THE MULTICULTURALITY OF CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE IN VOJVODINA¹

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Abstract: The objective of this paper is to cast light – relying on use of the subject-related literature and on personal field research over the past three decades – on the phenomenon of multiculturality of children's folklore practice found in some national/ethnic communities in Vojvodina: Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Romanians. Considerable attention is given to the (dis)continuity, changes, comparative research and the latest trends in the children's folklore on the cultural scene of this multicultural milieu.

Key words: multicultural Vojvodina; children's folklore; continuity/discontinuity; folkloric cross-penetrations; comparative research.

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is one of the those regions in Southeastern Europe which are identified as strikingly multiethnic, multicultural and multiconfessional ones: it is a territory where diverse national and ethnic communities have lived together for centuries, exerting various cross-influences that produced cross-penetration and fructification in both material and spiritual heritage, including the field of musical folklore.

According to the 2011 census, 26 national/ethnic groups live in the Province, and six languages are in official use: Serbian, Hungarian, Slovak, Croat, Romanian, and Ruthenian/Rusyn (Bosnić Đurić, 2014, 149-150). Teaching languages in public, both primary and secondary schools include – in addition to Serbian, five languages of minority peoples (Hungarian, Slovak, Croat, Romanian and Ruthenian/Rusyn). The publishing scene is also made up of the said languages, plus (to a lesser extent) German, Ukrainian, and Romany.² There are 17 periodicals in the field of culture, arts and literature that are regularly published in Vojvodina; seven of these are issued in the languages of national minorities and ethnic groups.³

This study has resulted from the ethno-musicological research within the project of Matica Srpska titled "Multikulturalnost dečijeg folklora u Vojvodini" (Multiculturality of Children's Folklore in Vojvodina) carried out by the institution's Department of Stage Arts and Music. At this point, I wish to express my profound gratitude for the trust and support provided.

For more on the schools and curricular programmes which provide teaching in the languages of national minorities, see: <u>Srednje škole | Edukacija</u>, n.d.

³ There are four publishing houses specializing in the editions in minority languages: DOO *Forum*, Novi Sad (Hungarian), AD Štamparija *Kultura*, Bački Petrovac (Slovak), NIU *Ruske*

In 2008, the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina – in cooperation with the national councils of the said minorities – established the cultural institutes of the Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats, Romanians and Rusyns in Vojvodina. Their objective is to preserve, upgrade and promote those national/ethnic communities respective cultures (Bosnić Đurić, 2014, 153). Radio-Television of Vojvodina (RTV) broadcasts in the Serbian language, plus nine languages of the minorities (Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Rusyn, Bunjevac dialect [bunjevački], Ukrainian, Romany, Croat and Macedonian), which is a striking rarity Europe-wide.⁴ Additionally, there are local radio and/or TV broadcasters operating in the minority languages.

The very term "multiculturality" is of a recent date, and it mostly implies coexistence and cross-penetration of a number of cultures and forms of cultural life within a milieu, region, or country. It is also interpreted as a "specificity of a developed, enlightened, humane and democratic society" (Rotar, 2008/2009, 5), which should "enable acceptance, or at least tolerance, of other cultures" (Požar, 2016, 114).⁵

A number of studies on the multiculturality of Vojvodina have been published in various scientific fields (Koković, 2011, 42-49; Požar, 2016, 113-127; Ratković, 2013, 64-82; etc.), while in *Zbornik radova: IV međunarodni skup "Multikulturalnost i savremeno društvo"* (The Proceedings of the 4th International Gathering "Multiculturality and the Contemporary Society") one can read

Slovo, Novi Sad (Rusyn), and NIU Libertatea, Pančevo (Romanian). For more on the issue and on the publishing scene related to minority cultures in Vojvodina, see: Kultura Vojvodina, 2016

⁴ The currently operating TV channel RTV 1 broadcasts in Serbian, while the RTV 2 broadcasts in Serbian and the minority languages. The role of RT Vojvodina has remained communicational, emancipatory, and educational, political and socioeconomic, but above all cultural; for, this broadcaster is the mainstay of an important cultural mission and a promoter of musical-folklore values of the national/ethnic communities in the Province (Fracile, 2009, 189-190). For more on traditional music of the minorities in the programmes of RT Vojvodina (in the Republic of Serbia), see in the related publication by N. Fracile (Fracile, 2009, 185-192).

As has been perceived by the sociologist Dragan Koković, "the recent years have seen a large-scale debate on multiculturalism as a postulate that diverse cultural groups exist in each society whereby none of the forms has the legitimacy to impose itself as dominant culture. Hence the necessity to establish rules of coexistence of those groups based on absolute equality and mutual recognition" (2011, 42). In his writing "Multikulturno ili interkulturno obrazovanje" (Multicultural or Intercultural Education), Koković thinks that the term multiculturalism "usually means that form of cultural policy, the concept of society (multicultural society) in which several cultures coexist on equal terms, while 'interculturalism' implies a cultural policy oriented toward an intercultural society wherein several cultures are in the phase of dialogue and search for a new cultural synthesis" (Koković, 2011, 42).

contributions that perceive this complex social phenomenon in interdisciplinary manner (Maksimović, 2013, 158-166; Spasić, Trajković and Lazarević, 2013, 167-176).

There are many published ethno-musicological studies/writings dealing with the traditional music and dance of Vojvodina's national/ethnic communities; approaching their respective topics from the comparative standpoints, their authors spotlight the wealth, peculiarities, differences and cross-penetrations of the folkloric heritage of this multiethnic province in the Republic of Serbia (Ivkov, 2006, 198-213; Ivkov, 2015, 189-199; Karin, 2009, 259-267; Fracile 2001a, 153-163; Fracile, 2001b, 19-34; Fracile, 2012, 157-164; Fracile, 2013d, 622; Fracile, 2013e, 191-216; Jurjovan, 1983, 33).

The objective of this paper is to cast light – relying on use of the subject-related literature and on personal field research over the past three decades – on the phenomenon of multiculturality of children's folklore practice found in some national/ethnic communities in Vojvodina: Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks and Romanians. Considerable attention is given to the (dis)continuity, changes, comparative research and the latest trends in the childen's folklore on the cultural scene of this multicultural milieu. For the needs of this research, 200 examples of children's folklore have been analyzed; they were recorded in both rural and urban milieux, involving pre-school and school children, students and informants of middle-aged and senior generations – that is, ages 5 to 87.

Unlike the numerous folklore genres that (adult) people no longer practise, children's folklore in Vojvodina makes part of the living tradition. Despite this fact, it has to a great degree remained beyond the attention and research of ethnomusicologists. The rare published writings in this field often begin with a statement that children's folklore has been examined too little – not in Vojvodina only, but in some neighbouring countries as well (Marjanović, 2005, 8; Fracile, 1989, 522; Planjanin, 2014; Rajković, 1978, 37; Comişel, 1982, 7).

The emergence of cutting-edge electronic devices has taken much of the children's preoccupations, leaving many children's activities aside. In both rural and urban milieux, however, one can still witness children's songs and music-involving games – yet less often than before. Some of them are part of the surviving heritage, while others have come into being inspired by the modern world of children.

An analysis of the folkloric material from the four above-mentioned national communities, the recorded songs have been classified as follows:⁶

- Counting rhymes;
- "pattern-songs" which mirror children's response to nature (joy, desire, response to the sight of a bird, snail, sun, etc.);
- songs sung while dancing (*kolo* / ring dance or another type of dance or games);
- songs sung while making particular movements of arms, hands, legs, body (action songs);



Figure 1: Anamaria Borca and Slaviţa Stepan, in the village of Kuštilj, 2014 (Fracile, 2014a)

This classification would have been impossible had there not been the assistance provided to me by the members of the Hungarian and Slovak minorities in Vojvodina – Zsófia Kanalas, ethnomusicologist, Ágnes Meleghy, music teacher, and Anna Zorňanová, student of Ethnomusicology master studies at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. (Also, Ágnes Meleghy and Anna Zorňanová sang to me a number of children's songs from the folklore heritage of Vojvodina's Hungarians and Slovaks respectively.) For all their help, I express my deepest gratitude.

⁷ The term has been taken over from the Romanian folklore to denote a sub-genre of songs which are often performed according to a stable melodic-rhythmical pattern that is varied during performance from one performer to another.



Figure 2: Daniel Colojoară and David Butan, in the village of Kuštilj, 2014 (Fracile, 2014b)

- cognitive songs;
- educational/learning songs;
- songs as parts of a folk custom;
- songs without alongside movements/action, passed from one (kindergarten or school) generation to another.

Although performed in different languages, some Serbian/Hungarian/Slovak/Romanian children's songs often have an identical function. Thus, for instance, counting rhymes may serve to divide a group of children into two or more subgroups, or to determine which child is going to shut his/her eyes. Also, children's songs may serve for cognitive, educational (learning), communication, imitation and amusement purposes. The children's songs which have identical topic/theme are noticeable, too. Thus, within the sub-category of "pattern-songs", I have recorded those that express children's fun in their play with a (garden) snail: Pusti, pužu, rogove – Serbian, Csiga-biga gyere ki – Hungarian, Slimačik mačik – Slovak, Cucumelc melc – Romanian. The lyrics, however, display some differences, for the Serbian/Hungarian/Slovak/Romanian children address the

The enlisted folklore sub-categories have been identified in the material analyzed, which by no means denies the existence of other kindred songs.

snail in their own specific ways. Thus, the snail may be threatened by punishment in case it disobeys the child's order ("I am going to kill you"), or promised a reward ("you'll get some milk and butter"). Here follow the lyrics of the Serbian song about the snail first, then the translations of the same song from Slovak, Hungarian and Romanian, accompanied by corresponding notations:⁹

Mg. 64/A13

Performed by Dragana Maravić, 9 years old Recorded and transcribed by N. Fracile Novi Sad, May 5, 1998

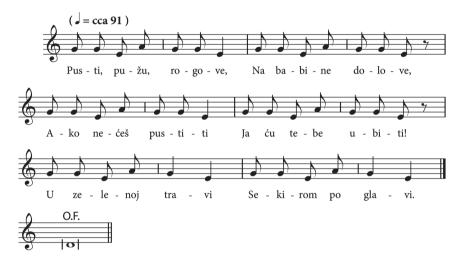


Figure 3. Pusti, pužu, rogove (Fracile, 1998)

Hold out your horns, oh snail, Onto Grandma's vale, For if you wouldn't hold them out I'm going to kill you On the grass here green, Cutting your head with an axe.

⁹ The English translation conveys the meaning, not the syllabic and rhyming structure.

WS750121

Performed by Anna Zorňanová, 20 years old Recorded and transcribed by N. Fracile Novi Sad, April 18, 2013

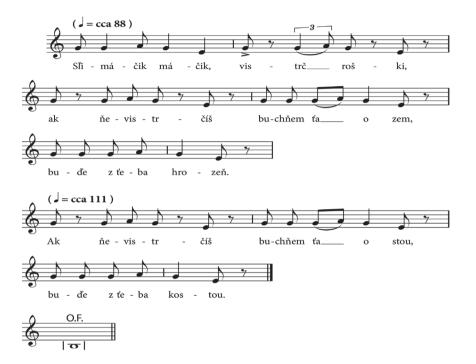


Figure 4. Sľimáčik máčik (Fracile, 2013a)

Hey snail, you snail, stretch out your horns, If you don't, I'll hit you against the table, And turn you into a church, If you don't, I'll hit you against the ground, And turn you into a scary sight.

WS750133

Performed by Ágnes Meleghy, 23 years old Recorded and transcribed by N. Fracile Novi Sad, April 19, 2013

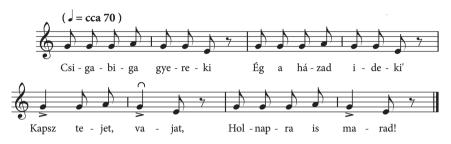




Figure 5. Csiga-biga gyere ki (Fracile, 2013c)

Come out, oh little snail, For your shell-home is burning here, You'll get some milk and butter Enough for tomorrow, too!

CD31/9

Performed by Daniela Barbu, 9 years old and Gabriela Barbu, 6 years old Recorded and transcribed by N. Fracile Kuštilj, June 15, 1988

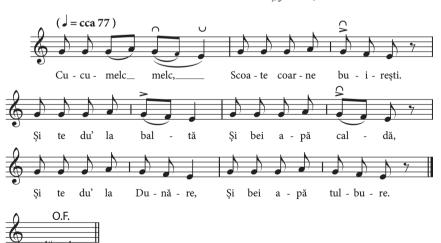


Figure 6. Cucumelc melc (Fracile, 1988)

Oh, snail, little snail, Stretch forth your boyar horns. Go to the little puddle And drink plenty of warm water, Go to the Danube bank And drink plenty of muddy water.

The well-known Serbian song *Laste prolaste* (Fly through oh swallows) sung along some dancing steps and an arrangement of participants' positions, has also been identified within the folklore heritage of some other ethnic communities in Vojvodina: *Bújj, bújj, zöld ág* – Hungarian, *Sita, sita penta* – Romanian, *Zlatna brana* – Slovaks, with some variations in the performance.¹⁰ I still remember that in my childhood we used to sing the dance song *Sita, sita penta*, without understanding its lyrics, for in the Romanian language it had no sense. But we did not care about the lyrics, for what mattered to us was which group of the children was going to win the rivalry-involving game. This can be taken as an unwritten rule in children's folklore, for the words are actually unimportant to children. Moreover, they fail to invest much effort in learning and singing the words correctly; on the contrary, they may modify the lyrics to the extent that the roots of some words, or even the meaning of the text, become hardly intelligible.

It is worth mentioning that the first line of the Hungarian dance song Bújj, bújj, $z\ddot{o}ld$ $\acute{a}g$ (the dance is similar to the dancing along the abovesaid songs) reads: Szita, szita p'entek, which corresponds to the title of its Romanian counterpart Sita, sita penta, performed in the vicinity of Vršac. One could assume that at some time in the past Romanian children adopted this line of the Hungarian children's song, perhaps the dance itself, too, whereafter it has been passed down from one generation to another. What can be said with certainty, is that many children's songs, regardless of the national/ethnic identity, are based on a generally familiar melodic-rhythmical motif which corresponds to the length of the line. During performance, the motif itself is varied, often depending on the length and the metro-rhytmical structure of the line. However, it is the connective and quite characteristical element of structure in the folklore of both the ancestral and the contemporary generations.

Speaking about the repertory of children's songs, one has to confirm that some of the traditional songs are still sung today, which reveals their amazing continuity, while others have fallen into oblivion (Fracile, 1987, 61-74). The overall wealth, diversity and current relevance of the children's repertory is certainly based on children's receptivity. Under the influence of their social milieu and living conditions, as well as radio and television programmes, they

Nice Fracile, Zvučni arhiv (Sound Archive): Laste prolaste (WS 750139), Bújj, bújj, zöld ág (WS 750139), Zlatna brana (WS 750123), Sita, sita penta (CD 28/25).

receive information on, say, the latest products of confectionery industry and include these in their play; hence the very popular children's song on peppermint candies (Fracile, 1987, 64).

There are many examples of Romanian children adopting and singing the Serbian songs $Hoku\check{s}$, $poku\check{s}$, Eci, peci, pec, A miu, mau mi (Fracile, 1989, 524), Miki Maus igra fudbal (Mickey Mouse Is Playing Football), U Severnoj Americi (In North America) and others. The latter was very popular in Vojvodina at the end of the 20^{th} century, and also part of the children's repertory in Serbia Proper – with some negligible differences in lyrics and music. In terms of lyrics content, performing style and particularly the opening (up-beat), the song U Severnoj Americi can be taken as illustrating a recent trend, compared to the many examples of children's folklore analyzed for the needs of this writing.

Mg.XX/A28

Performed by Arabela-Florina Fracile, 5 years old Recorded and transcribed by N. Fracile Sr. Kamenica, January 29, 1983

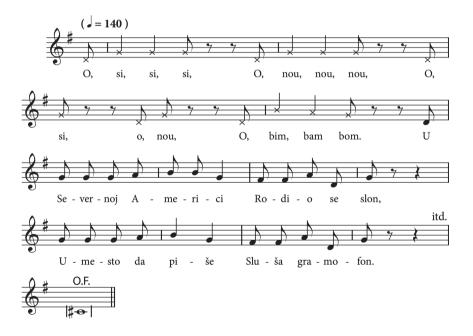


Figure 7. U Severnoj Americi (Fracile, 1983)

The dance song *Tancuj*, *tancuj* (Dance, dance!) is a specific case exemplifying broad cross-penetration of folklores in the multicultural Vojvodina. Although this children's song comes from the folklore heritage of Vojvodina's Slovaks, it is gladly performed among other national/ethnic communities – not by children only, but by adults, too. It has been entered in the repertory of the great singer Zvonko Bogdan (1942), who performs it in both Slovak and Serbian, promoting the piece at numerous festivals and concerts of traditional music – across the country and abroad alike. Yet it is still passed further orally and has remained one of the most favourite Slovak children's songs that are performed along dancing.

WS750118

Performed by Anna Zorňanová, 20 years old Recorded and transcribed by N. Fracile Novi Sad, April 18, 2013





Example 8. *Tancuj, tancuj* (Fracile, 2013b) [Dance, dance!]

Conclusion

I am well aware that this subject requires a comprehensive and more in-depth investigation which implies establishment of a team wherein at least one member would come from the respective national/ethnic communities in Vojvodina. Therefore, this paper should be taken as a point of departure and an appeal for the undertaking of a joint project that would contribute to casting light not only on the multiculturality in Vojvodina, but also on its development/history and, additionally, on developing children's competence to "through interactions with diverse cultural minorities, take an attitude of equality, appreciating and respecting the cultures and customs of the members of cultural minorities" (Požar, 2016, cited in Kragulj and Jukić, 2010, 171). The results of the research have confirmed the conserved status and endurance of some children's counting songs, songs about various animals, songs as part of dances and games, yet also the emergence of new children's songs at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. In the multicultural Vojvodina, children's folklore – as a living folklore category – suffers invariable changes, exposed to the process of permanent improvisations and creative outputs. Therefore, we are naturally witnessing the process of cross-penetrations, yet also the presence of intercultural content in the children's folklore in Vojvodina. These phenomena shall in the future depend, and to a great degree so, on teachers and their attitude to the folklore heritage of the national/ethnic minorities.

If we accept that multiculturality, as well as diversity, is the source of the wealth of a society, part of that wealth is children's folklore in the multicultural province of Vojvodina, which is still – though to a lesser degree – conveyed orally. Adoption of some children's songs from another culture and their spontaneous inclusion in the repertory and further promotion is a most welcome step toward enriching one's own culture, perhaps also toward intercultural education, a phenomenon that requires lasting observation, research, support and enhancement.

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