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*D. NIKOLIĆ, Municipium Aelianum • S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, The Romani Language in the Linguistic Landscape of Serbia. A (non)visible Minority Language • K. POPEK, The Question of Christian Slavic Refugees and the Russian Occupation of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia (1877–1879) • M. VOJINOVIĆ, Breaking the Isolation. Kingdom of Serbia and the Adriatic Railroad 1906–1908 • M. VIDENOVIĆ, The Outbreak of the First Balkan War and the Italo-Turkish Peace Negotiations in Lausanne in 1912 • A. NIKOLIĆ, The Promulgation of the 1910 Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the Imperial Framework • D. FUNDIĆ, Searching for the Viable Solution. Yugoslav and Czechoslovak Nation-Building Projects during the 1930s • M. LORENCI, Tribes in Arms. Gjon Marka Gjoni and the Irregular and Paramilitary Volunteer Forces of Northern Albania during the Fascist Occupation (1939–1943) • A. STOJANOVIĆ, A Croatian and Catholic State. The Ustasha Regime and Religious Communities in the Independent State of Croatia • A. EDEMSKIY, “The Chivu Stoica Plan” (September 1957). A Step on the Road to the “Open Balkans” • A. BONIFACIO, “Death to the Slavs!” The Italian-Yugoslav Relations on Mutual Minorities and the Impact of the 1961 Trieste Disorders (1954–1964) ❧*

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SLOBODAN G. MARKOVICH, ED., *CULTURAL TRANSFER EUROPE-SERBIA: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES*. BELGRADE: FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCES – DOSIJE STUDIO, 2023, 262 P.

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The metaphor of Serbia being at the crossroads between the West and the East (whether with capital letters or not), containing grains from both worlds with the consequential argument of the uniqueness of Serbian culture, has long been worn out, yet the voices stressing the perennial and vernacular character of the Serbian national identity remain equally strong. Resolving at least an aspect of this paradox requires observing the extent of interwovenness between the European and Serbian past whilst also imagining their overlapping future. How much were the two spheres truly interlinked and mutually dependent, and furthermore – how does one come about objectively measuring that?

These and many other questions were targeted by a recent volume *Cultural Transfer Europe-Serbia: Methodological Issues and Challenges*, edited by Slobodan G. Markovich and published jointly by Belgrade's Faculty of Political Sciences and Dosije studio. The book is a by-product of the *Cultural Transfer Europe – Serbia from the 19th till the 21st century (CTES)* project, starting in 2022 and being funded by The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia. The stated goal of the project, namely to “contribute to the understanding of how cultural transfer Europe-Serbia shaped modern Serbia”, is quite ambitious for a single volume, and thus [so far] two other publications have come out of the same project – *A Reformer of Mankind. Dimitrije Mitrinovic between Cultural Utopianism and Social Activism* and *Културни трансфер Европа-Србија у XIX веку* (*Cultural Transfer Europe-Serbia in the 19th Century*). The volume in review here complements the other two by providing a methodological framework indispensable

for arriving at the above-mentioned ‘understanding’ and linking all of the project’s contributions more tightly to the international literature.

Despite the book consisting of 11 chronologically ordered chapters and a foreword, divided into five different parts, I believe that the truer image of this volume’s structure would be separating it into two somewhat coherent wholes. The first one provides us with the necessary methodological tools to deal with cultural transfers, itself an interdisciplinary topic. Here, the reader can get familiar with basic concepts, key academic disputes in the field, as well as with the limitations and further considerations when researching cultural transfers in the Serbian context. The second [larger] part consists of attempts at applying the said methodology and analysing concrete examples of cultural transfers, most often between Serbia and Western Europe, but also more broadly than that.

The first chapter, following the foreword by the editor, is by one of the great names of the cultural transfer research field – Wolfgang Schmale. In his contribution, Schmale gives us a brief narration of the field’s evolution and, more importantly, provides us with definitions both of what is it that is being transferred and how, as well as what is the main motivation behind the entire cultural transfer research. Namely, Schmale firstly reiterates his earlier distinction between *Struktureme* and *Cultureme* as cultural units – either having a mere

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“identitary-potentiality” (the former) or “identitary-essence” (the latter) – which are being transferred, whilst highlighting that they are being transferred through translations, mediations, dissemination, reception, appropriation, transformation, unconscious adoption, contagion... Most importantly, Schmale stresses that the focus on the transformation of those cultural units to new contexts through transfers highlights the ‘mixture’ character (or *metisage*, to use Michel Espagne’s term) of each national culture. In other words, for Schmale, cultural transfer research is about showing that concepts such as nation and race are not perennial but social imaginaries. Thus, Schmale indirectly sets out criteria for his fellow co-authors in the volume – has their piece contributed to the deconstruction of the concept of a nation as a homogenous, clearly bounded unit?

The fourth chapter in the book, authored by Marina Simić, greatly supplements Schmale’s remarks. Namely, in demonstrating how contemporary anthropological approaches to the topic of cultural transfer still bear some legacy of the diffusionist arguments, Simić underlines the importance of concepts of *translation* and *context*. The interplay of the two highlights the varying meanings that any single cultural unit can hold depending on the circumstances and the environment, that is, that every cultural transfer is followed by a “transformation and re-interpretation” (p. 98) of the transferred cultural artifact. This allows Simić to conclude with the introduction of an *alternative modernities* perspective, which in turn strengthens the argument that no national context exists in a vacuum, isolated from other cultures.

Gordana Đerić’s chapter, one of those closer to the volume’s end, which discusses the methodological aspect of the intended future research, similarly stresses the importance of the translation activity (understood in its more narrow, literal sense) as a signifier of the level of overlap between two

cultures. Thus, with the later aim of attaining a better apprehension of perception of Europe in Serbia by offering an overview of the European literature translated into Serbian between 2000 and 2020, Đerić argues that what is ‘lost in translation’ was caused by the differences in assigned meaning within two cultures.

Finally, concluding what I consider to be the first part of the volume is Slobodan G. Markovich’s chapter on the limitations in researching the cultural transfers in 19th century Serbia, with a practical application of that research by identifying key social groups which acted as agents of Europeanisation in the same period. Namely, the first part of the chapter demonstrates the challenge of analysing the level of modernisation of a society which is predominantly rural and illiterate whilst the majority of the sources originate either from the urban middle-class minority or from ethnographers, like Vuk Karadžić, who have been living away from the Serbian countryside and have inevitably been influenced by the Romantic *Zeitgeist*, or are alternatively produced by the equally biased Western travelogues. Nevertheless, Markovich manages to identify the main actors of the European cultural transfers in Serbia, distinguishing the epochs of the Habsburg Serbs, who mostly moved southwards to aid with the bureaucratic work instrumental for the modernisation of the nascent Serbian state, from the age of the ‘Parisians’, or more broadly the ‘planned elite’ – the Serbian students sent abroad to study, who upon returning got into key political positions and instrumentally directed the development of Serbian society. Along with the people from Western and Central Europe who moved to Serbia and whose population ratio continuously increased over the 19th century, Markovich identifies these three groups as the main carriers of European values into the Serbian culture, and thus as relevant research subjects for exploring the topic of cultural transfers between the two entities.

This allows us to gradually move towards the second part of the book, discussing more concrete examples of cultural transfers. Dragana Grbić's chapter successfully sets the tone with an engaging discussion of both material and immaterial cultural transfers between Serbia and other parts of Europe in the 18th century. In an interesting demonstration of a two-way transfer, she is observing how the different customs, clothing and traditions that the Serbs brought with them to Southern Hungary altered their new environment, but also how the transferred relics changed the landscape more literally – with the example of New Ravanica monastery being paradigmatic. Grbić's contribution to the volume is likewise contained in the analysis of the exchange that the Serbs had with the East – namely Russia, a newly accepted member of the European culture. Finally, Grbić's account is completed by analysis of the translatory work carried out by Zaharije Orfelin, and how his awareness of the (i)literacy and habitats of Serbs, in influencing his translation, is indicative of the differences between the Serbian and European society at the time.

Nemanja Radulović's chapter on Vuk Karadžić's personal networks represents one of the strongest moments in the entire volume, and to an extent provides it with a more balanced account overall by offering a powerful argument of the reciprocal influence that the Serbian culture had on more global developments. Namely, Radulović goes beyond the focus on the texts, that is on the literature history, to note the influence of Serbian folk poetry, and includes Karadžić's personal correspondence as well as several contemporaries' diaries, in order to demonstrate that there was a much longer list of admirers and in general people influenced by new insights stemming from the research of Serbian folk poetry. In the letters and other testimonies, one can observe that there were non-textual appreciations of Karadžić's innovations and that the

development of folklore studies was given a huge impetus by Karadžić's work. In short, besides massively expanding the linguistic context of the time, that is stretching the borders of what concepts were available to certain individuals, Radulović convincingly demonstrates that the spread of the influence made by people like J. G. Herder and Jacob Grimm is not entirely comprehensible without a focus on private networks of people like Vuk Karadžić.

The only chapter dealing with the 20th century is that of Ivana Pantelić. She gave a brief and yet quite fact-loaded overview of the changes in the Yugoslav culture following the Tito-Stalin split and the renewed Western orientation in the cultural sphere. By observing the numerous *Struktureme* that were transferred from the West, Pantelić notes the "hybrid" nature of the Yugoslav model within the education system, the rising consumptionist culture, theatre, music and film, as well as fashion. What is, however, unfortunately omitted from this contribution is the reciprocal effect that the Yugoslav culture had elsewhere, which is only mentioned in passing in regard to the Yugoslav jazz bands travelling to the Soviet Union. It feels as a somewhat missed opportunity since the post-war Yugoslavia had a relatively greater influence on the West than the political entities which preceded or succeeded it.

Orel Beilinson's analysis of the arbitrariness of the concept of adolescence when transferred into Southeastern Europe, as well as Nikolina Nedeljkov's considerations of the grassroots-based pluralistic discourse allowing for an intermixing of cultures as a counterforce to both nationalism and oppressive globalism, whilst both truly interesting and insightful, offer relatively minor novelties for the overall volume's topic. Similarly, Goran Kaulzarić's innovative locating of the neoliberalists' compatibility with Eastern spirituality and religions at their crossroads with the classical liberals, although having wider implications for the

intellectual history, remains far-fetched for the issue of the concrete cultural transfers between Europe and Serbia. Finally, a short interview with Vesna Goldsworthy, one of the opening accounts of the volume, in addition to being a really invigorating read, sends an important reminder to fellow academics – that, despite the important work that the research of cultural transfers carries out, its exploration does not necessarily get rid of many prejudices, but perhaps merely “pushes them underground” (p. 38).

Goldsworthy’s struggle against prejudices of the Balkans being a place of savages goes hand in hand with the more recent historiographical turn towards the global and transnational perspective which aims to counter the orientalist accounts which represent certain parts of the world as passive recipients of the content arriving from the ‘more developed’ countries. In that regard, this volume brought in some new arguments of two-way exchange processes, however, I believe it is safe to say that it also could have done somewhat more. It is possible that the cause for this lies in the relatively low share of pages dedicated to the twentieth century, and especially the post-war Yugoslav state, the rare period when the Serbian political framework, disproportionately to its size, influenced much greater events. Likewise, the overt focus on the cultural exchange *between* the states, whilst presuming that any national context (with all of its entailed interpretations) remains unaltered over time, equally radiates an image of an almost frozen Serbian state entity. In reality, the global hierarchy, and Serbia’s position within it has oscillated significantly since the 1800s, in turn permanently changing any meaning that would be attributed to cultural units continuously adopted from Europe or elsewhere.

That being said, any book should be judged by what it sets out as its goal, and this one undoubtedly was quite successful in that regard. None of the chapters in the book bring in some ground-breaking

archival discoveries – nor do they intend to – but are instead deeply focused on developing a method and guidelines useful for further research of the topic of cultural transfers between Serbia and Europe. Thus, this is a very concise study, based on well-defined concepts, equally very well-written and easy to read with numerous pictures helping a reader conjure up an image of another time(s). Furthermore, the volume fits quite neatly with the recent and laudable historiographical trends putting forward global, transnational or comparative perspectives, untangling themselves from national contexts. Most of all, the volume represents a truly rare case of the conference contributions so consciously and efficiently directed to jointly pull in support of the overarching argument. In sum, the book presents a convincing case that the Serbian national culture neither ever existed nor developed on its own, clearly demarcated from “foreign” influences, but was instead constantly rearticulated with its neighbours, most often with Europe. As such the book should be recommended not just to early-stage social scientists dealing with this region or older fellow academics relatively unfamiliar with Serbian history, but also to anyone brave enough to contemplate the hardships of deciphering the past and the future of cultural transfers between two or more regions.

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