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REPRESENTATIONS AND CONFIGURATIONS OF MULTICULTURALISM IN LOUIS ADAMIČ'S *THE NATIVE'S RETURN*

Darko Ilin¹

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ABSTRACT

Representations and Configurations of Multiculturalism in Louis Adamič's *The Native's Return*

In his work *The Native's Return* (1934), Louis Adamič navigates the complexities of multiculturalism, drawing on his experiences in both the polyethnic United States and the multinational Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The article explores Adamič's multicultural awareness in his writings on Yugoslavia's customs, social relations, culture, and politics. This analysis will provide insightful perspectives on Adamič's representation of Yugoslavia in the American public sphere and how his American experience influenced his views on Yugoslav cultural and political situations.

KEYWORDS: Louis Adamič, *The Native's Return*, multiculturalism, return, cultural pluralism

IZVLEČEK

Reprezentacije in konfiguracije multikulturalizma v delu *Vrnitev v rodni kraj* Louisa Adamiča

Louis Adamič v svojem delu *Vrnitev v rodni kraj* (1934) raziskuje kompleksno naravo multikulturalizma, pri čemer se opira na svoje izkušnje iz polietničnih ZDA in multinacionalne Kraljevine Jugoslavije. Avtor v prispevku raziskuje Adamičevo multikulturno zavest v njegovih delih, ki govorijo o običajih, družbenih odnosih, kulturi in politiki Jugoslavije. Njegova analiza ponuja vpogled v Adamičevo reprezentacijo Jugoslavije v ameriški javni sferi ter pokaže, kako je njegova ameriška izkušnja oblikovala njegove poglede na jugoslovanske kulturne in politične razmere.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Louis Adamič, *Vrnitev v rodni kraj*, multikulturalizem, vrnitev, kulturni pluralizem

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines representations and configurations of multiculturalism within Louis Adamič's work, *The Native's Return*. A comprehensive exploration of the theoretical framework underpinning multiculturalism thus becomes imperative. The multicultural state, multiculturalism, and cultural diversity, far from constituting novel phenomena, are intrinsically linked to fundamental societal concepts such as nation and ethnicity. Likewise, these concepts are inherently intertwined with the binary opposition of self/other, specifically, with the notions of otherness and difference/diversity, which form the foundational basis for comprehending interpersonal relationships within society (cf. Strumska-Cylwik, 2013; Gaupp, 2021). The theoretical discourse about cultural diversity as the coexistence of distinct communities whose identities were shaped by affiliations with specific groups, nations, or religions coalesced in the 20th century. Multiculturalism, as a term, has consistently carried both theoretical and activist political connotations. Consequently, it becomes essential to address not only multiculturalism but also cultural pluralism as two interconnected theoretical frameworks. Moreover, it is crucial to examine how these frameworks aspire to manifest themselves in both an engaged and a political context.

The term "multiculturalism" is intricate and marked by ambiguity, as it can signify a tangible cultural and social reality when various ethnic communities coexist within the same state (Lukšič Hacin, 1999, p. 15). This significance is underscored at the linguistic and lexical levels in specific languages as is exemplified by distinctions, such as those, for instance, in Serbian between "*multikulturalnost*" and "*multikulturalizam*" (Mesić, 2006, p. 70). This linguistic nuance corresponds to the divergence between "multiculturality" and "multiculturalism," with the former denoting the aforementioned social situation. Stuart Hall has similarly advocated for a distinction between the adjective "multicultural," indicating social situations, and the noun "multiculturalism," representing policies and strategies governing such societies (Hall, 2000, p. 209). Therefore, multiculturalism can be understood as a normative-descriptive category (Lutovac, 2020, p. 347), seamlessly integrating both facets of its meaning at all times.

However, the term multiculturalism can be comprehended theoretically, signifying a specific relationship between different ethnic communities coexisting within the same state. Within this theoretical framework, alongside multiculturalism, other notions such as cultural pluralism, interculturalism, and transculturalism can be identified (Lukšič Hacin, 1999, p. 15). Despite the apparent similarity and frequent interchangeable use of these terms, it is crucial to recognize them as distinct concepts. They denote similar but, in many respects, different theoretical systems and worldviews concerning the possibility of the coexistence of multiple communities within the same space. Multiculturalism debuted in 1963, while cultural pluralism emerged in the early 20th century (Lukšič Hacin, 1999, p. 84). This

temporal distinction suggests that multiculturalism can be perceived as a phenomenon rooted in cultural pluralism. On the other hand, terms like intercultural and transcultural are more recent, directly emanating from the principles of multiculturalism. However, they are subject to criticism as attempts to reshape and adapt to the needs of modern times. It is essential to cautiously approach any one-sided rhetoric suggesting that multiculturalism is merely a transitional phase leading to interculturalism. This perspective overlooks the parallel development of both theoretical systems, as they borrow concepts from each other, collectively contributing to the evolution of thoughts about a society determined by pluralism and diversity.

The third dimension of understanding multiculturalism arises within the political context. For instance, in the 1960s and 1970s, countries like Canada, Australia, and Sweden adopted official plans to foster the development of a multicultural society. Consequently, multiculturalism involves formulating, implementing, and assessing multicultural policies (Lutovac, 2020, p. 347). The crux of the multicultural policy lies in achieving a sustainable balance between promoting the social integration of minority cultures and implementing anti-assimilation measures (Bašić, 2018, p. 9). In essence, the concept of multiculturalism as a social policy represents a pragmatic realization of the theoretical underpinnings of multicultural theory. This implies that multiculturalism consistently navigates between two poles: the descriptive aspect, reflecting the current societal situation, and the pragmatic and potential aspect, envisioning improvements to the present state. Thus, multiculturalism emerges as an ongoing, elusive, and fragmented concept in a perpetual oscillation between its current state and its potential evolution.

LOUIS ADAMIČ AND MULTICULTURALISM

Considering that multiculturalism as a political notion emerged only in the latter half of the 20th century, while the theory of cultural pluralism was established by Horace Cullen as early as 1915 (Lukšič Hacin, 1999, p. 84), categorizing Louis Adamič as an advocate of multiculturalism presents a methodological challenge, leading to a possible anachronism. Therefore, it appears more accurate to characterize Adamič as a proponent of cultural pluralism due to the period in which he operated. However, it is crucial to recognize that Adamič aligned with Cullen's utopian vision of a harmonious society achievable through ethnic diversity. However, he did not endorse Cullen's essentialist perspective on the inviolability of ethnic identity (Shiffman, 2005, p. 59). Adamič posited that a nation cannot construct its identity solely on a specific cultural tradition or the aggregate of its diverse traditions, as identity is an ongoing process (Žitnik Serafin, 2012, p. 79). Adamič's comprehension of identity, culture, tradition, Americanization, and integration is more nuanced and process-oriented, aligning closer to contemporary concepts influenced by postmodern relativism. That is why we will continue to use the notion of multiculturalism in the context of this paper,

even as we acknowledge the potential limitations and anachronisms of applying it retroactively. This choice allows for a more coherent exploration of Adamič's ideas within a broader, contemporary framework while remaining mindful of the historical and theoretical context in which his work was situated.

Adamič's engagement in multiculturalism studies and his pursuit of its objectives are situated within the context and tradition of the United States, constituting the central theme of Adamič's work. He focuses on the identity of the United States, arguing that the constant influx of migrants continually challenges and reshapes what it means to be American. The philosophies of the early 20th-century cultural pluralists profoundly shaped Adamič's understanding of diversity. These philosophers rejected the notion of an American race defined by Anglo-Saxon blood and culture, opting instead for a perspective that envisioned the nation as a mosaic of diverse ethnic communities speaking various languages and preserving traditions from their homelands. Together, these elements contribute to enhancing the American identity (Enyeart, 2015, p. 60). Influenced by such a stance and marked by his own migrant experience, Adamič adeptly merged the theoretical and practical dimensions of cultural pluralism.

In his most significant works, Adamič delved into the intricacies of the migrant experience, addressing this theme in his autobiographical pieces such as *Laughing in the Jungle* (1932) and his sole novel, *Grandsons* (1935). Additionally, he explored these themes in numerous essayistic works, articles, and documentary narratives published throughout his career. Adamič's interest extended to the psychological, cultural, and political dimensions of migration, contemplating how the migrant experience contributes to the collective identity of a multiethnic nation like the United States. As proponents of cultural pluralism critiqued the uncritical process of Americanization, a call emerged for a considerate and well-planned policy fostering migrant integration. While Adamič supported integration, he diverged from endorsing homogenization (Shiffman, 2005, p. 77). His perspective on emigration and migration reflected a utopian vision of equality, wherein the state would be obligated to afford all migrants identical rights and opportunities for self-realization, ensuring their inclusion in American society. Crucially, Adamič seamlessly interconnected the advocacy for labor rights with the rights of migrants, showcasing a remarkably comprehensive understanding of the challenges within American society.

At the outset of the 20th century, Adamič was not the sole advocate of cultural pluralism in the United States; notable figures such as Horace Cullen and John Dewey also played significant roles. Nevertheless, Adamič occupied a distinctive position among them due to his multifaceted engagement with and questioning of the concept of the melting pot. Firstly, Adamič brought his own migrant experience to the forefront, serving as a foundational standpoint for his perspectives. Secondly, he concurrently considered the narratives and encounters of other migrants throughout the United States who recounted the pressures imposed by

the melting pot concept (Orosco, 2016, p. 40). This implies that Adamič's ideas were grounded in a deeply felt and internalized migrant experience, allowing him to challenge the notion of forced assimilation more comprehensively and with greater self-awareness. His commitment to and focus on immediate personal experience are evident in his preference for direct contact with people. Their stories not only inspired his writing but also provided a profound insight into the specific American situation.

Adamič's perspective on American society is notably infused with communist ideas to a greater extent than the perspective of other liberals of his time. He envisions America as a collective of diverse ethnic and cultural communities, each free to uphold its unique practices and traditions. Simultaneously, these communities can engage in collaborative, intercultural dialogues to foster a profoundly democratic culture that incorporates the multitude of their individual resources, skills, and insights (Orosco, 2016, pp. 44–45). Adamič emphasizes the potential for cooperation among these diverse communities to collectively contribute to forming a society and culture that transcends a mere summation of its components. Rather than a patchwork, he imagines the emergence of a new, enriched culture—one that offers a more inclusive and fulfilling environment for everyone.

While Adamič avoids framing the discourse in terms of minorities and dominant groups, he acknowledges the dialectical relationship between the "ideal" Anglo-Saxon American population and the numerous immigrants. He recognizes that forced assimilation has detrimental effects on both migrants and the dominant population. Consequently, Adamič advocates for mutual assimilation, positing that representatives of the Anglo-Saxon community should integrate into migrant communities in a reciprocal manner (Adamic, 1940, p. 308). This innovative viewpoint reflects Adamič's unique perspective on the American situation, its cultural pluralism, and, ultimately, multiculturalism.

In his seminal work on Adamič titled *Rooting Multiculturalism*, American researcher Dan Shiffman underscores the significance of both Adamič's theoretical contributions and his activist endeavors in shaping and fostering multiculturalism. Shiffman recognizes the overlapping nature of the concepts of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism and endeavors to tease out the distinctions between them. However, he faces challenges in categorizing Adamič within a specific stream because Adamič, originating from cultural pluralism, transcends it and aligns more closely with the evolving perspective of multiculturalism (Shiffman, 2005). Adamič's thoughts on cultural relations demonstrate advancements beyond the theoretical frameworks of his time. One notable instance is his unwavering commitment to the idea that people should move beyond a liberal culture of tolerance and instead embrace a profound democratic culture of acceptance (Orosco, 2016, p. 45). This notion remains remarkably forward-thinking and relevant in the 21st century.

CONFIGURATIONS OF MULTICULTURALISM IN *THE NATIVE'S RETURN*

In his influential work *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Will Kymlicka (1995) draws a key distinction between multinational and polyethnic states, two forms of multiculturalism that, while related, have different historical origins. Although both reflect the presence of (ethno)cultural diversity in contemporary societies, they arise in different ways. For example, multinational states emerge either through voluntary unions or due to conquest. In contrast, polyethnic states are shaped primarily by immigration. Kymlicka also notes that many states display features of both models (Kymlicka, 1995, pp. 11–26). Louis Adamič had firsthand experience with both types of countries. His primary focus was on the polyethnic United States of America. Yet, in his work *The Native's Return*, he delves into the multinational context of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which emerged from the efforts of South Slavs after World War I.¹

Having immigrated to the United States from what was then Carniola at the age of fifteen, Louis Adamič, as Jelena Šesnić argues, exemplifies a range of identity strategies within the framework of transculturation. His dynamic engagement with American society reflects both a personal negotiation of identity and a broader effort to model forms of social life for immigrant communities, particularly among first- and second-generation immigrants (Šesnić, 2018, p. 191). Taking into account Adamič's experience of having resided in both the polyethnic environment of America and the multinational context of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, an intriguing avenue of investigation involves delving into how his life in the multiethnic American setting shaped his perspectives on multiculturalism within a multinational state such as Yugoslavia.

It should be recognized that Adamič's multicultural experience fundamentally shapes not only *The Native's Return* but his entire body of work. The full original title of the book is *The Native's Return, An American Immigrant Visits Yugoslavia and Discovers His Old Country*, suggesting that the focal point of the work is the narrator's intercultural experience. At the same time, Adamič's strategic use of his own dual position of expatriate and "returnee," a "local," as implied by the title of his memoir-travel work, deserves critical attention (Šesnić, 2018, p. 200). The primary genesis of the book is a return to the native country, not merely for the sake of travel but also for the purpose of research. During his nearly one-year-long visit, Adamič endeavors to acquaint himself with Yugoslavia and "discover" it. His objective is to gain a more precise understanding of the situation in his native country and, simultaneously, to present to English-speaking readers a newly established state that was inadequately known to the public. The existing information about Yugoslavia largely originated from foreign sources that may not have fully comprehended the country and its people.

1 It should be noted that Adamič had the experience of living in yet another multinational state during his childhood: the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. By all indications this marked his upbringing and fostered an interest in multicultural state formations.

The central concept for grasping Adamič's transcultural experience in this work is the notion of "return," inherently tied to the experience of migration. Considering Adamič's active involvement in shaping the Yugoslav diaspora,² it is crucial to perceive him as an integral part of the Yugoslav diaspora in America. Supposing that at "the core of the concept of diaspora lies the image of a remembered home" (Stock, 2010, p. 24), Adamič's visit³ to his homeland can be interpreted as an endeavor to reconstruct the memory of home and, consequently, to provide a narrative recount of his native land. However, this interpretation only partially captures the complexity of his journey. The personal, intimate dimension of his homecoming is most evident in the early stages of his visit, particularly during his stay in Carniola. The remainder of his travels through various regions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia takes on a more touristic and investigative character, an effort to acquaint himself with a broader idea of the homeland. Importantly, Slovenia was not part of Yugoslavia when Adamič emigrated to the United States, as the Yugoslav state did not yet exist. Hence, his return must be viewed in a distinct context. Sometimes, returning to the native country and maintaining social ties with the homeland becomes a means for the returnee to cultivate cultural capital (Marschall, 2018, p. 12). In this manner, Adamič, having established himself as an immigrant in America, endeavors to carve out a place for himself in Yugoslavia as a representative of the Yugoslav diaspora. Simultaneously, he seeks to deepen his multicultural and transcultural position in America through an adventurous and exploratory journey toward understanding his roots. It is imperative to consider the fact that Adamič wrote the book with the intention of making it accessible to the widest possible readership. Not only does his return represent an actual return—the motives and circumstances of which are ultimately inscrutable—but it also represents a fictional return—subservient to Adamič's vision of what an innovative narrative of an expatriate's return should entail.

An important dimension of the migrant experience and the experience of return is the concept of "home"—which may or may not remain accessible to the expatriate. In contemporary contexts, home should be understood as a far more complex notion than simply one's place of birth, village, or country of origin. In other words, home is not merely a fixed geographical point imbued with personal meaning. Rather, it should be conceptualized as a multicultural and transcultural phenomenon, embracing both its rootedness and its mobility. Home is simultaneously dynamic and anchored; it resembles an accordion that expands to disperse individuals across distant places yet also contracts to draw them back into intimate, localized spaces (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 518). This flexible understanding of home

2 Regarding the Yugoslav diaspora in America, see Đikanović, 2016 and Larson, 2020. I use the word diaspora not only as a collective term for emigrants from a particular country but in line with studies of the diaspora—as a distinct anthropological and identity category of existence, encompassing the association of emigrants.

3 Concerning various modes of returning home, see Long & Oxfeld, 2004.

aptly captures how many expatriates perceive and experience their relationship to place. This experience is increasingly prevalent in a globalized and mobile world.

Considering Adamič's contemplation on the concept of identity that is shaped by the migrant experience, particularly the notion of hyphenated identities, where multiple simultaneous connections of a person with various places are emphasized, it underscores the fragmentation of essentialist concepts of identity (Kustatscher et al., 2015, p. 6). This understanding of identity can also be linked to modern concepts such as the notion of hybrid identity introduced by Homi Bhabha (2004) or the concept of intersectional identities.

The interpretation of home in Adamič's *The Native's Return* is intriguing because it transcends a straightforward and essentialist understanding of home and homeland. "I had emigrated to the United States from Carniola, then a tiny Slovene province of Austria, now an even tinier part of a *banovina* in the new Yugoslav state." (Adamic, 1934, p. 3). This statement, which appears in the book's first paragraph, provides a glimpse into the complex concept of home in Adamič. Throughout the book, readers will encounter statements that may appear contradictory. For instance, the assertion, "In the last few years I had become an American writer, writing on American subjects for American readers" (Adamic, 1934, p. 3) attests to his American identity. Additionally, when discussing Americans, he uses the first-person plural (Adamic, 1934, p. 78). However, upon setting foot in Dubrovnik, he exclaims, "My people!" (Adamic, 1934, p. 8), even though his primary connection is with his native Carniola. It is precisely this ambivalence in identity that shapes the multiperspective nature of this work. Jelena Šesnić contends that the macro-narrative structure employed by Adamič in *The Native's Return* reflects the author's navigation between American, Yugoslav, and Yugoslav-American (with individual elements of Slovene, Croatian, Serbian, etc.) perspectives. However, this triangulation of perspectives also brought him some long-term difficulties (Šesnić, 2018, p. 202). It could be argued that beyond his skill in navigating multiple perspectives, Adamič's identity functions on several intersecting levels. He identifies as a Slovene, feels a sense of belonging to the broader Yugoslav community, and simultaneously embraces his American identity. This multifaceted affiliation enables him to critically engage with the problems and shortcomings of each group without partiality. In doing so, Adamič exemplifies a multicultural approach to ethnic, political, and cultural issues, grounded in an ability to mediate between different national and cultural frameworks.

In his discussions about the integration of various ethnic groups into American society, Adamič highlights the necessity for the dominant population to cultivate curiosity to truly appreciate diversity. This particular curiosity is evident in his depictions of customs, people, and places in Yugoslavia:

They asked me about America. Was the *kriza* (the economic crisis) really as bad there as the papers said? Were there really so many people out of work? Was the depression hard on the Slovenian and other Yugoslav immigrants [...] Were the buildings

in America really so tall? Was it true that there was a tree in California so thick that they had bored a tunnel through it for an automobile road? How did the American farmers till their soil? Was it true that most of the work on the land was done by machinery? –that New York had a population of seven million?—that there were ranches in the West bigger than entire Carniola?—that there were underground railroads in New York? (Adamič, 1934, p. 25).

Adamič vividly conveys the curiosity of the Slovenes he encountered, emphasizing their multicultural awareness expressed through questions and reflections that allow them to enrich their own cultural frameworks and, ultimately, improve the conditions of their everyday lives.

Adamič's multicultural awareness is evident in his continuous comparisons of the people, the architecture, and the customs of Yugoslavs to those he became accustomed to during his nineteen years of living in the United States of America. Through the lens of his American experience, Adamič manages to truly comprehend Yugoslavia and to value its people. Being an American enables him to understand Yugoslavia and recognize its strengths and weaknesses (Larson, 2020, p. 171). He perceives his birthplace as significantly smaller than the Empire State or Grand Central Station (Adamič, 1934, p. 21). Adamič expresses delight in Ljubljana bookstores selling books in German, French, Czech, Serbo-Croatian, English, and Italian (Adamič, 1934, p. 29). The Dalmatian climate, reminiscent of the climate he experienced on the southern California coast, also captures his admiration (Adamič, 1934, p. 148). Adamič, as a literary journalist seeking to present his Yugoslav experiences to the American public, always keeps the reader in mind. Therefore, unsurprisingly, he attempts to familiarize his implicit audience with Yugoslavia's geographical and climatic characteristics. In doing so, he simultaneously emphasizes his multicultural awareness and, ultimately, his cosmopolitanism.

When Adamič discusses the geopolitical conditions in the regions inhabited by South Slavs and the rising influence of fascism, particularly along the western border of Yugoslavia, he presents an intriguing perspective that he attributes to the fascists:

They say that eighteen hundred years ago the territory now inhabited by these singing, laughing Slavic barbarians was a valued possession of the noble Roman Caesars; hence it still belongs to Rome, to Fascist Italy. The fact that the Slovenes, then a branch of the Old Slavs, peacefully settled there when no one else occupied that area and the Roman Empire, without any fault on their part, had long been in a state of collapse, does not interest the Fascists. (Adamič, 1934, p. 95)

Through this, he aims to underscore that totalitarian systems such as fascism lack intercultural and multicultural awareness, operating with ideas that are detached from reality. This is also evident in his reference to the forced Italianization of Slovenian personal names (Adamič, 1934, p. 91), an issue to which he paid special

attention when discussing the Americanization of immigrant names with the goal of assimilation.

Similarly, Adamič primarily selectively highlights the places that hold special significance for America or are somehow connected with America. From this, we can infer that this is not solely a book about Yugoslavia but rather an American book about Yugoslavia. For example, in his depiction of Dubrovnik, he emphasizes that the ships and sailors of Dubrovnik were among the most renowned in the world, highlighting their connection to global maritime history:

It is almost certain that Ragusans were on Columbus' ships when he sailed to India and bumped into America. In fact, it is probable that Ragusan ships touched the American continent before Columbus. Certain it is that a number of them reached Mexico, Central and South America, in the few years immediately after Columbus' adventure. Ragusans went around the Horn early in the seventeenth century; they were old-timers in California when the first Yankee got there. (Adamic, 1934, p. 152)

Adamič's hyperbolic and, at the same time, speculative portrayal of the glory and skill of Dubrovnik sailors reflects his attempt to contextualize elements of Yugoslav culture on the global (particularly Western-centric American) geopolitical stage. Simultaneously, he aims to resonate with the American reader and their set of expectations. This approach is evident in his description of the Dubrovnik hinterland and Konavle, in which he asserts that every third person speaks some English because "every other Konavle family has someone in America" (Adamic, 1934, p. 159). Migration and multiculturalism are central themes in Adamič's descriptions. On the one hand, he genuinely seeks to explore authentic Yugoslavia, which leads to an independent existence within its repressive state apparatus. On the other hand, he endeavors to demonstrate that Yugoslavia extends beyond the confines of the ethno-national context and actively participates in the exchange of cross-cultural experiences.

Another stop on Adamič's journey through Yugoslavia is the town of Galičnik, known for sending young men abroad (to Germany, Russia, the United States) to work on construction sites. Adamič highlights their significant contributions to the construction of notable structures such as the palace in Versailles, St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, various hotels in Naples, the Mormon Temple in Utah, and more. He goes on to suggest that Galičnik may even be the most cosmopolitan place in the world, describing it in detail (Adamic, 1934, pp. 117–122). Adamič expresses enthusiasm for multicultural or polyethnic cities and communities characterized by multiculturalism and the migrant experience. These are the aspects he prefers to describe in his work, alongside customs and political conditions in Yugoslavia. In the paragraph below, the narrator demonstrates that despite limited formal education, men from Galičnik were fluent in up to four foreign languages and possessed unique multicultural knowledge and experiences:

Talking with the men [...] I learned of things in Greece, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Austria, Germany, Spain, and Russia. Several accounts of social, economic, and political conditions in the various countries seemed to me as intelligent as anything one could find in the average European newspaper or magazine.

Since their well-being and prosperity depend to a great extent upon the state of world economy, their interest in the general economic crisis and the possibilities of recovery was intense. (Adamič, 1934, p. 122)

This section unveils Adamič's appreciation for multicultural experiences as something that can serve as a substitute, or at least a counterpart, to formal education. Adamič's role in advancing the concept of democratizing education in the direction of multiculturalism should be contextualized within the progressive ideas of American thinkers in cultural pluralism, particularly John Dewey (cf. Waks, 2007), which eventually becomes a central pedagogical paradigm in certain parts of the world.

As portrayed by Adamič in *The Native's Return*, work serves as the primary and sole bridge for a Yugoslav individual to connect with the world, whether they are a simple worker, Tesla, or Meštrović (Paternu, 1981, p. 96). In other words, both the people of Dubrovnik and Konavle, as well as those from Galičnik, find their multicultural experiences and migrations closely tied to the concept of work. They represent the labor force engaged in the process of labor migration, be it permanent or temporary, which is influenced by the economic conditions in Yugoslavia. Adamič maintains an ambivalent attitude toward this phenomenon. On the one hand, he criticizes the government for keeping people in poverty. On the other hand, he wholeheartedly supports those who leave Yugoslavia to work in other countries. Adamič sees them as seizing the opportunity for a better life and, perhaps equally important, the opportunity to become part of a multicultural community, even though the amount and the difficulty of their work may remain the same or even increase.

In his writings and interactions with immigrants in America, Adamič deliberately selects his conversational partners and the locations he visits and describes. Notably, Sarajevo and Belgrade emerge as the two most prominent cities characterized by multiculturalism. In Sarajevo, a city that uniquely amalgamates various ethno-confessional tendencies, Adamič encounters a young man named Omar Hadži Alić, a Muslim from Sarajevo whose life is shaped by mixed origins, "On his father's side [...] he was of Turkish ancestry, but considered himself a Slav, a Bosnian, a Yugoslav" (Adamič, 1934, p. 183). However, his multiculturalism extends beyond his layered identity and is also manifested in his life journey, as he describes to Adamič:

"You see, my father sent me to an English school on Malta, then to Constantinople, where I also studied English and learned French and German. Lately, running my father's business, I have made some friends among the foreigners, tourists, especially the English and Americans, who come to the store. They send me books and

magazines and, reading these publications, every once in a while I realize that we here in Sarajevo are... well, hanging between sky and earth." (Adamić, 1934, pp. 184–185)

As in the case of the people from Galičnik, Adamić highlights certain qualities in Omar: his multicultural education, fluency in foreign languages, and experience living in a vastly different social and cultural context. Adamić presents such individuals as potential narrative ambassadors, accepting Omar's reflections on the situation in Yugoslavia, especially Sarajevo as its microcosm, as valid and worthy of inclusion in his book.

The section dedicated to Belgrade is the part of *The Native's Return* that most explicitly deals with Serbian cultural and political circumstances. At the beginning, Adamić presents his typology of two types of Serbs. Those belonging to the first type come from rural areas; more precisely, they are the poor Šumadija peasants, who value freedom and independence, democracy and civility, are patriots, proud of their nationality, progressive, honest and pure Serbs who "[e]xcept here and there, (...) never mixed with Turks, Rumanians, Bulgars, gypsies, or Jews" (Adamić, 1934, p. 237). The second type is the "businessmen" connected to the Belgrade "moguls"—most often a mixture of all the mentioned peoples and Serbs. This characteristic intensifies their opportunistic and aggressive traits, making them very dangerous and unscrupulous (Adamić, 1934, p. 237). Adamić's association of negative traits with a multiethnic origin raises questions about essentialism and value hierarchization, potentially conflicting with the ideals of the multicultural society he advocated.

Next, Adamić directs his narrative attention to Belgrade in the early 1940s, exploring aspects such as politics, urban planning, architecture, economy, tourism, and culture. Therefore, we can understand Adamić's text as a cultural text that contributes to creating a narrative about the city as a spatial-cultural construct (see Rohleder & Kindermann, 2020). His representation of Belgrade can be scrutinized within the context of transcultural exchange and the construction of American stereotypes about Belgrade during that historical period, serving as a crucial cultural function of the text. Adamić skillfully manipulates the expectations of the American reader, framing Belgrade within the context of American cities. He draws comparisons between Belgrade and Chicago from three decades prior. He delves into a psychological comparison between the people of Belgrade and those of Los Angeles (Adamić, 1934, pp. 242–243). Additionally, he contextualizes Belgrade within the broader European framework, strategically placing it in the geopolitical milieu of the early 20th century.

Adamić's portrayal of Belgrade, labeled as a "boom town" in the title of his chapter, is marked by significant migrations when individuals immigrate to the city in great numbers. He notes, "Many peasants, venders, migratory laborers, and drifters who come in from Shumadia, from central Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and the Albanian mountains still wear their local national costumes" (Adamić, 1934, p. 241). In this

context, Adamič underscores the significance of labor migration from smaller towns and less developed areas of Yugoslavia, contributing to the richness and vibrancy of the emerging multicultural society in Belgrade. However, he also highlights that “people from Croatia, Dalmatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, and Macedonia commenced to pour into their new capital as fast as railroads could bring them” (Adamic, 1934, p. 243). This portrayal positions Belgrade not only as a destination for labor migration of the impoverished population but as the capital for all its citizens, solidifying its status as a central multiethnic hub in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Referencing the long-standing perception of Belgrade as a liminal zone between East and West (cf. Lazić, 2003), Adamič concludes that two decades ago, distinguishing the cultural sphere of Belgrade was challenging. However, he observes that it has become evident that the West is gradually superseding the East (Adamic, 1934, p. 247). Adamič discerns this transformation in various aspects of daily life, noting the decline in the Muslim population and the reduced remnants of the old Turkish quarter. At the same time, the Belgrade bazaar retains a Turkish character, serving as the sole place in Belgrade where an oriental atmosphere prevails (Adamic, 1934, pp. 239–241). Similar to his approach in describing Ljubljana, Adamič aims to highlight the multicultural elements of the city, particularly by observing people and storefronts.

One or two confectionery stores on Prince Mikhailo's Avenue still sell Oriental sweetmeats. But the display windows of other shops on the street, which is the center of Belgrade's shopping district, are totally Western. There are the latest styles in ladies' dresses and gowns, lingerie and stockings, hats, gloves, and footwear; gentlemen haberdashery stores, with London neckties, hand-tailored shirts, tuxedos, dinner jackets; flower shops and American drug stores; bookstores selling reading-matter in Serbo- Croat, Slovene, French, German, and English; agencies of most American and European makes of automobiles, tires, typewriters, radios, frigidaires, and sewing-machines. (Adamic, 1934, p. 247)

Similar to what he observes in Ljubljana, Adamič underscores the availability of foreign books in Belgrade as a clear indicator of the multicultural atmosphere in the city. Additionally, he notes elements of everyday life, such as clothing, shoes, and household appliances, that reflect the city's progressiveness in the Western sense.

In contrast to the evident foreign influences contributing to the modernization of Belgrade and its placement on the geopolitical map of Europe, life in small towns is characterized by its apparent insignificance and enduring nature. Adamič observes, “No matter what happened in America, in Russia, and in the rest of Europe, nine chances out of ten the agriculturists in the village of Blato, as in Brankovo and other villages in Carniola, would stay where they were—for some time to come, at any rate.” (Adamic, 1934, p. 84) Adamič emphasizes such paradoxes in his book, highlighting that while some economic and cultural centers manage to develop a

multicultural environment, the majority of the rural population remains unaffected and resistant to industrial and technological progress, as well as the realization of the ideal of multiculturalism. Perhaps this is why the narrator dedicates significant space to the small Macedonian village of Galičnik, as it appears that its inhabitants transcend the mentioned paradox, with its inhabitants, despite being members of the working class that experiences multiculturalism.

Adamič's endeavor to promote multiculturalism is frequently intertwined with his concern for the worker, the farmer, and the ordinary person, as illustrated in the following passage:

For centuries, as the Kosovo epic so tragically records, the Yugoslavs have had within them two powerful urges—one toward union, the other toward discord. The first, despite their clannishness, has been strongest in the common people, who are all God's *siroté*, poor people, and as such have a great deal in common; while the second has usually come from their leaders and would-be leaders seeking momentary political and economic advantages for themselves. (Adamic, 1934, p. 231)

In Adamič's perspective, the unity and togetherness of the Yugoslav peoples are inherent. He contends, however, that the elites and ruling classes hinder such unity as it does not align with their economic interests. In essence, the elites do not promote or facilitate the cultivation of a robust multicultural consciousness among Yugoslavs, who, if united, could progress more rapidly and efficiently, forming a shared Yugoslav identity. This aspiration remained unrealized during the various joint-state formations in Yugoslavia.

CONCLUSION

Adamič's perspective on cultural pluralism and multiculturalism is intricate and primarily shaped by his firsthand experience residing in the United States of America, a polyethnic state built upon immigrant communities. Recognizing that his multiculturalism is rooted in personal encounters and direct interactions with fellow immigrants is crucial. His writings on cultural pluralism stem from a research approach reminiscent of immersion journalism and reflect experiences closely aligned with real-life situations (Flis, 2020). Despite being a renowned writer and lecturer, Adamič did not approach the migrant issue from a position of superiority. At one point, he himself was merely one among the multitude of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island.

It is important to note that Adamič's perspective still reflects elements of cultural pluralism that categorize some peoples as primitive and others as civilized (see Adamic, 1934, pp. 70, 108, 125, 215). This introduces an axiological component into the study and understanding of cultures that diverge from more contemporary

multiculturalism. It is crucial to note that Adamič's multicultural stance was in the process of formation in 1933 when he wrote *The Native's Return* and that his more advanced works were published after his return from Yugoslavia. Exploring the development of his multicultural consciousness throughout his career becomes intriguing, paving the way for understanding Louis Adamič as a precursor to multiculturalism as a sociopolitical worldview.

Because of Adamič's experience in a multiethnic state, an insight into his reflections and writing about the multinational issue of Yugoslavia is valuable as it brings a new and fresh perspective on cultural pluralism in interwar Yugoslavia. Adamič was particularly interested in multicultural environments and individuals, as well as in customs that not only provided entertainment for American readers but also prompted intellectual reflection. In *The Native's Return*, like in his other works and articles, Adamič studies multicultural aspects of society through the lens of individual human destinies and elements of everyday life because that seems to him to be the most striking. In other words, by choosing individuals and places that are in some way marked by multiculturalism, Adamič tries to convey stories about them to the American reader so that the latter would get an insight into the situation in a multinational state. However, we should be aware that this is only one possible view of it, which is largely constructed and subordinated to the particular ideological intentions of the storyteller. Therefore, it is important to point out that Adamič is a sharp and meticulous observer who makes thoughtful political forecasts (which proved to be accurate); however, sometimes he is just a confused newcomer who does not fully understand domestic social codes (Šesnić, 2018, p. 201). The fact that Adamič cannot understand in detail and fully encompass certain social aspects of life in Yugoslavia is conditioned by his ambivalent position, which becomes obvious if one considers his migrant background and the concept of return. *The Native's Return* is, therefore, not a return to the native Carniola as a part of Austria-Hungary, but rather a return to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which was established on a completely different foundation and which Adamič needed to discover and explore in his own unique way. Although the events he describes and the social context he refers to are strictly defined, his work provides highly significant and far-sighted insights into multicultural issues in the Yugoslav regions. His work was published almost a century ago; nevertheless, an incredible modernity shines through it, making it a read that is relevant even in the 21st century.

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POVZETEK

REPREZENTACIJE IN KONFIGURACIJE MULTIKULTURALIZMA V DELU *VRNITEV V RODNI KRAJ* LOUISA ADAMIČA

Darko Ilin

Avtor v prispevku obravnava multikulturne perspektive hibridnega dela *Vrnitev v rodni kraj* (1934), ki zajema različne zvrsti, od potopisa do političnega in etnografskega komentarja. Louis Adamič je bil slovensko-ameriški pisatelj in priseljenec, ki je živel in ustvarjal v prvi polovici 20. stoletja. Na podlagi svoje priseljenške izkušnje je prevpraševal prevladujoči koncept talilnega lonca in se zavzemal za raznoliko in sodelujočo ameriško družbo. V svojih edinstvenih stališčih, na katera so vplivale komunistične ideje, se je zavzemal za globoko demokratično kulturo, v kateri bi lahko etnične skupnosti sobivale in hkrati ohranjale svoje tradicije. Adamičev multikulturalizem se je razvil in presegel sodobno miselnost, kar se kaže v njegovem zavračanju liberalne kulture strpnosti v prid demokratični kulturi sprejemanja.

Avtor obravnava temeljno delo Louisa Adamiča *The Native's Return* (*Vrnitev v rodni kraj*), v katerem ta preučuje večplastne razsežnosti večkulturnosti, identitete in migracij v kontekstu svojih izkušenj v polietničnih Združenih državah Amerike in multinacionalni Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. Na podlagi teoretičnega vpogleda v multikulturalizem kontekstualizira Adamiča v okviru študij kulturnega pluralizma in multikulturalizma ter tako postavi temelje za nadaljnjo analizo. Razišče Adamičevo pripovedno strategijo, zajeto v konceptu »vrnitve«, ki poudarja dinamično in transkulturno naravo doma in identitete, ter pojasnjuje Adamičevo ukvarjanje s sodobnimi pojmi identitete, kot so transnacionalne identitete in intersekcionalnost, pri čemer izpodbija esencialistične perspektive.

Poleg tega analizo razširi na Adamičevo večkulturno zavest, ko ta primerja jugoslovanske in ameriške običaje ter poudarja vlogo radovednosti pri spodbujanju razumevanja različnosti, pri čemer njegov prikaz Beograda služi kot osrednja točka za raziskovanje transkulturne izmenjave in oblikovanja stereotipov ter prispeva k širši kulturni pripovedi. Tipologija Srbov v Adamičevi pripovedi sproža kritična vprašanja o esencializmu in ponuja vpogled v kompleksnost doseganja večkulturnosti.

Avtor v članku izpostavlja Adamičevo zavezanost navadnemu delavcu in kritike nesoglasij elit ter osvetljuje njegovo vizijo združene in večkulturne Jugoslavije. Z raziskovanjem manjših mest in makedonske vasi Galičnik dodatno razkriva paradokse multikulturalizma v različnih regijah. Adamiča pozicionira kot predhodnika sodobnih razprav o večkulturnosti, migracijah in identiteti ter ponuja niansirane perspektive, ki bogatijo naše razumevanje teh kompleksnih družbeno-političnih pokrajin.

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