

# Language Ideologies of the Bunjevac Minority in Vojvodina: Historical Backgrounds and the Post-1991 Situation

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## 1. Introduction

### *1-1. Overview*

Bunjevci (singular: Bunjevac) are South Slavic Catholic people situated mainly in the autonomous province of Vojvodina (especially that of Bačka region<sup>1</sup> in the northwest part of Serbia), southern Hungary, Croatian coastal area (Dalmatia and Lika), and in western Herzegovina. The Bunjevac dialect<sup>2</sup> is a Štokavian dialect form of the western South Slavic languages and shows Ikavian reflexes of Common Slavic vowel jat'.<sup>3</sup> The modern realizations of jat' (*e*, *ijelje*, and *i*) are named Ekavian, (I) jekavian and Ikavian, and Ikavian variant is characteristic for the speech

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1 The Bačka region is today divided into Hungarian and Serbian sections.

2 This paper mostly refers to the language of Bunjevci as the Bunjevac “dialect” following the official current denomination “Bunjevački govor” (literally meaning “Bunjevac speech”) in the Republic of Serbia.

3 The Serbo-Croatian speaking territory is divided into three major dialect areas, named after three forms of the interrogative pronoun “what”: Štokavian, Kajkavian, and Čakavian. Štokavian is the base of standard Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin languages, and on the other hand, Kajkavian and Čakavian is dialect forms of Croatian. The subdivisions of the dialectical variations are based on the accentual system and reflexes of jat'.

of Istrian Dalmatian region of Croatia, while Ekavian is commonly associated with standard Serbian, and (I)jekavian with standard Croatian.

The main phonological features of Bunjevac dialect are as follows: (1) strong Ikavian, (2) loss of phoneme *h* or its replacement by *v* and *j*, (3) shortened form of *ao* / *eo* to *o*, and (4) loss of non-accented *i*. The morphological features are as follows: (1) conjugation of some verbs (e.g. *moći*: *možem*, *možeš*, ..., *možedu*/*možu*/*mogu*; *ići*: *iđem*, *iđeš*, ..., *iđu*, etc.), (2) declension of the cases (e.g. sg. instl.: *nožom*, *krajom*, *ključom*, *lišćom*, *mišljom*; pl. gen. *očivi*, *ušivi*, *noktivi*, etc.), and (3) preposition form (e.g. *s nje*; *s vas*; *na me*; *za te*, etc.). There are many vocabularies specific to Bunjevac dialect, including significant amount of Turkish origin words.)

In the former Yugoslavia, Bunjevci are, together with Šokci (singular: Šokac),<sup>4</sup> registered as the subcategory of Croatian ethnicity. After Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) died, and especially from the late 1980s on, Yugoslavia saw the rise of violent clashing between Serbs and Croats, which eventually brought about the Yugoslav wars. In Vojvodina, attempts to divide Bunjevac and Šokac from Croatian ethnicity were launched in order to create two separate Bunjevac and Šokac ethnicities. This resulted in the revision of choices for ethnic affiliation in the 1991 Yugoslavian census. The categories of Bunjevac and Šokac were introduced as the new categorization of ethnic affiliation for the purpose of reducing the number of Croatian population inside the Socialist republic of Serbia. Although Bunjevci were officially recognized as a separate ethnic group beginning in 1991, there are many Bunjevci who question the new categorization and continue to identify themselves not as a separate ethnicity from Croatian but simply as Yugoslav, or, as a part of Croatian ethnicity in the frame of “Vojvodina Croats” (which includes Šokci). The emergence of a separate Bunjevac ethnicity on the eve of the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia placed the whole Bunjevac community in an unstable status in between Serbia and Croatia. A complex mix of factors such as the needs for security and social status, interests, kinship background, regional bonds, and ideological backgrounds (including re-

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4 Šokci are South Slavic Catholic people situated in southern Hungary, eastern Croatia, and the Bačka region.

ligious attitudes) have influenced in process of self-identification. It is difficult to estimate how many Bunjevac citizens identify themselves as Croatian because the number of declared Croatians in censuses does not include any reference to the percentage of Bunjevac-Croatian. Moreover, their self-identification differs depends on the position or occasion. For instance, on the administrative level, many Bunjevci from Vojvodina travel abroad with Croatian passport, because of the convenience of access without visa application, even if they insist that Bunjevac is a separate non-Croatian ethnicity. However, in any movement to re-shape the Bunjevac identity, the core of the ethnic identity is always pursued in the sphere of the debate on literary language. This paper tries to tease out the relationship among the categorization of ethnicity and manifested language ideologies of Bunjevci in Vojvodina.<sup>5</sup>

### ***1-2. Methodology and Material***

Since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, much research has been done on the standard languages of newly established nation-states.<sup>6</sup> Those works trace the codification processes of the successor languages of Serbo-Croatian. Although included in the former Serbo-Croatian speaking groups, little attention has been paid to the language problem of the Bunjevac minority from the perspective of transitional processes of the former Serbo-Croatian language. Since the Bunjevac question is still one of the most sensitive issues in Serbia and in Croatia, researchers (mainly Bunjevac origin) have published articles on the post-Communist identity of the Bunjevci. However, outside of Serbia and Croatia, the

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5 On language ideology, see Michael Silverstein, "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology," in R. Cline, W. Hanks, and C. Hofbauer, eds., *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels* (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1979), pp. 193–247; Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, "Language Ideology," *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* 23 (California: Annual Reviews), pp. 55–82.

6 Victor A. Friedman, *Linguistic Emblems and Emblematic Languages: On Language as Flag in the Balkans, First Kenneth E. Naylor Memorial Lecture in South Slavic Linguistics* (Ohio: Ohio State University, 1999); Robert D. Greenberg, *Language and Identity in the Balkans: Serbo-Croatian and Its Disintegration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Bunjevci's language problem has hardly ever attained focus. One of the reasons is supposed to be the fact that language rifts in the former Yugoslavia have been analyzed mainly from the perspective of language planning, which is directed by the language policy of the nation-states.

Therefore, through the case study of Bunjevac issues, the following chapters attempt to exemplify manifested language ideologies in their publications and to answer the following questions, namely: What was the influence of the break-up of the Serbo-Croatian united language on the ethnic community that do not have their own government-controlled decision-making systems? How did the language shift manifest itself in small communities that because of their geopolitical position are not only under a single-political-interest sphere but in between two or several regimes? How were those transitional processes promoted, and how were decisions made by the members of the various communities?

These questions are related to the following topics: After the Yugoslav disappeared as a national identity, which identity would be chosen by the non-state-forming minorities? Which language would be their maternal language after the break-up of the Serbo-Croatian language? While controversies concerning the ethnic identity and its language could be found in the whole of former Yugoslav region, such issues still remain unresolved in Vojvodina, especially surrounding Bunjevac case. Furthermore, topics surrounding the Bunjevac question are related to a more diverse set of social problems in the post-Communist world, namely, re-composition of space, population transfer, manipulation of collective memory, categorization of ethnicity and language, new social inadequacy, and minority language rights.

First of all, this paper traces the historical background of Bunjevac literary tradition, especially focusing on the beginning of the standardization process through publishing of newspapers, calendars, and magazines in Bunjevac dialect (Chapter 2), then illustrates the chronology of the rise of Bunjevac question and demonstrates the relationship among the Bunjevac identity issue and Yugoslav ideology (Chapter 3), and finally shows the shift in demographic categorization and its influence on the community, offering the analytical comparison of two types of language ideologies of Bunjevac communities, which are manifested in their publications the break-up of the former Yugoslavia (Chapter 4). The follow-

ing analysis is based on my readings of articles, magazines, bulletins, and literary works of Bunjevac people.

## 2. Historical Background

### *2-1. Against Magyarization: from Settlement to the Mid-19th Century*

The origin of Bunjevci is itself the object of political controversies, as it is closely related to the argument over their ethnic affiliation.<sup>7</sup> Among the several theories about the etymology of the term “Bunjevac,” the most accepted theory holds that Bunjevci derives from the name of the Buna River in Herzegovina.<sup>8</sup> From the sixteenth to seventeenth century, when their settlement faced the threat of Islamization from the Ottoman Empire, they first migrated into Senj and Dalmatian hinterland. Some families then migrated further to the mountain areas of Velebit, Lika, and Gorski Kotar. Led by Franciscan monks, they collectively migrated into the drainage basin of the Danube River around the Bačka region. Bunjevci then mainly settled in Subotica, which is now the second largest city in the autonomous province of Vojvodina.<sup>9</sup>

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7 On the history and origin of Bunjevci, see Jovan Erdeljanović, *O Poreklu Bunjevaca* (Beograd: Srpska kraljevska akademija, 1930); Bernardin P. Sokácok Unyi, *Bunyevácok és a bosnyák ferencesek története* (Budapest: Magyar barát, 1947 (translation to Serbian: E. Hubert, G. Nađ, V. Hatala, and Đ. Feješ transl. *Istorijska Šokaca, Bunjevaca i Bosanskih Franjevaca* (Subotica: Bunjevačka matica, 2001)); Geza Kikić, ed., *Antologija poezije bunjevačkih Hrvata* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1971); Ante Sekulić, *Narodni život i običaj bačkih Hrvata* (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1986); *Leksikon podunavskih Hrvata – Bunjevaca i Šokaca* (Subotica: Hrvatsko akademsko društvo, 2005); Petar Vuković, “Bunjevački jezik – korijeni, varijeteti, perspektive,” *Godišnjak za znanstvena istraživanja* 1 (Subotica: Zavod za kulturu vojvođanskih Hrvata, 2009), pp. 139–155.

8 Other theories suggest that “Bunjevac” derives from (1) the name of house *Huma* in Herzegovina, (2) the name of house *Bunja* in Croatia, (3) the verb *buniti se* (to rebel). On the argument surrounding this issue, see Erdeljanović, *O Poreklu Bunjevaca*, pp. 5–19; Ante Sekulić, *Bački bunjevci i šokci* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1989), pp. 15–20.

9 Pajica Bašić, *Subotički Bunjevci* (Subotica: Minerva, 2003), pp. 15–26.

Since of Bunjevci had been traditionally categorized as “Illyrians” or as “Dalmatians” under the Habsburg Empire, it is difficult to determine when Bunjevac’s ethnic identity had unified. While on the one hand, there were several names for the Bunjevac population, on the other hand, there are cases in which the category of “Bunjevac” had been used by Serbian habitants in Dalmatia to refer pejoratively to Croatians at large.<sup>10</sup> “Bunjevac” is supposed to have been the ethnic name which was used by them.

By the time of the Treaty of Karlowitz (Karlovci) in 1699, the Kingdom of Hungary under the Habsburg monarchy recovered its territories including the Bačka region, which ended Ottoman rule of the area. Bunjevac writers and scholars from the eighteenth to the middle of nineteenth century were mostly Franciscan monks from the Hungarian episcopal towns of Kalocsa and Buda. They shared a self-consciousness being a diaspora, thus their common incentive was to protect their Bunjevac tradition, solve the religious and social problems, and establish the orthography of their own dialect. Usually those Bunjevac scholars wrote in Latin, but some of them wrote literary works in the Štokavian Ikavian dialect. In 1730s, Lovro Bračuljević (1685–1737) wrote religious essays in his own orthography of Bunjevac dialect, insisting that it is important to write as native people talk.<sup>11</sup> In his “Notices” (“Opomene,” 1736), Stjepan Vilov (?–1747) followed Bračuljević’s example and attempted to coin new letters to write down palato-alveolar sibilants (e.g. č-cs, dž-cx, ć-ch, đ-gj, š-ss, ž-x). In the same year, Šimun Mecić wrote a prayer book in the Bunjevac “language.” Their efforts had great influence on the contemporary Bunjevac scholars in Buda. Emerik (Mirko) Pavić (1716–1780), the most prominent Bunjevac writer in the mid-eighteenth century, published the annual periodical *Illyrian Calender* (*Ilirski kalendar*, 1754–1780), while Grgur Peštalić (1755–1809) is regarded as the

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10 In 1930, Erdeljanović mentions the pejorative usage of “Bunjevac” for Croatians in general, and this terminology is still used even today. I personally encountered this usage of “Bunjevac” in 2008 in the Dalmatian hinterland city Knin. See Erdeljanović, *O Poreklu Bunjevaca*, pp. 3–4.

11 See Sekulić, *Bački bunjevci i šokci*, pp. 273–274.

first Bunjevac poet for standardizing the orthography of Ikavian dialect through his epic poems.<sup>12</sup>

During the 19th century, the pressure on the South Slavic people to magyarize began to mount. Bunjevac scholars and writers, especially Franciscan monks, attempted to resist this process of “de-nationalization” of Bunjevci.<sup>13</sup> As in other places in nineteenth-century Europe, the rise of the national consciousness became salient among South Slavic people. The Serbian Matica (Matica Srpska) was established in 1822 in Buda as the first “Matica (literally meaning “queen bee”),” an influential cultural institution with its own publisher. Matica later became the centers of the nationalist movement in several Slavic countries and functioned as the central institution for the preservation of national culture.<sup>14</sup> From 1835 to the 1840s, pan-South-Slavic Illyrian movement blossomed especially among Croatian intellectuals, and in 1838 the Illyrian Reading Room (Ilirska čitaonica) was built in Zagreb, to be later renamed “Illyrian Matica (Matica ilirska)” in 1842.

## ***2-2. Tri-pronged Identifications: From the Mid-19th Century to 1918***

The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 resulted in a law that applied to national minorities, enhancing the status of the minority languages. As this law legalized publication of newspapers in the mother languages of the national minorities, it presented an opportunity to Bunjevac intellectuals for initiating a debate on the minority right of Bunjevci. Yet at the same time, the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 contributed to the economic development of Subotica and other cities in Bačka, and, as a consequence, a considerable number of German and Hungarian people immigrated to those cities. As Hungarian became the

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12 On the role of Pešalić in arising the national consciousness of Bunjevci, see Nevenka Bašić Palković, “Grgur Pešalić: *Dostojna plemenite Bačke starih uspomena* (1790) – Prvi rodoljubivi ep u književnosti Bački Bunjevaca XVII vika i njegova izdanja,” in *Etnolingvistička i istorijska istraživanja o bunjevcima* (Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 2008).

13 The religious handbook *Rucsna knjixica* was written in 1837 in the Ikavian Bunjevac dialect, and was published in Buda.

14 In 1864, Serbian Matica moved to Novi Sad (the largest city in Vojvodina).

single official language in Subotica, school education,<sup>15</sup> the language of the mass liturgy in Catholic churches and of the government bureaucracy was exclusively Hungarian, and in a matter of time many Bunjevac citizens in urban areas began to speak Hungarian as their mother language.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the rise of Hungarian national movement and the increase in Hungarian population accelerated the “Magyarization” of the south Slavic people, thus bringing about the reactionary movement against it.

Against the increasing pressure of the assimilation, Bunjevac intellectuals had created various literary works in the Ikavian dialect in order to preserve linguistic specificities, folktales, and ethnographic culture. One of the leading figures at this time was the Catholic Bishop Ivan Antunović (1815–1888), who received financial and moral support from local Serbs and Croats in Zagreb. Some Serbs in Bačka region, who had been living with Bunjevac citizens, expressed their sympathy with Bunjevac nationalism. For instance, Đorđe Popović-Daničar (1832–1914), a Serb, took the initiative to publish the *Bunjevac Calendar* (*Bunjevacki kalendar*, 1868–1869), firstly in Novi Sad, then in Subotica. The Calendar of 1868 consists partly of Slavic-origin name of months, accompanied by Latin-origin name of months (e.g. “Sicanj ili Januar”<sup>17</sup>), and

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15 Although it became possible to teach in the minority languages, Bunjevac schools in Subotica were all closed in the 1870s. See Ante Sekulić, *Bački Hrvati: Narodni život i običaji* (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1991), pp. 70–75.

16 Since the 17th century, Bunjevac citizens had been the majority in Subotica. In 1868, this was still the case, according to *Bunjevac Calendar* (1868), pp. 21–22, with approximately 50,000 Bunjevac (79.4%), 6,000 Hungarians (9.5%), 3,500 Serbian (5.6%) in Subotica. However, according to the census data from 1910, more than half of the population spoke Hungarian as a mother language (Bašić, *Subotički Bunjevci*, p. 23). Although considerable number of Hungarian families immigrated to Subotica and other neighboring cities, the rapid decrease in Bunjevac population was apparently caused by the assimilation of Bunjevci into Hungarians.

17 “Sicanj” is the Ikavian dialect variant of standard Croatian “Siječanj (January),” and Latin-origin dialectical form “Januar,” “Februar,” “Marač,” “April,” “Maj,” [...] “December” are put along with “or (ili).” *Bunjevacki kalendar* (1868), pp. 1–12.

followed by poems, an explanation of cities where Bunjevci settled, and advice for house-keeping. The whole text of *Bunjevac Calendar* was written exclusively in the Bunjevac dialect.

Still, the cultural influence of Croatian intellectuals from Zagreb was much stronger than that of local Serbs. Antunović established a close connection with Croatian institutions, especially through the Catholic bishop and politician Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815–1905).<sup>18</sup> With financial support from Croatia, institutions and cultural organizations were established in Subotica with the purpose of awakening “national consciousness.” Antunović insisted that Bunjevac and Šokac people should be aware of their own ethnicity as subgroups of Croats in order to resist the pressures of assimilation. This attitude was based on the view that Austro-Hungary had not recognized them as Croats for the intention to reduce the Croatian population inside the Empire. Antunović published *Bunjevac and Šokac Newspaper (Bunjevačke i šokačke novine, 1870–1872)* in Kalocsa, a political four-paged weekly, which discussed the issue of the human rights of minorities and the educational methods for raising the national consciousness of South Slavs.<sup>19</sup> Antunović actively invited contributions from Croats from other cities, especially from Zagreb. One of the most heated debates was about which language Bunjevci and Šokci should write. Most articles were written in the (I) jekavian Croatian standard language, while some Bunjevac writers and scholars wrote in the Ikavian Bunjevac dialect. Since this newspaper clearly showed an affiliation toward the Croatian national movement, *Bunjevac and Šokac Newspaper* was considered to be Bunjevac community’s first step toward the integration into the Croatian cultural sphere. After publication of the *Bunjevac and Šokac Newspaper* was prohibited by the Hungarian authorities, Antunović published a weekly newspaper *Bunjevac and Šokac Fairy (Bunjevačka i šokačka vila, 1873–1876)*,<sup>20</sup>

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18 Robert Skenderović, “Suradnja biskupa J. J. Strossmayera i Ivana Antunovića,” *Croatica christiana periodica* 59 (2007), pp. 85–103.

19 In total, 146 issues were published. *Leksikon podunavskih Hrvata – Bunjevaca i Šokaca*, pp. 29–31.

20 From 1875, Blaž Modrošić became the editor. At the beginning, *Bunjevac and Šokac Fairy* was published as the appendix of the *Bunjevac and Šokac Newspaper*.

which subsequently later appeared one every two weeks. The relationship to Croatia was remarkable in this newspaper too. In 1876, there were 40 subscribers of *Bunjevac and Šokac Fairy* in Subotica, while in Zagreb there were 42 subscribers and in Varaždin<sup>21</sup> 43 subscribers.<sup>22</sup> *Bunjevac and Šokac Fairy* contained poems, historical and religious stories, articles on social problems, along with political debates, and was predominantly written according to contemporary Croatian (I)jekavian orthography.

In 1882, Antunović published in Vienna *Debate on the Bunjevac and Šokac People in the Drainage Basin of Danube and Tisza* (*Razprava o podunavskih i potisanskih Bunjevcih i Šokcih*). Written in Croatian, this book attempted to trace the history of the Bunjevac and Šokac peoples, focusing on the blood relations between Croats and Serbs, and at the same time, the ethnic affiliation of Bunjevci to Croatian nationality. He wrote: “Everywhere where Slavic people settled again after the unfortunate defeat of Mohacs, there are more or less Bunjevac and Šokac people, or Croats, as we today love to call them, and each of the fates turned equally for the former and for the latter.”<sup>23</sup> This view received severe criticism from both Serbia and Hungary.<sup>24</sup> Matica Srpska in Novi Sad rewarded Ivan Ivanić’s piece *On Bunjevci*<sup>25</sup> (*O Bunjevcima*, 1894),

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21 Varaždin is a city located in northern Croatia.

22 *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije*, vol. 2 (Beograd: Jugoslavenski leksikografski zavod, 1982), p. 586.

23 “Na svakom onom polju, koje su posle nesretnog mohačkog poraza snova zasjeli Slaveni, gdje je god bilo tamo je u većem ili manjem broju bilo takodjer Bunjevaca i Šokaca, ili kako se danas volimo nazivati, Hrvatah, pa se je svaka sudbina na jednom i na drugom pojednako izmjenjivala.” Ivan Antunović, *Razprava o podunavskih i potisanskih Bunjevcih i Šokcih u pogledu narodnom, vjerskom, umnom, gradjanskom i gospodarskom* (Beč: Razdieljiva Pisac, 1882), pp. 132–133.

24 Since the achievements in *Debate on the Bunjevac and Šokac people in the Drainage Basin of Danube and Tisza* was highly estimated in Croatia, Antunović was nominated for the honorary member of the Yugoslav academy of Science and Art. However, it is reported that this proposal was rejected because of the pressure from Hungary. See Skenderović, “Suradnja biskupa J. J. Strossmayera i Ivana Antunovića.”

25 Ivan Ivanić, *O Bunjevcima: povesničko-narodopisna rasprava* (Beograd: Izdavačka štamparija D. Petrovića, 1894).

which emphasized the ethnic affiliation of Bunjevci to Serbian nationality, insisting that Bunjevci are catholicized Serbs. Still, Antunović continued the publication in order to preserve Bunjevac ethnic traditions, especially through the prayer book *People with God* (*Čovik s' Bogom*, 1884) which is written in Bunjevac dialect. The Bunjevac writer Ambrozije Šarčević, a follower of Antunović and co-editor of the *Bunjevac and Šokac Newspaper* published the Hungarian-Serbian-Croatian-Bunjevac-Šokac dictionary, which is considered to be the first Bunjevac dictionary.

Furthermore, the view of Bunjevac as a separate ethnicity was posited by the weekly magazine *Marigold: Bunjevac and Šokac Paper* (*Neven: Bunjevačko-Šokački list*, 1884–1914)<sup>26</sup> edited by Bunjevac writer Mijo Mandić (1857–1945). *Marigold* foregrounded the Bunjevac's national independence,<sup>27</sup> demanding on a Bunjevac language curriculum in schools,<sup>28</sup> and was printed exclusively in Bunjevac Ikavian. In February of 1914, the opening article titled: “We want our own language in our own local and state schools!”<sup>29</sup> The article argued for lifting the ban on using the Bunjevac dialect in schools, and, insisted that their Ikavian

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26 Under the wartime censorship this magazine was prohibited. From 1918 to 1921 it was published as a daily newspaper and until 1940 as monthly magazine. It was published first in Baja, then Sombor, and finally in Subotica. Its editors were replaced several times, and it had different political inclination, frequency and place of publishing, and design for every change.

27 “Cowards and traitors are ashamed of their motherland and the Bunjevac language, while heroes will go to their death as if it were a feast for their defense, and there is no sweeter death than to die for the faith and the motherland.” (“Kukavice se i izdajice srame svoje domovine i svoga bunjevačkog jezika, a junaci za obraniti ih idu u smrt kao na pir i nema slađe smrti, što za vjeru i domovinu mrijeti.”) *Neven* (April 8, 1914).

28 “[...] we decided that we also try to establish the school in which Bunjevac (language) will be taught, on our own power through one association.” (“[...] pa smo odlučili da ćemo i mi iz naših sila putem jedne zadruge kušat osnivati škola u kojima će se i bunjevački pridavati.”) *Neven* (March 28, 1914). “Bunjevac language” was officially recognized as one of the mother languages in the Austro-Hungarian census.

29 “Želimo naš jezik: u našim općinskim i državnim školama.” *Neven* (February 14, 1914).

dialect should be treated as the standard language. Since Subotica was one of the central cities in Serbia where the labor movement was highly developed, the view of Bunjevci as an independent South Slavic nation was closely related to the Bunjevac's own self-identification as a mix of Serbs and Croats – a fact which represented the ideal of the Yugoslav movement, especially among working classes.

### 3. Language Ideologies after 1918

#### *3-1. In between Serbia and Croatia: The Interwar Period*

In 1918, Bačka region came under the rule of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>30</sup> Since the kingdom of Yugoslavia was mainly governed by Serbs, Croatian nationalists expressed dissatisfaction with the new kingdom. Consequently, the tension among Serbs and Croats heightened during the interwar period, and the Bunjevci were caught up in the conflict between Serbs and Croats. The Croatian Peasant Party had played an especially crucial role in unifying Bunjevci into the Croatian ethnicity. When the Bunjevac-Šokac Party (Bunjevačko-šokačka stranka) was established in 1920, *Marigold* became its party bulletin. The declared purpose of the Bunjevac-Šokac Party was to fight the threat of the assimilation into Serbs. After 1922, the subtitle of *Marigold* was altered into “*Newspaper of Bunjevac Croats (list Bunjevačkih Hrvata)*,”<sup>31</sup> and was written exclusively in Croatian.

In the interwar period, the political focus on the Bunjevac question stimulated Bunjevac intellectuals around Subotica into various cultural activities. Several literary magazines were published from diverse po-

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30 At that time, the kingdom was officially called Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1918–1929).

31 When they failed to attain any parliamentary seats at the election in 1925, some members of Bunjevac-Šokac Party approached Croatian Peasant Party. That resulted in the Sombor Declaration (“Somborska deklaracija”) of 1926, which decided that Bunjevac-Šokac Party would be merged with Croatian Peasant Party. See Mario Bara, “Somborska deklaracija i njezino značenje za bačke Hrvate,” in *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 3 (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2006), pp. 779–793.

litical standpoints. For instance, a monthly magazine *Literary North: Magazine for Literature, Science and Culture* (*Književni sever: Časopis za književnost, nauku i kulturu*, 1925–35), which had been printed in Serbian with Cyrilic letters, published the special issue on the Bunjevac question for its second anniversary. The editorial remark of this issue mentions that “[...] it is our conviction that Bunjevci are worthy and honorable part of our nation, who have the important role of the living bulwark of our homeland border in the north.”<sup>32</sup> This issue included Milivoj Ilovac’s article on the orthography of “Bunjevac language,”<sup>33</sup> which prompted Serbian intellectuals to write several articles on Bunjevac-related issues.<sup>34</sup> This magazine devoted considerable number of pages to the oral literary tradition of Bunjevci, especially that which had been collected by Balint Vujkov (1912–1987). Vujkov collected folktales not only from Bunjevci, but also from other Croatian minorities in Slovakia, Rumania, Austria, and Kosovo. Vujkov edited a socialist-oriented magazine called *Bunjevac Wheel: Youth Magazine for Literature and Culture* (*Bunjevačko kolo: Omladinski časopis za književnost i kulturu*, 1933–36), also in Subotica, which presented a variety of works of prose and poems in an attempt to construct a contemporary Yugoslav literature. Literary works by Bunjevac writers were in Bunjevac dialect, while other texts were in Serbian. Latin letters were used in both cases. This magazine is today recognized by ethnographers as a valuable source which once published many unknown Bunjevac folktales, which Vujkov recorded and reshaped into a novel.

The late 1930s saw a critical rise in tensions between Serbs and Croats. Particularly after the Nazi takeover in Germany and the fascist organization Croatian Revolutionary Movement (i.e. Ustaša) began to

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32 “[...] naše je uverenje, da Bunjevci, kao valjan i čestit deo našega naroda kome pristoji važna uloga živog bedema naše domovinske granice na severu.” *Književni sever* 3 (March-April 1927), p. 1.

33 Milivoje Ilovac, “O pravopisu i jeziku Bunjevaca,” in *Književni sever* 3 (March-April 1927), pp. 108–113.

34 Ante Sekulić, *Rečnik govora bačkih Hrvata* (Zagreb: Institut za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje, Katolički institute za kulturu, povijest, i duhovnost “Ivan Antunović,” 2005), pp. 5–6.

threaten Serbian politicians, the internal conflict among Bunjevci became inevitable. A Croatia-oriented magazine *Wheat of our Plains: Magazine for Literature, Art and Science* (*Klasje naših ravni: časopis za književnost, umjetnost i znanost*, 1935–44<sup>35</sup>) was read not only in Serbia but also in Croatia, and after 1938, this magazine was published in Zagreb with the new subtitle: “*Periodical Magazine for Researching Culture, Life and Custom of Croats in Bačka and Baranja* (*Povremeni časopis za istraživanje kulture, života i običaja bačko-baranjskih Hrvata*).” This subtitle clearly states that their attempt to unify Croats in Vojvodina, including the Bunjevci in that ethnic category. On the other hand, from the pro-Serbian side, Bunjevac writer Mara Đorđević Malagurska edited the book *Bunjevac Woman on Bunjevac people* (*Bunjevka o Bunjercima*, 1941), in which Bunjevci was regarded as a separate ethnicity.<sup>36</sup> The reason why there were not the pro-Serbian Bunjevci who identify themselves as Serbs is, probably, that the difference of the religion was the crucial factor in deciding the ethnicity.

During the Second World War, this triangular friction among pro-Serbian nationalists, pro-Croatian (i.e. pro-German) fascists, and Yugoslav-oriented communists became the armed fight in the former Yugoslavian region. In the next section I will examine the situation of the Bunjevac community under Communism and during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia.

### ***3-2. Bunjevci as Croats, Croats as Yugoslavs: Under the Former Yugoslavia***

In May 1945, the Order of the Supreme People’s Liberation Committee of Vojvodina directed that Bunjevac and Šokac peoples should officially be categorized as a Croatian subgroup, irrespective of their

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35 This magazine was republished from 1996 as the bulletin of the Subotica branch of Croatian Matica.

36 “We are Bunjevac! We want to stay Bunjevac! We are not Croats! [...] There are no Croats in Subotica, but there are Croatian Frankoists, against whom all national elements fight, here as well as in Croatia!” (“Mi smo Bunjevci! Mi hoćemo da ostanemo Bunjevci! Mi nismo Hrvati! [...] U Subotici nema Hrvata, ali ima Frankovaca hrvatskih, protiv kojih se kod nas, kao i u samoj Hrvatskoj, bore svi nacionalni elementi!”) Mara Đorđević Malagurska, ed., *Bunjevka o Bunjercima* (Subotica: Gradska štamparija, 1941), p. 5.

self-identification.<sup>37</sup> At the same month, the People's Liberation Front of Vojvodina published a magazine *Croatian Word* (*Hrvatska riječ*) in order to provide information to the Croats in Vojvodina. In September, Croatian National Theater (Hrvatsko narodno kazalište) was established in Subotica, in which the dramas of Croatian writers, including Bunjevac and Šokac writers in Vojvodina, were chiefly performed. Thus, the croatianization of Bunjevci started immediately at the beginning of the state building process. This was conducted mainly for the purpose of maintaining the balance of Serbs and Croats. The 1946 constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia declares equality among the four South Slavic nationalities laying the foundation for the identity politics of the new socialist state. Interest adjustment between Serbs and Croats was especially important, and the government sought to erase the memory of antipathy leftover from the Second World War.

Moreover, because of the post-wartime disorder in Vojvodina (such as the destruction of land, demographical shift, the ensuing transition in economic and political structure, and urbanization of Bunjevci), the circumstances around Bunjevci were drastically changed in the 1940s.<sup>38</sup> After Yugoslavia was expelled from the Communist Information Bureau in 1948, pressures from the Eastern bloc urged Yugoslavia to strengthen internal unity by putting the differences of nationalities aside. This shift in Yugoslav identity politics resulted in the Constitutional Law of 1953, which abolished the Council of Nations. One of the main focuses was put on the historical roots of Yugoslavia.<sup>39</sup>

Through the 1950s, Yugoslav identity had been propagated as if Yugoslavs existed continuously from the Medieval Times, and the focus was put on similarities of South Slavic nations regarding history, political

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37 Istorijiski Arhiv Subotica, Fond Okružnog narodnog odbora – Subotica, f. 070.3, 1945 (May 15, 1945).

38 A considerable number of people of German descent in Vojvodina were forced to flee to Germany.

39 Aleksa Đilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution 1919–1953* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 174–176.

situation, and art.<sup>40</sup> This policy was expanded to other nations, in order to affirmatively include ethnic heterogeneity inside the identity of Yugoslav. This identity politics resulted in the introduction of the category Yugoslav not just as nationality but also as ethnic affiliation.<sup>41</sup> In 1951, Croatian National Theater was combined with the Hungarian National Theater (Magyar Népszínház) and renamed the Subotica National Theater (Subotičko narodno pozorište<sup>42</sup>). Debates on the Bunjevac dialect had occurred around the Serbian Matica, which concluded that the Bunjevac dialect is a sub-variant of the spoken language of Vojvodina.<sup>43</sup> In 1954, the Novi Sad Agreement codified the official language of the former Yugoslavia as Ekavian-based Serbo-Croatian and (I)jekavian-based Croato-Serbian, which equated Serbian, Croatian, and Montenegrin as a single language with two types of pronunciation (Ekavian / (I)jekavian), and two scripts (Cyrillic / Latin). In 1956, when *Croatian Word* was renamed into *Subotica Newspaper* (*Subotičke novine*), the language of the magazine was altered from (I)jekavian to Ekavian. Through 1950s and 1960s, literary magazine *Handful: Magazine for Literature, Art, and Social Questions* (*Rukovet: časopis za književnost, umjetnost i društvena pitanja*,<sup>44</sup> 1955– ) played an important role among the Bunjevac writers. Croatian (Croato-Serbian) was used in the first two years, and then was

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40 This is represented in the pictorial magazine *Yugoslavia* (1949–1959), the representative propaganda magazine not only for Yugoslavs but also for other European countries. *Yugoslavia* traced the history of the republics, in order to create a single national narrative applicable to the whole Yugoslav region. The editor Oto Bihalj-Merin continued this practice in his monographs on art history, which attempts to visually equate medieval people in the former Yugoslavia and contemporary Yugoslavs. See Oto Bihalji-Merin, *Prodori moderne umetnosti: Utopija i nove stvarnosti* (Beograd: Nolit, 1962).

41 Ethnic Yugoslav officially appeared for the first time in the 1961 census.

42 The word “theater” was altered here into the Serbian standard word “pozorište,” from Croatian standard “kazalište.”

43 This view is posed by Ivan Popović. See Ante Sekulić, *Rečnik govora bačkih Hrvata* (Zagreb: Institut za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje, Katolički institut za kulturu, povijest, i duhovnost “Ivan Antunović,” 2005), pp. 5–6.

44 This Ikavian subtitle (“umjetnost”) was renamed into Ekavian (“umetnost”) in 1970 as “Časopis za književnost, umetnost i društvena pitanja.”

replaced by Ekavian Serbo-Croatian. This magazine, which included not only Bunjevac writers but also writers of other ethnicities in Subotica, symbolically represents the process how Bunjevac writers were gradually integrated into the regional identity of Vojvodina Yugoslavs.

Through the 1960s Bunjevac writers wrote and published dominantly in Ekavian Serbo-Croatian.<sup>45</sup> (One exception was ethnographic writings.<sup>46</sup>) Against the Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) language dominance, Croatian intellectuals expressed their opposition in the Declaration on the Status and Name of the Croatian Literary Language of 1967, and this was followed by the mass movement called “Croatian spring of 1968.” Both the Croatian nationalist movement and the pro-Serbian reactionary response had enormous influence on the Bunjevac community. Since 1970, when Bunjevac poet Ivan Pančić (1933–1992) published the first part of his poems *Natpivavanja*<sup>47</sup> in the Bunjevac dialect, several Bunjevac writers began publishing literary works in their Bunjevac dialect, while acknowledgements, introductions, prefaces, and afterwords were in Croatian (Croato-Serbian). In 1971, Croatian Matica in Zagreb published two anthologies of Bunjevac writers, namely, *Anthology of Prose Writings by Bunjevac Croats (Antologija proza bunjevačkih Hrvata)* and *Anthology of Poems by Bunjevac Croats (Antologija poezije bunjevačkih Hrvata)*. For Croatian readers who are not familiar with the Bunjevac dialect, a small Bunjevac-Croatian dictionary was attached at the last pages for anthologies. Those Bunjevac writers who regarded themselves as Croats attempted to re-create the relationship with Croatia, while preserving the Bunjevac identity as a part of Croatian tradition.

In contrast, some Bunjevci considered this tendency as an attempt to force their assimilation into Croatia. When a Yugoslav census of 1971 was conducted, a considerable number of Bunjevci in Subotica requested

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45 Milovan Miković, *Iznad žita nebo: Ogledi iz književnosti* (Subotica: Hrvatska čitaonica, 2003), pp. 214–215.

46 From 1951 to 1965 Vujkov published eight books in various Yugoslav cities, including a book translated in Slovenian.

47 *Natpivavanja* (singular: *natpivavanje*) is a word specific to the Bunjevac dialect, with the meaning “to overbear by singing, to sing louder or better than another.”

that Bunjevac ethnicity be included in the census as an ethnicity separate from Croatian ethnicity. Although this was not accepted on the government level, it was recorded that personal requests for the declaration as Bunjevci counted 14,892 (16.77%) in 1971, and 8,895 (5.75%) in 1981 in Subotica.<sup>48</sup> As the war approached, the social suppression over the ethnically “inappropriate” citizens became stronger in Vojvodina, and the decision between Croatian nationality and Bunjevac nationality not only influenced the social and economic benefits of the individuals but also would become a matter of life and death.

#### **4. Language Ideologies and the Break-up of Yugoslavia**

##### ***4-1. Institutionalization of Bunjevac Separate Identity: De-Croatization Process***

Throughout history, the Bunjevac community had always been caught up in the conflicts of neighboring political regimes. Yet of all these, the Yugoslav succession wars played perhaps the most crucial role in dividing the local community of Bunjevac in Vojvodina. Borderline areas of Serbia and Croatia where the population was ethnically heterogeneous became the central political concern of both republics, due to territorial security. When Serbs in Croatia established the self-proclaimed Serbian Autonomous Oblast of Krajina (later Republic of Serbian Krajina) in 1990, the Bačka region commanded considerable attention because of the high rate of Croatian population. One of the attempts to reduce the Croatian population in Vojvodina (especially in Bačka region) involved the separation of Bunjevci and Šokci from Croats, introducing the new categories of the ethnic affiliation, Bunjevci and Šokci. According to the 1991 Yugoslav census, 21,434 declared themselves as Bunjevci, while 74,808 declared themselves as Croats. However, it should be emphasized that the Bunjevac dialect, which should be a fundamental marker of separate ethnicity, was and is not officially recognized as a language.

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48 In 1981, the number of people who declared themselves as Yugoslav drastically increased. *Popis stanovništva, domaćinstava i stanova 1981* (Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 1983).

Besides the state's propaganda, there are local institutions, small cultural communities, and various grass-roots gatherings in Bačka region which have attempted to mold Bunjevac population into either a separate ethnicity or as a part of Croatian identity. In March 1991, the Bunjevac and Šokac party (Bunjevačka i šokačka stranka)<sup>49</sup> was organized for the purpose of promoting the view that Bunjevci and Šokci are two separate nationalities. When Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence in June 1991, Croats in Vojvodina felt the direct threat of genocide, and on the other hand, "de-croatization" of Bunjevci had been increasingly propagated through various aspects. On November 1991, Serbian Culture Center "Sveti Sava" and Bunjevac and Šokac party established Bunjevac Cultural Center (Bunjevački kulturni centar) in Subotica, and this institution took a central role in promoting the national culture of Bunjevci through various folklore events. Folk customs, traditional beliefs, oral literary tradition, and other ethnographic evidence were frequently used as sources of the independent ethnic identity. Through activities in co-operation with Serbian cultural organizations, the Bunjevac Cultural Center highlighted the closeness of Bunjevac folk tradition with the Serbian one in order to foreground the ethnic relationship between Bunjevci and Serbs.

The Serbian Matica took the initiative of promoting standardization, and published the *Dictionary of Bunjevac of Bačka (Rečnik bačkih Bunjevaca)* in 1990. One of the editors of this dictionary, Marko Peić, later became the first president of the cultural organization Bunjevac Matica (Bunjevačka matica). Bunjevac Matica was established in 1995 under the name Renovators' Bunjevac Matica (Obnoviteljska Bunjevačka matica),<sup>50</sup> and performed the part to codify the "Bunjevac language" through publications of calendars, bulletins, and various books written in Bunjevac dialect (i.e. "Bunjevac language"). In 2002 in Subotica, National Council of Bunjevac National Minority (Nacionalni savet bunjevačke nacionalne manjine) was formed, and Bunjevac Information

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49 From 2003, the attribute "Šokac" was removed. Šokac people typically consider themselves as Croatian, and the declared number of Šokci was smaller than 2,000 both in the census of 1991 and 2001.

50 Renamed "Bunjevac Matica" in 1999.

Center (Bunjevački informativni centar) was established as the publicity bulletin of the National Council of Bunjevac National Minority. One of their aims was and is to standardize Bunjevac dialect as one language, and to attain the recognition of “Bunjevac language” as the seventh official language<sup>51</sup> in the Vojvodina autonomous region.

#### **4-2. Resistance against the Separatist Movement: Identity as Vojvodina Croats**

To avoid the political controversy, a considerable number of Bunjevci declare themselves as Yugoslavs, although the category Yugoslav is losing its actual meaning<sup>52</sup>; those who have only one parent who is Bunjevac origin, tend to declare themselves as non-Bunjevac. On the other hand, although political party Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina (Demokratski savez Hrvata u Vojvodini) was formed in 1990, it was not until approximately 2000 that the full-scale pro-Croatian movement had set up camp against the separatists’ activity. In 1998 the Croatian Matica founded its branch in Subotica, and in 2002, Croatian Reading Room Subotica (Hrvatska čitaonica Subotica) was established. About this time, other various small cultural and educations organizations with the attribute “Croatian” were established.<sup>53</sup> In 2003, a weekly magazine called *Croatian Word* was re-issued, and began publishing activities from 2005. Croatian Word publishing house mostly publishes literary works by Bunjevac writers, as well as some working papers on Bunjevac culture and literature, often focusing on the achievements of Balint Vujkov. Following the example of Pančić, literary parts are written in the Bunjevac dialect, and other texts are written in Croatian. In 2005, Ante Sekulić published *Dictionary of Spoken language of Bačka Croa-*

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51 Besides Serbian, languages of the official usage are as follows: Croatian, Hungarian, Pannonian Rusyn, Romanian, and Slovak.

52 Bojan Todosijević, “Why Bunjevci Did Not Become a Nation: A Case Study,” *East Central Europe* 29:1-2 (Budapest: Central European University, 2002), pp. 59–72.

53 See the list of the network of Croatian institutes, offices, organizations, and associations in Vojvodina. Mario Bara and Tomislav Žigmanov, *Hrvati u Vojvodini u povijesti i sadašnjosti: osnovne činjenice* (Subotica: Zavod za kulturu vojvođanskih Hrvata, 2009), pp. 85–100.

*tian (Rječnik govora bačkih Hrvata)* from the Institute for Croatian Language and Linguistics in Zagreb. The activities of all these organizations are characterized by a shared view that the Bunjevac minority is a part of Vojvodina Croats – a view clearly showed in the very name of one organization led by Tomislav Žigmanov (1967– ), Institute for the Culture of Vojvodina Croats (Zavod za kulturu vojvođanskih Hrvata), which was established in 2008. Pro-Croatian activists and writers tend to maintain the balance between the attempts to connect Bunjevci with Croatia, and the emphasis on the specificity of their identity as Bunjevci.

Although twenty years have passed since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, the Bunjevac question has not reached a consensus; rather, the bipolarization tendency inside the Bunjevac community has become only conspicuous. For instance, in education, there are three kindergartens and five elementary schools, in Subotica and its outskirts, in which Croatian is exclusively used from 2002. On the other hand, the optional subject “Bunjevac spoken language with the element of national culture (Bunjevački govor sa elementima nacionalne kulture)” was introduced in elementary schools in 2007. Now that the conflict between Serbia and Croatia has seemingly come to an end, Bunjevci are still facing even greater challenges concerning their identity. In everyday situations, each of them has to choose between ethnic affiliations, either as a Bunjevac, or as a Croat ethnicity.

Since the intention of co-existing with one community means the abjection by the other community, it is logical that in the former Yugoslav region after the Communism, an outer boundary among republics easily becomes an inner boundary of a community. In the process of the re-politicization of the ethnic identity of Bunjevci, the internalization of the war-time conflict is remarkable. At the same time, the distinctiveness of Bunjevac case lies in the fact that the bipolarization tendency of Bunjevac community does not simply consist with the scheme of the proxy war between Serbia and Croatia. While Bunjevac separatism is based on the pro-Serbian movement, their interest does not always correspond to the official minority politics of Serbia. One notable inconsistency could be found in their usage of Bunjevac “language” and claim for their language right, which are not legitimized in Serbian policy. The next chapter analyzes the language ideologies of both the separatist Bunjevac

group and pro-Croatia side, and attempts to tease out how the ideology on the categorization of languages has functioned in the re-shaping process of Bunjevac ethnic identity.

#### ***4-3. Publishing Activities and Bunjevac Literature in Post-Communist Era***

Although both the separatist and the pro-Croatian movement attempt to preserve the linguistic features of Bunjevci, their language ideologies are based on different attitudes, namely, the requirement of the legal status as the literary language, and the preservation of Bunjevac spoken language as a rural dialect. Bunjevac dialect was recognized as a single language during the nineteenth century, and was used not only for literary works but also for various political and social discourses. However, starting in the twentieth century, because Serbian language was exclusively used in cities in Vojvodina, the social position of Bunjevac dialect gradually decreased. Nowadays, those who can speak the Bunjevac dialect are limited to the older generation, who exclusively live in villages near Subotica (i.e. Tavankut, Ljutovo, and Mala Bosna), and Serbian language is predominantly used by most Bunjevac population. In a 2002 census in Serbia, eleven languages<sup>54</sup> were listed as one's mother language, and "Bunjevac language" was not included in that category. In Subotica, 8,914 out of 148,401 are listed as the speakers of "other languages" in the 2002 census, and this is regarded because a considerable number of Bunjevci wrote "Bunjevac language" as their mother language.<sup>55</sup>

Recently, the Bunjevac Information Center has been taking an active role in the standardization process of the Bunjevac dialect through publications of the monthly magazine *Bunjevac newspaper: Informative and Political Bulletin of Bunjevac National Minority (Bunjevačke*

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54 Besides Serbian, officially recognized languages are as follows: Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, Macedonian, Romani, Rumanian, Slovakian, and Vlach.

55 Comparing these results to those in other areas, this percentage is markedly high. In Belgrade, 6,033 out of 1,576,124 are listed as the speakers of "other languages (ostali jezici)." *Stanovništvo: popis stanovništva, domaćinstva i stanova u 2002, vol. 3* (Beograd: Savezni zavod za statistiku, 2002), p. 16.

*novine: informativno-političko glasilo bunjevačke nacionalne manjine*) and the adolescent magazine *Spining Top (Tandrčak)*, and moreover, through broadcasting activities in the Bunjevac dialect. As of 2011, there are four radio stations that have a weekly 30-minute program in the Bunjevac dialect, while the Novi Sad television broadcasting also has a 30-minute program once every two weeks. The Bunjevac Matica, which publishes the bulletin *Word (Rič)* and several books on Bunjevac history, culture and literature, edited *Anthology of Contemporary Bunjevac Literature: Beauty of Our Words (Antologija savrimene bunjevačke književnosti: Lipota naši riči, 2009)*, which contains works of 22 contemporary Bunjevac writers. The editor of the anthology argued that “It is true that this [Bunjevac] language is different from one author to the next, who knew to a greater or a lesser degree how to write in Bunjevac language. Although there are many variants, we could say that Marko Peić and Ladislav Kovačić were closest in their works to that real linguistic essence, which is unfortunately heard less and less.”<sup>56</sup> This afterword reveals that Bunjevac writers need not write based on the determined orthographic rules, and that Bunjevac Matica accepts a diversity of forms and styles in which the “Bunjevac language” can be written.

As Bunjevac dialect had been used exclusively in villages without any connection to modern social life throughout the Yugoslav period, it is difficult today to describe the contemporary political and economic problems using only the Bunjevac dialect. The usage of Bunjevac dialect as a language in publications is harshly criticized because of (1) the lack of the linguistic norm, (2) the excessiveness of the borrowings from Serbian language, and (3) both phonological and morphological influence from Serbian.

Bunjevac writers who identify themselves as Croats try rather to preserve the Bunjevac dialect as it is by referring to ethnographic works

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56 “Istina, uspravo taj jezik različit je od autora do autora koji su u manjoj ili većoj mjeri, znali pisati na bunjevačkom. Iako varijacija ima dosta, mogli bi reći da su Marko Peić i Ladislav Kovačić u svojim djelima najbliži onom pravom lingvističkom ekstraktu, koji se na žalost sve više može čuti.” *Antologija savrimene bunjevačke književnosti: Lipota naši riči* (Subotica: Bunjevačka matica, 2009), p. 215.

collected by Vujkov and others. Beginning around 2000, they actively started to issue literary works in the Bunjevac dialect. Since those writers consider their mother language to be Croatian, in their literary works in Bunjevac dialect the acknowledgements, introductions, prefaces, and afterwords are written exclusively in Croatian standard language. One of the most representative Bunjevac writers, Tomislav Žigmanov, in his literary works attaches a small Croatian dictionary about less known words and idioms of Bunjevac dialect.<sup>57</sup> This attitude does not only mean that they write for readers in Croatia, but also clearly indicate that the Bunjevac dialect should not be considered as one of the dialects of the Croatian language.

## 5. Conclusion

While there are various non-state-forming minority issues that reflect social problems in the transitional phase of the former Yugoslav region, the language ideologies manifested and practiced by Bunjevci represent the specific political attitudes that accompany the process of deconstruction of Yugoslav identity. From the perspective of history and language ideologies of the Bunjevac people, the features of the Bunjevac-related issues are summarized as follows: (1) Because of their geopolitical position, Bunjevci have historically been mobilized by neighboring political powers. There have thus been many ways to categorize Bunjevci, namely, as a separate ethnicity, as a sub-group of Croats, temporarily as a sub-group of Serbs, and as a Yugoslav ethnicity. Consequently, the difficulty in hearkening back to a single collective memory of the nationality results in today's heterogeneity of Bunjevac self-identification. This is clearly showed in the diversity of language usages in various publications by Bunjevci. (2) Since in the former Yugoslav region the difference in religions was an important factor in deciding the ethnic identity, the pro-Serbian Bunjevci have converged on the separatist movement. Nevertheless, the requirements of the minority

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57 See Tomislav Žigmanov, *Bunjevački blues* (Subotica: Samizdat, 2003), pp. 71–80; Tomislav Žigmanov, *Prid Svitom – Saga o svitu koji nestaje* (Osijek: Matica hrvatska, Ogranak Osijek, 2008), pp. 113–122.

rights (including the language right) by separatists are not always compatible with the governmental policy of Serbia. Therefore, since the relationship between separatist Bunjevci and pro-Croatian Bunjevci is not completely equal to the scheme of proxy war among Serbia and Croatia, members of the Bunjevac community has tended to be subject to diverse interest adjustments of the local society surrounding Subotica. (3) Although Bunjevac minority is officially recognized as a nationality, their mother language is officially still not decided. Because of this continuing discordance between ethnicity and its language in the demography of Serbia, separatist Bunjevci feel more threat of assimilation into the Croatian ethnicity. Since this situation (a result of wartime policy) has remained unchanged even twenty years after 1991, the conflict inside the Bunjevac community has since accelerated, especially through the increasing influence of Croatian-side manifestation of the ethnic identity and the language ideology. The increase in the bipolarization tendency of manifested language ideologies of Bunjevci can be seen as a salient illustration of the internalizing process and the preservation of a larger conflict, and of the resultant re-composition of national and ethnic identities in post-Communist Yugoslav region.