

IN BETWEEN EVERYDAY LIFE AND NOSTALGIA (Emigrants from Serbia and Montenegro in Argentina) *

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This study deals with the members of the Serbian and Montenegrin diaspora in the Republic of Argentina, which has developed a specific social character due to various historical and geopolitical circumstances.

According to the data of the Embassy of The Republic of Serbia in Buenos Aires, some 30,000 people of Serbian and Montenegrin origin live in the territory of Argentina. This population originates mostly from the territory of today's Montenegro and Croatia, and, to a lesser extent, from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Looking into the contemporary life of these emigrants and their descendants, we encountered an array of very complex issues, particularly regarding their relationship towards identity (ethnic, regional, cultural, religious) and the way this identity is formed and manifested in everyday life. Field research showed that the respondents, even though greatly assimilated, are still emotionally bound to their ethnic origin. On the other hand, they are frequently either unable or reluctant to define their ethnic identity, and thus almost all of them use the term "our" to refer to their origin, language, culture, and community. This relationship with identity is caused by former historical and political circumstances, since the very beginning of the immigration. In the contemporary context, identity formation with the diaspora is influenced not only by a greater degree of assimilation, but also by reactions to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the state union of Serbia and Montenegro.

In addition to a brief historical review and summary of the contemporary situation, this study will introduce a part of the field work conducted in Argentina, focusing on the emigrants' connection to attitude towards traditional heritage, the sustaining of traditional customs and religious practice, connections with the country of origin and mother tongue, forms of social organizations, and the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the contemporary life of emigrants.

Key words: diaspora, Argentina, identity, origin, history, everyday life

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INTRODUCTION

During 2011 and 2012 researchers from the Institute of Ethnography SASA¹ had the opportunity to spend time in the territory of the Republic of Argentina on several occasions, where they gathered information on emigrants. On these occasions we became acquainted with this unusual diaspora, which has not been researched sufficiently to date. This discovery sparked the researchers' interest and desire to document and bring closer this diaspora, through various scientific studies, monographs and projects.

According to the data of the Embassy of The Republic of Serbia in Buenos Aires², some 30,000 people of Serbian and Montenegrin origin live in the territory of Argentina. They originate mostly from the territory of today's Montenegro and Croatia, and to a lesser extent from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the very beginning we would like to point out that even though this study will mention other South Slavic peoples, the focus of this research is the Serbian diaspora, and descendants of the emigrants with Serbian ethnicity in Argentina.

Studying the contemporary life of these emigrants and their descendants, we encountered a series of very complex issues. Of particular interest is the relationship of emigrants with identity (ethnic, regional, cultural, religious) and the way this identity is formed and manifested in everyday life.

Very often studies that deal with ethnic issues point out that certain characteristics of ethnic identity – such as flexibility, partiality, dependence on context, vulnerability to manipulation for a variety of reasons, politically or otherwise, etc. – make it hard to define. All these elements are the reason why defining ethnic identity is very challenging and may fog the view of social scientists, making it difficult to stay objective during the research. Interestingly, respondents themselves, the members of certain ethnic communities, often encounter the same problem, as is the case of the diaspora in Argentina.

The field research demonstrated that the respondents are very much emotionally bound to their ethnic origin, even though they are greatly assimilated. On the other hand, they are frequently either unable or reluctant to define their ethnic identity, and thus a great number of them use the term “our” to refer to their origin, language, culture, and community. Therefore, we also chose to use the term “our” when referring to these subjects. This type of attitude towards identity might be caused by former historical and political circumstances, since the very beginning of the immigration, which will be discussed later.

For this reason, without the intention to get deeply into theoretical controversies, in this research we accept and implement the definition of Barth, who insists that the ethnic group is actively formed by its members, based on their subjective belief that they belong to the particular group (Barth, 1969). A similar definition is provided by Wsevolod W. *Isajiw*: an “ethnic group is an unintentional group of people who share the same culture, or the descendants of these people who identify themselves, or are identified by others, as the members of the same group” (Isajiw, 1974: 122).

1 During 2011 and 2012 SASA researchers Branislav Pantović, MPhil and Dragana Radojičić, PhD visited Argentina. The field research was performed according to a questionnaire put together by a SASA research team: Dragana Radojičić, PhD, Aleksandra Pavićević, PhD, Mileša Stefanović-Banović, MPhil and Branislav Pantović, MPhil. We would like to use this opportunity to express our gratitude to Dragana Radojičić, PhD and Aleksandra Pavićević, PhD who on more than one occasion offered insight into our work, and their critics and suggestions helped us improve this study.

2 There is a Serbian embassy in Buenos Aires where we got information about diaspora; on the other hand, at the indicated time of research, Montenegro officials did not have a diplomatic office open in Argentina.

The field research performed during the study of this subject in 2011 and 2012 had 32 respondents³. The focus of the research was on emigrants' attitudes towards traditional heritage, the sustaining of traditional and religious rituals and practice, their relationship to their motherland, forms of social structure in diaspora, etc.⁴ A part of this research will be shown later in this study in order to better illustrate the contemporary situation in the field. More thorough research of the diaspora in Argentina is still in progress.

The greatest challenge while dealing with this area of research is definitely the lack of bibliography. Among the few works there is a monograph by Ljubomir Antić *Naše iseljeništvo u Južnoj Americi i stvaranje Jugoslovenske države* published in 1987, a scientific paper about the emigration from Boka Kotorska Bay based on sources from the Archive in Herceg Novi by Marija Crnić-Pejić, and the contemporary study *Crnogorci u Južnoj Americi* by Gordan Stojović and Marjan Miljić.

A very large potential source of information for the study of this diaspora that has been underutilized is archival materials, mainly from the Yugoslavia Archive and Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Serbia, where we were researching in 2011 and 2012.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL COMMENT ON THE EMIGRATION TO ARGENTINA

Occasional emigration from the South Slavic territories to overseas countries occurred even in the 18th century, but it is only since the late 19th century that the first mass emigration and creation of emigrant colonies from the territories of today's Balkans were officially documented. The emigration from these territories to overseas countries is most commonly classified in four phases. The first phase started in the middle of the 19th century and ended by the end of the First World War, the second refers to the period between the two World Wars, the third occurred during the Second World War and after war years, and the fourth phase started in the late 1950s and has lasted until today (Krstanović-Lukić, 1992: 26-30).

The most massive emigration from the South Slavic territory overseas and to Argentina occurred during the first and the second phase⁵, while the later waves were notably less sizeable. The first emigrants were sailors from Boka Kotorska Bay and Dubrovnik. Later, influenced by the sailors, other people started emigrating, firstly from Dalmatia, then from neighbouring territories – Lika, Montenegro, and Herze-

3 Since we contacted the Serbian Embassy in Argentina and the representatives of Serbian Orthodox Church in Buenos Aires, we would like to use this opportunity to express our gratitude to the ambassador Gordana Vidović, and the priest Boško Stojanović for all their help during this research.

4 We also had access to Ján Botík's monograph *Slováci v Argentínskom Chacu – Los eslovacos in el Chaco Argentino*, published in 2002, which deals with the Slovaks in Argentina. In this study the author gave systematic and detailed comment about the Slovak emigrants based on his own research and stay in the field, in the first place in the Chaco province. Even though this detailed ethnic and anthropologic study deals with the Slovaks, the author, due to historical context, naturally mentioned also the Serbs and the immigrants who saw themselves as ethnic Serbs. The fact is that for the time being, unfortunately there is no such complete study on the Serbs in Argentina, like the previously mentioned monograph by Ján Botík.

5 Migrations to Argentina and other South American countries were even more intensified in the late 19th century, after the USA had introduced annual quotas for immigrants. During this period entering

govina – a bit later from Bosnia and Vojvodina⁶, and lastly from Serbia and Macedonia (Slijepčević, 1917: 14).

Reasons and circumstances for emigration in different territories certainly have some timely and territorial peculiarities. However, one can say that the fundamental reasons for the migration of most people were in the first place economic, and partially political⁷.

Until 1918, 90% of emigrants were farmers and stockmen, and a small number of them were sailors. They were mostly men able to work, and mainly unmarried (Antić, 1987: 17). “If they got married, in most cases they would take a girl from the native city by recommendation. Mixed marriages were very rare and mainly not well received by the family” (Crnić-Pejović, 2007: 196). The ships travelled mainly from Trieste and Genoa, and a large number of travellers did not even know there was a difference between North and South America. The travel costs were usually covered by the relatives who emigrated earlier and were well off.

Argentinean immigration laws did not require literacy, so the majority of immigrants were either illiterate or semiliterate. Still, many of them made an effort to educate their children, which made them look good in the eyes of the local population. Education, however, also implied a threat of assimilation, and so in order to preserve their native language and culture, emigrants founded national schools (Antić, 1987: 24–25).

Archival research and existing bibliography indicate that it was difficult to determine the exact number of “our” emigrants in Argentina, as well as in other overseas countries, during all the phases of emigration. One of the most important reasons was the fact that the immigrants were very often registered incorrectly. For example, during the first phase of emigration, if emigrants stated Austria, Hungary or Turkey as their country of origin, they were registered as Austrians, Hungarians and Turks.

After the First World War ended, the South Slavic citizens from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Montenegro (of that period) became the citizens of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The newly founded state made efforts to unite and satisfy the needs of all of its emigrants. In July 1920, a decision was made to open a General Consulate in Buenos Aires, which opened up in 1922. In 1928, the Consulate was transformed to an Embassy⁸. However, even after the foundation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, most of the immigrants stated other countries as their countries of origin, most frequently because they were unaware of the aforementioned political changes at their own home country.

Argentina was less difficult than entering the USA and Canada, mainly because of the lack of work force and low population density. This state gave numerous benefits to the immigrants, such as paying for the travel costs inside the country, cheap agricultural land, and very favourable terms on loans (Antić, 1987: 12).

6 It is interesting to mention that *Ján Botík* in his work *Z Dolnej zeme do Argentíny* mentions that the Slovaks came from Vojvodina (from Padina, Kovačica and Stara Pazova) between 1924 and 1930 to the Argentinian province of Chaco, where they appointed a Slavic teacher and school in 1934, in order to preserve their origin. The author also mentions that Slovak colonists in Chaco kept their customs until the 60s and 70s of the 20th century (Botík, 2011: 239–245).

7 During the first phases, a very important reason for emigration to overseas countries was also a desire to escape the Austro-Hungarian three-year military service.

8 Isailović (2000) states that at that moment this was the only diplomatic branch in the whole South America of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and also later of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Still, it is very curious to mention that during this time there was a general consulate of the Kingdom of Montenegro which was sporadically issuing passports, even though it did not have any authority by the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. We found this detail in the Yugoslavian Archive: fond no. 765, folder 2, description unit 9–21.

We are still facing the problem of determining the exact number of descendants of “our” emigrants, and very often this gap in information represents one of the greatest challenges while researching this diaspora, and defining emigrants’ ethnic identity. Our research indicated that, regardless of the degree to which a respondent had assimilated, the events following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s caused the greatest confusion regarding the determination of identity of emigrants who originate from Serbia and Montenegro. The sense of being a Yugoslav and being a part of a (united) Serbian-Montenegrin diaspora can still be found in a number of emigrant’s descendants. This is why the question of defining identity, especially with emigrants of Serbian and Montenegrin ethnicity who come from the territory of today’s Montenegro⁹, has become further complicated after the disintegration of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006.

A resolute referendum¹⁰ on the independence of Montenegro was held on the 21st of May, 2006. The referendum question was: “Do you want the Republic of Montenegro to be an independent state with a full international and legal personality?” and the options offered were YES and NO. The question of independence deeply divided Montenegro. History and economy were the two pillars of on which both blocks’ campaigns rested, but they were interpreted in different ways¹¹. According to official results, independence was supported by 55,4% of voters. Therefore, with a margin of 0,4% of votes, Montenegro became an independent and sovereign state¹².

The above-mentioned situation caused new ethnic polarizations between Serbian and Montenegrin populations, in the first place in Montenegro, and later among the diaspora in Argentina. This polarization will be a part of the discussion to follow.

9 The issue regarding Montenegrin and Serbian identity in the Republic of Montenegro also refers to historical and political issues, and its analysis exceeds the scope of this study. We would like to use this opportunity to enclose data from the Montenegro census in 2011, which gives a more colorful explanation of the mentioned situation. From 620 029 people in Montenegro, 278 865 of them identified themselves as Montenegrins, whereas 74 806 from this group listed Serbian as their mother tongue. 178 110 respondents identified as Serbs, and 1 360 listed Montenegrin as their mother tongue. For more details please refer to: <http://monstat.org/cg/page.php?id=534&pageid=322>.

10 In 1991 Badinter Arbitration Committee (which consisted of presidents of Constitutional Courts of France, Spain, Germany, Italy, and Belgium) ranged Montenegro among other Yugoslavian states that did not have any political obstacles in order to become autonomous state. According to the findings of this commission, the states have the right to self-determination in the boundaries of federal units and the right to constitute a sovereign state in the process of separation from the federal state - Yugoslavia. The referendum in Montenegro was held on the 1st of March in 1992. To question “Do you want Montenegro as a sovereign republic to continue to be a part of a community - Yugoslavia, completely equal with other republics which want the same thing?” 95.94% of the total number of people who voted circled affirmative answer, so Montenegro stayed in state union with Serbia (Rastoder, 2011).

11 The representatives of independence block insisted on the fact that “in Montenegro there will not be neither winners nor defeated because the independency will represent the victory for the whole Montenegro” and that their goal is “affirmation of state and national interest for Montenegro”. On the other hand unionists were promising that “regime will finally be removed from the people’s back and the prosecutor’s office and judiciary will be professionalized so that criminals with the power and those close to them would be held responsible”, and they were saying that the independency will aggravate the economic situation and complicate family and political relationships with Serbia. For more details please visit: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5006380.stm> and <http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=453244>.

12 For more details, please refer to: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5006380.stm>.

CONTEMPORARY LIFE – FIELD RESEARCH RESULTS

Nowadays, “our” emigrants in Argentina are primarily descendants of the first emigrants and emigrants who came after the Second World War. A substantially smaller number of descendants originate from the emigration in the late 20th century, and they are mostly highly educated immigrants¹³. Also, in the last couple of years, there has been a growing trend of immigration for the purpose of forming marriages between citizens of Serbia and Argentina; the majority of emigrants have been women.

As previously mentioned, it is estimated that the diaspora in Argentina numbers some 30,000 people. The majority of this population originates from the territory of today’s Montenegro and Croatia, and a smaller number originate from the territory of today’s Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. They live in different regions of Argentina, but mostly in the provinces Chaco, Buenos Aires and Santa Fe. Only a small number of emigrants use the ancestors’ language for spoken and written language, and it is mostly used in colonies. It is thought that the number of people who regularly use this language does not exceed 200 (Stojović, Miljić, 2012: 144). The largest number of “our” people, totalling approximately 10,000, live in the northern Argentinean province Chaco, which used to house the biggest colony of emigrants from Montenegro, called La Montenegrina.

During our research in 2011 and 2012 we performed interviews with 32 members of the diaspora in Argentina, from Buenos Aires, Rosario, Ensenada, Machagai, and Roque Sáenz Peña. Fieldwork consisted of direct interviews. Except for criteria determined by this study’s focus, no other specific criteria were taken into consideration in the selection of respondents. The interviews were performed with the people available, and inclined to participate. However, it should be noted that the respondents were mainly active members of this community, whose ethnic consciousness is presumably more developed, as they were the ones who were the most motivated to participate in this research.

The majority of members of the diaspora who responded to our questions were descendants of the second and third generation emigrants from Montenegro, while three originated from Kosovo and Metohija (Peć), three from Raška (Golija), and four from central Serbia (Belgrade and Niš). We concluded that ancestors from Montenegro mainly belong to the first and second wave of migration, at the beginning of the 20th century and between the two wars, while ancestors from other areas arrived with the third wave of migration, after The Second World War.

The first significant piece of information to be obtained from respondents was the emigrant generation they belonged to. Eleven respondents belonged to the third generation, as their parents were also born in Argentina. The majority consists of second-generation emigrants, whose parents – some even as children – came to Argentina. The last three respondents belong to the wave of the newest emigration, and they have been in Argentina since the 2000s. Four of the members of the diaspora who responded to our questions belong to the older generation (born before 1943), the greatest number is middle-aged (born between 1943 and 1955), and twelve of them were born after 1970. Even though most of the respondents completed college or university studies, the respondents from the older generation only have elementary education. The occupations of respondents are very diverse, but most of them work in administration and management.

¹³ According to the data acquired by the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in Buenos Aires.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned historical and political reasons and theoretical perplexity, it is not simple to establish firm research criteria to define the members of this community. As previously mentioned, this complexity is the reason that during field research our basic criteria for ethnic affiliation was awareness of the members themselves of belonging to this community. In order to preserve this awareness, the existence of ethnic symbols is necessary, as members use these symbols to identify themselves (Prelić, 2008: 193).

In the case of emigrants in Argentina, members of this diaspora consider themselves both as an integral part of Serbian native people and loyal citizens of Argentina. Almost all respondents described themselves and the whole community as closer to Argentinean people than to those in the country of origin, with regards to mentality, value system and everyday life.

On the other hand, field research and conversations with the respondents confirmed that in the case of this community, the most important factors were ethnic symbols, awareness of the same origin and cultural and historical heritage, and awareness of common tradition. In addition, for most of the emigrants, Orthodox religion acts as a very significant ethnic symbol. As the most important elements of social and cultural life the emigrants emphasized existence of the home country's clubs and the Serbian Orthodox Church. For the older emigrants a very important symbol of identity was knowledge and usage of mother tongue, even though almost all of them speak Spanish much better. Almost none of the younger emigrants speak their mother tongue.

RELATIONSHIP TO MOTHERLAND AND MOTHER TONGUE

Almost all of the respondents had the same response to the question of which country they consider as their home country: Argentina. One respondent answered with a delayed, "No. One and the other" (m, 1933); by "the other" he most probably meant his home country, but he did not specify. It is interesting to note that the only time someone mentioned the home country (Montenegro) in addition to Argentina, the respondent is a member of the third generation in Argentina (f, 1970), and as her mother tongue she stated Spanish. However, to the question "What does the native country mean for you?" almost all respondents paused to think and reconsider their previous answer. Some of them reacted too emotionally, and were unable to give an answer. The majority of answers related to belonging: "native country is a country of the people you belong with, a place where you belong spiritually", "a sense of belonging somewhere", "a birth place", "a place where family is, where I was born", "where my family comes from" and etc. Three respondents could not give an answer, as one of them stated: "I do not know, it is a place where you come from, and in both cases I am a frog from the other puddle"¹⁴.

Only a small number of respondents had never visited their country of origin (Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro), and most of them have been for a visit at least two times. Those who have closer or more distant relatives in the country of origin keep in touch with them through internet or telephone.

From the country of origin the respondents keep letters, books, documents, photo-

¹⁴ "*Soy el sapo de otro pozo*" is an expression in Argentina. It might be compared with similar English ones "To be a misfit" or "To be out of place".

graphs, national costumes, *gusle*¹⁵, icons, flags, musical records and CDs, etc. It is curious that these objects are not only from descendants' native countries, but from all the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

All the respondents agreed that on no occasion is a deceased buried or posthumously transferred to origin countries.

The question "What is your mother tongue?" inquires more as to a connection with the culture of the country of origin than a sense of belonging to the country of origin. The majority of respondents (twelve of them) consider "our" or Serbian language as their mother tongue, and they are the members of the first and second generations of emigrants. Those whose answer was Spanish (five of them) are the members of the second and the third generation of those born in Argentina. Surprisingly, among all these emigrants born in the territory of former Yugoslavia, only one person speaks his mother tongue better than Spanish.

The field research confirmed that the respondents who represent the second and third emigrant generations most commonly talk with their children in Spanish, or, very rarely, in both languages. According to their testimonies, their children are completely assimilated and the majority of them do not speak the language of the country of origin.

In most families, even though the parents spoke Serbian, they conversed with their children exclusively in Spanish or, "a bit in Serbian, a bit in Spanish". There was only one case in which the child spoke Serbian very well, and in seven cases they understood Serbian but spoke only a little. In the majority of cases, they did not speak Serbian at all. During the field research, most of the younger emigrants stated that they would like to learn Serbian and they are really interested in their ancestors' culture, but they do not have any free time.

SOCIAL LIFE

On arrival to Argentina, the emigrants, as in other overseas countries, gathered and founded various societies, homeland clubs or/and associations, mainly based on their own national or home basis. According to the available data, during early waves of immigration there were not any major distinguishable divisions between the emigrants, because the tendencies towards independency and liberation existed between all Slavic people under the ruling of Austro-Hungarian Empire, until 1918. After Yugoslavia was formed, almost all societies used word "Yugoslavian" as a prefix, even though there were those who held on to their national characteristics (Crnić-Peجویić, 2007: 177).

Today, there are several homeland clubs in Argentina where "our" diaspora participates, and all of them, except the "Cultural Centre Nicola Tesla"¹⁶, still contain the prefix "Yugoslavian" in their names, no matter what the national background or state of origin of the people in those clubs is¹⁷. Interestingly, even though the names were given during the time Yugoslavia still existed as a state, the field research indicated that this prefix in the name was not only kept by default, but because it actually reflects the

15 The *gusle* can be a single-stringed or two-stringed musical instrument, used in the region of the Balkans. It is most commonly made of maple wood. As a single-stringed instrument *gusle* can be found in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Dalmatia.

16 It was founded in 2009, as an economic and cultural institution. Serbian language courses were occasionally held at this center.

17 It refers to former Yugoslavian states.

ideals of the society members, no matter what their ethnic affiliation and/or citizenship is. This can be confirmed by the fact that emigrants who originate from present day Montenegro in Venado Tuerto registered their church community as the “Yugoslav Church of Belgrade Patriarchate”, and continue to use this name even today¹⁸.

The program and goal of all societies is very alike: the gathering of emigrants, their protection, mutual aid, the sustaining of communication with the homeland, the preservation of mother tongue and identity (Crnić-Pejović, 2007: 177).

The first society/association in Buenos Aires, which gathered people from the territory of former Yugoslavia, then from the Habsburg monarchy, was the Austrian Mutual Aid Society (*Sociedad Aústriaca de Socorros Mutuos*) founded in 1878. In 1919 this society changed its name to “Yugoslav Mutual Aid Society from La Boca” (*Sociedad Yugoslava de Socorros Mutuos de la Boca*). In 1988 it was united with the society from Dock Sud “Yugoslav Centre” (*Hogar Yugoslavo de Dock Sud*) and the society changed its name to the “Yugoslav Joint Society Our home” (*Sociedad Mutual Yugoslava Naš Dom*). At present, this is the only active society where emigrants of “our” origin gather in Buenos Aires¹⁹.

The Province of Buenos Aires (Provincia de Buenos Aires) has five different associations which gather people of “our” origin: in Mar Del Plata, the “Cultural Centre of United Slavs”²⁰ (*Centro Cultural Eslavos Unidos*); in General Juan Madariaga, the “Yugoslav association Njegoš”²¹; in Tandil, the “Yugoslav social and cultural centre”²² (*Centro Social y Cultural Yugoslavo de Tandil*); and in Berisso, in officially “the capital city of emigrants” in the province of Buenos Aires, the rejuvenated “Yugoslav association” (*Colectividad Yugoslava*).

The Province of Chaco (Provincia Chaco) has two societies where Argentinean people of “our” origin gather. The first one is situated in Presidencia Roque Sáenz Peña and is called the “Yugoslav cultural and sport association” (*Sociedad Yugoslava Cultural y Deportiva*). The other society is situated in La Montenegrina and is named the “Yugoslav society Durmitor”, but currently it is not active.

It is important to emphasize that the members of “our” diaspora were a part of many societies, homeland clubs and emigrant organizations in the Republic of Argentina that no longer exist. For example, the “Kosovo association” (*Sociedad Kosovo*) from Ensenada was active from 1911 to 1947. Members of this society included people from

18 For more details please refer to public announcement regarding reactions to the visit of Metropolitan Amfilohije to South America: <http://www.mitropolija.me/?p=9891>.

19 During the field research we realized that the members were mostly older people, who belong to the first or the second emigrants’ generation from all territories of former Yugoslavia, whereas their children are not a part of association work. The members of the society live in harmony; they are very well organized, and have their own incomes from memberships and renting their own real estate. They have a folklore group (*Conjunto Marjan*) and sport section as well.

20 According to the data of the Serbian Embassy in Buenos Aires, this association has 120 members originating from all over the former Yugoslavia’s territory. In addition to social and cultural activities, courses of Serbo-Croatian language are occasionally organized.

21 After meeting with the Serbian ambassador Gordana Vidović in Buenos Aires in 2011, we found out that this is one of the most compact associations of “our” diaspora in the Republic of Argentina. Also, we learnt that during the regular gatherings members of the society try to cherish customs, language, culture of the homeland, and to hand down the same to their children.

22 They have choir and folklore group. Very often they meet in order to celebrate *our* and Argentinean holidays, they actively participate in public events of the city Tandila, but they do not have their own premises.

Montenegro, Bosnia, Macedonia, Croatia, and Serbia, and the name “Kosovo” was chosen as a symbol for national recognition through history²³, as explained during the field research in 2012 by a member of that society, Domingo (Neđeljko) Jovanović.

One can say that emigrants’ social life is not noticeably determined by their ethnic origin and sense of belonging. None of the respondents take their ethnic origin into consideration when choosing a friend, and they generally state that they are friends with “all Argentineans, but in the church with the Montenegrins and the Serbs – *ours*”. Although homeland clubs or associations are not found in the majority of local communities, in the places where there are gatherings they are mainly based on their ethnic origin. All the informants believe that the existence of this institution is very significant for the preservation of folk customs and sense of common origin. They say “it is significant for custom preservation”, “it is important that the tradition and customs are cherished closely to church”, “it is for people who came and for the customs to remain”, “because it is a way to preserve roots awareness”, “it’s important for the roots that bring us together and for the language”, “in order to cherish identity and to spend time together”.

THE ROLE OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE CONTEMPORARY LIFE OF EMIGRANTS IN ARGENTINA

A study of the archival material revealed that since their very founding, almost all associations emphasized the need to form Serbian Orthodox Church²⁴ in their statutes and plans. Since the first emigrations, until the late 40s in the 20th century, there were no representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the territory of South America, so the Orthodox emigrants from the territory of former Yugoslavia were mostly directed to the Russian Orthodox Church²⁵ and to some other local Orthodox churches.

The first temple of the Serbian Orthodox Church was built by “our” emigrants in 1938 in Machagai (Chacoprovince), honouring Saint Nicolas. However, until the 1950s, in the absence of a priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church, there was a Russian priest²⁶ who was sent by the Serbian Patriarchate. The foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Argentina began just after the Second World War in 1948, when the Serbian Orthodox Church patriarch²⁷ sent the first Serbian priest to Argentina.

Today the Serbian Orthodox Church has five churches in Argentina. At “Yugoslav association Njegoš” facilities in General Juan Madariaga, religious services are also held from time to time. In 2011 the “Buenos Aires’ and South-central American’ Eparchy”²⁸ was founded, with the headquarters in Buenos Aires and metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro as administrator. In 2011 and 2012, five new priests were appointed to the new eparchy of Argentina, Venezuela, and Chile.

Even though assimilation is present and there is a distancing from the motherland, certain events in the country of origin are reflected within the diaspora in Argentina as well, and they lead to new divisions that can also be observed in the church. Dur-

23 For more details please refer to <http://www.semanarioserbio.com/?p=2969>.

24 Please refer to Yugoslavia archive, fond number 385 “The Embassy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in Argentina- Buenos Aires” (1926–1945).

25 It existed in this territory since the late 19th century.

26 Alexander Konovalenko (?–1952).

27 Gavrilko Dožić (1881–1950).

28 In Serbian: Buenosaireshka i juzhno-centralnoamerichka eparkhiya.

ing the 1920s, the *Montenegrin Orthodox Church* started operating in Montenegro. This church claims the canonical jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church with regards to the legal Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral, after the cancellation of Peć Patriarchate in 1766. The *Montenegrin Orthodox* church has not been recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and other autocephalous Orthodox churches. In addition to this canonical issue, the *Montenegrin Orthodox Church* also takes issue with the Serbian Orthodox Church and its properties, mostly in the territory of the Republic of Montenegro.

The conflict between Serbian Orthodox Church and Montenegrin Orthodox Church is reflected within the diaspora in Argentina as well. The most prominent example is in Chaco province, where most of the emigrants of Montenegrin origin live (Stojović, Miljić, 2012: 149), and the religious community is very well connected. In addition to issues regarding jurisdiction, property issues occurred as well. The research also shows that the issue between Serbian Orthodox Church and Montenegrin Orthodox Church created a series of dilemmas and complicated issues regarding identity for a number of emigrants, which they do not like to talk about.

THE CONNECTION TO RELIGION AND TRADITION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The field research performed in Argentina points out that the dissolving of the Serbian Orthodox religious community has been occurring for a long period of time, mainly because the second, third and following emigration generations are completely integrated within Argentinean society and within mixed marriages²⁹. Even though a large number of them are still getting married and being baptized in the Serbian Orthodox Church, until recently most of them had no participation in the church life. During a conversation with priest Boško Stojanović we found out that the founding of the eparchy and appointing new priests led to a noticeable increased tendency for participation in the church life. This finding was confirmed during conversations with the emigrants.

All the respondents were baptized in the Serbian Orthodox Church, except for two who were baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. Twelve of them got married in the Roman Catholic Church, and eight of them in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. It is interesting to mention that even though there was evidence of significant assimilation, the majority of the younger generation got married in the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The children were mainly baptized in the Serbian Orthodox Church, and in a few cases in the Roman Catholic Church or the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (“baptized by Russian priest at home”). The most interesting answer to this topic was “Yes, they are baptized in Orthodox and Catholic Church in order to choose their religion on their own”.

To the question of whether they go to the church, all respondents gave affirmative answers. Twelve of the respondents answered that they go to the Serbian Orthodox Church and the rest of them stated that they go both to the Serbian Orthodox Church

29 Also, all the respondents agreed that today mixed marriages are a common event, which was not the case earlier. One respondent told us “Yes, it is normal now, but it was not before. For example, in Madriaga there were 300 men, and only 20 of them got married, because there were no women from the Balkans, and they were very conservative and wanted a wife from the Balkans, so some of them met the women from their homeland through letters and photos”.

and to the Roman Catholic Church or to the Serbian Orthodox Church and Russian Church Abroad, “when *our* priest is not available”, one respondent said.

Most of the respondents go to church for religious holidays, weddings and baptisms, or “when the priest comes”. The same answers were also given by believers who go to church on the regular basis, because in certain churches religious services are held only few times a year. Among the respondents who stated that they go to both churches, there are those who go to Catholic or Russian Church when the priest in the Serbian Orthodox Church is not available.

Half of the respondents answered that “our” people are mainly buried with a funeral service performed by an Orthodox priest, whenever it is possible, served by Serbian or if not available by a Russian priest.

* * *

Strategies of identity used by ethnic groups most commonly refer to history and tradition, which implies that certain patterns will last and will be transferred from generation to generation (Prelić, 2008: 289). This suggests the inclination for tradition of the members of minority groups, which was confirmed by our field research. It was demonstrated that in the case of diaspora in Argentina, the strongest components of people’s tradition are folk customs connected to the church calendar or life cycle of an individual. The results of the research, which describe in detail the situation in the field regarding custom practice, are outside of the scope of this study. However, we will illustrate this notion with some data.

Except for two respondents, all the respondents answered that they know when their *slava*³⁰ is and what *slava* represents. Thirteen respondents stated that they celebrate their *slava*, while the rest do not. Only one respondent answered that he does not have *slava* day. The majority, ten of them, celebrate Saint Nicolas Day, while St. John Chrysostom, St. Elijah’s Day, St Stephen and St. John the Baptist were mentioned by four respondents.

Also, everyone but one respondent has a religious icon of a saint in their house, mainly the icon of the saint they celebrate, their family’s patron. Most of those icons are family icons, inherited from their grandparents. In several cases the icons were brought by emigrants from Serbia and Montenegro, while other respondents had obtained the icons themselves.

A little over two thirds of the respondents, 23 of them, answered that they remembered at least some customs they had seen from their parents, grandparents, or in the country of origin. Most of them remembered the *slava*, which one of the respondents described in Spanish as “bread passed from hand to hand, between the members of a family standing in a circle”. Another respondent remembered wedding customs as well, and still another explained in Spanish that he remembered burning of the wood for Christmas³¹, but he could not remember the name of this custom. Two respondents stated that they remember everything.

More than a half of the respondents stated that they celebrate Serbian New Year³², and one respondent stated that he remembers that this day was celebrated “when

30 It is a Serbian Orthodox Church tradition of the ritual glorification of one’s family’s patron saint. The family celebrates the *slava* annually on the saint’s feast day.

31 Refers to *badnjak* (log of a holy tree - oak).

32 According to the Julian calendar, introduced by Julius Cesar. It was the predominant calendar in most

there were elders, but not anymore". Orthodox Christmas is celebrated by all the respondents, and Orthodox Easter is celebrated by most of them, 23 from 32 respondents. It is curious to mention that to the question, "What is your favourite religious holiday?", an equal number of respondents stated New Year, *slava*, Christmas, and Easter, and only one stated that all the holidays are equally important.

Some responses indicated the fading or forgetting of tradition or assimilation. For example, for 21 respondents, the description of rituals performed during religious holidays came down to formal food allowed by fasting or regular food, family meals, then baking and breaking of ritual bread (*slavski kolač*, *česnica*) and *žito*, and going to the church together whenever it is possible.

We asked several questions regarding traditional food, bearing in mind that food can be a faithful guardian of the past and indicator of national and religious identity. The literature points to certain situations with individual migrations and minority groups where culinary characteristics have remained preserved even in cases when the mother tongue is long forgotten. On the other hand, food is a domain of constant innovations and one of the ways to shift from one culture to another, without even noticing and without great resistance, unlike some other cultural inheritance (Radojičić, 2012: 36–45 and 180–201).

Only two respondents stated that they do not or cannot make any national dishes or drinks. The rest stated they can make at least one or two dishes or drinks. They stated: pies, strudel, *gibanica* (with potato, dock leaves or dried meat), *sarma*, *čevapi* and cakes. One respondent said that they made sauerkraut (sour cabbage) each year, and most of them mentioned that their mothers and grandmothers used to make more national dishes, which they can no longer remember.

Eight of them drink *rakija*, and the same number of them drink "our coffee". Two respondents stated that they eat *slatko* and *ratluk*. On the other hand five respondents did not know or have never heard about *ratluk*, and six of them have never heard about *slatko*. Those who stated that they drink "our coffee", *ratluk*, *rakija*, etc. told us that these products are generally ordered from Serbia, some from Montenegro, and some from Croatia. Two respondents told us that they order everything through the Serbian Embassy in Buenos Aires.

CONCLUSION

The given historical review and summary of the contemporary situation points out that these so far unexplored populations of emigrants in South America represent a complex phenomena, and a community whose identity is built from various historical, political, cultural, religious and ideological layers.

It is obvious that despite the small number of people and great degree of assimilation, this community is showing a desire to sustain its ethnic and cultural characteristics and fulfilling its specific cultural needs.

In order to sustain the awareness on ethnic affiliation for a longer period of time, the awareness must be bound to a certain number of cultural elements, which in certain contexts become the symbols of ethnic differences. The existence of a network of

of Europe, and in European settlements in the Americas and elsewhere, until it was superseded by the Gregorian calendar. However, most branches of the Eastern Orthodox Church still use the Julian calendar. Serbian New Year is on the 14 of January according to the Gregorian calendar.

cultural institutions, not only today, but in the past as well, can be cited as one of the key factors of the minority groups' survival. One can say that the continuity of existence and functioning of the institutions guarantees the continuity of the social life of the group and the existence of its inner social dynamic (Prelić, 2008: 366–368).

During the archive and field research, which is still ongoing, emotional bonds, awareness of being a part of the same origin and having the same cultural and historical heritage, and the awareness of common tradition have surfaced as the key elements in the case of this diaspora. The need for group survival, throughout history and today, manifested itself through organizing and gathering in homeland's clubs and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Being in the field, we found out that among the younger generations of emigrants' descendants there is an increased interest in history, culture, tradition, so in this regard even the ancestors' language would be a very useful support in the form of organized help from the homeland, and countries of origin.

By presenting this preliminary research, our aim was first to point to this diaspora, which is not well-known, even though it represents one of the key elements of cultural and historical Serbian heritage abroad. We hoped to raise some issues or establish certain processes and situations that can initiate further, more detailed study of this diaspora.

The field research and extensive archival study proved to be the best sources for future, more detailed research of 'our' emigrants in Argentina.

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