

**“For they were people of stolid faith and a granite-like pride”:
Examining Ethnic Relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina Through a Literary Lens**

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Abstract

This thesis, a work of cultural and political history, seeks to understand the role of religion in the long-term causes of the breakup of Yugoslavia by creating dialogue between history and literature. The work will constrain itself geographically to Bosnia and Herzegovina, a region that was host to two of the most prolific authors in the Yugoslav canon, Ivo Andrić and Meša Selimović. While both men were committed Yugoslavists, their cultural backgrounds were grounded in different, and somewhat opposite religious perspectives. Ivo Andrić's writings represents a Judeo-Christian view of the region while Meša Selimović presents a Muslim one. A selected corpus of their novels serves as primary sources for this project. The plots of the novels take place before Yugoslavia was formed in 1918. Setting these novels in the distant past allowed the authors to explore the deep undercurrents of Western Balkan history unshackled by the bonds of the contemporary norms of Yugoslav society. It is this detachment from the immediacy of events that allows for a more nuance and holistic view of the region.

The exploration of the many facets of religious life in Bosnia, as represented in literature and works of history, will help us understand how the memory of past traumas played a part in transforming Yugoslavia from a region known for its multiethnic cohabitation to one marred by fratricidal violence. A series of questions will be used to engage in this dialogue between the literary corpus and history itself, with literature providing the hypotheses and history providing the factual evidence. The work will focus on the religious differences between Christians, particularly Serbs, and Muslims and how the relationship between both groups evolved over time. The religious and ethnic question has often been cited as a primary cause of the breakup of Yugoslavia and as such offers a fruitful avenue of study. Bosnia and Herzegovina for its part is in essence a microcosm of Yugoslavia at large, with three of the most important ethno-religious groups involved in the breakup of the country (Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks) having a strong presence throughout the country.

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Introduction

“I had come to Yugoslavia to see what history meant in flesh and blood.”

-Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*¹

Literature, Silences and Ethnic Relations in Yugoslavia

In the bleak medieval landscape created by Ismael Kadare in his 1998 novel, *An Elegy for Kosovo*, two crestfallen minstrels traveling together after the ill-fated battle of Kosovo Fields are confronted with their new grim reality. The occasion is a solemn one, as the ruler of Serbia, Prince Lazar, had fallen in battle while leading a confederacy of Balkan peoples against the invading Ottoman Turks. After wandering for some time, they find themselves in the home of a local noble where they are asked to perform at a banquet. Both the Albanian Gjorg and the Serbian Vladan fall back upon their traditional songs. Accompanied by the sounds of the *lahuta* or *gusle*, the minstrels recount the epic oral poetry of their respective nations, detailing past conflicts between each other. In a tragic misunderstanding, the concerned noble and his entourage express their collective disgust at this perceived squabbling. The lord rises and after describing the pair as “wretches”, is joined by one of the guests who shouts “What songs do you expect from them? Hate is all they know”.² They cannot understand why these two peoples continue to live out past conflicts, in this case through song, at a time of crisis for their respective kingdoms. Ironically, the minstrels, now on friendly terms, were only retelling the epics of their peoples, and this rather degrading treatment has left them equally confused and despondent. Despite the book being set in 1389, the novel has been

¹ Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007), p. 103.

² Ismail Kadare, *Elegy for Kosovo* (New York: Arcade, 1998), pp. 96-97.

described by commentators as a thinly disguised commentary on a rapidly disintegrating Yugoslavia.³

It is in this clever anecdote that we find Kadare's rejection of the "ancient hatreds" thesis of the conflict so prominently written about by western observers of the region. Popularized by Robert Kaplan's famed travelogue *Balkan Ghosts*, it posits that the conflict broke out in 1990's Yugoslavia because of primordial hatreds playing themselves out in real time. This treatment of the Balkan minstrels is a great example of what Milica Bakić-Hayden refers to as "Nesting Orientalisms", a variation on Edward Said's "Orientalism" theory, in which countries are viewed through their geographic and cultural closeness to western Europe.⁴ It also fits into Maria Todorova's discursive conversation set forth in *Imagining the Balkans* in which she admits that "balkanism" goes beyond the traditional occidental-oriental divide, identifying how the Balkans have their own history and are more than an imagined space.⁵

Central and Eastern Europe are often portrayed in western media as a backwater in need of westernization. Yet this view lacking in nuance, a condition perpetuated by the region's status as being on the "periphery of Europe".⁶ Like the Albanian Kadare, many of Yugoslavia's authors have crafted works of historical fiction that attempt to better understand their contemporary troubles

³ Maria Margaronis, "Palace of Dreams: Ismail Kadare's 'Elegy for Kosovo'," *The Nation*, November 20, 2000, thenation.com.

⁴ Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia." *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995), pp. 917-919.

⁵ Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 1-20.

⁶ See the Core-Periphery Model by Immanuel Wallerstein. With the periphery being described as regions, peoples, or concepts that are on the outskirts of a more dominant power centers, global trade, or narratives; Immanuel Wallerstein, *Capitalism and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the 16th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 347-350.

through the use of a past setting. This approach can be seen in the works of literary masters such as Ivo Andrić, Danilo Kiš, Borislav Pekić, and Meša Selimović. Other writers, such as Miroslav Krleža and the playwright Branislav Nušić have opted for the society novel or satirical approach, where fiction is used to depict a contemporary social problem. Both methods involve mixing fiction with historical fact or contemporary realities. Could they help us better understand one of the most pressing questions to haunt the former Yugoslavia? That is, how could a modernizing state seen as a model for religious diversity and tolerance as well as having institutionalized secularism and repressed public religious expression under their strongman Josip Broz Tito, have disintegrated along strictly confessional fault lines? Was religion truly essential to the propagation of this conflict or was it instead a sort of political sentiment reactivated during the onset of modernity? This thesis contends that the “literature of periphery” may hold answers hidden beyond the archives commissioned by former imperial powers in Constantinople or Vienna.

There are four essential concepts tied to this conflict that will be introduced in this thesis: ethnicity, public religion, myth and modernity. Ethnicity is a classification of population based on group identity. Public religion, in contrast to private religion, refers to the role of religion in the public sphere rather than private life. In the Balkans as part of the deprivatization of religion, as a process of modernity, religion finds itself as a player in the public sphere, namely by becoming a market of public identity.⁷ While the role of religion has been prominently documented as a leading cause of the conflict by writers such as Kaplan, it is also a subject that touched every aspect of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from the edification of children to the administration of justice. As for myth, these are “sacred” stories that helped ancient peoples understand their world. Instead of viewing myth through this context, this project uses an Arendtian lens to understand the modern

⁷ See *Why the Religious Question* for more information about this identitarian turn.

use of these stories where they are mobilized as a political tool used to subvert individual judgement. For example, the political mobilization the Kosovo Myth in Serbia.⁸ Lastly, modernity and modernization are used almost interchangeably throughout the text, but they have specific definitions. Modernization is the process of creating modernity (e.i. transforming agrarian societies into ones industrial-technological ones) while modernity is the social condition that is the result of this modernization. In our case, this transition of a traditional society to a modern was a process imposed by the imperial center on the periphery. For example, the process of industrialization and the implementation of a Weberian bureaucracy were undertaken by the Austrians, just as the *Tanzimat* reforms and its modern deceptions of an egalitarian citizenship were projects of the Sublime Porte.

The use of literary sources in the study of history can pose challenges to historians, whose usual sources include archival documents. Yet, they have much to offer those who seek to understand the past. Unlike official state documents that were commissioned for imperial needs, these novels can help chart alternative voices from the “periphery”. Not only can literature reveal the contemporary lived realities of the authors themselves, but it can also offer interpretations of the past from the lens of a specific period and perspective that may only be reflected in archival records with great difficulty (e.g. emotions, subtext, social anxieties, psychological biases, intellectual history, and moral sensibilities). Through its long-term narrative the novel offers an intimate glimpse into the psychology of a character(s), or even groups, thus reflecting the varied

⁸ Foundational narrative of Serbian nationalists that was derived from epic oral poetry. The story revolves around the military defeat of medieval Kingdom of Serbia and its leader Prince Lazar at the hands of the Ottoman Empire during the battle of Kosovo Field (1389). It was famously mobilized for political purposes by Slobodan Milošević in 1989, during his speech at Gazimestan commemorating the 600th anniversary Battle of Kosovo at the site that the battle took place.

viewpoints found in a society. It is through this tapestry of viewpoints, thus represented through characters, that we can get a glimpse at larger themes that the author chooses to explore. *L'Art du Roman*, a work by the Franco-Czech author Milan Kundera, discusses the novel and the work of a novelist. In this essay, Kundera states that the novel is “La grande forme de la prose où l’auteur, à travers des ego expérimentaux (personnages), examine jusqu’au bout quelques grands thèmes de l’existence”.⁹ In essence, what the novel offers is the examination of existential themes in a complex and comprehensive manner through the use of its characters. This is why British novelist D. H. Lawrence called the novel “the highest form of human expression so far attained”: it is incapable of the absolute.¹⁰ It is the very diversity of perspectives introduced by the novel’s long-form and character driven developments that help flesh out these perspectives. In essence, literature may in fact help bring to the front voices lost to archival silences and to bring forward social processes that are hard to re-constitute through the use of institutional archives.

In summary, this thesis seeks to understand how modern states such as the late Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Yugoslavia managed their diverse populations with the ultimate goal of understanding how this process eventually led to the eruption of inter-ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia. To study these long-term causes of the breakup of Yugoslavia, a junction between history and literature will be implemented.¹¹ History can provide a general understanding of the period, whereas literature can help to identify thematic elements that may not

⁹ Milan Kundera, *L'Art du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 179.

¹⁰ D. H. Lawrence, "The Novel," in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Centaur Press, 1925), p. 104.

¹¹ These would be causes that have existed for years, decades, or even centuries before the event. This approach was chosen as this work seeks to identify structural issues rather than ones based on individual events.

be brought to light by traditional history.¹² Literature can be disarming. On the surface it does not belong in the realm of the factual. Yet, specific pieces of literature, such as Ivo Andrić's *The Bridge on the Drina*, have been elevated to such symbolic statuses that they have practically become history themselves. In fact, these works of literature are but small shards of a collective memory and hold a place in telling a shared story. Scholars can learn from these stories, as long as they understand how to analyze and contextualize them properly.

The Novel as a Historical Archive of the Religious Question in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Returning to the previous paragraph, the idea of understanding the breakup of Yugoslavia through literature is a herculean task for a thesis. As such we will have to narrow the focus on this work geographically, to a certain type of literature and to a specific “cause”. This thesis will be constrained in three ways: by taxonomic classification (religion), geography (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and by type of literature (the novel).

Hence it can be said the religious and ethnic question in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be explored by way of literature, in this case through the study of a corpus of novels supported by the historical record, in the goal of understanding it as one of the many causes for the breakup of Yugoslavia, and its subsequent sectarian strife. In fulfilling this mandate (i.e. understanding the

¹² Peter Burke conceived “traditional history” as being rooted in 19th century Rankianism. Ranke himself dismissed cultural history as “amateurish” as it was not based on the use of archives sources or official documents, nor was it used for state building purposes. Followers of traditional history preferred to focus on fields such political history and the state, with a focus on specialization. This type of history is usually told from the top-down with a focus on the elite. Burke identifies Edward Thompson role in changing writing history “from below” (bottom-up) in contrast to this top-down approach. He puts an emphasis that it the very nature of cultural history, its exploration of the cultural whole rather than a specialization and its focus on telling the story from the bottom up, that allows historians to explore where “other historians cannot reach” (Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, pp. 1, 8, 16-18).

role of religion in shaping interethnic relations in Yugoslav Bosnia), one must ensure they have selected the right lines of inquiry or even that they have chosen the right mandate and *modus operandi* (i.e. literature as the lens of study, literature as the vehicle of study) to begin with. In the subheadings below, the choice of religion as a lens of study, fiction as a source, authors and modernity (as a point of friction) will be justified.

Why Study the Religious Question?

Religion will be the primary lens of this study, with a focus on the religious differences between Christians, particularly Serbs, and Muslims. As was laid out in the historical context, it has often been cited as a primary cause of the breakup of Yugoslavia, but beyond this it offers a unique lens to observe the development of identitarian qualities and national mythologies based on confessional preferences. The exploration of these themes in literature will help us understand how the memory of past traumas played a part in transforming Yugoslavia from a region known for its multiethnic cohabitation to one marred by fratricidal violence.

Historically, there are four important ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Croats (Catholics) [17.4% in 1991], Serbs (Orthodox) [31.2% in 1991], Bosniaks (Muslims) [43.5% in 1991] and the Jewish people, with the latter's population having been greatly reduced because of the Holocaust.¹³ Much like Bosnia, nearby Albania is a nation divided between Christianity and Islam. Albania also saw a large part of its population convert to Islam during the centuries of Ottoman occupation. Yet, unlike Bosnia, religious sectarianism is not considered to be an issue. An Albanian is an Albanian, despite their religious affiliation. In Bosnia however, the Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats have struggled to find common political ground for the building of a strong

¹³ Fran Markowitz, "Census and Sensibilities in Sarajevo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 1 (2007): p. 42.

Bosnian state. This begs the question, why is religious affiliation so strongly tied to ethnic identity in Bosnia? In his book *Balkan Idols*, the historian Vjekoslav Perica channels the historian Michael Petrovich when he observes that in Yugoslavia religion was not so much a matter of private conscience as of one's public identity.¹⁴ It is the reasons for this identitarian aspect of religious identity that is of interest to us.

The period between the introduction of the *Tanzimat* reforms starting in the 1830s until the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941 was a time of great change in the region. The advent of modernity saw the transformation of Bosnia from an imperial space, ruled by the Ottomans and later Austro-Hungarians, to one of nationalism and the nation state developed during the Austro-Hungarian Period into the Royalist period in Yugoslavia.¹⁵ This era saw the development of dual nationalisms in Yugoslavia. The first was a statist one, Yugoslavism. It was at first defined by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and later continued through the “brotherhood and unity” of the Titoist period. It was based on the conception of a common Yugoslav identity consisting of a shared Serbo-Croatian tongue, culture, and experience as south Slavic peoples. The second consisted of separate local nationalisms based on ethnic makeup; these sought to promote their own ethnically homogeneous states.¹⁶ This second identity began to manifest itself publicly after the death of Tito in 1980. Both types of nationalisms (unitarist and ethno-religious) were built in opposition to each other. All of them sought to promote their own myths of origin, to help them lay claim to what they considered their historic lands. The sociologist Émile Durkheim referred to religion as the

¹⁴ Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 5.

¹⁵ Maria Falina, *Religion and Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia: Serbian Nationalism and East Orthodox Christianity*, 1st ed., (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), p.25.

¹⁶ Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 165.

most powerful producers of "collective representations", these being things that a community holds in common such as myths.¹⁷ Hannah Arendt would expand on this by elaborating the political nature of myths in the modern world, essentially that these are foundational stories that structure political reality.¹⁸ Encoded in these stories, we can find broad-lined societal values as well as national symbols with identitarian or nation-building functions. As such, examining these myths can help us understand the inner workings of the group to whom they belong as well as the outward expression of their identity. Thus, it can be said that religion, national identity, and mythos are utterly intertwined and cannot be unwound.

From this angle, the novels of Andrić and Selimović are not simple reflections of the past; they are symbolic rewritings (i.e. elevating a text into metaphors to explore deeper themes) which, according to the Arendtian perspective, reveal the tension between the material fact and the mobilizing narrative. Therefore, these texts are the perfect vessel to explore cultural themes relating to public religion, myth and identity.

Why Fiction?

Fiction, embodied by the historical novel set in a distant past, was chosen as a vessel to explore the interethnic relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina for its ability to transcend the limitations of traditional archival material.¹⁹ First and foremost, this type of literature offers the historian a

¹⁷ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), p. 44.

¹⁸ James M. King, "Hannah Arendt's Mythology: The Political Nature of History and Its Tales of Antiheroes," *The European Legacy* 16, no. 1 (2011): 27–38,

¹⁹ Often seen as the bedrock of traditional history, these are often primary source documents produced by the ruling authorities and state institutions (e.g. state documents, administrative records, legal records, church records, etc.). While these are appropriate tools understanding institutional authority, they often fail to capture the perspective of the periphery due to their top-down, elite centered, perspective.

fortuitous avenue of study as it crystallizes and gives form to the latent tensions and symbolic fractures found in a society. In layman's terms: its uncanny ability to detect the emotional undercurrents in society that are not always explored by traditional works of history and to express these to a reader in a way that they can comprehend. It also offers a plethora of other advantages namely its ability to tell individual stories that are often lost in the grand narratives of history, its intellectualization of violence as a social phenomenon and its ability to escape imperial and autocratic narratives found in traditional archival material.

It should also be noted that the fictional works of both authors were written in politically charged environments that made openly discussing ethnic politics a tricky endeavour, making it easier to approach it by using a cultural medium. Ivo Andrić himself reflects on this phenomenon of public silence regarding certain sensitive political issues in *Letter from the Year 1920*, when he implies that it is easier to speak freely from outside the country than in it. The letter itself is addressed to a childhood friend of the narrator. It details why he is leaving the country, stating that he does not feel that he can talk about issues of ethnic hatred publicly for fear of reprisal.²⁰

Why Ivo Andrić and Meša Selimović?

Bosnia and Herzegovina was host to two of the most prolific authors in Yugoslav literature, Ivo Andrić and Meša Selimović. These two figures represent different, and somewhat opposite perspectives. Somewhat being the operative word because in Yugoslavia nothing is ever so simple. These authors are also self-declared Yugoslavists, whose loyalties lay with the state of Yugoslavia rather than their own ethnic origins. For simplicity's sake, it can be said that the works of both authors are moored in two different cultural anchorages; the work of Ivo Andrić presents a Judeo-

²⁰ Ivo Andrić, *The Damned Yard and Other Stories* (Belgrade: Dereta, 2007), pp. 185-201.

Christian symbolic matrix (i.e. in sociology this is collection of shared meanings, rules, and cultural symbols that shape how people act, think and relate to each other in society), whereas Meša Selimović presents an Islamic one. These opposing tensions are a deliberate choice and represent an attempt to reduce bias. By interweaving distinct narrative voices, the reader may be able to juxtapose the views of two different sides of the periphery.

Beyond representing somewhat opposing perspectives, these authors have been chosen because as adepts in the art of storytelling they embody the qualities necessary to fulfill Conrad's idea of "nearer truth".²¹ Their works correspond most closely to Paul Veyne idea of "récit non-vraisemblable": essentially their novelistic works mimic the surface qualities of non-fictional historical epics while leaving room for the author chart their own narrative course. This, of course, gives the author the chance to explore aspects of history that nonfictional sources can often struggle to impart on their readers. One of the primary mechanisms the authors use is to allow us a glimpse at the psychology of their characters, "to explore the larger themes of existence" as Milan Kundera would have it. It should be noted that both authors can be described as humanists. This means that they are primarily interested in describing or understanding the human experience. While Andrić often focuses on the complexity of human relationships between groups or societal issues, Selimović, for his part, crafted introspective works in which the reader enters the mind of a semi philosophical figure through a first-person narration allowing the reader to follow their individual reflections on topics ranging from identity and morality. Like most great authors, both considered themselves above the fray of daily events and found themselves more interested in portraying

²¹ In an essay on Henry James, Joseph Conrad asserts that fiction is "nearer truth" because it allows us to tap into social phenomena that make up the human experience. See *Historiography* for a fuller explanation of this concept (ref. Joseph Conrad).

larger truths about the realities of the human condition. This can be reflected in the fact that both found themselves identifying with groups from outside their immediate ethnic origin and both remained committed Yugoslavists rather than ethnic nationalists. Lastly, both were committed secularists, with Selimović identifying as an atheist. This meant that, as novelists, they tried to position themselves above their own cultural upbringings as impartial observers. Andrić, for his part, crafted two of the works used for this project; *Bosnian Chronicle* and *Bridge on the Drina* while he was under house arrest during the Second World War, a time of great ethnic strife in Yugoslavia. It would be difficult to believe that these works were not conceived with this context in mind.

It is important to note that the authors themselves were aware of the power of storytelling. Andrić's short story compilation *The Damned Yard and Other Stories* is a testament to this fact. One of the tales from this compilation, "The Vizier's Elephant", is a powerful allegory set in the town of Travnik that offers a reflection on how implausible tales can reveal much about the human condition and society at large:

*"The towns and villages of Bosnia are full of stories. Under the guise of improbable events masked by invented names, these tales, that are for the most part imaginary, conceal the true, unacknowledged history of the region, of living people and long vanished generation. These are those Eastern lies which the Turkish proverb holds to be 'truer than any truth'."*²²

Not only does this speak to the idea of "nearer truth", but it is also an illustration that these novelists had an intimate understanding of the power held by their novels as well as their own part in this process of "truth telling". Their novels were written deliberately and with a specific purpose in mind. How they went about doing so differed in the choice of narrative but explored many of the same questions, including the state of Yugoslavia's interethnic relations.

²² Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 23.

Finally, there is an overlap in publication between both authors. Andrić primarily published his great works in the 1940s and 1950s while the Selimović did so in the 1960s. While both were from different generations, they lived through many of the same marking events, including the formation of Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the First World War, the various political assassinations that rocked the country in the 1920s, the establishment of the Royal Dictatorship in 1939 and the outbreak of interethnic conflict during the Second World War. Both authors were part of the same literary circle in Belgrade.²³ Therefore, it should be no surprise that one finds traces of intertextuality (i.e. the influence of a literary text on another either directly or indirectly) in both of their works.²⁴ It should be noted that this same phenomenon can even be found within an author's own corpus with characters, events, locations and themes being revisited in different stories.

Why is Modernity a Point of Friction

In this case, modernity manifests itself as a process imposed by the imperial center on the periphery. Its first stirrings can be found in the reformatory period in the late-stage Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans had ruled over the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina from approximately 1463–1878, a span of four-hundred years, but it was not until the 1860s that the process of reform crystalized.²⁵ These reforms were known as the *Tanzimat* and officially began in the fall of 1839, but it was not until the 1860s that this reformist zeal reached Bosnia and Herzegovina. This territory had before then resisted this program through the power of local landlords, and it was not

²⁴ One example is that Andrić has a short story involving a fainthearted dervish confronted with the brutality of life outside of his religious circle, while Selimović has an entire book about same subject.

²⁵ The Kingdom of Bosnia was secured in 1463, while Herzegovina fell in 1482.

until 1850-1851 that this resistance was crushed.²⁶ Having cleared the opposition to centralizing reforms, Governor Topal Şerif Osman began to implement the *Tanzimat* reforms in Bosnia as early as 1861. This event initiated the first point of friction between the Bosnian periphery and the forces of modernity. The two opposing camps were the modernizing imperial administration and its antagonist, the indigenous population of Bosnia and Herzegovina seeking to preserve their traditional way of life.

An essential part of these reforms was to create a new Ottoman citizenship called “Osmanlı”. It was based on the rational idea of equality among citizens brought forth during the Enlightenment. This western ideal, characterized by a “cold” and “disembodied” rationality, and emphasizing logic as well as objectivity, was soon to clash with a society structured around religion.²⁷ In Ottoman Bosnia, this was a rigid religious hierarchy that prioritized tolerance towards other religions, but with Islam holding a dominant position. In this system, Islam was not just a religion but a world order, that manifested itself as a mode of social organization. Thus, it should be no surprise that the universal principle of equality for all subjects clashed with the traditional social stratification of the Ottoman Empire where Muslims were exempt from taxes as part of their duty to protect the empire's territories while non-Muslim populations were subject to this tax due to their inferior status.

The 1839 *Tanzimat* reform was to put an end to this hierarchy but was immediately met with resistance from both sides: Muslim subjects did not understand why they had to pay the tax,

²⁶ The main antagonist to these reforms, the governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina Ali Pasha Rizvanbegović, was removed from power and executed in 1851; Nathalie Clayer and Xavier Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est : Des Empires aux États balkaniques* (Paris: Karthala, 2013), pp. 34-35.

²⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-34.

while non-Muslims did not understand why they had to pay yet another tax higher than the poll tax, when nothing changed in their daily lives. For Muslims, this policy of equality also clashed with their sense of religious superiority, which they had become conditioned to through the four centuries of occupation under a Muslim Empire. Therefore, this drive for modernization provoked rejection on both sides. It is also from here that we can derive this idea of religion as a marker of political differentiation in the public sphere, since belonging to a religious group defines rights and duties – namely tax payments and military service being owed to the imperial state by its subjects. The friction came to a head in the 1860s when the *Tanzimat* began to be implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Rather than uniting the Ottoman Empire's disparate ethnic groups by creating a modern "citizen", *Tanzimat* was poorly received, disrupted traditional power dynamics and created a fractured society.²⁸

Overlaid on these modernization reforms of the Ottoman Empire, was a new logic of reforms, this time Habsburg and emanating from Vienna. The Austrian Empire had occupied Bosnia by 1878 and then annexed the territory by 1905. This modernization was different, but it too aimed to produce a modern citizen and an efficient administration and ran into similar problems. It is in this period of attempted dual modernizations that we find the heart of Bosnia's interethnic conflict, at its core a link between modernization and violence. This imposed modernity, by clashing with a society structured by religion and by trying to remove it from the public sphere, provoked a counterreaction. This rejection manifested itself by the assertion of the individual in the public sphere based on their religious affiliation. There is a clear reason why Ivo Andrić analyses this period at length, particularly in *The Bridge on the Drina*, where animosity

²⁸ Amzi-Erdoğan, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024), pp. 28-31.

and violence between religious groups crystallize not because of religion itself, but because of the social, fiscal, and political status it confers.

By linking modernization and violence, this thesis will demonstrate that it is not hatred of the religious other that leads to violence, but rather a rapid and poorly integrated modernization - one that is imposed from the outside and disregards the ways in which these societies have been structured for centuries. This animosity coalesced around religion, because faith defined the status of the individual in Ottoman society; by wanting to erase this religious framework, without modifying the existing hierarchies, the injustice of the social order was brought to light.²⁹

Historiography

Although it may not seem intuitive today, history and literature were not always considered separate disciplines. In antiquity, the works of historians such as Homer or Herodotus read more like literature than the scientific work of a historian. This link began to wane as history began to take a scientific approach near the end of the 19th century.

The father of this movement was Leopold Von Ranke, who pioneered the archival method moving history away from narrativity and into the realm of rigorous source criticism (i.e. the analysis of the validity of primary sources). This was a departure from Enlightenment writers, such as Edward Gibbon (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*), for whom the literary qualities of the text were most important. This Rankean type of history prioritized primary sources over all others, including literary ones. A champion of empiricism, his work aimed to show “as it actually happened” and thus forms the bases of traditional history.³⁰ In conjunction with this

²⁹ Ei: non-Muslims: "Why pay more tax than before?", Muslims: "Why should I pay taxes when I am the politically dominant group in the State?".

³⁰ Peter Burke. *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), pp. 8-9.

new “scientific” approach, the growth of the university system brought about standardization and the professionalization of the discipline. These new institutions reinforced the scientific view of history by championing rigorous methodology and narrow field specialization, making it difficult to be a generalist. This moved history even further away from its old storytelling purposes.³¹ The 20th century for its part saw the profession continue along the scientific route with a turn towards the social sciences, this is especially true of sociology. During this time, the Annales school became more prominent in France in conjunction with the Marxist Historiographical movement.³²

The scientific view of history remained dominant until the 1960s when cultural history and interdisciplinary studies grew in prominence. This would see the revival of literary history and a reproachment between the disciplines.³³ While this type of history has roots going back to Jacob Burckhardt, scholars of cultural studies focused on class consciousness, sexual orientation and race. These themes were previously underrepresented in traditional sources but were present in the kinds of sources valued by those studying cultural history. In the 1970s historians would also begin to develop their own epistemology for using literature as a historical archive under the umbrella of the cultural history, and its famed “cultural turn”. This movement covered a broader thematic range than the previous cultural studies, running counter the specialization of traditionalist history movements (so much so that it is hard to define what is cultural history beyond an interest in symbology).³⁴ This movement towards rehabilitating aesthetic artefacts (e.g. novels, furniture, cars, etc.) as a field of study happened in parallel with similar movements in neighboring

³¹ Andreas Boldt, "Ranke: Objectivity and History," *Rethinking History* 18, no. 4 (2014), pp. 469-474.

³² Lynn Hunt, *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 1-2.

³³ Marc Bloch, *Histoire & Historiens* (Paris : Armand Colin, 1995), p. 3.

³⁴ Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, pp. 1-5.

disciplines including New Journalism, that is the use of novelistic techniques in journalism, as pioneered by Tom Wolfe.

Central to the discourse of history as narrativity are a series of texts from the 1970's onwards. In *Essai d'épistémologie*, published in 1971, the French historian Paul Veyne plainly states that "L'histoire est un roman vrai". This idea of history as a "true novel", or a story of true events, is a rejection of the purely objective view of history for a more subjective interpretation. Of course, objectivity is the stated goal of the historian, but it can seldom be achieved. Unlike Marc Bloch, who believed history to be a science ("l'histoire est la science des hommes dans le temps"), Paul Veyne had no such illusions, viewing it as a descriptive method that is essentially art rather than a science ("L'histoire n'a pas d'existence scientifique").³⁵ According to him history is not just about "events" but relies on the imagination and narrative choices of the historian, and that these narrative choices combined with the historian's perspective are what shape our understanding of the past. Both novel and history are narrative, and it is the historian's prerogative to create a narrative to help make sense of this past. Veyne does outline a major distinction, that history has to be true, hence a "true novel" and the historian's method did not exist beyond seeking this truth.³⁶ Invoking Ranke, he elaborates that history, like the novel or theater, must show their subjects as "alive" or "living" requiring them to have some psychological sense, this manifesting itself as the link between knowledge of the human heart and literary beauty. Only by mastering this relationship with "originality, cohesion, flexibility, richness, subtlety, and psychology" can the historians, in the world of Ranke, show events "as it actually happened".³⁷ In 1973 the

³⁵ Bloch, *Histoire & Historiens*, p. 3; Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, pp. 11-20.

³⁶ Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, pp. 11-20.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-201.

American historian Hayden White produced *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in the 19th Century* and in 1978 he wrote the *Tropics of Discourse*. His work explores the relationship between history and the novel as well as how to classify history within tropes (literary devices used to organize historical facts into a structured narrative).³⁸ It also delineates that all history is narrative in some way as the historian must carefully give order to the facts. It is this narrativity that allows history to be meaningful. Therefore, historical narrative is in itself a type of fiction. As such, he argues that history is closer to literature than pure scientific fact.³⁹ However, it is important to note that White rejects a pure relativist view of history.⁴⁰

The turn of the millennium brought about a renewed interest in the study of literature from historians. In 2014, French historian Ivan Jablonka published *L'histoire est une littérature contemporaine*. In this work, Jablonka attempted to explain the relationship between literature, history, and the social sciences and discussed the importance of literature for our understanding of the world. While it is a continuation of the work of Paul Veyne, he does not agree with him that history is a novel. Instead, he places emphasis on history as a social science due to its investigative qualities (“l’histoire est d’autant plus scientifique qu’elle est littéraire”).⁴¹ This view is disputed by other historians such as Judith Walkowitz, V.A.C. Gatrell and Patrick Joyce who have made

³⁸ Hayden White identifies four “master tropes” (i.e. metaphor as romance [history as a heroic quest], metonym as tragedy [history as a crushing unalterable force], synecdoche as comedy [history as reconciliation] and irony as satire [history as cynicism or futility]).

³⁹ Unlike observable phenomena in the natural sciences or proven historical facts, history is narrativity (the arrangement of facts). This is once again a rejection of the purely objective view of history.

⁴⁰ Hayden White, *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. XXIV-XXV.

⁴¹ Ivan Jablonka, *L'Histoire est une littérature contemporaine: manifeste pour les sciences sociales* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014), p. 307.

the study of melodrama a part of their historical research.⁴² In a panel published in the *American Historical Review*, curator Zoe Butt elaborates on how to learn from literature (in this case fiction). Discussing *Exterminate All the Brutes* by Sven Lindqvist, a work that studies the life and mind of Joseph Conrad, she remarks that “artworks respond similarly to history through their intertextuality (the layering of reference, symbology, narrative, historical trope)”.⁴³

Like Veyne and White but unlike Jablonka, this thesis aligns itself with the position of history as an art rather than a science. While Jablonka highlights the study of history as a social science, the narrativity of history and the role of the historian in organizing this evidence runs counter to this “scientific” intuition. This is especially true in the use of fiction as a historical archive, as this is far from the kind of source associated with this type of scientific thinking. In the case of literature as a historical source, this thesis agrees with White, and his caveat, of using historical and scientific evidence as a core process of proving as well as disproving literary intuitions. This allows this thesis to remain comfortably between the narrativity of art and the rigour of a science to help prevent it from sinking into the depths of pure subjectivity. Yet, where this thesis diverges from this safe middle ground between art and science, is that it asserts confidently that literature offers something that goes beyond the archive. No source is perfectly objective, the archives no more so than any other. Therefore, literary sources not only offer novel ways of reconstructing the past but are also a sort of historical repository; this means that they are equivalent to, but different from, the traditional archive.⁴⁴ Based on Hayden White’s commentary

⁴² Martin Wiener, “[Review] Treating “Historical” Sources as Literary Texts: Literary Historicism and Modern British History” *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 3 (1998): p. 638.

⁴³ Zoe Butt, “We Are Not the Stories We Tell Ourselves.”, *The American Historical Review* 127, no. 3 (2022), p. 1299.

⁴⁴ Andreas Boldt, “Ranke: Objectivity and History”, pp. 460-462.

on why history has stagnated, this thesis seeks to avoid the trapping of outdated models of art and science by embracing the strengths of literature.⁴⁵

As cultural history and cultural studies have grown in scope, so too has the importance of literature in our collective memories. While works of fiction reflecting the lived experience of an author, such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, are the easiest for a historian to justify studying, there is in fact a wide range of works that could be relevant to historians. Fiction, with its reliance on the symbolic realm, is an incredibly powerful tool for the cultural historian to explore societies long removed from the historian's present understanding of them. These works offer themselves as shortcuts to these "lost worlds" by structuring meaning through narrativity, bridging the gap in archival record and serving as an archive of mentalités, intellectual thought and emotions. That is why works of fiction such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* can be a fixture in colonial studies, despite scarcely mentioning the colonial history of the Congo. In fact, Conrad's understanding of these historical undercurrents ran deeper than superficial references. He was in touch with the universal themes of the human experience. In his 1905 essay on the British novelist Henry James, he discussed the relationship between fiction and history:

*"Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting — on second-hand impression. Thus, fiction is nearer truth. But let that pass. A historian may be an artist too, and a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience."*⁴⁶

Despite the confident assertions of James and some cultural historians who share his views, the use of fiction as history is often a contentious issue. In fact, the debate over the validity of fiction

⁴⁵ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 43.

⁴⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg, 1997), pp. 9–10

as a historical archive has become an interdisciplinary conversation, most prominently in Holocaust studies.

Due to the horrors inflicted on the Jewish people during the Second World War, many survivors turned to literature to reconstruct and make sense of these past events. While the diary or memoir was one avenue of expression, another was fiction, featured most prominently in the form of novels and short stories. Some of the most notable authors of this literature in the western world include Primo Levi (*If This Is A Man*) and Elie Wiesel (*Night*) while Serbo-Croatian authors such as Danilo Kiš (*Hourglass*) and Boris Pahor (*Necropolis*) have also drawn praise. In *Hourglass*, the Jewish-Serbian novelist Danilo Kiš conducted a post-modern retelling of his father's life during the Holocaust, merging fiction and real life together to paint a horrifying picture of the ordeal. An astute observer of history, Kiš believed that historical literature should bridge history with contemporary realities without distorting the past. In essence, writers such as Kiš may be unconstrained by the limitations of literal truth, instead being free to fill or redefine the boundaries of the historical record as they wish (although Kiš himself is infamous for recreating those same limitations in his work e.g. insufficient written sources, multiple interpretations, etc.). Kiš used his trademark postmodern literary style as the embodiment of these limitations to challenge the notion of historical truth and the authority of official narratives.⁴⁷ In the introduction to his collection of short stories *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, the Russian American poet Joseph Brodsky notes that although the names of the characters may be fictitious, their stories so closely mirror reality that they may in fact be construed as real. He proceeds to state that the reader can

⁴⁷ Matt Oja, "Fictional History and Historical Fiction: Solzhenitsyn and Kiš as Exemplars." *History and Theory* 27, no. 2 (1988), p.120.

escape the horror of the book's stories by closing it and putting it away, but that for those unlucky souls who are experiencing these traumas in the real world, the horror never stops.⁴⁸

Despite this lofty view of literature by its authors, the point still stands that these are not works of history, as they lack a certain empirical quality. This thesis rejects the rather declarative view of novelists such as Conrad that their works are more "truthful" than history. It does however take up the point brought forth by the likes of Kiš that the medium allows for a larger degree of freedom for the writers to express themselves, resulting in a more nuanced or complex understanding of the subject at hand. While it is true that the novels of Andrić and Selimović don't tell us "the objective truth" about Bosnia's imperial past (no source can be purely objective since it must pass through intermediaries e.g. the historians own bias, the contrived nature of the archive, etc.), they document the authors' representations and the social psychology of an era as well as the sense of alienation felt by those on the margins⁴⁹. In this, literature is not as substitute for archival and historical material but rather serves as an archive of representations and systems of intellectual justification (i.e. devices such as tropes, symbols, metaphors, etc. used to organize and communicate meaning) to draw from.

One of the primary advantages of fiction is that it can help disguise themes and messages that were unwelcome to the ruling authorities, or difficult to trace in historical records. Yet one must be wary not to confuse literature as equivalent to pure documentary evidence. There will always be a gap between literary representation and lived realities, although this is something that is true of any source. It is this gap that separates Paul Veyne's "true novel", the "récit de faits

⁴⁸ Danilo Kiš, *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* (Funks Grove, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2001), p. xvii.

⁴⁹ Behan McCullagh, "Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation," *History and Theory* 39, no. 1 (2000). p. 60.

vrais”, from fictional works such as the novel “récit non-vraisemblable” or the fable, “récit invraisemblables”.⁵⁰ Unlike Hayden White, Veyne does not believe that fiction can be used to construct a historical narrative, citing evidence type, in this case fiction, as a boundary.

These boundaries between literature departments and those of the historian were quite contentious before the advent of the cultural turn. In between these two opposing forces, positivism and relativism, there are historians such as Lynn Hunt who occupy a middle ground between both camps. An early advocate of the power of the cultural turn, *The New Cultural History* (1989) makes the case that expanding the boundaries of history by studying novels is essential for understanding the historical imagination. Yet by the time of her book *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (1999) she had noticed a dangerous trend related to the relativism of the textuality movement, how it was perhaps sinking too deeply into postmodernism having pushed back against the previously dominant “scientific” type of histories. This collection of essays argues that interplay between the text and real-world evidence is still necessary and that they both shape one another.⁵¹ This split was partially caused by a re-evaluation on the validity of official sources, such as the archive, that have come under increased scrutiny over their construction starting with thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.⁵² A more recent work Marisa Fuentes’ *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016) makes the case that archives has often omitted or distorted the lives of marginalized people creating an archival silence (e.g. studying the lives of

⁵⁰ Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, pp. 11-20.

⁵¹ Lynn Hunt, *The New Cultural History*, pp. 97-105; Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 1-5.

⁵² Victoria Bonnell and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 3.

enslaved women in Barbados by way of an archive created by white slave-owners).⁵³ This is relevant to the use of literature as a historical source as the construction of the archive by the powerful puts into question its “objectivity” and necessitates alternative sources to help fill these silences.

Despite these debates, fiction has much to offer this historian. For example, the narrative of a novel, and its interplay with the cultural background of the author, can teach us about the place and time in which a novel is written. Furthermore, fiction can elicit various interpretations, receptions and commentaries and the meaning of oeuvres can change over time. Lastly, what is included in a narrative can be as equally revealing as what is excluded. Beyond what is on the page, fiction can help us understand emotions and intellectual currents (in a way that can be independent or divorced from fact). Finding ways of representing mentalities, consisting of emotions and intellectual currents, is something that can be difficult to do as a historian. Fiction, on the other hand, is adept at capturing these things. The novel, in particular, is an effective tool to study emotions and intellectual currents as it strives to portray the thoughts and feelings of characters through a long form narrative. The spirit of one’s times, the *zeitgeist*, is an esoteric concept after all.

Evolving from the ideas of *mentalité* pioneered by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre at l’École des Annales, some French historians of the Nouvelle Histoire such as Jacques Le Goff embraced the arts, including literature, as a source. To arrive at a global and total view of history they reasoned that they would need to embrace all types of documents.⁵⁴ A controversial figure in

⁵³ Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 13-35.

⁵⁴ Jacques Le Goff, *La Nouvelle Histoire*, Paris : Éditions Le Seuil, 1988, p. 64.

this history of *mentalité* is Raymond Williams. He was not a historian, but his work has been heavily discussed and analyzed in the field. In 1977, he released *Marxism in Literature*, introducing the concept of a “structure of feelings”. This concept seeks to locate the meaning of the present in the past through subtle changes in feelings and emotions, both reflected and experienced in society. Therefore, the historian may relate two points in a temporal landscape through the understanding of those changes at the previous point⁵⁵. Thus, it can be argued that certain novels can detect changes in *mentalité* that shape events that happen after a novel is written. These emotions manifest themselves in political life, as the work *L'émotion en politique* from Philippe Braud demonstrates. He argues that too often this analysis focuses on rational behavior rather than affective phenomena (ie: anger, pride, sadness, etc.). Many historians such as William Reddy and Ilaria Scaglia have attempted to analyse this same phenomenon, with the former exposing the emotional regimes that underpin political systems.

One of the most important theorists for this thesis in this regard is István Bibó. His seminal work *Misère des petits États d'Europe de L'Est* exposed how emotions manifested themselves as a form of political hysteria in Central Europe. In doing so it attempts to explain the series of tragedies that unfolded in the “little states of Eastern Europe” over the 20th century, a period where modern states were formed and nationalist sentiment was on the rise. The work essentially argues that emotions played a key role in the political destabilisation of this part of the world.⁵⁶ Yugoslavia and its various ethnicities suffered similar fates of this political hysteria during the Second World War and again during the Yugoslav wars. Others, such as Mark Steinburg, have demonstrated how

⁵⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 132–35.

⁵⁶ István Bibó, *Misère des petits États d'Europe de l'Est* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993), pp 18-24.

unique regional emotional culture have shaped societies attitudes towards religion and morality.⁵⁷ As such, the study of emotions through literature will be of importance and will inform the literary hypotheses in this thesis. It should be noted that the history of emotions is a field that goes back to the early 20th century and while there may still a gulf that exists between the study of these “feelings” and the rigor of history (again, perfect objectivity is near impossible), it is by no means a pseudoscience but a thriving discipline. Like any source, these emotions should be compared with the socio-economic and political realities of the period studied to see if the hypotheses hold.

Our last historiographical foray attempts to understand the interplay between physical space and social hierarchy. For these themes, a rich collection of historical works exists. This starts with Henri Lefebvre and his work *La production de l'espace* that examines urban spaces arguing that "space is a social product", a dynamic environment shaped by social, political and economic factors. Another seminal work here is Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment*, an analysis of the relationship between the design of physical spaces such as army barracks and the implementation of social classification. Michel de Certeau for his part examines how ordinary people resist these hierarchies implemented from above as delineated by thinkers such as Michel Foucault in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

The existing historiography of the region does have *lacunas* (blind spots) that the study of literature can help fill. The first of these was caused by the unitarist narrative imposed by Titoism, in which the Yugoslav state censored all non-Yugoslavist narratives. Yet there was still a community living in exile in the West producing works to counteract these silences. The second

⁵⁷ Mark D. Steinberg, “Emotions History in Eastern Europe,” in *Doing Emotions History*, ed. Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 74–100.

lacuna is that much modern scholarship on the region has focused on large macro-scale analysis on the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. In this field there is a stark divide between works produced by western observers of the region and those on the periphery. Western journalists, such as the aforementioned Kaplan, popularized this idea of the Balkans as a land of “ancient hatreds” that somehow found its way into popular culture. Modern scholarship has largely rejected the essentialist view of the conflict, with historical works largely focusing on the economic crisis of the 1980s and the ensuing political crisis. For example, the manipulation of the populace by the nationalistic political elites that took over from the communists. This includes Sabrina Ramet’s *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia*. Others such as Ivo Banac also reject this ancient hatred thesis and in *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* sought answers in the actions of the politically connected during the troubled interbellum period. One of the most exiting scholarly works in recent times has been Max Bergholz’s, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community*. This work goes beyond disproving the ancient hatred thesis by stating that violence in and of itself can be a driver of future ethnic conflict in previously amicable communities.

What is often lacking in this scholarship is a *longue durée* view of the region that observes how people actually lived, since many historians working in this field today are preoccupied with the high-level ethnic conflict of the 1990’s (and to a lesser extend the World Wars). These micro-histories remain disconcerted from the broader macro level. Consequently, it is difficult to understand how dynamics between different groups changed over time. Literature helps bridge this gap by observing how confessional preference molded how groups interreact with systems such as social classification (based on socioeconomics), technological changes, bureaucracy, etc.

Methodology

It is obvious that the historian will be using literature in a narrow context, in this case using the text as a source of historical knowledge rather than the more expansive range of study available to literary scholars. Yet defining what this means is the tricky part. To satisfy the scope of research for this project, novels have been chosen that focus on relations between different religious groups. Fiction is not necessarily “fact”; fiction is not synonymous with non-fiction. Although this is a self-evident truth, it leads to some helpful delineations. What is argued is that the fiction chosen for this thesis is “nearer truth” in the words of Joseph Conrad and as such should be cross referenced, corroborated, and compared to other historical narratives. One should heed the historian Harry Payne’s advice that “I would take the contents of novels not as a set of answers about a society but, instead, as a set of questions, plausible hypotheses as to how the historian might in fact organize his evidence”.⁵⁸ Thus characters, themes, symbols, and plots are an imaginative way of constructing the story of those hypotheses⁵⁹. In essence, literature allows us to formulate these hypotheses (these can be based on emotions, perception of space, socio-economic divisions), but we will systematically verify these hypotheses with tangible historical and sociological data (censuses, analysis of agrarian reforms, Ottoman or Austrian cadastral registers). In the case that these hypotheses are incorrect, then they will serve as useful tools to understand why these representations took hold at the moment they did.

Furthermore, the link to the imagination brought forth in fiction puts this thesis solidly in the realm of cultural history, or in this iteration, interpreting the past through a social, cultural and

⁵⁸ Harry Payne, “The Novel as Social History: A Reflection on Methodology” *The History Teacher*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1978), p. 345.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

political lens via an interdisciplinary approach inspired by anthropology and literary criticism (in our case, texts as cultural artefacts).⁶⁰ In cultural history “everything is a source, everything is public”; by its very definition nothing is excluded from the historian’s study. Cultural history in essence tries to break free from the constraints of its predecessors (i.e. traditional history and social history).⁶¹ This newfound freedom allows this thesis to employ the use of novels, under the condition that four obligations are respected according to Pascal Ory in *L'Histoire culturelle*. The first is that the historian maintains his neutrality, that is to suspend his judgment. The second is to situate the source’s milieu, particularly vis-à-vis its notoriety and its radicality in contrast to its contemporary norms (i.e. to understand historical setting of the source, its level of fame/infamy and how shocking/extreme its ideas were for the normal rules of that era). The third is the concept of distinction, that is to understand what type or genre the work belongs to and to understand the limitations of that genre (e.g. the difference between fiction and non-fiction). Lastly, we have the issue of temporality, this would be the medium employed in the production of the work and how it was appropriated (i.e. the physical vehicle and how it is experienced by its patrons).⁶²

It is in fact these obligations, referred to as “boundaries” by the historian Roger Chartier that help delineate history from cultural studies. In his work *Au bord de la falaise*, he argues that history walks along the cliff’s edge between science and fiction. Thus, in one chapter he defines some of the criticisms of using literature as history and why he rejects these. The first of these is the materiality of the text: this is the idea that the metaphysical texts cannot be separated from a biased interpretation by their readers during their abstraction (i.e. to extract meaning or ideas from

⁶⁰ Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, p. 30.

⁶¹ Pascal Ory, *L'Histoire culturelle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, col. Que sais-je?, 2004), pp. 45–47.

⁶² Ory, *L'Histoire culturelle*, p. 54.

a novel) because the texts have a physical body that may shape influence them, thus they are subjective. This could be as simple as a play being interpreted differently due to the location in which it is performed (e.g. three different publics in different locales may interpret a play differently). The second criticism concerns itself with the corporality of the reader or the reader's own subjectivity, referred to as the "spontaneous ethnocentrism of the reader".⁶³ It supposes that the way we read texts will depend on the reader and his social condition. In response, Chartier states on the question of subjectivity that if this was the case, then all history by way of literature would just be cultural studies. What separates cultural studies from literature as a source of historical knowledge are the "boundaries" drawn around literary works, drawn to avoid bias into the evaluation of them. Certainly, this cannot be avoided completely. This point was articulated by Hayden White, who mockingly took the profession to task for clinging to what he views as "outmoded" perceptions objectivity born of "bad" art (i.e. eschewing modern literary techniques) and "bad" science (i.e. rooted in positivism) that is stuck in the 19th century.⁶⁴ White argues that these boundaries are more fluid than other historians would like to admit, stating Burckhardt as one of the few classic historians that understood how to transcend these limitations.⁶⁵

It should also be noted that cultural history, as methodology, seeks to represent struggles over meaning.⁶⁶ The novel, with its heavy use of the symbolic and as a product of cultural struggles itself, is a particularly fruitful avenue of study. Returning to Harry Payne's citation on the use of

⁶³ Chartier, Roger. *Au bord de la falaise: L'histoire entre certitudes et inquiétude*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009), pp. 325-326.

⁶⁴ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 43.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44-47.

⁶⁶ Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, p. 3.

literature to arrange facts, he states that “The novelist's symbols and metaphors resemble the historian's hypotheses, not his data. They suggest imaginative and often penetrating ways of constructing the whole story, not evidence toward its construction”.⁶⁷ As such, the historian will need to use a unique corpus of questions to guide the development of a narrative for his work. These questions should be specific to the author(s) and work(s) chosen. To arrange these facts, the historian will have to do some interpretation. Sometimes this interpretation comes in the form of selecting what to include or exclude when there is an abundance of evidence or potential sources. In this case, literature is used to fill the gaps in the historical record and to help interpret the past (in this sense novels are not just an addendum to archival material but equivalent).⁶⁸ As such the narrative will have to reflect both adequately and inadequately explained events, the novels helping explain the latter.⁶⁹ As Payne states in his conclusion “good history” is the art of finding the right questions and that, if found in novels, these questions may provide clues to the solution of “human action over time”.⁷⁰

Thus, our corpus of literature will be employed to observe how material phenomena such as the three below are translated into fiction:

- The spatialization of exclusion
- The perception of distant imperial authority
- Internalization of political powerlessness in the face of imported modernity.

For the first of these, it is important to understand how these novels describe property and territory in both the Austrian and Ottoman context. For this we will make recourse to academic works such

⁶⁷ Payne, “The Novel as Social History”, p. 345.

⁶⁸ See *Why Fiction*.

⁶⁹ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, p. 51.

⁷⁰ Payne, *Op. cit.*, p. 351.

as Nathalie Clayer and Xavier Bougarel's *Les musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est* or Leyla Amzi-erdoğdular's *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe* and William Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: an Intellectual and Social History*. For the second, we will have to define the center and periphery dialect using works such as Maria Todorova's *Re-Imagining the Balkans* or David Do Paço's *Trieste: les horizons d'une ville centre-européenne, 1690–1820*. The last of these, the examining of this political powerlessness that manifests itself on the periphery will find the works of Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Milica Bakić-Hayden's "*Nesting Orientalisms*" and Maria Todorova *Imagining the Balkans* to be of use.⁷¹

General Chapter Outline

The chapters are organized thematically. The first of them will concern itself with how religion shaped socio-economic factors and how in turn those factors shaped the spaces for these groups to interact with each other. The second chapter will seek to understand how religious identity shaped these social interactions. The third chapter will tackle the geographical factors that shaped Bosnia's religious and intellectual history. The fourth, and most esoteric, chapter concerns itself with the reaction of religious institutions that wield considerable power when confronted with moral dilemmas. The last chapter examines how religious institutions in Bosnia were shaped by two competing modes of diversity, the Austrian and Ottoman models.

Chapters are divided by multiple subsections and include literary analysis and conclude with a historical analysis, with a transition linking them both together. The literary analysis is derived from our corpus of questions. It interweaves excerpts of the works of Ivo Andrić (*Bosnian*

⁷¹ While many of these authors in this example are westerners, there are many authors from the periphery (Yugoslavs) featured throughout the bibliography.

Chronicle, The Bridge on the Drina, The Damned Yard and Other Stories) and the works of Meša Selimović (*Death and the Dervish, The Fortress*) to conceptualize the chapter themes so that we may derive our hypotheses from them. Then, as a transition between the literature and historical analysis, the larger ideas brought forth by the authors will be explored in more depth. Historical evidence will then be used to analyse these hypotheses. This will not only allow us to see if they stand up to scrutiny, but it will also flesh out the historical context of the literary themes.

Chapter 1: A Call to Prayer - Religion, Socio-Economics, and the Division of Physical Spaces

“And as regards this Osatican 'climbing urge' there is no difference between Muslim and Christian - although there is little else in which the two Osatican denominations agree: they even live in separate parts of town.”

- Ivo Andrić, *The Climbers*⁷²

This chapter will examine how religion, imperial hierarchies and power shifts shaped the development of physical spaces, informing the visual and auditory landscape of towns and cities. The levers of this development are rooted in economic factors such as land distribution, that were deeply tied to religious systems.

1.1 - The Landscape as a translation of imperial hierarchies

(Sound, architecture and bridges)

The soundscape of Bosnia's cities is defined by a cacophony of competing noises, each trying to assert dominion over the other. The best known of these melodious hymns is the Islamic call to prayer, broadcast by muezzins from the balcony of a minaret. In contrast, the counterpart in this incongruent symphony is the bell, a symbol of the Christian world. These are struck from their own platforms, perched in the high belltowers of churches. Yet, even among the bells, there exists a sectarian division, as the Orthodox and Catholic churches both use the same methods to call their flocks.

In Ivo Andrić's *Letter from 1920*, Max Levenfeld, a doctor of Cristian-Jewish heritage from Sarajevo is concerned with the state of ethnic relations in Bosnia. One night he finds himself lying in bed contemplating leaving the country while listening to the sounds of the night from his open window. However, the serenity created by the sound of the Miljacka river and the rustling autumn

⁷² Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 131.

leaves is shattered by a series of sounds. The first of these is the Catholic clock, striking at 2am, followed by the Orthodox chimes a few minutes later while the Mosque, for its part, is preparing for its own change of the hour at eleven.⁷³ He then states that he is happy that the Jews, Sephardic or Ashkenazi, for their part have “no clock to sound their hour”.⁷⁴ This small sonic foray between the faiths is part of a larger war for the heart and souls of the denizens of Bosnia that extends far beyond the auditory realm. This is demonstrated when returning to a *Letter from 1920* Max Levenfeld then goes on to state that:

*Thus at night, while everyone is sleeping, division keeps vigil in the counting of the late, small hours, and separates these sleeping people who, awake, rejoice and mourn, feast and fast by four different and antagonistic calendars, and send all their prayers and wishes to one heaven in four different ecclesiastical languages. And this difference, sometimes visible and open, sometimes invisible and hidden, is always similar to hatred, and often completely identical.*⁷⁵

His view is clear, that these differences shape many aspects of life in Bosnia. After all, from an anthropological point of view, religion is a foundational building block of society, affecting things as diverse as education, burial practices, urban planning and the justice system amongst others⁷⁶. If culture is the “blueprint for behavior” and religion is a subset of culture, it stands that religion is a lens in which behavior can be observed.⁷⁷ With this in mind, it is his position that these confessional differences can lead to hatred. While true that these bells are religious delineators, this chapter aims to push this idea a little further. In pre-modern, then later imperial, societies like

⁷³ Islamic time calculations are based on lunar cycles. The narrator refers to this time as the “ghostly Turkish hour”, as it is measured by “strange calculation of distant and alien parts of the world” (Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 199.).

⁷⁴ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 199.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁷⁶ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Rebecca Stein and Philip Stein, *The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 1-4.

Bosnia, sound and architecture are not merely religious symbols but instead are delineators of territorial claims playing out in the public space.

If one were to walk-through the historical center of present-day Sarajevo, they would quickly be confronted by a series of towering structures belonging to the nation's four major religious sects. In Sarajevo's old town one can find within a few blocks of each other, the Catholic Sacred Heart Cathedral, the Serbian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos and the historic Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque. Even the Ashkenazi Synagogue, one of many Jewish places of worship in the city, is just a short walk across the Miljacka river. Much like Beirut sports the Mohammed Al-Amin Mosque and the Saint George Maronite Cathedral almost side by side, Sarajevo does the same. While religious buildings can be seen by outside observers as symbols of religious harmony, that is the physical embodiment of pluralism, they can also be seen as signs of fratricidal competition.

At the time of Sarajevo's Olympic triumph in 1984 the city was touted as a model of pluralism, yet in 1992, not even a decade later, it descended into chaos. The image of a multiethnic paradise, fashioned by modernity and cosmopolitanism, was a manufactured one.⁷⁸ In retrospect, these words of Max Levenfeld seem almost prophetic "Because this poor, backward country, in which four different faiths live cheek by jowl, needs four times as much love, mutual understanding and tolerance as other countries".⁷⁹ The deep societal fissure that those commentators at the Olympics struggled to identify, is much less veiled today. The city of Sarajevo, where Serbs and Bosniaks were militarily engaged, is split into explicit ethnic enclaves with a

⁷⁸ Zlatko Jovanovic, *A Cultural History of the 1984 Winter Olympics: The Making of Olympic Sarajevo* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 117-118.

⁷⁹ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 198.

separate Serbian quarter taken up in the suburbs of East Sarajevo. Similarly, in Mostar, bitter street fighting between Croats and Bosniaks has left the streets, serving as makeshift frontlines, scarred and mangled. The competing factions no longer live together, having decamped to their own enclaves while the burned-out husks of buildings along these roadways serve as the stark delineations between the Croat and Bosniak worlds. In the Croat quarter, a Catholic church and belltower destroyed during the war now reaches for the sky, far above any building constructed in that city since time immemorial.⁸⁰ While these modern markers of religious competition and ethnic conflict are easy to identify, even with little knowledge of the region, there has always existed signs of tensions beneath the veneer of slogans and unity credos such as "It's not the cross that marks the Slav".⁸¹

This literary description of a warring duel between religious factions for our ears and eyes is not only an aesthetic flourish added to the text, but something well documented by historians, most notably by Alain Corbin. His book *Les Cloches de la Terre* is a reflection on the sensory experience of the French countryside. While the secularization of the public space has made the presence of bells intruding to today's observer, he makes the case that bells were an important part of everyday life for pre-modern people anchoring their collective memory through their life experiences which was associated with a certain soundscape. He notes that people become very emotional when their local church sound is gone, because bells are no longer around or have been

⁸⁰ The Franciscan Church of St. Peter and Paul I in Mostar renowned for having the tallest bell tower in Southeast Europe (107 meters).

⁸¹ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 198.

removed.⁸² It is the sound of these bells, and the emotion that they convey, that construct the territorial identity of churches.

The bells are anchors for localism and the desire to set down roots. The churches housing these bells are often well located geographically (for example, they are at important junctions and burghs in the countryside) and are usually the most historic buildings in the town – giving these bells a symbolic value.⁸³ “Le capital symbolique”, as it is referred to by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, is the prestige associated with an institution. This prestige offers legitimacy and a recognized cultural and social capital.⁸⁴ Corbin reserves some of his sharpest analysis for the bells as a tool of acoustic conquest, where in mixed milieus, bells serve as an act of dominance by way of creating “noise pollution” in order to acoustically conquer their neighbours. In this sense bells are both a delineator of territory and a tool of territorial control.⁸⁵ As in France, Bosnia’s competing religious calls are an act of “symbolic violence”, where the dominant group attempts to foist its vision of the world upon the other. They are able to do so because of the symbolic capital afforded to these religious instruments which helps them legitimize existing social hierarchies. In the context of the literature, the erection of a bell tower taller than the minaret after the departure of the Ottomans (or the grand mosques and pitiful churches of Ottoman times) is not merely an emotional act of revenge; it is a subversion of the social and political hierarchy where the now weaker party begins to internalize their inferior position and the stronger party begins to assert its dominant position. If we are to examine this dynamic through the prism of sociology, then it is

⁸² Alain Corbin, *Les Cloches de la Terre* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), p. 271.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 99, 197-199.

⁸⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–258.

⁸⁵ Alain Corbin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 199-204.

obvious that the domination brought about by symbolic violence is represented by the occupation of visual and auditory spaces as a way of asserting a monopoly on the legitimate presence of that group in the public sphere.⁸⁶ At the heart of this conflict, Corbin has identified that the fear of humiliation lies at the heart of almost all these confrontations with pride and vexation matching the position of the nominated and dominant.⁸⁷ For example, as Christian commercial power grew in the late Ottoman era with backing from the West, Muslim power diminished owing to war and a shrinking empire.⁸⁸ This newfound Christian dynamism resulted in the Muslim elite feeling like they had lost status.⁸⁹ It is exactly this dynamic that is reflected in *The Climbers* where the Muslim community is vexed at the newly found wealth and status of the Christians who have pridefully put up a new church belltower.

This politicization of the landscape even extended into the way its citizens interacted with the built infrastructure, a phenomenon that can be observed in the novels and in the historical record. One thing that both authors have in common is that they describe a Bosnia in which the lived environment of all four faiths was not necessarily shared but divided by physical barriers (e.g. geographic segregation, institutional partitions, etc.). In a *Bosnian Chronicle*'s Travnik, the three primary faiths have their own quarters. Muslims live in the city, while the Serbian and Croat

⁸⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, ed. Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp.78-92.

⁸⁷ Corbin, *Les Cloches de la Terre*, pp. 199-200

⁸⁸ The loss of the Hungarian *timars*, or estates, was felt in Bosnia where many charitable trusts or *waqf* depended on that income (see Chapter 1.2). At the same time, the growing Christian imperial presence in the Balkans and an ascendant Serbia were keen to establish trade links with the local Christian communities.

⁸⁹ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, pp. 39-45.

Christian *rayah* live in their own separate suburban areas as well as in the surrounding hills.⁹⁰ The Jews of this story are treated poorly by both Christians and Muslims alike, and in a very moving passage they are the only ones to mourn the departure of the French consul at the end of the novel.⁹¹ The exclusion of the Jewish population is just as apparent in *The Fortress* when the main character is walking through a Jewish ghetto.⁹² A similar dichotomy exists in *Bridge on the Drina*, where the bridge acts as a physical barrier between the Christian (primarily Serb) world and the slavophone Muslim one. The physical structure of the bridge, and its famed “*kapia*” (i.e. a two-sided public terrace built on a widened bridge span near the center of the structure), is one of few places of public co-existence between the faiths. Christians occupy the quieter left bank of the river, living in nearby hamlets, and Muslims the right bank, where the town and marketplace (*čaršija* or bazaar) are located. The division was so prominent that Christians would have to take their first crossing to the other side of the Drina to be Christened during the first days of their lives.⁹³

In the example above, we can see that division is not just a temporary inconvenience for the characters; it is an essential feature of their lives. Yet, in an Ottoman system that was based on ethnic hierarchies, this division also served a clear purpose; to define or delineate and in a flawed but pluralistic fashion, to dictate the rhythms of life (worship, death, time...). In doing this they fostered a sense of local community and acted as an agent of social cohesion. The end of the

⁹⁰ The *rayah* refers to tax-paying subjects in the Ottoman Empire, it originally applied to all citizens regardless of religious status, but it would later be identified with non-Muslim subjects, specifically the Christian peasantry; Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle* (New York: Arcade, 1993), pp. 7-9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

⁹² Meša Selimović, *The Fortress*, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 139.

⁹³ Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 13-15.

Ottoman era saw the gradual transition of Bosnia and Herzegovina to a new model of diversity based on common citizenship, leaving the old delimiters of this system as anachronism. A parallel to this situation can be found in *Les Cloches de la Terre* when Corbin informs us that the French state was in dire economic straits during the Franco-Prussian Wars. Short on funds, they decided to melt parish bells for their copper to use it as ammunition for the French army cannons. This act, perpetrated by a “rational” state with a monopoly on violence that cared little for tradition, imposed a modernity that led to a loss of village identity throughout France.⁹⁴ Just as the dismantling of the Ottoman *millet* system in Bosnia attempted to reduce a long held social boundary into obsolescence, the French state’s requisition of parish bells in *Les Cloches de la Terre* stripped French villages of their age old rhythms, the very boundary that defined their existence.

As modern states began to secularize and industrialize, religion was slowly moved to the private sphere.⁹⁵ The public space that was once occupied by both bells and the call to prayer transitioned from the sacred to the secular. In doing so, it transformed these religious instruments from symbols of localisms, representing unique sounds recognized by their flocks, to an empty symbol devoid of their confessional functions. Finally, these states also centralized and slowly began to exert control over these institutions, reducing the local authority of the clergy. Could it be that this void in the public space, once occupied by regulators of local identities, was a ripe vessel to be filled with a global identitarian quality by competing nationalists, thus transforming the Bosnian soundscape from a dialogue between faiths to a series of competing nationalisms based on sonic delineations? The experience of Max Levenfeld supported by the analysis of Alain Corbin would certainly fit this premise.

⁹⁴ Corbin, *Les Cloches de la Terre*, pp. 15-40.

⁹⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 26-28.

1.2 - The political economy of confession

(Land status, the vakufs, and the urban-rural divide)

Understanding how these physical and auditory barriers came to be is then of the utmost importance to analyzing the inter-religious dynamic between groups. In Ottoman Bosnia socio-economic conditions and the organization of parishioner communities went hand in hand. This is especially true of land distribution, in which the best lands were often held by those of the Muslim faith, creating a conflict with the Christian population.⁹⁶ For example, in *The Story of the Vizier's Elephant*, the deputy vizier Suleiman Pasha Skopljak is a Bosnian belonging to a leading families of *begs*, the Islamic version of the landed gentry that owned large estates, houses and shops.⁹⁷ Similarly, many of the institutions, particularly the religious ones, including schools were funded by a complex system of endowments. These endowments were gifts that primarily benefited the Muslim community. This is readily apparent in the works of Meša Selimović, for example in *Death and the Dervish* a *tekke* (dervish house) serves as a focal center of learning with many events of the novel occurring inside its walls. Similarly, the *Fortress* features a religiously endowed madrasa where the main character spends much of his time outside the home. In both cases, these religious institutions serve as bastions of the community and a space for Muslims to rally around. It should be noted that endowment funds pegged for economic development were primarily aimed at the Muslim merchant class, despite seeming to benefit all religious groups. For example, in both *Bridge on the Drina* and *Bridge on the Zepa* the creation of permanent bridge crossings comes with a fully furnished stone *han* (caravanserai). These are lodgings in which travelers can stay free of charge. These structures allowed trade to flourish, but not equally. The *han* was

⁹⁶ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, pp. 79, 114-115, 187-188.

⁹⁷ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 48.

reserved for certain merchant families, typically Muslims, and this allowed them to benefit economically by reducing merchant expenses and thus encouraging trade.

The power of these endowments' ebbs and flows with that of the Empire. In *Bridge on the Drina*, we see the transformation of the stone *han* on the Drina bridge from a luxurious structure taken care of by a steward who manages the endowment to a shadow of its former self. The structure's endowment had shrunk along with the borders of the Empire, and those same luxurious standards could no longer be upheld. Eventually the *han* falls into abandon and is seldom used by travelers, the caretaker struggling to maintain it.⁹⁸ The periods of decline usually coincided with the retaking of Balkan territories by foreign Christian powers, which in turn created new competitive tensions as Christian revolts grew more frequent and their economic situation improved.⁹⁹

So, what is the relationship between ethnic segregation based on economic stratification and interethnic conflict and is ethnic segregation a cause for conflict? Sociologists and historians have analysed these questions and their findings are mixed. However, a large body of evidence suggests that likelihood of ethnic conflict is linked to ethnic segregation. In *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity* Andreas Wimmer charts the history of ethnic conflict not as ancient aspiration but as a consequence of nationalism (nation-states) and modernity. In doing so he states that the creation of ethnic boundaries is a product of social struggles and that political exclusion is itself a cause for conflict. His research indicates that civil wars are more

⁹⁸ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 72-74, 139.

⁹⁹ Clayer and Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, pp. 39-45.

common in these systems than in ones that are pluralistic with strong political institutions as these types of societies treat all their citizens equally, reducing the power of these ethnic boundaries.¹⁰⁰

The writings of Meša Selimović seem to indicate that these kinds of interethnic conflicts are in part a type of competition over limited resources and existing privileges. A prime example can be found in his novel *The Fortress* where, during a four-way conversation about the “irresistible urge to do evil” exhibited by some Bosnians, a passionate argument erupts between the main character Ahmet (a former soldier, now questioning the society in which he belongs), Mula Ibrahim (a former soldier, merchant in the bazaar and friend of Ahmet’s, whom the latter rescued during the battle of Chocim), Shehega Socho (a wealthy merchant with a bone to pick with the authority) and Osman Vuk (Shehega Socho’s right hand man). Mula Ibrahim objects to the harsh rhetoric employed by Shehega about the supposed bad character of their people stating that “Countries are countries, people are people, the same as anywhere”. Shehega Socho for his part is quick to riposte, stating the following:

*Neither is this country like others, nor are its people. The country is wretched. Haven't you seen the names of our villages. Tell them Osman! "Luckless, Mudville, Blackwater, Burnt Ash, Thornystake, Hunger, Wolf, Fuckham, Wolfvalley, Wolfsden, Thorny, Hopeless, Stink, Snakehole, Misery... There! All misery, poverty, hunger, bad luck. And the people? It makes me sick to talk of them. Why is it like that? I don't know, perhaps we're evil by nature, marked by God. Or perhaps because disaster is ever with us and we fear to laugh aloud lest we anger the evil forces that forever circle around us. Is it any wonder we bow and scrape, that we hide, that we lie that we think only of today and only of ourselves and see our own good fortune in another's misfortune? We've no pride, no courage."*¹⁰¹

When Mula later asks in response “Are we all bad?”, Shehega unequivocally quips “All. Some more, some less. But all.”¹⁰² While this is of course an exaggeration, it clearly demonstrates the

¹⁰⁰ Andreas Wimmer, *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1-15

¹⁰¹ Selimović, *The Fortress*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

frustrations many men gathered have with Bosnia's long simmering socioeconomic issues; and a curious issue of the "Bosnian character" that will be explored in Chapter 4.

These same ideas are present in the writings of Ivo Andrić as well. Returning to a *Letter from 1920*, one of the most striking passages underlines that the conflict between confessional groups can't be separated from the socio-economic environment in which they were born in.

*The most evil and sinister looking faces can be met in greatest numbers at places of worship – monasteries, and dervish tekkes. Those who oppress and exploit the economically weaker do it with hatred into the bargain, which makes the exploitation one-hundred times harder and uglier, while those who bear these injustices dream of justice and reprisal, but as some big explosion of vengeance which, if it were realized according to their ideas, would perforce be so complete that it would blow away the oppressed along with the oppressor.*¹⁰³

This citation cleverly frames the responsibility for this exploitation as not belonging to a single denomination, but of members of all of them. It therefore implicitly links this exploitation to power dynamics based on denomination.

These observations by novelists are in accordance with the existing scholarship. To gain power and social mobility in the Ottoman Empire, a low born subject typically needed to do two things: convert to Islam and join the military. The latter was only possible by doing the first. This is because the Ottoman Empire was ruled by a military-administrative structure in which the *ulemas*, or religious authorities, had significant share of the power alongside the *askeri*, or military administrators.¹⁰⁴ Among Ottoman subjects we find roughly two social divisions: those in the ruling class, and those that were ruled by them. Belonging to these groups was defined by one's religious affiliation and was defined by the level of obligation to the state one owed, namely taxation and military service. The "ruled" paid taxes to the state while the "rulers" who paid no

¹⁰³ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁴ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 24.

taxes were expected to perform military service. At the top of the social hierarchy stood the Sultan, whose iron clad will was carried out by the Grand Vizier using the Sublime Porte, the central government of the Ottoman Empire. His governor for the province was the Vizier of Bosnia. He ruled with the help of the *begs*, or noblemen, as well as members of the military class, such as the Janissaries and Sipahis. While Janissaries were privy to a good social standing, the Sipahis were entitled to the fruits of the *timar* system, essentially the endowment of agricultural lands for military service.¹⁰⁵ At the bottom of the hierarchy were the ruled, or tax-paying citizens. This includes merchants, peasants, and artisans. Their status was dependent on religion, with the Muslims belonging to the first class of citizens and at the bottom the infidels (*giaour*) known as the *rayah*, essentially the Christian serfs.¹⁰⁶ Religious communities in occupied territories such as Bosnia were organized along the *millet* system, which meant they had a degree of self-governance. Unlike Muslims, Christians and Jews were under no obligation to go to war, but a certain number of them were taken as tribute to become Muslim soldiers as part of the Dervshirme system.¹⁰⁷ To be part of this military-administrative system, was to be endowed with the *possibility* of acquiring significant power and privileges.

Tied to this military administrative system was the system of land distribution. An important point of friction between Christians and Muslims was that over one-third of lands were endowed in 1878, mostly to the Muslim *begs*.¹⁰⁸ Yet it was not only military members who benefited from these land grants. Many lands were also held by Waqfs (*vakufs*), religious or charitable foundations run by the Muslim elite. Finally, there were also a lot of small-scale

¹⁰⁵ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 24-26.

¹⁰⁶ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. viii.

¹⁰⁷ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

landowners, who were predominantly Muslim. The 1910 census indicated that over half of privately held lands in Bosnia (900 000 ha) were overseen by a landlord with tenants and as much as ninety percent of those lands were held by Bosniaks.¹⁰⁹ This meant that the economic situation was difficult for the Christian peasantry who often served as the serfs of their Muslim neighbours or a forced labour pool for the *begs* and vizier. This was especially true in rural and agricultural areas, where most of the arable land was held by large estate holders. In addition to this, the core of almost every urban center consisted of endowed properties that were maintained by pious foundations, such as the before mentioned *vakufs*. This included land for educational and religious institutions, further exacerbating the urban enclaves (Bosniak) and exclaves (Catholic and Orthodox) that belonged to certain confessional communities. For example, dervish lodges (*tekkes*) were established in almost all the early urban settlements, allowing Islam to spread and giving local adherents access to the Sufi network that extended across the Muslim world. It should be noted that some of these *tekkes* also had their own assets (e.g. land, shops and mills) and as such they could afford to pay officials, feed dervishes and host dignitaries.¹¹⁰ Beyond land many well to do Muslims also participated in the program endowing entire villages, agricultural estates, houses, commercial properties as well as expensive items such as books.¹¹¹

The lack of economic opportunity, as well as available land, pushed many Christians to emigrate to larger metropolitan centers such as Belgrade and Zagreb. This led to the incorrect perception that the Islamic presence in Bosnia was growing while the Christian one was in decline. This perception was fueled in part by the fact that the Muslim birthrate in much of south-east

¹⁰⁹ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, pp. 187-188

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 24, 46.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 113.

Europe were higher than that of their Christian neighbours; yet this was not the case in Bosnia. This trend even continued after the land reforms were enacted during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and later when lands were confiscated in socialist Yugoslavia. This resulted in a situation where the Muslim population grew but the Christian population remained stable due to emigration. As such the number of Christians as a percentage of the population decreased. For example, Muslims saw their population grow from 34.5 percent of the population in 1948 to 43.7 in 1991.¹¹² The population of nearly 800 000 individuals increased to over 1.9 million. During that same time the Serbo-Croatian Christian share of the population dropped from 65.5% (41.5% Serbs, 24% Croats) in 1948 to 51.4% (34.1% Serbs, 17.3% Croats) in 1991. In contrast, the Serbian population stayed relatively stable, growing from 1.1 million individuals to 1.3 million within that time frame. The Croatian population remained similar in size throughout that same time span, they only grew from six hundred thousand individuals to seven hundred and sixty thousand.¹¹³ As these demographic shifts occurred, a broader regional migration pattern was simultaneously being shaped by access to education and economic opportunity.

The exodus of young men to the larger cosmopolitan centers, typically those with universities and a proper industrial economic base, is not unique to Bosnia and was a commonplace occurrence in many of the less cosmopolitan republics.¹¹⁴ It typically led Croats to Zagreb and Serbs to Belgrade, but this process of migration also extended to other European countries and even as far as the United States of America. In fact, excess labour was often managed through

¹¹² Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, p. 172; Since the category of "Muslim" was not officially created until 1968, these statistics should be used with caution.

¹¹³ Clayer et Bougarel, *Op. cit.*, p. 176.

¹¹⁴ Andrei Simić, "Urbanization and Cultural Process in Yugoslavia." *Anthropological Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (1974), p. 211.

emigration in what has been a staple of Yugoslav foreign policy since its inception.¹¹⁵ While Belgrade, Zagreb and to a lesser extent Ljubljana (replacing Graz as a center for learning for Slovenians upon its establishment in 1919) were important university centers for a vast majority of the Christian Serbo-Croatian speakers, there were few opportunities for Yugoslavia's minorities to receive an education in their own cultural milieu. During the Ottoman Era, Muslims were encouraged to study elsewhere in the empire as part of the Pan-Islamic current. Many Bosnian Muslims would venture out of Bosnia to study in Constantinople or other Islamic centers such as Cairo, a privilege they were entitled to as citizens of the empire because of their confessional status. These historic entitlements slowly waned as the Ottoman state modernized and were completely severed as the Austro-Hungarian Empire consolidated its rule over Bosnia. The Austrians wanted to increase their own influence over the territory, and to do so they had to reduce the local Muslim population's ties to the Sublime Porte. This left the Muslim population with limited options to study abroad, and little socio-economic reasons to do so as they still had a monopoly on land.¹¹⁶ In essence, these ancient land titles were all they had left to remind them of their former glory, so they clung to them even more dearly. It was not until the establishment of Socialist Yugoslavia that a secular university would open in Sarajevo. As such it was not until 1949 that promising students could stay in Bosnia for their education.

Thus, there was not only little reason for Muslims to leave but little opportunity to do so. It was not until the next wave of emigration in the 1960s as part of what was the first large wave of migration since the Second World War that Muslims from Bosnia would be encouraged to go

¹¹⁵ Kosiński, Leszek A. "Yugoslavia and International Migration." *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 20, no. 3 (1978), p. 314-315.

¹¹⁶ Clayer, Nathalie, et Xavier Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est : Des Empires aux États balkaniques*, Paris: Karthala, 2013, pp. 82-84, 150-151.

abroad. By then, the communists had mostly resolved the land monopoly issue and attempted to promote a *gastarbajteri* (guest workers) economic policy culminating in a landmark 1968 recruitment agreement with West Germany. It aimed to reduce the political pressure brought on by the dire unemployment situation. This migration had a significant effect on all of Yugoslavia, including poorer republics like Bosnia. It was primarily driven by economic considerations (i.e. reduce unemployment and accumulate hard currency in the form of remittances), and it was promoted by the state as a tool for economic growth. It would also relieve existing political pressure brought on by workers struggling to find employment. The idea was for these workers to return to Yugoslavia wealthier than they had left it, flush with foreign currency to help finance the development of their old communities.¹¹⁷ Instead, when the program ended following the oil crisis in 1973, a mere five years later, there was still little economic opportunity in Bosnia for those workers to return to. As the Yugoslav economy could not absorb these returning workers, many chose to stay in Germany with their families. The program thus failed to bring about the required modernization and at the same time led to a crippling brain drain. For those who did come back, they experienced alienation and an exasperation with the system that would be further exacerbated by the 1980s economic crisis in Yugoslavia. Policies such as these were also a leading factor in the 1968 protests and were seen as a sign of growing friction and frustration with a government that was shipping its citizens abroad¹¹⁸. For context, by the 1970s, roughly one in five (19%) of all employed Yugoslav citizens were working abroad.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Mato Bošnjak, "Between unemployment and migration: institutionalised female labour migration from socialist Yugoslavia, 1963–1973", *Social History*, 51(1), pp. 59-60, 63-64.

¹¹⁸ Ulf Brunnbauer, "Yugoslav Gastarbeiter and the Ambivalence of Socialism: Framing Out-Migration as a Social Critique", *Journal of Migration History* 5, 3 (2019), pp. 413-437.

¹¹⁹ Bošnjak, "Between unemployment and migration", p. 63.

While Bosniaks mostly stayed within Bosnia rather than migrating internally or externally, the situation was different for Bosnia's Christian population. In the novel *Bridge on the Drina*, we see a group of Serbian students gathered on the famed bridge during the Austrian occupation preparing for this process of migration. This literary depiction is not so different than the one experienced by many small-town Serbs. Visegrad was not a large center, but rather a provincial town that would see many of its youths off to larger centres. With little socio-economic incentive owing to the land ownership issue and the lack of economic opportunity, many Serbs and Croats had little choice but to seek opportunity abroad or elsewhere within the country. In the pre-interbellum and post war period this was due to agrarian issues namely rural poverty driven by overpopulation. It is estimated that nearly three-quarters of the population in Yugoslavia still lived rurally in the 1930s. Taking into account production and the gross national product, it is possible to estimate that there was a surplus rural population in Yugoslavia of thirty-nine percent, a toll that is considerably higher than most of its neighbours.¹²⁰ During the interbellum, the most effective program to remediate this issue would have been a capitalistic western industrial model but unfortunately, Yugoslavia opted to pursue an agrarian industrial policy that failed to produce the desired results.¹²¹ Given these factors, it should be of no surprise that so many prominent Serbs came from similar communities outside of the borders of Serbia itself, or on its periphery, and made their way somewhere else to make a name for themselves. Among these men and women, one would recognize Milovan Djilas, the former Vice President of Yugoslavia, who details his life as a young student in an impoverished part of rural Montenegro in his book *Land Without Justice* before heading to Belgrade to attend university and then climbing up the ranks of power. Similarly,

¹²⁰ Roman Krakovsky, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books), p. 63.

¹²¹ Krakovsky, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, pp. 68-69.

the world's most famous engineer Nichola Tesla came from rural Slavonia in Croatia before going off to University in Graz.

It should also be noted that these same economic pressures that caused many of Bosnia's Christians to emigrate also played a part in the conversion of Christians to Islam and later vice versa. The literature on the subject indicates that identity in Ottoman Bosnia was more fluid than one would expect and that economic considerations were one of the many reasons for religious conversion. The previously mentioned study by Leonard Kukić and Yasin Arslantaş showed that economics was a driver of religious and ethnic identity and that poorer households were more likely to convert than wealthier ones. In the conclusion of that study, the authors stated that the removal of the poll tax (eliminated when one converted to Islam) was the greatest driver of conversion for low-income families.¹²² These conversions to Islam in Bosnia Herzegovina did not happen instantaneously (in contradiction to the myth of spontaneous conversion). They were gradual and became most intensive in the first two centuries after the establishment of Ottoman rule.¹²³ Ottoman records from the 15th century show the connections between Ottoman urbanization and Islamization throughout the Ottoman Balkans, where urban areas were predominantly inhabited by Muslims and rural areas by Christians.¹²⁴ Until the twentieth century, however, the majority of all Bosnians were peasants.¹²⁵ As previously mentioned, conversion was seen as an opportunity to gain economic status. However, its advantages went far beyond that, it

¹²² Leonard Kukic, and Yasin Arslantas, "Religious change and persistence in Bosnia: Poverty, conversions, and nationalism, 1468- 2013", Working Paper 22-07, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. Instituto Figuerola de Historia y Ciencias Sociales (2022), p. 24.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-26.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18

allowed one to escape one's social status by joining the leading confessional caste in the Ottoman ethnic hierarchy. The military administrative system provided access to participation in civic life, advancement, and an international network. Since only Muslims could join the military and claim tax exemptions, this opened "the way for conflation of religion and class in Bosnia Herzegovina".¹²⁶ Furthermore, despite a rural Bosnia being quite poor, its cities, mostly populated by Muslims, were quite wealthy. Admission into this religiously minded military caste was quite porous due to the presence of corruption, and it was once said that the "population of Sarajevo consisted of Janissaries, craftsmen, and merchants and no one else — the wood sellers, bread makers, and even Christians converts to Islam had bought their membership in the military".¹²⁷ Such was the advantage of joining this privileged stratum that putting an end to this system would not rest well with Bosnian Muslims, who wanted to keep their existing privileges, at first against the reforms of the Sublime Porte, and later against the Austrians themselves.

It should be noted that this study by Leonard Kukić and Yasin Arslantaş confirms an important intuition from the *Bridge on the Drina*. Andrić intimates that unlike the Serbian nationalist myth of a uniformly opulent Muslim elite, that the average Muslim peasant remained poor despite his conversion. In this sense, this work of fiction serves to invalidate a persistent piece of nationalist history. The Christian peasantry had not uniquely suffered under Ottoman rule, the Muslim peasantry had been similarly afflicted with poverty and only the Ottoman urban elites truly profited from their conversions. The study confirms that economic considerations were important reasons for their initial choice of conversion, yet they did not convert back once poverty had stricken their villages during the Austro-Hungarian era. The article suggests that this might be due

¹²⁶ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 28.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

to their group being more fixed in their confessional identity owing to the rise of a national conscience 19th century.¹²⁸

The short economic analysis of the Bosnian villages and towns that we conducted in the chapter above shows that the spatial segregation imposed by the Ottomans drew its strength from their ownership of the land which was directly tied to their religious identity. This system was then dismantled by Austro-Hungary and Yugoslavia, without these states providing sufficient economic and educational opportunities. This in turn drove the local Muslims to cling to the land as a symbol of identity, even more strongly than they had previously. This phenomenon will be highlighted in the next section.

1.3 - The collapse of imperial privileges and spatial anxiety

(Imperial Transitions and the redrawing of the invisible boundaries of the city)

The economic tensions between Christians and Muslims are highlighted in the short story *The Climbers* by Ivo Andrić. The story takes place in the town of Osatica in the Srebrenica district, a village whose landscape is now partially submerged under the waters of Lake Perućac, which was flooded after the Bajina Bašta power plant was built on the Drina River in 1966. Of course, one would be hard pressed not to notice the village's proximity to Srebrenica, the site of one of the worst atrocities of the Yugoslav wars. The story starts with a rather telling narration that lays out the physical and human geography of the town:

Osatica. A town on a plateau, but the plateau is surrounded on all sides by high mountains and their bare, karst slopes. So both parties are right: those Osaticans who claim that their town is on a hill, as well as those who say that it is in a hole. But in spite of conflicting opinions they all have one thing in common: all Osaticans are born with an aspiration for heights and even the most unassuming and the humblest of them want to climb at least a span higher than they are. To climb higher and to have it seen and known. Those who are

¹²⁸ Kukic & Arslantas "Religious change and persistence in Bosnia", pp. 2, 27.

no good for anything else at least dream of climbing and tell stories about it. And this desire for climbing of all sorts and at all costs, for the illusion of height, never leaves them until their death - which is the end of all desires and, for the Osaticans, a kind of last and very special climbing. This craving is handed down from old to young, from one generation to the next. And as regards this Osatican 'climbing urge' there is no difference between Muslim and Christian - although there is little else in which the two Osatican denominations agree: they even live in separate parts of town. The Christian part is on karst, on a hill clustered round the church which is situated at the highest point, whereas the Muslim part is on the slopes of the hill, where everything is 'within reach' as they used to say, and where the soil, easier to cultivate, yields better crops.¹²⁹

Within the opening paragraphs of this story, we can already see a clear physical delineation between both communities. In the story the Muslims inhabit the better agricultural land, leaving the less productive land to the Christians. Each group is building their settlements around the existing distribution of land. Despite these distinctions, we see that there is one space that allows co-existence, a shared passion for climbing. Yet even this shared pastime is one that brings division in the form of competition, for whoever climbs the highest claims the highest honour. It also gives us an idea of how land distribution during the Ottoman Empire favored certain groups above others. In the introduction, the reader is told that the Muslim residents of the town have the better land, but even as this division seems clear cut, there is a nuance to this disparity. Not every Muslim was the recipient of such generosity, with many of the non-land-owning Muslims being poor. For example, when the Sublime Porte calls their subjects into the Russo-Turkish war, many of the town's wealthy residents were able to break their oath of service or were protected by a powerful figure, yet the poorest amongst them, chiefly the famed climber and war hero Hasim Glibo, could not pay their way out, participating in the conflict as lowly foot soldiers.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, pp. 131-132.

¹³⁰ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, pp. 132-134.

This brings forth several questions such as how Christians and Muslims chose their religious affiliation in the first place, and how were they grouped geographically and culturally. It is the prevalent view amongst both Serb and Croat nationalists that the conversion of Bosnian Christians to Islam was based on opportunism and was interpreted as an ethnic betrayal. Serbian nationalists spread the view that Bosnian Muslims were Asiatic and therefore had fewer rights to the land than the Orthodox peasantry.¹³¹ However, the reality is much more complex. First, Bosniaks are ethnic South Slavs who converted to Islam. Second, as we have seen, a litany of studies have suggested that socio-economic incentives established by institutional powers were much more prominent in the decision to convert to Islam.¹³² However, it should also be noted that the majority of all Bosnians were peasants until the twentieth century, meaning they were still relatively poor compared with the urban *begs*.¹³³ Hence, despite converting, poverty was still endemic in the peasantry of both groups. As is stated in *Bridge on the Drina*, many of the local converts in Višegrad did not fare much better than the unconverted with a few salient quotation highlighting their poor living conditions and broken aspirations: “Many of the converted Turks who, in changing faith, had not found what they had hoped for” and “had continued to sit down to a meagre supper and go about with patched elbows...”.¹³⁴ Despite this poverty, most literary texts in this collection highlight the pride many Muslims took in their Ottoman origins. Returning to *The Climbers* even across socio-economic lines we can see the Muslim subject’s attachment to

¹³¹ Leyla Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe: Muslims in Habsburg Bosnia Herzegovina*, 1st ed., (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024), p. 189.

¹³² Kukic & Arslantas “Religious change and persistence in Bosnia”, p 10.

¹³³ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 24.

¹³⁴ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 35-36.

Ottoman Empire, to whom belonging to is perceived as a way to elevate themselves from the rabble:

*In the days of Turkish power in Bosnia, the inhabitants of the lower part of the town climbed more frequently and were more ambitious climbers. They could well afford it, for indeed they were the Sultan's sons, looking down upon this world from horseback. Although, of course, there were poor men among them too: more men leading other people's horses than rich and noble riders. But even when the Turks' power was gone, their riches no more, their fame and their reputation remained, together with great self-esteem and a hundred stories about the good old days.*¹³⁵

In the passage, the wealth of the Muslim inhabitants is not just monetary but one of spiritual lineage to the Sultan, who commanded what was Islam's most important empire at the time. Yet it is also based on a certain level of misplaced nostalgia, as the historical evidence laid out earlier in this chapter has informed us that most Muslims did not benefit from their conversion. Cultural theorist Svetlana Boym refers to this as restorative nostalgia; the kind that is unaware that it is nostalgia and is blind to evidence that would contradict its pure origins (in comparison reflective nostalgia is about an acceptance of imperfections, with a focus on longing and loss).¹³⁶ The irony of the story of the Osatica climbers is that it details the action of two heroes; one is a local Muslim (Hasim Glibo) and the other a Christian (Alexander Lekso). Both are lowborn and are given little social standing in their respective communities. The text goes on to tell us that shockingly, Hasim Glibo was worth more to the town as a dead man than when he was alive.¹³⁷ For the Muslims, his death was seen as a glorious partaking in the struggles of the empire. In contrast to the Muslims of Osatica, for whom imperial service is considered important (their wealth and status being derived from participation in the military administrative structure of the empire), the Christians have arranged their lives around the church. As such, the Christian climbing tale is one that sought to

¹³⁵ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, pp. 131-132.

¹³⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), pp. 41-42.

¹³⁷ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 133.

reach the top of the new church's cross. Since the Christian population had few economic levers to use against their neighbours, their religious life took center stage. This contrast is consistent with the historical record, with duty or service towards the empire being a marker of identity as was the church for Christians. As the empire faded and the Austrians would occupy Ottoman lands, Muslims clung to their Ottoman lineage, especially its bureaucratic structure, to justify their territorial sovereignty and jurisdiction to preserve their status, rights to land, and socioeconomic standing.¹³⁸

An important theme that reoccurs in *Bridge on the Drina* is that shifts in power lead to socio-economic decline for certain groups. Bosnian Muslims are in a position of strength at the start of the novel, but as their position erodes their elites shift from being representatives of the imperial center to becoming a peripheral, defensive minority. These declines are usually contrasted by the rise of fortunes of other groups, in our case the Christian population. Speaking of the Christians, the arrival of the Austrians in Osatica gave them a chance to rebuild their church. In *The Climbers* the installation of a sturdy new bell tower, reflects their newfound status in society:

*But, as it was said before, it was not only the Mohamedians Osaticans who were possessed by the 'climbing urge', but also those who lived up the slope, gathered around their church; to be sure they never climbed quite as high as they wanted do, but certainly as high as they possibly could. When the Turkish askars left Bosnia and the Austrian administration took over, the Osaticans realized that their church ('The Temple of the Holy Ascension of the town of Osatica') was degradingly small, low, humble-looking, that they had no bells and no bell tower. Their eyes it seemed finally opened to this. They were ashamed and tried their best to put things right. First, they built a belltower, as strong and high as they possibly could, and then, without letting their godly rapture cool off, they got bells as far away as Vršac – two at once, a small one and a big one. This cost the parish a great deal of money, but their joy and their glory were also great, and great were the opportunities of defying their infidel neighbours down in the valley.*¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 22.

¹³⁹ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 135.

Note the humble condition of their church before the renovations and contrast this with the high cost of casting the bells for the new structure that had to be imported from afar (i.e. Vršac, a city located in Eastern Serbia). Now the Christians of Osatica had a chance to redefine the soundscape and push back against the Islamic trumpets that had tormented them.

*For two days the people danced the round dance in the churchyard. The bells never stopped. It seemed that they never would and that from now onwards people would spend their lives in incessant ringing. Those in the lower part of the town came to hate life because they had to listen to this loathsome noise and crazy clanging. This was a kind of nemesis for their drums and trumpets, which from time immemorial, used to wake up their fellow Christians fellow-citizens in the upper part of town, before sunrise, for a whole month at a time, during the Ramadan fast.*¹⁴⁰

The exuberance of these celebrations would not have been lost on the town's Muslims inhabitants. For them, the bells would have been seen as a bad omen that signaled the rise of Christian fortunes to the detriment of their own. The sound of bells would have reminded them that the forces of Christianity were not all that far away, as exemplified by the loss of their former estates on Hungarian lands. These had once provided large sums of money towards the religious endowments gifted to Bosnian institutions. Beyond being a reminder of a lost golden era, these celebrations were a physical display of the growing temerity of the *rayah*. As is stated in *Bridge on the Drina*, the old privileges were not only vanishing but were being tested. Reflecting on the changing social norms of the non-Muslim population and their temerity, the novel tells us that

*As far as the local people were concerned, life on the kapia went its way as of old. Only it was noticed that now Serbs and Jews came more freely and in greater numbers to the kapia and at all times of day, paying no heed as they once had done to the habits and privileges of the Turks.*¹⁴¹

Speaking of the Muslim population, their fear of the *rayah* was a somewhat rational one. With the exception of Bosnia, every territory taken back in the *reconquista* of the Balkans by national

¹⁴⁰ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 136.

¹⁴¹ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 140.

powers (ex: Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro...) engendered the mass displacement of the existing Balkan Muslim population.¹⁴² In *Bridge on the Drina* we are shown multiple vignettes of waves of Muslim refugees coming across the bridge from Christian held lands, especially Serbia, as it eventually becomes the nearest center to the new Serbian frontier. While most left, several stayed in town. One such family of refugees was that of Mujaga Mutapdžić, known as “The man Užice”. When he was five, the leading Muslims evacuated now Serbian Užice, with many returning to Turkey. Instead of returning to the Ottoman motherland, his father returned to his ancestral homeland of Bosnia. Mujaga did well for himself in the town of Višegrad but recounted that after a year under Austrian rule he could not bear to pass his life “within the sound of the bell”. Trying to stay ahead of the advancing forces of Christianity he moved to Nova Varoš, but that too proved to be a futile endeavor, and the Turks would eventually evacuate the Sanjak of Novi Pazar making him a refugee for a third time. Mujaga would lament the state of decline of the Ottoman world in the Balkans; as he could not tell you where his grandfather is buried in Užice, nor his father Nova Varoš and that he is no longer resigned to die “where the muezzin still calls”. He laments that “it seems that it is written that our seed will be extinguished and that no one knows where his grave will be”.¹⁴³ Similarly in *Bosnian Chronicle* we are shown that this Ottoman decline coincides with the rising fortune of the *rayah* stating that:

The warriors of the Great Empire, agas and spahis, who had been forced to relinquish the rich estates of the Hungarian plain and to return to the cramped and poor country, were bitter and resentful of everything Christian, and that these same wars that were bringing the “Turks” back to Bosnia: filled the local rayah with bold new hopes and daring new horizons; and this too was bound to influence the attitude of the rayah to their imperial overlord, the Turk. Both sides -if one may speak of two sides at this stage of the struggle- fought each in its own way, and with the means that were suited to the times and circumstances. The Turks elected repression and force, the Christians fought back with passive resistance, cunning, and conspiracy, or readiness to conspire. The Turks defended

¹⁴² Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, pp. 38-39.

¹⁴³ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 94-99, 290-294.

*their right to live and their way of life, the Christians fought to gain those rights. The rayah was getting "uppish" and was no longer what it used to be.*¹⁴⁴

In essence, Andrić's work suggests that the bells are just as much a symbol of passive resistance as they are a reminder that the Ottoman rule in Europe was coming to an end. Like the stone *han* beside the Drina bridge, the Islamic world west of the Bosphorus was shriveling into a shell of its former self.

We have thus established that the socio-economic conditions in Bosnia were such that a tacit segregation developed over time, and that these same economic conditions created the impression that some groups had advantages over others. Did these conditions still exist by the time of the Austrian conquest of Bosnia and later Yugoslav rule? And if so, did it even matter or did the hardships of the past endure in the collective memory of the population? We know for example that these class differences did indeed exist in the days of the Austrian administration; this is why the question of land reform was a crucial one to both Austrian and later Yugoslav authorities. To protect their interests the Muslim landlords argued the inviolability of their contracts (a private contract with tenants that could not be altered by the state). To them these land holdings were synonymous with the continuity of Muslim life in Bosnia.¹⁴⁵ It is no surprise that having the ownership of land so closely tied to this socio-economic system made it so that the system itself became identitarian. It is this attachment to the land as observed in Bosnia's competing ethnicities that would lead to the rise of agrarian populism. At first voluntary buyouts were attempted to alleviate the concentration of land in Muslim hands while the Serbian parties contended that a policy of mandatory buybacks should be enacted instead (arguing that the land

¹⁴⁴ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴⁵ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, pp.115.

contracts were with the state, as the 1858 Ottoman Land Code that bound peasants to the land had been retained by the Austrians).¹⁴⁶

The royalist era in Yugoslavia continued this trend more forcefully with the government vowing to dismantle the remnants of serfdom, sharecropping, and pledging to break up large agricultural estates. This was also a nationalist project that aimed to get land back into the hands of ethnic Serbs, with a focus on regions such as Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nearly two thirds of the land expropriated was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and at the expense of the Bosnian Muslims. Thus, Bosnia was a primary target for this policy. The colonialization was also marred by outbreaks of interethnic violence with nearly 2,000 Muslims killed by local Serbs between December 1918 and September 1920 and over four thousand Muslim farm owners driven off their land at the start of 1919 alone.¹⁴⁷ This land project was eventually carried over into the Communist era, this time under the guise of collectivisation. The result of this communist era land confiscation was a peasant uprising called the Cazin rebellion that took place in 1950. Named after a city in Bosnia, it is widely considered to be one of the last peasant uprisings in Europe and was severely suppressed.

Another key aspect of the Yugoslav state's approach to this matter was a policy agenda that included a series of agrarian land reforms that took place from 1945 to 1953. One of these included the virtual abolition of large private estates. This was done by capping the size of private holdings at 10 hectares. Thus, by the time of the Yugoslav wars this historic landowning distinction between

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.187-188.

¹⁴⁷ Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005*. (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press 2006), pp.48-49.

Christians and Muslims was not as prominent, yet its memory still held sway in the minds of the population.¹⁴⁸

This symbolic importance of the land ownership is exemplified in Kemal Bakarsic that's claim that the destruction of the National Library in Sarajevo was less an act of ethnic hatred, than it was one of destruction of memory, in this case related to economic history. He stated that the attack on the library was to destroy the *defterler* an Ottoman property register in the goal of erasing the memory of Muslim property ownership, the historical record of their rights to the land and also to destroy evidence that Serbs had once held property alongside Muslims, thus minimizing what ethnic co-existence did occur.¹⁴⁹ The situation with the *vakufs* was dealt with similarly. The Austrians successfully registered the endowment properties to increase tax revenues, irritating the Muslim community. In some cases, endowed properties were used by the Austrians as public land or even destroyed to make way for civil works projects (e.g. Veliki Park in Sarajevo was built over a Muslim graveyard). This even extended as far as converting religious structures into other uses. Conflicts also arose over how to classify communal spaces such as pasture and forest that were endowed to the Muslim community.¹⁵⁰ This process was slow and gradual, which created a certain impatience in the Serb community and thereby encouraging nationalists to spread lies about the foreign origin of Muslim landowners to discredit their claims to the land.¹⁵¹

While both Andrić and Selimović document a pre-national or proto-national world, they do identify certain material conditions that persisted into the modern era. The “segregation” these

¹⁴⁸ Ognjen Zurovec, Pål Vedeld, & Kumar Sitaula. "Agricultural Sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Climate Change—Challenges and Opportunities" *Agriculture* 5, no. 2 (2025), p. 247.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Schwartz, “Beyond “Ancient Hatreds””, *Hoover Institution*, 1999.

¹⁵⁰ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe* p.115.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.189.

authors describe is a sort of hierarchical coexistence, based on an asymmetrical but pacifying segregation, and not the exterminatory exclusion theorized at the end of the 19th century. Bridges, like the one over the Drina, connected different social classes, whereas the front lines of 1992 aimed to erase the other. The existing academic literature on segregation in Bosnia is quite complex, yet the question one must ask themselves is quite simple.¹⁵² Does segregation reduce or increase the likeliness of inter-ethnic conflict and what is the link between economic cleavages and violence? Furthermore, were these enclaves born of violence or were they purely arranged due to socio-economic and other factors?¹⁵³ While this Chapter has drawn a clear link between how communities are organized due to socioeconomics, it will now attempt to explain the link between segregation and ethnic violence. While the work of sociologists such as the aforementioned Wimmer reject the idea that diversity in itself is a cause of conflict, some studies such as *A fish stinks from the head: Ethnic diversity, segregation, and the collapse of Yugoslavia*, hint at a correlation between an increase in diversity in a given region of Bosnia and inter-ethnic conflict, offering a more nuanced portrayal of its cause.¹⁵⁴ The decrease in segregation hinted at in studies such as this is rooted in the demography of 1960s Yugoslavia that saw Bosnia's larger centers such as Sarajevo transformed into modern cosmopolitan cities without the tacit segregation that had existed in the past. Throughout Socialist Yugoslavia efforts were made at promoting the ideals of "brotherhood and unity". While it is true that intense violence and ethnic cleansing occurred in areas that were previously ethnically diverse such as the most mixed areas of Sarajevo, the author

¹⁵² Lesley-Ann Daniels, "Segregation and the Onset of Civil War" (working paper, Institut Català Internacional per la Pau, Barcelona, 2012), p. 3.

¹⁵³ While the second question has partially been answered by an analysis of the socio-economic situation, we will take up it up again when we discuss how communities organize themselves in reaction to violence.

¹⁵⁴ Hammel, & Mason & Stevanovic, "A fish stinks from the head: Ethnic diversity, segregation, and the collapse of Yugoslavia". *Demographic Research*, 22, p.1127.

points out that blaming diversity is a severely flawed argument. He states that the level of antipathy between groups only decreases with higher diversity as seen in surveys.¹⁵⁵ This is supported by other scholars such as Zlatko Jovanovic, who has noted the massive scale of the anti-war movement and its associated rallies that took place in Sarajevo but also throughout the country (e.g. the April 5, 1992, rally in Sarajevo saw an estimated 50,000 to 100,000 citizens of all ethnic backgrounds gather for peace.).¹⁵⁶ There is also evidence that there was much more resistance to the initial outbreak of ethnic violence in non-homogeneous areas of Sarajevo as well as a resistance to imposed re-segregation at the citizen-to-citizen level. It could be surmised that these mixed areas were often the targets of violence because of their status as border areas between communities, thus they would have to be cleansed to link ethnic enclaves to each other.¹⁵⁷ Thus, this violence should be seen as a political project rather than a purely organic one.

Rejecting the correlation between de-segregation and violence (correlation does not equal causation), the authors of the text of *A fish stinks* puts forward several alternative theories to explain the interethnic violence, the most compelling of which is that ethnic tensions that were kept in check by the Communist government of Yugoslavia were reignited by the passing of Tito in 1980 and the subsequent economic and political crisis. This was likely due to political and economic rivalries spilling over into inter-ethnic resentment exploited by the political class of emerging nationalist politicians.¹⁵⁸ Since segregation itself was a result of economic realities, then it must

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1127

¹⁵⁶ Jovanovic, *A Cultural History of the 1984 Winter Olympics*, p. 228.

¹⁵⁷ Valentina Otmačić, *Resisting Inter-Ethnic Violence: Community Approaches to Conflict Transformation in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina*. 1st ed., *Taylor & Francis Group*, pp 35-37.

¹⁵⁸ E.A Hammel. & Carl Mason & Mirjana Stevanovic, "A fish stinks from the head: Ethnic diversity, segregation, and the collapse of Yugoslavia". *Demographic Research*, 22 (2010), p.1127.

be surmised that this economic reality acted as a “generative force” as we will explore in the Chapter on Political Hysteria.¹⁵⁹ It should be noted that these grievances would have harkened back to the legacy of Ottomanism but were not necessarily rooted in present reality. There is often a gulf between perception and reality when it comes to these types of history. One of the legacies of Communism is that it did after all continue the work of the Royalists in confiscating land, less so for nationalist purposes, but more so for ideological ones.

It should be noted that segregation in and of itself is an indicator of a deeper malaise. Since the Bosnian Civil War, Bosnia has returned to a system of de-facto segregation albeit even more obvert and rigid than the tacit system that had existed before. Brotherhood has once again given way to antipathy. Research has shown that both voluntary and involuntary segregation is driven by a host of fears real or imagined as well as a desire for security.¹⁶⁰ There was also a precedent for this type of violence. In 1875, a massive agrarian conflict took place in southern Bosnia, the Herzegovina Uprising (*Nevesinjska puška*), when Serbs rebelled against the Ottomans with a level of violence that foreshadowed future conflicts in the region. It was also driven by economic considerations. In this case by anger towards the local Muslims who opposed the *Tanzimat* reforms of Abdülmecid I who had conferred fairer laws towards the Christians of the Ottoman Empire (choosing to continue to exploit their Christian neighbours), just as the backdrop of the Bosnian civil war took place in the context of a large recession in Yugoslavia that took place over the 1980s.

¹⁵⁹ A "generative force" is something with the power to create, produce, or originate (Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force*, pp. 3-20).

¹⁶⁰ Pattaroni & Pedrazzini, “Insecurity and Segregation: Rejecting an Urbanism of Fear”, *Cities: Steering Towards Sustainability* (2010), pp. 177-187.

Yugoslavist planners, both Royalist (interwar modernism) and Communist (Yugoslav modernism), thought that for a union of South Slavs to be successful they would have to embrace modernity. This meant leaving the old world of ethnic tensions behind. To bridge this gap, they promoted an internationalist style of architecture that would sideline local architectural styles for ones that were more uniform. A “new architecture” for a “new people”, the Yugoslavs. To them, architecture and design was a tool of rapprochement. They did not always succeed in their task. In her travelogue *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* Rebecca West would note that the design of Karadorđević dynasty mausoleum at the Oplenats hill, just outside the town of Topola, was not built with the unity of the nation in mind.¹⁶¹ While conceived as the burial place for the royal family of Yugoslavia, the byzantine design and mosaics, as well as the relocation of the bones of Karageorge from the church in Topola to its ground, give it away as a site of memory for Serbians rather than Yugoslavs. As her husband would remark to her during their visit together “so this building with its enormously expensive mosaics can mean nothing whatsoever to any Croatian, Dalmatian and Slovene” (and by extension, I should add any Bosniaks – although the term had not yet been coined, nor had Bosnia’s Muslims been recognized as a distinct ethnic group).¹⁶² This anecdote was added to demonstrate the importance that some in Yugoslavia attributed to these aesthetic considerations. In their way stood the physical embodiment of history, the segregated city as we have seen represented in literature. After all, just as cities can be organized by the planning process, religion too plays a part in the development of cities. As important markers of faith are erected, communities of faith may build around them. The architecture in these neighbourhoods may even reflect the ethnic or religious mores of its parishioners. While prominent

¹⁶¹ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, pp. 492-495.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

examples of this architectural style exist throughout Yugoslavia, including Bosnia, it is in Bosnia that planners faced their strongest resistance. As the rigid architectural dogmatism of this style waned, architects found innovative ways of re-inserting local styles that tried to reconcile modernism and Bosnia's Ottoman heritage.¹⁶³

In essence, religion, socio economics and the physical space occupied by competing ethnic groups were so intertwined that it even prompted Yugoslav planners to attempt to mute its most exuberant national characteristics. To those who have lived in these localities their entire lives, the bells and minarets of their region were a physical reminder of the ebbs and flows in political power, political autonomy and of the waning or rising of economic fortunes. While segregation itself is not responsible for ethnic violence, it is a powerful symbol of past grievances and wrongdoings.

¹⁶³ Dijana Simonović, “Neidhardt’s Vernacular-Modernist Glossary of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Architecture and Urbanism” *International Conference on Contemporary Theory and Practice in Construction*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2022), p. 2; See Juraj Neidhardt and Dušan Grabrijan's 1957 publication *Architecture of Bosnia and the Way to Modernity* (*Arhitektura Bosne i put u savremeno*)

Chapter 2: An Identity Divided – Coexistence and Cohabitation in the Land of Mythos

*“I call to witness the ink, the quill, and the script, which flows from the quill;
I call to witness the faltering shadows of the sinking evening, the night and all she enlivens;
I call to witness the moon when she waxes, and the sunrise when it dawns.
I call to witness the Resurrection Day and the soul that accuses itself;
I call to witness time, the beginning and end of all things - to witness that every man always
suffers loss.”*

- Meša Selimović, *Death and the Dervish* [Modified Qur’anic Verse]¹⁶⁴

This chapter examines how myth has been used to mold identity and how political actors manipulate foundational stories for their own purposes. It then re-interprets the western gaze to show that the view of the region as a multiethnic paradise promoted by some occidental observers is a flawed one, based on a superficial examination of Bosnia’s cosmopolitanism.

2.1 – Public identity and myth

(Višegrad stories, Karadorđe and the mobilization of myth)

The legacy of Bosnia’s two literary titans is a complex one, oft debated and reinterpreted by political partisans. The dualities in nature exhibited by Selimović and Andrić offer a fragmented portrait. Selimović was born into a Muslim family from Tuzla while Andrić’s roots lie on the Croatian side of Travnik. One was a communist, the other a royalist. For all their differences, they also had much in common. Both were born in Bosnia, wrote extensively about their homelands, professed themselves to be humanists, considered themselves to be Yugoslavists, ended their careers in Belgrade and even identified as Serbs later in life. This poses an interesting question: if they identified with Serbian culture, does it make it appropriate for their image to be reused by nationalists, such as the Serbian theme park town of Andrićgrad in the town of Višegrad, that saw

¹⁶⁴ Meša Selimović, *Death and the Dervish* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 1.

innumerable atrocities committed against them during the Bosnia war? Similarly, does Selimović's Serbian turn make him any less of a Bosnian?

These simplistic reimaginings of both men by nationalist actors are symptomatic of a culture of oversimplification frequently employed by political partisans. This should not be surprising. Simplicity creates a clean narrative, whereas nuance muddies it. For one, both writers died before seeing the fragmentation of their beloved Yugoslavia. Serbian Yugoslavs could still claim to be Bosnian, whereas today the political situation may force one to choose a single nationality. In *Death and the Dervish*, Selimović starts every chapter with re-imagined Qur'anic verses such as the one found in the chapter heading, clearly demonstrating his Muslim upbringing and repurposing it to suit his literary narrative. The above quotation cannot be found in the Quran. Instead, the author re-interpreted several Qur'anic verses. His literary subject was Bosnia itself and it is clear that he could not detach himself completely from his Muslim heritage, even while being an atheist. Like Andrić, there is a universalist quality to his work that is not compatible with nationalist narratives. Both men, of course, have this layered triple cultural belonging - Bosnian, Serbian and Yugoslav.

Meša Selimović's declaration of a Serbian heritage is rooted in a statement he made in his autobiography, *Sjećanja (Memoirs)*. Selimović insisted that he was a "Serb by nationality, a Bosnian merely by birth"¹⁶⁵ and that:

Notwithstanding the claims of the nationalists, the difference among Serbs, Croats, and Slavic Muslims is neither linguistic, nor ethnic, nor, as religious practice fades, confessional. The essential difference derives from a sense of community: Which set of national myths will an individual choose to celebrate as his or her own? Which group of people will he or she celebrate them with? Despite contemporary appearances, movement

¹⁶⁵ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. XIII.

*among these groups has been appreciable over time, and the boundaries until recently have remained porous.*¹⁶⁶

Earlier in this text, we outlined that confessional differences are less “private conscience” than “public identity”. Since religion is the primary identifier of “public identity”, defining social status and socio-economic positioning, then studying the competing political myths established by these groups is the best way to understand how these present themselves in the public sphere. In essence, how do these political myths separate Bosnians into confessional groups and why did the introduction of Yugoslavism as a state policy fail to supersede or even displace those preexisting myths?

There exists a tangible link between myth, conflict and totalitarianism that was brilliantly outlined by Hannah Arendt in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in which she posits that totalitarian regimes tend to mobilize their base by using preexisting myths to distort or manipulate history. She is quick to point out that both Russian Pan-slavs and Pan-Germanic nationalism emerged from a sort of myth of divine origin, whose tribal quality imbued them with “contempt for liberal individualism”. She presents Dostoevsky’s characterisation of the Russian people as a “Christopher among the nations”, along with Hitler’s frequent appeals to the divine, to highlight how the lack of religiosity in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany was no barrier to the use of religion as a secular tool of totalitarianism.¹⁶⁷ This view is supported by thinkers such as Emilio Gentile, who has underlined that modern political movements function a lot like religion, highlighting the “sacralization” of politics by the use of myth (i.e. that myths are essential to

¹⁶⁶ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. XIII.

¹⁶⁷ "Christopher among the nations" is a direct reference to Saint Christopher carrying the Christ-child across a dangerous river. It invokes messianic missive that the Russian people are the vessel of God and that it is their mission to carry out his will; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1973), pp. 233-235.

political religions and are a product of the challenges imposed by a fragmented society faced with modernity).¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Raymond Aron makes the case the ideology has replaced faith and characterized myth as a secular religion that is used to promote utopian thinking.¹⁶⁹

This link to modernity and its challenges brought forth by Emilio Gentile is just as present in the works of Arendt who states that totalitarians took advantage of people's desires to retreat from their humanistic responsibilities towards their fellow man (in a multiethnic Europe), by escaping them via "tribalism and racism" that allows them to attain a sense of belonging in a world whose traditional structures are disintegrating. She singles out those "rootless masses" who have experienced the disintegration of their traditional lives through displacement, and "the shifting masses" in cities brought together by modernity and industrialisation, as being particularly susceptible to these types of isolating theories.¹⁷⁰ It therefore provides a metaphysical quality to the myth, which serves a dual purpose of absolving the individuals of the responsibility for their actions by providing a group justification for their crimes. This is reinforced by Raoul Girardet who believes that myths are not only works for fiction but larger narratives that explain the world. These stories become particularly active during times of uncertainty or change and can act as factors of equilibrium (i.e. stabilizing forces) or as tools of ideological manipulation.¹⁷¹

This historical determinism is a key aspect of the totalitarian system which classifies human actions as being part of the laws of nature or history.¹⁷² Arendt goes on to point out that unlike the

¹⁶⁸ Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), pp. 41, 147-161.

¹⁶⁹ Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, with a new introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), pp. vii, 321-324.

¹⁷⁰ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 236.

¹⁷¹ Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1986), pp. 10-12, 81.

¹⁷² Arendt, *op.cit.*, p. 462.

small nation states, whose nationalism was rooted in history, these regimes instead positioned their own visions of their community into a future that they envisioned it sharing.¹⁷³ In essence, myths are constructed. When history is mobilized for this purpose, it hardly resembles its Rankean cousin but rather functions as a propaganda tool to organize the masses, where the old aspirations of the nation state are replaced by a larger vision of foreign conquest more suitable for an empire. She illustrates this fact by examining the way the Nazis used the myth of Aryan superiority and its master race implications by the clever mobilisation of medieval antisemitism through the *Protocol of the Elder Zion* to convince the German people of the legitimacy of their dreams of world conquest.¹⁷⁴ The clever use of propaganda is a staple of this system, as she states that the “ideal subject of totalitarian rule” is one for whom there is “no distinction between fact and fiction”.¹⁷⁵ One could comfortably say that Slobodan Milošević’s mobilization of the Kosovo myth in Yugoslavia, as exhibited during his public speeches, were similar to Adolf Hitler’s mobilisation of Aryan superiority and medievalism in pre-Second World War Germany. While Milošević’s ethnonationalist aims of recreating a “Greater Serbia” by reuniting Serb territories may seem to align with that of the traditional nation state, its irredentist methods of achieving this goal set it firmly on the side of imperial expansion.¹⁷⁶ Emilio Gentile essentially argues that this pursuit of land, which he characterizes as a new civic religion of sacred character, manifests itself differently in a nation state than that of one totalitarian. In his work *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* we see that the Italian fascists at the turn of the 20th century are no longer content with the

¹⁷³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 232.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xi, 358-359.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

¹⁷⁶ Irredentism assumes that a territory belongs to a state if their “nation” has a cultural or historic connection to the land, allowing it to claim land that exists outside the existing confines of the state.

gains of Italian reunification but long for cities and lands that are less Italian in character, namely the former Austrian cities of Trieste and Trentino (Trent), places that despite having a strong Italian presence are multicultural in character.¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, both Serbia and Croatia envisioned a divided Bosnia in which they would rule over their own fiefdoms. Both the former and the latter had a tacit agreement to carve up Herzegovina and cut out the Bosniaks – showing a desire for a maximalist vision of their “greater nations” outside of their borders. The drive towards a “Greater Serbia” also applies to Kosovo (historically important to the Serbian state but demographically Albanian) and the Croatian region of Krajina as well as Eastern Slavonia (the Austrian era borderland with the Ottoman that contained a mixed population but was firmly part of the Croatian state).

While myths may just be fictional stories to the outside observer, it is important to understand that they are inherently powerful identitarian symbols, that can be grouped by archetype. For the Orthodox Serbs this foundation mythical archetype is surely that of martyrdom. Its origin is the “sacrifice” of Prince Lazar at the Battle of Kosovo, to be re-wrought time over. Radisav and the entombed children are literary representations of this myth of sacrifice, just as the martyrdom of the Serbian nation in defying Germany during the Second World War, and its ultimate consequence, the concentration camp at Jasenovac. For the Muslim Bosniaks on the other hand, the archetype is one of imperial service to the Sublime Porte re-enacted later through the lens of European Islam, loyalty to Yugoslavia and loyalty to a unitary Bosnia. It should be noted that variants of these stories are found throughout the Balkans but have been repurposed and reinterpreted by different national groups to highlight certain themes. Among these cross-cultural

¹⁷⁷ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 1-11, 20.

stories, entombment myths are found most prominently throughout the region. From the *Legend of Master Enole* in Romania, to Kadare's clever reimagining of this myth in his book *The Three-Arched Bridge* and again in Bosnia in *Bridge on the Drina*, these stories all share this common construct but serve different purposes.

We clearly see these mythical stories play out in the literature presented below. Yet it is important to note that these myths were mobilized in a modern context. The Kosovo myth or the myth of Bogomil origin are not "returns" to a sacred past, but modern ideological constructs. While they may share the superficial qualities of primordial stories, their construction is of a political nature. They are also fueled by restorative nostalgia. Like the Muslims community's blindness to the lack of socio-economic benefits of their conversion in order to maintain the illusion of a perfect Ottoman past; that seeks to take Serbs back to a perfect medieval kingdom. This kind of feeling fuels nationalism and conspiracy. It is a rebellion against "modern idea of time, the time of history and progress" that disregards inconvenient history to turn it into mythos while believing that this project is about truth.¹⁷⁸ Ernesto Laclau demonstrates that these myths operate as "empty signifiers"; that is malleable narratives, such as the entombment of the twins or the song about Karageorge, that are repurposed by political elites to mobilize the masses at a specific moment.¹⁷⁹ This corpus of literature documents this malleability so that the reader can see the way in which oral tales are modified according to the political needs of the periphery in relation to the imperial center.

A prominent example of this concept is the use entombment myths such as the fictional story of Stoja and Ostoja as nationalist retellings of an aggrieved nation and a tool to promote the

¹⁷⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, pp. xv, 41-42.

¹⁷⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *La raison populiste*, trans. Jean-Pierre Ricard (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 162.

Greater Serbia agenda. This story is a literary depiction of a famous Serbian epic, the story of the *The Building of Skadar*, an 1814 oral epic poem preserved in writing by Vuk Karadžić. His goal in capturing these stories was to preserve the region's traditional character, then undergoing rapid change. He also sought to help construct a national identity for the Serbian people. The story came to him by way of a Herzegovinian storyteller named Old Rashko and tells of the construction of Rozafa Castle in Shkodër, Albania. It features the Mrnjavčević family, composed of three Christian brothers, attempting to build a fortress whose walls continuously crumble. To complete their work, they are told they must immure the first wife who brings them lunch – which they do. This story stands in stark contrast to the Albanian portrayals of the myths in which the brothers are portrayed as Albanians and not Serbs. The way this myth has been used for nationalist purposes is manifold. The first is found in the sacrifice of the wife, Gojko's young bride, a literary stand in for the martyrdom of the Serbian nation, assailed on all sides. Thus, she can be seen as a symbol of national sacrifice. The second allows the reader to assert, or at least imply Serbian sovereignty over northern Albania by way of emphasising the Serbian brothers' ties to a medieval Serbian kingdom with Serbian overlordship over this territory. Of course, this part of the myth only works if one ignores the possible objections of the Albanian locals who in their own mythos (see the *Legend of Rozafa*) imagine themselves to be the descendants of ancient Illyrians and as such the true proprietors of the land. This myth belongs to the pre-Kosovo cycle of stories, of a young expansionist Serbia that has Skadar as positioned as the residence of the 14th century King Vukašin Mrnjavčević (Pretkosovski ciklus).¹⁸⁰ By tying the modern region to this historical Serbian king,

¹⁸⁰ This is a segment of Serbian epic poetry that includes events, rulers, and legends that preceded the 1389 Battle of Kosovo.

they are essentially stating that their control of the region predates the Ottomans or the modern Albania state, and as such belongs under the control of the Serbian nation.¹⁸¹

By combining these two elements we have some of the foundational pieces of the Greater Serbia ideology – martyrdom – and the appeal to a greater territorial expanse than the Serbia delineated by its current borders. By institutionalizing the myth, Vuk Karadžić transformed folk memory into national self-consciousness for the Serbian people. Despite being part of the pre-Kosovo cycle, this type of myth is eerily similar to Slobodan Milošević's invocation of the "Heavenly Serbia" myth to justify his war in Kosovo and his ethnic cleansing of Bosniaks. The martyrdom of Prince Lazar at the plains of Kosovo in 1389 is often invoked by nationalists and interpreted as that of a Christ-like figure of sacrifice who chose the kingdom of heaven above an earthly one. The battle is portrayed in popular histories of the region as a type of national grave (or for our purposes... entombment) from which the Serbs must escape and be reunited under a friendly banner thereby linking the new 19th century Serbian state to its medieval counterpart.¹⁸² Returning to Ernesto Laclau's empty signifier, the myths and stories collected by figures such as Vuk Karadžić's act as a hegemonic cultural artifact, used to construct a Serbian national identity with archetypes like entombment serving as empty signifiers for the martyrdom of the Serbian people to be exploited by nationalist voices.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Monika Kropiej, "Folk Storytelling between Fiction and Tradition: The 'Walled-Up Wife' and Other Construction Legends," *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 14 (2011), pp. 61-65.

¹⁸² Alexander Greenawalt, "Kosovo Myths: Karadzic, Njegos, and the Transformation of Serb Memory," *Spacesofidentity.net* 1, no. 3 (2001), pp. 49-50.

¹⁸³ Coined by Antonio Gramsci, this term refers to how the ruling class maintains power not just by force but through cultural institutions.

As established previously, the utopian image of Bosnia as a peaceful multiethnic paradise capable of creating a united populace is complicated by its history of tacit segregation. As was outlined, different ethnic groups may co-exist in the same spaces, but it does not mean that they share that same space. Both authors give us examples of both co-existence and co-habitation. The first is defined as living together without personal or cultural exchanges whereas the second is an arrangement where this type of personal relationship exists. One of the ways in which we see the experience of myth making is through this lens. Why are some myths shared, and some not and how did these spaces facilitate or complicate these types of exchanges?

The best known of these spaces in the literary world is the famed Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge from *Drina on the Drina*. The entirety of life in Višegrad revolves around this evocative structure and is a common touchstone for the town's Serbs and Muslims, who live very different lives from each other. This social nexus is described as a place of cultural exchange; where the first stirring of love and flirtation take place, where the well-to-do want to be seen, where bargains, quarrels and reconciliations happen, and where the beggars and lepers hang and where the fruit merchants display their wares on the parapet.¹⁸⁴ Off to the side of one of its ramps part ways up the structure is the *kapia*, an outcropping where many of the town's characters gravitate over the course of this chronicle spanning nearly four-hundred years. The faceless and timeless narrator of the novel informs us of the importance of this structure as a metaphysical bridge to heal the sometimes-unpleasant history between the town's competing factions.¹⁸⁵ Of this he states:

“So, on the kapia, between the skies, the river and the hills, generation after generation learnt not to mourn overmuch what the troubled waters had borne away. They entered there into the unconscious philosophy of the town; that life was an incomprehensible marvel,

¹⁸⁴ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, p. 19.

¹⁸⁵ No man can live as long as the novel lasts, hence time has no weight to narrator – nor do we know anything about him.

since it was incessantly wasted and spent, yet none the less it lasted and endured 'like the bridge on the Drina'."¹⁸⁶

This river crossing is the true town center of Višegrad and one of its few places of meaningful cultural exchange, especially after the Austrian liberalization of the town.

While the characterisation of the bridge as a shared place of healing for the sins of history (i.e. "what the troubled waters had borne away") is accurate, Professor Marina Antić reminds us that this bridge was also a silent witness to the same violence that gave rise to those myths in the first place.¹⁸⁷ The novel evokes this same sentiment, with the structure's *kapia* serving the site of many public executions. In times of Serbian insurrections, it became a site of grisly executions with the bodies left on spikes as a reminder of what may happen if one defies imperial authority.¹⁸⁸ Its very construction gives rise to a myth of origin that has its own distinct interpretations; one Christian and the other Muslim. On the left bank of the river stands an ancient earth barrow, the tomb of Radisav, a Serbian folk hero who was said to have magical powers emanating from his talisman ("no sword or rifle could harm him" and that "no chain could bind him"). The sultan had to drown him in his sleep, binding him with silk roads so that his talisman would not be effective. This story is disputed by the town's Muslims, who say that the tomb belongs to the dervish Sheik Tuhanija who was said to have denied an infidel army the ability to cross at this location. They said that if an infidel army should try to cross here once again, he would rise from the grave to stop them.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, p. 81.

¹⁸⁷ Marina Antić, "Living in the Shadow of the Bridge: Ivo Andrić's 'The Bridge on the Drina' and Western Imaginings of Bosnia.", *Spaces of Identity* 3, no. 3 (2003), p. 13.

¹⁸⁸ Andrić, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

¹⁸⁹ Andrić, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

The “real” Radisav – Radisav of Uniste, we are later told, was a dissatisfied bridge builder – one must remember that the rayah was often forcibly conscripted to work on the bridge, which they cursed. He was also part one of the very few families in his village that that had not converted. One day, he gathered around with his fellow bridge builders to hear the oral poetry of a Montenegrin poet singing old Serbian folk songs about Kosovo (wine in the fields of Prizren). Taken with the song, he makes an impassioned speech about how the ferry was a perfectly acceptable way to cross the river and that the bridge is meant to function as a vehicle for extermination of the Serbian people, adding that the bridge is only for the Turks. That night they hatch a plan to sabotage the bridge’s construction, already hampered by the river’s frequent floods, and blame it on the actions of a *villa* (fairy or river spirit). Small acts of sabotage happen and the rumour spreads that the bridge will never be completed.¹⁹⁰ A new story emerges, concocted by the *gusle* player that the hard-nosed foreman of the bridge project, Abidaga, was told by the *villa* that the bridge would never be completed until twins, Stoja and Ostoja, are walled into the foundation wall of one of the structure’s piers. As it were, a “half-witted” girl from the village gave birth to still-born twins by the same name who were buried nearby. She could not comprehend what was happening and went down to the bridge to find her children, showing her cracked nipples dripping milk.¹⁹¹ Abidaga, a cruel man who hates Bosnians, both Muslim and Serb alike, posts guards to the site. By doing so, he is able to stem damage the earthworks momentarily. However, now the saboteur damages the bridge from the water, rather than sneaking in on land where the guards were posted. Abidaga however is not fool. He lays a trap for them and catches Radisav in the act. Radisav is tortured but refuses to give up accomplices. As a warning to others, he is impaled alive

¹⁹⁰ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

and left on the bridge. In tremendous pain Radislav responds “Turks, turks... turks on the bridge may you die like dogs”¹⁹².

Over time the legend of Stoja and Ostoja morphs into a tale that describes the *villa* (named Brodarica) as tearing down by night what the workers put up during the day, then telling the master-builder Rade the Mason (Rade Neimar) that he must find Christian children twins, a boy and a girl, named Stoja and Ostoja, and entomb them into the pillars of the bridge as a gesture of appeasement. The children were taken but the builder felt so bad that he left a gap in the wall so that she could feed them, leaving her milk to run down the stone walls of the bridge by the opening.¹⁹³ It should be noted that despite level of violence displayed in this vignette, Andrić masterly uses this scene to introduce some subtlety into the portrayal of the local Muslim community which shows us that both local Muslims and Serbs hate the disturbances brought forward by the bridge. Instead of detachment towards their neighbours, local Muslims express a certain sympathy, if not outright solidarity, towards the anti-bridge cause of the Serb. This is the exact kind of nuance that is lost when Bosniak and Turk are used interchangeably (in this incident, it the Turks that are the oppressors, not the local Islamic community).

For the Serbs this story accentuates their suffering in the construction of the bridge (the bridge being built by cruel exploitation of the *rayah*), the martyrdom of Radislav, and the sacrifice of the Christian children as well as their mourning mother. It even ties into the origin story of the Plains of Kosovo. These are classic hallmarks of Serbian mythos. For the Bosnians, the story shows how the completion of the bridge fills their hearts with pride. No longer are they against the construction of the bridge but view it as a glorious accomplishment. This plays to the Bosniak

¹⁹² Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina Ibid.*, pp. 37-46.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

mythos archetypes of loyalty and imperial triumph, in contrast with the victim-centered approach of the Serbs. While it is hard to ascertain the level of enthusiasm that the average Bosnian Muslim had for these Ottoman structures, it can safely be assumed that this literary depiction is an accurate one. A surprising data point that helps reinforce this fact is that even after twenty-two years under Austrian occupation, Bosnian Muslims were still invested in Ottoman sponsored pan-Islamic world building, strongly supporting the construction of the Hejaz Railway to Mecca. In fact, it was not just the elite that were interested in this project as many of the monetary donations came from collections held at the mosque.¹⁹⁴

The episode of Radisav's impalement is not solely an illustration of the Serbian myth of victimhood. Andrić's fiction demonstrates how state terror functions as a mechanism of social engineering resulting in the creation of an "ethnic boundary". Coined by Fredrik Barth, this ethnic boundary is a reference to the symbolic line that delineates the "us" from the "them" (or the "other" in more extreme cases). He states that language, religion, or tradition are points of classification, and mythos would comfortably fall under that framework. He states that these boundaries are not fixed cultural content but are fluid and subject to change.¹⁹⁵ Through the lens of Weberian sociology and Bergholz, this act of extreme and spectacular violence is perpetrated by the representative of the Empire personified by Abidaga and is the tool by which imperial power creates this new ethnic boundary between Serb and Muslim. This act of violence does not stem from a pre-existing identity; it produces this separate identity by generating a foundational trauma

¹⁹⁴ Hamza Karčić, "Supporting the Caliph's Project: Bosnian Muslims and the Hejaz Railway," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 34, no. 3 (2014), pp. 286-288.

¹⁹⁵ Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), p. 15.

(the generativity of Bergholz).¹⁹⁶ Historians such as Anne-Marie Thiesse have argued that national identities are constructed rather than stemming from an inherent historical precedent and a tool to do so is found in the way violence is commemorated and perpetrated. For example, victories and defeats can be used to promote the nation, with the latter serving as a unifying force turning trauma into myth. In the Balkans this is especially true, as she gives the example of violent massacres such as the 1822 massacre of Greek islanders at Chios as being used to prove the right to statehood. She states that these nation-building projects are a "militant undertaking" that provide a certain aesthetic or emotional attachment to their identity.¹⁹⁷

It should be noted that these contrasting myths even predate Radislav. The location of the bridge, then a ferry, was known to be a place where village children who came here to fish had identified olden hoofprints. To the Serbian children, the hooves belonged to Šarac, the horse of their hero Kraljević Marko (also part of the Kosovo mythos), who escaped the old fortress located in the hills on east bank of the Drina— and realizing there was no bridge was able to ford the river anyhow. Muslims for their part scoff at this legend. For them the hooves belonged to Đerzelez Alija, who leapt over the river on his winged horse as he despised both ferry and ferry men. As the narrator tells us of both Muslims and Christians “They did not squabble over this, both were convinced in their belief and knew the other would not change his mind”.¹⁹⁸ Folk stories of this nature are not unique to Bosnia and are prevalent in both the Islamic and Christian worlds. For

¹⁹⁶ Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), pp. 3-20.

¹⁹⁷ Anne-Marie Thiesse, *The Creation of National Identities: Europe, 18th–20th Centuries*, trans. Brian McNeil (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 16–17, 82-84, 181-185.

¹⁹⁸ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, p. 17.

example, Bosnia has its own tales of Nasrudin Hodža (Nasreddin). Maybe the reason that this story was not contentious is that no violence was involved, unlike the story of Radisav.

Interestingly, if a figure became important enough, it could enter the mythos of the opposing camp and repurposed. For example, once hated by Christians, Mehmed-paša Sokolović (the builder of the famed bridge on the Drina) was re-claimed by Serbian nationalists during the 19th century. They would refer to him as one of their own – a man who used his genius in the service of foreign empires, rose to the top and secretly protected his kinfolk.¹⁹⁹ This is not only literary bluster, but a one rooted in religious and historic recognition. The Serbian Orthodox Church canonized his cousin Makarije Sokolović, the Patriarchate of Peć, as a saint. It also recognizes Mehmed-paša as the political force behind the restoration of this ancient institution, dormant since the fall of the medieval Kingdom of Serbia.²⁰⁰ Beyond the lack of a shared mythos, we even see that both groups share songs but sow division in them by changing out the heroes for ones in their own communities. When the town swells with Turkish refugees from Serbia during the Karađorđe Rebellion (Karageorge – Black George) east of the Drina, a dark, gloomy, even evil mood hangs over the town. The Serbs for their part are viewed with suspicion. They are accused of either of cheering on the rebellion from afar, hoping it will reach them, or by working directly with the rebels. It is at this time that an old Ottoman song had been repurposed with a certain Serbian hero in mind. As such:

“When Alibeg was a young beg
A maiden bore his standard ...”

¹⁹⁹ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 243-244.

²⁰⁰ It was Mehmed-paša who would convince the sultan to restore the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć in 1557. This ecclesiastical jurisdiction is located in Kosovo and is considered the holy seat of Serbian orthodox church. It important spiritual and historic institution to the Serbian people due to its connection to medieval Serbia.

Soon became:

“When Karageorge was a young beg
A maiden bore his standard ...”

It is in light of this rebellion that *Bridge on the Drina* tells us of the persecution of the perceived Serbian spies. The first is an old itinerant who believed that Serbian Kingdom would be resurrected and the second is a young man who was chopping wood alone in the woods but was singing this song. They were taken in for execution.²⁰¹ Thus, one could see that the battle for the soul of Bosnia between these two faiths extended even into realm of songs.

It should be noted that some of these myths and mythical figures may be hard to share between faiths as their mythos is based on a violent historical event. In an article for Prospect Magazine, Aleska Djilas was quick to recall a conversation with his Montenegrin cousin in Belgrade where they spoke of their shared love of the poetry of Petar II Petrovic Njegos, the prince Bishop of Montenegro whose seminal work, the epic poem *The Mountain Wreath*, remains the greatest epic of South Slavic Christians. While the real Petar II Petrovic was no advocate for extreme anti-Muslim actions, his poetry reads as a call for mass violence against Montenegrin Converts to Islam. As part of this conversation Aleska Djilas asks his cousin if he had ever asked Muslims students in his class how they felt about reading the text. His cousin responded that he had not given it any thought. He expands on this by stating that the text explicitly encourages expansionist and irredentist sentiment, and the eventual homogenization of conquered territory. He expands on how this is not a unique trait to the Serbs but one that is shared with many nations in the region that were in the process of becoming nation states (for example, the reversal of Smyrna from a Greek to a Turkish city after its conquests by Turkey, and the wave of refugees it

²⁰¹ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 85-93.

produced).²⁰² Historians such as Srđa Pavlović have similarly commented on this text, stating Greater Serbian nationalists, radical Muslims, Croats and Montenegrin independentists all interpret the text to mean what they want it to mean. To him this is but a literary text that explains the material conditions present during the first half of the 19th century, in the time of Njegoš.²⁰³ It is not hard to see why this text has been viewed in this way. The massive poem is dedicated to *Karađorđe* (Karadjordje) by the following statement “*Upheaval... To the Ashes of Serbia’s father*” and was inspired by the works of Vuk Karadžić, the father of Serbian historiography. The following segment explains how the text places Karageorge in the company of some of history’s most renowned men:

“Let this century of ours be the pride of all the centuries, it shall be a fateful era striking awe for generations. In this century eight children were born as if from the same womb; from the cradle of Bellona they made their appearance on earth: Napoleon; Charles; Blucher; the Duke of Wellington, and Suvorov; Karageorge, the scourge of tyrants; Schwarzenberg and Kutuzov, too.

But the hero of Topola, the great, immortal Karageorge, saw many hurdles in his way, yet he reached his grandiose goal. He roused people, christened the land, and broke the barbarous fetters, summoned the Serbs back from the dead, and breathed life into their souls. He is the Immortal’s secret: he gave the Serbs the chests of steel and awakened the lion’s heart in those who had lost their courage. The bands of the Eastern Pharaoh turn to ice in fear before George. Through George the Serbian hearts and arms were instilled with high bravery! “Stamboul, the bloodthirsty father of the plague, trembles before him, even the Turks swear by his sabre - no other oath have they indeed.”²⁰⁴

As Aleksa Djilas would remark, Serbian mythos has two archetypes: victims or heroes. This type of poetry belongs to the latter. He states that, in his estimation, nationalism is more

²⁰² Aleksa Djilas, “The Yugoslav tragedy”, *Prospect Magazine*, Issue 1, 1995.

²⁰³ Srđa Pavlović, “The Mountain Wreath: Poetry or a Blueprint for the Final Solution?”, *Spacesofidentity.Net* 1 (4), 2001.

²⁰⁴ Petar II Petrović Njegoš, *The Mountain Wreath*, trans. Vasa D. Mihailović (Irvine, CA: Charles Schlacks, Jr., Publisher, 1986; Project Rastko, 1999)

present in today in Yugoslavia than it was during the Second World War (the article was written in 1995). For this he blames the rise in literacy concurrent with the promotion of nationalist texts in schools.²⁰⁵ The allure of figures such as Karageorge recurs throughout *Bridge on the Drina* and speaks to the importance of these figures in the cultural canon of these nationalist actors. Pavlović has remarked that in Serbia and Montenegro these national texts are often read without the proper historical distance, nor nuance. This has resulted in the cultural achievement of figures such as Njegos being re-interpreted as a political missive.²⁰⁶

2.2 – Nation building as an identitarian project

(The four mythic canons, institutional projects, and “violence as a generative force”)

The genesis of Bosnia’s identitarian myths take root in the period of Ottoman rule. There are roughly four national canons that can be used to classify these stories. These are the Serb, Bosniak, Croat and Yugoslavist myths. The first three are nationalist in nature and the third is unitarist. To understand the nationalist myths, one must return to the story told at the very start of this introduction about the martyrdom of Prince Lazar at the Battle of Kosovo. After their defeat at this battle, the territory belonging to the Serbs and their neighbours was slowly integrated into the Ottoman Empire as their army advanced through the Balkan peninsula towards Central Europe. Suddenly Christians were living under a regime with a state religion that differed from theirs. As the years of occupation advanced, so too did the religious makeup of Bosnia, with Muslims becoming a group of cultural importance.

²⁰⁵ Aleksa Djilas, “The Yugoslav tragedy”, *Prospect Magazine*, Issue 1, 1995.

²⁰⁶ Srđa Pavlović, “The Mountain Wreath: Poetry or a Blueprint for the Final Solution?”, *Spacesofidentity.Net* 1 (4), 2001.

It is from the early period of occupation that both Muslims and non-Muslims drew from in the development of their national identities. Their views of the Ottoman empire created a clear dichotomy between Muslims and Christians. For Muslims, religious affiliation and the state were synonymous. As was discussed in Chapter 1, Islamic identity in Bosnia was deeply tied to the Ottoman empire and its imperial institutions, including one's social standing in the religious hierarchy of the military administrative system. All the while, Christians, particularly Serbs, built their identity in opposition to this. For Serbs, the Orthodox church was promoted as a pillar of Serbian culture.²⁰⁷ Muslims for their part drew their identity from their close ties with the Ottoman state. Like Serbians, Croats clung to their Catholic identity, differentiating themselves from both Serbs and Muslims. Much like the Serbs, their nationalist historiography has portrayed Bosniaks as lapsed Christians, but in this case, they believe them to be ethnic Croats rather than Serbs²⁰⁸.

By the time of the formation of Yugoslavia (then called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), the idea behind a new unitarist myth began to emerge: the Yugoslavist myth. The Yugoslavist myth emphasized the linguistic links between the Serbo-Croatian people and minimized the history ethnic conflicts in the period before the foundation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. While the ideas behind the myth had been floating around since at least the 19th century, they were adopted as official government policy in 1929 as a reaction to the political

²⁰⁷ Falina, *Religion and Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia*, p.25.

²⁰⁸ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, p. 134; Aleksa Djilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution 1919-1953*, (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1991), p 185.

violence and instability experienced in royalist Yugoslavia in the 1920's.²⁰⁹ The policy was consolidated under Tito in 1945 after the Second World War.

In the three nationalist myths, ethno-religious qualities of each group are emphasized. For the Serbians, the defeat of prince Lazar's martyrdom at Kosovo Fields loomed large. The conquest and subsequent conversion of the Serbian people emerged from military confrontation with Ottomans. As such it positioned the Serbs as an aggrieved and occupied people.²¹⁰ As previously mentioned, martyrdom and sacrifice are paramount to these Serbian myths, in which Kosovo can be interchanged with Jerusalem. This same national martyrdom complex can be found to a lesser extent in Bosniak and Croatian cultures.²¹¹ Serbian nationalist historiography as constructed by scholars such as Vuk Karadžić built a paradigm in which Bosniaks were portrayed as lapsed Serbs.²¹² Croats have a similar belief to their Serbian counterparts but instead emphasise that Bosnians were once Croats that were converted to Islam. Lastly, the Bosniaks distinguish themselves rather uniquely. Their origin myth draws its roots in the legacy of Ottomanism, advancing that Bosnian Christians of the Bogomil heretic sect converted to Islam in mass during the 13th century due to a dissatisfaction with the existing church system.²¹³ Of course, the reality of the situation is more complex than these myths would suggest. For example, the rate at which people converted to Islam varied over time (but was most intense during the first two centuries of

²⁰⁹ The policy was called "Integral Yugoslavism" and went hand in hand with the establishment of King Alexander I's royal dictatorship.

²¹⁰ Falina, *Religion and Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia*, p.12.

²¹¹ Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 167.

²¹² Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, p. 98.

²¹³ It is often referred to as the "myth of spontaneous conversion" in the academic literature on the subject.

rule) and the reasons why Bosnians converted were just as diverse, although many historians now point to socio-economic factors as the dominant cause for conversion.²¹⁴

These identitarian myths in Bosnia were often shaped by two entities: state actors and local powers. The Ottomans, Austria-Hungary, and Yugoslavia all used the levers of the state, as well as religious institutions (especially schools) to help shape ethnic identities through the propagandization of these foundational myths.²¹⁵ Similarly, local powers, such as the Bosnian landowning gentry, leveraged their closeness to the now decaying Ottoman Empire to retain their Islamic identity under Austrian rule. For example, they had access to Ottoman textbooks as well as maps in schools, they could get grants to study in Constantinople and retained access to the institutions of the larger Islamic world if they wished to study there. This was encouraged by the Ottoman Sultan who had his own grand ideas of pan-Islamism.²¹⁶ This worried the Austro-Hungarians who reacted by creating their own institutions in the hope of limiting the Muslim community in Bosnia's ties to the Ottoman Empire. Led by the chief secretary for Bosnia, the statesmen Benjamin Kállay promoted a policy of bosnianism (*bošnjaštvo*), a type of Bosnian nationalism fueled by the Bogomil spontaneous conversion myth. He hoped to push Bosnian Muslims away from Ottomans by justifying the conversion of Muslim Bosnians to Islam. This helped introduce the idea of a local Bosnian Islam and even later a European Islam separate from the Islam of Ottomanism.²¹⁷ Part of this myth's success was that it was deeply intertwined to

²¹⁴ Amzi-Erdoğan, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 17; Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, pp. 189-190.

²¹⁵ Clayer et Bougarel, *Op. cit.*, pp. 35, 82-84.

²¹⁶ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, pp. 82-84.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

agrarianism and Muslim landowners.²¹⁸ To promote this policy of Bosnianism they replaced the Ottoman appointed *mufti* with their own in 1880. From then on, the Reis-ul-ulema (grand *mufti*) was chosen by emperor. They even opened a national museum of Bosnia in 1888 as a nation building project. Furthermore, they integrated *sharia* courts with local courts and opened their own schools for *cadis* (Islamic teachers operating religious schools, madrassas). They only allowed some degree of religious autonomy to Bosnia's Muslims until after territory was annexed in 1908.²¹⁹ It should be noted that despite adoption by parts of the Bosnian gentry over the 19th century, these ideas did not become popular until much later, in the decades following the Second World War, when they were adopted by all classes of society.²²⁰ Similarly, both royalists and communists used the instruments of the state to help promote a unitarist vision of the state.

If the Austrian system latently created European Islam, then it is fair to examine why the Yugoslav system failed to ingrain Yugoslavism in the same manner. To create a unitarist myth requires an integrated school system to promulgate it, but to promote a national myth one only needs students from one's own ethnic group. The problem lies in the fact that for much of Bosnia's history, students studied under a system resembling ethnic atomization rather than a unified national standard. During the Ottoman era, schools were segregated under the *millet* system—until the *Tanzimat* reforms began to push for a more modern system of education. At that time the Muslim schools such as *madrasas* shaped by the *ulema* system of religious scholars had fallen behind the more modernized school programs run by Christian institutions.²²¹ Another reason for these changes is that the bureaucracy of the Ottoman empire was in the process of modernizing

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²¹⁹ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, pp. 82-84.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

and in dire need of a new professional class of administrators (e.g. medicine, engineering, military, admin, judges ...). As a result, they created a new system of non-religious schools the *rüştiye* (secondary) and *idadi* (high) schools. While the new system of schools mentioned above started in Istanbul, it was also be implemented in the provinces by 1840; with a centralized department of education and grade-based admissions implemented by 1857. These schools would also be used to reinforce Ottomanism as public policy.²²² The Austrians continued this trajectory of an integrated school system but also introduced their own changes in order to “civilize” Bosnia.²²³ This extended into allowing both Latin and Cyrillic instruction, with the Latin script being favored in education during the early days of the occupation before complaints from the Serbian community made them recant and allow dual language instruction with Croats and Muslims studying in Latin and Serbs in Cyrillic. The language of instruction was at first determined by what group of children held the majority in class, before parents were later given the choice of language of instruction. While this could be seen as a form of equality, some scholars have intimated that this was a way to isolate Bosnia’s ethnic communities from each other.²²⁴ Despite these assertions, scholar Gordana Božić points out the implementation of these educational policies created new avenues for ethnic autonomy. Not only did they create the aforementioned European Islam but also allowed for education to reinforce confessional identity through both the language of instruction and the type of alphabet used. It should be remembered that these were two key pillars of national identity, as is religion. Božić hints that this was the ancestor of the two-school under one roof

²²² Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l’Europe du Sud-Est*, p. 335.

²²³ Jelena Gajic, “Education of Muslim Girls During the Interwar Era and Socialist Transformation in Yugoslavia”, (MA diss., Charles University, 2004), p. 45.

²²⁴ Anida Sokol, “The Austro-Hungarian Language Policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina” in *Empires and Nations from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century, Volume I*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 124.

system of segregation seen post-Bosnian war. A good example of this system can be found at the Travnik Gymnasium in which the school is literally divided in two halves, one Croat and the other Bosniak.²²⁵ Others, such as Gordana Marković, are quick to remind us that in the nationalist upheavals that defined the end of the Austro Hungarian Empire, language could be a function of religion and that choosing a language of instruction was a method to define the national identity of a community.²²⁶ It was these very reforms by the Austrians that created a new intelligentsia who in turn would push for more school autonomy. Schools soon struggled to decide if they should embrace Croatian, Bosnian or Serbian identity.²²⁷ One of the large failures of this instruction was that Muslim girls were by and large left out of this system. Women were prohibited from attending school as the religious authorities said that the Qur'an prescribed their confinement to their own homes in preparation for marriage. To remedy the situation the Habsburgs opened both boy and girl schools. Yet, many did not attend these places of instruction owing to discrimination from their own communities who rightly was them as foreign institutions. Among non-Catholics, school instruction was poor. This was especially true of the Muslim community that had 94.65 percent of its population lacking a basic education.²²⁸

After the First World War, Royalist Yugoslavia and later Socialist Yugoslavia tried to double down on integration, with the latter teaching students the creed of brotherhood and unity. While the school system could boast of some success, with illiteracy rates falling dramatically,

²²⁵ Gordana Bozic, "Reeducating the Hearts of Bosnian Students: An Essay on Some Aspects of Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina", *East European Politics and Societies* 20:2, 2006.

²²⁶ Gordana Marković, "A Neverending Story – The Utilisation of Language as a Political Instrument: National and Language Policy of Austria-Hungary in Bosnia and Herzegovina", *Balkanica - Annual of the Institute for Balkan Studies*, no. LVI (December) (2025), p. 54.

²²⁷ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, p. 90-91

²²⁸ Gajic, "Education of Muslim Girls During the Interwar Era and Socialist Transformation in Yugoslavia", p. 52.

they would fail to build a common Yugoslav identity amongst their students.²²⁹ If one is to look at the percentage of Bosnians who identified as Yugoslavs, the share of the population does not even reach a plurality of the population with a paltry 5.6 percent of Bosnia's population identifying as Yugoslavs as per the 1991 census.²³⁰ This is most likely complicated by low intermarriage rates. While Sarajevo led the Bosnia Republic with intermarriage rates as high as 30-34% before the 1992–1995 war, that same remained stagnant at 13% in Bosnia at large, before dropping precipitously after the Bosnian war. It should be noted that these numbers remained higher than in Yugoslavia at large (for example Yugoslavia only had a 8.4% rate of intermarriage in 1981).

This brings us to the debate about cosmopolitanism versus identity. As the opposing force to cosmopolitanism's universalism, identity is about distinct boundaries and an identifiable sense of belonging. Despite the emphasis on a certainty of self found in the latter concept, we know that identity is frayed in a modern world that is constantly changing. Instead, identity is multifaceted and this takes a certain level of nuance to understand. In 1994's *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* sociologist Craig Calhoun argues that identity-based movements are "fraught with ambivalence" because they rely on essentialist claims to form group identity in a modern context that contradicts this surface level unity. In *Balkans Ghosts* and many other western journalistic works covering the Balkan wars of the 1990s we see a clear invocation of this pernicious "ancient hatred" trope, yet these tropes often diminish the substantial role that the actions of individual actors can play in a conflict.²³¹ In these fictional scenes of ethnic co-operation, we see clear human

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 90-95.

²³⁰ Fran Markowitz, "Census and Sensibilities in Sarajevo", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49(01) (2007), p. 42.

²³¹ Angeliki Sotiropoulou, "The role of ethnicity in ethnic conflicts: The case of Yugoslavia." *ETH Zürich ISN* (2004), p. 1.

bonds form. In Pop Nikola, and Mula Ibrahim we see solidarity between neighbours lead to real friendship and understanding despite the past trauma they share. Yet the opposite is also true, when violence and trauma go unchecked, we find interethnic resentment. As is shown in *Bridge on the Drina* the spirit of Radisav loomed long after his death. This is the central thesis of Max Bergholz, the author of *Violence as a Generative Force*, who examines how violence can shape identity by examining acts of violence in a small Bosnian village by the name of Kulen Vakuf. He posits that violence does not solely reflect historical traumas but can actively mold new identities. His book shows us how a peaceful village was rocked by interethnic violence in the Second World War and how that violence created a breakdown of neighbourly relations that persisted long after. He also shows how much of this violence (Ustaše, Chetniks, Muslim Nazi Brigades...) was not directly ordered from the political center but was a choice made in the field by local commanders.²³² These stories are then in turn re-interpreted and exploited by nationalist actors to pursue their own agenda much as the story of Stoja and Ostoja was remolded and rewritten to become the story of a martyred woman rather than a half-witted peasant. This suggests that identity is not only constructed but is generative; it relies on the inputs and outputs of human beings and is therefore a dynamic, rather than a static, system where violence helps construct identity (the inputs are brutal acts of violence, and the outputs are the new molded identities).²³³

Other historians such as Glenn Bowman have similarly argued that political violence is a tool to artificially forge national identity. In *Ethnic Violence and the Phantasy of the Antagonist: The Mobilisation of National Identity in Former Yugoslavia* he argues that the “fantasy of the antagonist” can be invoked by political elites to create a kind of in-group solidarity to band together

²³² Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity*, pp. 100-154.

²³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-20.

against the “other”. In doing so they invoke a kind of defensive violence to protect their group. This phenomenon is referred to as “Constitutive Violence”, creating an antagonistic identity based on ethno-nationalism. He further argues that this type of violence allowed these same political elites to find legitimacy in failed political structures such as the hollowed out communist system post-Tito. He frames this violence as not as inevitable, but rather one forged by political elites by framing their politics through the lens of a “necessary struggle for survival” by that group.²³⁴

While Andrić documents the literary gestation of the myth in the 19th century, the events of 1989 demonstrate its operational and political reification. The *SANU Memorandum* (Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts), a nationalist declaration of Serbian grievances that helped spur the Milošević regime, explicitly rebukes authors who allowed “subversive” narratives in their texts. Stating that “In this connection, the realm of literature is serving as the main arena for caprice and anarchy”.²³⁵ One should not underestimate the nationalist view. They are quite aware of the power of myths. Milošević himself invoked Lazar himself and the Kosovo myth by hosting a massive rally at Gazimestan, the very site where the famed medieval Battle of Kosovo Fields took place. Speaking to the power of myth, and their malleability of this myth to suit the required nationalist narrative: “Today, it is difficult to say what is the historical truth about the Battle of Kosovo and what is legend. Today this is no longer important”.²³⁶ The irony was that the speech spurred ethnic tensions with the Albanians, a people who had assisted

²³⁴ Glenn Bowman, “Ethnic Violence and the Phantasy of the Antagonist: The Mobilisation of National Identity in Former Yugoslavia,” *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 106 (1994), pp. 133-153.

²³⁵ Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, “Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) Memorandum, 1986”, *Making the History of 1989* [Haverford College Translation via the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) at George Mason University] (1986), p. 6.

²³⁶ Slobodan Milošević, “Gazimestan / Vitus Day Speech” Political Speech [British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Translation], Gazimestan Monument, Kosovo, June 28, 1989.

the Serbs during the famed battle as part of a pan-Balkan confederacy. In Chapter 4, we will discuss the consequences of challenging such untruths.²³⁷

As Milan Kundera would observe in the very opening of his magnum opus *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”.²³⁸ In the collection of stories, Kundera demonstrates that totalitarian regimes erase a people by a forced process of forgetting that applies to their history, culture, and memory thus replacing who they were with a new manufactured identity. Perhaps the forced adoption of the unitarist narrative in Bosnia had the similar effect of creating reactionary response to fill the narrative void offered by increased freedom. If so, it is this void that the nationalists filled with their own historical memory when the communist system collapsed. This new nationalist identity would have likely been alluring in comparison to the old party line. After all, the death of Tito brought about a new vision of Yugoslav history powered by these new ethnically driven narratives. It shattered the unitarist position. As the famed Croat historian Ivo Banac put so eloquently in his summary of Yugoslav historiography:

*“Yugoslav historiography could not survive the notion that the distinction between historical truth and popular legends was not a matter of importance. It could not survive the notion that there were different truths, negotiated by professional historians. The one-sided war of historians is notable because legends and ideological distortions were often promulgated by the best historians, not by amateurs”*²³⁹

²³⁷ In the *Damned Yard* we witness an important character, that of Kamill, being jailed for telling a story of the pretender of the throne. His storytelling is based in an exploration of truth and as such is a threat the very identity of the ruling regime – as his stories tug at the legitimacy of their rule. Similar consequences await those who in real life challenge these kinds of regimes.

²³⁸ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), pg. 1.

²³⁹ Ivo Banac, “Yugoslavia.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 97, no. 4 (1992), p. 1104; The irony should not be lost on the reader that despite this warning, Banac himself would fall into the same trap as those he was criticizing when he would eventually put his name forward for a foray into politics.

Could it be that these “ancient hatreds” were just as much a project in elite manipulation, and that perhaps identity is a malleable concept then one would like to think?

2.3 – Cohabitation and the superficiality of cosmopolitanism

(Saint Georges day, Baku, and the false cosmopolitanism of lust)

The works of Selimović, for their part, do not delve as deeply into the mythos but serve as great illustrations of the kind of ethnic exchanges that existed between groups. In the Sarajevo of both *Death and the Dervish* and *The Fortress* we not only see a segregated landscape, but also that they do not share the same cultural space. In the first novel, our seemingly pious dervish finds himself walking alone by moonlight. While his outward appearance reeked of sacred righteousness, we are also shown glimpses of his inner doubts, namely his commitment to a strict existence that requires isolation from the world. In the distance, he can hear the sounds of young Christian women preparing for St. Georges Day, which he describes as “giggling, a distant song”. The dervish is apprehensive about the festivities commenting on the unfamiliar atmosphere (“the whole *kasaba* trembled with fever”), one that clearly make him uncomfortable (“the air was permeated with sin”).²⁴⁰ The dervish is dismayed by their lack of faith and views their surrender to this sin as a weakness.²⁴¹ He describes the festivities as follows:

There was an old right to sin on the eve of Saint Georges Day. They kept it without regard to the faith, even in spite of it. They defiled themselves during these twenty-four hours full of the lustful scent of lovage and love, of lovage that smells sinfully of women and love that smells of the lovage of women's thighs. In this span of day and night sin spewed from the sealed bellows of desire, lavishly, as if spilled from a giant bucket. A strange, ancient time is lumbering behind us, stronger than we are, showing itself in a rebellion of the body, which, although short-lived, is remembered until the following rebellion, thus perpetuating itself. Everything else is an illusion, everything else that might occur between these primal

²⁴⁰ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, pp. 30-32.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

*victories of sin. But the trouble is not so much in lustfulness as it is in this foreign evil that has lasted for ages, stronger than the true faith.*²⁴²

He also fears that his own co-religionists may engage in these festivities which he describes as a night where women bathe in the nude in the water mill springs for the pleasure of devils and tries to warn them, but he knows that all of the Kasaba will be partaking despite its “foreign” primeval origins.

*Go home, I said to the unruly young men who were approaching. Tomorrow is Saint Georges Day, an infidel holiday, it is not ours. Do not commit sin! But it was all the same to them, all the same to the kasaba, no one could take this night away from them.*²⁴³

The night of, the dervish almost gives in to his innermost desires made wild by the sent of lovage and must lock himself inside his *tekke* asking God to bring him to his senses.²⁴⁴ This incident shows us that despite the city being divided, cultural exchanges do happen. Unfortunately, on this occasion even this intimacy is compromised by the view of this holiday as a sinful, alien day where everything is permitted. Beyond that night there is no hope of a future, especially not in a society with such a strongly delineated religious hierarchy.

The later novel, *The Fortress*, shows us a literary representation of what life looks like for a multiethnic couple. The protagonist of this story is a Muslim married to a Christian woman. In this novel, this is shown to be a relative rarity. Despite their poverty, and a miscarriage, it is a happy marriage. Yet, this marital tranquility is one that is paid for by the bride. She has been ostracised by her Christian family, who refuses to come to her marriage.²⁴⁵ The novel is quick to show us that these types of relationships are not the norm and are not viewed entirely positively.

²⁴² Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. 32.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-35.

²⁴⁵ Selimović, *The Fortress*, pp. 28-32.

When already under suspicion for ill advised remarks about his time in the military that he made previously, he is questioned by *Serdar* Avdaga (commander / law officer) about a poem he was singing in the hills who asks him what he does, aside from writing poems as he is unemployed. The conversation devolves into the *Serdar* telling him that his own words brought on his unemployment, not just for speaking freely, but that “people could criticize him for marrying a Christian girl whose father was an enemy of the state”.²⁴⁶ This girl is his wife, Tijana. The fear of the other, even when that relationship poses no physical threat to the group, is a theme that reoccurs in the works of both authors. Despite the fears and doubts of the protagonist, the novel ends with the couple’s love enduring. In essence *The Fortress* is a parable – where the fortress is not just a physical jail but a sort of societal trapping that oppresses both Muslim and Christians alike and prevents true co-existence, opting for a superficial version of it where interactions are limited. Yet this is a condition that is escapable through individual effort.

In contrast with these rosier scenes both authors also give us gloomier portraits. In a *Bosnian Chronicle* we find a priest who is in the line of performing medical services who is discouraged from doing house calls to Muslim households because he may be kidnapped if the patient dies or his condition deteriorates.²⁴⁷ In a darker scenario to the one presented in *The Fortress*, a scene from *Death and Dervish* portraying the particularly brutal murder of a female inn owner highlights the dangers of illicit love across ethnic lines; whether consensual or through implicit coercion. The inn is located near the frontline of a battle where the dervish and his fellow Muslims are confronting a Christian force. Likely driven by a sense self preservation, the women slept with the Turkish soldiers that roomed at her inn; then when the Muslim force was driven

²⁴⁶ Selimović, *The Fortress*, pp. 113-115.

²⁴⁷ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 220.

back, she was rumoured to have slept with men from the Christian army. Upon the return of the Turkish army, she is brutally murdered in revenge for this “betrayal”. If anything, she was just a civilian trapped in a difficult situation, trapped between two warring factions – this complication of civilian life in wartime is alluded to by the author when they state that where armies go, grass does not grow (due to their devastation), but children sprout.²⁴⁸ The Dervish had befriended her son, clearly infatuated with the mother but unable to act on it due to his religious practices. He even took him in to be educated by the Sufi order, whom he is a member of. Yet a discomfort permeates their relationship. The dervish wonders if the boy resents him for what happened to his mother, and if that secret, mutually shared but not discussed, knowledge is slowly poisoning their relationship. This is not the only time in the novel that the dervish’s strange relationship with women rears itself; the most striking example is found on St. Georges day.

The real St. Georges day or *Durdevdan*, marks the arrival of spring and is not so different than the one described in these literary texts. While being a primarily Orthodox Christian celebration, it was one of the few holidays that was shared among faiths, with Croats, Muslims and Roma participating in the festivities before the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. This was due to the folkloric pre-Christian roots of the event, associated with nature and fertility (hence the appeal to lovages!).²⁴⁹ While this day was one of shared comradery, the rigid religious hierarchy, as displayed in Chapter 1, would often prevent these exchanges from progressing much further. In fact, the religious-legal system of the region was created to explicitly limit inter-faith unions. In the Ottoman Empire, each religious community administered its own flock, but all non-Muslims

²⁴⁸ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. 246.

²⁴⁹ Aleksandra Terzić, Željko Bjeljac, and Jovana Brankov, "Saint George's Day in the Balkans — Customs and Rituals," *Journal of the Geographical Institute "Jovan Cvijić" SASA* 64, no. 3 (2014), pp. 383-393.

had the right to use the local judges (*kadi*) in *sharia* courts for the administration of their legal matters including marriages or divorces, thus allowing them to bypass their existing religious representatives. As a generality marriage outside of one's religious community was discouraged. Traditional Islamic law allows Muslim men to marry Christian or Jewish women but strictly forbids Muslim women from marrying outside the faith.²⁵⁰ Christians for their part heavily discouraged marriage to "heretics", even if those heretics were of other Christian denominations. Orthodox priests and Franciscan Catholic monks often required conversion before marriage, or rebaptism if already married. This was not only to delineate their own jurisdictional authority but also to keep their flock pure in order to survive as a group while in a position of inferiority.²⁵¹ One workaround for these mixed marriages was to use a local *kadi* and his court and to bypass the Christians authorities, but again these sorts of unions were highly discouraged.²⁵²

There are two powerful examples of ethnic co-operation shown in *Bridge on the Drina*. These are striking, as they are pure and untainted by self-interest. The first occurs when the town of Višegrad faces a massive natural disaster, the great flood of the 18th century. Coming on in the late days of October, this disaster forces the inhabitants of the town to flee to higher ground. Suddenly, the divisions that underpin the town dissipate, and the various ethnic communities, Serb, Muslim and Jewish, are forced to work together. During the storm, Christians and Jews find shelter in Christian homes while Muslims do so in homes belonging to their creed. Once everyone is housed the merchants of all faiths gather in the home of Hadji Ristic. There they are joined by a

²⁵⁰ Eleni Gara, "Interfaith Marriage in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire: Legal and Social Aspects," *Mediterranean Journal of Gender and Women's Studies* 5, no. 2 (2022), pp. 240-241.

²⁵¹ Emese Muntán, "Rethinking Global Catholicism from Ottoman Europe: Catholic Missions and Local Agency in the Early Modern World," *Journal of Global History* (2026), pp. 11, 16.

²⁵² Eleni Gara, "Interfaith Marriage in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire", pp. 245-246.

host of other citizens and for a day they put aside their differences by bonding over stories and drinking plum *rakija* (brandy).²⁵³ The second involves the friendship between the towns two primary religious leaders, the Serbian patriarch Pop Nikola and the Muslim community leader Mula Ibrahim. We are introduced to them as they are gathered with the school teacher Hussein Effendi and the rabbi David Levi. They have been summoned to meet on the *kapia* by an emissary of Austria at the start of the occupation of 1878. The foursome, the most important people in the community, are terrified of what the future may hold for them – fearing that they will be made an example of. Here, they sit and share a moment of unity as they await their fate, with Pop Nikola delving into his massive tobacco pouch to share with the others.²⁵⁴ The text implies that generations of these men played together when they were young, before being more rigidly linked to their communities of faith:

*So they sat on the kapia as they had once done when they were young and carefree and like the rest of the young people wasted their time there. Only now they were all advanced in years. Pop Nikola and Mula Ibrahim were old, and the schoolmaster and the rabbi in the prime of life. They were all in their best clothes, filled with anxiety both for themselves and for their flocks. They looked at one another closely and long in the fierce summer sun, and each seemed to the others grown old for his years and worn out. Each of them remembered the others as they had been in youth or childhood, when they had grown up on this bridge, each in his own generation, green wood of which no one could tell what would be.*²⁵⁵

In this statement, we are also informed of the history that ran between the two elder statesmen, with a deep pool of mutual understanding existing between them “as if they understood one another by their eyes alone” and a description of their relationship as being “close acquaintances since youth and good friends, insofar as one could speak of friendship, between a Turk and a Serb”.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 76-81.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124, 128-132

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Pop Nikola was the son of the celebrated Pop Mihailo whom the Turks had beheaded on the very *kapia* on which they sat. Yet in the stormy youth of Pop Nikola, when he had trouble with the “Turks” of the town and was forced to flee to Serbia, it was so that Mula Ibrahim’s father lent him a hand. In adulthood they became friends, joking that they are neighbours even though their houses were located at opposite ends of the town.²⁵⁷ Yet even with this warm humanistic portrayal of these men, we are reminded that this is the exception and not the rule:

*On occasions of drought, flood, epidemic or other misfortune they found themselves working together; each among men of their own faith Otherwise, whenever they met at Mejdan or Okoliste, they greeted one another and asked after one another’s health, as priest and hodja never did elsewhere.*²⁵⁸

At every turn we are reminded of the fragility and tenuousness of these relationships, that they require responsibility and good judgment from all parties over long periods of time to overcome adversity. On the *kapia*, they would articulate this sentiment:

*‘All that breathes or creeps or speaks with human voice down there is either your or my responsibility.’ ‘It is so, neighbour,’ Mula Ibrahim would stutter in reply, ‘indeed they are.’*²⁵⁹

We are also reminded of the importance of individual choices in shaping human behaviour; that to forge these types of leaders, goodwill must be extended even in difficult situations. In the case of Pop Nikola, his stormy youth gave way to a wise elder statement:

*But when the troubles years had passed. Pop Mihailo’s son had settled down in his old parish, married, and calmed down. Those times were long ago and now forgotten. (‘My character has changed long ago and our Turks have become peaceable,’ Pop Nikola would say in jest.) For fifty years now Pop Nikola had administered his widespread, scattered and difficult frontier parish calmly and wisely, without other major upheavals and misfortunes than those which life brings normally in its tram, with the devotion of a slave and the dignity of a prince, always just and equitable with Turks, people and leaders.*²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 129.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

Another interesting example can be found in the *Damned Yard*, a story of a friendship struck between a Catholic priest and a Muslim prisoner. While both are jailed in an imperial prison in Istanbul, they bond over their love of stories and storytelling. The Muslim, a man of mixed Turkish and Greek heritage has been jailed for the potential challenge to the state narrative contained within one of his stories. In this case it was his sympathetic obsession with Cem Sultan, once a pretender to the Ottoman throne who was betrayed and scorned by both Turkish and Christian alike. This is an important counter to the idea of mythos being purely divisive. The novels do offer us a few examples of shared spaces for these types of interactions to take place. The *kapia* found in *Bridge on the Drina* and by extension the town bazaar are the most prominent examples, as they serve as a neutral ground where Bosniaks (Muslims), Serbs (Orthodox), and Jews interact for trade and social life. The jail courtyard from the *Damned Yard* is another, that offers a contrasting view of the highly segregated view of the world crafted by Selimović. By the same token these are spaces that are also host to violence and disagreements, while serving as a vector for inter-ethnic mediation.

Examples of these types of co-operative relationships, such as the one between Pop Nikola and Mula Ibrahim, can be found in the historical record (i.e. marriage records, imperial registers, correspondence, archives...) but they are usually reserved for times of strife or natural emergencies. This includes joint peasant uprisings against local landlords and a shared resistance to the *Tanzimat* reforms culminating in the Husein Gradašćević rebellion. Yet the strict religious hierarchy established in Chapter 2 shows the limits of what is possible in such a system. For example, while interfaith marriages did happen in the more mixed parts of the empire, they were often only possible with the help of loopholes in the law and were highly contested. This often led

to family conflict and even intervention from the central authorities in the affairs of the Sharia courts.²⁶¹

While the anecdote of the Feast of St. George effectively demonstrates a fleeting transgression, it should be noted that these exchanges never truly present a challenge the existing social hierarchy created by the Ottoman. The *millet* system tolerates diversity, but it forbids political equality. The "tolerance" in question here is a tolerance of juxtaposition, not integration in the more modern sense. Interethnic friendships like that of Pop Nikola and Mula Ibrahim's or solidarity in the face of disasters such as the incident with the massive floods are about survival against an implacable nature or power, but they do not forge a modern social contract. It should be noted that most of these interactions are set in the pre-modern era, unlike the modern era where this type of exclusionary model of diversity would be replaced with a totalitarian model of extermination. Yet, hints of what are to come are laced through the text. The literature here illustrates the absence of a public sphere; this being a virtual place distinct from the state and private life in which public affairs can be discussed to form public opinion (in the context of the work of Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt). It is in the space that the public interfaces with the state to transmit the needs of society. The absence of such a place prevents the formation of genuine public opinion. This could be due to state or corporate control that prevents the creation of open and rational debate. Arendt emphasises the importance of the plurality of voices in these spaces,

²⁶¹ Fatma Turhan, "Marital Issues of Bosnian Christians in the Nineteenth Century: Authorisations, Interventions and Prohibitions." *The History of the Family* (2026), pp. 1044-1046.

to combat the polarising dynamics of contemporary populism, but without said space it becomes difficult to do so.²⁶²

There are many theories as to why Bosnia and Herzegovina failed to bridge the divide between co-existence and co-habitation. Some historians have surmised that the feeling of shared heritage amongst Yugoslavs only truly exists when there is a compelling external threat.²⁶³ This is reflected in the animosity shown to the European outsiders in a *Bosnian Chronicle*. To others, it is the historically latent creation of a Yugoslav state that had little time to build up its institutions before the Second World War having inherited a broken school system, low rates of intermarriage and an economically latent state. Yet there is a third explanation that may also shed some light on the unique situation in which Bosnia found itself. That is that Bosnia cosmopolitanism was more based on intolerance than acceptance, due to the lack of a true shared identity. One may recall the lustful imagination of the protagonist during St. George's Day celebrations in *Death and the Dervish*, and the participation of other non-Christian members of the *kasaba*. On the surface it seems that it may result in a certain level of cultural exchange or even possible inter-marriage, yet it is little more than a lustful foray.

This incident recalls the superficiality of some types of cosmopolitanism as presented by the historian Bruce Grant his article *Cosmopolitan Baku*. In this article he interviews residents of 1970s Baku, then seen as a beacon of urbanity and sophistication in the Soviet Union during its Brezhnevite golden age (i.e. an age of jazz, cinema, parties, and multinationalism and flourishing

²⁶² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 27, 176; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 7-8, 175-177, 199-200.

²⁶³ Perica, *Balkan Idols*, p. 15.

economy under the aegis of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and Azeri leader Heydar Aliyev). This Baku, like Sarajevo, evokes in many Azeris a certain level of nostalgia, with a recurring refrain being “Ty ne predstavliaesh’ / You can’t imagine”.²⁶⁴ Like Olympic Sarajevo, this was a project of enlightened socialism, carrying about it the baggage of state sponsorship.²⁶⁵ Yet, despite Baku being showcase for Soviet internationalism, it can be inferred from his conversations with the Azeris, many who had come from the countryside for work or pleasure, that little is left of this vibrant world beyond this refrain. For the Azerophone women there is no longing for this time, it has been consigned to the dustbin of history. Yet amongst the men – there is a memory of one thing and one thing only... foreign women. As Grant tells us:

*“Only men would sometimes appear wistful over worlds gone by in a manner that did not take much prompting. ‘You might go to Baku to take your exams, you might go to Baku to negotiate a different placement in the army, but when you were young, you really went to Baku for one thing – the women’, two companions assured me one evening. One added, ‘Before there were all kinds of women! You can’t imagine! Today, you know, there are women too, but we are married, and I am sorry but, they all look the same to me. I miss the Jews, and I miss the Armenians too. I even miss the Russians’.”*²⁶⁶

This longing for past sexual relationships was as shallow an interaction as it came. It was a temporary, even transactional time in the lives of those who recalled them. For those in the countryside, an urbane Baku represented a world apart from their own, best consigned to their youth.²⁶⁷ This is the superficiality of cosmopolitanism, a surface exchange that in reality did not leave a lasting impact or an integration into the social fabric of society. Like in Sarajevo, cosmopolitanism did not prevent ethnic conflict – Armenians would soon come to understand this superficiality, as they too belonged to this foreign world, despite their long history in the country.

²⁶⁴ Bruce Grant, “Cosmopolitan Baku”, *Ethnos*, 75(2) (2010) p. 124.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.124-125.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Chapter 3: Fortress Bosnia - Inaccessibility of the Bosnian Landscape and Minds

"I sometimes think there's no country in Europe as roadless as Bosnia"

- Ivo Andrić, *A Bosnian Chronicle* [Spoken by Consul Daville]²⁶⁸

This chapter presents and reinterprets Bosnia's geographical isolation as a tool for the periphery to resist the meddling of imperial powers. It also attempts to understand how technology will nevertheless circumvent these geographic features to disrupt pre-modern life in traditional societies. The novel is mobilized in this chapter as a dialogue between center and periphery, that will be thoroughly cross referenced with sociological and historical data.

3.1 - The Physical Fortress: Topography and roads as stakes in imperial sovereignty

(resistance through inertia, illustrated by *Bosnian Chronicle*)

There are few idioms as quoted as "all roads lead to Rome"; after all, the quality and repute of the Roman transportation network was the envy of the known world, with the built infrastructure for these projects extending into the furthest extent of the empire. In the Balkan peninsula, the most important of these routes was the Via Egnatia, stretching from the port of Dyrrachium, in present-day Albania, to Byzantium, in present-day Turkey, thus connecting the eastern and the western halves of the empire. To secure their possessions inland in Illyria, the Romans constructed the Via Militaris connecting Constantinople to ancient Belgrade, while along the coast they built the Via Flavia to connect Dalmatia to Tergestum (ancient Trieste). Secondary routes linked the mineral rich Bosnian hinterland to Salona, the ancestor of Split. This proto-Bosnian province had only been won over to the Roman side after a hard-fought campaign, where the legions struggled to conquer the unforgiving landscape. Despite these towering achievements in the field of

²⁶⁸ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 68.

construction, road building in this part of the world was no simple task. The harsh terrain made the construction of routes such as the Egnatia so prohibitive, that few have attempted the same level of infrastructure development since. This is especially true of Bosnia and its famed emerald-green hills.

Attributed to the French Consul Daville, the “roadless” quotation at the start of this chapter was part of a larger literary dialogue between the senior Consul Daville and the young Consul Desfosses in a *Bosnian Chronicle*. Trapped in the Ottoman town of Travnik during much of the Napoleonic Wars, these two men of different philosophical outlook and temperament experienced isolation from the wider world in different ways. The older consul, a more conservative figure, passed his time by devoting himself to his national duty and family, practically confining himself to the embassy and residence of the Ottoman Vizier, while his junior, a more liberal type, took to the countryside in an attempt to understand the land for a book he planned to write. While this fictional conversation takes place hundreds of years into the past, Bosnia’s rugged topography has ensured that the country still retains one of the lowest densities of highways in the world (a paltry 220 linear kilometers as of 2026, in a country with a surface area of 51,209 square kilometers).²⁶⁹ The relative isolation created by Bosnia’s emerald coloured hillscape is a favorite of Ivo Andrić, for whom the mountains serve as a protective barrier against the outside world but also something that holds Bosnia back by cutting it off from external influences. Through this fictional dialogue between the two archetypes, Andrić lays out some of his sharpest intellectual discourse on the role

²⁶⁹ International Trade Administration, "Bosnia and Herzegovina - Infrastructure Engineering and Construction," Country Commercial Guides, last modified February 4, 2026, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/bosnia-and-herzegovina-infrastructure-engineering-and-construction>.

of geography and infrastructure from the perspectives of empire and periphery. This serves as the base of our literary hypothesis, that finds its material proof in the analysis of these scenes.

Continuing the conversation about roads started by the two consuls, we see that it has evolved into a conflict of visions about the nature of Bosnians. The older consul views the “backwardness” of the country as a moral failing that is due to the “bad nature” of the Bosnian people themselves.²⁷⁰ This view was inherited from a conversation he had with the Turkish vizier of the province, who had little regard for the people he was governing.²⁷¹ For the elder consul, roads represent progress, the kind brought about by Western nations and their ideas. As a representative of France, he sees the French nation as the embodiment of the Enlightenment and a vehicle to civilize the world.²⁷² This thinking imbues him with a strong dislike of the enemies of progress as he clearly states:

*"These people, more than any other people in the world, have a peculiar and perverse hatred of roads, which in fact represent progress and prosperity. In this God-forsaken country the roads are not kept up and they don't last, they almost fall apart by themselves. You see, the fact that General Marmont is building a great highway through Dalmatia is doing us more harm with the Turks here, even with the Vizier, than our boastful and eager friends in Split could possibly imagine. These people don't like to see roads anywhere near them. How can you explain that to our friends in Split? They're busy bragging to all and sundry how these new roads of theirs will improve communication between Bosnia and Dalmatia, and they have no idea how suspicious the Turks are about it."*²⁷³

The younger consul for his part is quick to shrug off his mentor's perspective. The idea that this perceived lack of progress was based on an ethnic characteristic goes against his analytical nature. He posits the following in response, clearly understanding that these roads may also bring danger to the local populations:

²⁷⁰ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 69.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-31

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

*"Well, it's no wonder" [...] "As long as Turkey has the kind of government it has, as long as conditions in Bosnia remain what they are, there'll be no roads or communication. On the contrary, both the Turks and the Christians, though for different reasons, oppose the opening and maintenance of all traffics links." [...] "But the point I'm trying to make is that these folk here don't want any roads, that there are reasons why they don't want them, and that the roads do them more harm than good."*²⁷⁴

Desfosse puts the blame of backwardness on Ottoman rule. Like Daville, he also sees the road as a form of progress, yet he posits that the Bosnian people have as much to fear from new roadways as they have to gain, that they may even have legitimate reasons to oppose them. The new road is referred to in the text as the one initiated by general Marmont and his people in Split. This is likely a reference to the French Road (or Napoleon's Road) located in today's Croatia. This was a massive infrastructure project initiated by the French to connect Dalmatia's more populous coastline to its sparser interior by a series of roadways. In effect, undertaking this project would help break Bosnia's regional isolation by connecting it to the newly annexed province of Dalmatia, now part of the French Empire's Illyrian provinces. The coast had hitherto been separated by the mountains, and passage to the major cities from the interior hinterlands was a hardy task, even occasionally impossible, particularly in the winter when the weather made the trek through the old route impassable.

Despite their glaring differences both the literary vessels of Daville and Desfosses seem to appreciate that these new roads do, in fact, present a tepid imperialist foray into Bosnia and hint at future French designs over Ottoman territories. This talk of roads would later be supplemented by a discussion about the plans for an independent French postal system being run through Ottoman lands.²⁷⁵ This encroachment would be matched by that of a second European power to the north

²⁷⁴ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, pp. 68-69.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

of Bosnia: the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In consort with the rival French, they would establish their own consulate in Travnik shortly after the establishment of the French mission. The townspeople, especially Travnik's Muslims, looked suspiciously upon these foreigners. The novel begins and ends with the Muslim *begs* of the city gathered for a smoke at the divan Lutva's Café in Travnik where they are discussing the unwelcome presence of these outsiders. The obstinance of the residents, their resistance to outside influences (and change in general) as well their willingness to outlast them, is demonstrated in the following quotation:

*"no one could wait like the Bosnian Moslems, for they were people of stolid faith and a granite-like pride, who could be as impetuous as a spring torrent and as patient as the earth."*²⁷⁶

Ironically enough, the Catholic friars from the nearby monastery also refer to their own "pig headed" character. This characteristic is introduced as a shared one among the Bosnian ethnic group. Furthermore, this self-acknowledgement should not be lost upon the reader as it is presented as a conscious decision made by these local Bosnian characters on how choose to interact with the world and not a failing of character.²⁷⁷ At the conclusion of the novel the Napoleonic Wars have come to an end with a French defeat and the Consuls are to return home. The *begs*, now in a celebratory mood, revisit their previous anxiety laced conversation from the start of the novel. One of the senior *begs* mocks the others for making much ado about nothing saying that "everything will be the same again, just as, by the will of Allah, it has always been".²⁷⁸ While he is talking about being rid of western powers, it should be noted that these Bosnian noblemen are just as resistant to the reforms of the Ottoman sultan, as some locals cheer the downfall of the reformer, Sultan Selim III. The *hojas* in the *bazaar* even go as far as to refer to the sultan as an "infidel"

²⁷⁶ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 47.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

while vying for a return to the true faith.²⁷⁹ While this resistance to outside influences is a theme of the novel, the story illustrates a duality in Bosnian religious practices. Not only are they obstinate in their dealings with their own countrymen who share different faiths, but they are equally so with outsiders who share religious similarities. In the case of Bosnian Christians this would be with Western Europeans, in this case the Catholic French and Austrians with imperial designs over Bosnia. In the case of Bosnian Muslims, this would be with fellow Muslims from the Ottoman Empire who have a zeal for “western” styled imperial reforms.

Whereas new inter-jurisdictional roads could certainly bring these outside powers nearer to the Bosnian hinterland, it does not explain the poor quality of transportation infrastructure within Bosnia itself. These would be roads and the like located in small locales where outside powers would have no natural interests. While the Ottomans built many famed bridges throughout their empire to connect foreign holdings with their capital, most notably solid stone river crossings, such as the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge in the town of Višegrad. It is also true that Bosnia suffered from abundant underinvestment in its infrastructure, particularly in transportation.²⁸⁰ This, despite the widespread availability of indentured labour among the *rayah*. While traveling to the Croatian monastery at Dolats, the young Consul Desfosse would offer remarks on this very issue, stating that due to the condition of the road, his voyage was taking much longer than necessary. He would soon be informed by one of the monks that there was a purposeful nature to the badly maintained roads. This was a ploy to ward off the ever-creeping progress of the outside world into the quaint monastic environment but more importantly also served as a sort of invisible barrier to reduce interactions between the different ethnic groups. Many monasteries supplemented their livelihoods

²⁷⁹ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, pp. 37-40.

²⁸⁰ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 23.

by hosting travelers through a system of guest houses, and while all travelers were welcome, some were more welcome than others. For Christians, such as those at the monastery, the arrival of a Muslim guest was perceived as ominous, especially if they were an important dignitary or a janissary. There was a good reason for their wariness; the monks feared reprisals from Turkish officials if anything went wrong while housing these visitors.²⁸¹ This point is illustrated in Ivo Andrić's short story *In the Guest House*. In this story, brother Marko Krneta runs a guest house for travellers in an isolated monastery on a poorly maintained road. Krneta becomes the host to unexpected company when a coarse band of Turkish Janissaries, one of which, Osmo Mameledžija, is sick and is near death, come to stay. The monks know that if the guest dies from his sickness, they will be harassed by the Muslim authorities from Sarajevo for a shakedown (or worse... persecution).²⁸² The fear of the other, brought in by roadways is one shared across religious lines. For Bosnia's Muslims, these vital economic corridors are seen as a conduit to increase foreign interference in their sanjak, especially as it pertains to the *rayah*, whom they fear are plotting with foreign powers such as France, Austria or Russia to liberate themselves from the imperial yoke. The bulk of their suspicions are mostly centered around the Serbs, especially those that live along the contentious border with Serbia.²⁸³

The historicity of these literary dialogues is hard to ascertain. What we do know about the region's road network at this time mostly comes from travelogues such as the journal of Marshal Marmont (*Mémoires du maréchal Marmont*²⁸⁴) and Arthur Evans (*Through Bosnia and the*

²⁸¹ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, pp. 68-69.

²⁸² Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, pp. 95-110.

²⁸³ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, pp. 68-69.

²⁸⁴ Auguste-Frédéric-Louis Viesse de Marmont, *Mémoires du maréchal Marmont, duc de Raguse, de 1792 à 1841*, vol. Volume 3, Book 11 (Paris: Perrotin, 1857), p.115-155.

*Herzegovina on Foot*²⁸⁵) that foreigners found the roads in Bosnia, especially those on the borderlands, to be in exceptionally bad condition. While Mormont speaks of the military necessity of passing troops through these roads, Evans makes the curious mention of the poor condition of these roads in the Bosnia territory of the Croats. As for Desfosses, he is clearly a stand-in for the French diplomat Chaumette des Fossés whose journal *Voyage en Bosnie dans les années 1807 et 1808* is likely the originator of this literary dialogue on geography as a shield from the outside world, where he notes the deliberate neglect of local infrastructure (“de la negligence que le gouvernement met à l’entretien des routes”).²⁸⁶ What he does not mention is that this neglect of the roadways was done purposefully by local Bosnians. Nor is the reason for the conditions of the roads ascertained with certainty in the academic literature. Whether this is literary fiction or historical truth, we do know that the isolation of the Croat Franciscans was of particular interest to Ivo Andrić. His thesis *The Development of Spiritual Life in Bosnia under the Influence of Turkish Rule* analyses the lives of Franciscan monastic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina under Ottoman rule. It speaks to the geographic isolation of the land and the role of the Franciscan in preserving traditional culture as one of the few sources of educated elites in the country.²⁸⁷ His thesis, like his literature, has been criticized by certain scholars such as Muhsin Rizvić in his book *Bosnian Muslims in Andrić’s Works*, but these critiques are tempered by other historians who say

²⁸⁵ Arthur J. Evans, *Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot During the Insurrection, August and September 1875* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1876), pp. 113, 228 -233

²⁸⁶ Amédée Chaumette des Faussés, *Voyage en Bosnie dans les années 1807 et 1808*, Paris: University of Michigan, 1822, pp. 117-120.

²⁸⁷ Ivo Andrić, *The Development of Spiritual Life in Bosnia under the Influence of Turkish Rule*, ed. and trans. Želimir B. Juričić and John F. Loud (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 33-34, 39-57

this reading ignores the nuances of his work. Therefore, this literary construct is likely based on Andrić's own intellectual foundations.

There is also a link between infrastructure development and the imperial gaze that should not be ignored. In fact, it is a key piece in the center-periphery relation. This spatial model examines the imbalance between a more powerful "center" and its "periphery", a subordinate region that is usually less developed and dependent on the former. Returning to the Roman example, the conquest of ancient Bosnia, then Illyricum, during the *Bellum Batonianum* campaign, was followed by a period of road construction so that Bosnia's silver could be extracted for use in the empire. The French and Austrian infrastructure projects are discussed in dialogues between the French Consuls Daville and Desfosses in *A Bosnian Chronicle*. These projects are no less transparent than those of the Romans, and that is why even lower-level administrators can detect it without being privy to the details. In both the literary and real world, roads, whether French, Austrian, or Ottoman are first and foremost tools for military penetration, taxation, and economic extraction. Whereas Desfosses postulates that roads equal progress and that the absence of roads equals moral and civilizational backwardness, the reality is rather more complicated.

In David Do Paço's article *Trieste: les horizons d'une ville centre-européenne*, the author shows how the 18th century city of Trieste on the Adriatic Sea passed from a sleepy commune to become the fourth largest city in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its chief port, thereby passing from the periphery into the center. In the article he theorizes that the city's development was not only the result of the empire giving it free port status in 1719, but also because it actively self-regulated its own autonomy from Vienna. He gives credit to a "three-way political game" between the local city of Trieste, the regional center of the Duchy of Carniola / Ljubljana, and the imperial

center as represented by the Habsburg Monarchy.²⁸⁸ In doing so he demonstrates that the imperial gaze, that is, the way the imperial center traditionally views the periphery as a powerless and passive space, is a flawed way of examining history. Instead, actors such as the city's multiethnic merchant class, many of whom were residents of the South-Eastern European diaspora, should be seen as autonomous actors who were not completely subordinate to Vienna. These fictional scenes of the consuls discussing the roadway networks amongst themselves and with the locals is actually a clever representation of the imperial gaze in Bosnia. The resistance of local populations to imperial projects such as road maintenance, whether they are Franciscan friars, Muslim beys, or Orthodox peasants, is not proof of an irrational obstinacy or of a backward society that rejects "progress" and is inherently "ill-tempered". Rather, it is a rational strategy for the preservation of a periphery in the face of the coercive appetites of the centers (Vienna, Paris, Istanbul). Geography is instead mobilized as a tool that will be referred to as "topographical isolation". This topographical isolation is used as an asymmetrical shield against the centralizing modern state. Modernity in this case can be seen as a loss of autonomy.

A Bosnian Chronicle stands at an important temporal junction in the corpus of literature that is being analysed. The novel closes in 1814. To the characters, who have no foresight into the events that are yet to come, this year has brought about the end of political intrigue in the region by foreign powers. On the surface this observation seems correct. Both the French and Austrian consuls had vacated their respective positions in Travnik, with the former having suffered a significant setback by the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Yet despite the assurances of the senior beg at Lutva's café, that life in Bosnia would return to what it was before the opening of the consuls in

²⁸⁸ David Do Paço, "Trieste : les horizons d'une ville centre-européenne, 1690-1820," *Monde(s)*, no. 14 (2018), pp. 71-93.

Travnik, this was not to be. Bosnia and Herzegovina would be occupied by Austria in 1878, ending centuries' long occupation of the country by the Ottoman Empire and replacing it with a new order. This was but a mere sixty-four years after the end of the events in the novel. This occupation confirms two things: that the locals' mistrust of foreign powers was entirely justified and that their traditional lifestyle was about to be irrevocably altered as their geographic isolation was reduced. This reduction was driven by the new occupants were part of a much more efficient bureaucratic machine, one that made modernizing a priority in contrast to the Ottoman Empire's failure to fully implement the *Tanzimat* reforms (see Chapter 5). Hence, the novel stands at the knife's edge of the large societal changes that rankled Bosnia's traditional society and sent it hurling towards modernity. The book only gives us a small glimpse at the ever-growing foreign influence that was pouring into Bosnia, a land still inaccessible but becoming more integrated into the larger world around it. The remaining literature rounds out our understanding of Bosnia's development from a new Ottoman territory to the early formation of Yugoslavia. Specifically, it allows us to understand how Bosnia was slowly opened up to the outside world by way of the development of its infrastructure.

3.2 - Technological Intrusion: The railway and social anomie under Austria-Hungary

(illustrated by The Bridge on the Drina)

The corpus of literature chosen encompasses a time span of nearly three centuries, a time span in which we can see how the pace of life evolves with the development of technology. It is in this period, particularly the later part, that we see the drive towards modernization and the political reforms of the 19th century. These would bring about the beginning of the modern nations and their multitude of issues managing their diverse ethnic populations.

Ivo Andrić's masterpiece *A Bridge on the Drina* possesses the oldest setting of any of the novels in this corpus, as well as covering the longest time span in our corpus where this phenomenon of modernization is observed.²⁸⁹ The story begins in the small hamlet of Višegrad, on the border with Serbia, but one whose border is not yet defined.²⁹⁰ The year is 1516, and a young Christian boy from the town of Sokolovići, not far from Višegrad, is taken away from his family by Ottoman soldiers. He has been selected along with a tribute of other local boys to be taken to far away Istanbul as part of the *Devshirme* system, essentially a child tax that took Christian children from the Balkans to be converted and trained as soldiers for the imperial army. To complete this trek, they had to cross the Drina river, but no bridge existed at this location to ford the watercourse. Instead, an infamous old ferryman by the name of Jamak gave passage seemingly at his own whims and whims. Crossing was a slow and laborious process, even more so for a young boy taken against his will to an unknown land, an experience the boy never forgets. Years later, he would become the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed Paša Sokolović, and remembering that painful moment as a child when he dreamt of a bridge at this location, he had a sturdy stone crossing installed.²⁹¹ A town soon developed around that structure, and, with the exception of travelers staying at the old stone *han*, most of the residents were locals from the surrounding region. In this Bosnia, even the imperial capital is seen as a distant land, but less distant than before this bridge was constructed. At the same time the use of foreign labour for

²⁸⁹ It should be read alongside *The Bridge on Žepa* – a precursor short story that takes place nearby and is limited in scope but outlays many of the same themes.

²⁹⁰ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 94-98.

²⁹¹ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 22-27; this same childhood pain that prompted this roadway modernization would be the last thing he remembered as he is brutally stabbed to death.

specialized jobs on the bridge project, such as the use of Dalmatian stone masons holds hints that this relative isolation would not last forever.²⁹²

Through Meša Selimović's *Death and the Dervish* and *The Fortress* we are given a representation of an 18th century Bosnia that is becoming less and less isolated from the world. This newfound dynamism is confirmed by the historical record and explored in the works of Noel Malcom who states that the Treaty of Karlowitz 1699 turned the territory into a military frontier that in turn added a new depth to economic life in the territory. With Europe (France and Austria) on the doorstep, foreign trade increased and strong population growth took place. During this time Christian and Jewish merchant communities in Sarajevo flourished. This was a welcome contrast to the 17th century that saw the region's population decrease.²⁹³ In *Death and the Dervish*'s Sarajevo, the ex-soldier turned dervish Sheikh Ahmed Nuruddin has gone to war against the Christians abroad and has a friend who is married to a Christian woman from Dalmatia, an indication that we are seeing a local world give way to a regional one. All the while we see the main character Ahmet Shabo, of *The Fortress*, go to war in what would become present day Ukraine and even travels to Venice at the end of the novel with the wealthy merchant Shehaga Shogo, signaling an expanded world view within the military and merchant classes. Short stories such as *Ali Pasha* and *The Vizier's Elephant* as well as *a Bosnian Chronicle* take us to Travnik and elsewhere in Bosnia during the Napoleonic Era (early 19th century). Here we see non-Turkic powers bearing down in the Balkan peninsula, just as they do over the course of the *Bridge on the Drina* where fierce clashes are held over the border in Serbia and skirmishes occur along the border with Austria. In the story *Ali Pasha* roads through Herzegovina are so well improved that they are

²⁹² Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, p. 30.

²⁹³ Noel Malcom, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), pp. 82–106.

used to parade around the disloyal Bosnian Vizier and in *a Bosnian Chronicle* large powers from the rest of Europe start to play a part in the development of the region, as they improve their infrastructure networks on the border with Bosnia.

While these developments show an increased pace of modernization, nothing compares to the literary depictions of the technology brought forth by the 19th century. Both the novel *a Bridge on the Drina* as well as the short story *a Letter from 1920* take us into that period that found Bosnia under Austrian rule and residents of places such as Višegrad marvel/are dismayed at the pace of the changes they are experiencing. The arrival of technologies such as the railway only help to compound this as they are now connected to the European continent. Now the residents have access to the larger neighboring urban centers to go to school as both texts tell us that many of the students leave for larger Yugoslav cities such as Belgrade, but they also have access to foreign schools abroad. Of the railway, not only do the residents of Višegrad complain about how quickly the Hungarian workers erect the railway station (in contrast to them complaining about how long it took to build the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge) but they also look at the possibilities of this technology – and the influence of the foreigner with disgust.²⁹⁴ Unlike in Ottoman times where the foreigners such as the Dalmatians and Hungarians leave town after the construction of the bridge, these newcomers are here to stay. Of the railway station replacing the old *han*, Ali Hodja would emphatically state that they put things up as quickly as they tore them down.²⁹⁵ When speaking to his fellow Muslims merchants who excitedly boasted about the speed of this new technology saving “time, money and effort”, he would respond by asking the “purpose” of the speed stating

²⁹⁴ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 28-31.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

that “If you are going to hell, then it is better that you should go slowly”.²⁹⁶ The ever so prophetic curmudgeon would later utter one of the most salient quotations about this technology as can be found in *Bridge on the Drina*:

*“You are an imbecile if you think that the Schwabes have spent their money and brought their machine here only for you to travel quickly and finish your business more conveniently. All you see is that you can ride, but you do not ask what the machine brings here and takes away other than you yourself and others like you. That you can't get into your head. Ride then, my fine fellow, ride as much as you like, but I greatly fear that all your riding will lead only to a fall one of these fine days. The time will come when the Schwabes [German-speakers] will make you ride where you don't want to go and where you never even dreamt of going.”*²⁹⁷

Ali Hodja would live long enough for his apocalyptic predictions to come to life. The novel *Bridge on the Drina* fittingly ends where it began, with life in Višegrad buttressed between the creation and destruction of the famed structure. Like the town, the bridge was already seeing its importance wane with the rise of the railway, but its destruction is still felt by the villagers, especially Ali Hodja, the eccentric traditional Muslim whose family once cared for the structure. To some scholars such as Tomislav Dulić and Marina Antić, the downfall of the bridge symbolizes the inevitable onset of modernity and its derivatives (nationalism, nation states, ...) as well as the end of the region's “pluralism”, the results of which are hinted at in *Letter from 1920*.²⁹⁸ These changes will be discussed in *Chapter 4*, but what should be highlighted is that the literature makes it very clear that behind these changes lies a transformation in technology and infrastructure. This literary Bosnia reaches an inflection point in its development sometime in the 19th century, where it transitions from isolation into a larger globalized world.

²⁹⁶ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 212-214.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 214.

²⁹⁸ Antić, “Living in the Shadow of the Bridge”, p. 15.

Yet, what do historians tell of the arrival of the railways in the region and its perception by the populace? The first railways were built by the Ottomans, but the vast majority of the network was constructed by the Austrians and as such we will concentrate on the period of Austrian railway building. Leyla Amzi-Erdogdular notes the Hapsburg occupation coincided with the “vigorous development” of industrialization, infrastructure and education.²⁹⁹ An important part of this process was the sustained construction of infrastructure, namely modern roadways and the railway. Noel Malcom notes the dual purpose of the railways as a logistical tool used by the Austrian military to transport their troops and as an engine for economic improvement. He argues that the railway opened up Bosnia for the development of primary industries, this being extraction of materials to be refined elsewhere. These were developed by the railways particularly mining (coal, iron, copper and chrome) as well as forestry. This extraction activity spurred the construction of iron and steel works in addition to chemical plants generating exports totaling \$28 million and building an industrial labour force of more than 65,000.³⁰⁰ More recent scholarship has been more critical of this railway expansion. Danijel Kežić emphasises that while railways had an important role to play in the development of 19th century European nations, but the situation in south-western Europe was different. He states that railways’ layouts were more in line with Hungarian political, military and strategic interests than those of the periphery and that upon the dissolution of those empires they were a hindrance to development rather than a boon. This is because the spacial layouts of these railways were chosen for imperial needs (e.g. economic extraction, military ...)

²⁹⁹ Amzi-Erdogdular, Leyla. “Alternative Muslim Modernities: Bosnian Intellectuals in the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 4 (2017), p. 917.

³⁰⁰ Malcom, *Bosnia: A Short History*, pp. 141.

rather than the needs of the people in the countries they were built in.³⁰¹ Dževada Šuško for his part notes that the railway contributed to the decline of domestic trade, in conjunction with the abolishment of customs duties (from the annexation), as it fueled the increased demand for cheaper good imported from Austria-Hungary.³⁰² Magnus Neubert and Stefan Nikolić identify the same phenomenon stating that the railway and integration into a larger market (Austro-Hungarian Empire) harmed Bosnia and Herzegovina's local market by lowering the cost to transport goods bringing about cheap imports and devastating the job market for local craftsmen forcing them back into agriculture. He added that the human capital in much of Bosnia and Herzegovina lacked the required training for industrial jobs and that only the regions that had this kind of labour force benefited from the railways. In regions where human capital was lacking, workers were imported from elsewhere in the empire, noting that the railways were primarily a tool for economic extraction.³⁰³ While the famed opposition to the railway may be a literary flourish, we do know that local Muslims were extremely opposed to the 1878 annexation in which they lost their economic and political status (railways were used to put down that resistance).³⁰⁴ What should be noted about this era is that Muslims in Bosnia were not necessarily anti-modernization, nor were their thinkers anti-modernity. Leyla Amzi-Erdogdular makes the case that they were enthusiastic about projects that had relevance to them as Muslims (e.g. The Hejaz Railway, a project to link

³⁰¹ Danijel Kežić, "The Bosnian and Serbian Narrow-Gauge Railways and the Construction of the Yugoslav Transport and Economic Space," in *Taming the Yugoslav Space: Continuities and Discontinuities in Coping with the Infrastructural Challenges of the 20th Century*, ed. Danijel Kežić, Vladimir Petrović, and Edvin Pezo (Belgrade: Institute for Recent History of Serbia, 2023), pp. 19 -22

³⁰² Dževada Šuško, *Faith and Loyalty: Bosniaks and the Austro-Hungarian Empire* (New York: Peter Lang, 2023), p. 87.

³⁰³ Magnus Neubert and Stefan Nikolić, "Why Railways Fail: Colonial Railways and Economic Development in Habsburg Bosnia–Herzegovina," *Journal of Development Economics* 181 (April 2026), pp. 2-6.

³⁰⁴ Dževada Šuško, *Faith and Loyalty*, pp. 94-95.

Istanbul, and by extension the Otoman Empire to the holy city of Mecca). What she summarises so eloquently is that this anti modernity current could also be read as a reaction to European encroachment “that threatened Muslim societies on all fronts: militarily, economically, politically, and culturally”.³⁰⁵ This would be a resistance to modernization being imposed on them, rather than embraced by them.

So how do geographic isolation, technological/infrastructure development and interethnic conflict intersect? We begin where the previous subsection on the Physical Fortress concluded: with the local population’s perception of modernity as a direct threat to its autonomy. One of the most striking examples can be found in a *Bosnian Chronicle* where series of conversation between the young Consul Desfosse and the catholic friars (especially Fra Julian from the Dolats Monastery) help shine a light on the situation. In one prominent example that takes place at the French consulate, the friars blame Muslims for the country’s backwardness. Desfosses, for his part, agrees but pushes back against the idea that the sole ownership of blame lies with one group and argues that the region’s Christians share responsibility for this condition. He argues that their subjugation has made them adopt many poor characteristics that have harmed their development, namely “mistrust, mental ferocities and fear of innovation”.³⁰⁶ These conversations about Bosnia’s development, (and its implicit implication that Bosnia’s level of openness to the outside world is holding it back) are quickly shot down by the friars who respond that if Bosnia had been more open than it would have been forcibly converted by the Turks³⁰⁷. This conversation is a prelude to a larger one where during his last days in Bosnia, the young Consul Desfosse returns to Dolats for

³⁰⁵ Layla Amzi-Erdogdular, “Alternative Muslim Modernities: Bosnian Intellectuals in the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 4 (2017), pp. 915, 928.

³⁰⁶ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 236.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

a celebration of mass. At Dolats he resumes his political discussions with his friend Fra Julian and they meet an impasse. After being accused of not understanding the Bosnian people, the young consul insists that he does and pleads his case that the Bosnians need to modernize, particularly in the fields of education and transportation. He calls the priest to action as he states that the educated class should be leading the charge:

[Fra Julian] *"I don't expect you to understand us"*

"But I do think," protested Desfosses, "that in all this time I've got to know your country pretty well. Contrary to other foreigners, I have tried to understand the hidden values as well as the shortcomings and backwardness which a stranger is so quick to notice and so quick to condemn out of hand. So you must allow me to tell you that I find the attitude of your Order often hard to understand."

"And I tell you that you can't possibly understand."

*"But I do understand, Fra Julian. The point is that what I see and understand I cannot approve. This country needs schools, roads, doctors, contact with the outside world, work, and enterprise. I know that you won't be able to realize and achieve these things as long as the Turks are here and the communications between Bosnia and Europe are what they are. But still, you're the only educated class here and you ought to prepare your people and prod them in that direction. [...]"*³⁰⁸

To his disappointment, Desfosse is stonewalled by the priest. The Franciscan order's disdain for the outside world extends far beyond their lack of road maintenance and is in direct conflict with the Enlightenment values held by the Frenchmen. The priest sharply criticizes the French but not without being in turn lectured by Desfosse who worries that the people of Bosnia will not be prepared for their eventual liberation (and joining of the greater European family):

"Enlightenment won't do us any good unless we also have faith in God," interrupted the friar; "Even in Europe this enlightenment won't last any length of time. But while it lasts it can only bring upheaval and misfortune."

[Desfosses] *"You are wrong, my dear Fra Julian. [...] A little more upheaval here wouldn't do you any harm. You can see that the people of Bosnia are divided into three, even four religions – divided and at one another's throat. All of them together are cut off from Europe – that is, from the world even four religions-divided and at one and others' throats. [...]."*

³⁰⁸ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 292.

Watch out, or you may find yourself committing the historical sin of not having grasped this, of leading your people in the wrong direction, of not getting them ready in time for what is undoubtedly their due and birthright. Among the Christians of the Turkish Empire one hears more and more talk of freedom and liberation. [...]

*[...] But you know the old saying, it's not enough to become free, it's much more important to deserve freedom. Getting rid of the Turkish rule won't help you much unless you have modern education and liberal ideas. In all these centuries your people have become so much like their oppressors that they will gain very little if the Turks should go away one day, leaving them not only with their own weaknesses as a subject people but with a legacy of Turkish faults as well-idleness, intolerance, violence, and the cult of brute force. What kind of liberation would that be? [...] There's no doubt that one day your country will join the European family, but it might very well happen that she will do so divided and weighted down by a legacy of prejudice, habits, and tendencies which have become outdated everywhere else and which, like some malevolent ghosts, will stand in the way of her normal development and make of her an antiquated curiosity, an easy target for any comer, just as today she is for the Turk. I think your people deserve better".*³⁰⁹

The consul then adds, rather impetuously, considering his presence in a monastery:

"You can see for yourself that no nation, no country in Europe, would think of basing its future progress on religion-

"Exactly, that's the whole tragedy," Fra Julian broke in.

[Desfosses] "No, it's a tragedy to live as you do."

*[Fra Julian] "When you live without God and betray the faith of your ancestors, that's tragedy. Whereas we, with all our mistakes and flaws, have remained true to it."*³¹⁰

[Desfosses] "Did it never occur to you that one day when the Turkish Empire falls and abandons these parts, these people under the Turkish yoke calling themselves different names and professing different faiths, will have to find some common ground for their exist. life-, a broader, better, more sensible and humane rule"

[Fra Julian] "We Catholics have had this rule a long time-the Credo of the Roman Catholic Church. We don't need any better rule

*[Desfosses] "But you know, not all your compatriots in Bosnia and the Balkans belong to that Church. [...] No one in Europe associates any more on that basis, don't you see? You ought to be looking for some other common denominator."*³¹¹

³⁰⁹ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, pp. 292-293.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 292-293.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

The conversation ends, much like all their discussions on the topic, at an impasse. The last point by Desfosses however reinforced the idea that religious association was being replaced across Europe as the main vector of group identity. New ways of identifying, based on linguistic, cultural or ethnical groupings were emerging. However, Bosnia was, and would remain, fixed with religious identification rather than a system that could unite these disparate groups. In some way this echoes the failure of later Yugoslavism to achieve unity. The friars at Dolats and their roads are not just a way to represent a certain backwardness due to a topological feature, but an intellectual resistance to what is happening in the outside world.

This exchange documents the link between infrastructure and openness and is almost certain based on the words of Amédée Chaumette des Fossés who makes the case that a more enlightened regime would have built such roads (“Si cette province appartenait à un gouvernement plus libéral, on pourrait y ouvrir facilement et à peu de frais de superbes routes”).³¹² It presents the orientaling western gaze as linking tradition with backwardness, but give us the Fra Julian as the counterpoint to this view. As the previous analysis on the railway makes clear, however, that the railway would soon have real impacts on the geographic isolation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Research has made it clear that railways and other technologies, such as the telegraph, are not just movers of goods or instruments to aid in communication but tools to build states. They allow a centralized bureaucracy to displace decision-making by local elites with those made by a central authority that can now penetrate deeper into its own territory.³¹³ Conversely as a technology so closely linked with 19th century modernization, the railways can introduce “radical cultural

³¹² Amédée Chaumette des Faussés, *Voyage en Bosnie dans les années 1807 et 1808*, p. 119.

³¹³ Alexandra L. Cermeño, Kerstin Enflo, and Johannes Lindvall, "Railroads and Reform: How Trains Strengthened the Nation State," *British Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (April 2022), pp. 715-717.

change” and increased separatism in minority areas (as it may reduce self governance) just as it can increase cohesion in non-minority regions.³¹⁴ These shifts in societal outlook become more prevalent with political and technological changes. One of the most significant changes was the advent of the railroad, a new technology that revolutionizes transportation and allowed for people to travel great distances at little physical strain.

In *Bridge on the Drina* we can see this process of modernization happening at a breakneck speed. The town changes rapidly in appearance in the first years of the occupation. The Austrians cut down trees, pulled down shops in the *bazaar* that were in disrepair and the marketplace was rebuilt. They also built a new barrack house on top of the old *han* that had been left in disrepair for generations at this point. They also added modern illumination, including lanterns on the bridge, and implemented cleanliness ordinances.³¹⁵ Finally, the new railway station, and line were also completed.³¹⁶ The labour brought in for these works, as well as the multiethnic Austro-Hungarian army, brought a certain cosmopolitanism to the town. But the constant construction and busyness in town is interpreted by the locals as restlessness. Commenting on the marketplace being full of foreign speaking soldiers (Czechs, Poles, Austrians, Hungarians, Croats...), we are told that the fast paced newcomers were disturbing the town’s way of life.

*The newcomers were never at peace; and they allowed no one else to live in peace. It seemed that they were resolved with their impalpable yet ever more noticeable web of laws, regulations and orders to embrace all forms of life... and to change and alter everything, both the outward appearance of the town and the customs and habits of men from the cradle to the grave.*³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Yannick I. Pengl et al., "The Train Wrecks of Modernization: Railway Construction and Separatist Mobilization in Europe," *American Political Science Review* 120, no. 1 (February 2026). pp. 41-43.

³¹⁵ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 138-142.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

These new changes concerned many of the townspeople at first, criticizing the rapid pace of development.

*When they thought all this incomprehensible energy had come to an end, the newcomers started some fresh and even more incomprehensible task. [...] This continual need of the newcomers to build and rebuild [...] this eternal desire of theirs to foresee the action of natural forces, to avoid or surmount them, no one either understood or appreciated. On the other hand all the townsmen, especially the older men, saw this unhealthy activity as a bad omen. Had it been left to them the town would have gone on looking as any other little oriental town. What burst would be patched up, what leant would be shored up, but beyond that no one would needlessly create work or make plans or interfere in the foundations of buildings or change the aspect which God had given to the town.*³¹⁸

In one rather humorous scene Ali Hodja, our contrarian traditionalist archetype, tells us of an attempt by the Austrians to implement tablets with numbers on the door (in essence a network of addresses for a postal system) that was sabotaged by public uproar. He encourages a sort of passive resistance against Austrian modernization projects.³¹⁹ Unfortunately for our Don Quixote, he was but tilting at windmills as the citizens of Višegrad would eventually get over that initial hesitation, leaving traditionalists like Ali Hodja in the dust.³²⁰

There would be even more changes to come, as newspapers and political offices would open for both Serb and Muslim parties. We are later informed that these news sources are read superficially and too fast. Gramophones now pierce the quiet atmosphere of the *kapia*, and new banks are opened as “the more money a man has, the more he needs”.³²¹ This newfound cosmopolitanism brought social changes along with it. Since the army officers would take their wives to frolic on the *kapia*, altered cultural norms and allowed the bridge to be used as a public

³¹⁸ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 138-143.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215, 224.

space for all Bosnian citizens. Women, Christians and Jews now made their presence on the bridge known, when they were previously discouraged from doing so.³²²

There was still one novelty that occupation and the newcomers brought with them; women began to come to the kapia for the first time in its existence. [...] This did not happen very often, but none the less it was enough to disturb the older men [...] and disconcerted and confused the younger ones.

There had, naturally, always been a link between the kapia and the women in the town, [...] Many a contest between rivals was settled there, many love intrigues imagined. [...]. All this there was, but women had never stopped or sat on the kapia, neither Christian nor, still less, Moslem. Now all that was changed. [...]

*And on working days at dusk, officers and civil servants strolled there with their wives, [...] These idle, laughing women were a cause of scandal to all, some more some less. The people wondered and felt insulted for a time and then began to grow accustomed to them, as they had grown accustomed to so many other innovations, even though they did not approve them.*³²³

These changes are further compounded by Bosnians themselves being able to travel across their borders. The first batch of Bosnian army recruits in the Austrian army were the first group affected and they come back to Bosnia a year later speaking of tales of “distant cities with strange names”.³²⁴ Then the students who had gone off to school would come back over the summer bringing with them new clothes, dances, and an interest in forming Sokol (paramilitary organizations) as well as books in Czech, German and Serbian. They would engage in heated political discussions on the *kapia*. Soon new ideas around ideology would spring up including a fierce argument between a student supporting nationalism and one socialism. Debates also spilled over into examinations of the religious question with national liberation ideas from Karageorge being imported into the conversation, inspired by recent Serb victories in the Balkans war.³²⁵ The

³²² Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 141.

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. 141-142.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232, 238-239.

reach of this new human network is highlighted by the fact that some Bosnians would even immigrate to America where new émigré networks could supply them with jobs.³²⁶ It should be noted that the novel does not gloss over the downsides to this modernization as it states that the days of “easy gains” had given way and that prices would rise with the cost of higher wages. Despite this rise in income, it was still not enough to supply a rising cost of living as it was still twenty percent lower than real needs. We are also informed that the only reliable business is army contracting.³²⁷

The arrival of the railway and bureaucracy, as represented by the construction of the new station and the attempt to implement an address system by adding numbers on the town doors, clearly provokes anxiety in some of the characters, such as Ali Hodja. Émile Durkheim remarked in his work *The Division of Labour in Society* on what happens when modernity intrudes on or disrupts social mores and norms – it creates a sense of palpable social alienation. This phenomenon is referred to as anomie and measured against a sense of normalness in which byproducts of modernity such as industrialization and urbanization destroy social norms before new ones can be established to replace them. This conflict typically arises during the transition between “simple” traditional societies whose norms are referred to as “mechanical solidarity” to “complex” modern societies, with their organic norms.³²⁸ The arrival of the railway does not only increase the speed of travel; it reorients the layout of the town and destroys the existing social structure. The famed bridge on the Drina loses its monopoly on movement and passenger flows now enter the town via the station instead of crossing the bridge. In essence, the radical destruction of traditional temporal

³²⁶ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 277.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 211, 224, 230-231.

³²⁸ Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), pp. 344-366.

and spatial markers by Austrian technology creates more than just a passing unease, it dissolves old forms of solidarity without offering a new, protective social contract. Modernity is not integrated from within; it is experienced as a traumatic intrusion.

3.3 - The Mental Fortress and Alienation: Rejection of the institution and the psychological isolation of the individual

(illustrated by Selimović and rooted in agrarian populism)

There are two primary ways that geography asserts itself in the fortress of Bosnia. The first is a physical barrier and the second is an intellectual one, a certain mindset. As Desfosse points out, if the Bosnians cannot modernize early enough on their own terms, then they may face difficulties in emancipation and become a periphery of Western Europe. Nor can they keep themselves insulated forever. While railways were expensive endeavors, the Ottomans had already begun laying down telegraph wire through their territories after the Crimean War. The telegraph held a distinct advantage over other physical infrastructure projects; its relative ease of construction in harsh terrain significantly reduced the geographic impediments that had heretofore hindered Ottoman communication methods.³²⁹ As illustrated in *A Bosnian Chronicle*, mail couriers could be intercepted, eliminated, or modified at some point along their long journeys. This made them particularly vulnerable to foreign interference, as the historical literature indicates that couriers were the primary way of linking the imperial center to its provinces.³³⁰ As with other technologies, the telegraph suffered a few delays and setbacks in isolated regions who were more resistant to the

³²⁹ Yakub Bektas and Michèle Albaret, “La télégraphie au service du sultan ou le messenger impérial”, *Persée Réseaux*, volume 12, 67 (1994), p. 151.

³³⁰ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, p. 82-84.

adoption of these innovations, but eventually it became a huge success.³³¹ The stubborn grasp of an agrarian tradition that is outdated at the expense of a more urban centered industrialization is only one of the ways in which the young consul was proven right. This resistance to reform is certainly not limited to economic or political reforms, it seeped into every aspect of society. As Desfosse hypothesised, Bosnia was not ready for its emancipation. Instead of embracing western values, especially secularization, the Bosnians clung to their religious identification because of its identitarian qualities. The young consul and the friar are thus both archetypes for these competing models of development exemplified by agrarian traditions versus capitalist modernity. These faults were further aggravated by a fractured ethnic landscape that gave way to an agrarian populism that chose a sub-optimal solution to the crises it was facing.

As Bosnia became less isolated from the outside world, its citizens would become exposed to different systems of thought. Desfosses' hypothesis was that without time to prepare their institutions and educate people for these large-scale societal changes, disaster would ensue. His worry that Bosnians would retain the identitarian qualities of religion above commonalities was prophetic in light of the Bosnia War. Yet one can't help but think that the monks of Dolats may also have been right. The technological intrusion brought about by the modernizing powers of these great empires would radically alter life in Bosnia and reduce its already limited regional autonomy. Bosnia was more interconnected with the world then ever but had even less time to chart its own destiny. This unease was felt by many throughout the empire as it lurched ever closer to the start of the First World War. In Vienna, a "fin de siècle mentality" set in. Of its defining characteristics are a sense of fatalism and a morbid fascination with death, a bulwark against

³³¹ Bektas et Albaret, "La télégraphie au service du sultan ou le messenger impérial", p. 149.

change.³³² Traces of this tension between religion and modernization can even be found in modern nationalist discourse. Alija Izetbegović, who later became the first president of independent Bosnia and Herzegovina, issued an academic text called the Islamic Declaration in 1970 that called for "no modernization without roots in the Qur'an", where he argued that adopting western modernization would erode the cultural and spiritual qualities of the country.³³³ Not only does this speak to the massive social upheaval brought forth by this technological intrusion but also of a deep malaise that could make one reject secular Enlightenment values. This sense of alienation instead led to something far more sinister, the embrace of illiberal populism, an attempt for the periphery to protect a way of life that was rapidly disappearing.

The material conditions for this type of system to manifest itself were ripe. By the 16th century, the territory of Bosnia was considered on the periphery of the world economy, not unlike its contemporaries in Central and Eastern Europe. Economically this meant that production was centered around primary goods (ex: agriculture, lumber), rather than finished goods and remained labour intensive as these were meant for daily use.³³⁴ These countries were characterized by the export of raw materials and the imposition of coercive labour methods such as serfdom or neo-serfdom. According to Wallerstein's World-Systems Theory this wealth gap between western and central European nations was originally caused by the collapse of serfdom and the subsequent rise of global capitalism between the years 1300-1600. The collapse of the old economic system of

³³² William Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: an Intellectual and Social History, 1848-1938*, (University of California Press, 1972), p. 165.

³³³ Ivo Banac, "Bosnian Muslims," in *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Mark Pinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 147-149.

³³⁴ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Capitalism and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the 16th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 301-302.

indentured servitude caused a transition in western Europe away from an agrarian economy to one that manufactured goods. This rerouted trade internally within Europe from the interior to the coasts and then, later, through the Atlantic. This caused central and eastern Europe to experience population decline and famine.³³⁵ While a market economy in the west led to the rise of an urban artisan class, in eastern nations the nobility by and large tried to combat population decline by binding the peasantry to the land. This made it hard to shake the yoke of serfdom and stagnation. The failure to address this gap compounded, and as the years dragged on it widened. This discrepancy is supported by economic data. In 1800, the gap in gross national product between Habsburg possessions and Great Britain was only six percent while in 1870, GDP in those holdings was only a third of Great Britain's.³³⁶ This example holds up throughout the region with a few notable exceptions such as Bohemia. So not only was Bosnia hindered by economic circumstances, but it also suffered from a geographic isolation that made this process even more difficult. This was compounded by a high birth rate, illiteracy, lack of land, rural overpopulation and under mechanization. The land issue was particularly acute, compounded by the fact that there were no avenues for non-land-owning people with no education; thus, demands for reform translated into popular revolts. The late Ottoman era saw clashes with the local Bosnian nobility over the *Tanzimat* reforms and later exploitation of the Christian peasantry, who had little in the way of land, which led to a series of popular revolts such as the Herzegovina uprising. It should be noted that before these reforms, Christians had inferior status in the Empire despite their numeric dominance. These problems persisted after the Austrian take over with the Serb revolt at Timok in 1883.³³⁷

³³⁵ Wallerstein, *Capitalism and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the 16th Century*, pp. 1-3.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Krakovsky, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 3.

This crisis of modernization brought on by a failure to reform would create the ideal breeding ground for populism.³³⁸ Since the population of the Ottoman Empire and later Habsburg Empires was non-heterogeneous like much of Central and Eastern Europe, it made it difficult for these population blocks to put forward a coherent political program (for example, the co-mingling of different linguistic and ethnic groups).³³⁹ It is this very multiethnic characteristic that eventually gave rise to a program of reforms, as new political categories were created to unite these groups. They would thereby cobble themselves together to create “the people” whose opposing camp would logically be “the elite”. Populists put the “people” above all else, defining it as those marginalized or those that perceived themselves to be.³⁴⁰ This political program focuses on solving a social need but acts more as a political community than as a coherent program. As the peasantry would win the right to democratic representation, they began to put forward a program to solve the peasant question. It should be noted that the peasantry in Yugoslavia was as high as seventy-nine percent of the total population, and as such the peasant held a high place of regard in the traditional culture of their people.³⁴¹ As such, a high share of these people made a living through agriculture. Since their condition was so dire, these countries intensified their response to this agrarian question. Some thinkers such as the Romanian, Constantin Stere, argued that it would be difficult to modernize as latecomers to capitalism with little capital, labour and a strong middle class. Thus, a new model for the economic development of those countries that stood in contrast with the existing capitalist West was pioneered. With “the people” at its core, this new model put

³³⁸ Krakovsky, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 45.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1-2, 4.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. VIII-X.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

an emphasis on the glorification of the peasant and peasant life.³⁴² This agrarian populism was probably best represented in Yugoslavia by the Croatian Peoples Party. Thus, it can be said that the model adopted by the capitalist West was abandoned for a new model that based itself on the traditional values often linked to the rural world; these are the same values that were being swept away by capitalism. While the first model may have offered a quicker path to modernization, it was not adopted. Like the monks at Dolats, or the *begs* of Travnik, the peasants clung to tradition over modernization to their own detriment.³⁴³

The problem with the chosen model is that it failed to raise the standard of living for the peasants. Investment put into agricultural modernisation struggled for several reasons. Firstly, the promised agrarian reforms could not deal with the problem of overpopulation; there is only so much land to redistribute after all. In Yugoslavia, the situation was dire with three-quarters of the population still living rurally into the 1930s. The country was deemed to have an excess rural population of 39 percent, higher than that of most of its neighbours.³⁴⁴ This was compounded by an economic crisis in the 1930s that crashed prices by 63 percent between 1929 and 1934, as well as intense agricultural competition from countries such as the United States and Brazil, that chipped away at its competitive advantage.³⁴⁵

Returning to the works of Émile Durkheim on anomie, he states that the main facets of modernity that drive this feeling is industrialization or urbanization, two preoccupations of the agrarian movement. The sense of alienation is also exacerbated by social isolation, hopelessness

³⁴² Krakovsky, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, pp. 46-47.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. P67

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

and the loss of a sense of purpose.³⁴⁶ When the western Balkans chose an alternative model (agrarian populism) in the face of Western capitalism, it chose something resembling the model of the monks at Dolats or the Muslim gentry whose refusal was much anchored in values opposite to that of cosmopolitan urbanity and much more identitarian. It is this attachment to the land and the distrust of the cosmopolitan city that explains why the great Yugoslav modernization program, which was profoundly urban and industrial, failed to take root in rural mentalities, creating fertile ground for future nationalist resentments. In the introduction of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* by Marshall Berman, there is a reflection on the meaning of the title of this book in which the title is a quote from Marx that states that in times of radical change in society, people will attempt to cling to something solid – usually tradition.³⁴⁷ We see this play out in the clinging to agrarianism and a resistance to the adoption of a model that resulted in the adoption of a populism rooted in agrarianism.

In the works of Meša Selimović the analysis of these topological factors plays out rather differently. Both protagonists in *The Death and the Dervish* and *The Fortress* have served in wars. While one has turned inward, becoming a devout dervish, the other's experience of war against an "infidel" army has uprooted his moral system and turned him into a free thinker in a land that has little need for people of that persuasion. After witnessing the death of most of his friends at the Battle of Chocim (Khotyn, Ukraine) and the brutal sexual assault of a Christian women that looked much like one from their own village, he returns from war and leads a non-conformist life. He marries a Christian girl and, occasionally, works menial jobs.³⁴⁸ Most importantly for the plot of

³⁴⁶ Émile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), pp. 344-366.

³⁴⁷ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 15-36.

³⁴⁸ Selimović, *The Fortress*, pp. 3-12.

the novel, he says things that get him into trouble with the ruling elite. One day, he steps out of line at a party by criticizing how his fellow veterans were treated when they came back from war and laments the complete pointlessness of their mission. For his outburst, he is severely beaten and humiliated by thugs hired by those he criticized. Speaking of these assailants, Ahmet comments:

*“They'd humiliated me, spat on me, defiled me, but break me they would not. They were from a foreign, enemy country, and I myself was to blame that we had ever met. We'd no common language, no common thought, no common life. I, a stupid sparrow, went to visit a hawk and scarcely got away with it.”*³⁴⁹

What is curious about this is that he describes the assailants, presumably his own countrymen, as foreigners. In this case, he is making an intellectual distinction describing how traveling the roads outside of Bosnia has made him a stranger to the people in his own country, who have been isolated from that experience. This theme of alienation is not all that different from the one expressed by Max Levenfeld in Ivo Andrić's *Letter from 1920* and is pervasive through many of the works chosen. Yet contact with the outside world is one that also shows itself to have an opposite effect as well, that being to make one more insular. In Selimović's *Death and the Dervish* our narrator's experience at war, has made him a reclusive dervish who rarely interacts with those outside of his religious order. One of the manifestations of his insularity materializes as a certain ignorance shown towards the injustices heaped on his fellow citizens, a condition that only changes after his brother is accused of a crime he did not commit. Speaking to this feeling of alienation, his friend Hassan closes out the novel with the following sentence: “I didn't know he was so unhappy - peace to his tormented soul”.³⁵⁰ For both narrators, Bosnia's isolation made it such that any interactions with the outside world would provide a cultural shock, or at the very least spread a type of subversive or “radical” outlook. For example, in *Death and the Dervish* Hassan's time in the more

³⁴⁹ Selimović, *The Fortress*, p. 74.

³⁵⁰ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. 455.

cosmopolitan Stanbul' turned him into the lovable renegade that we meet at the start of the novel, the kind of man who upsets his father by rejecting wealth and the responsibility of high office to follow his own interests, including horse-trading and pursuing a Christian woman, the wife of a Dubrovnik merchant.

In essence, the existentialism in these Meša Selimović novels is a literary depiction of the confrontation between the alienated individual, as hypothesized by Durkheim, and the totalitarian (or imperial) system. While both works show the individual's struggles against the system, only the case of Ahmet Shabo shows that the alienation of the modern subject can be transcended. Upon returning from the Battle of Khotyn he embodies the existential crisis of the individual confronted with the absurdity of institutional power. Echoing three great minds; Max Weber (on disenchantment as a consequence of modernization), Raymond Aron (on disenchantment in the face of totalitarian ideologies), and Hannah Arendt (on the uprooting of the modern individual), Ahmet Shabo discovers that the categories justifying the violence of the Empire are empty. His isolation is not geographical, but political and moral: it is the powerlessness of the individual in the face of the cynicism of the state bureaucracy. Selimović's novel is as much a metaphor for institutional oppression under Yugoslav communism as it is an Ottoman fresco. The choices these men make is the subject of the next chapter.

In conclusion, what the Romans found in Bosnia's topography, its mineral wealth, the Bosnians found security. Yet hills were no match for a world in which a simple telegraph wire could bypass obstacles that had taken the Ottomans great expense to bridge. Willingly or not, a process of modernization would make its mark on the land, rapidly altering a landscape that had held true for centuries. With that opportunity came imperceptible changes to the untrained eye, but it within these seeds that the troubles of the 20th century likely lay.

Chapter 4: Malodušnost (Diminished Soul) - Power, Justice and Political Hysteria

“Oh, wretched time that doesn’t allow a man to think or to be a hero”

- Meša Selimović, *The Fortress* [Spoken by Ahmet Shabo]³⁵¹

“I am forty years old, an ugly age: one is still young enough to have dreams, but already too old to fulfill any of them. This is the age when the restlessness in every man subsides so he can become strong by habit and by the certainty he has acquired of the infirmity to come. But I am merely doing what should have been done long ago, during the stormy flowering of my youth, when all the countless paths seemed good, all errors as useful as the truth. What a pity that I am not ten years older; then old age would protect me from rebellion; or ten years younger, since then nothing would matter. For thirty is youth that fears nothing, not even itself. At least that is what I think now that thirty has moved irretrievably into the past.”

- Meša Selimović, *Death and the Dervish* [Spoken by Ahmed Nuruddin]³⁵²

This chapter examines how the oppressive conditions that Bosnians had to live by during imperial rule eroded the most basic humanistic tenets of its citizens and created a sense of civil alienation that would mar future interactions between its citizens. The chapter makes use of sociology to explain how violence between groups plays out at the micro level through the examination of riots targeting other ethnic groups. It then transitions to a more modern setting, attempting to see how this sense of civic alienation helped create a sense of political hysteria, that translates into a nationalist sentiment coalescing around religion as an identitarian symbol.

It is crucial to emphasize that the riots and moral dilemmas described by Andrić and Selimović are not exploited here as factual documentary evidence, but rather as reflections of the regimes of historicity and the emotional repertoires of the region. Literature provides the sociological hypotheses—such as the fear of anomie and civic alienation—which the historical analysis then circumscribes and validates through empirical data. As for the analysis of crowds

³⁵¹ Selimović, *The Fortress*, p. 78.

³⁵² Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p 4.

contained in this chapter, there exists a fundamental difference between how the literary fiction records this phenomenon and the historical record. While the underlying mechanisms of crowd psychology are similar (substitutional violence), their political frameworks differ radically. Andrić uses a pre-modern setting to dissect a timeless human mechanism, which will reappear, in an ideologized and modern form, during the tragic events of 1914.

4.1 - The Architecture of Powerlessness: A comparison between Ahmet Shabo (the rejection of state cynicism) and Ahmed Nuruddin (destructive assimilation).

(Malodušnost as civic alienation)

The above quotations, taken from the two works of Mesa Selimović, outline the thoughts of two radically different characters Ahmet Sabo (from *The Fortress*) and Ahmed Nuruddin (from *Death and the Dervish*). These two characters are the inverse mirror of each other despite having a lot in common on the surface. The first of these two Muslims, a former *Janissary*, has returned home from war a deeply changed man.³⁵³ Now outspoken, he encounters fierce resistance to his ideas. For the crime of his honesty, he is severely beaten and ostracised. His lament on these “wretched times” is a call for justice in a land where none exists; here the system serves powerful interests and those interests alone. The second character is a man who has experienced little of what life has to offer, having returned from war a shattered man, he immediately retreats from the world. He is now a recluse belonging to the Sufi order of Dervishes who interprets the *Quran* in ways that support his own understanding of the world, and even more so, that reflect his own wants and desires. The first of these men, embraces the world outside of his orbit, despite all of its faults. He is married to a Christian woman and lives a spartan, poverty-stricken existence. He is not a schemer

³⁵³ A *Janissary* belongs to an elite Ottoman unit, the Sultan’s housecarl, recruited through the Devshirme system by which young Christian boys are forcibly recruited into the army. They were meant to counter the power of the Turkish nobility.

by nature and despises political machinations. The other is a more calculated man. Despite having retreated from the world, he lives well on the endowments of the community. The plot triggering event for both characters is borne from different sources, but reflects the same need, that of justice. For the first, is it is an active act of defiance against the ruling authorities and for the second is it passive, watching his brother be executed for a crime he did not commit and being unable or unwilling to put a stop to it.

These dual tales of heroism and cowardice also revolve around a second theme, the relationship between the individual and power, to which the administration of justice is inherently tied. If there is a unifying plot thread between the two stories, it is that both characters are trapped in a bureaucratic system that leads to their despondencies. Yet the outcome for both characters is markedly different. Ahmet, by his inspired stand against tyranny, ends up building a system of allies, acting as an ideal-type of resistance against a coercive state. His story ends on a hopeful note, with his return to his familiar life and friends – a community that loves and respects him. Ahmed, for his part, already a lonely man, succumbs to the temptations of revenge and the trappings of power. After the death of his brother and his wrongful imprisonment, he is released from jail where he orchestrates a series of events that allows him to usurp the title of *cadi* (judge / magistrate). In a tragic twist of faith his term as *cadi* is bounded by the trappings of power in a system that forces one to act unethically. His rule is marked by a similar tyranny to the one that was inflicted upon him. After having betrayed his friend Hassan, he is in turn replaced as *cadi*, faces execution and commits suicide. Remarking on the condition of his friend, now an enigma to him, Hassan states that “*I didn’t know he was so unhappy - peace to his tormented soul*”.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. 455

This torment must surely be the central theme of *Death and the Dervish*. This idea of a pervasive moral cowardice, either at the level of the individual or of society, is omnipresent in the works of Selimović. In the foreword to *Death and the Dervish* we are informed on the meaning of that word *malodušnost* for whom we are assured, holds no English equivalent. It is described as a form of “faintheartedness” or moral “cowardness”, defined by a sense of hopelessness and sometimes manifesting itself as a lack of courage or indecisiveness. It is linked to spirituality, being understood as a sort of “diminished soul”.³⁵⁵

While native to the region, in literature this word is most associated with the works of Meša Selimović, but there is an intertextual connection with a short story by Ivo Andrić named *Death in Sinan's Tekke*. Written in 1936 and published in 1966, thirty years before *Death and the Dervish*, it tells a story that resembles in part the larger novel length story told in *Death and the Dervish*. Both involve a dervish from Sarajevo who bears witnesses to an atrocity, and albeit not outright refusing to act, lets the events of that act unfold without intervening – thus the result is the same. Furthermore, both characters have inhibitions about the female form, clearly lusting for it but being deathly afraid of it. Finally, *Death and the Dervish* even makes a reference to Sinan's Tekke directly, when they are discussing Abdullah-effendi's discussion on cognition. In *Death in Sinan's Tekke* an ageing dervish by the name of Alidede, then living in Constantinople, returns home to Bosnia as “death was calling him home”.³⁵⁶ We are told of his wisdom, as people gather in Sinan's Tekke in Sarajevo to hear him speak. Yet the tone of the story is slightly ironic. As the dervish enters his death throes, the people gathered in the *tekke* see his lips move and assume he is praying. They would recall his death as miraculous, but little did they know, the man was in fact recalling

³⁵⁵ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. ix

³⁵⁶ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 113.

a horrific event from his youth, that had cast a bad cloud over much of his life. These events would be recalled in his last unspoken words. This was indeed a prayer, but of a much different nature than the holy one his admirers imagined – a lamentation for forgiveness for a past wrong he had committed. Many years prior, when he was a respected young dervish in the imperial capital, he woke in the middle of the night and opened his window to get some air. From the pane he saw a woman in the distance. The apparition wore a white dress but as it drew nearer, he noticed that she was dishevelled, half naked, and with her clothes torn. In tow were two male figures, clearly intent on harming her.³⁵⁷ She came just below his window and banged on the gate to the monastery, but he ignored her, paralyzed by inaction. Her pursuers peeled off before they reached her and she was on her way. Later that same night he woke to find the armed men once again pursuing her and heard her fall. All the while he stayed in his bed. The next morning there was no sign of her, he wanted to ask his companions if they heard anything but felt powerless to do even so little.³⁵⁸

In *Death and the Dervish*, the central plot revolves around Ahmed Nuruddin's inability to help his brother, who is imprisoned in the fortress and killed before he can find the courage to take a radical action to free him. This, at least, is understandable. The dervish's meek efforts to save his brother through political lobbying expose the unjust bureaucratic machine that makes such actions so daunting. Yet it is a different episode that we should compare to one in *Death in Sinan's Tekke*. One night while taking some air Ahmed Nuruddin finds a fugitive hiding from the guards. He watches the guards searching for him but is relieved when they do not find him, because he did not want any brutality inflicted upon the man to linger in his memory. Nor did he want to feel the

³⁵⁷ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, pp. 126-127.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-124.

remorse associated with having to hand him over. He then goes into a sort of monologue about justice and guilt, that essentially justifies any choice he is to make:

I did not even care: when people settle their accounts, guilt is easy to find, and justice is the right to do whatever we think must be done, and therefore justice can be anything.

The same is also true with guilt. As long as I did not know anything I could not take either side, and I would not get involved. Indeed, I had already gotten involved, by my silence, but that was an involvement that did not contradict my beliefs, and I could always justify it with the reason most convenient for me, if I ever learned the truth.³⁵⁹

Later that night he looks out his window to see someone hiding in the *tekke* courtyard. The monastery is dead quiet, and he decides to go down into the garden to ask him to leave, he does not want to be implicated in one way or the other.³⁶⁰ The man won't say why he is being chased, nor will he leave. The conversation devolves into a stalemate whereby the dervish wants him to leave but will not call the guards and the fugitive refuses to leave. When the dervish says that he could have "destroyed him" by calling the guards, the fugitive calls him out for his faintheartedness stating: "You didn't have the strength, not even for that."³⁶¹ Instead of solving the issue, the dervish ignored the problem and goes to bed. Describing his thought process he says:

I found a middle position, which was no position at all, since it solved nothing and only prolonged the suffering. I would have to take a side. There were countless reasons to do both, to destroy him and to save him. I was a dervish, a defender of the faith and of my order, and to help him meant to betray my convictions, to betray what had been an unblemished part of my life for so many years. If they caught him it would be bad for the tekke as well, and it would be even worse if it became known that I had helped him. No one would forgive me, and it was almost certain that someone would find out; he would tell them, either out of spite or fear. It would also be bad for my brother. Both for my brother and for me. I would have worsened both of our positions; some connection, some consistency would be found in such an act. It would look as if I were avenging my brother, or helping another man since I could not help him. There were also enough reasons to hand him over to the authorities let him settle his dispute with justice the best he could. And yet,

³⁵⁹ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, pp. 45-46.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

*I was human, I did not know what he had done, and it was not for me to judge him. Even justice can err; why should I have taken responsibility for him and burdened myself with possible remorse?*³⁶²

The next day he asks his protégé if there is a man in the garden, stating that he does not want to involve the *tekke* in sin:

*"I don't know. I'm afraid of sin. If he's guilty, people will eventually reproach us, and that wouldn't be good for the tekke. But if he's not guilty, sin will fall on our souls. And only God can know where a man's guilt lies; men cannot."*³⁶³

By the time he has returned, the fugitive is nowhere to be seen. He later finds out that his protégé had informed the guards, something that he had secretly desired and intimated:

*"I had counted on Yusuf's heartlessness. I had known that he would do it, but I nevertheless felt disgust and scorn for him when he did. He was the perpetrator of my secret wish, which had not been a decision, the decision had been his."*³⁶⁴

Yet even with this said, the dervish is still able to justify his decision by stating that "But even if it had been mine, the deed was his".³⁶⁵ This sentence foreshadows the dervish's descent into darkness, wherein by the end of the novel he incites a large crowd into a hysterical fit. Harnessing the collective injustices inflicted upon the assembled mass, he delivers a politically astute speech inciting a riot that results in the previous *cadi* being killed. Proclaimed as the new *cadi*, the dervish soon found himself in a trap of his own making. In a calamitous turn, his abuse of his position would lead to his own demise (the *cadi*'s wife would not forgive his injustice) highlighting the cyclical nature of revenge. This is but one amongst a few examples in the literature of violence being generative, as Bergholz would have it.

³⁶² Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, pp. 60-61.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

In both *Death and the Dervish* and *Death in Sinans Tekke*, the fiction serves as an archive of mentalities, illustrating how *malodušnost* manifests itself at the individual level. Yet in the former it takes a darker turn in which the main character is happy to have others do the work that he cannot or will not do himself. In *The Fortress*, the author theorizes this social anxiety at a wider societal level, where the group is indifferent to the suffering of one of its neighbours because he has stepped outside the bounds of what is permissible to say about the ruling elites. Not only was he beaten but the novel shows him being denied employment and thereby he almost becomes destitute. In a system where justice is miscarried by the powerful, this *malodušnost* manifests itself not merely as a moral failing, but as a profound *désubjection*, a loss of political agency where mutual mistrust and paralysis become the rational responses to a coercive apparatus. It is no surprise that both of Selimović's novels so prominently feature fortresses (so much so that in the introduction literary scholar Henry R. Cooper, Jr., refers to these jails as characters). These serve not as a defensive structure but as in *oubliettes*, prisons where dissenters and criminals disappear from the face of the earth. The centrality of jails in his works is a reminder of the corruption and arbitrary misuse of power by Bosnia's administrators as well as the unhealthy political atmosphere that permeates the country.³⁶⁶ In understanding *malodušnost*, through the lens of a pervasive misuse of political power at the societal level, it is thus possible to come to a deeper understanding of the true nature of this psychological ailment. What if *malodušnost* was not an innate flaw of character unique to the Serbo-Croatian people but a mechanism for self-preservation or even survival in the type of society that punishes individualism and the defiance of power? Rather than a simple moral condemnation, it is a sociological reflection that extends to inter-ethnic relations.

³⁶⁶ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. viii.

It can be argued that the destruction of the traditional society brought on by modernity created the ideal conditions for the manipulation of these newly isolated or atomized individuals. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt leans into how this atomization can be used to exploit the masses and was employed by both fascist and communist regimes. Danilo Martuccelli also develops this idea of atomization by radically different means in his “sociology of the individual”. As a novel that is a thinly veiled criticism of authoritarian communist Yugoslavia, Selimović would have understood the deformation of character association with life in such a system and tried to replicate this atmosphere.³⁶⁷ As such his novels act as ideal-types that crystallize how both the bureaucratic and totalitarian systems aim to destroy the humanistic or community bonds between their citizens. So much so that this community, now isolated and faced with arbitrary justice, develops a self-preservation mechanism in order to survive. *Malodušnost* is therefore not just a moral deficiency, but something a little more complex. It is a reaction to the civic alienation of the peripheral subject who has been methodically deprived of all agency, thus his capacity for political action, by the despotic center. Ahmed Nuruddin's trajectory illustrates how, in the absence of a public space to deal with his political problem, the only way forward is to compromise with violence. This moral rot at the center of totalitarian systems is well documented in post-communist societies, especially in dissenter circles. For example, Václav Havel details the existential alienation of having to participate in “life within a lie” (the antidote of which is to “live within the truth”), in which societal bonds are broken down by the forced participation in this system.³⁶⁸ In essence, when survival trumps civic responsibility and social bonds become frail in response, you have a recipe for disaster.

³⁶⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 317, 323.

³⁶⁸ Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*, (London: Vintage, 2018), p. 11-19.

4.2 - The Violence of the Periphery: A sociological analysis of Ottoman crowds in Andrić's work.

(Arbitrary justice, resentment and scapegoats)

The bleak political landscapes described in the works of both authors, in which power is wielded in an arbitrary fashion against those who have been left defenceless against it, creates the kind of environment that could only be described as a tinderbox. So strong are the emotional undercurrents in these events that we can see them flare up almost irrationally. These types of spontaneous riots pervade the works of Ivo Andrić just as much as Meša Selimović, with a particularly memorable scene in which the *bazaar* in Travnik played host to a murderous pogrom within its vicinity. During the riot, local Muslims fearing another insurrection in Serbia and bemoaning the Ottomans' inability to quell the unrest on the border, orchestrated a climate of fear across the countryside in which Serb peasants were rounded up and brought to the *bazaar* to be executed. The frenzied mob grew to include many ruffians and gypsies who poured in from the countryside to participate in the wanton violence. At the executions the crowds were described as taking "delight" in the movements of the bodies as they withered around in the hangman's noose, going as far as to "mimic" them.³⁶⁹ This almost escalated into a diplomatic incident after the body of a Catholic foreigner was paraded around in a macabre display. Rumours of the foreigner's conversion to Islam, and his burial in an Islamic cemetery, were only a few of the strange ritualistic elements of this suspected murder.³⁷⁰ The event is striking because it happens almost spontaneously. Then, like a fever dream, it dies with a whimper as the crowd comes to its senses and disperses. In the aftermath of the incident a lingering shame hangs over the town as the locals

³⁶⁹ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 266-272.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 275-280.

try to forget it ever happened. Not only is the town left in tatters, but we are given a glimpse of what a rabble-led movement will do to a group it perceives as the enemy. Upon his return from the Serbian front, the Vizier Suleiman Pasha scolds the townspeople stating that “If there is no rayah left who is going to do your work for you? And that the peasant’s business is to work (“Rayah should obey master”) but that the master should set the example.”³⁷¹

This same “madness of the crowd” is showcased in *The Story of the Viziers Elephant* where the Travnik *bazaar* turns its hatred against the sultan who has oppressed them by poisoning his prized elephant that had previously trampled through their shops:

*Such was their capacity for hatred! And when the hatred of the bazaar attaches itself to an object it never let’s go but focuses increasingly on it completely becoming and end in itself.*³⁷²

One night, the townspeople gather on a hilltop to discuss the beast. Two youths, Seceragic and Gluhbegovic, are at loggerheads. One defends the elephant, brought here against its will by the Ottomans, while the other quiets him and rather curtly responds “While you wonder who sent whom, the one who’s here makes your life a misery. So, stop wondering, and don’t let anyone put anything over on you, just lay into whoever’s nearest.”³⁷³ Instantly, his friend pushes back saying that there will be no end to it if everyone pushes back. The response amounts to little more than a so what!.³⁷⁴ The elephant is clearly a proxy for the outside forces that have occupied Bosnia. This anger is justified to some extent as in the words of one of the angry landowners “everyone has trampled on Bosnia”.³⁷⁵ This is especially true of this story’s Vizier, who rules Bosnia on behalf

³⁷¹ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 281.

³⁷² Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 48.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

of the Sultan. He uses violence to achieve results caring very little about who will be affected by his arbitrary whims. He is described as “the sort of tyrant who was only a scourge, nothing more, and who could, consequently, could be used only once.”³⁷⁶ The story starts with the murder of the leading *begs* of Bosnia as they are invited to meet the new Vizier in a gruesome display of power. His cruel abuses do not go unnoticed and in the end would bring about his end as:

*He had fulfilled his compelling urge to rule, judge, punish and kill, and if the complex situation in Bosnia and the Turkish empire could be resolved by bloodshed and terror, he might have been able to speak of success; but its solutions required far more than that and this was not to be found anywhere in the empire, least of all in the methods of the Dželaludin. And when violence is seen as incapable of resolving tasks before it, that violence turns against its perpetrator.*³⁷⁷

It is this last sentence that is most compelling. One thing that unites these disparate stories is that in each one, the world is portrayed as bleaker due to its lack of justice and the lack of a proper rule of law (justice being applied arbitrarily or selectively). It creates a sort of moral vacuum within the people of Bosnia in which revenge and mutual recrimination persist as well as a distinct moral ambivalence - our *malodušnost*. In these stories the abuse of power eventually leads to angry outburst or riots. It is exactly this atmosphere, fuelled by real grievances and injustices that can lead to new acts of violence. In these sorts of flare ups, the first victims are typically those who belong to the category of the “other” – in this case Jews or those of a different religious or ethnic denomination.

This literary depiction of mob violence was most likely rooted in the lived experience of the author. In the press, Andrić described the Anti-Serb riots that developed in Sarajevo after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand as the “Sarajevo frenzy of hate”, where Muslims and Croats

³⁷⁶ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 73.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

descended upon the local Serbs in an “orgy of violence”.³⁷⁸ This incident foreshadowed what was to come during the Second World War. While the mechanisms of crowd psychology depicted in the novel closely mirror reality (such as the violence of substitution), it is important to note that their political frameworks differ radically. Andrić uses a pre-modern setting to dissect a timeless human mechanism, which would later be found, under an ideologized and modern form, during the events of Summer 1914. In fact, it is this tragic incident that may have prompted the writing of the *Letter from 1920*. Yet, to compare it to the political climate of the 1920s would be a mistake; the bazaar riots against the Serbs or the Vizier's elephant are not examples of mass nationalism, but rather of scapegoating or the violence of substitution. This theory by René Girard, a French literary theorist and historian, posits that when a community experiences a crisis, it must find a scapegoat to sacrifice to restore order.³⁷⁹ In the case of pre-modern and late Ottoman Bosnia, it is the reaction of a weakened urban periphery compensating for its powerlessness in the face of the decline of the Ottoman imperial center with radical and expiatory violence against those weaker than itself. This dynamic illustrates a form of horizontal coercion: the structural violence imposed by the imperial center is redirected by the peripheral subjects onto an even more vulnerable “other”, thereby temporarily restoring a semblance of agency. It is the memory of such past events that will be instrumentalized during the interbellum where dissatisfaction with democratic politics, territorial anxiety, and existential fear for the nation would allow nationalist parties to capitalize on what would come to be called political hysteria. The dynamics of this violence, and its tendency to follow the ebbs and flows of regional power will be explored in Chapter 5 (see forward panic).

³⁷⁸ Lenard J. Cohen, "The Disintegration of Yugoslavia," *Current History* 91, no. 568 (November 1992), p. 370.

³⁷⁹ René Girard. *Violence and the Sacred*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, p. 185.

4.3 - From Riot to State Hysteria: The transition to modern Yugoslavia

(Historical absence of the rule of law and István Bibó's political hysteria)

Returning to the period in which these works were written, we can view these pre-modern riots as a tool to analyze a modern phenomenon, that being political hysteria, the study of which through literature, can inform us on the state of inter-ethnic relations in Yugoslavia. This atmosphere is best captured by the oft discussed *Letter from 1920*.

*You Bosnians have, for the most part, got used to keeping all the strength of your hatreds for those closest to you [...] you love your homeland, you passionately love it but in three or four different ways which are mutually exclusive, often come to blows, and hate each other to death.*³⁸⁰

While the first citation below is a straightforward acknowledgement of the frayed interethnic relations in Yugoslavia in the early 1920s, it is the second passage that proves more revealing. It refers to this omnipresent hatred emanating from a psychological state, hidden deep in the psyche of the citizens of Bosnia and a certain reluctance to address it:

*It's a fact that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are more people ready in fits of this subconscious hatred to kill and be killed, for different reasons, and under different pretexts than in any Slav or non-Slav lands.*³⁸¹

It is this underlying emotional response to trauma which manifests itself as political hysteria.

This concept, developed by István Bibó in his *Misère des petits États d'Europe de l'Est*, charts its roots in Central Europe. He defended the idea that this process was moulded in the painful emergence of modern nationalism started in 1789 and is the principal cause for chaos in Europe since that time. The author identifies the political movement that birthed the formation of nations as being “mass movements” thus the feelings of what the nation should be are shared by “la foule” (the crowd) where the populist feeling is represented in “the people” who were the safeguards of

³⁸⁰ Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 197.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-195

the “real” criterion of the nation (language, costumes, ...). The author ascribes a psychological lens to this political problem.³⁸² Hence the use of the term hysteria, which he defends stems from unresolved historical traumas that prevented these countries from fulfilling their natural evolutions into modern nations.³⁸³ One of the main cadres of analysis for these traumas can be found in the fragmented character of the nations that emerged out of the ashes of multiethnic empires after the First World War, and the meagre economic conditions that were the failure of the old multiethnic monarchies and the landed elites with whom political power was concentrated. With the latter he ascribes the deformation of the political culture due to these conditions.³⁸⁴ While discussing the former, he elevates the fact that the new “resuscitated nations” that appeared out of the sinews of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and of Russia had pre-existing borders and historical memories that left parts of their population dispersed in territories larger than they inhabit, leaving some of these citizens outside of the homeland of those nations leading to border conflicts with neighbours under the guise of linguistic nationalism.³⁸⁵ Thus “democracy” with its principle of the inviolability of borders established by the treaty of Versailles run in direct contradiction to these national aspirations.³⁸⁶ This is the same problem of “rootlessness” described by Arendt in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*. It is this fractured landscape that created existential fears for the survival of the nation, stemming from a historical trauma, namely the legacy of foreign domination.³⁸⁷

³⁸² Bibó. *Misère des petits Etats d'Europe de l'Est*, pp. 16-17, 129, 136-137.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 140, 153-156.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 139.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 147.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

He often describes this condition as inducing certain pathologies in the small nations states native to central and eastern Europeans that have experienced those historical conditions; his case studies were in Hungary, Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia. It must be emphasized here that this “political hysteria” designates an institutional and social pathology caused by historical trauma (such as uncertain borders and democratic deficits), and not an essential, biological, or ethnic character trait of the Balkan peoples. He even goes as far as referring to this as a deformation of character in the case of his home country of Hungary, due to these structural constraints.³⁸⁸ This of course extends into southern Europe, where he specifically mentions Yugoslavia and Romania as being afflicted with this type of pathology. One that he ascribes to a confused political philosophy, the crassest political lies that can be imagined, and certain auto-justification for their illiberal actions.³⁸⁹ He singles out Yugoslavia – with its nation status of “little peoples”, contested borders, and multiethnic character – as particularly prone to these problems.³⁹⁰

The end result is a sort of anti-democratic nationalism that finds its roots in populist politics. These political programs seek to divide “the people” from “the elites”, but more importantly, they exploit the fears engendered by the traumas of history.³⁹¹ This situation is often exploited by what Bibó refers to as a “false realists”, usually members of the aristocracy or a charismatic democratic leader who cleverly and violently consolidates their power by respecting the democratic form by reducing society to its pre democratic state by way of attacking those “western” facing politicians that he condescendingly refers to as “idealists”, giving them the

³⁸⁸ Bibó, *Misère des petits Etats d'Europe de l'Est*, pp. 380.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155, 165

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 180

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

moniker of “realists”.³⁹² Like Arendt, Bibó also ascribes a pseudo religious aspect to this nationalism in which the liberation of the individual and the community becoming intertwined by the “grace of God”. This system identifies the changing political and social order as a grave risk to the nation, one that it sees as being caused by democratic governance.³⁹³ This anxiety about the survival of the nation puts both democracy and liberty a precarious position, as the populist system sees them as opposing national survival.³⁹⁴

Both political hysteria and forward panic are best defined as extreme emotional responses to a social crisis. In the case of the former it is a modern phenomenon that is usually driven by political factors or actors while the latter is both modern and pre-modern and is driven by crowd dynamics but informed by shifting power dynamics. Since psychological and emotional phenomena are difficult to capture from a traditional historical source – it was necessary to find another medium to do so. Hence the use of literature, to capture the “structure of feelings” as mentioned in the introduction. This idea of feeling an era is an important one. Archival history can only provide a limited insight into the human condition, the latter residing primarily in the realm of culture and the lived experience. Since historians do not just retell stories in the mode of a chronicler but attempt to truly understand and explain historical events (and their causes), then cultural artifacts can complement these existing archival histories by adding context to help better understand why events take place. They can also lend a voice, to the unvoiced left out of these official histories.

³⁹² Bibó, *Misère des petits Etats d'Europe de l'Est*, p. 161.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

Kundera argues that the novel gives a greater insight into the broader themes of human existence through its characters' psychology providing us with a new lens to observe not just emotion but also the intellectual history of the era.³⁹⁵ It is from these detailed characterisations that take place over the length of a novel that creates a unique piece that stands apart from the generalities of the historical record (i.e. the focus on macro-narratives such as wars, treaties, etc. rather than the particular). The importance of these individual stories is one acknowledged by many authors. In a 1985 interview, the great Yugoslav writer Danilo Kiš had this to say:

*Literature must correct History: History is general, literature concrete; History is manifold, literature individual. What is the meaning of 'six million dead' if you don't see an individual face or body – if you don't hear an individual story?*³⁹⁶

Essentially, he is saying that the collection of these atomized stories may bring us closer to Conrad's idea of "nearer truth", as history struggles to replicate the effect of individual stories. In the case of fiction, the writers are free from the shackles of literal truth and state-dictated truth; thus, they are free to redefine boundaries of the historical record, or even to bridge its gaps.³⁹⁷ While the citation "correct history" is a little too strong, one should heed the moral "grey zone" ("zone grise" morale) of Primo Levi's *Les Naufragés et les rescapés* when they consider the "meaning of six million dead". In *Les Naufragés et les rescapés* analyzes his own holocaust story as a deep reflection on how concentration camps functioned. It aimed to reveal the uncomfortable collaboration between victims of the holocaust and their tormentors, reflecting on the deep shame

³⁹⁵ See *Methodology* section.

³⁹⁶ Dina Katan-Ben-Zion, "Danilo Kiš talks to Dina Katan Ben-Zion", transl. Judith Cooper-Weill, *Mishkenot Sha'ananim* 6 (1986), p. 3, 7.

³⁹⁷ See *Methodology* section.

brought forth by these sorts of “grey zone” memories.³⁹⁸ What Kiš is doing is issuing a call to mind the nuance brought forth by the telling of individual stories.

This atomization of history (the telling of micro-histories) brings forth an important link between literature and the study of violence, one that Primo Levi clearly understands best through his own lived experience. As can be inferred from my previous sentence, this link is most prominent in situations where the author has lived a traumatic situation and has wanted to impart that experience on the reader. Many examples can be found in Holocaust literature, but one of the most jarring is Charlotte Delbo’s account of her time at Auschwitz. A non-Jewish survivor, her trilogy of books *Auschwitz et après* (*Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, *Une connaissance inutile*, and *La Mesure de nos jours*) published between 1965 and 1971 is considered one of the most in-depth examinations of violence in the catalogue of Holocaust literature. Instead of simply retelling events, the work is a more expansive overview of trauma, violence, and memory. The power of good literature is not only in its telling or retelling of events, but in what it has to say about these events and their impact. In this vein, the characters from the novels of Mesa Selimović wade through this same “grey zone” as Primo Levi, where executioners, silent accomplices, and victims become indistinguishable under the pressure of a faceless and relentless system. Here, literature is an archive of moral complexity capturing nuances that would be impossible to capture in the archives of the administrative state or in many macro-histories of the region.

Authors of literary works have often been praised for their ability to use narratives to capture the mass psychology of an era. Figures such as Arthur Koestler, Rebecca West, John Steinbeck and George Orwell have been known to have such a solid grasp on these undercurrents

³⁹⁸ Primo Levi, *Les naufragés et les rescapés: quarante ans après Auschwitz*, trans. André Maugé (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. 42-74.

that it manifests itself to readers of their works as a predictive ability. For example, Steinbeck's *The Winter of our Discontent* portrays the moral degradation of Cold War America in the years preceding the Watergate scandal. Despite the book not directly mentioning Richard Nixon, the corruption of its Arthurian protagonist captured the feeling of disillusionment with America's failing moral compass so well that observers have credited it with predicting the scandal.³⁹⁹ A more relevant example to Yugoslavia comes from Rebecca West, and her magnum opus *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. The masterwork was released on the eve of Germany's invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941 and offered a retelling of her travels through the region in 1937. In many ways it foretold some of the horrors that awaited the star-crossed nation including the underlying ethnic tensions that plagued the young nation.

It should be noted that both authors studied throughout the course of this thesis lived through the troubled interbellum in Yugoslavia, an uneasy period that laid the groundwork for the ethnic violence seen during the Axis occupation of country. While Jews were the primary target of the Holocaust, unspeakable horrors were also visited upon Yugoslavia's various ethnicities, a jarring example of which is the Jasenovac concentration camp operated by the Ustaše puppet regime. The interwar years were marred by political instability, marked by the high-profile assassinations of the Croat politician Stjepan Radić King in the Yugoslav parliament in 1928, that paved the way for the royal dictatorship of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia who was himself assassinated in 1934. Yet, this long chain of assassination starts even before the formation of Yugoslavia, with King Alexander I Obrenović of Serbia's brutal murder in 1903, who was replaced by Peter Karađorđević, the future King Peter I of Yugoslavia. This lineage of assassinations, and

³⁹⁹ John Steinbeck, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, intro. and notes by Susan Shillinglaw, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), p. vii-xx.

the consequences they leave in their wake are evoked by Rebecca West's own recollection of the assassination of Empress Elisabeth of Austria.⁴⁰⁰ It is with this lineage in mind that Andrić penned *A Letter from the year 1920*. When the Bosnian narrator runs into his high school friend Max Levenfeld, doctor of Christian-Jewish heritage, from Sarajevo at the Slavonski Brod railway station on the Bosnian border. The doctor indicates that he plans on leaving Bosnia and never coming back. When pressed for an answer from the narrator, he chalks it up to hatred but is visibly uncomfortable discussing it further.⁴⁰¹ Three weeks later, Max writes to him a letter outlining his reasons. Max shares that not only is it difficult to discuss these issues publicly but that his views would not be well received. His letter states that "the fatal characteristic of this hatred is that the Bosnian man is unaware of the hatred that lives in him, shrinks from analysing it and hates everyone who tries to do so".⁴⁰²

So, what molded this outlook and what created such a resistance to addressing it? While the latter question has been mostly answered in Chapter 3 and the former has been partially addressed in Chapter 1, this chapter will go a little further and examine the origins of this hysteria and its effects on interethnic relations. As professor Roman Krakovsky makes clear in his book *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, the end of the First World War engendered a perceived victory for democracy. Large multinational empires in Central and Eastern Europe gave way to nation states, with new borders encompassing minority groups who were now split off from their fellow countrymen. Power in these new bodies did not rest upon divine blessing but with the people. Yet, democracy in practice was difficult. Minority groups were now competing directly

⁴⁰⁰ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. iii.

⁴⁰¹ Andrić "A Letter from 1920" in *The Damned Yard and Other Stories*, pp. 185-201.

⁴⁰² Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, pp. 192-195.

with majoritarian groups within the new political structures. This led to a crisis of identity, pushing states to explore alternatives to liberal democracy to construct homogeneous communities.⁴⁰³ This was particularly obvious in intellectual circles throughout the region. In nearby Romania, the contemporary of Mircea Eliade, the famed nihilist Emil Cioran, urged young Romanians to reject western ideals.⁴⁰⁴ It can safely be said that stability for these new states of central Europe was more important than democracy, even if stability could only be brought by abandoning equality towards law.⁴⁰⁵

Yet this new reality flew in the face of accepted protocol. As a condition for independence, these new states had signed covenants stating that they were to respect minority rights.⁴⁰⁶ The Treaty of Versailles, that oversaw the end of the First World War, was finalized during the Paris peace conference. A central pillar of that conference was the treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, signed on September 10th, 1919. It completed the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian empire and set the terms for the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the antecedent of Yugoslavia). It promised that no matter what race, language, or religion of the populations of this kingdom would be given a guarantee that they would be treated under the principles of liberty and justice “la garantie absolue qu’elles continueront à être gouvernées conformément aux principes de liberté et de justice”.⁴⁰⁷ These principles would manifest themselves in articles 2 (freedom of religion), 7 (civil and political rights), 8 (equality before the law), 9 (minority language rights) and

⁴⁰³ Krakovsky, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 74.

⁴⁰⁴ Krakovsky, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 79.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴⁰⁷ “Traité en vue de régler certaines questions soulevées du fait de la formation du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes (Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye)”. Signed at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, September 10, 1919.

10 (the rights of Muslims). Article 10 is key. It states that Muslims will be allowed to use their own Islamic teaching to deal with all personal or familial matters. It also allows them to retain the right to nominate their own *Reiss-ul-Ulema*, that religious structures (mosques, cemeteries) will be given protections, that *vakoufs* be retained, and that the government would not deny to existing and new charitable organizations the same facilities that are guaranteed to other establishments of this nature.

*“L’Etat serbe-croate-slovène agrée de prendre à l’égard des musulmans en ce qui concerne leur statut familial ou personnel toutes dispositions permettant de régler ces questions selon les usages musulmans. Le Gouvernement serbe-croate-slovène provoquera également la nomination d’un Reiss-ul-Ulema. L’Etat serbe-croate-slovène s’engage à accorder toute protection aux mosquées, cimetières et autres établissements religieux musulmans. Toutes facilités et autorisations seront données aux fondations pieuses (vakoufs) et aux établissements religieux ou charitables musulmans existants et le Gouvernement serbe-croate-slovène ne refusera, pour la création de nouveaux établissements religieux et charitables aucune des facilités nécessaires qui sont garanties aux autres établissements privés de cette nature.”*⁴⁰⁸

This was a clear declaration that the rights of Muslims within Yugoslavia were to be protected. Yet these rights were not respected from the very start. The very name of the state the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes excluded them. Until they were recognized as a distinct group in 1968, Bosniaks were not even included in the census (this would change in 1971).

In opposition to this homogeneity program, Yugoslavia’s minorities campaigned to retain their rights, seeing liberal democracy as the best tool to do so. Among the parties that stood in the Yugoslav parliament in those early years were two Muslim parties, the Yugoslav Muslim Organization and Džemijet, a clear indication that they had bought into the democratic project and aimed to bring recognition to the Muslim community. Then in 1921 Yugoslavia’s *Vidovdan*

⁴⁰⁸ “Traité en vue de régler certaines questions soulevées du fait de la formation du Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes (Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye)”. Signed at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, September 10, 1919.

Constitution was adopted. This document should have protected the individual liberties of these groups, yet instead there was an increased amount of friction between the different confessional communities. While the document eliminated religious education in schools or secularized the courts, it imposed an assimilationist and majoritarian vision of the state. Rather than creating a neutral, pluralistic public space, a “*lieu vide*” of democratic power as theorized by Claude Lefort, it chafed at the independentist tendencies of groups such as the Croats and Muslims (less so for the Serbs, as centralization meant control from Belgrade).⁴⁰⁹ The Vidovdan Constitution would be abolished by King Alexander in 1929, when the royal dictatorship was established to counter the rising tide of political extremism and political assassinations. The question of co-existence did not abate over the course of the dictatorship. The new regime was seen as pro-Serb by Croats and Muslims, as the King was of Serbian blood, and this was exacerbated by the fact that the country was wracked by the Great Depression – an event that helped radicalize Yugoslavia’s citizenry.⁴¹⁰

The lack of a culture of institutional justice that pervaded in Bosnia during the Ottoman era gave way to the Austrian system and later two different Yugoslavia’s that shared in this heritage. This highlights the structural fragility of Yugoslavia, and the Sisyphean task of trying to dismantle these entrenched institutional practices of arbitrary power. While the *Corfu Declaration* of 1917 with its promises of “religion and alphabets” (i.e. that Serbia and Croatia agree on religious equality between churches, freedom of religion including the Muslim community and that the Latin and Cyrillic script be granted equal legal status) was a promising first step, it ultimately did not consider the shaky foundation that the entire enterprise was built upon. It is no wonder, at the time of the formation of Yugoslavia, many leading men of their time thought that religion would

⁴⁰⁹ Krakovsky, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 84-85.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86-87.

be replaced by scientific rationality and as such as such these questions were not analysed with enough depth to ensure that they would not lead to future culture frictions.⁴¹¹ Yet as philosopher Charles Taylor has informed us, secularization does not mean religion disappears; it is merely more diffuse in society.⁴¹² This is certainly true in Yugoslavia.

Commenting on the state of neighboring Montenegro at the dawn of the 21st century (the Montenegro of his youth) the former Vice President of Yugoslavia Milovan Djilas would name the first volume of his autobiography a *Land Without Justice*. One of the lessons one may glean from the reading of this tome is that the lack of a culture of justice in Montenegro make him turn towards more radical ideologies, in this case communism. It is a land in which the more dominant Serbs drive out the neighboring Muslims through violence and intimidation without as much as a thought, much as they had when they had fought them centuries prior. It is a scene reminiscent of the frontier ethos evoked in *Bridge on the Drina* as the “Turks” are abandoning the last towns in Serbia and crossing the border at Višegrad for Serbia. Yet, this was a time that international treaties were in place that should have dissuaded such things from happening, most notably the Treaty of Berlin, signed on July 13, 1878.⁴¹³ This institutional legacy of arbitrary power and the absence of a reliable rule of law fostered the conditions for pre-modern riots and later provided the fertile ground upon which political hysteria would be actively cultivated by modern nationalist actors. One may recall that the street protests in 1988-1989 as part of Slobodan Milošević’s “anti-bureaucratic revolution” referred to the abuse of the people by corrupt elites. He rode that movement to power, ushering the end of Yugoslavia. Thus, it is important to remember that unjust

⁴¹¹ Falina, *Religion and Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia*, p. 42-44.

⁴¹² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 26-28.

⁴¹³ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, p. 39-45.

environments make easy prey for those looking to exploit others in order to consolidate their own power.

It should be noted that fear is a perfectly reasonable response to a large and corrupt bureaucratic system, as intervention in the pursuit of justice may bring the gaze of that same apparatus onto you. This is why existential dread that permeates the work of Selimović can also be viewed through the prism of a survival method. To be a moral man in an immoral world is to carry an enormous risk, a sentiment expressed by many existentialist authors. A pertinent example of this, amongst a sea of them, is that of the case of the assassination of the Croat policeman Josip Reihl-Kir. Prominently portrayed in the documentary *The Death of Yugoslavia*, he was the police chief in the city of Osijek who was targeted by politically connected actors in nationalist Croatia for his peacekeeping activities. As a border prefecture, his region had an ethnic mix of both Serbs and Croats. Tensions were high as Serbian nationalists began to erect barricades in their villages. Instead of responding in force, Reihl-Kir negotiated with them to dismantle their barricades in exchange for a promise that Croatian nationalists would stay out of their towns. They agreed to this because they had trust in his character and due to his reputation as a fair and trustworthy individual in both communities.⁴¹⁴ After several attempts on his life, his assailants finally succeeded. In his work *Violence in Politics* Political Scientist Felix Gross remarks that in the Balkan region political violence has often been used as a tool to achieve political results. While he focused his research on the role of secret societies like the Black Hand who wish to make external gains, he also looks at how regimes use the threat of terrorism to keep their own in line.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ Percy, Norma, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, London: BBC, 1995. [Episode 1: "Enter Nationalism – 36:15-39:40].

⁴¹⁵ Felix Gross, *Violence in Politics: Terror and Political Assassination in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Mouton, 1972), pp. 5-22.

I would like to end by recalling an interaction from *The Fortress* between our narrator and *Serdar Avdaga*, the officer of the law, about a poem he was singing in the hills. When the commanding figure asks him what else he does for a living, aside from writing poems, our hero responds that he can't find work. In a usually honest reply Avdaga responds that this was a natural consequence of his actions; the result of the narrator's decision to speak freely. For Avdaga, words are the source of evil, a poison. He continued by shifting the conversation to affairs of the state where he is asked if he thinks ruling is easy. Clearly attempting to justify the abuses of authority that he has committed; he responds by saying that attacking those who rule is easy, but that ruling is hard. He then tacitly threatens our narrator by saying people could criticize him for marrying a Christian girl whose father was an enemy of the state.⁴¹⁶ This implicit threat, that is the use of state power to silence a man for his views, is laid out before us. From the Ottomans, to the Austrians, to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and finally the Communists, they all abused the power of the state to fulfill their aims and quell dissent, even going as far as to turn citizen against citizen. In such a coercive environment, it is no wonder that *malodušnost* became a widespread survival mechanism (rather than an inherent characteristic of the people); to do otherwise was to put oneself at great risk.

⁴¹⁶ Selimović, *The Fortress*, p. 113-115.

Chapter 5: The Bridge - Between Vienna and S'tanbul, Bosnia's Competing Models of Diversity

“The first century passed, a long time for mortal men and for many of their works, but insignificant for great buildings, well conceived and firmly based, and the bridge with its kapia and nearby caravanserai served as they had on their first day. So too would a second century have passed over them, with its changes of season and human generations, and the buildings would have lasted unchanged, but what time could not do, the unstable and unpredictable influence of far away affairs did.”

- Ivo Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina* [Selected Quotation]⁴¹⁷

This chapter offers a reflection on the different models used by Bosnia's ruling empires to administer their various ethnic groups as well as the consequences born by the administration of these policies. A special emphasis is put on the manipulation of the local population, modernization, resistance to reform and the violence brought forth by shifts in imperial power.

As in previous chapters, the literary depictions of imperial transitions are mobilized here not as positivist historical records, but as ideal-typical representations of social ruptures. The fiction dramatizes the collision between traditional authority and modern rational-legal bureaucracy, allowing us to examine the psychological and ideological repercussions of these shifts.

5.1 - Two Models of Managing Diversity

(Asymmetric segregation versus bureaucratic centralization)

In 1878, the residents of Bosnia and Herzegovina were officially bound to the Habsburg crown. However, this arrangement was not a consensual one. It was made by way of a strange and curious agreement. The Treaty of Berlin (1878) ensured that the Austro-Hungarian Empire now administered the territory, having crushed the weak pro-Ottoman resistance. Yet the Ottoman

⁴¹⁷ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 72.

Empire was nominally in charge of the territory under the auspices of its de-jure rights. Bosnians were now living between two empires, with both imperial structures being superimposed upon each other. In the literary microcosm of Ivo Andrić's Višegrad, an eerie calm awaited the arrival of the Austrian emissary into Bosnia:

*The streets were empty, the courtyards and gardens as if dead. In the Turkish houses depression and confusion reigned, in the Christian houses caution and distrust. But everywhere and for everyone there was fear. The entering Austrians feared an ambush. The Turks feared the Austrians. The Serbs feared both Austrians and Turks. The Jews feared everything and everyone since, especially in times of war, everyone was stronger than they.*⁴¹⁸

This apprehension was justified to an extent. Overnight, their world had been upended, and a new system would take the place of the one they had known. While the Ottoman *millet* system was structurally discriminatory and relied on asymmetric hierarchies, it did allow a large degree of autonomy for religious communities. The Austrians for their part wanted to centralize and have more control over religious institutions. Ironically, the Ottoman institutions that one would have expected the Austrians to do away with were so imbedded in the administration of Bosnian society that they had to co-opt them for their own purposes (for example, sharia courts).⁴¹⁹ Further complicating the situation was the fact that the Ottoman Empire itself was in the middle of an important European-styled reorganization called the *Tanzimat*, that took centralized power away from local administrators and fuelled a pro-Ottoman nationalist vision that may have promised minority rights but also took away some of their powers of oversight. Thus, rather than being a mere battleground for simultaneous imperial rivalries, Bosnia became a palimpsest of superimposed modernizations. The initial Ottoman effort to forge a modern, egalitarian citizenship through the *Tanzimat* reforms starting in the 1830s was abruptly overlaid, and ultimately

⁴¹⁸ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 123.

⁴¹⁹ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 112.

supplanted in the late 1870s, by a distinct, rational-legal modernization imposed by Vienna. In essence, Bosnian society had to navigate the epistemic friction of these successive, overlapping imperial projects, each attempting to re-engineer its social fabric from afar.

The quotation at the start of this chapter is a direct reference to the changes brought to Bosnia from the end of the Ottoman rule into the Austrian era. Since time immemorial, this land had stood at the crossroads of empires, yet it remained outside the scope of most imperial priorities. But now the events in far-away lands would propel it to the forefront of European affairs, this time as an object of interest to the Austrian Crown. Returning to the story of Pop Nichola and the other religious leaders awaiting their fate on the *kapia*, we are informed by the Austrian Colonel that they may go and that they are all entitled to protection as they are all peaceable. The imperial proclamation is then posted on the *kapia* for all to see. This formal introduction serves as a mechanism to inform both reader and the citizens of the town that the Austrian bureaucracy is now in place and the rule of law will now apply. Oddly, the town notables are disappointed as they realize that nothing has changed. Their anxiety has been temporarily dispelled. Unlike the Ottoman era, there are no persecutions, exiles or hand cutting like the viziers ordered.⁴²⁰ Soon the marketplace is filled with newcomers, soldiers speaking the varied languages of the empire such as Czechs, Poles, Austrians, Hungarians and Croats. We are told that the locals perceive the newcomers as being “never in peace and didn’t allow others to live in peace” due to their busy nature. This literary sentiment perfectly captures the onset of Weberian disenchantment, where the relentless, mechanical pace of modern rational-legal bureaucracy shatters the traditional temporalities of the periphery. Yet, for the most part, the people remain unaffected as they view

⁴²⁰ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 131.

the occupation as a temporary one.⁴²¹ We are informed that the Austrian occupation is viewed rather neutrally at first by the local population. They are described as better than the Turks and differing in customs. In addition we are told that of the local peoples both Christians and Jews were the most likely to adopt these customs.⁴²² However, one could tell that underneath these surface level niceties lay an uncomfortable truth: not everyone welcomed the Austrian occupation equally. For one, there were signs that this was not business as usual. In one instance, the imperial proclamation of Emperor Franz Joseph that was posted on the *kapia* was not written in Turkish.⁴²³ While proclamations in the Austro Hungarian empire were written in German and translated to several different languages, the omission of the Ottoman tongue was a purposeful choice. Not only did this signal a clear shift away from Turkey and the introduction of a European-styled secularized administration, it was also part of a larger nation-building project. The Austrian administration under Benjamin Kállay opted instead to use what they called “Land Language” (*Landessprache*), basically a moniker for local south slavic languages in order to foster a united Bosnian identity (*Bošnjaštvo*) to counter the threats posed by Serbian and Croatian national aspirations.⁴²⁴ In the world of the *Bridge on the Drina* this tension is highlighted when that same proclamation was soon torn down and thrown into the Drina river, prompting the authorities to arrest the offending Serb youths in response.⁴²⁵ This scene reminds us of two things. First, that the *kapia* is a node of exchange for information – as we have seen since the very beginning of the novel. And second, that with the atomization of information, the *kapia* no longer serves as the sole point for the

⁴²¹ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 134-136.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁴²⁴ Gordana Marković, “A Neverending Story – The Utilisation of Language as a Political Instrument: National and Language Policy of Austria-Hungary in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, p. 54, 58.

⁴²⁵ Andrić, *Op. cit.*, p. 220.

distribution of information. With the modernization of infrastructure, new narratives are easily constructed in response to the imperial decrees.

As time goes on, we see a certain uneasiness begin to take shape over the town. On the *kapia* mothers gather to cry as their sons are recruited into the army, singing songs of their departed offspring: “every mother mourns who has sent her son as a recruit to the emperor”⁴²⁶. While the recruitment is done voluntarily at first, it would soon become more forceful and coerced.⁴²⁷ Later we are informed that “during the building of the railway, the people for the first time felt that the easy, carefree gains of the first years after the occupation existed no longer.”⁴²⁸ We are also informed that the cost of goods and basic necessities was climbing ever higher and never going down. Although wages were higher they were still 20% under what was really needed. It is from this point that we see the troubles really start with the Austrian administration. When the Balkan Wars breaks out, we see a clear change in dynamic. Not only do Muslims and Christians start feuding again but the religious question arises once again after the war with the advent of a Serbian Kingdom on the rise after their victories in the First Balkan War.⁴²⁹ This is when we see the Serbs on the *kapia* arguing about nationalism and communism. The 1908 annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina would accelerate sectarian tensions with the Austro-Hungarian administration openly persecuting Serbs, allowing the plunder of their properties and even murder. Later we are introduced to a *Schutzkorps*, a volunteer unit brought in to hunt Serbs; the unit is made up of local malcontents including drunks and gypsies.⁴³⁰ We are even shown Austrian soldiers mocking Serbs

⁴²⁶ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 170-172.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-172.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-232.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

for appealing to the law for help, which would have been a rational option considering the importance the Austrian bureaucracy ascribed to the rule of law. The Austrians also tried to get Muslims to join but are opposed by Ali Hodja who finds it distasteful that they would use other Bosnians to persecute Bosnians stating that “they are making use of us, and it will be our own end”.⁴³¹

This same pattern is seen in a *Bosnian Chronicle* when the French attempt to build ties with Croats, Serbs, Muslims and Jews but are largely rebuffed by three of them, only making limited inroads with the Catholics (limited as the question of French secularism brings tension to this relationship) and the Jews (who have been abandoned by all others). The Austrians for their part make quick inroads with the Catholics but remain on tepid terms with the Sultan’s Bosnian Vizier. Returning to the *Bridge on the Drina*, through these troubled years we see that the town has swelled with refugees, both Christian and Muslims, forced out of their previously inhabited regions – now monocultural in makeup.⁴³² As the First World War begins, we see a similar process take place in the town when the local Jews evacuate to Sarajevo, tracing their footsteps across the bridge from whence they had come. The bombardment of the town would destroy the famed Lotte’s hotel, home to Lotte a prominent Ashkenazi Jew. The hotel is portrayed as a symbol of the town’s newly found cosmopolitanism, but the political situation made the finances of the business unworkable. The loss of the town’s Jews demonstrates the end of an era.⁴³³

⁴³¹ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, pp. 284-85; the *Schutzkorps* was a real military unit with a dark past that will be discussed in *Chapter 5.3*, when discussing the use of proxies by imperial forces.

⁴³² Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 296.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

The initial anxiety of the four faith leaders had been proven correct, but this intuition was not born of the ether. As educated men, they understood that Bosnia's peripheral position in the European continent would mean that they would have little autonomy no matter who governed it. Thus, this imperial "liberation" is not lived as one as it is not an actual liberation, but instead another form of cohesion under a new coat of arms. The anxiety exhibited by these men is then not a fear of the unknown or a fear of the "other". It is something more akin to Ali Hodja: the knowledge that their cultural reference points and way of life were once again about to change dramatically under the pressures of an extractive imperial center.

The novel *Bridge on the Drina* fittingly ends where it began, with a river devoid of a bridge to ford it. The dream of a young Bosnian boy, who rose to great heights as the administrator of one of the greatest empires the world had ever known lays shattered. In his memory, Andrić informs us that "for all of us die only once, whereas great men die twice, once when they leave this world and a second time when their lifework disappears".⁴³⁴ But Mehmed Paša Sokolović's creation is more than a marker of a man, it is the symbol of an era. Memorialized by the words of Andrić in *Bridge on the Drina*, it is a portrait of life in Višegrad buttressed between two empires. It is a story of creation and destruction, a marker of memory – of loss, life and love. Just as Mehmed Paša recalled the pain of forced removal from the region as a child as he was stabbed to death, so too has the bridge retained every memory. Like the town of Višegrad itself, the bridge saw its importance wane with the rise of the railway. Yet, its destruction is still felt by the villagers, especially Ali Hodja, the eccentric traditional Muslim whose family once cared for the structure. Years earlier it was he who looked upon the Austrians suspiciously as they drilled secret holes in

⁴³⁴ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 73.

the bridge to mine it, the explosives having now gone off during the town's bombardment.⁴³⁵

Dazed at the start of the war, he is privy to a gut-wrenching scene – his world now shattered:

*In the distance the pier cut short like a gigantic tree-trunk and scattered in a thousand pieces and the arches left and right of it brutally cut short. The broken arches longed painfully towards one another across the break.*⁴³⁶

The longing of those arches for each other could easily be a metaphor for the new divisions between Bosnia's citizenry, deepened by the new age of nationalism set itself in motion by the advent of the First World War.

Yet, if we are to use this as a point of genesis, it is important to look back at how this came to be. It is my hypothesis that these two superimposed traditions in combination with the addition of an identitarian nationalism based on religio-ethnic groupings caused the careful equilibrium of interethnic co-existence to collapse. The bridge between East and West, between two imperial traditions, was finally succumbing to a modernity with little time for those flawed imperial models of diversity of yore. There is no use for symbolic and physical bridges in the age of nationalism, an era ushered in by Gavrillo Princip when he assassinated the reformist archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. One may ask who needs to build bridges in an age of attempted homogeneity? Yet, in the very last sentence where "the broken arches longed painfully one another" hints at a sort of nostalgia; that in this process of a radical modernization something may have been lost along the way in terms of interethnic relations. After all, longing is more than a passing sentiment it is a deep long-lasting desire for something that is gone or no longer exists.

In the conclusion to his book *The Contested Country*, political scientist (and son of the famed Montenegrin dissenter) Aleksa Đilas channels Hugh Seton-Watson when appealing to the

⁴³⁵ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, p. 221.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 311-312.

non-continuous nature of the development of Serb and Croat national identities, specifying that although modern conceptions of Serbia and Croatia are rooted in the memory of historical medieval kingdoms, these states were unstable and were “interrupted” in their development by their occupation by the Ottoman Empire. He contrasts this to the continuous development of states such as France and England and thus states that the Ottomans “interrupted the development of either two clearly separate identities or a homogeneous proto-Yugoslav one”. He would go on to point out that the lack of a strong state tradition allowed for some of these ancient continuous nations to emerge as modern nation states.⁴³⁷ Thus, he is hinting that some of the troubles that would lead to these inter-ethnic questions stem from this time of occupation. If we are to analyze these superimposed traditions to see how they manage this concept of ethnic diversity, it should first be noted that these are not completely heterogeneous, nor are they homogeneous within themselves.

The Ottoman period, for example, can be divided into two distinct periods and so can be the Austrian administration. This marks four differing types of administrative structures by two different Empires. The first was the *millet* system. As was previously mentioned, this is not a modern type of liberal multiculturalism but a sort of tolerance for the other (Jews, Christians) based on ethnic hierarchy, with the Muslim citizens of the empire being afforded certain privileges over the other groups. Over the 19th century a new system would emerge based on the *Tanzimat* reforms (translated as the reorganization) which aimed at transforming the Ottoman Empire into a modern bureaucratic state. This period officially starts in 1839 with two decrees, the *Rescript of the Rose Chamber* and the *Reform Edict* of 1856. However, one could make the case that it begins as early as 1824 when the *Janissary* corps was abolished. These twin decrees cemented state centralization

⁴³⁷ Djilas, *The Contested Country*, p. 181.

and the equality of all Ottoman subjects before the law, marking a clear departure from the legal distinctions between religions that defined the *millet* system and its population's civic rights.⁴³⁸ The Austrian period begins in Bosnia in 1878 and is marked by the adoption of the modern rational-legal bureaucratic model as defined by the German sociologist Max Weber, who believed that in this system state legitimacy is derived from the rational-legal order, characterized by specialization, hierarchical structures, formal rules, and impersonal procedures. The preferred administrative structure for such a system is a bureaucracy appointed by contract rather than patronage. Ideally, their rule was to be impartial and without passion. This was necessary to maintain impartiality. With this came the tendency to centralize, categorize, homogenize and to attempt the partial secularization of the public space. The rational-legal aspect of the Tripartite Classification of Authority is a project of modernity that contrasts with older forms of authority such as traditional (based on “ancient” customs, e.g.: the divine right of kings) and charismatic (based on the personal qualities of a leader, ex: religious prophets and revolutionary leaders).⁴³⁹ The latter two were more present in Bosnia during pre-*Tanzimat* period. For all its advantages, Max Weber foresaw some of the drawbacks of this system. In the English translation of this work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which the bureaucratic and capitalistic system traps its host in a hyper efficient system which are faceless and lacking discursion as well as creativity leading to a loss of freedom. His translator, Talcott Parsons coined the term the “iron cage”.⁴⁴⁰ This transition was not merely administrative but constituted a profound epistemic shock for the peripheral subjects, who were transformed from participants in a negotiated, albeit unequal,

⁴³⁸ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, pp. 29-30.

⁴³⁹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: A New Translation*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 341-42, 343-353.

⁴⁴⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1953), p. 181.

traditional order into objects of a rigid, homogenizing state apparatus. Austro-Hungarian rule was composed of a reformist period, and another known for its centralization and state control. The Austrian reformist project included two main parts, the construction of a new modern infrastructure system (railroads, roads, and telegraph lines) and the second was an overhaul of the administration (legal system, education and introduction of a Western-style bureaucracy). Of this reformist project, the administrative upheavals were built on the backs of the existing Ottoman systems as well as being a continuation of the *Tanzimat* reforms. The second half of Ottoman rule starts approximately at the beginning of the 20th century and is marked by a centralization of power and the persecution of Serbian dissidents, as the Sublime Porte feared their desire for a union with Serbia. Under the orders of emperor Franz Joseph, Bosnia would be formally annexed in 1908 triggering the Bosnian Crisis. This period would last until the First World War and was defined by the rise of Serb nationalism and nationalist groups such as Mlada Bosna.⁴⁴¹

The negative consequences of the combined legacy of Ottoman and Austrian occupation went far beyond the use of proxies to solidify their political standing over Bosnia. In Bosnia, as in many of its peers in Central Europe, domination by larger powers introduced a crisis of development in which Bosnia, as with most of the European periphery languished far behind their European peers. To understand just how far behind Western Europe Bosnia had found itself, one could examine not only the state of the economy as was done previously but also the educational standards set by both Austrians and Ottomans.

Before the establishment of Yugoslavia, education was overseen by religious institutions, namely the Orthodox and Catholic churches, with little to no state intervention. The Ottomans

⁴⁴¹ See Gavrilo Princip and the assassination of Franz Ferdinand as the eventual product of these events.

favoured religious education through the *millet* system, and the Austrians continued that tradition albeit with more state control.⁴⁴² Reform minded individuals such as Benjamin von Kállay attempted to modernize these systems but they were still lacking and even had the detrimental effect of alienating their students. In 1869, the Austrians passed a law forcing eight years of compulsory education in secular public schools, yet this was not applied in Bosnia even after the 1878 occupation. Instead, the Austro-Hungarian administration did not strictly enforce the 1869 law as they wished to prevent further alienation of the local population. Then in 1880 the Austrians took over Orthodox schools while attempting to force change on local muftis. Resistance to these changes was rather contentious, especially for the latter. While encouraging women's education for Muslims, they also failed to foresee the existing social barriers to their entry into this new "Western" facing world. At the time women and girls were still confined to domestic roles, and if they did attend schools; Muslim girls would attend a religious elementary school called *mektebs* until the age of fifteen, after which they would be veiled and forced to remain in the family home until marriage. Even in *mektebs* they were discriminated against by religious teachers who thought that women, even at so young an age, still belonged in the home. Yet, they failed to understand that female students risked being ostracised by the community for attending these foreign secular schools, as they feared that these schools would lead to a loss of their Islamic identity. Thus, Muslim women suffered a dual discrimination; by those conservative figures who opposed their education in religious schools and by their communities if they chose to attend state schools. It was not until 1909 that compulsory education was formally introduced in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the caveat of giving some religious and educational autonomy to the Muslim community. This half-modernization had the unintended effect of creating a new social taboo around women's

⁴⁴² Gajic, "Education of Muslim Girls During the Interwar Era and Socialist Transformation in Yugoslavia", p. 97.

educational institutions that may not have existed to the same extent before; a full modernization would have at least de-stigmatized women's education.⁴⁴³ Furthermore, the use of the Latin script in education was strongly encouraged which benefited the Catholic Croat population but alienated those did not use it, mainly the Serbs.⁴⁴⁴

The failure of this Austrian "civilizing mission" was abundantly clear. At the establishment of Yugoslavia, illiteracy was high among non-Catholics, with a staggering 94.65% of Muslims lacking basic education.⁴⁴⁵ Furthermore, the creation of the Bečka škola system of schools further highlights that education under the Austrians was a project for the elite, it was not grassroots and was in essence an artificial creation meant to imbue the local population with their own ideas of statecraft (for example European Islam started as a project for the Bosnian elite and was not adopted until much later).⁴⁴⁶ Failing to establish a genuine cultural hegemony, this top-down imposition left the population alienated, reinforcing religion as the sole organic refuge for collective identity. This problem was not solved in the early years of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes either, where they prioritized secular or Orthodox educational traditions over Islamic ones, as well as the promotion of a unitarist narrative in the goal of nation building which continued to isolate Muslim communities.⁴⁴⁷

It should be noted that these failures at reforming educational institutions had long lasting consequences. The limitations of the "civilizing mission" put forth by Austria, and the previous

⁴⁴³ Gajic, "Education of Muslim Girls During the Interwar Era and Socialist Transformation in Yugoslavia", p. 230.

⁴⁴⁴ Sokol, "The Austro-Hungarian Language Policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina" in *Empires and Nations from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century, Volume 1*, p. 124.

⁴⁴⁵ Gajic, *Op. cit.*, p. 52.; Dževada Šuško, *Faith and Loyalty: Bosniaks and the Austro-Hungarian Empire*, p. 95.

⁴⁴⁶ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l'Europe du Sud-Est*, p. 92-97.

⁴⁴⁷ Gajic, *Op. cit.*, pp. 52-54, 68-69.

neglect of education under the pre-*Tanzimat* Ottoman Empire allowed local elites to use religious education for their own purposes. The primary actors in this process were the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, and the Islamic Community. The Austrians for their part failed to create a policy of inter-confessional schooling for a number of reasons: due to their own meddling (pitting groups against each other, building mistrust of authority), their failure to create a united Bosnian identity with their policy of *Bošnjaštvo* (Bosnianism) and for giving in to the demands of local elites who preferred uni-confessional education. This same failure to rein in local elites transpired under Yugoslavia during the interbellum period. The state was relented and walk back their 1921 reforms to secularize education, amid a rising tide of nationalist and religious sentiment, making religious education optional. They eventually reintroduced mandatory church education in 1933, after Catholic complaints.⁴⁴⁸ On the other hand, educational outcomes improved substantially. The Second World War saw the implementation of a Ustasha curriculum emphasising the Croatian language and the Croatian education curriculum in Bosnia as well as the dissemination of pro-Nazi ideology while the partisans continued the work of eliminating illiteracy but also pushing the party agenda of creating a modernist society.⁴⁴⁹

It is the analysis of the manipulation of cultural institutions that has pitted the more traditional and journalistic “ancient hatreds” thesis put forward by Kaplan with more recent scholarship that indicates that these “ancient hatreds” were more so the product of elite manipulation. The lack of a proper secular education until the creation of Yugoslavia limited the ability of this state to create a sense of national unity amidst the previously segregated system. These tensions were further exacerbated by a certain friction with the local Muslim population

⁴⁴⁸ Falina, *Religion and Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia*, p.45-47.

⁴⁴⁹ Gajic, “Education of Muslim Girls During the Interwar Era and Socialist Transformation in Yugoslavia”, p. 153

who looked upon westernization and modernization projects suspiciously, thus leading a resistance to change. After all this new rational-bureaucratic model was different from anything they had previously experienced as we see in *Bridge on the Drina*. This new world full of efficiency, specialists, formal rules, and impersonal procedures was something quite foreign to Bosnians who had previously been ruled by a more arbitrary and inefficient system akin to despotism. In the previous system, rules consolidated around local warlords loyal to the empire or an oft corrupt imperial bureaucracy that derived its authority from the vizier of Bosnia and whose existence was subject to the whims of power.

This resistance to the scale of social change was not unique to Bosnia; the end of the 19th century brought a new *fin-de-siècle* mentality to the region. This resistance to change can be seen in Vienna where a movement of Asceticism developed as a reaction to the rapid change that had rocked the pre-existing social order (add more).⁴⁵⁰ This this new *fin-de-siècle* mentality was a bulwark against the massive social changes happening in the empire. One could argue that the unease felt by Pop Nichola and the religious leaders on the *kapia* were more than a fear of the unknown or stranger, it is a metaphor for a way of life that was about to change beyond anything they could have ever imagined. The same conditions that led to a Serb and a Muslim becoming friends were about to be altered forever.

5.2 - Resistance to the Tanzimat reforms

(Islam as a tool of resistance for the periphery)

It is clear from Chapters 1 and 4 that the Ottoman Empire used the region's Muslims inhabitants as their preferred proxy, which led to resentment from the local Christian population.

⁴⁵⁰ William Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: an Intellectual and Social History*, p. 141.

Yet this vision of a complacent Muslim population is complicated by the reluctance of the local Muslims to embrace the *Tanzimat* reforms later in their rule. The Bosnian *begs* and other local elites were not passive players in Bosnia but were able to drive their own agenda to advance their socio-economic interests. When the *Tanzimat* reforms were introduced, they even went as far as to declare them “un-islamic” to justify their defiance to the Sublime Porte. This brought on the Bosnian Uprising of 1831-1832 led by the famed Dragon of Bosnia, Husein Gradašćević. They were successful enough to defeat an Ottoman army at Štimlje (Shtime) in Kosovo and force the existing *vizier* of Bosnia to flee. In response the Ottomans would put down the rebellion forcing Gradašćević into exile. The most powerful of these *ayans* (hereditary landowners) were eliminated in 1850 by the Governor Omer Pasha Latas who had been brought in with the express intention of putting down resistance to the reforms.⁴⁵¹ Here, fiction and history align to demonstrate how the periphery instrumentalizes religion not out of mere atavism, but as a rational, ideological tool of resistance to counter the extractive modernization imposed by the imperial center. This pattern of the Muslim gentry rebelling against the imperial center when it did not follow its interests would again replicate itself when the ruler of Herzegovina Ali-paša Rizvanbegović the Mutasarif of Herzegovina (the same as the one featured in Andrić’s short story *Ali Pasha*), once an important ally against Gradašćević when he was captain of Stolac, would himself become a victim of the Imperial regime for dragging out the implementation of the *Tanzimat* reforms. In *Ali Pasha* the namesake curses his tormentor Omer Pasha and refers to him under his Christian name Michael whom he refers to as an “eater of pork” and curses “that this convert could destroy true Muslims”.⁴⁵² While the above is a literary flourish, the real Ali Pasha was a devout Bosnian Muslim

⁴⁵¹ Clayer et Bougarel, *Les Musulmans de l’Europe du Sud-Est*, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁵² Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 224.

who belonged to a local Sufi Order, having donated many properties to his local *tekke* via the Waqfs system.⁴⁵³ The works of Meša Selimović, in particular *Death and the Dervish* show Sufism explored as a tool for truth telling in a world of imperial control and injustice. Nevertheless, Sufism as a form of mysticism is itself completely at odds with the bureaucratic rationality attempted by Istanbul and later implemented by Austria (Sufism and its mystical religious practices were decimated by the advent of rationality, thus the fear of the Muslim community vis a vis modernization was not completely unfounded.).⁴⁵⁴ While these religious orders were supported by the regime as a tool of its imperial domination, some historians have made it clear that these orders have played a more nuanced role in the history of Bosnia by both supporting the Ottoman regime but also by serving as hubs of local resistance against injustices perpetrated by imperial authorities.⁴⁵⁵ Some even consider Heterodox Islam in Bosnia and its mystical and humanistic qualities to be the precursor of Bosnian Islam. Omer Pasha, himself was born a Serbo-Croatian Christian by the name of Mihajlo Latas on the frontier in 1806, having crossed over to the Ottoman side and converted to Islam. This would have been seen by many traditionalists such as Ali Pasha as representing the new system of governance due to his modernizing tendencies and modern military dress. From their point of view this outsider, albeit loyal to Istanbul, represented a threat to the preservation of tradition for a new civil society based on citizenship, hence the literary vitriol by Ali Pasha.

⁴⁵³ Zafer Gölen, “The Last Senator: Ali Pasha Rizvanbegovic”, *Osmanli Mirasi Arastirmalari Dergisi (Journal of Ottoman Legacy Studies)*, 6 (14) (2019), p. 252.

⁴⁵⁴ Amzi-Erdogdular, “Alternative Muslim Modernities”, p. 924.

⁴⁵⁵ Saadet Demiroğlu, “Deviance of Sufi Orders in Bosnia Through the Lens of State Power”, *The Balkans Politics, History and Society: Vol. Research 9*, ed. S. Abdula (Idefe Publications, n.d.) p. 59.

It is important to note that the ascendancy of Ali Pasha takes place at an identical time with that of a great power, that being the Austrian Empire, then located on Bosnia and Herzegovina's northern border. While Ali Pasha secured his claim to Herzegovina through loyalty to the empire, he was quick to establish himself as an autonomous ruler, who aimed to put his own sons on the throne. While he implemented needed reforms, he did not outright rebel. Instead, he built a robust network of roads, canals and other infrastructure projects to improve the economic lot of his titles while attempting to create an independent foreign policy by building ties with Austrians without approval from Istanbul.⁴⁵⁶ These policy successes allowed him to cement his own hard-earned autonomy. Loyalty in this case then became a tool for this new Herzegovinian elite to maintain legitimacy through his devotion to the Ottoman empire and to use it to secure his own long-term interests. This illustrates a critical dynamic of the European periphery: local actors possessed significant agency, engaging in the strategic appropriation of imperial power to subvert centralizing reforms and protect their regional autonomy.

We see the same appeal to Islam as a tool of resistance in Chapter 3, where the traditionalist Ali Hodja acts as a literary foil for this process, and Alija Izetbegović's *Islamic Declaration*, with its policy of "no modernization without Islam", serves as a real-world implementation of this idea in a more modern setting. If anything, incidents such as Husein Gradaščević's rebellion, the role of Sufism in the resistance to the *Tanzimat* of Ali Pasha and the *Islamic Declaration* highlight the inherent tension between modernization and tradition found in the Bosnian specific model of European Islam. We can thus say that Islam in this context is being mobilized by the Muslim gentry as an ideology of resistance by the periphery when faced by the reformism of the imperial center.

⁴⁵⁶ Gölen, "The Last Senator: Ali Pasha Rizvanbegovic", p. 248.

The corpus of literature in this case serves to invalidate the idea put forward by Christian nationalists of a passive Muslim elite that purely served Ottoman interests.

5.3 - The Dynamics of Violence

(Proxies and Forward Panic)

If the Ottomans were quick to mobilize Bosnia and Herzegovina's Muslims as their proxies when their interests were in alignment, the Austrian Empire was just as cunning. The early years of tranquility that marked their rule were nonetheless filled with complications of a bureaucratic and administrative nature. On the border, a Serbia in its ascendance risked causing trouble in Bosnia, where many of its inhabitants were Serbs just as they did in the days of Karageorge. Nominally their proxies were the Catholic Croats, as they were co-religionists who also made use of the Latin script. Yet this too was a delicate situation. Vienna wanted to prevent the Bosnian Croats from joining the Croatian part of the empire and as such they needed to focus on the building of a proper Bosnian identity. This forced the Austrians to make concessions to the Bosnian Muslims in order to foster their loyalty.⁴⁵⁷ Like the Ottomans before them, the Austrians had to be careful to balance the grievances of the Christians and the hereditary claims of the Muslims. Thus, they strove to straddle a line between reform and to keep the Muslim landowning gentry happy.⁴⁵⁸ They supported projects such as voluntary buyouts based on an agreement between landowners and tenants, but as stated in Chapter 1 these reforms were slow at first. This displeased Serbs who pushed for government financed mandatory buyouts, that would cement their claims to Bosnia as a Serb land.⁴⁵⁹ The impatience of Serb nationalists with this process was quick to produce conflicts

⁴⁵⁷ Falina, *Religion and Politics in Interwar Yugoslavia*, p.29-30.

⁴⁵⁸ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, pp. 187-188.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

with the Muslim landowners.⁴⁶⁰ Despite these concessions to the Muslim landowners, none of their reforms truly settled the claims of the various confessional communities who were still in competition to have their projects backed by Vienna. As historian Robin Okey would point out, this deference towards Bosnia's Muslim community post Ottoman Empire was limited in scope and that the "inner lack of sympathy with Muslims as Muslims which marked the Austrian administrators, Serbs, and Croats" helped fuel the Bosnian Muslim solidarity.⁴⁶¹

The frustration with the Austrian administration was no less true of the Serbs, whose persecution led them to develop a list of grievances that they could ascribe to those who were identified as colluding with the Austrian administrators. This was aggravated by the participation of other ethnic groups in the *Schutzkorps* mentioned in *Chapter 5.1*. This was a real unit with an armed strength of 20 000 men, often composed of Bosniaks and Croats who hunted down Serbs during "anti-bandit operations". Their actions amounted to what historian John R. Lampe refers to as "ethnic cleansing".⁴⁶²

It is clear from the literary and historical sources that these successive models of governance destabilized the local equilibrium between ethnic groups. Not only did the empire's forced modernization of its far-flung province (with its regional identity, language and customs) precipitate a certain nationalist feeling amongst that region's most ardent patriots but it also created artificial divisions between the different Serbo-Croatian peoples. In the case of Bosnia, the periphery exerted its resistance to imperium through religious identity. This can be demonstrated

⁴⁶⁰ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, p. 189.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 109.

in two ways, the first being how the different empires used the various ethnic groups to fulfill their own needs or to enforce their authority. Within this proxy system, religion played an important part in protecting local socio-economic interests. Alignment or dissent with a ruling empire was a way to protect the group privileges and status. Secondly, an interesting observation can be intimated from the timing of most of the interethnic violence in the novel as well as their cyclical reciprocity. It will be contended that this inter-communal violence was brought forth by “forward panic” and by the choice to engage in reciprocal acts of violence (again, violence being generative). Forward Panic explores the tangible link between crowd, police and military violence. It is based on the idea of a soldier in the heat of battle rushing forward in a panic rather than retreating, which would be the expected outcome. This theory was developed by the sociologist Randall Collins, himself a scholar of conflict and violence. It posits that when there is a shift in power dynamics, there may in turn be an emotional shift that transitions the “confrontational energy”, blocking the existing tension from turning into violence, into a frenzied response. In this case the now dominant party will attack the weaker one, but be carried away by this emotional momentum and will be unable to stop the attack.⁴⁶³ Since this is not a rational response it is usually not restrained in its violence leading to what the author refers to as “overkill”, or far beyond what is necessary to achieve the conditions of victory.⁴⁶⁴ The shifting weight of imperial and regional ambitions seems to be catalysts for the outbreak of micro level outbursts of violence. It should be noted during this process that when the balance of power shifts (for example, when the Ottomans retreat or the

⁴⁶³ Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 21, 24-27, 40-41.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-111

Habsburgs rise to power) it is not the expression of ancestral hatred, but rather a panic in the face of an institutional vacuum.

As Max Bergholz observes in *Violence as a Generative Force*, violence reconfigures identities, positioning how groups will react during the next shift in power. This mechanism posits that mob violence is a symptom of failing imperial sovereignty. Andrić's narrative anticipates what sociologist Randall Collins would later theorize as "forward panic": these literary outbursts of violence are not manifestations of primordial hatred, but acute, localized panics triggered by the collapse of institutional authority and rapid shifts in the balance of power. The appeal to forward panic fits well into this pattern as the most memorable outbursts of interethnic violence in Ottoman Bosnia take place amid the backdrop of the rise of Serbia as a regional threat and the slow decay of the imperial authority of the Sublime Porte. Later it takes place as the Austrian Empire begins to bear down on Bosnia and local elites begin to see avenues to partner with the new European powers to achieve some form of autonomy. Interethnic violence would again reappear during the latter part of Austrian rule as Serbs became more emboldened in their search for autonomy. This type of violence would again rear its head during the Second World War, and again in the 1990s, as regional nationalists begin to take power. Within these periods we see clear shifts in power between the different ethnic groups.

Returning to this idea of forward panic, the most gruesome scenes of violence always occur when a change in power dynamic occurs. This shift in power manifests itself in pogrom like uprisings where Serbs are targeted such as the wave of violence by the more dominant Muslim side in reaction to Karageorge during the First Serbian Uprising, a conflict in which the Serb side of the border saw a mass displacement of Muslims as Serbs took the upper hand. A similar pattern would take place in nearby Montenegro. Later we see the same pattern occur as the Austrians

initiate mass violence against a Serbian population, much like the Muslims had earlier during Ottoman's time. The modern era would see similar incidents, most prominently during the Second World War and again as the power of the communist party waned during the 1980s. If the literary narrative seems to indicate a sort of cultural fatalism or an inescapable cycle of reciprocal violence, that assumption would only be partially correct. As *Violence as a Generative Force* informs us, violence in Bosnia is a driver of identity, not a biological inevitability. It is anti-historicist in nature, highlighting the contribution of individual choice – as when violence happens to people based on ethnicity, it makes ethnicity more important. Violence is a choice, just as restraint and the latter has the power to create inter-ethnic solidarity. Interethnic hatred was not inevitable, and a large part of the issue lies in the fact that successive imperial regimes actively instrumentalized ethnic boundaries for administrative control. By failing to cultivate a unified, pluralistic civic space, they ensured that socio-economic competition remained strictly compartmentalized along ethno-religious lines, transforming material grievances into existential identity conflicts.

In essence, the mobilisation of violence is not due to confessional differences but in reality, it coalesced around religion owing to its identitarian quality that defined the status of an individual in society as well as how it affected a group members and relationships with ruling empires. In this context it is a malformation in the creation of the nation, due to the importation of a foreign modernity imposed on the periphery, that created injustices in the social order. These injustices or “perceived” injustices can also be conceived as threats or as a chance to extract revenge as different empires invert social hierarchies or pit groups against each other.

Conclusion

“What have we done, what have we achieved, what have we torn down, and what have we built? Are we not struggling in vain against these instincts, which are stronger than anything offered by reason? Are the things that we promise in exchange for an earthly, primal rampage not too arid and unattractive? How can we resist the allure of these ancient calls? Will our distant, savage ancestors vanquish us and return us to their age?”

- Meša Selimović, *Death and the Dervish* [Spoken by Ahmed Nuruddin]⁴⁶⁵

The celebrated English writer Rebecca West began her magnum opus *Black Lamb Grey Falcon* with following quotation: “To my friends in Yugoslavia who are all dead or enslaved”.⁴⁶⁶ While published in 1941, the masterwork had its roots in a six-week trip taken by the author in 1937, but its release in the midst of the Second World War made its subject matter all the more timely. Unlike the Second World War, the fracture of Yugoslavia did not come from an external enemy such as Nazi Germany, but from within as the Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA), armed and controlled by the Serbs, moved against Yugoslavia’s breakaway republics. Despite these differences, the results were eerily similar; a fratricidal conflict would engulf the region with each ethno-religious group staking their claim to what they believed was owed to them. Nearly fifty years after the triumphant victory over fascism, a foundational piece of communist mythos, the land descended into chaos as the label of victims and aggressor were once again brandished like weapons. So why did Communist Yugoslavia collapse into violence so spectacularly when on the surface its nation building program was going along swimmingly?

As journalist Stephen Schwartz points out in his 1999 Hoover Institution article *Beyond “Ancient Hatreds”* the simplest explanation to most western commentators is to refer to the

⁴⁶⁵ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. 33.

⁴⁶⁶ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p. vii.

doctrine of ancient hatreds, that the Balkan peripheral is one where violence has historically ruled the day. This is often accompanied by reference to a fault or character flaw—sometimes carrying subliminal hints of Orientalism (e.g., the Slavic or Balkan character). It is this same recourse that the Hungarian noblemen refer to when judging Kadare's Balkan minstrels from our introduction. This explanation, of course, is rejected by the author. While moralizing, by way of offering a simple biologically essentialist solution to a complex problem, may feel good, Schwartz is quick to make the case that human input was a critical catalyst for the eruption of interethnic violence in Yugoslavia.⁴⁶⁷ Another explanation that has been offered is that the conflict with its rather murky polarity between Christianity and Islam is part of a civilizational conflict between the orient and occident. This too seems like a flawed approach. Some historians have taken umbrage at the focus given to religious life as the primary origin of the Yugoslav Wars, criticizing an overly simplistic reliance on Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* to explain the causes of the conflict (i.e. that future wars will not be fought between countries but instead by cultures or religions). On that point I believe that they are right. The three-way frontier ethos formed by the intersection of Venice, Austria-Hungary and the Ottomans stand as a complicating factor to the view of the conflict as a binary between Christianity and Islam or as simple fault line between the Orient and Occident (i.e. where conflicts arose along fault lines between different groups within a region, not necessarily along broader civilizational divisions).⁴⁶⁸ Huntington himself acknowledged that the wars in the former Yugoslavia were a type of "fault line" war. Yet, there is one salient point in which this clash of civilization type of analysis holds weight, and that is the use of religion as a marker of identity over the course of the conflict.

⁴⁶⁷ Schwartz, "Beyond "Ancient Hatreds"", 1999.

⁴⁶⁸ Amzi-Erdoğdular, *The Afterlife of Ottoman Europe*, pp. 24-25.

While this was the point of departure for this thesis, when we speak of religion in the Yugoslav context, it is important to stress that we are not talking about confessional differences but public identity and historical memory. It is no surprise that the rise of religious sentiment in the 1980s coincides with the rise of the nationalist factions as in Yugoslavia the question of religious affiliation can not be detached from the question of group identity. So how does one explain the focus on religion to explain the failure of pluralism in Yugoslav Bosnia when communist Yugoslavia was nominally a *de facto* atheist state. The key word here is nominally. As we have seen religion has played a key part in mythmaking, ethnic identity, social economics, as well as the legacies of Ottomanism. It should also be noted that Tito's death led to a large religious revival in Yugoslavia. This process began with the resurgence of St. Sava worship in late-communist in Serbia, along with the devotion to Augustin Kažotić in Croatia, where famous Marian apparitions (i.e. visions of the Virgin Mary) led to mass pilgrimages to the church of Our Lady of Medjugorje in Herzegovina.⁴⁶⁹ I believe that the evidence put forth in this thesis puts to rest the idea that this conflict is not merely a clash of civilizations. By utilizing the novels of Andrić and Selimović not as empirical archives, but as ideal-typical models of civic alienation and epistemic shock, this thesis has demonstrated that the conflict is rather the result of a profound crisis of political modernity. The failure to institutionalize a pluralistic civic space transformed socio-economic and structural grievances into an existential crisis where religion remained the only available grammar for political mobilization.

These causes are deeply rooted in the history of the region. As the Serbian political scientist Aleksa Đilas wisely notes in the conclusion of this book *The Contested Country*, the failure of the

⁴⁶⁹ Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, pp. 6, 9-10.

communist regime to erase the divisions between these various confessional communities lay in their inability to look beyond their ideology, specifically overstating the role of class differences in inter-ethnic conflict, assuming that the elimination of these differences would bring about peace and prosperity for all, a view that is in line with the internationalist tenets of socialism. He reminds his readers that Communist Yugoslavia assumed that “historical memories, tradition, and religion” were a source of tension between Yugoslavia’s ethnic groups, but that it was a negligible problem because it belonged to the past and that they would be erased by “socialism, progress and communism”. One could say that they correctly identified the issues, but their utopianism did not allow them to grasp the long-term consequences of their neglect for these “dated” themes. Like this thesis, Đilas identifies that one of the roots of the issue lies in the process of an uneasy modernization. The state’s attempt to impose a forced secular homogenization from above failed to heal the institutional traumas inherited from the imperial eras.⁴⁷⁰ He states:

*One could say with some irony that the major problem, both for Communist Yugoslavism and for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Yugoslavism, which was based on “enlightened” and “progressive” ideas, was that they were not conservative enough. If either movement had contained a modicum of conservatism, it would have recognized the importance for Croats and Serbs of tradition, religion, and, above all else, historical memory and would not have been surprised that peasants, workers, and “exploited” masses in general accept these values.*⁴⁷¹

It should be noted that the breakdown of ethnic relations in Yugoslavia at the turn of the 21st century was not an isolated incident. The 20th century for example is littered with ideological and ethnic disputes in all corners of Europe. Ironically, our narrator from *Letter from 1920* discovers that his friend Max has been killed, not in Bosnia, but while fighting for the republican cause in Spain, as he states, “Thus ended the life of the man who ran away from hatred”.⁴⁷² What

⁴⁷⁰ Djilas, *The Contested Country*, p. 184

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷² Andrić, *The Damned Yard*, p. 201.

is unique about this conflict is its location, on the periphery of Europe, and its timing. After all, “The End of History” was published by Francis Fukuyama in *The National Interest* in 1989. The post Cold War period was predicted to be a triumph for the Western liberal order, but events not far from the core of Europe shattered that perspective. In fact, Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* was a direct response to this overly optimistic portrayal of the post-cold war era. Yet what is most interesting about this conflict is that it sets up this binary tension between “ancient hatreds” and “free will”.

The beginning of this conclusion starts with a rather potent citation. Ahmed Nuruddin’s innermost thoughts read almost as an ethereal siren’s call, seemingly addressed directly to the reader rather than to himself as he pleads for self control stating: “How can we resist the allure of these ancient calls? Will our distant, savage ancestors vanquish us and return us to their age?”.⁴⁷³ While in the literal context of the book, it is a direct reference to the sexual desires of a dervish, who is overtaken by lust for Christian flesh on St. Georges Day, it offers a clever insight on the decisions that the Dervish will have to make in his future. He can give in to his temptations and embrace the decadence of power or to stay spiritually and ethically pure by embracing his holy austerity. More importantly it is a clear declaration that agency and historical tension are always at odds. This thesis strongly disputes the focus on ancient hatreds being solely responsible for interethnic violence as it absolves the role of historical actors to influence the trajectory of how this violence developed.

Thus, predestination is rejected for a more nuanced perspective that posits that underlying tensions in this region were not properly addressed and led to future conflict in which the memory

⁴⁷³ Selimović, *Death and the Dervish*, p. 33.

of the past was weaponized. So obvious were these tensions that they had concerned the large powers of Europe at the end of the First World War, when large multiethnic empires were being broken up into nation-states. At several points, they attempted to enshrine some type of protections for minority groups, including within Yugoslavia. On every occasion these treaties were shattered, and the rights of religious minorities were violated. This includes the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 (with its follow-up in Constantinople a year later) and the Treaty of Saint-Germain in 1919.

Another point of interest is that the fatalistic paralysis that characterizes many of the central characters in our corpus of novels is quickly swept away or retrospectively made to look silly. In one of my favorite passages from *Bosnian Chronicle* the *beys* gathered at Lutva's Café are chided by one of their own for their fear of the now departed foreigners stating: "Everything will be the same again, just as, by the will of Allah, it has always been".⁴⁷⁴ There is some irony to this statement as this exultation of Bosnian isolationism was not to be. Instead of a triumphant and rising end to the novel, the reader, with his powers of historical hindsight, is left with a sense of impending doom as he knows what the story's characters do not; that the period of Ottoman rule that had defined the town for centuries would quickly be replaced by a new political order. Just as in Višegrad, where the townspeople are initially unable to adapt or to position themselves via the mass modernization of their country, we see that this oncoming modernization could not be stopped with Bosnia's obsolescence leaving it even more vulnerable to these large societal shifts. The action of individual players in this grand game between great powers may seem small, thus nihilism, one of the main drivers of this fatalism and a product of this modern world, seems to be

⁴⁷⁴ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, p. 429.

a natural reaction to this current.⁴⁷⁵ However, this condition is merely a symptom of the periphery's alienation, not an inherent trait. *Violence as a Generative Force* informs us that in the cavalcade of miniscule events, individual actions have consequences. It is the sum of those decisions that define how groups respond to each other. This is the power of humanism, the antithesis to the cold determinism of the historicist. To paraphrase Karl Popper, the danger of historicism – the belief that history follows the laws of pre-destiny where future outcomes are seen as inevitable – is problematic because it brings out the worst cases of nihilistic detachment.⁴⁷⁶ If events unfurl in an inevitable matter, then the actions of its participants can therefore be justified. The attack on individual agency through moral relativism is part of how authoritarian powers justify their decision making. It is no surprise that Eliade's ideas on myths, the cyclical call to eternal return to a primordial state to escape the "terror of history" was of comfort to certain authoritarian regimes over the 20th century.

In her landmark work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt makes the case that these regimes are quick to co-opt pre-existing national myths for their own purposes. By preying upon atomized individuals, stripped of meaningful civic participation, these movements use myths to substitute democratic realities with ideological fictions. A prominent example can be found in the co-opting of the medievalist myth in Nazi Germany to justify Aryan superiority and the *Übermensch*. Of course, Nuremberg, as the perfect medieval city, was the ideal setting for the nucleus of such a movement. Movements such as this use these myths not only to justify their

⁴⁷⁵ From fatalism in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna to the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, many logicians believe that although nihilism may predate modernity, but it is deeply intertwined with it and has such as developed own distinct characteristics.

⁴⁷⁶ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton Classics ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), xlv-xlvii.

ideology but to create a sense of belonging, and as a tool to destroy existing traditional state structures. Thus, there exists a tangible link between myth, civic alienation and conflict that was brilliantly outlined by Hannah Arendt in her polemic *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.⁴⁷⁷ Totalitarian regimes tend to mobilize their base by using preexisting myths to distort or manipulate history.

In Yugoslavia this strategy was employed by the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević as he mobilized the Kosovo myth to justify his takeover of the country. On the grassy plains of Gazimestan, on the 28th of June 1989, he rose to the microphone and delivered a populist speech to an estimated million-man crowd. The rally was the culmination of his “anti-bureaucratic revolution”, a collection of street protests to overthrow the exiting power structure and to install Milošević allies in multiple Yugoslav republics and in provinces of Serbia. This is the defining event that would mark the start of Milošević’s ascendancy and spark the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav state. The location of the speech was a politically astute one. Steeped in symbolism, it was the very location where the medieval Kingdom of Serbia was defeated at the battle of Kosovo Fields six hundred years before. The event was preceded by a strange public commemoration where the remains of Prince Lazar of Serbia, who had perished in this battle, were paraded around the Kosovar Republic. Nearly two years after this fateful speech, Yugoslavia was embroiled in fratricidal conflicts between its successor states.

Of this idea that human actors have a role to play in how events unfold, it is undeniably true. Milošević’s rise to power was not inevitable, and the events he put into place could have been stopped as early as when he orchestrated his political takeover of Kosovo by clever political machinations. Yet, at every opportunity, the federal power in Yugoslavia refused to act. Many

⁴⁷⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 233-236.

Yugoslavs understood exactly what was happening to them. In Belgrade, as in many cities, massive anti-Milošević and anti-war protests preceded the Bosnian War. The most famous one held in March of 1991 and was led by Vuk Drašković of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO). It was attended by an estimated 100,000 people, including the great Serbian writer Borislav Pekić. Milošević used the army to crush them, sending tanks out into the streets. Speaking of Borislav Pekić, his novel *How to Quiet a Vampire* is a powerful exploration of these exact questions.⁴⁷⁸

Regarding the power of culture, particularly literature, as an avenue for truth telling, it is important to understand that it was very much recognized as a threat to authoritarian regimes. In the former Yugoslavia, communists and nationalists alike, took means to rebuke or punish authors if they caught wind of “subversive” narratives in their texts. As we saw with the SANU memorandum, they viewed them as the primary “caprice and anarchy”, a rather dubious conclusion – but one aligned with their goals of suppressing dissent to their nationalistic ambitions.⁴⁷⁹ On this point they were correct, aligned against them were not only prominent literary figures such as Borislav Pekić and Vuk Drašković but also a plethora of artists including prominent Yugoslav anti-fascist rock bands. Unfortunately, the SANU memorandum had little to say about the (mis)use of national mythos or of the lies of political figures being a source of “anarchy”. Milošević had built a political career based on being an opportunist schemer long before his speech at Gazimestan. As the brilliant documentary by Norma Percy *The Death of Yugoslavia* demonstrates, this was a man who reinvented himself from a bland communist administrator to a self-proclaimed champion of

⁴⁷⁸ In *How to Quiet a Vampire* Pekić examines how the root causes of this totalitarian malady are hidden but deeply ingrained in European thoughts.

⁴⁷⁹ Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, “Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) Memorandum, 1986”, *Making the History of 1989* [Haverford College Translation via the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) at George Mason University] (1986), p. 6.

the Kosovan Serbs. He did so by inciting a riot at Kosovo Polje in Kosovo on April 24, 1987, as revealed by the riot organizer Miroslav Solevic. This act was a betrayal of his mentor Ivan Stambolić who was then forced out of the party during the 8th session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia.⁴⁸⁰ Stambolić was a SANU critic, dissenter and unitarian who was later murdered in 2000 under orders by Milošević. To extreme nationalists such as Milošević and his cohort of western apologists such as Michael Parenti, the truth is a threat to their very existence because they built their foundation on lies.

If any lessons can be gleaned from the fracture of the country (and the emergence of a nationalistic populism that preceded it), it is that this conflict did not arise because of confessional differences. Instead, religion, already a surrogate for identity, was harnessed by political actors to fulfill their own political ends. They were able to do so because the political conditions prevailing at that time were ripe for exploitation. The rapid disintegration of the existing communist system allowed for a power vacuum in which one was unsure what type of system would prevail and who would hold power. In a choice between democracy and authoritarian populism, the latter proved victorious. As the Argentine philosopher *Ernesto Laclau* would remark in his seminal work *On Populist Reason*, populism is not a fixed ideology, it is a discursive element based on the rhetoric of unresolved democratic demands, usually lobbied at the “elite” that hold power. He elaborated that populist movements were constructed in such a way that they draw their power from a symbol, or leader, that can help unify the diverse demands of their electorate, and that they aim to achieve

⁴⁸⁰ Percy, Norma, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, London: BBC, 1995. [Episode 1: "Enter Nationalism – 10:15-13:45]; The Serbs organized truckloads of stones to be thrown at the local police to stage an incident, then the Milošević who was expectedly told to calm the situation made a nationalist speech while telling the protesters that “No one is allowed to beat you again!”

that mandate by filling “a significant void”.⁴⁸¹ For our intents and purposes, this “significant void” mirrors Claude Lefort’s concept of the *lieu vide* (empty place) of power in a democracy: a shared space where political competition can be held in a regulated way.⁴⁸² Lefort warned that the inherent fragility of this empty space risks inviting demagogues who attempt to embody the people and permanently seize power.⁴⁸³ Political actors such as Milošević are exactly this sort of figure. He used myth (e.g. Kosovo) and religion not out of theological fervor, but to deliberately saturate the “lieu vide” of democratic power left by the collapse of communism; thereby replacing political plurality with an essentialist, ethno-religious hegemony. It is exactly the malleability of these myths, and the instability of the social contract in these peripheral zones, that the literature of Andrić and Selimović have attempted to warn us.

In contemporary Yugoslavia, memory and myth are still being employed by malicious actors to encourage an a-historical, heavily modified or sanitized versions of history. A prime example of this can be found in Višegrad, the city of *Bridge on the Drina*, where many Bosniaks were massacred during the Yugoslav Wars in an act of ethnic cleansing. A project of the nationalist Serb enclave Republika Srpska, “Andrićgrad” is a new pseudo-historical quarter to celebrate the author and the other nationalist or mythic figures from the Serbian cannon (for example it included a statue of Gavrilo Princip). It has been described by some as “Disneyland of Serb nationalism”, and functions as a sort of a-historical anachronism being located in a region with so much Ottoman

⁴⁸¹ Laclau, *La raison populiste*, p. 87-89.

⁴⁸² Laclau, *La Raison populiste*, pp. 87-89.; In pre-democratic societies this space would have been occupied or as he calls it “incorporated” by a monarch. In a democracy this space has been “unincorporated” meaning that nobody occupies this position, and that the best that a ruling government can do is to temporarily hold it (i.e. in a democracy power cannot be singularly seized by a political actor)

⁴⁸³ Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 303-306.

history. What Andrić himself would have thought of this project is anybody's guess but seeing the complex tapestry of cultures weaved together by his works make me wonder if this type of sanitized celebration would have been out of place for him. In contrast to this blind celebration of Andrić as a Serbian icon, rather than a shared Bosnian one, some Bosniaks look at him with mistrust due to this association, overlooking his long commitment to Yugoslavism. Croats for their part have almost abandoned him, despite him being one of their own. Selimovic for his part has been celebrated by Serbs and oft criticized by Bosniaks. This celebration of Andrić and Selimović, fractured along ethnic lines, does in fact mimic existing tensions in modern Bosnia, where explicit, not tacit, segregation has created a world where a policy like two schools under one roof can exist (i.e. two classrooms divided by ethnicity with separate curriculums). While this project has primarily focused on Serb and Bosniak relations, it should be noted that many of the same themes can be found in Franjo Tuđman's Croatia, especially when it comes to Holocaust distortion.

A methodological limitation of this project is that the primary analytical focus remained strictly on the literary representation of these dynamics. I think an analysis of the main religious institutions themselves would have been a great avenue of study. How did they position themselves vis-à-vis ethnic conflict or did they just concern themselves with spiritual matters? While we have some great examples from the Second World War, I would have liked to familiarize myself with what institutions were doing during the emergence of nationalism after the death of Tito.

A future avenue of study would be to expand on the role of modernity in Central and Southeastern Europe, as well as to expand on how this new mentality shaped the creation of Yugoslavia. I am particularly interested in the idea of social acceleration as theorised by Hartmut Rosa. The definition of modernity I would use is one from the introduction of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* by Marshall Berman. He defined this concept as "any

attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home with it".⁴⁸⁴ As for social acceleration it is the increased pace of life caused by the modernization of society. This little piece of intellectual history is one that is central to understanding *Bridge on the Drina*, where the pace of life and rapidity of change are front and center but is also something that I have noticed as a reoccurring theme in the works of many of my favorite novelists from region, including Milan Kundera, Danilo Kiš, Ismael Kadare, Ivo Andrić, Borislav Pekić and Robert Musil amongst others. I am particularly interested in how this idea is advanced in the *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* by Kundera. It was also something I was surprised to see so prominently featured in my review of the Islamic Declaration by Alija Izetbegović during my research for this project. A second possible avenue of study could be the examination of the role of the Jewish community in the Balkans, a recurring motif in the works of Ivo Andrić.

⁴⁸⁴ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988). p. 5.

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