

Crafting Identity through Folk: The Construction of National Identity within
Serbian Diasporic Institutions and Homes

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates how embroideries and textiles that are collected and exhibited within Serbian Canadian homes and museums serve to develop a sense of national identity. By conducting two case studies, involving The Serbian Heritage Museum, created by Serbian immigrants in Windsor, Ontario, and the Jancovic family collection, an intergenerational family collection in Montreal, Quebec, this research will analyze their archived textiles, curatorial texts, and interviews. Comparing these collections to the work of The Republic of Serbia Ministry of Culture and Information's work with UNESCO, which aims to define a sense of national identity to combat the perceived risk of obsolescence as a result of the growing impact of globalization, reveals how immigrant communities develop their own identities in comparison to governmental bodies. In exploring these three forms of identity building within Serbian communities, one can observe how heritage crafts gradually come to function as commodities rather than artifacts within certain institutional settings, while also increasingly catering to the nostalgia of a pre-industrial pastoral life. Through this threefold examination of Serbian national identity, this thesis will analyze the malleable affiliations of tradition and authenticity, as well as the shifting roles of tool, artifact, and commodity placed upon folk art in identity building contexts.

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Introduction

When looking at diasporic communities, the act of collecting identity building objects therefore speaks to a community's experience of displacement from the home, as such objects carry a sense of collective identity and personal memory.¹ In exploring sexuality in terms of phenomenology by looking how at how objects appear in writing as 'orientation devices' in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed explains how a sense of homeliness is developed within the homes of diasporic individuals through the act of surrounding oneself with objects that remind them of the land they once inhabited.² In engaging with this push and pull of identification and alienation, Ahmed explains how the act of decorating one's home with the objects they possess serves to install a sense of comfort, and reinforce identity.³ In this thesis, I examine how within Serbian immigrant communities, one can observe how individuals, in both home and institutional settings, develop a sense of identity through the textiles and embroideries they collect and exhibit. To do so, I compare the textile collections of the Jancovic family collection, in Montreal Quebec, to that of the Serbian Heritage Museum, created by Serbian immigrants in Windsor Ontario. Through these two case studies, this research delves into how immigrant identities are constructed within the home and presented to the public, exploring the act of collecting and analyzing how their practices overlap or contrast with The Republic of Serbia Ministry of Culture and Information's (the Serbian ministry) attempt to define a sense of national identity through the UNESCO World Heritage Center. By

¹ Sara Ahmed, "Find Your Way," in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 9.

² Sara Ahmed, "Find Your Way," 10.

³ Sara Ahmed, "Find Your Way," 10.

Ahmed further explores these ideas in relation to migration in her text, "Home and away: Narratives of migration and estrangement," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (1999): 329–47, in which she explains the oppositional nature in the terms migrant and identity, explaining how the fetishistic idea of finding one's home functions in cementing a sense of identity within the individual.

exploring these three forms of identity building within Serbian communities, one can observe how heritage crafts gradually come to function as commodities rather than artifacts, while also increasingly catering to the nostalgia of a pre-industrial pastoral life. Through this threefold examination of Serbian national identity, this thesis will analyze the malleable affiliations of tradition and authenticity, as well as the shifting roles of tool, artifact, and commodity placed upon folk art in identity building contexts.

Section 1: Case Study Introductions

The Serbian Heritage Museum

The first case study is the Serbian Heritage Museum, located in Windsor, Ontario. Conceived in 1972, the idea for the museum was developed by the local Serbian Heritage Women's Club in Windsor after receiving encouragement from the Serbian Business and Professional Organization.⁴ After a unanimous decision from club members that a museum would be needed and beneficial to the community, on July 3, 1972, the museum was later initiated in 1975.⁵ Following these events, the Serbian Heritage Women's Club began collecting the first materials, which are now archived within their collection, from the local Serbian community.⁶ After gathering materials, the Serbian Heritage Women's Club held their first exhibition in 1976 at the Hiram Walker Institute, now Windsor's Community Museum, resulting in an overwhelmingly positive response from both the general public as well as the Serbian community.⁷ Quickly following the exhibit, within the same year, the Serbian Heritage Women's

⁴ "About the Museum," The Serbian Heritage Museum, accessed April 9th, 2021, <http://www.serbianheritagemuseum.com/about-the-museum/>.

⁵ "About the Museum," The Serbian Heritage Museum.

⁶ "About the Museum," The Serbian Heritage Museum.

⁷ "About the Museum," The Serbian Heritage Museum.

Club obtained its own charter, becoming the Serbian Heritage Women's Society, dedicated to the "preservation and promotion of Serbian culture and heritage," instating a museum committee to develop a museum within the Serbian Centre on Tecumseh Road.⁸ It was a decade after this endeavour, in 1987, that the Government of Ontario provided its support for this project through a grant that allowed for an expansion of the Serbian Cultural Centre, to include a new Heritage Museum, providing funding for the museum to purchase the necessary display equipment for the exhibitions.⁹ Establishing itself as a not for profit corporation in 1993, the museum has hosted a variety of exhibits that display Serbian culture and heritage for 25 plus years through the generous donations and loans from the local diasporic community.¹⁰

Working alongside similar frameworks of women historically situated within museums since the nineteenth century, the role of the Serbian Heritage Women's Society as volunteers who created and developed the museum demonstrates the continual role of women's invisible labour within institutional settings. In her text "Professional/Volunteer: Women at the Edmonton Art Gallery," Anne Whitelaw sheds a light on the similar practices of the Edmonton Women's Society in developing the Edmonton Art Gallery, explaining how it is "individuals, motivated to develop the cultural life of emerging cities, garner support from patrons and artists societies and create institutions that would provide objects for the education and, ostensibly, the moral improvement of the citizenry" that play an important role in the development of museums.¹¹ In both institutions, these separate women's societies view folk and art as "an invaluable

⁸ "About the Museum," The Serbian Heritage Museum.

⁹ "About the Museum," The Serbian Heritage Museum.

¹⁰ "About the Museum," The Serbian Heritage Museum.

¹¹ Anne Whitelaw, "Professional/Volunteer: Women at the Edmonton Art Gallery, 1923-1970," in Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson (eds.) *Rethinking Professionalism: Essays on Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012, 359.

component of city life and worked hard to build community support for the establishment of museums.”¹²

After over two decades of collecting materials from the Windsor-Serbian community, the museum has developed an extensive assemblage of materials in their collection. Within this collection, the museum documents conventional materials, including archival files such as textual records, videos, photographs, and architectural records, rare books and magazines, and textiles, such as regional folk garments, tapestries, and military uniforms; however, present within its collection are more unconventional materials such as personal items, decorative wood objects, and decorative household items.¹³ In the initial stages of this research, one of the goals of this project was to visit the Serbian Heritage Museum to analyze its textile collection and conduct interviews with its staff members on the Museum’s selection and archiving processes. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this element of the project was unable to be realized; therefore, within the context of this research, the museum will be analyzed through its digital archives. While containing minimal visual documentation of their textiles, within their digital files there exists an abundance of textual records of the types of materials found within their collection, as well as those that have been borrowed from local Serbians within the community. By looking into such materials, including past exhibition catalogues, their archives will also serve to reveal how textiles are framed within the context of the museum. Within this specific analysis, it is important to note that in their catalogues, there are no credits made to the authors of these texts. Therefore, in looking at the framing of Serbian craft and textiles within the museum, it is presented as being by the institution itself and not one sole curator.

¹² Anne Whitelaw, “Professional/Volunteer: Women at the Edmonton Art Gallery, 1923-1970,” 367.

¹³ “Highlights,” The Serbian Heritage Museum, accessed April 9th, 2021, <http://www.serbianheritagemuseum.com/highlights/>.

The Serbian Heritage Museum will also serve to reveal how a distinctly diasporic Serbian institution represents Serbian heritage. This method of diasporic representation is evident in the the collection of Serbian materials from a migratory Serbian community, as well as the mandate of the museum, which is “ to preserve the knowledge of Serbian immigrants to Ontario and Canada, and to promote the great contribution made by Serbs to Canada’s industrial, cultural, social and intellectual life.”¹⁴ While the museum also states that it focuses on local, national, and international collaboration within their programs and research,¹⁵ this privileging of diasporic voices in characterizing Serbian heritage is what sets it apart from institutions like the Serbian ministry's work with UNESCO that will be discussed later in the thesis.

Jancovic Family Collection

In terms of looking at the Jancovic collection, this second case study will offer insight into what it means to collect Serbian heritage objects within the homes of diasporic individuals. While this one collection isn’t a stand in for how all diasporic Serbians represent national identity within their homes, the interview with Vera, the current owner of the collection, aims to reveal how migratory households have developed individual, memory-oriented collections in terms of collecting textile-specific materials, building off the presumption of sentimentality and personal memory being imbued within family collections often described in pre-existing scholarship on migratory and collection studies.¹⁶

¹⁴“ Mission Statement,” The Serbian Heritage Museum, accessed April 9th, 2021, <http://www.serbianheritagemuseum.com/mission-statement/>.

¹⁵ “Mission Statement,” The Serbian Heritage Museum.

¹⁶ The Jancovic family and their collection were chosen for this case study as a result of their long term relationship with the researcher of this project, Serena Desaulniers, which allowed her to observe the abundance of intergenerational textiles that they have collected over the years that decorate and are used within their home.

Vera's mother, Mira immigrated from Bistrica (Gradiška), in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to Canada in order to start a new life with her recently married husband, Vaso in 1964. The Jancovic collection contains a variety of textiles, both handmade and store bought, that have been collected for over 50 years.¹⁷ With pieces of the collection being passed down generationally from mother to daughter, the collection first begins with textiles produced by Vera's grandmother, Smija, who then passed the collection down to her daughter Mira, before it came into the hands of Vera.¹⁸ Through this lineage, it can be understood that the collection carries generational memories for those who possessed these materials, as Vera carries experiential memories of these textiles that were present throughout her life. Containing a variety of materials, the collection includes textiles such as items worn at Start Svat, an Orthodox Serbian marriage ceremony, including the red embroidered sashes seen in *figure 1*, which were used in Mira's wedding ceremony in Bistrica, and pieces that were frequently used within the home, such as the table cloth seen in *figure 2*, which was produced by Mira using a stenciled design, and has been worn down through its frequent use in the home.¹⁹ In this sense, the collection is understood as carrying a variety of both functional, religious, and sentimental objects.

¹⁷ Vera, (2021), interviewed by Serena Desaulniers, March 11th, 2021.

¹⁸ Vera (2021).

¹⁹ Vera (2021).



Fig. 1 Unknown artist, wedding sashes with red embroidery and lace, Jancovic Family Collection, Montreal, Canada.



Fig. 2 Mira, blue embroidered table cloth with stencilled design, Jancovic Family Collection, Montreal, Canada.

Speaking to her own engagement with these intergenerational materials within the home, Vera expressed the impossibility of holding onto all textiles that carried sentimental connections for her, as some included garments that disappeared over the years before she acquired the collection from her mother. She explained how after obtaining these textiles this past decade after Mira's passing, there was such a large amount of textiles that she could only keep a select few, donating some so that other people could use them and throwing out others that were too tattered.²⁰ As a result of this facet inherent to domestic textiles, the interviews conducted with Vera involved prompts that led her to discuss her experiential memory engaging with textiles that were both currently and formerly within the collection she now possesses, allowing her space to explain memories, techniques, and materials that play a role in the collection as a whole.

While the construction of Serbian national identity is not solely tied to textile arts, this research is grounded in textile collections, as such materials have been significant in shaping a sense of national identity amongst diasporic Serbian individuals in these two case studies. The Serbian Heritage Museum's exhibition catalogue, *Serbian Family Treasures*, published in 1994, demonstrates the importance of such textiles within the homes of diasporic Serbian families. Within this exhibit, the museum borrowed artifacts from Serbian immigrants that were presented within their homes, which were considered to be important and carry sentimental memories for those who possessed them. While this document lists various materials including medals, religious icons, and instruments, amongst these materials, 14 of the 23 items within the exhibit

²⁰ Vera (2021).

consisted of textiles, whether they were folk clothing items or needle point pieces.²¹ Within this catalogue, the claim is that:

Family ties have traditionally been strong among the Serb people. These ties are often symbolized by precious family mementos which are handed down from one generation to the next as symbols of love and a reminder of one's heritage. [...] All hold special meaning and sentiment to the families, regardless of monetary value and will be cherished by generations to come.²²

The museum's labelling of home spun materials and artistic reproductions of paintings through needlepoint as being potent symbols which connect immigrants to their heritage within their exhibit demonstrates how textiles have served as an important point in developing a sense of national identity, carrying a deep-seated sense of memory for diasporic Serbians within Canada.

In looking at the Jancovic collection, one can observe how sentimental generational collections of textiles have also similarly served to cement such materials as being significant in terms of developing a sense of Serbian identity. Within her interview, Vera highlighted how certain pieces, such as *figure 3*, demonstrate a longstanding sense of Serbian identity through the generational lineages that these materials hold. Initially produced by Smija during World War 2, as she fled from the war, this embroidered pillowcase that is now preserved behind a glass frame in the Vera household serves to demarcate a sense of family pride.²³ Carrying the same sentimental ties that the Serbian Heritage Museum highlighted within their exhibit, *Serbian Family Treasures*, this textile carries a legacy for the family, as it has been passed down now for three generations.²⁴ Vera also similarly noted that this exchange of textiles was also significant within Serbian communities as a whole:

²¹ Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Serbian Family Treasures*, (Windsor: 1994), Exhibition catalogue.

²² Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Serbian Family Treasures*.

²³ Vera (2021).

²⁴ Vera (2021).

I remember mama talking about when she got married, all the people in the village, her relatives, her grandma and grandpa, baba and deda, they all showered them with gifts, but it was more like chocolates and linens, you know, doilies.²⁵

In this sense, textiles and embroideries are considered to carry an alternate value for Serbian immigrants, as they have been used to connect family lineages, and are exchanged in moments of celebration. As Vera explains, Serbian textiles function as the “threads that tie family together.”²⁶



Fig. 3 Smija, white embroidered pillowcase using “netsanye” technique, Jancovic Family Collection, Montreal, Canada.

²⁵ Vera (2021).

²⁶ Vera (2021).

In terms of looking at both of these collections, there are two facets that emerge in relating them to the Serbian ministry's work in defining Serbian national heritage with UNESCO. The first of which involves exploring what it means to develop national identity and heritage, questioning the framework in which identity is built, analyzing who has authority in dictating what heritage consists of; looking at systems of ancestry, shared experience, and rituals which are used to bring individuals together; and material valuations concerning the types of textiles and systems of production that are seen as being valuable. The second half of this analysis involves examining aspects of sentimentality and memory imbued within collections, both institutional and personal, and observing how they intersect and diverge with concepts of national identity.

Section 2: The Production of National Identity

In looking at the framework behind the concept of national identity, many scholars draw from the work of political scientist Benedict Anderson's notion of the imagined community. Through his theory, Anderson grounds his ideas in the facelessness inherent to communities, claiming that they are imagined as nations, since communities are derived from the fact that members do not know each other despite the sense of togetherness they feel through shared activities and values.²⁷ He thus asserts that this impersonal quality inherent to nations means that they are imagined, as even the largest of them carries a series of infinite boundaries that lie beyond other nations.²⁸ In making this statement, Anderson references British-Czech philosopher, Ernest Gellner, elaborating on the fact that nations are invented by nationalism, as

²⁷ Benedict Anderson, "Introduction," in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London; New York; Verso, 2006), 6.

²⁸ Benedict Anderson, Introduction, 7.

the concept forms likeminded individuals into communities, joining them through an imagined style rather than genuineness.²⁹ Canadian historian, Ian McKay, adopts Anderson's theorization of the imagined community, as he draws on the inherent facelessness found within national identity in order to characterize how group identity is derived through the joining of people through commonalities of symbols and values, which aren't dependent on knowing each individual.³⁰ In this sense, national identity is understood as being socially constructed, as a wide variety of individuals are joined through shared ideas and values.

In "Common Histories, Constructed Identities: Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Rebranding of Serbia," Serbian historians Aleksandra Terzić, Željko Bjeljac, and Nevena Ćurčić highlight various facets of the work of the Serbian ministry in defining national heritage through their work with UNESCO. With many Eastern European traditions crossing over with that of Serbian identity, they explain that

The ethnographic heritage of Serbia is rich in spiritual values related to customs, celebrations, music, song, dance, stories and legends, and this type of heritage is presented through numerous festivals, gatherings and tourist events [...] These elements play an important role in the creation of national identity.³¹

This excerpt highlights how Serbian identity is closely tied up in Orthodoxy, and to rituals and objects affiliated with this spirituality. This is because since the Balkan wars in the 1990s, which resulted in Yugoslavia breaking off into smaller countries, one of the most clear delineations of ethnicity was religious affiliation, as Serbians have a tendency of being Orthodox, Croats are

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, Introduction, 6.

³⁰ Ian McKay, "The Idea of Folk," in *The Quest for Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 16.

³¹ Aleksandra Terzić, Željko Bjeljac, and Nevena Ćurčić, "Common Histories, Constructed Identities: Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Rebranding of Serbia," *International Journal of Intangible heritage*, No. 10, (June, 2015), pp. 102.

recognized as being Christian, and a majority of individuals located outside of the Serbian towns of Bosnia and Herzegovina are Muslim.³² In this sense, one can see how rituals and the objects which make up one's national heritage function as a backbone in developing the values which make up Serbian national identity.

Within this context, Serbian cultural institutions have applied to UNESCO in order to have Orthodox holidays become officially labeled as elements of Serbian intangible cultural heritage. This is evident in the work of the Ethnographic Museum of Belgrade, who worked with the assistance of the Republic of Serbia-Belgrade Ministry of Culture and Media, in 2012, in order to register Orthodox rituals and holidays as being representative of the intangible cultural heritage of Serbia to UNESCO.³³ Responding to the request from Serbian cultural institutions to have such events recognized as elements of intangible cultural heritage, the National Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Serbia approved the labelling of Orthodox

³² Eurydice states the following in terms of describing Serbia's religious background: "Currently, according to the Census in Serbia, in regard to religious affiliation, there are 84.6% Orthodox Christians, 5% Catholics, 3.1% Muslims, 1.1% atheists, 1% Protestants, 3.1% do not declare themselves confessionally, and about 2% other confessions." However, according to the 2011 census, "Croatia is predominantly Roman-Catholic (86.28%). Second largest religious group are Orthodox Christians (4.44%), mostly members of Serbian Orthodox Church" and other significant religious groups are also Muslims (1.47%). Within Bosnia and Herzegovina the population is divided into two districts: republika Srpska, a mostly Serbian republic with a population of 1,228,423 people; and the Brčko District of BiH, a mostly Muslim population with a population of 83,516 people. For more information on the demographic breakdown of these countries visit the following websites:

"Bosnia and Herzegovina Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions," Eurydice, European Commission, January 31st, 2020. Accessed July 11th, 2021. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/bosna-i-hercegovina/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions_en

"Croatia: Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions," Eurydice, European Commission, January 31st, 2020. Accessed July 11th, 2021. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-66_en

"Serbia: Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions," Eurydice, European Commission, January 31st, 2020. Accessed July 11th, 2021. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-14_en

³³ The Ethnographic Museum of Belgrade to Ms. Vilma Niskanovic, August 7, 2012, in *United Nations, Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization: Intangible Cultural Heritage*, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/20393.pdf>.

rituals, including, Slava (Saint Patron's Day), the prayer within St. George's Day, the ritual of making and lighting farmer candles, the Easter ritual of guarding Jesus Christ's tomb, and Lazarica processions from Sirinicka Zupa, as being some of the 27 elements that encompass Serbian heritage.³⁴

Both the Serbian Heritage Museum and the Jancovic collection also reference the significance of their Orthodox faith in terms of characterizing what constitutes Serbian identity. This is seen in the Museum's photographic documentation of religious festivals, in addition to items depicting religious icons. The unifying of Serbian heritage through religious faith is also evident in their exhibition titled *Serbian Family Treasures*, in which one can see an abundance of Serbian icons, such as the Madonna and Child, St Nikola, archangel Michael, St Sava, and depictions of the Last Supper, which are found across icon lamps and needlepoint work within the exhibit.³⁵ Vera similarly mentioned her Orthodox ties in relation to her collection, as she drew attention to the material significance of the table cloth in celebrating Slava. In elaborating on the holiday, she highlighted the excitement and days of preparation it would take to put together Serbian dishes including of sarma, pechenie, and vanilise, and explained the significance of the table cloth in terms of taking it out to decorate the table, sharing that "it was like the centerpieces of the table, you know, [you had] to make sure it was ironed properly and it was clean and everything, and she (Mira) had to be cautious because it had silk threads, this one was the colourful one."³⁶ Highlighting the table cloth as being the backdrop for family

³⁴ To read more of the elements of Serbian intangible cultural heritage that have been approved by UNESCO, reference the following link:

The Ethnographic Museum of Belgrade to Ms. Vilma Niskanovic, August 7, 2012, in *United Nations, Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization: Intangible Cultural Heritage*, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/20393.pdf>.

³⁵ Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Serbian Family Treasures*. (Windsor: 1994), Exhibition catalogue.

³⁶ Vera (2021).

gatherings, she draws attention to how such materials have been used to frame Serbian identity within the household, stating that it was “something that represented [her] parent’s country, [her] upbringing. [...] Those fabrics, the food, the family, those people that became family, and the traditions, [all things she was] very grateful for.”³⁷ In both instances, textiles are understood as framing Serbian identities, as they are mobilized to perform elements of Serbian identity through their use in environments and gatherings to display and enable Orthodox rituals.

In describing some of these more religious and rural celebrations within Serbian communities, questions surrounding the presence and obsolescence of peasant craft in urban settings emerge, as folk art is often presented as being remnants of a dying culture at the hands of globalization. In writing on the development of Canadian craft within Nova Scotia, Erin Morton explains how folk art “is in grave danger of disappearing,” as in more recent times, it has become endangered by more hostile forms of capitalism, which threaten the romanticized “simpler form of capitalism and people’s daily experiences” that saturate contemporary ideas of folk art.³⁸ Characterizing craft revivalism against capitalist practices, Morton describes this endeavour as occurring in order to protect the vestiges of rural life, which are at risk of becoming consumed by globalist and capitalist practices.³⁹ Referencing one’s nostalgia has historically been a powerful method in defining a sense of collective identity amongst individuals, as it functions in harkening back to a more simple time before the advent of urbanization and industrialization, counteracting the globalizing influences of contemporary society. Hungarian architect, János Gerle explains this phenomenon by stating that “while eternal influences [have] caused such traditions to

³⁷ Vera (2021).

³⁸ Erin Morton, “A Genealogy of Folk Art in Canada: Nostalgia and the Ancestry of Modern Art,” in *For Folk’s Sake: Art and Economy in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, (Montreal; Kingston; London; Chicago: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 18.

³⁹ Erin Morton, “A Genealogy of Folk Art in Canada: Nostalgia and the Ancestry of Modern Art,” 18.

become obsolete, at the turn of the century, people have been seeking out this homogenous model in order unify society.”⁴⁰ Defining this practice as the search for the vernacular, Gerle claims that the vernacular is understood as being the survival of the heritage of an agricultural society, carrying with it a spiritual heritage of a people’s ancient and forgotten history.⁴¹ One aspect in which he defines how the vernacular is present is through “the mother-tongue of forms,” i.e. the material markings left on earth from humans.⁴² To Gerle, such sorts of vernacular carry their roots in peasant culture, stressing a focus on originality and authenticity.⁴³ Through this understanding, defining a national identity through folk can be understood through the act of unearthing pre-industrial traditions and objects in order to protect national identities from being swallowed up within globalist practices. As later explored in this paper however, through this gesture of defining a romanticized notion of national identity through vernacular and folk art, this practice also erases the impact of industrialization and repurposing present in peasant craft through the stress placed on authenticity.

In terms of looking at the Serbian ministry’s development of a sense of national identity, they similarly romanticize pre-industrial living within rural Serbian communities through folk art as a means of unifying what it means to be Serbian, mirroring longstanding practices of the region. In the 1925 Paris exhibition, the Yugoslav Pavillion placed a variety genres of applied folk art in the same exhibit in order to mythologize the idea of the “collective individual” and

⁴⁰ János Gerle, “What is Vernacular? or, the Search for the ‘Mother-Tongue of Forms,’” in *Art and the National Dream: The Search for Vernacular Expression in Turn-of-the-Century Design*, edited by Nicola Gordon Bowe, (Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1993), 143.

⁴¹ János Gerle, “What is Vernacular? or, the Search for the ‘Mother-Tongue of Forms,’” 143.

⁴² János Gerle, “What is Vernacular? or, the Search for the ‘Mother-Tongue of Forms,’” 145.

⁴³ János Gerle, “What is Vernacular? or, the Search for the ‘Mother-Tongue of Forms,’” 145.

“individuals as the representatives of the people.”⁴⁴ This endeavour only occurred internationally soon after the formation of the country in 1918, and aimed to display an “Expressionist interest in ethnographic tradition.”⁴⁵ While this exhibit can thus be understood as mobilizing folk art as a means of joining various ethnic groups together, almost a century later, similar methods are being mobilized in the Former-Yugoslavia region as a means to make these same ethnicities distinct from one another.⁴⁶ Terzić, Bjeljac, and Ćurčić characterize this venture as a means to combat the “challenge of globalization,” as developing a sense of Serbian national identity is mobilized in order to fight against the perceived risk that global cultural factors could swallow up the area’s ethnic traditions and values, as a result of the displacement of Serbians across the globe.⁴⁷ With UNESCO labeling folk specific objects as being symbols of national Serbian identity, folk art can be understood as a means of shaping identity in the region, as seen in the aforementioned practice of the Yugoslav Pavillion in the 1925 Paris Exhibition.

With materials such as traditional rugs from Pirot, wool sweaters from Zlatibor, Kosovo-styled embroidery, and national costumes from different parts of Serbia, including folk shoes (opanak), folk hats (šajkača), being marked as symbols of national heritage, customary methods of production are encouraged, and are tied to traditional conceptions of Serbian folk art and craft.⁴⁸ Standing in as representations of ethnic villages and folk life within Serbia for many

⁴⁴ Željka Čorak, Rajka Davison, and David Davison, “The 1925 Yugoslav Pavilion in Paris,” in *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Vol. 17, Yugoslavian Theme Issue (Autumn, 1990), 41.

⁴⁵ Željka Čorak, Rajka Davison, and David Davison, “The 1925 Yugoslav Pavilion in Paris,” 41.

⁴⁶ To read more on this occurrence, you can refer to Aleksandra Terzić, Željko Bjeljac, and Nevena Ćurčić, “Common Histories, Constructed Identities: Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Rebranding of Serbia,” *International Journal of Intangible heritage*, No. 10, (June, 2015), pp .

⁴⁷ Aleksandra Terzić, Željko Bjeljac, and Nevena Ćurčić, “Common Histories, Constructed Identities,” 103.

⁴⁸ These materials were similarly drawn from the letter written by The Ethnographic Museum of Belgrade to Ms. Vilma Niskanovic in order to approve 27 rituals as being elements of Serbian intangible heritage.

The Ethnographic Museum of Belgrade to Ms. Vilma Niskanovic, August 7, 2012, in *United Nations, Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization: Intangible Cultural Heritage*, <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/20393.pdf>.

decades, the aforementioned crafts can be traced as symbols of Serbian heritage as a result of their ties to folk life, which is evident in the marketing of folk art within the former Yugoslavia. In his text, *Designing Identities Reshaping the Balkans in the First Two Centuries: The Case of Serbia*, Southeastern European scholar, Bratislav Pantelić, elaborates on how such materials were marketed under a modernist guise, as they could “fit into an image of modernity and prosperity.”⁴⁹ During the 1970s, craft was thus mobilized to represent the “collective spirit of the working class” promoting the “colourful ‘naive art’ of peasant artists” internationally.⁵⁰ In this instance, a mythos of peasant life was developed as a means of marketing folk craft under ‘modern folklorism.’⁵¹ This marketing of now-UNESCO labelled objects of intangible cultural heritage over time demonstrates a confirmation of Gerle’s labelling of national identity as being grounded in peasant culture, as seen in the historical lineage of folk objects being positioned as the epitome Serbian heritage.

Within this context of defining national identity through folk art as a means of juxtaposing industrialized societies in order to harken back to the perceived more desirable and simpler times of rural living, strong ideas surrounding the concept of tradition emerge in a manner that delimits what is constituted as being folk craft. This practice is evident in McKay’s reference to “Volk,” a German term that is considered to be the cousin of the English word “Folk” as a means of drawing a contrast between rural and urban lifestyles. With the term “Volk” conveying the idea of “the people” and “the nation,” McKay argues that the term itself

⁴⁹ Bratislav Pantelić, “Designing Identities Reshaping the Balkans in the First Two Centuries: The Case of Serbia,” *Journal of Design History* 20, no. 2 (2007), 139.

⁵⁰ Bratislav Pantelić, “Designing Identities Reshaping the Balkans in the First Two Centuries: The Case of Serbia,” 139.

⁵¹ Bratislav Pantelić, “Designing Identities Reshaping the Balkans in the First Two Centuries: The Case of Serbia,” 139.

opposes modernity, as it suggests that sacred traditions and customs create collective identities.⁵² Drawing from the work of eighteenth century German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder, McKay states: “[Herder] was self-consciously turning to the ‘barbaric’ and the ‘primitive’ as ways of countering the stresses of modernity, positioning tradition and custom as almost sacred elements of collective identity.”⁵³ As such, folk can be understood as having a history that has long been mobilized to develop a sense of collective identity through the notion of simplicity associated within its practice. Displaying what Morton describes as “historical presentism,” folk art is thus defined “according to the past changes in the cultural cycles of capitalism,” as the cycle of loss and recovery embedded within the revival of folk culture through capitalist endeavours ensures that peasant culture is continually placed in a position of unrest and exploitation.⁵⁴ Such cycles of folk art within capitalism simplify peasant culture into a fantastical depiction of rural life in order to advance ideas of nostalgic, highly sentimental of interacting “with artistic modernisms and industrial capitalistic pasts.”⁵⁵ Through this understanding, the populist appeals imbued within folk and peasant culture are understood as being longstanding through time, documenting a sort of nostalgia that tends to exist separate, yet alongside industrial and technological innovations.

Within this context of turning to notions of “the simple life” as a means of framing folk art as a nostalgic national identity, this ties museums and other institutions closely with concepts of authenticity that serve to represent folk art as static and unchanging through time. In his essay “Against Tradition,” museum curator Sean Mallon expands on this idea, explaining that “notions

⁵² McKay, “The Idea of Folk,” 11.

⁵³ McKay, “The Idea of Folk,” 11.

⁵⁴ Erin Morton. “The Historical Presentism of Folk Art,” in *For Folk's Sake: Art and Economy in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, Montreal; Kingston; London; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016, 3 and 13.

⁵⁵ Erin Morton, “A Genealogy of Folk Art in Canada: Nostalgia and the Ancestry of Modern Art,” 18.

of ‘tradition’ are dependent on ideas of what is ‘authentic’ and what is ‘inauthentic’—what is ‘traditional’ and what is ‘contemporary,’ or what is ‘tradition’ and what is ‘change’.”⁵⁶ Through this statement, he elaborates on how terms such as “authenticity” and “tradition” are placed in opposition to contemporaneous modes of artistic production, rendering them as static and unchanging through time. He thus follows suit by explaining that such associations make it difficult to untangle one’s self from the concept of tradition that dominates discussions of change and folk art in general, because “when people read the word ‘traditional,’ a widely shared range of meanings is transmitted.”⁵⁷ Elaborating on the impact of such affiliations within Indigenous cultures, he draws from an interview with Samoan poet, Albert Wendt, who states that

Traditional inferred our cultures were/are so tradition-bound they were static and slow to change; that they weren’t dynamic and growing and changing; that because they were slow to change and fixed in history they were ‘simple and easy to understand.’ Traditional also had implications about how we were viewed as people even to the extent that, because we were tradition bound, we behaved out of habit and past practice and [were] slow to adapt to other ways or change our own ways, that we didn’t want to think for ourselves, or were incapable of individual thinking and expression.⁵⁸

In this excerpt, Wendt elaborates on how this labeling renders such cultures as being static and unchanging through time so that they may be more ‘digestible’ to those outside such cultures.

While Mallon’s article speaks directly to how terms such as tradition and authenticity impact Pacific cultures specifically, he explains that these practices fall into greater global contexts: “Minority cultures in Europe are also sometimes subject to the same simple categorizations of folk art and traditional practices.”⁵⁹ Within this context, he quotes Wendt in

⁵⁶ Sean Mallon, “Against Tradition,” *The Contemporary Pacific*, Volume 22, Number 2, Fall 2010, 366.

⁵⁷ Sean Mallon, “Against Tradition,” 366 and 372.

⁵⁸ Sean Mallon, “Against Tradition,” 367.

⁵⁹ Sean Mallon, “Against Tradition,” 369.

saying that within the museum setting, cultures are represented as “being as still and lifeless as a ‘stuffed gorilla.’”⁶⁰ In terms of looking at the work of the Serbian ministry’s work alongside UNESCO, one can see how traces of such concepts trickle down into how folk art is constructed as national identity objects. This is evident in the following statement by Terzić, Bjeljic, and Ćurčić, as they assert that while “folk creativity is still cherished to some extent by residents and the forms vary in different areas of the country, it is reflected mostly in traditional crafts and skills [...]. However, in modern society these items are mostly used as tourist souvenirs.”⁶¹ Creating a binary of folk art and contemporary production, this stress on tradition holds Serbian craft in stasis, its modes of production rendered in UNESCO-labelled textiles as being relatively unchanging through time, especially through its juxtaposition to the urbanized lifestyle of the region’s inhabitants. However, despite this described crossover between folk art and capitalism in the form of tourism, peasant culture is presented as continually existing as a symbol for national identity, and its aforementioned links to capitalism contradict the binary of rural folk art and globalist capitalist commodity which is essential for developing national identity through peasant culture.⁶²

In looking back to Pantelić’s explanation of the marketing of ‘modern folklorism’ in the 1970s, he elaborates on the static and archaic affiliations that tie Serbian-identity-forming folk art to specific, traditional modes of production. Within his explanation of the marketing of the craft items which were marketed under the guise of “collective spirit of the working class,” he draws an example from the now-UNESCO labelled intangible cultural heritage Zlatibor

⁶⁰ Sean Mallon, “Against Tradition,” 369.

⁶¹ Terzić, Aleksandra, Željko Bjeljic, & Nevena Ćurčić, “Common Histories, Constructed Identities,” 105.

⁶² For more on this, see Mallon and Wendt’s reflections on the implications of the categories of tradition and authenticity on hierarchies of value as these relate as well to political and social control in “Against Tradition,” *The Contemporary Pacific*, Volume 22, Number 2, Fall 2010, 362-381.

knitwear, stating that it was in high demand within the market as a result of its “colourful designs and unrefined texture, which created a sense of authentically indigenous products.”⁶³ In this instance, Serbian folk was mobilized through the lens of tradition, tying it to the previously mentioned ideas by Mallon, as conceptions of Serbian tradition were deployed in order to present such craft production as being slow to change and easily digestible.

However, in terms of marketing an aura of tradition around craft such as Zlatibor knitwear, there exists elements of industrialization found within its production that contradicts the ideas of authenticity imbued within these textiles. While containing close ties to notions of folk life through its representation of a small rural town within Serbia, the marketing of such garments in the 1970s presented this knitwear as being produced “by local village women in Sirogojno, a reconstructed ‘ethnic’ village on Mount Zlatibor in Serbia.”⁶⁴ By playing off notions of pastoral ethnic villages, an illusion of folk life was developed as a means of stimulating a peasant culture that aligns with traditional notions of craft.⁶⁵ Within this instance, one can see how more contemporary pushes for folk revival, tends to involve digging up traditions in a manner that glorifies pre-industrial life, obfuscating the possibility for contemporary iterations of

⁶³ Bratislav Pantelić, “Designing Identities Reshaping the Balkans in the First Two Centuries: The Case of Serbia,” 139.

⁶⁴ Bratislav Pantelić, “Designing Identities Reshaping the Balkans in the First Two Centuries: The Case of Serbia,” 139.

⁶⁵ In terms of looking at the construction of national identity within a Canadian context, this practice of reconstructing pastoral life and techniques is longstanding. One example of this is found in the work of Mary Black during the Canadian handicraft revival in the 70s in Nova Scotia, as she revived the regions craft production in a way that commodified natural materials and authentic products. Within this practice, Black held a large influence in forming Nova Scotian craft in the sense that she had control over the designs of the textiles that were created.

More can be read on the Nova Scotia handicraft revival in Ian McKay’s book, *The Quest for Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (2009), as well as in Erin Morton’s book, *For Folk’s Sake: Art and Economy in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (2016).

Ian McKay, “Mary Black and the Invention of Handicrafts,” in *The Quest for Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 153.

craft to thrive. Through the goal of creating ‘authentic’ craft in both instances, artificiality emerges in order to enliven the mythos of an untouched rural community.

However, in looking at the production of folk textiles in Eastern Europe, these strong ties to ideas of tradition are not reflected in the material production of the region. Within her text, “Peasant Embroidery: Rural to urban and east to west relationships 1860-1914,” fashion historian, Lou Taylor highlights the longstanding reciprocal nature between folk art and globalization. Stating that peasant textiles continually and slowly absorb the influences from surrounding phenomena, whether it be surrounding cultures or urbanization, she draws on the false affiliations that rendered folk art as being unchanging through time.⁶⁶ In looking at the Yugoslav-now-Serbian region, despite much of the population from the first half of the 20th century being raised in peasant homes with traditional values, Yugoslavian families were being increasingly immersed into factories and cities as a result of rapid urbanization and industrialization.⁶⁷ This advent led to two changes in the role of women within the household. First off, women were being encouraged to enter to the workforce as a result of industrialization, making it so that they were responsible for juggling both work and home life,⁶⁸ and affordable synthetic materials, including “sequins and machine produced ribbon and lace and block roller cotton” were being marketed to the region’s peasant consumers.⁶⁹ With many women then going into industries such as garment production, the high standard that had been set for design and sewing made it so that the population no longer had the time to give to produce embroidery and

⁶⁶ Lou Taylor, “Peasant Embroidery: Rural to Urban and East to West Relationships 1860-1914,” *The Journal of the Decorative Arts Society 1850 — the Present*, no. 14, Turn of the Century Design: Cross Currents in Europe (1990), 43.

⁶⁷ Rose M. Somerville, “The Family in Yugoslavia,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Aug., 1965), 350.

⁶⁸ Rose M. Somerville, “The Family in Yugoslavia,” 354.

⁶⁹ Lou Taylor, “Peasant Embroidery: Rural to Urban and East to West Relationships 1860-1914,” 44.

folk art, as more energy was dedicated to spinning cloth and making garments.⁷⁰ These changes in Serbia as a result of industrialization and urbanization did not mean that the folk left Serbian aesthetics, however, as the Fashion Design Department in Belgrade continued to encourage the retention of older traditions of textile production, bringing them into the mass market.⁷¹

Taylor elaborates on this historical interplay that has continually existed between folk textiles and urbanization. Drawing a parallel to the Fashion Design Department in Belgrade, she similarly explains this occurrence within Eastern Europe's textile production by drawing an example from the Russian red rose motif, which originated in Russian folk embroideries, and has come to be found across the globe as a result of its incorporation into commercial factories.⁷² Similarly, through the chemical dyes and synthetic materials that have become adapted into customary peasant clothing, one can observe how folk art has similarly absorbed external ideas, incorporating them onto ancient customs as a means of reinterpreting new value.⁷³

In looking at the Jancovic collection and listening to Vera's interview, this continually developing nature of folk textiles is evident, as the collection contains a vast mixing of both customary and contemporary techniques. Within the material findings of the collection, there includes pieces, such as the previously mentioned wedding sashes (fig. 1), which are deeply imbricated with Serbian customs, as well as doodle-like embroideries, as seen in *figure 4*, which is an embroidery produced by Mira that depicts her and her husband standing alongside their children, including Vera, who are holding up strings of ornaments. Despite the lack of national design elements within this textile, there is still traces of the family's Serbian heritage, as seen in

⁷⁰ Rose M. Somerville, "The Family in Yugoslavia," 359.

⁷¹ Rose M. Somerville, "The Family in Yugoslavia," 359.

⁷² Lou Taylor, "Peasant Embroidery: Rural to Urban and East to West Relationships 1860-1914," 43.

⁷³ Lou Taylor, "Peasant Embroidery: Rural to Urban and East to West Relationships 1860-1914," 43.

the Orthodox cross necklace around Mira's neck, therefore communicating a sense of identity through its placement in a different manner than that of the wedding sashes.



Fig. 4 Mira, black embroidery depicting Mira, her husband Vaso, and their daughters Vera and Lidija, Jancovic Family Collection, Montreal, Canada.

Vera also drew attention to how both customary and urbanized methods of production intermingle within similar embroideries themselves. Describing the importance of the act of embroidery within the household, she recollected memories of Mira producing a traditionally inspired folk blouse (*figure 5*) that aimed to simulate customary Serbian folk dancing dress. In remembering the production of this garment, she stated: “I just remember, it was almost like she was duplicating one of the blouses, and it was a piece of artwork in itself, and it would take her hours, she would take a pen and craft these little designs and patterns.”⁷⁴ She explained that this

⁷⁴ Vera (2021).

blouse was later worn on many Serbian holidays with pride, as it was a means for Mira to display her heritage.⁷⁵ Vera touched on how customary symbols have been adapted into new designs as a means to display one's identity. With the incorporation of German silk threads that Vera would pick up for Mira to use from nearby stores, she pointed to how more globalized factors enabled the production of Serbian garments.⁷⁶ In looking at Taylor's explanation of the reciprocal relationship between Eastern European peasant culture and industrialism, which bring together customary techniques and machine produced materials, one can see how the rural and urban, industrial have historically worked in conjuncture to develop new symbols of national identity.



Fig. 5 Unknown photographer, Mira wearing a blouse she designed and embroidered with her husband Vaso, Jancovic Family Collection, Montreal, Canada.

⁷⁵ Vera (2021).

⁷⁶ Vera (2021).

In discussing the incorporation of the German silk threads in Mira's embroideries, Vera highlighted the design possibilities found through the accessibility of such materials as a result of the variety of them Mira had access to purchase. In sharing the wonder behind the opportunity of these mass produced materials, Vera stated: "they were silk and they would shine, and you had probably almost 150 or 200 colours to choose from, and there was such a slight variance, but mama would always specify exactly which shade she wanted."⁷⁷ However, mass produced materials were not always as greatly appreciated within Serbian diasporic communities, as Vera also recalled an extended relative dismissing such materials, remarking that more recent consumerist waves had reduced their significance.⁷⁸ Through these examples, different levels of value are evident in the incorporation of industrialized practices and materials within the production of Serbian textiles, with different individuals according a strong sense of tradition, or not, based on the materials and practices.

In terms of looking at the Serbian Heritage Museum, they tend to present a discourse that addresses the liminality that exists within the terms traditional and authentic, while still favouring textiles that reference more customary ideas of Serbian craft. Written across many of their exhibition catalogues that focus on textile collections, the museum frequently closes their catalogues with the following statement: "Originally material for embroidery was home grown, home spun, and home dyed. Today it is different. The main point of the exhibited artifacts is that they are real handmade of pure natural raw material with national designs and that are either unique or manufactured in small series."⁷⁹ Through excerpts such as this, the museum

⁷⁷ Vera (2021).

⁷⁸ Vera (2021).

⁷⁹ Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Folk Cultures of the Serbs*. (Windsor: 2007), Exhibition catalogue.

acknowledges that the material production of Serbian folk has changed and evolved over the years, as earlier mentioned in Taylor's explanations of how peasant culture and industrial innovation influence and grow off each other; however, despite this statement, the museum still seems to privilege customary textiles, by regularly drawing from a bygone era of Serbian folk. This privileging is evident in the repetition of the aforementioned statement throughout their catalogues, as well as the continual presentation on tradition-focused descriptions across this same ephemera.

In terms of considering this privileging of handmade and naturally produced materials that is expressed within the Serbian Heritage museum's exhibition catalogues, Steiner and Phillips suggest that the separation of folk art from globalized and commercial factors is what has historically allowed it to be granted the label of authentic. Drawing an example from Stolpe in 1896, they explained how he complained that Native American art was "difficult" collect, as it carried too many markings from Western industry, as seen in the glass beads, furniture nails, and floral motifs inspired by traded wares that decorated their work.⁸⁰ With "colonized peoples all over the world often [wearing] the same kinds of garments and ornaments they sold as souvenirs," this repetitive view of industrialization and trade within ethnic communities has rendered a paradigm in how craft is presented.⁸¹ In thinking of Gerle's statement of external influences causing traditions to become obsolete, this practice of seeking out folk art untouched by industrialization "arrives as a result of society feeling at disjuncture with one another as a

⁸⁰ Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, "Art, Authenticity, and Baggage of a Cultural Encounter," in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, eds. by Ruth B. and Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, (University of California Press, 1999), 9.

⁸¹ Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, "Art, Authenticity, and Baggage of a Cultural Encounter," 10.

For more examples, on the historical valuing of authenticity in folk art refer to Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, eds. by Ruth B. and Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, (University of California Press, 1999).

result of individualized lifestyles and perspectives.”⁸² In looking at this statement in relation to the Serbian Heritage museum's exhibition catalogues, one can see how they bring forward similar lines of thinking, as Serbian folk art is framed as authentic when it is made in small batches with naturally made and hand dyed materials.

In looking at this disjuncture between the acknowledgement of Serbian folk art as something ever changing yet tied down to historical representation within institutional settings, one can understand it as being a result of two factors: the commercialization of folk art and the desire to outline a series of symbols in order to neatly form a Serbian national identity. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher Steiner explain this disjuncture of explaining folk art as being something unstatic, yet historically-bound, as being a result of the its ever-changing status of being a work of art, an artifact, or a commodity.⁸³ In describing the repetition of specific motifs within folk in a capitalist context, Steiner and Phillips also explain it as a result of the fact that craft has been based on the “pleasurable repetition of an already known pattern,” not novelty, explaining that within the commercialization of folk art, tourists look for forms they already know, aligning them with their own preexisting understanding of said cultures and craft.⁸⁴ As previously stated, in referencing the work of Mallon, such references to folk art within the Serbian Heritage museum’s catalogues that state that its exhibits only present works made in small batches with raw and natural materials, functions to fit this work into a specific lens of a craft from a Serbia untouched by industrial, capitalist practices. Similarly, in developing a sense

⁸² Janos Gerle, “What is Vernacular? or, the Search for the 'Mother-Tongue of Forms,’” 144.

⁸³ Ruth B. Phillips & Christopher Steiner, “Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter,” in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, 4.

⁸⁴ Christopher B. Steiner, “Authenticity, Reproduction, and the Aesthetics of Seriality: The Work of Tourist Art In the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” In *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pg 99.

of national identity the continual desire to form a vernacular craft involves the concept of reviving a civilization that has been untouched by outside influences, carrying through this notion of purity and originality alongside it. This desire mirrors Gerle's call for a homogenous rural model of an untouched non-industrialized society in order unify nations.⁸⁵ Therefore, in the context of the Serbian Heritage Museum, their practice of focusing on tradition and authenticity-bound ideas of Serbian folk textiles functions as twofold: to curate an understanding of Serbian national identity familiar to Serbian immigrants to gather under and to create a lens for the outside public through which to view an easily digestible Serbian culture.

Within their catalogue *Serbian Embroidery and Fashion* (2005), which explores the regional influences within Serbian embroideries, the museum delves into the evolution of Serbian textiles over time, stating that the region has had a variety of influences in their textile production, ranging from Byzantine, the Middle East, and Central Europe, and the catalogue breaks down the materials most prominent from various regions of the Balkans which Serbians have inhabited. Within this exhibit, they further explain the evolution of Serbian embroidery over the years, asserting that:

The art of embroidery was handed down from mother to daughter for generations, each generation adding its own taste, artistic skill and innovation. In this way manifesting a collective aesthetic atmosphere, creative tendencies and skill of many generations of anonymous creators originating in the widest popular masses, who made objects used in everyday life but which were, at the same time, of high artistic quality.⁸⁶

Within this statement, the museum thus demonstrates the cumulative growth inherent to folk art and textiles, building off Taylor's statement that urban and peasant cultures have always

⁸⁵ János Gerle, "What is Vernacular? or, the Search for the "Mother-Tongue of Forms",," 143.

⁸⁶ Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Serbian Embroidery and Fashion*. (Windsor: 2005), Exhibition catalogue.

influenced each other. While the museum still carries a primary focus on presenting ideas of authenticity and tradition within their exhibits, there is a possibility that within their non-digitized collection, more contemporary styles of Serbian embroideries can be found.

In looking at writings on Zlatibor knitwear in the Sirogojno Style Museum in Sirogojno, it is evident that the representation of this UNESCO designated heritage craft within more contemporary discourse has also shifted to represent the generational differences that the Serbian Heritage Museum highlights. Within their website, they describe Zlatibor knitwear through both a traditional and contemporary lens stating:

Apart from the clothing items with the images of Zlatibor nature, that made designer Dobrila Smiljanic and the women-knitters from Zlatibor famous, the Sirogojno Style label is nowadays on the works of young fashion designers who combine the traditional way of production with the contemporary styles, colours and motifs.⁸⁷

Through this statement, the Sirogojno Style explain how such textiles have moved beyond a monolithic method of production, incorporating the practice within more globalized markets in a manner that presents Zlatibor wool as being an ever-changing craft, despite the fact that it still carries customary tracings in its design. Through their explanation, they also describe how the previously-mentioned phenomena of marketing such wool in the 70s influenced the area's designs, saying that while such hand-knitted clothes are now recognized for their landscape motifs, many geometric and floral elements that are now found across these garments emerged in the 70s.⁸⁸ While still using the term "tradition" to define customary Zlatibor textiles, the word is continually positioned as something dynamic through this writing, as they state that the

⁸⁷ "About Us," Sirogojno Style, accessed April 26th, 2021, <https://www.sirogojno-style.com/en/about-us>.

⁸⁸ "About Us," Sirogojno Style.

“Sirogojno Style has been always creating new interpretations of its history, tradition and recognizable motifs.”⁸⁹

Even in terms of looking at the relation between materiality and authenticity, the collection reveals how identity building practices can be incorporated within more globalist systems. With Zlatibor knitwear being produced, sold, and officiated as a symbol of intangible cultural Serbian heritage within UNESCO, despite the fact that it is now produced within the Sirogojno Style with Icelandic wool,⁹⁰ one can see how authenticity is a social construct in its application, as it is malleably applied to materials. In this example of Zlatibor wool, it is evident that the aura and marketing of authenticity is prioritized over the production of such materials themselves, as ‘authentic’ craft can be produced by mass-produced materials as long as the mythos of an untouched rural community continues to play a significant role in preserving the idea of a more simple and romanticized means of living.

When thinking of tradition in relation to this heritage craft, there is variation in terms of the understanding of what words such as tradition mean in how they are mobilized throughout the texts included on the Sirogojno Style's website. While Mallon’s critique of the word tradition argues that it places a veneer over the nuances of history and evolution in craft, as seen in the writings of the Serbian Heritage Museum, which differentiates between ritual methods of production and generational changes; and the Sirogojno Style, which leaves behind notions of cultural essentialism within the word, the term tradition can be understood as carrying malleable affiliations in its application. Despite this variance in terminology, Mallon argues that in rendering terms such as tradition ubiquitous within institutional settings “people who regularly

⁸⁹“ About Us,” Sirogojno Style.

⁹⁰“ About Us,” Sirogojno Style.

visit exhibitions are conditioned to expect certain kinds of information with particular displays.”⁹¹ Oversimplifying rich histories of craft in the process through such terminology within institutional settings, he contends how the language which describes art within such settings at times functions in a manner that distorts said ethnicities into a simplistic caricature of a pure culture, untouched by globalist ventures. As an alternative to the word tradition, Mallon instead puts forward the terms “custom” and “customary” as replacements, as they are “considered to sound more dynamic and to have the connotation of things that endure but also adapt.”⁹²

In terms of presenting craft and heritage objects to the public through both institutional settings, a discussion emerged about who are the people curating craft. In understanding what it means to collect and exhibit folk art, McKay highlights this point by stating that “folk art seems to mean anything a curator or collector wants it to mean.”⁹³ Through this statement, he highlights how folk itself is a term that can be relatively arbitrary despite the longstanding ideas that are imbued within its categorization. Reflecting on the mobilization of folk within institutional settings, in her book, *For Folk’s Sake: art and economy in twentieth-century Nova Scotia* (2016), Morton further elaborates on how much power institutions and outside experts have in terms of molding perspectives of folk art so that these fit into preconceived ideas of rural life. In this, she states that “folk art does not exist without a curator, university intellectual, or museum to define it,”⁹⁴ explaining how it is external institutions that define folk rather than the communities themselves. Explaining the Euro-centric colonial practices that glorify perceived barbaric

⁹¹ Sean Mallon, “Against Tradition,” 376.

⁹² Sean Mallon, “Against Tradition,” 372.

⁹³ Ian McKay, “The Folk under Conditions of Postmodernity,” in *The Quest for Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 291.

⁹⁴ Erin Morton, “The Historical Presentism of Folk Art,” 4.

lifestyles within folk cultures, as explained by Mallon, both McKay, Morton, and Mallon touch on the role of the institution-led outsider who shapes how folk life and craft tends to be presented to those outside said communities.

In the case of this research and to a degree the Serbian ministry's work with UNESCO, internal decision making of what and how Serbian folk art is presented to the public occurs. While it may be considered obvious to look at the personal collections of Serbian immigrants, such as the Jancovic collection, and acknowledge that within these collections individuals carry agency in the personal objects they collect, the structure of The Serbian Heritage Museum similarly reveals traces of personal representation within its exhibition practices. In first looking at the museum's collection, these traces are evident through the fact that the museum was developed by Serbian immigrants themselves. In addition, with the artifacts of the collection primarily consisting of donations and loans from Windsor's local Serbian community, as well as the inclusion of oral history documentation within archives, the museum is largely stamped by the varying voices of diasporic Serbians in Windsor. This is why the *Serbian Family Treasures* exhibit was chosen as a focal point in this paper, as the exhibition of personal symbols of heritage which decorate the homes of individual Serbian immigrants is placed at the foreground, featuring their own memory objects. To a degree, this practice bridges the divide between the sort of imagined community that Anderson mentions, as the institution puts individuals' valuables in dialogue with one another, allowing various individual identities to join as one. Similarly, in the instance of UNESCO's work alongside the Serbian ministry, Serbian cultural institutions play a role in determining what should be labelled as heritage, as seen in the work of The Ethnographic Museum of Belgrade and Republic of Serbia-Belgrade Ministry of Culture and Media's role in dictating which objects and rituals should be included. In this sense, internal

institutions, albeit powerful ones, have played a key role in defining the region's cultural heritage, and in this way do not quite follow the model of academic outsider highlighted by Mallon, McKay, and Morton.

Section 3: Sentiment, Memory, and the Act of Collecting within Diasporic Communities

In looking at the development of national identity in a global context, it is also important to consider the role of collecting and its inherent ties to memory and sentimentality, especially in the context of diasporic communities. In his book, *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*, theorist Peter Schwenger draws on the significance of possession, reflecting on the relationship that exists between objects and the people who possess them. Through this reflection, he references Walter Benjamin in stating that within such relationships, some of the most intimate interactions emerge, as things carry the possibility of absorbing the psychic investments of their owners, to a degree possessing the owner just as much as the owner possesses them.⁹⁵ Schwenger thus asserts that the owner is no more than the sum of their objects.⁹⁶ Within this idea, he delves into how things themselves are indifferent to their ownership, as preoccupation and pride only emerge on the side of the subject; however, despite this one-sided nature between object and owner, objects carry the possibility of inheriting history and a sense of agency from their owner in the process.⁹⁷ Through this understanding, the objects one collects plays a significant role in shaping and reflecting identity back to those who possess them.

⁹⁵ Peter Schwenger, "Possessed Objects," in *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 65.

⁹⁶ Peter Schwenger, "Possessed Objects," 65.

⁹⁷ Peter Schwenger, "Possessed Objects," 65.

In looking at the symbolic power of objects within the household, one can see how they can carry the potential to serve as potent materials in terms of forming a sense of national identity. Intersectional feminist scholar Sara Ahmed argues for this potential by looking at the role of objects as being orienting devices through phenomenology. In her theorization, she states that orientation is a reflection of how someone resides in space, and pairs it with phenomenology in stating that consciousness is always directed toward an object, emphasizing lived, embodied experience.⁹⁸ She argues for affective experience in terms of orienting oneself around objects, as they carry the possibility to impress upon the body depending on their past history.⁹⁹ Referencing Heidegger, she thus posits that orientation causes a sense of homeliness through familiarity, as navigating space involves negotiating the familiar and unfamiliar.¹⁰⁰ Similar to the work of Schwenger, Ahmed's theorization reflects on the relationship that exists between objects and the materials that surround them. By removing the act of possession within this understanding, she brings in space to discuss the potentially alienating experiences of disorientation with regards to diasporic communities.

In understanding how orientation relates to phenomenology and migratory experiences, the act of getting one's bearings is positioned through the understanding of how the body extends into space. In describing this, Ahmed states: "migration could be described as a process of disorientation and reorientation: as bodies 'move away' as well as 'arrive,' as they reinhabit spaces."¹⁰¹ Through this argument, objects are considered to play a role in one's orientation, as their positioning within environments informs how individuals are situated. By explaining this

⁹⁸ Sara Ahmed, "Find Your Way," 1 and 2.

⁹⁹ Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: Finding Your Way," 2.

¹⁰⁰ Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: Finding Your Way," 6 and 7.

¹⁰¹ Sara Ahmed, "Introduction: Finding Your Way," 9.

experience as an extended bodily phenomenon, space is thus theorized as being “like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body,” since individuals continually orient themselves through their familiarity within it.¹⁰² With recognition and alienation playing a role in developing a sense of intimacy and comfort, individuals associate and disassociate within environments as a result of personal memories and experiences of navigating a variety of different landscapes. Slavic and comparative literatures scholar, Svetlana Boym, similarly discusses this idea, as she breaks down the role that such objects play in developing a sense of intimacy and community for diasporic groups, focusing specifically on this interplay within domestic settings. In discussing the intimacy of the home, Boym states that diasporic intimacy “is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but [is instead] constituted by it,” drawing on the feeling of disjuncture deeply-seated within such experiences.¹⁰³ She further develops this concept by drawing on how this sense of alienation is not individual, as it is entrenched in collective memory and traditions of social interactions, encapsulating “the most personal of dreams” that are not only limited to the private sphere.¹⁰⁴ Within this explanation, disorientation is understood as being a collective experience within migratory individuals, as the sense of disjuncture carries deeper impressions of what constitutes homeliness within the body.

Ahmed delves into the object-oriented experience of defamiliarization, explaining how the interplay between recognition and lack of recognition of one’s material surroundings plays a role in developing a sense of homeliness. Through these ideas, she explains how migratory individuals face two directions, a home that is lost and one that is yet to become a home.¹⁰⁵ In

¹⁰² Sara Ahmed, “Introduction: Finding Your Way,” 9.

¹⁰³ Svetlana Boym, “On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov’s Installations and Immigrant Homes,” *Critical Inquiry*, Winter, 1998, Vol. 24, No. 2, Intimacy (Winter, 1998), 499.

¹⁰⁴ Svetlana Boym, “On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov’s Installations and Immigrant Homes,” 499.

¹⁰⁵ Sara Ahmed, “Introduction: Finding Your Way,” 10.

reflecting on her own personal experiences as an immigrant, she states the following in explaining her experience packing her belongings: “I am collecting myself up, pulling myself apart. Stripping the body of the house: the walls, the floors, the shelves.”¹⁰⁶ Alluding to the material contents of her home as being extensions of her identity, her description takes on a bodily affiliation, as though she is placing herself into her moving boxes. Within this statement, the objects of migratory individuals can thus be understood as taking up orienting qualities, as the bodily-extension-like elements of their possession serves to situate individuals within their own identities.

In interviewing Vera, elements of this transience between recognition and alienation emerged. In recalling her memories, she drew on the commonly told stories of bright eyed immigrants travelling across the globe to arrive in Canada, ready to start a new life with their family. Fondly talking of a photograph of her parents first arriving in Montreal with only a suitcase and cotton sheet to carry their few possessions, Vera explains how this image of her newly arrived parents carries a strong impression in her mind with regards to her upbringing.¹⁰⁷ Conveying a strong role in how she reflects on her own identity, Vera also stated that despite her status as a first generation Canadian: “I am more Serbian than Canadian.”¹⁰⁸ Drawing on how she feels as though her identity resides much more in a country in which she did not grow up, one can see how ties to rituals and objects can potentially play a role in how one identifies with their sense of heritage. Through these examples, she thus explains how her identity is rooted in a specifically immigrant experience.

¹⁰⁶ Sara Ahmed, “Introduction: Finding Your Way,” 10.

¹⁰⁷ Vera (2021).

¹⁰⁸ Vera (2021).

Through the positioning of Serbian textiles within Mira's home, a distinctly Serbian household is developed within a Canadian house. In her interview, Vera touched on how these materials characterized her Serbian identity, referencing the brown and yellow embroidered blanket draped across the couch like an afghan, the table cloths lining the table, and the sugar starched embroidery vases sprinkled through the house, all characterizing Serbian folk life.¹⁰⁹ In describing *figures 6 and 7* that were draped above the kitchen table in her childhood home, she explained how such objects were integral within her upbringing, sharing "I remember [them] hanging over the kitchen table on the wall the first 7, 8 years of my life. [...] It was something so simple, but today it means so much more."¹¹⁰ While Vera had very little knowledge of the historical precedence of such materials, she explained how she held fond memories of these aforementioned textiles close to her heart. In reflecting on her interactions with such garments, she revealed how *figure 6* played an role in shaping her memories, as the imagery of the ceramic vase reading "Dobro Jutro" (good morning) greeting her everyday, and the domestic setting depicted in *figure 7*, which read: "Tko na jelo dago ćeka, izgubit će pola téka" (Whoever waits a long time for food will lose half of his time) is stamped throughout the backdrop of her memories. As referenced by Ahmed, the textiles that decorated Vera's childhood home thus functioned as orientation devices, as they situated the family within their Serbian heritage as a result of their positioning across the home.

¹⁰⁹ Vera (2021).

¹¹⁰ Vera (2021).



Fig. 6 Mira, blue stencilled kuvarice embroidery reading “Dobro Jutro” (good morning), Jancovic Family Collection, Montreal, Cana



Fig 7 Mira, blue stencilled kuvarice embroidery reading “Tko na jelo dago čeka, izgubit će pola téka” (Whoever waits a long time for food will lose half of his time), Jancovic Family Collection, Montreal, Canada.

While Vera had little knowledge of the kitchen embroideries (fig. 6 & 7), the Serbian Heritage Museum documents the historical provenance of these materials which are cemented as key symbols of Serbian identity. Within their exhibition catalogue, *Serbian Kitchen Accessories* (1996), the same types of textiles as those of Vera are described as a textile known as *kuvarice*, which is made from cotton and hung in kitchens, and which functioned to

capture ordinary life intertwined with women's thoughts. The presence of visual, vocal and rhetoric elements speaks cheerfully not only about preparing food for loved ones but also about love, nature, and qualities of life. Inscribed morals enhance those benefits.¹¹¹

While Vera was unaware of the inherent identity building practices of these textiles within Serbian households, as explained by the museum, their presence within the museum demonstrates how *kuvarice* has similarly served as significant identity building materials amongst Serbian Canadian immigrants. While not currently labeled as heritage items within UNESCO, the collection of 61 *kuvarice*, stored within the collection and donated from Windsor's locals,¹¹² in addition to Vera's two textiles demonstrates that such domestic embroideries serve to display Serbian values, carrying deep-seated memories across the region's immigrant community.

Drawing parallels to the search for community embedded within the practice of building a national identity through folk and craft within urban societies, this yearning for a sense of connection amongst diasporic communities is similarly drawn from the experience of the metropolis, which creates a sense of alienation for migratory individuals.¹¹³ The role of objects in preserving the collective memory of diasporic communities, however, functions in a different

¹¹¹ Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Serbian Kitchen Embroideries*. (Windsor: 1996), Exhibition catalogue.

¹¹² Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Serbian Kitchen Embroideries*. (Windsor: 1996), Exhibition catalogue.

¹¹³ Svetlana Boym, "On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes," 501.

manner to that of national identity building practices within capitalist societies, that aim to preserve their pre-industrial culture, as their preservation, collection, and at times production, of such objects draws them into a sense of familiarity and intimacy through both personal and collective memories attributed to such items.¹¹⁴ German sociologist, Georg Simmel, points out how the minute acts of everyday life, including the decorations of one's home, function in developing "a language of 'woven' 'threads' that 'bind us together', that point to the possibility of mapping a heterogeneous, diversified and complex totality."¹¹⁵ Arguing that metropolitan centers are filled with stimuli, resulting in a sense of disorientation, while on the other hand, rural environments stand in opposition to its individualizing tendencies, as the rural every day is considered to exist as shared cultural memory.¹¹⁶ Within the context of diasporic households, these material references to folk culture serve to thus bring forward a sense of collective memory, as it orients them through their reference to a home which is no longer, removing the sense of isolation they may feel from the more sensorially disorienting experiences of the new cities in which these communities find themselves.

In looking at how national Serbian identity is developed in comparison to that of Serbian-Canadian immigrants, one can see how Simmel and Boym's ideas come into play. Their findings suggest that claiming objects as being identity-building symbols in both the homes of diasporic individuals and institutional settings carries at times overlapping value systems. In looking at the work of the Serbian ministry alongside UNESCO, their work in defining Kosovo-styled embroidery aligns very closely to *figure 8*, a red, blue, and yellow embroidery featuring

¹¹⁴ Svetlana Boym, "On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes," 517.

¹¹⁵ Ben Highmore, "Simmel: Fragments of everyday life," in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2002, 37.

¹¹⁶ Ben Highmore, "Simmel: Fragments of everyday life," in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2002, 43.

geometrically shaped flowers, found within the Jancovic collection, as the Serbian ministry defines this style of embroidery as a

stylized decorative embroidery that can be found on traditional Serbian clothes, especially on women's chemises, and, in a simplified form, between the two world wars, on textile items of furniture in the cities. The combination of fabrics used for chemises (mostly hemp, but also flax, half-cotton and cotton), the dominant red colour of the embroidery rendered in various materials (wool, metal thread, yellow or white metal thread, tinsel), the applied techniques and garment names, fuse into a whole, which is a result, but also a reflection of the Serbian, Byzantine, Romanesque and Eastern Christian cultural spheres.¹¹⁷

In looking at *figure 8*, these same stylistic qualities are also found within the embroidery, which features geometric floral designs in red, yellow, blue, and metallic thread, that mirror those characterized by the Serbian ministry. Additionally, in terms of considering the aforementioned label of tradition within this textile, within the ministry's description of Kosovo-style embroidery, they also highlight how the production of this garment represents "knowledge and skills associated with traditional crafts and it represents a traditional way of decorating the clothes of Serbs in Kosovo and textile household items and contemporary women's dress."¹¹⁸ In looking at the ministry's description of such materials, one can see how it is deeply entrenched in customary ideas of Serbian culture, as its material production carries similar lineages to the Serbian Heritage Museum's description and favouring of artifacts that are handmade with either natural materials or national designs. Also, within this example, traces of both the role of national identity building as well as personal identity building within the home are seen as overlapping.

¹¹⁷ "Kosovo-Style Embroidery," The Republic of Serbia Ministry of Culture and Information, accessed April 29th, 2021, <http://www.nkns.rs/en/popis-nkns/kosovo-style-embroidery>.

¹¹⁸ "Kosovo-Style Embroidery," The Republic of Serbia Ministry of Culture and Information, accessed April 29th, 2021, <http://www.nkns.rs/en/popis-nkns/kosovo-style-embroidery>.



Fig. 8 Mira, a Kosovo-style embroidery with floral detailing including red, blue, green and yellow thread, as well as netsanye detailing, Jancovic Family Collection, Montreal, Canada.

Conversely, within the Jancovic collection, there exists many materials that fall outside the aforesaid institutional labeling. This incongruity between the materials used and the difficulty in labelling them demonstrates the malleability that exists when applying terms such as artifact and tool to such textiles. As seen in the materials of *figure 4*, the embroidery of Mira's family which was made from a scrap of cloth that Mira acquired from ripping apart either bedsheets or table cloths, and demonstrates how elements of repurposing materials and incorporating traces of commodified goods within folk art, tends to be largely ignored within the institutional collections

analyzed for this research.¹¹⁹ As previously mentioned, this textile, despite its lack of natural materials or national designs, is deeply imbued with Serbian identity and sentimentality that carries cultural significance to the family which possesses it, as seen in the Orthodox cross and family gathering that is situated within its imagery. Also, scattered throughout the Jancovic collection are similarly commercialized folk motifs which speak to their significance in developing a sense of sentimentality for those who possess them. Some examples of which are seen in the blue embroidered tablecloth (fig. 2) and the kuvarice reading “Dobro juror” (good morning) (fig. 6), which were produced through stenciled designs printed on the cloth from Serbia for the maker to follow. Eliciting a nostalgic folk imagery through the reoccurring fruits and floral motifs, the presence of these materials within the household serve to similarly frame a distinctly Serbian folk environment, developing Simmel’s “language of ‘woven’ ‘threads’ that ‘bind us together’” on both a figurative and literal scale.¹²⁰

Contradicting the ideas of small batch production and customary national design, by looking at the mass-produced materials within the immigrant home is significant. Boym states that such materials, despite their contradiction to ideas surrounding authenticity and tradition, carry an importance with regards to the “memorial narrative” within the object which “endows it with an aura of singularity.”¹²¹ In this sense, the act of collecting by diasporic individuals characterizes a step away from the explicit goal of preserving “old cultures,” as seen in the embroideries within the Jancovic collection, since such collections are motivated by whatever narratives makes the collector feel a sense of intimacy specifically. Stating that the home and

¹¹⁹ Vera (2021).

¹²⁰ Ben Highmore, “Simmel: Fragments of everyday life,” in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2002, 37.

¹²¹ Svetlana Boym, “On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes,” 517.

museum both exist as memory sites, Boym clarifies that “each apartment collection presents at once a fragmentary biography of the inhabitant and a display of collective memory.”¹²² In the instance in which these materials are considered, such collected artifacts are also most likely long removed from their potential role as commodity, as they have all been charged with a unique aura by the migratory collector, telling stories of “diasporic exile” rather than the “narrator’s roots.”¹²³

Boym characterizes this rupture within the migratory individual home by describing how their act of collecting is grounded in a sense of loss from which they build community and collective memory, not finding solace in the concept of a simpler means of living, but instead in remembering that which makes them feel most at home. Therefore, in looking at collections, such as the Jancovic collection and even to a degree the materials from the Serbian Heritage museum, such as the kuvarices from their *Serbian Kitchen Accessories* exhibit, as well as the donations from the *Serbian Family Treasures* exhibit, one can see how domestic collections are charged with Boym’s notion of the ‘aura of the collector,’ as such objects are imbued with a sense of diasporic exile, as they remind the collectors of the homes they once had. In stepping away from this nostalgia which often link textiles with rural imagery and institutional understandings of Serbian folk art, Boym instead describes the act of collecting within diasporic households as being something that is done from a sense of longing and placemaking, allowing the collector to develop a sense of community within the home.

As mentioned at the start of this paper, such textiles have served to construct the backdrop of Serbian identities for religious holidays demarcated as symbols of Serbian heritage

¹²² Svetlana Boym, “On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov’s Installations and Immigrant Homes,” 521.

¹²³ Svetlana Boym, “On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov’s Installations and Immigrant Homes,” 523.

by the Serbian ministry and UNESCO, and this is similarly true in the instance of the presence of commercialized and mass-produced items that characterize Serbian identity and folk within the household. In describing the blue embroidered tablecloth (fig. 2), Vera explained how this now stained and torn cloth carries memorial connections to her Serbian identity. Describing that while the pristine tablecloth in the dining room provided a space for the family to gather around to participate in religious ceremonies and feasts, the blue and white embroidered cloth functioned to enable such ceremonies. When Mira's textiles would become old and worn down, Vera explained that such materials would thus be incorporated in the kitchen, used to create customary Serbian dishes such as pita, a filo, egg, and cheese dish that is a Serbian staple in Mira's household, and is present at every holiday.¹²⁴ In describing the production of such food, Vera explained that the filo dough was not to be rolled out on the table, but instead on a moist cotton cloth, and since Mira didn't have much when she first immigrated to Canada, she would pull from what she already had.¹²⁵ In this instance, Vera highlights Boym's argument that in terms of labeling memory objects within the home, there is no discriminate eye that discerns originality from mass production or tradition from kitsch, as it is specifically the use or enactment of such objects within the home that imbues them with an original sense of Serbian memory and renders them as heritage objects.

However, in terms of looking at institutional collections in comparison to those found within the home, it is also significant to consider the lived and embodied relation that individuals carry with the materials they collect, especially considering the tactile nature inherent to textiles and how they are used within the home. In thinking of the work of Schwenger, Ahmed, and

¹²⁴ Vera (2021).

¹²⁵ Vera (2021).

Boym, this relationship is significant, as it points to how such homely relationships to objects play significant roles in shaping one's relations to their identity. In terms of looking at the embodying practices of constructing identity within the home, the production of such crafts within the Mira household also demonstrates an enactment of Serbian identity. Within her interview, Vera described Mira's hands as being integral to her curiosity and learning.¹²⁶ Touching on the Ahmed's theorization of orientation and Schwenger's conception of the relationship between object and owner, this tactile relationship carries the potential of orienting and imbuing a sense of heritage and homeliness through the ways immigrants navigate space.

In looking at the significance of the hand in relation to national identity, the production of Serbian craft within Canada by Mira serves to demonstrate an embodied connection to one's heritage. In explaining the significance of Smija's textile produced during World War 2 (fig. 3), Vera described the technique used within the textile "netsanye," which refers to the process of creating holes and taking a pearlescent white thread and repetitively going over the circular shape of the puncture mark in order to develop a pattern.¹²⁷ Within her upbringing, Vera recalled Mira producing similar textiles with the same techniques within the household, demonstrating a sense of intergenerational passing of customary techniques of Serbian textile production from Smija to Mira.¹²⁸ This practice exemplifies the reference to anonymous generational passing of embroidery techniques within rural Serbian households, as earlier mentioned in the Serbian Heritage Museum's exhibit *Serbian Embroidery and Fashion*.¹²⁹ In referring to this technique as "netsanye," which has no English academic writing equivalent (leading it to thus be understood

¹²⁶ Vera (2021).

¹²⁷ Vera (2021).

¹²⁸ Vera (2021).

¹²⁹ Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Serbian Embroidery and Fashion*. (Windsor: 2005), Exhibition catalogue.

as vernacular), the technique specifically carries generational Serbian identity, as the term framing such materials, in addition to its technique, was passed down from Smija, to Mira, to Vera. Therefore, the fabrication of such embroideries frames the production of netsanye as creating a Serbian environment within a Canadian home.

In addition to the act of making within the home as being an enactment of diasporic identity specifically within the Mira collection, the act of initialing one's textiles also served to insert Mira within her Serbian identity. Within *figure 8*, one can see the designs of a customary Kosovo-style embroidery, which includes small bits of netsanye that Mira used to stamp her own artistic flair within the piece; however, set against these more conventional design elements, she includes her initials, M.J., in silver thread. Found across many of Mira's textiles, Vera described this practice as the following: "it was almost her signature mark of who she was. There was always something, whether it was an initial, but it was so important."¹³⁰ While not necessarily a common practice within Serbian folk textiles, the inclusion of Mira's initials demonstrates a visual insertion of Mira within their heritage through the fact that she materially sets herself within a customary Serbian textile, the signature therefore depicting Mira's orientation of herself within her heritage.

In thinking of the significance of textile-specific work in terms of building a sense of heritage amongst Serbian immigrants, there is a strong emphasis on the elements of portability and bodily engagement with such materials, as it offers up a space for one to wear and engage with the history of their heritage in a personal, tactile manner, different to that which one would encounter in an institutional setting. Describing the importance of the act of embroidery within

¹³⁰ Vera (2021).

the household, Vera drew on memories of Mira producing the traditionally inspired folk blouse that aimed to simulate customary folk dancing dress (fig. 5). By explaining that this blouse was proudly worn to many Serbian holidays,¹³¹ Vera touches on the significance of inserting oneself into their heritage through textiles. This is even evident in her description of the photograph from her childhood of her parents arriving in Canada, as the large sheet wrapping her parent's possessions speaks to the malleability and portability of fabric that makes it easily adaptable to the homes of immigrant families. These conclusions can similarly be drawn from the Serbian Heritage Museum's exhibit, *Serbian Family Treasures*, as the catalogue explains that

Following the two world wars, large waves of Serbian immigrants arrived in Canada. Many were forced to flee their native country and as a result, had to leave most of their belongings behind. Some of the items displayed in the exhibit were obtained during return visits to the homeland or were sent over from the old country.¹³²

With so many of the collection's materials consisting of textiles, decorative household objects, and small religious icons, the portability of the memory objects which Serbian immigrants possess is significant, and in looking at the prevalent documentation which characterize them as Serbian heritage objects, it is a given that their owner's possession, orientation, and engagement with them serves to imbue memories within these garments' material fibers.

While institutional collections carry the ability to be imbued with personal memory, in their framing to the public, it is rare that these elements are ever understood or communicated to the viewer. Within the context of the Serbian Heritage Museum however, it is evident that traces of these stories are present in a manner different that the framing of similar textiles by the Serbian Ministry and UNESCO, as materials are collected and borrowed from the homes of

¹³¹ Vera (2021).

¹³² Serbian Heritage Museum of Windsor, *Serbian Family Treasures*. (Windsor: 1994), Exhibition catalogue.

immigrant families themselves, and the museum has conducted oral history interviews in order to bring in the voices of these families within the institution's setting. Also, to a degree, the museum's incorporation of more commonplace, useful and conventionally designed objects, such as kuvarice and other decorative home objects, demonstrates a step away from the rigidity of what constitutes Serbian folk, as seen in the Serbian Ministry's labelling of Serbian intangible heritage, which tends to favour a historical and tradition-bound perspective of Serbian heritage objects.

Conclusion

In looking at these two case studies in comparison to the work of the Serbian ministry and UNESCO, one can observe how there is both conjuncture and disjuncture found in how Serbian Canadian immigrants come to identify with their heritage through textiles. With rigid ideas surrounding tradition, authenticity, and small-scale production found in institutional positions, one can see how institutions hold a lot of power in terms of influencing the public's understanding of Serbian heritage objects on a large scale, as their focus on preserving tradition at times leaves out more personal and collective experiences embedded within Serbian national identity. Reflecting a specifically pastoral idea of rural Serbian life back to Serbians themselves, it is evident that such materials draw on ideas of a rural society that has long changed because of industrialization. Given the historical influences of Byzantium, the Middle East, and Central Europe within the historical production of such materials, globalized elements of Serbian identity are glossed over, demonstrating traces of mass-produced materials within these collections while also making the region appear as though it has been untouched for decades. However, it is in

looking at the homes of Serbian immigrants where one can see more varied spectrum of heritage objects, containing customary garments as well as more commercially inspired pieces, and not materially or ideologically tied down to ideas of the “old country” or a static, idealized, nostalgic version of Serbia. In these textiles, which instead carry the ability to encompass a clash of customary, contemporary, commodified, and mass-produced materials, Serbian national identity is more deeply understood through the enactment of rituals and communal gatherings within such materials, imbuing a Serbian spirit into inanimate objects through their proximity and use in such rituals.

Considering the authorial voices which shape Serbian national identity, there is divergence in the application of terms such as tradition, as the examples in this thesis demonstrate how even Mallon’s explanation of the rigidity of the term tradition, has been malleably adjusted across institutional settings. In considering this pliability in terminology, it is evident how any understanding of Serbian heritage objects may shift from being positioned and understood as a tool, artifact, or commodity. This is evident in the fact that despite the labeling of customary objects as being representative of cultural heritage within institutional settings, their production still at times mobilizes them as commodities in order to simulate the region’s economic tourist market, and within the Serbian households, heritage objects are equally made with mass produced materials or have been potentially purchased as commodified goods themselves. This interaction thus demonstrates how the intertwining of globalist and capitalist practices do not dilute Serbian cultures by interrupting the pre-industrial values that have been embedded within them ideologically. Finally resting as artifacts within these currently existing collections, since they are removed from their potential functional positions within the household, whether it is decorating the tables for dinner or displaying one’s heritage in

ceremony, such materials carry the embodied presence of one's heritage in a manner that does not discriminate against the material history of these objects, but only adds to them through their use in Serbian households.

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