



Memorizing battle musically

The Siege of Szigetvár (1566) as an identity signifier¹

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Nations are signified by their constructed or mythicized cultural memory, since “identity is part of memory discourse”.² There are shared historical legacies in Southeast European countries, among which the most significant are Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire: “It has been chiefly the Ottoman elements or the ones perceived as such which have mostly given rise to the current stereotype of the Balkans, so that it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Balkans are, in fact, the Ottoman legacy.”³ Contrary to it, the Habsburg legacy and the belonging to the Habsburg Monarchy have mainly not been seen in the same, negative way. Consequently, there are two different understandings of national identity and different strategies in defining self-representation in the (previous) provinces of the two empires, which is also explicated in Southeast European operas. The construction of Croatian national identity is considered through the stage representations of the historical Siege of Szigetvár (1566).

The most significant and popular Croatian opera in the 19th century, *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski*⁴ (tragedy in three acts, 1876) by Giovanni von Zaytz alias Ivan Zajc (1832–1914),⁵ after libretto by Hugo Badalić (1851–1900) is based on the drama *Niklas Graf*

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 - 2 As Kevin Klein pointed out, cf. Maria Todorova: Introduction. In: *Balkan Identities. Nation and Memory*. Edited by M. T. London: Hurst 2004, pp. 1–24, p. 1.
 - 3 Ibidem, pp. 11–12.
 - 4 While the dominant Croatian form of Zrinyi’s name was up to the half of the 20th century Zrinjski, later on the form Zrinski was adopted. For that reason, I have used the older form of the name when I mentioned the opera character, and the new one when referred to the historical person.
 - 5 Giovanni von Zaytz was born in 1832 in the Austro-Hungarian city Fiume (today Rijeka in Croatia), where his father Johann von Zaytz, Kapellmeister of a military orchestra from Prague, moved with his ensemble. Giovanni von Zaytz was a composer, conductor, music teacher, and organizer. He studied at the Milan Conservatory (1850–1855) and although he started a very successful career in Milan, he went back to his birthplace Fiume to continue his father’s duties after his death. In 1862 Zaytz moved to Vienna and continued a successful career as an operetta composer at the Carltheater. After eight years, in 1870, he moved to Zagreb (Agram) and became conductor at the Croatian opera house, leading organizer of the musical life, music teacher, and continued composing operas in the Croatian language, and other works.

von Zrinyi by the German Romantic poet Theodor Körner (1791–1813). Therefore, the legend of the fearless Habsburg, that is, Hungarian general of Croatian origin served for military and heroic national self-representation of Germans, Hungarians, Croats and, through Croats, was also celebrated by other Slavic people (Slovenians, Czechs, Slovaks, and others). While the drama shows the struggle of the Hungarian general against Ottomans, as a metaphor of the German resistance to Napoleon, the protagonists of the same battle in the opera are Croats and Turks.

“Nations are modern entities, yet most identify as being in continuity with ancient predecessors. Images of defeat are able to resolve this apparent contradiction, rationalizing the notion necessary to the nationalist construction of history that current and ongoing national mobilization reflects continuity with a primordial but dominant ethnic solidarity, while at the same time resolving psychological ambivalence toward heroic symbols of the earlier, prenational cultures with which the modern nation identifies; symbols that serve simultaneously as ideal encapsulating the goals and values of the nation, and as obstacles to the modern, horizontal configuration of power necessary to a distinctly national form of social organization.”⁶

Therefore, my purpose is to explore how significant historical battles from national “golden ages”, serving for “continuity” with pre-nationalist times through the projection of the Other, are integrated to the idea of self-representation and self-interpretation in the opera.

The historical patriotic opera about the early modern battle for Sziget⁷ represents the process of building a Croatian national identity in the context of its intertextual narratives based on cultural memories. The mentioned process is analyzed through the fundamental aspects of national identity as cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall has defined them:

- 1) narrative of the nation (presented in national narratives, in literature, in the media and in everyday culture and creates a connection between stories, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols, national rituals which represent shared experiences and concerns, triumphs and destructive defeats),
- 2) the emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition, and timelessness,
- 3) invention of tradition,
- 4) the foundational myth or myth of origin,
- 5) the fictitious idea of a pure, original people or ‘folk’.⁸

6 Steven Mock: *Symbols of Defeat in the Construction of National Identity*. Cambridge [et al.]: Cambridge University Press 2012, p. 8.

7 Sziget means an island, and Szigetvár a fortress at the island (in this case at the river *Almás*) in the Hungarian language.

8 Stuart Hall: *The Question of Cultural Identity*. In: *Modernity. An introduction to modern societies*. Edited by Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert and Kenneth Thompson. Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell 1996, pp. 596–633, pp. 613–615.



An important role in constructing national identity here is given to the historical event, that is, to destructive defeat, which is also confirmed in the opera. In other words, “battles against foreign aggressors [...] reinforced a sense of national identity”.⁹

The foundational myth or myth of origin

The cult of Nikola Šubić Zrinski as a Croatian national hero was already established and confirmed in time when Zajc composed his opera, due to the national historians, authors and artists.

“Numerous members of the Zrinski family are recognized as national poets, heroes and martyrs in both Croatia and Hungary. For such a status, they owe a great deal to the Croatian and Hungarian historiography. Researchers of national ideologies would say that historiography, possessing the knowledge of a nation’s history, served as one of the most important means for the national homogenization. It was (and still is) a medium for the distribution of ‘verified’, ‘non-questionable’ information and interpretation of a nation’s history.”¹⁰

In the nineteenth century the politicians who intended to achieve national homogenization and patriotic enthusiasm, (re)constructed national cultural memory. This was precisely the aim of the rehabilitation of memory on the families Zrinski and Frankopan, starting from 1860 with Ante Starčević and Eugen Kvaternik from the Stranka prava (Party of Rights), which stressed nationalistic ideas.¹¹

The sacrifice of Zrinski resulted in establishing a myth about him almost immediately after the battle in both Hungarian and Croatian cultural memory. Ferenac Črnko, Zrinski’s chamberlain, and one of the rare surviving soldiers from the battle, was author of the first and the only one report from a witness – *Podsjeđanje i osvojenje Sigeta* (Conquest and Siege of Sziget, 1566).¹² Moreover, the importance of the battle was considered so great that Cardinal Richelieu expressed Europe’s “universal acknowledgement and appreciation: We needed a miracle that the Habsburg Empire

9 Howard J. Wiarda, Margaret MacLeish Mott: Catholic Roots and Democratic Flowers. Political Systems in Spain and Portugal. Westport: Greenwood 2001, p. 9.

10 Nataša Štefanec: Zrinski family in the Croatian historiographic discourse. In: Militia et Litterae. Edited by Wilhelm Kühlmann, Gábor Tüskés in cooperation with Sándor Bene. Tübingen: Niemeyer 2009, pp. 391–410, p. 391.

11 Ibidem, p. 399.

12 The original Črnko’s text is not preserved, and it is known through numerous copies and translations. One of the earliest is the Latin translation *Historia di Zhiget*, published in Vienna in 1568. In the same year there were two German editions, and in 1870 two Italian editions. Cf. Ferenac Črnko: *Podsjeđanje i osvojenje Sigeta i propratni tekstovi*. In: *Opsada Sigeta I–III*. Edited by Milan Ratković. Zagreb: Liber 1971, pp. 1–25. This version of Črnko’s text is a synthesis of the preserved copies and translations, which was researched and edited by Croatian philologist Stjepan Ivšić in 1918.

would elude, and this miracle happened in Szigetvár”,¹³ because the Ottoman army was stopped on the way to Vienna and tried to conquer the Habsburg capital again only in 1683.

Origins, continuity, (invention of) tradition

New investigations indicate that Zrinski was of Croatian ethnic origin and a political magnat of the Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom.¹⁴ However, in the Romantic historical and artistic writings, the “proofs” for his nationality were very simplified:

“Zrinjski has given our names to his horses: thus his horse, which was taken over in Sziget by the janissary Ali-aga, was Prvan, and the one that was killed near Konščine, was called Mrkač. [...] In which language the soldiers communicated with each other can be proved by the fact, that they gave the name Pribjeg to one Turk, who escaped and came to them!”¹⁵

The Siege of Sziget and Zrinski’s courage inspired many artists, authors, and composers, who helped establishing the myth about Zrinski not only in Hungary, as John Neubauer explicated, but also in Croatia. Thus Renaissance poet and writer Brne Karnautić from Zadar wrote *Vazetje Sigeta grada* (The Conquest of the City of Sziget, ca. 1573),¹⁶ the first Croatian historical epic dedicated to the national history and the Siege of Szigetvár. The battle was also the topic of the most significant Hungarian epic poem *Szigeti Veszedelem* (Peril of Sziget, 1647, published in 1651; translated to Croatian as *Opsida sigecka* (The Siege of Sziget by the author’s brother Péter Zrínyi or Peter Zrinski) by Zrinsky’s great-grandson Miklós Zrínyi or Nikola Zrinski VII. This was one of the first epics in the Hungarian language.¹⁷

13 Sándor Kárikó and Tibor Szabó: A Hungarian-Turkish Cultural Heritage. Scandal and Reconciliation. In: Proceedings, 4th International Conference on Science and Technology for the Safeguard of Cultural Heritage in the Mediterranean Basin, Cairo, Egypt, 6th–8th December 2009. Vol. 1. Edited by Angelo Ferrari. Rome: CNR Institute of Chemical Methodologies 2009, pp. 18–20, p. 18.

14 Damir Karbić: Mythological and real heritage. Use of genealogy and history in political schemes of the counts of Zrin/Zrinyi/Zrinski and their medieval ancestors. In: Militia et Litterae, pp. 33–51.

15 Slavomil Perok: Životopisne crte grofa Nikole Šubića-Zrinjskoga sigetskoga. Zagreb: Narodna tiskara Dra Ljudevita Gaja 1861, pp. 46–47.

16 His work was posthumously published in Venice in 1584.

17 Considering the libretto of the opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski* by Ivan Zajc in his otherwise profound study, John Neubauer was focused on Hungarian literary sources related to the Siege of Szigetvár and Miklós Zrínyi, not taking into account mentioned Croatian literary sources at all. For that reason, some result of his research of this topic should be slightly reconsidered. Cf. John Neubauer: National Operas in East-Central Europe. In: History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope and J.N. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamin 2004, pp. 514–523. Since the results of John Neubauer’s research was a basis for Michael Walter’s considering of Zrínyi/Zrinski, he came to the unacceptable conclusion that the Habsburg general was a “wrong hero” of the Croatian opera by Ivan Zajc, as it was explicated in his lecture *The wrong hero: Ivan Zajc’s Nikola Šubić Zrinjski and the problem*



The literary works of early modern Christian times, such as *Odilenije sigetsko* (Farewell to Sziget) by Pavle Ritter Vitezović from 1684 or the epic *Pisma od bana Zrinovića i cara Sulejmana Trećega koji opside Siget ungarski i pod njim umri na 1566* (The letters of Ban Zrinović and the emperor Suleiman The Third who conquered Hungarian Sziget and died beside it in 1566, 1759) by Andrija Kačić emphasize first of all that this was a battle against the ‘infidel’ Muslims. As they claimed, Zrinski was fighting first of all for God, Emperor, a homeland, and only then for Croatia in particular.

The Siege of Szigetvár and Zriny’s heroic act was a model for even six operas based on this historical event, by Franz Xaver Kleinheinz, František (Franz Joseph) Gläser, August Adelburg Abramović, Albert de Vleeshouwer, and Ivan Zajc.¹⁸ Certain works of different genres were also inspired by the Battle of Sziget, such as the *Zriny-Marsch* by Franz Jüllig, *Zriny for voice and orchestra* by Franz Salmhofer and others. Additionally, the ten compositions for piano, dedicated to Zrinski, were awarded after the competition in 1866.

Narrative of the nation

“A country is shaped not only by the events of the past but by how the nation makes sense of those events. Military battles and heroic legends help a nation understand its collective self. Soldiers, kings, and democrats model the cultural norms for a nation’s citizens. Battles, in retrospect, tell us what causes citizens were willing to die for. [...] The values we were willing to die for – representation, liberty, self-government – became the defining characteristics of our country.”¹⁹

The narrative of the nation in the opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski* is based on the memorizing the Siege of *Szigetvár* after three centuries, seen through the eyes of the 19th-century composer. Croatian soldiers would have died for God (or, Christianity represented by the Catholic church) and the Habsburg Emperor, with a reference to Croatia as a part of the Empire. From that point of view, the choice of the German drama as a model for the libretto, although slightly ‘corrected’, even including two versions (in Croatian and German) is understandable for Croatian national self-representation.

In the nineteenth century the drama *Niklas Graf von Zrinyi* by the German playwright Theodor Körner was the most significant literary homage to the Siege of

of “national opera”, held at the Music Academy in Zagreb on 2 March 2012: <http://www.culturenet.hr/default.aspx?id=43559> [2013-10-30].

18 Cf. Vjera Katalinić: Četiri Zrinska. In: Krležini dani u Osijeku 2000. Hrvatska dramska književnost i kazalište – inventura milenijuma. Vol. 1. Edited by Branko Hećimović. Zagreb: Zavod za povijest hrvatske književnosti, kazališta i glazbe HAZU; Osijek: Hrvatsko narodno kazalište, Pedagoški fakultet 2011, pp. 118–124.

19 Wiarda/Mott, Catholic Roots and Democratic Flowers, p. 9.

Szigetvár. In order to express German protest against Napoleon in 1812, Körner found a plot about the “Hungarian Leonidas” as the most appropriate. His drama followed his research of historical and literary sources.²⁰ It became popular immediately after the premiere on December 31, 1812 at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna. Due to the success, the drama was soon at the theater repertoire in different German cities, and became famous and popular all over Europe. Körner’s theater play had a significant role in reviving the myth about Zrinyi,²¹ partly due to the actuality of a patriotic topic at the time when Germans were struggling against Napoleon for their liberation, and partly due to the fact that Körner himself went to the war and lost his life as a 22-years old soldier.

Precisely this drama was performed at the opening of the first theater house in Zagreb, the Gradsko kazalište (City Theater, later renamed into the Narodno kazalište / National Theater), known as Stankovićevo kazalište (Stanković’s Theater)²² in 1834 and encouraged interest for this topic. For that reason, it is not surprising that Hugo Badalić was inspired by the same topic, although in different interpretation. In accordance to the national promotion, the librettist of the opera made the chosen parts from the original drama suitable for the Croatian national self-representation. Badalić did not only translate the chosen parts of the drama, but also re-nationalized it: he Croaticized the names of the characters, presented Zrinyi as Zrinjski, a

20 Körner informed his parents in March 1812 that he decided to write a drama about heroic death of the Hungarian Count Zriny. “In einem Briefe vom 29. März dankt er dem Vater, daß dieser ihm geschichtliche Quellen für die Vorstudien aufgeschrieben habe. Die Quellenstudien nahmen ihn neben seiner sonstigen Beschäftigung bis Anfang Juni in Anspruch. Am 3. Juli las er bereits das fertige Manuskript in einer großen Gesellschaft im Hause Friedrichs von Schlegel vor.” Josef Dahmen: Körners Leben. In: Körners sämtliche Werke in zwei Bänden. Vol. 1. Berlin, Leipzig: Knauer 1906, p. XII.

21 ”Nach dem starken europäischen Echo auf die Belagerung von Szigetvár (Sziget) im Jahre 1566 und auf den Heldentod von Nikolaus Zrinyi IV. (ca. 1508–1566) folgte im 18. Jahrhundert eine Periode der Stille. [...] Erst im letzten Drittel des 18. Jahrhundert zeigte sich wieder Interesse für die Zrinyis und die Figuren erhielten Einlass in den literarischen Diskurs – merkwürdigerweise vor allem in den deutschsprachigen. In dieser Wiedergeburt stellt Körners *Zrinyi* (1812) ein wichtiges und langes Kapitel dar.“ Cf. Kálmán Kovács: Theodor Körners *Zrinyi*. Die Wiedergeburt des Nikolaus Zrinyi um 1800. In: Militia et Litterae, pp. 285–303, p. 285. – Among other authors who were also inspired by the Battle for Sziget were Friedrich August Clemens Werthes: Niklas Zrini, oder die Belagerung von Szigeth. Ein historisches Trauerspiel in 3 Aufzügen. Wien 1790; Josef Freiherr von Hornmayr zu Hortenburg: Niklas Graf von Zrini. In: Österreichischer Plutarch, oder Leben und Bildnisse aller Regenten und der berühmtesten Feldherren, Staatsmänner, Gelehrten und Künstler des österreichischen Kaiserstaates. Vol 7. Wien: Doll 1807, pp. 91–108; Johann Friedrich Kind: Die Belagerung von Szigeth. In: Tulpen. Vol. 3. Leipzig: Hartknoch 1807, pp. 1–88; Johann Ladislaus Pyrker: Zrinis Tod. Ein Trauerspiel in 5 Akten. In: J. B. P.: Historische Schauspiele. Wien 1810, pp. 215–304. Cf. Kovács, Theodor Körners *Zrinyi*, pp. 287–288.

22 This was the first theater house in Zagreb, named after its founder, the Serbian trader from Zagreb, Kristofor Stanković. The first theater plays in the Croatian language were performed in this theater in 1840, and afterwards, in 1846, the opera *Ljubav i zloba* (Love and Malice), names as the first Croatian national opera, by Ignay Fux alias Vatroslav Lisinski took place.



Croatian general, with his Croatian soldiers, but the main motive of their courage remained the same: the faithfulness to the Habsburg Empire and the Kaiser. As Badalić pointed out, the opera related to the revival of the myth about Zrinjski, who was offered to the people during the Balkan crisis in 1876:

“In this hour, when [...] cannons decide the fate of Croats, here it is, Croatian people, take a green leaf of your history, here’s the hero of Sziget, Nikola Šubić-Zrinjski! He is an embodiment of your sublime task during previous several centuries; he makes you still understand how much significant are you for yourself and for the world. Anyone, with any belief, should admit that the struggle of the small troops for their freedom and their education against the wild torrents and against tremendous masses, acquired honorable name for Croats in all nations and all centuries.”²³

Additionally to the mentioned “corrections” of Körner’s play, Badalić and Zajc added a new, “oriental” scene (the first scene in the second act) to the opera. The Other was introduced in order to mirror the Self in a complementary way. Through the battle, that is, through military and patriotic discourse, the characterization of Zrinjski as a brave soldier, national hero, faithful husband, and a father of three children is even more stressed in opposition to the Sultan and his soldiers. For Zrinjski, the military honor, patriotism and faithfulness to the Habsburg Emperor were the most significant ideas, for which he was ready not only to sacrifice himself, but also to sacrifice his own sons. As such, his enemies regarded him undefeatable. In that way, the topos of self-sacrifice received an important place in narratives on national identity. Having in mind that the concept of Orientalism in Southeast European operas significantly differentiates from the Western model, the Ottomans are presented in a negative light, but still with respect to their military successes.²⁴ For that reason, both Croatian and Ottoman soldiers are presented in heroic idiom.

In January 1566, 72-years old Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent started his last conquest in order to occupy Vienna. Before that, he decided to conquer the fortress of Szigetvár in south Hungary, where Miklós Zrínyi or Nikola Šubić Zrinjski was situated with his soldiers. According to numerous historical sources, the Ottoman army counted between 90.000 and 150.000 soldiers and, opposite to him, the Habsburg general was struggling with only 2.500–3.000 soldiers. As Croatian historian Matija Mesić, the author of Zrinjski’s biography, written on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the battle in 1866, pointed out:

23 Hugo Badalić: Nikola Šubić Zrinjski. Glazbena tragedija u 3 čina (8 slika). Zagreb: Tiskom C. Albrechta 1876, p. 3.

24 Cf. Ralph P. Locke: *Musical Exoticism. Images and Reflections*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2011; Tatjana Marković: *The Ottoman Past in the Romantic Opera’s Present: The Ottoman Other in Serbian, Croatian and Montenegrin Opera*. In: *Ottoman Intimacies, Balkan Musical Realities*. Edited by Risto Pekka Pennanen, Panagiotis C. Poulos, Aspasia Theodosiou. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute at Athens 2013. (= *Papers and Monographs of the Finnish Institute at Athens*. 18.) pp. 71–86.

“About the number of soldiers, our sources are rather corresponding to each other. Budina takes [...] 2.300 and a little bit more; Forgač knows [...] about 1.800 infantry soldiers, 200 horsemen and 150 citizens of Sziget who were able to take arms; Bizar says [...] that there were more than 2.000 soldiers; Istvánfi takes about 2.500 without women and children. Only Albini claims in his report from 14 September, that the emperor said that Zrinjski had 3.000 soldiers.”²⁵

In spite of the fact that he could not win against a several times bigger army without the promised emperor’s support, Zrinjski decided to struggle with the much stronger enemy. The Emperor Maximilian had assembled a great army to defend Vienna against Suleiman and made no effort to save Zrinyi; however, even in that situation Zrinyi remained loyal to him.²⁶ The Siege of Sziget lasted from 5 August to 8 September, much longer than one would expect, having in mind the relation between two groups of soldiers. Although the Ottoman army won over Zrinjski’s troops, the losses at both sides were heavy – Zrinjski and almost all of his soldiers were killed, as well as more than 20.000 Turks.

The opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski* by Ivan Zajc can be regarded as a kind of historical chronicle, since it presents the Battle for Sziget surprisingly consistently, following the atmosphere and preparations for the final battle in both, the Croatian or Habsburg and the Ottoman camps alternately, and the battle proper.²⁷ The national military forces are led by Zrinjski, in the service of the Habsburg Monarchy, and the Ottoman army led by the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent himself and his grand-vizier Mehmed Sokolović (Mehmed Sokollu Pasha). Being old and ill, the Sultan soon died, but Mehmed Sokolović did not reveal that before the battle was

25 Matija Mesić: *Život Nikole Zrinjskoga Sigetskoga junaka*. Zagreb: Matica ilirska 1866, p. 241.

26 “Freund, frevle nicht an unserm guten Kaiser [...] Das Leben sieht sich anders an vom Throne. [...] Der Einzelne versinkt im Allgemeinen. / Es ist des Kaisers angestammtes Recht, / Er darf von Tausenden das Opfer fordern.“ Theodor Körner: *Sämtliche Werke*. Vol. 3: *Zriny, ein Trauerspiel. Rosamunde, ein Trauerspiel*. Karlsruhe: im Bureau der deutschen Classiker 1829, pp. 77–78. Cf. “[...] don’t speak irreverently about our good Emperor [...]. Life appears different from the throne [...]. The individual goes down in the general. / It is the Emperor’s hereditary right: / He can demand a sacrifice from thousands, / If the good of millions is at stake.” (ll. 1621 and 1638–41; Körner, *Werke* 2, pp. 114–115) in John Neubauer: *Zrinyi, Zriny, Zrinjski*. Or: in which direction does the gate of Vienna open? In: *Neohelicon* 29 (2002), vol. 1, pp. 219–234, p. 229.

27 It is noteworthy to mention the fragment about this event from a 19th-century history of Ottomans is rather close to the narrative of the libretto: “Solyman was impatient of the delay which the resistance of so small a place as his citadel now caused him, and he summoned Zriny to surrender, and sought to win him over to the Ottoman service by offering to make him ruler of all Croatia. Zriny, whom his countrymen have not unworthily named the Leonidas of Hungary, was resolute to die in defense of his post, and he inspired all his men with his own spirit of unflinching courage. Three assaults were given by the Turks in August and September, all of which Zriny repelled with great loss to the besiegers.” Cf. Sir Edward Shepherd Creasy: *History of Ottoman Turks*. From the beginning of their empire to the present time. Vol. 1. London: Bentley 1854, p. 311.



over. Later on, Zrinjski was praised by his soldiers as a Croatian hero. The opera ends with the scene of the beginning of the battle, in which still the very popular choir *U boj, u boj!* (“To battle, to battle, the sword appears from its sheath, Let the enemy know how we die”) is followed by a short instrumental number called “Catastrophe”, implying that Zrinjski and his camp did not survive the battle, although succeeded to prevent the Ottomans to conquer the fortress and to continue their march to Vienna.

This multi-layered narrative of the nation, which includes topoi such as double identity of *Zrínyi*/*Zrinjski*, who has been chosen to be the main character of the opera belonging to Croatian national tradition through the German theater play (although re-nationalized), in the versions in the Croatian and the German languages, is characteristic for Croatian national identity. These topoi, additionally to the fact that the composer of the opera, Ivan Zajc, himself is not an ethnic Croatian, challenge and call for profound reconsideration of the traditionally defined so-called national opera.²⁸

Music narration

The complex media of opera includes intertextual relation between literary, music and iconographical aspects. Therefore, the narration of nation is considered also from musical point of view.²⁹

In accordance to the mentioned *differentia specifica* in the treatment of Orientalism in Southeast European operas, both rulers are characterized musically as heroes. The presentation of both groups includes characteristic genre scenes: Croatians play a male “bojna igra” (battle dance) with lances, and Ottomans amuse themselves with the exotic female dances. The Sultan is presented as an experienced military leader, with dignity of his age. His words are mainly set in *Sostenuto grandioso* or *Allegro grandioso* tempo, and accompanied with horns, bassoons, and timpani. The Sultan’s appearances are often followed by a motif referring to his military successes: not only his officers and soldiers praise him, but also the women from his harem. In the added fourth scene, based on Zajc’s earlier operetta *Nach Mekka* (1868), the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Mohács (1526) is celebrated: “The Turkish camp before Sziget. A wide space some way from the tent. Turkish women, odalisques, eunuchs and harem guards celebrate the anniversary of Suleyman’s victory at Mohács”.³⁰ The central part of the music narration related to the Ottoman

28 Rather than to be, as it seems, not acceptably, simply marked as a “paradox”. Cf. Michael Walter: *Oper und Nation – zum Paradox der Nationaloper*. In: *Zur Debatte. Themen der Katholischen Akademie in Bayern* 7 (2011), pp. 23–24.

29 Consideration of the opera is based on the insight to the score manuscript (*Zbirka muzikalijskih i audio materijala, Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica u Zagrebu*) and piano score edited by Nikola Faller (s. a.).

30 The composer’s description of the venue, where the fourth scene of the opera takes place. From Croatian to English translated by Tomislav Pisk. In: Nikola Šubić Zrinjski, Ivan pl.

Other is presented in the No. 13b Couplet of Timoleon with chorus, the narrative about the key historical event for Hungarian (and indirectly Croatian) national identity, the defeat after the Battle of Mohács:

TIMOLEON.

The Hungarian stood up
Against our Sultan,
But he felt the might
Of our mace and ram.
The young king lay dead
with his troop so low,
Slain by the Ottomans,
Oh, what a blow!

CHORUS.

Slain by the Ottomans.
Oh, what a blow!

TIMOLEON.

Like a bird, like a majestic hawk,
The Sultan slays them with a stroke.
The fields are bloody in his wake,
The country can but tremble and shake.
Takes up arms against a lion.

CHORUS.

That's what happens when a worm
Takes up arms against a lion.
Long live our Suleyman!" (Zajc/Pisk, pp. 116, 118)

The major defeat of the Hungarian Kingdom led to the loss of the territories and to the Ottoman occupation about 150 years long. Moreover, as it is mentioned in the song, the young king of Hungary, Bohemia and Croatia, Lajos II (Louis II) lost his life when he was only 26 years old. This music description of the battle symbolizes the expectations of the Ottoman army after the forthcoming Battle for Sziget too.

Music narration makes also clear what was Zrinjski's and his soldiers' motivation to sacrifice themselves and, via the values they were "willing to die for", the main Croatian national identity's signifiers. The quotation of Haydn's *Kaiserhymne* at the very beginning of the opera in the instrumental Introduction, shows that the motive of Zrinjski's heroic act of sacrificing his own life in the battle with much more powerful Ottoman army was his loyalty to the Emperor and Empire. The quotation appears again at the beginning of the farewell duett of Zrinjski and his wife Eva in the eighth scene, first performed *piano* by flutes I, clarinettes I, horns I, fagots and violas (No. 30 Duett of Eva and Zrinjski, m. 1–10), and then again *forte* in *tutti* orchestra (m. 11ff.) in B-major. While Zrinjski has no doubts in his forthcoming act

Zajc, Glazbena tragedija u tri čina. A musical tragedy in three acts. 2 CD–5596622. Zagreb: Croatia records 1992, p. 112.



of sacrifice, he still wonders why it is necessary to sacrifice his child and wife, but she encourages him:

“Do not deny us our glory!
What is life without you?
Your deeds will forever live,
Let them remember me
And our daughter too.” (Zajc/Pisk, p. 152)

Like the love duett in Verdian operas, the dialogue between Zrinjski and Eva turns into a duett, which ends by expression of faith in justification of sacrifice that will bring a bright future to their people. At the end of this music number, the same motif from the *Kaiserhymne* is for the first time presented in the vocal part: the decisive, *Pesante ritenuto*, *fortissimo*, *tutti* orchestra accompanies the couple’s unifying singing the following words: “Heavenly fire will all consume, / But Croats will their fight resume!” (Zajc/Pisk, p. 152)

In the next music number, when Eva and Zrinjski found out that their daughter “passed to heaven” before them, the melody of the *Kaiserhymne* is first performed by Eva and Zrinjski (No. 31. Terzett Eva, Juranić and Zrinjski, m. 14 ff.), and afterwards, Juranić joins them in their expressing gratitude to God for saving their daughter / fiancée.

This is followed by the most famous number of the opera, the battle cry *U boj* (To battle). The popular patriotic song for a male choir and baritone solo, inspired by the poem of Franjo Marković, was already composed and performed in Vienna in 1866, when the 300th anniversary of the Battle for Sziget was celebrated in Zagreb.³¹ Due to its popularity, Zajc included it in the opera, prior to the last battle scene. Moreover, the material of this song was integrated into the opera as one more unifying music thread. Namely, the composer used the music material from the song in certain numbers as a leitmotif of Zrinjski’s heroism: in the first scene, when the Sultan informs their soldiers that he plans to occupy first the fortress of Sziget, the grand vizier Mehmed warns him that Zrinjski is there, and the Sultan’s doctor Levi confirms “He is a great hero”, what the soldiers repeat – the pronunciation of Zrinjski’s name for the first time in the opera is accompanied by the ‘motif of heroism’, borrowed from the song *U boj*. It appears two more times in the finale of the opera before its original form in the mentioned song, here used as a basis of the five-part mixed choir before the battle proper.

In accordance to the mentioned approach to the Other, the Sultan Suleiman is also profiled as a hero. Entire first scene is pervaded with his leitmotif, related first of all to his military victories.

31 Cf. Zdravko Blažeković: Odras društveno-političke situacije u Bosni i Hercegovini na hrvatsku glazbu 60-tih i 70-tih godina 19. stoljeća (Refleksi okupacije Bosnei Hercegovine u hrvatskom glazbenom stvaralaštvu). In: Zvuk (1980), vol. 4, pp. 46–55, p. 50.

The music narration is obviously constructed as a network of motifs of military topoi. Its focus on the references to the forthcoming final battle is confirmed by the unusual concluding short instrumental episode under the title “Catastrophe”, in which the stormy passages accompany the fanfares and the last appearance of the motif of Zrinjski’s heroism. The music patriotic message of the opera is underlined by the final bright E flat-major chord, the tonality of Beethoven’s *Eroica*. The defeat was transformed into victory, and Nikola Zrinjski was called by Petar Ritter Vitezović as the “Illyrian Hector”.³²

Closing remarks

The antagonism between Croats and Turks in the opera *Nikola Šubić Zrinjski* by Ivan Zajc could be well understood in the wider context of the struggle between the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire. The musical “red thread” through this stage work shows that the main character is a representative of the former one, and that he is fighting – even sacrifices his own life, as well as lives of his family and soldiers – for God and the Emperor. Beyond this imperial identity, and place of belonging, national identity is also expressed, especially after the big celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Battle for Sziget in Zagreb and other Croatian cities. The myth about the hero and martyr Zrinjski was transmitted and transformed through the media (history and geography textbooks, historiographies, newly-established journals) to the age of nationalism.³³ Like in some other cases (France, Serbia, Israel, Ghana, Brazil and others), a military defeat was incorporated into the process of construction national identity. Defeat includes

“only those myths or symbols that serve to commemorate a moment at which the nation, or a predecessor community with which the nation normatively identifies itself in continuity, suffered or is perceived to have suffered a military conquest represented as a historical turning point leading directly to a period of subjugation or domination, the effects of which are seen as enduring to at least some degree up to the present day. Note that it is *perception* that is key to the definition.”³⁴

32 Cf. Vjekoslav Klaić: *Život i djela Pavla Rittersa Vitezovića*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska 1914, p. 57.

33 As Benedict Anderson pointed out, the print-language is “what invents nationalism, not a particular language per se.” As such, print-vernaculars, such as battle reports (such as Ferenc Črunko’s) newspapers, journals, radio programs and so on, were a key element in construction of national identity. By exchanging different pieces of information related to the shared heritage and cultural memory in their own language, the readers of print media became aware that they belong to the same imagined community. In that way, the print media provided a sense of national unity. Cf. Benedict Anderson: *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso 2006, pp. 136.

34 Mock, *Symbols of Defeat in the Construction of National Identity*, p. 9.



The mentioned commemoration was revived in different periods of crises in Croatian history, including the Balkan wars in the 1990s, precisely by perception of the original myth, which was a basis for establishing invented traditions. In other words, there is an interdependence between myths, national identity and war.³⁵

35 Cf. Maureen Duffy: England. The Making of the Myth. London: Fourth Estate 2001, p. ix.