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## CULTURAL TRANSFER, TRAUMA AND CULTURAL INTIMACY: INITIAL QUESTIONS AND APPROACHES TO RESEARCHING EUROPE–SERBIA CULTURAL TRANSFER DURING 2000–2020<sup>85</sup>

**Abstract:** The article presents the fundamental guidelines in the study of the term *cultural transfer*, which has existed as a practice much longer than the concept in which it has been expressed in recent decades. Since this is an interdisciplinary concept and semantically complex term, its functions and limitations are examined in the context of traductology and social translation. At the same time, we are interested in the associative and synonymous meanings of this term in the Serbian language, as well as its related concepts, such as the concepts of *cultural mobility* and *intertextuality*. Moving on from philological studies, history of literature and comparatistics, where these terms are vernacular, the second part of the article presents possible approaches to the phenomenon of *cultural transfer* in the context of ethno-anthropological and sociological studies, such as the concept of *cultural intimacy* and *cultural trauma*, which help to understand the functions and aporia of cultural transfer in Serbia in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (2000–2020).

**Keywords:** cultural transfer, translation, cultural intimacy, cultural trauma, Europe, Serbia

### Definitions of terms

The term *transfer*, conventionally used primarily in reference to goods, rights, finance, psychology, astronomy, sports and technology, is used in our study with the meaning of conveying, translation, entry, importing, exchange, influx and throughput, ultimately the *transmission/passing on* of cultural goods (artefacts, words, ideas, sentiments, achievements, thought patterns, world views, etc.) from any European country to Serbia. Following such an understanding of the term, by studying *cultural transfer* we are studying the *reception, embedment, materialisation, modes of reception, influence, insemination* and *superposition* of certain artefacts, ideas and knowledge in Serbia's society.

For the purpose of developing the term *cultural transfer*, we will consider the transcultural nature of certain goods, phenomena and events, cultural diffusion, influence and creative interaction between cultures. Inseparable from *intertextuality* and the targeted and unplanned traces that

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cultures leave on each other, this term is also closely related to *cultural mobility* (Greenblatt 2009), so the description of our research includes meanings connected to *transfer* and/or *mobility* of cultural goods and artefacts in the European context, such as processuality, dynamicity, influence, interactivity, communicativity, exchangeability, and circularity.

When speaking about cultural transfer, we also refer to *cultural mediators*, i.e. individuals who, consciously or unconsciously, become mediators between cultures through their work. Clearly, without them there would be no circulation, acceptance, expansion or adoption of humanist cultural goods. The primary consideration is translators and the broader significance of the translation profession in social history, the history of ideas, and cultural exchange. By placing translation at the centre of the study of the conditions and mechanisms of cultural exchange, we are addressing the phenomenological consequences of translation on the worldview of a broader speech community, as well as the significance of translation in light of the processes that lead to systemic social changes. We start from the premise that the role of the translator in the history of ideas and social history – especially in processes that structurally alter the society – was mostly invisible, neglected and/or ignored, even though it is unmatched in its significance and influence.

In the theoretical respect, the possible reasons why cultural transfer through the work of translators has not been systemically thematised are presented, presuming that it is a process that, due to its longevity and commonness, is not perceived as worthy of special study. It is the authors' belief that what is being translated and from which language is of critical importance for steering a community in a certain direction. Therefore, in cooperation with the National Library of Serbia, we will attempt to collate this information and create an overview of the literature translated from European languages into Serbian, during the period 2000–2020.

Although disciplinarily different approaches to the translation practice and the interdisciplinary approaches created following the post-disciplinary shift in social sciences and humanities research will be considered, we will start from the premise that the function of translation is the optimal transposing of *the meaning of the source* into a different cultural code or code system of the *target language*, where the translator has the initial role of decoder and transmitter of the textual and non-textual reality of the source.

The act of translation is perceived broadly: from the basic linguistic level (correlation of the code system of the *source* language with the code system of the *target language*) to the practical, considering translation as an important part of the *dispositif* of power (Foucault 2005), which is a

technical term for the mechanism or network of influences that produces or shapes knowledge, and finally, which is used to govern, manage (in the sense of achieving direct effects of government and the exercising of power). Translation, understood like this, is an indispensable element with incomparable importance for strategically constructed knowledge and influence, which allows and reinforces the mechanisms of a certain authority and/or power. In short, the assumption is that there is no government (in the sense of exercising of the state's power) that would be independent of its cultural and especially educational system, i.e. from the contents that, to a significant extent, originate from literature translated from different languages.

In addition to the field of social change and cultural influence of the source on the target speech community, another topic is the standing questions of traductology and the sociology of translation. The question, in the context of cultural transfer and transfer in culture, is what "the translator's task" is (Benjamin) today and whether Benjamin's expression "pure language" can be understood as a type of *metaphysical core* of all existing languages, which through the greatest literary works embodies the deep connections not so much between different languages but between temporally and spatially remote, seemingly incommensurable cultures. To what extent is the translation of most distinguished literature (especially poetry) a procedure that attempts to make the impossible possible, do poetry translators have to be poets themselves, and does the process of transferring cultural artefacts into a different context (target language) create reserves for the growth and significance of the source language? The answers to these questions and others related to the process of translation, translator motivation, the ambiguity of the issue of translatability, the placement and definition of this activity ("art and/or craft"), the social status of translators, philosophy of translation, and the future of translation, will be sought, in essay form, from the most prominent literary translators into Serbian from various European languages.

### Context and semantic framework of the study

The article will briefly present several possible approaches to the topic of cultural transfer during the period from 2000 to 2020, as well as the specificities of this period. The specificities are primarily related to the accessibility and wide range of sources; new technologies have made nearly all sources available. In addition to being selective in choosing the material, we will also be biased, in part due to the proximity and short duration of the given study interval and in part due to the diverse (inter)disciplinary focuses of the researchers involved in this project.

Even if these differences are neglected, as well as any personal idiosyncrasies, which entail and crucially influence the standardisation of linguistic idioms and the outcome of our work (despite the self-proclaimed “objectivity” of social sciences and humanities), the period being studied has its specificities and its “language”, which is difficult to ignore, regardless of the perspective from which it is studied.

When speaking of transfer in this context, we are also speaking about *transition*, the term used to designate the time frame that we are investigating in Serbia – the *transition* or *transformation* period. Since *transition* was supposed to be a process of legal and political reformation of society and the state, pending its accession to the European Union, this time frame is mainly interpreted (to borrow the language of Arnold van Gennep) as a type of initiation or rite of passage – in a word, as an interim state (of unlimited duration) in the process of the social “maturation”, “democratisation”, “opening” and targeted “Europeanisation” of Serbia’s society.

In addition to the critical approach to the given terminology, which is one of the key issues, we inevitably have to look into the formal and content origination and the features and interpretations of this process. The question is what we are talking about when we speak about the *transfer/transit* in this context: about the *transition* of society from a “planned” socialist economy to the “market economy” system, about the “emancipatory discourse” that should mark the community’s “new beginning”, about a discourse that was performative, with indisputable achievements that greatly transformed the community’s practices and world views, or about the appropriate rhetoric and (interim) discourse trend, (self-)legitimising for the actors who were the bearers of policies during this period, without influencing change, and the targeted “Europeanisation” of society – just to mention some of the interpretations of the “Serbian transition”. If we leave all the interpretation options open, at least one of them will not permit us to explore the field of the transferred elements that have become common in language, ideas, patterns of thought, everyday life, and in the state’s legislation, economy and policies.

### Between essentialism and constructivism – research approaches

Serbia’s heterotopic position in the title of our project, meaning a place completely different from its European surroundings (from the Greek *heteros*, “other”, “different” + *topos*, “place”) can be cause for provocative philosophical and socio-psychological thinking (Foucault 1984; Soja 1990; Foucault 2009). Indicating the way we think of and construct the world (Berger & Luckmann 1966; van Dijk 1977; Gergen 1985: 266–75; Fau-

connier and Turner 2002), this position links an entire web of preconceptions in the cognitive background of reasoning, as well as the temporally accumulated identity notions about the “European” and the “Serbian”, stereotypes, collective phantasms, fictional content and traumas.

Antireductionist anthropological and sociological concepts are of great assistance in the analysis of the discourse characteristic for this period, as well as in overcoming the official essentialism and binary narrative production of meaning (Djerić 2006: 195–220; Djerić 2014: 281–303). Standing out from the framework of anthropological studies is the concept of *cultural intimacy* developed by Michael Herzfeld, who defines his approach as the “hostile sentiments within a shared setting” between essentialism and constructivism, i.e. between two related denials of the social experience – extreme positivism and extreme deconstructivism. Herzfeld’s observation approach, based on the analysis of the everyday discourse “among one’s own” and “in front of foreigners”, using an appropriate terminological apparatus, discovers a world “behind the façade” of official policy, becoming a suitable means for understanding transfer and the “logic” of auto-stereotypical and hetero-stereotypical depiction (Herzfeld 2004; Herzfeld 2016; Herzfeld 2018).

When discussing cultural intimacy, Herzfeld speaks about commonplaces in the discourse, about stereotypes that constitute the *collective self*, its cumulative self-perception and depiction, as well as about the noncritical emulation of everything that comes from “prestigious centres”, and finally, about the consent of local elites to the role of emulators and the “competitors who inevitably lag behind”. This author insists on the “lived historical experience” and materials, balancing the tension between essentialism (which he admits played a role in the shaping of ideas and impressions) and its deconstruction, i.e. scepticism and distrust of it. It is precisely the tension between official essentialism, in the sense of literality, and, on the other hand, (de)constructive disputing that is our field of work.

Piotr Sztompka’s sociological concept of *cultural trauma* (Sztompka 2000: 449–466) is also instructive in the analysis of cultural transfer in the past twenty years since, like Herzfeld’s, it seeks to uncover layers beneath the surface of the official discourse. This concept treats the influence of subversive social changes on the loss of cultural orientation, the chaotic nature of commitments, and tests different possibilities in post-socialist societies. In Sztompka’s understanding of trauma, it is primarily a matter of a subverted normative context and cultural disorientation, a certain disorder and confusion. Trauma is the flip side of changes following the collapse of communism, which features the atrophying of criteria in the education system, lowering of norms, loss of authority and benchmarks, the sudden or gradual relativisation of general knowledge and values, (self-)marginalisation of education, culture, art.

Depending on the specifics of the given post-socialist societies, one could also discuss the spectacular relativism, revisionism, class stratification, and the increase in internal intolerance. Declarativity and absence of meritocracy favoured the chaotic nature of the focus during this period, so different pathologies and radical approaches threatened to assume the place of standards and become “normalised”.

Even though Sztompka’s approach does not perceive trauma in this way – as a consequence of wars, but rather as the result of the change of economic systems, state, political and discourse regimes – with Herzfeld’s concept of intimacy, this perspective seems to be an appropriate framework for studying cultural transfer in Serbia during the period from 2000 to 2020. By adopting these two concepts, we would decrease the “impediment” that exists among Serbian researchers and their unwillingness to speak up about key community issues (Herzfeld 2004: 9). Furthermore, these concepts offer the terminological instruments for shedding light on the local ethnographic material and contemplation of the stereotype of the collective self during the period of increased transfer involving European states following the wars and the bombing of Serbia in 1999, helping us to more subtly perceive the sources of trauma, as well as the change in the perception of “Europe” during the period from 2000 to 2020, the methods of self-determination and level of identification of our compatriots with the term “European” (Tournois and Djerić: 709–731).<sup>1</sup>

The idea is to adopt the analytical means of these concepts, to present them theoretically and later be able to apply them to specific empiric material in case studies. The initial portion of our research, conditionally called *theoretical*, should contain review texts, informative in nature – the presentation of the concepts, their analytical tools, the field of application, influence, achievements, disputes, and deficiencies. In the second, more demanding part, we would choose local topics from the Europe–

1 According to the few empirical studies, albeit methodologically different, that the author was involved in during the period from 2000 to 2020, the attachment to “Europe” has been decreasing over time. The positive perception of “Europe” is linked to the 2000–2003 period, only for this relationship to become more reserved by 2010. During that period (2004–2010), the surface of the discourse increasingly showed advocacy of the European Enlightenment concept of understanding the past, although it was predominantly declarative rather than real since the motifs, ideas and content of national romanticist concept were “dressed up” as European Enlightenment, in accordance with the political demands and expectations of the EU rather than internal convictions and community needs. See Z. Golubović, I. Spasić, Dj. Pavićević (eds.), *Politika i svakodnevni život. Srbija 1999–2002* (Belgrade: IFDT, 2003). G. Djerić, “Herojski kraj za evropsko odelo: redizajn politike sećanja Srbije na početku 21. Veka”, in *Etnoantropološki problemi*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2012), 107–126.

Serbia cultural transfer body. For example, if we take the easily accessible legislative framework as the source and the comparable case of transfer of the Law on Gender Equality,<sup>2</sup> and more specifically, the stipulations on gender-sensitive language, it would hardly be possible to assert that cultural transfer was literal in this domain. On the contrary, the identification of the discord between the letter of the law in effect and its (in) applicability, which the legislator and experts are arguing over, with the “unpacking” of the cultural and language history “baggage”, would mark the true beginning and essence of our work.

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2 <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/zakon/2021/52/3/reg?fbclid=IwAR1tvje9ljSS7Y3zupNXGEX0yat4Zs7vBHQICDDR60HDiWQ557iSO9rhfXA>

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