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'The Great Garments' – An Overview of the Symbolic Dimension of Bunjevci Women's Traditional Ceremonial Clothing

Against the backdrop of the new approaches to studying garments, in this paper Bunjevci women's traditional ceremonial clothing – garments (locally referred to as *ruvo*), will be observed in the symbolic context that shows the belonging to the specific social group, lifestyle and the status of the person wearing them, or the woman's identity. Moreover, based on the information collected in the professional literature and interviews with the members of the local public, this paper provides an overview of the meaning conveyed by the garments in the past as opposed to the meaning that is currently conveyed by them. In other words, it shows how specific items of the traditional ceremonial clothing worn by Bunjevci women, as cultural products with a symbolic dimension, functioned as signs in everyday environment. In addition, the paper presents the colours preferred by Bunjevci women for the making of the garments, as well as the role of the colour of clothing in the stratification of women in the society.[1]

Key words: traditional clothing, woman's traditional clothing, Bunjevci women, Vojvodina

1 On 4th July 2017 in the Municipal Museum of Subotica, within *Dužijanca* Celebration, an exhibition was held entitled *With God's Help* that in 2017 addressed the issue of *The Great Garments of Bunjevci Women*. The exhibition authors were Aleksandra Prćić, Marinko Piuković and Jelena Piuković. This paper is the result of the research conducted for the purpose of the above mentioned exhibition.

INTRODUCTION

The garments *(ruvo)* worn by Bunjevci women are amongst the most prominent identity symbols of Bunjevci and, according to a narrator: „one could accurately distinguish a Bunjevci woman amongst all the other women by the appearance of the garments".[2] Bunjevci are currently still very proud of their traditional garments and they gladly show them in public in appropriate situations, such as *Dužijanca* Celebration, *prelo* or different other cultural events.[3]

In a traditional community, the clothing certainly did have an important role in non-verbal communication and the community determined what individuals could or could not wear (Bogatyrev 1971: 33, according to Radisavljević 2009) There were unwritten rules concerning clothing and the traditional ceremonial clothing had a specific social importance and showed the position of every member of the community both in the family and in society (Sekulić 1991: 275). Traditional women's garments differed according to the type of material and the way of dress, depending on whether they were work wear, clothing worn for going to the city or intended for going to church or the most ceremonial situations such as *godovi* – saint feast days or weddings. Moreover, the traditional garments worn by young single women differed from those worn by married or elderly women.

Women's garments included undergarments and outer clothing items. Undergarments were made from linen and they comprised of a shirt, a skirt, an un-

2 Irrespective of the fact that Bunjevci are divided into those who consider themselves exclusively as Bunjevci (in Serbia they have the status of a nation) and those who believe that Bunjevci are a group included in the Croatian people, both groups consider traditional clothing worn by Bunjevci as an important marker of identity.

3 Bunjevci arrived to Podunavlje from central Dalmatian hinterland, the broader area of Herzegovina and Dalmatia in the 16th and the 17th century in three larger-scale migration waves. The settlement of the Sanjak of Segedin was the priority for the Ottomans, since the population that had previously inhabited that area (the Serbs and the Hungarians) moved northwards (Šarić 2014: 54). The Ottomans retreated from Bačka after the defeat on the Tisa (Tisza) River in 1697 and the area was included in the Habsburg Monarchy. The reign of the Empress Maria Theresia saw the commencement of settlement of the Hungarians, the Germans and the Slovaks, amongst other nations to Bačka (Sekulić 1991: 67) and hence the current Vojvodina area became multi-ethnic. Throughout history the ethnic composition of Vojvodina changed several times, yet multi-ethnicity remained one of the main features of this area.

Dužijanca – harvest celebrations. *Dužijanca* is currently one of the largest traditional events of Bunjevci – Croats in Bačka. Until 1911 after the harvest every family marked the end of the harvest on their property. In 1911 the parish priest Blaško Rajić integrated all the ecclesiastical feasts into one referred to as ecclesiastical feast *Dužijanca*. *Dužijanca* was organised by the city for the first time in 1968, as a folk and tourist event and in 1993 the urban and the ecclesiastical feast were merged into one. *Dužijanca* has ever since been a unique event, whose central ceremony is held on the Assumption of Mary in Subotica.

Prelo – evening reunion of guests (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 273). *Prelo* reunions used to be held during the carnival season on family-owned properties, bringing together friends and family. The first large-scale *prelo* was organised by Pučka kasina in 1879. Since then *prelo* reunions are intended for bringing people together and they are more like parties.

derskirt and a belt locally called *turnir* (Sekulić 1991: 277; Malagurski Đorđević 1940: 8), whereas outer clothing items included a blouse, locally referred to as *otunčica*, a skirt and an apron (Sekulić 1991: 278)[4]. The entire women's garments (*cilo ruvo)* or, as the narrators also refer to them as 'the great garments' *(veliko ruvo),* could be made from different materials, depending on the season of the year and the time of the making. The summer garments intended to be worn every day were sewn from the materials such as *cic* (a type of cotton fabric with forms and polychrome ornaments)*, piket*, *sefir* and later on, in the mid-20th century, from synthetic fabrics that were wrinkle free.[5] The winter garments were made of woollen fabric *paja* (stof linen fabric) or čoja (a type of tightly-woven fabric). As opposed to the garments intended to be worn on a daily basis, the ceremonial garments were sewn of silk and *kumaša* – plush. Such ceremonial clothing was worn in the morning for the mass service on saint feast days – *godovi* and at weddings. The objective of this paper is to present what different garments can tell about the identity of the woman who wears them.

Several authors have thus far addressed the issue of the description of individual items of the Bunjevac women's traditional clothing, the types of materials used and the methods of making the clothing. Amongst the oldest sources available in my case, which addressed the issue of the clothing of Bunjevci in the past is the book entitled *Folk Costumes and Embroidery of Bunjevci* by Mara Malagurski Đorđević, dating back to 1940. The author presents individual items of the traditional folk clothing of Bunjevci, which at the time had been almost completely forgotten. Moreover, she presented the weaving techniques and different types of embroidery made by Bunjevci women. Ante Sekulić also addressed the issue of folk costumes of Bunjevci, in one chapter of his book entitled *The Bunjevci Croats from Bačka: Folk Life and Customs,* published in 1991. Moreover, the issue of traditional clothing and life of Bunjevci was tackled in the exhibition catalogue of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb *From the Heritage of the Bunjevci Croats of Bačka*, dating back to 1998. One of the more modern texts that deals with individual items of the traditional garments of the Bunjevci Croats was the work by Kata Suknović *The Bunjevci Folk Costumes* dating back to 2010. Furthermore, Marinko Piuković provided a picturesque illustration of the traditional clothing of Bunjevci in his monograph *The Treasure from the Chest – The Traditional Clothing of the Bunjevci from Subotica Region,*

4 *Skute* – a linen skirt – an undergarment (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 329). *Turnir* – a women's belt into which wool was sewn and when they put it on, skirts appeared more attractive and fell more evenly on them (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 374). *Otunčica* – a light women's coat, a blouse, of the same material as the skirts (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 227).

5 *Piket* – a type of ready-made cotton fabric often with imprints of a motif of a rose or tiny flowers (Piuković 2012). *Sefir* – soft thick fabric with embroidered basically with monochrome or polychrome threads in the form of discrete stripes (Suknović 2010).

published in 2012 in which the photographs show different clothing items of Bunjevci, as well as the difference between women's ceremonial silk clothing and the clothing worn on a daily basis in different situations.[6] The previously mentioned works addressed the issue of traditional clothing as an authentic element of tangible cultural heritage. Individual items of clothing are minutely described and so are the materials used in their making and the occasions in which the clothing was worn, to name a few.

As opposed to the previously published works and in line with the more recently adopted approaches to studying of clothing, this paper focuses on the symbolic dimension of women's traditional clothing, or on what the garments actually say about social belonging, lifestyle and the status of the person who wears them. Consequently, the traditional clothing has not been comprehensively analysed in this paper, as the focus is primarily on 'the great garments' and on what they symbolise in terms of women's identity. Based on the information collected in the professional literature and the narratives by the locals, the paper provides an insight into how individual traditional clothing items of Bunjevci women, as cultural products with a symbolic dimension, can function as signs in everyday environment. In addition, it shows in what ways the women's traditional garments revealed the differences both in the social and in the material status of women in the past. Moreover, the role of the colours of clothing in the stratification of women in society have been analysed.

The reason why this paper addresses the issue of women's only traditional dress is the fact that Bunjevci women's clothing has retained its traditional features for a considerably longer period compared with traditional men's clothing (cf. Radisavljević 2009: 153). Hence, traditional women's clothing has been analysed during the period from the end of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, after which period Bunjevci women no longer wore the traditional clothing. Clothing has always played the role of showing the social status, the material wealth, age group and even the belonging to a specific group of professionals. Writing about women's traditional clothing, Sekulić concluded that "Bunjevci women's traditional clothing, as was the case with other Croatian women's traditional garments, showed the women's age, changes in their life from childhood, maidenhood, engagement and marriage, as well as married life and motherhood, maturity and widowhood" (1991: 275).

The research was conducted in Subotica and the information was collected based on the studies of professional literature, narratives by the locals and analysis of old photographs. Furthermore, two narratives by Ante Pokornik, recorded by

6 *Dolaf* – a chest with three of four drawers for a woman's dress (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 64).

Bela Gabrić in 1978, or in 1980[7] provided interesting and significant sources of information about the period between the two world wars. Since the traditional folk clothing was abandoned in Subotica as early as in the second half of the 20th century, it is currently difficult to find interlocutors who used to wear it in their everyday life whose memory is still good enough to allow them to share their personal experiences. Most of my interlocutors used to wear traditional folk costumes in their early youth and they still do so on special occasions. Some of them, like Dominika and Grga Piuković, as well as the nun Eleonora Merković, are striving to revive the Bunjevci women's traditional ethnic clothing through their committed work on the preservation of the traditional clothing and protect them from oblivion for the future generations. The narrators spoke based on their own memories, as well as based on the memories of their parents' stories and the stories told by other elderly family members. Most of them originate from Subotica and the villages Tavankut and Mala Bosna. They spoke about the period from the end of the First World War to the mid-20th century. The open conversations provided room for the identification of important previously unknown facts in terms of clothing. I analysed the ceremonial clothing from the end of the 19th century and that between the two world wars based on photographs of individuals and smaller groups of people, most frequently taken at photography studios on the occasion of great feasts and at weddings. The rare photographs taken outside the studio were the photographs of *Corpus Christi Processions* in Subotica between the two world wars.

TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

Traditional clothing is a reliable indicator of political history, depicting socio-economic relations and cultural events, whereas the Germans and the Hungarians were the bearers of the culture of clothing in Bačka region. From the second half of the 18th to the end of the 19th century they influenced the formation of the culture of clothing in the southern rim of the Pannonian Basin, for which the abundant frilling of clothing made of home-made hemp, linen or cotton fabric and minimal tailoring were typical, as well as winter clothing items made of sheep skin or good woollen fabric, richly decorated

7 Ante Pokornik (1910-1989) was born in Subotica. As the President of the branch of Bunjevci momačko kolo (The Bachelor's Dance) in Ker he was active in entertainment and cultural life in the city. Moreover, he was well acquainted with Bunjevci traditional heritage and customs and a collector of national treasures. He published three articles: *Priskakanje vatre na sv. Ivana Cvitnjaka* (*Subotička Danica* for 1988), *Moj sokak I.* (*Subotička Danica* for 1989) and *Moj sokak II.* (*Subotička Danica* for 1993). Bela Gabrić (1921-2001) was born in Verušić near Subotica. He was a prominent Croatian cultural worker, a writer and a publicist from Bačka. He exerted a significant impact on the Croatian culture as a collector of the Bunjevci Croats' letters and customs, to which he dedicated his entire life.

with polychrome ornaments of similar materials (Radisavljević 2009: 150). A significant impact was exerted by the clothing worn by the Hungarian nobility, which, irrespective of the fact that it was created against the backdrop of the European culture of clothing, was still a special variety. This clothing, especially women's clothing, comprised of a skirt and a waistcoat (which are integral to the European tradition), whilst the apron is specific of Hungarian traditional clothing and it was obligatory also in the most expensive noblewomen's wear (Kadak 1959: 84, according to Radisavljević 2009: 151). The cultural impact exerted by the imperial capital brought the prevailing baroque style in arts and architecture, as well as in tangible property, especially in clothing into the area of Military Frontier and it resulted in the appearance of the so-called frontier baroque (Nikolić 1978:103).

"The term national costume currently stands both for the previous and for the more recent clothing worn by rural population dating back to the last quarter of the 19th and around the mid-20th century, which would currently include the 'regularly worn' clothing (the old-fashioned clothing), appropriate ceremonial garments (the more recent clothing) and finally clothing combinations intended to convey a specific meaning and symbolism. During the second half of the 20th century and even nowadays the latter has been used for folklore and artistic, as well as tourism purposes and/in the media." (Bušić 2014: 168, 169).

The difference between former traditional clothing and the more recent traditional garments needs to be pointed out, where the formerly worn clothing includes the clothing of the most part of the 19th century. It was normally hand-made, made from natural materials with visible former influences and considerable regional similarity. The more recent traditional garments include the clothing made after a fashion of the urban social strata (Bušić 2014: 169). My interlocutors distinguished *the traditional garments* belonging to the new social stratum and the traditional clothing worn by the old social stratum, which as early as the 1930's was worn during the performances by folklore societies. The clothing combination worn on such occasions comprised of a skirt, an underskirt, a waistcoat – *mider* decorated with *port* and silver buckles, an embroidered blouse and *igrač* – a silver bow (picture)[8] tied around the waist.

Traditional clothing started being abandoned as early as by the end of the 19th century (Muraj 2006: 8). The influence exerted by the Central European clothing

8 *Port* – a wide ribbon embroidered with golden thread, it is sewn onto a ceremonial shirt and skirt, amongst others (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 261); *Bort, bortna* – braid made from silver and gold (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 33). In older literature, for example in an article published in 1896 in *Subotička Danica* (s.n. 1896: 47, 48), the term *port* was used, whilst Sekulić referred to the decorative ribbons on skirts as *bort*, as in German Borte (1991: 279). *Igrač* – a dancer, silk ribbon around the waist of a girl who is held by each of the dancers in the circle dance (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 99). *Mider* – a bra, a corset (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 158).

style and the industrial and commercial development resulted in a more frequent use of materials made in factories (silk, brocade, plush, etc.), as well as different accessories (ribbons, metal buckles, buttons and decorative metal threads) for clothing decorations. Rural population of different ethnic groups took over the new materials in accordance with their respective needs and their personal taste, keeping abreast with what at the time were considered as modern interpretations (Bušić 2014: 170). Irrespective of the fact that urban fashion exerted a huge influence on the Bunjevci women's traditional clothing during the last quarter of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, their clothing style differed from women from other ethnic groups. This was confirmed also by the nun Eleonora Merković, from her personal experience, when she remembered her childhood in the 1930's:

"During that time one could tell what group one belonged to based on their traditional garments. Šokac women had their own designs. We do have something in common, but they also have their own special features. Hungarian women, Slovak women, Serbian women, each of them had their own specific features, although we were all neighbours. You could tell by their traditional clothing who they belonged to."

The narrative by Ante Pokornik pointed out the importance of preserving one's own clothing style. He explained the positions or the specific heights reserved for embroidered motifs on Bunjevci women's skirts of čojica (a type of tightly woven fabric) or *paja* (stof linen fabric). Skirts could be embroidered with polychrome silk or cotton thread with the needlework called *vodica* and they had different floral *(cviće)* motifs, such as roses, buds *(pupe)* and carnations *(karamfili),* amongst others. *Vodica* was around 10 cm in width and it was placed around 20 cm from the edging of the skirt. Amongst Bunjevci women *vodica* could not be placed above 20 cm higher than the edging, as that would not be typical of Bunjevci women anymore, but it would resemble the embroidery made by Šokac women (Gabrić 1978). Furthermore, the narrators pointed out the differences between the garments worn by Bunjevci women originating from Subotica and that worn in its outskirts (Tavankut, Đurđin, Mala Bosna) compared with the garments worn by Bunjevci women from Sombor.

"The Sombor women did not have a belt *turnir* and so it not hold their clothing. When they saw that Bunjevci women, whilst they were walking down the main street, had a belt *turnir* then they also wanted to use it. They had no apron and they only wore a skirt and the outer blouse. When they saw it was nice, then they also started wearing it." (nun Eleonora Merković, Subotica)

Currently during the folk festivals women also wear *bili šling* (white needlework), a clothing item of white fabric decorated with perforated white embroidery and needlework (skirts, blouses, *keceljci* (pinafores), and in some cases also *mider*

(a bra, a corset) and *igrač* (a silk ribbon)) (Fig. 2). There are combinations of a skirt with a šling (white needlework), a blouse and a *keceljac* (pinafore) and a silk waistcoat and a silk *igrač* (ribbon). White embroidered skirts combined with a silk waistcoat in the past used to be worn by some groups of *kraljica* (queens) on the second day of prayers on Pentecost pageant (Černelić and Štricki Seg 2014: 199).[9] Almost all the narrators pointed out the fact that in the past a woman who would walk around wearing only white embroidered garments, was considered to be walking around wearing only the underwear and some people still think in that way (cf. Škrbić, Rubić 2014: 505).

The nun Eleonora Merković explained why this clothing style became so popular more recently (at the beginning of the 1990's), stating as follows:

"This white needlework that you can see on feast days in the streets nowadays and on the occasion of Dužijanca, started being used only recently, when I returned from America. We did not have silk, as it was rather damaged, we had nothing to wear and so we took the underskirts. Now we can see the beauty of white needlework when it is enhanced. Pinafores were always worn by women on top of the outer skirts when they served food and beverages during the weddings, so they would not stain their clothing. Then we took the pinafores that had been used at weddings and combined them with a skirt and a shirt. Such shirts used to be worn as undergarments, underneath the silk."

The traditional clothing worn by individual nations needs to be considered with the global value system in society, as well as in relation to specific conditions that influenced the development of individual ethnic groups. It is a well-known fact from history that Bunjevci arrived to the area of what is currently referred to as Bačka during the second half of the 17th century and at the beginning of the 18th century (Šarić 2014: 45) and they took over the role of border guards in the Habsburg Monarchy. Serving as border guards, they were exempt from land taxes and hence they gained a solid material status. They were paid in land and money, as well as in fabric and cloths (Vaniček 1974: 99, according to Nikolić 1978: 52). Imports and trade in fabrics from other parts of the Monarchy were probably the reason why Bunjevci early abandoned their own handicraft making of fabrics and cloths. In her writings about the clothing styles and the needlework of Bunjevci Mara Malagurski Đorđević witnessed the high level of artistic and dexterity skills of Bunjevci women during the making of cotton fabrics and trimming of clothing. Nevertheless, all that was forgotten as early as at the end of the 19th century, because of "the silk garments that were so

9 *Kraljice* – groups of little girls aged 8-14 years old who went round the houses on the feast of Pentecost singing ritual songs (*ljeljske*). The group comprised of eight girls: the first couple was called pridnjaci (those at the forefront), the second *sabljari* (those carrying swords), the third were the queen and the brother-in-law and the fourth were *stražnjaci* (those in the back) (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 134).

adored by Bunjevci, which almost all the Bunjevci maidservants, not to mention the rich girls, always wore on feast days" (1940: 6). In the past Bunjevci women were reputable for their weaving and needlework skills and primarily for the making of thin fabric referred to as *tanki,* which was used for the making of ceremonial women's shirts that were enhanced with ornaments on the sleeves *(začunčani)* (Sekulić 1998: 10). The needlework decorated the underskirts and shirts, where a special attention was paid to decorations of the sleeves, the front parts of clothing – *nidrima* (on the bosom) and *obašva* – a tiny straight necklace that decorated the neckline (Sekulić 1986: 290, according to Maglica 1998: 13).

Concerning the issue of the decorating fabrics through needlework, the narrators still remember the way it used to be in the past, as "there were girls who did the needlework by themselves", yet these were normally poorer girls and needlework was normally done by needlewomen who were professionally involved in this activity.

In the 19th century, one of the popular ways to stress their wealth amongst Bunjevci was the purchase of expensive garments, which was most frequently worn by single girls – girls ready for marriage. Consequently, this period is linked with stories about the expensive silk made in Lyon and the wastefulness of Bunjevci linked with clothing, which was also emphasised by the Bishop Antunović at the end of the 19th century (Anišić 2013: 98).

The fact that garments are still considered as a specific type of capital is confirmed by the fact that the narrators even nowadays, speaking about the issue of a woman's garments first draw conclusions about the woman's material status and the answer to the question: "What conclusions can be reached about a specific women based on her garments?", most frequently read: "Her material status was known, the type of household she came from." This was indicated by the type of fabric used for the making of the garments and the ornaments sewn on the garments. The most expensive garments were of silk and decorated with golden *port* (wide ribbon) and needlework.

'THE GREAT GARMENTS' OR 'THE ENTIRE GARMENTS' – WOMAN'S TRADITIONAL CLOTHING OF THE NEW SOCIAL STRATUM

In case of the woman's traditional clothing of the new social stratum a clear difference is visible between *poslendanska* (the clothing worn on regular days) and ceremonial clothing worn on feast days (Sekulić 1991: 275). Pokornik stated that ceremonial women's garments, as well as garments intended to be worn every day comprised of three items: a long skirt, *otunčice (a light women's*

coat, a blouse, of the same material as the skirts) and the apron (Gabrić 1978). Beneath the *otunčica* of the ceremonial garments, they wore a blouse of fine fabric, whereas beneath the outer skirt they wore *skute* (a linen skirt), underskirts and *turnir* (belt).

Women's ceremonial garments always included a silk head scarf, because "the clothing of those who did not wear silk scarves almost appeared unnoticeable" (Vita Nimčević, Subotica, born in Tavankut).

As has been previously stated, the garments intended to be worn on a daily basis was sewn of cheap materials, as opposed to the ceremonial garments that were made of silk or plush. The motifs on the silk and on *kumaša* (a type of heavy-weight embroidered silk velvet fabric) and the design of the garments, primarily of *otunčica* (a light women's coat, a blouse, of the same material as the skirts) followed the latest fashion trends. Pokornik stressed the fact that fashions changed around the year 1900 and then again in 1920, whilst after 1930 clothing that was more alike the urban clothing became the most fashionable (Gabrić 1978). Photographs from the end of the 19th century (Fig. 3) and those dating back to the mid-20th century (Fig. 4) show the transformations of the garments that occurred over time.

Women used to weave wool to produce hand-made outer skirts. They made them in different colours and in plaid motifs (Malagurski Đorđević 1940: 7). In the mid-19th century, the ready-made fabrics and cloths became more available and hence women abandoned making fabrics and cloths by themselves (in handicraft). Concerning the design of the garments, in the mid-19th century the skirts were full length down to the ground and richly pleated, yet over time they became narrower and shorter. According to a source dating back to 1896, a richly decorated design skirt required around "7-8 meters of silk and around 10 meters of *port* (a wide ribbon with a golden thread)" (s.n. 1895: 47). Moreover, silk had to be added for the apron and *otunčica* (a light women's coat, a blouse, of the same material as the skirts), which eventually meant that the making of 'the great garments' *(veliko ruvo)*, or 'the entire attire' *(cilo ruvo)* required around 10 meters of silk. On the other hand, Sekulić stated that *svileno ruvo* (the silk garments) required around 6 meters of fabric, whereas that made of woollen fabric required around 5 meters (1991: 279), which probably applies to all the garments sewn in the 20th century.

During the second half of the 19th century when the handmade woollen skirts were replaced by those made of ready-made materials, there were primarily monochrome silk materials and *kumaša* (a type of heavy-weight embroidered silk velvet fabric) embroidered with gold work on *grane*, and *port* (a wide ribbon with a golden thread). Monochrome silk and *kumaša* (a type of heavy-weight

embroidered silk velvet fabric) were replaced by expensive Lyon silk on large polychrome patterns on heavy-weight embroidered silk velvet fabric, *kumaša* with multi-coloured patterns, yet there were also the garments made of *čistih kumaša* (pure heavy-weight embroidered silk velvet fabrics) (SuD 1929: 88, according to Maglica 1998: 15). Pokornik also pointed out different types of silk. Moreover, he stated that rich girls around 1910 purchased the so-called *teške granate svile* (heavy-weight polychrome silk) and *kumaša* (a type of heavy-weight embroidered silk velvet fabric), whereas in the summer they purchased *grenadin* – thin rarefied silk embroidered with different tiny flowers and some girls personally did the silk needlework. After that, marcelin silk became fashionable and later on *krepdešin* (a heavy-weight silk) and *poplin* fabric (Gabrić 1978.).

Otunčica (a light women's coat, a blouse, of the same material as the skirts) followed the fashion trends of the bourgeois clothing and at the end of the 19th century, it was designed tight around the waist, sewn from a large number of smaller parts. The sleeves were designed on *rancoš* (they had firm pleats – above the shoulders). After 1916, *otunčica* changed. It was tight around the waist on the back and in front, on the chest, it was crimped. Around 1920, *otunčica* made of stof linen fabric or plush were no longer designed tight around the waist, but their design was more similar to a modern suit (Gabrić 1978). Whilst in old times the lower part of *otunčica* was wide, as it was supposed to cover a large number of underskirts, in order to get a nice wide form, in the first half of the 20th century *otunčica* changed and its form became more similar to that of a blouse. Its lower part was narrower and one needed to wear a smaller number of underskirts (Gabrić 1978).

Bunjevci women wore an apron over the skirt, in front (Sekulić 1991: 279).[10] There were several types of *aprons*: *woolen* – hand-made by the women and *maveski* (cotton) or šotoških – made of ready-made materials.[11] There were aprons referred to as *redušare* – (simpler), they were woollen, and *posvečarke,* they were ceremonial. Ceremonial aprons were worn beneath the *otunčica*, as opposed to *keceljac* (pinafores) that were worn over *otunčica* and the apron. Pinafore was worn by younger women, ceremonially dressed in silk and *kumaša* (a type of heavyweight embroidered silk velvet fabric) when they were serving at table (Sekulić 1991: 280). Pinafore was most frequently made of linen fabric, embroidered with white needlework and sometimes the needlework was done with *srma* – silver metal threads (Fig. 5).

The pinafore as a part of the garments (made of the same fabric) was worn

10 It has to be pointed out that in the language used by Bunjevci to describe clothing, one needs to distinguish between: *opasati* – gird with a belt around the waist, *pripasati* – put on an apron and *potpasati* – to put on *turnir* – a special women's belt (Sekulić 1991: 279).

11 *Maveski* – of cotton (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 155).

during the period between the two world wars, whilst the ceremonial white pinafore *was put on* only in the previously mentioned situations.

"If it was ceremonial clothing, then a silk pinafore was worn. Otherwise, the pinafore was made of sefir (soft thick fabric with embroidered basically with monochrome or polychrome threads in the form of discrete stripes." (Dominika Piuković, Subotica)

Beneath the outer garments, Bunjevci women wore *donje suknje* – underskirts. They first wore *skute*, then *parket* and then underskirts.[12] *Skute* are the lower part of the women's underwear made of linen fabric and they are tight (Sekulić 1991: 277). They are sewn from linen fabric in three parts. The clothing item linked with the shirt and *skute* was *turnir* – a special women's belt. Women used to wear it around the waist, so that their skirts would fit more nicely and be worn more easily.

The underskirts or white skirts *(bile suknje)* were sewn from white linen fabric, 5-6 *pola* (lit. 'halves', 1 *pola* = 76 cm) in width, "5-9 under skirts were worn formerly and more recently 3" (Malagurski Đorđević 1940: 7). The narrators nowadays claim that women most frequently wore 3 underskirts, which confirms Ante Pokornik's narrative. He stated that women used to wear 3-4 underskirts, depending on the amount of starch in their skirts (Gabrić 1978).

The nun Eleonora Merković spoke about the appearance of the traditional women's garments at the end of the 19th century in a highly picturesque way, as follows: "At the end of the 19th century the garments comprised of longer and broader skirts, so a girl could not come out of the yard through the fence gate, but the entire fence needed to be opened for her to get out."

Shirts are included both in men's and women's traditional clothing (Sekulić 1991: 275). They were initially made of linen or hemp fabric and subsequently women's shirts were of the finest cotton fabric, referred to as *tanki*. The sleeves were decorated with needlework. The shirt was worn underneath the ceremonial garments, so only the sleeve ends and the collar was visible (Sekulić 1991: 275).

Mara Malagurski Đorđević stated that at the beginning of the 20th century "girls, too, started wearing silk headscarves of different colours, but normally white" (1940: 8). Until that time they used to walk around bare-headed, whereas married women used to wear headscarves and caps. Headscarves became fashionable and they slowly replaced other headwear. Nevertheless, one could tell the difference between Bunjevci women and other women by the way they tied their headscarves. *Subotička Danica* dating back to 1928 stated that *bunjevački povežljaj* – the way Bunjevci women tied their headscarves was so significant,

12 *Parket* – cotton fabric with fluff on one side, fustian (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 234).

that one could identify a Bunjevci woman amongst a thousand other women (s.n. 1928: 87). In ceremonial occasions they wore silk headscarves tied on two ends in a double knot. Upon the tying of the headscarf on two ends, initially two and then subsequently four pleats – *mrske* formed on both sides. A form made of hard paper was placed inside the headscarf (some narrators stated that the form was placed inside a starched white handkerchief, which was in turn inserted underneath the headscarf) (Arančić 2014: 392). In addition, paper was placed inside the ends of the headscarf that were coming out of the knot, so they would stain firmly in their place. The form was intended to provide support to the headscarf and help in the formation of the two previously mentioned upper pleats (SuD 1929: 88, according to Maglica 1998: 16).

Pokornik stated that the fashion concerning silk headscarves amongst Bunjevci girls was like the fashion of hats amongst married women and it used to change twice a year – on Palm Sunday and the Assumption of Mary. It was at that time that traders used to bring headscarves with the latest polychrome patterns. Wealthy girls were striving to keep abreast with the latest fashion trends concerning headscarves, with plush or brocade patterns. The patterns included rings, in the shape of the crescent or golden grain motif or roses (Gabrić 1978).

The styles of wearing and tying of headscarves also changed over time. Pokornik presented three types of tying of headscarves from the end of the 19th century to the Second World War. Before 1900 the headscarf was folded so that one third was inside and two thirds fell down over the head onto the back. Hence, the headscarf was quite long in the back. The silk headscarf was tied on the head in order to form two pleats *(mrske)* on each side and in the back it fell down onto the back and it all looked rather massive. It was folded over the forehead in front. Over time the headscarf became shorter and it was folded almost in half in the shape of the triangle. As opposed to the narrators, Pokornik stated that women used to tie their headscarves by leaving three pleats on each side. All the three pleats were equal, so the headscarf in the back fell down straight and it spread. Around 1930 the fashion changed yet again. Silk headscarf was tied with three pleats on each side, yet the bottom pleat was slightly deeper and so in the back the headscarf was slightly taut and when the girl bent her head down, the headscarf was as firm as a bird's beak. Pokornik concluded that it was the last fashion trend, since nowadays "girls do not wear headscarves anymore" (Gabrić 1978.).

PURCHASE OF THE FABRICS FOR 'THE GREAT GARMENTS'

'The great garments' were sewn for single girls before marriage. If a girl was wealthy, she had several silk garments, so "a wealthier bride-to-be from Subotica used to take 5-6-7 such garments with her to the house of her groom-to be" (s.n. 1895: 47). "The quantity of the garments owned by a girl depended on the material status of her family and on the period that she spent as a bride-to-be, since 'the great garments' were most frequently received once a year." (Dominika Piuković, Subotica)

The garments were most frequently made for *godovi* – saint feast days (Corpus Christi, the Pentecost, the Assumption of Mary and for *prelo* reunions that used to be held during the carnival (Sekulić 1991: 279).

"The Assumption of Mary is in August and so the threshing was completed. At that point one knew the situation with the grain and whether it will be sufficient for the garments. Also, where the time of the Three Kings arrived, they had already fattened up the pigs and so the girls used it when there was a little bit more money around." (Grgo Piuković, Subotica)

Textile fabrics were purchased in the city in the fabric stores and they were meticulously selected. Sekulić pointed out the experience of a textile trader in Subotica who had to provide goods for saint feast days, which he ordered from Lyon, according to his instructions, yet the quantity was not supposed to exceed that sufficient for two garments. Sisters normally ordered the textiles with identical motifs, yet generally, it was not appropriate to have identical garments as some other girl (1991: 279). The decision about the fabrics to be purchased was made by the girl's parents or independently by the mother. Mara Malagurski stressed the fact that a lot of attention was paid upon the selection of textile fabrics: "Bunjevci women particularly liked matching pastel colours with perfect nuancing. Otherwise, the entire textile roll would remain in the store unsold or would be sent back to the factory" (1940: 8).

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE GARMENTS

Bunjevci had a special attitude towards the ceremonial silk garments, which is not surprising given their price. There is a saying: "Once the garments are inside the house, the burden is in the attic", which would mean that in order to make the garments for one girl, one had to sell two oxen (beasts of burden). In *Subotička Danica* dating back to 1896 it was stated that the price of ćurdija – the most expensive item of the old traditional garments, stood at around 300 forints.[13] Moreover, the prices of silk and *port* (ribbons) were stated and a conclusion was reached that one needed the same amount of money for the garments, which stood 300 forints (s.n. 1896: 47).[14] Girls wore the garments only shortly and were very careful not to dirty them. The garments were worn only in the morning to attend the mass service and for a short walk after the mass. Silk ceremonial *garments* were not worn on the rural properties, but only in the city where they were kept. "On Sundays there was a 10 o'clock mass service and after the mass they went for a walk, which lasted for about half an hour or slightly more, as they had to hurry home to make it for lunch that was at 12 o'clock sharp" (Gabrić 1978).

Although Bunjevci most frequently lived on rural properties, most of them owned a house in the city and the ceremonial silk garments were kept there. Those who did not have a house, had to manage in some other way. In that case they hired some premises where the young could go – "whom they will go to". That was paid in grain, corn or in similar contributions. That is where they kept their ceremonial costumes and garments and they brought along other things with them that were required for young men and women (Gabrić 1978).

The nun Elenora confirmed the previously said. She was born on a rural property in Mala Bosna and she remembered her youth in which they wore ceremonial dress:

"We did not wear them on rural properties. They were only worn in the city on saint feast days. If someone did not own a house, they made friends with someone and young people kept their ceremonial garments in the city. We wore regular clothing to get to the city. That was lightweight clothing that did not

13 *Ćurdija* – fur coat, a winter cloak made from animal skin, most frequently navy or black colour, on the inside it was from lamb skin or from wild cat and with abundant fox fur and gold threads on the outer edges. It had four pairs of silver buckles – *toka* (Peić i Bačlija 1990: 54).

14 According to the information collected from Historical Archives of Subotica, the annual salary of civil servants in 1896 stood between 1200-1600 kruna, or 600-800 forint (Historical Archives of Subotica, F.2. City Council of the free royal city of Subotica, ref. № 1205, The main book of civil servants salaries). Moreover, according to information about trading in grain and livestock from Subotca newspaper from 1st January 1896 (s.n. 1896: 6) the price of fattened up pigs stood around 40 coins per kilo. In 1896 in the Austro-Hungarian Empire the currency was krone, but they also used other currencies, such as forints. One forint was worth 2 krone, whilst for krone one got 50 coins (Kolar Dimitrijević 2013: 126). Hence, the price of a pig of 150 kg stood at 120 krone, or 60 forints and for a silk garment one had to sell 4-5 pigs.

show the waistline, made of *sefir* (soft thick fabric with embroidered basically with monochrome or polychrome threads in the form of discrete stripes) or woollen fabric. The garments showing the waistline (*na struk*) were worn only in the city, where there was no dust."

A girl wearing silk garments did not dance in the circle dance, as she was not supposed to sweat. Silk garments were never washed. If a girl was planning to dance, she took off her *otunčica* (a light women's coat, a blouse, of the same material as the skirts), and wore a blouse. "When the girls were at the wedding and were planning to dance, they took off the silk blouse and wore the embroidered one, so they would not sweat. Or else they wore underarm pads to protect the garments from sweat." (nun Eleonora Merković, Subotica)[15]

A girl had to know how to wear 'the great garments' and how to walk whilst wearing them. She needed to make small steps and her posture had to be straight.

"We were trained. In adolescence when the curves start showing, girls tend to hunch their back slightly. Then they were given the rolling pin behind their backs to straighten their backs, to have a nice posture, so the skirt would not dangle here and there, but follow their steps. They paid attention to aesthetics, how to dress and how to walk." (nun Eleonora Merković, Subotica)

'The great garments' made of silk were kept and they lasted for one hundred years. They were most frequently inherited.

A LITTLE GIRL, A YOUNG GIRL, A WOMAN

In the past amongst Bunjevci women the dress and the appearance of the headwear were clear indicators of a woman's social status.

During childhood little girls wore children size and design clothing. Depending on their physical development, between 14 and 16 years of age, they would get their first garments showing the waistline. Sekulić stated that girls started wearing underskirts at the age of 14 (1991: 277), which means that was the time they started wearing long skirts that reached down to the ground (Fig. 6).

Ceremonial silk garments were made for single girls. Single girls' garments were made of the most expensive fabrics, as well as more richly adorned with embroidery and gold threads. The expensive 'great garments' were intended to show

15 Embroidered blouse nun Eleonora Meković described as a blouse made of linen fabric or silk linings that the girl would decorate with needlework. That type of blouse was worn for circle dance as it was washable.

that the girl was coming from a wealthy household and she was hence expected to be proposed by wealthy young men (Fig. 7).

Concerning the dress code in the past Pokornik pointed out that young girls always wore identical 'great garments', made of the same fabrics, irrespective of whether it was ceremonial silk garments or those for everyday occasions (made of materials such as *cic* (a type of cotton fabric with forms and polychrome ornaments) and similar). Older young girls or young women were allowed to wear a skirt that was different from *leveš* (a blouse) and a pinafore (Gabrić 1978).

The garments owned by the girls were brought as a dowry. Most garments were worn by women throughout their entire life and the most decorated ones, primarily those in brighter colour nuances, were worn for some more time, during their early years of married life. After that*, the garments* were put away into a *dolaf* (a chest with three of four drawers for a woman's attire) to be kept for her children or given to other girls in the family as a gift (the same was confirmed by all the narrators). As a married woman she wore more modest, less luxurious fabrics, without expensive ornaments.

During childhood, girls' hair was arranged in two braids and when they grew up and became young girls*,* their hair was braided in one plait. Mara Malagurski Đorđević stated that, with the exception of winter, when they wore headscarves, girls formerly used to walk around bareheaded, with a *kurđup* (bun) on the nape of their head, comprising of tiny braids.[16] Their hair was decorated with flowers to the right of the bun, formerly with fresh flowers and subsequently with artificial (1940: 8). According to records, before buns*,* on ordinary days, young girls used to arrange their hair in *vinac* (a wreath) (Sekulić 1991: 283). When young girls went dancing, hairdressers arranged their hair (Arančić 2014: 390). Moreover, the hair was especially arranged for the wedding (Stantić 2003: 34) and that was the last time that a girl was seen bareheaded in public (Fig. 8).

The covering and the decorations of women's head is an archaic ritual that is common in almost all cultures. Originally it had a magic meaning linked with the woman's reproductive role (Williams 1991: 139, according to Radisavljević 2009: 154). Nevertheless, following the spreading of Christianity, the attitude towards hair changed and it started showing the woman's social role. A married woman never walked around without a bun or a cap with a headscarf (Malagurski Đorđević 1940: 8). This was also confirmed by Pokornik, who stated that, beneath the silk headscarf, women wore either a bun or a cap, whereas younger women and single girls wore *danac* – a type of cap that was pleated

16 *Kurđup* comes from Italian cordella – ribbon, band. According to Bunjevac women's narratives, *kurđup* was braided and arranged hair. Nevertheless, before hairpins, the braids were tied with ribbons (Sekulić 1991: 283).

and tied with a string on the head, so that it could not be seen. That provided protection to the headscarf from dirtying and the hair grease (Gabrić 1978).

Konđe (headdress for a married woman) were sewn of satin or silk, whilst some were decorated with gold embroidery and reminded of diadems. Those intended to be worn every day were made of washable fabrics and they were most frequently red colour (Malagurski Đorđević 1940: 8). The caps were similar to *konđa* and their origin is more recent. The difference between the two was that *konđa* was tied back on a feather, whereas the cap was sewn and was pinned and hence fixed to the hair. In addition, *konđa* covered the forehead more and it covered almost all the hair, whilst caps revealed more forehead, leaving a part of the hair around the forehead visible. Single girls never wore *konđa* (ibid.).

After the wedding, at midnight of the wedding night, the wreath was taken off the bride and her head was covered with a headdress – *konđa* or a headscarf. From that moment to her death, a Bunjevac woman never appeared in public without these headdresses. She was allowed to take off her headscarf in the privacy of her home, but she was never to take off her *konđa* (Sekulić 1991: 283). This was also confirmed by the narrative of Ante Pokornik, who stated as follows:

"Around midnight the bride and the groom retreated to another room. The groom took off the bride's wreath; she took off her wedding dress and put on the clothing of a young housewife, whilst putting a headscarf or a konđa on her head. That was a sign that she had become a woman." (Gabrić 1978)

THE COLOUR OF CLOTHING AND THE ROLE OF COLOURS

Upon analysis of old photographs until mid-20th century, irrespective of the fact that the colours can no longer be discerned, one cannot fail to notice that the garments of most women, both younger and older, were of darker nuances. Even in case of the garments with floral patterns or any other patterns, the background is most frequently dark. The narrators stated that women most commonly opted for black, navy, brown, green, burgundy and violet:

"Even when there was a lighter colour, it was a more moderate nuance of a blue or a green. If it was red colour, then it was burgundy." (Jozefina Skenderović, Subotica, born in Tavankut)

Bunjevci women were not fond of vivid, intense colours. Pokornik stated that, in case they had more *paja* (fabric for winter garments), girls would purchase a čojica fabric. Čojica was most frequently the colour of meat or violet and rarely

red. The red colour was never their favourite, as it was glaring and was accepted by younger single girls only subsequently (Gabrić 1978).

Until the 1920's also the silk garments intended for the wedding were in darker nuances and very rarely white. This was confirmed by the narrators and the reason stated was primarily convenience, or the fact that the garments brought by the women as dowry was worn their entire life and black colour as ceremonial can be worn in different occasions, both for ceremonies and funerals.

"Women of age, above 50 years old only wore black. The pinafore could have a discrete polychrome pattern, but everything was black. If my memory serves me well, my two aunts had a green velour with silver and when they were in their forties, they coloured it in black. Nothing was disposed of." (Jozefina Skenderović, Subotica, born in Tavankut)

Nevertheless, in case they were wealthier, young girls also had light-coloured dresses (pink, light blue) that they wore in the summer, on saint feast days or at weddings. In the photographs that show the processions on Corpus Christi and those taken at the photo-studio during the saint feast days in the summer it is visible that young girls wore light-coloured dresses or they wore light-coloured headscarves.

On Corpus Christi there were large processions (Fig. 9) and the bishop Ivan Antunović said delighted (1875: 101):

"On that day both the elderly and the young were striving to wear their best and cleanest clothing and they were rushing to church to attend the magnificent Eucharistic procession. The priests were dressed in the most expensive and the most glorious priest's garments."

At the end of the 19th century, the bishop Antunović described Bunjevci as God-fearing and loyal to church (Antunović 1875). Consequently, irrespective of their social status, all women during the period of lent always wore dark clothing, whereas on saint feast days, such as Easter, Corpus Christi or Pentecost, the single girls wore light-coloured garments and light-coloured headscarves. The previously mentioned was described by the nun Eleonora Merković in a picturesque way as follows:

"All the colours that were present amongst our Bunjevci women followed the Christian symbolism. During Lent they wore dark colours when they went to church. At Easter they wore silk headscarves and the single girls' dresses were light-coloured. At Corpus Christi children wore white."

Black colour symbolised humility, moderation, repentance, abstinence, and authority (Brenko 2009: 40). On the other hand, white symbolised purity and innocence and it was a metaphor of peace and beatitude. Moreover, the white

colour also marks the transition from one period of life into another: birth – baptism, marriage, funeral – the beginning of afterlife (Brenko 2009: 40), that is why children and young girls in processions frequently wore white.

CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of all that has previously been stated, a conclusion can be reached that in the past women's traditional garments certainly could be considered as a text read by the members of the community. They provided information about both the collective and the personal identity of women. 19th century was a period of great inventions and the commencement of industrial textile manufacturing. In that context, industrial ready-made fabrics became more accessible to rural population, amongst which there was also silk, as a specific status symbol. Hence, based on the silk garments conclusions could be reached about a high material status of a woman. Nevertheless, clothing provided information also about her social status, revealing whether she was a little girl, a single girl, a bride-to-be or a married woman. At the beginning of the 20th century, traditional women's costume also had a function of pointing out one's belonging to an ethnic group in a multi-national environment. The narrators stated that in the village one could tell by the clothing whether a woman in question was a Bunjevci woman, a Slovak or a Hungarian woman. Nowadays, upon observing the ceremonial processions of women and men wearing traditional costumes, most people are unaware of the symbolism conveyed by specific clothing combinations worn by women in the past. The Bunjevci traditional folk costume is one of the elements of the traditional culture and in contemporary conditions is considered as an important identity marker (Vugdelija i Gotal 2014: 302). Irrespective of the fact that it has always remained faithful to its basic form, 'the great garments' (*veliko ruvo*) kept abreast with fashion trends. It appears that both the traditional garment and Bunjevci maintained the balance between the rural and the urban, combining elements from both lifestyles.

In fear of the overall globalisation of the contemporary culture, Bunjevci are striving to save the traditional customs and their folklore from oblivion. Hence, the making of the traditional garments have become popular yet again. Judging by what can be seen during traditional festivals and events, women most frequently opt for designs that used to be popular at the end of the 19th century. One of my interlocutors explained it with the fact that those garments were the ones that pointed out women's beauty in the best way, emphasising their waistline, whilst simultaneously hiding "the less beautiful parts of the woman's body". Upon reflection of the reasons behind that, I came across 'Laver's Law',

or in other words, a categorisation of fashion items published in his major work in 1937 titled *Tastes and Fashion: From the French Revolution Until Today*, in which he stated as follows (Laver 1936, according to Jastretijević 2014: 90):

"The same piece of clothing will be indecent 10 before its time, shameless 5 years before its time, daring 1 year before its time, modern and elegant in its time, considered as current fashion, dowdy 1 year after its time, hideous 10 years after its time, ridiculous 20 years after its time, amusing 30 years after its time, quaint 50 years after its time, charming 70 years after its time, romantic 100 years after its time and beautiful 150 after its time."

INTERLOCUTORS

Merković, Eleonora; born in 1943 in Mala Bosna

Nimčević, Vita; born in 1939 in Tavankut

Piuković, Dominika; born in 1940 in Subotica

Piuković, Grgo; born in 1942 in Subotica

Skenderović, Jozefina; born in 1955 in Tavankut

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