

## Case Study: Monument to King Peter I Karadjordjevic in Zrenjanin

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Monuments as attributes of a nation, such as flags, parades, anthem, currency, national costumes and others, are an important symbolic medium of political education in which are combined into one unit history / politics and the people / person.<sup>1</sup> Sacralization of history and politics often takes an important place in political education. Monuments make "tangible ideology of nationalism and notions of the nation, and contribute to ensuring the continuity of a historical and predestined apstacted community."<sup>2</sup>

National monuments are a kind of shrine built in the cult of the nation, where the idea of the nation is turned into sensuous form. Sermons that are held there, are in service of political education.<sup>3</sup> Monuments as "lessons of history turned into stone"<sup>4</sup>, create a collective identity "by binding to a common past and commitment to a shared memory."<sup>5</sup> As national symbols they provoke emotions in order to praise the nation, and condemn the atrocities that threaten to disrupt it. History is always politicized, and it is written by the winning elite, so legends are replacing the facts. In the time before mass media, the monuments were the ones that staged, theatricalized the past. They cross as a symbol from the context of historical consciousness in the context of national memory.<sup>6</sup> Here mechanisms of a power act through repetition, overlapping, and connecting. An event from the past is often separated from its context to serve the political goals, so likewise myth "has the character of magic formulas, providing unquestioning identification with the political goal and makes it a value that is not contested."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alaida Assmann, *Rad na nacionalnom pamćenju*, translated by Aleksandra Bajazetov-Vučen, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 2002, p 51.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nacionalni identitet*, translated by Slobodan Đorđević, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 1998, p 125.

<sup>3</sup> Alaida Assmann, *Rad na nacionalnom pamćenju*, translated by Aleksandra Bajazetov-Vučen, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 2002, p 51.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nacionalni identitet*, translated by Slobodan Đorđević, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 1998, p 124.

<sup>5</sup> Alaida Assmann, *Rad na nacionalnom pamćenju*, translated by Aleksandra Bajazetov-Vučen, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 2002, p 54.

<sup>6</sup> Alaida Assmann, *Rad na nacionalnom pamćenju*, translated by Aleksandra Bajazetov-Vučen, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 2002, p 54.

<sup>7</sup> Alaida Assmann, *Rad na nacionalnom pamćenju*, translated by Aleksandra Bajazetov-Vučen, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 2002, p 57.

However, one of the most important features of the monuments is reflected in their ambivalence. They are built to bear witness to eternity, but they mostly bear witness to transience. Built to raise the national consciousness in a permanent culture of remembrance, as petrified eternity, monuments actually remain frozen in time in which they arise. Thus, their time has long passed even during the time of their projections and construction. Due to political turmoil and national movements, they can not meet an impossible task that is imposed upon them - "to provide solid bases and possibilities in reality that is constantly changing ... They embody the desired, and the reality it represents is a reality that is desired and evoked, not a reality that could be fact stated."<sup>8</sup> If embodied demands were met, *the monument would not exist*. Size, grandeur of monuments suppose to overshadow the current crisis and help in its resolution emulating *the golden era of the past*. They are, therefore, like Janus, with a view of two opposite sides, not anticipating only history, but also the requirement for a specific future.

Monument to the King Petar I Karadjordjevic in Zrenjanin is a type of national remembrance monuments so called *nationalmonarchic monuments*. On these monuments, the fate of the people is inextricably linked to the monarch<sup>9</sup>, in this case, King Peter Karadjordjevic, liberator and unifier after World War I. This monument was erected in the main square in Zrenjanin (city bears the name of Peter's Town for a time), the first time in 1926 in the memory of the personality and the work of the Serbian king (and later King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes). In 1941, the German occupation authorities demolished it completely, until its restoration began at the initiative of Prince Tomislav in 1997 according to the original designs. Officially it was unveiled in 2005 by Prince Alexander II Karadjordjevic, great grandson of King Peter. This bronze monument shows the king as a horseman, with two reliefs on the pedestal with scenes of famous moments of the king's rule *Crossing Over Albania* and *Procession on Terazije After the Coronation*.

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<sup>8</sup> Alaida Assmann, *Rad na nacionalnom pamćenju*, translated by Aleksandra Bajazetov-Vučen, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 2002, p 57.

<sup>9</sup> Alaida Assmann, *Rad na nacionalnom pamćenju*, translated by Aleksandra Bajazetov-Vučen, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 2002, p 52

The root of expressing national consciousness is mostly located in the liberation wars. Therefore, this monument was erected to thank the rescuer, showing brilliance and power of the monarch. Like all monuments of this type, the hero is portrayed as an idealized timeless and eternal mythic figure, uniting the nation. King Peter I is seen here as the father of the nation. To national identity and to nationalism the metaphor of the family is very important, therefore the nation seems like one big family, which "surpasses and replaces the individual family, but it causes almost as strong loyalty and a remarkable commitment."<sup>10</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, the monuments are being built always in the time of crisis, so therefore this one too in both periods in its construction (1926 and 1997) trying to raise national moral by theatricalizing the past. The words of Crown Prince and representatives of the authorities testify this. Prince unveils the monument in 2005 with following words:

"It is upon me to wish you that ideas that have guided my grandfather again become the source of peace, tolerance and progress of the country and the people which know who they are, where they comes from and where they want to get ... The monuments are not the purpose and goal of their own, but permanent witnesses and signposts – they are witnesses of the values that a nation has recognized as its own ideal, and the signposts to those who in the days of big dilemma and turns, find in them sublimed experience of a time and permanent answer to secret questions."<sup>11</sup>

Mayor od Zrenjanin G. Knezevic in the same occasion addresses the nation and the media by comparing past and present with words:

"...As a carrier of progressive ideas and values, proven fighter for freedom and human rights, he, in then legally chaotic Serbia, fiery advocated for the constitutional order and liberal democracy, democratic institutions and the legal system. Achievements of that period are still a postsign today in unstoppable steps to Europe."<sup>12</sup>

Monuments to King Peter I, like this one were built at the same time (a few years after his death) throughout the Kingdom (especially in multinational Bosnia and Vojvodina) in order to preserve the integrity of the United Kingdom. "Ethnicity, or at least awareness of it, in different places and different times will figure in various ways, with different

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nacionalni identitet*, translated by Slobodan Đorđević, Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd, 1998, p 125.

<sup>11</sup> [www.royalfamily.org/press/press-det/stampa-1341.htm](http://www.royalfamily.org/press/press-det/stampa-1341.htm).

<sup>12</sup> [www.arhivzrenjanin.org.rs/.../obnova\\_spomenika\\_kralju\\_petru\\_.htm](http://www.arhivzrenjanin.org.rs/.../obnova_spomenika_kralju_petru_.htm).

social costs and gains connected with it."<sup>13</sup> Growing up in this area of the world or another is not the same, as it is not the same growing up in 1944, 1974, 1994, or 2004. Therefore, this monument, like any other is experienced differently at different times, mostly cyclical, particularly in this area of the world.

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Jenkins *Etnicitet u novom ključu*, prevod Ivana Spasić, Beograd, Biblioteka XX vek, 2001, p 84, 85.