

UDC 930.85(4-12)

ISSN 0350-7653

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

BALCANICA

XLII

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

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BELGRADE
2011



Hungarian Views of the Bunjevci in Habsburg Times and the Inter-war Period*

Abstract: The status and image of minorities often depends not on their self-perceptions, but on the official stance taken by the state in which they live. While identity is commonly recognized as malleable and personal, the official status of minorities is couched in stiff scientific language claiming to be authoritative. But as politics change, these supposedly scientific categorizations of minorities also change. Based on academic reports and parliamentary decisions, in Hungary today the Catholic South Slavs known as Bunjevci are officially regarded as an obscure branch of the Croatian nation. This has not always been the case. Early records of the Bunjevci categorized them in a variety of ways, most commonly as Catholic Serbs, Dalmatians, and Illyrians. In the nineteenth century Bunjevac elites were able to project to the Hungarian public a mythological positive historical image of the Bunjevci, delineating them from the negative stereotypes of other South Slavs. This positive image, fixed in encyclopaedias and maintained until the Second World War, represented the Bunjevci as Catholic Serbs who (unlike Croats or Orthodox Serbs) were constantly faithful to the Hungarian state and eager to assimilate. In the 1920s and 1930s traditional Hungarian stereotypes of Bunjevci protected them from abuses suffered by other South Slavs. As political relations transformed, official views of the Bunjevci also changed. With the massive upheaval during and after the Second World War, there was a change in accounts of who the Bunjevci were. The transformation from communism and the break-up of Yugoslavia have also evoked demands for changes in identity from some Bunjevci, and brought new impositions of identity upon them.

Keywords: Bunjevci, Croats, Serbs, South Slavs in Hungary, minorities, encyclopaedic knowledge, imagery, ethnic categorization, imposition of identity, stereotyping, inter-war period.

Not long ago, Tara Zahra laid down a challenge to other historians. While acknowledging that scholars have been remarkably good at highlighting moments of ethnic mobilization, Zahra suggested that most of the time people live in a state of indifference to national or ethnic identity, and that historians should find ways to make this state of indifference visible.¹

* Research for this article was completed with support from a fellowship at the History Department at the University of Uppsala. I owe thanks to Robert J. W. Evans, Slobodan G. Markovich, and R. Chris Davis for smoothing out some rough spots. Thanks to Balázs Trencsényi for inviting me to present an early version of this paper at a conference at CEU in Budapest. I am also grateful to Balázs Dobos for helping me gain access to the report on Bunjevci he co-authored for the Hungarian Academy. As

Zahra's ideas echo the work of social scientists examining the fluid nature of identity, such as Glenn Bowman who claims that even seemingly intractable ethnic, national and religious identities are "unfixed and contingent with certain circumstances bringing one element of the field of identifications which constitute the social self to dominion and other circumstances overturning and reshaping that hierarchy."²

In contrast to the view of fluidity, identity has also been described as constricting and permanent; a sort of cement straightjacket which can be poured over the otherwise indifferent individual. In this interpretation indifference is all well and good, but is irrelevant when identity is demanded or imposed by others such as neighbours, strangers, or the state.³ In other words, no matter how you hope to shape your own identity, people around you perceive who you are in ethnic and national terms regardless of your wishes, and many "know," in encyclopaedic terms, what it means to be a member of your ethnicity or nationality. There is little you can do to alter such encyclopaedic knowledge. Like it or not, you are caught under a lexicographical entry, pasted to an identity. If you are a member of a small minority this situation is extreme indeed. Historical records of your existence will generally be made by census takers, ethnographers, government officials, historians, and encyclopaedists from the majority, who will file you, box you, label and store you with descriptions you may not like, but can hardly alter.

my title suggests, I concentrate here solely on Bunjevci in lands that are now or once were part of Hungary. Nothing I say should be taken as applicable to the identities of Bunjevci in lands outside old Hungary, nor to Hungarian views of the Šokci — topics that require separate treatment.

¹ Tara Zahra, "Imagining Noncommunities: National indifference as a category of analysis", *Slavic Review*, 69: 1 (2010), 93–119.

² Glenn Bowman, "Comments", *Current Anthropology* 43: 2 (2002), 219–220; and on how solidarities are mobilized in certain situations, id., "The Two Deaths of Basem Rishawi: Identity constructions and reconstructions in a Muslim-Christian Palestinian community", *Identities: Global studies in culture and power* 8: 1 (2001), 47–81. In a similar vein, but showing how and where ethnicity tends to matter within a matrix of indifference, Rogers Brubaker et al., *National Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton 2008); the research agenda for which was set by Brubaker in his *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the new Europe* (Cambridge 1996), esp. 67.

³ On the demand for, and imposition of identity, see Gerald Stourzh, "Ethnic Attribution in Late Imperial Austria: Good intentions, evil consequences", *From Vienna to Chicago and Back* (Chicago 2007), 157–176; Robert Hayden, "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive sharing of religious sites in South Asia and the Balkans", *Current Anthropology* 43: 2 (2002), 205–219, and his "Reply", *ibid.* 227–231, esp. 228 in resp. to Bowman.

Social scientists and psychologists can demonstrate that identity is indeed malleable, but the problem for historians is that we are forced to look at our subjects' identities (or indifference to identity) through the lenses of majorities who recorded them in the past. To borrow an observation from a Swedish historian: "Even cross-cutting issues such as demography and economics" (and identity, we might add) "are dependent on data collections made on the basis of national legislation and in national categories."⁴ The external gaze provided by such collections, however, is also intrinsic to collective identities.

This challenge of sources, however, also offers an opportunity, if we accept part of the postmodernist critique and give up on the idea of authenticity of voices from the past on group-identity (while not giving up on our rigorous historical research standards). Instead of assuming a claim made in the past about identity is cement-like proof, we might instead allow the voices to say what they say and how they say it, and simultaneously reveal the limits within which fluid identities were forced, and the way in which majorities viewed them. Thus, we can come to an understanding of minorities, as well as the identities of dominant majorities. In this way, acknowledging that much of the record was affected by the majority and stored by the state provides a point of analytical strength. For just as histories of the conditions of the working classes and stories of gender relations have improved our understanding of the bigger picture, of how society works, so too can a study of a particular minority help us understand how states functioned, and how dominant majorities saw and see themselves, and what this tells us about identity in a larger sense.

In what follows, I hope to bridge two layers of analysis, identity as chosen and imposed, as malleable and fixed, fluid and solid, and demonstrate that there is some justice to both views and that they are indeed contingent on externalities and yet can be reanimated from the files into which individuals have been fixed. Some of the most salient of these externalities are brought from historical interpretations — whether advanced by elites of a community or imposed on the community by outsiders.

Even the most hallowed ethnic and national identity was created in the past, and goes through changes as time passes. In the case examined below, I will show how a certain minority identity — that of the Bunjevci — has been created and re-created over time.

Prologue: Official views of who the Bunjevci are today

A diplomatic spat has been going on in South-eastern Europe for nearly two decades now. Hardly noticed by outsiders because of the conflicts that

⁴ Rolf Torstendahl, *Historisk tidskrift* (Sweden), 129: 3 (2009), 534.

enveloped the former Yugoslavia, the disagreement is between Croatia and Serbia, and laterally involves Hungary. The disagreement is over the identity of a Catholic, South Slav group, the Bunjevci as they call themselves (*Bunjewatzen* in German, *bunyevácok* in Hungarian). In brief, since the break-up of Yugoslavia, Serbia has recognized the Bunjevci as a national minority, and in every census since 1991 a significant number of Serbian citizens have declared themselves to be Bunjevci. By contrast, Croatia insists the Bunjevci are a branch of the Croatian nation, and that in counting them separately from other Croats, Serbia is reducing the number of Croats living in Serbia and thereby reducing its obligations to its Croatian minority. Others have suggested that, in Serbia, Bunjevci identity has offered a safer haven than Croatian nationality, especially during the wars of Yugoslav succession in the 1990s as the rise in Bunjevci numbers in the 1991 census mirrors the fall of the number of Croats.⁵

The debate between Serbia and Croatia has also been played out in Hungary where, in August 1991, Bunjevci from the Hungarian town Baja urged the Hungarian government to recognize the newly formed state of Croatia. Since 1993, in Hungary state funding for minority institutions is dependent on official recognition of minority status. To gain that status, demand for it must be proven by a petition to parliament, with at least 1,000 signatures from members of the minority. Furthermore, the minority must be able to demonstrate that it has lived in Hungary for at least 100 years. Finally, Parliament can ask the Hungarian Academy for an official opinion on the minority. On three occasions Hungary's Bunjevci have indicated that they want official recognition as a national minority. In 1993 a Bunjevci cultural group, *Neven*, protested to the Hungarian Parliament against the non-inclusion of the Bunjevci amongst Hungary's national minorities. By 2006, Bunjevci activists from Baja had fulfilled all the requirements to

⁵ This point is made by Miroslav Samardžić, *Položaj manjina u Vojvodini*, 2nd ed. (Belgrade 1999), 36. Cf. Jean-François Gossiaux, "Yougoslavie: quand la démocratie n'est plus un jeu", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 51: 4 (1996), 837–848 (842). Items from the debate are: Milana Černelić, "Attempts to Deny the Bunjevci of Bačka (Vojvodina), the Right to Belong to the Croat Nation", *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, 41: 1–2 (1997), 233–259; Vladimir Ilić, "Attitudes of the Ethnic Elites Members in Vojvodina to Minority Rights and to Inter-Ethnic Relations", *Sociologija* 44: 1 (2002), 25–40 (29); Bojan Todosijević, "Why Bunjevci did not Become a Nation: A case study", *East Central Europe* 29: 1–2 (2002), 59–72; Mato Matarić, "Bunjevci Croats are Getting Together Again", *The South Slav Journal* 24: 3–4 (2003), 53–55; Mladena Prelić, "Bački Bunjevci: problem identiteta u istorijskoj i savremenoj perspektivi", in V. Stanovčić, ed., *Položaj nacionalnih manjina u Srbiji* (Belgrade 2007), 597–605; Suzana Kujundžić-Ostojčić, "Bački Bunjevci na svom putu od naroda do nacionalne manjine", *ibid.* 607–617; and Zlatko Šram, "Socijalna alijenacija bunjevačkih Hrvata u Vojvodini", *Sociologija i prsto* 47: 1 (2009), 3–25.

petition parliament for recognition, but the Hungarian Academy's official opinion was that the Bunjevci were Croats and the request was rejected. Finally, in 2010, after a second parliamentary petition, the academy published a decision noting that although the Bunjevci had been recognized as a minority in Hungary prior to the Second World War, ever since they had been considered a sub-group of Croats. The academy further declared that although the "scientific [sic] and political debate on the question of the Bunjevci's origin, name, belonging, and relevant forms of identity cannot be considered closed," there was no reason to define them separately from Croats. Accordingly, parliament again rejected the Bunjevci's claim to minority status.⁶ In outrage, the Hungarian Bunjevci activist Mijo (Mihály) Mujity began publishing a blog in Hungarian entitled *The Bunjevci Holocaust: The Calvary of the Bunjevci People*.⁷

It is not the "scientific" nature of this debate that interests us here, but primarily what it once said about Hungarian identity in the inter-war period, and secondarily what the disappearance of the Bunjevci in the post-war period, and the debate on their identity in the post-communist period may suggest today. We will begin with a summary of views of Bunjevci prior to the First World War. Despite the seeming obscurity of the issue, there are plenty of sources on the Bunjevci, especially from the critical period of South-Slav nation-building, the nineteenth century, when there was an explosion of publishing activity by, for and about Bunjevci, in their own tongue as well as in Hungarian.

The appearance of the Bunjevci in the Hungarian historical record

In this period, Bunjevci elites played an active role in the creation of the Hungarian narrative about them. The leaders of what was then a Bunjevci town, Szabadka (now Subotica, in Serbia), commissioned a Hungarian historian named Iván Iványi to write an account of their forefathers and the settling of their town.⁸ According to the heroic tale Iványi published in 1896, the Bunjevci first appeared in the historical record at the end of the seventeenth century during the Habsburg campaigns to re-conquer Hungary from Ottoman forces. In 1687 a group of Catholic South Slavs, led by Franciscan monks from Bosnia, presented themselves to Habsburg com-

⁶ The academy's opinion was drafted by Balázs Dobos and Ágnes Tóth, published online as "A magyarországi bunyevácokról (Szakértői összefoglaló)", available online at http://www.mtaki.hu/hirek/pdf/110113_osszefoglalo_bunyevac.pdf, quote p. 2.

⁷ <http://bunyevac.blog.hu/>

⁸ See Iványi's memoirs, István Iványi, *Visszaemlékezéseim életem folyására*, ed. Z. Dér et al. (Subotica 1974).

manders requesting permission to settle on the depopulated lands of Southern Hungary, in return for which they offered military service.⁹ Austrian officials called these people Catholic Rascians (that is, people from Rascia — a synonym for Serbs). Thus, the forefathers of the Bunjevci of Szabadka entered service in what was to become the extended military frontier zone, manned by Southern Slavs, who were given special freedoms not afforded to other commoners — freedom from taxation or the imposition of labour service by nobility and towns nearby. Moreover, civil authorities were enjoined not to “punish, interrogate or bother them,” in return for which they were expected to serve the Crown in Vienna, first as a line of primary defence against Ottoman incursions.¹⁰ They were also to protect the Crown, even in case of domestic uprisings by the Croatian or Hungarian nobility. Serbs, in particular, were granted special rights, which were periodically renewed by the crown. For the Orthodox, in particular, these rights were associated with their church, and came with a promise not to interfere with their religion. For the Bunjevci, who were Catholic as were the Habsburgs, no such promise was needed.¹¹

⁹ On Franciscans and migration to Hungary see Stjepan Sršan, “A horvát bevándorlás és a boszniai ferencesek szerepe Baranyában a 18. század elejéig”, *Baranya* 1–2 (1991), 152–164; Jovan Radonić, “O seobi Bunjevaca u Subotici 1687 godine”, *Glas Srpske akademije nauka*, Odeljenje društvene nauke, 214: new ser. 3 (1954), 119–127; Konstantin Kostić, *Bunjevci u Somboru pod vodstvom Franjevaca do 1787. godine* (Sombor 1934); Bernárdin Unyi, *Sokácok–Bunyevácok és a bosnyák ferencesek története* (Budapest 1947); Robert Skenderović, “Sudjelovanje slavonskih franjevaca u nacionalnom pokretu podunavskih Hrvata tijekom 19. i početkom 20. stoljeća”, *Scrinia Slavonia* 6 (2006), 194–216; Tamás Faragó, “Vándormozgalmak Magyarországon a 18. század utolsó harmadában”, *Demográfia* 41: 1 (1998), 7–38; id. “Spontaneous Population Movements in the Hungarian Kingdom during the Early Eighteenth Century with Special Attention to the Croatian and Serbian Immigration”, in D. Roksandić and N. Štefanec, eds., *Constructing Border Societies on the Triplex Confinium* (Budapest 2000), 187–203; István György Tóth, “Bosnyák ferencesek a hódoltsági misszióban”, *Misszionáriusok a kora újkori Magyarországon* (Budapest 2007), 257–309; Srećko M. Džaja, *Konfessionalität und Nationalität Bosniens und der Herzegowina. Voremanzipatorische Phase 1463–1804* (Munich 1984), 181–185; Antal Molnár, *Le Saint-Siège, Raguse et les missions catholiques de la Hongrie Ottomane, 1572–1647* (Rome 2007), 67–70; and Arthur J. Evans, *Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot during the Insurrection, August and September 1875*, 2nd ed. (London 1877), 222.

¹⁰ István Iványi, *Szabadka szabad királyi város története*, 2 vols. (Szabadka 1886), vol. II, 148–149.

¹¹ Docs. in Jovan Radonić, ed., *Srpske privilegije od 1690 do 1792* (Belgrade 1954); summary László Szalay, *Magyarországi szerb telepek jogviszonya az államhoz* (Pest 1861); and the royal patents in János Hornyik, “A rászok ellenforradalma 1703–1711”, *Századok*, 1868, 530–552, 608–632, 693–719 (535–538).

There were almost immediately frictions with local Hungarian authorities who tried to disarm the Bunjevci and Serbs, and collect taxes, from which these militiamen repeatedly received exemption from Vienna. At one point, Hungarian authorities from one county told the crown that 37,691 florins were lost annually in taxes because of these exemptions.¹² And authorities compared the Rascians' customs with those of "beasts of the forest."¹³ For their part, the attitude of border guards might be summarized in the words of Captain Novak Petrovics who (c. 1687) declared that they would "not bear the Hungarians, because up to now the Hungarian nation had treated the Rascians badly."¹⁴

These tensions evoked outrage, amongst Hungarian nobles that ancestral lands had been handed to foreigners (particularly Orthodox Serbs), and amongst peasants that these foreigners had been given, moreover, rights that no native Hungarian serf was afforded at the time. Worse, Hungarian peasants who had enjoyed certain liberties as border guards in the past saw those liberties steadily eliminated by Vienna and local landlords. Not surprisingly then, when major uprisings against the Habsburgs occurred in Hungary, such as the insurrection led by Prince Francis Rákóczi II in 1703–1711, and later the revolution of 1848–1849, they contained an edge of ethnic conflict based precisely on resentments of Southern Slavs' rights.¹⁵ In these uprisings, South Slav border regiments served the crown loyally against the Hungarian rebels.¹⁶

But with the reduction of the Turkish threat and the consolidation of Habsburg rule under Empress Maria Theresa (r. 1740–1780), many border-guard districts lost their privileges, including the one containing most Bunjevci. Fortunately for the Bunjevci of Szabadka, in 1743 the Empress granted the town tax privileges as a Royal City, and the Catholic inhabitants were given special rights. The loss of their privileges in this hinterland

¹² Estimate from 1701, in Iványi, *Szabadka*, vol. II, 156–157.

¹³ István Iványi, "A tiszai határőrvidék", *Hazánk történelmi közlöny*, 2 vols. (Budapest 1884), vol. I, 337–338.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 271; and J. H. Schwicker, *Die Serben in Ungarn* (Budapest 1879), 4.

¹⁵ Perhaps equally unsurprisingly given the unpleasant relations with local Hungarian authorities, a prominent Serb known as Pero of Szeged (Segedinac) also joined a Hungarian peasant uprising against local landlords in 1735. See László Hadrovics and Imre Wellmann, *Parasztmozgalmak a 18. században* (Budapest 1961), 13–51.

¹⁶ In detail, on the development of the border guard, see J. H. Schwicker, *Geschichte der Österreichischer Militärgrenze* (Vienna 1883); and Gunther Erich Rothenberg, *The Austrian Military Border in Croatia, 1522–1747* (Urbana, IL 1960).

so outraged Orthodox Serbs, that some moved to Russia in protest.¹⁷ But Szabadka, and some Bunjevci in it, became wealthy.¹⁸

And who were these Southern Slavs? We have some record of them from the military survey of 1700, in part to settle just who the border guards were, and thereby to stop outsiders from claiming of border guards' rights. So, we know of one Lukacs Szucsics, born in Albana, Bosnia, where his father had also been a soldier. Szucsics had ten years of military experience as a "raider" in Bosnia. He had lived in Szabadka for twelve years, serving as a captain. He had taken part in twelve military campaigns, being captured once and subsequently ransomed for 1,000 thalers. Szucsics had one son, ten oxen, four year-old calves, eight horses, two colts, a hundred sheep, twenty pigs, nineteen cadastral acres (hold) in barley and thirty in oats, as well as twenty "day's worth" of grapevines, half of which were not yet bearing fruit.¹⁹ Szucsics was, then, relatively well-to-do, with a heroic past and, in Hungarian histories, what was to be a prosperous future.

His story was also the story of the Bunjevci in Hungary. These people were often called "Catholic Serbs" by Hungarian encyclopaedias and ethnographical accounts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁰ In more detailed accounts, they were described as an attractive people who were a pillar of Hungarian society. Indeed, scions of ennobled Bunjevci families, such as the Antunovics, Kuluncsics, Rudits and Vonits families, served as county sheriffs and bishops. They also, incidentally, developed family my-

¹⁷ József Antunovics, "Magyar népelet. A szabadkai dalmata népszokások, rövid történeti ismertetéssel", *Hazánk, időszaki folyóirat*, ed. János Török, vol. 1 (Pest, 1858), 205; Iványi, *Szabadka*, vol. II, 1 ff. Cf. Ivan Antunovich, *Razprava o podunavskih i potisanskib Bunjevcih i Sokcih* (Vienna 1882). One estimate is that 1,000 Orthodox Serbian guardsmen took their families, totalling 100,000 people, to Russia. See Schwicker, *Geschichte der Österreichischer Militärgrenze*, 74–76.

¹⁸ On the enrichment of royal cities, incl. Szabadka, under Maria Theresa, see István Kállay, *Szabad királyi városok gazdálkodása Mária Terézia korában* (Budapest 1972).

¹⁹ Iványi, *A tiszai határőrvidék* (Budapest 1885), 33; and id. *Szabadka*, vol. II, 152. I do not know what a "day's worth" of vines meant, though it seems likely to have been a yoke.

²⁰ For Bunjevci as "Catholic Serbs" (sometimes "Rascians"), see Elek Fényes, *Magyarország statisztikája*, vol. 1 (Pest 1842), 71–2; Ignác Acsády, ed., *Az Athenaeum kézikönyvtára: A tudományok enciklopédiája, különös tekintettel Magyarországra*, 2 vols. (Budapest 1868); Pál Hunfalvy, *Magyarország ethnographiája* (Budapest 1876), 474; Aladár György, ed., *A föld és népei: Magyarország* (Budapest 1905), 228; Velimir Juga, *A magyar szent korona országában élő szerbek* (Budapest 1913), 27–28; and *A Napkelet lexikona*, 2 vols. (Budapest 1927), vol. I, 187. For an entry Bunjevci speaking the "Serbo-Croatian language," see Béla Bangha, ed., *Katolikus Lexikon*, vol. 1 (Budapest 1931). For Bunjevci as "South Slavs," see *A Pallas Nagy Lexikona*, 16 vols., vol. III (Budapest 1893).

thologies of ancient noble Dalmatian ancestry, though the documents proving this were inevitably “lost” over the turbulent course of history.²¹

The narrative of the Bunjevci’s heroic arrival to Hungary and subsequent prosperity was supported by documents and presented by Iványi, a Hungarian historian backed by wealthy Bunjevci at the end of the nineteenth century. The story is, even today, engaging and seductive. The problem is that the historical record is not so clear. As noted above, the first Habsburg record cited by Iványi, does indeed describe “Catholic Rascians.”²² But Habsburg sources from the time, indeed all sources until much later, were vague and inconsistent in their description of South Slavs, often using toponyms, such as Illyrians (people from Illyria), Rascians, Dalmatians, etc.²³ For centuries, German and Hungarian sources certainly did describe the Bunjevci as Catholic Serbs (alternately Rascians), but also called them Illyrians and Dalmatians. Thus, in 1879, an author called them “Katholische Serben (Bunjevaczén)” in his book on the Serbs of Hungary.²⁴

²¹ E.g., the history of the Rudits and Vojnits families in Gyula Lelbach, *Romba dől világ*, 3rd ed. (Budapest 2009), 14–16.

²² “Raizen”, thus: “Churfürst zu Bayern recommandirt, die kathol. Raizen, damit ihren 3 Palanken zu erbauen u. zu bewohnen eingeraumt werden möge.” 9 July 1687, Protoc. Exped. Folio 570, no. 22, Hofkriegsrat Archiv, Vienna, cited by Iványi, *Szabadka*, vol. I, 92. Terms used include “Raizen” (see above), “Rascien,” “Razin,” “Räisiche,” and “Räzische.” See letters of 1689 from the Margrave to Emperor Leopold I, in Philipp Röder von Diersburg, ed., *Des Margrafen Ludwig Wilhelm von Baden Feldzüge wider die Türken grössentheils nach bis jetzt unbenützten Handschriften*, 2 vols. (Karlsruhe 1842), vol. II, 35, 68, 94–95.

²³ For example, one Hungarian author wrote that Illyrians were “Orthodox Rascians, Vends, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Dalmatians, the Roman Catholic Šokci and Bunjevci of Hungary, Serbs, and Bosnians.” Gyula Kereskényi, *Érd (Hamzsabég) és Batta (Százhalom) községek történeti vázlatja* (Székesfejérvár 1874), 36 n. On the unset nature of ethnic identity among South Slavs, see John V.A. Fine, Jr., *When Ethnicity did not Matter in the Balkans: A study of identity in pre-nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in the Medieval and Early-Modern periods* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2006). On Illyrian identity, see Zrinka Blažević, “Indetermination: Narrative identity and symbolic politics in early modern Illyrism”, in B. Trencsényi and M. Zászkaliczky, eds., *Whose Love of Whose Country? Composite states, national histories and patriotic discourses in early modern East Central Europe* (Leiden 2010), 203–223; and Micaela S. Iovine, “The ‘Illyrian Language’ and the Language Question among the Southern Slavs in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, in R. Picchio and H. Goldblatt, eds., *Aspects of the Slavic Language Question*, vol. 1 (New Haven 1984), 101–156. For an example of Bunjevci known as Dalmatians, see László Heka, “A bunjevácok (dalmaták) Szeged életében”, in L. Blazovich, ed., *Tanulmányok Csongrád megye történetéből*, vol. 26 (Szeged 1998), 63–183.

²⁴ Schwicker, *Die Serben in Ungarn*, 4. Other sources in German listing Bunjevci as Serbs: Julian Chownitz, *Handbuch zur Kenntniss Ungarns* (etc.) (Hamburg 1851), 140; *Mittheilungenüber Handel, Gewerbe und Verkehrsmittel so wie aus dem Gebiete der Statistik*

But were the people identified by Iványi actually the forefathers of people who later called themselves Bunjevci? In the confusing period during the wars with the Turks at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth centuries, when authorities were scarcely interested in ethnic identity, this is impossible to judge. First of all, South Slavs of all faiths had entered Hungary en masse before and during the Ottoman occupation of Hungary. Despite the terrible destruction and population loss caused by the wars, some of these people were surely still around after the Turks left.²⁵ Indeed, it seems most likely that many Bunjevci, and almost certainly the Bunjevci of Érd (a small town near Budapest, far from the one-time military border), were descendants of immigrants who came to Hungary in the Ottoman period or before.²⁶ These people, along with other South Slavs who moved north at the time, were clearly not fleeing Muslim oppression to enjoy life under a Christian monarch when they arrived in Hungary, for they stayed in Ottoman-occupied lands instead of travelling farther north and west.²⁷

The category of Catholic Serbs is also problematic, though not in the sense of today. It did not cause confusion in the seventeenth century. A Je-

überhaupt, nach Berichten an das K.K. Handels-Ministerium (Vienna 1851), vol. 2, 162; Joseph Hain, *Handbuch der Statistik des Österreichischen Kaiserstaates* (Vienna 1852), vol. 1, 209, s.v. Das serbische Gebiet; *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie für die gebildeten Stände, Conversations-Lexicon*, 10th ed., vol. 15 (Leipzig 1855), 324, s.v. Wojwodschafft Serbien; *Die Gegenwart: ein encyclopädische Darstellung der neuesten Zeitgeschichte für alle Stände*, vol. 1 (Leipzig 1855), 881; Wilhelm Hoffmann, *Encyclopädie der Erd- Völker- und Staatenkunde: ein geographisch-statistische Darstellung*, vol. 2 (Leipzig 1866), 1765, s.v. Österreich; J. H. Schwicker, *Das Königreich Ungarn* (Vienna 1886), 16; Philipp Franz Bresnitz von Sydačoff, *Die panslavistische Agitation und die südslavische Bewegung in Oesterreich-Ungarn* (1900), 508.

²⁵ For the argument that some Bunjevci came to Hungary in the 15th or 16th c., see Ante Sekulić, *Bački Hrvati* (Zagreb 1991), 47. On immigration to Hungary, see Ferenc Szakály, “Serbische Einwanderung nach Ungarn in der Türkenzeit”, in F. Glatz, ed., *Ethnicity and Society in Hungary*, vol. 2 of *Études Historiques Hongroises 1990* (Budapest 1990), 20–39. Some Ottoman censuses from Hungary include family names, and from these it is often clear that people mentioned are South Slavs. See, e.g., Gyula Káldy-Nagy, ed. *A Csanádi Szandzsák 1567. és 1579. évi összeírása* (Szeged 2000), *passim*.

²⁶ On immigration to Érd and nearby towns before and during the Ottoman period, see Kereskényi, *Érd*, 35–37. On Catholic S. Slavs in nearby Tököl, see István György Tóth, “Sarajevói dokumentum a pesti bosnyák ferencesekről (1664)”. *Történelmi Szemle* XLIV: 1–2 (2002), 115–133 (125).

²⁷ Some authors claim some Bunjevci came to Hungary before the Ottoman invasion — see Ante Sekulić, *Bački Bunjevci i Šokci* (Zagreb 1990), 331. Cf. Djuro Šarošac, “Slaveni u Madžarskoj”, in I. Balassa, ed., *A magyarországi délszlávok néprajza*, vol. 2 (Budapest 1977), 7–36 (32).

suit priest writing from Belgrade in 1617 was disturbed because there were scarcely any priests to serve the scarcely literate Catholics in the region, who were being “infected” by Orthodox priests who spoke their language.²⁸ Further examination of church records shows what might seem to modern-day nationalists a disturbing conversion of some Orthodox Serbs (as well as Muslims and Protestants) to Catholicism.²⁹ The Orthodox who converted clearly did not stop being Serbs, but merely became Catholic ones, for at the time the concern was not with ethnicity but with faith, and there was (and theoretically still is) no contradiction between Catholicism and any ethnicity whatsoever. Leaving aside the delicate question of whether a Serb who today converts to Catholicism (or Buddhism) becomes a Croat (or Bunjevac, or just Buddhist), it is clear that the dividing line between various South Slav nationalities had not yet been set, and religion did not as yet serve as the definitive marker between Southern Slavs when the Bunjevci were first described.

Indeed, even with the growth of nationalist ideologies, the case was increasingly made for the unity of Southern Slavs. The great Serbian ethnographer Vuk Karadžić argued that all South Slavs were a single people, whether called Serbs, Bunjevci, Croats, or Yugoslavs.³⁰ Just as one could speak of Bunjevci as Catholic Serbs, so it was once possible to publish a patriotic book in Belgrade about *Famous Muslim Serbs*.³¹ When Bunjevci first entered Hungarian public discourse in the nineteenth century, the idea that they were Serbs who happened to be Catholic was unremarkable.

²⁸ See doc. in Mihály Balázs et al., eds., *Erdélyi és bodoltsági jezsuita missziók I/2, 1617–1625* (Szeged 1990), 285–297.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 411–413.

³⁰ See Karadžić’s description in “Srbi svi i svuda” (1836), repr. in *Sabrana dela Vuka Karadžića* vol. 17. *Etnografski spisi* (Belgrade 1972), 31–48 (Bunjevci, 32).

³¹ Milenko M. Vukićević, *Znameniti Srbi Muslimani* (Belgrade 1906). Cf. J. Hadži-Vasiljević, “Muslimani naše krvi u Južnoj Srbiji”, *Bratvo* XIX (Belgrade 1925), 21–94; and *Natalija: Life in the Balkan powder keg*, ed. J. A. Irvine and C. S. Tilly, transl. J. Pavetić-Dickey (Budapest 2008), entry of 14 Jan. 1919 (St. Sava’s Day), 366. This view was not isolated to believers in South Slav unity — see ref. to “Mohamedanische Serben” in Ferenc Fodor, *Osteuropäisches Jahrbuch 1922* (Budapest 1922), 131. On competing ideas, see Dominic J. Mandić, “The Croatian Character of the Medieval Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in A. F. Bonifačić and C.S. Mihanovich, eds., *The Croatian Nation in its Struggle for Freedom and Independence* (Chicago 1955), 105–139; memoirs by Jakov Ignjatović, *Szerb rapszódia*, transl. Z. Csuka (Budapest 1973), 53–55, and 78–79; Ivo Banac, “The Confessional ‘Rule’ and the Dubrovnik Exception: The origins of the ‘Serb-Catholic’ circle in Nineteenth Century Dalmatia”, *Slavic Review* 42: 3 (Autumn 1983), 448–474, 450–451; and Dennison Rusinow, “The Yugoslav Idea before Yugoslavia”, in D. Djokić, ed., *Yugoslavism: Histories of a failed idea 1918–1922* (London 2003), 11–26.

Views of the Bunjevci in Hungary to 1918

In addition to being the period when the Bunjevci's ethnic history was set in Hungary, the nineteenth century was when the image of Bunjevci was established by Hungarian ethnographers, some of Slavic origin. The first to mention Bunjevci did so in this rather muddled description: "Slavonians, separated into Bunjevci and Šokci, and who are all Roman Catholics."³² But the description of Bunjevci as Catholic Serbs was the most prevalent. Indeed, the idea that the Bunjevci were Catholic Serbs was so widespread in the Habsburg Monarchy, that even Czech encyclopaedias repeated it.³³

With the spread of nationalism, Hungarians became concerned about the potential threat the growth of Slavic identity and ideals of Slavic unity posed to the Hungarian state.³⁴ As if to mollify these fears, Bunjevac authors described their people in overwhelmingly flattering terms, and claimed that the Bunjevci were faithful to the Hungarian state. In 1842, the Hungarian public was introduced to the Bunjevci in an article series published by a Bunjevac author in the most important cultural journal of the time. This was a most thorough description of the Bunjevci and, in an age in which the immutability national character was taken seriously, it set the tone for all subsequent works. The article described the Bunjevci as a serious, handsome, patriotic and well-to-do people, who raised excellent horses.³⁵

In a famous discussion of the nationality question published in 1886, a Hungarian author declared that, unlike Orthodox Serbs, the Bunjevci were quick to assimilate to Hungarians, but added that their perfect mastery of Hungarian (for them a foreign language) did not mean that they would stop being Bunjevci.³⁶ This idea of the Bunjevci's willingness to assimilate to Hungarians also took deep root. Search as one might, there are virtually no negative mentions of Bunjevci in Hungarian works. Even neutral and seemingly scientific articles, such as those on folklore, repeated themes found earlier on the patriotism of the Bunjevci. A Hungarian geographical and ethnological lexicon from 1881 called Bunjevci: "Roman Catholic Serbs, who otherwise scarcely differ from their racial brethren ... they show much

³² János Csaplovics, *Etnographiai értekezés Magyar Országról* (1822, repr. Budapest 1990), 26.

³³ See *Ottův Slovník Naučný*, vol. IV (Prague 1891), s.v. Bunjevci.

³⁴ See István Gorove, *Nemzetiség* (Pest 1842), 86–87, and 92–97; Casimir Grafen Batyáni von Németh-Ujvás, etc., *Geschichte des Illyrismus oder des süd-slavischen Antagonismus gegen die Magyaren* (Leipzig 1849); and Jenő Szentkláray, *A társadalom nemzeti feladatai Délmagyarországon* (Temesvár 1897), 17; cf. a refutation, coupled with a call for tolerance and a mention of Illyrians, Lajos Mocsáry, *Nemzetiség* (Pest 1858), 191–204.

³⁵ Jenő Szárics, "A Bunyevácok", *Regélő Pesti Divatlap*, 2–13 Oct. 1842.

³⁶ Lajos Mocsáry, *Néhány szó a nemzeti kérdéstről* (Budapest 1886), 20–21.

more sympathy towards the Hungarian race than Rascians.”³⁷ In a later study of Christmas Bethlehem play customs amongst the Bunjevci of Baja, the author claimed the Bunjevci had become so assimilated to Hungarians that he could scarcely find anyone who could give him the text of the play in the original Bunjevac tongue.³⁸ But nowhere was the representation of Bunjevci more positive than in Hungarian encyclopaedias, regardless of the fact that some placed Bunjevci as a sub-category of Serbs. Some examples will suffice — the following, which calls the Bunjevci “Catholic Serbs,” is from an encyclopaedic description of Bács-Bodrog County in Southern Hungary, where many Bunjevci lived:

After Hungarians, the most handsome... are the Bunjevci...
The Bunjevci are happy to educate their children and take care that they learn Hungarian...
The Bunjevci are a beautiful people, a good people: they work hard, and like to work; and so they are wealthy, and well deserve their place amongst us [Hungarians]. They embrace Hungarians with brotherly love; they faithfully stick to the Hungarian state, and do not find its institutions to be foreign.³⁹

The claim that the Bunjevci were faithful to Hungary in the Revolution of 1848–49, as doubtless many were, is also frequently mentioned, and was made as early as 1871.⁴⁰ And the claim that Bunjevci supported Hungarian rebels during the Rákóczi Uprising (1703–1711) was made by a Bunjevac author writing in Hungarian as early as 1858.⁴¹ Both claims served Hungarian national propaganda, and the interests of Bunjevci who wished to avoid discrimination. And both claims, in as much as they are made about all Bunjevci, are ridiculous. Even some Hungarians supported the Habsburgs

³⁷ György Aladár, *Európa földrajzi és népismei leírása*, vol. 3 of *A föld és népei* (Budapest 1881), 429.

³⁸ Antal Kovács, “Karácsonyi népszokások Baján”, *Néprajzi Értesítő* 7 (1906), 47–55.

³⁹ István Frankl, “Bunjevácok”, in Gyula Dudás, ed., *Bács-Bodrogh vármegye egyetemes monográfiája* (Zombor 1896), 395–407; and the entry by a Bunjevac from Baja, Bálint Bellosics, “Bunjevácok”, in Samu Borovszky, ed., *Bács-Bodrog Vármegye* (Budapest 1909), 395–411. In support of Bunjevci fidelity in 1848, see docs. on Szabadka in István and László Magyar, eds., *Szabadka és vidéke 1848/49-ben (Levéltári dokumentumok)* (Subotica 1998).

⁴⁰ Mihály Horváth, *Magyarország függetlenségi harcának története 1848 és 1849-ben*, vol. 1 (n.p.: Ráth Mór, 1871), 138; Margit Balogh and Aladár György, *Magyarország* (Budapest 1905), 334; *Révai Nagy Lexikona* (Budapest 1912), s.v. Bunjevácok. Cf. Alba M. Kuntić, *Počeci borbe za preporod bačkih Bunjevaca: Jedan uspeh akcije kneza Mihaila i Ilije Garašanina za nacionalno oslobođenje i ujedinjenje* (Belgrade 1969).

⁴¹ Antunovics, “Magyar népélet”, 203–205.

in both the Rákóczi and 1848 struggles — indeed Rákóczi fought his first battle against a band of Hungarian nobles.

The lack of contradictory sources describing Bunjevci support for the Habsburgs against Hungarians is most striking when compared with the treatment given by Hungarian histories to Serbs and Croats. No less a figure than Iványi describes the Serbs who entered Hungary on the tail of Turkish conquest in overwhelmingly negative terms. He said that this “wild” people committed the most beastly criminal acts against Hungarians.⁴² This theme was repeated in the period running up to and during the First World War, notably in a work on the Ottoman period calling Serbs the premier henchmen of the Turks in Hungary.⁴³ A Hungarian history translated into English for the edification of the British called the Serbs “the most dangerous adversary of the Hungarians,” while claiming that the Bunjevci “were and still are alienated from their Servian kinsmen by religious differences... the Catholic Church succeeded in winning them over to the side of the Hungarians.”⁴⁴ Similarly, most histories of the Rákóczi insurrection and the revolution of 1848–49 mention atrocities committed by Serbs, and Croatian perfidy, but neglect the Bunjevci altogether.

It should be stressed that many Hungarian historians describe not only Serbian barbarity, but Hungarian atrocities committed against Serbs during the Rákóczi uprising and in 1848–49. Thus a patriotic history of the Rákóczi uprising written in 1868, which describes Serbs committing terrible atrocities against Hungarians, mentions the brutal slaughter of Serbs by Prince Rákóczi’s troops.⁴⁵ For 1848, an example of the admission of Hungarian crimes in standard histories is provided by the diaries of a Hungarian officer, Count Leiningen-Westerburg, who witnessed the slaughter of the “Rascians of Becse” and was disgusted by the “cruelty and rapaciousness” of his own troops who killed Serbs, despite his attempts to stop them.⁴⁶ As a result of the brutality of both sides, the count wrote that the region had been reduced to “a mere wilderness” in what was “a real war of extermination.”⁴⁷ In addition to balanced discussions of Hungarian atrocities, there is widespread acknowl-

⁴² Iványi, *Szabadka*, vol. I, 3–4; and id., “A tiszai határörvidék”, 337–338.

⁴³ Sándor Takáts, *Rajzok a török világból*, 3 vols. (Budapest 1915), vol. I, 319.

⁴⁴ Henry Marczali, *Hungary in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge 1910), 210 and 225.

⁴⁵ Hornyik, “A rácok ellenforradalma”.

⁴⁶ Letters of 22 Oct. 1848 and 22 Feb. 1849, *The Letters and Journal of Count Charles Leiningen-Westerburg*, ed. H. Marczali (London 1911), 92–96 and 137–144 (141).

⁴⁷ Ibid., 95; also descriptions of hatred between Serbs and Hungarians (amongst whom, General Damjanich), letters from Czibakháza of 23, 24, and 25 Feb. 1848, *ibid.*, 144–151. This is seconded by a traveller who visited the region a year after the fighting had ended: Anon. [S. Kapper], *Südslawische Wanderungen im Sommer 1850*, 2 vols. (Leipzig

edgement that some Hungarians stood on the Habsburgs' side, and there are descriptions of Serbs who fought on the Hungarian side in 1848–49.⁴⁸ Indeed, there is a street named in Budapest after the greatest of them all, General Damjanich, executed by Austrian military authorities in 1849.⁴⁹

Thus, even amongst heroic Hungarian histories, the view is not advanced that Serbs fought only on one side, against Hungarians. Yet even today, no such nuanced histories have been written in Hungarian about Bunjevci. Instead, Bunjevci who struggled against Hungary disappear altogether amongst Croats or Serbs. It beggars belief that during the Rákóczi rebellion the Bunjevci, who had not long before entered Hungary and enjoyed the protection of the crown against rapacious Hungarian lords, would have taken the side of the rebels. Yet there is scarcely mention of the Bunjevci in Hungarian historical accounts, just accounts of struggles between Hungarians and Rascians, whom later historians have assumed to be Orthodox Serbs. For example, in a description of the destruction of Baja by Rákóczi's forces in which some 12,000 cattle were taken, there is no mention of Bunjevci, although the town was largely populated by them.⁵⁰ In 1848 surely some Bunjevci joined Croatian and Serbian forces backing the Emperor against the Hungarian rebels, in a foretaste of later South Slav unity.⁵¹ When Bunjevci are recorded, they are described as faithful to

1851), summarized as “Rambles in Southern Slavonia”, *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine*, Mar. 1853, 311–328.

⁴⁸ On Serbs who served in the Hungarian forces, see Gábor Bona, “Szerb katonák az 1848–1849-es honvédseregben”, in id., ed., *Szerbek és magyarok a Duna mentén 1848–1849-ben: Tanulmányok a szerb–magyar kapcsolatok köréből* (Budapest 1983), 153–165; and for a vignette, see Károly Eötvös, *A nagy év apró emlékei* (1905, repr. Veszprém 2009), 222–223. In detail, on the fighting between Serbs and Hungarians, see Ö. Olchváry, *A magyar függetlenségi harc 1848–1849-ben a Délvidéken* (Budapest 1901).

⁴⁹ The following, heroic biography, gives a fairly standard description of Damjanich's fidelity to Hungary, and strong Serbian identity: Emil Gaudernak, *Damjanich János tábornok élete története* (Budapest 1931).

⁵⁰ Hornyik, “A ráczok ellenforradalma”, 547–558. An exception to this general rule, which mentions attacks on Bunjevci by Rákóczi's forces is Ferencz Badics, “A Bácska”, in *Magyarország, Az Osztrák–Magyar Monarchia írásban és képen*, 20 vols. (Budapest 1888), vol. 1, 573–618 (585 and 594–598).

⁵¹ The Bunjevci were directly asked to join the Serbs. See the address “To the Slavs of the Roman Catholic Church in Bačka, Banat, Srem and Baranja who are of one tongue with the Serbs”, 10 May 1848, in Radoslav Perović, ed., *Gradja za istoriju srpskog pokreta u Vojvodini 1848–1849*, ser. 1, vol. 1, March–June 1848 (Belgrade 1952), 311–312. On Slav unity against Hungary in 1848, see the letter from the gov. of Hungary to László Szaray in Frankfurt, 24 May 1848, in Ștefan Pascu, ed., *Documente privind revoluția de la 1848 în țările române. C. Transilvania*, vol. 4, 14–25 May 1848 (Bucharest 1988), 461–462. Cf. József Thim, *A magyarországi 1848–49-iki szerbfölkelés története*, 3 vols.

Hungary. “Oh, God, just give my homeland many such good friends as the Bunjevci” declaims a character in a pseudo-biography from 1938.⁵²

It is easy to demonstrate that those who have claimed Bunjevci allegiance to the Hungarian state have ignored contradictory evidence. Hungary had its share of troubles with Bunjevci, for instance in the village Bikity, in March 1862, where “exclusively the poorer Bunjevci people... took part” in an assault on state representatives, and eventually the military had to be called out to suppress them.⁵³ As time passed, and the direction that the modern Hungarian state was taking (after 1867) became clear, prominent Bunjevci can be found who complained about Hungarian domination. In 1878 a town councillor from Szabadka wrote bitterly about changes in the education law which denied children education in “the Bunjevac language.” He warned that Hungarians who assumed Bunjevci were assimilating because they spoke Hungarian in public were unaware that when no Hungarians were about, Bunjevci reverted to their native South Slav tongue.⁵⁴ Another Bunjevac, who wrote anonymously under the name X.Y., said Bunjevci were clubbing together because of Hungarian chauvinism. X.Y. also took the position that the South Slav peoples were all one people, whether called “Serbs, Bunjevci, Šokci, Dalmatians, Illyrians, or Bosnians.” In addition to denouncing Hungarian attempts to assimilate the Bunjevci, X.Y. railed against Bunjevci who afraid to stand up for their own people. “Many”, X.Y. complained,

don't even like to talk about this, or say there is no Bunjevac question, while others would like to solve the problem but are embarrassed to study the Bunjevac tongue or deal with the Bunjevci's family issues and other affairs, and would rather study French, English, Turkish, Chinese, Gypsy, etc. languages than the South Slav one.⁵⁵

(1930–1940), vol. I, 56, 131; vol. II, 194–196, and 506–509. For a background on ideals of South Slav unity, see Dimitrije Djordjevic, “The idea of Yugoslav unity in the nineteenth century”, in id., ed., *The creation of Yugoslavia, 1914–1918* (Santa Barbara, CA 1980), 1–17; Gabor P. Vermes, “South Slav Aspirations and Magyar Nationalism in the Dual Monarchy”, in I. Banac, J. G. Ackerman, and R. Szporluk, eds., *Nation and Ideology: Essays in honor of Wayne S. Vucinich* (Boulder, CO 1981), 177–200; and Ana S. Trbovich, “Nation-building under the Austro-Hungarian Sceptre: Croato-Serb antagonism and cooperation”, *Balcanica XXXVII/2006* (Belgrade 2007), 195–222.

⁵² Dezsőné Kosztolányi, *Kosztolányi Dezső* (Budapest 1938), 80.

⁵³ See letters from Almás and Baja of 5 and 9 Mar. 1862 in Nikola Petrović, ed., *Svetozar Miletić i Narodna stranka, gradja 1860–1885*, vol. I, 1860–1869 (Sremski Karlovci 1968), 165–169.

⁵⁴ Lázár Mamusich, *A „Bácskai Híradó” és a Bunjevac elemi tanúgy* (Szabadka 1876).

⁵⁵ X.Y., *Bunjevac kérdés és az 1868-iki XXXVIII. és XLIV. törvénycikkek végrehajtása* (Szabadka 1896), 5.

This anonymous Bunjevac author also said that whenever anyone called for education in the Bunjevac language, they were called “pan-Slavic traitors” to Hungary.⁵⁶ That was no exaggeration. State control of the Bunjevci was indeed tight, and the Interior Minister was kept informed about the “pan-Slav” agitation amongst the Bunjevci. In 1902 the minister was informed by the county sheriff about developments in the “Bunjevac movement” in Szabadka and Baja. The sheriff suggested the minister ask the Bishop of Kalocsa to remove a religious instructor named Kuluncsich from the town, as he had been guilty of agitating for the teaching of the Bunjevac tongue in schools, and publishing dangerous articles in the journal *Neven*.⁵⁷

Far-fetched as this may seem today, the demand expressed repeatedly over decades for more education in “the Bunjevac language” was neither ridiculous nor impossible, for there were Bunjevci teachers who were up to the job.⁵⁸ The argument was that just as Serbs write according to their speech and Croats according to theirs, so the Bunjevci should maintain their own. At the time the Bunjevci had a calendar, and number of journals published in their dialect. In addition to *Neven*, they could read *Bunjevac*, the *Bunjevačke i šokačke novine*, and the *Bunjevačka i šokačka vila* in their own dialect. These last two were established by Bishop Antunovich of Kalocsa, a Bunjevac who had been born near Baja. In 1882, just six years before his death, Antunovich published a programme for the Bunjevci to resist assimilation and maintain a separate and unique identity amongst other South Slavs.⁵⁹ Antunovich was subsequently described as the founder of Bunjevac

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁷ Letter of 6 Sept. 1902 in Gábor G. Kemény, ed., *Iratok a nemzetiségi kérdés történetéhez Magyarországon a dualizmus korában*, 7 vols. (Budapest 1952–1999), vol. III, 527–528. On education in the region, see György Dudás, *Az oktatásügy története Bács-Bodrog vármegyében* (Zenta 1903).

⁵⁸ On the struggle for education for Bunjevci in Hungary, see Mijo Mandić, *Borba Bunjevaca za svoj jezik u osnovnim školama* (Belgrade 1938). There was a long tradition in the Monarchy of writing in local dialects. See the imperial addresses to the peasantry and sorage documents collected during Empress Maria Theresa’s reign, drafted in the local dialects, some of which have been identified as Bunjevac, in István Udvari, ed., *A Mária Terézia-féle úrbérrendezés forrásai magyarországi délszláv népek nyelvén*, 2 vols. (Nyíregyháza 2003), esp. vol. II, *Bács vármegyei szerb és bunyevác jobbágyok úrbéri bevallásai*.

⁵⁹ Antunović, *Razprava o podunavskih i potisanskih Bunjevcih i Šokcih u pogledu narodnom, vjerskom, umnom, građanskom i gospodarskom* (Vienna 1882); and the critical review by The Editor (Iván Bátori), “Razprava”, *Bunjevac*, Zombor, 18 Aug. 1882. On Antunovich, see the biography, with Antunovich’s personal correspondence: Matija Evetović, *Život i rad Biskupa Ivana Antunovića narodnog preporoditelja* (Subotica 1935).

literature by a Hungarian encyclopaedia.⁶⁰ The culmination of Antunovich's efforts came after his death. In 1894 a *Hungarian-Bunjevác (Croat-Serb) Dictionary* was published, implicitly claiming a common Serbo-Croat language of which Bunjevác was a dialect.⁶¹

Despite the authorities' attention, *Neven* kept publishing criticism of the Hungarian government. Within a year the author of an article on "the nationalities question in parliament" had been sentenced to six months in prison and fined 200 crowns for denigrating the Hungarian nation and agitating against officials.⁶² To resist such abuses, some Bunjevci joined forces with other South Slavs in organizations such as the Serbian-Bunjevci Agitation Committee of the Social Democratic Party, which also raised the suspicion of authorities ever fearful of pan-Slavic activities.⁶³ Precisely because of the pressure put on them, a Hungarian social democratic paper warned in 1913 that the country's South Slavs were turning towards Serbia.⁶⁴

With the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, and rising fears of South Slav unity, leaders amongst the Bunjevci were placed under police surveillance, as were other South Slav leaders in the Habsburg Monarchy. But none were treated more severely than the Orthodox Serbs, particularly following the joyful reception some local Serbs gave to Serbian troops who entered the Monarchy after the failure of the Austro-Hungarian attack of 1914.⁶⁵

In the period just before, during, and immediately after the First World War the Bunjevci were more fully integrated into the ideology of South-Slav unity. What had been unremarkable in the past came to be unacceptable. Croats, such as the Croatian politician Stjepan Radić, had al-

⁶⁰ *Révai Nagy Lexikona*, vol. IV (Budapest 1912), s.v. Bunyevácok.

⁶¹ Ambrus Sárcevic, *Magyar-bunjevác (horvát-szerb) szótár* (Szabadka 1894).

⁶² Letter of 3 July 1903, *ibid.* 528–529.

⁶³ See docs. in Kemény, ed., *Iratok a nemzetiségi kérdés történetéhez*, vol. VI, pp. I, 174, 393–395.

⁶⁴ György I. Kalmár, *Szociáldemokrácia, nemzeti és nemzetiségi kérdés Magyarországon (1900–1914)* (Budapest 1976), 194–195.

⁶⁵ For Hungarian govt. reactions, see docs. in Kemény, ed., *Iratok*, vol. VII, 1914–1916 (Budapest 1999), 48–70; and in *Count Stephen Tisza, Prime Minister of Hungary: Letters (1914–1918)*, ed. and transl. C. de Bussy (New York 1991), 8–9, 50–51, and 168–174. On abuse of Serbs and other S. Slavs (incl. Bunjevci) during the war, see Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War, 1914–1918* (London 2007), 63–68; cf. Jonathan E. Gumz, *The Resurrection and Collapse of Empire in Habsburg Serbia, 1914–1918* (Cambridge 2009), *passim*; Henry Baerlein, *The Birth of Yugoslavia*, 2 vols. (London 1922), vol. I, 248ff; and a Hungarian account of one of the massacres, Ferenc Pollmann, "A szerbekkel szembeni osztrák-magyar atrocitások az első világháború kezdetén. Sabác, 1914. augusztus 17.", *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 122: 3 (Sept. 2009), 715–730.

ways declared Bunjevci were Croats.⁶⁶ But this separateness, and conflicting views on who the Bunjevci were, came to be seen as irrelevant towards the end of the Great War, as stress was laid on the unity which would lead to a unified South Slav state.⁶⁷ The Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić objected to Hungarian representations of the Bunjevci and other South Slavs, particularly in census data, declaring:

Foreign ethnographers, unaware that the Bunjevci, Šokci, Dalmatians or Illyrians in official statistics are Serbo-Croats, unaware of the lack of veracity and the distortion of Hungarian statistics, have composed yet more variegated maps on which the great mass of Serbo-Croats has not been taken into consideration, particularly in northern Bačka and Baranja.⁶⁸

That this was the official South Slav line is indicated by the fact that a prominent Croatian Yugoslavist, Ante Trumbić, had used almost identical words in a letter to the Foreign Office in London, in which he put the number of Bunjevci in Hungary at roughly 70,000.⁶⁹

At the end of the First World War, some representatives of the Bunjevci declared their desire to join Serbia in the new South Slav Kingdom. Most of the lands inhabited by Bunjevci were separated from Hungary and

⁶⁶ Stjepan Radić, *Moderna kolonizacija i Slaveni* (Zagreb 1904), 228; and see the Hungarian notice of the Croatian use of “Croats of Bačka” as a definition of Bunjevci in “Horváth földrajz a nép számára”, *Földrajzi Közlemények* 18: 2 (1890), 71–80 (79). Cf. Đorđe Popović-Daničar, *Bački Bunjevci i Šokci* (Belgrade 1907).

⁶⁷ The idea of South Slav unity was repeated before and during the war by scholars in England, some of whom mentioned Bunjevci, such as B.C. Wallis, “The Slavs of Southern Hungary”, *Geographical Review* 6: 4 (Oct. 1918), 341–353 – Wallis called Bunjevci “Roman Catholic Serbs”, 341; R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy* (London 1911), *passim*; and id. “The Problem of Revision and the Slav World”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 12: 34 (July 1933), 24–35 (27). Seton-Watson called Bunjevci Croats, q.v. his “Memorandum”, May 1930, in *R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs: Correspondence 1906–1941*, 2 vols. (London 1976), vol. II, 193–200 (198); cf. Baerlein, *Birth of Yugoslavia*, vol. I, 90–93, placing Bunjevci closer to Serbs.

⁶⁸ Jovan Cvijić, “La frontière septentrionale des Jugoslaves” (Paris 1919), repr. es “Severna granica južnih Slovena”, in vol. 3 of his collected works, *Govori i članci*, ed. R. Lukić et al. (Belgrade 1991), 315–27 (324). This view was taken up by Baerlein, *Birth of Yugoslavia*, vol. I, 90 and 92.

⁶⁹ Report from Trumbić to Rbt. Cecil, FO, 18 Oct. 1918, in Anita L. P. Burdett, ed., *The Historical Boundaries between Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia: Documents and maps, 1815–1945*, 2 vols. (London 1995), vol. I, 503–517. For a nuanced view of various Croatian positions, see George Grlica, “Trumbić’s Policy and Croatian National Interests from 1914 to the Beginning of 1918”, *Journal of Croatian Studies* 14–15 (1973–74), 74–112.

given to the nascent Yugoslavia.⁷⁰ But the establishment of the new state and the victory of the ideology of South Slav unity did not end the debate in Yugoslavia. In broad terms, Croat scholars claimed that Bunjevci were Croatian, whereas Serbian sources tended to plump for the Yugoslav, or the Catholic Serbian description. Bunjevci themselves could and did choose between three, the Yugoslav, the Croat, or the Catholic Serbian identity.⁷¹

Hungarian views of the Bunjevci in the inter-war period

For the Bunjevci left in Hungary, things were quite different. Hungarians' nightmares of Slavic unity had become reality. Parts of Southern Hungary were occupied by the Serbian Army, and a swathe of Hungary was awarded to the nascent South Slav Kingdom. The reasoning for the dismemberment of old Hungary in the Peace Treaty of Trianon (1920) was national self-determination underpinned by a conviction on the part of the peace makers in Paris that in the past Hungary had abused its minorities.

In 1919, as it became clear that the future peace treaty would append two-thirds of Hungarian territory to neighbouring states, the Hungarian public expressed outrage and denial. In some cases, there were serious doubts that minorities truly wanted to leave the Hungarian motherland.⁷² A story, widely reported in the press that year, claimed that Bunjevci wanted

⁷⁰ See docs. in Drago Njegovan, ed., *Prisajedinjenje Srema, Banata, Bačke i Baranje Srbiji 1918. Dokumenti i prilozi*, 2nd rev. ed. (Novi Sad 2001), 20, 33–34, 39–41; Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, eds., *Jugoslavija 1918–1988. Tematska zbirka dokumenata*, 2nd rev. ed. (Belgrade 1988), 127; and Ferdo Šišić, ed., *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914.–1919.* (Zagreb 1920), 168. Cf. Jovan Grčić, “Bunjevci i Srpsko Novosadsko Narodno Pozorište”, *Književni sever* (1927), 141–145; Veco Dulić, “Učešće Bunjevaca u prisajedinjenju Vojvodine Srbiji”, *Književni sever* 5: 2 (1 Feb. 1929), 73–74; Toma Milenković, “Adalékok a Szerb-Bunyevec Agitációs Bizottságnak a nemzeti kérdésre vonatkozó álláspontjához (1918 közepétől 1919. április 13-ig)”, in S. Gábor and F. Mucsi, eds., *A magyarországi tanácsköztársaság 50. évfordulója* (Budapest 1970), 144–165; László Kóvágó, *A magyarországi délszlávok, 1918–1919* (Budapest 1964), 72–98; Károly Orcsik, “Federáció vagy központosítás: válaszút előtt a születő délszláv állam”, *Magyarországi Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok* 20: 1–2 (2008), 123–130 (128); and Miklós Miskolczi, “Szabadkából Subotica – egy különleges megszállás története”, *Népszava*, 10–11 Nov. 2007.

⁷¹ Examples of work done in Yugoslavia at the time on Bunjevci, are Rudolf Horvat, *Hrvati u Bačkoj* (Osijek 1922); Alba M. Kuntić, *Bunjevac – Bunjevcima i o Bunjevcima* (Subotica 1930); Mиловоje V. Knežević, ed., *O Bunjevcima* (Subotica 1930); Jovan Erdeljeanović, *O poreklu Bunjevaca* (Belgrade 1930); Petar Pekić, *Povijest Hrvata u Vojvodini od najstarijih vremena do 1929. godine* (Zagreb 1930).

⁷² In addition to trusting in Bunjevci, many Hungarians doubted that Slovaks and Ruthenes had any real demand to leave Hungary.

to remain in Hungary. An ultra-patriotic author confusedly wrote in her diary “The Bunjevats swear to stick to their fatherland and so do the Catholic Serbians.”⁷³ Yet the fledgling South Slav state was granted lands home to a majority of Bunjevci, including the town of Szabadka, now Subotica.

After the First World War Hungarian governments were sensitive to criticism of the state’s treatment of national minorities, who had declined from 45.5 percent of the population in pre-WWI Hungary, to 7.9 percent in rump Hungary in 1930. Authorities continued to be suspicious of minorities especially those whose kin states had received formerly Hungarian lands. Moreover, Hungarian authorities made the case that pan-Slavism posed a threat to European peace.⁷⁴ South Slavs were suspect on both counts. As if in reaction to such fears, claims were again made about the faithfulness of the Bunjevci to Hungary. One book described the Bunjevci of Baja, which remained in rump Hungary, as resisting Serbian seduction and remaining true to their Hungarian homeland. In this account, only a few bad apples, the worst of Baja’s society, were attracted to South Slav agitators.⁷⁵

To counter foreign criticism, Hungarian laws regarding minorities, particularly educational regulations, were liberalized. In practice, however, the policy remained one of assimilation or expulsion.⁷⁶ Educational policies were specifically geared to this end. So, the educational regulations of 1923 introduced three types of school for communities where at least forty children belonging to a national minority lived, and where parents asked for education in the minority language. In this case, in theory, parents were free to choose one of three type of schools: Type A, with education in the minority tongue, except for the lesson on Hungarian; Type B, with education in the hard sciences in the minority language, and in the humanities and arithmetic in Hungarian; and Type C, where all lessons were in Hungarian, except for the lesson on the minority language. In practice, the ministry often ignored parents’ requests, and when they responded they

⁷³ Cecile Tormay, *An Outlaw’s Diary* (Hungarian 1920; English 1923; and Hawthorne, CA 1968), 171; one such report, “A bunyevácok a magyarok mellett”, *Számos* (Szatmár-Németi), 5 Mar. 1919, p. 1.

⁷⁴ E.g. László Ruttkay, “Panslavism and Hungary”, *The Hungarian Quarterly* 2: 2 (Winter, 1936/37), 241–248; and Horthy’s memorandum to Hitler, Aug. 1936, in *The Confidential Papers of Admiral Horthy*, eds. M. Szinai and L. Szűcs (Budapest 1965), 83–90.

⁷⁵ Lehel Knézy, *Baja a forradalom és a szerb megszállás alatt* (Baja 1940; repr. 2009).

⁷⁶ See G. C. Paikert, “Hungary’s National Minority Policies, 1920–1945”, *American Slavic and East European Review* 12: 2 (Apr. 1953), 201–218; Loránt Tilkovszky, *Nemzetiségi politika Magyarországon a 20. században* (Budapest 1998), 43–54; and on Hungarianization of names, Mihály Kóhegyi and Zsuzsa Merk, “Szláv nevek magyarosítása Baján (1895–1945)”, in Á. Fejér et al., eds., *Magyarok és szlávok* (Szeged 1993), 363–376.

overwhelmingly provided type C schools — so that some 90 percent of the schools attended by Slovaks, South Slavs and Romanians in Hungary were of type C.⁷⁷ Such discrimination was used in the early 1920s by Yugoslav state agents, who encouraged South Slav communities in Hungary to move to the new Yugoslav state.⁷⁸

In 1924, to assess the situation amongst the South Slav minorities, the Hungarian Prime Minister's office delegated an official named József Margittai to visit South Slav communities throughout the country. Margittai's first trip was to three towns near Budapest, Érd, Százhalombatta, and Ercsi, where he planned to assess conditions amongst the Serbs and Bunjevci to see how widespread the demand to emigrate to Yugoslavia was.⁷⁹ As it turns out, Margittai meant to see what could be done to save the Bunjevci of Érd and Ercsi for Hungary. By contrast, he visited the Serbian community of Százhalombatta, which he regarded as the source of agitation, to see how many Serbs were leaving, and how much land would come available for trustworthy ethnic Hungarian farmers from the lost lands who had chosen not to live in Yugoslavia.

In Érd, Margittai found that the Bunjevci (whom he also referred to as Illyrians) called themselves Serbs, spoke the Bunjevac dialect, and made up 28 percent of the town's population (45% were Hungarians, 27% German). Margittai found that only two families had opted to move to Yugoslavia, and amongst the remaining Bunjevci South Slav agitation was practically non-existent. Church services were held every second week in Bunjevac, and Margittai advised that the "Illyrians" ought to be placated with religious education in their own language, but (perversely) suggested authorities should wait to introduce this education until the Bunjevci's irritation with the new cantor, who spoke only Hungarian, subsided; for they had had the temerity to approach the Bishop in Székesfehérvár with a request for a new cantor merely because the Hungarian one mispronounced Bunjevac words and sounded silly. Furthermore, suggested Margittai, while the school was currently only in Hungarian, classes in "Illyrian writing" and religion might be offered in the Bunjevac tongue (i.e. Type C schooling) without harm, for the Bunjevci of Érd showed a willingness to become

⁷⁷ Tilkovszky, *Nemzetiségi politika*, 46.

⁷⁸ On this agitation, see the memoirs of Milan Glibonjski, *Pécs szerb megszállása egy szerb újságíró szemével: Milan Glibonjski visszaemlékezései*, ed. and transl. Á. Hornyák (Pécs 2006).

⁷⁹ Margittai's report of 25 July 1924 and Ministry's decision to delegate him of 29 July, in Hungarian National Archives (OL), Prime Minister's papers (ME), K 28 96cs. 157t., Kisebbség-délszláv iratok 1925–1944.

Hungarian, as witnessed by the high percentage of marriages between them and Hungarians.⁸⁰

In Ercsi, there were just 704 Bunjevci out of the village's total population of 8,477. Here the Bunjevci clearly wanted education in their own tongue; 41 of them had sent a petition to the Minister of Education saying as much. Moreover, there was some tension with Hungarian Catholics, who always took second place behind the Bunjevci in religious processions, and who had to suffer through religious services in Bunjevac. In Ercsi, Margittai found, there was agitation to move to Yugoslavia. Some eight Bunjevci farmers had actually converted to Orthodoxy and moved, but "most of them were disappointed and returned."⁸¹ Elsewhere, Margittai found that a "respectable" Bunjevac farmer had threatened to break his son's neck if he dared to marry a Hungarian girl. But in Margittai's judgement, the Bunjevci were well on their way to assimilation to the Hungarians, and so granting them a few hours of education in their own language could not hurt, for they would become Hungarian in any case; conversely, if their wishes were denied they might resist assimilation.⁸²

Everywhere Margittai and his successors went, they found the Bunjevci faithful to Hungary, and well on the way to assimilating to the Hungarian nation. Margittai's optimism might have been undermined by certain findings; but when it came to the Bunjevci his negative comments were always leavened by some positive note. He admitted of Felsőszentiván, a village that had been in the Serbian zone of occupation after the war, that "no intention to emigrate to Yugoslavia can be observed amongst the Bunjevci, though they did not behave the best during the occupation."⁸³ Even Margittai must have been discouraged when some Bunjevci from Tököl sent a threatening letter to Prime Minister Bethlen after the Bunjevci there were denied education in their language. Also discouraging were reports of agitation, and a petition for Bunjevci education, coming from Dusnok, in the south, where some 2,648 of the village's 3,172 inhabitants spoke the Bunjevac language, but where education had been solely in Hungarian for the past 38 years. Margittai quickly ascertained that the people of the village were faithful to Hungary. Those who had signed the petition were denounced as unpatriotic by others in the town council meeting. Margittai concluded: "The Bunjevac-speaking inhabitants of the community are honourable, upstanding, patriotic people, who would never have taken it into their minds to mention a change in the language of education if they

⁸⁰ Report of 13 Dec. 1924, *ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.* pp. 17-24.

⁸² Report of 17 Jan. 1925, *ibid.* pp. 27, 28.

⁸³ Report on visit to Baranya, Oct. 1929, *ibid.*

had not been agitated.” For Dusnok, Margittai concluded, three masses a month, and sermons in the language were sufficient.⁸⁴ In Tököl, the Ministry of Education told the Prime Minister, agitation had come from “external influences.”⁸⁵

Though Margittai found all to be well, articles in journals from Yugoslavia at the time (specifically from Croatia and Serbia) mention Hungarian state abuse of Bunjevci, notably in Katymár and Bácsbodrog. Hungarian authorities in Budapest asked for evidence to refute these Yugoslav claims. Not surprisingly, when the very local authorities who were accused of committing these abuses were asked to investigate, they declared these reports baseless.⁸⁶

The treatment of Bunjevci by Margittai seems remarkable when compared with his treatment of other minorities. Hungary’s miniscule Croatian minority was discussed by Margittai, but entirely separately from the Bunjevci. While the Bunjevci were to be kept at all costs, the emphasis with Croats was whether they were willing to assimilate, or whether they wished to move to Yugoslavia — and either solution was fine.⁸⁷ As to Serbs, the question was not if, but how soon they would leave the country. The Prime Minister himself expressly instructed the Interior Ministry not to stop the Serbs of Beremend from leaving Hungary.⁸⁸ By contrast, Bunjevci who had opted for Yugoslavia, but were dissatisfied with conditions there, were allowed to return to Hungary. Yet the Prime Minister’s office advised a police captain that Serbs who had left Hungary should not be allowed to return, but should be discreetly stopped through a thorough application of the rules regulating the settlement of foreigners in Hungary.⁸⁹

Elsewhere in Hungary, there continued to be confusion in the public about the Bunjevci’s identity. Like Margittai, other Hungarian experts contrasted the Bunjevci with Serbs, and declared that the Bunjevci had always been faithful to the Hungarian state. Most encyclopaedias maintained the claim that the Bunjevci were Catholic Serbs. But some claimed that the Bunjevci were not Slavs at all, but were the original denizens of the Balkans (Illyrians in the original sense) who had been Slavicized in language — but

⁸⁴ Report of 27 Nov. 1924, doc. no. K28-1926-157-2799, *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Letter of 23 May 1925, *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Reports in *Ozbor* on 15 Sept. 1927, and *Dnevník* on 24 Feb. 1930, *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Margittai’s report of 20 Sept. 1929, *ibid.*

⁸⁸ Letter of 5 Nov. 1927, *ibid.* Also see report of 4 Nov. 1930 in Imre Ódor, ed., *Nemzeti ügyek dokumentumai Baranyában 1923–1938* (Pécs 2001), 14.

⁸⁹ Letter from the PM’s office to a police captain, signed Diószeghy, Dec. 1924, OL ME K 28 96cs. 157t., Kisebbség-délszláv iratok 1925–1944; and OL ME K28 96cs. 157t. doc. of 6 Oct. 1930.

not race — by Croats and Serbs over time, and so could most easily be turned into Hungarians.⁹⁰ And as war came, some Hungarian sources began to describe the Bunjevci as a sub-group of Croats. All of these descriptions, however, shared the view that the Bunjevci might easily be absorbed into the body of the Hungarian nation.⁹¹ It should be stressed again that the Bunjevci were clearly recognized by the Hungarian state as a separate South Slav minority prior to the Second World War.

While we do not have time to take a long view now at representations of the Bunjevci across the border in Yugoslavia, a few words are in order. Debate was carried on in numerous studies about the true ethnicity of the Bunjevci (Croat, Serb, or just Yugoslav). Suggestively, Croatian ethnic parties did garner some Bunjevci votes.⁹² Yet this people living on formerly Hungarian lands who had been categorized as Catholic Serbs in the past, seemed most ideally fit for an overarching Yugoslav identity. Some studies published in Yugoslavia did break new ground in the on-going debate on the Bunjevci. But it was also at this time that the first Yugoslav lexicon, *The Serbo-Croato-Slovene National Encyclopaedia*, gave an entry on the Bunjevci that was, word for word, a copy of a Hungarian encyclopaedia entry from 1912, down to the point of mentioning that the Bunjevci had always been loyal to Hungarians.⁹³

⁹⁰ Jenő Mezernich, *Bunyevácok (Tanulmány)* (Budapest 1938), 12; Unyi, *Sokácok-bunyevácok*, 14. This bizarre idea, which appeared first in a Franciscan work in 1798 (cit. Unyi), goes against the most basic knowledge of human nature by assuming these people never genetically mixed with Slavs, or that Slavs in the Balkans were racially pure, or that some original essential genetic nature can be found for human groups. Another version assigns Vlach origins to Bunjevci: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, history, politics* (Ithaca, NY 1984), 53. Banac gives no sources for this claim, and no explanation whatever.

⁹¹ That the Bunjevci were listed in the past in Hungarian censuses is openly acknowledged in the Hungarian Academy's report advising Parliament that the Bunjevci are Croats. See Dobos and Tóth, "A magyarországi bunyevácokról".

⁹² Banac, *National Question*, 349; Mark Biondich, "The Historical Legacy: The evolution of interwar Yugoslav politics, 1918–1941", in L. J. Cohen and J. Dragović-Soso, eds., *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe: New perspectives on Yugoslavia's disintegration* (West Lafayette, IA 2008), 43–54; and election data for 28 Nov. 1920 in Petranović and Zečević, eds., *Jugoslavija 1918–1988*, 158. It is dubious to assume newspapers reflect public opinion, but worth recording that Bunjevci press positions to Croatia did follow regime changes. See Krešimir Bušić, "Odjeci uspostave Banovine Hrvatske u hrvatsko-bunjevačkoj javnosti", *Društvena istraživanja* 4–5 (2005), 719–741.

⁹³ *Narodna enciklopedija srpsko-hrvatsko-slovenačka*, vol. I (Zagreb 1925), s.v. Bunjevci. The original text, in Hungarian, is in *Révai Nagy Lexikona* (1912).

The benefit of being Bunjevci

The verbatim repetition of Bunjevci fidelity to the Hungarian state by the Yugoslav encyclopaedia should not be seen as simple plagiarism. Instead, it represents the essence of the wedding of enlightenment confidence in the immutability of social and historical facts with belief in the eternal nature and unity of ethnic (or racial) character. The Yugoslav encyclopaedia repeated the facts, because they had been established by Hungarian encyclopaedists. One of those facts was that the Bunjevci were faithful to the Hungarian state ideal. Unlike Croats or Serbs, Bunjevci who struggled against Hungarian domination were aberrations to the rule that Bunjevci character was predominately and eternally pro-Hungarian. Because it was pro-Hungarian, the Bunjevci were susceptible to assimilation to the Hungarian majority (in this, the narrative of Yugoslav and Hungarian encyclopaedias agree).

From the Hungarian point of view, the Bunjevci served as proof of the decency of Hungary's treatment of patriotic minorities (those deserving to be called Hungarian), and demonstrated the injustice of accusations that the Hungarian state abused minorities prior to the First World War. The positive image of a minority satisfied with and faithful to the Hungarian state is maintained regardless of any circumstantial evidence to the contrary arising from the behaviour of individual Bunjevci, precisely because this positive stereotype served to confirm Hungarian decency and uphold a positive national self-image. In this view, there may have been a few bad apples amongst the Bunjevci (as there are amongst Hungarians), but the majority were solidly pro-Hungarian. Contrariwise, pro-Hungarian sentiments expressed over time by individual Serbs were seen as an aberration to the rule of the Serbians' perfidy, and their anti-Hungarian sentiments.⁹⁴

But it is important here not to lose sight of the implications for Bunjevci living inside and out of Hungary. Those in Yugoslavia had the benefit, not shared by Hungarians and other non-South Slavs in that country, of being viewed as members of the South Slav nations who constituted the state's very *raison d'être*. They benefited from their perceived role as unifiers of the country in the declaration of unification from Subotica, and were not harmed by the view that they had been the victims of extreme Magyarization which had caused many of them to lose their ethnic consciousness and support the (alien) Hungarian state.⁹⁵

The Bunjevci in Hungary also had it good. Unlike other minorities, they were perceived as supporting the Hungarian state, as being by nature

⁹⁴ This view was so prevalent that it was even picked up by John Reed, *War in Eastern Europe* (London 1916, repr. 1994), 45.

⁹⁵ E.g. Stefan Ilkić, "Bunjevci i madjarizacija", *Književni sever* (1927), 125–40; Vasa Stajić, *Madjarizacija preporod Bunjevaca* (Sremski Karlovci 1935).

and inclination true to Hungary. In distinction to Serbs or Croats, the Bunjevci were to be cherished, to be discouraged from leaving their motherland Hungary, and to be helped along the way to full absorption into the loving body of the Hungarian nation surrounding them. At the very least, the authorities treated them with far less suspicion and far more tolerance than they did other South Slavs. It seems fair to imagine that some Bunjevci enjoyed and appreciated the benefits of being perceived as faithful to the Hungarian state. There were, in short, benefits to being Bunjevci — for the majority, and the minority alike.

Afterword

The enormous atrocities of the Second World War were based upon ethnic stereotypes and encyclopaedic knowledge writ large. Through the most awful bloodletting, faith often played the most clear guide to the Axis Powers in determining ethnic belonging, and thereby who was to be spared, and who to be killed.⁹⁶ Authorities in Croatia, categorized as an Axis ally, could play the decisive role in determining that the Bunjevci were Croats. German sources followed their lead. The Hitler Youth journal, appropriately called *Will and Power*, reported that the Bunjevci were Croats.⁹⁷

In 1941, as an ally of Nazi Germany, Hungary re-occupied some of the lands lost to Yugoslavia in 1920, including places with large numbers of Bunjevci. In accordance with Axis policy, Hungarian authorities broke centuries of tradition to categorize the Bunjevci as Croats.⁹⁸ Under Yugoslav rule for the previous two decades, the Bunjevci had been exposed to the best of Croatian and Serbian literature and culture. For these people, if not for the Bunjevci of rump Hungary, the minority education offered now by the Hungarian state was not adequate. A Bunjevac official from Szabadka (Subotica) reported to the Prime Minister's office in Budapest that the textbooks being used were inadequate and teachers under-qualified. He suggested that books should be imported from Croatia, and that the teaching staff from Yugoslav days should be re-hired. The laconic reply

⁹⁶ See Mark Biondich, "Religion and Nation in Wartime Croatia: Reflections on the Ustaša policy of forced religious conversions, 1941–1942", *Slavonic and East European Review* 83: 1 (Jan. 2005), 71–116.

⁹⁷ *Wille und Macht* 9: 1–12 (1941), 134.

⁹⁸ There was some resistance to the change. In 1945, with the Germans being driven out of Hungary, a prominent geographer wrote of the Bunjevci that "they are often included among the Croats." Pál Rónai, *Atlas of Central Europe* (Balatonfüred 1945; facs. ed. Budapest 1993), s.v. "The Croatsians", 134.

from Budapest was that textbooks for the Bunjevci had been published and were of adequate quality, as some of them had been written by Bunjevci.⁹⁹

At the end of the war, with the communist take-over, the potential for a revival of Bunjevci identity was overridden as communist officials categorized the Bunjevci as Croats. Thus, ironically, Communism and Fascism, two powers that attacked traditional religion, used faith to determine the Bunjevci's ethnic belonging. The Bunjevci remained Croats until the break-up of Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁰

In 1990, as a foretaste of things to come, a new dictionary of the Bunjevci's dialect was published in Serbia.¹⁰¹ The re-appearance of the Bunjevci in Vojvodina (N. Serbia) in the Yugoslav census of 1991 coincided — not by chance — with the war in Croatia and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. This was not a good time to be a Serb in Croatia, or a Croat in Serbia. In the census of 1991 the number of Croats living in Serbia fell in direct proportion to the number of people who then declared that they were Bunjevci. The Croatian government claimed that the government of Serbia had revived the category of Bunjevci on the 1991 census to reduce the number of Croats living in Serbia. As to individual motivations for declaring Bunjevci identity, there were ample reasons for denizens of Serbia to veil Croatian identity during the war. However, the conflict between Serbian and Croatian forces has long-since stopped and relations between the two states have normalized, yet Bunjevci continue to claim a separate identity on Serbian censuses, and have gained official recognition as one of Serbia's minority groups, despite the ongoing objections of the Croatian government.

Throughout the communist period the Bunjevci of Hungary could express their separate identity only through folklore, reading circles, and dance groups.¹⁰² In the communist period, the Bunjevci of Hungary had to

⁹⁹ Letter from Mityó Szkenderovics to Pál Balla of the PM's office and reply, 1944, OL ME K28 96cs. 157t.

¹⁰⁰ E.g. "Bunjevci, ime nekih hrvatskih naselja...", *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, vol. 2 (Zagreb 1956), s.v. Bunjevci, 304; Balint Vujkov, *Hrvatske narodne pripovjetke i bunjevačke* (Novi Sad 1953); Rikard Pavelić, *Bunjevci* (Zagreb 1973); and *Opća enciklopedija*, vol. 1 (Zagreb 1977), s.v. Bunjevci, 731.

¹⁰¹ Marko Peić, Grgo Bačlija, and Dragoljub Petrović, eds., *Rečnik bačkih Bunjevaca* (Novi Sad 1990). Also see description of Hungarian influences on the dialect: Ágnes Kacziba, "A bácskai bunyevácok szótárának magyar elemei", in K. Bibok, I. Ferincz, and I. H. Tóth, eds., *Ötvenéves a szegedi szlavisztika* (Szeged 1999), 71–79.

¹⁰² Academic discussion of the Bunjevci in Hungary ever since has been largely restricted to dreary descriptions of singing, spinning, and weaving, based on research from a century past. E.g.: Mária Kiss, "A Baja környéki délszlávok (bunyevácok) szokásformái", in János Barth, ed., *Dunatáji találkozás: A Bács-Kiskun megyei nemzetiségkutató konferencia (Baja 1991. április 27.) előadásai* (Kecskemét 1992), 115–149.

choose between Croatian, “Serbo-Croatian,” or the vague and dissatisfying “other South Slav” identities. The traditional Hungarian view of the Bunjevci, from the long centuries before the Second World War when the Bunjevci had been regarded as separate from Serbs and Croats, was simply erased. The official line throughout the communist period in Hungary was that the Bunjevci were Croats of a special sort.¹⁰³ It should be noted that Bunjevci spokesmen demanded this. But minority representatives were — and could only be — committed communists, and followed the party’s line on South Slav identity.

The ideological position was reflected everywhere, with the Bunjevci keeping their position as an upstanding people. They were described as outstanding socialists, highly represented amongst anti-fascist partisans.¹⁰⁴ In one account, a fellow from Baja is described as a martyr to communism, killed while helping crush the 1956 “counterrevolution” in Budapest.¹⁰⁵

A researcher looking into Hungarian ethnic data might find the sudden disappearance of Bunjevci from the categories of published data disturbing, and may wonder if this people were another victim of genocide during the Second World War. In fact, their disappearance merely reflects their official re-categorization as Croats or “other South Slavs.”¹⁰⁶ A representative of Hungary’s statistical office explained the changes in ethnic categories in census data thus: “The nationality alliances, and thus the South Slav one as well, wanted their data to be in accord with the political power of the day.”¹⁰⁷

Still, a shadow of the Bunjevci’s former identity as Catholic Serbs remained in the communist period, as some Bunjevci were categorized as Rascian-Croats (Hun. rác-horvát). These Rascian-Croats were said to live in Bátya, Dusnok, Érd, Ercsi and Tököl, precisely the places identified as

¹⁰³ E.g. Mihály Mándics, *A magyarországi bunyevác-horvátok története/ Povijest bunjevčakih Hrvata u Madjarskoj* (Kecskemét 1989).

¹⁰⁴ Dobos and Tóth, “A magyarországi bunyevácokról”, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Biography of Miklós Jurinovic in Ferenc Bársony, Sándor Békevári and Sándor Eszik, eds., *A Magyar munkásmozgalom Bács-Kiskun megyei harcászai (életrajzgyűjtemény)* (Kecskemét 1969), 50, also see bios pp. 38–39, 81, and 105.

¹⁰⁶ On “other South Slavs,” and Bunjevci categorization as Croats in Hungarian census data, see Daniló Urosevics, *A magyarországi délszlávok története* (Budapest 1969), 13–27.

¹⁰⁷ In Hungarian: “A Nemzetiségi szövetségek – így a délszláv is – a mindenkori politikai érdekeinek megfelelően szeretne volna vizontlátni népének adatait.” Letter from Orbán Nagy, 5 Feb. 1993, cited by Dobos and Tóth, “A magyarországi bunyevácokról”, 10, n. 23.

Bunjevac towns by Margittai prior to the Second World War.¹⁰⁸ To be perfectly clear, as we have seen, Rascian is a synonym for Serb in Hungarian; thus Rascian-Croat is a pseudo-scientific rendering of Serbo-Croat. This category made sense in light of Serbo-Croatian ideology in Yugoslavia. It also rang true in Hungary, a nation where language is one of the prime markers of national identity. In Hungary at the time Serbian and Croatian minority schools taught children the “Serbo-Croat” language. Finally, it seems likely that the Rascian-Croat name was a way to deal with the identity of a people who thought of themselves, and who had always been depicted before, as Catholic Serbs.

The break-up of Yugoslavia and the collapse of Yugoslav identity had its effects on the South Slavs of Hungary as well. Serbo-Croat schools were separated into Serbian and Croatian ones. The appearance of Bunjevci in Serbia was followed by the demand by some Bunjevci in Hungary for official recognition of their separate identity, which has been repeatedly denied by state authorities, based on academic reports which oddly neglect the Bunjevci’s status as a recognized minority in pre-WWII Hungary.¹⁰⁹

In all three states, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia, the determination of who Bunjevci are (Croats, or simply Bunjevci) is couched in academic language, drafted by ethnographers and historians, supposedly based on scientifically sound proofs of identity. The overall tone today is not far removed from encyclopaedias of yore. The seriousness of these categorizations and academic discussions give a scientific mask to something trivial and very personal — the identity of individuals. In all three of these states there are individual Bunjevci who strenuously claim they are Croats, and are recognized as such. In two states, Serbia and Hungary, there are also Bunjevci who

¹⁰⁸ Rascian-Croats – see György Sarosácz, “Magyarország délszláv nemzetiségei”, in G. Ortutay, ed., *Népi kultúra – Népi társadalom: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Néprajzi Kutató Csoportjának évkönyve VII.* (Budapest 1973), 369–386 (370); id., “A magyarországi horvátok etnikus jegyei”, in Á. Fejér et al., eds., *Magyarok és szlávok* (Szeged 1993), 306–320 (309); and László Kővágó, *Nemzetiségek a mai Magyarországon* (Budapest 1981), 49. The term has not yet died, see Antun Mujić, ed., *Danica ili Kalendar za bunjevačke, šokačke i racke Hrvate koji žive u Mađarskoj 2000.* (Baja 2000); and Zsivkó Gorjánác, “Röviden a bácskai bunyevác-, rác- és sokác-horvátokról”, in L. Kupa, ed., *Tájak, tájegységek, etnikai kisebbségek Közép-Európában* (Pécs 2007), 130–135.

¹⁰⁹ Given the position of the Bunjevci in Hungary in the inter-war era, documented above, the following statement in the Hungarian Academy’s report wants revising: “However, there can be no doubt that... through their Roman Catholic faith, the Croatian nation already successfully integrated this ethnic group in the 19th–20th century...” (in Hungarian: “Kétségtelen azonban, hogy... a római katolikus vallás révén kötődő népcsoportot a 19–20. századra, ... már a horvát nemzet sikeresen integrálta.”) Dobos and Tóth, “A magyarországi bunyevácokról”, 4.

claim a separate identity from Croats. However, in only one of these states, Serbia, is the wish of these individual Bunjevci to be recognized simply as Bunjevci (more-or-less) respected.¹¹⁰ In Serbia, it seems entirely possible that a social scientist might find three siblings in a Bunjevci village who separately claim Croatian, Bunjevac, and Yugoslav identities. These claims are likely to change, depending on preference at the time asked. In Croatia, the siblings could only reasonably expect recognition if they claimed Croatian or Yugoslav identities, and may indeed have no desire for a non-Croatian Bunjevci identity (which holds no benefits in Croatia). In Hungary, where the Yugoslav identity dissolved along with the Yugoslav state, the academy and parliament have determined that, regardless of individual wishes, the Bunjevci are Croats.

Who a minority is depends not on the actions of individuals, but how the majority, and most importantly those in authority, see it. But as political systems change, so may majority views of minorities. The history of the Bunjevci demonstrates that sometimes the minority can play a formative role in the development of majority stereotypes, while at other times the minority is unable to have any effect on majority views. Minority identity is depicted by majority officials as iron hard. But majority definitions of Bunjevci identity have demonstrably changed over the past. For individual Bunjevci, the quicksilver of identity has been used to escape prejudice, and to take a position indifferent to conflicts between majority identities.

For decades the Bunjevci identity all but disappeared, as it was comfortably folded into other identities. For many — perhaps most — Bunjevci today, a Croatian identity is comfortable, and is undeniably right. But this does not mean that the revival of a separate Bunjevci identity today is necessarily artificial, or that those who claim it are necessarily wrong. There is a historic identity of Bunjevci separateness — from both Serbs and Croats — on which to build. The revival of the Bunjevci identity suggests nothing more or less than that where it is asserted, people from the majority and minority alike find it plausible and useful. For many people today, as in the past, there are definite benefits in being Bunjevci.

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316.347 Bunjevci

¹¹⁰ The Serbian position and data on Bunjevci is given by Vojislav Stanovčić, “Forging Unity out of Diversities”, in S. G. Markovich, E. B. Weaver, and V. Pavlović, eds., *Problems of Identities in the Balkans* (Belgrade 2006), 55–94 (83–84 and 87–88).

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