

Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović,
Institute for Balkan Studies of the
Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts

Jovica Pavlović,
Institute of European Studies, Belgrade

Srboljub Peović,
Institute of European Studies, Belgrade

Nikola Tucakov,
Institute of European Studies, Belgrade

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES AS IMPORTANT AGENTS OF CULTURAL TRANSFER DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD: THE CASE OF THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA*

Abstract: The following chapter has two main objectives: first, to offer a systematic overview of existing literature and secondary sources on the role of religious minorities in facilitating cultural transfer within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia during the interwar period; and second, to enrich current knowledge with new insights derived from previously unexplored documents and first-hand historical sources. The chapter aims to provide a thorough and comprehensive reassessment of the topic while introducing fresh research findings. It employs cultural transfer theory and the associated cultural transfer methodological framework, which includes various research methods used in historiography, ethnography and related fields, such as archival research, document and discourse analysis, comparative analysis and process tracing. The concluding remarks highlight that, prior to the advent of electronic mass media, religious minorities were crucial in introducing and disseminating foreign ideas domestically through their interactions and material exchanges with others of their faith. In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, such activities were frequently met with suspicion and illiberal responses from official state authorities, with the nature of these reactions varying across time and depending on the political context.

Keywords: Cultural transfer, interwar period, Yugoslavia, Protestantism, Islam, Judaism

Introduction

The interwar period in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from its foundation in 1918 up until 1929 – was a time of profound transformation and turbulence, shaped by a mosaic of ethnic, religious and cultural identities. Amidst

* This research was supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, project no. 7747152, Cultural Transfer Europe-Serbia from the 19th to the 21st century – CTES.

the political and economic upheavals, the Protestant, Jewish and Islamic communities played pivotal roles in shaping the cultural landscape of the country. This paper explores how these diverse groups contributed to the rich tapestry of cultural transfer and exchange in Yugoslavia between the world wars, illustrating how their unique religious and cultural perspectives fostered a dynamic intercultural dialogue. By examining their respective roles and interactions with the rest of the Yugoslav population and the Yugoslav officials/government, we will gain a deeper understanding of how these groups navigated and influenced the complex cultural setting of interwar Yugoslavia, contributing to a legacy of intercultural exchange/transfer, dialogue and enrichment.

With this goal in mind, the work is divided into six sections that aim to methodologically review the developments in cultural exchange between citizens belonging to the mentioned religious minorities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and those belonging to the cultures stemming from the two main Christian denominations; Orthodox and Catholic Christians, with the primary emphasis being placed on the eastern parts of Yugoslavia, where Orthodoxy represented the majority religion. Following this introductory part, the second section covers key theoretical and methodological considerations, while the following three sections each deal with one of the above-mentioned religious communities of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Lastly, the final section offers a brief summary of the work and some concluding remarks.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

This research draws upon the cultural transfer framework as its primary theoretical and methodological foundation. This approach is designed to explore various forms of intercultural exchange, with a particular emphasis on examining the movement of texts, discourses, practices and knowledge across different cultures.¹ Utilising this theoretical model, cultural transfer addresses the intricate complexities of cultural interactions and exchanges. It illuminates how objects, ideas, beliefs, artworks and individuals can traverse and occasionally disrupt political, cultural and temporal boundaries.²

-
- 1 Steen Bille Jørgensen & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, "Introduction: Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach", in Steen Bille Jørgensen & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (eds.), *Cultural Transfer Reconsidered: Transnational Perspectives, Translation Processes, Scandinavian and Postcolonial Challenges* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 2.
 - 2 Anna Veronika Wendland, "Cultural Transfer", in Birgit Neumann & Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 45.

In terms of methodology, cultural transfer employs a range of operational and analytical techniques commonly found in fields such as historiography, ethnography, transregional studies and literary studies. These methods encompass archival research, which involves the meticulous examination of historical records; document analysis, which focuses on the detailed scrutiny of written materials; and discourse analysis, which investigates the ways in which language and communication shape and reflect cultural interactions. Additionally, comparative analysis is used to identify similarities and differences across various cultural contexts, while process tracing tracks the sequence of events and influences over time.

Cultural transfer is deeply rooted in the practice of translation, which extends beyond merely conveying the literal meaning of texts. It aims to capture the deeper context and nuanced messages intended by the author or speaker. This approach allows researchers to understand not only the immediate content but also the broader cultural contexts from which historical materials originated or were transferred between cultures. By doing so, it provides a more comprehensive view of how cultural elements are adapted, reinterpreted and integrated across different societies, offering insights into the dynamic nature of intercultural exchange across time.³

Finally, in terms of the timeframe of the investigation, our research was naturally limited to the interwar period, which – in Yugoslavia – lasted from 1 December 1918 (after World War I ended and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formally established) to 6 April 1941 (when Nazi Germany bombed Belgrade, thus ending the period of peace in this part of the world).

The Role of Protestant Communities in the Interwar Period

The period between the two world wars in the territory of present-day Serbia, which was then part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929), can be characterised as one of religious pluralism. The Kingdom's inhabitants were predominantly Orthodox Christians, followed by Roman Catholics and Muslims, as well as Protestant Christians and various branches of neo-Protestant communities. This religious diversity presented unique challenges for government policies toward religious minorities. In 1919, a new Ministry of Religion was established, and until 1921, all religious communities previously recognised in Austria-Hungary maintained the same status. The Vidovdan Constitution⁴ was proclaimed on 28 June 1921, with

3 Steen Bille Jørgensen & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, *op. cit.*, 2–3.

4 The constitution was named after St. Vitus, whose feast day is celebrated on 15/28 June, coinciding with the date of the medieval Battle of Kosovo (1389).



Building of the Adventist Church in Belgrade, built in 1935–1938.

Article 12 granting legal status only to recognised religious communities. These included the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic and Greek-Catholic churches, the Lutheran and Reformed churches, the Islamic Religious Community and the Mosaic Faith Community (Judaism). However, smaller neo-Protestant religious communities were neither recognised nor adopted under this framework.⁵

During this period, various Protestant and neo-Protestant communities were active within this cultural-geographical context. Although often grouped together, these communities were quite distinct in terms of structure, teachings, their relationship with the state and many other characteristics. Among the Protestant communities classified today in Serbia as “traditional” or “historically established”, three organisations were active during the interwar period: the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Evangelical Christian Church of the Augsburg Confession (Lutherans) and the Reformed Christian Church (Calvinists). These three religious groups were closely associated with ethnic minorities and could be characterised as ethno-confessional, although they were not strictly homogeneous in terms of ethnicity. It can be said that these Protestant groups served as a form of identity shield for various ethnic minorities, primarily Slovaks, Germans and Hungarians, in whose languages literature was predominantly printed and services conducted.

5 Radmila Radić, *Verom protiv vere. Država i verske zajednice u Srbiji 1945–1953* (Belgrade: INIS, 1995), 21.

Since evangelisation or missionary activities were not typical for these groups, they did not pose a “threat” of proselytising among the local Serbian population, resulting in no significant conflicts with the Serbian Orthodox Church. Consequently, they were legally recognised throughout the entire period of the Kingdom. The absence of missionary activities meant that membership in these communities was primarily acquired by birth and through intra-family socialisation, with religious conversions to them being a notably rare phenomenon.

On the other hand, neo-Protestant organisations of various types, including the Nazarenes, Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals and Methodists, were ethnically diverse and predominantly open to missionary efforts. Consequently, the state’s attitude towards their activities during the interwar period differed markedly. This was particularly true for the Nazarenes, owing to their pacifism and refusal to serve in the military, and for the Adventists, due to their prohibition against working on Saturdays. The official reason for the negative stance towards the Adventists was the refusal of some members to participate in warfare and military activities, which, similar to the Nazarenes, quickly led to them being labelled an anti-state element. In the mid-1920s, the Adventists attempted to foster better relations with the political establishment. However, Bjelajac argues that police and military authorities soon recognised the distinction between the Nazarenes and Adventists, noting that most Adventists were open to taking an oath and serving in the military but refused to work on Saturdays. Both communities experienced rapid growth after the First World War.⁶ The constitution of the community adopted in 1927 at the Second Great Assembly of the Yugoslav Union Mission in Novi Sad,⁷ written by prominent preacher Albino Močnik, endeavoured to strengthen ties with the authorities. It explicitly and repeatedly states that the Yugoslav Adventists were prepared to observe the existing laws of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, as evidenced by Paragraphs 5 and 9.⁸

The Baptist church started to organise its activities more actively after the Baptist Congress held in 1928 in Svilojevo, Bačka.⁹ According to the Ministry of Religions’ statistics, the community had 988 members that year. However, this was a period marked by the community’s more active development and growth. Most of its congregations were founded in

6 Branko Bjelajac. *The Believers in Christ on Persecution of the Nazarenes in Serbia* (Tustin: Trilogy, 2019), 258.

7 Milan Šušljic. *Bićete mi svedoci* (Belgrade: Preporod, 2004), 295.

8 Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović. *The Untold Journey of the Nazarene Emigration from Yugoslavia to North America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2024), 27.

9 Tomislav Branković. *Protestantske zajednice u Jugoslaviji* (Belgrade: Pravoslavni Bogoslovski fakultet, 2011), 56.

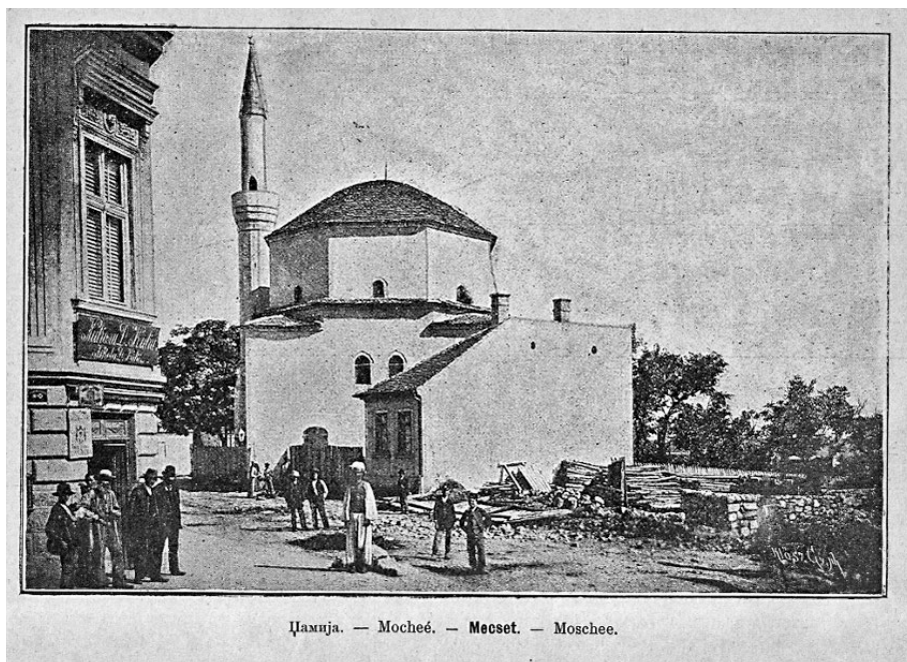
the late 19th century, but the interwar period brought new developments within the community. In 1925, an internal split occurred, resulting in the creation of two branches: the South Baptist Mission, influenced by American Baptists, and the Mission of the Danubian Countries, which was under the influence of German Baptists. The construction of the first prayer house in Novi Sad began in 1927, when the community invited preacher Robert Schlosser from Poland to assist them. Once the building was completed, services were conducted in both German and Serbian.¹⁰

All neo-Protestant communities in interwar Yugoslavia arguably faced challenges from the majority religious communities and, at times, even from the “traditional” Protestant churches. An analysis of the underlying reasons for the social rejection of neo-Protestant communities reveals certain characteristics that were viewed as socially undesirable, provoking reactions from other religious organisations. Particular attention should be drawn to their transnational structure and inclination towards missionary activities, which typically meant that their primary method of attracting followers was religious conversion rather than familial socialisation. Owing to their transnational nature, these communities garnered adherents from various ethnic groups, leading some religious organisations historically associated with specific ethnicities to perceive this as a threat of proselytism. Missionary activities were primarily conducted by distributing religious literature, often translations of various Adventist, Baptist, or Pentecostal tracts, texts and writings by foreign authors. The connection between “domestic” neo-Protestants and their counterparts abroad, along with the transnational ties these groups established with believers worldwide, was sometimes met with scepticism during the Kingdom period. The authorities closely monitored the transnational connections of these groups and the “foreign” missionaries in the Kingdom as potential foreign influences with political implications. Despite the numerous challenges faced by neo-Protestants in the Kingdom, their numbers continued to grow. In addition to establishing prayer houses, they also opened various institutions, predominantly of an educational nature or aimed at the translation and distribution of religious periodicals.

The Islamic Community

The unification of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929) brought together diverse Muslim communities. Following the recognition of their independence at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Serbia and Montenegro were required to incorporate pro-

10 Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović, “Evandeoski hrišćani na Dunavu. Razvoj baptizma u Novom Sadu“, u: *Dunavom od Bezdana do Beograda*, ed. Djordje S. Kostić. (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2012), 97.



Bayrakli mosque in Belgrade. Photo from 1892.

visions for safeguarding Muslim communities, recognised as minorities, into their legal frameworks. Serbia had acknowledged the Islamic community from 1868 to 1877 and established a renewed one in 1883, this time led by the Supreme *Mufti* in Niš. Montenegro officially recognised the equal status of the Muslim faith in 1905, with the office of the Supreme *Mufti* created after the Balkan Wars.¹¹

The majority of Muslims in the newly formed state, however, came from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following the Austro-Hungarian occupation in 1878, Vienna implemented a distinctive system as part of its efforts to limit the influence of Istanbul. The Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina was formally established in 1882. The equality of Muslims was recognised in other Habsburg territories from 1912 to 1916.¹²

These Islamic communities continued to function with minor organisational changes until 1929, when a unified Islamic Community of Yugo-

11 Dragan Novaković, "Organizacija i položaj Islamske verske zajednice u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji", *Temе*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2003), 452; Jovana Šaljić Ratković, "Islamska zajednica Srbije, prvih deset godina (1868–1877)", *Istorijski časopis*, Vol. 62 (2013), 345–359; Fikret Karčić, "The Reform of the Shari'a Courts", in Nathalie Clayer, Eric Germain (eds.), *Islam in Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 261.

12 Ibid., 453; Karčić, *op. cit.*, 261.

slavia was established. This new body transplanted its organisation from the Austro-Hungarian model. Two parallel structures emerged in Sarajevo and Skopje, with central institutions located in Belgrade. The Constitution of the Islamic Community was codified in 1930 and revised in 1936 following political rearrangements, relocating the community's centre to Sarajevo.¹³

The *Sharī'a* school in Sarajevo, founded in 1887, was elevated to the status of a faculty in 1937, and a department of Islamic law was opened at the University of Belgrade in 1931, integrating Islamic studies into higher-education institutions. The University of Belgrade also opened the Department of Oriental Philology in 1926, headed by Prof. Fehim Barjaktarević from Sarajevo. Academic ties with Turkey were expanded in 1937, which saw the beginning of a student exchange program between the two countries for Yugoslav Turkology scholars and Turkish Slavists and a Yugoslav government-sponsored scholarship for Turkish students to study in their country.¹⁴

According to the 1921 census, Muslims made up about 11% of the total population. About half were the Bosnian Muslims, while the rest were Albanians, Turks and Slavs living in the southern regions. Unlike Bosnian Muslims, Albanians, who constituted the majority of the Muslim population in the southern regions, were regarded as an undesirable community. With high illiteracy rates and fewer connections to European states, Albanians were constrained in the role of cultural intermediaries. Additionally, relations with their Slavic neighbours were marked by a long-standing segregation between the two ethnic groups.¹⁵

The Bosnian *ʿulamāʾ*, being more numerous, better educated, and more integrated within the Yugoslav state, were dominant in the institutional structure of the Islamic community, even in the southern regions. Reformists within the Bosnian *ʿulamāʾ* played a key role as cultural intermediaries, both in fostering loyalty among the Muslim population and serving as agents of cultural transformation, especially as teachers in *madrasās*.¹⁶

13 Ibid., 469–470.

14 Andjelka Mitrović, “Katedra za orijentalistiku”, in Andjelka Mitrović (ed.), *Orijentalistika: juče – danas – sutra* (Belgrade: Filološki fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2019), 11–13; Fabio Giomi, “Domesticating Kemalism: Conflicting Muslim Narratives about Turkey in Interwar Yugoslavia”, in Catherina Raudvere (ed.), *Nostalgia, Loss and Creativity in South-East Europe. Political and Cultural Representations of the Past* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 154–155.

15 Hugh Poulton, Miranda Vickers, “The Kosovo Albanians: Ethnic Confrontation with the Slav State”, Hugh Poulton, Suha Taji Farouki (eds.), *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 144–146; Hugh Poulton, “Macedonians and Albanians as Yugoslavs” in Dejan Djokic (ed.), *Yugoslavism. Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 127.

16 Muhammed Aruçi, “The Muslim Minority in Macedonia and Its Educational Institutions During the Inter-War Period”, in Nathalie Clayer, Eric Germain (eds.), *Islam in Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press) 357–360.

Following the war, a group of secular scholars, mainly educated at European universities, managed to assume control of the reformed *Gajret* organisation in the post-war organisation elections. *Gajret* (*Effort*), founded in 1903 with a pro-Habsburg stance and no explicit national agenda, was reformed in 1907 and gradually steered toward an anti-Habsburg and pro-Serbian orientation, leading to its ban after the assassination of Prince Franz Ferdinand in 1914. The royal support enabled *Gajret* to expand its operations by opening new branches in Bosnia, Raška and Vardar Macedonia, in addition to its central office in Sarajevo. The organisation also established a network of student dormitories where they promoted Western standards of spatial organisation, dining and dress, while fostering national consciousness among the students.¹⁷ To counter the influence of *Gajret*, some Muslim notables, aligned more with the traditional hierarchy, established a rival group, *Narodna uzdanica* (*Popular Hope*), which promoted the Croatian national identity but shared the same principles and structure as the more influential *Gajret*.¹⁸

Following the Great War, the Bosnian Muslim public closely followed the Turkish War of Independence. Reporters from Sarajevo noted widespread enthusiasm among the local Muslim population. However, coverage of these political events in Turkey remained limited in contemporary writings. At the same time, journals affiliated with *Gajret* openly criticised the Ottoman Empire and its supporters. Intellectuals close to *Gajret*, such as Šukrija Kurtović and Hasan Rebac, sought to craft a narrative reframing Bosnian Muslims as defenders of their Serb and Yugoslav national identities during Ottoman rule rather than as “traitors”, which is how they were seen in the popular discourse of the Serbs, drawing on a more European model.¹⁹

Continuing the traditions from earlier decades, Muslim intellectuals remained the principal source of translations of Turkish literary works to the Yugoslav languages. Bosnian Muslim magazines published quite a substantial number of new translations of Turkish texts. Western European literary works were occasionally translated from Turkish rather than the original versions. A number of Turkish women authors, like Nigar bint Osman, Fatma Aliye, Latifa (the first wife of Mustafa Kemal) and especially Halide Edib, had their literary works translated by multiple male Bosnian Muslim authors.²⁰

17 Fabio Giomi, “Muslim, Educated and Well-Dressed: *Gajret*’s Self-Civilizing Mission in Interwar Yugoslavia”, *European Review of History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2019), 43–47.

18 Ibid, 155.

19 Giomi, “Domesticating *Kemalism*”, 157–160.

20 Alma Spahi, *Receptcija turske književnosti u Bosni i Hercegovini u XX vijeku*, PhD diss. (University of Belgrade, 2016), 10–13; Fabio Giomi, “Seduced by Gender Cor-

Although Mustafa Kemal's military successes earned him widespread popularity among Muslims globally, his subsequent political reforms between 1922 and 1924, especially the abolition of the Caliphate, had a profound impact. Like his counterparts elsewhere, in 1926, Šemsudin Sarajlić, an intellectual from Sarajevo with both Habsburg and Ottoman educational backgrounds, published a book titled *New Turkey*, based on Turkish and European sources and depicting the reforms in an extremely positive light. Other Muslim and non-Muslim authors soon followed, such as Maksim Svava, who wrote two books in part thanks to translations done by his Muslim friends.²¹ During the late 1920s, a core group of Muslim intellectuals who had received secular education, despite their internal differences, began to embrace Kemalist ideas. This movement gradually extended to a minority within the *ʿulamā* by the end of the decade, especially following the rise of Yugoslav-Turkish relations in 1930s, when the topic of Kemalism started to attract non-Muslim authors as well.²²

Muslim women began appearing in the public sphere soon after the war. In 1918, debates over the veil emerged, with Dževad Sulejmanpašić publishing a provocative treatise on the "Muslim women question." His treatise called on the new government to take a more radical approach. The short treaty includes an interesting episode of *Orientalism*: according to the author, non-Muslim prostitutes in Sarajevo imitated Muslim women's clothing to attract European clients using *exotic* attire. Despite the controversy and the treatise's flaws, it became a foundational reference in future debates on the issue.²³

Opening local women's branches, Gajret also sought to reshape notions of masculinity, femininity and the ideal couple in its writings, often drawing on the image of the "new Turkish woman" (*nova Turkinja*) as a model of post-Ottoman femininity. Turkey, which introduced female voting rights in 1930s, was seen as a role model in the writings of the "progressives".²⁴ The phenomenon of the emancipated Turkish woman was transplanted both through increasing tourism and copying the imagery of the Turkish official magazine *La Turquie Kemaliste*. Authors of

poratism: Muslim Cultural Entrepreneurs and Kemalist Turkey in Interwar Yugoslavia" in Nathalie Clayer, Fabio Giomi, Emmanuel Szurek (eds.) *Kemalism: Transnational Politics in the Post-Ottoman World* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 208–209.

21 Giomi, "Domesticating Kemalism," 162–166.

22 Ibid, 165–166.

23 Fabio Giomi, *Making Muslim Women European: Voluntary Associations, Gender, and Islam in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878–1941)* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2021), 117–124.

24 Giomi, "Muslim, Educated and Well-Dressed", 51–55; Giomi, "Seduced by Gender Corporatism", 180.

Christian background, like Dragiša Lapčević and Maksim Svara, also incorporated this discourse as desirable for domestic Muslim women.²⁵

In the newly unified Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Bosnian *‘ulamā’*, Muslim intellectuals and political organisations played crucial roles as agents of cultural transfer. Through educational reforms, engagement with modern European ideas and connections to Turkish Kemalist reforms, these actors helped shape both Muslim identity and broader Yugoslav society. Despite the challenges of maintaining tradition while embracing modernisation, their efforts facilitated a significant cultural transformation in the interwar period.

The Jewish Community and Cultural Transfer in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

At the creation of the Yugoslav state, initially named the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, markedly different Jewish communities found themselves brought together in the new polity. The predominantly Ashkenazi communities of former Austria-Hungary differed in tradition, language and culture from the Sephardic communities of the former Ottoman lands, but they also differed in terms of self-understanding and relation to broader, non-Jewish society. The legacy of the Ottoman *millet* system and the long-standing presence of Sephardim in their local communities led to a distinct but well-integrated co-existence with their neighbours, whereas in the north, the position of the Ashkenazim was shaped by their more recent presence and a Magyarised or Germanised cultural profile. Centuries-old divergences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic religious practices were compounded by developments in the 18th and 19th centuries; events such as the divide between Reform and Orthodox Judaism, the rise of Hasidism and the Hungarian Neolog–Orthodox schism deeply affected the religious outlook of Ashkenazi communities, while the Sephardim were unaffected by such divisions. Nevertheless, objective unity within the same state necessitated, and to a great extent produced, a more unified conception of the *Yugoslav* Jewry, which was to be an active participant in cultural transfer processes.

After 1918, the disparate Jewish communities faced the prospect of relating to the Yugoslav state as a single minority group of “Yugoslav Jews”. Several organisations emerged, therefore, as major actors in bridging the Ashkenazi-Jewish divide.

The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia was founded in 1919 as a result of pre-war and wartime efforts by Ashkenazi community leaders in Belgrade and Osijek to establish a wider basis

25 Giomi, “Seduced by Gender Corporatism”, 189–193.



Bet Israel Synagogue, Belgrade. Photo from 1908.

for Jewish representation in a future South Slav state.²⁶ That same year, the founding of the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia in Zagreb provided the basis for the further integration of Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities within the political project of Zionism as a single national movement. The growth of Zionism and the rapid establishment of local Zionist organisations also enmeshed many Yugoslav Jews in the global Zionist movement, with its centres in Central and Western Europe and North America. These connections would prove an important vector for cultural transfer between Yugoslav and European Jewry. The presence of a third Jewish organisation, the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith, predated the establishment of the Kingdom. This Jewish service organisation, founded in 1843 in New York, opened its first lodge in Serbia in 1911, with further lodges established in other Yugoslav cities towards the second half of the 1920s.²⁷ Incorporating elements of Masonic organisations, the B'nai

26 Nebojša Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1997), 43–44.

27 Andrija Radenić, “Bene Berit u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji 1911–1940”, *Žbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja*, Vol. 7 (1997), 3–71.

B'rith attracted the political, cultural and economic elite of Jewish men, fostering Ashkenazi–Sephardic unity and assistance to Jewish organisations, particularly charities, as its primary goals.

Although these statewide Jewish organisations provided the necessary institutional framework for an unprecedented level of interconnectedness between local Jewish communities, it is nonetheless at the local level that forms of cultural transfer can best be traced. In what is contemporary Serbia, Belgrade naturally took a leading position as the overall most populous city and predominantly Sephardic centre, followed by Novi Sad and Subotica as the main centres of the Ashkenazi Jewish population of contemporary Vojvodina.

In Belgrade, particularly important sites of cultural transfer towards the wider non-Jewish population were the Jewish Reading Room and Jewish music societies. The Jewish Reading Room, officially founded in December 1929 at the initiative of the leading organisations and individuals of both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, reflected a need for an institution for the educational and cultural improvement of Belgrade's Jewry, as well as further fostering Sephardic–Ashkenazi unity by providing written materials and organising public lectures.²⁸ Although nominally intended for Jews, membership was never restricted to them, so the reading room attracted Serbs both as lecturers and audience members, turning it into a meeting point for cultural and intellectual pursuits that touched on Jews or Judaism. Apart from topics in Jewish religion and tradition, attendees could hear reports on contemporary life in Palestine, the music of leading Jewish composers, as well as reflections on the works of such disparate figures as Heinrich Heine and Albert Einstein, delivered by leading Jewish and gentile intellectuals.²⁹

The Serbian–Jewish Singing Society further exemplified cultural transfer in the field of music. Formed in 1879, its Jewish–Serbian character was reflected in the backgrounds of chorists and conductors, the latter including the famous composers Josif Marinković and Stevan Stojanović Mokranjac, while its repertoire included canonical works of the European classical tradition, such as those of George Frederick Handel.³⁰ During the interwar period, the founding of the Jewish Academic Choir by Mario Menashe Bronze, a conductor fleeing Nazi persecution in Germany, provided an additional avenue for Belgrade's Jews to participate in cultural transfer and had a mixed Ashkenazi–Sephardic membership.

28 Radivoje Davidović, *Jevrejska čitaonica 1929–1941* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2016), 9–17.

29 Davidović, *Jevrejska čitaonica 1929–1941*.

30 Ivan Hofman, *Srpsko-jevrejsko pevačko društvo (hor 'Braća Baruh'): 125 godina trajanja* (Belgrade: Hor 'Braća Baruh', 2004), 26.

At its concerts, the choir performed not only Yugoslav and internationally well-known compositions, but also introduced the city's audiences to synagogal Romanticist works of Salomon Sulzer and Louis Lewandowski from the German and Austrian Jewish milieus.³¹

As has been noted, the mainly Ashkenazi Jewish communities of today's Vojvodina were often thoroughly acculturated to the German and especially Hungarian culture of this part of Austria-Hungary. While the central state-level Jewish organisations of the new state took Serbo-Croatian as their official language, the vernacular use of German and Hungarian remained widespread in the region, resulting in a somewhat lesser degree of integration with the local South Slavic population than south of the Danube and the Sava.

While the Jews of Novi Sad had their own cultural and music societies that could act as vectors of transfer, perhaps the most remarkable feature of Zionism in Vojvodina was the adoption of the *He-ḥalutz* (lit. The Pioneer) movement and its model of communal agricultural settlements, intended for preparing the Zionist youth for cultivating the land in a future Jewish state. One such settlement was formed in the village of Vilovo in Bačka,³² while a preparatory workshop was established in Novi Sad.³³ Inspired by similar trends in Labour Zionism outside of Yugoslavia, these new forms of youth culture presented one of the most tangible ways that the global Zionist movement could influence local practices among Jews in Vojvodina.

The framing of cultural transfer in relation to the Jewish minority in Serbia during the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia raises important questions that go beyond the basic difficulties presented by the great differences between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities. While many Jews contributed enormously to their contemporary culture as individual actors, to frame their contributions as "transfer" ultimately rests on a logic of their separateness from localities where Jewish culture had been present for centuries, effectively introducing a degree of separation with dubious grounding in actual circumstances. In accord-

31 Ibid, 27.

32 Milica Mihailović, "Jewish Youth Societies in Yugoslavia 1919–1926", in Milica Mihailović and Vojislava Radovanović (eds.), *Jewish Youth Societies in Yugoslavia, 1919–1941: Catalogue of the Exhibition, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, May 9th, 1995: Exhibition is Dedicated to the Fifty Anniversary of the Victory over Fascism* (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, 1995), 50.

33 Teodor Kovač, "Something About Ha-Shomer Ha-Za'ir and its "Nest" in Novi Sad", in Milica Mihailović and Vojislava Radovanović (eds.), *Jewish Youth Societies in Yugoslavia, 1919–1941: Catalogue of the Exhibition, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, May 9th, 1995: Exhibition is Dedicated to the Fifty Anniversary of the Victory over Fascism* (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, 1995), 71–78.

ance with what Wolfgang Schmale notes about rigid conceptions of homogeneous national cultures, such a sharp distinction would be a greater reflection of deliberate propagandistic efforts than of “natural”, distinct cultural units.³⁴ Therefore, this section endeavours to highlight collective organisations of Yugoslav Jewry as *cultural mediators* between Europe and the territory of contemporary Serbia during the interwar period, affirming their fundamental inseparability, despite their minority position, from broader cultural processes of Serbia during this time.

Concluding Remarks

As evident from this overview, the Protestant, Jewish and Islamic communities played an important role in shaping the cultural landscape of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, acting as important channels for cultural transfer and exchange coming from abroad. The Protestant community, though modestly sized, had a significant impact on the intellectual and educational spheres of Yugoslav society. Their presence, primarily through missionary work and educational institutions, introduced new ideas and approaches to social reform and modernity. The influence of Protestant thought, alongside the contributions of missionary schools and organisations, created a cross-cultural exchange that extended beyond mere religious boundaries. Islamic culture, with its rich heritage and diverse traditions, also significantly impacted Yugoslavia’s cultural landscape. The Islamic communities in Yugoslavia, which were concentrated in regions with historical Ottoman influence, contributed to the architectural, literary and artistic developments of the time. Their cultural practices and interactions with other communities facilitated a unique blend of traditions that characterised the cultural life of the era. With its deep-rooted historical presence in the region, the Jewish community brought a wealth of cultural and intellectual traditions that enriched Yugoslav society. Jewish contributions to commerce, arts and science were instrumental in fostering a vibrant urban culture. The interaction between Jewish cultural practices and the broader Yugoslav milieu facilitated a dynamic exchange of ideas and art forms.

Examining the contributions of these three communities, it becomes evident that their collective impact was instrumental in shaping the cultural and intellectual milieu of interwar Yugoslavia. Their engagement in cultural exchange not only bridged diverse traditions and perspectives but also contributed to a legacy of intercultural understanding and coopera-

34 Wolfgang Schmale, “What Is Cultural Transfer?”, in Slobodan G. Markovich (ed.), *Cultural Transfer Europe-Serbia* (Belgrade: Faculty of Political Sciences and Dosije Studio, 2023), 13–31.

tion. The interplay between Protestant, Jewish and Islamic cultures with the majority Orthodox and Catholic communities during this period underscores the importance of inclusive and multifaceted cultural dialogues in fostering a diverse and dynamic society. As Yugoslavia navigated the challenges of the interwar era, the contributions of these communities played a crucial role in crafting a cultural narrative that encouraged diversity and promoted mutually beneficial enrichment, even though the state often attempted to control the influence they exerted on the majority population.

Bibliography

- Aruči, Muhammed, "The Muslim Minority in Macedonia and Its Educational Institutions During the Inter-War Period", in Nathalie Clayer, Eric Germain (eds.), *Islam in Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 344–361.
- Bjelajac, Branko, 2019. *The Believers in Christ on Persecution of the Nazarenes in Serbia* (Tustin: Trilogy, 2019).
- Branković, Tomislav, *Protestantske zajednice u Jugoslaviji* (Belgrade: Pravoslavni Bogoslovski fakultet, 2011).
- Davidović, Radivoje, *Jevrejska čitaonica 1929–1941* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2016).
- Hofman, Ivan, *Srpsko-jevrejsko pevačko društvo (hor 'Braća Baruh'): 125 godina trajanja* (Belgrade: Hor 'Braća Baruh', 2004).
- Djurić Milovanović, Aleksandra, "Evandeoski hrišćani na Dunavu. Razvoj baptizma u Novom Sadu", in *Dunavom od Bezdana do Beograda*, ed. Đorđe S. Kostić (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2012).
- Djurić Milovanović, Aleksandra, *The Untold Journey of the Nazarene Emigration from Yugoslavia to North America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2024).
- Djurić Milovanović, Aleksandra, *Dvostruke manjine u Srbiji. O posebnostima u religiji i etnicitetu Rumuna u Vojvodini*. (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2015).
- Giomi, Fabio, "Domesticating Kemalism: Conflicting Muslim Narratives about Turkey in Interwar Yugoslavia." In Catherina Raudvere (ed.), *Nostalgia, Loss and Creativity in South-East Europe: Political and Cultural Representations of the Past* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 153–190.
- Giomi, Fabio, *Making Muslim Women European: Voluntary Associations, Gender, and Islam in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878–1941)*. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2021.
- Giomi, Fabio, "Muslim, Educated and Well-Dressed: Gajret's Self-Civilizing Mission in Interwar Yugoslavia." *European Review of History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2019): 41–59.
- Giomi, Fabio, "Seduced by Gender Corporatism: Muslim Cultural Entrepreneurs and Kemalist Turkey in Interwar Yugoslavia", in Nathalie Clayer, Fabio Giomi, and Emmanuel Szurek (eds.), *Kemalism: Transnational Politics in the Post-Ottoman World* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 178–216.
- Jørgensen, Steen Bille & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, "Introduction: Reframing the Cultural Transfer Approach", in Steen Bille Jørgensen & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink

- (eds.), *Cultural Transfer Reconsidered: Transnational Perspectives, Translation Processes, Scandinavian and Postcolonial Challenges* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 1–20.
- Karčić, Fikret, “The Reform of the Shari’a Courts”, in Nathalie Clayer, Eric Germain (eds.), *Islam in Inter-War Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 253–270.
- Mitrović, Andjelka, “Katedra za orijentalistiku”, in Andjelka Mitrović (ed.), *Orijentalistika: juče – danas – sutra* (Belgrade: Filološki fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2019), 109–134.
- Markovich, Slobodan G. (ed.), *Cultural Transfer Europe-Serbia: Methodological Issues and Challenges* (Belgrade: Faculty of Political Sciences and Dosije Studio, 2023).
- Mihailović, Milica, and Vojislava Radovanović (eds.), *Jewish Youth Societies in Yugoslavia, 1919–1941: Catalogue of the Exhibition, Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, May 9th, 1995: Exhibition is Dedicated to the Fifty Anniversary of the Victory over Fascism* (Belgrade: Jevrejski istorijski muzej, 1995).
- Močnik, Albino, *Ustav zajednice Jugoslovenskih adventista* (Belgrade, 1927).
- Novaković, Dragan, “Organizacija i položaj Islamske verske zajednice u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji”. *Teme*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2003), 451–474.
- Popović, Nebojša, *Ževreji u Srbiji 1918–1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1997).
- Poulton, Hugh, “Macedonians and Albanians as Yugoslavs”, in Dejan Djokic (ed.), *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992* (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 115–135.
- Poulton, Hugh, and Miranda Vickers, “The Kosovo Albanians: Ethnic Confrontation with the Slav State”, in Hugh Poulton, Suha Taji-Farouki (eds.), *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 139–169.
- Radenić, Andrija, “Bene Berit u Srbiji i Jugoslaviji 1911–1940”. *Žbornik jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* 7 (1997): 3–71.
- Radić, Radmila, *Verom protiv vere. Država i verske zajednice u Srbiji 1945–1953* (Belgrade: INIS, 1995).
- Ratković Šaljić, Jovana, “Islamska zajednica Srbije, prvih deset godina (1868–1877)” *Istorijski časopis*, Vol. 62 (2013), 345–359.
- Šušljic, Milan, *Bičete mi svedoci* (Belgrade: Preporod, 2004).
- Spahi, Alma, *Recepcija turske književnosti u Bosni i Hercegovini u XX vijeku*. PhD diss. (University of Belgrade, 2016).
- Wendland, Anna Veronika, “Cultural Transfer”, in Birgit Neumann & Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Travelling Concepts for the Study of Culture* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 45–66.