Cultural Politics, Nation Building and Literary Imagery
Towards a Post-colonial Reading of the Literature(s) of Bosnia-Herzegovina 1878–1918

by Stijn Vervaet (Ghent)

Introduction

Post-colonial studies connected with cultural and literary theories \(^1\) that see literature (or: “narrative”, “culture”) as a phenomenon intertwining with power, \(^2\) can also provide an interesting approach for the study of literary and other intercultural contacts in the Balkans. In this article on Bosnian literary and cultural life between 1878–1918, I will attempt to show why post-colonial studies can be inspiring for the study of cultural relations between Austria-Hungary and Bosnia and Herzegovina, esp. when doing research about the interweaving of power, culture/literature and the construction of national or other collective identities. In addition, I consider it to be an approach that should be developed in accordance with the (historical) context, which constantly urges us to make corrections to post-colonial claims concerning the (study of the) Balkans.

Many historians consider that the Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia was very similar to colonial rule in British India. Some of them describe the Bosnian politics of the Dual Monarchy, labeling it without hesitating as “Habsburg colonialism”. \(^3\) Some evidence for such a contention on a symbolic level can be found in Austrian ethnological and travel literature on Bosnia, and probably even in belles lettres, in which a discourse of power, of “civilizing the wild” and an exotic picture of the Other can be revealed. \(^4\) As apparently some of these authors tend to essentialize Bosnia as the Other, depicting it as an abstract East and implicitly perceiving Austria-Hungary as an abstract West. Hence, is it then justified to describe contemporary Bosnian literary life and press as merely peripheral or even colonial, oppressed by an imperial center? \(^5\) I will attempt to point out the discourses/narratives of the center, as well as of the periphery, the narrative of power/domination and the counter-narrative of the subordinated or colonized. Of course, this does not mean that the cultural and literary history of Bosnia during the period of Austro-Hungarian occupation should be thought of as insimplified, binary oppositions. Instead, I prefer to avoid the binary opposition, suggested by the definition of an “imperial center” and a “colonized periphery”, of the Austrians and Croats as “pro-Western” cultural actors (i.e. the self-defined heirs of the “European legacy”) and the Serbs and Muslims as “anti-Western” ones (i.e. the so-called heirs of the “Ottoman legacy”). The kind of “transitional” character of the Balkans, and their status between East and West, writes Todorova, “invoked the image of a bridge or a crossroads. [...] The Balkans are also a bridge between stages of growth, and this invokes labels such as semi-developed, semi-colonial, semi-civilized, semi-oriental.” \(^6\) The incorporation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Dual Monarchy seems to have caused the same effect on authors of travelogues and (quasi-)journalistic forms in the Dual Monarchy, inspiring them to impose a kind of semi-colonial rhetoric on those former Ottoman provinces. \(^7\) This attitude did not differ essentially from that of Western Europe vis-à-vis the Balkans.

This case study explicitly wants to avoid the danger of reducing an in se heterogeneous world “through the single category of colonialism.” \(^8\) Therefore, “center” and “periphery” should be understood in this context rather as imaginary geographies and used in a dynamic way, not as monolithic geographical entities or essentialist vectors, although these divisions may well have their historical roots and are not merely invoked by the seemingly conceptual or methodological insufficiency of a postcolonial approach. As Elleke Boehmer reminds us, \[^{7}\] postcolonial discussion has by and large confined itself to sophisticated theoretical commentary which, though often insightful, can tend to be rather general, or indeed generalizing, in its scope. Because of this generalizing reach, and the emphasis on textual resistance specifically, there is also a tendency in some postcolonial criticism for historical and political context to be neglected. This is paradoxical given that both colonial and postcolonial literatures find their defining parameters in history. \(^9\)

In our context, the dialogue between (the Austrian) center and (the Bosnian) periphery can be revealed by an analysis of the cultural policy of the Dual Monarchy in Bosnia, compared to the literary and (often also national-colored) program of Bosnian newspapers and periodicals (other than those published by the Austro-Hungarian Landesregierung itself). A second
strategy consists in examining the various imagieries of the Austro-Hungarian center; the various narratives of its rule in the literature of the Bosnian periphery. I will illustrate this encounter with two examples, the first situated at the intersection of power, culture and nation building 1878–1918, and the second in the field of imagieries.

1. Cultural Politics, Canonization of Epic Literature, Literary Reviews and Cultural Identity

One of the major issues in the entanglement of centers of power, cultural politics/literature and developing (in both the “transitive” and the “intransitive” meaning) national consciousness is the process of canon formation. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the canonization of epic oral literature began at the time when the first newspapers and literary periodicals were founded. The first Bosnian literary magazine, Bosanski prijatelj (The Bosnian Friend), was edited in 1850 by the Franciscan friar Ivan Frano Jukić, but printed in Zagreb. The first Bosnian press was founded only in 1866, when Osman-pasha Topal invited the Zemun printer Ignjat Sopron to open a printing firm in Sarajevo. Under the Austro-Hungarian occupation, the amount of newspapers and literary periodicals increased, although rigorously censored by the provincial government. Enormously popular at that time in Bosnia was the collecting and editing of folk songs. Austria-Hungary took part in it as a power that had the material possibilities to do so. For example, the Austro-Hungarian official Kosta Hörmann collected and edited Folk Songs of the Bosnian Muslims, an undertaking that turned out to be of crucial importance to the developing national consciousness of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It seems that Austria had, as an imperial power, mainly political goals in mind: increasing the Austrian government’s popularity among the (Muslim) community, as the correspondence between Civiladlatus (Chef der Landesregierung) Appel and Joint Minister of Finances Benjamin Kállay reveals. In 1888 Appel asks Kállay for permission to print the collection of Hörmann in the provincial print shop (Landesdruckerei), at the expense of the provincial budget, stressing that such an undertaking would make a good impression on the population. Although by initiating the creation of a Bosniak literary canon the Austrians pursued a typically colonial cultural policy (like the British encouraging Indian studies and consulting Hindu sacred texts to establish a legal system for British India), at the same time this policy continued a tradition which had existed already in Serbia and Croatia for many years. This is even more or less explicitly stated by Kállay in his answer to Appel, in which he suggests that Hörmann could write an introduction to the collection of songs. Here Hörmann should give some main characteristics of the collection, and explain why mainly songs of the Muslims were published: most of the songs of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Christians had already been made public in other famous collections, but those of their Muslim compatriots had not. In the same letter, Kállay advised Hörmann to make clear that those songs are “all the more interesting, as they, due to the Bosnian descent of those groups of the population and their conversion to Islam, present a peculiar mix of old Bosnian traditions/customs and Muslim habits.” Hence, one might argue that the Austro-Hungarian authorities did not envisage the creation of a Bosniak literary canon in the way the Croats and the Serbs did (in the framework of the construction of a national identity, the more so as the Austro-Hungarians actually aimed at the establishment of a Bosnian, and not a Bosniak national consciousness); but eventually their policy in this respect undoubtedly contributed to the canonization of Bosniak oral literature and, ultimately, to the establishment of a Bosniak national identity.

In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the process of canonization, in which centers of power are always and unavoidably involved, was influenced from two or even three sides: Vienna and both “home centers”, Belgrade and Zagreb. Of course, editors in each location emphasized the national belonging of the songs to a particular ethnic group, which sometimes resulted in heated discussions in the national press about who claimed whose folk songs or had “stolen” them: the Serbs from the Muslims or the Croats and the Muslims from the Serbs. Polemics on canonization of oral folk songs in the South Slav lands in general had existed already, and, as Wachtel writes: “orally transmitted folk songs became a bone of contention between those who were propagating separate South Slav nationalisms and those who strove for South Slavic integration.” In Bosnia, those quarrels had been provoked rather by diverging perceptions of nation and nationality than by the involvement of the Austrians in...
such matters. Thus, editing folk songs can be regarded as a kind of creating and confirming
the first national literary corpuses of Serbian/Croatian/Bosniak literature, but it was not an
undertaking initiated by the Austrians to introduce the Bosnians to their own literary her-
itage: one might argue that in fact they used the popularity of folk songs and the collections
of folk songs for their own political purposes. However, this does not mean that the cultural
consequences of that kind of cultural politics were harmful to the South-Slav folk songs or
to Bosnian cultural life in general. Since its publication in 1888/89, the collection of Kosta
Hörmann has been both extensively praised for its scientific merits and criticized for
nationalist reasons.19

From its very beginnings Hörmann’s collection of folk songs has been regarded by Muslim
critics as the first collection that gave the Bosniak nation the status it deserved. According
to them, for the first time in literary history the Bosniak/Muslim songs were not regarded as
Serb or Croat, but as belonging to a genuine, distinct Bosniak/Muslim culture and ethnos.
At any rate, as maintained by the same Bosniak literary historians, no edition of the songs
in which the latter were called by their proper name – Bosniak folk songs – was published
before 2001.20 Their interpretation indicates on the one hand that a national canon/cultural
tradition is indeed always created retrospectively by searching for common features of a
national culture in the past. On the other hand, their appreciation of the role and influence
of the Austrian cultural policy in Bosnia is illustrative of the nationalist discourse that has
characterized Bosniak historiography and literary criticism since the 1990s.21 It is clear that
the Austro-Hungarian authorities, although initially striving to create a Bosnian nation by
editing the folk songs stood at the very beginnings of the making of that nation, of the “in-
venting of tradition” relevant to its eventual emergence. Today, when the national (political,
cultural, and literary) history of the Bosniaks is being canonized,22 the dominant narrative
about the cultural policy of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Bosnia seems to be appropri-
ated to nationalist purposes. This is probably the reason why Buturović, much later, stresses
that Hörmann’s collection supplies us with the historical evidence for his endorsement of
the existence of a separate Bosniak nation. But, whether Hörmann was “aware” of the fact
that the epic songs he collected were “the specific particularity of a well-defined ethnos”,23
as Buturović states, remains an open question.

Indeed, the plot of many songs is set in historical events (often battles) from the 15th till
the 18th century, presenting those times as a heroic era for the Bosnian Muslims. Being
put together into one collection, they opened ways to the Muslim population of Bosnia for
the recognition of their own, collectively shared past, which is regarded to be crucial for the
creation of national identity.24

The song *Filip Madžarin i Gojeni Halil* (*Filip Madžarin and Gojen Halil*) recalls the in-
surrection of the Krajina-beys against the Sublime Porte (1638) in an epic way. A certain part
of the song tells about the discontent of the beys from the Bosnian Krajina with the decisions
of the central power in Istanbul: one of them, Mustaj-bey from Lička (Mustaj-beg Lički), utters
their grievances, refusing to obey the edict of the sultan and even announcing the possibility
of revolt against the sultan: “On my faith and religion, / Mujo, I am already fed up with / The
czar’s edicts from Istanbul.”/.../ So the bey swore by his faith: “/ I will start a war against
the czar,” [...]25 In *Đanan-buljuk baša i Rakocija* (*Džanan the buljuk-basha* [commander
of a military company, *SV*] and *Rákóczy*) we meet a 12,000 man army of Bosnian Muslims
fighting for the Sultan in Transylvania against a Christian coalition led by Duke Rákóczy.26
Thanks to the bravery and shrewdness of the Bosnian battalion, the Ottomans win the battle
and save this part of the empire. When Džanan, the commander of the Bosnians, is asked by
Sultan Suleyman if he wants to receive Bosnia as his *pashalik* and save this part of the empire, he
answers that he does not want the Pashalik of Bosnia, nor “any treasures without [confirmation]” (meaning that
he neither longs for political power, nor does he seek an estate that he can own only temporarily),
he further declares he is not made for veziership, and he and his Bosnians have enough trea-
sures to keep at home. Therefore, he asks the Sultan to give the Bosnian landowners (*spahi’s*)
the right to issue a *tapija* on their conditional estates (*timars*), which means they could turn
them into free holdings (permanent, heritable possessions), and to have their own *defter-
hana* in Bosnia. Further, he asks the sultan to acknowledge the special troops (*jeršikuls*)
that protected fortified cities and grant local military commanders (*kapetans*) the right to
receive their salary (*uléfa*) in Bosnia, so they need not go to Istanbul.27 These explicitly so-
cial wishes and strivings for class rights of the Bosnian aristocracy are expressed in the song,
but never fulfilled in reality. The specific, at times cordial, at times strained relations between

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Bosnian Muslim beys (esp. the ones from the Krajina) and the central Ottoman power, which was depicted in those (and many other) songs, would later come to be regarded by Bosniak nationalist ideologists and historians as a fundamental proof of the glorious and unique past of their nation. They regarded the songs as an evidence of the historical continuity of the Bosniaks as a distinct ethnic group (not only in the Ottoman Empire in general but also in Bosnia), striving for its own, national, autonomy. Of course, such interpretations too easily forget that in the 17th to the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire religious determination and social status were of key importance, and that, amongst Bosnian Muslims, class needs and discontent with certain social conditions were motivating their strivings for autonomy, and not some supposed national or ethnic cohesion.

In many other songs half mythic, half historical Bosnian Muslim heroes play the main roles. Because Alija Derzelez is one of the most popular epic heroes of Bosnian Muslim epic poetry, I will shortly focus on him: Similar to the Serbian epic hero Marko Kraljević, Alija has an extraordinary horse and a reputation as an undefeated warrior of almost magic proportions. He seems to be the epic pendant of several distinct historical figures (which in some instances are even blurred altogether into one figure): of Alibeg Podunavac, Sandžak-bey from Smederevo who lived in the second half of the 15th century, of the famous Turkish nobleman (akindžija) from the family Mihaloglu, or, as it is the case in the song Derzelez Alija i Vuk Jajčanin (Derzelez Alija and Vuk Jajčanin) of the legendary Turkish warrior Gürz Ilyas. In this song Alija has a dream which forewarns him that Vuk Jajčanin has killed the Pasha of Sarajevo, slaughtered and enslaved the Muslims of the city, taken Alija’s tower (kula) and kidnapped his sister. In the second part of the song we see him leaving from the mountain Avala (near Belgrade) and traveling to Sarajevo in order to take revenge on Vuk (an act which could be interpreted as saving the Muslims). At a given moment, Alija comes to the Drina river and, lacking time to go to Višegrad to cross the bridge there, he jumps on his extraordinary horse over the Drina. One can imagine the immense popularity of these well-known songs about mythical heroes such as Derzelez, with whom the large masses of Bosnian Muslims could identify at times they felt their identity to be endangered – after the 1878 Congress of Berlin.

A publication of the songs at the time when the Muslim population of Bosnia was still very confused by the changed geopolitical circumstances should undoubtedly have meant an important psychological encouragement to them. As Rizvić writes, it is sure that the epic content of many of these songs fed the national pride of the Bosnian Muslims and confirmed the values of their oral poetry in the folk language. Subsequently, Hörmann’s songs, collected with the help of several Bosnian Muslims, were clearly one of the cultural stimuli that caused a new “vertical solidarity” (transcending social classes) among the Bosnian Muslims which, in the long run, would result in their national awakening. Relevant to my point of view is that Hörmann was a representative of an imperial power, and that, whether he wanted or not, he found himself in a privileged position to represent the Other. Nevertheless, although being an Austro-Hungarian official, he succeeded in approaching this Other. Due to its hybrid nature, Hörmann’s work was of great significance for Bosnian cultural life and eventually transcended the pure political goals Kállay and Appel strove to achieve.

Other examples of this Austro-Hungarian cultural policy of “colonization by way of text” are the cultural activities of both the Landesmuseum (“Regional Museum”/“Zemaljski muzej”) along with its review (Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja) and the literary magazine Nada (Hope). The latter magazine was founded at the request of the Joint Minister of Finance, Benjamin Kállay, who specified the tasks of the review in his note to the government as follows:


As Kállay elucidated in his request to the provincial government, Nada was founded to serve political goals, more specifically to function as a counterpart to the popular Serbian and
Croatian literary magazines and the nationalist tendencies they spread. However, it turned out to be much more than an exclusive means of political propaganda. Again, Nada’s editor-in-chief Kosta Hörmann departed, with the support of the Landesregierung, from an already existing cultural fact: the popularity of literary magazines. Indicative is even the layout of the front page, on which, next to the newly invented Bosnian heraldic insignia (a shield with lilies and a dagger), figured a guslar, a South-Slav epic folksong singer, symbol of the collective memory of the people, playing the one-snared violin or gusle. The gusle-player is wearing a čalma (turban), and next to the name of the review figured a star and a half-moon, probably symbols of the Muslims. Nada, however, was not only created to function as the voice of the center of power (and was not only known as such by its readers and critics), but also significantly enriched the cultural life in Bosnia. Therefore, it was not merely an instrument of Austria’s imperial policy-makers in Bosnia – whose goals it eventually failed to realize.

Nada could be identified as an example of what Eagleton labels “a link between power and culture”. “No political power”, he writes,

can survive satisfactorily by naked coercion. It will lose too much ideological credibility, and so prove dangerously vulnerable at times of crisis. [...] To govern successfully, it must therefore understand men and women in their secret desires and aversions, not just in their voting habits or social aspirations. If it is to regulate from the inside, it must also imagine them from the inside. And no cognitive form is more adroit at mapping the complexities of the heart than artistic culture.

To a great extend responding to the aesthetic views of the Croatian poet Silvije S. Kranjčević, who in fact edited the magazine, Nada was for the literary life of Bosnia of those days an innovative and professionally managed literary review. It was received by the local population in different ways and, just as the Folk Songs of the Bosnian Muslims, the judgment of it very often depended on the national and political determination of the critique.

Examples of a subversive (nationalist) counter-discourse towards the Austrian policy and another way of canonizing (oral) literature can be found by re-reading the Bosanska vila (The Bosnian Fairy), the main literary magazine of the Bosnian Serbs, in which we discern a fierce anti-Austrian line. Just as on the front page of Nada, the gusle-player also for many years figured on the front page. The need of its editors to stress the authenticity of their cultural identity and to contrast it with the one the Austrians proposed was fuelled by (Serbian) nationalism and could be in a way compared with a nationalist/nativist reaction of the colonized to the “imperial gaze”.

The editors of the Fairy very carefully selected the authors and texts they included in the magazine: as far as literature in Serbo-Croat was concerned, until 1904 they published exclusively Serbian authors or Muslim writers who declared themselves Muslim Serbs (Srbi-Mohamedović). They also promoted what could be labelled the entire Bosnian pre-national Serbo-Croat “ethno-symbolic heritage” (oral folk songs) as exclusively Serbian, considering Muslim songs as Serbian. By doing so, they continued the tradition of essentialist nationalism, introduced by Vuk Karadžić, who had claimed that in Bosnia there is only one nation, the Serbian, divided into three religions. Thus, the Bosnian Fairy established an obvious dialogue – or even polemic – with the Austrian cultural politics. One could argue that here, the cultural policy of the Austrian “center of power” – at least from the point of view of its national goals – accomplished the opposite effect, as it was completely rejected by a large part of the population, because it was perceived as anti-national (i.e. anti-Serbian or anti-Croatian). The role of literature in this process should not be underestimated, esp. given the fact that other modern means of communication were still lacking or not fully developed.

2. The Pen of the Censor and the Image of the Dual Monarchy in the Literature of Bosnia-Herzegovina

My second illustration of the diverse and complex cultural encounter and the ensuing dialogue between the Austro-Hungarian center(s) and the Bosnian periphery concerns the image of the Dual Monarchy in the literature(s) of Bosnia. I will first address the question of preventive censorship in Bosnia imposed on the press at the time, and then turn to some canonized literary works which deal with the Austro-Hungarian era. These examples will show that it is impossible to speak about one image or one narrative of the Double Monarchy in the literature(s) of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Because the period of Austro-Hungarian rule in
Scrutinizing the reaction of several Bosnian writers and journalists to a particular event and the (im)possibility to express their opinion about it will tell us how the Austrian preventive censorship functioned and how Bosnian writers accommodated it. Two exemplary “key-events” are without any doubt the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by the Austrian troops in 1878 and its subsequent 20th and 25th anniversaries. In the short story of Nikola Šumonja Pod gvozdenim krstom. Pripovijetka iz prošlih dana (Under the Iron Cross. A Short Story from Past Days), the narrator depicts the collective suffering of law-abiding Bosnian Serbs during the military occupation of Bosnia by the Dual Monarchy. After the publication of the first episode of the story in Bosanska vila (The Bosnian Fairy) in 1886, the Austrian censor forbade its further publication, but a short time later it was resumed nevertheless in Javor (The Maple Tree) in Novi Sad, which at that time was also a part of Austria-Hungary.

This phenomenon, namely the unevenly strong censorship in different parts of the Monarchy and the sometimes unexpected “possibilities” it entailed for writers and publicists, was not typical for Bosnia only, but seems to have been characteristic of the Dual Monarchy as a whole, and was due to its political structure. The lack of centralism, inherent to Austro-Hungarian Dualism, thus opened a lot of opportunities to its citizens. Very important indeed for understanding the Bosnian “periphery” of those days is to acknowledge the role of other South-Slav “centers” both inside and outside of the Dual Monarchy: Zagreb, Novi Sad and Belgrade.

A second illustration – although not from Bosnia – is the case of Rijeka/Fiume. Here, Croatian writers and politicians could more easily publish nationalist polemic literature that had been forbidden in Croatia. It seems that even Budapest fulfilled this function for anti-Habsburg Croat intellectuals.

Even after the rule of Kállay preventive censorship continued to exist. An example taken from a (merely pro-regime) Serbian periodical is the introductory text Kroz četvrt stoljeća Okupacije (Through 25 Years of Occupation), in the first number of the magazine Dan (Day). The author explains in a footnote that “he had hastily to revise this text, to avoid the first issue of Dan not getting published on time because of this article, because the censor erased two entire pages.” Actually, the author of the article (Savo Miladinović, co-editor of the magazine), his Serbian nationalist views notwithstanding, turns out to be overtly regime-inclined, and there are only a few passages in the text that are indicative of his critical attitude towards certain economic aspects of the Austro-Hungarian regime (in line with the social and political profile of the author): “Foreigners got concessions instead of us natives, several business consortia were founded, which exploited the land and forests, and edged us from our businesses and revenues.” In 1906, when writing about the bloody crushing of the general strike in Sarajevo and Zenica, the editors are confronted with severe censorship, so they leave several rows blank. They explain the chaotic layout of the paper and the many blank sections in their newspaper as follows: “The censorship erased 491 rows in this issue, so we had to put advertisements on the empty pages, because we are not allowed to leave pages blank.”

Croat newspapers of that time were in the same situation, e.g. the Hrvatski dnevnik (Croat Daily) where we find small paragraphs in the middle of a page, entitled Raboš preventivne cenzure (The Tally of Preventive Censorship), explaining to its readers exactly how many lines the censor wiped away, and in which texts. Sometimes, those paragraphs are even ironic about the role of the censor, as in the next example, taken from the Croatian Daily of January 1906: “In the number of yesterday, the devoted pen of the censor took the most striking passages from different articles. Especially the introduction was butchered, as the basic thoughts, the reason why the article was confiscated, were extracted from it. All in all, yesterday 56 lines were sacrificed.” Or, the editors even started mocking the censor: “Yesterday, we got off easily – It seems that the southern wind made the ice around the heart of the censor melt, because we had only 10 lines confiscated. This is anyway the ‘existential minimum’, which every fair man will allow him eagerly.” Irony in newspaper texts and literary works thus often served as a form of resistance to censorship, as well as to Austro-Hungarian colonialism in general, as illustrate the satirical columns by Savo Skarić Zembilj in the
newspaper Srpska riječ (The Serbian Word) and Kočić’s famous satire Jazavac pred Sudom (The Badger in the Court), to which I will turn later.

In 1914, a significant number of editors of well-known papers and magazines signed a petition demanding freedom of press, published in the Serbian oriented newspaper Narod (The People). In sharp tone, they “raise[d] their voice against the frequent harassing of the independent press by the governmental practice of law.” They emphasized that

the frequent confiscations, which originate from the law on the press and the old-fashioned material penal law, the high fines, and the unprecedentedly strong sentences that are pronounced […] make the existence of an independent press impossible and prevent it from its elevated role. Typographical guilt is passed judgment on as in the absolutist period, any criticism of the system or foreign politics is regarded to be a crime, which is punishable with 4-5 months of severe prison. […] In accordance to the degree of freedom of press one can judge freedom in general in a country, and expulsion of the independent press means crushing the freedom of thought by force.52

The editors turned with this petition to “all the liberal representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, demanding them to reveal this protest in the Sabor and to start working energetically in order to enforce a new, liberal law. Until then, this reactionary law should be implemented more liberally.”53

After these examples of censorship taken from the daily press, and apart from the above-mentioned less-known story of Nikola Šumonja, I now turn to some canonized examples from the literature from Bosnia which deals with the changing everyday life caused by the Austro-Hungarian occupation. Aleksa Šantić’s patriotic song Ostatje ovde (Stay Here, 1896) was published on the front page of the first issue of the Serbian literary magazine Zora (Dawn) in Mostar. It is a pathetic-rhetorical appeal to the Herzegovinian Muslims not to leave their homeland, as thousands of them had already done. The first wave of emigration happened immediately after the occupation because Muslims did not want to live under an infidel administration (kaurin/daurin indicating non-moslem); a second one occurred after the 1882 Conscription Law (Wehrgesetz) for Bosnia and Herzegovina was declared, for many Muslims were unwilling to serve in the army of an infidel tsar.54 In the song, the lyric subject clearly calls onto them to stay, appealing to the love for their homeland: “Stay here! […] The sun of a foreign sky / Won’t warm you as it does here, / Bitter are the bites of bread there, / where no one of yours is, where you do not have a brother.”55 The homeland is compared to a mother: „Who would look for a mother, better than his own? / And your mother is this land here.”56 The reader’s attention is turned to the stony landscape that is covered by “the graves of your forefathers,” which “knew how to defend it [the land],” thus recalling the heroic past of the Herzegovinian Muslims: “Cast a glance at these rocks and fields / Everywhere are the graves of your ancestors. // They were giants to this country, / Shining examples that knew how to defend it, // Stay in this land you too, // And give the spring of your blood for it.”57 The romantic tone of the song made it widely popular.

Before repeating the first strophe, Šantić stresses that blood-ties connect the inhabitants with their land: “Everything ties you to these rocks: / Name and language, brotherhood and holy blood.”58 They share the homeland that should be defended, the (Serbian) blood and name (on -ič) with the poetic subject that speaks from the song. The Serbian national ideology, also present in Zora, considered the Muslims to be “brothers of the same blood,”59 which by historical chance changed faith, but allegedly never changed ethnos, name or language, which remained Serbian. At first glance this is a patriotic song, yet the historical context (1896) urges us to recognize that it had an unmistakably anti-Austrian message for its readers. Seen in the light of the political and cultural circumstances of the moment – it appeared in the era of the movement of the Serbs (1893–1903) and the Muslims (1899–1909) for religious and educational autonomy, which both began in Mostar60 –, the song could allude that Serbs and Muslims as brothers share the same fate, both being forced to live under a foreign administration, against which they should defend their common homeland together. Notwithstanding the strong Austro-Hungarian censorship and its standing precondition not to publish texts of political content in literary reviews, Šantić’s song was published by the editors of Zora nonetheless.

In Svetozar Ćorović’s short story Ibrahimbegov ćošak (Ibrahim-bey’s Balcony, 1903)61 the narrator tells the story of an impoverished Muslim bey who cannot adapt to the modern capitalist institutions that made their entrance into Bosnia-Herzegovina with the arrival of
Austro-Hungarian rule. The old bey Ibrahim, descendant of a wealthy feudal Muslim family, lives very poorly as lamplighter and čaršija-
cleaner. He still owns the house of his father, with its characteristic čošak (a covert balcony or gallery, typical of Ottoman architecture in Herzegovina) overlooking the marketplace. This balcony, with its almost sacral value, is the only thing that ties him to the glorious past of his family: The home is his patrimony (babo-vina), the only thing that distinguishes him from the other poor people. The engineer working at the city council, (to Ibrahim-bey the embodiment of Austro-Hungarian power) pressures him to sell it, because it is “ugly” and “disturbing.” As Ibrahim-bey does not want to sell it (“They’ll tell him that he sold his patrimony for a handful of coins to the Germans”), the engineer expropriates the property, only to tear down the home. Ibrahim-bey is forced to assist in demolishing his own house and dies during the works: in his absentmindedness he fails to notice the balcony falling down on him. The story is indicative of the new social hier-
archies brought by Austrian-Hungarian rule. Ibrahim-bey is not only totally impoverished, but also deprived of social respect: Grgo, once a simple stableboy in his father’s household, is now working for the city and commanding Ibrahim in a very rude way. The emergence of modernity which, with its stress on rationality and functionality, introduces a new set of totally different values, is portrayed by the narrator of the story in a negative light.

Probably one of the strongest critics of Austro-Hungarian rule among the Serbian writers in Bosnia, Petar Kočić, was kept under surveillance by the foreign administration. His play Jazavac pred sudom (The Badger in the Court, 1904) is a sharp satire on the Austro-Hun-
garian bureaucracy. The hero of the play is the Bosnian peasant David Štrbac, who arrives at the local court with a badger he has caught in his corn field. He wants the badger to be tried according to the very accurate Austrian laws. On the question of the judge, why did he bring the badger in court, and why he just did not kill it immediately after having caught it in the field, David answers:

I know the law, and I do not want out of it. I do not want out of it, even if you would kill me! [...] Some years ago, when I was not yet skilled in your laws, I killed a badger in that same field. It was probably the brother of this one. The emperor’s forster seized me and made me pay a fine of five forints. Having put the money in his pocket, he severely threatened me: ‘You may not do this anymore, because to-
day’s law protects even a badger.’ So, when law is protecting it, let law judge it when it causes damaged!

While the court clerk and the judge attempt to explain to him that the imperial laws can’t be implemented on badgers, David takes the occasion to tell them overtly what he thinks about the Goliath of Austro-Hungarian rule in Bosnia. He cynically praises the occupier’s law system which has been so benevolent to him and his family that it has freed him from a lot of problems: when his son got conscripted into military service, where he soon died, the imperial army sent him three forints as compensation. David refused the money, and he and his family started crying from happiness, as “the empire freed them from the bad guy.” Later, the tax collectors rid him of his cow, goats and pig, which were, according to David, always in the mood for mischief and therefore needlessly complicated David’s life, so he again started expressing „gratitude” to the Empire for its generous help, and concludes:

I tell you that this glorious court has freed us, the peasants, of a lot of things. No more do the thick bulls roar from their shadowed resting places, nor do they butt our children; no longer do large herds of oxen rub our fences and crops like they used to do in the old foolish Turkish times. Today you won’t see the people having such fattened and bull-like cattle anymore. The cattle that the glorious court left us is quiet, tame and reasonable; it is true, a bit thin and weak, but we, stupid Bosni-
ans, do not really deserve any better!

Kočić stresses not only David’s originality and cleverness, but also his highly-developed Ser-
bian national awareness. The intensity of the patriotism David expresses was probably not really uttered by peasants at the time, yet his character connects widespread social discontent with nationalist grievances. Answering the question of the judge if the peasants are satisfied David replies:

Oh, we are satisfied! Something is well weighing us down from all sides; because of a kind of strong happiness, we’re deadened so we can hardly breathe. [...] But it is very hard for me that chiefs tell me I am not a Serb. Look at me, Sir, take a good look; I weighed myself on two imperial scales, on a Turkish one and on that of this
Emperor of yours, and both said not an ounce more or less than twenty-five okas! But when the Serbian spirit in me starts to grow and expand, there is no imperial scale in this world that could truly tell my weight.

The drama ends with the judge calling a doctor, who, after examining the peasant, while speaking a mix of German and Serbo-Croat, and measuring David’s skull, declares him insane.

The Muslim writers are more complex (or: heterogeneous), regarding their reception of the Austro-Hungarian occupation. This is due to the fact that the Muslim community was politically highly disoriented and remained so even a long time after the Austrian occupation of Bosnia. This political disorientation could be one of the reasons why national awareness among Muslim writers and intellectuals was more diffuse than among the catholic or orthodox populations at the time: they were shifting between Serb, Croat or Bosniak national determination at times opting for a (pan)islamic cultural identity.

A telling example for this shifting national affiliation can be traced in the work of the poet Musa Čizim Čatić, generally considered to be the first modernist Bosniak poet. In his first patriotic poems, which he sent to the Bosnian-Serbian literary journal Bosanska Vila after his studies in Istanbul, he claims to be a Serb: “I am a Serb, a Serbian child, / Clear is my Serbian conscience; / The glory of my forefathers / Shines like a burning sun.” In the same poem, he mentions Serbian half-mythological and half-historical heroes together with Muslim ones: he praises (Kraljević) Marko, Miloš (Obilić) and Derzelez Alija. A few years later, he abandons this Serbian determination and writes poems, devoted either to Islam or patriotic verses about his Bošnjaštvo (Bosnianness). Later, during the Balkan wars (1912/13), he writes the poem Osmanliji (To the Ottoman), a poem consisting of five sonnets in which he calls upon the Ottoman Empire to wake up and resist the four-headed demonic beast at its frontiers that wants to crush the glorious past of the Empire of the Crescent. In the same period, explicit panislamic sympathies can be observed in the articles he wrote as the editor-in-chief of the Mostar literary review Biser (The Pearl).

As for the way the occupation was reflected in the Muslim/Bosniak contemporary literature one can look at the example of Edhem Mulabdić’s Zeleno busenje (The Green Lawn), first published in Zagreb in 1898. This text is, together with Osman-Aziz’s Bez nade (Without Hope, 1895), one of the first Bosniak novels ever to be published and as such is considered by Bosniak literary critics to be one of the cornerstones of the Muslim literary canon in those days. It has elements of traditional narrative forms as well as of the didactic-realistic historical novel, which by its stress on mimesis tends to confirm the moralistic and political views of the author. The plot of the novel starts at the beginning of the occupation, with Austrian troops having crossed the river Sava and approaching Maglaj, a small town in central Bosnia. Parallel to this, the narrator tells the story of a Muslim family in Maglaj. Depicting the fates of the three sons and the widow of Omer-effendi, Mulabdić evokes the different views of the Muslim population in Bosnia of the Austrian occupation. Mehmed, the oldest son, works as a clerk in the town’s court and acts in accordance with the orders of the sultan not to resist the Austrian troops. The second son, Ahmet, leaves his beloved Ajiša to join a small, disordered battalion of volunteers which will fight the Austrians. Ultimately, he gets killed in one of the battles near Maglaj. The youngest one, Alija, leaves with the female members of the family for the village Trnine. In fact, many (ethnic and social) stereotypes as depicted in Mulabdić’s novel correspond with the political views of the class of rich Muslim landowners at the time: the battalion of volunteers is an unorganized pack of rogues, in the village of Trnine there are always some silly Vlachs ready to cheat an honest Muslim out of his property by putting his house at fire; there is one good Christian kmet, Lazar, who, the change of government notwithstanding, continues to bring the third to his bey; finally, the Austrian soldiers are all cultivated people with fine manners (with one shameful exception of Montenegrin origin).

When compared to the program of the nationalist Muslim newspaper Bošnjak (Bosniak), of which Mulabdić was the editor between 1892 and 1894, Mulabdić’s novel outlines the ideological point of view of the author and the upper class of Moslem beys on the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia: accepting the new system was by far the best option for the Moslem population. From the position of the all-knowing narrator and through the fates of the characters depicted, Mulabdić de facto promotes the idea that the Bosnian Muslims should accept the occupation and the new system it introduces. In other words, as the title
of the novel metaphorically suggests, this new system will replace and cover the old one like a green lawn.

The Croat literature in Bosnia has its roots in the old Franciscan literary tradition of chronicle writing. This tradition allows us to observe the complex relations of the Franciscans with the Ottomans as well as with the Catholic West, a position in-between that, in fact, fore-shadows their complex relationship with the Austrians and the policy of aggressive catholic proselytism as preached by archbishop Stadler. As Ivan Lovrenović justly observed, most of the Franciscans awaited the occupation with optimistic feelings, but were quickly disappointed when Austria-Hungary did not resolve the agrarian question, one of the most crucial social and economic problems in Bosnia. At the time of the Austrian occupation, the best educated Croat intellectuals were without any doubt the Franciscan monks who had great influence on the local population, not limited to the Catholics. At this juncture a misunderstanding of the Franciscans’ appreciation of the Austrian rule in Bosnia should be pointed out. Many literary historians (mainly nationalist ones) conceive the Franciscans as one solid block that acted in favor of the Dual Monarchy. However, not all of them believed the occupation by Austria-Hungary to be the best solution for Bosnia: in the period of national awakening in the South Slav lands, some of them cherished Bosnian autonomist ideas. To understand this, we should go back to the ideas of Father (fra) Ivan Frano Jukić (1818–1857). Though influenced by the Illyric movement, the national identity he promotes is a Bosnian one, which includes all the confessions in Bosnia. He promoted his views through the literary review he edited under the title Bosanski prijatelj (The Bosnian Friend). Father Grgo Martić (1822–1905), one of the most outstanding Franciscans at the time of the occupation, and a convinced Illyrian with overtly Serbian sympathies in his youth, turned to a political Croatiannes only in the 1860s, which indicates why he eventually favored the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia. At the end of his life he withdrew to the monastery of Kreševo and devoted himself to his literary activities. It is at this time that he wrote a poem in favor of general Filipović. The political and historical views of Father Antun Knežević (1834–1889) reveal him to be the real heir of Jukić more than Martić has been. His understanding of national identity as a kind of political Bosnianness (bošnjaštvo) clearly differed from Kállay’s national project as well as from the ethnic nationalism of the Moslem upper class promoted by the newspaper Bošnjak. In a letter to a friend in 1885, he wrote: “we do not live in paradise, and except for our personal liberty, there’s no difference between this slavery and the slavery under the Turkish administration. Our people have been brought to the lowest degree of poverty, due to the constant expulsions and high taxes [...].” All these different views can be found in the Franciscan journals of that time.

Concluding remarks

Used critically and with awareness of the cultural setting and the historical background of the Balkans as different from ‘real’ (post-)colonial societies and the Dual Monarchy as different from ‘real’ colonizing empires, post-colonial studies could open new perspectives in describing Austrian-Bosnian contacts. Taking into consideration the following reservations, it seems justified to use a modified or quasi post-colonial approach to analyzing the Austrian-Bosnian relations in the period from 1878 to 1918:

- Although significant cultural differences between the post-Ottoman Bosnia and the Dual Habsburg Monarchy definitely existed, they did not cause the same gap that is normally created in ‘real’ colonial encounters (in Africa, Asia, America or Australia) between the colonizing and the colonized culture. Describing European-Balkan or Austrian-Bosnian cultural relations from a post-colonial perspective involves the danger of stigmatizing those regions and thereby putting them in the context of an even bigger economic and cultural periphery than it was really the case under Austro-Hungarian rule – or today – and of reducing the heterogeneous cultural and literary life that existed between 1878 and 1918. These power-relations were structured much less asymmetrically than in ‘real’ colonies. The structure of the Dual Habsburg Monarchy, with its lack of centralism, opened a manifold of opportunities for the citizens and could therefore also question the (often self-understood) “universality” of cultural repercussions, generated by any imperial system, as some post-colonial theorists tend to suggest.
In the given context, “center” and “periphery” are understood rather as imaginary geographies and used in a dynamic way. Thus, the Bosnian ‘periphery’ did not appear to be a monolithic structure, but was characterized by its own, internal dynamics, different centers (Sarajevo, Mostar) and rivalries between competing Serbian, Croatian and Muslim/Bosniak national projects and their respective dominant discourses. Very important, too, for the understanding of the Bosnian ‘periphery’ of those days is to acknowledge the role of other, non-Austrian and non-Bosnian, but broader South-Slav “centers” such as Zagreb, Belgrade and Novi Sad.

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Notes


5 Austria-Hungary in a very ambiguous way influenced the development of literature and culture in general in Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g. on the one hand hindered local initiatives, through censorship and several bureaucratic measures, but on the other hand created also a lot of opportunities by sponsoring certain cultural projects). The term “internal colonialism” (Michael Hechter) sounds very attractive in this context, esp. because it can be applied on less overtly colonial states as well, e.g. the position of the Baltic or Central Asian States in the Soviet Union, the position of Ireland in the former British empire, in totalitarian regimes the abuse of culture by the state apparatus (Stalin’s and Hitler’s “colonization” of literature, music or film for propaganda-purposes). However, our aim here is not to define whether the rule of Austria-Hungary was colonial, but to look at the effect of these historical conditions and to try to describe them adequately. Cf. Hechter, Michael: Internal Colonialism. The Celtic fringe in British National Development 1536–1966. Berkeley: California UP 1975. Ruthner, Clemens: Central Europe Goes Post-colonial. New Approaches to the Habsburg Empire. In: Cultural Studies 16/6 (2002), pp. 877-893.

7 Cf. the titles mentioned in footnote 4. However, Haselsteiner indicates that not all Austrian newspapers did support the official discourse of the court and the military concerning the necessity of the occupation of Bosnia. He writes that some newspapers even criticized the official over-stressing of the so-called civilizing mission that the Dual Monarchy had to fulfill in these provinces. Cf. Haselsteiner, Horst: Öffentliche Meinung oder Meinungspluralität? Zum Widerhall der Okkupation in der deutschsprachige Presse der Donaunomarche. In: Haselsteiner, H.: Bosnien-Herzegowina. Orientkrisen und Südöstliche Frage. Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlaü 1996, pp. 49-73.

8 Cf. Gandhi, Leela: Postcolonial Theory. A Critical Introduction. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP 1998, pp. 171-172: "Postcolonialism semantically delivers the idea of a world historicized through the single category of colonialism. [...] the organisation of the immediate past under the rubric of colonialism tends to reduce the contingent [...] randomly diversity of cultural encounters and non-encounters within that past into a tied relationship of coercion and retaliation. [...] Seen as such, ‘colonialism’ supplies a category through which history becomes coherent, and therefore knowable, as a movement between imperial subordination and anti-colonial resistance."


13 I will use the adjective Bosnian as a regional indicator, to refer to the inhabitants, literature or culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole, and Bosniak as a national indicator, to refer to (the literature and culture of) the ethnic group that prior to the 1990s was called Bosnian Muslims.


15 Ibid.


20 Buturović, Denana: Narodne pjesme Bolničaka u Bosni i Hercegovini. Sarabao Kosta Hörmann 1888–1889. Izbor i predgovor Denana Buturović. [Folk Songs of the Bosnians in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Collected by Kosta Hörmann. Selected and introduced by Denana Buturović.] Sarajevo: Svjetlost 2001, p. ix: "U ovom izdanju bolničaške usmene pjesme pruži put su nazvane vlastitim imenom: Narodne pjesme Bolničaka u Bosni i Hercegovini." [In this edition, the Bosnian oral songs are for the first time called by their proper name: Folk songs of the Bosnians of Bosnia and Herzegovina.]

21 Or in fact even since the early 1970s, parallel with the public debate about the official recognition of the Bosnian Muslims as a separate nation, next to Serbs and Croats. This nationalist discourse does not at all differ from Croat or Serbian nationalist rhetoric that at this time, and especially during the 1990s used to be at its revival as well.

22 One of the most well-known and exemplary works of this kind of canonization of Bosnian history is Imamović, Mustafa: Historija Bolničaka. [The History of the Bosniaks]. Sarajevo: Bolnička kulturna zajednica Preponod 1997, 1998.

23 Buturović 2001, p. x: "Međutim, Hörmann je znao da su epske pjesme koje je on godinama prikupljao i proučavao, rasprostranjena i specifična osobenost određenog etnosa, da je njihov izvor u narod kome pripadaju." [But, Hörmann knew that the epic songs which he had been collecting and studying for years were were the wide-spread and specific particularity of a well-defined ethnos, that their source is in the nation they belong to.]


26 The song refers to battles in Transylvania in 1658–1661.
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27. Bookkeeping department where the defter (Ottoman land and tax registers) were kept. The wish for an own defter-
hana indicates the demand for legal certainty: the accounts department would register their possessions and made
them secure.

brez hesabah, / jej car, care, njeznam za vezinstva, / a dosta sam zadobio blaga, / imam čime u Bosnu se vratil, / imam za
što b'jele dvore zgradit, / a i moi ostali Bokičac; / nego hoco, care, od Stambola, / da ti dadas bosanskim spahijam, / 
što imaju zemlju in timar, / da na zemlju in tapju daju, / i da im se digne tefterhana / iz Stambola do Travnika b'jela.
/ I tvojim, care, jelikűli, / po gradovi mladim kapetanim, / da st' ulefa debla dona, [...]/ Preskočiše Drinu vodu hladnu.
/ Kod vidí Derèzé Alija – / Ker bijaše u Alje adet, / Gde mu skaoču hrti tankoviti, / Tu mu more dorat preskoči – / Pa izmače debela dona, [...]/ Preskoči mu
Drinu vodu hladnu, [...].”


30. Cf. the very enthusiastic reception of the songs among the Muslim population: ibid., I, p. 102f.


32. Cf. the very enthusiastic reception of the songs among the Muslim population: ibid., I, p. 102f.


35. For archival materials on the founding of the review, cf. Besarović 1968, pp. 74–133.


37. Ibid., p. 92: “Für diesen meinen Entschluss war aber auch die Erwägung massgebend, dass die Herausgabe einer
zweiten Zeitschrift sich auch aus Gründen politischer Natur empfehle, weil bekanntermassen die hier in
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50 Raboš preventivne censure. In: Hrvatski Dnevnik 8, 11.01.1906, p. 5: “Jučer smo prošli vrlo jeftino-čini se, da je ju-

govina otopila i oko srca cenzovala, jer nam je zaplijenio samo 10 redaka. To je svakako ‘existenc-minimum’ kog će
mu svaki pravedan čenjek rado dozvoliti.”


52 For a Croat or Serb national identity.

53 Later, during the 1890s, emigration continued because of the bad economic situation in Herzegovina, or because of

54 later the newspapers [i.e., ‘Vesnik’, ‘Narod’, ‘Narodni list’] were forbidden for a while, and its editor Risto Radulović even imprisoned for his

55 overtly criticizing Austro-Hungarian rule.

56 Danas ne meraš viđeti u svijetu žirovne i bakovite sermije. Što nam je slavni sud ostavio, to je mirno, čudesno, / 

57 vrelo krvi vaše.

58 “…alos to više čini, jeri jasao danalni zakon brani.” E, kad ga brani, nek mu i sudi kad štetu počini!” In: Kočić, P.: Sabrana djela [Coll. Works]. Banja Luka, Sarajevo:


60 In: Zora 1/1 (1896), p. 1 (the song is published in all the collected or chosen works of Šantić, and even today taught

61 by Stijn Vervaet (Ghent)


75 The name Vlach is in the novel is used pejoratively to indicate the orthodox/Serbian population of Bosnia.

76 The figure of Lazar corresponds to the positive Christian stereotype, which enables the Muslim upper class to create a positive auto-stereotype of their own class, depicting the muslim landowner as being beloved by his christian kmets.

77 The newspaper Bošnjak can be regarded as an example of cultural self-colonization, as its editors to a great extent appropriated the ideological postulates of the occupier in relation to the forthcoming development of a Bosnian nation. Similar to Kállays project of multi-confessional Bosnian nationalism, the editors of Bošnjak stressed the leading role of the Bosnian Muslims for the formation of the Bosnian nation. They did not only deny the Serbian and Croatian claims on Bosnia, but stressed the role of the Islam for this project and even went as far as denying the existence of a Serbian and Croatian nation in Bosnia, which caused hot discussions in the press in those days. As a matter of fact, the nationalism of Bošnjak was analogical to that of its Serbian and Croatian partner’s counterparts – one could say that Bošnjak turned their thesis (of the non-existing of a separate Bosniak nation) upside down.


79 Cf. e.g. Maksimović, Vojošlav: Viđenja Bosne [Views of Bosnia]. Ploče: Medurepublička zajednica 1970.


82 Uz Bosnu Filipović [Filipović Upstream the River Bosna], originally published by Milena Mrazović in 1893.