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The Influence of Migrations on the Ethnic/National and Religious Identities: the Case of the United Methodist Church in Banat¹

This research focuses on the correlation between migrations and ethnic and religious identities on the example of the United Methodist Church (UMC)² in Banat. This paper observes a complex network of social, political and cultural factors which induced the changing of the number of members of the UMC local congregations, and their ethnic structure. Ever since the founding of the first UMC congregations on the territory of Serbia (mostly in Vojvodina) at the beginning of the 20th century until the end of World War II, the greatest number of their members were German. After they had immigrated, there was a sharp membership decline and many UMC congregations were extinguished. Today there are four UMC congregations in Banat, the largest one being the Macedonian Roma congregation in Jabuka, which is called the "Roma church" by the local people. Protestant congregations in Serbia are minority denominations and the UMC in Banat does not have many members. In the UMC in Jabuka the pastor is a woman, which is also very rare.

Key words:

United Methodist Church (UMC), religious identity, ethnic identity, Roma national minority, Slovak national minority, Banat, Serbia.

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² The official name of the Methodist Church in Serbia is "Evangelička metodistička crkva" translated directly into English would be Evangelical Methodist Church. This Church is part of the worldwide denomination called "United Methodist Church" (UMC), so I use this term in the text.

This paper observes the influence of migrations on the structural changes in religious congregations and the influence of ethnic belonging on the expressing of religious identity of their members on the example of the United Methodist Church (further in the text abbreviated UMC) in Banat from the beginning of the 20th century until today. During the 20th century, a wide network of mutually intertwined social, political, and cultural factors induced the changing of the number of members of the UMC local congregations, and their ethnic structure. Ever since the founding of the first UMC congregations in Vojvodina at the beginning of the 20th century until the end of World War II, the largest number of members were German. After they had immigrated, there was a sharp membership decline and many UMC congregations were extinguished.

Today there are four UMC congregations in Banat, the largest one being the Macedonian Roma congregation in Jabuka. Besides that one, there are two Slovak congregations in Padina and Kovačica and an ethnically mixed one in Vršac, where they perform services in Serbian. We ask how the members of other local congregations perceive the UMC members, whether they define them based on their ethnic belonging. Also, one of the questions is how the ethnic, age and sex structures of these congregations affect their musical creativity at church services.

After I had become acquainted with the already existing written works about the UMC in Serbia, I realized that this congregation has never actually been the object of any ethnological or anthropological researches in our country. Taking into consideration that the UMC was greatly influenced by the migrations of its members during its existence in our parts, which also affected the ethnic structure of the congregations and the expressing of their ethnic identity, I have decided to devote special attention to these issues. This paper was created as a result of my own field research conducted by using the methods of interview, casual conversations, and observing the church services in all four congregations mentioned above, in the period from October till December 2013.³

The coherence between the ethnic and religious identities

The ethnic/national and religious identities represent kinds of collective identities which are more or less coherent depending on different social factors. Contemporary ethnological and anthropological studies show that religious identity often represents one of the most important indicators of ethnic/national identity (Nedeljković 2007, 256). In the professional literature, the role of religious identity as a guardian of ethnic/national identity in some nations has often been pointed out (Smith 1998, 59). In support of this, there are results of some ethnological and anthropological studies of the Serbian diaspora. It is the migrations of population (especially to overseas

³ I wish to thank all the examinees for their affability, and especially to the EMC pastors, Mr Jan Sjanta from Padina, Daniel Sjanta from Kovačica, Lila Balovski from Jabuka, and Miodrag Mihajlović from Vršac, and also to musicians Martin Balovski and Branislav Jovanov from Jabuka.

countries) that often cause the religious identity to become one of the prominent symbols of ethnic identity (Pavlović 1991; Lukić-Krstanović 1992; Prelić 1995; Prelić 2008; Blagojević 2005; Blagojević 2012).

In this paper I deal with a somewhat different situation, which is the relation between religious and ethnic/national identities of national minority members who both in their homeland and in the receiving country have the dominant other religious identities. For example, the Slovaks in the Republic of Slovakia are predominantly Roman Catholics. However, their compatriots in Serbia are mostly Lutherans, that is, members of the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (further in the text: SEC) (Raković 2010, 376-377). On the territory of the municipality of Kovačica, in Banat, there are a great number of Protestant religious congregations whose members are Slovaks. Thus, in Kovačica, there are nine more religious congregations besides SEC. In Padina, there are eight more religious congregations besides SEC. Therefore, although the SEC is the most numerous one, still the members of the Slovak national minority in Serbia are divided into a larger number of Protestant congregations. One of them is the UMC, on which this paper is focused because of the specific relation between the ethnic and religious identity. Namely, I have noticed that people from their surroundings gave this religious congregation an ethnic name, depending on the ethnic structure of its members. Accordingly, the UMC in Vršac was called the "German church" at the beginning of the 20th century, while today in Jabuka they call it the "Roma church", although neither Germans nor Roma people are the predominant members of the UMC. On the other hand, where the members of a national minority are the majority – like, for example, in Kovačica and Padina where Slovaks are dominant – the members of the local community who are not members of the UMC do not define their members ethnically, but only religiously.

The Uvangelical Methodist Church (UMC)

The Uvangelical Methodist Church represents a denomination of the Protestant Christianity which was inspired by the teaching of the Anglican priest John Wesley (1703-1791). His brother, Charles Wesley, wrote over 6000 poems (in some resources it is said 9000) which served as the foundation for the dissemination of the Wesleyan Methodist theology. However, although neither of the brothers played a musical instrument, Charles's sons and grandsons became well-known musicians and composers. (Church Society 2013; Wesley Center Online 2013; Wesley 1820). The Methodist movement segregated itself from the Anglican Church and became a separate ecclesiastical denomination only after Wesley's death. From Great Britain this movement spread to the USA and throughout the whole world. Today there are about 100 denominations of the Wesleyan Methodist movement which are joined together in the "World Methodist Council" which has about 80 million Methodists (World Methodist Council 2013).

Methodists dedicate special attention to education (founding of schools, universities, etc.), as well as to giving help to the economically threatened and sick

persons (founding of hospitals, orphanages, kitchens for the poor, etc.). When comes to theology, Methodists profess Arminianism claiming that Lord Jesus Christ died for the whole humanity, and not only for a group of the chosen ones. The Methodist teaching was especially popular among the slaves in the USA who founded the so called "black churches" (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2013).

A short review of the Methodist Church in Serbia

The history of the Methodist Church in Serbia is connected with the activities of the Blue Cross Society. At the end of the 19th century subsidiaries appeared in Hungary, which mostly worked among Germans and Slovaks. It is worth mentioning that many Germans were colonized on the territory of today's Vojvodina after its liberation from the Turkish government and becoming a part of the Habsburg Monarchy (Krel 2008, 157). Members of the Blue Cross Society had a good cooperation with Methodists, who preached at their gatherings. A German Methodist Otto Melle was well accepted in Srbobran where he lived at the beginning of the 20th century. Local people called him the "German priest" (Bjelajac 2003, 116). The first Methodist Church on the territory of Vojvodina was founded in Vrbas in 1904. At the same time, they also started to preach to Hungarians in Srbobran, in Hungarian language (116). There was missionary work among Hungarians, in Hungarian language. However, they did not have much success because the Hungarians remained faithful to the Roman Catholic Church and Reformed Church (116-117). Therefore, together with migrations and colonization of Germans, the Methodist teaching came to our country, but at first they were mostly restricted to the German population because of the language.

In the Kingdom of SHS all Methodist congregations united in Vrbas in the Yugoslav Missionary Conference in 1992 (Milin 1986, 141). According to some data, in the Kingdom of SHS in 1923 there were about 1400 members and 1000 children in Sunday Schools in the Methodist Church (Bjelajac 2003, 124). In the late 1920s, the Methodist congregation lost a certain number of their members because of the economic migrations from the territory of Serbia (127). In the 1930s, three big centres were standing out among the congregations in Vojvodina: Zrenjanin (then called Veliki Bečkerek), Vršac and Mramorak. In 1931 there were 334 Methodists in Vojvodina (128). The first Methodist church service in Belgrade was performed in 1939 (128-129). Methodists in Yugoslavia were socially engaged until World War II. They had a hospital in Novi Sad called "Betanija", a boarding school for girls and a nursing home (129).

After the occupation of Yugoslavia in World War II, German troupes and Hungarian occupational authorities did not hinder the work of the Methodists. There were Nazis in the Methodist Church who represented an influential part of the membership (130). According to the data quoted by Branko Bjelajac, when the Soviet Army and Partisans reached Vojvodina, 520 Methodists immigrated to Germany. Some local Methodist congregations became completely extinguished (131). By 1958, a great number of German nationality members immigrated from Yugoslavia (132). Here we can see

the influence of forced migrations and belonging to a specific ethnic group on the weakening and almost complete disappearance of a religious congregation, in this case, the UMC in Vojvodina.

After World War II in some places in Vojvodina there were still some Hungarian Methodist believers. Work among them was renewed with the financial help from America and Switzerland (131). There were two districts on the territory of former Yugoslavia during that period – the north (Vojvodina) and the south one (Macedonia). Most Methodists lived in Macedonia, so the centre was in Skoplje and the secretariat was in Novi Sad. The chief administrator was the superintendent. The north district had four counties: Bačka, Banat, Srem, and the Hungarian county. All congregations in Macedonia and the one in Kosovska Mitrovica belonged to the south district. The authorities allowed financial help and means from abroad which helped the gradual renewal of their work (132).

In 1948 the communist authorities banned the work of the Blue Cross Society which was mainly consisted of Slovak Lutherans, who then became Methodists. Because of the lack of educated clerical staff, the "clerical sisters" were admitted to work in church. They helped in performing the church services and organizing sisterhood and children's meetings, they visited and took care of the sick people (132). In 1959 the Methodists had about 3000 grown-up members and 400 children (133). After the separation of SR Macedonia from SFRJ, the north district (Vojvodina) and the south (Macedonia) split up, but they stayed in the same conference. The centre of the north district is in Novi Sad. Both districts are within the same diocese, the centre of which is in Switzerland (135).

Between the two world wars, Methodists had magazines in Serbian and German. In SFR Yugoslavia they published magazines in Macedonian, Slovak and Serbian. Today in Serbia they publish magazines in Slovak and Serbian. In 2000 there were 480 Methodists in Serbia. Services are performed in Slovak, Serbian and Hungarian language. Today most Methodists in Serbia are Slovaks and Roma people. On the territory of Vojvodina there are 14 local congregations with about 1000 members (138).

Contemporary practices in Methodist congregations in Banat

As it has already been mentioned, this research included the Methodist congregations on the territory of Banat – in Vršac, Padina, Kovačica and Jabuka. Although these congregations are relatively near each other, their structure is ethnically different, so the church services are performed in different languages. Music in services is very different and it gives *a special note* to each one of these congregations.

From the UMC archives in **Vršac** we can learn that the first Methodist preacher in this town was Kreuzer Karl in 1900. Slovak Janko Sjanta preached from 1990 till 2006. His sermons were heard by the current UMC priest in Vršac, Miodrag Mihajlović from Jabuka. The members of this congregation, as it is written in the archives, gathered

together in the house of the Warmit family during the German occupation and later in the house of Dr. Sendjerov. Today they gather in a private house which has a wooden cross and a sign UMC on it. According to pastor Mihajlović, this and other religious congregations in Vršac are exposed to the attacks of *hooligans*. They threw stones at the church several times, so he was forced to put gratings on the windows.

This ethnically mixed religious congregation has about ten members today and they are mostly elderly people. Their members are Slovaks, Czechs, Slovenians, Serbs and they have one Roma woman. There were also Romanians earlier. The services are held in Serbian. For singing in services they use the Baptist songbook. Pastor Miodrag Mihajlović wrote about a hundred songs which are being prepared for printing. Martin Balovski and Branislav Jovanov, the UMC members from Jabuka, wrote music for some of these songs, which are sung at services by the members of the congregation. Since there are no musicians in this congregation, Janoš Lovas, a Roman Catholic cantor, (Hungarian) sometimes plays at services or they use recorded music or they simply sing a cappella.

On the territory of the **municipality of Kovačica** there are 25,274 inhabitants, most of which are Slovak (Census 2012, 35). According to the data I got from the **Padina** UMC pastor Jan Sjanta (a Slovak by ethnic belonging), the Methodist Church has been in Padina since 1953. It was formed by the Blue Cross Society members. Until 1972 the congregation assembled in a house known as "Turanov's house". That year a new house was bought and preacher Olejar Mihajlo (Slovak) came from Zrenjanin with his family. There were also two lay preachers in the congregation, Ondriš Sjanta and Pavel Šajben (Slovaks). The current Padina UMC pastor Jano Sjanta, the grandson of the above mentioned Ondriš Sjanta, was born in Padina. He has served in several different places in Vojvodina and Macedonia since 1978. In 2006 he returned to his hometown. This congregation currently has about 25 members. As for the age structure, most of them are over 60, but there are believers in their twenties, thirties and forties. They gather together three times a week, on Wednesdays and twice on Sundays. They cooperate with the Baptist and three Pentecostal congregations. Preachers meet once a month, they talk and pray together. According to Sjanta, members of other Protestant congregations in Padina did not approve of the fact that the pastors in the SEC and Methodist Church were paid. According to their criteria, it is "scandalous" for a pastor to get paid.

The UMC in **Kovačica** was officially formed in April 1950, also by the Blue Cross Society members. The current pastor Daniel Sjanta came to Kovačica in 2010 as the first ordained pastor in this congregation. The house they gather to pray in, together with a flat for the pastor, was bought then. According to Sjanta's testimony, local people recognize and respect him regardless of their denomination. They address him with "Mr. Pastor". Until he came, lay pastors served there and the congregation gathered in very modest conditions. They had only one room for prayer. Sjanta claims that due to the lay management, there is no systematic church archives with the history of the congregation.

Today the UMC in Kovačica has 32 adult members and a certain number of

children and young people. Besides them, there are some people who are in the process of joining the congregation. For them they use the term "friends", while the congregation members call each other brothers and sisters. Although priest Sjanta is privately on good terms with the dominant Slovak Evangelical Church (SEC) priests in this place, the UMC in Kovačica does not have official relations with it. In his own words, "it all depends on a personal base, on the people who are leading the congregation, on the pastors' approach. In Stara Pazova, Šid and Pivnice there is cooperation between the Evangelical Church as a majority and the Methodist Church". The pastor's wife Elena Sjanta (maiden name Brezina) grew up in a Baptist family. However, when she married a Methodist pastor, she decided to join the UMC for the sake of the congregation.

They have services three times a week. The difference between these services is very small. The pastor plays the electric organ at services and all the members of the congregation sing in the Slovak language. He sometimes plays the guitar or the flute. On every first Sunday in a month after the vespers they sing religious songs for an hour. I attended the Sunday vespers on 3 November 2013. The members of the congregation suggested the songs by numbers according to their own affinity. For example, one of the members said: "let's sing song number 156!". After they have finished that one, somebody else suggested the next song. The texts of some songs are sung to the melodies of Slovak folk songs, but there are also Russian and even Swedish folk melodies. They use the songbook called "Sionske piesne" ("Zion songs") published in 1982 in Padina. Daniel Sjanta translates liturgical poems from English into Slovak and Serbian and he also translated a Christmas carol from the Hungarian language. Apart from this, he wrote two songs, in which he adjusted his own words to the already existing melody. The criterion for the choice of the song is its euphoniousness and the quality of the text.

Apart from his primary clerical duties, Sjanta holds a free English language course for all interested parties as a contribution to a wider community – not only for the UMC members, but also for the other ones, grown ups and children. He started this activity in Padina. He was motivated by the fact that many people need the English language and it was a way to help them. In Sjanta's words, the course helped him to get to know many people and make some friendships. The students agreed on their own to give a certain sum of money as a contribution for the church, although not all of them were the members of this congregation.

Within this congregation there is a children's club "Mosaic" where the pastor's wife works, who is a kindergarten teacher. Apart from this, they also have the so-called youth group, high school group and group for the older youths. Besides gathering at the church, they also have the so-called *home groups* which are meetings at private houses. There are three different kinds of groups: for married couples, for the catechumens and the general type ones. Among other things, the function of these groups is to bond with the non-members of the congregation who would perhaps never come to the Methodist Church, but are open to private contacts. In pastor Daniel Sjanta's words, they "want to socialize, sing and talk about God". This is the way of

keeping the informal social contacts among the church congregations. They have this activity mostly during the winter because, as the members say, ” people work more in the summer”.

The Banat village of **Jabuka** is situated on the territory of the municipality of Pančevo. According to the 2011 census, it has 6181 inhabitants (the 2012 Census). As stated by Lila Balovski, the Methodist congregation in Jabuka has been gathering since 1969. The pastor from Vršac started to come then, Krum Ivančev, whose ancestry was Macedonian. He founded the so called *home congregation*, which means that the believers gathered for prayer in private houses. When the number of believers became too large for the house meetings, they bought a building in which they also gather today. The sanctification of the building was performed in 1973. In November 2013 they celebrated 40 yeras of the UMC congretation in Jabuka.

This congregation is also special because its leader is a woman – pastor Lila Balovski. She tells how she decided to become a pastor:

Everyone in my family was Methodists, my parents and grandparents. I have always believed in God. When I turned 18, I was bewildered when people talked about joy in faith. I did not feel that. I prayed to God to experience peace and joy in my heart. At first I felt that I was a sinful person and then I was overcome by joy. It was then that I decided to serve to Him until the end of my life and keep this feeling within myself.

According to the decision made by the Annual Conference of the UMC, she has been preaching in Jabuka since 1992. When she came to the village there was only a small number of Methodist believers. She met her husband here, who is an active Methodist, with whom she began to preach together. In Balovski's words, at first the people from Jabuka found it strange that a woman was a pastor in this UMC: “there were no attacks or awkward situations, only bewilderment. Now they have all got used to it.” At funerals she wears a *talar* or a cassock.

The gets the greatest response from the Roma people. The UMC in Jabuka is mostly Roma. Today this congregation has about 80 active members, out of which 20 are teenagers. As for the sex structure, there are slightly more women than men. Balovski claims that the children were the first ones who came to the congregation and then the parents. They gather in the house in the centre of the village which was renovated in 2010. That year an incident happened when after a fight a young Roma man killed a non-Roma young man with a knife. Inhabitants who were not Roma protested because of this. Balovski says that some of them threw stones at all the Roma houses, as well as the EMC in which the Roma people gather and which is known as the “Roma church”. The building was severely damaged, but after the renovation it was expanded. The members of this congregation told me that many people in the village find it strange that “the church does not have a belfry and a bell”. There is also a separate *youth room* where young people gather together. Every Sunday is considered to be a big feast day and that is why they have services twice a day. Grown-up members have a prayer hour every Thursday.

Choir and orchestra rehearsals are on Saturday evenings. According to the pastor,

the lack of musicians was a big problem in the congregation at the beginning of the 1990s. However, soon Roma children and young people came, who then learned to play. Today this congregation is rich with musicians, who are mostly Roma, and their music characterizes it. Some musicians are educated, like for example, the pastor's son, Martin Balovski, who finished secondary music school in Pančevo. They play the piano-synthesizer, guitar, Goblet drum, trumpet, bass, and accordion. At services they mostly sing in Serbian, a few songs are sung in Macedonian, since there are some other members besides the priestess who come from Macedonia. They do not sing in the Roma language because these Roma people also come from Macedonia and, as they say, do not speak the Roma language.

They got musical instruments from Germany. Roland Werner, a music professor, has been coming here since 2008. He taught a group of Roma musicians to play spiritual music for funerals and make a living in that way.

The prominent member of the church choir, the accordion player Branislav Jovanov, has been playing the accordion actively since he was 15 years old. He was born in a family of Orthodox Roma people. He married young and could barely make a living from his music. A friend recommended him and he started to play in the Methodist congregation, since there were no musicians among the members at that time:

Over the time I felt they had peace and love there, I could see something was going on – they were not like all the other people who rejected me. Here people love me regardless the fact that I am a Gypsy. Outside we are Gypsies for them. Now, as some would say – Roma, Gypsies – it is all nonsense. A Gypsy is a Gypsy, no offence there. We are not ashamed of that. In the church I am not a Gypsy. In the church I am a man. I primarily received love from people. I did not know who God was. I cannot say – I came to the church, I believe in God. I had no idea that He exists. For me people were gods in the beginning. Why? Because these people treated me with tenderness. It is not the same as in the outside world. I got to know God through the people who had God, who believed in Him. I started to come here, and then my family started to come too – my wife and children. My father was very much against it. We moved out and started on our own. For five years we did not have electricity and water. Our second son grew up under the candle light. After 7-8 years we managed to build a house. It is good that this church has so much to offer. We spend time here, play table tennis, have fun, play basketball, football. We have different kinds of music. A lot of young people went through this church. They get married very young and that is a big problem. When they have children, they do not come here anymore.

According to pastor Lila Balovski, the UMC missionaries found a way to get close to the Roma people: 'we opened the church doors and our hearts and offered help in any way possible. We went to visit them at their homes. We talked with them. They felt accepted and loved. We are all one before God, we have to respect each other. If we do not respect people around us, how can we respect God who we cannot see?' The pastor believes that there are changes in the lives of the members of this congregation, and abstinence from alcohol is one of them. Crime rate is lower and

they pay more attention to their families. The children go to school and learn.

Balovski thinks that it was the hardest for the Roma people who first came to the UMC because the people from their surroundings were mocking them. The attacks were in the sense *why are you changing your faith*. The UMC pastor has a good relationship on the private, human level with the Serbian Orthodox priest, but there is no official religious dialogue. When the UMC missionaries first came, they gave away the New Testament for free, but the people were suspicious and would not take it. It took ten years for them to become accepted as a part of a village community. This congregation also has home gatherings, mostly in winter, and mainly the same generations.

As for the charity work, during the 1990s crises a humanitarian service from abroad sent them packets of humanitarian help which they gave to everyone regardless of their religious affiliation. As stated by Balovski, the EMC in Jabuka bought a 37 acre piece of land for the congregation members who do not have their own land to cultivate. The field is divided into ten lots – for nine families and the tenth lot is for the Lord. They grow vegetables on those lots and everything they need to feed themselves.

Besides in this congregation, Balovski is a pastor in a small missionary Methodist congregation in Pančevo. She began to preach there in 1993, the same year as in Jabuka, but with much less success. They gathered in private houses until 2000 when they were allowed to use the German Evangelical Church which was abandoned after World War II and the departure of the Germans. They have only one service there on Sunday afternoons. Priestess Balovski performed several funerals there. Those were mostly people of German ancestry whose family members “wanted to hear a word of consolation in German language”.

Conclusion

This research has shown that different kinds of migrations, both collective and individual, played an important role in the life of the UMC in Banat. Most members of the UMC in these parts belong to national minorities. Their ancestors (Germans, Slovaks, Macedonians, Roma) settled and immigrated under the influence of different factors (social, political, religious). For example, the religious factor was of crucial importance for the migrations of Slovaks and their settling in the territory of Vojvodina at the beginning of the 19th century. They were Protestants and as such they were not welcome in the Roman Catholic majority surroundings which they were forced to leave.

Forced migrations were a very important factor as can be seen on the example of the immigration of Germans after World War II, the result of which were the changes in the ethnic structure of the UMC. Therefore, political factors influenced the migrations of believers among other things, which consequently caused the change in the ethnic structure of the UMC congregations. On the other hand, on the territory of former Yugoslavia after World War II, colonization occurred. Thus, among others,

Macedonians and Roma people colonized Vojvodina. This religious congregation in the ethnically mixed places in Banat was named after the ethnic belonging of its members at the beginning of the 20th century as well as today, for example the *German* or *Roma* church. It is exactly this equating of the Methodist congregations with ethnic belonging that brought to the physical extinguishing of many congregations after World War II and the departure of the Germans. On the other hand, people began to oppose the Methodist preachers because in that period everything *German* was perceived as hostile, and so was the former “German church”. However, since the 1990s, right there in the former German place – Jabuka near Pančevo – a place where thousands of Serbs, Jews and Roma people were killed during World War II – among the members of the Roma national minority the Methodist preaching has the most followers. In Banat places where Slovaks are a majority, like Padina and Kovačica, the EMC members are not defined ethnically because they all – the congregation members and their surroundings – belong to the same national minority.

Besides collective, there are also individual work migrations of preachers and pastor who are sent to different places by their church organizations according to the needs and agreement. It needs to be pointed out that the local congregations of the UMC in these parts (and further in Vojvodina) were founded thanks to the active work of migrant missionaries-preachers. In the first phase at the beginning of the 20th century those were Germans who did not speak Serbian, so the language barrier was one of the factors which caused the weak acceptance of this teaching by the Serbs and members of other ethnic congregations who live in these parts.

The UMC in Banat has a small number of members and it represents a minority within Protestantism which, on the other hand, is a minor religious congregation in Serbia. In the UMC in Jabuka the pastor is a woman, which is also rare in the Christian world and in Serbia even in the Protestant congregations where female clergy is allowed. For example, the UMC in Vojvodina has twelve priests and only four of them are women. On the other hand, the superintendent in Novi Sad is a woman, Ana Palik-Kunčak.

These preachers were and still are well-accepted because of their humanitarian work, giving of material and educational help – as we have seen on the example of the land for the poor or free English lessons. Besides, the preacher’s nice and kind way of communication appealed to many members of this congregation.

This research has shown that in the UMC in Banat there is a direct bond between the local congregations and the influence of changing of the ethnic, age, and sex structures on the music expression of their religious identity. In Slovak places the UMC members sing in Slovak. Under the influence of age structure – the members are mostly older – the melodies of the songs are from the older repertoire (from the beginning of the 20th century), but they use the electric organ, though. In Vršac they have a small and ethnically very mixed congregation where members are mostly elderly people. At services they even use recorded matrices of instrumental music or they have guest musicians from other church congregations. On the other hand, in the numerous UMC congregation in Jabuka, where there are a lot of young people,

contemporary pop music melodies or lively 7/8 folk rhythms dominate, which can be related to the Roma-Macedonian structure of this congregation.

The members of the UMC local congregations are mutually bonded by the same dogmatic teaching. With some Protestant congregations, like Baptist or Pentecostal, they have good cooperation. With other religious congregations they mostly have a good relationship on a private level, but the interreligious dialogue is not much developed. By welcoming foreign Methodist preachers and visitors from foreign countries, the members of this congregation overcome the local frames bonding at the same time with other Methodist congregations from all over the world.

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