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***The Story of Dorćol:  
The "Jevremova – Street of Meetings" Manifestation and  
the Multicultural Construction of Place of Memory\****

**Abstract:** The paper considers the manifestation "Jevremova Street – Street of Meetings" as a new custom instated by the Belgrade municipality of Stari Grad (Old Town), as a means to promote the spirit of neighborly relations and tolerance, as well as evoke the collective memory of the multiethnic and multiconfessional make-up of the inhabitants of the oldest part of the city – *Dorćol*. The obvious intent to keep up with the global trend of multicultural policies initiated not only this manifestation, but also a specific kind of "branding" of *Dorćol* through a series of different activities and publications dedicated to emphasizing the cultural specificity of this part of the city which is characterized by a unique topography, the great age of the city center, and a multicultural past. The attempts made by administrative governments and cultural organizations to promote *Dorćol* and revitalize its significance as a "place of memory" and an attractive tourist, cultural, educational and commercial location, a multiethnic location rife with urban spirit was motivated, in this author's opinion, by political reasons and was supposed to serve as a means to demonstrate the extent of the democratic and civil changes in Serbia after the year 2000. The data presented here was gathered through the ethnographic method of participant observation.

**Key words:** *Dorćol*, place of memory, multicultural past, "branding" of the urban center.

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## Prologue

"Dorćol was a prototype of cosmopolitan life: a place of intersection where different forces met and interacted, frequently opposing. A place where different peoples and cultures had made their home for centuries: Serbs, Turks, Tzintzars, Jews and Roma, people from Dubrovnik, Austrians, Greeks, Albanians and even Tatars. And before them – Celts, Eurasian Avars, Huns, Goths, Byzantines, ancient German tribes and even crusader knights – had called Dorćol their home... Just like the history of the whole Balkan region, Dorćol is a site of many conflicts and ambivalences...."

After all the changes, sometimes destructive, other times constructive, and years of general neglect, Dorćol has still managed to keep its charming colorfulness, its contradictions and paradoxes. Even after all the changes of demographics, rulers and officials, one thing is certain: just when you think Dorćol has lost its soul, something new will amaze you and show you that losing this soul is impossible."

*Dorcol manual for lost, found & around* 2010, 4, 5

This is the introduction to a tourist and cultural guide to Dorćol<sup>1</sup>, titled *Dorcol manual for lost, found & around*. This unusual little book is apparently intended to "brand" Dorćol – its cultural specificities, multicultural identity, urban "spirit", tourist attractions and other content pertaining to commerce and entertainment, with the goal of promoting the center of Belgrade in a new (and fashionable) way and in accordance with contemporary multicultural policies. The reader is left with the impression that, at least when it comes to the quoted passage, what is at play is a kind of mythologization of Dorćol – and this impression is not far from the truth. What Dorćol used to be once – a lively multiconfessional and multiethnic neighborhood – can only be found in traces today.

The most numerous population of the neighborhood – the Turks – migrated away en masse in the 1870's, after the symbolic "surrender of the keys to the city" to the new Serbian government. The many mosques they had, built in what is today the municipality of Stari Grad, have long since been torn down, and only the notable Bayrak Mosque remains as a testament to the former ethnic makeup of Dorćol. The Greeks and the Aromanians (Tzintzars) have mixed with the Christian Serbs long ago, and only the occasional names and surnames of contemporary inhabitants of Dorćol still point to the ethnic origins of their ancestors. Sephardi Jews had lived in this part of the city for more than 400 years, and unlike other Jewish ghettos, their neighborhood was never segregated nor walled off. Sadly, most of them perished during the Nazi Holo-

<sup>1</sup> Today Dorćol is a part of central Belgrade's municipality of Stari grad (Old Town), and includes the whole area between the Kalemegdan Fortress, Skadarlija (a vintage street, generally considered the main bohemian quarter of Belgrade), Uzun Mirkova and Vasina street to the Danube banks.

caust of World War II, and their synagogues, schools and houses were destroyed in the bombings. Today, their once significant presence and influence is commemorated by one street in Dorćol which bears their name.

Contemporary Dorćol has mostly been ethnically homogenized. Modern urban planning is erasing all traces and remnants of old picturesque houses, little craftsmen's workshops, and narrow cobbled streets "peacefully tucked in among the greenery". The old Dorćol, which was neglected for decades during Socialist Yugoslavia – and, thus, paradoxically preserved, is slowly disappearing. The *Jevremova – Street of Meetings* event represents an attempt by the allied forces of municipal authorities, cultural, educational and artistic organizations, the existing religious groups and local activists as "memorial entrepreneurs",<sup>2</sup> to preserve the once unique and recognizable "spirit" of Dorćol as a "place of memory". The quote below, taken from the website of the Jewish municipality, also indicates the existence of a certain level of mythologization and nostalgia for the past:

"If I ever forget you Dorćol,<sup>3</sup>  
Let my heart turn to stone,  
If I ever forget you, while I watch  
As you slowly disappear."<sup>4</sup>

### Introduction to *Story of Dorćol*

The aim of this paper is to present and analyze the newly instated manifestation *Jevremova Street – Street of Meetings*, which in contemporary conditions mythologizes the past by attempting to revive the "spirit" of Dorćol based on a real as well as an imaginary multiethnic image, and hence stimulates neighborly relations and tolerance among Dorćol's inhabitants. The context of this analysis will be in the light of historical understanding of this urban hub and its past ethnic structure.

"People make places", and because of this Dorćol was chosen as a reflection, representation and paradigm of the multi-ethnicity. Namely, ever since

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of *memorial entrepreneurs* was taken from Jennifer Jordan's paper, and is here used as a vivid depiction of all the social and cultural actors and local activists who engage in different projects of constructing and manufacturing localized landscapes/places of memory (Jordan 2006, 78).

<sup>3</sup> Probably association to Psalm 135:7 "If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill" (World English Bible).

<sup>4</sup> "Ako te ikada zaboravim Dorćole/neka se srce moje u kamen pretvori/ako te ikad zaboravim, dok gledam/kako polako izčezavaš." Source: <http://www.makabijada.com/images/Dorćol/index.htm>

the founding of the city, some two thousand years ago, the space of Dorćol was home to a large number of peoples who inhabited it for different intervals of time. For example, historical data shows that, within the last 250 years, Dorćol was, continually or sporadically inhabited by members of about 20 different peoples and minor ethnic groups, living side by side. They belonged to a number of different religions – Orthodox Christianity, Catholic Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The process of national/ethnic unification, through the formation of the Serbian national state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after liberation from the Turks, changed the image of the *proto-multicultural* which once existed. The complex ethnic mosaic left deep traces in the way in which people conceptualize this place.

*The story of Dorćol* is, therefore, approached from two aspects: the spatial-temporal and the multiethnic.

Firstly, I shall consider the symbolic and socio-cultural meanings which are attributed to Dorćol. The city is treated as a discourse which is spoken through the language of space, architecture and the inhabitants who endow all these with meaning through collective imagination, as well as those who are just visiting and gathering impressions of the city. Dorćol and its characteristics are therefore analyzed utilizing the theoretical framework of urban semiotics (Barthes 1997, Carlson 1993, Gottdiener 1983, Greimas 1990).

Based on historical and ethnographic data, mostly taken from "Istorija Beograda" (*History of Belgrade*) (1974) and on the itineraries of a noted Balkans scholar Felix Kanitz (1904/1985), a multiethnic image of Dorćol, from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be outlined. As it is not the intent of this paper to give a detailed analysis of the ethnic origins, migrations and the complex socio-economic, cultural and political relations of the inhabitants of the Belgrade, issues on which extensive literature is already available, the goal is to offer a general outline of the ethnic diversity which prevailed in a relative small space such as Dorćol.

Complex interrelations between different peoples and ethnic groups must be viewed within the specific order which existed within the Ottoman Empire, which on the one hand indicates the fluidity of the concept of ethnicity in relation to historical and political circumstances (Malešević 2011), and on the other hand emphasizes the importance of the social construction of groups with the purpose of categorization, since in the Ottoman Empire these groups functioned as ethnic, legal, economic and, above all, religious categories. The theoretical framework in which the interethnic relations of the inhabitants of Dorćol are considered is the idea of Fredrik Barth (Barth 1969) which states that the basis for an ethnic group is made up of its ability to symbolically define its own boundaries and, as such, enter into the process of delineation, categorization, communication and interaction with other groups. With the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of separate nation-states, this issue

emerged as a question of *national* and *hidden* minorities in this area (Promicer 2004; Nedeljković 2007).

The final aspect of the story of Dorčol is the description and analysis of the above-mentioned manifestation *Jevremova Street – The Street of Meetings*. The research was conducted using the ethnographic method of participant observation. The intention was to describe and analyze the symbolically-carnivalesque, cultural, historical and political function of this manifestation and indicate the manifest and latent intentions of the organizers to influence contemporary social life to a certain extent, in such a way that multiethnic relations will be represented in a positive light, leaving aside all those historically unsolved, politically forced and imposed, real or imaginary ethnic conflicts.

### The "Proto-Multiculturalism" of the Balkans

Throughout history, Southeast Europe has been a region of rich multi-ethnicity, a vibrant area traversed by numerous peoples and ethnic groups, who sometimes settled it, migrated within it, or, occasionally, moved on beyond it. The metaphor of the border, bridge or crossroads between Europe and Asia is the dominant rhetoric of the Balkans. Throughout the Balkan Peninsula various cultural circles have overlapped and merged, imprinting, from a historical perspective, civilization traits and values of "long duration" to peoples who have for centuries lived side by side in the region. Southeast Europe has also, in modern history, been a region where two great religions – Christianity and Islam, and two great multiethnic empires – the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires – confronted and clashed.

It is an interesting question whether these empires were actually multicultural. According to Branimir Stojković, "Recent historical studies of multiculturalism have shown that there is reason to question the claim that only contemporary societies are multicultural, and that societies in the past were in no way multicultural" (Stojković 2008, 152). The quality of de facto multiculturalism should therefore also be recognized in former complex societies of the imperial type, and this fact is to be distinguished from the discourse of multiculturalism as a contemporary phenomenon closely linked to the concept of human and cultural rights. In this sense, many scholars cite the Ottoman Empire as an example of a complex multicultural society, in which cultural difference was defined in terms of the right to religious practice by non-Islamic communities (Christians and Jews), and the right to an autonomous legal system that regulated relations within each ethno-confessional group, which were all recognized by the Ottoman Empire as political-religious communities that paid taxes to the sultan – the institution of the *millet*. However, as Branimir Stojković points out, "unlike contemporary societies in which multicultu-

rality is based on the concept of rights that take the individual as their starting point, in classical societies the emphasis was on collectivity"; therefore, it would be more accurate "to describe these societies as *proto-multicultural*" (ibid, 153), or, as Stojković suggests in the case of the Balkans – "barely multicultural", in view of the degree to which this quality was manifested (ibid, 155).

In the case of the Balkans it must be noted that the life of the peoples and ethnic groups that inhabited it was determined by ever changing historical and political circumstances, which sometimes put these communities in a position of peaceful coexistence, and at other times into a position of mutual hatred and conflict. The concept of *segregative multiculturalism* can particularly be applied to the Balkans; it became dominant concurrently with the creation of nation states in the 19th century, involving the assimilation of smaller ethnic groups and the homogenization of national cultures (ibid, 156). The creation of national states resulted in the disappearance of existing empires in the Balkan Peninsula, just as it obliterated, as it were, their proto-multiculturality, altering, to a certain extent, the ethnic composition and cultural habitus of the newly created states. Still, multi-ethnicity has remained a permanent trait of this part of Europe.

This brief introduction was meant to provide the necessary background for a description and better understanding of the main focus of our paper – *the story of Dorćol*, the urban nucleus which had always been the hub of Belgrade's economic, social and cultural life. Dorćol is, therefore, a paradigm, as it were, of the above-mentioned proto-multiculturality of the Balkans.

### Where and what is Dorćol? Urban Semiotics of the City Nucleus

According to Alexandros Lagopoulos, "in the mid-1960s, some years before the emergence of the semiotics of space, there appeared a new school of human geography, humanistic geography, inspired by phenomenology, for which space became a meaningful entity, or as this school expressed it, space became *place*.... Like other commodities and symbolic goods, built space is produced, circulates, and is consumed within a semi-autonomous social field, and has two aspects, a commodity aspect and a semiotic one. The first aspect is studied mainly by political economy and covers two different values of space, common to all commodities: a use value and an exchange value. The second aspect, studied by semiotics, adds a third value: cultural value. Thus, space is produced jointly by material processes, which are fundamental, and semiotic processes" (Lagopoulos 2009, 170, 172). Already in 1964, Roland Barthes pointed to the difference between the level of meaning and that of use objects, though he also linked the two levels with his concept of 'sign-fun-



ction, the manner in which any object can become a sign of its own usage (Ibid, 172). According to Roland Barthes, the city is a discourse, and that discourse is a language written by the built environment and read by its inhabitants through use and cognitive imaging, but for him the problem was how to pass from metaphor to analysis when speaking of the language of the city. "The semiotics of the city should view the city as a text created by human beings in space, spoken by and speaking to those who inhabit it, move through it and observe it" (Barthes 1997, 168; Carlson 1993, 11). Basically, he proposed that an analysis of this text could be undertaken by structuralist methods, by a study of the opposition, alternation and juxtaposition of the elements within it.

How to find a meaning of urban artifacts that is something other than meaning conveyed by its function? One of the evident answers lies in the social processes and ideologies which become the carriers of meaning for urban semiotics. Along the lines of the urban analysis proposed by Barthes, French sociologist Richard Fauqué has suggested a set of *urbemes*, i.e. categories of semantic oppositions that structure people's perceptions of the city, and that could be either spatial relationships ("above : below", "center : periphery" etc.) or relationships of quality ("pleasant : unpleasant", etc.). In that way, the "meaning" of urban elements is based on opposition and context (Gottdiener 1983, 108; Carlson 1993, 12). "The analysis of meaning of settlement space cannot be divorced from the specific historical, ideological, political, and economic processes which have combined to produce that space" (Gottdiener 1983, 104).

In their discussion, French semioticians Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtés include in sociosemiotics the typology of literary discourses and genres, the typology of cultures, the study of the domain of connotation, and that of the relation between groups in society and linguistic practices (Lagopoulos 2009, 173). In addition, A. J. Greimas thought that the object of topological semiotics was twofold, both as the inscription of society in space and as the reading of the society in question through space. These two dimensions he called *spatial signifier* and *cultural signified*, which, according to him, seem to constitute urban semiotics (Greimas 1990, 142). Further, he proposed a reading grid based on two semantic categories: *society vs individual* and *euphoria vs dysphoria* (similar to Fauqué's *pleasant vs unpleasant*), and three axiological isotopies – *aesthetic*, *political*, and *rational* – which can give us an idea how to construct, for historically and geographically determined zones, an ideological model of the city which could generate multiple urban mythologies (Ibid, 146).

Guided by these basic theoretical and methodological postulates of urban semiotics, I will try to present Dorćol as it was at the time that its specific character was formed. Through a combination of interpretations of spatial, socio-historical, and ethnic characteristics, cultural meanings, and toponyms relating

to this part of the city, I will attempt to describe the urban *habitus* of the urban nucleus as it was in the past and as it is today.

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The first important topographical-semiotic dichotomy is the opposition of *natural space* versus *built* and *inhabited* space. Travelers arriving from the west and north had to cross one of two rivers, the Sava or the Danube, in order to reach the bottom of the hill that rises at their confluence, and which, together with the two bodies of water, represents the dominant of natural space. The first thing that would meet the traveler's eye would be the white walls of the fortress on the hill, which inspired its Slavic name *Beli grad* (or *White Town*). The Ottoman Turks, however, referred to it as *Dar-al-dzihad* or "the House of Defense", which is quite understandable given the fact that Belgrade had for centuries a dual character as a military and commercial center, and that during Ottoman rule, which lasted, with interruptions, from 1521 until 1867, it was the single most important bulwark on the empire's northern border. The hill above the confluence, which today comprises the cultural-historical complex of fortress and park, is called *Kalemegdan*. This is a Turkish toponym that involves space semantics: the fortress (*kale*), which was the military and administrative seat of the city, and battle (*megdan*) (fig. 1).

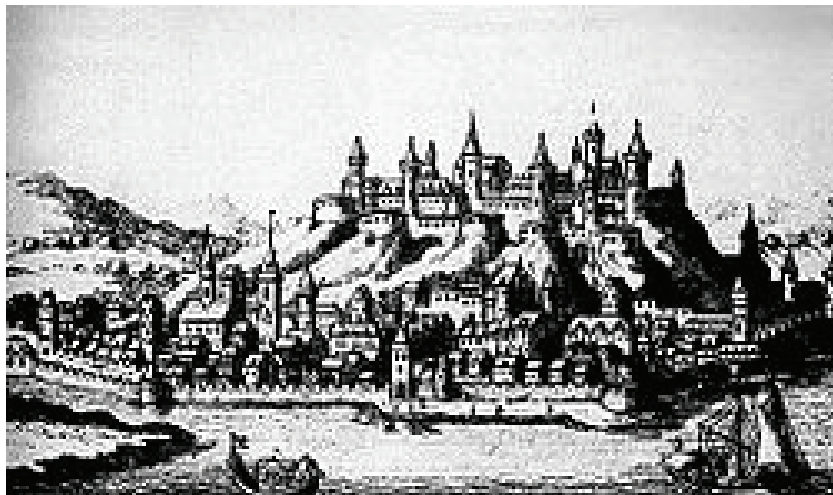


Figure 1. Belgrade in XVI century.



The wide and open space that once stretched out between the fortress and the residential quarters of the town was, on many occasions, "the old battlefield on which the Cross and the Crescent waged battle for centuries"<sup>5</sup>, as the Austrian travel writer, archaeologist and ethnologist Felix Kanitz – a subtle observer with a profound knowledge of the Balkan situation – almost poetically put it in the 19th century (Kanitz [1904], 1985, 13). Behind the wide and open space of Kalemegdan was the residential part of the town, fortified with defensive walls with four gates, the most important of which was the Stambol Gate. This was the "*town in the moat*", what was actually the town until the mid-19th century, while today it is the center of Belgrade, and as an urban complex it is a protected cultural heritage (fig. 2).

The natural features of "the town in the moat" – the hilly plateau that slopes downwards to the *two river banks* – also affected the *dichotomous territorial and ethnic division* of the town.

The slope towards the River Sava was the "Serbian town", the smaller part of the town in which the Christian Orthodox population had traditionally always lived, centered around the old Cathedral (the Church of St. Michael the Archangel), and while under Austrian rule known as *Raizenstadt*. On the slope towards the River Danube was the vaster "Turkish town" or *Dorćol*, predominantly settled by Muslims, Jews and occasional Christians – Greeks and Tzintzars, while in the 18th century, a German Catholic community was formed along the river bank itself.

Dorćol was thus the "Turkish" part of town, whose name itself means "an intersection of four roads": *dort – four, yöl – road*. This was actually the intersection of two main streets – the vertical Kralja Petra Street, or Main Market Street, the socio-economic artery, extending over a hilly plateau, and connecting the Sava and the Danube – two river banks and formally as symbolically *two worlds*; and the horizontal Cara Dušana Street that separates Dorćol, in a spatial-symbolic sense, into the *upper* and *lower* part.

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<sup>5</sup> The reference is to several great battles between Christian and Muslim armies: the first in 1521 when Belgrade, which at the time was under Hungarian rule and with a mixed Serbian-Hungarian defence, fell before the onslaught of Suleiman the Magnificent's Ottoman army; later, three wars between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires waged in the 17th and 18th centuries, when Belgrade and Serbia came under Austrian rule for shorter or longer periods of time; and the battles of the Serbs in the 19th century fought for ultimate liberation from the Turks, who definitively withdrew from Belgrade in 1867, symbolically handing over the town keys to Prince Mihailo Obrenović at Kalemegdan.



Figure 2. A plan of Belgrade 1815-1830.<sup>6</sup>

Upper Dorćol, originally called *Zerek* (which in Turkish means "vista" because the Danube and all the surrounding area was visible from there), was a busy trade center and hub of social life – *old downtown* or *bazaar* – which remains basically unchanged to this day. The heart of this area is the above-mentioned Kralja Petra Street and Jevremova Street. These streets were well known, since many of the most influential people of different ethnic origins had houses there, as well as some of the most important cultural institutions are located here. *Lower Dorćol* extends over the area below Dušanova Street all the way to the Danube bank. It used to be called *Jalija*

<sup>6</sup> This was an appendix to the book by Joakim Vujić *Travelling through Serbia*. Up until the Second Serbian Uprising, Belgrade was confined to the boundaries of the town in the moat. Later, in the 1830s, Belgrade started to expand, or the suburbs rather than the town: Savamala and Palilula, where the now demolished planned Baroque suburbs had once stood: the lower Serbian township and the German Karlstadt township. The town was clearly separated into predominantly Serbian and predominantly Turkish areas, besides the fortress which was maintained as a Turkish military garrison. Scale 1:12,000. Source: *Belgrade: maps and plans from the 18th to the 21st century*. Available: <http://www.urbel.com/documents/monografija-web1.pdf>

(from Turkish *yali* wich means "strand" or "bank"). This part of Dorćol was mostly inhabited by Muslims and Jews, who mainly lived in the so-called *Jewish Quarter*. After the forces of the Ottoman Empire withdrew from Belgrade in the 18th century, this is where the court of Prince Eugene Savoy was located, and this area was colonized by Germans (since then called *German Town*). During the centuries that followed, this area suffered from natural and man-made disasters: floods and wartime destruction left their marks and brought about the economic ruin of Lower Dorćol (source: *Dorćol manual* 2010, 5; Mišković 2010, 162-165). Today, this historical difference is still visible in the architecture of the Upper and Lower Dorćol, but also in an economic and symbolic sense: it is in Upper Dorćol that some of the finest, historically important buildings from Belgrade's past are preserved, and today it is a fashionable part of the city with fancy restaurants, cafés and shops, and is more desirable for living.

Up until the second half of the 19th century, Dorćol had the distinct appearance of an Oriental "Asiatic town", with numerous mosques, shiny minarets, dervish madrasahs, caravanserais, specific Oriental crafts, shops and inns. It is this character that, in a semiotic sense, simultaneously produced an *imageological euphoria* and a *sensual dysphoria* in western travelers. Felix Kanitz described how "the colorful mix of oriental and western elements stimulated the play of imagination", but also a sense of repulsion in the traveler who "set foot on Dorćol soil". The picturesque crowds, noise and clamor of different languages in the narrow streets, in the markets and bazaars in which all public life openly took place, and whose bumpy cobblestones caused some discomfort to the unused traveler, provided a contrast to the quiet, dilapidated side alleys, in which Turkish houses stood behind high windowless walls; the pleasant gurgle of fountains mingling with the unbearable smells from the inn kitchens; fiery-eyed women in picturesque clothes in Jewish and Gipsy neighborhoods in contrast to the Turkish women in their oriental costumes, etc. (Kanitz 1985, 15, 49).

After 1830, when Serbia was granted the right to be an autonomous Serbian principality within the Ottoman Empire, Belgrade gradually started to spread outwards to encompass its former suburbs, and thus the spatial opposition of *center vs periphery* gained particular importance in terms of architecture and town planning, and in an ethnic and culturological sense. Parts of the town that had previously been on the outskirts, which had begun to be built in the mid-19th century, were populated by Serbs; the layout of streets, squares and parks, electrification, the building of public and private buildings modeled on central European architecture were, in Kanitz's words, "in sharp contrast by their western style" to the still Turkish appearance of the Belgrade "town in the moat" (Kanitz 1985, 15). However, the clearing away of the moat and the demolition of the defensive walls in 1867, and the beginning of reconstruction

after the mass departure of the Turks, Belgrade lost most of its former Oriental look, and "only Dorćol continued to evoke memories of the old days" (Mišković 2010, 297), at least for a while.

### The Ethnic Diversity of Dorćol

"It is difficult to say whether Dorćol and Zerek are more colorful or shabby, architecturally or ethnographically"<sup>7</sup> (fig. 3 and 4)

Stevan Sremac (1855-1906), Serbian writer



**Figure 3: Mix of architectural styles: a view of Dorćol from Jovanova Street, in the first half of the 20th century<sup>8</sup>**

The complex interethnic relations which existed in the Balkans under Ottoman rule can best be understood through Fredrik Barth's concepts of ethnic

<sup>7</sup> "Dorćol i Zerek ne znaš je li šareniji ili izdrpaniji, arhitektonski ili etnografski", Stevan Sremac.

<sup>8</sup> <http://politikin-zabavnik.rs/pz/content/beograd-koga-vise-nema?page=532>

boundaries and relations in poly-ethnic societies. "The critical focus from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses. The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts. The ethnic boundary canalizes social life – it entails a frequently quite complex organization of behaviour and social relations. The organizational feature for all inter-ethnic relations is a systematic set of rules governing interethnic social encounters. Stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose such a structuring of interaction: a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact, and allowing for articulation in some sectors or domains of activity, and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification... A poly-ethnic society integrated in the market place, under the control of a state system dominated by one of the groups, but leaving large areas of cultural diversity in the religious and domestic sectors of activity"(Barth 1969, 15, 16). Ethnic distance and the boundaries of ethnic groups were, therefore, formed based on different parameters, and depending on historical and political circumstances, could be fluid, in the same way that *ethnicity* could be fluid, as defined by Siniša Malešević: "In the context of cultural difference it is the specific situational property that shapes the form and intensity of ethnic relations... Hence ethnicity is not a substance but a social condition, a particular state of individual and collective existence... The situational context generates action and determines the patterns of conflict and solidarity"(Malešević 2011, 79).

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Ethnic heterogeneity was visible in Dorćol in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (fig. 3), where every ethnic and religious group occupied a certain part of the city space, imparting to its distinctive features in terms of lifestyle, ethnic costumes, various languages and dialects, and also trades, since every ethnic group engaged in different economic activities. The Turks had the privilege of practicing the most prestigious crafts and trades from which Christians were barred, while Jews and Greeks enjoyed certain privileges in commerce. Coexistence in the extremely nationally heterogeneous environment that was Dorćol, was basically characterized by mutual social and ethnic distance and specific interactions. In the following brief survey of Belgrade's ethnic structure, I will only dwell on the most important ethnic groups that left a permanent stamp on Dorćol.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The source for the ethnic structure is *Istorija Beograda*, 1974, 513-524; 525-553.



**Turks**, led by Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, managed to conquer Belgrade at 28 August 1521. Since that time *the Belgrade Turks*, as the ruling class, were, in a political and socio-economic sense, the largest and most dominant group. A minority of these Turks were "real" Ottoman Turks from Anatolia, while the majority was Bosnian Turks. Other Muslim groups lived side by side with them, namely Circassians, Pomaks, and Tatars. The complicated ethnic structure of the Belgrade Turks resulted in their differentiation in terms of economic and social status. When the Turks left Belgrade in 1867, few stayed behind, and Dorćol, where they had for the most part previously lived, was almost deserted. Over time, the numerous mosques in Belgrade were torn down, and today the only active mosque from this time is the Bayrak Mosque<sup>10</sup> in Jevremova Street, built in the 16th century, which used to be the meeting place of pilgrims before their departure for Mecca. Today, along with Islamic Community of Serbia there are some educational institutions such as Faculty of Islamic Studies and the madrasah.



**Figure 4. Ethnographic medley: Bazaar in Dorćol. In the bottom left of the picture can be seen the ruins of "Pirinčana", the court of Prince Eugene of Savoy from the 18th century.**

The **Jews**, present in Belgrade since the 16th century, and concentrated mostly in lower Dorćol, were the most compact ethnic and religious group,

<sup>10</sup> In May of 2012, was officially opened Bajrakli restored mosque and buildings that will be located educational institutions of the Islamic Community of Serbia, Faculty of Islamic Studies, the madrasa and other educational institutions of learning.

and second only to the Turks in terms of economic power. Although in Belgrade there never existed a Jewish ghetto, they remained isolated, standing apart by their socio-economic and cultural life. Dorćol was populated by Sephardi Jews, while the later arrivals, the Ashkenazi Jews, settled in other parts of the town. In the German bombing during World War II, many Jewish houses and synagogues were destroyed, among them the magnificent Beth Israel synagogue in upper Dorćol at Cara Uroša Street, built in 1906. Out of 12,000 Belgrade Jews, only 1115 survived the Holocaust. In the following decades a significant number of Jews emigrated to Western Europe and USA, and later to newly founded state of Israel.<sup>11</sup> Today, Belgrade has a small but very active Jewish community, organized by the Jewish Community Federation, but their former presence is witnessed by the street named after them at Lower Dorćol and a Jewish Historical Museum in Kralja Petra Street.

The **Greek** population was, both ethnically and economically, a compact group of the Christian population in Belgrade. Along with the Jews, they were the wealthiest class; since most of the commerce was in their hands, the ethnonym "Greek" was often used at the time as a general professional term for a merchant. Literate and educated, they were the Christian cultural elite of the city. They had lively contacts with all other ethnic groups, and they lived in Upper Dorćol or Zerek. Very communicative and active in public life, capable and influential, for decades they made their imprint on the town of Belgrade (see Đorđević Jovanović 2004).

Within this particular community, the **Tzintzars** or *Greco-Wallachians* or *Aromanians* although Hellenized, and later Serbianised, had specific ethnic origins and their own language. Many still include them among the "hidden minorities", or so-called "tiny" communities, which have been given increasing attention by scholars and international human and minority rights organizations only over the past two decades (Plasković 2004, 147-156)<sup>12</sup>. Hidden minorities refer to small ethnic groups whose status within the state is not determined, regardless of whether this situation arises from the small number of members, ethnic "unconsciousness" or disinterest in the matter. Even though they have no political aspirations, such communities usually remain distinctive for a long time (Promicer 2004, 11-24). In attempts to make this already long-assimilated

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<sup>11</sup> For "Jews in Belgrade" see also at Jewish Community Center web site: [http://www.jobeograd.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=99&Itemid=182](http://www.jobeograd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=99&Itemid=182)

<sup>12</sup> The Council of Europe, recognizing the undisputable contribution of this people to European history, adopted Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1333 and Committee of Ministers Decision 674/7.1, calling on countries in which Tsintzars (Aromanians) live to get actively involved in the projects of Tsintzars organizations in order to preserve the Tsintzars language as a European cultural treasure.



ethnic group "visible", a Serb-Tsintsar society, *Lunjina*,<sup>13</sup> was founded in Belgrade. This is in fact an ancient autochthonous Balkan population that call themselves *Aromanians*. Felix Kanitz remarked in his time that they represented one of the most important cultural elements of the Balkans. "A Tsintsar is by origin Illyrian or Thracian, he speaks a Romance language, his religion is Orthodox, in terms of culture he is Greek, and he is a merchant, artisan or herdsman by trade; everything else, such as his name, family name, ethnic affiliation or citizenship, is quite indeterminate. Everything is subject to change." (Popović 2008, 27). Over time, they developed the quality of mimicry: they often changed their characteristic, mostly two-syllable family names (Kiki, Leko, Bodi, Dada, Nika, Sina, Paču, Nuša), adapting them and adopting in public life the customs and language of the social environment in which they had settled, while in their private life and family circle they observed their own customs and spoke their Tsintsar language among themselves. Their great adaptability and business sense, but also the fact that they did not have their own alphabet or standard language, nor their own state, and the fact that they were never constituted as a nation in a political sense, facilitated ethnic symbiosis and assimilation into other Christian ethnic groups in the Balkans. They were the moving force of the Dorćol Main Market Street and its Levantine spirit, they formed the basis of the future civic society in Serbia, and along with the Serbs, they played a prominent role in the intellectual, political, economic and financial development of the modern Serbian state (Popović 2008; Janjetović 2002)<sup>14</sup>.

The **Serbs** were the most numerous Christian population in Belgrade. Under the Ottoman rule they mostly lived in the so-called "Serbian Town". They were heterogeneous in terms of origins, manner of arrival and settling. After 1830, Serbs from the interior of Serbia were the most numerous group of new arrivals, followed by Serbs from the southern Turkish regions of the Balkans; but also extremely important was the migration of Serbs from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the so-called "Serbs from across" (the river), who brought with them significant Central European cultural influences and a different way of life into the still Oriental Belgrade.

The **Roma** existed as a homogeneous but isolated group, living in separate settlements far from the main market, on the edges of suburbs and on the outskirts of the city. There were "Turkish" and "Wallachian" Gypsies, mostly Muslim but also a smaller number of Christians, and there was also a distinction between "wanderers" and Gypsies with a settled way of life.

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<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.scd-lunjina.org>.

<sup>14</sup> "In the first half of the 20th century, Serbian families of Tsintsar origin preserved their prominent position in Serbian towns and cities. Consequently, much credit goes to them for the modernization and progress of Serbian society in that period" (Janjetović, 2002, 185).

There were other, less numerous ethnic groups at the time, notably **Armenians**, who used to have their own colony, but who had mostly moved elsewhere by the early 19th century, and **Germans**, who introduced European crafts and trades, thereto unknown to the Serbian population.

### Constructing Dorćol as the "Lieux de Mémoires": The Manifestation *Jevremova Street– Street of Meetings*

"We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it to left"

Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History*

An important and frequent way of evoking and shaping collective memory and feeling is through public symbolic representative events, whose organization, structure and performance clearly manifest the intention to affect to a certain extent the present-day social life of the community by means of a narrative revival of the past. "The vital point here is that public events are phenomenally valid forms that mediate persons into collective abstractions, by inducing action, knowledge and experience through these selfsame forms... The features of the public event indicate that it points beyond itself: in other words, it is symbolic of something outside itself. Public events are locations of the dense presence and the high production of symbols" (Handelman 1998, 11, 14).

The event I intend to describe, and in which I have been at same time observer and participant, was established four years ago by the administration of the Belgrade municipality of Stari Grad, several cultural and educational institutions, and some local activists, to whom we can refer as "memorial entrepreneurs" (Jordan 2006, 78), and is held on Palm Sunday – the feast of the Stari grad municipality. The very name of this public event explains its aim and purpose: *Jevremova Street – Street of Meetings* (fig. 5).

The discourse of *meetings* can be interpreted in manifold ways. First, it is a meeting of residents among themselves, second, with representatives of the municipality administration as well as with important individuals and institutions that belong to Jevremova Street and its neighbourhood, and are part of the specific cultural and social milieu. It is, also, a *meeting with history*, which gives purpose and meaning to this event. The goal of this happening is to impact on awareness, memories and tolerance towards the different and towards Others.



**Figure 5. Jevremova – Street of Meetings, April 2009.**

The first proclamation issued on 12 April 2009 states the reasons for organizing this event: "To live in the *Stari Grad* municipality, in *Zerek*, *Dorćol* or in *Jevremova Street*, is not an imaginary privilege but a true blessing. The mission to rescue from oblivion long-gone neighbors – Celts, Greeks, Romans, Armenians, Turks, Tsintsars, Jews (...) is a great treasure that must be preserved and cherished... The principal idea was to revive the spirit of early nineteenth-century urban Serbia... The *Jevremova – Street of Meetings* event aims to promote the preservation of cultural and historical heritage, but also of civic values and culture for the neighborhood in contemporary circumstances."<sup>15</sup>

Semiotically speaking, the linear space of the street is treated as a phrase of "the story of Dorćol", and is transformed into an intersection (as a grid) of different segments of time and of the cultural, confessional, ethnic and professional identities and practices that used to exist or are present to this day in the life of the street and the entire neighborhood.

The celebration begins with an early morning rite at the main Belgrade church, not far from Jevremova Street. After the official opening of the program, in the next few hours different segments of the celebration take place along Jevremova Street. Various scenes and events that are something like "images from a mobile exhibition" simultaneously take place, such as:

<sup>15</sup> This text was sampled from the poster which was used to call up citizens to join this manifestation.

a) from different historical periods: the Renesans music ensemble, wearing medieval costumes and playing medieval music, walk along the street, while at the other end of the street a rock concert takes place; some participants of the performance are dressed in nineteenth-century town costumes, and among them are young men and women dressed in serbian peasant folk costumes, etc.

b) the participation of members of various confessional and ethnic groups: thus outside the Bayrak Mosque are offered food and artifacts specific to Islamic culture; the Serbian-Tsintsar's Society "Lunjina" and the Jewish Community Choir perform their program on the street corners; and the same is happening in front of the embassy of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (which is located in the same street);

c) different professional and social groups perform their parts: children from nearby schools sing, play, draw on the street or sell their handicrafts; museums and galleries in the area open their doors to visitors with free admission to the exhibitions; memories of writers, actors and other public figures who have lived in this part of the city are revived; clowns and jugglers entertain audiences, etc.

d) at several points different foods and drinks are advertised as symbols of national cuisine and tradition.

The whole celebration takes on the character of a carnival, where the audience is not a passive observer but an interactive participant in street fairs, contributing to a vibrant communication that takes place throughout the event which intervenes in the culture of remembrance, since it "revives" a historical tradition through performance on the narrative stage. In spite of the fact that "history turns into myth as soon as it is remembered, narrated, and used, that is, woven into the fabric of present" (Wertsch 2009, 238), invoking such a history has an effect on good neighborly relations among residents of different ethnic backgrounds and religions.

This recently-introduced custom, now has already become a "tradition", has kept the same structure and organizational principle, always repeating some segments such as the participation of ethno-confessional and cultural/educational groups from the territory of Dorçol, while some participants have changed (different artists, performing arts companies, food or arts and crafts sellers), or the content of the performances themselves has changed.

Like other rituals, this one is also understood as representational and at the same time didactic, recycling cultural lessons learned and yet to be learned, fulfilling several important functions:

1) presentation of cultural and professional content characteristic of this local area, with the intention of strengthening its importance and visibility in everyday public life;

- 2) to stimulate, through entertainment, companionship, a sense of community and belonging to this part of the city as a carrier of specific cultural identity;
- 3) to influence cotemporary social life to a certain extent, in such a way that multiethnic relations will be represented in a positive light;
- 4) latent political intention of the municipal administration to represent themselves in a good light as caring for fellow citizens and tradition.

### Concluding Remarks

It is a fact that the *Jevremova – Street of Meetings* manifestation analyzed herein omits various historical events and circumstances which led to the disappearance of ethnically diverse neighbors – some left of their own will, some were banished or murdered, and some blended into the majority population. However, the clear intent to signify Dorćol as a "place of memory" can be read from the proclamation used to establish this manifestation through the revitalization of the memory of these, mostly former neighbors as well as the civic spirit of XIX century Serbia. Thus, Dorćol is signified as a "place of memory"/ "lieux de mémoire" in Pierre Nora's sense, "as a relationship to the past which is immersed into an Us-group, whose self-understanding and course of action is tied to the image of the group's own past" (Kuljić 2006, 110). The "Us-group" in this case are Serbs, specifically representatives of the municipal government, cultural and civil activists who wish to establish themselves as the bearers of democratic political and ideological change<sup>16</sup>, after the officially proclaimed break with socialism and communist ideology. Under socialism, the historical facts of the multiethnic and civic past of Dorćol weren't emphasized nor were they utilized to create the image of this part of town. For decades, Dorćol languished, largely neglected, as a symbol of a different, from the communist perspective undesirable time – the civil and capitalist society which had existed in Serbia at the end of the 19th and during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or the even earlier time of Ottoman rule. This modern construct – the idealized, "mythical" image of a multicultural Dorćol which disregards the conflicts which had existed between the ethnically and confessional disparate former neighbors, and the creation of the symbolic function of a "place of memory" as a "semantic space which lies between history and its utilization" (Kuljić 2006, 110) is based on rituals and ceremonies like this newly established manifestation. It is, therefore, based on staged tradition and the desire to solidify the democratic and civil identity in the fragile transitional present. "The creation of identity which relies on the past is a perfor-

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<sup>16</sup> In Serbia, these changes occurred after Slobodan Milosevic left government on October 5th 2000.

mance of the culture of memory" (Ibid, 111) mediated by socially conditioned interests which have the power to construct, in this case Dorćol, as a location of collective memories.. "*Lieux de mémoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations... because such activities no longer occur naturally", says Pierre Nora (Nora 1989, 12). "Collective remembering is a representation of the past and has an ongoing, vital connection with contemporary cultural discourse and identity. When speaking of memory, Asmann asserts that 'the present is haunted by the past and the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present'. So, by coming to know and believe the narratives of collective memory, we come to know and believe things about who we are today" (Wertsch 2009, 237, 238).

The public event *Jevremova Street – Street of Meetings* underlines those cultural values that could be characterized as the urban sensibility of civic society, leveling different experiences in the spirit of mutual tolerance. This idealized image of coexistence that feeds the "myth of Dorćol" as a quite distinctive part of the city, was constructed with the undisguised intention to "brand" Dorćol in the light of an image of multicultural memorial landscape with specific cultural heritage.

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Priča o Dorćolu: manifestacija "Jevremova – ulica susreta" i  
multikulturalna konstrukcija mesta sećanja

U radu se razmatra manifestacija *Jevremova – ulica susreta* kao novi običaj koji je uvela beogradska opština Stari grad u nameri da promoviše duh dobrosusedstva i tolerancije, ali i izazove kolektivno sećanje na nekadašnji multietnički i multikonfesionalni sastav stanovništva najstarijeg dela grada – Dorćola. Očigledna namera da se ide u korak sa globalnim trendom multikulturalnih politika inicirala je ne samo pokretanje ove manifestacije već i svojevrsno "brendiranje" Dorćola kroz niz različitih akcija i publikacija posvećenih isticanju kulturne posebnosti ovog dela grada, koga karakteriše specifična topografija, starost gradskog jezgra i multikulturalna prošlost. Nastojanje administrativne vlasti i nekih kulturnih organizacija na opštini Stari grad da promovišu Dorćol i revitalizuju njegov značaj kao "mesta sećanja" i atraktivnu turističku, kulturnu, obrazovnu i komercijalnu lokaciju koja "odiše" urbanim duhom i multietničkim miljeom, bilo je podstaknuto, po autorovom mišljenju, političkim razlozima koji bi trebalo da iskažu duh demokratskih i građanskih promena u Srbiji nakon 2000-te godine. Etnografskom metodom posmatranja s učestvovanjem opisane su glavne karakteristike manifestacije *Jevremova – ulica susreta* i analizirane njene funkcije u kontekstu istorijskih i etničko-konfesionalnih osobenosti Dorćola, uključujući i urbano-semiotičku analizu ovog kvarta.

*Ključne reči:* Dorćol, mesto sećanja, multikulturalna prošlost, "brendiranje" urbanog jezgra

Récit sur Dorćol:  
manifestation "Rue de Jevrem – rue des rencontres" et  
construction multiculturelle des lieux de mémoire

Dans cet article est analysée la manifestation *Rue de Jevrem – rue des rencontres*, "nouvelle" coutume introduite par la municipalité belgradoise de Stari grad dans l'objectif de promouvoir l'esprit de bon voisinage et de tolérance, mais aussi d'éveiller le souvenir collectif de la composition multiethnique et multiconfessionnelle d'autrefois des habitants du quartier le plus ancien de la ville – Dorćol. L'intention évidente d'emboîter le pas à la tendance globale des politiques multiculturelles a été à l'origine non seulement du lancement de

cette manifestation mais également de la création d'une image de marque particulière de Dorćol à travers une série de différentes actions et publications consacrées à la mise en relief de la spécificité culturelle de cette partie de la ville caractérisée par une topographie spécifique, la vieillesse du noyau historique de la ville et un passé multiculturel. L'effort des autorités administratives et de certaines organisations culturelles dans la municipalité de Stari grad de promouvoir Dorćol et de revitaliser son importance comme celle d'un "lieu de mémoire" et d'une localité touristique, culturelle, éducative et commerciale attrayante, "exhalant" l'esprit urbain et le milieu multiethnique, a été encouragé, d'après l'auteur, par des raisons politiques qui devraient témoigner de l'esprit des changements démocratiques et civiques en Serbie depuis l'an 2000. À l'aide de la méthode ethnographique de l'observation participante, les principales caractéristiques de la manifestation *Rue de Jevrem – rue des rencontres* ont été décrites et ses fonctions ont été analysées dans le contexte des spécificités historiques et ethno-confessionnelles du Dorćol, au moyen également d'une analyse sémiotique de l'urbanité de ce quartier.

*Mots clés:* Dorćol, lieu de mémoire, passé multiculturel, création de l'image de marque du noyau historique de la ville

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