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Is cultural intimacy crucial? Simit Sarayi at Obilićev Venac in Belgrade: Heterotopia, non-place and place of "Others"*

Drawing on renewed academic interest in the study of Serbian-Turkish relationships, this article addresses the complexities of the Ottoman heritage in a Serbian urban setting through its cultural-symbolic and anthropological dimensions. Specifically, this article explores 'what stands behind' Belgradians' negative attitude towards the Turkish coffee-shop chain Simit Sarayi. To do so, we use Michael Herzfeld's (1997) *cultural intimacy* perspective of 'understanding from within' what 'makes sense of space'. We illustrate how the systems of meaning Belgradians use shape the true nature and experience with such an intimate 'Other' that is the Turkish [franchise].

Key words: cultural intimacy, heterotopia, place of 'Others', Simit Sarayi, Belgrade

Да ли је културна интимност пресудна? Симит Сарајци на Обилићевом венцу у Београду: хетеротипија, не-место и место „других"

Ослањајући се на обновљено академско интересовање за проучавање српско-турских односа, у овом тексту говоримо о сложености османског наслеђа у српском урбаном окружењу кроз његове културно-симболичке и антрополошке димензије. Конкретно, у тексту се истражују значења која стоје иза негативног става Београђана према турском ланцу кафића *Симит Сарајци*. Користимо се концептом *културне интимности* Мајкла Херцфелда о „разумевању изнутра" онога што „даје смисао одређеном простору", илуструјући га значењима уобичајеног дискурса која обликују искуства Београђана са тако интимним 'другим' као што је ова турска франшиза.

Кључне речи: Културна интимност, хетеротопија, место 'других', Симит Сарајци, Београд

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> "When we opened our first store, we had a dream to serve fresh simits both in Turkey and across the world, the dream of announcing and ingratiating our brand and taste across the world. Today we continue to grow with our dream come true. Every single day, we bake with love our fresh and delicious foods for our customers from all around the world."[1]

Experts, political analysts, and academics have stressed the growing economic and cultural engagement of Turkey in the Western Balkans (e.g. Lazić 2017). Simit Sarayi, its most emblematic coffee shop chain which introduces itself as the "Growing Global Brand of Turkey"[2], could be considered as an integral part of such activism. Its corporate motto may serve as a rallying point to any customer wishing to enjoy a 'third place experience', a place where people of different ethnic and religious origin practice daily interactions, what Freitag called 'Ottoman cosmopolitanism', a phenomenon rooted in the late Ottoman Empire when people whatever their ethnic, linguistic, religious national, and social backgrounds achieved to live together peacefully (Freitag 2014). However, the 'empty seats' that have marked the course of the franchise from September 2017 to September 2020 in Belgrade tell a different story.

In this article, we investigate why the Turkish franchise faced such a negative attitude from local customers. The complexity of Ottoman heritage in the Balkan Peninsula[3] opens up stimulating research perspectives for studying not only its historical aspect but also its cultural-symbolic and anthropological dimensions. In this regard, the research conducted by Michael Herzfeld in Greece in the 1980s and the1990s deserves special attention, as well as his concept of *cultural intimacy*, formulated in 1995 (Herzfeld 1997). The inspiring Herzfeld's perspective of 'understanding from within' and 'behind the façade' of official discourses has engendered a number of terms and mind tools by means of which a community's world of the implied and the associative is revealed. With respect to our research context and objectives, the concept of cultural intimacy is insightful precisely in the sense attached to it by the author, because it raises and poses questions, rather than offering complete answers. We understand it as a developing process, a 'combative midfield' between constructivism and essentialism, and as a concept appropriate for understanding the specific logic of auto-stereotype and hetero-stereotype representations and their constant play. In addition, we consider it enlightening both in terms of its exposure to commonplace discursive practices and habits existing in the Serbian society, and the rarely addressed complex relations between two intertwined cultures, such as Serbian and Turkish.

In this article, we aim to explore how *cultural intimacy*, i.e. the notions and stereotypes that constitute it, affected the development of Simit Sarayi in Belgrade, which presupposes that shedding light on this content in the specific local environ-

[1] https://www.simitsarayi.com/en/who-we-are (Accessed December 8, 2020)

[2] https://www.simitsarayi.com/en/who-we-are (Accessed May 26, 2020)

[3] First and foremost, as stressed by Hajdarpašić (2008), the Ottoman past stays one of the most disputable historical topics across much of the Balkan region.

ment connotes the familiar questions and uncertainties related to everyday lived experiences. Moreover, over several centuries of shared history, Serbian-Turkish relationships have been 'intimately felt' (see Davidson & Milligan 2004) and, as such, the various locations of Simit Sarayi's stores, particularly the one located in Obilicev Venac, have become the sites of emotional experience and representation. In extending Herzfeld's 'militant middle ground perspective' (Herzfeld 2016a), we argue that human agency plays a critical role in instrumentalizing shared stigma and cultural memories to form positive/negative attitudes towards a foreign actor. We engage with the everyday consumption routines of Belgradians through their interactions with the Turkish franchise. The emotional dimensions of such interactions are implicitly addressed through an exploration that bridges culturally intimate and national layers.

This research is part of the cultural studies research agenda that started about 15 years ago aiming at widening notions of the political to involve everyday politics and practices of inclusion/exclusion (Hermes *et al.* 2005). We draw on the scholarly works of anthropologists, geographers, social and political scientists to improve the understanding of the role of individuals in an effort to tackle the tension between essentialized social categories and lived realities (see Tuominen 2020). In more practical terms, we suggest that systems of meaning Belgradians use have tangible effects on their urban environment and shape the true nature and experience with such an intimate 'Other' that is the Turkish coffee shop chain Simit Sarayi. Following this line of reasoning, one of Simit Sarayi's stores in Belgrade (Obilicev Venac) is treated as an example of *heterotopia* (Foucault 1984; Soja 1990) in the sense of the difference of location (*hetero* – unlike, different, *topos* – place) in regard to its environment, and consequentially this place belongs to 'Others' and is for 'Others'.

Our research methodology is 'critically quasi-ethnographic' (Murtagh 2007). The main empirical material used in this study includes 45 semi-structured interviews with Belgrade inhabitants and regular dialogues with 16 franchise employees including Simit Sarayi's country manager. Specifically, respondents were asked "Do you/Would you go for a coffee / tea or cake / *burek*/ *djevrek* at Simit Sarayi? Yes/No, why?". They were also requested to express their opinions on the importance of the country of origin (i.e. does it influence or not their first choice?). During the constant meaning-making and gradual focusing process, we enlighten the possible implications of a concurrence of – 'the otherness', 'historical enmity' - narratives on the formation of views, personal inclinations and/or actions of individuals towards the Turkish franchise in Belgrade. Practically speaking, by exploring the 'empty seats' at Simit Sarayi on Obilićev Venac, we investigate the common places in the discourses of collective *self-promotion* and *introspection* in *social poetics* (Herzfeld 1997) in time. Holding the status of 'locals/foreigners' and endorsing the role of 'marginal social scientists', we do not intend to criticize any government policy (Herzfeld 2018), although the political is often unavoidable in the Balkan realm (see Atkinson *et al.* 2005). On the contrary, we direct the research at what everyone knows, i.e. towards the meanings of mental notions and images that are equally present in the *implied*, *gestures* and *silence* as well as in words.

‘Like past a Turkish cemetery’: The most significant Others in cultural intimacy

- “What is this?
- […]
- Nobody is sitting there, except those two tourists. Dead place.”[4]

The so called ‘tourists’ were the authors of this article. Consequently, in order to understand “what is it that’s going on here?” (Goffman 1974, 8), we use the *cultural intimacy* lens, that is to say the general points and stereotypes that, according to Herzfeld, construct the *collective self* or, in other words, the collective self-presentation and self-understanding (Herzfeld 1997). We also consider the circumstances in which one reaches for precisely such linguistic constructions, stemming from ‘images in heads’ about Us and Others. Therefore, when speaking about stereotypes, we are talking about the established *models* of verbal and nonverbal generalization, i.e. *patterns* of creation of more complex projects and *expected actions*, which, thanks to the “secret of reduction” – that “shortcut” to conclusion – and the action stemming from such a conclusion, are the most efficient means of instrumentalization of differences.

Since this *shortcut* in thinking is necessary and its implementation process is normalized, it serves as a means for identifying and confirming what we already ‘know’, but also as an evaluation mechanism. Following this line of reasoning, we consider the simultaneousness or identification and evaluation using the example of the frequent figure of speech *to pass by someone ‘like past a Turkish cemetery’*[5]. Namely, such phrase used in a non-literal sense is important because of the function that they perform in orienting and fixing certain meanings, as well as because of the content that they convey: they are present both in the strictly semantic aspect and at the level of action, in the sense of producing and operationalizing the meaning into the ‘real’, effective (Đerić 2005b). These are idioms that rule and with the help of which one rules.

To observe (or not notice) a given object implies placing that object in a certain *system of expectation* (Connerton 2002), i.e. it is part of the “reporting” system from an organized set of notions based on the lessons from the corpus of long memory. If, in addition to the habits of thinking, the notions ‘about the bodily automatism’ (Connerton 2002) are also an integral part of the mechanism of transferring collective memory, we also face the ‘formulaicality’ (see Dąbek-Derda 2004) of deeds and actions, in addition to the ‘formulaicality’ of language (expressed in tropes, metaphors and similar figures of speech). In brief, we assume that a range

[4] This event happened on September 27, 2018, when both authors were sitting on the terrace of the Simit Sarayi's store located on Obilicev Venac.

[5] We kept the literal translation ('*‘to pass by someone ‘like past a Turkish* cemetery’) of a local idiom ('*‘Proći pored nekog, kao pored turskog groblja’* = '*to pass by someone/thing as if they don’t exist’)* because it is important for the overall understanding of the pattern of ’(im)perceptible reproduction’ of stereotypes in language. We are thankful to one of the reviewers for his suggestion.

(and proximity) of thinking and action, about the formulaic language of cultural intimacy is not without effect: it is complete and performative only with the formulaic treatment.

The figure of speech *to pass by something/someone 'like past a Turkish cemetery'* suits the locally coherent system of notions and presupposes the meaning of disinterest, but also the a priori insignificance and/or inferiority of the place (object, person, etc.) by which one is passing. This meaning is part of the verbal convention or, more precisely, the inertia of thought and practice in the potentially unlimited series of social relations and situations. The routine (rude) speaking of this phrase in addition to being an inevitable means in individual arrangements, is also a reflection of broader 'value hierarchies' (Appadurai 1988) and 'gradients of disparaging' that are often intertwined and nested in the discourses in the Balkans and discourses about the Balkans (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Bakić-Hayden 2006). As a consequence of the reversed roles in power games, the figure of speech *"like past a Turkish cemetery"* summarizes many of the 'lessons' and tendencies of the mythopoetic remembrance, especially poetic processes through which the collective submission during the Ottoman period is turned into moral superiority of the subjugated members of the community (Đerić 2005b).

In a broader sense, the function of these or similar idioms constitutes a part of well-known practices of a commonplace, 'banal' reminding about a nation and its (im)perceptible reproduction: by using them, speakers confirm and/or reproduce themselves as members of a certain nation, and those nations are reproduced once more within a broader system of nations (Billig 1995). Everyday language offers a large number of examples of situations where one passes by something or someone "as if passing by a Turkish cemetery": political rivals or opposing sides in court, as well as quarrelling friends or offended girlfriends when describing an encounter with (former) boyfriends use the phrase 'as if passing by a Turkish cemetery'. All of them will choose to describe *passing by without saying a word*, (intentional) *ignoring* or *not noticing* using this expression, as optimal for all those situations. The comparison 'to pass by someone as if they were a Turkish cemetery' (i.e. *to cut someone dead*) in the above cases unmistakeably refers to a previous 'history' of the two sides, that is, to previous (traumatic) experience, a thorough knowledge on each other, and even an emotional pain of the side that speaks and which, actually, feigns indifference.

The spatially and symbolic performative also reveals the secret of reduction and the allegedly ethically elevated and emotionally (non-)engaged, indifferent attitude towards the 'illusion' of the place that is being passed. During a nine-month period of presence, Simit Sarayi was an *inter-place*, both familiar and foreign – concurrently at Obilićev Venac, and beyond it, in the phantasmatic geohistory. Consequently, its 'difference' was defined more by the associations that it causes in the historical and reflexive perspective and the contents that it gives rise to, or which are read into it, than by any objective feature of the given place in real time. Gaining the status of 'illusion' or 'phantasm', something that (seemingly) doesn't exit, the objective features of the Simit Sarayi products could not even be assessed.

We refer to this frame or 'scheme of interpretation' to explore how Belgradians perceive, categorize and thus give meaning to a particular situation that are the (non-)interactions with Simit Sarayi's coffee shops and particularly the one located at Obilićev Venac.

Methods

Study setting and problematization

Although the coming of the Turkish coffee-shop chain in Belgrade raised some enthusiasm, the opinion of the owner of another coffee shop chain located in downtown Belgrade, an ethnic Greek, stood out with its frankness and his words somewhat foreshadowed the future of the franchise. Dismissing even the theoretical possibility of Simit Sarayi opening stores in Greece, he explained his attitude with a comparison. He literally said: "Opening Simit Sarayi in Belgrade is the same as opening a McDonald's store in Teheran: it won't work!"[6]. Even if we overlook the link between politics and/or *politics of history* with doing business in the present, as well as the expressed repulsion that certain respondents felts towards the politics of the ruling party in Serbia (which in some cases is inseparable from the rejection felt towards the Turkish – coffee shop chain), it is difficult not to notice that the opening and/or the existence of the Simit Sarayi franchise in Belgrade problematises the established course of comprehension, i.e. the expected form of interpretation of Serbo-Turkish relations[7]. This argument served as a preamble to the empirical investigation our study is based on.

Unlike the sediment of experience of the Serbian-Turkish relations, their longevity and complexity, the history of the Simit Sarayi coffee shop chain in Belgrade is relatively short. The first stores – five of them –, were opened in mid-September 2017, at several locations in the centre of the city. The new and locally unknown chain was the topic of a web portal that presented Simit Sarayi as an interesting concept[8]. The ratings of the consumers of its products and services varied from enthusiastic praises of the *burek*[9], *djevrek*[10], tea and coffee, to an unfavourable evaluation of the price/quality trade-off.

A month after the opening, in October 2017, the Simit Sarayi store located on Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra was one of the 'stops' of the presidents of Turkey and Serbia, R.T. Erdogan and A. Vučić, as part of the two-day visit by the Turkish president and an economic delegation to Serbia (TRT Srpski 2017). The clichés

[6] Actually, at least until 1979, the American fast-food chain performed much better in Iran than the Turkish one ever did in Serbia.

[7] As such, through everyday consumption, our respondents/Belgradians have expressed to whom their affinity goes while at the same time they have rejected the *mental structures and common principles of vision and division, forms of thinking* imposed by the state.

[8] https://www.ana.rs/forum/index.php?topic=234911.0 (Accessed November 24, 2020).

[9] A typical Balkan salty pastry filled with cheese.

[10] A ring-shaped bread roll or bagel. Its Turkish name is 'simit'.

'make one's self at home', spreading familiar rhetoric that eliminates all borders and speaks of mutual relations as "friendly", "neighbourly" and "good-neighbourly" (despite the fact that Turkey and Serbia do not have a common border) were what gave this visit its tone[11]. Cordial words of welcome by local officials for the Turkish gastronomies, and Turkish capital in general, created the impression that this chain was guaranteed success and a profitable future in Serbia. Yet, exactly two years after the first media presentation of the Simit Sarayi coffee shop chain in September 2017, the closing of the most famous Turkish franchise in Belgrade was announced on September 16, 2019[12].

In August 2018, a Simit Sarayi store opened in the heart of the tourist zone, at 22 Obilićev Venac in Belgrade. Its lifespan was the shortest: less than ten months passed from the beginning of the shop's operation to the written announcement of its closing on June 26, 2019[13]. During that period, the picture visible to all was 'emptiness'. Surrounded by a number of popular cafés and restaurants, this store stood out in that there were very few people who sat in it. Most often – no one at all, except one of the authors who was a regular customer. When asked „How are you doing today?", the manager was most of the time embarrassed and replied „It is quiet today ...". Locals could hardly be found there, which was a bit unusual for this part of the city where one is always demanding for more. Namely, being directly connected to the main pedestrian zone, Knez Mihailova Street and Republic Square, Obilićev Venac and its cafés are active businesses nearly year-round. Thus, within the realm of an "urban café sociality" (Bookman 2014, 85), Simit Sarayi's stores generated little feeling of "togetherness". Why did it happen to the Turkish franchise?

The reoccurring identical picture of 'empty seats' at franchise's stores, even in the peak tourist season is symptomatic for exploration from a heterotopic and cultural intimacy perspective. We are primarily interested in why, during the nine months of Simit Sarayi's existence on Obilićev Venac, people passed by it 'like past a Turkish cemetery'. In this purpose, we shed light on the meaning of the rhetoric figure (or phrase) to pass by someone or something 'like past a Turkish cemetery'; we wonder why they treated it as if it doesn't exist. Hence, we explore the origin of the disregard of the majority that thwarts and/or abolishes elementary curiosity in connection with Simit Sarayi. Moreover, as part of our efforts to enlighten at least a portion of the wider picture of the cultural intimacy content, we believe that stressing what the local environment is 'quite familiar with' or is 'was known long ago', and which, precisely because of its 'familiarity', so far has re-

[11] According to contemporary studies on Turkish cultural intimacy, the Balkan region is becoming a sphere for demonstrating cultural openness and establishing a specific form of "internal cosmopolitanism" in official policies, at least in the domain of popular music (e.g. Stokes 2010).

[12] https://www.horecapropeler.com/vesti/kraj-simit-sarayi-turske-fransize-pekara-u-beogradu (Accessed November 20, 2020).

[13] From September 2019 till January 2020, the Turkish franchise closed three additional stores, leaving only two opened.

mained beyond lay interest and academic thematization (Herzfeld 1997; Billig 1995; Đerić 2014).

In brief, we aim to re-examine the meanings that are affixed by such rhetoric formulas ('like past a Turkish cemetery'), metaphors and dominant stereotypes (about Us and Others), as well as the connotations that remain beneath the surface of what has been said and which cannot objectively be assessed. Along a joint travelogue with the Turkish franchise in Belgrade, we put emphasis on the preconceptions and knowledge expressed in *silent* (unspoken) and *loud stereotypes* (Đerić 2005; see also, Košničar 2015; Šimáková 2018).

Empirical investigation

Our research project has been supported by more than two years of participant observations *in situ* since the inception of the first Simit franchise store in Belgrade to the very last days before all of them closed. We visited all stores located in the city center and were regular customers of three of them. We had 'on-the-spot' conversations with 5 store managers and 10 waitresses/waiters. We also talked and had a regular correspondence with the country manager of the Turkish franchise. Previously, we drew on various sources of evidence such as archival data (corporate websites, online blogs and portals, local newspaper articles, etc.) to "*amass converging evidence and to triangulate over a given fact*" as advocated by Yin (1999, 1217).

The primary empirical material of this study is based on 45 semi-structured interviews (30-50 minutes) carried out over a two-months period (April-May) in 2018. We implemented a link-tracing design in the form of a respondent-driven sampling method which uses a set of participants that grows in waves with each round of participants recruiting their peers (Heckathorn & Cameron 2017). Our sample comprised educated (38.6% hold a BA) Belgradians aged 19 to 77 years. Male and female respondents were equally distributed, and a majority worked as private sector employees (36.4%). Following the assumption that *"consumption bridges economic and cultural institutions, large-scale changes in social structure, and discourses of the self"* (Zukin & Maguire 2004, 173), we explored the host population's attitudes towards the Turkish coffee-shop chain Simit Sarayi. Specifically, respondents were asked „Do you/Would you go for a coffee / tea or cake / *burek*/ *djevrek* at Simit Sarayi? Yes/No, why?". They were also requested to express their opinions on the importance of the country of origin (i.e. does it influence or not their first choice?). During the pre-test, participants explicitly expressed they do not want to be recorded nor to write their answers on the questionnaire, thus illustrating a form of "ontological insecurity" (Svenonius & Bjorklund 2018, 124) which depicts post-communist societies (see Tournois & Rollero 2020). Consequently, we reported their answers on the questionnaire itself[14]. All participants were interviewed individually.

[14] In quoting the interview excerpts, we used the respondents' gender (M/F) and age in order to respect their requests for privacy.

Within the iterative reflexive process suggested by Srivastava and Hopwood (2009), we followed the recommendations of Moustakas (1994) in terms of elimination and refined focusing.

Stigmatization, collective memory and the most significant 'Others'

Diverse forms of stigma have been integrated into contemporary national narratives not just among Westerners (see Zarakol 2014). Hence, the power transformation of mental images into practice, as a far-reaching consequence of the common history, which is traumatic for both sides, is not unfamiliar to Turkish diplomats even in recent times.

Serbian Ambassador to Turkey from 1995 to 1999 noted that those pictures are an implied frame of present and all future exrelations. In discussing the contradiction of contemporary politics, Ambassador Darko Tanasković recalled the request that he received from his hosts, during the period of the NATO intervention against Yugoslavia, that when the bombing ends, he urges his compatriots in Serbia not to be angry at the Turkish more than at the other participants in the aggressions *just because they are Turkish* (Tanasković 2013). His Turkish counterparts were fully aware, Tanasković continues, that for historical and psychological reasons people in Serbia will more easily and quickly forgive the Americans for the bombing than the Turkish[15].

The path that Ambassador Tanaskovic took would be what Itzkowitz named a "problem of perception", which refers to the psychological aspects of the Ottoman heritage and specifically the way in which the inhabitants of the states formed on the former Ottoman Empire perceive themselves and others. Widely spread among (Western) European countries was a Manichean portrayal of the 'Turkish' as the 'bearers of all kinds of evil' (Itzkowitz 1996). Accordingly, we argue that the contents of collective memory, what Ambassador Tanasković called "historical and psychological reasons", had an influence on individuals' attitudes, and in general, on the level of their interest in the Turkish franchise. They were sometimes expressed without any diplomatic run-around. One participant, answering a question regarding the importance of the origin of a company, i.e. the country from which it comes, responded straightforwardly: "I honestly avoid buying brands that I associate with bad politics, for example I avoid Turkish and American brands because of the bombing and years of slavery." (M/31). And he added: "I wouldn't go to Simit Sarayı because I know that it is a Turkish brand, and I as just told you, I don't like to give money to people who ruled all of Serbia for five hundred years."

Placing in the forefront 'own'/collective notions about the historical relations in regard to the current moment, the expression "years of slavery" indicate a mentally significant order, superior to the visible order of things and official en-

[15] Ambassador Tanaskovic probably had in mind that throughout the 1990s, Turkish media used on a daily basis the term "*Serbian butcher*" when referring to atrocities committed by Serbian forces in Bosnia (Aydintasbas 2019).

deavours and discourses. Thus, Simit Sarayi appears to be a place of self-reflection of the respondents and their confrontation with the collective historical trauma. On the other hand, most of the respondents' answers were not so explicit, leading us to assume that because of 'political correctness', or some other reasons, they were not explicitly named or elaborated but presumably had a decisive influence on individuals' actions towards the Turkish franchise. Consequently, we propose to consider it as a literal example of a heterotopia, a non-place, since in a specific place in a specific time it confronts different historical and reflective spaces (Foucault 2005).

"No. I don't know what that is": Heterotopia, place to 'Others' and for 'Others'

To the question "Would you go for coffee/tea or a cake, *burek* or *djevrek* to Simit Sarayı?", respondents predominantly gave straightforward answers:

- "No. I don't know what that is." (F/48)
- "No, because I am not attracted to their offer in any way, even though it is located across from where I work." (M/50)
- "No, I'm not interested and I don't know even where it is." (M/59)
- "No, because I don't know what that is." (F/19, M/48, F/31)
- "I don't know what that is." (F/37)
- "No. I don' even know what that is." (M/23)

Whether unobserved, unseen and/or unidentified, the 'place' where the Turkish franchise is located actually stimulates such strong allegations and is construed as an 'other place'. Furthermore, even for those who expressed an interest, franchise outlets are stuck between a possibility and a dodge which ultimately sparks ambiguity: "Honestly, this is the first time I've heard about it, but how do I know... if they have decent coffee, I would go. Why not." (M/30); "I didn't go, but I leave the possibility that I will do it because I live near one of the facilities. I didn't even notice that the facility was open on social networks and in conversations with friends, because by chance there are three bakeries with a tradition where I live." (M/32). Foucault (1984) suggests the term 'heterotopia' to address the issues related to such 'different' and 'non-conforming' spaces.

Obilicev Venac, a strict downtown location with no particular design attribute, has become a 'space of representation' which has his roots in "the culture and tradition of a people, but also in the memories and dreams of individuals" (Colombino 2009, 285). Designated as an 'elsewhere', it has acquired a collective 'spirit', possibly (re)discovered by individuals/Belgradians for themselves, and thus as a heterotopia, it has gained a public character recognized and offered to all (Foucault 2009; see also Nal 2015). Furthermore, the term heterotopia implies an actual place in a concrete environment that, even though linked to real space and time, also evokes timeless, fictional content, inseparable from the deposits of cultural intimacy meaning. Simit Sarayi on Obilićev Venac in Belgrade is more than merely a single store within a coffee shop chain in that part of the city: it as a place with a multiple fragmented or even antagonistic meanings (see Dehaene & De Cauter

2008) and an associative space that brings to life the evocative elements of an imaginarium accumulated over time, as a non-place, a place belonging to 'Others' and for 'Others'.

Simit Sarayi on Obilićev Venac is also the performative encounter of opposed collective fantasies and *traumas* (Alexander 2004; Spasić 2011). One's attitude towards it is as towards a place that is in an ironical – if not subversive – relationship towards the space where it is located, as well as towards the cultural intimacy content profile of the Serbs as expressed by an informant (F/36): "I don't know what that is. A Turkish pastry shop?! Sounds interesting, but I wouldn't go there." Here, we can see that this place causes a plexus of views (about Us and Others) accumulated over time, regardless of the concrete, contemporary experiences of the citizens. In a word, Simit Sarayi on Obilićev Venac evokes a series of preconceptions in the cognitive backdrop of the reasoning or the *mental space* (Fauconnier & Turner 2002) that resists the value-neutral reality of the given place.

This place is (to some extent) "electrified with symbolic power" (Hoelscher & Alderman 2004, 348), memory and place jointly making much of the background of the production of meanings in a critical and dynamic process. Consequently, we further shed light on several images and notions from the abundant narrative production, which deprives even the smallest space of inertness and emptiness in order to come closer to the web of reflexive currents that could influence the tastes and opinions, and on orientation and actions in general. 'Unlocking' the way that *society remembers* (Connerton 2002; Cappelletto 2003), in the sense of conscious and subconscious transfer of memories and knowledge, is a necessary step towards understanding the local manner of confronting the arrival in the public sphere of a new actor, a Turkish company. In line with the preceding discussion and drawing on Marshall (2004), we suggest that opening a Simit Sarayi store acted like a cultural stimulus that brought back memory in an everyday landscape that finally regained significance (yet evolves towards new significance) through very elemental human functions such as sound, sight, and even (no)touch.

Cultural remembering and the most significant 'Others' as roots of rejection

Under the term *cultural memory / collective memory* (Halbwachs 1992; Gedi & Elam 1996; Zerubavel 2003; Todorova 2004) of a society, we mean exclusive content from the given society's past, that is the basis for the knowledge and belief apparatus of Self (and differentiation from Others), one's own *formative notion* and *development of normative tradition* (Assmann 2002). In the case of the Serbs, the constellation of the set of notions, myths and knowledge from this canon (or normative tradition), in its most reduced form, in addition to the Saint Sava myth, consists of the Kosovo myth which has the implication of local, authentic versions of the Christian myths, structurally similar to the established myths of the cultural memory of other European peoples (Todorova 2005).

The Kosovo myth is related to the historical battle in 1389, when the Ottoman army defeated the Serbian army, as well as the myth-poetical (oral, "folk") and literary tradition related to the battle. One legend from the Kosovo tradition states that despite the Serbian defeat, the hero of the battle was Miloš Obilić[16] who allegedly killed the Ottoman Sultan Murad I (1329–1389). Since Sultan Murad was in fact killed in this battle, the historical or fictional character Miloš Obilić gained the status of the most prominent hero in Serbian myth poetics, so it is no surprise that the memories of him are plentiful and many. In addition to the most important medals being named after this hero, in the inventory of cultural memory, we find memorials of Miloš Obilić in the names of many sports clubs, streets, generally in topography, as well as in the centre of Belgrade, at Obilićev Venac, which was named after him.

The distinct place belonging to Others in the above myth belongs to the Turkish. The various mechanisms of reproduction of social relations and knowledge have maintained the presence of the purpose of these myths, regardless of the passing of time. Among others, the mechanisms for determining the normative tradition consists of *repetition*, *overlapping* and *linking* chronologically distant historical content into a single, unquestionable narrative, a type of education and *popular pedagogy/pedagogy of the people* (Assmann 2002, 2011). Even though from the standpoint of *communicational memory*, the memory that according to Assmann (2002, 2011) covers three generations, or one lifetime, there were more 'candidates for the role of the 'most significant Other'. The *history policy* towards the 'reservoir' of cultural memory of the Serbs is such that this role consistently belonged to the Turkish. This 'choice' was unquestioned even from the standpoint of the 19th century development of the nation, its 'birth': both the uprisings against the Turkish at the beginning of the century (1804 and later) and the liberation or Serbian Wars of Independence (1876–1878) were fought with the aim of achieving liberation from the Ottoman Empire and achieving statehood.

From the Serbian perspective, Turkish stand very high up on the imaginative scale of 'most significant Otherness', far above all others. One of the store managers expressed it clearly: "You will always find someone / a Serbian who will tell you about a story that his family lived in connection with the Turks, even if it was his grandfather or great grandfather who lived it"[17]. His comment suggests that family and collective memory as well as national story mingle. Here, we can observe that individual action is materialized through willful blindness and rejection, the group they belong trying to 'revive' the past through a particular place in an attempt to (re)'claim territory' and (re)'establish social boundaries' (see Till 2003).

[16] Concerns regarding the historical character of Miloš Obilić appear because his heroic feat is mentioned in the earliest records and manuscripts about the battle, without giving his name. Accounts mention the heroic feat of an unnamed hero, which is explained by the conventions of medieval literature and the epic genre where only persons of noble descent are mentioned by name, such as Serbian Prince Lazar, who was also killed in this battle (see Bakić-Hayden 2006, 140–142).

[17] Initially, we were reluctant to exploit this feedback in order not to harm the situation of the store manager. Given that he resigned from his position, we used it in our article.

Without a feeling for context or balance, the contents outside of the cliché "archenemies", especially positive examples and possible benefits of the Ottoman rule were left to the winds of time[18]. They are not even assumed[19]. Viewed opposite Serbia's 'golden age', which preceded the Ottoman rule, these black-and-white pictures could not have produced anything other than hostility, i.e. the most significant *Otherness*, and an unconscious fear of a revival of 'Ottomanism' (Dević 2016). Hence, falling within the world market's sphere of influence and Western culture illustrate the transition from tradition to modernity (see Müller, 1992) and thus collides with perceived social backwardness and feudalism.

Consequently, residents' attitudes towards the Turkish coffee shop chain should be interpreted within a broader Western/European perspective of representations contructed on ambiguities. For example, in his analysis of ' World War II era Hollywood horror films', Argiro has stressed how specific featured characters „*reproduces long-standing Western European stereotypes about Eastern Europeans by trading in received gothic fantasies"* (2015, 1) while Hammond has portrayed the Balkans as 'one of the major sources of alterity for the West' (2005, 135). Such long lasting tropes and cultural constructs are hard to die and thus fuel both Western and Eastern European collective imaginary.

On the one hand, the truisms on unfulfilled potentials, 'underdevelopment and permanent lagging behind' Europe (Todorova 2005) are habitually traced in some of the variations of a 'five-hundred-year long period of Ottoman rule' theme. Although omnipresent in East Europe, this (dominant) trope, according to Todorova (2010), undoubtedly has a more complex history and spreading: it is also present in Western representations of nationalism outside the West European space, as well as in the manner in which the non-Western world represents itself, which is why the author, trying to avoid the secret of the *origin* and the imposed 'binaryness', adopts a view on a relative synchrony between East and West Europe within a *longue durée* framework. Thus, respondents as Serbs may feel stigmatized within a region that is located on the opposite extreme side of the "ontological scale of Europeanness" (Boatcă 2010, 52) and seems to be permanently "catching up with the West" (Todorova 1997, 235). Irony of history, it is a position they 'share' with Turkey which still holds a particular status in Western imaginative geography given EU's perception of Turkey as "*the Other of Europe*" (Müftüler-Bac 1998, 240).

[18] The Ottomans (and by extension contemporary Turks) *"received very little credit for their long and unique tradition of religious tolerance"* (McCarthy 1995, 8). As emphasized by one of the reviewers, this tolerance is especially pointed out in the context of the Sephardic Jews, who were expelled from Iberia and generously accepted by the Ottomans, and less so in the context of the Balkan peoples.

[19] Recent academic practice shows slight divergence from this rule. Even though Leovac (2019) mentions common syntagma for Serbo-Turkish relations, such as "old shackles" etc, the author makes a significant thematical step outside the given frame and describes the inclusion of Ali-Rizvan Pasha and especially his wife Mejra in the cultural and social life of Belgrade, emphasising the positive effects of the pasha's wife's actions on culture of city life.

On the other hand, after the emancipation from Soviet influence in 1948, the Yugoslav elites constructed an autonomous concept of „The Third Way" of socialism (Kanzleiter 2011) with the help of which the traditional negative image of the Balkans could be reimagined. Although the Yugoslav experiment collapsed in the 90s, participants see post-socialist Serbia as a descendant of a modern and Westernized country while keeping with its cultural peculiarities, and these peculiarities mean to emancipate from its (Ottoman) past symbolically represented by Simit Sarayi. Accordingly, informants perceive the deep transformations that occurred in the Serbian society are irreversible and that they are now "… in the course of unstoppable human progress, as measured by emancipation and freedom" (Baysha 2015, 7).

Such an equivocal situation may spark up anxiety (Buchowski 2006) not to say animosity, which may explain rough responses such as "I would not go there because I heard bad things from more people. I think they are Turks and since I don't like their cuisine either, I have no reason to visit. I don't even like Turkish coffee." (M/43).

The examples of 'a regular scapegoat' emphasize that the Most Significant Other is not unknown to the community, but that it has been construed as 'different' and 'dangerous' since the beginning of historical relationships (Douglass 1992, 2003). Precisely in the continuous transfer of that dangerous differentness, lies the power of perception of the 'Turks' as 'the others'. In time, it had grown from a customary 'rhetorical folklore' intended for stirring moral panic (Goode & Ben-Yehuda 1994; Young 2009), into a constant background noise: it is embedded in the very essence of social life, and in the cultural intimacy of the community. Not only that its idiomatic quality is not perceived as offensive, but it is unobserved in the community that produced it. By becoming established in its negative shape, it acquired a form of stable social fact in orientation that impacts local people's everyday lives expressed through the consumption of goods such as coffee and pastries.

Conclusion

This empirical research has contributed to the existing literature in showing how the historical and cultural antecedents to the Serbian-Turkish relationships negatively affect the host attitudes towards the franchise and transform its stores into a non-place, a place of "Others". Moreover, assuming that cultural intimacy provides a frame for consumers 'to act and feel', we have shown that, given that the name of the franchise is not even mentioned by the majority of our respondents, it is neither a marker nor a maker of class distinction in local consumer culture (Bookman 2013). On the contrary, it has clearly generated a widespread negative rejection whatever participants' age and/or occupation.

With the intention to explore what 'makes sense of space' and specifically 'what stands behind' Belgradians' attitude towards the Simit Sarayi franchise, we have adopted an agency perspective to the general points about Turkish in everyday discourses, as well as the content of Serbo-Turkish intimacy that are kept quiet

and/or not reflected upon. By thematizing the aporia of the ambivalent relationship towards the Turkish, we argued that both the spoken and the silent stem from the pedagogics of cultural memory, from where, according to the principle of faster, forced logic, they spread to a relatively complete set of stereotypes of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997). These stereotypes shape impressions, meanings, ideas and actions. Depending on the needs of the political moment, they are easily instrumentalized, since the mental space is predestined with content and idioms of collective memory, about the self-understanding difference and ancient juxtaposition.

This article has emphasized the importance of the domain of 'the unspoken' but 'taken for granted' in people's mental background of reasoning. The latter finally outweighed affirmative official discourses when decision had to be made at the individual level. In a word, a receptive rhetoric did not undermine the stability of perceptions, images, and meanings of arch-narratives. According to opinions of certain respondents, it actually reminded them of those arch-narratives, and even further strengthened their importance. Thus, the results of our detailed investigation contradict to some extent the assertion that the sturdy progress of state bilateral relations was also accompanied by a positive change of mutual perceptions in both countries (Tesfa-Yohannes 2011). The findings also highlight that, apart from politics, cultural intimacy facilitates a more thorough examination of the 'real life of states, societies, and institutions' (Herzfeld 2016b) by giving voice to its citizens.

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