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И АНТРОПОЛОГИИ
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РОССИЙСКОЙ АКАДЕМИИ НАУК

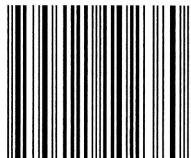


ЕТНОГРАФСКИ
ИНСТИТУТ
СРПСКЕ АКАДЕМИЈЕ
НАУКА И УМЕТНОСТИ

PROSPECTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE



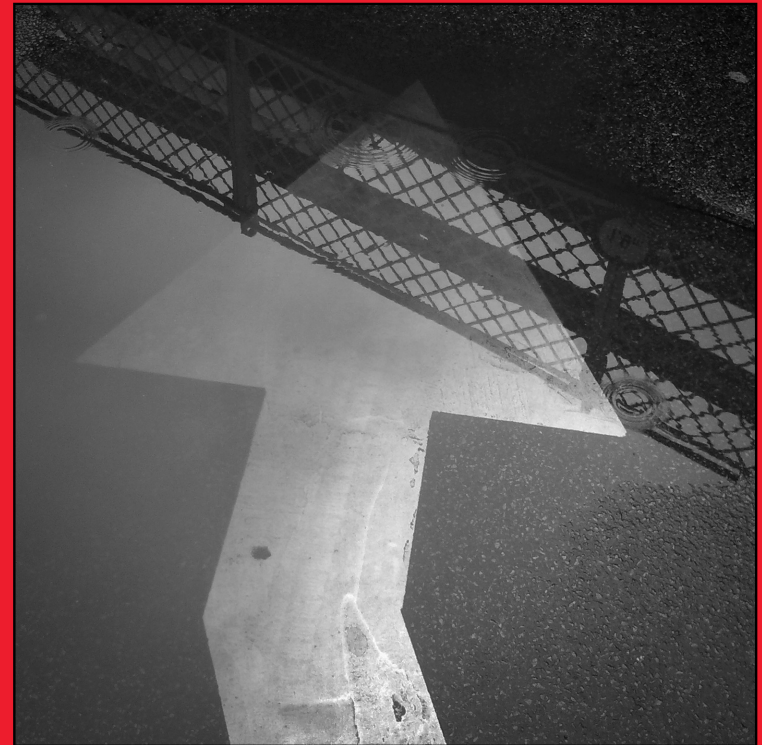
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PROSPECTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE



**PROSPECTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL
RESEARCH IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**

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Prospects for Anthropological Research in South-East Europe

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The book marks a new phase in the fruitful collaboration between the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Ethnography Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. It is an important publication for any future research on the development of ethnology and anthropology in Southeast Europe. The papers presented here, the topics they raise and the methods they employ, comprise an overview of the issues, concepts, phenomena and research methodologies anthropology in this has been dealing with in the early 21st century. Positions of the discipline itself, transformations of traditional culture and various phenomena of contemporary culture in Southeastern Europe are subjected to a theoretical scrutiny in the papers of this volume.

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Đorđina Trubarac Matić

**FROM THE CLASSICAL SERBIAN EPICS TO THE HAGUE
THEMATIC CIRCLE AND BACK: DECASYLLABIC SINGING
AS A LINGUISTIC REGISTER SEEN FROM THE
FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE***

Contemporary singing to the *gusle* and the new decasyllabic songs made in the style of the Serbian “classical epics” – which both gained in public visibility with the break-up of Yugoslavia – is a phenomenon which calls for scholars’ attention. Until recently, the interest has been reduced to the attempts of explaining its sudden expansion by relating it to the rising nationalism and populism during the 1990s. This made some authors reduce the whole contemporary singing to the *gusle* to the instrument for promoting the warmongering and extreme-nationalist ideas. The disdain for these ideological and political standpoints was transferred not only to the “new” singing to the *gusle*, but to the *gusle* itself and their language – which put some scholars in the situation to defend this instrument and the language of the epic genre from accusations of their “historical guilt” for the war during the nineties. This paper aims to show that the contemporary singing to the *gusle* – at least among the Serbian population – is a complex phenomenon (both from the thematic and functional points of view) and that the songs about the events and historical protagonists of the nineties are only one of its subtypes. Communication in epic decasyllables is discussed as one of the historically recorded registers

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of the Serbian language, which, as such, should not be the object of ethical evaluation since it does not imply any ethical value in its very form and structure.

Key words: contemporary Serbian epics, decasyllabic register

The contemporary singing to the *gusle* and the new decasyllabic songs made in the style of the Serbian “classical epics” could be defined, conditionally, as a post-folkloric variant of the genre of chronicle epics, recently named as *post-folkloric epic chronicle* (Ђорђевић Белић 2016).¹ However, it can also embrace non-epic texts composed in epic-like style,² mostly in epic decasyllables – although, in the majority of cases, the classical epic decasyllable (asymmetric and without rhyme) is replaced with the rhymed one.

From the time of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787-1864), the most prominent collector of Serbian folk literature and a language reformer, and his own doubts about the value of the epic chronicles, this epic was mainly perceived as a kind of second-rate versified chronicles,³ although it was recognized as a kind of “living laboratory” for the research of epic poetry during the first half of the

¹ By using the term “post-folkloric” Smiljana Đorđević Belić follows the line of S. Neklyudov (Неклюдов 1995), but she gives a typological meaning to the term of “post-folkloric”. She uses the term *chronicle* as a qualification of the genre (epics), which refers both to the structure (composition, narrative models, realistic perspective and lower level of sublimation and symbolization) and to the temporal aspect – thematization of recent events, perceived by the singer/author and the public as a part of the present or of the recent past of the community, a specific group of people, a family, or a person (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 21–22).

² For more information about some of the modalities of inter-genre relations, see Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 125–163.

³ For the resume of the approaches to the chronicle epics and the attitudes towards it in Serbia and the region of ex-Yugoslavia, see Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 68–74.

20th century.⁴ After WW2, it was discussed mainly from the literary perspective and, thus, generally regarded as paraliterature with “traces of decadence and degeneration” (Детелић 1996, 22), which is aesthetically poor (Деретић 1996, 188) a sort of “song-like chronicle reports” (Килибарда 1976, 9), or, even, “decasyllabic grotesque” (Bugarski 1997). As Mirjana Detelić has shown, it is not easy to make the leap from a versified text into Poetry. In order to achieve it, a strong resonance with deep layers of epic traditional poetry has to be reached (cf. Детелић 1996) – and precisely this has been an insurmountable obstacle for the vast majority of the texts belonging to the post-folklore chronicle epics. As a product of

⁴ This scientifically promising approach was dominant between the two world wars. It was marked by the work of Matija Murko, Gerhard Gesemann and Alois Schmaus. These scholars saw the *gusle* singing of their time as highly valuable material for understanding the genre in its interaction with the life of the community and various aspects of its culture (for more detailed resume of this period of epics' studies, with references to authors and their particular works, see Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 63–65). The ideological turn imposed by the new governing elites of the communist Yugoslavia interrupted this fruitful period. Although in discontinuity with the results of the previously mentioned scholars, this approach found in North America a ground for further prolonging its existence (although indirectly, through Homeric studies). This happened by a set of circumstances: the launching of Milman Parry's Oral Formulaic Hypothesis in the 30's, the consequent overlapping of Homeric studies with those of the mechanisms of composing texts sang to the *gusle* and, finally, the openness of the Tito's Yugoslavia to the Western culture, which made possible Albert Lord's fieldwork in the country twice during the 50's (1950–1951 and 1958–1959) and the John Miles Foley's in 1975. The Parry and Lord's hypothesis was differently received by the Yugoslav folklorist (for more detail about the scholars involved, their works and a resume of the polemics between them, see Сувајџић 2005, 11–13). Its influence was not of a major importance in the Yugoslav formulae studies, which preferred the research line traced by Schmaus (for the resume of the argumentations and related bibliography, see Сувајџић 2005, 13–15). Although aware of all the weaknesses in the work of her precursors (Detelić 2010), Mirjana Detelić largely built upon the concept of formula, reaching her own formula hypothesis. Focused on the poetics of the formula, she drew attention to its deeper semantic layers, which she demonstrated through the examples from the “classical” Serbin epics. Her ideas on formula were most extensively elaborated in Детелић 1996; although the topic was present in her work until the very end of her life (Detelić, Delić 2015).

dominantly written culture (opposed to oral culture), in which the text is fixed from the very beginning by a particular author, these songs are deprived to a great extent of the most powerful honing device to improve the song – the multiple repetition of the non-canonized text and its transmission achieved exclusively by word of mouth.⁵

Although it was a living cultural practice, the research interest for the chronicle epics “continued to exist on the margins of the dominant line in the circle of Serbian folklorists” (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 66) – a tendency which could even be understood as a kind of “research censorship” used in order to avoid damaging the image of what has been perceived as an “ideal tradition” (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 193).⁶

With the war which marked the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the singing to the *gusle* boomed as a part of a much broader phenomenon of war folklore, in which the events and the dominant personalities of that time were thematized. This branch of the chronicle epics was discussed in terms of the (ab)use of *gusle* singing for political purposes and, during the nineties, as a tool for the promotion of the warmongering and extreme-nationalist ideas (cf. Žanić 1998; Čolović 1993; 1997; 2000; 2008; Naumović 2009; Милојевић 2007). The disdain for the aforementioned ideological-political standpoints even shifted from the war-folklore chronicle epics to the *gusle* as such, which were suddenly perceived as one of the key symbols of “political mythology” responsible for the war during the nineties and also as an obstacle for joining the EU. Referring to the words of Andrej Nikolaidis “*gusle* kills, just like tobacco” (Nikolaidis 2004) stated in a non-scholarly text, Ivan

⁵ Here I refer to the majority of the contemporary songs, although, in some cases, there can be found examples of further folklorization of the text. In this respect, a good description of the contemporary practices and tendencies regarding the authorship, improvisation, canonization of the text, its folklorization etc. is recently given by Ђорђевић Белић (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 49–55).

⁶ For a more detailed insight into the approaches to the post-folkloric epic chronicle and the attitudes towards it in the second half of the XX century in Serbia and region of ex-Yugoslavia, see Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 68–74.

Čolović launched an expanded sequence of culprits (in his case, in a scholarly intended paper): “it is not only *gusle* that kills, the language kills, the poetry kills, the history kills, the mythology kills, the religion kills, the so-called national-patriotic culture as a whole kills”⁷ (Čolović 2008, 181). Then, he clarified his words by adding that he did not consider killing to be the “fatal, substantial characteristic” of the *gusle*, but the result of the “long-term pedagogical work in which *gusle* has been reduced to become a part of the war-propagandistic arsenal during the last two centuries” (Čolović 2008, 181-182). This kind of negative attitude towards *gusle* soon managed to get not only into the scholarly discourse but, as it has been recently discussed (Трубарац Матић 2018, 19–55), to extend to the wider population and take roots in popular culture, TV shows, theatre, everyday language etc. The “attack” on *gusle* led some scholars and prominent intellectuals to “defend” the instrument and this traditional form of expression.⁸ However, the absurdity of the situation made the others guard distance and stick to the studying of the phenomenon of the contemporary singing to the *gusle* on the basis of the tradition and practice of their primary research disciplines (Големовић 2008; Кнежевић 2012; 2013; Јокић 2013; Лајић Михајловић 2014; 2016; Ђорђевић Белић 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2015; 2016; 2017). As the aforementioned polemics is exclusively provoked by the textual rather than by the musical aspect of the songs, I will focus here on the topic from the linguistic, functional and pragmatic perspective. This means that some important issues regarding the contemporary singing to the *gusle*, such as the consequences of the switching from the classical decasyllable to the rhymed one will stay out of the present discussion.

Now, if we transfer the content of the polemics into the framework of the rational discourse of scholarly approach to the

⁷ This and all the following translations are done by Đ.T.M.

⁸ For example, Matija Bečković, Ljubomir Zuković, Radovan Papović, Andrej Fajgelj etc. Some of their articles on *gusle* and their importance and value for Serbian culture can be found on the web page of the Association of Guslars of Serbia: <http://www.savezguslarasrbije.rs/o-guslama/naucni-radovi>

phenomenon, it should be discussed in relation to what is perceived as one of the most intriguing issues of the epics as such, which is “the question of the identity of the genre in the circumstances of changed functionality, i.e. the question of the relation between the function and the aesthetics of the genre in diachrony” (Лајић Михајловић 2014, 38). Thus, in order to approach the phenomenon of the contemporary singing to the *gusle* properly, we must focus on the problem of the identity of the genre observed in the diachronic context and, in order to determine the nature and the scope of its possible “changed functionality”, we must compare it to the “classical” epics. In our case, the classical epics will be the epics of Vuk’s era, since it is the oldest practice of the singing to the *gusle* which is extensively described.

As far as the function of the epics concerns, I give credit to the conclusions of Danka Lajić Mihajlović, who observes that the basic function of the epics is communication, which can be defined as interpersonal (which implies social interaction with present people), pseudo-communication (with God, gods, ancestors) and intrapersonal communication (with oneself) (Лајић Михајловић 2014, 39). Besides, as a form of collective remembrance, it involves the transmission of new information, as well as of knowledge and experience regarding regulation of social relations, ethics, history and religion.

Now let’s turn to the identification of the genre, which, in order to be approached comprehensively, should be observed from several analytic levels, as noticed by Detelić (Детелић 1996, 7):

“At the level of the history of verse, it is sung in the meter which comes from the pre-Slavic antiquity in an almost unchanged form (Jakobson, Ivanov & Toporov, Gasparov)⁹ and, by its very structure, it normally

⁹ Here, Detelić refers to the results of the studies of Roman Jakobson, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Vladimir Toporov and Mikhail Leonovich Gasparov regarding the Slavic epic metrics. Building upon the previous studies of comparative Slavic (Sreznevskij), Classical Greek (Bergk) and Indo-European (Meillet) metrics, Jakobson convincingly demonstrated that the Slavic epic decasyllable can be traced back to Primitive Slavic and, furthermore, that it

“remembers” more than the words put in it. At the level of history of genres, it belongs to the developed epics of the early feudalism, founded on national consciousness and pathos (Meletinsky), which logically implies its pronounced ideological determination (protection and defence of the state, Church and nation). At the level of literary theory, it belongs to the aesthetics of identity (Lotman), which means that it cannot be understood well, nor interpreted properly, without knowing the type of culture in which such aesthetics makes sense as a value system. Finally, at the level of poetics, one cannot get anywhere without bearing in mind all the previously mentioned, i.e. no particular issue in this field can be solved if the solution does not endure the test at all the other analytical levels at the same time.”

In this paper, I will discuss the contemporary singing to the *gusle* from the first three analytical levels mentioned above: 1) the decasyllabic epic verse; 2) the emphasized ideological content; and 3) the aesthetics of identity.¹⁰ The issues of poetics, literary value and the relation between the function and the aesthetics of the genre will stay out of focus. The decasyllabic singing will be primarily observed as a folkloric phenomenon, in the sense of Richard Bauman's definition of folklore as a function of shared identity (Bauman 1971, 32), which is in direct resonance with the question of functionality. But, at the same time, it will be discussed as a post-folkloric phenomenon (Neklyudov 1995), generated within a specific type of culture based on intercontextuality – in which different cultural and communicational contexts coexist in mutual interaction – written, oral and mass media communication,

comes from the pre-Slavic Indo-European antiquity (Jakobson 1966, 414–463; 1985, 22–29). Regarding Ivanov, Toporov and Gasparov they developed further research of Slavic metrics within the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School.

¹⁰ The aesthetics of identity consists of the identity relation between the codes of the sender and the receiver, i.e. it is based on the identification of the phenomena depicted with model-clichés that the audience know in advance and expect to find in the text since they are elements of the preexistent system of cultural codes (cf. Lotman, 1970, 245–246).

the communication through new technological channels, the commercialization of tradition, folklore and culture in general, cultural paradigms of rural and urban etc.).¹¹

1. DECASYLLABIC METER AS A LINGUISTIC REGISTER. Speaking about the differences between the song as a story about some particular event (which inspires the creation of a song) and the song as a particular performance or text, Albert Lord, in *The Singer of Tales*, touches on the topic of the way in which a *guslar* can make up a song and improve it with repeated performances. In the footnote n°3 (Lord 2000 [1960], 99), he mentions how once, during Milman Parry's fieldwork in 1934, Nikola Vujnović (the person who accompanied Parry during his expedition), asked the *guslar* Salih Ugljanin if he could, at that very moment, make up a song about Parry's and Vujnović's arrival and finding him to sing songs for them. Ugljanin responded that he could. He did it straight away and they recorded his performance. In the same footnote, Lord also mentions a song dedicated to Parry and his expedition (Appendix VI, 271-275), which was made up in 1933, by Milovan Vojičić, a *guslar* from Nevesinje. These annotations provided by Lord are relevant in terms of revealing that the *guslars* were actually able of *speaking* about the events in epic decasyllables, which means that they had the linguistic competence of using them as a linguistic register. But, is there any other recorded proof for this statement?

Actually, there is a lot. From the first extended descriptions of *guslars'* practice written by Vuk in the first half of the XIX century to those recorded by other collectors in the decades to follow. In his foreword for the first volume of his *Serbian Popular Songs* written in 1823, Vuk mentions a peasant from Tršić (Vuk's native village) who was a skilful singer and made up many humorous songs of a local, anecdotal character (of which he cites some verses), which he would compose directly after a particular event would occur (Вук

¹¹ Recently, the contemporary practice of singing to the *gusle* was extensively discussed and analyzed as a post-folkloric phenomenon by Smiljana Đorđević Belić (Ђорђевић Белић 2016; 2017).

1953 [1841] I: XIX–XXIII). Vuk's grandfather and uncle also had similar abilities. As a child, Vuk was present when his uncle, while working in the field in 1803, made up a song about the death of Smail-beg Begzadić, which occurred some 3–4 days before (Byk 1958 [1841], IV: XXIV). We know that several decades after, in the second half of the XIX century, there was a Member of Serbian Parliament who, after the assembly, was able to recite in decasyllables the debate on the bill for introducing the new monetary system into Serbia (Subotić 1932, 136). Cases of such skilled versifiers in epic decasyllables were recorded during the XX century too: in the time of the monarchy, between WW1 and WW2, Pavlović mentions a certain Milutin Pantelić, who made up a song about manipulations in the elections (the watchers of the ballot boxes and organized voting of army unites) (Павловић 1921, 157). He also made up others with different goals, like the one aimed to expose publicly the names and shameful actions of a group of sheep thieves (Павловић 1921: 157–163). Pavlović mentions an old man, Petronije Prodanović from Blaznava, who was able to make a song about every single event (Павловић 1921, 155). Some time after his daughter died, while working in the garden, he saw a rose she had planted and, while watching it, he made up a threnody in epic decasyllables in which he mourned her death (Павловић 1921, 156–157). Pavlović also writes about some soldiers who made songs on the battlefield, thematizing the injustices of municipality authorities of which they had learnt from the letters they received from home (Павловић 1921, 235–237). Finally, I will mention the song *The Death of the Budimljani in Divci by Prijepolje*. In 2008, almost immediately after the corpse was found of a member of the *chetnik* movement (who was killed and secretly buried in 1944), this song “started circulating” (mainly via e-mail) among the family members. The remains were soon exhumed and re-buried, and the song was performed on the occasion of the re-burial (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 177–178).

The songs similar to those described, which are of private, local or short-term interest, have been often considered by *guslars* as inappropriate to be sung to the *gusle* (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 184). As Vuk states, the same perception existed in his times as well (Byk 1953 [1841] I: XXIII). This is why they were normally quickly

forgotten and did not remain in the chain of transmission for a long time.

Vuk describes the acquiring of the ability to make new songs as a process which takes time. According to his testimony from 1823, “the heroic songs are mostly made up by middle-aged and elder men” and, although - in the regions where epic singing is most lively - “there is no man who does not know several songs, and there are those who know even more than fifty, and maybe hundreds of them”, only those who knew at least fifty different songs, if they were talented, could make up a new one (Byk 1953 [1841] I: XVIII). He adds that nobody among the folk took for something special or worth of admiring, when someone would make a new song (Byk 1953 [1841] I: XXVI).

As we can see from Vuk’s words, not all those who knew and sang songs were able to make up a new one (talent and skill were necessary). However, those who had that ability – and there was not a small number of them (since the making up of a song was not considered to be something special) – could, after having learned enough songs, master the technique to such a degree that they could easily compose new ones. As Vuk states, “just as one man speaks more beautifully and clearly than another man, the same way one sings and tells the songs” (Byk 1953 [1841] I: XXVII).

From all of the above, we see that *speaking* in epic decasyllables is a historically recorded register of the Serbian language – although still completely unperceived and non-described comprehensively from all the linguistic analytic levels.¹² Without any pre-existing text on the subject, the mentioned singers could compose decasyllabic songs which could have literary value - e.g. those made up by Filip Višnjić (Byk 1958 [1841] IV: XII) - but could also be literary insignificant (if valued from the etic perspective), or of a short-term importance for the local community - often anecdotal and humorous, in which the register of epic decasyllables

¹² Apart from this, deeper insights are needed in order to elucidate completely the coalescence of the ability of *talking* in decasyllables with *singing* them. Danko Lajić Mihajlović has recently given a revealing contribution in this direction (Lajić Mihajlović 2014).

was a parodic framework for narration. This practice of *speaking in epic decasyllables* could not appear out of nowhere – previous to Vuk's times, there must have existed a long lasting tradition of using epic decasyllables in this way, through which the register was shaped. The fact that the mere speaking and telling stories in decasyllables which did not resonate with “big national topics” has never been perceived as worth of transmitting to the next generations, nor being written down, can explain why there are no older testimonies of this kind of decasyllabic texts.

A good example of a wider contemporary use of epic decasyllables as a linguistic register in everyday commenting on recent events is the Twitter account *Филип Вишњић*, where the anonymous owner of the account leaves his short comments in epic-like style, i.e. in epic decasyllables (non-rhymed) and his followers comment on them by using also epic decasyllables (both rhymed and non-rhymed).¹³

Regarding the Čolović's moral accusations of *gusle*, the language and the poetry, one should bear in mind that the epic decasyllable is a linguistic register, i. e. an optional variety of language, which does not imply any ethical value in its very form and structure, although it can be used to convey all sort of contents (messages), which definitely can be submitted to moral judgment. The ethical value of the transmitted message lies not in the epic decasyllabic verse itself, but in the ideological contents which can be put in it.

The moral accusations on behalf of the language (as such) might even be discussed in the terms of intention to launch a new language ideology¹⁴ with the aim to make it take root in the minds

¹³ For the reference, see the list of Internet sources under: Twitter. *Филип Вишњић*.

¹⁴ I use this term in the way it is usually used in linguistic anthropology, i.e. as a set of ideas, beliefs and feelings that people have about language, which are shaped in a specific cultural context and can be linked to social, political, ideological or economic interests. They are fallacious constructs about the language which represent the interests of a particular group in society, in the way that they become instruments of power (cf. Piller 2015).

of people. However, as any language ideology, they are only mental constructs, which do not reveal anything substantial about the language/register itself. Although, in this particular case, they reveal something else - as there are several accused parties here (*gusle*, language, poetry, history, mythology, religion and “national-patriotic culture”), which are or can be the constructive elements of personal and national identity - the abovementioned accusation can actually be qualified as an act of epistemic violence¹⁵ from the position of an “intellectual elite member”, directed toward those who are to interiorize the feeling of cultural self-inferiority in order to renounce the constituent elements of their identity (cf. Fanon 2008 [1952])¹⁶ – which opens the question of infringement of professional ethics of a researcher in the field of humanities.

2. IDEOLOGICAL DETERMINATION AND THE AESTHETICS OF IDENTITY. As mentioned before, one of the characteristics of the genre of medieval European epics – and the Serbian classical epics that stem from this epic tradition – is the ideological determination which involves protection and defence of the state, Church and

¹⁵ By epistemic or epistemological violence I refer to the act of aggression in which “the subject of violence is the researcher, the object is the *Other*, and the action is the interpretation of data that is presented as knowledge. (...) Epistemological violence refers to the interpretation of social-scientific data on the *Other* and is produced when empirical data are *interpreted* as showing the inferiority of or problematizes the *Other*, even when data allow for equally viable alternative interpretations. Interpretations of inferiority or problematizations are understood as actions that have a negative impact on the *Other*. Because the interpretations of data emerge from an academic context and thus are presented as knowledge, they are defined as *epistemologically violent* actions.” (Teo 2010, 295).

¹⁶ Speaking of the “colonized mind”, Frantz Fanon defines colonized people as “every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (Fanon 2008 [1952], 9). He describes the way this inferiority complex is inculcated by the colonizer: “there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly—with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio—work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one belongs” (Fanon 2008 [1952], 118).

community. This feature can easily be recognized in numerous songs which thematize the war of the nineties: there are whole circles on particular battles and persons who participated or died in them (for example, on the Battle of Košare, or the defence of Nevesinje), the hymns dedicated to the political and military leaders during the wartime (Slobodan Milošević, Ratko Mladić, Radovan Karadžić), as well as those about soldiers and civilians who were killed in the circumstances of war and NATO bombing, songs describing war suffering or events in The International Court in the Hague. There are many among them in which can be found explicit or implicit expression of politically and nationally biased rhetoric, intention of creating personality cults or calls for mobilization for defence. I will not get into more detailed descriptions of this corpus, since Dimitrije Golemović has already done it (Големовић 2008, 103–135). However, I want to call attention to the transition from ideologically determined “classical” epics to an ideologically multi-determined genre of the contemporary chronicle epics. Generally, almost all the uprisings and wars in which the Serbs participated are thematized in *guslars’* songs and, in some cases, from different ideological positions. During the SFR Yugoslavia, songs celebrating Tito, Sava Kovačević and other partisan fighters, prominent members of the post-war communist elite, like Peko Dapčević or Vladimir Rolović, the communist revolution and ideology, or the post-war reconstruction of the country were sung and promoted.¹⁷ But, there are also songs coming from the opposing ideological sides, such as those thematizing the sufferings in the political prison and labour camp of Goli Otok (in which mainly Stalinists and other post WW2 sympathizers of Soviet Union were kept),¹⁸ or those

¹⁷ E.g. *Poema borbi i radu, Boro i Ramiz – vjesnici kosovskih svitanja, Crnogorski besmrtnici, Pogibija generala Vladimira Rolovića, Pjesme iz NOB-a Milisava Puzovića, Sedam sekretara SKOJ-a, Herojima Sutjeske / Bitka za ranjenike* etc. were all released by Jugoton, the largest record label and chain record store in SFRY. For more details about these and all other sources recorded on vinyl and tapes, see Sources.

¹⁸ E.g. *Pismo sa Golog Otoka, Crnogorka kune od nevolje Goli Otok i Lijeve Polje* (Jovanović & Bošković); *Ђавоље коло на Голем Отоку*. For more details about these and all the other sources from internet, see Sources.

coming from the monarchists' side, celebrating the *chetnik* movement, their prominent figures and battles against the German and *ustasha* armies during WW2, or those about the members of the royal dynasty of Karađorđević, etc. All of these songs, with an unequivocal ideological-political motivation, make a kaleidoscopic image of politically and ideologically turbulent times marked by conflicts on different political bases and inspired by opposing ideological standpoints. As illustrated above, all of these groups found a channel for their own identity sharing through singing to the *gusle* about their own convictions, their common truth and their own historical experience, no matter if their ideology was inspired by the right-winged, "national-patriotic culture" (cf. Čolović 2008, 181), or different fractions of the left-winged proletarian international movements.

The "destiny" of being easily (ab)used for political or ideological purposes can be linked to some point to the third characteristic of the genre (mentioned above), which is the aesthetics of identity, since it implies the identity relationship between the epic song, the cultural reality and the communicational system of cultural codes used by the sender and known to the receiver of the message. Regarding the politically or ideologically engaged songs about the conflicts in the nineties (created in the circumstances of war), Đorđević Belić noticed the importance of intercontextual influences between the aggressive language of the media in the wartime and the process of conceptualizing the epic opponent/the enemy in these epic chronicles (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 124).

Besides, the gnoseological nature of the aesthetics of identity, which is based on establishing an identity relation between the everyday life phenomena and particular logical and cultural models, can be used with ideological and political intentions, or they can simply serve as a tool for expressing political standpoints and commenting on events from everyday political and public life – as it is the case in the songs about the political and social issues, problems and polemics of contemporary Serbia and the rest of the world (songs on the referendum for the independence of

Montenegro, economical migration, the International Court in The Hague, low nativity rate, panegyric songs about Vladimir Putin, etc.).

Although (as far as I know), they have not been sung yet to the *gusle*, but only composed in epic decasyllables, there are also songs critical toward the current Serbian government, which can be read on the Facebook page of *Anica djevojka*. There the author (Ana Ilić) parodies daily-political events in Serbia and their protagonists (the municipal elections in Belgrade, the exposé of the current Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, various activities and declarations of the President Aleksandar Vučić, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić and his singing skills, the new Slavija square fountain, the opening of the first IKEA store in Serbia, the problems with the garbage landfill in Vinča, etc.), doing it almost immediately after they take place. These texts drew broader attention after the author's appearance at the discussion *What's there Stinking Around the Landfill in Vinča* organized by the initiative *Ne da(vi)mo Beograd* ('Don't let Belgrade d(r)own'), held on July 4th 2017 in Belgrade, in which she recited a song of hers that thematized the problems with the aforementioned landfill. The texts of Ana Ilić gained additional popularity when the same song was cited in Borka Pavićević's article *Tvoje govno, tvoja odgovornost* ('Your shit – your responsibility'), published in the pro-opposition newspaper *Danas* on July 9th, 2017.

To conclude, the identification of the entire Serbian post-folkloric chronicle epics with just one political or ideological option is simply not possible. Although I give all the credit to Čolović when he observes that in the political life the *gusle* "symbolizes the *vox populi*" and that their main function in political communication is to present those whose ideology is promoted as a legitimate and authentic representative of the people (Čolović 2008, 142–143), it should be noticed that there is almost no political option or ideology among the Serbian population whose bearers have not (ab)used the epic decasyllable register for expressing their political standpoints,

although there have always been *guslars* who opposed this practice.¹⁹

Finally, Čolović stated that the *gusle* have been reduced to become a part of the war-propagandistic arsenal during the last two centuries. But, is this actually true? Are the *gusle* nowadays truly *reduced* to that?

3. NON-ENGAGED CONTEMPORARY CHRONICLE EPICS AND OTHER GENRES SUNG TO THE *GUSLE*. Apart from the aforementioned engaged contemporary epic chronicles, there is a vast corpus of non-engaged songs – “classical-historical”, didactic, religious, legendary, even mythical-legendary songs, but also those sung in ritual context, like toasts on the occasion of *slava* feasts and weddings, or, as we have seen, even re-burials. Besides, there are typically post-folkloric epic decasyllabic texts (which are not a part of *guslars*’ repertoire), like those created and spread on internet among members of particular sub-cultural groups, e.g. the fans of the cult drama television series *Game of Thrones*, which can be read on the Facebook page *Вестерос је срце Србије* (‘Westeros is the heart of Serbia’) ²⁰ – the name which directly refers to the slogan *Косово је срце Србије* (‘Kosovo is the heart of Serbia’) and, indirectly, to one of the most important thematic circles of the Serbian “classical” epics.

One of the largest groups of songs is the one dedicated to the tragically or prematurely died persons, among which there are public and semi-public figures (e.g. the songs thematizing the death of a football player Dragan Mance in a car accident,²¹ the death of Zvonko Osmajlić – a personal bodyguard of the politician Vuk Drašković – in the assassination on the Ibar Highway²² the

¹⁹ About the debate among the *guslars* on this issue see Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 193–200.

²⁰ In these versified texts, particular episodes or contents from the series are retold in epic decasyllables. See *Вестерос је срце Србије*; Ilić 2014; Илић 2014a; 2014b. I am grateful for this information to Ivana Živaljević.

²¹ *Трагићна смрт Драгана Манцеа*, see Sources.

²² *Погибија Звонка Осмајлића на Ибарској магистралу*, see Sources.

assassination of Pavle Bulatović, former Minister of Interior Affairs of Montenegro,²³ the murder of the judge Milorija Đukić at her workplace²⁴ etc. However, there is also a vast corpus of songs about the death of completely anonymous young people killed in traffic²⁵ and other accidents,²⁶ or victims of high school bullying.²⁷ Although many of them are ordered by the relatives of the victims (and therefore paid for), there are also songs composed spontaneously, by the relatives of the deceased, which are the expression of their personal grief (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 186).

Although we do not have recorded evidence of this kind of family folklore older than the already mentioned (the beginning of the XX century, provided by Pavlović), the probability that they existed long before the XX century must be high and should not be rejected, since the communicational goals achieved through them enter within the scope of the oldest functions of the epics, such as the glorification of and the communication with the deceased and the ancestors. These songs provide for the listeners a point of meeting with the deceased, who is brought to their memory. Also, they represent a kind of compensation for a prematurely interrupted life, since the life of the deceased is “prolonged” in the memory of the members of the community by the means of the song²⁸ and, finally, they serve to introduce the deceased among the rest of the dead family members and ancestors (who are often explicitly mentioned in this kind of songs).

Another group of songs which share the same link to the cult of ancestors are the decasyllabic toasts sung by the *guslars* at *slava*

²³ Погибија Павла Булатовића, see Sources.

²⁴ Погибија судије Милорије Ђукић, , see Sources.

²⁵ Е.г. Помен рана момачког јаблана, see Sources.

²⁶ Е.г. Братске ране невидане, about the death of Arsenije Janjić in a snowstorm on a mountain, see Sources.

²⁷ Е.г. Убиство Милоша Гојковића, see Sources.

²⁸ Ђорђевић Белић considers that it should not be excluded the intention that the family chronicle goes beyond the limits of family folklore, since the families often hire the most famous guslars to sing these songs (Ђорђевић Белић 2016, 190).

feasts and at weddings. Among the Serbs of the Dinara mountain range, there still exists a custom to invite a *guslar* to the wedding to sing a wedding toast speech, made up for that occasion, in which the *guslar* addresses, by name, the groom, the bride, their parents, the best man etc. and expresses the wishes appropriate for each one of them. Although he is usually paid for this, he can also be a family member – for example, in the case of the wedding of Dragan Avdalović from Bileća, when the *guslar* was his uncle Momir Moša Avdalović (his father's brother).²⁹ The uncle sings to the *gusle* and thanks God for the opportunity for such a joy, he recalls in the memory of the listeners the significant ancestors of the groom's family, clan and tribe; he encourages the groom, advises him, wishes him luck; he tells to the bride's family that she is entering into a good and honourable family etc. Just as in the previous case, the *guslar* introduces a new member (a bride) to the family and to the ancestors (who are invoked by mentioning their names in the toast) – since they supposedly attend the wedding to witness the initiation of the newlyweds to the community of reproductively active members of the family, through whom the lineage will be continued.

FINAL REMARKS. The epic decasyllabic meter is one of the historically attested registers of the Serbian language, in which it is possible to speak on any subject, with any possible communicational intention, both with and without the ambition of achieving a literary valuable text. As a linguistic register the epic decasyllabic verse does not imply any ethical value in its very form and structure, although it can be used to transmit contents (messages) which can be submitted to moral judgments. Among the Serbian population, the contemporary singing to the *gusle* is a complex phenomenon, which exists between the traditional folkloric gender (deeply rooted in archaic beliefs, practices and functions of epic singing) and the post-folkloric phenomena generated within a culture of constant inter-contextual exchange of languages (verbal and non-verbal) of different channels of communication. Their bearers can belong to different

²⁹ For the recording, see Avdalović in Internet sources.

social/political/ideological/cultural and sub-cultural groups, with their own sets of ideas, preferences and specific needs of common identity sharing. Shaped by tradition through the centuries as a tool for homogenizing the identity of a group through gathering its members around common truths – which is a necessary aspect of groups' survival strategies – singing to the *gusle* still has considerable mobilization potential and can be politically and ideologically (ab)used. However, this characteristic is just a communicational potential of the language as such and the outcome of the communicational act, the moral and other consequences and effects of the message depend exclusively on the ethical, social and historical responsibility and consciousness of the participants in the act of communication.

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