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**Examiner Report of the Dissertation by
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***Tożsamość, ideologia, przemoc. Centrum i peryferie we
współczesnych tekstach kultury w Serbii***

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The PhD thesis at hand addresses the intersection of memory studies and nationalism studies and focuses on Serbia. Here, Czachowska-Aleksić (in the following CzA) successfully interlaces concepts such as Pierra Nora's *Lieux de mémoire*, Assmann's categories of memory and Malešević's grounded nationalism. From the beginning, this work makes high conceptual and methodological demands and chooses an original perspective: the author does not only deal with the nationalist discourses produced in Belgrade (as already discussed by Eric Gordy, Florian Bieber, Jelena Đurejnović) but focuses on Vojvodina and Sandžak.

Hereby she chooses two regions than can be in different ways considered minority regions of Serbia. During the two Yugoslav states in the 20th century they had different special statuses regarding autonomy. The commensurability of both case studies will be discussed in detail, just like CzA does at various points.

The centre (Belgrade) and periphery (Novi Sad as the capital of Vojvodina and Novi Pazar as the capital of Serbian Sandžak) are often conflicting competitors with their places of remembrance. Especially since the double periphery also has to deal with the centres Budapest and Sarajevo as the capitals of Hungary and the former Yugoslav Muslims or Bosniaks.

What Vojvodina and Sandžak have in common is that despite historically being independent administrative units, they both belong to Serbia until today – as opposed to *Republika Srpska* (RS) and Kosovo. This thesis deals with national interpretations, symbolic politics and territorial mental maps, but as a reader, I wonder why these two regions were not included in the comparison. They were subject to ethnic cleansing and even genocide in the 1990s and had very similar conflicts as the ones described here about historic rights, public history and monumental art in public space.

The thesis is composed of five stringent chapters: in the introduction (*Rozważania wstępne*, pp. 3-22), CzA places herself in transdisciplinary culture studies, more precisely in critical discourse analysis with a constructivist approach to the examination of national culture. She describes the state of the art between Ivan Čolović and Sonja Biserko, Polish experts such as Maciej Falski, Tomasz Rawski, Magdalena Rekść, Dorota Gil and Bosniak authors such as Ejup Mušović and Mustafa Memić. The bibliography is lacking the dissertation by Ana Ranitović "Why do they call it Raška when they mean Sandžak? On the synchrony and diachrony of identities in Southwest Serbia" which was defended in Oxford in 2016, is freely available online and deals with exactly the same topic: the symbolic politics of Sandžak's serbianisation. The current state of research on Vojvodina is discussed competently and then introduces the outline: out of the four main chapters the first provides the methodology, while the following chapters apply these concepts: first on the discourse production from Belgrade and then the rivalling politics of remembrance and symbolism among the Hungarians in Vojvodina and the Bosniaks in Sandžak.

The chapter "*Rozdział pierwszy: Centrum peryferie i ugruntowany nacjonalizm. Narzędzia metodologiczne*" (pp. 23-84) provides a broad overview on methodological approaches of memory and nationalism studies. However, CzA begins with an in my opinion well-chosen short overview on the history of Serbia including Vojvodina and Sandžak (pp. 23-45) that already sets a clear course: the Kosovo battle of 1389, the *Velika seoba* ("Great Migration") in the 1680s from Kosovo to southern Hungary (today's Vojvodina), the competition of Serbian and Yugoslav nation-building in the 19th and 20th centuries and Tito's nationality politics with the upvaluation of Bosnia's Muslims with the national census category "Muslim".

Then CzA introduces Siniša Malešević's model of grounded nationalism which she constantly returns to in the following: using the example of Ireland and the Balkans, the author has shown how the concept of nationalism is not only anchored as an elitist option in the societies and how strong the diffusion and dissemination of national ideologies is in everyday life. CzA adopts a threefold analytical framework from Malešević which will be applied repeatedly later on: a)

bureaucratisation (with a monopoly on violence) and symbolic violence (Bourdieu) as a top-down transmission belt, b) centrifugal ideologisation, and c) interaction on a microstructural level. With this constructivist approach he is clearly in the tradition of the new classics of nationalism studies such as Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner.

The functionality of symbolic capital for securing domination can be shown with the prime example of the mythologicalisation of the political discourse in Serbia and the politics of remembrance. Here, CzA invokes concepts by Assmann/Assmann (collective vs. communicative memory), Pierre Nora (*lieux de mémoire*) and successful examples of application (e.g., François/Schulze) that all generally draw on visualisation. Since there will be literary examples following in detail, CzA stresses the role of literature in the process of nation-building and the central question of the creation of the canon as a normative set of the national that is directly mirrored and reproduced in schoolbooks.

The opposition of centre and periphery is the ordering principle that CzA correctly contextualises within economy (Raul Prebisch here wrongly as Paul Prebish, p. 70): Pathbreaking are Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory and the ambiguous semi-peripheries that were developed further by Marina Blagojević Hughson. The entire Balkans but also the two regions Vojvodina and Sandžak are in the "double periphery" since various centres want to emanate and paternalise them. Especially the literary context of peripheries and border regions has been described in detail regarding auto- and heterostereotypization and geopoetic determinations.

The second chapter "*Rozdział drugi: Rywalizacja krajobrazów pamięci. Serbska ideologia nacjonalistyczna według filarów ugruntowanego nacjonalizmu na przykładzie relacji centrum-peryferie*" (pp. 85-178) explicitly mentions the rivalry of places of remembrance and from the beginning foregrounds the often toxic confliction of the debate of national memory. The individual subchapters follow Malešević's order: a) bureaucratisation (with a monopoly of violence) and symbolic violence (Bourdieu) as a top-down transmission belt, b) centrifugal ideologisation, and c) interaction on a microstructural level.

The myths of Kosovo and Saint Sava are typical for Serbian national identity as they both sacralise themselves with victimisation ("martyrs, Golgotha") and cyclic topoi from the epic heroic songs such as "chosen people/divine kingdom" and the figure of the tragic army leader on the Kosovo Field, Tsar Lazar. The myth of Sava also has the pre-Ottoman Middle Ages as its reference point and glorifies the Nemanjić dynasty and the moment of the Serbian kingdom's maximal territorial expansion.

In a (Tito)Yugoslav context however we have the partisan myth that became the central founding myth of Yugoslavia after 1944 with its slogan "Brotherhood and Unity". In the course of the 1980s and with the active participation of Serbian writers such as Dobrica Ćosić and Vuk Drašković this monopolistic narrative was hollowed out and delegitimised in the communicative memory. Then in the 1990s the deconstruction of this myth in the former Yugoslavs' cultural memory took place, especially in the vandalism of memorial culture and in the rehabilitation of people who had been ostracised under Tito, such as the Serbian Četnik leader Draža Mihailović.

The embeddedness and visualisation of national myths is generally the most visible in national capitals from where it emanates and is imitated in the periphery. What follows is a good overview of current historical revisionist memorial projects in Belgrade. Unfortunately, CzA does not include any photos in her manuscript which is difficult to comprehend: she mentions a monument erected in 2021 for Stefan Nemanja in Belgrade (the largest in all of Serbia at 23.5m) or the rehabilitation of the Serbian royal house (that fled to London in World War II and was later disempowered by the partisans) and the Četnik leader Draža Mihailović. CzA introduces the aspect of centrifugal irradiation from the capital when she writes about the monument culture for Gavrilo Princip, the Serbian assassin from Sarajevo 1914 who is remembered in Belgrade and in East Sarajevo. Murals, renamings of streets and commemoration days (as national bank holidays) are also part of the public space that is being occupied by nationalism – one headline in 2021 was the mural for the main person responsible for the genocide in Srebrenica 1994, Ratko Mladić.

Within the militarisation and sacralisation of the events in Serbian history since 1389 (especially also both World Wars and the secession wars in the 1990s) a closed view of the world is assembled that displays the Serbs as heroic victims and moral victors. Finally, CzA brings our attention to film and literature as well as processes of wording, i.e., practices of naming that can produce reality. This concerns the usage of including and excluding pronouns or affectionate forms of address (such as “Nole” for the tennis star Đoković).

In the last part of the chapter CzA examines the radiation of Serbian national ideology on Vojvodina and Sandžak. Coming back to the already mentioned commensurability of both case studies: both regions felt more at home in a supra-national and strongly federal decentralised state such as Yugoslavia after the 1970s than in a “normal” nation-state: While the multiethnic Vojvodina, where Hungarians make up about 13% of the population, was an autonomous province 1974–1989 (just as Kosovo), Sandžak did not have any special regional rights and was divided between Serbia and Montenegro.

However, in the late 1960s a top-down nation-building of the Yugoslav Muslims started which was in the 1990s organised from Sarajevo as Bosniakisation and is successful in Sandžak whose population identifies with the post-Yugoslav Bosnian/Bosniak language. Consequently already an import of the Cyrillic alphabet from Belgrade presents a conflict in education since it is perceived as internal colonisation (CzA also refers to it as “Ghettoisation”, p. 147) – especially in towns such as Novi Pazar or Tutin where the Muslim population makes up 80-90%. The phenomenon of architectural serbianisation in Vojvodina of the last few years where baroque churches dominate is hardly touched upon: the domed structures in the Byzantine style that we know from the southern Serbian-Kosovar region are culturally alien to this central European and former Habsburg region.

The chapter in general but also the subchapters keep jumping from one of the regions to the other and despite the absolutely commendable breadth and trans-disciplinary interest, reading becomes exhausting. The text is too narrative and not structured enough, for instance when

suddenly verbal violence is mentioned, reactions to Vučić's visit to Novi Sad 2018 or the tourism industry in Sandžak. Therefore the "Podsumowanie" (p. 175-178) does not succeed at condensing and systemising the abundance of examples. However, it is noted that both regions are equally claimed by Serbia – with the difference that the Bosniak identity and language in Sandžak is denied and delegitimised, while the national identities and multicultural population in Vojvodina are historically warranted and indisputable. That is why the symbolic violence is much larger in Sandžak (p. 176) even though CzA mentions elsewhere that bottom-up visual symbolism in public is more common in Vojvodina. She is unable to solve this contradiction.

The third chapter "*Rozdział trzeci: Strategia dominacji vs. strategia oporu. Tożsamość (podwójnych) peryferii na przykładzie wojwodińskich Węgrów*" (pp. 179-244) gives us more of an understanding of today's situation in Vojvodina and expresses the conflictive opposition of dominance and resistance. The national appropriation from Belgrade stands opposed to the strong Hungarian discourse of irredentism since the Trianon Trauma from 1920 when Hungary lost two thirds of its territory. Ever since the right-wing populist prime minister Viktor Orbán took over in 2010, who likes to see himself as the direct successor of Saint Stephen, the founder of Hungary, irredenta and the narrative of Greater Hungary have become the reason of state. CzA examines how strongly Hungarian revisionism has "spilt over" into Vojvodina's memorial and remembrance culture. CzA also proves knowledgeable regarding Vojvodina despite no evident Hungarian language skills – she cites exclusively Serbian sources (and translations in the case of belles-lettres).

The strongly one-sided focus on Hungarian literature in Vojvodina is surprising and makes up the largest part of this chapter. Even though CzA was able to find excellent and very programmatic examples for the in-betweenness and hybridity of the Vojvodina-Hungarians, the methodological introduction is not primarily laid out for analysing literary works in such detail. Since the comparability of the two regions is given by CzA also elaborately presenting three authors from Sandžak, this literary digression is very successful.

The authors whose historic novels are examined are Nagy Abonyi Árpád (*1965; the novel "Budapest, Retour" and the melancholic gaze back of an emigrant), László Végel (*1941) and Ottó Tolnai (*1940).

Végel recounts in "Neoplanta" and in "Novi Sad Diaries 1991–2016" the story of Neusatz/Novi Sad since its founding by Maria Theresia: the serbianisation after 1941, the re-Magyarisation during World War II, the Tito-Yugoslav offer of inclusion and the 1990s nationalism. Episodes on the Holocaust of the Jews of Novi Sad demystify the multicultural city. He stylises the historic and lost Novi Sad through its particular cuisine, architecture and soundscapes.

The Hungarians of Vojvodina are thus exposed to two national discourses that are shaped by very similar motives, namely the narrative of victimisation and the myth of the lost paradise. As a result, CzA asks how long Vojvodina's syncretic identity will survive in the face of the strong ethnicisation of identity in the region (see p. 244).

The last main chapter ("*Rozdział czwarty: Strategia negacji vs. strategia orientalizacji. Tożsamość (podwójnych) peryferii na przykładzie sandżackich Boszniaków*", pp. 245-301) deals with the Sandžak Bosniaks. As in the preceding chapters, CzA uses Malešević's three-fold analytical framework: a) bureaucratisation (with a monopoly on violence) and symbolic violence (Bourdieu) as a top-down transmission belt, b) centrifugal ideologisation, and c) interaction on a microstructural level.

CzA expertly documents the Bosniakisation of the Sandžak Muslims in the 1990s (and under direct influence of the Bosnian war) which has been carried out on the language level: Bosnian/Bosniak as one of the four successor languages of the pluricentric Serbo-Croatian from Yugoslav times is still being denied by Belgrade.

A typical event was the gift of a copy of the Sarajevo fountain ("*Sebilj*") to the town of Novi Pazar in 2010 or the clock tower ("*sahat kula*") in Tutin. But more important are the political, religious and cultural institutions, especially the conflict within the Islamic Community that led to the separation of the Belgrade-loyal *Islamska Zajednica Srbija* from the Sarajevo-loyal *Islamska Zajednica u Srbiji* (which is not touched upon enough in this text). Only in the literary part of the chapter on Sandžak does Turkey's strong role come through: as the protector and destination of all Balkan Muslims since the 19th century who decided to emigrate from the post-Ottoman Christian states. An enormous wave of emigration took place in the 1950s when Muslims from Sandžak, Macedonia and Kosovo left Yugoslavia (according to the probably best expert Edvin Pezo it was 70,000 people in the inter-war period and almost 130,000 in the 1950s). As everywhere in the Muslim Balkans, Turkey is active in the shape of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) when it comes to cultural politics and building mosques.

It becomes clear that the grappling of historical, linguistic and identity distinctiveness especially in the face of the lasting delegitimisation from Belgrade is primary for the Bosniaks which leads to the strategy of invoking Illyrian (and not Slavic) descent (see p. 269). Similarly to the Albanians, the attraction of this claim lies in being more autochthonous than the South Slavs who did not arrive in the Balkans before the 6th century.

Concluding, CzA presents three authors from Sandžak who are all unfortunately rooted in schematic black and white patterns and send rather plain ethnocentric messages. The first is Sanela Halković (*1971) and her historic phantasy novel "*Ilir autarijatski*" that became a bestseller in Sandžak: it recounts the life of the hero Ilir from the Autariatae tribe in pre-Roman times.

The second author is the retired professor Sait Kačapor (*1947) and his Bosnian-Turkish novel "*Bosniacs, loyal citizens of Turkey*" and "*G(l)adne godine*" from 2022. He captures the emigration perspective of the Sandžak's rural population that submits itself to its emigration to Turkey and its role as a victim. This novel also follows the "islamophile meta narrative" (Enver Kazaz) and an idealised image of Turkey. Also the third author, Avdo Ćeranić (*1951), writes historical novels (e.g., about Serbian and Muslim neighbours during WWII in Sandžak) in which the Serbs are always the baddies, and the Bosniaks the goodies who sacrifice themselves. It becomes apparent

that Islam is the foundation of today's Bosniak identity, paired with the myth of autochthony and a narrative of victimisation and innocence. Unfortunately, CzA does not use the concept of liminality that could be quite fruitful for her double periphery.

The conclusion ("*Uwagi końcowe*", pp. 302-314) makes clear that the Serbian politics of homogenisation in Vojvodina comes from a strategy of dominance, in Sandžak, however, one of negation. Accordingly, the minorities react differently: while the Vojvodina-Hungarians have discovered their relationship to Hungary as a resource of dissimulation, the Sandžak Bosniaks have Islam, Sarajevo and Turkey, which yields a strong historically founded strategy of orientalisation.

All in all, the work at hand is a mature academic achievement that will crucially advance the state of knowledge in Southeast European studies. My very few critical remarks in no way relativize the astonishing performance of the candidate, but are meant to optimize the manuscript before the publication which will find very high international visibility.

The author chose an intra-regional comparison in an original design and has succeeded at presenting the discourses of nationalisation from the Belgrade centre and the counter discourses in the northern and southern periphery on many levels. From my point of view, it would have been desirable to illustrate Serbia not only as a one-sided assimilation apparatus serving Aleksandar Vučić, but to pluralise and include liberal NGOs in the depiction that are surely present in both regions. This detail again shows that the candidate is able to write without any national bias, but presents her case-study *sine ira et studio*.

I would like to stress again that this contribution without any doubt fulfills the scientific criteria for a written dissertation, so that I recommend the Scientific Council of the Department of Language and Literature at Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań to accept the thesis as a written PhD qualification and to proceed with the further steps of the procedure.

Nadia Czachowska-Aleksić has made a very important, innovative and mind-blowing contribution in the field of South Slavic Studies. According to the German system of grades I would propose the highest grade (*summa cum laude*, according to the Polish *wyróżnienie*) and highly recommend the book for (international) print.

