

***Creating Yugoslav Culture:
Croatian and Serbian Attitudes toward a Common Culture,
1918-1929***

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Abstract

The thesis analyzes the attitudes of the Croatian and Serbian cultural and intellectual elites toward Yugoslav culture in the formative period of the first Yugoslavia – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes – between the establishment of the South Slavic state in December 1918 and the proclamation of the royal dictatorship in January 1929, and their participation in the process of construction of a possibly qualitatively new cultural space.

Through the discursive analysis of writings and speeches of two complementary cultural associations – *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* – besides the manifestations of support or resistance to the new cultural identifications and categories, the self-constitutive mechanisms are investigated. Cultural debate of the 1920s is presented in relation to the political situation in the state and the nation-building attempts. Ideological strategies revolving around the tropes of “crisis,” and employment of the metaphors concerning national(-ist) myths for establishing the internal, “intra-Yugoslav” power-relations, and positioning Yugoslavia in relation to Europe, are discussed as vital characteristics of the cultural space of the first Yugoslavia, with far-reaching consequences.

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Introduction

Throughout its history, due to its complex political, social, cultural, and economic structures, its first bloody dissolution in 1941-1945, overcoming of divisions that followed it, fast (but temporary) development, Yugoslavia was an appealing topic for numerous historiographical and other scholarly works; its break-up during the 1990s ensured it would remain a common scholarly issue. Especially since 1991, any writing on Yugoslavia can hardly escape the awareness of the “failure,” burdening the topic it is dealing with. Retrospectively, many aspects of Yugoslavian history are “discovered,” both in the historiographies of the successor-states and abroad; it is partially a result of a search for the causes of the 1990s break-up that such, once secondary, issues became emphasized. One of the research areas profiting from this was the cultural history of Yugoslavia; always highlighted as one of the core elements of Yugoslavism – ideology propagating the South Slavic similarity, cooperation, and eventual mergence into one cultural and national unit – culture only recently started getting the scholarly attention. Still, it remains an underrepresented topic in comparison with, for instance, political and economic history, or nationalism studies. Interconnectedness of a multitude of topics is recognized, and culture is being introduced to the researches, although usually as an auxiliary explanatory model, and rarely sufficiently in depth. This thesis is not intended to give a comprehensive study of interwar Yugoslav culture, nor to decisively deny or possibly argue that Yugoslav culture existed. The starting point of this investigation of *certain elements* of Yugoslav culture is a noticeable discrepancy between the great importance invested in culture as a fundamental bonding factor of the South Slavs in the intellectual and cultural discourse, and, in practical terms, its minor significance for the process of “constructing Yugoslavia,” as more than a mere state.

When on December 1, 1918 the Serbian Prince Regent Alexander proclaimed the unification of Serbia with the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, a project envisioned and developed for several centuries with a different intensity, one which was made a primary political issue from the mid-19th century, was accomplished. According to the common phrase, for the first time in their long history, the South Slavs were gathered within one political unit; now the unification in other than political terms was expected to follow. The establishment of the new state in 1918 was supposed to be fulfillment of the Yugoslav idea. “Yugoslavism,” a concept around which the relationship among the South Slavs revolved, had an uneasy history. It was marked by many ups and downs and, as Ivo Banac and other scholars agree, was far from a coherent, uniformed ideology.¹ An idea emphasizing similarities of the South Slavic “nations” or “tribes,” and the necessity of cooperation among them, was firstly developed in Dalmatian urban environment during the Renaissance. As Zrinka Blažević demonstrates, reflections on the common historical and cultural elements among “Illyrian” tribes (a common designation for South Slavs until the mid-19th century) had a long prehistory.² Although primarily associated with the concrete political aspirations aiming to establish and maintain the common South Slavic state, Yugoslavism should be viewed as a set of ‘polifunctional ideologies’ – Illyrism being just one of them – that emerged already in the protonational context. Reintroduced primarily in the Croatian politics of the mid-19th century as a part of the national revival movement, Illyrism showed some ambivalence regarding the advocated “unity;” whether it was an expression of existence of one nation consisting of more “tribes” (three entities usually addressed were Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian), or several nations that were closely related,

¹ See Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

² See Zrinka Blažević, *Ilirizam prije Ilirizma* [Illyrism prior to Illyrism] (Zagreb: Golden marketing, Tehnička knjiga, 2008).

but not identical. In the period following the Croatian national revival, Yugoslavism replaced Illyrism as an integrative ideology.

Despite its importance for the Yugoslav idea, culture was mentioned neither in the “Address” of the delegates of the National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, in which the willingness of the temporary State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs to join the Kingdom of Serbia in a new state was declared,³ nor in the Alexander’s “Response,” by which he accepted the offer.⁴ The unification was thus a purely political act; the hypothesis posed in this thesis is that, due to a gap between the dominant, political, and subordinated, cultural space, otherwise important and even constructive debates in the latter space could not find their way to influence the actual policy-makers.

This thesis aims to analyze the attitudes of the Croatian and Serbian cultural elites toward a common, Yugoslav culture during the “formative period” of the first Yugoslavia, between the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in December 1918 and the proclamation of the royal dictatorship in January 1929. Rather than merely to observe the presence or absence of the support for the Yugoslav cultural project, in this thesis the contemporary cultural discourse is analyzed, emphasizing several core issues which were of vital importance for developing new culture and new cultural identifications, as well as for reaffirming the pre-existing particular national cultural units.

The 1918-1929 period is chosen as a chronological framework primarily because then, for the first time, the South Slavic units, including the dominant pair – Serbia and Croatia, although the latter was not administratively and territorially united, but was still referred to as one national and cultural unit – encountered each other. After decades of anticipating the

³ Snežana Trifunovska (ed.), *Yugoslavia through Documents: From its Creation to its Dissolution* (Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1994), 157-158.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 159-160.

unity, in this period the time had come to deal with its effects and make it sustainable. The economic, political, and cultural crises were constant experiences of the 1920s. However, unlike the political space which was limited and liable to the oppressive state mechanisms, the cultural debates were rather free. The Yugoslav state apparatus, as Andrew Baruch Wachtel suggests, was distanced from the cultural sphere,⁵ and the Serbian political elite, identified by the majority of non-Serbs as the main source of obstruction of stabilization of the country, “generally stayed out of the country’s culture wars.”⁶ It was through these, in comparison with the later periods, rather liberal cultural debates, that the self-constitutive processes vital for the future developments of both the particular national and Yugoslav culture occurred. The dictatorship not only confined the public sphere and changed the nature of the public discourse, but it also, in cultural terms, sought to resolve the accumulated problems by forcing a new identification. The proclamation of the unitary Yugoslavism as official state ideology drastically changed the nature of discourse on cultural issues and, even more drastically, the attitudes toward Yugoslav culture.

It is, of course, improper to speak about the Serbian, Slovenian, or Croatian attitudes in general, especially toward something as complex, delicate, and, in the end, individual, as the cultural affiliation. The masses of people were not asked what they thought about the new state, or regarding the construction process of new identities. The question that arises is what is the group whose attitudes could be regarded the most relevant and representative? In his 1997 book *Cultural Policy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1918-1941* – so far the most comprehensive work on Yugoslav culture – Serbian historian, Ljubodrag Dimić, focuses on the cultural policy-makers, primarily the state administration and the Ministry of Education,

⁵ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 105.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

under whose jurisdiction culture, understood in the broadest sense, was.⁷ However, this approach is questionable for several reasons. Firstly, in the politically unstable system as the first Yugoslavia was, with governments changing very frequently – although always predominantly Serbian – there can be no well articulated long-term cultural policy. And the cultural policy-makers were primarily politicians, connected with cultural issues by no more than interest and support for the Yugoslav cause. On the other hand, emphasis on the individual artists and “cultural workers,” although they communicated and were gathered in the like-minded groups, cannot sufficiently depict the policy-making aspect. The methodology of this thesis draws a lot from Andrew Baruch Wachtel’s 1998 book *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*.⁸ Covering both the royalist (1918-1941) and the communist (1945-1991) Yugoslavia, Wachtel focuses exactly on the “lower levels” – individual intellectuals, writers, and artists; he establishes a connection between the artistic movements and the dominant operational models – unitarist, multicultural, and supracultural – employed in the process of creating Yugoslav culture. In terms of assessing the attitudes toward Yugoslav culture, his approach seems to give only a fragmented picture, upon which more can be said about the nature of cultural production in Yugoslavia, than about the attitudes or self-constitutive strategies. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the “middle ground,” represented the best by the two oldest and biggest cultural associations: *Matica hrvatska* (the Croatian Matica) and *Matica srpska* (the Serbian Matica)

A research of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* and their attitudes toward a cultural unity cannot offer a comprehensive insight in the attitudes of Croatian and Serbian population. Rather, being the intermediate level between the state administration and individual intellectuals; deeply embedded in the national cultural traditions, but after 1918

⁷ Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918-1941* [Cultural Policy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1918-1941], Vol. I-III (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 1997).

⁸ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

compelled to operate in a new (multi-) cultural surrounding; reflecting, and influenced by the attitudes of the mainstream intellectual elite, an analysis of their discourse could explain the encounters of official and unofficial cultural politics, of pro- and anti-Yugoslav points of view. In turn, this could reveal the relations other than, and deeper than the conventional national cultural identification or unreflective expressions of devotion to the Yugoslav cause.

Established in, respectively, in Zagreb in 1842, and Budapest in 1826, they were the main proponents of the processes of building the nation cultures. With relatively large and social rather uniform (mostly small urban bourgeoisie) membership, significant publishing enterprises and image of “working for the (particular) national cause,” but supporting the Yugoslav idea, they might be the level to be examined in search for well-articulated cultural attitudes. Their attitudes were manifested through numerous speeches, either at various manifestations, or most importantly, at their meetings, and in their publications. Both *Matice* published their journals: *Matica hrvatska* its *Kolo*, and *Matica srpska* its *Letopis Matice srpske* (The Chronicles of Matica srpska). Even the choice of domestic and foreign literary works published by them could be an indicator of their attitudes; this, however, remains out of the scope of this thesis. The State Archive in Zagreb and the Manuscript Department of *Matica srpska* in Novi Sad provide valuable archival material. In the case of *Matica hrvatska*, the minutes of the annual General Assemblies provide an insight in the discourse concerned with the particular events of the previous year. Unlike the journal *Kolo*, which was predominantly dedicated to the artistic aspect of literary production, these speeches are a link to the general political situation. Attitudes presented in them are those of the *Matica*’s leadership, but analyzed jointly with the responses to them, they can be said to present the cultural and political attitudes of the biggest Croatian cultural association. On the other hand, due to the organizational structure of *Matica srpska*, such speeches are of lesser importance. The attitudes of *Matica srpska*, an association representative of the Serbian urban small

bourgeoisie middle classes, can be read from its publications, primarily monthly published *Letopis Matice srpske*, which dealt not only with the artistic deliberations, but also the economy, politics, history, sociology, ethnology etc.

The structure of this thesis follows the main research questions. The first chapter, besides the review of relevant literature, introduces the most important paradigms, necessary for understanding the mechanisms of self-constitutive processes employed by the two *Matice*; identification process, and articulation of symbolic geography tropes.

The second chapter aims to answer the question what changes did the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes bring to *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska*? Their dual role is discussed; how (and if) did the inheritors and vital proponents of the particular national cultural narratives accommodate their “old” roles to the “new” circumstances, faced with an ungrateful task of “creating Yugoslav culture?” Also, the internal developments and somewhat similar crises that both *Matice* experienced in the late 1920s are interpreted in relation to the political condition in the country and competing narratives within the particular national frameworks.

The third chapter examines the “crisis,” in the South Slavic state and abroad, as a constitutive characteristic of the 1920s. The multiple layers of an all-present crisis are addressed, both its political and cultural aspects. Of particular importance is their intertwinement, for their mutual relation is a key to understanding an inability to create new sustainable cultural categories. The most striking manifestation of the cultural crisis was the “lack of unity.” It was a shared concern of both *Matice*, but their attitudes toward it show significantly different reasoning. During the 1920s, this was a cultural issue over which the Croatian and Serbian attitudes diverged most pronouncedly; in relation to this question, two cultural narratives reaffirmed their particular “identities.”

The fourth chapter elaborates on employment of the tropes of Balkanist discourse by *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* in the cultural debates during the 1920s. The discursive analysis interprets the self-constitutive strategies regarding the “in the middle position” – a self-understanding common to practically all South Slavic national narratives and, after 1918, applied to the new Yugoslav context. The occurrence of myth-like metaphors, of which the “crossroads” and “bridge” were predominantly used (somewhat surprisingly, having in mind the recent interpretation of Balkanist discourse, especially in the Croatian case, stressing the *antemurale* metaphor), is analyzed as an “including” rather than “exclusive” discursive mechanism with implications on the signifier and the signified, the “other,” alike.

Application of the methodology of cultural history and history of ideas to Yugoslavism reveals two interconnected phenomena; the plurality of attitudes toward Yugoslavism and Yugoslavia itself, which reflect particular group interests and ideologies on the one hand, and slowly but steadily diminishing support for the Yugoslav cause among the Croats, or the appropriation of the Yugoslav idea in its unitarist variant by the “Great-Serbian cause,” on the other hand. Rather than merely documenting the latter observation, which became *locus classicus* of a number of scholarly works, by employment of a topical approach this thesis aims to address cultural issues that have so far not been sufficiently researched.

1. Theoretical Approaches

Yugoslavia and the Balkans had the misfortune to become a topic of great scholarly and non-scholarly interest since the early 1990s. Post-Yugoslav conflicts in time and space – the late 20th century Europe – that were supposed to have surpassed ethnic violence, set many authors to offer an “explanation” for the brutal dissolution of Yugoslavia. Almost contemporaneously, “thinking the Balkans” as a spatial and cultural paradigm became a prominent scholarly topic; partially as a response to reemergence of the complementary concept – “Central Europe,” since the 1980s.⁹ Methodology and questions raised in works on Yugoslavia and Balkanist discourse provide a useful basis for analysis of the Croatian and Serbian attitudes toward a common culture during the 1920s.

The Yugoslav idea is ‘unique’ as it encompasses a large number of meanings, extending far beyond the three successive states of the South Slavs existing, with a break during the Second World War 1941-1945, from 1918 to 2006.¹⁰ Any (hi-) story of Yugoslavia is primarily a (hi-)story of an idea, and only consequently of its realization in the political space; as a history of an idea, deliberation on the concept of Yugoslavia unavoidably calls for incorporation of social, cultural and numerous other aspects.

To grasp the vast multitude of historiographical works on Yugoslavia in general is a difficult task. Especially since the early 1990s, explanatory models for Yugoslavia’s establishment, existence, and particularly its break-up became popular topics.¹¹ Despite a

⁹ Timothy Garton Ash pointed out the revival of Central European cultural identity among the intellectuals of the region. See Timothy Garton Ash, “Does central Europe Exist,” *The New York Review of Books*, July 18, 1985, 42-48.

¹⁰ Serbia and Montenegro formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) as a successor of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY); it existed from 1992 to 2003, when the state changed the name to the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This state broke up with the Montenegrin declaration of independence in 2006.

¹¹ Dejan Jović, “The Disintegration of Yugoslavia: A Critical Review of Explanatory Approaches,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2001), 101-120.

large number of relevant titles by “outsiders,” i.e. non-Yugoslavs,¹² the research questions of this work require an emphasis to be put on works of “insider” scholars as well. The main aim is to compare the Croatian and Serbian attitudes toward the concept of Yugoslav culture during the formative period of the first Yugoslavia. Before undertaking any comparison, it must be observed that all aspects of Yugoslavian history are primarily assessed through the prism of its eventual failure. While this may be an understandable attitude, it often results in methodological fallacy, namely belittlement of numerous, often uneasy, efforts that were supporting the whole Yugoslav project. The fact that the Yugoslav idea, including its vital cultural aspect, turned out to be unappealing to the majority of “Yugoslavs” by the 1990s, tells little about its appeal in the interwar period.

Whether sharing positive or negative sentiments toward a common South Slavic state(s), the post-Yugoslav national (although not necessarily nationalistic) historical narratives are still highly “Yugo-centric.” Since recently, the post-Yugoslav national historiographies, i.e. those of the successor states, are making some progress in deconstructing the stereotypical views of Serbian-Yugoslav and Croatian-Yugoslav relations.¹³ Still, an interpretation claiming that the Serbian elites used the Yugoslav idea as a means to a Great Serbian end, and that the Croatian public was predominantly and continuously against the Yugoslav idea, can be found in both national historiographical traditions. According to such interpretations, the permanent goal of the pre-1918 Serbian history was the establishment of a

¹² See Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia: a Concise History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001); John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Viktor Meier, *Wie Jugoslawien verspielt wurde* (München: C. H. Beck, 1995); Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia: A Concise History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001); Dejan Djokić and James Ker-Lindsay (eds.), *New Perspective son Yugoslavia: Key Issues and Controversies* (London, New York: Routledge, 2011); Sabrina P Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005).

¹³ See Drago Roksandić, *Srpska i hrvatska povijest i Nova historija* [Serbian and Croatian History and the New History] (Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1991); and Alex Draganich, *Serbs and Croats: The Struggle in Yugoslavia* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992). However, the writings on Serbo-Croatian relations are heavily influenced by the war in Croatia in the early 1990s.

Yugoslav state,¹⁴ and the Serbian political elite identified this state with the territorial expansion of Serbia itself.¹⁵ On the other hand, the Croatian historiography remained prone to emphasizing the necessity of the 1918 unification in the face of Italian territorial aspirations on ethnically and historically Croatian and Slovenian lands.¹⁶ The contemporary public already articulated an awareness of intrinsic connection between unity and freedom from foreign oppression; as Serbian politician and author Ljubomir Stojanović stated in 1919: “If we were united, we would be stronger and able to keep our freedom.”¹⁷ A Yugoslav state was, and still is thus presented as more than the fulfillment of a centuries-old dream; it was a pressing necessity.

Aware of the political confrontations in the first Yugoslavia and bloody dissolutions in 1941-1945, and again after 1991, historiography – “outsider” and “insider” – tends to focus on the political issues. The nation-building process, economy, and culture are not omitted, but *grand narratives* rarely escape confinements of political history. For an entity whose existence was thought to be strongly based on cultural similarities or even sameness, surprisingly little attention is paid to it, not only in modern historiography, but in the earliest public discourse of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as well.

In the book *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (published originally in 1984, before the events that made it a basic tool for understanding the Yugoslav predicament began developing), Ivo Banac describes the development of the

¹⁴ Kosta Nikolić, “Srbi i stvaranje Jugoslavije” [The Serbs and the Creation of Yugoslavia], *Istorija 20. veka*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2008), 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Croatian historian Goldstein expresses this belief saying (or repeating) that if Yugoslavia had not been created, Italy would have taken much more Croatian territory, probably the whole coastline. See Ivo Goldstein, *Hrvatska 1918-2008* [Croatia 1918-2008] (Zagreb: Europapress holding, Novi Liber, 2008), 27.

¹⁷ Ljuba Stojanović, *Nekolike misli o našem novom državnom uređenju* [Some Thoughts on Our New State Structure] (Belgrade, 1919), 11-14; taken from Marko Bulatović, “Struggling with Yugoslavism: Dilemmas of Interwar Serb Political Thought,” in John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (ed.), *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 254-276.

Yugoslav idea as a *longue durée* process.¹⁸ Focusing on the pre-1918 development and only the first phase of the existence of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, until the adoption of a constitution (*Vidovdanski ustav*) in 1921, Banac presents the establishment of a common state was perceived by at least parts of the population to be a logical and desirable outcome of a long on-going nation-building process; a kind of Yugoslav “end of history.” Banac puts the main emphasis of the nation-building process and its relation to politics in the interplay of Slovenian, Croatian, Muslim, Serbian, Montenegrin, and Macedonian nationalisms with an overarching Yugoslav project. Although in the early phase the main preoccupation of the new state was finding an appropriate political framework to respond to the competing nationalisms, Banac tends to neglect the cultural aspect. Such an approach is definitely not satisfactory for analysis of a later, post-1921 period. Politics lost momentum in a “national debate” quite soon; it was carried on more persistently in the sphere of culture. Thus, as Wachtel rightfully argues, in addition to politics and nation-building, culture has to be taken into consideration as the third constitutive factor in a wider project.¹⁹

With a few exceptions, more in depth scholarly works, especially more recent, on Yugoslav interwar culture written by “insiders” are rare.²⁰ Most of the works are case studies of particular exhibitions, artistic groups etc. Ljubodrag Dimić’s 1997 three volume work *Cultural Policy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1918-1941* is the most elaborated work on the cultural situation in the interwar Yugoslavia.²¹ He depicts a large number of cultural issues debated within official circles, and positions them in a wider social, economic, and cultural context. The main problem with Dimić’s book is a by far too strong emphasis on, and

¹⁸ Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

²⁰ Dragutin Tošić, *Jugoslavenske umetničke izložbe 1904-1927* [Yugoslav Art Exhibitions 1904-1927] (Belgrade: Institut za istoriju umetnosti, Filozofski fakultet, 1983).

²¹ Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918-1941* [Cultural Policy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1918-1941], Vol. I-III (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 1997).

confidence in, the possibilities of government to take an active role in the creation of a new cultural identity. The position of the minister of education, in charge of “culture” in the widest sense, was occupied by many politicians in the examined period. Hence the existence of a long-term policy can be easily questioned, especially a policy toward a concept as sensitive and complicated as Yugoslavism.

To this day, arguably the best survey of Yugoslav culture is Andrew Baruch Wachtel’s 1998 book *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*.²² Wachtel views Yugoslavia(s) through a cultural prism, arguing that a struggle between unitarist, multicultural, and supracultural models had a vital role in shaping more than a Yugoslavian culture – it influenced the political organization of the whole state as well. Wachtel rightfully observes that “most of recent work on the area has concentrated on particularist nationalisms, for obvious reasons, with the result that the rich tradition of Yugoslav thought is being obliterated.”²³

The first, unitarist model that Wachtel elaborates on, refers to the pre-Yugoslav period, prior to the unification in 1918.²⁴ Although the Yugoslav idea was developed within the Croatian 19th-century elite, the leading political position in a South Slavic state to-be was assigned to Serbia. Opinions on the leading cultural role varied; Rački and the Croatian elite saw Croatia taking the leadership,²⁵ but Wachtel claims that Yugoslav culture was, during the 19th century, “Serbianized.”²⁶ Thus a unitarist model, as Wachtel claims, aimed to use the best elements of one national culture as a basis for a new, Yugoslav culture. The second, multicultural synthetic model Wachtel elaborates concerns the 1918-1941 period. Since it is

²² Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-66.

²⁵ Nada Klaić, “O ideološkom sustavu Franje Račkoga,” [On the Ideological System of Franjo Rački] *Zbornik Zavoda za povijesne znanosti Istraživačkog centra Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti*, Vol. 9 (1979), 9.

²⁶ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, 44.

directly related to the cultural debates of the 1920s, it will be more thoroughly addressed in several places in this thesis. In order to create new, Yugoslav, culture, the best elements of all particular national cultures were to be joined together; the new culture would manifest its multiple components, but only discreetly, because the particular level ought to be transcended. The third, supracultural model is inherently tied with strong political and cultural federalist attempts of Yugoslav socialist model that was developed after 1945 and failed prior to 1991 (effectively already during the 1960s).²⁷

Wachtel's argument on the intertwinement of culture and politics is highly valuable. He convincingly states that "it would not be an exaggeration to say that the foundations for all Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian history in the 20th century were laid during the cultural and political debates of the 1920s;"²⁸ precisely that is the framework this thesis deals with. Not only did artistic movements influence the attitudes toward cultural and political unity – romanticism and modernism favored it, unlike realism and post-modernism – they influenced or reflected contemporary politics. Interwar Yugoslavian culture was, as Wachtel argues, based on a synthetic model.²⁹ Rather than emphasizing one of the particular cultures, as was the case with Serbian culture prior to 1918, after 1918 the dominant idea was that the best elements of all, i.e. Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian, cultures were to be used for building a new, multicultural and synthetic culture. This model implies the awareness of multiple cultural traditions, making "one culture" a goal to be reached only in the future. Differences and similarities alike among the South Slaves had effects well beyond cultural politics; they were used for external purposes – positioning of a newly born country within a wider European framework, and internal purposes – drawing more or less imagined boundaries

²⁷ Ibid., 1.

²⁸ Ibid., 67-68.

²⁹ Ibid., 67-127.

between the cultural, ethnic, and, consequently, administrative and political units. Furthermore, symbolic geography was employed on both the internal and external level.

Whereas Wachtel's contribution to the understanding of a connection between Yugoslav nationalism and culture is plausible and substantiated with numerous examples, he, contrary to Dimić, seems to overestimate the role of individual cultural figures and groups in "creating" and offering a new cultural identity to wider audiences. A vital methodological question is hereby raised – what are the appropriate sources for writing a Yugoslav (cultural) history? The majority of works on Yugoslavia in general are based on the governmental documents. On the other hand, cultural histories of the interwar period tend to focus on individuals or small groups. Thus the options are either Yugoslav government and administration, or those claiming to be Yugoslavs. This ambivalence is reflected in historiography since 1918. Yugoslav political, social or economic histories are being written primarily through a prism of (Yugoslav) institutions; this facilitates a kind of supra- or even non-national narrative. The existence of only a limited number of cultural institutions with both Yugoslav form and content makes writing a Yugoslav cultural history a truly problematic enterprise. However, pointing this issue out is not to say that Yugoslav artists and Yugoslav culture did not necessarily exist.

Both Dimić's and Wachtel's approach should be weighed against, as Brubaker and Cooper warn, unreflective usage of the concept of "identity."³⁰ As the alternatives to "identity," they offer the concepts of identification, self-understanding, and commonality, connectedness, and groupness.³¹ Concepts developed by Brubaker and Cooper would warn against an approach based on the governmental documents because they do not provide a

³⁰ Chapter "Beyond Identity" was written together by Rogers Brubaker and Frederic Cooper, and also published in Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 59. Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 28.

³¹ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4; 28-63.

sufficient insight in the interplay of a multitude of other relevant factors. The focus on high politics renders relations and interactions on the lower levels mostly invisible, and it is they that formulate a “cultural identity.” Against their claim that “to persuade people that they are one; that they comprise a bounded, distinctive, solidary group; that their internal differences do not matter, at least for the purpose at hand – this is a normal and necessary part of politics, and not only of what is ordinarily characterized as identity politics,”³² a “top-down” approach based on the state’s cultural politics, as employed by Dimić, is therefore insufficient. Whether it is the first – monarchic, or the second – socialist Yugoslavia, the state itself had very little success in creating and proposing an “identity” different from the already existing national ones.

Wachtel’s approach could hardly be labeled “bottom-up,” as it emphasizes the role of a small intellectual elite. Unlike Dimić, he elaborates on the concrete cultural actions aiming to “make” a culture and a nation. The projects Wachtel describes were rooted in the existing national cultures, even when vehemently advocating unity on account of particular cultural traditions. The main methodological problem with such an approach lies in the detachment and isolation of intellectuals and artistic groups from both the centers of power and the traditional culture shared by a majority of population.

A very important issue that preoccupies scholarship and public discourse today, as it did in the 1920s, is the “question of numbers.” Contemporary discourse could hardly reach a compromise on the fundamental question – are Yugoslavs one nation with three (tribal) names, or is Yugoslav an umbrella term encompassing already formed and distinct national entities? The relation between nationhood and culture is a crucial point for understanding the discourse on Yugoslav culture during the 1920s. Even before the unification in 1918, it was

³² Ibid., 60.

obvious to a majority of informed observers that the South Slavs are not “one.”³³ Simultaneously, a belief that they could become so was widely spread. Within the new political framework a clearly *constructivist* attitude was formed toward an ethnic and cultural unit whose unification was previously conceived, prepared, and realized in *essentialist* terms. Overlapping relations between the competing nationalisms, of which Yugoslav, Serbian, and Croatian are the strongest, though not the only ones, on the one hand, and the intrinsic connection between politics, nation-building, and culture on the other hand, makes the “question of numbers” still difficult to resolve. Therefore, writings on culture should be observant on the relationship between culture and nationalism.

The mostly widely used trope of cultural self-identification and self-positioning was what could be termed “in the middle metaphor,” meaning between the East and West. This claim was a vital element of almost all national cultural identifications in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. The Yugoslav case is specific insofar as a “between the East and West” trope was given a fundamental role in constructing Yugoslav culture and nation during the whole interwar period; it was especially so in the “formative period” during the 1920s. Rather than employing a peripheral label originating within the core-periphery paradigm, Yugoslav cultural elites chose “in the middle paradigm,” which had several advantages.³⁴

Firstly, a cultural identity articulated in such a manner corresponded well to the composition of the new state. Particular cultural traditions have for centuries been parts of different empires and, to paraphrase Jovan Cvijić, “civilisational zones” that were perceived through a prism of the East-West dichotomy.³⁵ In this way, the religious, linguistic and other differences could be reconciled rather painlessly. Furthermore, “in the middle” trope went along very well with the constructivist strategies. As Wachtel points out, the best elements of

³³ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, 2.

³⁴ See Pål Kolstø (ed.), *Myths and Boundaries in South-East Europe* (London: Hurst, 2005).

³⁵ Jovan Cvijić, “The Zones of Civilization of the Balkan Peninsula,” *Geographical Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1918), 470-482.

each particular culture were to be used to “create an overarching Yugoslav culture, one that had never existed before but that could be shared by all.”³⁶ Cultural plurality was a highly significant factor on which most of attempts to construct Yugoslav culture were based.

Secondly, it was a rather easy way to express one’s devotion to the Yugoslav cause. As an ideological strategy, it was a pro-Yugoslav statement that did not necessarily negate the existence of particular national cultures. A discursive analysis of mentioned strategies of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* suggest that the articulation of such attitudes was often an expression of uncertainty of one’s own cultural identity rather than an honest expression of pro-Yugoslav sentiments.

Thirdly, the “in the middle metaphor,” signifying a position between the East and West,” was used in a modified manner by different national(-ist) projects within Yugoslavia. Simultaneity of the past and present was expressed through the tropes of national missions which gave the nation a special role and place in symbolic geography. Anthony Smith points out specific mechanisms:

The other way of constructing maps and moralities for present generations was through the use of history and, especially, the cult of golden ages. The purposes of nationalist educator-intellectuals are social and political, not academic; they aim to purify and activate the people. To do so, moral exemplars from the ethnic past are needed, as vivid recreations of the glorious past of the community. Hence the return to that past through a series of myths: myths of origin and descent, of liberation and migration, of the golden age and its heroes and sages, perhaps of the chosen people now to be reborn after its long sleep of decay and/or exile.³⁷

Serbian and Croatian nationalisms perceived their respective countries to be the “bulwark of Christianity” – spaces where during “the golden age” a superior culture was defended from the attacks of inferior but aggressive “other.” Serbian nationalist narrative regarding a “shield” trope revolved around the fights of the Serbian medieval state against

³⁶ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, 8.

³⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: penguin Books, 1991), 66.

Ottoman invaders, particularly the 1389 battle at Kosovo polje.³⁸ Croatian nationalist narrative used a bulwark trope as well, but in relation to two “others,” namely Ottomans and Orthodoxy, both representing the East. A late medieval label, *antemurale christianitatis* was said to be one of the most important Croatian characteristics and its merits, usually not recognized by Europe in whose name it was done.³⁹ Tropes “between the East and West” and that of “shield” or “bulwark” coexisted in Croatian and Serbian nationalist narratives, although they were not entirely compatible. Here presented discursive analysis points to the prevalence of “bridge” trope over the “bulwark” metaphor, even in the Serbian and Croatian nationalist narrative. The Yugoslav, especially unitarist, nationalism was inclined, partially in response to the contemporary circumstances, to a “between the East and West” trope.⁴⁰

Complementary to this issue is the question of the relations of the nationalist narratives to the Balkans as a cultural label. The works of Maria Todorova show a highly ambivalent and indicative stance toward Yugoslavia. Although Todorova regards Yugoslavia as a part of the Balkans, she pays surprisingly little attention to it. The situation with Slovenia and Croatia, which are experiencing an uneasy struggle with the concept of the Balkans at least since the 1980s, is even more ambiguous.⁴¹

In her 2005 article, *Spacing Europe: What is a Historical Region?*, Todorova observes “a powerful shift away from border studies toward now fashionable category of space,” which, according to her, poses a possible threat of essentialism.⁴² Balkanist discourse – both as a manifestation of (non-) scholarly negative stereotypization and the writings that unveil it

³⁸ Alex N. Draginich and Slavko Todorovich, *The Saga of Kosovo: Focus on Serbian-Albanian Relations* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984), 18-27.

³⁹ Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, “Zašto i otkad se gozimo Balkana” [Why and Since When Do We Detest the Balkans?], *Erasmus: časopis za kulturu demokracije*, No. 19 (1997), 27-35.

⁴⁰ Pål Kolstø, “Introduction: Assessing the Role of Historical Myths in Modern Society,” in Pål Kolstø (ed.), *Myths and Boundaries in South-East Europe* (London: Hurst, 2005), 1-34.

⁴¹ Bojan Baškar, “Within or Without? Changing Attitudes toward the Balkans in Slovenia,” *Ethnologia Balkanica*, Vol. 7 (2003), 195-206.

⁴² Maria Todorova, “Spacing Europe: What is a Historical Region?,” *East Central Europe*, Vol. 32, No 1-2 (2005), 65.

– seems *a priori* more inclined to perceive the “region” as only vaguely delineated; the differences between the Balkans and Europe might be overwhelming, but the question where one set of characteristics meets another is rarely addressed outside the Yugoslav case, which itself is often only a secondary Balkanist topic. Notwithstanding the issue of “civilisational borders running through the middle of Yugoslavia,” which became emphasized in a later period, the cultural discourse of the 1920s operates primarily within the “categories of space.” Attempts to create Yugoslav culture “between the two worlds” – and drawing from them – would signify it as a distinct (cultural) spatial category, *encountering* rather than *bordering with* other spatial categories. But the application of the category of historic legacy to the Yugoslav case is problematic, for Yugoslavia immediately after 1918 could not be assessed as a historical region in any but essentialist terms. The methodology of “spacing Europe,” as proposed by Todorova, has a limited applicability in the interwar Yugoslav case.

Rather than counting how many times and where in the text they were mentioned, it is worth contextualizing the cultural labeling (Central European, Balkan, or South East European) in historiography within wider recent developments, as DMITAR BECHEV suggests.⁴³ Already a glimpse at contemporary discourse suggests a usage of the Balkans label as somewhat different from what Balkanist scholarly works would imply; it was rarely employed, and when it was, it was in a rather vague, and not necessarily negative, manner.

The Yugoslav cultural project, simultaneously orientated toward the East and West, at least nominally, had preconditions for utilization of *Orientalist* as well as *Occidental* cultural strategies.⁴⁴ Stereotypical and not always correct understanding of the Croatian attitude toward the Yugoslav cause as negative, seems to be easily explained for it is perceived as greatly embedded in Balkanist narrative. The Serbian and Yugoslav cases seem

⁴³ DMITAR BECHEV, “Constructing South East Europe: The Politics of Regional Identity in the Balkans.” *RAMSES Working Paper*, Vol. 1 (March, 2006).

⁴⁴ DIANA MISHKOVA, “In Quest of Balkan Occidentalism,” *Tokovi istorije*, No. 1-2 (2006), 29-62.

more complex as they are receptive to both Orientalist and Occidental strategies. A Slavic-European dualism that Mishkova observes in Bulgarian nationalist narrative is operational in the Serbian case too. She argues that “a considerable number of Bulgarians and Serbs saw Europe as being distinct from, often opposed to, Slavdom-and-Orthodoxy.”⁴⁵ Beyond the mentioned understanding lies a variety of attitudes toward a Yugoslav cause that do not strictly follow ethnic divisions, which do not substantiate a universal Croatian or Serbian attitude.

The concept of “nesting Orientalisms,” developed by Milica Bakić-Hayden, offers a valuable tool regarding the interplay of Orientalism and Occidentalism.⁴⁶ Bakić-Hayden elaborates on the mechanisms of gradation of *Otherness* among Yugoslav peoples; the negative characteristics associated with the Balkans are projected away from oneself to one’s neighbors, thus attempting to confirm one’s Western and European affiliation. Although Bakić-Hayden developed this paradigm primarily in the context of Slovenian and Croatian attempts to politically and culturally break the ties with Yugoslavia, representing the Balkans, it functions well in a much earlier Yugoslav context as well.

The occurrence of Occidentalism in e.g. Serbian and some versions of Yugoslav (nationalist) cultural ideas asks for reinterpretation of Bakić-Hayden’s paradigm. A remarkable and quite radical example of a completely reverse strategy – projecting the negative characteristics associated with the degenerate West as opposed to “true” and “pure” Balkans – is the journal *Zenit*, published in Zagreb 1921-1923, and afterwards in Belgrade until 1926. Intellectuals involved with it were simultaneously influenced by the West in the

⁴⁵ Diana Mishkova, “Symbolic Geographies and Visions of Identity: A Balkan Perspective,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2008), 244.

⁴⁶ Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), 917-931.

sense that they followed the contemporary artistic vogue, and kept rejecting it in favor of new, vigorous Balkan dynamism.⁴⁷

The relations between the Yugoslav idea, imagining and constructing Yugoslav culture, and the tropes of symbolic geography in the interwar period have rarely been a topic of scholarly works. As shown, literature on political conflicts, the nation-building attempts, particular cultural actors or groups, even the employment of the tropes of the East-West dichotomy exists, but these topics are usually not viewed as complementary parts of the same process. Based on a research of discourse of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska*, this work aims to analyze the position of Croatian and Serbian cultural elite toward a common South Slavic culture and Yugoslav cultural “identity” within this multilayered process.

⁴⁷ See Vidosava Golubović and Irina Subotić, *“Zenit” i avangarda 20ih godina* [Zenit and the Avant-garde of the Twenties] (Belgrade: Narodni muzej, Institut za književnost i umetnost, 1983). Also Irina Subotić, “The Avant-garde Visionary and Utopian Model Proposed by Ljubomir Micić and his Journal ‘Zenit,’” *Etudes balkaniques*, No. 3-4 (1996), 54-57.

2. *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* in a new framework

Almost every speech given at the meetings of both *Matice* would start with a proverbial note on the greatness and an immensely important role of the respective association for “our” cause, notwithstanding the precise content of this pronoun. A century in the Serbian, and more than eight decades in the Croatian case, of existence and diligent work legitimized the role of the Croatian and Serbian *Matice* as the “highest cultural and educational institutions in the country.” Albeit devoid of modesty and the sense of proportions, such labels were rather accurate; only *Matice* could have claimed a strong organization with dominant centers in Zagreb and Novi Sad, a fair number of local branches that were, however, primarily the support in terms of numbers of members, rather than being able to actively contribute to the work, and, what was an issue of great pride and concern – publishing.

Everyone was aware of a gap between these associations and the general public – the wide masses, who were supposed to be the primary target of the activities of *Matice*. Throughout the examined period, both the Serbian and Croatian *Matica* retained an intellectual, although occasionally provincial, discourse, shared only by a small part of the general population; it was a characteristic of almost all enterprises concerning “thinking” and “making” the culture. In a country with 51,5% of the population illiterate (but with huge regional variations – 99,4% of the adult population of *Dravska Banovina* were literate, while on the other hand, more than 80% of the population of Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina were illiterate),⁴⁸ it might seem “natural,” but this gap between the space of “high” culture, which was almost exclusively an area of devising the national and cultural identities, and “popular” culture referring to the rural masses and lower urban classes, indicates more than the urban-rural, modern-traditional, and the civilization-culture oppositions. Despite claiming

⁴⁸ Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije: 1918-1988* [The History of Yugoslavia: 1918-1988] (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), 324.

differently, the Croatian and Serbian *Matice* were often participants in the perpetuation of these dichotomies.

2.1. Continuations and disruptions

In a 1928 article, a Serbian author and art historian, Milan Kašanin, gave a surprisingly accurate insight in the foundations and values of *Matica srpska*. Kašanin stated that “the war and the one hundredth anniversary of *Matica srpska* have marked and ended one historical period of the *Matica*’s work. Now, a new era and a new life are beginning. Our ideology was necessarily political and nationalist, since all our forces had to be gathered to defend the national survival.”⁴⁹ Parallels between *Matica srpska* and the Serbian and Yugoslav society can be drawn; besides reaffirming the significance of the 1918 events as a turning point in the South Slavic history with the rejuvenating effects, Kašanin presented the long tradition and a fierce fight for the national liberation as values to be cherished; *Matica srpska* had a new, future-orientated mission, but it was not devoid of historical awareness.

The accommodation of “old” institutions, dating to the pre-1918 period, to the “new,” post-1918 circumstances, does not concern only *Matice* nor *Matica*-like associations, although many of their characteristics make their development in the new framework indicative regarding the cultural issues during the 1920s. Firstly, both *Matice* were “old”. Founded in Budapest in 1826, *Matica srpska* was relocated to Novi Sad, until 1918 part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in 1864; the Croatian *Matica*, called Illyrian from 1842 until it was renamed to “Croatian” only in 1874, was founded in Zagreb in 1842. They were not alone; the establishment of *Matice* was a common trait of other national revival movements too – Czech in 1831, Moravian in 1849, Dalmatian in 1862 (joint with the Croatian in 1912),

⁴⁹ Milan Kašanin, “Novi zadaci Matice srpske” [The New Tasks of *Matica srpska*], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CII, No. 317, Issue 1 (July, 1928), 1.

Slovak in 1863, Slovene in 1864, Polish (in Lvov) in 1882, Bulgarian in 1909.⁵⁰ Beside their longevity, they can also be considered “old” due to the social structure of membership, organization, and political, economic, and, what is very important – their cultural views. The understanding of culture shared by the Croatian and Serbian *Matica* was deeply embedded in their respective national narratives. Although not opposed to the Yugoslav cause, they were never its strongest advocates; prior to 1918, they were *Serbian* and *Croatian* cultural associations, engaging with the “Yugoslav” issues sporadically and rather superficially.

Secondly, they had a certain financial strength that all other cultural associations and institutions, with the exception of Academies – Yugoslav in Zagreb and Royal Serbian in Belgrade – lacked. It is not to say that they had no problems; every annual report submitted in Zagreb and Novi Sad alike practically revolved around the insufficient funds and neglect from the state institutions, but the real-estates they possessed, membership fees, legacies of better-off supporters, and profit from publishing made their situation, if nothing else, more tolerable in comparison with other similar associations. For instance, *Matica srpska* insured all its mobile and immobile possessions for 11,190.000 Dinars, and earned almost 300.000 Dinars on account of renting land in 1922.⁵¹ At the same time, Ministry of Education supported its work with 50.000, and the city of Novi Sad with additional 25.000 Dinars.⁵² *Matica hrvatska* was in a somewhat better financial situation. Partially, this reflected the overall economic situation in the county; Zagreb was less affected by the war than Novi Sad, and otherwise bigger and more developed. Also, the support for *Matica srpska* was decreasing as a response

⁵⁰ *Matica srpska*, <http://www.maticasrpska.org.rs/matica/index-eng.html>, accessed on 18 May, 2011.

⁵¹ MS 10.393, “Izveštaj o radu upravnog odbora Matice srpske u poslovnoj 1922./23. godini” [Report on the activities of the Board of Directors of *Matica srpska* for year 1922/1923], 12-14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 25.

to Belgrade taking over the leading position as the center of the Serbian and Yugoslav culture. In 1925, the active capital of *Matica hrvatska* was reported to be 1,156.029 Dinars.⁵³

The most pressing issue for both associations – not only for *Matica hrvatska* (as many authors suggest) after the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in December 1918, was how to reconcile their “old” and “new” cultural policy and, in the bottom line, identity. The oscillations between a lower, particular level, for which it was not clear whether it was “national” or “tribal,” and a higher, Yugoslav level, were by no means characteristic only for the 1920s or the interwar period – this issue preoccupied the socialist Yugoslavia as well, at least until the 1960s.⁵⁴ But during the 1920s this issue for the first time became a practical one. And unlike the dictatorial and “post-dictatorial” 1930s, until 1929 a discussion on the nature of the Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, and Yugoslav culture was energetic and “free.” On account of their long tradition, “popular support,” and tangible results in culture and education (primarily in the field of publishing), *Matica srpska* and *Matica hrvatska* were eager to join the debate.

The war inflicted heavy material and human casualties on the whole territory of the new country, especially Serbia, through which armies of all belligerent parties passed several times. *Matica hrvatska* operated in a rather unaffected area, so its main burden was financial; donations from the state were out of the question and the primary sources of revenues – individual donations, membership fees, and publishing – were very limited. Still, *Matica hrvatska* continued its works, although in a somewhat limited scope. *Matica srpska*, on the other side, experienced much bigger problems during the war. Due to its Serbian orientation, it was from the beginning of the 20th century closely observed by the Austro-Hungarian officials. As early as August 1914, administration banned the work of *Matica srpska*, and its

⁵³ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, “Zapisnik Glavne skupštine Matice hrvatske održane dne. 5. srpnja 1925” [Notes of the General Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* held on July 5, 1925], 17.

⁵⁴ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, 1.

leaders were interned.⁵⁵ Tihomir Ostojić, the secretary of *Matica srpska* from 1911 to 1914 and from 1918 until 1920, was the main target.⁵⁶ Another financial blow came with changing the Austro-Hungarian currency the Krone, to the Serbian, and now “Yugoslav” Dinar; the ration of four Kronen for one Dinar, as established in 1920, was a heavy burden for both associations.⁵⁷

In certain aspects, the change that occurred in 1918 had the same effect on *Matica srpska* and *hrvatska*; in the others, especially regarding the attitude toward cultural unity, they showed different inclinations. The development of the Croatian and Serbian *Matica* after 1918 thus oscillated between the continuities and discontinuities, with the former or the latter outweighing, depending also on the political and economic development in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in general.

2.2. Politics and culture in *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska*

A somewhat detached position in relation to the mainstream Serbian and Croatian politics, and the (co-)existence of competing political and cultural ideas, make determining the political stance of both Croatian and Serbian *Matica* only an approximation. Albert Bazala, shortly the president of *Matica hrvatska* (1927), was a member of the National Club, a coalition of the Croatian (*petit-*) *bourgeois* parties, even temporarily suspended from his university position in 1924 because of his political activity; “apolitical” Dragutin Domjanić (president 1921-1926) to a much lesser degree, but Filip Lukas (president 1928-1945) quite clearly articulated their nationalist attitudes, close to the right-wing Croatian Party of Rights. While the leadership of *Matica srpska* personally was not strongly attached to any political

⁵⁵ Živan Milisavac, *Matica srpska: 1826-1976* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1976), 32.

⁵⁶ MS 5952, Ostojić Tihomir: Izvještaj. Dopis o svome progonu, Novi Sad, 1920. [Ostojić Tihomir: Report. Notes on his prosecution, Novi Sad, 1920].

⁵⁷ Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije 1918-1991: hrvatski pogled* [The History of Yugoslavia 1918-1991: The Croatian Perspective] (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 1998), 147-148.

party, the two strongest Serbian parties – Democrats and Radicals – had their supporters among the *Matica*'s members.

With all Serbs being “liberated and united” within one country, *Matica srpska* lost some of its importance as a flag-bearer of the Serbian cultural and national struggle; attempts to revise its “mission” in relation to the new circumstances were made, but with limited success. Relations between *Matica* in Novi Sad – the “Serbian Athens,” as it was sometimes called, and Belgrade, were occasionally uneasy. *Matica* felt its efforts were neglected by the government, mostly in financial terms, and the voices from “Serbia proper” could be heard objecting about *Matica* that it patronized the uneducated people, and was arrogant to the other Serbian regions, especially Serbia proper, which liberated them; “they [members of *Matica srpska*] considered Vojvodina to be a cultural-aristocratic province in our state, and fancied themselves God-given *kulturträgers* in this ‘pitiful’ and ‘uncultured’ land.”⁵⁸

Matica hrvatska was in the very center of Croatian politics, which was mostly opposed to the “Belgrade centralism,” but throughout the interwar period it remained divergent from the main body of Croatian politics – the Croatian Peasant Party (CPP). *Matica* mostly operated within the national middle-class categories inherited from the earlier periods; it acted *for* the people, was inspired *by* the people, but was not the *people*'s. The discourse of *Matica* reveals nothing on the relation toward the most influential Croatian party, CPP. Even the assassination of several Croatian delegates and wounding of the CPP's leader Stjepan Radić, who succumbed a month later, in the Belgrade Parliament on 20 June, 1928, which was an event with far-reaching implications for the whole country, had almost no response in *Matica hrvatska*.

Stjepan Radić, then a member of *Matica hrvatska*, was present at the General Assembly on 11 June, 1922. Although Radić supported the presidential speech, he said that he

⁵⁸ Biljana Šimunović, *Matica srpska u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: Zadužbina Andrejević, 1997), 31.

had objections to a part of the secretary's speech, which might have political implications,⁵⁹ but did not specify what precisely he had in mind. President Domjanić immediately interrupted him and "asked the speaker not to talk about politics."⁶⁰ The same warning came from a police official, regularly present at *Matica's* meetings, as was customary in the whole country. However, Radić continued saying that the secretary's report was acceptable, but that "the committee in the future should not work against the will of people and its representatives [referring, *inter alios*, to himself] when discussing general public questions; another police warning prompted him to leave."⁶¹ The agenda of *Matica hrvatska* and the majority of Croatian political parties might have been the same, but the strategies were not congruent.

Politics were avoided on all occasions, not only in the episode concerning Radić. Such practice was based on an understanding of *Matica's* primary concern – "cultural activity" – as "non-partisan" rather than as an "apolitical" category. Culture and politics were seen to be complementary, serving and accompanying a cause that became *locus classicus* not only of the Croatian and Serbian *Matice*, but of the entire cultural discourse after 1918 – achieving a higher level of the national and cultural unity as a precondition for all aspects of development of the country. As long as unity was a welcomed trope – in the case of *Matica hrvatska* it was at least until the late 1920s, but never unconditionally – precisely the political quarrels, which will be to focus of the following chapter, were identified as the main obstacle for achieving unity; common goal required all political actors to converge and to transcend partisanship.

An interesting event, one which was, interestingly enough, never written about in historiographical works, but which is of great importance for understanding the position of *Matica hrvatska* on the Serbo-Croatian cultural and political relationship, and the attitude

⁵⁹ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, "Skupština MH 11. lipnja 1922, Zapisnik o Skupštini MH održane dne. 11.lipnja 1922" [Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* held on 11 June, 1922, Minutes of Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* held on 11 June, 1922].

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

toward the Yugoslavism in general, occurred at the General Assembly held on May 20, 1928.⁶² An unprecedented discussion was held on that occasion; freshly elected president of *Matica hrvatska*, a prominent philosopher, university professor and politician, Albert Bazala, was accused of working against Croatian national interests.

The Serbian educational association from Sarajevo, *Prosveta* (“Enlightenment”) deliberated on establishing a single common educational society for the whole country. The standard warning of the pressing need to elevate the catastrophic illiteracy was made a battle cry around which many cultural associations gathered. Thus in the mid-1920s *Prosveta* initiated the creation of a union – *Opšti prosvetni savez* [General Educational Association] – of the prominent educational associations, Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian, which was supposed to be realized on occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of *Matica srpska*.⁶³ Although the anniversary itself was in 1926, due to financial and organizational problems, it was held a year later, in 1927.⁶⁴

At the conference held on December 28, 1927 in Novi Sad, Albert Bazala and Fran Jelašić (secretary of *Matica hrvatska*) became members of the Temporary Committee for drafting the statute for the new cultural association.⁶⁵ Although Bazala later claimed that his act was not binding for *Matica hrvatska* in any sense, some counselors argued that Bazala’s involvement was a blatant breach of his presidential authorities. The minutes of the meeting in Novi Sad support Bazala’s claim. In the speech, in which he supported the idea of creating such an association, but warning of its possible shortcomings, Bazala clearly stated:

Neither am I, as other delegates, authorized by *Matica hrvatska* and the *Croatian Association of Writers* to make a definitive statement regarding the establishment of this association. We should not rush such a good initiative, to do something that might be a source of new problems and nuisances. It is better

⁶³ Vasa Stajić, “Proslava Prosvete” [The Celebration of *Prosveta*], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CI, No. 314, Issue 1 (October, 1927), 2.

⁶⁴ Božidar Kovaček, *Matica srpska 1826-2001* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2001), 15.

⁶⁵ “Konferencija delegata kulturno-prosvetnih društava” [The Conference of Delegates of Cultural and Educational Associations], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CII, No. 317, Issue 3 (September, 1928), 360-384.

to discuss and clear out the issue thoroughly, in order to give it the most convenient form. This does not, however, mean that we should postpone the whole process.⁶⁶

Bazala was accused by several members of *Matica hrvatska*. The secretary Jelašić concluded that Bazala's argument with the committee did not refer to the character, but to the program of the activity of *Matica hrvatska*.⁶⁷ This hardly calmed the situation. A writer, Mile Budak, who would in 1941-1945 become a high-level official of the Ustashi regime – the minister of education in the Independent State of Croatia, stated that the delegates of *Matica hrvatska* that were sent to attend the centenary of *Matica srpska* in Novi Sad “were not supposed to give any statements regarding joining a federal organization before the committee of *Matica hrvatska* determined what the whole thing was about; as to prevent *Matica hrvatska* from experiencing the harm that the other Croatian institutions underwent when they suddenly joined such common organizations.”⁶⁸ In the background was obviously a question much deeper than the (lack of) authorization; the relationship between *Matica hrvatska* as “the highest cultural association” in Croatia with the other South Slavic, especially Serbian cultural institutions. The debate on Bazala's involvement in creating a new – Yugoslav – cultural association, indicated the attitudes of a significant part of the Croatian cultural (and political) elite toward the wider issue – what is currently and what should be the future political and cultural position of Croatia within or, possibly, out of the framework of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes? Budak ended his speech with a remark that removed all ambiguities regarding his personal stance: “But Dr. Bazala performed a miracle: he took such an attitude in Novi Sad, that he was frenetically applauded. Because of these

⁶⁶ Ibid., 373.

⁶⁷ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, “Skupština MH 11.lipnja 1922, Zapisnik o Skupštini MH održane dne. 11. lipnja 1922” [Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* held on 11 June, 1922, Minutes of Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* held on 11 June, 1922].

⁶⁸ Ibid.

praises, we knew in advance that he had to have done something we Croats would never applaud.”⁶⁹

Bazala tried to defend his position reminding the gathered members that “the tradition and the spirit of *Matica hrvatska* were not only Croatian, but Slavic as well. The relationship with the Slavic peoples will not destroy the independence of *Matica hrvatska* nor its national character. Cultural Slavdom and Yugoslavism do not imply the destruction of the Croatian spirit; Yugoslavism is a synthesis of the forces of all South Slavs.”⁷⁰ This was Bazala’s well known belief, a *locus classicus* of his public appearances regarding the issue of the relation between the Croatian, Serbian, and Yugoslav culture. Another member of the committee, Stjepan Ivšić, tried to calm the discussion interjecting that “in this time, when the Croats are labeled separatists, from some of the words of Dr. Bazala it could be concluded that in the committee of *Matica hrvatska* everyone is against Slavdom. *Matica hrvatska* has always supported tight connections with close brotherly Slavic societies, especially with *Matica srpska* and the *Serbian Literary Association*.”⁷¹

Before resigning from his position, Bazala concluded that “from the statement of Dr. Budak, it is obvious that in the council of *Matica hrvatska* there is no wider, Slavic perspective.”⁷² Probably not wanting to prolong the dispute, and wishing to avoid further conflicts and potential public scandal, Bazala tried to resolve this unique debate on the Serbo-Croatian and Croato-Yugoslav relationship by resigning. However, he did offer his list on the elections for the new leadership of *Matica hrvatska* held immediately after this discussion. Apparently, the majority of counselors no longer shared his understandings and attitudes; his former deputy, Filip Lukas, received most votes and became the president.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Thus in 1928 *Matica hrvatska* entered a new phase of its development. A year later, in 1929, king Alexander I proclaimed the royalist dictatorship. Lukas, who retained the presidential position until 1945, expressed a much harder attitude than his predecessors Tućan, Domjanić, and Bazala; from 1928, and especially from the mid-1930s, *Matica hrvatska* experienced a “drift toward the political right,” a process well described by Višeslav Aralica.⁷³ The first presidential speeches of Lukas showed the abandonment of “mild” and cooperative searches for the Croatian national and cultural identity in relation to other “Yugoslavs.”

From the beginning of the 20th century, *Matica srpska* experienced a turbulent development. The “young generation,” desiring to end the fatigue and routinism, took over the lead of *Matica srpska* in 1911, when Tihomir Ostojić became its secretary (the position of secretary in *Matica srpska*, unlike *Matica hrvatska*, was more important than that of the president).⁷⁴ Cries for liberation and unification of all Serbs (South Slavic unity was a common trope, but often in the background) became more pronounced.⁷⁵ An attempt to continue “where the war made us stop” was made difficult by a combination of economic and political reasons. Reinvested as the secretary in 1918, Ostojić resigned in 1920, taking tenure at the University of Skopje.⁷⁶ Neither did his successor, a prominent intellectual, Vasa Stajić, hold the secretarial position long. Historian Živan Milosavac explains his decision to resign by saying that “Vasa Stajić, realizing how illusory it is to dream of some important cultural mission of *Matica srpska* in the new circumstances, left the position of the *Matica*’s secretary.”⁷⁷ The public was aware of problems in *Matica srpska*, newspapers throughout the

⁷³ Višeslav Aralica, *Matica hrvatska u Nezavisnoj državi Hrvatskoj* [Matica hrvatska in the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2010).

⁷⁴ Božidar Kovaček, *Matica srpska 1826-2001*, 15.

⁷⁵ Živan Milisavac, *Matica srpska: 1826-1976* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1976), 31.

⁷⁶ MS 5928, Tihomir Ostojić: Ostavka. Dopis Upravnom odboru MS u vezi sa ostavkom na mesto sekretara MS. Novi Sad, 1920 [Tihomir Ostojić: Resignation. Memorandum to the Governing Board of Matica srpska Regarding the Resignation on the Position of the Secretary. Novi Sad, 1920].

⁷⁷ Živan Milisavac, *Matica srpska: 1826-1976*, 33.

country but, reasonably, mostly in Vojvodina and Belgrade, reported on the “crisis” in *Matica srpska*. Titles like “Do not profane what is holy,”⁷⁸ “How can *Matica srpska* be helped?,”⁷⁹ and many others alike pointed to an on-going “crisis.”

The position and role of *Matica srpska* changed after 1918 in the sense that, as a result of “liberation and unification,” now it had to compete with Belgrade for the cultural leadership of the Serbian people; this struggle was often too exhausting for *Matica srpska*. Božidar Kovaček claims that “the reason for deterioration of the work of *Matica* was, partially, a lucky circumstance that the majority of the Serbian people now lived together in its own free state, where the ‘national work’ was no longer the precondition of survival.”⁸⁰ Milosavac notices the same “provincial lethargy,” which he interprets in terms of the “new-old” dichotomy, alike the 1911 change of generations.⁸¹ Kovaček argues that another reason for worsening of the *Matica*’s situation lies in the ideology of integral Yugoslavism, “forced” by king Alexander I Karađorđević, which “marginalized” the institutions carrying the Serbian national name and program.⁸² Scholarly works on *Matica srpska* share an assessment of the impact of the 1929 dictatorship and integral Yugoslavism on the situation in *Matica* – integral Yugoslavism oppressed the Serbian name as well, and was thus hostile toward *Matica*.

Such interpretations are correct only to a certain level; such assessments neglect the changing attitude within *Matica srpska* toward the relation between the Serbian and Yugoslav culture and a growing number of supporters of “forced” unitarism among the members in the late 1920s. The “old” leadership, led by the president Radivoje Vrhovac, was opposed by the “new” (although not necessarily of young age) supporters of unitarist Yugoslavism and, consequently, the royalist dictatorship, led by a sociologist, Mirko Kosić, and Fedor Nikić.

⁷⁸ “Ne profanišite svetinju!” [Do not profane what is holy!], *Novi Sad*, Vol. 5, No. 47, December 22, 1928.

⁷⁹ “Kako se može pomoći Matici srpskoj?” [How can *Matica srpska* be helped?], *Novi Sad*, Vol. 6, No. 8, 23 February, 1929.

⁸⁰ Božidar Kovaček, *Matica srpska 1826-2001*, 15.

⁸¹ Živan Milisavac, *Matica srpska: 1826-1976*, 35.

⁸² Božidar Kovaček, *Matica srpska 1826-2001*, 15-16.

They considered the “raising of the cultural standards a basic precondition for the political and constitutional development of the state. The constitution of *Matica srpska* was changed in 1920, 1923, 1929, and 1930. The alterations were not “ideologically” pregnant in the sense that they reflected the oscillations of political mood or affiliation to one or the other cultural ideas; they were mostly “technical,” aiming to modernize *Matica* and bring it in line with new political, social, and cultural circumstances. One of the issues that proved to be inadequately solved was the admittance of new members and their voting rights. In 1929, this culminated in attempts of the “oppositional” group to take over the lead in *Matica* by bringing in “its” members. Although the whole question is primarily a technical one, concerning the power-struggle within *Matica*, it is important for it implies an attempt to bond *Matica* more closely with the dictatorial regime. In cultural terms, this implied the abandonment of narrower “regional (Vojvodian)-Serbian” for a wider “Serbian-Yugoslav” identity.

Especially turbulent were two sessions of the Assembly of *Matica srpska* in 1929; however, no significant or well-articulated ideas regarding the Serbian and Yugoslav culture were presented at either session. Following the provocations by Dr. Hadži, backed by his supporters (mentioned as his students), unable to verify the membership in *Matica* of numerous gathered people, and because of the physical confrontation of two counselors that prompted police intervention, president Vrhovac dismissed the first session, held on 1 September, 1929.⁸³ He did not attend the second session on 27 October, 1929. Although the repeated session was more sober, again no final solution regarding the admission of new members or new administration was reached;⁸⁴ such an unresolved situation additionally burdened *Matica srpska* throughout the 1930s. And the fact that most of the mentioned new

⁸³ MS, 8433, “Stenografski zapisnik redovne godišnje skupštine Matice srpske održane 1. septembra 1929.g.” [Stenograph notes of regular Annual Assembly of *Matica srpska*, held on 1 September, 1929], 10.

⁸⁴ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, “Skupština MH 11.lipnja 1922, Zapisnik o Skupštini MH održane dne. 11.lipnja 1922” [Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* held on 11 June, 1922, Minutes of Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* held on 11 June, 1922].

members were “colonists and volunteers,” who were usually supporters of the king and unity – proper “Yugoslavs,” so to say – gives an additional political implication to the problem.

While the Croatian *Matica* was distancing itself from the Yugoslav cause, including (or especially) its cultural cause, the Serbian *Matica* was trying to overcome its “provincial cultural policy and Vojvodian regionalism” in favor of a wider (integral) Yugoslav cause.⁸⁵ These emphases on the Yugoslav identity should, however, be carefully distinguished from the Great-Serbian aspiration; the discourse analysis will point out several vital categories of this shift.

2.3. *Thinking and creating culture*

To speak, as Dimić and, partially, Wachtel did, of cultural policy rather than culture itself – having the Yugoslav experience in mind, can be an appropriate approach, at least as long as the limited possibilities of the actors involved in making this policies are observed. The understanding of what culture is was another trait shared by *Matica srpska* and *Matica hrvatska*. Every presidential and most of the secretarial speeches given at assemblies in *Matica hrvatska* referred not only to Yugoslav culture, but implied definitions of “culture” as an “expression of the national spirit” etc. The detailed analysis of discourse on cultural essentialism and constructivism will be presented later, but several main characteristics of methodology and strategies employed by *Matice* toward the issue of common cultural space are worth elaborating.

Arguably the most important characteristic of the “cultural activity” of *Matica srpska* and *Matica hrvatska* is their specific role; they are engaged in the cultural production primarily as a mediator. *Matice* themselves produced very little or no art. Just as the majority of cultural and educational associations throughout the country, their contribution was more

⁸⁵ Biljana Šimunović, *Matica srpska u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, 30.

political- and “theoretical-” than production-orientated. *Matice* gathered intellectuals and “cultural workers,” a category covering a wide range of professions, including politicians, professors, journalists and publishers, “free professionals” like lawyers, members of (Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox) clergy; everyone connected in any manner with “culture.” Dragutin Domjanić, the president of *Matica hrvatska* from 1921 to 1926 was, interestingly, among few prominent and active members directly involved in cultural production; he served as a judge as well. Domjanić was a respected poet, writing in the Croatian *kajkavian* dialect. Among the “artists”, predominant were authors, either writers or publicists. On the one hand, as an inheritance of an earlier nation-building period – albeit this process was not considered to be completed – and, on the other hand, as a response to the pressing issue of language issues (differences or similarities) among the South Slavs but primarily the Serbs and Croats, the “nation-thinking” process was devised in cultural categories; furthermore, it was a literary project. Speaking of “the cultural ideals of *Matica srpska*,” Subotić claimed that “Matica considers its duty to cooperate in formulating the *new national religion* [referring to national unity, italics added] and knows: its literature and poetry are the most convenient propagators of the new ideas and new [national] feelings.”⁸⁶ The most tangible result of the cultural work of both institutions are numerous published titles, translations of foreign classics and domestic authors, well-established and promising young names alike, and the “popular literature” with (sometimes disputed) educational value.

The entire cultural discourse in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes rested on four cornerstones, concepts that were sometimes interchangeable, and none of which were consistently defined: politics, culture, education, and art. The most important was the relationship between culture, politics, and education. “Culture” was handled by the Ministry

⁸⁶ K. Subotić, “Kulturni ideali Matice srpske” [The Cultural Ideals of *Matica srpska*], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCVII, No. 301 (1922/1923), 94.

of Education. To explain this as a mere technical issue would be misleading; culture and education were closely tied, if not identical concepts.

The president of *Matica srpska* argued that “the school, literature, and art are the most powerful factors for the formation of a single national spirit.”⁸⁷ But first, in order to have good school policies, a political good will is required. The politicians, whom the affiliates of *Matica srpska* regularly accused of working against the common cause, were the first instance; school the second. As will be elaborated in the chapter on unity, the strong emphasis put on school is not only due to the extremely high illiteracy rates; it also indicates an uncertainty regarding the nature of cultural and national identity. The question arises: can culture and, consequently, a national identity be acquired through education? The zeal of two *Matice* (though of the Serbian more pronouncedly) concerning the enlightenment of popular masses suggests a positive answer. Culture itself was not *only* inheritable; through proper education, one’s cultural identity could have been “improved,” made more receptive for unity.

In the journal *Letopis Matice srpske* (the Chronicle of *Matica srpska*) school, literature, and art were repeatedly proclaimed to be “the most powerful factors for the formation of a single national spirit.”⁸⁸ On the one hand, the possibility of art to transcend the particularities, due to its “immunity to all narrow-regional, tribal and partisan infections” was observed:

Through our art, everything that was until now so blindly separated will be joined together in one unique and common cultural-artistic action; this will be a step further in the strong and flourishing enthusiasm of our new and common cultural progress.⁸⁹

On the other hand, the practical engagement of *Matice* with education was, apart from publishing “books for the people,” quality and usefulness of which was occasionally discussed, minimal. The main role of both *Matice* was to provide “moral,” financial, and

⁸⁷ Radivoje Vrhovac, “Za potpuno duhovno jedinstvo” [For Total Spiritual Unity], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CIV, No. 323, Issue 1 (January, 1930), 2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁹ M. Petrov, “Pred našu proslavu” [In Expectations of Our Celebration], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CI, No. 312, Issue 2-3 (May-June, 1927), 178.

technical support. More importantly, the Croatian and Serbian Matica alike were forums for debating culture. They were important parts of what Habermas termed the public sphere.⁹⁰ Although important, they were not vital; the cultural and educational policy was entirely in the hands of the Ministry of Education in Belgrade. This is not to say that the ministry was immune to the suggestions of “cultural workers.” If nothing else, numerous members of the “creative cultural elite,” obtaining degrees in humanities and unable to earn a living only as writers and publicists, were employed as the state officials.⁹¹ Contemporaries rightfully commented on the lack of coherent educational (*ergo*, cultural as well) policy, but these issues were not exceptions since the state could not reach an agreement even on more pressing problems. Wachtel plausibly points at a significant problem: “because the political arena tended to dominate public discussion, other areas of public life, particularly ones relating to the creation of a Yugoslav national culture were pushed to the background.”⁹² Therefore, numerous cultural associations could publish ideas on culture, even receive support from the ministry, but could not make real change in the political space of the first Yugoslavia; the results of their intellectual labor remained confined to the fluid cultural space of the first Yugoslavia.

⁹⁰ See Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964),” *New German Critique*, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 49-55.

⁹¹ Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije: 1918-1988* [The History of Yugoslavia: 1918-1988], 339. See also Milosav Jančićević, *Stvaralačka inteligencija međuratne Jugoslavije* [The Creative Intelligentsia in Interwar Yugoslavia] (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, Centar za socijloška istraživanja, 1984).

⁹² Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, 79.

3. Crisis and the creation of Yugoslav culture

An investigation of the discourse on the cultural and national issues as employed by *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* aims at introducing a “middle” level between the individual intellectuals and artists on the one hand, and the administration and the creators of an official cultural policy, on the other. This “middle” level is represented in terms of cultural identity; here the “old” inherited particular national traditions encountered “new” realities and an ambitious project of creating a new culture.

A researcher has to distance themselves from an assessment of the national attitudes – Serbian, Croatian and Slovene alike – toward all the Yugoslav issues, which operate within a kind of binary system, ranging from the support of, to opposition to, the Yugoslav idea, with all nuances eventually ending in one of the extremes. Diachronic observation of the attitudes toward a common culture is useful as it provides a *Begriffsgeschichte*-like insight in changes of the key concepts and the development of associations like the Croatian and Serbian *Matica* in relation to political events. However, this approach tends to be simplistic and is prone to generalizations, presenting the Croats as mainly opposed to Yugoslavia/-ism and separatist, and the Serbian pro-Yugoslav attitudes as a disguise for Greater-Serbian nationalism. While the discourse of *Matice* does *partially* exemplify such conclusions, it offers more; an insight in the constitutive concepts and tropes around which the process of creating a “Yugoslav cultural space” revolved.

Although contemporaries themselves were not entirely sure to which “world” – the East or the West – the first Yugoslavia belonged, the young South Slavic state was experiencing certain problems usually regarded as typically western. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was in a desperate economic situation that would not change significantly until the state’s break-up in 1941; a combination of inherited industrial, social,

juridical, and infrastructural shortcomings was only worsened by the devastation inflicted by the First World War. As throughout Europe, late 1918 was only a temporary relief. Even the frenetic excitement of a part of the population was short-lived. The gravity of the situation – politically, as a result of constitutional crisis and permanent threat to the state’s borders, and culturally, as a part of a process in the search for the “cultural content” to accompany the recently gained political “form” – occupied a huge part of the public discourse. But the Yugoslav or “Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian” intellectual and cultural space, although self-centered, was positioning itself in relation to the “outer world” as well; in this sense, it is worthwhile to examine some characteristics of the tropes concerning the crisis, for they are indicative of the cultural self-positioning, which is the topic of the chapter four.

What is here termed “crisis” is not a single issue; it is rather a number of related problems, some of which were intrinsically Yugoslav, while others were common to the whole of Europe. A general overview of the contemporary public discourse, at least of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska*, suggests at least three interconnected crises: economic, political, and “cultural.” Terms like “constitutional crisis,” “Croat question,” “Serbian question,” “Macedonian question,” “crisis of our [Yugoslav] culture,” “crisis of our book,” “crisis of the parliamentary system” etc., were parts of the public discourse well before they became the titles of scholarly works. The press regularly reported on them, and many of them were so often used that they were devalued; especially the political and cultural crises are interesting regarding the process of “creating Yugoslav culture.”

3.1. The political crisis

The horrors of war exposed the intrinsic weaknesses of Western civilization that claimed superiority; or even to be the only “civilization,” in opposition to the other “cultures.” Oswald Spengler was just one of the European intellectuals prompted to question the very

foundations of “European civilization;”⁹³ such attempts responded well with concerns of at least a part of Yugoslavian intelligentsia.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was, at least officially, affiliated to the West in political terms. It was a close French ally, and a member of the Small Entente; in cultural terms it tried to prove itself equal to any European country, especially the victorious powers. Whereas the centralist 1921 *Vidovdan* constitution could have been modeled after the Serbian 1903 constitution,⁹⁴ the model for numerous aspects of the political, cultural, and economic life were sought in Europe, especially France and the United Kingdom. Many intellectuals opposed copying the West, observing Yugoslav specificities which made application of all Western attainments unfeasible. The Yugoslav position was rendered too vulnerable to survive a new war, particularly with hostile neighbors, and the grim European politics. A Hungarian politician, Marton Lovászi, wrote in *the Chronicles of Matica srpska* in 1925 that “the starting point of the European crisis is that the World War endangered the survival of European civilization. Doubtlessly, European civilization could not survive another war.”⁹⁵ Tensions should be avoided in Yugoslavia and in Europe alike; only unity could avert a disaster.

The “war-narrative” was a particularly interesting element of Serbian (primarily) and Yugoslav political and national identity. Refuting accusations that the Serbian-backed assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 triggered the world conflict, the war was seen as forced on Serbia, which suffered great human and economic devastation; it defended itself having in mind the liberation and unification of the other South Slavs. Both the sacrifices and victory were constitutive elements of this narrative. The memory of war

⁹³ See Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971).

⁹⁴ Vesna Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History* (Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 105.

⁹⁵ Marton Lovaci [sic], “Evropska kriza” [The European Crisis], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCIX, No. 303, Issue 1 (January, 1925), 10.

built not only strong ties with France, the major ally on the southeastern front, but the awareness of self-sacrifices as well.⁹⁶

The first major issue that the new country had to deal with was its organizational form, whether it should be a centralized or a federal state; Ivo Banac extensively wrote on this.⁹⁷ Already during the war, this question was the focus of negotiations over post-war unification, without a final decision being made. The debate on federalism or centralism was the only issue in which the attitudes of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska*, being closely tied to the problem of cultural unity, continuously differed. A rather strong regional orientation that *Matica srpska* nourished, which coexisted with the pan-Serbian and Yugoslav ideas, had little influence on its stance regarding this problem. As early as 1919, *Matica srpska* supported the centralist option as formulated at the Paris peace conference, stating that “our country should not be organized as a federal state, like Germany or Switzerland.”⁹⁸

Questions of organizational forms went hand in hand with issues of democracy. In a strongly centralized state like the first Yugoslavia, with a huge influence of the king and court, and run by only a small social stratum, democracy never fully developed. Misdeeds of the regimes were usually used as an explanation of the growing dissatisfaction in the country, which was also manifested in the attitudes toward cultural unity. The Croatian chronicler of *Matica hrvatska*, Jakša Ravlić, summarized it claiming that “the majority of the *Matica*’s leadership was in favor of one, common state, but the injustices [...] against the national feelings of particular peoples, maybe mostly the Croats and Macedonians, strengthened the opposition.”⁹⁹ This, somewhat stereotypical view is shared by Branko Petranović, a Serbian historian writing on Yugoslavia; he concluded that the Yugoslav authors cooperated more

⁹⁶ Vesna Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, 99-104.

⁹⁷ See Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*.

⁹⁸ MS, 1763, “Predlog za unutrašnje uređenje države Jugoslavije usvojen na sastanku u Parizu 15, 18 i 22. marta 1919. g.” [A Proposition for Internal Organization of the Yugoslav State, Accepted at a Meeting in Paris on March 15, 18, and 22, 1919].

⁹⁹ Jakša Ravlić, *Matica hrvatska 1842-1962* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1963), 170.

closely in the early periods, but that the reactions to centralism resulted in alienation, retreat and enclosure in one's one national and regional borders, publishing and grouping according to the national affiliations.¹⁰⁰

Otherwise mostly separated, the cultural space and the political space of interwar Yugoslavia were inherently connected in relation to the crisis. One without the other could not function; they formed a kind of *circulus vitiosus*, in which cultural unity was the basic precondition for political stability, or at least achieving a minimal compromise; without the political good will, unity would remain, as it did, only a dream. Beginning with the late 1920s, *Matica srpska* sharpened its pro-unity discourse and, after the establishment of the royal dictatorship on January 6, 1929, the critical evaluations of the parliamentary system intensified. Statements of the president of *Matica srpska*, Radivoje Vrhovac, are instructive in this regard. In 1924 Vrhovac negatively spoke about “democracy from above,” which, in his opinion, created “a cult of official position” and developed into a heartless plutocracy.¹⁰¹ It was still too early for a true “democracy from below,” which was precluded by poor educational and cultural conditions. His Croatian counterpart, Albert Bazala, shared this opinion; at the already mentioned controversial meeting in Novi Sad in 1928, Bazala argued that “the national enlightenment is in its core a problem of democracy, not in the political, but in the cultural sense.”¹⁰² The main problem, however, was that neither *Matica* could offer a strategy for improving the situation.

As many other intellectuals, Vrhovac welcomed the dictatorship. Wachtel is maybe somewhat bolder than ex-Yugoslav (Croatian and Serbian at least) historians when claiming that “the first days of the dictatorship were unquestionably a success. Croats and Slovenes

¹⁰⁰ Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije: 1918-1988* [The History of Yugoslavia: 1918-1988], Vol. I, 339.

¹⁰¹ Radivoje Vrhovac, “Šta bismo hteli” [What Would We Want], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCVIII, No. 302, Issue 1 (October, 1924), 2.

¹⁰² “Konferencija delegata kulturno-prosvetnih društava” [The Conference of Delegates of Cultural and Educational Associations], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CII, No. 317, Issue 3 (September, 1928), 374.

hoped that the king would curb Serbian power.”¹⁰³ A strong supporter of national unity, Vrhovac wrote on the king’s act in laudatory terms, once again emphasizing the interconnectedness of politics and culture:

Today’s parliamentary regime cannot be maintained anymore [...] Our national question has originated in the cultural field, and there it will be, in the end, resolved; in the last analysis, it is a cultural issue, an issue of cultural accommodation, and its resolution can be reached only through the cultural life and cultural work throughout our state.¹⁰⁴

At the core of this problem, as Vrhovac saw it, was the fact that “the birth of our young new state was done mainly by the “pre-war” people that tied their own hands in the framework of their different political doctrines, having in mind only their personal prestige and the responsibility toward only one tribe, one party, and even, unimaginable in a modern country, toward one religious confession.”¹⁰⁵ Such narrow views overcame every wider concept of national and political action. It must be noted that intellectuals alarming the public of the “political obstructions” did not point at particular Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Muslim, or other nationally orientated parties; not only individual politicians and parties were responsible, Vrhovac believed that the whole existing parliamentary system allowing for that was faulty:

Among other things, we pointed out the doubtful value of our democracy and the parliamentary system, having in mind an uneasy role of our professional politicians which obstructed – maybe more than anyone else – the sorting out of the situation in the country; in his [politician’s] narrow view, there was no state and its attributes, and he prevented the liberation of the tribal mentality of all different prejudices and thus precluded the feelings for the spiritual unity of our nation.¹⁰⁶

The political space and the cultural space of the first Yugoslavia were seen, especially by people connected with the latter, as permanently separated. On the one hand, the “elusive compromise – a conflict over the state organization rather than interethnic (Serbo-Croatian)

¹⁰³ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, 78.

¹⁰⁴ Radiroje Vrhovac, “Za potpuno duhovno jedinstvo” [For the Total Spiritual Unity], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CIV, No. 323, Issue 1 (January, 1930), 2. See also *Vojvođani o Vojvodini* [Vojvodians on Vojvodina] (Beograd: Udruženje Vojvođana, 1928).

¹⁰⁵ Radiroje Vrhovac, “Šta bismo hteli” [What Would We Want], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCVIII, No. 302, Issue 1 (October, 1924), 1.

¹⁰⁶ Radiroje Vrhovac, “Za potpuno duhovno jedinstvo” [For the Total Spiritual Unity], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CIV, No. 323, Issue 1 (January, 1930), 1.

hostilities – that Dejan Djokić deems to be the core problem of the first Yugoslavia,¹⁰⁷ omits the cultural dimension. On the other hand, Wachtel’s exclusive emphasis on the cultural issues does imply the existence of a “separated” cultural space, but no deeper connections with the political space (economic space, desperately rudimentary, had a limited role in this process) are indicated. The contemporary discourse points out precisely the discrepancy between these two spaces. Since they are intrinsically interconnected, the solution of the “Yugoslav crisis” – rather than “Croatian,” “Serbian,” or any other particular problem – has to be comprehensive; all-including and all-embracing. *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* very quickly after the establishment of the common state came to realize their secondary positions and roles. As “the oldest cultural associations” of their respective nations, and the major protagonists of the Yugoslav cultural space, they were unable to bridge this gap toward the Yugoslav political space. Nowhere was it so painfully obvious for the contemporary intellectuals and “cultural workers” as regarding the issue of cultural unity of the South Slavic people.

3.2. Cultural crisis

The cultural aspect of crisis continuously experienced by the first Yugoslavia is a complex category with several major interlinked components, ranging from the seemingly more benevolent “book crisis” to what Vesna Drapac terms “a state in search of a nation;”¹⁰⁸ a shared belief that national unity, unlike state unity, was not achieved. Running significant publishing businesses, *Matice* frequently elaborated on the “book crisis,” whose effects they directly felt. This was not perceived only as an economic problem, but as a part of a wider phenomenon – the crisis of Yugoslav culture. The “book crisis” was felt much more in Novi

¹⁰⁷ Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ Vesna Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History*, 96.

Sad than in Zagreb. A somewhat smaller publishing production of *Matica srpska* suggests that the root of the problem was indeed financial. The annual secretarial reports on published and sold books of *Matica hrvatska* refer to numerous problems as well, but it never happened, as it did to *Matica srpska* in 1933, that not a single title was published.¹⁰⁹ The “book crisis” was a common topic in *the Chronicle of Matica srpska* throughout the 1920s; several articles were dedicated to this issue only,¹¹⁰ otherwise it was elaborated within a wider category, which was labeled the “crisis of our culture.”¹¹¹ In a country with such a high illiteracy rate, a book is a fragile item; still, this “crisis” was debated on a much deeper level. In Svetislav Predić’s opinion, the responsibility was shared between the literary critics, publishers, businessmen, writers, daily press, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Post and Telegraph.¹¹²

A Serbian writer and critic, Todor Manojlović, warned that the “book crisis” was only a part of the comprehensive crisis of culture:

‘The book crisis,’ in the bottom line, means: that books are not read, that there is no interest in the literature, and that feelings, sensitivity for spiritual and cultural issues are lacking – it is a *cultural crisis* [...] We are living, somehow exterritorialy in the middle of the enlightened Europe, in evolution of whose ideas we are not participating, whose noble tunes and melodies have no response with us.¹¹³

Unlike the rest of the commentators, Manojlović did not blame this crisis exclusively on the post-1918 development; frivolity and spiritual alienation of Serbian politics, he believed, dated to the prewar era. Even before the War, there were no high ideals and cultural life. A common excuse for most problems in the state – “the postwar recovery period” – was in this manner refuted and deconstructed. The “barbarianism” he spoke about was deeply embedded

¹⁰⁹ Božidar Kovaček, *Matica srpska 1826-2001*, 16.

¹¹⁰ See Svetislav Predić, “Još o krizi knjige” [More on the book crisis], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CI, No. 311, Issue 3 (March, 1927), 256-272.

¹¹¹ K. Subotić, “Kulturni ideali Matice srpske” [The Cultural Ideals of Matica srpska], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCVII, No. 301 (1922/1923), 92-98; Geza Farkaš, “Potreba i mogućnost kulture” [The Necessity and Possibility of Culture], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCIX, No. 305, Issue 1-2 (July-August, 1925), 3-7; Todor Manojlović, “Naša kulturna kriza” [Our Cultural Crisis], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CI, No. 311, Issue 3 (March, 1927), 249-253; Vasa Stajić, “Budućnost naše kulture” [The Future of Our Culture], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CI, No. 312, Issue 1 (April, 1927), 1-4.

¹¹² Svetislav Predić, “Još o krizi knjige” [More on the book crisis], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CI, No. 311, Issue 3 (March, 1927), 257.

¹¹³ Todor Manojlović, “Naša kulturna kriza” [Our Cultural Crisis], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CI, No. 311, Issue 3 (March, 1927), 250.

in both Serbian and Yugoslav cultural space. However, Manojlović stood alone with his sinister conclusion. For the vast majority of his fellow observers, the central issue was that of cultural unity.

The attitudes of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* most notably diverged on the question of the cultural unity; they were not necessarily completely opposed, but show different reasonings and inclinations. The first and fundamental question referred to the categories discussed; are the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, three “tribes” of a Yugoslav nation that was yet to be fully developed, or are they already formed, separate nations? The concepts employed – tribe, people, and nation – had no clear and fixed meaning. The category of “tribe” was opposed to that of “nation,” but their relation to “people” was vague and liable to personal interpretation. In 1924, a Serbian sociologist, Mirko Kosić, elaborated on the question of national and cultural unity and concluded:

There is a strong separate national consciousness of the Serbs; formerly weaker and now definitely inflamed national consciousness of the Croats; and not only separate national consciousness of Slovenes but a separate linguistic-cultural field, detached both from the Serbian and Croatian fields. Our publicists wish to “resolve” the problem of the national unity of the Serbs, Croat, and Slovenes simply by labeling those three “parts” as tribes. But, the science defines a tribe as something else, and in the scientific sense the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes are not tribes, but nations. However, it is also true that these three nations can, under certain conditions, be blended in a community we call nation.¹¹⁴

No unique stance on cultural unity was formed within *Matica srpska* until the very end of the 1920s. Among the leadership and in the publications, a variety of attitudes was articulated. Total unity was desired by all, but the proposed strategies differed. The royal dictatorship, followed by a decree on renaming the state the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and a new administrative organization on October 3, 1929, was welcomed by the members of *Matica srpska* as well. Summarized by the battle cry “unity before everything, unity above

¹¹⁴ Mirko M. Kosić, “Narodno jedinstvo sa gledišta sociologije” [National Unity from the Sociological Point of View], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCVIII, No. 302, Issue 1 (October, 1924), 32.

everything,”¹¹⁵ for a short period after 1929, enthusiasm due to what was believed to be the achieved national and cultural unity dominated the discourse of *Matica srpska*: Vrhovac boldly claimed that “by the legitimization of the Yugoslav name for our Kingdom, the tribal grouping and the competition for tribal prestige is forever prevented.”¹¹⁶

Unity was in the minds of the members of the Croatian *Matica* as well, but their main concern was differentiation between the levels of identity. Yugoslav identity as a superimposed category was desirable as long as it was not conflicting with the “Croatian level.” In the period 1918-1929, the leadership of *Matica hrvatska* repeatedly expressed its long tradition of devotion to the Yugoslav cause. However, the true devotion is hard to distinguish from paying lip service to the regime. Defending the Croatian cultural particularity, *Matica*’s president, Domjanić, said in 1927:

Some people have observed that our cultural strength is diminishing, since it is too divided into various centers. They wanted to unite the culture as well, to centralize us in that aspect too [...] We are interested whether it is really a luxury for our, in comparison to the other, small people, to have several cultural centers? In my belief, it is not. A flower springs where it finds appropriate soil and the Sun [...] The cultural centers develop where they are induced by the historical necessity, the geographical conditions, the national consciousness, or all three factors. The existence of all of our cultural centers is justified and they must not be disturbed. Our most important cultural centers are, the Serbian – Belgrade, the Slovenian – Ljubljana, and the Croatian – Zagreb. Indeed, we are a state of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It would be easier if we effectively had one language and one script. But even then, our three centers would not be redundant. Can one center be sufficient for the whole state? No, it cannot.¹¹⁷

Most importantly, in the discourse of *Matica hrvatska*, as Domjanić pointed out “who is ashamed of their national name is ashamed of themselves as well; they were never a Croat, nor a

¹¹⁵ Franjo Malin, “Za jedno pismo” [For One Script], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CIV, No. 326, Issue 3 (December, 1930), 181.

¹¹⁶ Radivoje Vrhovac, “Za potpuno duhovno jedinstvo” [For Total Spiritual Unity], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CIV, No. 323, Issue 1 (January, 1930), 2.

¹¹⁷ Due to illness, Domjanić could not attend the assembly, so his prepared speech was read. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44., MH 1567, 2.2. “Govor predsjednika dra. D. Domjanića, pročitana na Glavnoj godišnjoj skupštini MH, dne. 29. lipnja 1927” [Speech of the President dr. D. Domjanić, read at the General Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* on June 29, 1927].

Serb, or Slovene, and therefore cannot be a Yugoslav,”¹¹⁸ the Yugoslav and Croatian levels of identity are complementary; they can coexist and should not be mutually exclusive. His Serbian counterpart, Vrhovac, asked “how can we be good Slavs if we are not good Yugoslavs?”,¹¹⁹ although he was quite cautious regarding the implementation of the same reasoning to (intra-)Yugoslav relations.

The crucial element of the solution for the Yugoslav cultural and, consequently – due to their interconnectedness – political problem, was the Serbo-Croatian agreement. Omission of the third constitutive element, the Slovenes, in scholarly works is partly based on the fact that it was, together with other national questions, somewhat neglected by the creators of the cultural policy themselves. In the already mentioned article, a Serbian sociologist, Mirko Kosić, sinisterly warned:

The sustainability and development of our state depend primarily on an agreement between the Serbs and Croats. But such agreement has to stipulate staying in a single country, since the demarcation between the Serbs and Croats is impossible; otherwise, an ‘irredentist’ movement would spread and there would be no peace. Only a state community of the Serbs and Croats (the Slovenes can easily territorially demarcate) can be peaceful, and their national community would be culturally productive.¹²⁰

As time passed by, it was ever more obvious that unity, especially the Serbo-Croatian, remained a distant, unreached goal. Both *Matice* were well aware of the situation. *Matica hrvatska* was in favor of cultural unification, but not at any price; it defended the particular Croatian culture within the Yugoslav cultural space. *Matica srpska* showed more sensitivity to the question. It is, however, an ungrateful task to distinguish between paying lip service to the regime whose legitimizing strategy revolved around unity, and the true beliefs of intellectuals.

¹¹⁸ Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44., MH 1567, 2.2. “Govor potpredsjednika dra. D. Domjanića na glavnoj Godišnjoj skupštini Matice hrvatska održane dne 24. travnja 1921” [Speech of the Vice-president dr. D. Domjanić on the General Annual Assembly of Matica hrvatska held on April 24, 1921].

¹¹⁹ Radivoje Vrhovac, “Za potpuno duhovno jedinstvo” [For Total Spiritual Unity], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CIV, No. 323, Issue 1 (January, 1930), 4.

¹²⁰ Mirko M. Kosić, “Narodno jedinstvo sa gledišta sociologije” [National Unity from the Sociological Point of View], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCVIII, No. 302, Issue 1 (October, 1924), 35.

One characteristic of cultural debates in the public discourse of the first Yugoslavia that not only substantiates the culture-politics relationship, but also implies a certain crisis of cultural identity are discursive strategies; an interplay of constructivist and essentialist stances that marks the whole grand debate on Yugoslav culture. The vast majority of intellectuals supported the common state; the Croatian intellectuals, although pronouncedly critical, rarely favored cultural (and political) nationalism or separatism.¹²¹ The Serbian and Croatian elites observed the lack of unity and shared a belief that it was achievable; the point of divergence was – how?

The frustrations of a part of the intellectual and cultural elite that supported the essentialist view became more intense in the late 1920s. An unusual character of the Yugoslav cultural circles was Franjo Malin; a Croat and fierce supporter of unitary Yugoslavism, the first Croat to enter the Main Board of *Matica srpska* in 1925.¹²² Malin articulated the most radical stance, which culminated after 1929; he developed a pseudoscientific theory of “Yugoslavism before Yugoslavs.” In his opinion, “brought from the ancient Carpathian homeland, the Yugoslav idea is *true*. It marks our full national unity. That national unity – the Yugoslav national unity – is *a fact that existed far before the Yugoslav people entered history*” [italics added].¹²³ Yet, with all the preconditions satisfied, Yugoslavs were still not spiritually united. The royal dictatorship and a new, Yugoslav name were for a short period seen as a viable solution for this problem.¹²⁴ However, the majority of the intellectual public, especially in Serbia, including the strong advocates of national unity, consciously or unconsciously employed the constructivist attitude.

¹²¹ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, 83.

¹²² “Posle 99 godina prvi Hrvat član Glavnog Odbora Matice srpske” [After Ninety-Nine Years, the First Croat Member of the Main Board of Matica srpska], *Vidovdan*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 5, 1925), 1.

¹²³ Frano Malin, “Istorijsko-politički pregled: Jugoslovenska misao” [Historical and Political Overview: Yugoslav Idea], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CIV, No. 326, Issue 1-2 (October-November, 1930), 72.

¹²⁴ Franjo Malin, “Smetnje duhovnom jedinstvo našega naroda” [The Obstacles for the Spiritual Unity of Our People], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CII, No. 316, Issue 1 (April, 1928), 15.

Again, unity required the two spaces – political and cultural – to work together. One could not be achieved without the other, for “it does not suffice to liberate and politically unite; one should know how to recruit, bond, and spiritually unite. The common cultural life, firstly only of the ‘higher,’ educated classes, is the right way toward creating the national consciousness, and bringing up the will to be and to stay together. Where this common cultural life cannot penetrate, chances for forming one nation are slim.”¹²⁵ Awareness of a long way to go was shared by most. The unity, as its propagators (at least before 1929) claimed, had to be “created gradually and indirectly, through the development of one common culture.”¹²⁶ Politics, they believed, could not force or decree unity. Still, this is precisely what happened in 1929. Rather, politics should be “a material precondition for beginning of the spiritual process of forming the nation within a state framework.”¹²⁷ The fact that the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian culture were “three and one simultaneously”¹²⁸ for the whole duration of the first Yugoslavia, and even well into the second one, depicts an inability to reach a “cultural compromise” and an inaptness of even the principal cultural protagonists like *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* to bring the cultural and political spaces to congruence.

¹²⁵ Mirko M. Kosić, “Narodno jedinstvo sa gledišta sociologije” [National Unity from the Sociological Point of View], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCVIII, No. 302, Issue 1 (October, 1924), 31.

¹²⁶ Mirko M. Kosić, “Zadaci naše nacionalne politike” [Tasks of Our National Policy], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCIX, No. 303, Issue 3 (March, 1925), 166.

¹²⁷ Mirko M. Kosić, “Narodno jedinstvo sa gledišta sociologije” [National Unity from the Sociological Point of View], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCVIII, No. 302, Issue 1 (October, 1924), 30.

¹²⁸ Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, 95.

4. Matica hrvatska, Matica srpska, and creating Yugoslav culture between the East and West

Few tropes were so persistently used to describe the political, cultural, economic, geographical, and other aspects of Yugoslav experience, as was the case with what is here referred to as “in the middle” trope. From 1918 at least until the 1980s, the self-perception of Yugoslavia and its citizens revolved around its ‘unique position between the two worlds.’ These two worlds – the East and the West – were socio-spatial concepts in everyday usage, whose meaning has changed surprisingly little since the late 19th century. However, due to the political and cultural specificities of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, there were certain discrepancies in their meaning and strategies of their employment, in comparison with the general practice as described in the majority of scholarly works.

Although the process of self-positioning in relation to the East and the West culminated during socialist Yugoslavia and Tito’s Non-Aligned Movement, the Yugoslavian position in relation to the “other” played a significant role in the 1920s as well. In many aspects, the importance of the East-West dichotomy and the symbolic geography in general is understandable in the case of a country that throughout its history coped, and, apparently eventually failed, to overcome the inherited differences among its constitutive units. For the public sphere, aware of the plurality of Yugoslavia and trying to either maintain the cultural polyphony under the unifying Yugoslav umbrella, or to nullify the differences in favor of one and the same culture, to think in terms of the East and the West, their differences and possible collisions, meant not only to be observant of the complexity of the Yugoslav cultural condition, but also to grasp the mechanisms – political, cultural, and intellectual – that could be applied in creating the Yugoslav cultural space.

An interesting trait of the Balkanist discourse is the tendency to easily omit the Yugoslav issue from the scope of its deliberations; particularly since the devastating break-up of Yugoslavia during the early 1990s gave the impetus for renewal of the cultural stereotypization and generalization, which, in turn, resulted in the emergence and rapid growth of Balkanism ever since. Due to the growing number of Balkanist titles, a general survey of the field can hardly be more than superficial. A part of significant works was mentioned in the first chapter. Still, several prominent works should be elaborated thoroughly as the paradigms and concepts developed there might help understand the attitudes of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* toward the Yugoslav culture in the 1918-1929 period.

Arguably the most important name is that of Maria Todorova, who started the avalanche of Balkanist discourse.¹²⁹ In her 1997 book, *Imagining the Balkans*, analyzing Western views – a discourse manifested through (mostly) negative stereotypes on the Balkans as a cultural rather than a mere geographical space – Todorova positions the Balkans in a wider East-West paradigm, stressing, however, the difference between the Balkans and Orient (in Saidian terms), since the Balkans were never a complete opposite of the West, or on a smaller scale, Europe.¹³⁰ For the Yugoslav case, her work is vital as it gives an insight in the nuances of the Europe-Balkans relations. The main importance of this paradigm regards the fact that this dichotomy was perpetuated on a lower level – within Yugoslavia itself, but not always in the direction implied by Todorova. Several problems arise when it comes to the Yugoslavian role within the discourse. The most obvious one concerns the Ottoman heritage as a signifier of what Balkan is; Slovenia and the central parts of Croatia saw no Ottoman rule, and Montenegro successfully defended its *de facto* independence. Built on the ruins of the two imperial systems, Yugoslavia comprised what was, and still is, stereotypically and

¹²⁹ Maria Todorova, “The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer, 1994), 453-482.

¹³⁰ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

quite vaguely understood to be a “borderline of civilizations.” The political affiliation and cultural oscillations of the first Yugoslavia do not allow its clear positioning, or pinpointing it on a cultural mental map. But by far the most significant shortcoming of Todorova’s paradigm is the fact that she, ironically, implies the passivity of the Balkan people, which can only be labeled as a backward and pale version of Europe, not as its complete opposite; unable to adopt the Balkanist strategies and employ them either to themselves or their neighbors, or even, as was the case with the cultural self-imagining of Yugoslavs, to adapt it and occasionally turn it against the West.

Diana Mishkova introduced the “Balkan Occidentalism,” a mirror view of Europe in the Balkans,¹³¹ pointing to the other direction of the relationship, but refraining from committing what Todorova calls “the fallacy of Occidentalism.”¹³² Although Mishkova focuses on an earlier period, her paradigm allows for more reflexive “self-constitutive strategies,” which are more suitable for the Yugoslav case. On the other hand, Milica Bakić-Hayden elaborated on the specific intra-Balkan self-constituting mechanisms – projecting the “otherness” away from oneself, to one’s neighbor: “Yugoslavs who reside in areas that were formerly the Habsburg Monarchy distinguish themselves from those in areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire [...] Within the latter, eastern Orthodox peoples perceive themselves as more European than those who assumed identities of European Muslims and who further distinguished themselves from the ultimate Orientals, non-Europeans.”¹³³ But this mechanism that Bakić-Hayden terms “nesting Orientalism” is not only a post-1991 phenomenon; certain elements of this strategy were employed even before the common South Slavic state was

¹³¹ Diana Mishkova, “In Quest of Balkan Occidentalism,” *Tokovi istorije*, No. 1-2 (2006), 29-62. Compare with Diana Mishkova, “Symbolic Geographies and Visions of Identity: A Balkan Perspective,” *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2008), 237-256.a

¹³² Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, ix.

¹³³ Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter, 1995), 922.

established, and others were perpetuated throughout its history, either in the form of benign or potentially dangerous stereotypes.

The symbolic geography mechanisms are important for understanding the process of creating Yugoslav culture; they appeared in different forms, and were less politically delicate, but they were constitutive tropes of debate on Yugoslav culture already during the 1920s. Several aspects of the usage of the symbolic geography in this debate are worth mentioning, precisely because this was the focal point of the whole Yugoslav issue. Not only was the symbolic geography used – in the public sphere, but, interestingly, not by the administration or the court, which remained immune to such deliberations – in defining the Yugoslav place in the post-1918 political and cultural system, hence “externally;” it was also used “internally,” to systemize the intra-Yugoslav diversity, and, by understanding the situation, to act upon it, whether to justify the diversity, as *Matica hrvatska* during the 1920s did, or, like *Matica srpska*, to forge synthetic (not necessarily unitary) national Yugoslav culture.

The most noticeable manifestations of the symbolic geography concerns the myths; self-constructed narratives developed and employed by each group – whether labeled a tribe or a nation – that explain its “historical role,” and, as a constitutive element of its identity, define the relations toward the nation’s “other.” In an introduction to a 2005 book, *Myths and Boundaries in South-Eastern Europe*, its editor, Pål Kolstø, distinguishes between four types of myths, all embedded in the symbolic geography and heavily relying on the East-West dichotomy, as well as the auto- and hetero-stereotypes.¹³⁴ The first is “the myth of being *sui generis*,” which correlates well with the Serbo-Croatian cultural debates and general power-relations. Kolstø rightfully notices that “in an uneven power relationship, in which a politically and numerically stronger group confronts a weaker group – the latter will tend to highlight the differences between the two, while the former will tend to emphasize

¹³⁴ Pål Kolstø (ed.), *Myths and Boundaries in South-East Europe* (London: Hurst, 2005).

similarities, up to the point of subsuming the weaker group unto itself.”¹³⁵ However, applied to the case of 1920s Yugoslavia, this concept should not be exclusively exemplified along ethnical, national, or cultural lines. Numerous Croatian intellectuals and “cultural workers” were strongly in favor of synthetic Yugoslav culture, just as a significant number of their Serbian counterparts were opposed to it. Although *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* tended to operate within the inherited national narratives, within them a certain plurality of attitudes did exist. Thus, rather than perpetuate the national divisions, a differentiation concerning the myths ought to be made according to the affiliations to the cultural projects, rather than “nationality.” Whether one was a Slovene, Croat, or Serb, indeed was of a great importance, and usually did affect individual attitudes, but was not necessarily a decisive characteristic; finer nuances have to be taken into consideration as well.

The second myth Kolstø elaborates is “the myth of being *antemurale*.”¹³⁶ Together with its variations, this is arguably the single most important trope, which was regularly used in debates on Yugoslav culture. Kolstø argues that “rather than insisting on the uniqueness of the group, the group is now included in some larger and allegedly superior cultural entity that enhances its status *vis-à-vis* other groups, who do not belong,” and adds that “the *mur*, or ‘wall,’ is of course the ultimate boundary metaphor, the last line of defense of the cosmos of order, against the forces of chaos or disorder.”¹³⁷ He correctly observes a “twist,” presenting occasionally, from the late 19th century onwards, the Croats as a bulwark against the West, primarily the Habsburgs and Italy, assuming the role of defenders of Slavdom.¹³⁸ The analysis of the discourses of two *Matice* shows the vital strategies of application of these myths to the process of *thinking, creating*, or even *deconstructing* Yugoslav culture, including indicative consistencies and inconsistencies of their employment. One significant variation of the

¹³⁵ Pål Kolstø, “Introduction: Assessing the Role of Historical Myths in Modern Society,” in Pål Kolstø (ed.), *Myths and Boundaries in South-East Europe* (London: Hurst, 2005), 19.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

antemurale myth is the “crossroad myth” immanent both to the “lower,” particular national (Serbian, Slovenian, or Croatian) level, and especially to the “higher,” Yugoslav level; here, a crossroad position is an explanatory category vital for understanding and, if necessary, overcoming the plurality of Yugoslav culture. Complementary to it is the “bridge-metaphor,” referring to the merging rather than separation of cultures, which Todorova highlights as the central one. Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić state that “a bridge between East and West reveals the Balkan experience of ‘in-betweenness,’”¹³⁹ referring to a “transitional character” of the Balkans.¹⁴⁰ In the discourse of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* this trope was abundantly employed on both levels; in a Yugoslav and a particular national context.

The third myth, “*martyrium*,” focuses on “the defeats and the victimization of the group [...] investing the identity boundary with a moral significance; those who are downtrodden are morally superior to their oppressors.”¹⁴¹ It mostly gained in importance in a later period. However, this is not to say that it was not used in the interwar period. Kolstø does not relate it to the *antemurale* myth, although in the Yugoslav case they go hand in hand. Defending something against a vicious attacker, as were the Ottomans, implied enduring great sacrifices; this made the defenders even more worthy. Just like the Serbian, the Croatian version of the myth focused on the non-European Ottomans as the main “others;” on the other hand, the Serbs, being Orthodox Christians, were also the Croatian “other,” representatives of the East against whom Croatia defended European, “Western” values. The Serbian version shares many similarities; the Ottomans remained the primary “other,” which was much more pronounced than in the Croatian case. The defeat by the Ottomans at Kosovo polje in 1389 was, and still remains, one of the central elements of the Serbian national identity, including its cultural aspects; that event ended – symbolically rather than factually – the “golden age” of

¹³⁹ Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić (eds.), *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), 16.

¹⁴⁰ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 18.

¹⁴¹ Pål Kolstø, “Introduction: Assessing the Role of Historical Myths in Modern Society,” 21.

the Serbian medieval state. Regarding the reversed direction, Serbia defended the “true Christianity” against the corruption coming from the West, which, in addition, neglected the Serbian sufferings that saved it. The religious component is of great importance for sustaining an identity in this case; as Bjelić and Savić argue, “the Orthodox Church always presented itself as the West; that is, as part of Christendom in relation to the Islamic East. But in relation to Roman Catholicism, the Orthodoxy presented itself as rooted in the monastic East.”¹⁴²

The “golden age” trope is a decisive element to the fourth myth – “the myth of *antiquitas*” – in which, as Kolstø argues, “myth-makers tend to focus on the period of the state’s greatest expansion, its ‘golden age.’”¹⁴³ The longevity of the South Slavs, their rich history in the Balkans, was one side of Yugoslav culture. Notwithstanding the extreme essentialist concepts that claimed that the Yugoslav idea was older than the Yugoslavs themselves,¹⁴⁴ even those believing that the Yugoslav idea is “here,” and only needs to be realized, sought the legitimization of the whole enterprise in South Slavic history. This “burden” of history, however, was not seen as conflicting, but as complementary to the future-orientated Yugoslav ideology, aiming, quite ambitiously, in Herderian terms, to rejuvenate Europe.¹⁴⁵ The pre-Yugoslav (that is, pre-1918), and Yugoslav (post-1918) history were perceived as parts of a same process; the “golden ages” like the Serbian 14th century empire under the emperor Dušan, or the Renaissance highlights of a city-state Dubrovnik (whose Croatian identity was often disputed by Serbian intellectuals, not necessarily in order to label it Serbian, but also to make of it an example of a shared, proto-Yugoslav cultural space, albeit

¹⁴² Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić (eds.), *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, 4.

¹⁴³ Pål Kolstø, “Introduction: Assessing the Role of Historical Myths in Modern Society,” 22.

¹⁴⁴ Frano Malin, “Istorijsko-politički pregled: Jugoslovenska misao” [Historical and Political Overview: Yugoslav Idea], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CIV, No. 326, Issue 1-2 (October-November, 1930), 72.

¹⁴⁵ Rory Yeomans, “Of ‘Yugoslav Barbarians’ and Croatian Gentleman Scholars: Nationalist Ideology and Racial Anthropology in Interwar Yugoslavia,” in Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling (eds.), *‘Blood and Homelands’: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2007), 94-102.

a tiny one) were not only the foundations of the 20th-century, modern Yugoslav culture; “old” and “new” was intrinsically connected, forming one “continuous” entity.

4.1. Yugoslavia at a crossroad, a bulwark, or a bridge?

An analysis of the discourse of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* on Yugoslav culture shows that all previously mentioned tropes were abundantly employed. However, not all of them correlated in the same degree with the Yugoslav reality and needs. The tropes like crossroad, bulwark, or a bridge, had a twofold function. On the one side, through them the everyday reality and the complexity of the Yugoslav political, social, cultural, and economic situation was interpreted; on the other side, understanding them was a precondition for overcoming their possible negative consequences.

Although Kolstø’s systematization is valid and highly useful, the analyzed discursive strategies as employed by two *Matice* cannot substantiate such a clear division. Due to their interconnectedness, the mentioned four myths in their relation to the symbolic geography will here be addressed under a wider label – “between the East and the West;” within it, finer nuances will be differentiated and analyzed more thoroughly. Complementary to Kolstø’s systematization, but directly focused on the Croatian symbolic identity, is the work of Ivo Žanić, who elaborates on the *antemurale* motif as a “part of the complex image of Croatia in the triangle crossroad-bulwark-bridge.”¹⁴⁶ Žanić warns of an easily forgettable fact that these metaphors are “not a description of their position by a recognized external authority but a self-description of Croatian origin, as in other, similar cases – Polish, Lithuanian, and Hungarian.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Ivo Žanić, “The Symbolic Identity of Croatia in the Triangle *Crossroads-Bulwark-Bridge*,” in Pål Kolstø (ed.), *Myths and Boundaries in South-East Europe* (London: Hurst, 2005), 35-76.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 40.

The motifs of bulwark, crossroads, and bridge were, of course, not invented only in the 1920s; they all had “pre-Yugoslavian” history, but after 1918 were, for the first time, applied to the direct Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian, or Yugoslav, contacts – now they were explicitly politically pregnant. The changes in the political sphere resulted in a modification of some tropes. In the late 19th century, the leader of the Croatian Party of Rights (*Hrvatska stranka prava*), Ante Starčević, developed an idea of the Croats as “people defying both East and West,” and identified the German “barbarians” as the main opponents; he was not yet ready to support the reversed *antemurale* metaphor, for it implied a South Slavic affiliation of Croatia, which he fiercely refuted.¹⁴⁸ Ironically, one of the most prominent members of one of the successor-parties of Starčević’s CPR, Frano Supilo, was not only directly engaged in the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, but elaborated on the “reversed *antemurale*” metaphor, claiming that “Croatia as a *bridge* to the Balkans is denial of any national idea. Croatia as a *bridge* to the Balkans (a bridge!) is the most humiliating role that can be given to a people (...) In the name of God, stop talking about ‘bridges,’ or a Croat will be ashamed to call himself a Croat.”¹⁴⁹ Croatia should not be, Supilo argued, a tool for German (that is, Austrian) and Hungarian *Drang nach Osten*, or supporting the politics against its South Slavic brothers. Regarding this, historical myths were now ascribed an additional layer of meaning; in 1921, *Matica hrvatska* was concerned that the 1671 “Zrinski-Frankopan catastrophe” was insufficiently perceived as a fight against Germanism, German force and attacks.¹⁵⁰ Much later, the bridge trope was also refuted by Stjepan Radić’s successor at the helm of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vladko Maček, who claimed that “Croatia is neither Eastern nor Western; it is a peasant land,” and said that he did “not like the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵⁰ Jakša Ravlić, *Matica hrvatska 1842-1962*, 170.

word bridge because people tread across bridges, and we have been trodden on for centuries.”¹⁵¹

The cultural crisis, elaborated in chapter three, revolved around the lack of cultural and national unity, and was interpreted in terms of symbolic geography. In Franjo Malin’s understanding, this was due to the specific geographical position of Yugoslavia:

Our historical development might have gone normally if our people were not situated at the crossroads of the two worlds. Here lies the historical sin that we are still expiating today, that still does not allow us to unify completely. Located at the crossroads between the East and the West, on the territory where for ages the “witches’ Sabbath” was going on, our people are divided and separated. The western side came under the influence of the West, and the eastern under the influence of the East, which were very soon manifested in all aspects of our national life.¹⁵²

Only a decade before Malin wrote this, the South Slavs were facing each other across a stereotypically imagined civilisational border. The political division was a lesser problem, annulled by the establishment of the common state in 1918; a once clear separation of the politically and culturally European Habsburg Empire from the eastern and Balkan (former) Ottoman possessions, was now done with.

Many other intellectuals shared Malin’s beliefs, but only a handful of them were able to develop it beyond the stereotypical and simplified understanding of the ‘unique position of Yugoslavia.’ One among those few was Jovan Cvijić, a Serbian geographer and an influential public figure. The majority of his works – although the scholarly validity of some might be questioned – was on cultural geography of the Balkans, though Cvijić was interested firstly in the Serbs, then in the South Slavs, and only marginally in the rest of the Balkan Peninsula, which he treated as a single cultural- and physical-geographical space.

In a number of his works, Cvijić modified his concepts, particularly regarding the “psychological types” of the Dinaric South Slavs, but the basic outline remained the same.

¹⁵¹ Ivo Žanić, “The Symbolic Identity of Croatia in the Triangle *Crossroads-Bulwark-Bridge*,” 63.

¹⁵² Franjo Malin, “Smetnje duhovnom jedinstvu našega naroda” [The Obstacles for the Spiritual Unity of Our People], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CII, No. 316, Issue 1 (April, 1928), 11.

Cvijić employed different methods for different fields of interest; when focusing on physical geography, the approach was positivistic, and the results fit into the referential system of geography as an exact science. His insistence on the psychological approach is much more interesting, but harder to grasp. For studying psychological profiles, Cvijić used, as he called it, a “direct method” based on observing people in their homes, and the “indirect method,”¹⁵³ which he himself failed to perceive as deeply embedded in the cultural stereotypes and closely tied to the mythological metaphors Kolstø elaborates on. Such a division is characteristic not only for Cvijić, but for a large part of anthropogeography closely connected with geopolitics; it is a combination of “exact” geographical knowledge and anthropological studies, linking psychical types and territory; culture and politics. Cvijić uses this methodology in all of his works, thus constructing an inextricable spatial and cultural narrative of a (Yugoslav) people-nation. However, besides the cultural topology of the South Slavs and the Balkans, Cvijić’s original contributions are very limited; systematization was original, but the psychological characteristics he described were vague and derived from the pre-existing national self-constitutive narratives.

In the manner of a geographical determinist, Cvijić interpreted the psychological differences among the Yugoslavs in relation to the external cultural influences. According to Cvijić, the Balkan Peninsula was space where diverse civilizations encountered; zone of the old Balkan, or modified Byzantine civilization, on the one hand, and the zone of Western civilization, on the other hand, here encounter the indigenous “patriarchal regime.”¹⁵⁴ Writing this in 1918, Cvijić envisioned the Yugoslav-state-to-be rather than the Balkans; he accurately described its “in the middle” position, but refrained from foretelling its future.

¹⁵³ Jovan Cvijić, “Studies in Yugoslav Psychology (I),” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 9, No. 26 (Dec., 1930), 375.

¹⁵⁴ Jovan Cvijić, “The Zones of Civilization of the Balkan Peninsula,” *Geographical Review*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (June, 1918), 470-482.

Cvijić's "patriarchal regime" was ambiguously treated in the Yugoslav cultural debates; it was refuted as a source of backwardness, and "the people" were proclaimed the primary concern of the cultural elite who were supposed to "cultivate" them. Moreover, using the trope of a "noble savage," the masses were held to be the Yugoslav *differentia specifica* in comparison with the "other" – Europe. The "Yugoslav spirit" might originate with the people, but both *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* agreed – as Kosić presented it – that Yugoslav culture was to be created in a different space:

Most importantly, the necessity of creating a common *bourgeois* culture of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes must be realized; it should be created through an acculturation of the European cultural elements and become just another variant of European-American culture. The second option, for us Serbs, is to turn toward Eurasia, Byzantium, and Russia, India and Mongolia-China, but then the possibility of *real* national unity with the Croats and Slovenes is over, and we are returning to the purely Balkan political and cultural combinations.¹⁵⁵

Not everyone believed in the great importance of the East-West dichotomy, especially not for Yugoslav society. Milan Kašanin argued that both the crisis of contemporary European culture and the problem of East and the West "are quite foreign and little known to us, imported and implanted as the majority of our material and spiritual 'wealth.'"¹⁵⁶ For him, "the problem of the West and the East is for us neither imminent nor acute; it is presented like that in the writings of logomaniac and snobbish people."¹⁵⁷ The solution for a "non-existing problem," according to Kašanin, was simple: "the East should completely adopt the West European culture."¹⁵⁸

The Western cultural and political affiliations of the first Yugoslavia were generally not questioned, although the Balkans lingered as a discursive trope. When many young Serbian intellectuals and students took refuge in Paris during the First World War, these

¹⁵⁵ M. M. Kosić, "Zadaci naše nacionalne politike" [Tasks of Our National Policy], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCIX, No. 303, Issue 3 (March, 1925), 167.

¹⁵⁶ Milan Kašanin, "Napomene o problemu Zapada i Istoka" [Notes on the Problem of West and East], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CII, No. 318, Issue 3 (December, 1928), 399.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 403.

“young Balkans” established “a first contact with the West and Western Civilization,”¹⁵⁹ If this was the case with Serbian culture, did the question of affiliation apply to a wider, Yugoslav level; could the shared culture be Western – European, and Balkan – “Eurasian” simultaneously, or was only one level, preferably western, believed to be sustainable?

To answer this question, attention should be paid to the Balkan trope, in order not to perpetuate the tendency, as Wendy Bracewell formulates it, “to see self-definition in the region in terms of an all-encompassing East-West polarization.”¹⁶⁰ Contrary to what most of the scholarly works on the Balkan(-ism) might suggest, the “B-word”¹⁶¹ and everything it stood for, was not, as is commonly claimed, “detested.”¹⁶² In a culturally pluralist country such as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes obviously was, even if it was undesirable, aspiring to “enter Europe as a people with all objective prerequisites necessary to, in the foreseeable future, become an important political and economic factor in Central Europe,”¹⁶³ even the strongest opponents of the Eastern influences were not *afraid* of the Balkans.

Besides Cvijić, possibly the most thorough elaborations on the East-West discourse, the position of Yugoslavia in a wider hierarchy, and the intra-Yugoslav differences, were given by Filip Lukas, president of *Matica hrvatska* in the 1928-1945 period. As a historian and professor of economic geography, Lukas combined his erudition and scholarly expertise with what can be labeled nationalist attitudes. While Fran Tućan, the president of *Matica hrvatska* in 1918-1920 presented no significant ideas regarding this issue to the members of *Matica*,

¹⁵⁹ Boško Tokin, “Jugoslovenski ratni, književni i umetnički kalejdoskop” [Yugoslav war, literary, and cultural kaleidoscope], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. CII, No. 317, Issue 2 (September, 1928), 237.

¹⁶⁰ Wendy Bracewell, “Balkan Travel Writing: Points of Departure,” in Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis (eds.), *Balkan Departures: Travel Writing from Southeastern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 2.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶² Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, “Zašto i otkad se gozimo Balkana” [Why and Since When Do We Detest the Balkans?], *Erasmus: časopis za kulturu demokratije*, No. 19 (1997), 27-35.

¹⁶³ M. M. Kosić, “Zadaci naše nacionalne politike” [Tasks of Our National Policy], *Letopis Matice srpske*, Vol. XCIX, No. 303, Issue 3 (March, 1925), 163-4.

and while his successors, Dragutin Domjanić, president 1920-1926, and Albert Bazala, president 1926-1928, were preoccupied either with defending *Matica hrvatska* and its position in “particular, but Yugoslav” Croatian culture or their own position, Lukas was more prolific. Not only did he give a lengthy speech at almost every General Assembly of *Matica hrvatska*, but he also published more or less academic texts, the primary interest of which were national issues. The first presidential speech that Lukas gave at the General Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* on June 23, 1929 – a year after the assassinations of the Croatian parliamentary deputies, members of the Croatian Peasant Party, which additionally radicalized the situation in the country, and half a year after the introduction of the royal dictatorship – indicated changing the course of *Matica hrvatska*.

Lukas adopted the discourse of symbolic geography and further developed tropes he found appropriate for discussing Croatian and Yugoslav culture. For Lukas, geography and culture were inherently connected in a historical context; “there is no culture without a history, nor is there a history without a culture, because culture and history go together; history as a function of the culture, and culture as the essence of the history [...] Culture is not only the result of history, but also its prompter and the cause.”¹⁶⁴ However, there were some inconsistencies, for Lukas interchangeably emphasized the temporal and spatial components of a “national being;” he would occasionally give primacy to the historical legacy, claiming that “a people [a nation] depend more on its history than its blood and climate.”¹⁶⁵

Lukas also thought Croatia to be at the crossroads of the East and the West, exposed to the multiple external influences:

It could be said that the weakness of our Croatian internal unity is due mostly to the continuous influence of the strong neighboring cultures. The differences between a Dalmatian coastal type and a type of Civil Croatia in the Danube region originate primarily in the

¹⁶⁴ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, “Govor potpredsjednika Filipa Lukasa držan na Glavnoj skupštini MH dne. 20. svibnja 1928” [Speech of the vice-president Filip Lukas given at the General Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* on May 20, 1928], 3.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

geopolitical inclinations of our country; these two historically created types exist today as well, under the influences of the neighboring strong cultures – Italian and German.¹⁶⁶

Rarely were the “others” so precisely named. Their choice is interesting as it indicates the Croatian position on the *new* European cultural map, as Lukas imagined it. Croatia, he believed, inclined toward Central Europe, but no clear division could be made. If culture was superior to ethnicity, Slavdom, as an ethnic category, and the affiliation to Western civilization were not mutually exclusive; hence the Croats could have been both “western” and Slavs:

Every generation has its own Janus’ twofaced head; one future-orientated, standing as a vision or a problem in front of it, and the other past-orientated that lives eternally in the present. Both faces go together and cannot be separated [...] With one foot in the Balkans, and the other in the West, the Croatian people stood exposed to the Eastern and Western influences; therefore our history and culture are ambivalent. But the predominant influence came from the West, mostly during Humanism and the Renaissance. True, our racial type refers to the Far East, but the culture that is stronger than the race – because it transforms according to the human character – binding us with the West.¹⁶⁷

Lukas was not the only one that implied a triple structure rather than a rigid binary dichotomy; besides the East and the West, the third self-constitutive category was the Balkans. Whether thought of as bridges, crossroads, or bulwarks, Serbia, Croatia, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes alike, were positioned on a more general level between the East and West, but, on the other hand, for the purposes on an intra-Yugoslav differentiation, a more nuanced hierarchy was required:

The Europe was divided into two spheres, the borderline of which was passing through the center of the Balkans. Among these two spheres, the Slovenes and the Croats inhabited the Western, and the other Balkan peoples the Eastern [sphere]. Therefore in Zagreb the young and restless power of the Balkans, and the steady, refined, and stylized form of the West meet. That is why in Zagreb a pacifying compromise of the peoples, races, cultures, and religions occurred and still occurs; the blade of opposing forces is blunted.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 11-12.

¹⁶⁸ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, “Govor predsjednika dra. Filipa Lukasa održan na Skupštini Matice hrvatske 23. lipnja 1929” [Speech of the President Filip Lukas held at the General Assembly of Matica hrvatska on June 23, 1929], 4-5.

From the cultural perspective, occupying such a liminal space is highly ambiguous. It is benefactive as a culture gains plurality, but this was not necessarily seen as a positive effect. If nothing else, as the president of a cultural association struggling to maintain the Croatian cultural particularity, Lukas was cautious of the cultural transfers. It was not only the Serbian “cultural imperialism” that posed a threat. Lukas believed that history, in Rankian terms, was a product of national individualities;¹⁶⁹ since one of the crucial traits of a nation is its culture, the “denationalization” of a culture would have grave repercussions:

As much as the reception of culture for the personal and the enrichment of one’s nation is necessary, it can also become fatal for a small nation. The cultural imperialism is just as despised as the political; if supported and obtruded by the state, it can be more dangerous than the political hegemony, because the political hegemony is oppressive from without, and the cultural imperialism dissolves the intrinsic being and the core of a nation. In that case, and there were many alike in the course of history, the autochthon national culture, together with the people that created it, are lost.¹⁷⁰

An interesting feature of the discourse employed by Lukas – which, according to the minutes of the meetings, was regularly welcomed by the members of *Matica hrvatska* – is preference for the bridge trope over the bulwark metaphor, which is considered to be more suitable for nationalist causes.¹⁷¹ Although it is sometimes hard to delineate between the two paradigms, they are associated with different strategies. If the bulwark, or *antemurale*, metaphor implies inclusion in an “allegedly superior cultural entity,”¹⁷² which would, in the Croatian and Yugoslav case, be (Central) Europe, it is exclusive toward the “other.” This was highly problematic in the Yugoslav circumstances during the 1920s, concerning the attempts to create a common culture; but also in the Croatian case, for it presupposes and potentially reifies intra-Croatian divisions. On the other hand, the bridge metaphor is more inclusive,

¹⁶⁹ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, “Govor potpredsjednika Filipa Lukasa držan na Glavnoj skupštini MH dne. 20. svibnja 1928” [Speech of the vice-president Filip Lukas given at the General Assembly of *Matica hrvatska* on May 20, 1928], 2.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷¹ See Mark Biondich, “‘We Were Defending the State:’ Nationalism, Myth, and Memory in twentieth-Century Croatia,” in Lampe, John R. and Mazower, Mark (eds.). *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 54-81.

¹⁷² Pål Kolstø, “Introduction: Assessing the Role of Historical Myths in Modern Society,” 20.

tolerates multiple cultural influences and, consequently, more complex “identities;” “as a bridge between the East and the West, Croatia took part in the both worlds; in the Western cultural production, where our social and cultural development was formed, and in the Eastern, where we are racially and linguistically rooted, and where now the self-sprung source of our biological regeneration is.”¹⁷³ Lukas observed what he believed to be the predicament of Croatian culture, but even when denying the existence, or possibility of creating Yugoslav culture, a relationship between Croatia and its “others” was maintained.

Although Lukas argued that Croatia accepted the Western cultural elements and fulfilled its historical, political, and social development in the Western spirit,¹⁷⁴ at least in 1929, he was not *yet* ready to decisively pinpoint it on a cultural map. He claimed that “if we are connected with the West, we are an antithesis of the East, and if we are rooted linguistically and racially in the East, we are an antithesis of the West,”¹⁷⁵ and emphasized the Croatian self-awareness; because of it, the Croats critically and selectively accepted Western influences, but were not willing to refute the Eastern self-sprung influences.¹⁷⁶

Whether discussing a “higher,” Yugoslav, or a “lower,” particular national – in this context Serbian and Croatian – level, it is obvious that very similar, if not the same, self-constitutive strategies were used in the formatting period of Yugoslav state and culture after the unification in 1918. A number of their characteristics is analogous to the ideological strategies developed and employed since the late 1980s in the context of the break-up of Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav wars; the intensity of their usage during the 1920s was, however, much smaller. Rather than serving the mutually hostile nationalist projects, symbolic geography tropes were of great importance for overcoming the “identity crisis.” On

¹⁷³ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, “Govor predsjednika dra. Filipa Lukasa održan na Skupštini Matice hrvatske 23. lipnja 1929” [Speech of the President Filip Lukas held at the General Assembly of Matica hrvatska on June 23, 1929], 7.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 7.

the one side, the Yugoslav idea had a long tradition, but after 1918 was, for the first time, implemented in the real – politically, socially, economically, and culturally grave – situation. The East-West paradigm was only one of the mechanisms of self-positioning of the new state. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was obviously physically in Europe, but had to confirm its “Europaeness;” the state administration did it through the political alliances, and the intellectual circles by (re-)thinking the new, Yugoslav level of their “identity” within a wider paradigm. The cultural crisis revolving around the lack of unity, and an inability to overcome it by the constructivist means are closely connected to the Yugoslav “dualist development.” Particular national cultures had fewer problems regarding the multiple external influences; plurality was observed on the both levels. Yugoslav, Croatian, and Serbian culture were (self-) located in relation toward the spatial-cultural concepts – the East, the West, and the Balkans. Here arising power-relations were intertwined with the myths, manifested in the public discourse through various metaphors, telling or reaffirming the stories about one to themselves. Arguably the most peculiar trait of the usage of these metaphors is the rare employment *antemurale* tropes. On Yugoslav level, the bulwark trope would emphasize the Yugoslavia’s special position, a role of defender of Europe, and reify the borders toward its “eastern” neighbors; on the particular national levels, bulwark became a primary self-definition only in a later period.

In this formative period, during the 1920s, Yugoslavia – although suspicious and reserved, if not hostile, to the majority of its neighbors – was trying to be *included* in European or Western political, economic, and cultural life. Influential cultural associations like *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* at least temporarily tried to surpass the self-centeredness of their respective national cultures, and to operate on two levels simultaneously. Their discourse acknowledges the multiple external cultural influences, but also indicates pro-Western tendencies.

5. Conclusion

A work on Yugoslav culture almost “naturally” tends to be comprehensive; simultaneously all-inclusive, and yet reduced to a simple conclusion. Somehow, the central question of any elaboration on Yugoslav culture seems to be “was there such a thing as Yugoslav culture?” Such an approach is not specific only for the cultural issues; it is rather a predominant methodology applied to most deliberations on “Yugoslavia,” both as an idea and the state(s); a decisive assessment seems to be needed. For “outsiders” the Yugoslavian case is interesting as it provides an insight in the mechanisms and structures comparable either to the newly formed states on the Versailles Europe, the post-1945 communist countries of Eastern Europe, or the Non-aligned countries. The “insiders,” i.e. the (post-) Yugoslavian (as different from “Yugoslav”) scholars, are prone to stressing Yugoslavia’s “different,” somehow special position in relation to the mentioned categories. For them, particularly after the bloody break-up during the 1990s, a decisive assessment of Yugoslavia is, in a way, also a self-defining strategy.

This work, however, was not intended either to reify or refute the existence of Yugoslav culture during the 1920s. Nor fortunate, nor unfortunate, the first Yugoslavia – more precisely, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes between 1918 and 1929, which was in the focus on this analysis – was simply an existing framework within which often fierce cultural debates were held. At the end of analyzed period, in 1929, the president of *Matica hrvatska*, Filip Lukas, gave his verdict; according to him and a significant number of Croatian like-minded intellectuals and cultural workers, Yugoslav culture did not exist; there were three cultures: that of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, with more or less originality.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ CSA, MH 1567, 2.2. Zapisnici sjednica, 2.2.7.1. Glavna skupština (1901.-1936.), kutija 44, “Govor predsjednika dra. Filipa Lukasa održan na Skupštini Matice hrvatske 23. lipnja 1929” [Speech of the President Filip Lukas held at the General Assembly of Matice hrvatska on June 23, 1929], 10.

The president of *Matica srpska*, Radivoje Vrhovac, claimed differently, but was aware of the predicaments of Yugoslav culture. Even if Lukas was right and “Yugoslav cultural experiment” in the formative period of the first Yugoslavia failed; if the culture-makers were unable to transcend the inherited national cultural frameworks and to produce the synthetic multicultural environment, as Wachtel argues, this “failed enterprise” decisively influenced the two biggest cultural and national entities, the Croats and Serbs. In the new country, the Serbs and Croats occupied the same political space – although both *Matice* operated within the same political unit already before 1918 – and were, in one way, or the other, engaged in the process of constructing a common cultural space. The questions of similarity and connectedness within a particular culture and between the two particular cultures, as well as the self-positioning in relation to each other, a process which reflected the political power-relations within Yugoslavia, marked the future development of respective cultures. That is, “national” rather than “tribal” cultures. For, contemporaries rightly warned how inappropriate term “tribe” was for describing the South Slavic cultural and national entities. Although coping with significant internal differences (the leadership of *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* shared more cultural traits than they did with, for instance, some of their fellow-nationals from regions incorporated in the same state only in 1918, which points to culture, particularly “high,” as a social and class product) were by 1918 already formed “national cultures.” While *Matica hrvatska* argued that Croatian and Yugoslav levels were not mutually exclusive, *Matica srpska* – although occasionally accused for not overcoming its regional character – was inclined toward a unitary solution, based on erasing the differences and merging into one and single culture.

Claiming that there was no Yugoslav culture in the interwar period might obscure numerous processes on the lower levels which actually had “Yugoslav” characteristics. Even the dominant Serbo-Croatian cultural relations were not confined only to those two entities;

cultural debates in which two *Matice* participated operated on both levels – Croatian/Serbian and Yugoslav. Any deliberations on Yugoslav cultural policy in a way reified it, or at least temporarily made it more tangible. However, that refers only to the sphere of cultural policy; actual cultural production proved to be much more resistant to becoming Yugoslav. Even the Yugoslav label of Ivan Meštrović, arguably the best known interwar “Yugoslav” artist, who identified himself with the Yugoslav cause for a long time, was questioned by his contemporaries. For other, less prominent artists, it was even more difficult to “become a Yugoslav artist.”

Throughout the examined period, two *Matice* cooperated, more or less closely; the members of *Matica hrvatska* believed that “the work of our *Matice* must not be separated; it has to be mutually fulfilling in order to satisfy the national needs.”¹⁷⁸ The product of this cooperation might not be significant – *Matice* continuously struggled with their role of “cultural producers,” even within their respective national cultures – but were still the most significant associations. The establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918 for both *Matice* brought little change; however, from the rather small provincial cultural associations in the Austro-Hungarian framework, they became the biggest in the new state. Their newly gained “size” and cooperation – even when they are not communicating directly, but participating in the same process – should be juxtaposed to the alternatives to identity that Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper propose. Since identity “tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity),” they argue that identification and categorization, self-identification and external identification, and commonality, connectedness, and groupness should be emphasized.¹⁷⁹ With very few exemptions, an analysis of “Yugoslav identity” of

¹⁷⁸ Jakša Ravlić, *Matica hrvatska 1842-1962*, 166.

¹⁷⁹ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” 59-90.

any kind takes a constructive stance, viewing identity as “constructed, fluid, and multiple.”¹⁸⁰ Preoccupation with very similar, if not, in the end, identical problems, shared strategies and mechanisms of self-understanding, and identification as a complex process – continuous “search for one’s ‘identity’” – that *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska* experienced, clearly point to the coherent processes on the “middle levels.” The Yugoslav state failed to “impose the categories, classificatory schemes, and modes of social counting and accounting”¹⁸¹ primarily because the political identification, manifested in occasional changing of the names of territorial units, was forced over the cultural, which was in the contemporary discourse claimed to be in the core of the problem. However, the inclination toward Yugoslav cultural unity should not be overestimated only on the basis of the cooperation, even in the period while both *Matice* shared more or less favorable attitude toward Yugoslav culture; the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian intellectual environment remained nationally and culturally closed.

Focusing on several most important tropes employed by two *Matice* during the 1920s, this work aimed to question the retreat and enclosure in one’s own national and regional borders. Filip Lukas clearly manifested the Croatian regression to the national framework. Still, the “inclusive” self-constituting metaphors prevailed. There was no Yugoslav culture, and Croatian culture was national, Lukas claimed, but due to its position at a civilisational crossroad, Croatia was exposed to multiple external influences. The discourse of *Matica hrvatska* during the 1920s at least temporarily abandoned a more “exclusive” bulwark trope; Croatia was a bridge between the East and West, and despite a sense of belonging to the West, the Balkan influences were not necessarily negative. Members of *Matica srpska* mostly shared this Western inclination. This was not the only point of convergence. The political, cultural, and only then economic crises were among the central elements of their discourses,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 59.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 72.

but practically of the whole first Yugoslavia as well. The concerns regarding the lack of cultural and, consequently, national unity was common to both *Matice*, but not necessarily the proposed strategies to overcome it.

There can hardly be a decisive or unanimous conclusion of the attitudes of the Serbian and Croatian intellectual elites toward the Yugoslav culture. The elites and the state were inapt to “create” a new culture, to impose categories through which new types of identifications would be achieved. One of the reasons for this failure lied in the discrepancy between the political and cultural spaces of the first Yugoslavia, the latter being neglected by the political elites and confined to the debates of a small circle of intellectuals, unable to influence the official cultural policy-makers in the government.

But through the “middle-level” interactions, such as between *Matica hrvatska* and *Matica srpska*, their thinking the same issues, at least until the late 1920s certain cohesion was achieved. Even if no sustainable Yugoslav culture and cultural identification were articulated and the cultural production and policy regressed in the particular national frameworks, as was the case, it was through the cultural debates of the 1920s where in a mutual, Serbo-Croatian relation, as well as the Serbo- and Croato-Yugoslav relations, the identification process of particular national cultures began. Starting with 1918, Yugoslavism for the first time got a practical dimension; two “same, but different” cultures began developing in a closer, often uneasy communication, not only to one another, but in a wider South Slavic – Yugoslav context. The self-constitutive discourses and attempts to position oneself in mutual (intra-) Yugoslav relations, elaborated in this thesis, set course for the future cultural developments, partially evident even after the dissolution of the political and cultural Yugoslav space.

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