Choral societies in nineteenth-century Europe served as socio-cultural, political, and artistic centers, and in the case of Serbia, their activities were of key significance in the network constructed between the diaspora and the homeland. Serbian choral societies are indispensable for understanding Serbian national mobilization in the nineteenth century. This paper examines the activities of the numerous societies and their network, which extended from the United States to the Ottoman Empire. The nationalist idea was embodied in the vernacular language and presented first of all through folk and also patriotic songs, cherished by national as well as foreign (mainly Czech) composers.

Serbian national identity was established outside the state territory due to activity in the diaspora and emigration from the Austrian (and later Austro-Hungarian) Empire, forming a kind of double identity as a result of the different historical, political, social, and cultural backgrounds of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire. The border between the two empires divided the Serbian people, so that their culture developed in two very different contexts. The shifting military border between the two empires passed through Serbia (the Banatian military frontier) and Croatia (the Slavonian military frontier). Invaded by the Ottoman Empire in 1521, Belgrade was later occupied three times by Austria (in 1688, 1717, and 1789), and each time recaptured by the Ottomans. In Vojvodina, the province of the Monarchy, music institutions such as the Musikvereine, municipal orchestras, national theatres, music schools, and conservatories provided a musical life based on European models. On the other hand, life in the Ottoman provinces was marked in the first place by the struggle for liberation, and only during the rare intervals of

* This research was conducted within the postdoctoral project Opera and the idea of self-representation in Southeast Europe supported by the Austrian FWF (Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung; Elise-Richter project V143-Gi8) at the Institute of Musicology, University of Graz (2010–2012) and at the Department of Musicology, Institute for Art History and Musicology, Austrian Academy of Sciences (since 2012).
peace, or after achieving independence in 1878, could a similar cultural life be established or revived.

The two kinds of national identities have been defined theoretically in various ways. One of these assumes differences between so-called Western and Eastern embodiments of national identity based on different ways of understanding national memory. It is emphasized that national identity in the Western sense implies “a ‘political nation’... referring exclusively to the population living within an area defined by borders,” while in the East a common language and culture play the main role. Although this distinction is applicable in some cases, a strict division of Europe into East and West is not fully accurate since, for instance, German national identity is historically closer to the ‘Eastern’ identity due to its lack of unified territory. It seems that newer colonial and postcolonial theories of national identity might be more appropriate, with the concept of hybrid identity, assuming diversity in one unique geographical space along with the lack of such a unique space within the influential diaspora. Narratives of identity are expressed through various media, one of which is certainly the opera, reflecting contemporary national self-representation, often based in the nineteenth century on a mythologizing of national history.

Serbian national mobilization will thus be considered in the context of intense cross-border transactions between the diaspora and the homeland. Two perspectives on the process of building national cultural identity through diaspora can be distinguished: on one hand, the communication between the diaspora and the homeland directed from outside cultural centres to the national territorial centre, and on the other, the circulations and interactions within the diaspora itself, the Serbian network based outside the home country proper.

Singing Bridges between Diaspora and Homeland

Serbs were disseminated over a large part of Europe, where they spoke a variety of languages but were unable to communicate with people speaking

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1 See Bischof and Pelinka, eds. (1997), 26. The authors clearly follow the theory of two kinds of national identity developed by Anthony Smith (1993).
2 See Bhabha (1994).
3 See Faist (2010), 15.
4 See Siu (2012), 147.