

Language, Culture and Identity in the Borderlands: The South Slav Communities of Hungary, from 1949 to the 1990s

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Abstract

This chapter will focus on the cultural politics of the borderlands between Central Europe and the Balkans, where South Slav communities may be found outside coherent Serbian and Croatian-speaking areas. This is the borderland region of Hungary that has been referred to in different historical periods and under different political regimes as: Lower Pannonia, Transdanubia, the Military Frontier (Vojna Krajina), or the Danube Banovina. This work will be illustrated by passages and references taken from Mara Stevanović's book *Nebo bez oblaka* (1977) which was the only children's book of short stories in "Serbo-Croat" to be published in socialist Hungary, which well-illustrates the daily lives of children, their parents and grandparents (three generations) from rural, ethnic minority backgrounds, mostly in the Banat region. The time period covered in this paper will be from the socialist period (1948 – 1989) into the Hungarian transition of the 1990s. The chapter will take into account the significance of the 1949 Hungarian Constitution which guaranteed the cultural rights of the South Slav population in Socialist Hungary. It then demonstrates how there was a shift in political interpretation from considering the South Slavs as "atoms of pluralism" (Crowe, 1989) to their being actively supported by the Hungarian government from the 1960s onwards, in terms of the development of minority culture and education.

Keywords: Culture and identity, symbolic geographies, borders and intermediate areas, language politics, lesser-used-languages, language death.

Introduction

This paper will explore the issues of language, culture and identity among the South Slav communities in the borderlands of Hungary through the prism of a collection of short stories and folk tales published in 'Serbo-Croat' for children by the writer Mara Stevanović in 1977. Entitled *Nebo bez oblaka* (Cloudless Skies), itself a reference to the 'carefree days' of childhood, this collection of tales reflects the ever-changing condition of a minority culture using a lesser-used-language in János Kádár's socialist Hungary of the 1960s and 1970s. It soon becomes clear from the different narrative styles employed in each of these stories, that the author had harvested many of these tales from the South Slav community, rather in the tradition of gathering in folk tales and folk songs practised in Central and Eastern Europe in the 19th century (Gellner, 1983). So, throughout the book there is a sprinkling of magic realism, as witnessed by the number of talking animals and conversational encounters between the seasons, the wind, the sun and the clouds; tales which at times seem to reflect the machinations of the gods in the epic tales of Homer. These folk tales are interspersed by stories which are clearly penned by the author from her own experience of working with children in both Budapest and the largely rural South Slav ethnic community. Then there are stories that reflect on the experience of the Socialist period in Hungary, such as: the significance of the 1949 Hungarian Constitution and minorities' legislation; the implications of a child continuing her education in the Serbo-Croatian grammar school in Budapest, or the everyday practicality of studying a lesser-used-language in school in a bilingual setting. Otherwise, there are tales of school, pioneer camps, the school holidays, the seasons of the year, and everyday rural life and society in a socialist country.

It should be noted that the South Slav community in Hungary always seemed to be affected by the Hungarian state's external relations. For example, the Magyarisation of the Slavonic-speaking minorities had been particularly encouraged after the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, when teaching in the Hungarian language increased in the South Slav minority schools as minority language groups went into sharp decline (Crowe, 1988, p.23). After the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, 'unreliable elements' were purged from national minority organisations. Stevanović, in her earlier years as a children's editor of the Serbo-Croatian newspaper *Narodne novine* would have had to have navigated carefully, through fairly treacherous waters. Yet, by the beginning of the 1970s, the Kádár regime was going to great lengths to support minority language education at all levels as the Hungarian ethnic minorities were seen as a 'bridge between countries', especially after the IX Party Congress in 1975 (Crowe, 1988, p.27) which reflected the spirit of the Helsinki agreements and witnessed a

flourishing of lesser-used-language education in Hungary. This was the period in which Stevanović was writing her book, so it is only natural that some of Stevanović's stories should reflect the spirit of the times, and indeed one story *Na Balatonu* (On Lake Balaton) actually recounts the meeting between two young pioneer girls from the South Slav community who meet a comrade from the Soviet Union and communicate with each other through the medium of shared similarities in the Slavonic languages of Russian, Ukrainian and 'Serbo-Croat', thereby serving as a 'bridge between communities' and fulfilling the changing mood of the Kádár régime. Furthermore, it is this writer's supposition that the different stories and tales in the book were written at different periods and that some of them had been gathered from traditional Slavonic folk tales.

Differences in content and style would suggest that the stories were written over a period of time and that the contents of the book have been arranged differently from the chronological order in which they were written. Furthermore many of the stories which carried a more obviously socialist message would probably have been written in an earlier period (presumably the early 1960s) before the shift in the political attitude towards Hungary's ethnic minority communities really began to change in the 1970s. Presumably, some of these stories would have been published first in *Narodne novine* before being collected together for *Nebo bez oblaka*.

As for Mara Stevanović, little information is available on the life of the author of *Nebo bez oblaka*, apart from the details provided on the fly leaf of her book. We know that she was the editor of the children's supplement of *Narodne novine* (the People's Newspaper) of the Democratic Association of South Slavs in Hungary (*Demokratski Savez Južnih Slovena u Mađarskoj*).

In its heyday *Narodne novine* was described as being one of the four main nationality newspapers in Hungary, serving an ever expanding readership (Vago, 1984); and its circulation in the 1980s was about 2,800. Published in Budapest, it appeared in Serbo-Croat and Slovenian, under the leadership of its chief editor Marko Marković (Bell, 2003). Its precursor had been *Naše novine* (Our Newspaper), which had run from 20 October 1946 until 3 October 1951, and was tightly controlled by the Hungarian Communist Party.

We also learn that Stevanović had set out to provide a Serbo-Croatian reader for children from the South Slav national minority and that:

“This is the first literary prose act in our country since the liberation, which has been carried out in the Serbo-Croatian language, thereby presenting an

exceptional task not only for members of the Serbian and Croatian national minorities, but also for the entire publishing industry in our homeland” (Stevanović, 1977).

The fly leaf on her book also comments on the author having produced:

“Three bouquets of beautiful tales intended for children of the youngest age, in addition to children who have already studied a lot at school but... listen happily when granny or granddad tells them tales, and lastly children who are saying goodbye to their childhood, and who will, today or tomorrow be taking the first steps into working life.”

As such, the architecture of *Nebo bez oblaka* is as follows: The first seven short stories are entitled *Priče o maloj Miri* (‘Stories about Little Mira’) and these stories are clearly aimed at the younger child. The second part of the book *Crveni balon sve dece sveta* (‘A Red Balloon for all the children of the world’) is for six to eight year olds, and the third part *Četa mala ali odabrana* (‘A Small but Select Band’) is aimed at older children who would perhaps be in years seven or eight at school.

Furthermore, to this writer’s knowledge *Nebo bez oblaka* was to be the only children’s book of short stories in the Serbo-Croatian language to be published in socialist Hungary (1948-1989), before the South Slav community fractured into three distinct Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian communities in 1991, following the onset of inter-ethnic conflict to the south of the Hungarian border with the ‘former’-Yugoslavia and its successor states. Thereby, demonstrating once again that what happened beyond the Hungarian borders often impacted on the minority communities living in Hungary.

Symbolic Geographies and Location

As a location the area under discussion presents both a mental and a physical space between Central Europe and the Balkans, which fluxes and changes with the passage of time. This is a borderland or an intermediate area that extends from southern Hungary into contemporary Slavonia and Vojvodina. By the expression “intermediate area”, one may understand a context in which common elements of identity extend beyond the borders of European nation-states (Promitzer, Hermanik and Staudinger, 2009, p. 9).

There was no real sense of linguistic territoriality in the case of the South Slav community in Hungary; whereby, with reference to Anthony Smith (1991, p. 21) a sense of national space was mapped by a national language. When there was a sense of

sub-state identity, the South Slav case was very different to the sub-state nationalisms of other communities, such as the Catalans in Spain, or the Scots in the United Kingdom (Hudson, 2015, pp. 89-110) which can clearly be defined as *homeland communities*. Clearly, as Zsuzsa Csergo has observed not all sub-state ethnicities can be classified as homeland communities (Csergo, 2007, p.7) and it would certainly be incorrect to classify the South Slavs of Hungary as such, given that the South Slav community did not claim any historical rights, and acted as a silent minority throughout the socialist period, rather like the ethnic Hungarians living across the border in Vojvodina in the Socialist Federative Republics of Yugoslavia or the Lusatian Sorbs in the German Democratic Republic. Furthermore, Csergo adds that immigrant groups do not usually claim historic homeland rights in their country of origin (Csergo, 2007, p.7). The South Slavs saw themselves primarily as Hungarians, and only after that did the Hungarian South Slavs identify with a particular village or county in Hungary, but certainly they did not identify with any sense of homeland community or sense of national awakening. Can one take this sense of identity even a stage further and posit that in the case of the Hungarian South Slavs there is actually the shadow of a *lingering migrant past* that has its origins in the settlement of the Military Frontier (*Vojna Krajina*) in the 17th century? This sense of a lingering migrant past would be reinforced by the fluidity of the Hungarian border area, the intermediate area between Slavonia, Baranja and Vojvodina throughout the 20th century, with reference to the area's troubled historical past which witnessed frequent migrations across flexible borders in both a northerly and southerly direction during and after both World Wars.

The focus of this chapter is on the mental and physical space of the "South Slav" – speaking communities which are found outside coherent Serbian and Croatian-speaking areas. In other words, the borderland region that has been referred to in different historical periods and under different political regimes as, for example: Lower Pannonia, Transdanubia, the Military Frontier (*Vojna Krajina*), or the Danube Banovina *inter alia*. This is also referred to as *naš kraj* ('our area', 'our neck of the woods' or 'down our way'), in many of Stevanović's stories. Some of the villages and rural areas referred to in her book are imagined and other sites are real, such as Lake Balaton, Gellert Hill on the Banks of the River Danube in Budapest, and the River Sío – an artificial canal in Central Hungary that flows out of Lake Balaton, through the city of Szekszárd and into the River Danube.

Reading through Stevanović's work, there is the sense that she is describing a disappearing world; that of rural family traditions juxtaposed against the onset of urban modernity. So, there are stories of life in the countryside, or in the village and of

extended families across three generations that include grandchildren and grandparents. The background is often set against farm work, or hunting, adventures in fields, meadows and forests and the theme of nature in general. Then there are stories of children spending the summer vacation in pioneer camps, and one story even makes passing reference to the local Collective Farm, whilst another refers to the role of workers involved in flood relief among victims caught up along the banks of the swollen River Danube, once again highlighting the socialist setting. Otherwise, the stories lay emphasis on the different seasons of the year, how the children spend their school holidays, the first days of spring, picking cherries in the summer time or waiting for the first snow, sledging and building snowmen.

There are even tales that make passing reference to a more troubled past. One such uplifting story is *Božićna Priča* (A Christmas Story) which just hints at poverty and health conditions in the Admiral Horthy period in Hungary, before the introduction of universal social healthcare in a post-war socialist Hungary. Or another example is provided by *Mamina Lutka* (Mummy's doll) which refers back to the Second World War and recounts the poignant tale of a father wounded in action and his last Christmas presents delivered through the deep snows by one of his comrades-in-arms to his young wife and little daughter.

Yet throughout her work, the essence is always of being Hungarian first before identifying oneself as a member of the South Slav community. Witness the children who paint the Hungarian flag on their space ship built out of cardboard boxes or the patriotic speech delivered by a grandfather to his inquisitive little granddaughter in his exposition on the 1949 Hungarian Constitution and what it meant for Hungarian ethnic minorities. In a similar vein there is the pride in her pupils expressed by the 'Serbo-Croatian' language teacher as she speaks of the contributions that her pupils will one day make to their mother country – Hungary.

So these stories relate to the impact of assimilation to a larger state entity set against strong feelings of local affiliation and local identity (*naš kraj*), and those transcultural phenomena, whereby the state that they live in has imposed different cultural and linguistic norms than those they perform in their own private lives at different periods in the twentieth century and over the last decade-and-a-half.

The stories relate to the mental and physical space of the "South Slav" – speaking communities which are to be found in a borderland region that since the creation of an independent Serbia in the 19th century and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918 (The Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929), has remained outside coherent Serbian and Croatian-speaking areas. Indeed, there has been a long tradition

of migration into and out of this intermediate space or borderland of Lower Pannonia, and the theme of migration or *seobe* that has led to small South Slav communities being scattered throughout present-day Hungary. This means that there are clusters of South Slavs living in towns, such as Budapest, Szentendre, Pécs and Mohacs, and throughout the villages of southern Hungary. It was in the 18th century that Buda, Pest and Szentendre would become established as Serbian cultural and religious centres, with Szentendre boasting seven Serbian orthodox churches in the early 20th century.

However, growing Magyarisation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire towards the end of the 19th century had led to large scale migration to Serbia, exacerbated by the Treaty of Trianon (June 1920) when most of Hungary's South Slav populations moved further south into the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

By the time of the socialist period, in the 1980s, there were about 100,000 Serbs, Croats and Slovenes living in Hungary and these were generally classified as South Slavs. This was a sharp drop from the combined Serbian and Croatian population in Hungary in 1910, which had numbered some 600,000, but of course this was the pre-Trianon period, before Hungary would lose 64 per cent of its total population to newly recognized European states along with five of its most populous cities. According to the 1910 census, Hungarians had only made up 54.5 per cent of the total population of the Kingdom of Hungary (and these figures exclude Croatia-Slavonia) whereas today, ethnic Hungarians make up 96 per cent of the Hungarian Republic. Post-Trianon, according to the 1920 census only 3,816 Serbs remained within the newly re-defined Hungarian state borders, although minority organisations would claim about 10,000 people as being ethnically Serbian (*Euromosaic*, Serbs in Hungary, 2006, p.1). The Serbs therefore formed one of the smallest Hungarian minority communities before the Second World War.

Croats, on the other hand, along with Slovaks, form one of the largest minority populations in Hungary today, with a population estimated at between 15,620 according to the 2001 census and 90,000 according to Hungarian-Croatian minority organisations (*Euromosaic*, Croats in Hungary, 2006, p. 1). As with the Serbs the biggest period of settlement came in the sixteenth century, at the height of the Turkish occupation of the Balkans. Croatian immigration declined towards the end of the 18th century and almost ceased altogether at the end of the First World War, when Croatia became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of Yugoslavia).

Language Politics and Minority Education in the Socialist Period

During the Second World War the Hungarian government had instituted education in the mother tongue for those minorities who had remained in Hungary and authorized the introduction of bilingual signposts in the areas of bilingual settlement. However things would change, come the Liberation.

David Crowe, writing in *Nationalities Papers* in 1988 has argued that in the aftermath of the Second World War ethnic minority identity and belonging had become an insignificant issue given that the 1949 census figures revealed that only 128,758 people out of a total population of 9,204,799 had chosen a language other than Hungarian as their primary language (Crowe, 1988, p. 22). He goes on to show how this figure had dropped quite significantly from the 1941 census returns, when only 660,365 Hungarians out of a total population of 9,316,613 had opted for a language other than Hungarian. For Crowe, there is no doubt that this change in figures had come about from a climate of fear in Socialist Hungary, in a situation which had been exacerbated by migrations in both directions across Hungary's borders with its neighbours. Many of those who had chosen to remain in Hungary after the establishment of the Communist regime in 1948 had chosen to identify themselves as Hungarians and had hidden their own ethnic and linguistic identities in order to protect their property and avoid possible expulsion (Crowe, 1988, p.22). This was also in the aftermath of the 1948 Stalin-Tito split in a period when any suspicion of pro-Yugoslav sympathy would have been extremely dangerous, and this prevailing atmosphere would last until the end of the 1950s, overshadowed further by the Hungarian Revolution and the Soviet Invasion of Hungary in 1956.

Yet, such an atmosphere would appear to be in stark contrast to the spirit of Article 49 in the new constitution of 20 August 1949, which made: "...discrimination...against any citizen on the grounds of... religion or nationality...illegal." And this is a theme taken up in one of Stevanović's stories "*Danica koja uvek voli da zapitkuje*" (Danica, the girl who always liked asking questions) in which the little girl Danica asks her grandfather about the 1949 Constitution, which is dealt with in quasi-religious terms, as is demonstrated by her grandfather's closing speech:

Look, the Constitution was born then and it has stayed with us, right up to this day.... It has grown up, grown in strength and is safe and a big friend of ours. From that moment on we have lived as brothers: Magyars, Croats, Serbs, Slovaks, Germans, Roma.... When in autumn, you go back to school and the teacher gives the lesson in Hungarian, you will understand it, and when you study it in your mother tongue, you will also understand it. For now, you are

growing up so that you can hand over everything to you own children, our words and songs will be learned from generation to generation, so that in a hundred years' time, they will sing just as we sang when we were small.... The Constitution wants us to preserve our mother tongues and songs, and you, even though you are still small, you must understand and make an effort to be a good student, so that you can read and recite well, and dance our folk dances too, as is fit and proper for the intelligent little girl that you are. (Stevanović, 1977, p. 97).

As it stood, the Constitution of 1949 had guaranteed the cultural rights of the South Slav population, promising them equal citizenship rights and protection against discrimination, and with this they were provided with access to education from pre-school, right through to university, which forms the back drop to several of the stories in Stevanović's book.

Crowe, by contrast with the essence of the above children's tale, as recounted in *Nebo bez oblaka* comments that: "The spirit of Stalinist internationalism branded emphasis on ethnic and minority identity a form of "bourgeois ideology" ...[and] as a result of its conflict with Yugoslavia, it moved politically unreliable Southern Slavs away from the Austrian and Yugoslav borders" (Crowe, 1988, p. 22).

This forced internal migration is of course a reference to the by now infamous split between Tito and Stalin which came about in 1948, and would only be partially papered over by Khrushchev, in a bid to strengthen his own power-base in the internal struggle for power in the Soviet Union that followed Stalin's death (Federov, 2009). Yugoslavia in the meantime, chose its own road to socialism and took up with the non-aligned movement. Furthermore, socialist front organisations such as the Democratic Association of South Slavs of which Stevanović was a member and their publications, such as *Narodne Novine* for whom Stevanović worked as a journalist and would serve as an active spokesperson through her writing, would serve as a watchdog among the country's South Slav community.

During the 1950s, minority organizations were considered as "atoms of pluralism" by the new socialist state. There was a deliberate push towards Magyarisation as teaching in Hungarian increased in the minority schools and South Slav cultural groups went into decline. Concomitant with this, no opportunity was permitted for dealing with the authorities in any language other than Hungarian. Furthermore, when Janos Kádár came to power in the aftermath of the October 1956 Hungarian Revolution, one of the first steps taken by the new government was to purge the non-Hungarian national organisations of their so-called "unreliable elements" (Crowe, 1998, p. 23).

The policy of Hungarian assimilation would persist until the end of the 1950s. However, in 1960 the Hungarian government gradually shifted towards actively supporting its sub-state national minorities, by providing active legal support for the development of minority culture and education (Crowe, 1998, p.23) and a series of laws and new constitutional provisions which would guaranteed the rights of each group over the next twenty years, such as extending lesser-used-language usage within government organizations and the teaching of lesser-used languages in primary and secondary schools.

As early as November 1958, the Hungarian government announced that it planned to create minority pre-school settings in every village where the mother tongue of the majority of the population was not Hungarian-language speaking and providing that at least 25 children could be registered in each setting (Crowe, 1988, p.25). This is evidenced in several of Stevanović's stories, such as *Mamin prvoškolac* (Mummy's little schoolboy), *Četa mala ali odabrana* (A small but select band) *Rastanak* (Return) and *Ostvaran san* (Achieving your dreams) which are tales about children in Serbo-Croatian speaking educational settings, from pre-school and pioneer camps on Lake Balaton, through to the "Serbo-Croatian" grammar school in Budapest (*Budimpeštanska srpskohrvatska gimnazija*).

By 1975, it was recognized by the Central Committee at the Party's XI Congress that the minority groups should "form a bridge between countries", and János Kádár would openly re-affirm this sentiment in a speech before the Party's XII Congress in 1980. This was also in the period of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (now the OSCE), held in Helsinki in 1975, and the Hungarian government engaged with the human rights protection that was now being afforded to ethnic minorities by the Helsinki agreement. The authorities now went to great lengths to support lesser-used language education at both elementary, secondary and higher education levels. These developments coincide with the publication of Stevanović's book in 1977 and in many ways the 1970s and 1980s can be seen as a "golden age" for the South Slav community. Indeed the fact that *Nebo bez oblaka* was even allowed to be published reflects this "golden age" of the minorities theme. So, it should come as no surprise that Stevanović made the occasional nod to the regime in her collection of children's stories. As such Hungary became a model in its treatment of ethnic minority groups for neighbouring Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia (Rady, 2000).

The spirit of this period is well-reflected in Mara Stevanović's work, not only with the actual publication of her book *Nebo bez oblaka*, but also in some of the stories

themselves. Witness, for example, this short extract from *Četa mala ali odabrana* (A small but select band):

That day, the teacher didn't go over any new material, but instead, she spoke to the children about her love for the mother tongue, for her people, and told them about how it all was before the Liberation, how she had signed up for a course for teachers, because she wished not only to further her knowledge of her mother tongue, but also to pass it on to the young.

I have had many classes and pupils, said the teacher, but rarely such good pupils as you. For a teacher there is nothing better and more pleasurable than to see the seeds which bear fruit. You give the impression that there will be even more pleasure ahead for all of us – at school, for your parents, and for all our country. And I am really so proud of you all... (Stevanović, 1977, p. 150).

Meanwhile, because of a serious lesser-used-language teacher shortage, a reflection on the difficult conditions encountered throughout the 1950s, by 1969 the Hungarian government began to pay lesser-used-language teachers between 5 and 10 per cent more than their monolingual colleagues. Then, in 1972 the government created a special commission for minorities' education within the Ministry of Education which worked with the national associations to help coordinate all minority teaching programmes and sponsored summer language courses and exchange programmes with other neighbouring socialist programmes (Crowe, 1988, p.27). Exchanges were also arranged with non-socialist countries, and this author for example would benefit from such an exchange in the summer of 1979, visiting *Főiskole* (Teacher Training Colleges) in Pécs, Eger and Budapest and meeting teachers who taught English, music and 'Serbo-Croat' in the local secondary schools and universities and their students.

In the 1980s, the ethnic make-up of Hungary was 96 per cent Magyar with the rest of the population being made up of ethnic minority communities. Indeed, of these only 1 per cent registered themselves as members of national minorities at all, and most of the non-Magyar nationalities were bilingual (US Library of Congress). By 1984 there were approximately 55,000 minority students, receiving education in their mother tongue in elementary and secondary schools, this was a significant increase from 21,615 in 1968 (US Library of Congress) and well represents the changing climate towards minority language education in that period. Furthermore, it was noted by Minority Rights Group that during the late 1980s, there was a marked increase in the number of minority organisations and after 1990 the Secretariat of National and Ethnic Minorities was established within the Ministerial Council to coordinate and oversee policy (MRG-Hungary Overview). Free elections held in Hungary in 1990,

led to the formation of a conservative coalition government. The new government was very much concerned with the plight of Hungarian minorities abroad, principally in Romania. As part of its attempt to secure and enhance the international standards of rights protection for minorities, the government actively championed the rights of minorities in Hungary itself (Rady, 2000).

Article 68 of the Hungarian Constitution, amended in 1989/90 declared that:

...The Republic of Hungary shall provide for the protection of national and ethnic minorities and ensure their collective participation in public affairs, the fostering of their cultures, the use of native languages, education in their native tongues and the use of names in their native languages.

Also, from 1993, a law on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities was passed, which recognized the existence of 13 minorities (including Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) and that all minorities should be entitled to form their own Minority Self Governments (MSGs), so for example, the Croatian MSG is referred to as the *Hrvatska državna samouprava*, and this development meant a break-away from the collective group of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes that had hitherto been referred to as South Slavs, as in the *Demokratski savez Južnih Slovenih u Mađarskoj* (The Democratic Association of South Slavs) in Hungary. This change in status coincided with the political events that were taking place to the south beyond the Hungarian border, namely the Homeland War and the other Wars of Yugoslav Transition. Otherwise, apart from prohibiting assimilation, discrimination and harassment, the provision of majority-language classes for children is compulsory when demanded by more than eight children. Also, the state is obliged to support the cultural activities of minorities, their television and electronic media. The MRG report goes on to argue that:

The Hungarian school system offers several modes of minority language teaching but minority language schools and bilingual schools have very few pupils in practice. The most common model remains the one where minority languages are taught as a second or foreign language for only four or five hours a week. (MRG-Hungary Overview MRG-Hungary Overview).

To some extent this reflects the situation in Stevanović's tale *Mala četa ali odabrana* (A small but select band), given that the story is an account of a selective and special after school activity.

From Language Politics to Language Shift and Then to Language Revival

According to Euromosaic (2006, p. 3) there are inter-generational differences to be found among the Serbian and Croatian communities in Hungary, whereby the older generation is predominantly Serbian or Croatian-dominant bilingual, the younger generation is Hungarian-dominant bilingual (if not Hungarian monolingual). This means that Hungarian Serbs and Croats would speak 'Serbo-Croat' at home as the *Kućni jezik* or *materni jezik* (mother tongue), whilst speaking in Hungarian with the majority population. Put another way, there would be differences with regard to abilities according to each generation, so that grandparents would be fluent in 'Serbo-Croat' addressing their children in 'Serbo-Croat', but being answered back in Hungarian, whilst grand children might have had little or no 'Serbo-Croat' at all.

Attempts are currently being made to reverse the 'Serbo-Croatian'-Hungarian language shift by establishing Serbian and Croatian native language schools or Serbian and Croatian-Hungarian bilingual schools, as allowed by the Hungarian Education Act. Furthermore, within the context of an ethnically Serb perspective, Euromosaic reports that there are now nine pre-primary Serbian schools in Hungary, with 87 pupils enrolled in Serbian native language education and a further 94 pupils enrolled for bilingual education at pre-school level. One secondary school offers education in Serbian either as the mother tongue, or a bilingual education, and Euromosaic (2006, p. 3) records that 126 pupils attended either Serbian language or bilingual classes, with 66 students studying Serbian in Higher Educational Institutions.

Most Hungarian Serbs nowadays are either bilingual or trilingual, meaning that they use Hungarian and/or a local variety of Serbian and/or standard Serbian. According to the 1990 census, 2,953 people declared Serbian to be their mother tongue, whilst in 1991, this had increased to 3,388, though it is not clear whether this relatively small increase points to a reversal in language shift (Euromosaic, 2006, p. 3).

The Euromosaic report concludes with the idea that:

A lack of funding, the apparent gap between the legal framework and the actual implementation of the legal provisions in the field and the convictions of some minority members that Serbian culture and identity can survive without the Serbian language seem to be the main reasons for [not putting measures in place to increase the use of the Serbian language in everyday life within the Serbian community]. (Euromosaic, 2006, p. 3).

According to the Euromosaic report it would appear that the inter-generational transition of the Croatian language is being broken and attempts are being made to

reverse the Croatian-Hungarian language shift by establishing more Croatian language schools and Croatian-Hungarian bilingual schools as allowed by the Hungarian Education Act. It is claimed that whilst pre-primary and primary Croatian language education is successful, measures to aid the flow of Croatian pupils to secondary education in Croatian seem to be necessary. “But even if that succeeds it remains unclear whether that will help in revitalizing the use of Croatian in the daily life of the Croatian minority” (Euromosaic, 2006, p. 3). As with the Serbian minority population, it would appear that it is the lack of funding and an apparent gap between the legal framework of a “highly sophisticated Minorities Act” that the actual implementation of the legal provisions in the field have proved to be a stumbling block. Furthermore, Euromosaic notes that some minority members of the Croatian minority community believe that Croatian culture and identity can survive without the Croatian language.

Of course, modernity and radical changes in social and political change, such as the move from a rural, village lifestyle to a modern, or post-modern global lifestyle, linked with issues such as intermarriage can easily bring about language death to a once thriving community (Petrović, 2009, p. 158). Language shift is of course a very serious issue here, as it is the penultimate stage in the process of language death (Crystal, 2000), a process which particularly impacts on the lesser-used-languages of Europe today.

Language shift, the first stage of language death, is a process which has been affecting South Slav communities elsewhere in the intermediate area between Central Europe and the Balkans. For example, Tanja Petrović (2009) in her chapter entitled, “The Language and Identity of Serbs in Sothern Slovenia” has demonstrated how the language shift for the Serbs in the Bela Krajina region of Slovenia is in its final stage of language shift, and she explains the gradual process of language death in a situation, whereby: “You understand your Serbian-speaking grandparents, but always respond to them in Slovenian (Petrović, 2009, p. 157). Thereby reiterating the statement made at the beginning of this section.

There might, of course be other factors at play here that account for the demise of a lesser-used-language. Sometimes people choose to have their children taught in the majority language of the state, rather than in their own lesser-used-language, as this will provide them with easier access to social status and professional advancement within the majority culture. This might well have been the case of the South Slav communities in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s, whereby parents were confronted with a situation in which they questioned the very validity of educating their children in ‘Serbo-Croat’, when they could so easily be educated in Hungarian, the majority

language of the Hungarian state. This is where economic and social factors come to play, because at the end of the day, the personal manipulation of language politics within a minority culture is all about assisting one's offspring to find jobs and status within a majority language driven culture. It is this author's belief that the South Slav community in the 1980s was faced with a similar situation in terms of language shift to the one facing the Serb community in the Bela Krajina in Slovenia today. This takes us into the scenario of the wars that were fought out in the former-Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995, which would have a ripple effect on the wider intermediate area between Central Europe and the Balkans.

Ultimately, the wars of Yugoslav secession that took place to the south of the Hungarian border, between 1991 and 1995 completely fractured the South Slav community in Hungary, which shattered into separate Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian entities. Which would in turn be recognized as separate minorities or MSGs by the Hungarian state.

A good example of this process is how *Narodne Novine* which had served as the weekly journal of the *Demokratski savez južnih Slovena u Mađarskoj* (DSJS – Democratic Union of the South Slavs in Hungary), fractured into two opposing newspapers that would serve as platforms for the two disparate communities of Hungarian Serbs and Hungarian Croats in April 1991. *Narodne Novine* was the newspaper on which Mara Stevanović had worked as the children's editor for whole South Slav Community in Hungary. The new journals emerging from this fracture were the *Srpske Narodne Novine* (Serbian Weekly News) and the *Hrvatski Glasnik* (Croatian Herald).

The *Srpske narodne novine* was formed in Budapest in 1991, and was published in the Cyrillic alphabet. A typical example of the newspaper's content is well illustrated by the 3 June 2006 edition, which may be found on the Internet and was simply chosen at random. Under the headline *Brzo i vatreno* (rapid and ardent), the cover features a *kolo* (Serbian national folk round dance) with a band in the background featuring a double bass player and an accordionist. The feature article (*bronika*) is entitled *Proslava i znaku mladih* (Celebration and symbol of youth) and is supported by a picture of a Serbian folk dance and an Orthodox ceremony with a priest, a cross, and bread on a table. The point to note when juxtaposed against Stevanović's *Nebo bez oblaka* is how different all these symbols are in terms of the representation of village life and cultural politics in the folk communities today from those of socialist Hungary, given that in *Nebo bez oblaka* the church never even gets mentioned and the

terms Serb and Croat are never employed separately, whilst the language is normally referred to as *materni jezik* (mother tongue) and when the language is actually named, it is always as ‘Serbo-Croat’ and never as Serbian and/or Croatian. Likewise, the areas and villages of the South Slav population are simply referred to as *naš kraj* – as in *u naš kraj* (down our way). It is as though distinctions between Serb and Croat are not even recognized. Nevertheless, the *kolo* does get a mention in her work with a reference to the poem *U kolo* by one of her colleagues Marko Dekić, who had worked with Stevanović on the *Narodne novine*:

They were swinging in the *kolo*
 All the lads were dancing:
 Young Bunjevac boys
 Serbian and Šokac lads.
 And as well as all this,
 From the right and flowing...
 (Stevanović, citing Dekić, 1977, p. 148).

The homeland war (1991 – 1995) being fought to the south of the border had clearly had a ripple effect on the South Slav community and had fractured a seemingly united South Slav community in Hungary into two separate ethnic entities and identities, namely Serbs and Croats, and had reinforced a need for greater recognition, as is witnessed by the cultural publications that have ensued, especially *Hrvatski glasnik*, where typical images feature Catholic churches and priests celebrating mass, *tamburica* bands and folk dances, and all articles are written in Croatian in the Latin alphabet and *jekavski* variant. So that since the 1990s there has been a move away from language shift (the first stage in the road to language death) to language revival. Part of this need has been driven by an intellectual elite who could preserve the ‘purity’ of the language and articulate the cultural needs of the community whether in folk costume or religious representation and in reviving the use of the Croatian language. Perversely, perhaps, the fighting to the south of the border had served only to reinvigorate and reinforce the local need to promote the division of the Serbian and Croatian languages, cultures and identities in Hungary and other modes of cultural representation.

Postscript

Mara Stevanović’s book *Nebo bez oblaka* has not been included in the current curriculum for the teaching of Croatian language and literature in bilingual schools in Hungary (*Okvirni Program Hrvatskog Jezika i Književnosti za Dvojezične Škole*, no

date given). At first sight this might seem striking, given the quality of her work, and the fact she had written this book to provide children in the South Slav Community with a literary reader written in their own lesser-used-language, to say nothing of her Croatian identity (though this had never been mentioned in 1977!)

Her absence from the contemporary literary scene might seem even more ironic, given that the poetry of one of the writers, Marko Dekić, who had worked with Stevanović as a journalist and editor on the *Narodne novine*, has become standard teaching material in the Croatian community of Hungary today, as indeed his work had been much praised in Socialist Hungary in the 1970s. Furthermore, one of his poems on the *Kolo* dance had appeared in Stevanović's *Četa mala ali odabrana* ("A Small but Select Band") – cited above. Yet, of Stevanović there is nothing, except a reference in the World Catalogue of Books to say that she was a Croatian writer in Hungary; nothing more, just that!

Through gradually translating Mara Stevanović's *Nebo bez oblaka*, over the past couple of years, it has become clear to this author that the reason why she is not fêted in either the Serbian or the Croatian minority communities today provides an insight into the shift that has been taking place in minority language politics in Hungary since the 1990s. For the Serbs, she is unacceptable as a Croatian author even though her writing is in *Ekavski* (standard eastern variant) normally associated with the Serbs; and for the Croats her work is unacceptable as an author who wrote in the standard Eastern *Ekavski* variant and not *Jekavski* (the standard western variant of Serbo-Croat) which is associated with Croatian identity. For both communities she has become a non-person because she identified too closely with the newspaper *Narodne novine*, an organ of the Hungarian communist party which was discredited by the cultural politics of the Hungarian transition. Furthermore, although she recounted folk tales and children's stories for her young audience, a few too many of her stories reflect the period in which she was writing, with references to pioneer camps on Lake Balaton, the 1949 Hungarian constitution, or welcoming a young pioneer from the Soviet Union. Indeed, some of the terminology used reflects the communist period, rather than the contemporary one. For example and with only one exception she refers to *zimski praznik* (Winter holiday) rather than *Božić* (Christmas), whilst *Uskrs* (Easter) becomes *prolećni raspust* (the Spring holiday). This was all very politically correct for the 1970s and 1980s, emphasising the secular nature of the Hungarian socialist state, but very much out of keeping with the post-communist period when communities turned to their Churches as an affirmation of their cultural identity, whether Orthodox or Catholic. The most overtly communist

tale in her book was entitled *Crvena Zvezda* (The Red Star) and opens with a mythological rendition of Bloody Sunday in 1905, the rise to power of Lenin and the spread of communism throughout the world. It must, however be emphasized that the prose style of this story is quite out of tune with the rest of Stevanović's book, and perhaps serves more as an example of the author having to toe the Party line according to the dictates of the socialist realism of the 1960s and 1970s. Witness the following abstract:

And the man who took the red star in his hands and raised it to unattainable heights was called Vladimir Ilich Lenin. His name is celebrated not only by the people in that vast country [the Soviet Union], but by all working people in the world. His red star continued to shine and to spread its rays throughout the big country in the east, but its rays also shone in our homeland and in many other countries and their peoples were united in a vast community of which there is nothing stronger in the whole world. For all the peoples the red star showed the road to freedom and lit up for them the road to creativity and progress. However, those people who were still oppressed by slavery also looked with love at the beautiful light of the red star, because it embodied freedom and joy for them, too. And thus, from day to day, the light of the red star grew stronger and stronger and one day it will shine throughout the whole of our globe and then all the peoples will be happy.

At the end of the day, we are confronted with a tale of a shift in cultural politics and fluid identities in terms of the languages, cultures and Identities of the Hungarian borderlands. Probably the real reason why Stevanović's work has all but disappeared from the literary record is that her work is just too much of a reflection of the socialist period and that time has simply passed her by. Dekić's work, by contrast has survived because it concentrates more on the folkloric element, so that there are no references to pioneer camps, red stars, Lenin and the 1949 Constitution. Stevanović's work has dated through far too many references to socialism. The second reason for her disappearance is that although she is described today as a Croatian writer (www.worldcat.org) there is not a single reference to Croatian culture, identity or language in the entirety of her book and she wrote in the standard *ekavski* variant of Serbo-Croat that was always associated with Serbia. Once again events and sensibilities to the south of the Hungarian border have taken their toll.

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