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THE HABSBURG LEGACY FROM A POSTCOLONIAL AND POSTIMPERIAL PERSPECTIVE

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In the discourse on the Habsburg Monarchy, two opposing attitudes prevail. Depending on one's perspective, which can be nationally exclusive or nostalgic, the Monarchy is perceived either as a “peoples' dungeon” (*Völkerkerker*) or “unity in multiplicity” (*Einheit in der Vielheit*). A group of researchers has recently invested much effort to overcome this discursive gap, by applying a theoretical paradigm called the *Habsburg Postcolonial*. This theoretical approach relies on Anglo-Saxon postcolonial studies and recent research into Central European cultural phenomena, and analyzes opposing cultural forces in the Danube Monarchy (a multinational state formation of questionable colonial importance), by focusing on: the intertwining of language, culture and politics; images of the self and others; dynamics between the center and periphery; and particularism and universalism. Unlike overseas colonialism, dichotomies such as that of center and periphery do not appear in pure forms in complex empires such as the Habsburg Monarchy, so there is a strong tendency among scholars to use postimperial theories when researching this area. This article is concluded with a short case study that shows how the same historic material—a story about medieval Hungarian nobleman Bánk—was transposed in a variety of (supra)national contexts in the turbulent nineteenth century.

Key words: Habsburg Postcolonial, Central European Studies, Empire Studies, Ban Bánk (József Katona, Franz Grillparzer, Franjo Marković)

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Unlike maritime-oriented countries in Western and Southern Europe such as England, France and Portugal, or its neighbors Germany and Italy, the Habsburg Monarchy never possessed overseas colonies.¹ For this reason, it cannot be considered a colonial power in the strictest sense

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of the word. Situated in the heart of Europe, this multinational empire never succeeded in developing political maritime domination, which early theorists of geopolitics consider constitutive to the emergence of early modern world powers (see Schmitt 1993). Nevertheless, due to its inner cultural, political and economic debates and conflicts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Habsburg Monarchy has often been associated with colonialism. Its colonial importance has generally been interpreted in the context of a continental form of rule and power—a certain form of European “inner colonialism”. Evidence supporting the claim about Habsburg colonialism has usually been sought by citing the dominant position of Austrian Germans as the first center of power and the Hungarian political and economic elite as the second, whereas the position of minorities especially Slavs, was often portrayed as subordinated and hence “colonized”.

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When ethnically homogenous nation states began to form in the nineteenth century, the Habsburg Monarchy as an ethnically, denominationally and culturally complex state had to confront numerous contradictions. One of the most obvious of these was the discrepancy between the official attitude that the Monarchy represented “unity in multiplicity” (*Einheit in der Vielheit*), and the actual ethnic and cultural heterogeneity and disintegrative tendencies it was causing. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century and the collapse of centralizing reforms—with which Joseph II tried to establish a stronger connection between different constituents—that it finally became clear that cultural and, above all, linguistic unity of this multinational empire would never be achieved. An alternative to this development was unimaginable, primarily because the Habsburg Empire was not formed by a large, culturally dominant center that annexed smaller political entities. To the contrary: the joint state was formed in the early modern period, when independent political entities of a similar size (such as the Czech and Hungarian kingdoms) were annexed to the German-Austrian core of Habsburg rule. In the process of their integration into the Monarchy, entities kept many of the particularities of their original constitutions. For instance, territories annexed later, i.e. after the disintegration of Poland and the fall of the Venetian Republic at the end of the eighteenth century, were dealt with in a similar way.

Despite the presence of (pseudo-)colonial features from the end of the 1870s onward—which is at first glance ascribed to the Danube

Monarchy’s political and economic hegemony, especially in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina—researchers argue that, taking into account the phenomenon of colonial rule in countries overseas, it would be more appropriate to speak of the Habsburg Empire’s cultural colonialism. This is a phenomenon traditionally observed in connection with its opposite—nationalism within subordinated nations. In the process of modern nation building, “one dominant ‘colonizing discourse’ was substituted by multiply intertwined regional ‘microcolonialisms’”, which in turn caused “normative cultural hegemony to fragment into several carriers” (Stachel 2003: 261). This condition was reflected in the formation of a dichotomy between the center and the periphery, a phenomenon considered typical of colonization processes.

Consequently, constellations arising in such conditions were inherently different. Prior to the Austrian-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Hungarian elite accused Vienna of “colonization,” perceiving it as the political center of foreign rule against which they should fight. However, the view of “colonization” was a lot more complex in Croatia, a country subject to the Crown of St. Stephen. On the one hand, Buda-Pest was considered a center of external authority and often perceived as “colonial”. On the other, Vienna was also considered a center of external domination, albeit in a different way. Comparable differences can be observed in a range of other ethnic and/or confessional groups in certain Habsburg countries—e.g. in Bohemia and Moravia between Czechs and Germans; in Dalmatia between Croats, Serbs and Italians; and in Galicia between Poles, Ukrainians (Ruthenians) and Jews, etc.

Narratives that portrayed the Danube Monarchy as a “peoples’ dungeon”, i.e. a state formation in which all nations except the hegemonic ones were disempowered and enslaved, and those that depicted it as a harmonic union of diverse ethnic groups and religions (the backbone of the nostalgic “Habsburg myth”) are equally inadequate when analyzing such complex relations. Significantly more appropriate is one of the fundamental starting positions of cultural studies, “according to which culture as a symbolic order, i.e. as a supersystem of narratives, is a place of expressing power and authority; a place where this power is inscribed, but simultaneously also called into question” (Ruthner 2002: 99). Even though these contradictory portrayals of the Monarchy constitute valuable research topics, the analysis of “contradicting cultural forces” should rely neither on nostalgia for the k.u.k. Empire, nor on nationally exclusive interpretations. On the contrary, the “intertwining of language, culture and politics, disguised hierarchy of

individual 'peoples', i.e. 'nationalities', images of the self and others in that cultural space, [and] dynamics of particularism and universalism" (Müller-Funk 2002b: 18) are crucial to analysis of the Habsburg Monarchy.

Such approaches to studying the Habsburg Monarchy in specific, and to Central and Eastern Europe in general, were initiated in the 1980s and strongly influenced by the so-called *cultural turn*. Numerous writers and intellectuals on both sides of the Iron Curtain began simultaneously proposing the concept of a new Central European space, unrestrained by national borders. The first strong impulse to prompt this new interest in Central European topics came two decades earlier from Italian scholar Claudio Magris, whose study *Il mito absburgico nella letteratura austriaca* (*The Habsburg Myth in Austrian Literature*), although written in 1963 (and translated into German in 1966), remains influential to this day. Because of Magris' study, research began to focus on the Danube Monarchy, i.e. *Mittleuropa* and their cultural legacy in the context of a retrospective, positively connoted utopia, in opposition to the nationalistic and dogmatic communist political discourses dominant in Central European countries after the disintegration of the Monarchy. It should be mentioned, however, that later, as an uncritical fascination with Central Europe began to spread, Magris distanced himself from nostalgic connotations, and designated his concept of the "Habsburg myth" as purely critical and analytical.

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In the 1980s, powerful incentives for research into the Habsburg Monarchy and other Central European topics were provided by a scholarly interest in the crisis of culture and society in *fin de siècle* Vienna, primarily due to its contradictions between the intellectual and artistic creativity of *Wiener Moderne* and its "anti-modern" surroundings: an anti-Semitic and nationalist political culture (Schorske 1979; Žmegač 1981; Le Rider 1990; Haller 1996). What can be observed in these and other recent German-language (especially Austrian) studies on the Central European modern period (and Central European topics in general) is a general disinclination toward the notion of *Mittleuropa*, and the conscious persistence of the notion of *Zentraleuropa* (Konrad 1996: 29). As French scholar Jacques Le Rider points out, the notion of *Mittleuropa* is historically and politically contaminated. This occurs partly through the view that it is an exclusively German zone of influence, or a kind of German continental imperialism, as German national-liberal politician Friedrich Naumann argues at the beginning of the twentieth century in his book *Mittleuropa* (1915). Additionally, a slightly different name gives newer research the opportunity to keep its distance, both from the wave of Middle European nostalgia, which started in the 1980s

with the formulation of the “Habsburg myth” (a phenomenon perceptible in various spheres of culture and society in Austria, and elsewhere), and from its perceptible commercialization and, to a certain extent, political instrumentalization.

Inextricably linked to the paradigm shift in the humanities, the changed perspective on the Central European space not only paved the way for new aspects of research, but also undoubtedly encouraged new methodological and theoretical approaches. What came to the fore was the question of collective and individual identity formation, whereby special attention was paid to the discursive production of social realities: i.e. to constructivism as their main feature. The long-term domination of essentialist approaches to various aspects of Central European research hence finally proved obsolete. Newer theoretical disciplines and models applied in this context include, among others, cultural anthropology, comparative imagology, research of nationalisms, theories of cultural memory, and gender studies. Also frequently mentioned in this context are *postcolonial studies*, a theoretical approach originating in Anglo-Saxon research, which focus primarily on the British Empire and the cultural legacy of its colonial policies.

The discussion on the application of postcolonial theory in the field of Central European studies intensified around the year 2000. The Internet platform *Kakanien Revisited* (led by Wolfgang Müller-Funk and Clemens Ruthner) and the Institute for Cultural Studies and Theater History (IKT) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (led by Moritz Csáky and Johannes Feichtinger) are independent, informally connected groups of Austrian researchers who have—with the support of numerous colleagues from Germany and other countries of the former Monarchy—formulated scientific hypotheses on a postcolonial approach to research on the Habsburg Monarchy, questioning its limits and possibilities, and testing them in a number of case studies. The results of these efforts—presented at various conferences and printed in several volumes (see Works Cited)—form the core of the *Habsburg Postcolonial* research paradigm, and provide guidelines for further research into Central European topics, from both postcolonial and cultural studies perspectives.

There was, however, strong opposition to the transposition of postcolonial analytical tools (which were originally developed to assess critically the cultural heritage of overseas colonial empires) onto the Danube Monarchy, i.e. Central Europe. This was considered potentially inappropriate to the study of a multiethnic empire without any colonies in the strict sense, because “not every regional subordination, i.e. dependence

caused the emergence of colonial-postcolonial hybrid identity" (Prutsch 2003: 40). Although general remarks were made about the necessity of a critical approach to some concepts of postcolonial theories, a more concrete concern was voiced regarding Edward Said's understanding of the relationship between the Orient and Occident, according to which cultural influence is only exerted in one direction: from the dominant center towards the colonized periphery. Researchers warned against the analogical transposition of this concept onto the more complex situation of the Habsburg Monarchy, in which "peripheral" peoples possessed their own, albeit modest, cultural infrastructure, the circumstances of which cannot be equated with the cultural colonialism faced by African and Asian peoples in the past. Furthermore, it was pointed out that a specific relation to the Anglo-Saxon context might jeopardize the peculiarities of the Habsburg and Central European space. It would therefore be wrong to perceive, for example, Slavic peoples in the Monarchy as merely "mute objects of colonization" (Simonek 2003: 130) in the binary opposition of the "colonial master" and "colonized subjects" characteristic of postcolonial theory.²

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Despite criticism of the glossary of postcolonial studies as being partly "unclear" (Prutsch 2003: 41) and warnings to use it carefully and precisely, most researchers insist that postcolonial theoretical concepts such as transnationalism and hybridity, relativizing the dichotomy between the center and periphery, the "third space" and *inbetweenness* are nonetheless apt to describe and analyze socio-cultural phenomena in multinational state formations of questionable colonial importance, such as the Habsburg Monarchy. In particular, it is argued that concepts from postcolonial studies could be used to recognize and describe the ambivalence inherent in such state formations, and determine which symbolic forms of cultural policy were used in the process of legitimizing economic and political interests.

² In the 1990s, prior to the intense discussion on subordination in the Habsburg Monarchy that broke out after 2000, a series of postcolonial approaches opposing binary concepts of power relations in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe was formulated. Building on earlier reflections on the problem of so-called "inner-European colonialism", scholars such as Larry Wolff (1994) and Maria Todorova (1997) not only anticipated the *Habsburg Postcolonial* paradigm but also inspired various other attempts to adapt concepts from Postcolonial Studies to intra-European conditions, from Ireland to Scandinavia and the Balkans (see Ingraio and Szabo 2007; Götsche and Dunker 2015). In this context it is also worth mentioning the work of scholars in the field of Croatian literature (such as Lada Čale Feldman, Marina Protrka Štimac, Suzana Coha, Natka Badurina, and Milka Car), who oppose the general, organicistic paradigm of their discipline, and have made extensive use of the theoretical framework of cultural studies and of postcolonial analytical tools.

It has also been noted that postcolonial theory as a "unique construct" cannot be of great use in the research of cultural and societal processes in the Habsburg Monarchy. However, if understood as a "tool box" of instruments utilized to achieve "new ways of observing and formulating questions" (Stachel 2003: 260), most researchers agree that this theoretical approach might prove fruitful.

The first attempt to systematize research results that apply the *Habsburg Postcolonial* paradigm was made in 2003. Clemens Ruthner noted three different ways in which the new paradigm could be utilized: (1) "colonialism as a finding (*Befund*)"; (2) "colonialism as a state of mind (*Befindlichkeit*)"; and (3) "colonialism as a metaphor". In the first case, Austria-Hungary is, due to its historical and societal circumstances, interpreted as "a pseudo-colonial power which attained foreign territories in an imperialist way in order to rule and economically exploit them (inner-continental colonialism)". In the second case, it is admitted "that the k.u.k.-Monarchy, although not a colonial power in the strict sense of the word, does exhibit specific symbolic forms of ethnically differentiated ways of governing, i.e. specific cultural worldviews similar to those of overseas colonial empires (imagology and identity politics)". In the third case, the Habsburg Monarchy is "rhetorically attributed to colonial powers, but with regard to discourses specific in certain historic periods (as a metaphor)" (Ruthner 2003: 111).

In the case of "colonialism as a finding", Austria-Hungary is historically and sociologically considered a colonial power primarily as regards Bosnia and Herzegovina, where, as numerous studies argue, military occupation (in 1878), administration, and cultural politics exhibit certain features of (semi)colonialism. As various researchers point out, contemporary studies often refer to the Habsburg policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina as an "inner colonial undertaking" and compensation for the empire's lack of overseas colonies. Furthermore, until its 1908 annexation and the subsequent foundation of a provincial parliament, Bosnia and Herzegovina and its population had no right to participate in the decision-making process, unlike other peoples (countries) in the Monarchy. There have been comparable studies on other Habsburg Crown lands, such as Galicia and Bukovina.

According to Ruthner, the third use of the concept is connected with Austro-Hungarian colonialism as a historic and sociological fact: colonialism as a "heuristic metaphor". This refers to the accusation that certain peoples and countries in the territories ruled by the Habsburgs were colonized by German-Austrian (and from 1867 onwards also Hungarian) centers of power. This accusation should be interpreted "in the context of

nationalistic discourses arising in the 19th century”, and was retrospectively resorted to by successor countries even after the fall of the Monarchy. Nowadays, expressing such views could “only mean the disavowal of the external scientific observer” (Ruthner 2003: 119). Excluding a few studies on individual cases of “colonialism as a metaphor”, such as that on the colonialist discussion in nineteenth-century Hungary by Amalia Kerekes, this potentially fruitful field of research still lacks substantial contributions.

Understandably, the majority of researchers focus on the *Habsburg Postcolonial* paradigm in the context of cultural studies: i.e. on the phenomenon of “colonialism as a state of mind”. In so doing, they do not, as Ruthner shows, focus on the question of “whether Austria-Hungary indeed was a colonial power *sensu stricto*”, but investigate “the *cultural* expression of the relationship between the center and subordinated, ethnically different peripheries, especially since culture assumes [...] a central role in formulating, mediating and interpreting such forms of governance” (Ruthner 2003: 116). Analyses of asymmetrical relationships are not exclusively limited to the cultural sphere, or to the symbolic hierarchy in the representation of certain groups, but underscore this asymmetry on other analytical levels: economic (inequality in trade and the development of the economic infrastructure), social (differences in social status, employment opportunities and social class) and politic (inequality in participation and representation). What is evident on all these levels is a striking “inequality of power, influence and meaning” (Hárs *et al.* 2006: 7). From a postcolonial perspective, we are able to observe the dynamics of this inequality in a new light.

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Among the more general themes covered by imagology and identity politics are images of the self and the other in the fictional and non-fictional media of Central European cultures, and the phenomenon of legitimizing political hegemony in the Danube Monarchy. They are based on the argument of cultural superiority over “backward” nations. Notions of civilization and cultural hierarchy that define the image of the self and the other are characteristic of identity formation among different peoples in the Habsburg Monarchy, and have proven to be especially fruitful research topics in literary and cultural studies. Numerous analyses show that emphasizing the difference between the self and other uncivilized or “backward” ethnicities was an important aim of integrating movements in “young” nations. Generally, linking the spheres of culture, difference and domination is the common denominator in all research contributions inspired by the *Habsburg Postcolonial* paradigm. Contributions from cultural and literary studies, which are undoubtedly the primary focus of the research,

are accompanied by numerous contributions from disciplines such as history, ethnology, cultural anthropology, political science, art history, and theatre and film studies.

Of all the cultural formats subjected to analysis, the most prevalent is literature in its broadest sense. Understandably, most attention has been devoted to the works of canonical authors such as Robert Musil, Joseph Roth, Miroslav Krleža and Dezső Kosztolányi. Other texts that have been analyzed are by authors such as Ivan Cankar or Tadeusz Rittner—who wrote in more than one language, and for whom cultural difference was of great importance—and by non-canonical authors. As regards the latter, many works are devoted to Jules Verne and Karl May’s classics of adventure fiction, whose plots are situated in South-Eastern Europe. Questions relating to imagology and culture of memory are addressed in examples of non-fictional or partly fictional texts such as essays, newspaper articles, travelogues, memoirs, and public lectures from various national traditions. The ethnographical encyclopedia *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild* (1886–1902), initiated by Crown Prince Rudolf (and therefore referred to as *Kronprinzenwerk*), remains an inexhaustible source of research topics. This immense publication in 24 volumes (21 volumes in the Hungarian edition) is systematically arranged according to different Crown lands, with special volumes dedicated to Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, *Habsburg Postcolonial’s* versatile theoretical framework has been successfully tested in various other fields—primarily general history, ethnography and theater studies—prompting research into phenomena outside Central European space (e.g. cultural colonialism in Southern European regions such as Sardinia or Malta).

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2.

The overview of research conducted to date into the vast field of the Central European (and especially post-Habsburg) space shows that efforts have been mainly devoted to nation building processes (national/nationalistic narratives), while opposing phenomena (imperial/imperialistic narratives) have been paid significantly less attention. Early in the formation of the new paradigm, some scholars (see Müller-Funk *et al.* 2002; Feichtinger *et al.* 2003; Hárs *et al.* 2006) observed the need for a sharper outlining of the notion of the imperial, and of specific relationships within it that formed

primarily through cultural differences and asymmetric power relations. Such notions, which can help to describe complex networks of multidirectional relations in the Habsburg and other continental empires in Europe, have only recently become an acknowledged research subject (Grob *et al.* 2013; Schmidt *et al.* 2015).

Although the (post)imperial perspective is included in the postcolonial study of Central European topics, for Edward Said (1978) and Homi Bhabha (1990) the notion of the empire can hardly be applied to the portrayal of inner-European circumstances, primarily because imperial formations such as the Habsburg Monarchy cannot be reduced to a unilaterally asymmetric system of hegemonic relations. Due to their cultural heterogeneity, such state formations breed alterity and loyalty in the broader space of communication. In literature, this circumstance is reflected in the coexistence of nationally exclusive and imperial, supranational discourses. Empires as well as nations are imaginary constructs, which are reflected multifariously in the representation of space, identity and memory.

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When postcolonial with postimperial approaches are brought together, we should keep in mind the considerable differences between these two theoretical paradigms: (1) while postcolonial studies principally focus on the relationship between “culture” and “power” as part of cultural discourse, research into empires is aimed primarily at a comparative study of large, ethnically and denominationally complex state formations from antiquity to modernity, and at insights from historiography, and political and social sciences; (2) while postcolonial studies (especially their Anglo-Saxon version) interpret “empires” from an unambiguously anti-colonialist and partially post-Marxist perspective, imperial studies approach them as ambivalent historical formations, permeated by (and relating to) the nation state, as one of its main counterparts in the modern period; and finally (3) both theoretical paradigms differ in their object of study because colonialism is generally associated with non-European, overseas territories, whereas empires can, depending on their structure, be defined according to territorial or maritime criteria, or a combination thereof.

The notion of empire was imported to cultural studies from geopolitical surveys and transnational historiography (Lieven 2000; Münkler 2005; Osterhammel 2009; Leonhard and Hirschhausen 2011). In this context, it refers to territorially large state formations marked by ethnic and denominational differences—a supranational form of rule, entailing a multitude of heterogeneous territories with varying legal statuses, different relationships of dependence between the center and periphery,

and permeating borders and fluctuating frontiers, such as the Habsburg Monarchy or the Ottoman, Russian or German Empires.

One of the important insights of postimperial studies is that it recognizes the need to undermine the dominant belief—that complex state formations are unsustainable in the long run—as it narrows the discussion to the structural framework of the nation state. Consequently, it is only the notion of the nation state that has been elevated to the standard norm of a European “history of progress”. This circumstance is one of the reasons for the return of the notion of empire to scholarly discussions. As is often pointed out in this context, European history has been marked by empires for significantly longer than it has by recently “invented” nation states. Since the formation of the nation state coincides with the foundation of modern European historiography, it is not surprising that it overwhelmingly dominates discussions in other social sciences and in the humanities in general. According to Jürgen Osterhammel (2009: 565), by the second half of the nineteenth century empires and nation states had become the only two relevant state formations in the world. In this context, the term “empire” does not only imply Great Britain and Russia, but also Germany, Italy and the USA—countries usually considered typical “new” nation states. In the twentieth century, these empires collapsed (Germany), were reconstituted (Russia and China), or succeeded by other empires (USA by Great Britain).

Consequently, there can be no doubt that these two forms of state formation in the modern period should be understood as ideal types, as described by Max Weber: as abstract, hypothetical constructs, based on features of certain social phenomena, but not necessarily corresponding to every feature of their specific realization. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, there has been a decrease in the correspondence of the dichotomy between empires and nation states on the one hand, and complex social realities on the other. Hence, researchers in the field coined the terms “imperialisierende Nationalstaaten” (“imperialist nation states”) and “nationalisierende Empires” (“nationalist empires”) (Leonhard and Hirschhausen 2011: 13). Both established and newly founded nation states increasingly began to adopt elements of imperial rule, by, for instance, establishing overseas colonial possessions and interpreting them as symbolic capital of the nation state. Conversely, empires intensely transposed national interpretative patterns into the framework of their own multiethnic societies (e.g. in the Habsburg Monarchy, where this was evident in the increasing Magyarization of its Hungarian part). In the broad spectrum of state formations between empires and nation states, there was also a series of

interesting federal projects. While some of these—such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia—collapsed, others, such as the European Union, remain future-oriented.

In the context of cultural studies, “empire” is usually understood as a complex narrative construct, which is constituted differently in different cultural formats, and contributes to the description or interpretation of certain phenomena and relationships. On the one hand, this approach shows that cultures of memory are accumulations of different sub-narratives arising from the common experience of living in the same state. On the other, it is clear that an empire is a supranational space of extended communicational possibilities, where often divergent narratives and narrative strategies emerge and are perpetuated in modified forms even today. By insisting on the concept of empire as a complex narrative construct (while not losing sight of its different definitions in historiography, political and social sciences), research that combines postcolonial with postimperial approaches shows that nationally-exclusive as well as supranational and imperial cultures can be observed as “narrative communities”, differing from each other in their narrative inventories (see Müller-Funk 2002a).

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In addition, this approach to the Habsburg Monarchy might help to overcome those obstacles in the path of scientific objectivity mentioned earlier: the restoration of the nostalgic potential of the Monarchy (the “Habsburg myth”), and its political and ideological demonization (“Völkerkerker”). If such exclusive attitudes were ignored, research efforts could be directed towards the interference of cultural concepts in the supranational and national spheres, and between specific national spheres. Taking into account the intertwining of culture, language and politics in the (post)Habsburg cultural space, as well as the dynamics of centrifugal and centripetal forces and the binary opposition of particularism and universalism found within, postimperial studies of Central European phenomena also draw attention to the cultural media, primarily literature—a medium known for its complex representations of cultural memory and its constitution of individual and collective identities.

A central point in this context is how imperial tendencies and the processes of national homogenization function in the medium of literature, how they intertwine and clash, and how this contributes to achieving concrete (political, ideological, and aesthetic) goals. Research also entails literary narratives, images, symbolic forms, identity and mnemonic constructs, which overlap multifariously in a culturally created space. In this context imagological issues are interconnected with modern nation building

processes and opposing efforts to preserve imperial structures. An important aspect of imagological studies lies in the production and functioning of auto- and hetero-stereotypes. The central role in this research is ascribed to representations of center and periphery, hegemony and marginalization, and the establishment and transgression of borders. However, dichotomies are not understood as absolute opposites, but as relationships whose scopes should be redefined in each individual case. Another important area of this research reveals our relationship with the past, and its narrative remodeling and purpose for and in the present.

3.

One of the numerous ways in which empires can be analyzed from a postcolonial and postimperial perspective—in this case the Habsburg Monarchy as a complex narrative construct in which the supranational sphere of the joint state under German-Austrian domination overlaps with and simultaneously opposes particular, often conflicting spheres of individual ethnicities—is to make a comparative analysis of how the same historic material was used in different national literatures in the turbulent nineteenth century. The way in which inherently different interpretations and adjoining (supra)national narratives can emerge from a common narrative inventory is illustrated in the story of Hungarian aristocrat Bánk, which was transposed differently into Hungarian, Austrian and Croatian literatures.³

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, during the rule of Andrew II of Hungary, Bánk was a high official awarded for his fidelity to the King with the honorary title “fidelis”. In this role, he performed a number of duties, among them that of the Ban (viceroys) of Croatia. Three nineteenth-century playwrights chose him as the hero of their plays: Hungarian József Katona (1791–1830) in *Bánk Bán* (written in 1815–19, published in 1820, and premiered in 1833); Austrian German Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872) in his tragedy *Ein treuer Diener seines Herrn* (*A Faithful Servant of His Lord*, written in 1826, premiered in 1828, and published in 1830) and Croatian

³ For a more detailed account of the use of this historic material in Central European literatures, see my upcoming paper “Bacbanus – ungarisch, österreichisch, kroatisch. Zur Inszenierung eines umstrittenen historischen Stoffes” (*Zagreber germanistische Beiträge* 24/2015, in print).

Franjo Marković (1845–1914) in his tragedy *Benko Bot* (written and published in 1872, and premiered in 1899). Despite the aesthetically and politically diverse positions of these three authors, their representations of Ban Bánk reveal common intentions: not only do they offer the audience aesthetic enjoyment against the backdrop of nation building processes in the Danube Monarchy and the associated strengthening of centripetal tendencies, but they also provide a critical reflection on the joint (supra)national state and the position of one's own nation within it.

Preserved historical documents address Bánk's activities early in the reign of Andrew II (1205–1235).⁴ In 1213, during the King's long absence, Hungarian aristocrats were disgruntled that Queen Gertrude (herself of German origin) favored the German nobility, and conspired against her, killing her along with some of her most trusted allies. The hypothesis that Bánk was among the conspirators—who were executed upon the King's return—stems from a later source. It cannot be considered authentic because it is highly unlikely that the King would grant a man who participated in the murder of his wife such a high position in the civil service. According to another claim found in later sources, Gertrude was allegedly murdered because she encouraged her brother to violate Bánk's wife.

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By combining these divergent and contradictory historical sources, Katona, Grillparzer and Marković construct two central plotlines: political and erotic. Even though there are some slight variations, the three texts contain a matching constellation of five characters: in opposition to the pliable, but still wise and just king is a power-hungry, scheming and ruthless queen; old Bánk is generally characterized as a loyal and reliable "servant of his master", but is at times prone to react impulsively; Bánk's significantly younger wife is torn between faithfulness to her husband (who represents a strong father figure), and an erotic fascination with the king's brother. The latter's aggressiveness, in combination with the wicked intrigue of the queen, drive her into an early grave. The interplay between historically established facts and elements of legend generates two inherently different ways in which Bánk can be represented in literature: "as a main conspirator against foreign usurpers or a 'faithful servant of his lord'" (Görlich 1971: 129). Which of these two options prevails in the three aforementioned plays depends less on the aesthetic, and significantly more on the political, ideological, historical and philosophical views of their authors, who

⁴ For a historically authentic background and analysis of Bánk as a historical personality, see Görlich 1971; Klaić 1982: 223–224; *Hrvatski biografski leksikon* 1983: 655.

advocate either the supranational joint state (Grillparzer) or the concept of a particular, ethnically defined nation state (Katona and Marković). This is closely associated with individual and collective identity formation in the Habsburg Monarchy, and reflects both the political and cultural asymmetry of a multinational empire, primarily the asymmetries between center and periphery and hegemonic and subordinated peoples, and between the master and, in this case, double-coded servant. A comparative reading of these three stories about Ban Bánk that is equally critical of nationalist and centralist narratives can therefore be considered a contribution to the “critical reconsideration of representations of the k.u.k.-Monarchy”, which Clemens Ruthner (2002: 103) highlights as an important goal of research into Central European cultures inspired by postcolonial (and postimperial) studies.

Grillparzer’s *Ein treuer Diener seines Herrn* was enthusiastically accepted by its audience at the end of the 1820s, but was later seldom performed and was aesthetically less-valued than his other Austrian classics. Conversely, the oldest of the three plays—Katona’s *Bánk Ban*—remained unnoticed for a long period, and did not achieve its now indisputable high status until the 1840s. This was at the height of the so-called reform period (the process of Hungarian national consolidation), when the author had already been dead for 15 years.⁵ These two plays differ significantly in their portrayal of the main character: Katona’s Bánk has nothing in common with Grillparzer’s “faithful servant of his master”. On the contrary, he is portrayed as a self-conscious aristocrat, loyal to the king, who becomes the main conspirator after the violation both of the rights of the Hungarian nation, and of his own family. However, Katona’s rebellion is not limited to an aristocratic resistance to overwhelming foreign influence. By introducing a social dimension, it becomes an issue that mobilizes the entire Hungarian people—a circumstance that reinforces the connection between political and erotic plotlines, because it is a reaction to the illegal interference in Hungarian affairs by Queen Gertrude, her brother Otto and their (German) entourage.

In Katona’s version, Bánk’s political activism, which finally urges him to kill the queen, does not culminate in triumphalist patriotism: the hero cannot escape his contradictory public actions or his imprudent relationship

⁵ See Görlich 1971: 133; Kulcsár Szabó 2013: 119–122. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Katona’s play is referred to as “the finest Hungarian drama of the 19th century” (Vol. 6, 15th ed., 1995: 763).

with his wife. However, his nervous breakdown does not interfere with the national-patriotic encoding of Katona's play: in a country free from foreign influence he can finally secure his rule and achieve national unity, while at the same time proving himself to the powerful Western neighbor. Despite its medieval setting, this story can be interpreted in the modern context, because although the audience initially showed very little interest in the play (probably due to censorship), it enthusiastically welcomed it later, in the years preceding the 1848 revolution. There can be no doubt that the play's mobilizing effect results from its choice of topic: rebellion against foreign usurpation, during which the tyrannical queen of German origin is killed by a freedom-loving aristocrat loyal to the king. In other words, it stems from an aspect of the plot that might be symbolically understood as a much-desired liberation from the central, joint state dominated by Austrian Germans. Katona's nationally coded play can be read in analogy with the authentic historic reality, in which Hungarian patriotism was slowly transformed into Magyar state nationalism. Its semantic potential is connected not only to Hungary's new position in the Monarchy, but also to its request to establish a Magyar nation state.

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The difference between Katona and Grillparzer's representation of Bánk in the play *Ein treuer Diener seines Herrn* undoubtedly arises from divergent, partly opposing positions on the relationship between the master, his subjects and the superimposed state.⁶ The text of the Austrian playwright does not exhibit anti-Habsburg tendencies. On the contrary, the hero's loyalty to the monarch is so unswerving that numerous critics of Grillparzer's servility to the Habsburgs underline precisely this aspect of the plot. Unlike Katona (who shifts focus towards the end of his play from the hero to the king, and celebrates the restoration of national unity in the effective final tableau) Grillparzer focuses on Ban Bánk in the final scene, to whom he—according to German tradition—refers as Bancbanus. In Grillparzer's final scene, Bancbanus first addresses the king and then his son and heir. There is no mention of the national issues that are omnipresent in Katona's play; even the rebellion is not caused by foreign tyranny. Due to his aversion to German and other nationalisms, Grillparzer was convinced that Austria could only exist as a joint state of multiple nations. This belief is also evident in his other historic plays based on the history of Habsburg countries (Lorenz 2007). Therefore, it is evident that Bancbanus' statements

⁶ A similar argument can be found in two older interpretations of these two plays. See Görlich 1971 and Mádl 1991.

about his loyalty to the dynasty and state refer to his loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty and the Danube Monarchy.

Although it would be wrong to attribute statements made by a fictional character to the views of the author who himself criticized Habsburg rule, it is nevertheless certain that *Ein treuer Diener seines Herrn*, along with his other fictional and non-fictional works, reflects Grillparzer’s conviction that the joint Austrian state with its German-language center was superior to the concept of the nation state that other peoples in the Monarchy wanted to achieve. In this regard, it would be productive to examine Grillparzer’s vision of Austria in relation to the centralist narrative, which non-German peoples in the Monarchy perceived as hegemonic. Catarina Martinis (2009) describes this narrative in the context of postcolonial studies as follows:

Just as Said observes in the case of overseas colonialism, the imperialist narrative in the Habsburg Monarchy also contributes to and consolidates the narrative construct of the nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson). Here, however, this is achieved by means of an entangled detour by which the discourse on multiculturalism is used to transform centrifugal and destructive dynamics of nationalism into a centripetal, centralizing and state-preserving movement.

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Among the numerous non-German intellectuals of the Monarchy who suggested political and ideological reasons for an aesthetic criticism of Grillparzer’s play (see Mádl 1991; Hyršlová 1991; Bobina c 2008) was Croatian writer and philosopher Franjo Marković. At the beginning of the 1870s, Marković wrote several historical plays that were met with a favorable reception. One of those plays was based on historical sources relating to Ban Bánk. Marković, who considered Grillparzer “a playwright of second or even third rank” (Marković 1870: 373) and his play *Ein treuer Diener seines Herrn* an expression of “a servant’s loyalty to his master” (Marković 1870: 357) was annoyed by Grillparzer’s “unscrupulous” use of material from Croatian history. Although historical sources claim otherwise, Marković argues that Bancbanus, the hero of Grillparzer’s play, was in fact a Croatian aristocrat known by the name Benko Bot. In 1872, half a century after Katona and Grillparzer’s plays, Marković presented his perspective on the historical material about Ban Bánk in his tragedy *Benko Bot*. The title hero (the Ban of Croatia) and his homeland are portrayed as victims of their united Hungarian and German opponents. This constellation undoubtedly references a perspective on the political situation within the Monarchy that many Croatian intellectuals gained after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867.

Clear parallels can be drawn between Marković's literary program and his work as a philosopher, primarily his efforts "to ensure the autonomy of Croatian national philosophy in opposition to philosophemes with distinctive features of great European national philosophies", and especially "to defend Croatian philosophy from its strongest and closest—German—influence" (Zenko 1998: 48). Marković's views—which could in the postcolonial context be defined as a protest against cultural imperialism of hegemonic nations in the Monarchy—correspond to the political activism of his protagonist. Similarly to Katona's but unlike Grillparzer's hero, Benko Bot decidedly commits himself to the national cause in spite of his loyalty to the king, a joint Croatian-Hungarian ruler. Marković, like Katona, unambiguously defines the ethnicity of his characters: the Ban and his young wife Jelina are Croats, Queen Gertrude and her brother Hinko are Germans, and the only Hungarian in the main five-character constellation of the play is King Andrew.

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Erotic and political rivalries and intrigues as the main driving forces of dramatic action are also nationally coded, albeit differently to those in Katona's and Grillparzer's plays: Queen Gertrude is, as in Katona's text, a ruthless intriguer who stops at nothing to undermine the King's confidence in Benko. However, as she organizes a secret encounter between Hinko and Jelina, Benko sees through her intentions and kills her in a fit of rage. Jelina's life also ends tragically: torn between her erotic fascination with the queen's brother and loyalty to her husband, she takes her own life. Benko does not avenge his rival, but returns to Croatia with Jelina's body, while the deeply moved Hinko takes the blame for Gertrude's murder and is sentenced to death. Upon learning of his confession, Benko returns to the court in Hungary and offers himself as the true murderer of the Queen. This decision manifests Benko's ambivalence regarding his loyalty to the joint state and ruler on the one hand, and his own nation on the other, echoing the dilemma faced by numerous Croatian intellectuals in the period after the Croatian-Hungarian Settlement of 1868. Other Croatian aristocrats, unlike Benko, are embittered by Jelina's death, and appear with an army to fight foreign rule. Hungarian royal troops crush the insurgency, and the rebels die alongside Benko on the scaffold.

The desperate activism at the end of Marković's play should, in contrast to Katona and Grillparzer's conciliatory finales, be interpreted in the context of Croatia's tense political situation in the late 1860s and early 1870s, when all its political camps were united in the fight against the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise, which they considered imposed

and discriminatory. One of the most extreme reactions to this treaty was a revolt on the Croatian Military Frontier in late 1871, which was brutally suppressed by the k.u.k. army, resulting in many casualties. Among these was Eugen Kvaternik, a well-known member of the Croatian Party of Rights (see Goldstein 2003: 189–191; Rumpler 1997: 441–445).

Admittedly, Marković’s play was written in a different period to that of Katona and Grillparzer, who wrote at a time when the nation building processes of the Habsburg peoples were at their peak. Nevertheless, *Benko Bot* can be read in the context of a national integration that was, at least in the case of Croatia, incomplete. Seen against this backdrop, Marković’s play is an early literary reaction to the new/old constellation of political and cultural asymmetries, which began to emerge after the two most powerful nations in the Monarchy reached a compromise in 1867, since the consolidation of Austria and Hungary was in many respects achieved at the expense of other nations.

As aforementioned, the mobilizing effect of Katona’s play manifested in resistance to foreign usurpation—an aspect of the play that could be symbolically understood as Hungarian emancipation from the German-dominated imperial center. Grillparzer’s Habsburg-centralist vision of the joint state in the play *Ein treuer Diener seines Herrn* is that of a supranational “unity in multiplicity” under the decisive influence of this German center. In contrast, Marković’s perspective on the Monarchy is defined by Croatian subjection by both centers of domination: Vienna and Buda-pest. In this respect, the martyrdom of Croatian rebels and futile resistance to foreign rule in *Benko Bot* are symbolic actions. When seen in the political reality of the dualist state, they have at least two semantic potentials: first, the Croatian fight against Austrian and Hungarian hegemony; and second, intensive efforts to achieve either federal reform of the Monarchy or an independent nation state.

These three dramatic versions of the story of Ban Bánk thus represent more than merely three cultural constructs expressing cultural differences characteristic of the Habsburg Monarchy. Katona, Grillparzer and Marković’s plays also point to the fact that the “question of cultural difference is inextricably linked with questions of political and social power” (Niedermüller 2003: 79).

Translated by Jelena Spreicer

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