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UDK 391.01:069](497.521.2)

069.02:39](497.521.2)

Original scientific paper

Received: November 22, 2007

Accepted: March 13, 2008

# Ethnological Research and Canonization of Autochthonous Folk Costumes in Croatia During the 1930s

*Utilizing the Polysystem Theory, the author examines the dynamics of ethnological research in Croatia within the broader (poly)system of folk arts during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a focus on the domain of clothing and textiles. The author shows that the early multi-disciplinary approach to the study of folk culture, as proposed by Antun Radić in 1897, was gradually replaced during the 1920's by the cultural-historical approach introduced by Milovan Gavazzi. The canonization of cultural-historical methodology in ethnological research in the late 1920s led to further canonization of selected older or "traditional" festive peasant clothing as "autochthonous" folk costumes. At the same time, textiles with elements of peasant decorations that were made in home industries for city consumption were classified as "applied" folk textile arts, while peasant and popular clothing and textiles that continued to change during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were classified as "inauthentic" and therefore not worthy of research or museum preservation. From that time onwards, it was mostly the "autochthonous" folk costumes that were displayed in ethnographic museums, utilized by political parties as symbols of national identity on organized folk festivals, and they continue to be used to this day in cultural and tourist industry. The author suggests that perhaps the best way for Croatian ethnographic museums to overcome the cultural-historical interpretation of "autochthonous" folk costumes in their permanent exhibitions would be to deconstruct its history, classifications, canonization*

*processes, and past political and economic instrumentalizations. In this way, ethnographic museums would be able to openly communicate to the public the reasons for moving away from such a static “celebratory history” of folk culture, towards the history of folk or popular culture as an open process that includes complex processes of modernization during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

Key words: “autochthonous” folk costumes, “applied” folk textile arts, ethnological research, Polysystem theory, canonization processes, institutional dynamics, museology

A visitor to the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb cannot but be impressed by a large and visually attractive permanent display of Croatian folk costumes, which was created in the early 1970s by the director of the Museum at the time, Jelka Radauš-Ribarić. The written guide to the exhibit explains that the displayed artifacts were selected to represent three ethnographic regions in Croatia, where, until recently, natural conditions determined the type of peasant economy and textile production. This has gradually changed over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the guide informs us, “as a consequence of big transformations which started to shake the peasant society at the turn of the (20<sup>th</sup>) century... The process of degeneration and rejection of the national costume took place between the two world wars...while we can observe the last phases of its final extinction in the post WWII period.” (Radauš-Ribarić, 1972: 5). The displayed artifacts themselves are predominantly from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the guide suggests that “the origins of the particular type of costume, specific cut of costume, decorative motifs, kind and shape of adornment, women’s or men’s head-gear, and even the hair style” are often hundreds and even thousands of years old.

The traditional/modern dichotomy that can be discerned from the above interpretation of Croatian folk costumes is quite familiar and certainly not an isolated phenomenon. The preoccupation with the origins of selected older type of folk costumes that were defined as traditional and evaluated as “autochthonous” or “authentic”, and neglect of “non-authentic” peasant clothing that continued to change during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been much discussed among textiles scholars and museologists in both Europe and North America. The focus in North American textile studies has been shifting towards comparative and historical study of cloth dynamics on a world-wide scale, including processes of “modernization” in more recent times (Schneider, 1987). More generally, a model of non-Western and non-elite Western cultures as static, closed systems embedded in traditional frameworks that were eventually destroyed by modernization, is now giving way to a model of all cultures (Western and non-Western, elite and non-elite) as dynamic, functional, heterogeneous, stratified, open (poly)systems (Even-Zohar, 1990; Dimić, 1993, Bonifačić, 1997).

In Croatia, just as in the rest of Europe, the critical examination of traditional/modern dichotomy has also been evident within the discipline of ethnology and folklore

studies from the 1970's onwards. Scholars associated with the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb began to question the definitions of "authentic" or canonized folk arts, as well as discuss their new social functions as symbols of national and (supra)national identities; at the same time, they began to study the long neglected non-canonized cultural products, both rural and urban, that continued to change during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bošković-Stulli, 1971, 1983; Rajković, 1988; Rihtman'Auguštin, 1979, 1987, 1989, 1991; Sremac, 1978; and many others). This reflexive scrutiny of past research approaches and broadened area of study created an intense dialogue concerning related theoretical and methodological issues both within the discipline of ethnology and folklore studies, and also with those of anthropology, sociology, philosophy, history, musicology and literary theory. Ever since that time, such interdisciplinary dialogue has been gradually transforming the discipline of ethnology and folklore studies in Croatia, as well as related programming in ethnographic museums.

However, the above mentioned changes have not developed uniformly among all relevant institutions in Croatia, or in all areas of research. The broadened area of study and the new theoretical/methodological approaches were at first implemented in studying the non-material cultural products and performances - such as literature, dance and music - which was the main focus of study at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research. The Department of Ethnology at the University of Zagreb, the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb and other ethnographic museums across Croatia focused more on the study of material culture including clothing and textiles. Due to a number of reasons, these institutions started to address issues related to theoretical/methodological approaches and the broadened subject matter, and to implement them in their research and museological practice much later (Bonifačić, 1999: 273). It can be said that only from the 1990's onwards the material culture studies, including clothing and textile studies, are largely moving away from the previously dominant cultural-historical methodology, and opening towards a variety of new approaches. This is reflected in the very theme proposed for this issue which addresses the need for multidisciplinary approaches in both research and exhibition practice of ethnographic museums.

I consider it particularly relevant now, at this time of transformation, to examine the past practice of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb and ask the question of how the interpretation in the Museum's permanent exhibition came to be. When and how did clothing and textiles from rural areas first come to be elevated to the status of folk textile arts or Croatian national textile arts? When and how did subsequent canonization<sup>1</sup> of selected peasant festive clothing as "authentic" or autochthonous folk costumes occur? How did the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb both respond and contribute to the process of canonization?

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<sup>1</sup> By 'canonized' I mean those norms and products "which are accepted as legitimate by the dominant circles within a culture and whose conspicuous products are preserved by the community to become part of its cultural heritage. On the other, 'non-canonized' means those norms and products which are rejected by these circles as illegitimate and whose conspicuous products are often forgotten in the long run by the community (unless they change their status)." (Even-Zohar, 1990: 15)

In this paper I will suggest that the elevation of folk clothing and textiles to the status of Croatian national textile arts occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During that time, modified folk textiles entered urban fashions as a symbol of the emerging Yugoslav and/or Croatian identity within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and soon after became an important branch of economy.

I will also suggest that the canonization of selected peasant festive clothing as “authentic” or “autochthonous” Croatian folk costumes occurred much later, during the 1930’s, when a cultural-historical research model began to dominate Croatian ethnology and folklore studies. During that time, these autochthonous folk costumes were instrumentalized as a symbol of Croatian national identity, but in the quite different context of the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

Finally, I will show how the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, from the time of its inception in 1919, contributed at first to the promotion of peasant clothing and textiles as national or folk textile arts, and later during the 1930s to the canonization of selected festive peasant costumes as autochthonous Croatian folk costumes. Such reflexive analysis of the Museum’s past practice shall not only illuminate the distant history with more precision, but should also be useful to the Museum in the process of defining with more clarity its current research and exhibition programming within the context of our own contemporary times.

## **From peasant textiles to Croatian national textile arts**

When the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb was established in 1919, the initial collection of peasant clothing and textiles was created from the holdings of a number of already existing collections (Gjetvaj, 1989). These early collections were indicative of the reasons and criteria for collecting textiles from rural areas during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Croatia, the interest in folklore emerged during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century within the Croatian National Revival or Illyrian Movement, in the midst of political struggles for national liberation (Bošković-Stulli, 1971). The folk culture of rural populations, in contrast to elite culture associated with towns and foreign rulers, became a symbol of the emerging national identity, which, under the influence of Herder and romanticism, was defined as a revival of the original essence of the people (Volk). Intellectuals who participated in the Illyrian movement were first to introduce certain elements of rural costumes into Croatian urban fashions (Balog, 1987; Bošković-Stulli, 1971; Maruševski, 1978; Schneider, 1985). The Illyrian Movement also inspired the quest for the preservation of folk culture. Various manifestations of folk culture began to be recorded in written form, while material culture was collected in private and museum collections (Gjetvaj, 1989).

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new motivation became evident in the collections of textiles from rural regions: to aid textile instruction in regular schools across Croatia, and also in specialized schools which trained women for textile production

in rural home industries. The criteria for selection of peasant textiles for such museum and private collections were the perceived aesthetic value of the decorative elements or other design features, as well as their applicability to the manufacture of textiles for urban consumption.

Already in 1873, Matković wrote a brief summary about textile home industries in Croatia and Slavonia for the World Exhibition held in Vienna. He mentioned home industry production of linen and hemp cloth, silk yarn, woolen cloth, and other woolen textile products such as “carpets, aprons, bedcovers, bags, belts, socks, overcoats, etc. which are artfully decorated with special colorful ornaments. Such crafts have also internationally acquired high reputation” (Matković, 1873:97-98). Other individuals, such as S. Lay, S. Subotić, N. A. Plavšić, and D. Herman, were also involved in the early international trade of textiles made in Croatian home industries which they promoted on trade exhibitions in Moscow (1867), Budapest (1885, 1886), Trieste (1883), Bruxelles and Barcelona (1888), Paris (18889, 1900), and others (Hrvatska umjetnost, 1943: 735-736).

Petrović (1992) writes that, in 1880, the Hungarian Ministry sent a request to the Art Society in Zagreb to prepare a collection of Croatian folk embroideries for the museum in Budapest, along with “description of technology, colouring, suggestions for the improvements of looms, etc.” (p. 150). This particular request was not only a sign of interest in trade of handmade textiles, but also a sign of the Hungarian claim to sovereignty over Croatia that was particularly strong at that time. Since such collections and data were not available at the time, the founder of the Art Society in Zagreb, Iso Kršnjavi, went to rural Slavonia to collect them. He published his findings about rural textiles and other material culture in the form of a travelogue, *Pages from Slavonia*, in which he expressed the need to establish a trade museum in Zagreb, and to publish an illustrated technological dictionary of weaving and related technologies. He supplied collections of Croatian folk textiles to the Museum in Budapest as well as other European museums. Kršnjavi also taught in schools and lectured with the intention of educating the public about Croatian folk crafts. Petrović (1992) reports: “In order to raise the level of taste and arouse interest in folk crafts, he [Kršnjavi] lectured in the monastery of sisters of charity about style in textile arts, and in this way reformed in that monastery all handicrafts and the making of ecclesiastical textiles” (p.153). Kršnjavi promoted textile crafts as Croatian national arts, and eventually paved the way for the opening of the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb in 1880. In 1919, the ethnographic section of the Museum of Arts and Crafts was transferred to the Ethnographic Museum.

Another collection that became part of the Ethnographic Museum in 1919 came from the Trade and Craft Museum associated with the Craft School in Zagreb. The content and purpose of this collection can be glimpsed from the catalogue describing it (Belović-Bernadzikowska, 1910). The collection consisted predominantly of samples of embroidery, lace, knitted textiles, kilims, and other woven textiles suitable for town consumption. They were to serve home industries of handmade textiles, as increasingly important branch of the Croatian economy because textiles were largely intended for export. “All over our country associations are being formed for the

preservation of folk textile arts, where our intelligent and patriotic women will invest their knowledge and efforts to help peasant women in that direction” (p. 1). The intention was “to save the magnificent Croatian folk textile arts from being destroyed or forgotten; moreover, to educate new workers and create a new economic branch on the old basis” (p. 1).

Yet another textile collection that was transferred to the Ethnographic Museum in 1919 came from the School Museum in Zagreb. Šufflay (1917) writes how around 1907 “the government ordered women’s schools to offer textile instruction in the national spirit” (p. 11). Belović-Bernadzikowska (1910) mentions that the central professional woman’s school in Zagreb opened an atelier, “a nursery of the most beautiful folk ornaments, intended for women’s schools all over the country – for schools that sinned in the past by tending only foreign works instead of our own Croatian ones” (p. 2).

The fourth and most spectacular early collection of folk textiles was from a legendary private collector, a merchant and textile industrialist, Salomon Berger. He collected folk textiles extensively, and either organized or collaborated with home industries of various types of textiles in several parts of Croatia, and later also in Dalmatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. When necessary, he organized training for peasant women in order to teach them new technical skills. Over the years, Berger exhibited textiles made in home industries at ninety six trade exhibitions in Europe, North America, and Australia, where he reportedly received large orders from many international traders, including ones from Montreal and Winnipeg in Canada (Franić, 1935a; Gjetvaj, 1989; Šufflay, 1928).

It was also thanks to Berger’s energetic collecting, marketing, and promoting that the opening of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb became a reality in 1919: the year after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and subsequent formation of the kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Berger sold his entire collection to the Museum, donated money for its operation, and became its director between 1919 and 1925, and later its honorary director until his death in 1934 (Gjetvaj, 1989). Perhaps it was due to Berger that, during that period, one of the important activities of the Museum was the promotion of textile home industries. For example, the Museum exhibited folk textiles made in home industries at the World Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris (1925), and at the world exhibitions in Paris (1927), Barcelona (1929), Copenhagen (1930), and Saarbrücken (1931/32) (Gjetvaj, 1989). The Museum also participated in trade exhibitions of folk textiles made in home industries that were held in Zagreb, and hosted the largest of such exhibitions on its grounds in 1935 (Franić, 1936).

Thus, it can be seen that the production of textiles in home industries was extensive, and that it was promoted both at home and abroad as the Croatian folk (or national) textile art. To what extent were these textiles based on peasant textiles collected in rural areas? The answers will vary from one region to another. My research of the history of needle lace production on the island of Pag has shown that a lace making school and a home industry of lace were set up and formally operated in the town of Pag between 1907 and the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The basic needle lace technique of reticella bound to cloth was already known to the women in Pag town, but the school training introduced some new technical aspects, such as making of reticella lace not

bound to cloth. Also, smaller elements of lace design were retained as a trademark of Pag lace, but the overall designs of objects were done by designers in order to meet the requirements for urban fashions and interior decorations (Bonifačić, 1994).

In Lepoglava, women knew how to make simple bobbin lace that they used to sell at local fairs. Šufflay (1917) reported that such lace was often of poor quality and made with foreign (Slovenian, Czech, and German) ornamental motifs (p.12). Her intention was to introduce Croatian motifs for lace made in the home industry she helped to establish in Lepoglava. However, she actually adopted decorative motifs from samples of Croatian embroidery into patterns for lace making – an indication that textile ornamentation from various regions of Croatia traveled not only geographical distances through school instruction, but also from one textile technique to another.

With government support, Salamon Berger operated a weaving school in Zagreb between 1902 and 1905. The government donated ten German looms *Tisov* to Berger's schools. During that time Berger trained 16 women from rural areas in his school, and employed a total of 600 women in home industry productions of various textiles (Berger, 1907). Berger (1907) described the purpose and organization of his school as following:

- 1) to gather peasant women from various parts of our country, and instruct them in our various [textile] techniques
- 2) to train them...how to supervise and further teach women in their village...
- 3) peasant women received from me materials for weaving and embroidery for 10 to 30 women in their village
- 4) in this school we created new decorations on the basis of old Croatian ornaments, as well as collections of samples for [international]...trade representatives. Of particular significance were samples to be given out to women in rural areas free of charge. (p. 6)

Obviously, Berger trained women to use new types of looms and new weaving and embroidery techniques and ornaments. Franić (1935a) describes the way Berger modified decorative aspects of rural textiles for international urban consumption:

Berger altered form and colour of ornament, but did not touch embroidery [decorative] techniques, he did not change spiritual values or disturb the inner content of ornament. He left the essence untouched, and altered and adjusted only the form so that the altered [textile] could serve [its new function]. Only in this way he succeeded to introduce Yugoslav folk [national] ornamentation onto the international world market as a desired good. From samples of his applied ornaments, five large folders have been retained by the Museum, and represent the important document of his efforts to save our rural home industry. (p. 9)

Stjepan Šajnović operated another textile home industry in Osekovo between the two world wars. He had “40 women weavers and embroiderers who made folk costumes,

ecclesiastical textiles, banners, and other clothing and decorative textiles” (Moslavac, 1995:10). Šajnović exhibited his products at Zagreb trade exhibitions. During summer months he sold his products at his booth in Crikvenica, one of the earliest tourist seaside resorts in Croatia between the two World Wars (Moslavac, 1995:10). Again, Šajnović altered the designs and created his own styles of modified folk costumes and other textiles.

Franić (1936) describes numerous other home industries that were operating in 1935 in rural regions of Croatia, as well as the two largest home industries in the cities of Split and Zagreb. In general, it appears that textile home industries were encouraged and established in rural and urban locations where local women already possessed the basic necessary skills, but were at times given additional training to master new techniques or technological aspects. The designs for textile products were provided by various outsiders, such as merchants, designers, teachers, or consumers. Certain aspects of these designs were sometimes local, but often only related to Croatian folk textiles in general, and at times even imported from abroad. As a rule, the decorative aspects of designs were simplified, and the overall designs of products altered, in order to satisfy urban tastes.

It is therefore obvious that textiles made in home industries differed greatly from textiles made by peasants for their own use. However, this difference was generally not reflected in the popular nomenclature until the 1930's. Until then, all textiles were usually referred to by the same name: *narodna tekstilna umjetnost*, which can be translated as either folk or national textile arts. As will be seen later, the effort to create Croatian national arts by modification of folk arts was not limited to textiles, but was, for example, also flourishing in the field of music (Sremac, 1978). However, by the 1930's, such notions were gradually replaced by the desire to primarily preserve the “authentic” forms of folklore, while at the same time encouraging further artistic and commercial applications of folk textiles for consumption in cities and towns. Thus, in the article describing the large trade exhibition in Zagreb in 1935, textiles made in home industries for urban and international markets were referred to as *applied popular arts* [primjenjena pučka umjetnost] in contrast to *autochthonous folk arts* [izvorna narodna umjetnost] which signified selected older textiles that peasants made for their own use (Franić, 1936). One of the main reasons for this change in classification and nomenclature was, I believe, that the canonization of selected textiles and clothing as “autochthonous” Croatian folk textile heritage became quite clearly established around 1930 as a result of developments in ethnological research.

## Ethnological research of clothing and textiles in Croatia: 1896 to 1940

In 1896, the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences of Arts (JAZU) in Zagreb initiated the systematic study of peasant culture with the publication of *The Journal for Folk Life and Customs of South Slavs* [Zbornik za narodni život i običaje južnih slavena]; at the

same time its editor, Antun Radić, introduced a new academic discipline – ethnology: “a science about people” (Muraj, 1989). This also marked the official beginning of folk textile research in Croatia, which then further expanded during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the establishment of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb (1919), the Department of Ethnology at the University of Zagreb (1924), and various new journals and publications.

Antun Radić (1897) gave the initial framework to the newly established discipline with the publication of a questionnaire for collecting ethnographic data about material, social and spiritual aspects of life and customs in rural regions. While Radić did not provide a fully articulated theory and methodology for subsequent interpretation of collected ethnographic data, he gave an overall approach to ethnological research which was remarkable and unique for his time. Namely, he considered folk culture to be in principle equal to elite culture – only functioning under different conditions - and therefore proposed a multidisciplinary approach for ethnological research that would enquire into and interpret the functioning of all aspects of folk culture, including changes that were happening in rural areas at the time (Bonifačić, 1995/1996: 162). The main publications of ethnographic reports based on Radić’s questionnaire that were published in the *Journal of Folk Life and Culture of South Slavs* are nine monographs describing selected rural communities, or parishes consisting of several communities. The ethnographic methods used in preparing these monographs are those of participant observation and informal interviews, since Radić insisted that only local people who knew life and people in the community undertake collection of data. The monographs are rich in information on many aspects of rural life, but particularly interesting in the domain of textiles, as they inquire into various changes in production, exchange and consumption of rural clothing and textiles that were taking place at the time (Bonifačić, 1995/1996: 168). From the questions that Radić posed in the questionnaire about clothing and textiles, it is obvious that Radić did not consider only handmade or older style clothing to be the valid subject of ethnological research, but all textile products that were either produced or used in rural communities.

However, following the establishment of the Ethnographic Museum of Zagreb in 1919, within the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, ethnological activities in Croatia became more varied. Since the Museum concerned itself with “preservation” of material culture that was perceived as being destroyed by the processes of “modernization” affecting rural regions, the focus of their research practice generally shifted towards older peasant clothing and textiles and their history (Bonifačić, 1996). An influential scholar at the time, Josip Matasović, exerted an important influence on ethnological activities in Croatia as the main editor and publisher of his multidisciplinary journal devoted to history, art history, and ethnography of South Slavs, *National Heritage* [Narodna starina] (1922-1935). Matasović considered that the interdisciplinary approach would be beneficial for both ethnology and history (Muraj, 1993). Vladimir Tkalčić, the first curator and later also a director of the Museum, also combined ethnographic methods with those used by historian in his research of peasant clothing (Bonifačić, 1996: 247).

Mirko Kus-Nikolajev and Milovan Gavazzi, however, introduced new theoretical models that were designed by German scholars for studying European peasant or other “primitive” non-Western arts and cultures (Bonifačić, 1996: 250). It was the diffusionist or cultural-historical model introduced by Milovan Gavazzi that eventually prevailed and dominated Croatian ethnology, beginning in 1928 with the publication of his first review article “The Cultural Analysis of Croatian Ethnography”, through to the 1980’s (Muraj, 1989: 24). Gavazzi’s appointments as curator (1922-1927) and then director (1939-1941) of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, professor at the Department of Ethnology (from the 1927 onwards), and leader of the Ethnographic Seminar at the University of Zagreb, reflect the fact that he was at the center of ethnological activities in Croatia.

Gavazzi’s cultural-historical (diffusionist) research approach was positivistic and descriptive (Muraj, 1989:38). Within the domain of clothing and textiles, his goal was to determine the genesis of the material, technical, and functional aspects of older peasant clothing and textiles through time and their diffusion through space – but excluding the 20<sup>th</sup> century processes of “modernization” (Bonifačić, 1996: 254). His project was later further developed and elaborated upon by other ethnologists in Croatia, the most influential ones among them being associated with the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. The permanent exhibitions in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, along with the published catalogues or guides, provide perhaps the most visible evidence of the dominance of Gavazzi’s research model from its introduction in the late 1920’s onwards (Kus-Nikolajev, 1927; Franić, 1935b; Gušić, 1955; Radauš-Ribarić, 1972).

It is important to distinguish at this point between the two levels of canonization. The described canonization was that of research models centered upon the question *how* to study textiles. The other canonization was that of the textile objects themselves which were consequently selected for study using cultural-historical methodology. The criteria for selection of clothing and textile objects were naturally not very clear-cut. In general, older (largely 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> c.) and preferably handmade festive clothing and textiles of rural populations were selected for study, with the exclusion of rural and urban elite, rural and urban workers, and rural and urban destitute<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, due to the cultural-historical research approach, clothing and textiles that retained some archaic or very old technical, visual or functional characteristics were more likely to be documented, researched or exhibited. Such textiles came to be perceived and presented as the “authentic” or autochthonous Croatian cultural heritage. Vernacular clothing and textiles that continued to change during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in

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<sup>2</sup> These exclusions were also ideologically motivated. At that time, workers and the destitute were the focus of communist ideology that was not widely supported by the Croatian elite, and was also strongly suppressed by the central government. At the same time, the left oriented intellectuals in Croatia rejected the use of folk traditions as a symbol of national identity as elitist and conservative. For example, the leading figure among leftist intellectuals, Miroslav Krleža, wrote in 1937: “Today, at the time of Diesel machines, a weaving loom or distaff cannot represent means of resistance, and everything that is thought, believed or preached as an all-saving political Truth, all that ideology is from the times of distaffs and weaving looms, all that is long outlived German Romanticism, exactly where it preaches autochthonousness” (Krleža, 1937/1973: 125).

terms of their physical characteristics or social functions were not only ignored but devalued as non-authentic<sup>3</sup>.

While the canonization of selected folk costumes and textiles has gradually taken place from the 1920's onwards among ethnologists and museologists in Croatia, it is also important to determine the channels through which it reached the broader population and became accepted within the Croatian culture in general. The education system, publishing activities, permanent displays and the guided tours through the exhibitions in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, served to inform the educated segments of the general public in Croatia. The predominant channel of distributing this interpretation and canonization of selected folk costumes among the broadest segments of uneducated rural population, was undoubtedly through political instrumentalization of "authentic" or autochthonous folk costumes, which will be described in the next section.

## **Political instrumentalization of autochthonous folk costumes in Croatia: 1928-1940**

As mentioned earlier, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, intellectuals who participated in the Illyrian movement were the first to introduce certain elements of rural textiles into Croatian urban fashions as symbols of national identity. The Illyrian movement was limited to Croatia, yet at first it promoted Yugoslav national identity, that is, the idea of the unity of all South Slavs as one nation. Even though the Illyrian movement was politically crushed in 1849, the ideas of national identity and liberation lived on. However, they became more complex and diverse, internally divided between the quest for Croatian independence and the unity of all South Slav nations, until the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918.

It was within the newly formed state that folk textiles were instrumentalized once again for political action in Croatia. Banac (1984) describes the policy of centralism in the newly formed state as following:

...these were the programs of educated classes, representing most of what was good and everything that was bad about South Slavic intelligentsia, whose members were impatient to change Yugoslav reality and were not too particular about the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in her paper in which she describes in celebratory terms (and partially invents, op. V. B.) the history of traditional or "autochthonous" women's folk costumes from the town of Pag, the author Marijana Gušić (1957) comments on the changing clothing styles in Pag town as follows: "When a traveller arrives [today] on the island of Pag, to any of the small communities on the island...he will meet the same picture as in all other regions: young and old walk around in banal, not to say impoverished clothing, and poor and unfunctional footwear...Ordinary industrial cloth, mostly cotton, gets quickly worn out and torn through work, besides our folk does not have knowledge of the proper care of contemporary cloth, not even of its best kind."

means...They looked upon themselves as engineers who would pull a passive backward country into modernity, if need be by force...they tried to bring about a Great Serbia or a Great Yugoslavia, some out of sheer idealism, some for more pragmatic reasons. Their attempts...were doomed to failure, and only succeeded in provoking resistance of such intensity, notably among the Croats, that it could be stemmed only at the expense of parliamentary democracy (p. 225)

The strongest opposition to the centralist policy was created by Stjepan Radić, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, who sought greater autonomy for Croatia within the new state. Stjepan Radić was a brother of Antun Radić, the aforementioned ethnologist. Antun Radić abandoned his academic carrier in ethnology in 1902, founded with his brother Stjepan the Croatian Peasant Party in 1904, and devoted himself until his death in 1919 to political writings and activities. Antun Radić largely created the ideological framework and program for the Croatian Peasant Party, while Stjepan became its charismatic and dynamic leader and activist. While they acknowledged the undisputed historical existence of the Croatian nation, they promoted the brotherhood among all the Slavic nations, and rejected any hegemonistic conception among them (Šidak, 1968). Thus, while the Party initially supported the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, it strongly rejected the centralist policies of a Serbian dominated government and struggled to gain greater autonomy for Croatia.

The strength of the Party was based on the size of membership, which was a direct result of the introduction of universal suffrage for men in 1920 (Banac, 1984: 227). This explains why, at that time, folk costumes and textiles were not instrumentalized among the leaders or the elite, but among peasants. During the 1920's, the ideology of the Croatian Peasant Party was more oriented towards the future, and aimed for the renewal of the whole Croatian culture on the basis rural or folk culture (Leček, 1995). In the domain of textiles, this renewal was primarily envisioned through already established notions of bridging elite and folk textiles, by design modifications of rural textiles, into new Croatian textile arts. Peasant women were often summoned to create textile decorations, banners, theater curtains, etc. for various programs and events organized by the Party. Designs for such new textile creations were most likely made by educated women teachers or party organizers. Sremac (1978) describes the first folk festival that was organized in Zagreb in 1926 by Peasant Unity, an organization for peasant cultural and educational activities that was closely connected with the Croatian Peasant Party. This first festival was relatively small. Dressed in folk costumes, rural choirs sang folk songs that were arranged by Croatian composers, since the organizers promoted "songs that are simultaneously folklore and art" (Sremac, 1978: 100).

Following the assassination of Stjepan Radić in 1928, the Croatian Peasant Party lost its political power and influence, and the ideology promoted by Peasant Unity now became closed in and ultimately regressive, aiming to preserve only the "pure" autochthonous forms of peasant culture. At the festival in 1929, for example, significant changes in relation to folk costumes and folk songs can be observed: increased

attention is paid to the “authentic” forms of both costumes and songs. Sremac (1978) writes that on the 1929 festival,

...all peasant choirs were required to perform dressed in the folk costumes of their region, and if the folk costumes were no longer to be found, they had to be reconstructed according to the memory of the oldest people in the village. That is why on the festival there were two “juries”. One judged the artistic accomplishments of the choirs, and another “folkloristic jury”...judged the purity of the folk costumes and songs...The appearance of this jury was a sign that greater attention was given to authentic forms; interestingly, greater emphasis was placed on the costumes than on the songs themselves.” (p. 101)

With the introduction of political dictatorship in the same year, all activities of the Croatian Peasant Party and Peasant Unity were banned. In 1935, after a six year interruption, the activities of the Peasant Unity were revived and festivals began to be organized with renewed vigor. Between 1935 and 1940, eight central festivals were held in Zagreb, and 150 regional festivals were held throughout Croatia (Sremec, 1978: 103). After the first festival in 1935, members of the “jury” (which included two ethnologists, Gavazzi and Bratanić) decided that in the subsequent years festivals would feature only autochthonous forms of folklore. Increasingly strict rules were further imposed relating to the authenticity of folk songs, dances, and costumes. Folk costumes were reconstructed in many regions, this time with “the help and supervision of experts” (p. 103). These experts were Milovan Gavazzi, who was teaching at the Department of Ethnology (1927-) and serving as director of the Ethnographic Museum of Zagreb (1939-1941), and Branimir Bratanić who was also teaching at the Department of Ethnology. Bratanić (1936) reports how villages began to compete at festivals in presenting more and more beautiful and pure folk costumes; the Peasant Unity branch in Petrijevci “decided to give a prize every year to the girl featuring the most beautiful folk costume in the village” (p. 75). Almost by definition, with or without the help of experts, the process of costume reconstruction probably resulted in many inventions of “authentic” or autochthonous folk costumes. For example, Gušić (1955) indicates how in Slavonija “the Peasant unity organization felt it necessary to have different clothes for different regions” (p. 73).

It is also evident from Peasant Unity publications that pressure was placed on peasant women to return to making older handmade folk costumes and textiles. They were urged to wear such costumes not only on festivals but also in real life, since the use of industrial materials and new styles in clothing were more and more prevalent in rural regions. Concurrently, there are indications of a resistance to that pressure. For example, at the annual general meeting of Peasant unity in February 1936, a member Franjo Novosel was suggesting that women should return to wearing handmade folk costumes; he was interrupted by protesting voices from the floor: “We don’t want to go backwards! We want factories!” (“Ravan put”, 1936). This incident was often commented upon in subsequent issues of Peasant unity publications. Various members argued that the return to the production of homegrown textile fibers and handmade cloth and costumes was a means to advance, and not regress. Such a return was

perceived to be positive for economic reasons, as it would allow for peasant self-sufficiency. Equally important, it was a way to preserve autochthonous Croatian culture, as autochthonous folk costumes were perceived to be the “Croatian cultural identification card” (Bratanić, 1936: 76).

In 1939, as a concession to the Croats amidst growing internal and international political tensions, the Belgrade authorities reached an agreement with the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vlatko Maček, and created a nominally autonomous province named the Banat of Croatia. The Croatian Peasant Party now became preoccupied with political and constitutional questions, and no longer strove to protect the interests of peasantry (Boban, 1971: 183). However, the Party renewed its efforts in organizing cultural activities in order to retain the votes of the peasantry. The fervor among members of Peasant Unity to promote peasant culture and a return to hand-made cloth and costumes was therefore growing, rather than diminishing. In issues of Peasant Unity publications from 1940, the representatives of numerous rural chapters reported that the growing of flax and hemp, and production of handmade cloth and costumes had been revived in their villages. The costumes were largely intended for performances at local celebrations or regional and central folk festivals, but some reports indicate that in several areas older costumes were revived for use in everyday life and local rituals. When describing festivals organized by the Peasant Unity between 1935 and 1941, the ethnologist Bratanić (1941) recounts increasingly strict rules regarding the songs, dances and costumes that could be presented:

Everything that is presented at the festival must be strictly our national, **Croatian** and peasant...Obvious **foreign influences** from towns or from neighbouring nations (German, Italian, Hungarian, etc.) must not be present, nor should there be **wrong** (false) “**patriotism**”. Such “patriotism” is manifested by displaying flags and tricolour ribbons, which are otherwise mere factory or store goods... Costumes must be national and peasant from head to toe, that is, from hats, scarves...to shoes [opanci] to boots...Costumes are not national simply by virtue of being made at home, instead they must be made in the national manner, with local construction patterns and decorations...Often the most beautiful costume is the simplest white costume. (pp. 47-48)

Bratanić (1941) went on to explain the reasons for introducing these rules:

While foreign influences are usually commented upon with the sayings such as “this is necessary”, “this is better and more practical than the old”, “this is cheaper”, “this requires less effort and suffering”, “this is progressive”, “this is modern”, our festivals seem to say: “this is valuable, good, beautiful”, and above all: “this is ours”. (p.39)

The Second World War not only disrupted the life in the region, but changed it irrevocably through the dissolution of the Yugoslav state and formation of the independent State of Croatia in 1941, followed by the formation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945. The socialist government sought to industrialize and “modernize” the whole country, including the rural regions, and thus discouraged policies of

promoting the return to the “lost paradise” in real life. On the other hand, the new government continued the tradition of staged folk festivals, by taking over rural chapters of Peasant Unity and creating many new chapters. The change in ideology, however, brought also a significant change in programming by incorporating the folklore traditions of all Yugoslav nations (Rihtman-Auguštin, 1991: 83).

## Conclusion

Viewed from a broader perspective, the described phenomena associated with Croatian folk arts were part of international trends and movements: the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century “discovery” of folklore and its appropriation as a symbol of emerging national identities; the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century international trade in “national” or “ethnic” handmade textiles from home industries; the international Arts and Crafts movement which, during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, often sought inspiration in either “primitive” or peasant *unknown craftsmen*, as Yanagi (1972) so aptly put it; the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century developments within the discipline of ethnology and anthropology leading to the systematic study of peasant and non-European “primitive” cultures; and the international trends in 20<sup>th</sup> century political movements to utilize handmade textiles as a means of mobilizing broad segments of illiterate populations<sup>4</sup>.

The intention of this paper was to illustrate the particular form these international trends assumed in Croatia in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A more specific intention was to show that the canonization of selected folk costumes and textiles, a significant development within the overall dynamics of folk textile phenomenon in Croatia, occurred during the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Gavazzi’s cultural-historical research approach prevailed within the discipline of ethnology in Croatia. The Ethnographic museum in Zagreb actively participated in that process since Gavazzi, as a curator in the Museum’s formative years, to a large extent determined its research program. This canonization contributed greatly to a shift in Croatian culture in general, from the previous pursuit of creating new Croatian national textile arts on the basis of peasant textiles, toward the preservation of autochthonous folk costumes and textiles. Again, the Museum played an important role in effectively distributing the newly established norms and knowledge in two ways. Firstly, through exhibitions, guided tours, and publications it reached educated segments of population. Secondly, by directly or indirectly collaborating with Peasant Unity in the organization of folk festivals and the reconstruction of “authentic” autochthonous folk costumes, it reached the uneducated segments of peasant populations.

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<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most well known example was Gandhi’s use of *khadi* as both symbolic and economic means of resistance to the British rule in India (Bean, 1989).

The permanent exhibit of folk costumes in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb still communicates this particular cultural-historical interpretation of the history of peasant clothing on the territory of Croatia. At the same time, we know that by now cultural historical approach has finally and rightly been overcome as **the** methodology for studying material culture within the discipline of ethnology in Croatia, as well as in the rest of Europe. So what is to be done with the Museum's permanent exhibit? One option would be to simply remove it and replace it with a new one. Another, to my mind perhaps more meaningful and challenging option would be to keep it for a while longer, but supplement it with some additional materials and a new catalogue that would offer a different interpretation of displayed artifacts. Namely, such new interpretation would show how selected clothing items were largely late 19<sup>th</sup> century selected festive costumes from only some (and not all) localities across Croatia. As well, it would demonstrate that during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century both "applied folk textile arts" and canonized "autochthonous" folk costumes were less and less used in the organization of local family and community life in rural areas, but assumed new functions both in rural areas and in Croatian society as a whole, namely:

- 1) political functions of building Croatian national identity
- 2) economic functions through organized textile home industries in the past, and more recently as part of tourist and cultural industries
- 3) symbolic functions in various domains of cultural life (school instruction in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, museum programming, publishing and TV programming, folk performance arts, etc.)

Why I consider it important to try to present to the Croatian public this "other history" of applied folk textile arts and autochthonous folk costumes which functioned within, what Maja Bosković-Stulli (1971) termed *folklorism*, and in interaction with local *folklore* as an ongoing and changing process of social life and culture? Because that, too, is our history. In fact, due to unique political and historical circumstances, *folklorism* in Croatia extended well into the 1990, much longer than in the rest of Europe (Bonifačić, 1999). This is why I consider it important to share this history in open and clear ways to both Croatian and international (tourist) public, so as to demonstrate both its past connections and similarities as well as differences in relation to the rest of Europe. I believe that such reflexive interpretation, shared with wider (and not just scholarly) public through Museum exhibition and publication, would facilitate both understanding and overcoming of this kind of folklorism, whose perpetuation is no longer desirable if Croatia wants to engage in a new and constructive scholarly, political and cultural dialogue with the rest of Europe.

As for the other aspects of the contemporary practice in Ethnographic museums in Croatia, such as temporary exhibitions, events, workshops, etc., it is already changing in approach. Namely, new exhibitions tend to have more accurate historical and comparative approach to the culture of clothing and textiles on the territory of Croatia, and they tend to include broader subject matter of "non-authentic" products of peasant clothing that continued to change during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as clothing culture

in Croatian cities and not only of rural areas. This was, for example, evident in a recent exhibition on footwear “What Cool Shoes” in the Ethnographic Museum of Zagreb (Brenko, Zorić, 2006), or the exhibition “Weavers in Istria” in the Ethnographic Museum of Istria in Pazin (Orlić, 2004), to mention just these two instructive examples. However, such greatly broadened area of WHAT to study, will force all of ethnographic museums across Croatia to critically sharpen their decisions in HOW and WHY to choose eventual concrete subjects for their research, documentation, collection, and ongoing public programming. The “multi-disciplinarity” of approach will be necessary, but I consider it to be too broad of a concept to guarantee in itself a meaningful museum practice. To paraphrase James Clifford and George Marcus (1986), I believe that the crucial challenge will be in how to successfully and constructively combine the *poetics and politics* of this “history from below” in all aspects of ethnographic museums programming, and then adjust it meaningfully to its potential local and international public.

*Translated by Ivona Grgurinović*