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The colonization of a celebration: The transformations of Krsna Slava

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Abstract

The article discusses the Slava, or Krsna Slava – traditionally, a Serbian Orthodox celebration of a family's patron saint. During Real Socialism, the custom was disapproved by the régime because of its religious content. After the collapse of Real Socialism and the disintegration of the Yugoslav federal state, the scale, context and meaning of the Slava have all changed. At the same time as the private celebrations have become larger, less secluded, and a target for marketing, a new type of Slavias has emerged as well. They are not related to a family, but to an organization. Both private and public organizations, including public schools and government offices, stage Slavias as public celebrations. The festivities display a mix of religious and nationalist elements. From a neo-institutionalist perspective, we interpret the change as an example of changing relationships between the state and civil society institutions. The Republic of Serbia has taken the course of rebuilding its citizenry's national identity on the basis of Serbian ethnicity instead of the former, supra-ethnic Yugoslav identity. In its search for legitimacy, the new state seeks support both from the Serbian Orthodox Church and from traditions that can be understood as distinctly Serbian. During Real Socialism, the Slava contributed to the reproduction of a traditionalist, religious and family-centered identity, which was a competitor to that of the citizen of a Socialist state. Now, the state is instead promoting the Slava, at the same time using it as a means of representing the state as an expression of exclusively Serbian ethnicity.

Keywords

Celebration, Slava, Serbian Orthodox Church, ethnicity, nationalism

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The Serbian Orthodox tradition devotes 78 different days of the year to patron saints to be celebrated according to an elaborate ritual, the *Slava*, or *Krsna Slava*. The name of the ritual can be properly translated as *celebration*, or *christened celebration*. In the following, we will discuss the changing meaning and institutional position of that celebration. Our discussion will refer to media reports on, and personal participation in the events; to literature on this particular tradition, on Serbian religion and ethnicity, and on the Post-Socialist, Post-Yugoslav political change; and as to the theoretical level, to issues about relationships between institutions of different types, resources, and degrees of formality.³ We will demonstrate how in the Post-Socialist Serbia a private, religious ceremony has been transformed into a public celebration of Serbian ethnicity.

Traditionally, the *Slava* is understood as a family's celebration of a particular saint recognized as the bringer of luck and prosperity. The celebration can last up to three days in a row; at present, the Serbian law allows one paid day off from work for those celebrating the *Slava* of their own family, but many do in fact need to take some more days off in order to prepare for the occasion. Friends, neighbors and relatives of the organizing family will be receiving an invitation, a refusal of which can be interpreted as an act of disrespect. A media report (Dragović 2013) estimates the typical cost of the food and drinks offered as corresponding to almost two times the average monthly income. In the Calendar of Saints to be paid homage to, the most popular is the day of St. Nicholas (*Nikoljdan*) on 19th December, three weeks before the Serbian Orthodox Christmas day. According to a customary saying, on that day everyone will be celebrating, since half of the population is organizing their own *Slava*, and the other half has been invited.

The *Slava* is clearly a social institution with strong legitimacy, embedded in a number of wide spread social practices and belief systems, and backed up by several other institutions. A recent institutional recognition originates from UNESCO, which included the *Slava* in its list of intangible cultural heritage in November 2014 (UNESCO 2014). According to the Nomination filed by the Republic of Serbia,

The celebration of the family patron saint – *Slava* – is practiced by most Orthodox Christian families throughout the Republic of Serbia as an important family holiday involving individual families and their guests – members of the extended family, neighbors, friends, and local community members (in rural communities).

The Serbs recognize the *Slava* as a way of expressing their ethnic identity, and they are the bearers of this tradition, but the celebration of the family patron saint is also practiced by Orthodox Christian families of other ethnic communities in Serbia.

Besides the family, we can see that many other institutions are involved: the Church, the state, and all the very real institutions that make up the imagined community of Serbian ethnicity. But it has not always been so. The present position of the *Slava* is intimately tied with changes in the relations between family, religion, ethnicity, and the state. From an integrated part of a traditional life form, the *Slava* was during the years of

³The empirical description of the *Slava* is more fully developed in a forthcoming article by the first author (Hadžibulić, forthcoming); for the purposes of the present article, it has been initially re-conceptualized by the second author, and then jointly worked upon by both authors.

the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1946-1991) turned to a system-incompatible, pre-modern remnant barely tolerated. From the 1990s and 2000s on, the Slava has in turn become growingly embraced by the powerful institutions mentioned, and not only by them: the celebration has also turned into a segment of the market for consumption and entertainment.

There are many positions that a cultural practice can occupy in a society. The positions tend to change; usually the process is slow, but sometimes not. The practice can sometimes be articulated alternatively as a part of several different competing discourses – that makes it a “floating signifier” which can receive different meanings (Laclau and Mouffe 1985/2001: 105-114). Regarding the Slava, we can see a rapid and radical transformation from a private family and community practice, opposed to the power and its prevailing version of modernity, to something that the power both promotes and successfully uses for its own legitimation. On a more general level, we could express the change in terms of relationships between the lifeworld and the system. The Slava – as a form of symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld – is turned to an instrument, a medium, for the power system. “The mediatization of the lifeworld assumes the form of colonization” (Habermas 1985: 196).

In this article, we are discussing a development that is also a renaissance, a revitalization, and a re-embedding of a traditional practice of celebration. But we also insist upon, that it is – paraphrasing Habermas – an instance of the “Colonization of a Celebration.” An analysis of the transformations of the Slava calls for an analysis as well of the role of the State vis-à-vis the institutions of civil society.

Particularistic identities and the state

The modern nation state is a “transformative” one, penetrating into the core identities of its subjects, requiring of them to think of themselves not merely in other social roles such as fathers or farmers but even as “French, Pakistani or Brazilian,” even enough to die for this national identity when required to do so (Migdal 1996: 13). As Émile Durkheim (1995: 201) remarked, “the main function of the state is to liberate individual personalities” from the ties of particularistic group loyalties. It is a highly formally organized set of institutions with coercive powers. A crucial part of the activities of a member of a modern society would not be possible without it; moreover, the very notion of “modern society” is not conceivable without accounting for the state.

Meanwhile, the state’s omnipresence is made possible not by coercion, but only through our consent. We agree to the state’s definatory privilege of telling us who we are, and where our foremost loyalties should lie. A state, whose subjects do not, is facing a major crisis. There is no better way of studying the relationships between the state and its people than to observe them during such a crisis – what the “real” people do in particular, local circumstances (van den Bossche 2003: 506), and in which ways the state is able to react to, intervene to, and mold their actions. The present article is concerned with one society coping with such a crisis – the post-Socialist, post-Yugoslav Serbia. The focus is not on overtly political activities, but on what in other circumstances would be

seen as purely private, familial, or religious celebrations. What makes the Serbian Slava celebration intriguing in this context is its prominent position simultaneously within at least four different contexts of identity making: family, religion, ethnicity, and (as of the 2000s), the state. Obviously, “identities” are not discussed here as fixed entities, but as produced and reproduced through interaction. The interaction takes place within a framework of institutions and discourses (e.g., de Federico de la Rúa 2007).

The state – the “Nation” in the political sense – lays claim on the identities of its citizens, and on their loyalty. At the same time, it is not the only social institution doing so. Other collective identities, such as those of the member of a peer group, a family, a religious denomination, or an ethnic group, also are tied with corresponding social institutions. The latter, even when informal, are still institutions in the sociological sense of legitimate frameworks for recurring collective activities.⁴ But even when possessing a greatly formalized structure (as many religious denominations do), their range and potency usually fall short of those of the state. Using a very broad definition, we could call them civil society institutions. The relationship between the state and the other contexts of identification is, thus, usually one between a powerful and highly formal set of institutions, and others considerably less so. By way of analogy and structural resemblance, we can say that an analysis of a slightly different issue, the possible relations between formal and informal institutions, is informative of that also. Helmke and Levitsky (2003: 12-13) classify the latter as logically falling into four categories, depending on the effectivity of the formal institutions, on one hand, and on the compatibility of their goals with those of the informal ones, on the other. Table 1 illustrates a modification of that typology.

Table 1. A typology of relationships between the state and other identity building institutions

		THE STATE	
		Effective	Ineffective
GOALS OF THE STATE vs. THE OTHER INSTITUTIONS	Similar	Complementarity	Substitution
	Diverging	Accommodation	Competition

When the goals of the state and the identity building institutions of the civil society are similar, their relationship is either one of substitution or of complementarity; when they diverge from each other, the identities reproduced by civil society institutions either compete with and challenge that of a state citizen, or become accommodated by a sufficiently effective state as tolerated, but not promoted options. We can easily see how, e.g., religious institutions might come to play a role within each of the table’s cells.

⁴ E.g., Nee (1998: 8): argues that institutions are “webs of interrelated rules and norms that govern social relationships comprise the formal and informal social constraints that shape the choice-set of actors.”

Also the social identity of “a member of the working class” has the colorful history of both competition with, and accommodation within the capitalist state, and that of substituting and complementing the identity of a citizen in a Real Socialist state. It should thus be remembered, that the relationship between the two counterparts may change over time. The historical transformations of cultural nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe are a case in point – we could look at the 19th to 20th centuries, but also at more recent events. For instance, in Yugoslavia during its final years in the 1980s-1990s, the state’s diminishing ability of delivering what the citizens were expecting, turned the ethnic identities (previously accommodated through the federal structure) to competitors with the state for peoples’ loyalty. After the dissolution, the successor states have willingly exploited the ethnic identities of their majority populations in a substitutive function – as a means of forging ties between them and the newly constructed and sometimes poorly performing state institutions. With a stabilization of the political system, the ethnic identity comes to be more like a complement to, rather than a substitution for, state nationalism.

A lesson to be learned from this analysis is, that the identity of a state citizen, and those appealing to more restricted loyalties, are backed by different institutional bases – even when it comes to ethnic identities. The state needs to find different ways of coping with the challenge posed by other claims on identity and loyalty.

Identity, ethnicity, and religion in post-socialist Serbia

The Central Eastern European development of late 1980s-early 1990s involved a profound transformation of both the political and economic systems, and of culture. To some extent, the challenges faced by all post-Socialist societies were similar: the economic system was no more capable of competing in the capitalist world market, and the citizens craved for political rights and freedoms. Even Yugoslavia, with its non-aligned status and individual brand of “Self-Managing Socialism” was not immune to these challenges.

The Central Eastern European revolutions initially took the shape of “State vs. Society”: the political system was diagnosed as suppressive of the civil society and as irresponsible to its interests and demands. In line with Hannah Arendt’s (1951/1994: 20f) classical analysis, the state’s totalitarian ambitions amounted to atomizing and unifying its population, leaving no space for the expression of common interests or communal bonds between the subjects. As an interesting instance of the régime’s totalizing policies, Katherine Verdery (1996: 39-57) discusses the “etatization of time” in Ceaușescu’s Romania. The endless queuing for basic necessities, lack of temporal autonomy and predictability in the working process, and attempts of replacing traditional religious holidays by those dictated by the authorities, are interpreted as parts of the same tendency.

The political liberalization gained through the revolutions gave the previously suppressed practices and ideas a chance of surfacing. However, the initial cry for individual rights soon gave way to a cry for those of the (culturally defined) nation. In a way, this could have been predicted. The Real Socialist state was careful to repress those

identities and solidarities that could have given rise to alternative political activity. Among the repertoires that can be used for collective mobilization, nationalism was the most readily available. When the Communist ideology collapsed, nationalism was there to take its place (Calhoun 2007: 94).

Whereas much of what was discussed above was similar for all people who shared the Real Socialist experience, some other challenges were more specific. All countries were to a certain extent forced to redefine their national history and their position in relation to other countries and regions; but in some, new independent states were formed as well (in the former Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia). The need of legitimating the state and defining its proper *demos* was a matter of even greater degree of urgency. Regarding Serbia and most of Yugoslavia, the latter tasks included further complications. The ethnic nationalism, readily exploited in other parts of the region, needed here to cope with specific difficulties. There was the need to surpass another, supra-ethnic Yugoslav identity, and the partial incompatibility of the identities promoted with the usual (of course, not the only available) definition of ethnicity as based on a separate language.

Apart from Slovenia, Macedonia and several minority regions without the status of a federal republic, the language spoken in former Yugoslavia was depicted as Serbo-Croatian, a language with two mutually intelligible standard varieties (Greenberg 2008). It does not surprise, that the language policies of the new countries soon began to stress that Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin are distinct languages by themselves. However, linguistic and practical considerations cast doubt on these claims (Cvetković and Vezić 2009). The ethnic identities, now given the task of legitimating new states and borders, were in need of additional support derived from history, religious tradition and folk customs. In comparison, the Yugoslav identity needed to be shown as unnatural and neglectful of the countries' "real" traditions. It has been remarked that Bosnians – the prime target of much nationalist warfare in 1992-1995 – always ranked above other Yugoslavian citizens in their rate of self-identification as "Yugoslavs" (as opposed to "ethnic" categories) in population censuses. Thus, the war was not just about ethnic groups fighting against one another, but also about ethnicity against a less exclusionist view of the world (Eller 1999: 295).

In the new Serbia, there is now an urgent political demand for creating links between the state and whatever supports the identity of the Serbs as a distinct nation, which in this discourse implies both a right for their own state, and obligations towards it. For this, the state turns to the identity creating functions of civil society institutions. Among such institutions, one with both resources and recognition, as well as a key role in defining Serbian ethnic identity is the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC). The Church's claim on such a role was expressed in 1998 by its Patriarch Pavle: "To be a Serb means to be Orthodox by default [...] a Serb cannot be an atheist [...] a Serb is never not baptized" (Patrijarh Pavle 1998).

The present Constitution of the Republic of Serbia from 2006 defines the state as secular, with no state religion (*Constitution...* 2006: Article 11). In practice, the state's relationship with the SOC has varied. Still in the 1990s, it remained ambiguous due to

President Slobodan Milošević's refusal to clearly determine his stance in the matter. However, since the establishment of the first democratic government in October 2000, a notable policy change has taken place. A number of new explicit connections between the state and the church have been forged, such as the introduction of Orthodox priests in the mandatory staff of the national army in 2001, the re-establishment of confessional religious education in public schools the same year, or the reinstatement of a Theological Faculty in the Belgrade University in 2010. According to Vukomanović (2008: 105), these and similar linkages illustrate the Church's efforts to "provide a new ideological and value framework for the state institutions such as the school and the army."

These developments are representative of a trend apparent in several countries of post-Socialist Eastern Europe since the early 1990s. According to Tomka (2011: 9), especially the Eastern Orthodox churches have become instrumental in efforts of strengthening the populations' sense of national identity. In Russia, the Church has received the position of a semi-official state church, representing "traditions and values around which a post-communist national identity could be constructed" (Sakwa 2008: 227). In this way, it helps to fill an ideological vacuum left by the demise of the official version of Marxism-Leninism as the state ideology (cf. Lagerspetz 2004). Also a trend of growing religiosity among the populations of the region is partly explained by a felt need to find social guidance after the disappearance of the previous system of norms and values (Tomka 2011: 65).

Even if the Serbian Patriarch's claim may be correct as to the historical importance of the Orthodox confession in the emergence of a distinct Serbian ethnicity, it is still a misrepresentation of the present population's actual religiosity. Rather than 100%, the current percentage of Serbian citizens identifying with the Serbian Orthodox confession is, according to survey results from 2010, around 79%; the share of other religious confessions is around 14% (Blagojević 2012: 47). These percentages differ somewhat from what is indicated by the *Aufbruch* study from 2007-2008. According to that population survey, 66.8% of the respondents considered themselves "definitely" or "somewhat" religious (Tomka 2011: 74). Of course, even these numbers witness of a strong revitalization of religion in the Serbian society, when compared with survey results from 1982 (Djordjević 1984). At that time, merely a quarter of the respondents reported themselves as religious, and religiosity had strong correlations with gender, education, age and the urban-rural divide (the typical religious person being an elderly rural woman with low education). By 2010, these correlations have disappeared. Blagojević (2012: 48), however, also warns for over-emphasizing the change: higher degree of conformity to ideological standards of the day may have led to under-reporting of religiosity by the high and middle social strata in 1982. But if we interpret his own survey results in the same way, we can follow the same trace even further. Today, as well, the answers of many respondents might signal their support for a topical ideology, rather than their religious conviction. In the same 2010 survey, no more than 63% of the respondents reported belief in a personal God (as compared to the total of 93% who reported a confessional identification) (ibid.: 47).

However, traditional religiosity has ways of entering the lives even of such people who do not consider themselves religious. There are always more people who celebrate religious holidays than there are of those who declare themselves as religious. The number of people who did so in 1984 was 56.7%, while in 1993 it reached 93.7% (Djordjević 1984; Blagojević 1995; Radisavljević-Ćiparizović 2006). In the conceptual framework of this paper, a traditional celebration (such as the Slava) is an instance of a social institution (as a legitimate recurrent social practice), informal in character. By underlining the celebration's religious nature, the Church as the more potent and more formal institution uses the weaker and less formal one for the purposes of complementarity and, possibly, of substitution.

The Slava: From private to public

As we noted earlier, the name Slava itself denotes celebration, or christened celebration (*krsna slava*). Other names used for this celebration are christened name (*krsno ime*), Saint (*svetac*), holyday (*praznik*), holy (*sveti*), service (*služba*), and Wisdom of the Holy (*pamet svetom*). Despite local variation, the ritual itself always includes certain basic elements. According to the Encyclopedia of Orthodoxy (*Enciklopedija pravoslavlja* 2002: 1056), first of all, it is based on a prayer for consecrated Slava's boiled wheat (*slavsko žito* or *koljivo*), representing bloodless sacrifice. Other inevitable elements of the ritual include the Slava cake or bread, the Slava candle, sacred water, red wine to be poured over the cake, incense (*tamjan*) and oil (as a sacrifice to God). Depending on the day of the Calendar, either ham or fish will be eaten. Celebrating the Slava should start at a church, by bringing the Slava cake and the Slava wheat for consecration (Sinani 2012: 176). Breaking of the cake at home is the highlight of the ritual. It is performed by the host with the oldest or the most important guest [i.e., a close friend of the family] (*dolibaša*), the host's (male) heir, and other family members (UNESCO 2014: 3). The host's wife is expected to personally prepare the Slava cake, demonstrating her skill in making dough ornaments and rich decorations on the cake (UNESCO 2014: 4). This ceremony and the subsequent lunch, in which just the closer family circle participates, is followed by a feast when the invited guests arrive. The feast starts by a toast presented by the host for celebrating God and the Patron Saint. The custom symbolically makes a Serbian Orthodox family a part of the Church by bringing God's blessing to it (Radisavljević-Ćiparizović 2006: 78). Within the Church tradition, the Slava is commonly comprehended as a holyday of the "small church" consisting of any single Christian family (Bandić 1986: 18). However, ethnographic and historical research have also discussed the ceremony's possible pre-Christian, pagan roots (e.g., Truhelka 1985).

The responsibility and honor of hosting a Slava "is passed through male successors, and through women only in exceptional situations, and even then on behalf of the host, i. e. the male head of the family" (Vlahović 1968: 128). As a rule, the oldest son inherits it from his father and passes it, in turn, to his oldest son. For some families, it is possible to trace back the Slava tradition through several generations. It is, thus, not just one of the family holidays, but a celebration devoted to a certain family (Bandić 1997:

246). As such, it does not only celebrate a certain holy person of the past, but the unity of the family, as well as its will and strength to persist over time and preserve its faith. By celebrating the Slava, a family is announcing its identity in a distinctive way.

The revival of religion after the political transformation of the 1990s led to a new recognition and visibility of the customs, and resulted in a rapid increase of the number of families celebrating. With the Church's blessing, any family can celebrate the Slava. For some, it was a forgotten family tradition re-introduced now, after neglect of almost fifty years. For others, the Slava became their first step on a newly discovered territory of religious life. At the same time, the phenomenon has passed the boundary between private and public spheres. The scale of the event has tended to grow, and, due to the increased number of invited guests, the celebration is often moved out of the homes to restaurants or wedding and lunch facilities. The new extended setting sends a direct message on a host family's commitment to this unique Serbian Orthodox custom, and to the family identity. The ability to organize such, sometimes, quite impressive gatherings, is also a strong statement on social status and power. Media frequently reports on Slava celebrations by public figures, starring celebrity guests and rich, long lasting festivities (cf., e.g., Brena i Boba... 2012). On such occasions, the religious basic elements of the Slava ritual are frequently banalized or entirely avoided. Thus, some families do not prepare Slava wheat at all, while the bread can be pre-ordered instead of preparing it oneself. Consecration of the bread and the attendance of fasting and non-fasting days are often totally neglected. Different components of the feast are productized and mediatized - the Slava candles are nowadays available in all sizes, colors and shapes, and there are frequent competitions for the selection of the most beautiful Slava bread (cf., e.g., *Izbor... s.a.*; *Na Dan Sv. Atanasija... s.a.*).

Another significant change in the character of the Slava has been brought about by the adoption of the customs as well by other types of organizations than the family. It has become common that government institutions, private businesses and associations of different sizes, municipalities, towns and cities, and even political parties and trade unions organize their own annual Slava celebrations. The list of such organizations seems never-ending. The Slava can be combined with a celebration of the start of work in new or renovated facilities, such as new healthcare units, office spaces of local municipal governments, theaters, and even with the opening of a reconstructed part of a public road. In January 2015, the municipal water supply company Vodovod in the second largest city in Serbia, Novi Sad, celebrated its Slava by consecrating the city's drinking water.

According to the words of an employee, after the consecration of water [...], the blessing is symbolically transferred to the water that is distributed to all the citizens of Novi Sad via the water supply system (NS: *Osveštana voda... 2015*).

Novi Sad (in Hungarian, Újvidék) is also the administrative center of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, a multi-ethnic region with six official languages. According to the 2011 census, 13% of Vojvodina's population are ethnic Hungarians, mostly Catholic or Protestant by religious affiliation. In Novi Sad, the share of ethnic Serbs is 79% of the population. A news report from the following year (*Sveta česnovača... 2016*)

refers to reactions by citizens of other confessions and by non-governmental organizations. Mr. Tomislav Bokan, the advisor of the Managing Director, however stressed, that...

[...] this act does not humiliate anyone, and his opinion is that the tap water in Serbia should be consecrated by an Orthodox priest.

- We don't live in Vatican, Croatia or Spain. We live in Serbia, the motherland of the Serbian people, and our people always had a great soul. You should know that we are working for the interest of all citizens, all nations and religious confessions – adds the advisor to the director. [...]

After the religious ceremony, the consecrated city water was served to all attendees, and the priest of the SOC emphasized that the betterment can only be experienced by believers. Hence, people of other religious confessions should not be worried.

The Slava and the state

Throughout Real Socialist Europe, the prevailing ideology had a strained relationship not only with religion, but with traditions of every kind. Parts of traditional folk customs could be successfully turned into a stylized representative folk culture, or to amateur activities prospering in cultural houses. The Slava with its explicit religious content was, however, not possible to be accommodated by the Socialist cultural policy as “national in form, socialist in content” (Slezkine 1994: 423). For a family continuing its Slava tradition, it included a display of open support to religion. It was potentially risky and not something in which any larger network of acquaintances or colleagues would participate or even be told about. But, given the régime's jealous demand for undivided loyalty, communal and family ties were already as such a potential source of harm. As a celebration of these ties, the Slava was anti-régime, *not only in content but also in form*.

The collapse of Communism and of the federal state structure both removed the state's ideological opposition to the religion and initiated a search for key markers of Serbian ethnicity. Both the SOC and the Slava became central ingredients in ethnic identity making.

It was through the Slava celebration that the SOC made its first important step towards the public sphere. Shortly after the collapse of the old system in the early 90's, the Slava celebration dedicated to the first Serbian Archbishop and prominent medieval intellectual St. Sava was established in all public schools as a mandatory school festivity. On one hand, this was a revival of an earlier practice that existed from 1840 until 1945, when the authorities finally abolished it. But it is also easy to see the school Slava as a substitute for previous, Communist rituals. What once used to be the Students-Pioneers of Communism attending school events, singing popular melodies in honor of Communism and in front of a portrait of the President-for-life Josip Broz Tito, was rapidly taken over by a display of students in Serbian national costumes surrounded by religious symbols, singing the hymn of St. Sava, in attendance of the priests who lead the Slava ritual.

According to the church tradition, St. Sava is proclaimed the protector of all schools; the Day of Saint Sava (*Savindan*) is celebrated on January 27 in all state owned

schools in Serbia. There are no classes on that day, but attendance of all the students and teachers at the celebration is obligatory. The usual Slava ceremony of breaking the cake and toasting is followed by a music and stage program by teachers and students, along with a feast for all participants and guests. As described by an ethnographer who observed the celebration in one primary school in Belgrade,

[i]n the main hall, on all the boards, show cases and walls, there are only pictures with religious contents. Creative achievements of the students in the field of arts are presented by two exhibitions of the most beautiful works: The theme of one of them is decorating of Easter eggs, and the other one – the portrait of St. Sava. In one of the show cases, literary works of the children awarded at the competition dedicated to St. Sava, “the Serbian teacher and educator,” are exposed. In the show case next to it, there are ten photographs from the school *Slava* of the last year, capturing the most significant moments: The headmaster and the priest break the *Slava* cake, parents and teachers stand with candles in their hands while the priest reads the prayer, children in national costumes perform an appropriate program [...]. On the first floor, on the main wall across from the teachers’ room, there is a large painting of St. Sava surrounded by children, called *St. Sava Gives His Blessing to Little Serbs* (Malešević 2007: 136-137).

The apparent continuity with the Communist rituals is striking, and something that has been witnessed in other Post-Socialist societies also (Anderson 1994: 194). However, it comes as no news that the line between religious, artistic, and even political performances is often difficult to draw. After a radical social transformation, the quest for new systematic ideologies to replace the past ones is always intensive (Geertz 1993/1973: 113; 218). In some schools in Belgrade, special honor was paid to the Prince Aleksandar II Karadjordjevic, the heir of Serbian pre-war dynasty who, after the collapse of Communism, returned to Serbia with his family after decades in exile. The Prince, though lacking any constitutional position, has received lots of goodwill from the government; since 2002, his family enjoys permanent use of the state-owned former Royal Palace compound in Belgrade. The SOC has openly declared its support for the restitution of monarchy (Luxmore 2003).

Not only schools, but numerous other government institutions celebrate their *Slava* and call for their work to be blessed by a Patron Saint. Among these public Slavias, the one of the city of Belgrade, revived in 1992, is certainly the most pompous. It includes a procession lasting for several hours and broadcasted by national TV channels. It is preceded by a division of the Cavalry, after which comes the procession proper led by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch, in company with the throne claimant Prince Aleksandar, numerous officials of the Church and the local government, representatives of the police and the Serbian Army, finally followed by citizens walking down the Belgrade streets. Representatives of the police and the Army carry icons of a larger format, while male students of Orthodox religious studies, dressed in church gowns, carry smaller icons, along with the banner and the flag of the City of Belgrade (*Gradska slava* s.a.).

As of recently, many state universities have joined the list of public institutions celebrating the Slava. The first celebration of the Faculty of Medicine at one of the largest universities in Serbia was attended by the mayor, the Dean, professors, students and

numerous guests. Bishop Jovan of Niš, the church dignitary performing the religious ritual, explained the meaning of the celebration in an interview:

From the beginning of times, both science and medicine [...] have discovered and provided medications, but the medicine for immortality has not been given by anyone but Christ [...]. That winner and excellent doctor was chosen by St. Sava [...] who was the founder of medicine in our country, since our monasteries were the first healing places and hospitals. By celebrating St. Sava we are going in the direction of receiving the eternal medicine, and that is the medicine of immortality and the Kingdom of Heaven (Niška televizija 2014).

In addition to the organization of Slavias by government institutions, there are several other ways in which the government promotes the tradition. The nomination to UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage mentions planned and ongoing educational activities, media campaigns, conferences, research projects, and, of course, the legal right for one day's paid leave on the occasion of the employee's own Slava (UNESCO 2014).

Discussion: From competition to substitution and complementarity

As we have seen, the Slava has many faces. Its surfacing into the public realm has led to a transformation of its practice and its meanings. When comparing the Slava before and after the early 1990s, the most striking difference is that between intimacy and publicity. The earlier practice functioned as a resource strengthening family ties through commitment to a tradition; it reproduced cohesion and solidarity within the extended family, and, sociologically speaking, the strong interpersonal ties (cf. Granovetter 1973). At the same time, the social space thus created was secluded and in opposition with public life. In contrast, Slavias of the new type are large in scale, public, and scenery for establishing and reproducing weak ties. They are actively promoted and exploited by the business and the government. Organized by private persons, they frequently turn into loud displays of status and wealth; organized by public institutions, they show the institution's status and potency, and its commitment to an exclusionist, religious, and conservative ideology.

The new public visibility of the Church is paralleled by similar developments throughout post-Socialist Central and Eastern Europe, and especially in Eastern Orthodox countries. The religion has become a semi-official provider of values and traditions instrumental for nation building purposes. The association of the Slava with religion and Serbian ethnicity is the crucial element which makes it applicable for the state's intentions. Although the UNESCO (2014) nomination, careful in its political correctness, mentions "Orthodox Christian families of other ethnic communities in Serbia" as also practicing the tradition, there really are no such "other" Serbian Orthodox ethnic communities (apart from those persons of Montenegrin descent who are members of the Serbian Orthodox Church). The need to find legitimation for the new state has turned the Slava from a family gathering to a public celebration of Serbian ethnicity. In its search for legitimacy, the state has found bedfellows of distinctly conservative leaning, such as the SOC and the former royal family. Whereas the Yugoslav civic identity was built upon the

own brand of Socialist ideology and supported by rituals where tribute was paid to that, the new state is engaged in the project of defining the identity of its citizens on an ethnic fundament. The new or revived forms of public Slava take over the functions of Socialist rituals. People celebrating the Slava become willing or unwilling partners in the state's legitimation project.

Despite dissolution of the former federal state, even the present Serbia is multi-ethnic as to its population. According to the 2011 Census, more than a million of its 7 million citizens belonged to some other ethnic group than the Serbs; in some parts of the country, the other groups are local majorities. The same applies to religious affiliation. The modelling of public ceremonies as Slavias, rather than as secular occasions with newly invented, transformed or revived festive elements, carries the powerful message of the civic, ethnic and religious identity being interchangeable.

The present analysis has shown one instance of how the state, in response to a crisis, penetrates into the everyday life of its citizens. Unable to reach them on its own terrain, i.e., to win legitimacy through successful performance of its functions proper, it has found a leeway to their hearts by expropriating a private tradition. The empirical examples were mainly about the transforming scale, setting and context of the Slava. However, further analyses from the participants' perspective could certainly reveal important differences in how the meaning of the celebration is interpreted by them and by different organizers – the public and private institutions, those families who have adopted the tradition only recently, and those continuing a family tradition unbroken for generations.

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