does not exist. Thus, custom of putting money and other presents in the coffin is also missing. Nevertheless, when coming to mortgage to bring suit for dead, people often put in the pocket of the suit few coins, glasses that belonged to deceased or box of cigarettes and lighter, if he was smoker.

But, let me be back to the mentioned tendency of enhancement of quantity of funeral presents as well as increasing of their monetary value. I believe that this phenomenon does not reflect only increased financial possibilities that people in village presently have, but, more that they mirror certain global consumerist ideology, inside which money and commodity appear as kind of symbolic summary of all other cultural values. Even in 1975. Luis Vincent Thomas wrote about this, trying to describe how in modern times symbolic capital was transforming into economic one (Thomas 1980: 303).

Need to compensate mystical feelings by quantity of comfort and to gain certain assurance that ritual act "will work", testifies about specific profanization of funeral bestowment as well as about desacralization of funeral customs at whole. It should be mentioned that in previous times, funeral bestowment was directed towards church and monasteries. Bereaved family donated certain sum of money or goods and for the return, it received regular prayers for deceased's peacefully resting and for well fare and good health of the rest of the family (Pavković 1991). This custom is quite rare in present time, though some of its variants can be found in invitation that bereaved family publishes inside of newspaper obituary. There, they suggest to all willing friends to make donation for hospital, school or orphanage instead of buying flowers.

Donation should prolong and spread memories of the deceased. This custom is more often conducted in towns than in villages where patterns and processes of memorizing are still in domain of traditional images (more than believes) about afterlife. But, though that this custom is example of quite constructive and positive social action, it also reflects secularization tendencies: giving to Church/God is replaced by giving to people, and eternal memento in Heavenly Kingdom is replaced by short-term remembrance on Earth.

### **Last (but one) travel**

After sleepless night, deceased, followed by family, relatives, friends and neighbors embarks on final voyage. Traditional believes about post mortem activities of his soul and presence of his spirit, influence chain of ritual acts which take part around the coffin and on the way to the cemetery. Funeral procession starts after religious service which was performed in the house. This service is considered as ultimate act inside of post mortem ritual and it was rarely excluded even in the time of communism. Data from the “Eparchial Schematics” show interesting tendencies in numbers of religious services conducted during second half of 20th century. Namely, comparing numbers of baptized, wedded and buried with participation of church, during `50ties and `90ties of 20th century, we can see consistent tendency of decreasing the number of baptized and wedded and stabile numbers of buried with religious ritual. Villagers even believe that people who fight against Church and thus abandoned this ultimate religious service received “deserved punishment”, whether on this or in the other world.

Few men, decorated with towels, tied around left arm, take out open coffin from the house. Hood is taken separately and in there is believe in some villages that no one should pass between coffin and hood. Anyone who would enter this marked space would risk to be caught in symbolic net that connects these two parts of dead bed.

The burden of this terminal moment – moment in which deceased leaves his home for ever – is even more visible in the custom recorded in Petrijevo village. In the moment when coffin is half way above the

threshold, men who are still inside the house, pull it back several times, as they try to keep the dead in the house. This pulling reflects not only the burden of separation, but supposed motions of deceased's soul, who refuses to leave, as well. The match is over when coffin finally reaches the yard, where second part of religious service is performed. People who stayed in the house bowl down chairs that were used during the vigil. Despite the fact that this custom was recorded in almost all researched villages, no one new to explain its meaning. It is possible that bowling chairs is also directed towards preventing deceased's soul to remain inside the house. Chairs in usual position could suggest kind of invitation to stay, but it is also possible that this act is kind of inversion so common in religious rituals. Namely, since that all things that were in direct or indirect contact with dead should pass certain (ritual) disinfection, bowling the chairs could be understood in the same context – as their preparation for common use.

After religious service in the yard, funeral procession embarks towards village graveyard. But before it reaches it, procession stops few more times – at particular places in the village (usually, crossroads or bridges) and in the church, where particular prayers are performed. Final service is conducted at the cemetery, above open coffin, placed beside the pit. Village graveyard is big enough to answer needs of village population. Eventual concerns about ecological and hygienic aspects of inhumation, that would potentially lead to ideas of removing cemetery at some more distant location are absent from villager's attitudes. Generations of ancestors lie close to homes of descendents and their relation is based on unwritten, but commonly accepted contract about mutual non disturbing, which is periodically confirmed through appropriate ritual behaving.

Funeral procession that moves through city cemetery stops only on the end of the road – when reaching the grave, where, religious service is performed (if bereaved family wishes it). Funeral orations are quite usual at these burials. They take part above the coffin, before it is descended in the pit, or in the chapel for cremation. These orations are not formalized, at least not in the sense that Cook and Walter described, but they are unambiguously directed towards celebrating

deceased's character and deeds. Proverb – that only praise should be said about dead man is implicit in funeral orations, so it would be really unusual to hear something that would oppose sanctifying of memories about him. But, it is quite interesting to notice how this proverb became kind of compulsion. Classic ethnological approaches would search for explanations in supposed fear from post mortem activities of deceased's soul. But is this sufficient explanation? Can this fear bring oblivion of all unpleasant situations that are so usual in every interpersonal relation? And even if we presume that for pre modern men, meeting with dead was realistic as much as meeting with alive, how can we explain this rule in the society whose members explicitly claim that they are not afraid of dead and that they even do not believe in possibility of contacting them.<sup>10</sup> I believe that response to these questions again uncover intrinsic relation that post modern man has towards death. It appears as final and unavoidable fate, as certainty for everyone, regardless to his character, power, wealth or social reputation... It seems that its shadow mollifies blade of eventual misunderstandings, conflicts and anger and bring forgiveness for human weaknesses. In comparison with mortality, the biggest and most universal weakness, the other become insignificant. Thus, in front of those who experienced the loss, fades everything except nice memories which are kept as kind of relics, with dose of superstitious fear – not from dead, but from bad remembering that can't really be corrected anymore.

### **Return**

After putting flowers on the new mound, starts return which evolves at both physical and meta physical plan. While they are still at the cemetery, funeral participants take boiled wheat. By this act, therefore by eating, which in funeral rituals presents both link and distinction between dead and alive, mournful again consume life which was temporary suspended. Young man who was carrying the cross on the head of procession announces the return. He should leave cemetery

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<sup>10</sup> Only two of my informants claimed that they were afraid of dead.

before all others and, without talking to anyone on the road back, reach the house from which procession embarked. Talking taboo suggests that this is moment in which actors cross from one ritual phase to the other – from terminal to phase of initial re-aggregation. On his way from graveyard to home, this tribune passes through profane, non ritual environment. There he can meet only persons who did not participate in the ritual. Talking to them would imply uncontrolled spreading and spending of sacred/ritual experience whose strength is to be used for regeneration after short period of social destabilization.

### **The feast**

After the tribune, rest of funeral procession returns to bereaved home. They all wash hands in the yard and in some villages, disinfection is done by glowing coal or peace of tree which every person should touch. Purified from close contact with death, all participants approach the last part of ritual fare well – the feast in which dead take part as well, but now, only symbolically.

Depending on season, feast takes part in the house or in the yard, though lately, lots of families rent a tent for this occasion. Feast is dedicated to the deceased. If the priest is present, he mentions deceased's name in prayers, while blessing the food. In other cases, the closest relative of deceased dedicates the feast through specific ritual. He takes the fork with piece of bread on it, dip it in dishes with food and says: "Dear friends, take this dinner and remember our dead!" Guests reply: "God rest his soul!" There is chair for the deceased on the head of the table. In front of it, little food is served and in some villages only toppled plate symbolizes deceased's presence/absence.

It is interesting to mention that only in funeral rituals, church calendar about fasten days is obeyed. In villages, families and individuals who regularly fast are quite rare, but funeral feast is exception. This fact, as well as the others that we described, testify that attitudes about death in rural environments are still very much related to religious concepts and that they are least modernized. However, one should be cautious with such a conclusions and should try to research content of



these religious believes which, themselves, were transformed in last few decades. Discontinuity of regular and active religious practice and lack of dogmatic knowledge that were caused by fifty years long communist and atheist ideology, significantly influenced content or revitalized religious life. It is not difficult to discover pagan layers under new/old Christian garment, though we can say that even these pagan forms are not in their best edition anymore. Decreasing of the fate and secularization as key processes of modern era, affected all layers of religious opinion – both Christian and pagan – pauperizing intrinsic meanings of traditional ritual forms. This process was most obvious in clear lack of complementarity of sacred and profane in life of individuals and community.

Funeral feast organized by urban family, correspond with urban life conditions, family's financial possibilities and, even primarily with specific life style of particular family. Some organize lunch at home which is attended only by closest relatives and friends. In some cases, participants in funeral are invited for symbolical feast in some of surrounding coffee bars, but more and more common practice is organizing huge feast in specialized restaurants nearby cemeteries. This custom is usually not obeyed by highly educated people and among those with older urban origin.

### **Conclusion, but not the end!**

Days and years of mourning have to stay out of this presentation, not because they are less interesting, but because it is time to make kind of pre conclusion.

Customs that we have described in the text, uncovered specific system that enables finding and creating sense that people need in order to overcome critical life situations such as loss of close person. This system liberates individuals from compulsion of informal behaving which is very often imposed in contemporary life conditions. This is compulsion that Aries and Gorer wrote about, describing it as imperative that man should behave in all situations, no matter how difficult they are, as nothing have happened. He is forced to be brave, combative and in good mood. He is forced to perform features which deny his right to publicly mourn, to be voluntarily excluded from community, right to remain silence about life and right to talk about death.

But, we saw that both rural and urban rituals are kind of response to bereaved man`s needs. We can discuss if, more developed and more solid rural ritual forms can be considered as more adequate than urban, but I think that this estimation should not be our crucial inquiry. We also saw that both urban and rural rituals are dynamic phenomenon which, more or less, faster or slower follow changes of attitudes towards death, religion, but towards life as well. One of the tasks that arises from this dynamism is to try to make net of these mutually related elements and to try to discover eventual regularities which would potentially make us possible to understand at least the direction in which this enchanting matrix moves: is it linear, or cycling, organized or entropic... does it lead us to the end or it operates inside of eternity...?

# **Historical Overview of the Development of Cremation in Serbia**

## **From ecology to ideology**

This paper was published in 2006 and was the result of my initial steps inside of death studies. In that moment, there was almost no literature about cremation in Serbia, and consequentially, no references to literature about cremation elsewhere. So, I had to start from the very beginning and to make kind of “school work” – I made my own bibliographical base which consisted mostly of some general notions on cremation, archive documentation and data from journal published by first and only Serbian cremation association. Beside this, I conducted classical ethnological researching which, after paper about cremation was done and published (Pavicevic 2006), took me into another direction of thanatological investigations. This is why here are missing references to important authors in cremation issue, whose works I found much later. Their studies, comprehensions and precious experience will be incorporated in book about cremation which I am currently working on.

### *One un/usual story*

Madame Sofia was one of the rare persons whose life lasted almost a century. She was an agile and vital old lady who died at age 95, after a short illness. Madame Sofia left a daughter in Belgrade and a son in Chicago, where she spent most of her working years, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren scattered around the globe. She didn't have any special wishes concerning her remains and type of funeral. Still, she was a member of “Oganj” (The Fire) association, so her daughter decided to cremate her mother and to place her urn into the family vault at the old and prestigious Novo groblje (New Cemetery), located in the centre of Belgrade. Thanks to an unusual

efficiency of a local funeral undertaker, all preparations were done promptly, surprisingly swift since the rest of the system is known for its ineffectiveness. An order for cremation was promptly attached to Sofia's coffin, so that, according to the procedure, it could be transferred on a funeral day to the special hall at the Cemetery, which serves for cremations only. Nevertheless, it seems that it wasn't Madame Sofia's destiny to rest in peace: her son, unable to attend the funeral due to his illness, plainly ruled out the idea of his mother's cremation. He explained the decision by saying that the family owns a vault so that classical funeral procedure would not be financial burden for family. Furthermore, he argued that a cremation itself was an uncivilized act, violence towards deceased. His sister, hurt by the brother's ingratitude and lack of comprehension of her own position, decided to return the mother's body from the cremation room back to the cemetery's morgue, where it would wait for "someone" who will bury it "properly". The waiting lasted around thirty days, until the deceased's daughter-in-law showed up with an authorization from Chicago, and buried Sofia in a coffin, in the family vault, without any special rituals.

Although this unusual life story took place in the last month of 2004, at a time when Serbia, that is, Belgrade, already accepted cremation as an appropriate way of dealing with the dead, it still can testify to a 100-years old antagonism, even now present. Namely, there are two opposed practices, two orientations, two convictions, and two ideologies: one which favors burials into the ground and the other preferring cremation. In order to understand the antagonism between the two, we must review its history and then try to grasp its meaning in the conditions of contemporary life.

### *General notes*

#### **Cremation in ancient times**

Rites and procedures connected with the deceased in a particular community stand as both a reflection of the intra-group social relationships and stratifications, and on the other hand, for the group beliefs about the afterlife, the deceased's journey to the other world,

and the possible influence and relationship between two worlds: the world of living and world of dead. A number of scientific papers from the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century discuss burial/funeral rites, incineration and its occurrence among the natives of the Balkans and among the later Slavic colonists. Some of the papers call attention to a thesis, according to which an incineration was a more ancient and more widespread type of burial among all Indo-Europeans. However, their argument does not seem to be supported by the evidence. Namely, archeological evidence implies that ground burials could be in fact more ancient, but at the same time strongly supports the assumption that ground burials and incineration existed side by side not only in different cultures but also within particular communities simultaneously (Erdeljanović 1922: 228; Vasić 1901: 1040; Vasić 1948: 188; Filipović 1959: 120; Ćorović 1956: 127; Trojanović 1901: 52).

According to available data, it could be concluded that incineration, since its first occurrence, held the same cultural contents as ground burials. The rite of incineration was connected with particular religious beliefs and accompanied by particular ritual behaviors, thus becoming a part of actual social patterns.

Since the very beginning of Christianity and within the borders of the Christian civilization, ground burials started to suppress cremations, which came to be labeled as a practice of the heathens; an official ban of cremation came from the Roman Emperor Carlo the Great in 8<sup>th</sup> century. His decree dated to 785 prohibited a practice of cremation throughout the empire, threatening perpetrators with the death penalty. However, the custom of cremating vampires and the like creatures from local demonologies endured for a long time. Hence the Code of Serbian emperor Dušan (1331-1354) prohibited both exhumation of the dead, their additional cremation, and their stitching with a hawthorn stick. In spite of these prohibitions, a few centuries later in Bosnia, in 1923, the last “suspicious” dead was cremated (Čajkanović 1994: 221). It is possible that the regulations of the Church and customary law have enabled the persistence of cremations. For instance, according to the Church, suicides and un-baptized individuals could not be buried at the church cemeteries, as was also the case for children born out-of-

wedlock and all individuals who had not died of natural cause. Their burial in local village cemeteries was prohibited as well. Nonetheless, there is no firm evidence showing that these categories of the deceased were actually cremated.

### **Modern cremation**

The beginning of the Era of Enlightenment and the process of secularization introduced a new perception of death, even though it maintained its religious features longer than other key moments of the life cycle. Thus, for example, the number of people baptized, and especially the number of couples who married in the Serbian Orthodox church after World War II and in the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century steadily declined, while in comparison the number of dead who were, during the same period, buried with participation of the church does not indicate any change (Jovančević 1999: 253).

However, the occurrence of the idea and the movement for modern cremation, which dates back in mid-19 century, may be marked as the beginning of the process of de-sacralisation of death. It appears that the first official initiative for modern cremation of mortal remains was launched at the international medical congress in Florence in 1869, although certain intellectuals, especially in Germany, had supported this idea even before this (Oganj 1974,no.1:5). The first international congress of cremation supporters, which took place in Dresden in June 1876, gathered the *ardent* supporters of cremation from several countries in Europe. The majority of these belonged to various fields of medicine, but there were also representatives of other scientific areas and arts.

The movement - which was later on institutionalized within International Cremation Federation – ICF, founded in London in 1937- stood for the legalization of cremation of the dead, justifying its idea firstly with environmental needs and economic issues. The lengthy process of decomposition which the body is exposed to after a classic funeral and the survival of bacteria which may have caused the disease the deceased died from, were stated as serious sources of infection and

a potential danger for the living. Apart from this, it was believed that cemeteries took up too much valuable living space and increased its price. These primary explanations and reasons for accepting cremation were justified in more details and supplemented in time and as practice of cremation supporters' associations of certain countries, as well as at subsequent international conferences held in Düsseldorf in 1926, Prague in 1936 and London in 1937 (Kujundžić 1936:63, Kujundžić 1937:69).

The greatest opponent of the ideas stated was Roman Catholic church which, sticking to the centuries-long tradition of classic burials, proclaimed cremation a pagan practice and forbade its priests to take part in funerals of those whose body was to be treated in this manner. Cremation supporters interpreted this prohibition as the fact that at the time of intensive arguments cemeteries were mainly property of the church, so that burials and Christian rituals were resulting in certain income which the church and priests would be deprived of in the case of cremation. In any case, the first crematorium in Europe was constructed in Woking, England, in 1873, while the first cremation using a special equipment was performed in Dresden in 1874. However, it appears that the first official approval for optional cremation was obtained in Italy, that is, Milan, where the first modern crematorium in Europe was constructed in 1876.

Unfortunately, 19<sup>th</sup> century statistics on the number of the cremations are not available, except in the USA. The available sources contain records on the number of the cremations in the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>.

### *Serbian case*

Although the idea of cremation appeared in Serbia as early as in 19<sup>th</sup> century, in works and activities of the poet and doctor Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, local cremation supporters saw their dream come true only in 1964, when the first, and until 2004 the only crematorium in the region opened in Belgrade. After Zmaj's death his friend and

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<sup>1</sup> (Internet Cremation Society site: <http://www.cremation.org>; Rad 1921: 18, 23)

successor Vojislav Kujundžić, physician continued to fight for the “fiery idea”, becoming one of its most ardent supporters in Serbia. In 1904, Kujundžić founded Association of cremation supporters “Oganj” in Belgrade. The work of this association was supported by members of intellectual elite in Belgrade, as well as distinguished individuals from towns in Serbian province. Activists, members and supporters of the Association were mainly doctors, artists, merchants, active and retired politicians and lawyers. The aim of the Association was to have a crematorium constructed in Serbia so that, in the future, the custom of burying the dead in the ground would be entirely replaced by cremation. These ideas and intentions were firstly propagated through publishing records from regular meetings of the association, and, since 1934, publication of “Oganj” journal which appeared as an organ of the Association of cremation supporters. Cremation was propagated as a “more modern”, “more humane”, “more civilized” and “more hygienic” manner of treating mortal remains as done in other European countries, citing the fact that ancient civilizations also cremated their dead, citing names of historically famous persons who were cremated and emphasizing the already mentioned environmental and economic reasons (Rad 1921:5,6,7). Apart from this, there were also numerous texts which stressed the aesthetic side to the issue, some of them even containing very picturesque descriptions of the lengthy process of decomposition of a dead body, compared to the cleanliness and speed of modern cremation.

Apart from informing public about the advantages of cremation, the Association, that is, Dr. Vojislav Kujundzic (who, probably due to the eagerness in his work was nick-named *Oganj*) persistently kept corresponding with authorities of the city of Belgrade and state authorities for years, requesting legalization of cremation and construction of a crematorium in Belgrade. These activities were long conducted without any tangible results, due to, as stated in some places, the conservative environment and deep-rooted customs among the people. However, the main obstacle to the implementation of cremation movement designs was the fact that the Serbian Orthodox Church, which at that time had a significant social role and which has never,



to the present day, changed its attitude towards cremation, strongly opposed it. According to many lay interpretations, such intolerance was connected to the central Christian dogma referring to resurrection, but the real reasons why (Serbian) Orthodox Church has not approved of cremation are of entirely different nature (Glasnik 1983: 127). However, unlike the cremation supporters' enthusiasm in promoting their ideas, the Church did not find much interest in informing the public about its attitude. This may have not been necessary at a time when loyalty and obedience to church discipline was taken for granted in the case of majority of flock, but it may be said that its failure to act at that time had impact to perceptions of generations to come <sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, in public debates with church, representatives of the cremation supporters emphasized that their movement had nothing to do with faith and religion (Kujundžić 1934: 2). Some subheadings published in *Oganj* journal issued before the war emphasized: "The fiery movement is out of politics and religion". The members of the Association even declared themselves as Christians, so in accordance with their declarative Christian identity, they did not deny belief in the resurrection which they themselves hoped for, but rejoicing in the fact that they would resurrect "from a clean urn", not from "rotting graves"(Rad 1933:14).

Doctor Vojislav Kujundžić who died in 1946 in Belgrade, did not live to see his dreams come true. He was buried in Novo groblje, and there are no data on whether a priest attended the funeral. However, his story did not end with this last "earthly" act. According to some data, remains of his body were exhumed 18 or 22 years later by members of "Oganj" Association, cremated in Belgrade crematorium and placed in the urn in the rosary No. 1 in Novo groblje. Describing this event, the last successor of Kujundžić and a great champion of the idea the world famous doctor Aleksandar Kostić<sup>3</sup> stated in the first post-war issue of

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<sup>2</sup> Even though in the second half of XX century only SOC remained true to its attitude (although nowadays priests frequently fail to observe it), records on the number of members of pro-cremation associations in republics of SFRY indicates that the majority of members were registered in Serbia. (*Oganj*, 1976, no.5: 9)

<sup>3</sup> Kostić was hematologist, but also first Yugoslav sexologist.

*Oganj* in 1974: “We exhumed his *holy relics*<sup>4</sup>, burned them and placed them in an urn on 15 June 1968“ (Milenković 1974a: 12).

Although placed in an honorary rosary, a vessel with Kujundzic’s remains was not the first to find its eternal resting place in one the Belgrade’s cemeteries. According to evidence from the public communal firm “Funeral Services”, between 1914-1963 (the period before the Belgrade Crematorium was build), 24 urns with ashes of the deceased were deposited at the Belgrade’s cemeteries. These were mostly respected citizens of Belgrade who had died and were cremated abroad in various Western European cities; in accordance with their own wishes, their remains were deposited in existing family vaults in Belgrade.

As time passed, and cremation supporters were getting no closer to achieving their goal – legalization of cremation and construction of a crematorium, *Oganj* started to publish texts and supplements with more or less explicit anti-church contents. On one hand, priests and popular-Christian funeral tradition were ridiculed through folklore motifs, while on the other hand severe criticism of the Church teaching and practice was expressed. The last issue of *Oganj* before World War II was published in 1941. Five years later, in 1946, an attempt to revive the journal resulted in publication of a double issue. The next issue was not published before 1974, and until 1994, was only issued occasionally. During this 20-year break, the supreme and the most important goal of the Cremation movement was achieved: cremation was legalized by Yugoslav state laws, and a crematorium with a special funeral hall was erected in Novo groblje (New Cemetery) in Belgrade in 1964. Two years later, in 1966, Roman Catholic Church allowed its priests to perform funeral services for the deceased who would be cremated, with only one restriction: the funeral service could not be performed in the cremation hall (*Oganj* 1974, no.1: 11). The Orthodox Church did not change the attitude, but established a certain unofficial rule, that is, a kind of selective permission for performing funeral service before cremation. Namely, the right to Christian funeral was

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<sup>4</sup> The expression “holy relics” in this sentence underlined by A.P. – the expression is used to denote non-decomposable bodies of Christian saints.

granted to the deceased who were not cremated at their own wish, but upon the wishes of their heirs. If the deceased expressed his/her wish to be cremated, the funeral would have to be performed without a priest.<sup>5</sup>

As could be expected, in the early decades of the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century cremation became a part of the atheist philosophy of life, which was also part of state political ideology. In this period, apart from (once again) doctors, artists and intellectuals, declared opponents of the church and religion, military officers, former partisans and party members were among the most frequently cremated. Most of the slabs in rosaries and columbaria posted during the 70's are not marked with a cross sign, and when they any symbol, it is usually with a five-pointed star.

*Oganj* subheadings no longer contained the religiously neutral and apolitical features of the cremation movement, whereas newspapers frequently published texts which were openly against the church and "Christian superstitions" (Milenković 1974b:5). In the first issue of the new series, the text titled "Atheists, come together!" contains an invitation to the those who had "made a break with illusions" about life after death to decide on this type of funeral, and appeal to the those who "feared the flame... believing even in future resurrection!" to "come to their senses"(Nešović 1974: 9).

A new column entitled "Why we opted for cremation" appeared in the newspapers, and it provided answers of the polled supporters of the cremation to this question. Based on these statements, conclusions may be made regarding the dominant reasons for cremation in the mentioned period. The aesthetic, environmental and hygienic reasons certainly made up the majority of answers, but, even within the same answer, there was a stated fear of decomposition and the underground fauna that lives on the dead corpses. Apart from this, even though in contradiction with this fear, the acceptability of cremation was justified by belief that religious superstitions in life after death are a matter of the past. The idea of immortality, which used to be connected to the soul of a righteous person, was in the new context attributed to "deeds,

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<sup>5</sup> Since 1990s, the majority of Belgrade priests do not observe this restriction.

pleasant memories and working achievements” (Oganj 1975, no.3: 6, 7)

The last decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially 1990s, brought new developments in the issue. The main characteristic of the new trends was the disappearance of almost all rules referring to social status, religious beliefs, professional and age structures of the cremated. In the previous period, only the elderly were cremated, as well as confirmed atheists, people without family tombs, middle and upper class people, and those whose families wanted to place them in a prestigious cemetery, by hook or by crook. Lately, cremation is performed for children and adults, the rich and the poor, believers and non-believers, those who have family tombs as well as those who do not have them.<sup>6</sup> In addition, some esoteric and mystical approaches appeared. Thus, for instance, supporters of certain, still unofficial, “neo-paganism” movement also speak in favor of cremation; their preference is explained by beliefs in the constant circulation of energy and substance in Nature, and beliefs related to principles and ideas of ancient Slavic pantheon (Tucić 2005.).<sup>7</sup>

The fact that urns containing ashes of the dead are increasingly

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<sup>6</sup> Data on the number of those cremated according to the records of Public communal company “Funeral services”

Year	1965	1975	1985	1995	2004
Cremated	11	228	469	1.002	2.258
Percentage of all funerals	/	4,1%	/	10,2%	21,12%

<sup>7</sup> In the summer 2005 Belgrade general public was “shaken” by an event seen as a rebirth of a pagan thought. Namely, the body of deceased and well known Serbian and Belgrade painter and publicist Dragos Kalajic was send off without the knowledge and attendance of his family. This was done, as the press argued, by a director and writer Dragoslav Bokan, who according to Kalajic’s daughter, violated “the death taboo” and the deceased’s pagan orientation (Jovanović 2005: 13). Unofficial sources argued that Bokan, was familiar with the deceased latent Christian orientation, so, he organized a Christian service, and then cremated the body.

being placed in family vaults, could suggest the need of a family to pay respect to its deceased members in one place. Nevertheless, the survey among members of the “Oganj” association shows that there are a relatively small number of the members who opted to cremate their loved ones out of that reason. Namely, twenty-five of the members responded positively to the questions “does the family own a vault and if there was a possibility that the deceased be buried and not cremated”. Obviously, the reasons favoring cremations are not only of a practical nature, but conceivably due more to an ideology, which is confirmed by new phenomenon of transporting the deceased from a town in the province to Belgrade for cremation, in order for his/her ashes to be taken back and placed in the existing family tomb. Such cases are interesting as they may be indicative of the future acceptance of cremation, not only in province towns<sup>8</sup>, but in villages as well. It is also interesting to mention that such transport of the deceased significantly increases costs of funeral.

In order to answer the question posed at the beginning of this study (how does the development of the idea of the cremation of the dead testify to changing relationship toward the death in the contemporary, urban population of Serbia), we have to look at the problem in its wider context: the context of funeral rites and behavior of those families and individuals who opted for cremation of their dead, in relation with traditional ritual patterns.

The hall for sending off for cremation in Novo groblje is by several times larger and more spacious than the chapels which are used for traditional funerals. Even though it does not contain any religious items or symbols, its architecture reminds of a Byzantine style Orthodox Church. The funeral rites among those who opted for cremation do not differ profoundly from the funeral rites at the classical funeral (ground burial).

Parting with the deceased is performed by a procession around the coffin which is placed on a pedestal in the back of the hall, which, according to the architectural characteristics mentioned, could be

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<sup>8</sup> Until 1990s, only inhabitants of the capital were cremated.

treated as a specific altar. According to employees, since the 1990's more priests have increasingly attended the act of cremation. At the same time the cross symbol has become more frequent.<sup>9</sup> As a rule, the cross is sent, along with the coffin, to the crematorium, where it is burned, or kept, depending of the family choice. In most cases though, the cross ends up in a fire, which is a very interesting fact in itself. This is probably related with the fact that the families who do not own a vault opt for cremation more often. Consequently, they have no place to put the large wooden cross. Nevertheless, the burning up of the cross could imply a complex of meanings and a certain ambiguity towards religion.

In the funerals/cremations where a priest does not attend, the family is offered the option to choose or bring its own music to be played at the chapel (there is no such possibility in chapels during classical funerals). The compositions played range from religious chants, classical and military music, and not infrequently, a composition that the deceased especially loved. In this chapel one can therefore hear popular rock and pop compositions.<sup>10</sup>

The behavior of mourners and those coming to offer condolences do not differ according to the funeral type, but depends instead on personal religious and many other standings. Hence, some people light candles, some do not, some kiss the cross and the coffin, while others do not; rather they just walk by or place flowers on it. Especially interesting is that there were no requests to have an open coffin during the ceremony, while this custom persists to some extent at the classical funerals.<sup>11</sup>

A custom common to both types of funeral is an offering of grain, brandy and beverages. Following is a meal at the deceased's home or

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<sup>9</sup> Mostly a large, wooden cross placed in front of the coffin during the ceremony.

<sup>10</sup> The author of this text attended two cremations where the deceased were farewell with the songs *Yesterday* by Beatles and *Chiquitita* by ABBA.

<sup>11</sup> There is no available evidence concerning the request, but the employees at the cemetery claim there were only two or three such requests in the past years, all at classical funerals.

a restaurant, marking the end of the funeral rites and the beginning of a post-funeral ritual practice, which shows more significant differences among the two funeral types. After a classical funeral, it is the established custom to offer a meal to all attendees at the deceased home or a restaurant, while after the cremation, it is usually only a symbolic gathering of the closest relatives and friends that takes place at the deceased home; the latter might but not necessarily include some food and drinks, while sometimes the custom is omitted completely.

In the classical funeral type, a first major commemoration is held on the 40<sup>th</sup> day of the funeral, attended by a priest and accompanied by the offer of grain and brandy; after a funeral involving cremation, sometimes but increasingly the deceased's family decides to situate the urn on the 40<sup>th</sup> day after the cremation. This kind of request is rare, according to the employees at the cemetery, and whenever the ceremony happens, the urn is situated without the attendance of a priest. Very few people attend the act (comparing to the number of people at the farewell, but there are two significant elements that could be understood as a ritual. The first is related to the act of situating the urn itself, and the other involves traditional food offerings (Zečević 1982: 80). The procedure requires that one of the cemetery employees situates the urn; the same set of rules, however, offers the possibility that a relative of the deceased might do this. This is often accepted, so frequently the nearest relatives of the deceased, a spouse or a close friend places the urn in the appropriate place. The chosen person usually kisses the urn, or honors the deceased by a minute of silence. The second element, the offerings of food and drinks, while present but to a lesser degree than in the classical funeral and at commemoration at 40<sup>th</sup> day of the buried, is not totally omitted. The same goes for the meal which follows the act, at the deceased's or his relatives' home. The most striking aspect in my informants' answers to these questions was their need to de-formalize the customs that is their need to break away from the strictly defined and established days and dates. This is particularly emphasized in their behavior and thinking during the traditionally established commemoration days, like half-annual and annual commemorations and All Souls Day. In fact, the majority of

the informants claimed that they attend cemeteries and their ancestors' and friends' graves "sometimes", "when they feel like it" and "not that often". Only a small portion of informants stated that they attend cemeteries on particular dates: mostly on the deceased birthdays, or the dates when the deceased passed away, while no one even mentioned All Souls Day. However, among the fifteen informants who had lost the loved ones in the recent past (in the year before the research), and who opted for cremation, there were none who did not, in one way or the another, mark the half-annual or annual commemorations. Twelve of them also performed a religious ritual attended by a priest, but none attended the graves on All Souls Day. Also, at the commemorations with a priest in attendance, the food (grain) and brandy were also served. This fact contradicts the general attitude of cremation supporters (expressed in the pool) who, as a rule, argue against food offerings at cemeteries.

Regardless of differences in the practice and occurrence of the funeral and post-funeral rites, the fact is that they do not depend so much on informants' resolve, but on his/hers personal a/religious beliefs. Based on the interviews, the only stable variable among the informants who opted for cremation is their declared atheism or unclear religious beliefs<sup>12</sup>. This could explain the differences between the behavior and attitudes expressed in the survey, which are particularly explicit in combining heterogeneous patterns of ritual behavior.

Finally, what influences the choice of cremation? Equivalent prices for classical funerals and cremations eliminated economic motives for the choice. We could therefore conclude that the reasons stated by contemporary supporters of cremation in Serbia (Belgrade), which were highlighted as a priority among the initiators of the cremation movement, were environmental in nature. However, in responses to the questionnaire these reasons are mentioned in only four cases, while fear from disintegration of the body is dominant in all responses.

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<sup>12</sup> Though they declare themselves as Orthodox Serbs (even "Orthodox atheists"), a variety of answers are found when explaining the "object" of their faith: *I believe in "something"*, *"in existence of some supernatural force"*, *"a higher principle that rules the world"*, *"harmony of natural elements"* etc.



It therefore appears that, from the very beginning, the environmental dimension of the cremation movement idea had another meaning that remained latent for a long time, to become explicit only in the new historic and cultural context. It concerns a special attitude towards death, which was practically initiated during the last two centuries, and which could link different periods, developments and motives in the history of modern cremation of the dead. This is the need of a contemporary individual to eliminate death from his surroundings (verbal, contemplative and physical), as soon and as imperceptibly as possible.<sup>13</sup> This need is expressed in the already well-established facts regarding institutionalization of death and specialization of activities connected with it in the contemporary, especially urban circumstances of life (Dušanić 2004:586). Cremation, rather than classic funeral, is an efficient and quick manner to dispose of traces of death from the world of the living. The reduction in funeral rites, which is especially evident in cities, finds its expression in parting before cremation which practically implies a shortened funeral ritual. It should be mentioned that employees in the crematorium say that, from the moment crematorium was first activated to the present day, there have only been a few requests from relatives to attend the process of cremation<sup>14</sup>. There is also fascinating data that in the same period there were as many as 700 collected urns containing mortal remains, which no one claimed (Mirić 2004: 18). It is obvious that for successors of these people the “funeral” ended in the parting hall before cremation.

The wishes of cremation supporters, expressed long ago, that compulsory cremation should be introduced, should be treated from this standpoint (Kostić 1974: 1). The same stands for their belief

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<sup>13</sup> This is how a respondent explains his perception: “Having watched funeral rites, I understood that every family wants to take the deceased out of their home as soon as possible, regardless of their sorrow and loss, as there is awkwardness and fear and some indescribable atmosphere at home, even at the cemetery and in the church until the deceased is either buried in grave or cremated”. The other one says: “One should avoid ceremonies, as they trigger painful memories of the deceased.”

<sup>14</sup> These requests were frequently connected to the suspicion that coffins are not burned, but resold.

that the time will come when cemeteries will vanish, and that ashes of the deceased will be scattered in gardens of remembrance or in places the deceased was especially fond of. This is why a “Garden of remembrance” was established in Novo groblje in 1970, and, until 1975, ashes from 153 urns were scattered in it (Oganj, 1974, no. 2: 7). In one of *Oganj* issues, Aleksandar Kostić openly stood for “sublimation”, that is, total destruction of mortal remains (Kostić 1974:1). As far as the contemporary period is concerned, it is very indicative that the garden of remembrance is the least attended area of Novo Groblje, shown by very occasional vases with fresh flowers. This has not changed even during All Souls Day, when the rest of the cemetery is “flooded” with visitors.

But, what are the possible implications of removing traces of death from the world of the living?

Perception of death among members of a certain community equally depend on their beliefs regarding “afterlife”, and the values which are dominant in their life on Earth. Being reminded of death may have destructive impact on the community and the individual, but it may also represent a solid reason to preserve certain ethic principles. The balance between chaos and order, sense and nonsense, is mainly achieved through various institutional mechanisms, which place the reality of death in a particular position in social surroundings. Cemeteries here have a significant role, being places of intensive reminiscence of death. A society without cemeteries and other reminders of the finiteness of life may become a society without constructive awareness of death, a society that, in fear of environmental disaster, becomes exposed to the danger of spiritual disaster, even though the latter will, logically, result in the former.

## **Is Death “Ethnic” Enough? Dying in Emigration**

The question of migration is primarily connected with historical and political-economic processes, and only to a lesser extent with the problems of identity, identity processes and strategies. Nevertheless, the development of emigrant institutions, their methods of organization and networking, their choice of cultural and ethnic models, symbols and self-definition patterns of emigrant's populations have already been the focus of ethnological and anthropological research. In this text I will concentrate on identity discourses, focusing on one particular life event to which very little or no space has been dedicated in existing studies: death. I first studied this phenomenon in the context of the Serbian Diaspora in European and overseas countries. However, in this paper I made also a short review of relevant data connected with the autochthonous Serbian minority in countries in the region.

At the beginning of this research, my expectations were based on existing data and the established assumption that life cycle customs are an important and multi-functional means for the formation and expression of identity under the conditions of life as an emigrant due to their peculiar symbolism (Pavlović 2000: 88). On one hand they represent temporary sign marks of gathering and integration of kindred, ethnic or vernacular communities, and on the other hand they are a symbolic, but conditional way of separating from the majority population or other groups. I use the term conditional because the conduction of traditional customs in the Diaspora presumes the simplification of 'own' traditional rituals, the adoption of traditions from the dominant cultural environment and the attendance of members of the "outside" network of social contacts, recruited from the emigrants' different spheres of interest. In the case of death, which by its nature is certainly an event packed with symbolism, it was logical to expect that it would find particularly characteristic expressions in the life of the emigrant population.

On the other hand, again due to the special nature of the event, the

material collected in the course of my research often led me to question whether the subject of death would dominate my work or the subject of migrant identity. This was caused by the fact that identity discourses are mainly inclined to collective rather than individual identity (regardless of their logical conditionality), whereas death rituals, perhaps more than any other custom within the life cycle, more frequently appear as an event in which individual identity takes precedence over the social one. Of course, I do not mean that the community is excluded from this event, but in the context of this paper and the study of migration, the question arises of whether death is “ethnic enough”: is it revealed as a relevant element of ethnicity, which by definition is linked with the collective, group identity (Eriksen 2004)? I was relatively encouraged by what I found in Eriksen’s work, which, summarizing different observations concerning ethnicity, quotes the Ebner Cohen, who states that ethnicity can be observed not just as a characteristic of inter-ethnic relations, but as a distinctive mark of inter-group relation as a whole, regardless of the nature of the group (Eriksen 2004: 97). It would therefore follow that ethnicity can be seen as one characteristic of interpersonal relations, which includes both situational and common human determination.

So, when I began to write this article, I was still not sure where it would lead me, or how I would succeed in answering the questions raised. I will attempt to show, through various examples, the role which both the event and the understanding of death have in the identity practice of the Serbian emigrant population, or ways, if any, in which death is “used” as an important mark of ethnic identity.

### *Funeral places, epitaphs and obituaries*

Although it would be logical to consider it in last place, the first association that came to mind in relation to death was cemeteries and gravestones – physical markers of space with symbolic messages aiming to “overcoming time”. Are Serbian emigrants buried in special cemeteries (in national, confessional, cemeteries reserved for foreigners) or in public burial sites of eternal rest? Do the epitaphs on

their graves testify to vital indications of their identity and the identity of the community? The answer to my first question varies according to the organization and size of the emigrant group and the time of their arrival. However, the nonexistence/existence of specially allocated cemeteries often discloses elements of the relation between the two groups, i.e. the relations between the natives of the host country and the immigrants. The question whether feelings of mystic fear predominate in this relation or matters of political-economic nature often influences the issue of graveyards.

Of course, burial in special cemeteries or in special plots within public cemeteries is primarily characteristic for earlier stages of Serbian emigration to transoceanic countries, especially the United States. One of the first such cemeteries was a plot in Montrose cemetery in Chicago, obtained in 1905. for the needs of deceased Serbian emigrants, initiated by the United Serbian Society. In 1981 they built a memorial stone on the site to all their former members “who have gone to the Great Beyond” (United Serbian Society 1981: 21). In Chicago there is also a cemetery next to the New Gračanica monastery, in which, judging by newspaper obituaries, only prominent members of the Serbian emigrant population are buried. Bearing in mind that the Montrose site was essentially intended for the burial of United Serbian Society members, it is easy to conclude that death is often used for the internal hierarchy of Serbian emigrant communities. I should also mention that there are Serbian cemeteries in California – Jackson, San Francisco and Los Angeles – and in Minnesota.

Older gravestones in all these sites, dating from the first half of the 20th century, are characterized by biographical entries of the deceased, e.g. place of birth, origin, and profession (Drljača 1989: 45, Pavlović 1990: 78). Cyrillic inscriptions predominate, although it is possible to find different examples, especially in family graves of families where one spouse was of different nationality. After the Second World War the situation changed: biographical details are reduced, Cyrillic inscriptions become rarer, while the Serbian consonants ‘č’ and ‘ć’ are reduced to ‘c’ or ‘ch’. In memorial stones built from the 1970s, there is a tendency to write sentimental, emotional texts and to use religious

terminology. In connection with these cemeteries, one interesting question arises: judging by data from Serbian church records and from cemetery sites, it appears that among the first generations of Serbian emigrants a large number were without family, or had left them behind in their native country. It becomes evident that epitaphs on stones in which the origin of the deceased is inscribed, were not directed towards his/her descendants but towards ‘others’. They represent the confirmation of the deceased’s unique emigrant identity, established through his/her life among ‘strangers’.

Regarding Western European countries, I am only familiar with the situation in France. In the Thiais cemetery in Paris there are three plots for the burial of Serbs: two are for Serbian emigrants, while the third is for Serbian soldiers, who died in French hospitals in the First World War. Limitations of available space and the uniqueness of new waves of emigrants (about which I will write later) caused the fact that in the last few decades the deceased have been buried in public cemeteries, location depending on the administrative district in which the deceased had lived.

The results of research into Serbian grave stone inscriptions in Southeastern Europe reveal interesting variations and divergences from the examples above, although in most of these studies emigrants, in the classical sense, are not an issue. Thus, epitaphs on gravestones in Serbian cemeteries in Hungary show the same manner of transformation as those in America: over time, Cyrillic inscriptions, Serbian names and language are lost, and there are family tombs on which the names of spouses with different nationality are inscribed in a different alphabet (Drljača 1990: 70). However, during the last fifty years many Serbian cemeteries in Hungary have been abolished (Lastić 2005: 226). Here is not the place to discuss the motives and reasons for this development, but we should bear in mind the role which cemeteries are given in constructing the historical memory of a people or nation. See for example the case of Albania, where in 1950, after Albania’s break with Yugoslavia, the government ordered the demolition of the cemeteries of Serbian and Montenegrin soldiers killed in battles with Ottomans, as well as of the cemetery of the Serbian minority in the area

of Shkodra (Vlahović 2005: 121, 126). Something similar occurred in Greece, where the mortal remains of Serbian soldiers buried along the Thessalonica Front of World War One, were collected and laid in one place, the well-known cemetery of Zejtinlik (Blagojević 2012). The case of Slovenia is especially indicative for our topic. There, regardless of their existence in large numbers for many decades, members of the Serbian population still do not have their own burial site (Pavićević 2005). As long ago as 1921, the Ljubljana city council had received a request for a site for the burial of Orthodox Christians, but such an institution still does not exist. From the chronicles of the Orthodox Church of the Ljubljana municipality it appears that until 1941, when the chronicle was closed, Serbs were buried either in public cemeteries or in sections of those cemeteries reserved for those of other faiths (Majković 1941: 32). Today, according to the Serbian Orthodox Church parish priest there, all Serbs are buried in public cemeteries, and epitaphs do not include significant identifiers of ethnic origin.

Members of the most recent generation of Serbian emigrants to Greece, Slovenia or Cyprus do not show great interest in what will be inscribed on their gravestones, which will in any event be found in a cemetery outside the 'homeland'. This undoubtedly is related to the fact that this emigration consists of mostly young people, who do not yet think about their own death. In the same time, it reveals the specific identity crisis which characterizes emigrants who left from different parts of former Yugoslavia during the last decades of the twentieth century. Thus, some of them feel that their name on a gravestone will be a sufficiently eloquent sign of their identity, while the attitude of others can be summarized by the announcement of a Serbian lady who, in 1995, moved from Belgrade to Cyprus: "This is how I imagine my epitaph: ZB, without faith, without homeland. She enjoyed life and others enjoyed it with her."

The question of the burial place of the dead and the symbolism by which their identity is expressed leads to the question, which is perhaps even more important, of the role that death plays in the identity of the living. What are the wishes of Serbian emigrants when choosing a burial place? In which ways are they imagined to testify to both their

symbolic and actual belonging? Where and how are those who await death in a ‘strange land’ buried?

The majority of migrations from Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were economically conditioned and these migrations were intended to be of temporary nature, at least in the mind of the emigrants. This resulted in the fact that the identity of the emigrants became transnational – they practically lived their whole life in two cultures, “here and there” or “neither here neither there”. In most cases, an ‘outer network’ of social relations was developed only as much as it was necessary, i.e. as much as the institutions of the host countries turned out functional in the everyday life of immigrants. The ‘Inner network’ of social relations was developed as the network of solidarity, but also as a symbolic presence of the homeland community, which was actualized on special occasions and fulfilled special needs of its members. However, everyday conduct was either restricted to the strict family circle or to the solitary individual, whose life was generally characterized by the routine drudgery of work and aimed at accumulating savings. ‘Real life’ was reserved for short visits home.

This context explains the fact that most of the emigrants express their wish to be buried in their “old country”. Fulfillment of such a wish depends on many parameters, above all economical ones, but also on the distance from home. Another important factor is the extent, to which social networks are developed in the country of residence. Bearing these reasons in mind the desire to finally return home in the case of overseas emigrations was more part of the emigrants’ rhetoric than their realistic expectation that it was going to happen. Research revealed that there were not many emigrants who left the last will and necessary money for the realization of the ‘last trip’. If, however, the wish to be buried in the homeland is explicit, the solution is cremation of the remains, because, in this case, travel is much easier and cheaper. However, this praxis is very rear among Serbian population (Blagojević 2005: 188). But, although Serbian emigrants are most often buried abroad, their final transition from the social community of the host country to their native community and vice versa might happen as well on the symbolical level (Krstanović-Lukić 1992: 187). A case in point



is a funeral oration held at a burial in Chicago, where it was said that “the soul of our dear and respected N.N. goes to the Serbian heaven, while his body rests in this hospitable American land” (Pavlović 2000: 88). According to Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, the traces of such final transitions might as well be found in the newspaper death notices, which, emphasizing the deceased’s homeland, actually confirm his final leaving (homeland) or return, if the deceased is buried in the place where he was born (Rihtman-Auguštin 1988: 180).

However, there are cases when the deceased was buried in his birth place regardless of the fact that there were no remaining kin there and that all the members of his or her immediate family (first, second, and even third generation of his descendants) were in a state of ‘irreversible’ acculturation in the country of destination where their parents had sought a better life many years before. The reason for such a choice is again related to specific attitudes toward graves, now in their homeland, in which some other close family members are already buried. Thus, *Glas kanadskih Srba* (“The Canadian Serbs’ Voice”) informed its readers in July, 2004, of the death of D.P., born in 1912, whose body would be transported to her native Herzegovina, to the village of Bjelač, where she will rest next to her early deceased husband (*Glas kanadskih Srba*, 29 July 2004: 15).

The situation of the Serbian emigration in West European countries is very different: the dead are more often buried in their native country, and there is also an institutional network to support such a practice. In the *Pariski poslovni podsetnik* (“Parisian business reminder”), a pocket book with telephones and addresses of various services that Serbian people might get from their compatriots, as well as of the institutions that they most often use abroad, for example, we find several advertisements for funeral services which carry out the very complicated procedure of transportation of the dead to Serbia, or some of the other former Yugoslav republics. The following entry is an eloquent example:

“Our only official authorized carrier, Mr. Žika Krstić, organizes all formalities, facilities and transportation of the deceased to his eternal

home. We are well acquainted with routes, people and customs. Žika Krstić is the fastest, the most efficient and the most economical. Up to five accompanists and the entire luggage, as well as all possibilities with regard to payment are possible” (Pariski poslovni podsetnik 2000: 53).

However, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Paris states that, although everybody wants to be buried “at home”, it happens rarely. This is confirmed by the internet newspaper Srpska dijaspora (“Serbian Diaspora”) although it’s *In memoriam* entries reveal also many who speak about burial in the homeland. Sometimes magnificent graves wait for the deceased representing real monuments of their social reputation and “success” achieved abroad (Rihtman-Auguštin 1988: 163). This practice was particularly characteristic for emigrants who left Serbian villages for West European countries during the 1970’s and 1980’s.

According to the Ljubljana parish of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the choice of the funeral venue is becoming increasingly more dependent on more rational considerations and attitudes to life and less on the unconditional “adoration of the homeland”. He mentioned a case which had happened during the 1980’s: it was so expensive to transport a corpse from Slovenia to Bosnia-Herzegovina that a Serb from Banja Luka, the son of the deceased, decided to transport his dead father in his own car, disguised as a living-yet-sleeping passenger. “He put a hat on his head, while two others propped him up and thus they travelled to their final destination. But that was possible during the times when there were no borders between republics.” In the last ten years, deceased Serbs are less and less transported from Slovenia as a result of the extraordinarily high prices of transportation of corpses, but also of the fact that the content of what ‘homeland’ used to be had changed with the political events and the war of the last two decades on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

The process of homeland demystification is particularly evident in the representatives of the new wave of Serbian emigrants, mostly for the above reasons, but also due to the profile of this emigrant population. Nevertheless, from the 40 informants in Greece, in particular in

Athens, who answered the question about the place where they would like to be buried, 17 of them expressed their wish to be buried “at home”. Ten claimed that they had not thought about that question, the same number wanted to be cremated (two of them expressed the wish that their dust would be thrown into the sea), two responded that they would not die, and only one of them answered that his eternal home would be in Greece. Ten subjects of my survey – all Serbs living in Cyprus – did not take issue. Although most of the responses reveal that many emigrants are inclined to “return” to the homeland – no matter whether they would like to stand on their homeland soil or would be covered by it – more than half of them did not use the terms home, homeland, or old country. The attitude, which these emigrants have towards the question of ‘home’, is most concisely expressed in the answer of a young Serb from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who had moved to Greece after spending several years in Belgrade as a refugee: “Home?! What does home mean now? I cannot be buried at home any more... Home no longer exists.”

It is interesting to mention also other ways of “investment into death” or “for the soul” except of graves, such as memorials, donations and church-building in the homeland, which carry a double message: one refers to the already mentioned double identity of emigrants, while the investment into graves or any other investment back home might be interpreted as a method of keeping certain positions in the social network and social relations in the homeland. On the other hand, concerning the fact that such investments are often seen as a way to keep the name of the investor or his kin from falling into oblivion, they might represent an attempt of symbolical bridging the gap between individual temporariness and the continuity of the social community, which represents a common human need and overcomes the classical subject of ethnicity studies. Such phenomena were characteristic for all generations of Serbian emigrants and are not related to, and dependant on the country, to which they emigrated. Thus, a certain Tripo Runjevac, who died in the U.S. in 1944, built a monument in Petrovo polje, Herzegovina, 32 years before his death, in 1912 and devoted it to his ancestors. Information about this kind of memorials

represent an inevitable part of *In memoriam* entries, for example one from the Canadian journal *Jedinstvo* (“Unity”), which, speaking about the deceased, gives information of the many donations he had made to different institutions in the homeland in memory of the dead (*Jedinstvo*, 3 September 1971: 2). Also the newspaper *Srpska dijaspora*, reporting about the death of the Serbian priest in Stuttgart, informs the readers that he built a church in Ljuljevci near the town of Gruža, which he devoted to St. John the Precursor (*Srpska dijaspora*, 19 March 2004). Similar example can even be found among the representatives of the latest Serbian emigration, as illustrated by a very successful sport coach with “contemporary” residence in Athens who sees the “crown” of his life in the building of a church in the Serbian town from which he comes from.

### *In memoriam, funerals and mourning*

The event of death, with its various associated customs, is far less marked by ethnic symbols than one would expect. Expressions of ethnic belonging of the deceased are present above all in different ways of announcing the death, especially in *In memoriam* texts that are published in the press or the internet. Such articles are used by the community members to say farewell to honored deceased, while in the case of ‘ordinary people’ the public farewell is rare. These entries have more or less the same structure, which contains notice of death, a short description of any illness suffered and finally a longer biography of the dead. The last states his birthplace, the year of and the reasons for emigration, and his merits in the expatriate community. The obituaries also state who the deceased has left behind and give their names – usually renowned members of the community who were pall bearers at the funeral and made funeral addresses. Texts which announce the death of male members of the community characteristically emphasize their engagement in the foundation of their national associations or their achievements in the ‘outer’ social world. Announcements of the death of honored women typically praise their activities in charity activities directed towards the homeland, as well as their firm attitude

in raising their own children in a national and patriot spirit (Srpska dijaspora, 24 August 2003; 19 March 2002). We often see women described as “the epitome of a Serbian wife and mother”. Most of them gave birth to more than two or even more than three children. Apart from that, it is important to mention that the obituaries of deceased woman present them, apart from their own biographic data, as wife of an “honored Serb” (e.g. Glas Kanadskih Srba, 30 January 2004: 14). Hence, these entries offer enough material for research into the gender dimensions of this topic.

*In memoriam* texts as well as funeral speeches represent also important sources for reading the political attitudes of the Diaspora members. However, this topic exceeds the frame of this article and will, therefore, be mentioned just briefly. The identity strategies of Serbian emigrant were changing during the last thirty years thoroughly connected to the political discourses and events in their home country. *In memoriam* published in the Jugoslovensko-kanadski tjednik (“Yugoslav-Canadian weekly”) during 1960’s and 1970’s, thus, are characteristic for not mentioning the nationality of the deceased. Only surnames or birthplaces gave possible hints as to which of the constitutive nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia the deceased belonged. Apart from that, these texts often emphasized the proletarian or communist attitudes of the dead. Such is, for example, the notice of death of M.S. in 1968, whose funeral was held “in a way which is appropriate for workers, without any church ceremonies” (Jedinstvo, 19 April 1968: 2). In contrast to this, since the year of 2000 the periodicals “The Canadian Serbs’ Voice” and “Serbian Diaspora” often published farewells by the community for deceased who were described as “uncompromising fighter for freedom from communist ideology”, “Serbian national fighter” and “Chetniks”.

Newspaper obituaries in the classical sense are hardly present in the newspapers of the Diaspora. Where they occur, they often include only a eulogy or words of sadness, without any additional information (e.g. the birth place of the deceased). This may stem from the fact that such newspapers are not published regularly, so cannot be used as a method of informing friends and relatives. The absence of death

notices in these periodicals might be also interpreted as an indicator of the role, which death plays in the wider, but still ‘inner’ community, where death does not appear as a relevant source of ethnicity. On the other hand, concerning the fact that information about death of community members is usually given orally, death notices appear as a mechanism for the confirmation of the unity of the immediate group (Pavlović 1990: 77).

As mentioned, the customs of emigrants are usually reduced to the basic tenets of the traditional practice and ritual, representing a mixture of old habits and those acquired and adopted in the new surroundings. Mirjana Pavlović maintains that customs related to death are the only that succeeded to maintain their traditional form (2000: 85). However, the analysis of my sources points to different conclusions. Namely, the perseverance of the traditional ritual form, which underlines the more or less logical and only possible sequence of the ritual stages concerning farewell to the dead (announcement, preparing the corpse, funeral, mourning), is not transferred in its content and even less, in its meaning. Even in the sequence of the mentioned stages we may notice an obvious tendency to professionalize them as well as to shorten them (especially the preparation of the dead and the mourning). However, it is clear that such a tendency is not exclusive to life in the Diaspora but rather represents a common tendency in modern societies. Today, the preparation of the corpse is usually done in some funeral institution. Srpska Diaspora informs us that there is a Serbian funeral service even in Chicago, bearing the symbolical name Sveta gora (“Mount Athos”, Srpska dijaspora, 25 May 2002). Research among Serbian emigrants in California revealed that the local way of burial preparations of the deceased are often mentioned as reason for people to express the wish to be taken home or even cremated. Namely, the deceased is subjected to blood extraction and beautifying afterwards which makes the corpse apparently look better and younger than s/he did in life. Before condolences are conveyed to the family, the visitors pay the deceased compliments for his/her look (Blagojević 2005: 187).

The ethnic composition of the people present at the funeral testifies to the complex outer and inner social networks. According to

the Serbian priests from Paris and Ljubljana, the specificity of certain customs often makes representatives of 'outside groups' confused. My respondents believe that this is the reason why families do not bring food and drinks to the grave, especially in Slovenia. Concerning overseas countries, this custom is even forbidden by administrative regulations. Therefore, wheat, rakija (brandy), bread and honey are usually served in the parish house, the Serbian club or restaurant, or, though very rarely, in the place where the deceased lived. Over the last years, the Serbian Orthodox Church has been inevitable at funerals, functioning as the only stable and, at the same time, very important ethnic marker (Pavlović 2000: 85). This includes the requiem – one performed in the chapel, in which the deceased is exposed, the other one at the grave. Apart from that, according to the protocol of the St. Sava church in St. Gabriel, California, it seems that the number of those who took communion on their deathbed increased during the 1980's (Blagojević 2005: 186). In addition to this, the family keeps awake the whole night and, similarly to the custom still existent in Serbian villages, the deceased is exposed in an open coffin. 'Compatriots' who come to express their condolences often leave by the deceased something that he/she used to like – cigarettes, lighters, money, golf balls, beer cans and similar things.

It is suggested that in Slovenia matters are the most difficult, particularly in relation to the processional stages of the funeral. Namely, according to the administrative procedure of this country, it is obligatory to have the state flag of Slovenia during the funeral. Hoisting the national flag is also permitted. The priest of the Serbian Church in Ljubljana mentions that only twice during the last twenty years, the Serbian flag appeared at a funeral. On the other side, the number of those who want to be buried with the Orthodox funeral service is increasing, as well as the number of those who want to be cremated. Funerals of atheists are often accompanied by the Catholic priests, who are on duty at the cemetery and who conduct the funeral oration as a matter of course. There are also funerals at which priests of both Churches are present. In this case, the service is done by the Orthodox priest, while the Catholic one is just present. My informants

mentioned that “the customs of the old region” were not carried out because it was “not necessary”, or “in order to avoid confusion”, and “because of children”, who are, obviously, assimilated in the local culture and for whom emphasizing of any difference might appear as a problem.

The periods of mourning is, for all researched regions, the same – commemorations of the death are repeated after forty days, half a year and a year. This includes going to the grave, but without practicing the traditional custom of bringing food and drink – wheat, round bread and rakija. All Souls Day does not appear as an important occasion for gatherings in overseas countries. The data from California suggest that not many people visit the grave. Usually, these are older women, who keep the grave stone clean (Blagojević 2005: 189). In France, however, the All Souls Day of Mitrovdan (just before the day of St. Dimitrios, 8 November) appears as a day of mass gatherings of the Serbian community. In 2006, the service of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Paris on that day gathered around 2,000 people. It is interesting that at funerals of Serbian emigrants in Paris food appears at the grave, and most of the funerals are held with the participation of the Church.

Concerning wearing black and other markers of mourning, I have information only for Serbian emigrants in the U.S., in particular in California and Chicago. In these places, black is worn only by elderly women, usually for forty days or half a year after the death of the deceased. If at all wearing black, younger people do it only at the day of the funeral. The custom of isolation of the family and temporary breaking the relations with the outer world, as well as not using TV, radio and music devices for a certain time, was observed, among the studied groups, only by one family from Herzegovina who lives in San Gabriel (Blagojević 2005: 189).

### **Empty grave**

Finally, I want to raise the question of how the community in the homeland perceives the death of its members abroad. The phenomenon of the so called “jabadžinski grave”, which has been recorded in



traditional migrant worker places in Bulgaria, led me to such a question. “Jabadžinski grave” means a collective grave for all migrant workers, who died and were buried abroad. It is the place at which the family in the homeland comes to see off symbolically their dead, performing customs and rituals usual at the funeral. In Serbia, as well as in all other regions of the former Yugoslavia, we come across the phenomenon of ‘empty grave’ which reminds of the mentioned traditional Bulgarian institution. Empty grave represents the place at which the community symbolically buried all those who died far from their home (Kulišić, Petrović, Pantelić 1998: 139, Jovanović 1993: 211). This way, the double identity of the emigrant is not only confirmed and transferred to eternity, but it becomes clear that whole community – both the part which lives abroad, as well as those who stayed in the country – bears traits of symbolic dislocation in time and space.

In this extremely symbolic world, death abroad appears to be also a very convenient instrument of (contemporary) political strategies of different groups in the homeland which, using mythological assumptions about the ‘holiness of exile’ try to confirm their own role and to sanctify the deceased’s. The most striking recent example for such usage of death was the death of Slobodan Milošević (president of Serbia 1990–2000, accused and detained in 2001, for war crimes at Kosovo) in the prison of the Hague Tribunal. This event served as occasion for various political claims of parts of the Serbian Diaspora, which found their place in the Diaspora periodical *Srpska dijaspora*. From the day, on which his death was announced, to the day of his funeral, articles were published which alluded to innocent suffering on an epic scale, discrimination and unjust stigmatization (Dimitrijević 2006). Similar motives can be found in the discussion about the transfer to Serbia of the mortal remains of King Peter II Karađorđević as well as of other members of the royal family, who rest in peace in England and Scotland (*Srpska dijaspora*, 15 March 2004, 11 September 2003). Though these cases are not related to migrant strategies of identification – the subject of this paper – I mention them as other revealing examples for the significance of death abroad.

*The role of death rituals at different levels of emigrant`s identity*

In order to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this article and considering the empirical material just exposed, it is necessary to regard the phenomenon of death and its meaning in the life of emigrants on several levels:

- the individual;
- the closest circle of the social network, which consists of the family and the closest keen of the deceased;
- the wider circles of the inner social network, which includes the so-called ‘patriotic community’ (wider circle of friends, acquaintances, people from the same village, region, and republic, politically like-minded persons, etc.);
- the outer social network, which is made up by all those people who are not included in the circles that I have just mentioned, but are directly related to the individual and his family.

Concerning the individual level, we have seen that death confirms the person’s double identity. It often gives this a lasting, almost eschatological character. Facing death also might lead to the final decision about the choice between belonging to the emigrant community or the home country, either in a real or symbolical way. This also refers to the identity of the closest surroundings of the deceased, because, as we have seen, the characteristics of double identity are transferred from the individual to the community – those who lived with the deceased and those left in the home land.

On the next level of the closest social circle of the deceased, death has an integrative role both in the emigrant surroundings and among the relatives in the home country. The customs, to which the family of the deceased obeys in the emigration, express and confirm their ethnic identity, but only to certain extent. This manifests and confirms the belonging to the wider circles of the inner network, which on the other hand, also affects the reduction of the ritual, because it does

not represent the measure of differentiation between and within the groups. It is possible to say that in such a context, the role of death in the hierarchy of social structure of the wider internal network is more important.

Concerning the place and identity of group in the outer social surroundings, the importance of event of death and rituals that follow – as ethnic marker – is limited and conditioned by the type, measure and the extent of dependence and involvement in the outer network of social relations. So, as stronger and deeper are these bonds the less “ethnicity” contains in farewell and funeral customs. We have seen that this have caused simplification of the customs of emigrants.

It is possible to conclude that attitudes and behavior related to death, as well as death itself represent important sources of personal, individual identities of emigrants, in which the ethnic dimension occupies an important place. However, concerning the function of death in relation to the identity of the group, death appears as relatively functional only in the frame of the inner social network, while it does not appear as an important pillar of ethnicity in the context of the outer social network.

There are two reasons for this situation: first of all, death is not ‘useful’ for the confirmation and widening of the outer social network. It even represents the danger for the “extinction” of the part of the network in which the deceased may have played important or even irreplaceable role. In this situation, emphasizing difference, or boundaries between groups, what ethnically colored death rituals certainly do, is seen as behavior that might contribute this process (of extinction). On the other hand, such “dysfunctionality” of death represents the mirror of wider global process of desacralisation of reality, which, above all, undermines removing of death from everyday reality and the attempt of forgetting about it. Death is more and more pushed in privacy, and, as exclusively private event, losses its place and function in the life of wider community.

The presented material demonstrates one more fact – the difference in attitudes between the old and new Serbian emigration. Indifference of new emigrants (above all those who left the area of the

former Yugoslavia during the 1990’s) for the question of funeral and death point to relation and dependence between two parameters that influence formation of their (ethnic) identity. First refers to the reasons of these migrations that were conditioned by the disintegration of the state, exile, difficult life conditions, and the fact that their national identity is often deprived from any spatial coordinates. These facts, combined with the second parameter, that is, factor of age structure of emigrants, as well as the mentioned attitudes of modern society towards death, result in a situation where the level of ‘ethnisation’ of death is low. (Pavićević 2004: 104, 105). Such a conclusion can especially be drawn from my research among Serbian emigrants in Greece. In Slovenia, where I met emigrant groups with a more differentiated age, educational and professional composition, the results of research confirmed the well-known rule that symbolic borders are less distinct in situations where two groups share a richer and more protracted history. This, however, does not necessarily point to processes of assimilation or to mutual tolerance of groups. It rather reveals the fact that there is competition for the same resources – economic, political or cultural, which determines the selection of symbols by the groups concerned. This is also not a context in which death would appear as a relevant event in relation to the outer network.

We have seen that, contrary to my expectations, death is an event with limited symbolic value. Nevertheless, it appears to be a very interesting ‘source’ for revealing facets of the migrant experience which often stay out of reach of scholarly studies: for reading and interpreting individual and micro-social realities and their relevance for the identity of the community.

## Two Earthquakes

### Ideological Influences on Media Reporting of Natural Disasters

I believe that it is not necessary to emphasize role that media nowadays have in constructing picture of the world. This is particularly valid for visual media which, from the moment when TV entered homes of common people, became the most powerful vehicle for creating public opinion. Beside this, omnipresence of different types of media in everyday life makes them kind of compensation for different mechanisms of collective (ritual) catharses which characterized pre modern societies. The same as TV, in one moment of media evolution, became metaphorical substitution for home altar, so contents of different media became compensation for non participation in collective sacrament. In traditional context, ritual was the one that enabled ecstasy, purification and return to everyday reality after braking social events, while in (post) modern society, this role is taken over media. They regenerate cultural reality by creating constructive picture about it. This is why one of my inquiries was - how death is represented in media? Do media follow the general pattern of post modernity and that is – avoiding explicit mentioning death, or they show opposite tendency? Does this change as time passes? And, how and if certain political ideologies (in the case of Yugoslavia we talk about socialism) influenced this shaping of death in public discourses?

Here I am going to focus at two events – two earthquakes that happened in Yugoslavia – one in Skopje (FYROM) in 1963 and other at the coast of Monte Negro in 1979, but I am also going to show some general features of reporting about death of common people in 60ties and 70ties in Yugoslavia. Basic source for my analyses were printed media, and particularly *Politika*, one of most prominent daily newspapers in Yugoslavia at that time.

## Obituaries

In editions from randomly chosen years from 60ties (1962, 1963), obituaries were still not followed by photos and were quiet undifferentiated from the rest of announcements. Both in 60ties and 70ties (1972, 1973), news about death of common people were short, informative, mostly without any photos. These news were quite inconspicuous, far from cover pages and main headlines and topics. Condition to exit anonymity of obituaries was unnatural death – death in traffic accident, murder, suicide and the like. However, texts about accidents reminded on detailed obituary and they were equally modest and marginal regardless number, age or sex of victims. It is interesting that, despite my expectations, similar situation was with news about death of some less important political figures – presidents of municipalities, former partisans and generally, people whose short biographies (published along the news) were pointing at their commitment to ideas and aims of National Liberating Struggle and their active participation in building socialistic society (Politika January 3, 1963: 7; Politika Jun 6, 1963: 6).

According to this, one could conclude that analyzed newspapers had insignificant impact on creating images of death. However, I believe that printed media, even in this way, did create certain notion about this life necessity – notion that was based on combination of traditional comprehension of death and atheistic ideology. In both contexts, death is unavoidable, expected and thus common event (just to mention that at this time intensive re-remembering of war struggles through partisan`s movies, and through different public discourses was permanently present). It`s tragic features are in the shadow of promised victory – victory of metaphysical reality at one side and triumph of progress and building well fare society, on the other.

This point of view was open by event which succeeded to emerge from the misleading silence of everyday media routine.

It was catastrophic earthquake in Skopje, on 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1963, in which around 1000 people lost their lives. Dimensions of this catastrophe made news about suffering reach first pages of newspapers.

Huge titles, bold letters, photos of ruins... However, layout, structure and content of information uncover characteristics of actual ideological patterns between printed lines.

*Politika* from July 26, 1963, published special edition dedicated to earthquake in Skoplje. Complete cover page, as well as few following pages were full of news about unprecedented dimensions of natural disaster, presumptions of victim number and help which was directed to Macedonian capital. In articles, shocking scenes of ruins, the cries of the people who remained under them, hopelessness of mother who, with two killed kids, sits at the burnt of former house, were described. Beside this, there were calls for every kind of help – from excavation wounded and killed to calls for blood donating and receiving homeless people. In next edition of *Politika*, from July 27<sup>th</sup>, first ten pages were dedicated to the event. At cover page – impact title was about announcement of two-day official sorrow in whole state. Subtitle was emphasized as well, bringing information that help was send to Skopje from all other parts of Yugoslavia. There was also main text reprinted from special edition, and that was all about direct mentioning death and dying. At following pages (till page 9) *Politika* published stories of survived – about where they have been when earthquake begun and how everything looked like “alive”. There were also articles about how state institutions were putting all efforts in supporting suffering people, how foreign governments have send telegrams with condolences and how some citizens have shown high level of humanity and solidarity by helping to distressed compatriots. Only on page 9, one could have find list with names of 123 excavated and identified victims of disaster. It is interesting to mention that, besides photos of ruins, there were two photos – on page 3 with subtitle: “Bandaging the wounded in the park”, and on page 7 photo which has displayed caring the wounded. None of these photos was commented in surrounding articles. From page 10 of this edition, “normal” life was beginning – life of different political and cultural events, chronics and like. *Politika* cover page on the third day after the earthquake, July 28, was marked by Josip Broz Tito’s, president of Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, visit to Skopje. Instructions that Tito was giving to saviors, his visible

emotional distress by ruined city, and his conviction that “Macedonian people was going to be happy again in our socialistic community” were implied in the article. Particularly interesting was that in this edition photos which were showing death more explicitly appeared for the first time. Thus, on page 3, there was a photo which displayed man caring stretcher with covered body of killed person. Title under the photo was: “Sorrow for lost child”. On next page, as well as on page 11, one could have find suggestive, but again primarily metaphorical images: old woman in black clothes and scarf covering her head, titled: “She remained alone, without son and grandchildren” and photo with the man, sitting on the ruins, titled:” Man who lost her family does not leave ruins of his home”. Again, none of these photos were commented in articles around them. Articles were exclusively dedicated to reportages about actions for helping people, and reconstructing, rebuilding and getting life back to normality. Direct mentioning death and dying was still absent. In this issue, regular column dedicated to art and culture was back, bringing articles about scientific knowledge on earthquakes. Aim of such an editorial policy could be contribution to felling of security and possibility of future controlling or predicting natural blind forces.

Inside of ruined city, rehabilitation atmosphere was in the shadow of personal, tragic losses. Readers of *Politika* could have found this out only in edition from July 29, fourth day after catastrophe. After articles at front pages of newspapers where main topics were Tito`s awarding the rescue teams and general mobilization of the nation in helping to affected area, on page 3 appeared photo which showed people sitting at the graveyard by the coffins with their deceased. Title of the photo was: “Burial of the First Victims”. Similar image of death, or better to say – it`s seeing off, was repeated on page 8 of same issue. There was a photo with soldiers who were descending coffin in a pit while beside them were crying woman and man with arms on his head. Title was: “Last good bye!” As in previous cases, these photos were surrounded by articles which didn`t mention any words about events shown on them (on photos). Beside this, news and witty texts about rescuing Belgium couple who were trapped under the ruins of Hotel Macedonia



for several days, dominated in the issue. Condolences telegrams to Josip Broz Tito as well as writing of foreign media about earthquake already became regular columns. During last two days of intensive reporting about tragedy, we can find articles which have brought in game statistical and ecological rhetoric. This was new kind of compensation for non-existing explicit facing mass death and destruction. But, again, data on total number of death, number of founded but yet not buried corpses, danger of their decay and insufficient depth of burial pits, were occupying negligible space between bold titles about reconstruction and renewal of economy, funding housing fund, opening shops and other signs of normalization of life.

On July 31, sixth day after earthquake, one out of many personal tragedies got peace of media space. On fourth page of *Politika* appeared small article about father who traveled from Belgrade to Skopje to excavate his 19 years old daughter who has been spending summer holiday in Macedonia and got killed in earthquake.

At this point we could make two preliminary conclusions. Media image of death in researched period was in the function of ideological instrumentalization of mass suffering. It was used for promotion of actual political and social system as mature enough to handle such disasters as well as for the presenting SFRY as state of high reputation in the world. On the other hand, we could say that newspapers marginalized very event of death in order to prevent spreading fear, panic and hopelessness and in order to construct image of life-which-goes-on. This fits into observation that modern society is characterized by different strategies of suppressing and *redefining* death phenomenon. But, question remains: how was it possible? How was possible not to talk about death when thousand of people were killed? How was possible not to write about horrible scenes of dying, personal losses and tragedies? And how are we going to explain numerous, quite explicit images of death which we face nowadays – in newspapers and in other media?

Response to part of these questions lays in what we have already mention – in the fact that in researched period, image of death was based on combination of traditional and modern (which for Yugoslavia

meant primarily atheist) comprehensions about this phenomenon. Traditional – in which death is accepted as certainty of natural, but also of metaphysical flow of events and atheist – in which comfort for this certainty is searched in promise of future (earthly) goods.

Thus, in this period death is something one do not try to escape, but also something that is not glorified. Mourning takes place in private sphere which is greatly characterized by traditional religious concept. Proof for this can be found in obituaries published during 1963, 1972 and 1973 in which bereaved relatives invite community to take part in periodical memorial rituals on 7<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup> day, half of the year and year after death. However, it seems that public discourses also count with this certainty of death. It represent good platform for promoting idea about possibility for *overcoming* death through unstoppable technological progress and, above all, through consistent ideological enlightening.

Historical and political background for such conceiving of death and for creating its media image is very important for understanding researched phenomenon and for understanding its development in later years. Namely, media picture of death that we tried to frame was inherent and possible only in conditions of strong secular ideological and political system. This system is characterized by clear and strong idea about sense of life which is out of religious frame. It offers solid compensation for Heavenly Kingdom – through state of well fare, based on solidarity, humanism, brotherhood and unity. Glorification of death in secular ideology appears as sing of its weakening and degradation which is testified by flow of events and media images of death at the end of 70ties and all through the 80ties in Yugoslavia.

It is already well known that death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980 marked the beginning of new era in Yugoslav history. Seemingly stabile state and political system started to reveal serious deficiencies. It is clear today that system was brought into the question even before this period, but it was not visible in public sphere. Nevertheless, media image of death which appeared during 80ties can be taken as indication of weakening current ideological matrix.

In this period, common mortals were dying a quiet death.

Newspapers were publishing news about traffic accidents, murders and other unnatural deaths, but, as in previous period, they were short and almost invisible. However, there were different examples as well. Thus, *Politika* from November 13, 1979, published surprisingly long article about double murderer who was sentenced to death and then amnestied. Several days later detailed text about forensic investigation in one murder case was published and till the end of the year, one can notice increasing number of articles and photos which were displaying death explicitly. What is interesting is that these were placed in columns dedicated to culture and history (funeral of Jovan Skerilić, Serbian writer, feuilleton about Draža Mihajlovic, Yugoslav Army General, accompanied with photo displaying man hanged on three, essay about grave of Rastko Petrovic, Serbian poet). However, particularly interesting were news and articles about death of politicians, warriors from National Liberation War, and members of Communist Party. They are now, contrary to previous period, more than bold-emphasized. Thus, news about death of Djura Pucar Senior “one of the most meritorious fighters of Yugoslav revolutionary worker’s movement” received central place at cover page of *Politika* from 13<sup>th</sup> April 1979. Two-days official sorrow was announced and in following days – till burial, *Politika* dedicated its central space to articles in which heroization of character and deeds of Djuro Pucar were main topic. These articles reported about activities of funeral board as well. Nevertheless, media attention was not reserved only for such high and important politicians. They reported both about death of some political officials who were on lower levels of power and reputation. Thus in the same issue where Pucar’s death was announced, *Politika* dedicated huge text to death and funeral of president of one of Belgrade’s municipality. What calls our attention here is tone of discourse about death which is now pathetic and which represents death as difficult loss and fatal event which comes in the moment when “we should celebrate our common political and labor successes” (*Politika* April 13, 1979: 10).

This situation was not unexpected. Death of famous socialist fighters remained only vehicle for confirmation of ideas they have struggled for. Post mortem rhetoric in this cases promised post mortem

glory and eternal remembering to the deceased, but essentially, it has served rebuilding memories on important historical moments which were in the bases of actual value system. However, the more this rhetoric laid upon thanatological discourses the more deficiencies of ideological system in answering crucial questions about life were visible and certain. Par excellence testimony of this process was death and funeral of Josip Broz Tito, in 1980, to which I dedicated separate text in this book.

Indications of change in media rhetoric about death were ambiguously confirmed again by reporting about earthquake, this time in Monte Negro, on 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1979. Newspapers articles published on this occasion surely deserve separate literal and linguistic analyses because they sound like they came out directly from fiddle epical tradition (which is connected to this region), yet, here, we don't have enough space for such an analyses. What is particularly interesting for our topic is the fact that reportages about earthquake which was far less destructive and took lesser number of victims than one in Skoplje, presented death in far more tragic and dramatic manner. And what can be even more important, they were showing death far more explicitly than in the case of Macedonian catastrophe.

Articles about earthquake which particularly affected coast of Monte Negro received central media space and remained there for several days after the event. They have directly reported about suffering, dying, excavations and about personal and individual losses. First day of reporting, cover page of *Politika* published article about earthquake inside of which was the photo displaying people around ruins. Title was: *Excavating woman from ruined hotel...* Both titles and articles were suggesting huge pain and tragedy of human life – those who were killed and those who remain to mourn after them. Here are few of them: *Day of great pain, Time when dead were counted, There is no Crmnica anymore...* Pictures that were prevailing through articles brought strong emotional tension which was in the key of traditional cultural symbols of this area. Thus, one article describes tragedy in Sotonici village where uncle was back to house in order to rescue his nephew and they both got killed. Here are parts of two particularly

emotionally stressed articles – one was titled : *Cry of Luka Vuletic*

*“This pile of stones in front of which Luka Vuletic is sitting, yesterday morning was his home. And two tables in front of the house he used only for festivities, and when friend were coming. Two coffins are now at those tables...”*

The second is: *There is no Crmnica anymore*

*“Crmnica is all in black. Black obituaries are on cherry trees in bloom. Black pile on the lapels, black scarfs [on heads]. No one laments loudly. Just sorrow, pain and depression. How could it not be? Seven pupils are not going to step in the classroom anymore. And there are even more kids. In Vukasovic family, mother and her three sons lost their lives...”*

Of course, there were also articles about help, solidarity, support of foreign countries, condolences telegrams to Tito and his visit to stroked area, but now, they were in the second plane, just opposite then in Macedonian case in which ideas of brotherhood, unity, rebuilding and solidarity were suggesting victory over death. Death and tragedy were now key words whose strength should have contributed to renewal of society and return to everyday life.

As we have shown, in this period, heroes of death were people who died in mass fate as well as respectable political workers and officials. Death of Dragan Mance, young and perspective football player in 1985 and quite huge media space that this event gained, were announcing expansion of this pantheon which, in following decades was going to be open to other public professions – sportiest, singers, actors and like.

# **“Dead Man Walking”**

## **Exhumation and Reburial of Famous Deceased in Serbia**

There is no doubt that funeral processions represent one of civilization’s constants, implying universality, common experiences and historical continuity in the basic patterns of human culture. Death, maybe even more than birth (and no doubt more than any other crucial moment in the life of the individual and the community), occupies a huge part of the world of symbols and meanings, while behavior and thinking related to this last act represent the most concise and complex reflection of the macro and the micro universes of human existence.

The transfer of the deceased to his eternal home has always been an important part of the ritual by which the living bid farewell to the dead. The procession, as a type of (meta-) physical thread, connected the extremities of life, yielding a dimension of acceptance and sense in a world of contradictions. The house of the living and the habitat of the dead, along with descendants and ancestors, or laymen and saints, find themselves on the same plane during the funeral procession. That plane, seen as somewhere between earth and sky, opens the passage between this world and the other, with each world, in a sense giving its blessing to its counterpart.

The last walk with the deceased is inextricably linked with the final announcement of his departure. It keeps life temporarily stopped for everyone who is near the procession to the graveyard, whether kin to the deceased or not, friends or enemies, adults or children.

Funerals have always differed in terms of the number of participants, the price of funerary equipment, the presence (or not) of a funeral orchestra, and the size of the meal the deceased’s family has prepared. However, funerals organized for ordinary people, as a singular event, have never held any particular place in the collective memory of traditional communities. The task of keeping alive the memory of the deceased fell to his closest kin. Remembering the eternal game of finite and infinite, as symbolized in every procession

of mourners, however, fell to the whole community.

This was similar both in rural and in urban areas almost up until the Second World War. However, in the cities (more often than in the villages), the funeral ritual was adequate for presenting the social and economic status of the deceased person's family. In attitude as well as sheer numbers, those who simply stopped to pay respects in front of a funeral procession would surpass the deceased's participating relatives, friends and neighbors (Borozan, 2006: 920). Ariès mentions that in French cities, such processions were also attended by various merchants, clerks and other people intent on earning some money on the occasion of someone's death (Ariès, 1988: 104,105). In Belgrade, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, processions used to move from the dead person's home to the graveyard of Tašmajdan, and later to the New Cemetery, stopping along the way at the major sites of the city. On these occasions, passers-by would cease their work, and in the case of funerals of famous people, traders would close their shops to pay last respects to the deceased (Borozan, 2006: 919).

Later, the process of moving dying people from their homes into hospitals influenced the change of the structure of urban funeral rituals. Professionals took over transporting the deceased to the cemetery, leaving only a reduced funeral procession on the path from the graveyard church or chapel to the grave. This limited the number of immediate participants, turning the funeral into an essentially private event. Moreover, the reduction of the procession removed death from the eyes of the world, in one element of the wider transformations that are characteristic of modern society (Gorer, 1997:28-31).

However, regardless of how important the funeral was, or the scale and structure of the ritual, when it ended, the memory of the deceased became the private property of his family. Any collective memory, of either the deceased or his funeral, rapidly shifted to the margins of oral chronicles among his fellow citizens. What endured was the symbolic inheritance that was renewed again and again with each new funeral, confirming the stability of basic cultural patterns grounded in the ambivalence of human lives.

The events that are the focus of my research in this text are based

on exactly this cosmological game between finite and infinite; that is to say, the transfer of famous dead people or in the words of K. Verdery the (after) life of dead bodies (Verdery, 1999). Similarly to Verdery, I will not deal with all transfers. I will focus on those of people exhumed after their first burial in order to be buried again, with particular reverence and very often at some other location. The special characteristic of such events is that they represent the active reconstruction of collective memory, based on a certain system of values, and based on a certain concept or interpretation of the meta-history of the community. Unlike more ordinary funerary events, burials of the famous demand a certain type of funerary aesthetics. Moreover, the funerals in question follow the unusual act of exhumation. The implication of a double death requires complex anthropological analysis, in which the central question should be: what is the basic concept of death underlying such events?

The theme of this article closely follows one treated in the influential book by the aforementioned researcher Katherine Verdery, “The Political Lives of Dead Bodies”. I feel obliged, therefore, to establish my position on her ideas.

Verdery’s reference to “political life” after death entails the usage of mortal remains for political ends, a phenomenon found to some degree in all societies and epochs. However, political usages do not greatly expand the meaning and function of a corpse as an object. The ideological manipulation with death represents only one aspect (the aspect of death) that can be read most easily from the position of scientific knowledge based on a rationalistic and positivistic world view. Interpreting cultural phenomena through the eyes of the state or a particular ideology may be tempting, but it is not always completely relevant. K. Verdery, , for example, pointed out the deeper and wider background of political rituals, which essentially represent one way of arranging and defining the world of meaning in a certain social context (1999:26, 177). It therefore surprises me that her study appeared with a subtitle that so limited its domain: “Reburial and post-socialist Change”. Verdery’s conclusion about the specificity of post-socialist exhumation and re-burial of the dead precisely accentuates the political



context of the phenomenon, which actually blurs the more important conclusion about the structure and meaning of such a ritual.

That is why I decided to approach this topic through both horizontal and vertical analysis, indicating the most important events of this kind in Serbian history from the middle ages to the present day, and then trying to address the question of similarities and differences between them. In that sense, the following questions will be important: who was exhumed and buried again, and in which situation? Who were the organizers, and who were participants in each reburial? To what extent was each reburial “directed” by the current socio-political context? What was distinctive and what was specific to each epoch in which these events happened? What system of values – collective and individual – was promoted, confirmed and created through these events? And finally, the question that, as I see it, is the most important: what concept of death itself lies behind the practice of exhuming the famous deceased, and what views of death are suggested by such exhumations?

As far as Serbia is concerned, it should be mentioned that Verdery takes into consideration some events related to the wars on former Yugoslav territory during the 1990s. She considers the mass exhumations of “anonymous” victims of Ustaša genocide, as well as the victims of Partisan actions during World War II. Apart from that, Verdery (1999:99-104) mentions the withdrawal of the Serb population from Sarajevo in 1996, when in the luggage many refugee families one could find remains of their dead relatives, exhumed from ground that no longer belonged to the community, either the living or the dead. My text, however, concentrates on analyzing the exhumation and re-burial of certain famous individuals in Serbian history and culture, not only because these events have not been, until now, the subject of scientific analysis, but also because they are very different from those researched by K. Verdery.

Based on the existing material, I have been able to make a preliminary classification of the deceased who received this distinctive type of posthumous respect and ritual, which announced their *eternal* glory.

The first known examples – and the only ones for several centuries – involved the exhumation and transport of the most prominent members of Serbian ruling families: Nemanjići, Lazarevići, Brankovići and Štiljanovići . It is important to mention that the deceased from these families included church as well as secular leaders, reflecting the close relation between church and state, typical of the time, and undoubtedly influencing the concept and character of the ceremony. We find a distinct practice in the case of these deceased. Namely, they were buried in the monasteries and churches whose donors they used to be. After a certain period of time, as it is written in the hagiographical manuscripts, they would appear miraculously to their descendants or to monks, and sometimes even to a completely unrelated but religious person, and this would prompt the decision to open their graves (J.Popović, 1991). When such graves were dug up, they were found to contain well preserved corpses that were, afterwards – amid church rites, services and respects – re-buried in a more important place inside the church. The kivot – a wooden or stone chest – became the centre of the cult for a newly uncovered saint, usually with engravings showing the many miraculous events described in the saint’s life. (D. Popović, 2006).

In the second version of this ritual, the corpse was transferred to a different place, a church or monastery somehow relevant to the life of the deceased. However, for famous rulers who died outside Serbia’s boundaries, reburial could also create a new historical monument, with the deceased serving as an intermediary between heaven and his former flock.

This model of transfer of posthumous remains reappeared in Serbia during the nineteenth and twentieth century, but with the circle of the deceased worthy of such treatment being expanded to encompass artists, scientists, and anyone else considered to deserve a place in the national pantheon.

One category of these events concerned those deceased whose cults had already been established, on the grounds of the discovery of their holy corpses and the miracles that they had performed, and whose bones were unsettled because of the impending danger of enemy

conquest and destruction. As such upheavals have been common in the Western Balkan region, the geographical coordinates of the eternal home of some of these dead people have changed several times. Such is the example of the corpse of Simon the Monk, also known as Stefan Prvovenčani, the first Serbian ruler, whose corpse was transferred fifteen times (Mileusnić, 1989: 35)!

For saints, exhumation could become a permanent condition, with the corpse then being transported in the kivot (reliquary coffin) with some regularity for the litija (a procession along a defined route around a larger or smaller territory), after which the saint was returned to the church and/or monastery from where he had been taken. This usually happened on the occasion of big festivals or jubilees of the Orthodox Church, as well as on the festival directly related to that saint. The ritual was also organized at the critical historical moments when the need for help from the heavens arose.

### **Rulers and Monks, Fathers and Sons**

Among the most noteworthy exhumations in this early period was the import into Serbia of the holy corpse of the great national ruler Stefan Nemanja in 1208-1209. He, having gone into retirement as Monk Simeon, died on the Holy Mountain of Athos, at the monastery of Hilandar, in the year 1199. Just as significant was the transport of the preserved corpse of his son, Sava, the first Serbian archbishop, from Trnovo (Bulgaria), where he died, in the year 1237.

The medieval Serbian ruler and the founder of the Serb Orthodox Church were brought to Serbia in order to “represent their fatherland” (Domentian, 1988: 231), which meant helping to confront external enemies and to unify their descendants and brothers who were conflicted.

Saint Sava himself had brought the remains of his father, Saint Simeon, from Hilandar to Studenica at the request of the former ruler’s other sons, who were quarrelling for the throne. The holy corpse of Sava was brought from Trnovo by his nephew, who hoped to regain credibility after dethroning another brother, Radoslav (D. Popović,

2006: 240; Stanojević, 1989: 23). At the level of political, ideological and historical context, the corpses of these saints were meant to be used to achieve peace and to legitimize the ruler's ideology in the sacral domain (D. Popović, 2006: 20). However, this was only the most obvious aim, stemming from the specific, mostly spiritual values of the epoch.

An important indicator, which to some extent opens up the possibility of understanding this level of cultural value and how it was manifested, is precisely the understanding of the relation between life and death, defined in this period and in these cases by the Christian religion. An important fact in this context is that famous Serbian rulers, such as Stefan Nemanja, usually spent the last several years of their lives as monks, abandoning the tributes, land and way of life due to them as rulers. With this act, they emphasized the spiritual dimension and not the corporeal, the heavenly and not the earthly, the infinite and not the finite. Of course as an ideal, the ruler's whole life, both before and after becoming a monk, should have testified to the fusion of his nation's horizontal and vertical (or secular and religious) history. Personal religious exploits and asceticism thus appear as required models, not only for collective existence, but primarily for an individual, singular attitude towards reality. Strong-minded secular rulers, although often involved in controversial events surrounding the struggle for the throne, opted in their final earthly acts to open the door for individual salvation, possible through their atonement and God's mercy. For the Orthodox Church, their miraculously preserved bodies confirm their success in attaining salvation.

Stefan Nemanja, who abandoned Serbia in order to devote himself to spiritual exploits, and to join his son, the monk Sava in Athos, returned only after his death as the saint Simeon Mirotočivi, thus confirming the eschatological principles of the Christian civilization. The bringing of his corpse had immediate political implications, with his grave in Studenica monastery becoming the centre of his cult, which served, among other purposes, to sacralise subsequent rulers of his dynasty, the Nemanjići, and their state ideology (Timotijević, 1998: 402). Throughout the centuries, up to the present time, the name

and cult of this saint have recalled the golden period of the Serbian state, although the ideo-political connotation with regard to the former ruling family has receded. What is of prime importance is the face of the revered national saint, a character who, due to his posthumous life, keeps the door to the Kingdom of Heaven open for others.

However, the rhetoric of the St. Simeon cult would be incomplete without the story of his son, St. Sava, the Christian illuminator of the Serbian people and the most revered figure in the foundation of an independent Serbian Orthodox Church. Before St. Sava became a monk, his name was Rastko. As a young man he renounced his privileges as a prince and left for the Holy Mountain. Although his entire life was marked with the longing for the solitary life in the monastic cells of Athos, his contribution to the solving of political problems in Serbia, especially after the death of his father, was crucial (J. Popović, 1991, 379). Although researchers have marked his time as the “lowest point” in the development of saints’ cults, the power of his sacred image was based exactly on his character, which combined political capabilities with “deep devotion to the Shepherd’s duty” (D. Popović, 2006: 77). St Sava’s afterlife journey from Bulgaria to Serbia again provided strong confirmation of the Christian theological ideas about the unity of the kingdoms of heaven and earth, while the overtly political aspects of his cult, as in the case of St. Simeon, transformed over time into a universal message about the precedence of the spiritual over the material. In the post-Kosovo period, the kivot with the corpse of St. Sava became practically an alternate centre of state power and, perhaps also, of national ideology (J. Popović, 1991:433). Yet the power of his relics was not based on the political instrumentalisation of religious truths. This is affirmed by the outcome of the Ottoman decision to cremate the remains, which was meant to leave the Serbian people headless, hopeless and worse; instead, the cult of St Sava continued and grew stronger after the cremation. This heavenly mediator, now without material proof of his sanctity, continued to exist for Serbs at the invisible line between this world and the other, offering a number of possibilities to those (re)calling his name.

These important events practically became the prototypes for the

transportation of famous dead people, not only at that time, but also in all contemporary ceremonies of this kind. Establishing of the cult of the saint started with their miraculous posthumous appearance, after which the corpse was exhumed. This would lead to the discovering of their preserved dead bodies, after which they were buried again either in the same place – but with a specially marked grave site – or elsewhere in the same church, or else they were transferred to some other monastery. The journey to the chosen site not only sanctified the stops along the route, it was also meant to announce new saints, whose graves shortly afterwards became important spiritual places for their surrounding areas. The biographies of these famous dead people, who achieved posthumous glory, both heavenly and earthly – Stefan Prvovenčani (the monk Simeon), Emperor Uroš, Stefan Dečanski, Patriarch Joanikije, Archbishop Nikodim and many others – wove a complex historical narrative composed of horizontal and vertical threads. As we have mentioned, the structure of the ritual and its message were more or less constant, while the aspect that varied was the historical and political context, as well as the interpretation of important concepts on which the ritual was grounded: sanctity, death, time and eternity.

### **Descending from Heaven**

The final Turkish conquest of Serbia, and more importantly the great migration of Serbs to the regions north of the Sava river, brought important changes in this interpretive framework, with political interpretations becoming more and more dominant, especially with regard to the relation between the realities of Earth and Heaven, in which, as Timotijević notices (1998: 397), “the idea of heavenly Serbia (Serbia Sancta) is put into the function of the historical, sanctified country of Serbia (Serbia Sacra)” . But before we turn our attention to the most important characteristics of the transfer of the dead in this period, we should mention one more important event that took place in the conceptual line, which outweighed even St. Simeon Mirotičivi in establishing harmony between life and death.

It concerns St. Lazar, a Serbian ruler who lost his life along with

most of the Serbian aristocracy at Gazimestan (Kosovo, Serbia) in 1389. Although for some time after this event, Serbs still had their secular rulers, this defeat was considered to mark the end of the Serbian independence. Nevertheless, the courage of the holy ruler, his self-sacrifice for his people, and especially the legend according to which the defeat was his personal choice – a choice between earthly and heavenly, contemporary and eternal glory – made a spiritual victory out of this defeat, so that the commander of the defeated army became one of the most important national saints. Lazar had all the important characteristics for establishing a cult – the skills of a ruler, Christian spirituality, voluntary denial of “earthly treasure”, dying as a martyr, and in the end, the posthumous miraculous preservation of his corpse. The transfer of his holy corpse from Priština to Studenica monastery in the year 1390, which was done by his sons, dukes Stefan and Vuk, represented one of the most sorrowful funeral processions that took place through Serbia in that period (Mileusnić, 1989: 113). However, the evidence about the victory of faith over the hopelessness and desperation provoked by a great national tragedy is provided by the development of the strong cult related to the holy corpse of King Lazar, also very important in modern and contemporary Serbian history. The magnificence of this cult is testified by the fact that during the great migration of Serbs, guided by Patriarch Aresnije III Čarnojević in 1690, the monks of Ravanica brought the holy corps of this saint to Sent Andreja . In 1697 the corpse was moved to the monastery Vrdnik, whereas in 1716 it was moved to Futog, in order to be saved from the danger that arose during the Austro-Turkish war. In 1848 the long posthumous journey was continued – to monastery Fenek, to Klenak, back to Vrdnik, and to the monastery of Bešenovo. Finally the corpse came to Belgrade in 1942 in order to be buried in the Collegiate Church (Obnova, 1942: April 16th). However, this was not the end of the journey of this saint. In 1988, before the wars started on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, Saint Lazar travelled again through the region regarded as Serbian land, with different strategic messages (Radić, 2002: 312). I will return to this issue later on.

With the loss of medieval Serb independence, the lack of a national

state and its institutions left the Serbian Orthodox Church as a kind of shelter, the stronghold of national identity, and the guardian of the Orthodox culture and knowledge about the glorious moments of the history of the Serbian people. Although the influence of the Church on secular politics existed earlier, the new situation brought an important shift in the focus of this influence. It was no longer just about spiritual guidance, but also about a strategic role in conserving national identity. This was also influenced by the geographical repositioning of spiritual centers from the Serbian domain to areas under Hungarian rule. Namely, after the battles at Marica and Kosovo, the Serbian population started to migrate to parts of southern Hungary. The first migrants were followed by the Serbian aristocracy, as well as the Church leaders, who, arriving at the new sites, again asserted themselves as spiritual and political leaders.

The formation of new spiritual centers, episkopies and mitropolities on Hungarian territory, was a process parallel to the transportation and funerals of posthumous remains of Serbian rulers and despots. Thus the sons of despot Stefan Branković, who died in Italy in 1476, brought his remains after ten years to bury them in Kupinovo, a new centre of Serbian land in Hungaria (Mileusnić, 1989: 164). In the 1505, this corpse travelled to Vlačka, together with his family, and then came back to Srem in 1509 to be buried in the church of the monastery of Krušedol. In the same church, the son of Despot Stefan, Archbishop Maksim, was buried in 1516. His corpse was exhumed after six years, and being found preserved, it was put next to his father, receiving all honors that belong to the saints. Not surprisingly, therefore, Krušedol monastery was acclaimed in 1708 as the centre of the Serbian Orthodox Mitropolity. Yet the importance of this spiritual and national centre was not diminished by the fact that in 1713 the Mitropolity was moved to Karlovci. Many other important people from Serbian history were buried at Krušedol, and their posthumous remains were brought to the monastery from the places, near or far, where they had died: Patriarch Aresnije III Čarnojević (died in Vienna in 1706.), Mitropolit Arsenije IV Jovanovic Šakabenta (died in Sremski Karlovci in 1748.), Duke Stefan Šupljikac (died in Pančevo in 1848.), Princess Ljubica Obrenović (died



in Novi Sad in 1843.) and King Milan Obrenović (died in Vienna in 1901.). After the preserved body of king Lazar came to the monastery Vrdnik in 1697, the national pantheon was fully established in the region across the Sava, to be joined in 1705 by the holy corpse of Tzar Uroš, buried in the monastery Jazak (Mileusnić, 1989: 104, 113, 164).

The change in the position and role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in national life, as well as specific historical and political circumstances, influenced changes in the interpretation of events that played, as we have already seen, important parts in the formation of the system of values and meanings. The accentuation of national belonging, identity, political and religious independence came to the fore ahead of the cosmology that is grounded on the idea of death as the door to heavenly life. And while the rhetoric of medieval transportation of posthumous remains had, basically, an eschatological interpretation of time and the notion that the Kingdom of Earth is only a pale image of the Kingdom of Heaven, new historical circumstances announced new interpretations. It is possible to say that the meta-function of the funerary ceremonies of the golden age of Serbian spirituality was moving closer from earth to heaven, while in the following period this direction changes slowly, and the idea of heaven becomes closer to the idea of earth. Or to put it more concretely, one can see vaguely the beginning of the process of secularization that went hand in hand with the birth of nationalism that was developing in the 19th century.

As we have seen, the previous period brought about a slight prevalence of the political interpretation of sainthood, as well as an intensified process of establishment of the national pantheon of saints. Inscriptions regarding the transport of saints, as well as, apparently, the rituals themselves, especially the works of church art from the baroque period, came increasingly to be used to defend Serbian religious-political identity, confirm geo-political borders and demonstrate territorial, religious and political rights. It is interesting to mention, as Timotijević states, that: “in the final baroque edition of *Srbljak*, the old Nemanjić cults were equally represented as the cults of saints from Srem that were used by the Karlovac Metropolitanate to confirm its old age and legitimacy in the regions across the Sava river; however, only two out of 13

saints belonged to the Serb church history, whereas the others originated from the area of political history of Serbia“(Timotijević, 1998: 395).

### *A New kind of heroes*

This trend continued in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries through the ideology of the Enlightenment, that is, the idea of restoration of the national state, within which an entirely new relationship between church and state was established (Slijepcević, 1991: 331, 329). This period is also connected to the establishment of the so-called cult of the nation, a notion that connected the sacral and the secular in a special manner, and using religious symbolism, tended to affirm various kinds of secular, state and national ideologies. Veneration of important individuals now becomes fully detached from the church, so that the saints from the previous period (whose relics are still occasionally relocated) are joined by entirely new and different protagonists based on nationalist specificities. Namely, while images of medieval saints were constructed based on their personal spiritual feats and Christian aesthetic, suggesting the supremacy of the spiritual over the corporeal and the heavenly over the earthly, as of the 18<sup>th</sup>, and especially the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Serbian national pantheon is increasingly joined by “national heroes” whose actions contributed to the cultural and political Enlightenment of the nation and the establishment of the Serb state as a modern, civilized, European community. Thus, the 19<sup>th</sup> century massively celebrates poets, writers and intellectuals in general, confirming Eliade’s idea about identifying the holy with the profane, which is characteristic for a modern society, especially in the last stage of its desacralisation.

In this light one should regard the relocation of the mortal remains of Branko Radicević, poet, who died in Vienna in 1853, and was transferred and buried in Stražilovo in 1883, as well as the relocation of the mortal remains of Vuk Karadžić, who also died in Vienna in 1864, and who was transferred and buried in the church courtyard of the Collegiate Church in Belgrade in 1897. In this light, one should also regard the restoration of the grave of Dositej Obradović in 1897, on the occasion of Vuk Karadžić’s second and final funeral, as well as

the mounting of the monuments of Djura Daničić, Djura Jaksć, and many other protagonists of the Serbian intellectual elite of the period (Pavicević, 2009b).

Even though each of these developments calls for particular attention, we shall linger on a more detailed analysis of two of these events – the transfer of the mortal remains of Vuk Karadžić, the father of the modern, written Serbian language, and the restoration of the grave of Dositej Obradović, a great Serb illuminator.

Both Dositej's and Vuk's lives were marked by the fight for national awakening and rebirth. The introduction of the folk language into literature, the increased access to education, and the reliance on European scientific tradition were the common denominators of their efforts. On the other hand, the differences between these two intellectuals were considerable: while Dositej was a supporter of the ideas of European enlightenment and rationalism, as well as a sharp critic of any traditionalism, from primitive folk customs to the church formalism and petrified church dogmas, the thoughts and activities of Vuk Karadžić were characterized by a significant romantic attitude towards folk life and its institutions (Novakovic, 1911; Gavrilović, 1898.). Apart from this, Dositej enjoyed great respect while living, and was even the first minister of education in the rebellious Serbia of 1805, whereas Karadžić was mainly forced to rely on the assistance and understanding of his friends and sympathizers, and only occasionally on financial aid extended by the institutions of the emerging state. The afterlife stories of these luminaries, however, followed opposite courses. Dositej died in 1811 and was buried by the old Metropolitanate Church in Belgrade (Nikitović, 1989: 22). His grave was marked only by a modest tombstone, and even the data on his funeral could not be found in the available sources. This leads to the conclusion that his funeral was not marked as an event of any special public importance; however, this could be explained by two important elements relating to his life and the time of his death. Namely, the life of Dositej Obradović was significantly marked by the fact that he spent a part of his younger years in a monastery, where, having accepted the tonsure, he assumed the name of Dositej. His actual name was Dimitrije, but

he did not revert to it even after leaving the monastery and dismissing his monastic vows. The name he used most of his life and that made him well-known was, in fact, his monastic name. It is well-known that Obradović left the monastery because of the unfulfilled expectations he had from monastic life, and that it was this experience that contributed to his critical attitude towards the Church (Radović, 1993.). Yet the Serbia of his day still adhered to certain prototypes of saints (as previously mentioned in this paper), which his life after rejecting monasticism could not possibly fit. Apart from this, at the moment of his death, Serbia still had no vision of the future state, let alone organized institutions that could stage an event worthy of collective remembrance, as Dositej's funeral might have been. Apparently, thirty years later, the situation was not considerably different. In 1837, on the occasion of the restoration of the Collegiate Church, Dositej's great friend and publisher of his works, Grigorije Vozarević, book-binder, opened Dositej's grave, collected his bones, consecrated them, put them in a linen bag, and buried them again together with a bottle containing a note on this action (Nikitović, 1989: 22). It appears that this event was also not very important for the public life of the capital of that period. Obradović experienced more significant posthumous glory only in 1897, and even then only in relation to the relocation of the mortal remains of Vuk Karadžić from Vienna.

It is not entirely clear who launched the initiative to bring Vuk's body to Belgrade, but its implementation would have certainly been impossible without the support and participation of state institutions of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Ministry of Education, the Serbian Royal Academy, Matica Srpska (a pre-eminent cultural institute) and King Aleksandar himself supported this project, which was undoubtedly an important strategic move in the process of organization of the young independent kingdom of Serbia (Gavrilović, 1898: 6, 15). As the transfer of Vuk's remains was being organized, the committee in charge decided at one meeting that this opportunity should also be used to refurbish the grave of Dositej Obradović in the churchyard of the Collegiate Church (Gavrilović, 1898: 9). However, as some committee members thought that this

would be to Dositej's detriment in comparison to Vuk, it was agreed that stone sarcophagi and lids inscribed with epitaphs should be ordered for both of them (Gavrilović, 1898: 10).

Before the coffin with Karadžić's mortal remains was seen off from Vienna in the presence of representatives of Austrian state authorities, the identification of Vuk's body had been performed. The coffin contained a well-preserved fez with a tassel, socks and pieces of clothing. As had previously been arranged between the Serbian Royal Academy and Slovenska Matica in Ljubljana, the mortal remains of Jernej Kopitar, a Slovene linguist and the reformer of Slovene literary language, were to be shipped to the fatherland together with Vuk. This joint transfer, as well as the joint church ritual to see off the two colleagues of different denominations and different national affiliations from the graveyard church in sent Marko's cemetery in Vienna, was based on the pan-Slavic idea and vision of the common state of close nations.

The train which carried the mortal remains of Vuk Karadžić was paid respects in all major towns that it passed through: Subotica, Novi Sad, Karlovci, Zemun. At each of these stations, the train was visited by numerous citizens who wanted to give the customary final kiss to the remains of this newly-established giant, while in some towns the solemnity of this post-funeral procession was emphasized by choir chants of mostly spiritual songs (Gavrilović, 1898: 51, 52). Speeches held on the occasion of the relocation of Vuk's remains mainly revolved around the glorification of his acts in the area of education and folk language, while the terms "eternity" and "heavenly immortality" were used only in the speeches of academician Stojan Novaković at the grave of Jernej Kopitar, which was opened at the same time as Vuk's. Glorifying Kopitar's work and linking him to the work of Vuk Karadžić, Novaković ended his speech with the following words: "May these respected remains go to the place where they will, in the middle of this new century, wait for the judgment day" (Gavrilović, 1898: 44). On the other hand, the author of Testimonial on the transfer of the dust of Vuk Karadžić, Andra Gavrilović, a school grammar teacher and member of the committee for the transfer of the remains, compares this event to

the transfer of the remains of Saint Sava to Serbia (Gavrilović, 1898: 57).

Apart from a large number of people from Belgrade, the solemn event of receiving the mortal remains of Vuk Karadžić was attended by the supreme representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, members of the King's government, state advisors, generals and the intellectual elite. Numerous organizations, associations and individuals joined the event with floral wreaths, while the members of the choir of the Serb school for teachers from Sombor wore black ribbons on that day, as a sign of mourning for the immortal giant (Gavrilović, 1898: 230). On the way from the railway station to the Collegial Church, the funeral procession passed through an undisrupted queue of Vuk's admirers, followed by priests, young theologians, a military band, singing societies, and church bells.

The funeral rites themselves were performed after the customs of the Orthodox Church service, and the Archbishop of Serbia and Metropolitane Mihajlo, as well as the Minister of education and church affairs Andra Nikolić, held speeches by the grave. While the wreaths were being laid, a mixed choir of “Obilić” and “Stanković” singing societies, sang a song specially prepared for the occasion, written by Josif Marinković with lyrics by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj (Gavrilović, 1898: 79).

This second funeral of Vuk took place on 30 September 1897. Dositej's remains had been consecrated some twenty days earlier, on 12 September. Interestingly, the grave of Djura Daničić, a significant Serb philologist, was renewed “at the same expense”. Daničić had died in Zagreb in 1882, was brought to Belgrade ten days later, and was buried at the expense of the state in Tašmajdan cemetery (Mladenović, 1981/82: 12). Daničić's grave was not actually opened, but its exterior had deteriorated badly before the 1897 renovation.

In any case, the sarcophagi of Dositej and Vuk are both still kept in the hall of the Collegiate Church in Belgrade, one on the left, and the other on the right of the main entrance. The establishment of the grave of Vuk Karadžić and the renewal of the grave of Dositej Obradović were intended to celebrate these important personalities in the history

of Serb culture; we can also say that the entire project was characterized by a strong political, strategic, and ideological background, the primary purpose of which was to establish and represent Serbia as an advanced, civilized and modern European state. Even so, the funeral ceremonies themselves had very limited enduring impact. This can be inferred because the graves do not have an important role in the collective memory of these celebrated Serb intellectuals (Pavićević, 2009a.). A much greater role in this is assigned to their monuments, memorials and museums, which were founded and established much later. The cults of these secular saints (if we can speak about a cult at all) may have been established through post-funerary rituals of transferring and consecrating their mortal remains, but the importance and impact of those rituals on the life of the nation are considerably less than those of the interment rituals connected to Serb saints before the age of Enlightenment.

### *Old rituals, new politics*

Even though it brought about the accelerated development of technology and general modernization of life, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also fraught with events that called for the relocation of mortal remains of the nation's great deceased. In 1941, the "incorruptible body" (meaning the miraculously preserved remains) of Saint-Prince Lazar was moved from Vrdnik monastery to Bešenovo (Jovičić-Nadj 1941: 109), while, as has been mentioned, in 1942 the relics of this saint were transferred to Belgrade, together with the relics of Emperor Uroš and Stefan Štiljanović, to be protected, under the roof of Belgrade Collegiate Church, from the devastating effects of World War II. The relics were solemnly received and then buried with all the proper religious ceremonies and services; in the few print media of the period, texts on these events were largely marked by anti-communist propaganda (Obnova, 16 April 1942; Novo vreme, 16 April 1942).

Shortly before these events, in 1940, the body of Kornelije Stanković, a significant Serb composer, collector of folk songs and missionary of the Serb musical spirit, was also brought to Belgrade.

Stanković's development was largely influenced by Vuk Karadžić; he died in Budapest in 1865. The transfer was initiated by the “Stanković” singing society, and state institutions apparently took part in the ceremony (Municipal newspapers of Belgrade, 1940: No. 2).

The practice of relocation, reception, and repeated burial of the dead continued after World War II. Thus, the mortal remains of Nikola Tesla, the great Serb scientist who spent most of his life in America, where he also died in 1943, were brought to Belgrade in July 1957. Tesla's case is a very special one; especially considering the fact that it was not the body, but the ashes, of the deceased that were brought to Belgrade; upon request of Tesla's nephew, Savo Kosanović, Tesla's body had been cremated several months after the original American burial. With the exception of saint Sava, this was the first case of a cremated deceased being celebrated posthumously, and the lack of an intact body must have considerably contributed to the low intensity of Tesla's posthumous glory at the time. Although cremation was introduced to Serbia in 1964 (and had been advertised in the US since the early 20th century as a modern, environmentally friendly and economically viable way to treat mortal remains), it has never acquired the status of a representative Serbian funeral. Famous persons, statesmen, politicians, artists, scientists, i.e. all those posthumously celebrated by the state, have, as a rule, been buried in the traditional manner. The urn with the ashes of Nikola Tesla was placed in his museum, and the question of its burial is still pending (Pešić, 2006; Pavićević 2014). To this subject whole part of my book about cremation in Serbia will be dedicated.

Let us also mention Rastko Petrović, the founder of the Serb avant-garde, a novelist, travel writer and diplomat, who died in Washington in 1949, and was brought to Belgrade in 1986 (Popović, 2003). The reception of this all-embracing intellectual was in no way grand. His body was not even buried in the Alley of the Great, but in the family tomb in Belgrade's New Cemetery. The funeral was attended mostly by admirers and connoisseurs of Petrović's work. The only representative of state and city institutions who attended the funeral was the Mayor of Belgrade at the time, Aleksandar Bakočević (Djurić, 1986:13; Damjanović 1986:13). In contrast, the previous two cases,



involving the mortal remains of Nikola Tesla and Rastko Petrović, the projects of celebration were apparently well organized and designed with a specific kind of branding in mind, i.e. bringing to the fatherland the bodies of the sons who belong to it. The process, combined by the power of those deceased's earlier actions in life, simply confirmed the greatness and values of their fatherland.

Transfers of the dead at the end of the 20th century, i.e. in the period of post-socialism, deserve not only particular attention, but a separate study as well. However, even a quick glance at such events from this period brings us to the conclusion that they have drawn on all the variants, models, functions and meanings which were characteristic of comparable funerary rituals in the previous periods. Remains, particularly of long dead saints, have continued to be moved and displayed at crucial historic moments, such as with the collapse of old and establishment of new regimes; overcoming of one ideology and introduction of another; wars and reconciliation, conquests and losses.

As Verdery (1999: 96) noted, the last wars on the territory of Yugoslavia were sparked by memories of the dead from previous conflicts. Meanwhile, the design and interpretation of the repeated encounters of the living with the dead were largely determined by the historical, political and ideological context: the collapse of communism, the collapse of the state, and the revitalization of Christian religiosity and the role of the Serb Orthodox Church in the life of the nation.

Considering the political circumstances under which these events took place, the transfer of the relics of Saint-Prince Lazar through Serbia and the mainly ethnic Serb territories in other parts of Yugoslavia which took place several times in the period 1988-1991, the return of the mortal remains of the Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović from America in 1991, and finally the return of the embalmed body of poet and diplomat Jovan Dučić, also from America to Trebinje in 2000 were events with strong political and strategic messages. It can even be said that this was their prevailing role – it was through such re-interments that the Serbian Orthodox Church once again reclaimed public space for its activities, which it had been denied in the communist period. At the

same time, Serb rulers with nationalistic inclinations used the same events to pave their own road to glory, while new, democratic political parties took each event as an opportunity to publish their programs and visions. These more or less widely known facts have overshadowed the complexity of the personalities of the deceased people who have been used in the relatively recent political developments. Yet imagery associated with these deceased leads us to the conclusion of this discussion.

I believe that the rhetoric of the transfer of Dučić was more or less clear. As he was a diplomat of pre-communist Yugoslavia as well as a poet and a writer with strong national enthusiasm, Dučić died in America in 1943 as a kind of political emigrant. He was first buried in the churchyard of a Serb monastery in Libertyville. Even though some parts of his poetic work, as well as the fact that he was, apparently by his own wish, embalmed, were opposed to Orthodox Christian beliefs, the Serbian Orthodox Church had an important role in the act of his celebration. His emigrant status, love for God and Serbhood, as well as the fact that he was the benefactor of the church in Trebinje were more significant than his possible spiritual failings. However, Dučić's transfer and funeral were a joint project of state and church, and its main messages were related to the processes and strategies for post-socialist identity formation (Čolović, 2002.). The intent was to make the process of Serb national renewal legitimate again (as it had been in the cases of Dositej Obradović and Vuk Karadžić); to confirm the Orthodox identity of the Serb people; and most of all, in the circumstances of Dučić's transfer, to decontaminate Serbia from the heritage of communism. Only the great from the pre-communist period could be accepted within the new/old national pantheon.

The greatest public debate was undoubtedly caused by the transfer of the mortal remains of Bishop Nikolaj (Čolović, 1990). His complex personality and rich biography were reasons to celebrate him for some, and to deny his right to holiness for others. This difference in public opinion does not, however, speak about the crucial contradictions of the personality of Nikolaj Velimirović as much as it does about the size of the gap within the Serb society and the conflicting visions of Serbia's

future. For Orthodox believers, obviously, the arrival of the holy relics of this Serb Chrysostom (as some call him, comparing him with Saint John Chrysostom) was an event of utmost spiritual importance, while for the non-Orthodox or non-believers this was yet another trigger for nationalist ideas and aspirations. Certainly, to embrace one side or the other would imply recognition of that political viewpoint, while only scratching the surface of historic events.

The posthumous arrival of Nikolaj Velimirović in Serbia took place at a time of not only nationalistic turmoil, but also in a period of the reassertion of the church's role in the life of the people. Even though this process has frequently been subject to political manipulation, it was also an expression of a sincere need to find a higher sense in historic developments. Decades of communism has ensured the marginalization of customary ideas and collective deliberations on death, as well as the reduction of traditional funerary rites, especially in urban environments. Yet this provided the ground on which post-socialist transformations in the systems of values and meanings took place.

The need for stability and the establishment of continuity with prior national traditions frequently had religious implications, so that post-socialism largely developed in the specific form of post-atheism, with all the resulting, frequently contentious, interpretations and manifestations. The celebration of Bishop Nikolaj, performed after the model of celebration of Saint Sava, thus had a primarily eschatological message, very important in the establishment of a new micro and macro world of meaning and sense, except that the macro world had become far less homogenous than in the time of St. Sava.

### *Finally, do dead speak?*

The multiple meanings and multi-functionality of rituals mentioned in this text rest upon the fact that they are primarily connected to death. The event of death, as an eternal secret entailing an unending stream of symbols and signs, opens up a whole range of possibilities to those who bear witness to it. The dead certainly do not

“Dead Man Walking” Exhumation and Reburial of Famous...

speak, as Verderi noted. Rather, the living may speak through the dead, by way of culture, history, politics, ideology and religion. Yet death, in turn, speaks through these realms of human life as a compressed reflection of civilization, always moving between the vertical and horizontal coordinates of human life, giving meaning and sense to this intricate fabric.

## Creating Heroes – Death, Religion and Politics

Regardless of the number and type of social functions which religiologists (from different areas of interest) ascribe to religions, it seems that central dogmas and beliefs of most religious systems are directed towards organization of the relationship between life and death, as well as organization of fundamental principles of life itself, in relation to the fact of its inevitable end. This is why throughout the whole history of civilization perception of death was inseparably linked with one religious ritual or another. It was used for the purpose of specific re-labeling of the corpse and *taming* of otherness, presented in the body of the deceased.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, religious funerary rituals have been used to prepare the deceased to encounter eternity, and to prepare the community to live without the deceased, or even to live with him/her, but in another form. The deep-rooted relationship between religion and death is corroborated not only by rich experience of the previous ages, but experiences from the modern era as well. Here, even though in somewhat changed forms, this relationship is reconfirmed, sometimes even in most unexpected contexts. At the level of collective patterns of opinion and behavior, this is reflected in worldly religions, which, as a sort of compensation, also occur along with diminishing of power of classical, institutional religions, and which largely rest on the test of death itself. Religion of nation, as well as personality cults (especially well-developed in socialist countries), confirm their fundamental beliefs by monuments and memorials commemorating incidental death, spectacular funerals and funerary rites, skillfully manipulating religious rhetoric on the relationship between the historical and eschatological time, finality and eternity (Toynbee 1998:34; Verdery 1999:99 ). In the area of private and individual, the unwillingness to part with the deceased and lack of alternative means of separation frequently transform even atheist

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<sup>1</sup> The term *taming* is used quite frequently by Philippe Aries.

funerals into religious acts.<sup>1</sup> Virtual cemeteries, funerals on the Ocean bottom, and various other projects, such as, for instance, Woodland Burial – which is becoming increasingly popular in Great Britain, testify to reshaping of mnemotechnics of the post-modern man which, in turn, frequently reveal similarly reshaped forms of his religiousness (Rumble 2009; Kubiak 2009).

Return to religion or return of religions, which as a global phenomenon emerged in the 1980s, occurred in various forms in different parts of the world. Whether it was occurrence of neo-pagan understanding of natural forces or various other alternative, occult and other metaphysical systems, increased interest in Eastern cults, or restoration of major institutional religions, developments in the end of the second and the beginning the third millennium have largely contested rapture of the supporters of the secularization thesis (Berger 2008: 12). Namely, at the moment it was *discovered*, secularization was regarded by sociology as a one-way process of social changes and spiritual transformation caused by “an increasingly rational state of spirit” (Djordjević 1995: 15). With this on mind, the rekindled interest in religion and religious institutions in lives of communities and individuals was for many an unexpected phenomenon; thus, it was also interpreted in various manners – from utter denial that this was a real return to faith and religion, to perception that this was about the process of thorough desecularization of the world (Berger 2008; Blagojević 2009:98). It was multiplication of forms and content of new religiousness that aggravated objective assessment of the scope and nature of the phenomenon; they were frequently developed in view of the relation between the traditional and the modern, and need to be treated as phenomena with many layers and meanings. This is why we should seriously take into consideration Grace Davie’s suggestion that return to religion must be interpreted in terms of its historical, social and cultural contexts (Davie 2008: 82, 84, 90), however, I would add, in terms of universalities of human cultures which religion frequently

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<sup>1</sup> Here the term *religious* is used in its broadest sense – implying any behaviour and opinion which, in one way or another, attempts to transcend reality and give it a meaning outside the materialistic concept of the world and human life.

testifies to as well.

Rekindling of interest in social roles of religions and churches in the territory of former SFRY in the 1990s was going hand in hand with the wars between the constitutive republics and nations of this country, as well as with the deep social, economic and political crisis in the region. Strategies aimed at constituting new/old nations and nationalities implied, among other things, establishment of continuity with religious traditions of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches and Moslem Community. The historic relations between confessional and ethnic affiliation, especially in the case of Orthodox and Catholic religions, turned out to be of crucial importance in pretensions which the combating sides expressed in terms of definition of new frontiers. This is why in scientific and public opinion the process of revitalization of religion was frequently interpreted only as a key to the religion of the nation and nationalism. To an extent, this was really so – return to religion frequently did not originally relate to interest in important truths of the Christian religion, while the increased attendance of religious rites, such as baptizing and wedding, as well as celebration of patron saint's day of the family, frequently only reflected a neo-romantic attitude to the national folklore and ethnic affiliation it presented. Apart from this, almost obligatory participation of church in public rituals of establishment of new memorials, relocation of monuments, manipulation with dead bodies, mass gatherings and spectacular funerals of public personalities, which became almost an everyday phenomenon of the Serb/Yugoslav society, unambiguously connected new religions to the idea of nation (Verderi 1999; Radić 2002; Cvitković 2003; Pavićević 2011). However, this was, and still is, but one side of the phenomenon of return to religion. To conclude that it is its essence and that its analysis would here become exhausted would mean to remain on the surface of phenomena of social, cultural and historic developments. Prudence in its interpretation is invited by several facts.

Firstly, the fact that instrumentalization of the relationship between religion and death is a phenomenon known of in each epoch and each ideology, whether it is nationalistic, imperial, communist, democratic,

etc, speaks primarily in favor of universality and irreplaceability of the symbolic capital of this relationship, rather than of essential parameters of religiousness of its protagonists. Secondly, it should be noted that simultaneously with the aforementioned manners of use and expression of *religious* feelings, the number of active believers was increased<sup>2</sup>, specific renaissance of church life and art happened, while the activities of the Serbian Orthodox Church were intensified as well in modernization of its missionary activities in the lives of Orthodox believers (Mitrović 2008; Blagojević 2005). Apart from this, an increase in the number of various religious and para-religious communities and cults: oracles, occults, witch-doctors, gurus, mediation groups, etc. which had nothing to do whatsoever with the idea of the nation was noted in Serbia. And lastly, though not least importantly, research has shown that throughout the period of rule of communism as the state ideology, as well as after its toppling, in Central Serbia the number of funerals performed with religious rituals was not decreased, unlike the number of baptisms and weddings performed according to Orthodox traditions (Jovančević 2000:274).<sup>3</sup> This data primarily relates to rural communities and provincial towns, whereas in Belgrade a significant increase in the number of church funerals has taken place since the 1990s.

For all the abovementioned, it appears that return to religion must be interpreted in a more universal context than the one offered by the religion of the nation. It can actually be interpreted as a specific *return to death*, i.e. as an attempt to produce a counter-weight against long-term censorship imposed against opinion and discourse about death in a modern society (Arijes 1988; Toma 1980; Cook&Walter 2005). This dimension of rekindling of interest in religion could be perceived as a platform for all its secondary occurrences. On the other hand,

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<sup>2</sup> Here *active* means those who relatively regularly participate in the life of the church, i.e. in religious services and holy secrets, primarily confession and communion.

<sup>3</sup> This data relates to an eparchy in Sumadija, one of the largest in Serbia. The comparison was performed based on data on the number of the baptized, married, and last rites in the years between 1948-1998 and 1949-1999.



when speaking about the level of the collective and the public, this statement could also be interpreted the other way round. Exposing of death publicly almost always implies revocation of religious symbols. Public funerals take place as specific religious rituals, regardless of proclaimed ideological affiliation of the epoch they take place in (Pavićević 2009b:226; Miloradović 2007:84). In more recent Yugoslav/Serb history, this is corroborated by seeing off of the body and funeral of Josip Broz Tito, Zoran Đinđić, even Slobodan Milošević. From a pharaoh-like funeral to pharaoh-like mortality, via the martyr-like death and Christian funeral of the one who would, because of the sacrifice suffered, be eternally remembered by the generations to come, to the funeral in the front yard of a family house, under the favorite tree, these events reflected different religious ideas incorporated in the foundations of secular ideologies which these deceased were the main representatives of (Pavićević 2011: 176).<sup>4</sup>

It is important to emphasize that mentioned events were also directed towards collective memory creation, so I'll refer to this question as well. In his capital study about death, Louis Vincent Thomas, expressed his expectation that memo techniques were going to be improved till beginning of new millennia. Transformed and modernized techniques of memorizing were supposed to replace mausoleums and crypts (Thomas 1980/1: 78). But, as we know this didn't happen. Memory techniques that we have today, are quite similar to those even from the ancient times. This was pointed out in Katherine Verdery's study, where she showed continuity of political thanatology praxes – continuity that connects ancient times and nowadays (Verdery 1999: 1). And though it is true that internet memorials, virtual cemeteries and other cyber techniques of memorizing suggest the direction of transformation, complete replacement of *traditional* forms and means of keeping memories is still far from our reality (Kubiak 2009: 121 – 128).

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<sup>4</sup> Focus of analyses is going to be on media presentation of these events and on the relation and position of dead bodies in these funeral rituals. In the case of funeral of patriarch Pavle, interviews with participants in the funeral procession were conducted as well.

### *Josip Broz Tito – Pharaoh of Yugoslav Socialism*

The most striking event of death of one public person, in former Yugoslavia certainly was the death and funeral of Josip Broz Tito, president of SFRJ, and one of the last “pharaohs” in the region. It happened in May 1980, announcing the end of an epoch which had still immense consequences on life of people from the former Yugoslav region. Symbolically it represented final demolition of proclaimed rationalistic and secular scene of communist ideology and disclosed that in its bases, complex religious symbolic and rhetoric were embedded (Miloradović 2007: 84).

In Days after Tito’s death, media didn’t bring any other information but that one. This rhetoric was not so much about his illness, last moments and eventual suffers he passed through. That kind of privatization and “humanization” of his personality was unthinkable. Contents of articles were unequivocally directed towards confirming and building for eternity the image of his almighty, heroic personality. Photos that followed the texts were illustrating common people in great sorrow – workers in their fabrics, villagers in their fields, children in school, and soldiers in their units. Pictures of Tito’s family in pain were few and moderate, confirming that frames of family privacy were too narrow and too common for one giant as he was considered to be.

Tito entered the collective memory while he was still alive. He was the only alive public person to whom monuments and sculptures were raised and his name was the only one to be given to streets (Bondžić 2009: 165).<sup>5</sup> Media concept of his death represented continuation of remembering – main role of which was to negate the fact that almighty ruler was dead. The same epithet – immortality and unlimited power was also ascribed to ideology and state whose personification Tito was. From present position it is clear that malfunctioning of the system happened much before Tito died, this is why 7 days long funeral ritual can be considered as certain opinion making process. The ritual which was transmitted through national television, operated with most honest

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<sup>5</sup> This was regulated by Instruction of Commission for agitation and propaganda.

feelings of belonging and adoring that most of Yugoslav people had for Tito and Yugoslavia. We can say that these were kind of latent functions of the ritual, but what was explicit was not less important – emotional vacuum had to be bridged giving the sense of continuing life without adored person.

TV program as well as printed media dedicated their broadcasts and issues exclusively to memory of Josip Broz. No cartoons, no music, except classical, no movies, except with thematic from the World War II (Politika May 4 – 10<sup>th</sup> 1980: TV program).

Tito's corpse was exposed in the solemn hall of Federation Parliament. To be more precise, the closed coffin was exposed around which in following days more that 2 million people passed by paying last respect to the leader. Analyzing procession that lasted for seven days, one cannot avoid the questions related to the fact that coffins are always closed when public persons are inside: Why are they closed? And, are celebrities inside? Seven days sounds quite long for the corps to be exposed. Was this so because Tito's leg was cut and his corps was probably not very pleasant picture to look at... Or it was because sense of immortality could not be created other way? Death is too obvious.

Tito was buried in the House of flowers – previously his working space which became his mausoleum visited by numerous pilgrims in following years. Tito's presence in the life of his vassals was decreasing in time that followed. In next 10 years memories were reheated by marking the day and moment of his death – by loud sirens every 4<sup>th</sup> of May in 03.05 PM and by celebrating his fictive birthday which was labeled as Day of youth – reminding of eternal youth of pharaoh like ruler (Politika May 25<sup>th</sup> 1980: 1).

Last birthday wishes were delivered to the death president in 1988 and last sound of sirens stopped the life in 1990. That was the time of new ruler coming to replace the old one and to change direction and contents of collective memory patterns (Lukić-Krstanović 2010: 109 – 117; Politika May 5<sup>th</sup> 1990:6).

I find significant the fact that moment of death was marked longer than day of birth. Beside this, Tito's grave was the place of mass pilgrimage even after 1990. This facts may lead us to conclusion that

it was the event of death (though, as we said, it was transformed and negated by techniques of collective memorizing) that was the source of long lasting Tito's postmortem fame. The reason for this may be searched in the known fact that communistic ideology represented specific secular, political religion, whose system of signs and symbols was greatly based on loans from traditional religion systems, so death and spectacular funeral of last great communist leader showed up the sacral nature of extreme secular ideology (Miloradović 2007: 84, 85). Death was the event that contributed to post mortem deification of Broz's personality. It strengthened and prolonged his cult. It's question if his cult and ideology he promoted would have pass through coming historical temptation if he would have lived longer?

### *Zoran Đinđić – Martyr and National Hero*

Since that order of dying of modern Serbian rulers was a bit different than order of ruling, we'll first talk about death and postmortem destiny of Zoran Đinđić, first democratic premier of Serbia, who was assassin at 12<sup>th</sup> of the March 2003. Considering instable political situation in Serbia at that time and the fact that Đinđić's political strategy was very much criticized from the side of different political actors, the same question, as in Tito's case, can be raised: namely, what his political destiny would be if he was not assassin?

Zoran Đinđić assassination was disturbing and quite shocking event. It interrupted already slow and uncertain normalization of life in Serbia that was expected from the side of its citizens, particularly those who participated 5<sup>th</sup> October Revolution in 2000, by which Slobodan Milošević and his government were thrown down.

Suddenness and tragic features of this event were both mirrored and suggested from media. News about assassination dominated front pages of all dally papers, while the inside pages were full of articles in which Đinđić's political and *human* character and his merits in the democratization processes were glorified.

But, though it was quite shocking and disturbing, this event did not bring complete detent of everyday life, at least not so explicitly as

it was the case when Josip Broz died (Politika March 14<sup>th</sup> 2003: A21). On the other side, fact that first longer period of official sorrow after Tito's death was announced as well as announcing emergency state in the country, testify that this event provoked almost mystical fear of system destabilization. This can explain spectacular funeral through which Đinđić was sent off.

There was not procession around the coffin. Instead, citizens could express their condolences by signing in the books of mourning that were opened in offices of Democratic Party, all around the country. Books of mourning were installed also at internet and they were full of sorrow, but also of glorification of Đinđić's political character. He was observed as the only politician with clear (European) vision of Serbian state and people. Beside this, numerous obituaries in press were published signed by friends, colleges, political parties, institutions, famous public persons and anonymous supporters (Politika March 14<sup>th</sup> 2003: B10 – B17). This was the point of strong differentiation between Tito and Đinđić – while in the Tito's case it was unthinkable to be among common mortals, for Đinđić, that is for bereaved nation, it was unthinkable not to see him there. This was kind of confirmation of his image of common, informal family person, intellectual and patriot – image that should make him figure available and recognizable for everyone, for every Serbian citizen (Politika April 21<sup>st</sup> 2003: 5; Politika March 12<sup>th</sup> 2005; Politika March 13<sup>th</sup> 2006: 1). Photos of his family published both in days around assassination and later when publicly remembering him, had the same aim. They were evidence of Đinđić being made of flash and blood. And more than this: while Broz's character was created as character of specific pagan, unreachable and untouchable divinity, in Zoran Djindić's image, strong Christian symbolic was embedded – using rhetoric which presented him as martyr for the benefits of the nation and as one who suffered and died for his justness.

It is important to mention that most numerous press articles were dedicated to possible reconstructions of his assassination. This was the point that was mostly emphasized even later on, when publicly remembering his deeds – usually at the anniversary of the murder.

The fact that very assassination appears as the most important point in construction collective memory leads us to the conclusion that his postmortem glory was not primarily based on his political deed, but on the way he died. It is question, the same as in Tito`s case, what would happened with his public image and his political reputation and if he would remain adored if assassination didn`t happen or if he died from some “natural” cause?

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Đinđić was not particularly religious person, he was sent off as Orthodox Christian with highest state and church honors. The mass procession, following the coffin, passed through central Belgrade streets to Saint Sava Church (which has great significance both for old and new ideas about Serbian national identity) where Orthodox Christian requiem was performed (Politika March 16<sup>th</sup> 2003: 1). The closed coffin was situated in the central part of the church, surrounded by members of his family and closest political associates. After the service and preach made by highest representative of Serbian Orthodox church, procession with several hundred thousand people continued its trip to the cemetery. Đinđić was buried in common city cemetery – one of the oldest and most beautiful one in Serbia, in the parcel where meritorious citizens are buried – artists, doctors, politicians, scientists... Every anniversary of Đinđić`s death is marked by different public events, among others – by visiting his grave, which thus became important place of collective memories. Separation of this famous deceased from this world, followed Christian and traditional *dogma* about important moments of soul`s trip towards eternity – 7 days, 40 days, half of the year and a year after death were marked by intensifying public discourses about irreplaceable lost (Politika March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2003: B16; Politika April 21<sup>st</sup> 2003: 1; Politika September 12<sup>th</sup> 2003:G12).

Intensive usage of Christian rhetoric and symbols in creating memory should be observe within phenomenon of religious revival and, more than this within re-actualization of social role of the church, which happened in all post communist countries.

On the other hand, it is important to mention that postmortem character of Serbian premiere was built upon the model of so called

exemplar death, heroic and martyr like death, death which was considered as sacrifice for the benefit of the nation. This concept is related to system marked (by anthropologists) as “religion of the nation”, concept that originates in 19<sup>th</sup> century – time of intensive nation building in Serbia (Čolović 1996: 49). Namely, creating modern national state meant certain level of secularization of society and new structuring of historical legacies and memories. This was the time of intensive enthroning heroes of the nation – process that was related to revision of eschatological (vertical) principles of Christian dogma and their replacing with promises of historical (horizontal) and eternal glory and remembering from the side of descendents (Timotijević 2001: 39). Using exactly this model was in correlation with idea of national revival and construction of new/old national identity – which followed transitional processes in Serbia.

So, while Tito, who as kind of polytheistic divinity continued to walk on earth, Zoran Đinđić irreversibly moved in Heaven’s national Pantheon. Periodically remembering his merits for building Serbian road to Europe, but his assassination as well, opened the space for political instrumentalisation of memories in which very event of death, colored by Christian and nationalistic rhetoric plays important role.

### *Slobodan Milošević – Grave under the Linden*

Third anniversary of Zoran Đinđić’s death, in 2006, was in the media shadow of sudden event – Slobodan Milošević, ex president of SRJ died in the prison unit of Hague Tribunal. Since that he was almost completely absent from public discourses and since that media for a long time did not have such hot news, they were flooded by photos of Slobodan Milošević, and articles about his death, politics, pro and contra arguments... With this, period of intensive re remembering was announced. Closeness of dates when they died was not the only common thing for these two politicians – Đinđić and Milošević. The other common feature emerge from the fact that Milošević died in the prison, which automatically meant that for the part of the Serbian society he was going to be crowned by the hollow of sanctity. This was

related to the quite often pattern in Serbian national history and epic poetry where kings and rulers imprisoned by the enemies (usually of other confession or nation) sacrifice themselves and on the end die for the benefits of the nation (Dimitrijević 2001; Mileusnić 1989:10, 84, 108). This was supported by most often expressed doubt in public discourses that Milošević did not die, but that he was murdered.

Short lasting postmortem glory of Slobodan Milošević was thus built following the pattern of Christian – martyr like death (the same as in the case of Đinđić). On the other hand, liminal ideological position that Milošević had (between communism and democracy) stipulated presence of other rhetoric as well. Thus, his fare well presented combination of pagan and Christian motives which, during several days after his death, *marched* through media images in Serbia (Vesti March 17<sup>th</sup> 2006:5).

There was even one more speculation about his destiny. I've heard it in the city bus, while traveling to my office. Two older men, probably pensioners talked and one of them said: "He is not dead. He can't be. They just let him go to Russia and they are going to inhumate empty coffin".

I thought, if this kind of tale gets media support, Slobodan Milošević is going to become definitely immortal. Fortunately this didn't happen, but I was again moved by the question – why coffins are rarely opened at funerals of rulers (we have also different examples such was the case with Lenin's mummy which was quite exposed for watching). What influences the selection of traditional and religious patterns that are used at these funerals? Is coffin closed because presence of death have to be moderate and carefully balanced, or it is closed because the very death is just a side matter of ruler's funeral?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I have recently discovered the fact that corps of Djuro Salaj, national hero and one of the most prominent fighter for syndical rights, was exposed in open coffin during his funeral in 1958. Though this event deserves thorough anthropological analyses of historical, cultural and ideological background, in which it took place, we can presuppose that the coffin was open due to still present traditional attitudes towards death as well as due to still undeveloped process of pushing death to the margins of everyday life, process by which the end of the millennia was marked.



Again, maybe there is really no one inside?

Nevertheless, this modern tale would not be complete if forensics did not appear. Since that the cause of Milošević's death was unknown, they took his hearth for the abduction (Vesti March 17<sup>th</sup> 2006: 5). Regardless to its prosaic nature, this act initiated chain of new archetypal images which reminded on familiar motives from wide spread traditional tales. In them, sources of power of the Hero, which are stolen, inserted or lost – hair, soul, eyes, and hearth – are hidden at some unreachable place – in the secret basement, at the bottom of the sea or in the lap of the Giant (Karadžić 1969: 157).<sup>7</sup> Slobodan Milošević's hearth was, thus brought to Belgrade in special box, separately from the casket with his corps.

Beside the question about the way he died, there were two more important or just more practical issues to be solved: how was he going to be send off and where to? These decisions were up to his party associates, but much more up to his political opponents. Later denied any possibility to perform the funeral at state level, or at any "special" place which would confirm positive postmortem identity of the deceased. Some possibilities for seeing off Milošević were: Offices of Socialist party (but they were quite small to receive expected number of citizens), Federal Parliament (place where Tito's mortal remains were exposit), Museum of revolution (nearby Tito's mausoleum) and tent (which irresistibly associated everyone on branded Serbian trumpet festival in Guča) (Politika March 17<sup>th</sup> 2006: 7). Despite the fact that no institution wanted to receive such "problematic", not to say tabooed deceased, Museum of Revolution was "chosen" for the procession. I believe that it was so exactly because of what is considered as main purpose of museums – to expose objects which are not in the use anymore, objects that belong to past.

Appointing the place for Milošević eternal house was tough question as well. Again there were several possible solutions: one was to bury him in Moscow – option that would bring release to state officials, but new potential myth as well. There was a danger, as

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, see motif from famous Serbian tale Baš Čelik.

one prominent journalist wrote that in this case, “Sloba never dies” (Žarković 2006: 6). And he was right. His funeral had to be performed as obvious and obviously final. Second solution was – Belgrade’s oldest cemetery, precisely, Alley of Honored (where Đinđić’s tomb is), which was also unacceptable because of possible *post mortem activities* of the dead. And, most unexpected decision was made: Slobodan Milošević was going to be buried in the yard of his family house in Požarevac, under the linden, tree he loved the most (Glas javnosti March 16<sup>th</sup> 2006: 2-3). All this epopee should have pointed out undesirable, wrongdoer character of the deceased. Association it should have provoked was related to traditional custom to bury suiciders, murderers, buglers and other criminals outside of village graveyard. But something completely different happened. Association upon this matter penetrated into Christian context which is rich with examples of saints and martyrs who, after exodus and sufferings were entombed at some secret places – quite often in the yards around houses of Christians. Pagan and totemic cults were present as well, since that pre-Christian traditions were familiar with worship of ancestors inhumed behind the family house.

Coffin with Slobodan Milošević’s mortal remains were transported to Belgrade by plane. Precisely speaking there were three coffins, one in another, made of different kinds of wood and metal. Fairy tale motive about three layered box with secret source of power was spoiled only because of plastic strips which wrapped the parcel.

Very funeral was not particularly significant for our analyses, but let me just say that Slobodan Milošević was buried without religious service (though some speculations about it were spread around), his coffin was covered by Serbian flag and there were no cross, only obelisk with name and years of birth and death. Coffin was descended escorted by melody of some Russian ballade. After seven day lasting metaphysical, or, as some journalists wrote – necrophilia spectacle, grave under the linden, which is, by the way, considered as sacred tree in Slav Mythology was covered by sudden silence.

But, it seems that in the years that followed, Milošević did not rest in peace. On the recent photos of his grave, one can see sculpture and

cross that appeared above the tomb (Glas javnosti March 11<sup>th</sup> 2012). Nevertheless, the story about these new ideological inputs we'll leave for future research.

In presented cases we saw how different patterns of religious opinion and behaving were inbuilt in funeral rhetoric's of three political leaders. What is interesting is the fact that political ideas and ideologies they represented were of more or less extreme secular/even atheist nature. This may bring us to conclusion that phenomenon of death is the source of crucial symbolic capital in all societies and in all times. And, no matter how secularized society is, it's symbolic thesaurus is tightly related to religion, that is to cult which is the source of whole culture.

Nevertheless, here we will represent one more case that significantly differs from previous. It is about death, fare well and funeral of 44<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Serbian Orthodox Church, patriarch Pavle, which was explicitly based on religious conceiving of death.

### *Patriarch Pavle - "Soul made of dandelion"*

Send off and funeral of patriarch Pavle was certainly an event which, by many of its features, fits into the previously described models of ideological uses of religious discourse on the phenomenon of death. However, also having the aforementioned in mind, I believe that a deconstructivistic procedure may be applied in its (and not only its) analysis, significantly different than the ones which as of recently prevail in anthropological analyses. Shifting of the focus of the analysis from the final image of reality suggested by a certain social ritual to the processes of its formation *bottom-up* should give an answer to a larger number of questions than the ones relating to anthro-political aspects of the event. Thus, the final goal of the research would not be to reveal implicit ideological messages of the ritual, because they are not as implicit any more, but the answer to the question which systems of individual and collective values participate in its shaping and how. Here there are also many other questions we will try to find the answer to: which means were used to form the images of death in the public

discourse on the occasion of this event? Was the funeral primary a political or religious event? What does the several-day long ceremony of seeing off of the body of Patriarch Pavle say about religiousness of the citizens of Serbia? And, is such content of public events caused by the current *spiritual* climate or does it *produce* such climate?

The Episcopo of Raška-Prizren Eparchy Pavle was appointed Patriarch of Serbian Orthodox Church in 1990. The period of time he spent on that position was fraught with intense political and armed turmoil, social and economic turbulence, ideological and cultural changes. The return of the Church to the public and social scene in Serbia was a process fraught with contradiction, at the same time supported and denied by the public. Patriarch Pavle was not especially active in the area of state politics. He kept in touch both with the authorities and opposition, which is why some called him *the Balkan peacekeeper*, while the other perceived him as an advocate of war (Skroza 2005). His public addresses in political developments were also interpreted differently; however, the fact that they were quite innumerable places his activities in this area of social life outside the focus. Patriarch Pavle was considerably more focused on Christian missionary activities, resolution of church-specific issues, as well as issues of spiritual life of his flock. His personal asceticism, modesty and fervency in religious services, completely distinguished his personality from the setting, and made him quite loved by not only believers, but Serbian citizens indifferent to religious considerations as well (Žarković 2009). These personal traits of his and his way of living would have considerable impact to the shaping of the public image on his death and funeral.

Patriarch Pavle encountered his final hour at hospital, where he spent the last two years of his life. He died in his sleep, aged 95, having received the holy secret of communion, on 15. November 2009. It was an ideal- type end of life of a Christian and even could be seen as act of *ars moriendi*. The news on the Patriarch's death were published by almost all electronic media on the same morning. Even though it was not quite clear when and how the seeing off of the body would be organized, citizens started to gather spontaneously in front of the Patriarchate building and Collegiate Church. In the afternoon, the body

of the deceased was brought to the Patriarchate, where from, after a short service, it was taken to Collegiate Church. President of Serbia Boris Tadić was among those who carried the coffin with the body of the deceased. The open coffin was displayed in the central part of Collegiate Church; in the several days which followed several hundred thousand people who wanted to pay the last respect to the Patriarch passed by it in a procession. Apart from citizens of Serbia, monks and priests, church officials and representatives of various religion communities, this multitude of *pilgrims* included a large number of domestic politicians and political representatives of other countries. Regardless of the fact that the seeing off of the body was taking place in the period of general concern due to the epidemic of H1N1 virus, the so – called “swine flu”, which is why citizens were advised to wear protective masks and avoid public gatherings, thousands of people were waiting in the several kilometer long queue, which stretched throughout the centre of the city for hours, waiting to enter Collegiate Church and pass the death bed. In the church, religious services were performed at all times, while consistent media reports on the developments contributed to establishing the atmosphere of general participation in the sacrament. Here, the unusual media unanimity, lack of sensationalism, as well as general empathy which took place in the queue for the *last kiss*, suggested that this was a special social event (Pralica 2010:148). The analysis of print media, Internet forums and discussions, and the question poll I conducted myself<sup>8</sup> point to several key points of public discourse and experience of this event.

Attitudes on the personality of Patriarch Pavle occur as one of general points in statements made by citizens. It is emphasized that he was a unique example of modesty and simplicity of a public figure, crowned by *a halo of sanctity* during his life already. Media also supported this image of the deceased. In print media, cover pages which published the news on the Patriarch’s death were followed by texts on

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<sup>8</sup> The question poll included 25 respondents with high educational background. The group consisted of seven active believers, five traditional believers, and thirteen declared atheists. As many as eleven of them took part in seeing off the body of the Patriarch: six active believers, four traditional ones, and an atheist.

his life. They described his life path from his childhood of a poor boy without parents, then as a young teacher of religious education who jeopardized his own health to save a pupil from drowning, a monk and soon afterwards an episcope, who thus spent most of his years in Kosovo and Metohija. His close associates, as well as officials of the Patriarchate, remembered him as the only Patriarch who mended his own shoes, patched his clothes, turned off the lights left on in corridors, fixed door handles, etc (Kurir 17.Nov.2009:4,5). The accompanying photos presented the scenes from the Patriarch's youth, before and after he became a monk, and his recent life – a little white-haired old man, riding on a public bus (instead of in an luxurious official car), walking the streets of Belgrade, by himself or accompanied by his spiritual children, but always without security guards, or walking by the deceased Serb Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, while his long robe flapping around his legs, irresistibly revoking the coat of the Little Prince from the front page of the novel (Politika 16. Nov.2009).<sup>9</sup> A large number of headlines were composed as metaphors, some of which directly relied on Christian terminology and understanding of sanctity, while others merely suggested elevation and subtlety of both the Patriarch's personality and his death, not connecting it to a concrete religious context. In the first issue of the *Politika* daily published after the death of the Patriarch, there is the headline "People saw him as a living saint" (Politika 16.Nov.2009:1). In the same issue, in the column entitled "Reactions", comments of Serbian public figures were published depicting the Patriarch as a *righteous man* (stated by V. Kostunica), *a person of biblical goodness* (Belgrade Rabbi, Isak Asijel), *a union of the heavenly and the worldly* (Emir Kusturica), *dedicated to God and his people* (Eparch Amfilohije). In the supplement to the *Pres* daily, which was fully dedicated to the death of Patriarch Pavle, headlines were even more suggestive than this: "Serb Patriarch – a saint!" (The Pres 17 Nov. 2009:1); "From an infirm boy to the living saint" (Ibid: 2); and "Ascetic life of a saint" (Ibid: 4, 5). The journalists' text under the headlines were unanimous praising the modesty as well

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<sup>9</sup> *Seeing of Serb Patriarch Pavle. From Death to Life*, Pertinent booklet with photos and short comments edited by Serbian Orthodox Church, Novembar 2009.



Patriarch Pavle and Zoran Đinđić



Little Prince

as human and Christian virtues of the deceased, while the impression was intensified by photos – on one of them the Patriarch was shown in his liturgical clothes, with a cross in his hand, his face lit by light from some unidentified source. In the background, there is a photo of the Patriarch on his death bed, dressed in ceremonial robes, with a shiny mitre on his head, eyes tranquilly closed, and hands crossed on his chest, piously kissed by a female pilgrim (The Pres 16 Nov. 2009:7). The scope of poetic perception of the Patriarch's personality was especially emphasized by captions in one of the texts: "He was called a walking saint, while some said that his soul was made of dandelion" (Pešić 2009: 4).

When asked how they explained such a grand funeral of the Patriarch, my respondents, fewer than half of whom attended it themselves, were almost unanimous in revoking the supreme ethical authority of the deceased thanks to his human traits. Apart from this,

it is interesting to mention that religiousness of those who stood in the queue to part with the Patriarch was not an unquestioned feature. There were both active and traditional believers, but atheists and agnostics as well, extreme nationalists, and those in whose identity ethnic affiliation did not play a significant role. It appears that in this event everyone found something for oneself.

In the analysis of this event and its public presentation, the manner in which images of death itself were shaped as well as the ideas about afterlife of this important person seemed to me especially important. The most important characteristic of this narrative is the fact that unlike other events of the kind, the emphasis was not placed on presentation of death as the tragic outcome of human life. Even though some print media, likely to shock the public anyway and prone to sensationalism, emphasized the tragic fact of the death of the Patriarch and uncertainty it brought about, quiet sorrow was the prevailing tone in the public, but also acceptance, gratitude, and respect. Thus, simultaneously with the statement made by the late Patriarch's granddaughter published by the Pres: "I lost my grandfather, Serbia lost everything" (The Pres 16.Nov:1) and headlines such as: "An irreparable loss" (The Kurir 17.Nov:1), there are also statements made by citizens who attended the funeral who experienced Patriarch's death as *the saddest day*, but also hope that they got a representative in heaven, as *loss*, but also as *pledge for further life without him* (Kurteš 2009:4). Reasons for such understanding and perception of death, contrary to shocking and increasingly explicit pictures published by media on almost daily basis are numerous. Firstly, the Patriarch died at a very old age, peacefully and without suffering. Secondly, his life path, activities, and ideas largely contributed to unanimity of media messages and individual interpretations which unambiguously relied on the Christian concept of death. It depicts death as a precondition for eternal life, and *a ticket to the Heavenly kingdom*. This is why the use of terms suggesting faith and hope in existence of some other reality the Patriarch went to, which will become accessible to anyone who follows the path of virtue, was an important feature of the public discourse. *Encounter with God, angels*, and sojourn *in heaven* in the days between the Patriarch's death



and funeral became quite usual sintagms of the public discourse. The large photo published in the special supplement of the *Pres* which showed a white dove with its wings stretched in the foreground, while the background depicted the blue sky with a church dome and a cross on it, was especially suggestive (the *Pres* 17.Nov:1). The perception of the Patriarch's death as a sad, however not tragic event, was supported by citation of various anecdotes from his life, as well as examples of his wittiness, which always contained some life moral as well.<sup>10</sup> The archaic relationship between death and laughter here had the role in establishment of collective mental balance on the one hand (Stevanović 2009), confirming the Christian concept of a saint as a common person accessible to everyone on the other. Thus, the Christian concept of sanctity also simultaneously became a spiritual achievement available to everyone.

The last topic I would like to single out as important and which occurred quite frequently in print media on the days of seeing off of the body of Patriarch Pavle was quoting of some of his morals stated during church sermons, or on the occasion on interviews with media representatives. Here we could single out two morals with the greatest frequency of repetition (in print media and on forums) which I will quote as a whole for the purpose of further commenting:

“If I were the last Serb, I would accept to perish, if it implied no crimes... I would accept that not only the great, but small Serbia perish as well, and all Serbs together with me, but I would not accept inhuman and inhumane behavior” (Pešić 2009: 4; the *Pres* 17.Nov: 5).<sup>11</sup>

“Let us beware those who are inhuman, and becoming inhuman

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<sup>10</sup> One of the most frequently quoted statements was the one relating to the Patriarch's comment on the luxurious cars used to transport bishops of Serb Orthodox Church. Namely, having seen a number of black sedans in front of the Patriarchate, and having learned that they belonged to his “colleagues”, he asked his interlocutor, what bishops (monks, that is) would be riding in had they not taken the vow of modesty and non-owning (taken by monks when becoming a monk) (<http://www.blic.rs/vesti/tema-dana/120727/Tihi-odlazak-duhovnog-vodje> )

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.blic.rs/vesti/tema-dana/120727/Tihi-odlazak-duhovnog-vodje>

even more” (the Politika 16.Nov: 1; the Pres17.Nov: 5)

The primary message of these morals of the Patriarch is certainly aimed at emphasizing the supranational quality of Christian religion. It was also reflected in the relationship between important ideological patterns of the public discourse on the death of the Patriarch. Namely, even though it contained evident traditional-national-confessional rhetoric, it was in the shadow of universal human values depicted in the person of Patriarch Pavle. However, I believe that a lot more can be found in emphasizing of these morals. They may be interpreted as a powerful anti-nationalist message relating to disputable moments of more recent Serb history, and even more in relation to pro-European state policy.

A part of the public opinion, as well as a number of my respondents, believed that the funeral of Patriarch Pavle was a politicized religious event. Its political dimension was perceived in active participation of the President and top officials of the secular state in the funeral of the religious leader, as well as in usual equalization of ethnic and religious affiliation in the public discourse. However, even though it is irrefutable that participation in the ritual for many meant scoring of political points, the ideas promoted by the ritual were far from political. In my opinion, the only real political, though at the same time religious and universalistic message could be the aforementioned anti-nationalistic aspect of the Patriarch’s morals.

According to the number of people who attended the event and media attention paid to it, the seeing off of the body and funeral of Patriarch Pavle could be compared to the seeing off of the body and funeral of Zoran Đinđić, in March 2003. The deaths of these two leaders, political and spiritual, managed to mobilize the nation/public almost in the same manner as in the case of death of Josip Broz in 1980. However, the nature of these events is depicted not so much by their formal resemblance as their mutual differences. The most obvious ones among them relate to the ideas promoted during these several-day-long ceremonies of parting with the deceased and public and collective mourning. While the death of the first democratic prime

minister was a maneuvering space for intense political propaganda, death of the Patriarch turned out to be an event with quite negligible political potential. Its major message was the message about modesty and dedication, which, despite the fact that Patriarch had for a long time been totally *invisible* in public life, brought together hundreds of thousands of Serb citizens, who, each of them for their own reasons, felt the need to participate in seeing off of his body. This difference becomes even more evident when analyzing the presentation of death itself and the concept of eternity included in each of these rituals. Emphasizing the tragic nature of death in the case of Zoran Đinđić was a logical consequence of the manner in which the former Serb Prime Minister died. His assassination opened the door to intense heroization of his personality and glorification of the political ideas he supported (Pavićević 2009b). Even though buried like an Orthodox Christian, the afterlife personality of Zoran Đinđić was developed after the model of so-called *exemplary death*, i.e. heroic and martyr-like death to the benefit of the nation, a model which is an important element of the religious system described as *religion of the nation*. Unlike the Christian concept of immortality, which characterized the public discourse on the occasion of the Patriarch's death, in the case of Đinđić's death there was a replacement of eschatological (vertical) principles of Christian dogmas by promise of eternal (historic/horizontal) glory and remembrance by the generations to come. This was certainly in line with the idea of renewal of the nation, and development of a new/old national identity, which accompanied transitional processes in Serbia during the last 15 years.

However, regardless of how bizarre it may appear, the key difference in these rituals is in the different attitudes to the dead body of the deceased. Even though they may be based on the test of death, political rituals most frequently perform its marginalization, placing prolongation of life of political ideas in the foreground. Thus, for instance, in the case of Josip Broz, the display of the coffin which took several days and several million people in procession, was aimed at prolonging the sojourn of the *immortal* among the *mortals*, and emphasized the fact that he would be there for good. This idea

was reconfirmed for years after the event by celebrating his birthday and handing in the Relay of youth to the dead president (Krstanović 2010:111). In the case of Zoran Đinđić, death was present even more symbolically. The procession beside the coffin was fully excluded; instead of parting with his mortal remains, the citizens parted with the dead Prime Minister by signing in the book of mourning, in the premises of the Democratic Party, ornamented by the photos of the deceased. The coffin with the deceased was exhibited only on the day of the funeral, in the Church of St Sava, and could be approached only by his closest associates, diplomats, and politicians.

The open coffin, in which the Patriarch was exposed from 15 to 19 November 2009, was unambiguously and directly showing death. On the one hand, it was obvious, and obviously final. However, on the other, the possibility to be in touch with the deceased, the wake around the death bed and kissing of the dead body, so alien to an urban taste, those traditional means of connection, interweaving and equalization of various levels of reality, here also suggested unity of life and death, this and that world, unity in which all participants in the ritual smoothly transit from one dimension into another. Direct contact with death was here possible and *safe* thanks to the fact that religious, i.e. Christian rhetoric of salvation, granting eternal life to the righteous in the *heavenly kingdom*, was fundamentally incorporated in this event.

The manner of shaping death, encounter with or evasion of the central topic of funerary rituals thus becomes the bases that give character to the event and speak about its nature – the funeral of Zoran Đinđić as a political event, and the funeral of the Patriarch Pavle as a religious event. This classification is corroborated by the concept of commemorating the memory of these important personalities of recent Serb history. Namely, while periodical commemoration of the memory of Zoran Đinđić is always marked by active media coverage on numerous events established to commemorate the memory of the late Prime Minister, as well as remembrance of the manner of his death, commemorating the memory of Patriarch Pavle is fully left to the Church and its believers.

But, let us conclude this text with an overview of the most

important answers to the questions posed in its beginning.

The funeral of Patriarch Pavle was an event in which various strata testifying on the complexity of the cultural and historic moment of the citizens of Serbia may be observed. It provided material to all stakeholders – politicians, representatives of other religious communities, promotion of unity of the *Serb people*, unity of the ecumene, etc. However, what arches over the whole complex of possible, partial interpretations is the Christian idea of virtue, spiritual efforts, and relationship between life in history and life in eternity. Here, the fact that these ideas were not linked to an (abstract) national being, but had an universal message, which made them recognizable for various participants in and observers of the ritual, was of greatest importance. Having abandoned the ties of everyday politicizing of life (and death), the seeing off of the body and funeral of Patriarch Pavle revealed fundamental shortcomings of the society, state, and major official and unofficial ideologies.

However, this was not a long-lived phenomenon. Quite unlike monuments of national heroes, the Patriarch's grave in Rakovica Monastery in the suburbs of Belgrade was placed on the margins of collective memory maps. Individual memory for the moment being remains outside the scope of this paper. However, I am almost certain, and this might be confirmed by some future research, that many citizens of Serbia keep in their wallets, cars, and who knows where else, an *icon* of the Patriarch.

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Aleksandra Pavićević *From Mystery to Spectacle*

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## О овој књизи

Прошло је десет година од како сам закорачила у поље танатолошких истраживања. Инспирирана догађајима из свог приватног живота, а затим и класицима танатолошких студија, започела сам прелиставање *страница о смрти* које је исписала историја цивилизације. Несагледива и бесконачна „књига смрти“ нагнала ме је да створим сопствени ситем, да сажмем сопствено искуство, да припитоим и помирим сопствена осећања ограниченог трајања и сасвим опипљиве бесконачности. Но, како ово не би била књига аутобиграфских и исповедних бележака, или како не би била само то, настојала сам да своје интелектуално и емоционално искуство пропустим кроз сито културе којој припадам. Ово би, уосталом, требало да буде задатак сваког истраживача, посебно очигледан у темама које се тичу суштинских питања људске егзистенције. Смрт и умирање свакако јесу такве теме. И више од тога, ове теме неизбежно и експлицитно претварају истраживача у тумача чији је циљ да установи равнотежу између личних и општих, индивидуалних и колективних, историјских и метаисторијских нивоа интерпретације.

Очигледно је да је наслов књиге био инспирисан насловом утицајне студије Филипа Аријеса: „Есеји о историји смрти на западу“. Приступи које се налазе у тој књизи охрабрили су ме да своју књигу осмислим као зборник мање или више независних текстова који су настајали током претходне деценије и да у њој сажмем најважнија сазнања о смрти и умирању у српској култури. Тако се, условно говорећи, књига може поделити на две тематске целине. У њој се налазе резултати истраживања ритуалног понашања и ставова о смрти *обичних* људи, као и анализа различитих историјских и културних околности које су утицале на оваква схватања и праксе. Друга група есеја доноси анализе различитих испољавања феномена смрти у јавним просторима. Ова истраживања указују на јак утицај културних, политичких и религијских идеја и идеологија на обликовање јавних, колективних представа о смрти. Они такође указују и на обрнути процес – како

ризнаца симбола садржана у „вечној тајни“ одређује садржај и поруке политичких пракси.

Основно ткање овог рукописа почива на фундаменталним хипотезама класичних танато-антрополошких истраживања, односно на амбивалентним, синхронијским и дијахронијским моделима који се тамо могу пронаћи. Један модел представља модерна друштва као она у којима су супротстављене чињенице потискивања говора о смрти у приватни простор, са једне стране, и инвазија смрти и слика умирања у јавном простору, са друге. Други модел је заснован на идеји да схватања смрти следе једносмерни еволутивни правац на релацији између традиције и модерности.

Међутим, пажљиви читалац ће приметити да се тумачење појава из овог домена непрестано отима чврстом структурирању: ћутање о смрти у модерним и нео модерним (овај термин сугерише Тони Волтер, британски социолог) друштвима никако није апсолутна категорија, док се однос између традиције и модерности појављује као вишезначан, вишесмеран и препун дубинских међусобних прожимања.

Интервјуи које сам спровела током истраживања, познанства, разговори и блискост са колегама које сам упознала на танатолошким конференцијама, као и растућа *гомила* литературе из студија смрти, подстакли су ме да ову књигу напишем у релативно „слободном стилу“, који ми се чинио као најбољи начин да своја сазнања учиним доступним и читљивим широј читалачкој публици.

Било како било, читаоци испред себе имају књигу о смрти и умирању. Њеним прелиставањем отвара се могућност литерарног путовања од сеоских до градских простора, од традиционалних до савремених ритуалних форми и идеолошких оквира, од приватних до јавних говора, од свакодневице до политичких сфера, од тајне до спектакла и назад.

Ова књига нам неће помоћи да решимо тајну смрти, али може допринети разумевању неких њених облика у савременом друштву





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