

# Transnational Approaches and fin de siècle Modernisms: The Case of the Croatian Modernist Movement

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## Transnational Approaches and *fin de siècle* Modernisms: The Case of the Croatian Modernist Movement<sup>1</sup>

In recent decades, numerous historical approaches have been proposed and advocated with the aim of surpassing the narrow national perspective in history-writing. They are most often subsumed under the name of ‘transnational approaches’. Epistemologically, they are grounded in such concepts as ‘entanglement’, ‘intercrossing’, ‘*métissage*’ etc. In this paper, the development and the basic epistemological premises of transnational approaches are first briefly examined with regard to the double imperative of reflexivity and surpassing methodological nationalism in historical research. In the second part, some key elements of transnational approaches, especially cultural transfer and exchange study, are shown on the example of research of the *fin de siècle* Croatian modernist movement, i.e., the *Mladi* movement as a case study. Finally, some thoughts are put forth regarding the possibilities of transnational research of *fin de siècle* modernisms and modern movements in general.

### *Introduction: The double imperative of historical research*

Reflexivity could be considered the most important feature of historiography in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the complex of social and political, as well as academic and epistemological changes – or ‘paradigm’ shifts – almost all of the previously held axiomatic assumptions concerning the presence of the historian himself in historical research and the role and status of history in social and political relations came under intense scrutiny. Perhaps the most important of the relationships that came under scrutiny is that between historiography and the nation. Notions of objectivity, essentialized categories of reasoning and nation-oriented research agendas could no longer be considered characteristics of ‘pure’ historical science which impartially and truthfully relives and reconstructs the past, but a feature of specific 19<sup>th</sup> century historical traditions heavily invested in their respective nation-building projects. But it is not enough only to offer a critique of dominant

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practices. New, alternative research agendas and approaches that countered the prevailing nationally-oriented historiographies had to be envisaged.

From the 1980s onward, a number of approaches emerged that challenged the dominant national perspective in history writing. They bear different names and had appeared in somewhat different academic contexts: *entangled history*, *connected histories*, *histoire croisée*, *transnational history*, *global history*, *shared history*, *Kulturtransferforschung*. Some of them are more conceptually and methodologically elaborated than others and their interrelationships are yet to be theoretically established. What they all have in common, though, is their interest in “circulations and connections between, above and beyond national polities and societies.”<sup>2</sup> Even though more nuanced theoretical elaborations are lacking, it is clear that the most pervasive common characteristic of these approaches is their opposition and alternative to national perspectives in historical reasoning and research. Therefore the most frequently proposed common denominator for all these approaches is *transnational history*, or more generally *transnational approaches*.<sup>3</sup> The monumental *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* defines it broadly as an approach “interested in links and flows,” which aims to “track people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between polities and societies.”<sup>4</sup> As this definition shows, many proponents of transnational approaches do not consider it an elaborate theory or methodology – let alone a master narrative or a paradigm – but a perspective, a specific stance regarding the relationship between the researcher and his object of study. Therefore the need to produce empirical studies based on transnational approaches was stressed over the need for a theoretical debate, which at the same time poses a risk of turning the ‘transnational’ into a merely fashionable label, rather than a well thought-out approach.<sup>5</sup>

A plethora of concepts and notions surrounding these approaches had been conceived and borrowed, not least from postcolonial studies: hybridity, *métissage*, intercrossings, translations.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most poignant for explaining the basic epistemological principle of all of these approaches is the concept of entanglement. It originates from the natural sciences, i.e., quantum mechanics, and had been borrowed from there as an explanatory concept in the humanities and social

<sup>2</sup> IRIYE, SAUNIER 2009: xvii-xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Historiography joined the debates around transnational approaches in the 1990s, but the concept had already been in use in political science, law and anthropology. Since then, starting in the United States, it had an uneven reception in various countries and academic circles. Needless to say, in Croatia this reception is non-existent or at best rudimentary. Cf. PATEL 2010; GOD-DEERIS 2011.

<sup>4</sup> IRIYE, SAUNIER 2009: xviii.

<sup>5</sup> PATEL 2010.

<sup>6</sup> SCHERKE 2018: 5; SCHMALE 2012.

sciences. Coupled with Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which utilized the observer effect theory to explain the fundamental property of quantum systems that the measurement of such a system cannot be made without affecting the system itself, these notions offer intriguing analogies for developing similar concepts in historical research. Not only do they underline the necessity of reflexivity in historical sciences and the essential impossibility for a historian as an "observer" of historical phenomena to "measure", i.e. to reproduce, recreate or reconstruct these phenomena as they really were (if there ever was such an ontological condition of things), but they also put forward entanglement as a concept which can minimize this very observer effect in historical research. We no longer deal with certainties, but with approximations, probabilities and verisimilitudes. The ideal of objectivity, or more precisely impartiality, can only be defined as an imperative of reflexivity, of a striving for awareness of those observer effects of which we can achieve awareness. It is therefore not surprising that the existing theoretical elaborations of transnational approaches had striven precisely to position these approaches as programmes for increased reflexivity in historical sciences, in addition to their more politically transparent opposition to methodological nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

In the pages that follow, I shall endeavour to outline some of the aspects of these relational, transnational approaches that have been most helpful and revealing in my own research into the *fin de siècle* Croatian modernist movement. It is already a commonly accepted proposition that the birthplace of the Croatian *fin de siècle* modernist movement – also known as the *Mladi* (Young) Movement – lay outside the boundaries of Croatia, in student *émigré* circles of Prague and Vienna. Yet, at the same time, the relationship between the movement to its more famous counterparts – the Viennese modernist movement and the Prague progressivist and realist movement – remains ambiguous. Although it is clear that the student activists of the modernist movement were clearly under the impression of their respective *milieus*, they were nevertheless primarily engaged with the Croatian public, its politics and culture. This raises the central question of the modalities of the Croatian modernist movement's entanglement with other Austrian and broader European modernisms. Can the Croatian modernist movement be seen purely as an imitation, a reflex of broader modernist currents? Or does a more nuanced model which takes into account different contexts need to be employed in order to fully examine the complex interactions between various actors, ideas and practices? In examining this problem, broader theoretical and methodological concerns come to the fore as well, dealing mostly with the possibilities of historical explanation of models for transfer and exchange between various actors in changing contexts.

<sup>7</sup> The most elaborate attempt to theoretically formulate such a transnational approach (*histoire croisée*) – they call them "relational approaches" – was put forward by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman. Cf. WERNER, ZIMMERMAN 2002; WERNER, ZIMMERMAN 2003; WERNER, ZIMMERMAN 2006.

*Modernist transfers and appropriation strategies*

Modern movements in general are objects of research that in and of themselves lead us to adopt a broader, transnational perspective. They are almost always connected in some way, whether simply as role models and reservoirs of ideas and practices or as full-fledged partners and allied movements. Yet at the same time, more often than not national boundaries acted as constitutive realities for them as well. Therefore it is impossible to fully understand them by focusing solely on their general, abstract and ideal-type aspects, or on their national iterations and specificities. Thus, the approach that focuses on the dynamic between the specific and the general, the global and the local, the new and the old emerges as the most fruitful. Methodologically, the relational approaches discussed in this paper offer the best way to go about this research. Depending on the research object and perspective, concepts ranging from entanglements and intercrossings to transfers and translations can be used to analyse the nature and dynamic of these multi-level and multifaceted interactions.

One of the key methodological precepts of cultural transfer studies that can be used in studying *fin de siècle* modernist movements is the one that postulates that the very act of exchange or intercrossing is not neutral and abstract, but constitutive for both the subjects and the objects of the exchange. Although the relationship between the actors of the transfer process is always asymmetrical, that does not mean that it is linear, a one-way street. Most importantly, however, the subjects of the exchange themselves change in the contact with the Other, just as the objects of the exchange do not remain inert in their meanings. Transfers do not entail a simple, mechanical transportation of an object – be it an item, an idea, or a practice – from one context to another. If that were so, this would imply that the meaning of an object is intrinsic to the object itself. Contrary to that, the transfer of an object is not only its relocation, but also entails a change of context which is constitutive for the interpretation of its meaning.

Even though the *Mladi* Movement's centres of formation were abroad, it had to ideologically position itself in line with the current political and cultural situation in Croatia.<sup>8</sup> The students in Prague were especially fascinated with what they had seen and heard. They were impressed with the successes of Czech national politics and were ardent admirers of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, proclaiming themselves 'political realists'. Yet at the same time they were very well aware that Croatia was not nearly as developed as the Czech lands were and that they would have to adapt the ideas they had appropriated to the current needs and the situation in

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the development of the Movement, cf. UJEVIĆ 2015 [1933]; MARJANOVIĆ 1951; LOVRENČIĆ 1972. Croatian student politics and Croatian students in Prague and Vienna are discussed in GROSS 1969; AGIČIĆ 2000; LUETIĆ 2012; IVELJIĆ 2015.

their homeland. In a letter to his future wife Marija, Stjepan Radić, a key member of the movement and later prominent Croatian politician, wrote:

“But in Croatia it is completely different than in Bohemia. In Bohemia, according to the law, the Czechs are undervalued as a people compared to Germans, but in reality, in life, the Czechs as a people are either equal, or have an advantage (of course, thanks to themselves), and as individuals, as human beings, they are completely equal. The great ideas of the French Revolution on equality (*égalité*) and liberty (*liberté*) have not just flown through Bohemia, they have taken deep root there. The national struggle is raging in Bohemia, there is fierce class strife and social conflicts, but everyone in Bohemia and in so-called Austria in general (except in Dalmatia and Galicia) are completely equal as human beings. This was accomplished by education and economic progress.”<sup>9</sup>

The Prague modernist circle around the journal *Rozhledy národohospodářské, sociální, politické a literární* was one of the key reservoirs of ideas for the *Mladi*. Many of the same ideas and even formulations expounded by the Croatian modernists can be found in the 1895 manifesto of Czech modernism “*Češská moderna*,” like the critique of the Young Czech Party, addressed as ‘the fathers’, the political emancipation of the youth, starting from the development of a strong and unwavering character and the notion of politics as “difficult, strenuous work and nothing but work.”<sup>10</sup> This ideological framework was appropriated and translated into a discourse more suitable for the contemporary situation in Croatia, partly maintaining direct source imitation.

The *Mladi* primarily demanded the transformation or development of a new national intelligentsia. Actually, their premises were multifaceted in this respect. They operated between the completely new and the adapted old. The context of the existing political, ideological and cultural landscape in Croatia, as well as long-standing traditions, necessarily framed their reception and application of new ideas and practices. Although their criticism of the views and politics of the *Stari* (‘Elders’) was very harsh, they were also open to dialogue. ‘*Stari*’ was not (just) a generational, but also a political label. A member of the older generation who was open to new ideas could actually be seen as a part of the *Mladi*. This means that the formation of a new national intelligentsia did not necessarily need to happen through an exclusive generational change, but was also possible through the, at least partial, transformation of existing elites. What was actually new in the ideas of the *Mladi* was the new type of the national intellectual. It contained two key elements. The national intelligentsia had to be based on modern, positivist knowledge of the people and their needs. As stated in one of the earliest

<sup>9</sup> KRIZMAN 1972: 228.

<sup>10</sup> ERSOY, GÓRNY, KECHRIOTIS 2010.

public proclamations of the *Mladi*: “One cannot work for the people without the knowledge of their aspirations and needs.”<sup>11</sup> This was a direct appropriation of Masaryk’s ‘political realism’ mixed with the awareness of a complete lack of activity by Croatian elites among the general population. However, despite having a collectivist ring to it, this idea actually did not extend beyond the framework of individualist bourgeois political awareness. The second pillar of this new national intelligentsia was a strong individual character that had to be shaped through education: “Society consists of people; and if we want our people to be happy we have to become strong, whole men.”<sup>12</sup> Positivist knowledge about the needs of the people actually did not really serve to develop an intelligentsia rooted in the people, as an organic intelligentsia, but rather to make existing national politics more effective in new, mass politics circumstances. The real subject of politics were still not the people, but their representatives embodied in bourgeois intelligentsia: “Do not let the expression ‘enlightener of the people’ simply be a dusty phrase and a shiny label; let us truly be the salt of our earth, enthusiastic drivers of its cultural power, advocates of a genuine education that leads to material and moral independence.”<sup>13</sup> This was actually a reformulation of the role of the *preporoditelj* (national reformer/revivalist), its (re)appropriation and adaptation to new political circumstances and needs. Contemporary European role models here meet with the 19<sup>th</sup> century Croatian political tradition. Even the *Mladi* were explicit about seeing themselves as successors to and, possibly, the ones who would complete the ‘Illyrian project’, i.e. the national movement. This, yet again, emphasized the line of continuity. Such a revival of the role of the *preporoditelj* in the guise of the young national intellectual brought about an axiologically defined necessary individual character. Just like in the case of “*Češká moderna*,” it particularly emphasized the importance of strength of character, perseverance, staunchness and moral strength. These characteristics dominated over positive knowledge. At the heart of the imaginarium of the *Mladi*, especially the generation gathered around secondary school publications, was the opposition between a wavering, frightened and passive intellectual who could not fight off the terror of Count Khuen’s, the Ban of Croatia-Slavonia from 1883 to 1903, government and a relentless, brave, uncompromising fighter for the people and national freedom.

In the manifesto titled “What do we want,” the editors of the Prague journal *Hrvatska misao* (Croatian Thought) summed up the critique directed at Croatian oppositional elites and the aspirations of the *Mladi* Movement:

<sup>11</sup> “Hrvatska misao,” *Obzor*, XXXVII, no. 286, 12.12.1896: 3.

<sup>12</sup> “Braćo i drugovi,” *Nova nada*, II, no. 1, 1898.

<sup>13</sup> “Braćo i drugovi,” *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> “Što hoćemo,” *Hrvatska misao*, I, no. 1, 1897: 3.

“Today the Croatian youth is full of romanticism, today they still sing ‘to arms, to arms!’, proclaiming with the greatest enthusiasm ‘let the Turk know how we die!’ – we want the youth to begin thinking realistically, to realize that the people have been pushed to their limit, that the people are desperate, that they decline morally, die materially. So instead of enthusiastic cheers, telegrams and statements, we want well-conceived work in the economic, educational and political fields.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Mladi* attacked the Croatian opposition for their politics of ‘Serbo-Croatian accord’. Instead, calling upon the true Yugoslav traditions of the historian Franjo Rački (1828-1894) and the linguist Đuro Daničić (1825-1882), they demanded full Serbo-Croatian national unity. As Stjepan Radić put it: “Complete national unity is our ideal. We do not want accord, compromise. Accord is arranged by different elements, accord requires stipulating, with stipulating you need ceding, with ceding comes lawsuits and litigation, and that always leaves a sting that sooner or later leads to another rift. Our national soul is one.”<sup>15</sup> The Yugoslavism of the oppositional elites was a false one, or rather, it had gone off of its rails. The *Mladi* saw themselves as the true successors to the Illyrian project and as rejuvenators of Croatian politics and Yugoslav ideology, acutely in the form of Serbo-Croat national unity. Yet this rejuvenation was not a simple imitation. The very problem they identified in Croatian culture and politics is that it was not up to date with current developments in modern Europe. Therefore there could be no return to old forms. The forces of tradition had to be brought into line with present needs and practices. The ‘Illyrians’ knew that and their movement was an integral part of the European romanticist national movements. Their current successors (‘the Fathers’) blindly perpetuated that tradition and had closed themselves off within provincial boundaries, ignoring the great changes that were happening elsewhere. When Yugoslavism was concerned, we could say that the *Mladi* tried to change its character from historicist and romanticist to modernist. It was now up to them to bring Croatia back up to date, to rejuvenate Croatian politics and Yugoslavism as its main ideological driving force.

Although positivist-based knowledge of people’s needs was supposed to be the basis of modern politics, role models from abroad were also admired. Indeed, modern European movements were the main source of inspiration for the *Mladi*: “Instead of arguing over the stylization of programmes, instead of historical analyses, we should focus on important contemporary issues: economic, philosophical, literary, critical and especially political ones. We should also closely observe the major modern movements in all fields of life, we also need to see politics as a vocation, as life, and not as trading accusations and theorising.”<sup>16</sup> The *Mladi fin de siècle* modernist movement was presented as a shift toward (Western) Europe, both

<sup>15</sup> “Hrvatski ideali,” *Hrvatska misao*, I, no. 1, 1897: 7.

<sup>16</sup> “Hrvatska misao,” *Obzor*, XXXVII, no. 286, 12.12.1896: 3.



in the political and the cultural spheres (Secession and Modernism). For them, the situation in Croatia, from the perspective of Prague, and especially Vienna with its flourishing modernist *fin de siècle* movements and trends, seemed backward and trapped in provincial despair. Therefore, the new intelligentsia, regardless of the fact that they relied on a firm character and knowledge of the people, could not be complete without detailed knowledge of the situation, trends and tendencies in European culture and politics.

Drawing from European political developments, especially in Bohemia, the *Mladi* ceased to view politics as a noble hobby and saw it as a full-time job. This necessarily entailed the condemnation of idealist, i.e. passive and rhetorical politics that could only result from seeing politics as a bourgeois pastime, a kind of supplement to an individual's main occupation. The main foundation of idealist politics among the *Stari* was the ideology of the Croatian historical statehood right. Just like the Young Czechs, the Croatian *Mladi* also fiercely, strenuously criticised the concept of the historical right: "It has to be clear to anyone that a nation does not need to prove that it has the right to be independent, it has this right because it exists as a nation, because it wants to live like a nation, because it has the strength to exercise this right."<sup>17</sup> Instead of the historical right, the basis of national politics had to be the concept of natural rights. In line with that, instead of history and philology, the ideological footing had to be based on economics and sociology: "We in particular, the Slavic people, should not seek our ideals in the past [...] The past can only divide us and it is our greatest misfortune that instead of great politicians, economists and philosophers, we had great historians and philologists."<sup>18</sup> Despite the thoroughness of this devastating critique of the *Stari*, the *Mladi* always expressed a certain reserve in their condemnation and left the door slightly ajar for possible future intergenerational collaboration: "We do not intend to destroy what they [the *Stari*, N. T.] have built. We are proud of what has been done. But we will not stand with our arms crossed, bowing to the past. A new era – new tasks."<sup>19</sup> Although they did leave the possibility for collaboration with the *Stari* open, it was clear that the future belonged to the youth. The elders who could adapt to the "new era" were welcome, but "new tasks" mainly had to be accomplished by the generation of the new intelligentsia led by the *Mladi*.

As in politics, the same notions can be discerned in literature. Croatian literature at that time was dominated by a romanticist-realist stylistic nexus which was heavily burdened by earlier, founding traditions, political considerations and, most of all, the particular interests of the national elites that had control over the most

<sup>17</sup> "Misao vodilja Srba i Hrvata," *Narodna misao*, 1897: 68.

<sup>18</sup> "Hrvatski ideali," *Hrvatska misao*, I, no. 1, 1897: 6.

<sup>19</sup> "Mladost," *Vienac*, XXIX, no. 51, 18.12.1897: 823.

important cultural institutions.<sup>20</sup> The result, especially in the eyes of the *Mladi*, was isolation from the broader European cultural currents and stagnation behind closed provincial walls.

Yet by the beginning of the 1890s, modernist tendencies had begun to appear in Croatian literature. But there was no real modernist movement until the onset of the *Mladi* Movement in 1897. The beginning of the Croatian modernist movement in literature can be attributed to the aforementioned Vienna group of the *Mladi* Movement which published their ideas and texts in three successive journals and publications, *Mladost* ('Youth'), *Hrvatski salon* ('The Croatian Salon') and *Život* ('Life'). Emulating the Vienna Secession – both in form and content – they called for complete artistic freedom, criticized the political instrumentalization of art and proclaimed the need for the incorporation of Croatian literature into modern European artistic trends. Not everyone in the Movement agreed, though. In particular, those members who were close to the Prague group emphasized that art should continue to play a national role and that the turn to Europe should not mean blind imitation, but an inspiration to create high-quality literature rooted in national traditions.

This question of national literature, its role and function, as well as its preferred stylistic orientation and content, became crucial in the ensuing polemic between the *Stari* and *Mladi* which raged most intensely in the cultural sphere. Yet focusing only on the national context of the debate will surely obscure the ways in which both sides drew from the broader, European reservoir of ideas and practices to reinforce their own position. Of course, these transfers came in many forms: borrowing, translation, imitation, emulation and appropriation. Every transfer entails a change in meaning, yet it may come in many forms and degrees. Sometimes writers and artists imitated European modernist role models to fashion themselves as 'modern', increasing their social capital in *fin de siècle* café society. Guido Jeny, a prominent member of the Vienna Group, reminisced on this in his memoirs with irony:

"Those writers – with a few exceptions – considered their engagement with 'Mladost' [the journal, N.T.] as a sort of entertaining change of pace and a chance to make themselves more 'interesting' by perfuming themselves with a bit of 'modernity' and – imagine – 'revolutionarity'. They will keep on daydreaming and seizing fine ideas and inspirations in a spirited conversation with Apollo's other chosen ones, with narcotic stimuli – after the most modern French, really Parisian, writers and poets of the 'fin de siècle', which I justly or unjustly considered mentally ill, and *Mladost* will create a relief for them on its fine paper."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For an overview of this period of literary history see FRANGEŠ 1975.

<sup>21</sup> MARIJANOVIĆ 1990: 187.

Furthermore, the same person can use different strategies when employing transferred, i.e., appropriated, ideas and practices in different contexts. Milivoj Dežman, hailed as the leader of the Croatian modernist movement, wrote the first manifesto of literary modernism in 1897. In it, he at the same time advocated complete artistic freedom and the national role of art. In a perfect example of an adaptation of contemporary modern ideas to the national context, he argued that these two principles are not mutually exclusive since only great art stemming from artistic freedom can produce works able to advance national literature and, vice-versa, only art with a nationally specific content can be interesting and original, i.e., truly ‘modern’:

“There are two currents in our literature: one is national, and the other is foreign. The first wants to spread national poetry, write in the national spirit and build on the national foundation. [...] But we have to take into account that this whole current wasn’t really national, the romantic spirit, German and Polish, reigned – only clothed in national garb. [...] What is the criterion for creating a specifically Croatian literature? Let us take an example. Why do we say for a work of art: this is Russian – why do we recognize that immediately? – Do they have special artistic foundations? No; Russian books contain Russian life, Russian thought. Literary, artistic foundations are international, but each work acquires its special character through its content.”<sup>22</sup>

He wrote this for the Prague-based journal *Hrvatska misao*, which advocated very socially and politically engaged art, yet infused with ‘modern’ ideas. Not quite a year later, Dežman wrote a programmatic article for the Vienna-based journal *Mladost*. This one was characterized more by the imitation of a ‘modern’, especially decadent habitus, than by a modernist programme for an engaged, yet modern national literature:

“Instead of dispelling our doubts, rigid realism has made us even more bitter and we have come to hate the world even more. We became frightened of the rigid reality and we turn to daydreaming, we crawl inside the secret hideout of our soul. [...] In this nervous shiver, in the midst of *suffering and hope*, a new art has arisen. It is not a certain theoretically constructed approach – no, it is a reflection of the new generation’s spiritual struggle. [...] Whether they are called the moderns, symbolists, decadents, impressionists, etc., they have one thing in common: they are searching for new goals, they are walking on unknown paths; they are escaping from the world. They are losing themselves in the quiet longing for new ideals.”<sup>23</sup>

One can hardly imagine a socially and nationally oriented, politically engaged art that emerges from a “nervous shiver” and “escaping from the world.” Dežman

<sup>22</sup> “O hrvatskim književnim prilikama,” *Hrvatska misao*, I, 1, 1897: 105-106.

<sup>23</sup> “Mladost,” *Mladost*, I, 1, 1.1.1898: 1-2.

thus employed different strategies of object appropriation based on the context in which they were to be used. When writing for the Prague-based journal *Hrvatska misao*, Dežman drew heavily from the aforementioned manifesto “*Češhá moderna*,” which called for freedom of speech, “the right to engage in ruthless criticism” and above all individuality, which was not at odds with the Czech character of art: “Be yourself, and you will be Czech.”<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, when collaborating with the Vienna-based *Mladost*, Dežman turned to other source material, like the other modernist Czech journal *Moderní revue pro literaturu, umění a život*, whose proponents rejected the political applications of modernism and advocated appropriations of contemporary European modernist currents such as symbolism and decadentism.<sup>25</sup> Of course, the Viennese *Ver Sacrum* also served as a major source for the circle around *Mladost* both in form and content, and the idea of collaboration between modernist writers and secessionist painters was directly taken from the Vienna Secession and applied in the *Croatian Salon* of 1898.

Although they were cautious at first, it was precisely this kind of decadent fashion that caused the *Stari* to lash out and attack the *Mladi* Movement and modernism in general. Decadentism became something of a straw man figure, standing for modernism as a whole. The *Stari* posed as their fundamental question: is it possible to adopt modern cultural ideas without jeopardizing dominant national traditions? For some of them, modernism was just a German Trojan horse, a ‘cosmopolitan’ virus sent to destroy national culture as the vanguard of the German *Drang*. This was precisely the point made by Franjo Ksaver Kuhač, a well-known musicologist and a staunch critic of modernism:

“It is not enough that Croatia has to fight with various foreign elements in our fatherland, so that it preserves its nationality and its survival, but also in most recent times a certain domestic current appeared, which strives to completely corrupt our youth, to rip out from their hearts the sense of morality, religion, patriotism and other noble feelings and characteristics. [...]”

“This coveting of originality was imported to Croatia by foreign agitators, who aim to impede Croats in their natural development, to poison their hearts and brains and find *Absatzgebiet* for their products that mock every morality and reason. To be able to succeed in having Croats become the slaves of the sins of others, they strove to win over Croatian writers and painters.”<sup>26</sup>

It is particularly interesting that the *Mladi* themselves formulated the German *Drang* as the greatest danger to Croatian culture and saw their modernist rejuvenation as a sure way to stave off this threat of foreign cultural and political domination. In 1900, Vladimir Nator, a 24-year old student of natural sciences

<sup>24</sup> ERSOY, GÓRNY, KECHRITIS 2010.

<sup>25</sup> PYNSENT 1988.

<sup>26</sup> KUHAČ 1898: 3-4.

at the University of Graz, published his first book of poetry in Zadar under the title *Slavenske legende* (Slavic Legends).<sup>27</sup> Nazor was not a part of the *Mladi* Movement, but he had already caught the eye and sympathies of the *Mladi* with his earlier published poems. With ‘Slavic Legends’, however, he had definitely established himself as one of the favourite modernist poets of the *Mladi*. In this book, Nazor depicted a magical and lively world of Slavic mythology intertwined with the everyday lives of Slavic peoples and the nature surrounding them. Legendary heroes, fairies and gods are not depicted as historic names embodying abstract ideals, but as young, strong and vital personifications of natural life and cultural ideals. Reiterating the well-established *topoi* of Slavism, Nazor painted the Slavic peoples as earthy and strong, yet tranquil and spiritual, destined by divine providence to rejuvenate a world infested with evil and bring it peace and moral rebirth. Combining secessionist and impressionistic techniques, Nazor did not recreate a specific historical space and time, but offered an atmospheric vision of an atemporal mythical world that actually pointed to the future.

Nazor’s book was ignored by almost all well-known traditionalist critics. Yet his poetic vision resonated with the *Mladi* Movement’s literary critics. Petar Skok Mikov, a young literary critic close to the Prague group, saw the publication of Nazor’s book as the beginning of a new phase in Croatian poetry in which pessimism, disquiet and Slavic melancholy would be overcome by optimism, health and harmony embedded in a Slavic pagan pantheistic philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Youth and activity in harmony with nature, both inner and outer, were to replace the current passivity and alienation from life. The other, and probably best known modernist critic of the *Mladi*, Milan Marjanović, praised the “spirit” of Nazor’s work which was a true example of how art should speak to the people.<sup>29</sup> His new poetic ideal represented the first step of national (re)awakening. By immersing himself in the distant past, the childhood of the Slavic peoples, Nazor offered a synthesis for the future. Utilizing Nietzschean categories, Marjanović claimed that Nazor’s poetry was neither Dionysian, which is Germanic in spirit, nor Apollonian which is Romanic, but rather expressed a true Slavic hymnic and idyllic mood. Finally, he saw these Slavic idylls not only as an artistic, but also as a political program.

Following Gisèle Sapiro, we can utilize Bourdieu’s field theory to explain these divergent and multifaceted transfer strategies. Transferred objects, ideas and practices have to be employed in a field with existing relations characterized by asymmetries and positions of dominance. Therefore the recipient field necessarily provides a framework for various appropriation techniques, strategies and mechanisms to be used by ‘newcomers’ to the field, wishing to achieve a better position for themselves in it. In literature, only broader research can suggest

<sup>27</sup> NAZOR 1948 [1900].

<sup>28</sup> “Knjiga Boccadoro i Slavenske legende,” *Svjetlo*, no. 29, 1900.

a dynamic of this struggle that is characteristic of modern national literatures: “Ever since Romanticism’s law of originality, *avant garde* artists (the Surrealists, for example) have asserted themselves by denouncing the orthodoxy of current dominant literary conceptions. In turn, they are stigmatized by their elders for their heterodoxy.”<sup>30</sup> Of course, one may not simply conflate heteronomy and nationalism on the one hand and autonomy and universalism on the other.<sup>31</sup> This leads us to view this struggle dynamic of the Republic of Letters as a reservoir of ideas and practices to be employed by various actors in power struggles in specific national literatures, for which cultural transfer studies may prove to be the most valuable analytical tool.

### *Conclusion*

In this paper I have presented the ways in which I use some of the discussed concepts in my own research into the Croatian *fin de siècle* modernist movement. I have mostly focused on the modalities of intellectual and cultural transfers, coupled with certain impetuses from postcolonial and Bourdieusian approaches. Of course, a broader research perspective – such as a study of entangled modernisms or modernist entanglements – would necessarily entail the employment of concepts that focus equally on both or all agents of exchange. Nevertheless, even when used on primarily nationally-oriented objects of historical research, relational and transnational approaches offer fresh perspectives which may result in new, more nuanced and multifaceted interpretations, surpassing the pitfalls of methodological nationalism and ‘provincial’ thinking in general. Isolated from these perspectives, national cultures, essentialized as subjects themselves, tend to be understood as self-enclosed and self-developing entities guided by their inner logic. But focusing on the transnational dynamic of modern movements – either those invested in preserving or those keen on transforming national cultures and politics – the modalities of their transfers and exchange, and the creation of a reservoir of ideas and practices which are imitated, emulated or appropriated by various actors, helps us see these phenomena in a new light. Examined from a transnational perspective, national phenomena are necessarily denaturalized and this is one of the most fruitful results of the heightened reflexivity these approaches advocate.

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<sup>29</sup> “Pjesme Vladimira Nazora: Slavenske legende,” *Nada*, no. 12, 1900.

<sup>30</sup> SAPIRO 2011: 230.

<sup>31</sup> SAPIRO 2011: 232.

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## Transnacionalni pristupi i *fin de siècle* modernizmi: slučaj hrvatskog modernističkog pokreta

Tijekom posljednjih nekoliko desetljeća transnacionalni pristupi dobivali su sve više popularnosti u okviru historijske znanosti. Mnogi autori danas tim pojmom obuhvaćaju različite pristupe, projekte i teorijske prijedloge, kao što su npr. historija isprepletanja (*entangled history*), historija ukrštavanja (*histoire croisée*), historija povezivanja (*connected histories*), historija dijeljenja (*shared history*), globalna historija (*global history*), studije kulturnih transfera i razmjena (*cultural transfer and exchange studies*) itd. Pluralnost unutar ovog zajedničkog nazivnika upućuje na zasad nedostatnu teorijsko-metodološku elaboriranost različitih transnacionalnih pristupa i njihova međusobnog odnosa, ali ujedno označava i pretpostavku prema kojoj transnacionalni pristupi ne predstavljaju zaokruženu teorijsko-metodološku i istraživačku paradigmu, nego teorijski i istraživački stav ili perspektivu koju obilježava ono što nazivamo „dvostrukim imperativom“: nadilaženje uskih granica koje određuje nacionalna perspektiva, kao i povezanog metodološkog nacionalizma te pojačana reflektivnost historičara, odnosno svijest o odnosu historičara i predmeta njegova istraživanja. Nakon uvodnog razmatranja razvojnih tendencija i epistemoloških pretpostavki transnacionalnih pristupa, u ovom se radu prikazuju određeni rezultati i mogućnosti primjene tih pristupa na istraživanje *fin de siècle* modernističkih pokreta. Kao studija slučaja uzima se hrvatski modernistički pokret, odnosno pokret ‘mladih’, u njegovim isprepletenostima sa suvremenim pokretima i modernističkim tendencijama. Najvažniji poticaji i modeli uzimaju se iz studija kulturnih transfera i razmjena, koji omogućuju sagledavanje mehanizama apropijacija ideja i praksi, kao i strategija njihove upotrebe u novim kontekstima. U tom smislu nacionalno se može razumijevati kao rezultat dinamike transnacionalnih apropijacija, odnosno interakcije lokalnog i globalnog, kao i kontinuiteta i diskontinuiteta ideja i praksi, a ne kao esencijalizirani entitet koji postoji sam po sebi, kao osnovna jedinica razumijevanja i djelovanja.

*Ključne riječi:* transnacionalni pristupi; historija isprepletanja; kulturni transfer; kulturna razmjena; dvostruki imperativ; *fin de siècle*; modernistički pokret, apropijacije.

*Keywords:* transnational approaches; entangled history; cultural transfer; cultural exchange; double imperative; *fin de siècle*; modernist movement; appropriations.

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