

## **Culture, Resistance and Violence: Guarding the Habsburg *Ostgrenze* with Montenegro in 1914**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Between 1878 and 1918 the Eastern border (*Ostgrenze*) of the Habsburg Monarchy and in particular the mountainous regions between Hercegovina and Montenegro posed security challenges. The people of the region had strong local traditions and a reputation for armed resistance to outside authority (having fought against Ottoman power for centuries). In 1878, the village of Klobuk had tried to fight off the Habsburg invader and had only slowly been subdued. In the following years, the new authorities built up a formidable line of defence along their new border with Montenegro including the garrisons at Trebinje, Bileća and Avtovac. After the annexation of Bosnia and Hercegovina in 1908, the security situation became tense, a situation exacerbated by fear of South Slav expansion after the Balkan Wars of 1912-13 (which went hand in hand with a wave of propaganda that depicted the Serbs and Montenegrins as violent by nature). As a result, Orthodox Serbs living along the Montenegrin border were increasingly viewed with suspicion. During the crisis of the summer of 1914, many men from the villages closest to the border were either hanged or deported. The implementation and interpretation of Habsburg military regulations (*Dienstreglement*) meant that the Orthodox population in the border areas suffered disproportionately in 1914.

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### **KEYWORDS**

Habsburg Monarchy, 1914, Violence, First World War, Montenegro, Hercegovina, Orthodox Serbs

### **Introduction**

In 1878 after the Congress of Berlin had created new opportunities, the armies of Austria-Hungary marched into the Ottoman Provinces of Bosnia and Hercegovina. It took about three months for the troops to quell resistance both in the capital Sarajevo as well as in more remote places close to the border with the newly recognised state of Montenegro<sup>2</sup>. This Eastern border (*Ostgrenze*) is defined here as the region of Hercegovina between historic

Dalmatia and Sandžak which lies between Mount Orjen and the Drina River basin. For the forty years it was under the Habsburg rule, the border ran through regions with a recent history what Hannes Grandits has referred to as a 'repeated eruption of power struggles'<sup>3</sup>. In 1875, the Monastery of Duži near Trebinje had been at the epicentre of a rebellion against the Ottomans led by Mićo Ljubibratić<sup>4</sup>. For several months, the region was devastated by violence which turned Orthodox people against the Muslim town population and the authorities. Many outside commentators saw this as a war of liberation from the Ottoman yoke and the rebels had even been joined by *garibaldini* from Italy<sup>5</sup>. At the Battle of Vučji Do in 1876, combined Montenegrin and Hercegovinian forces had defeated the Ottomans. In Klobuk, a small village in the Korjenici region, local men again rebelled against outside authority and withstood the Central European occupation forces in 1878. The Korjenici region (known historically as Vrm until the eighteenth century) was a historic *župa* (a county or group of villages led by *župan* or count) between Mount Orjen and Bileća just east of Trebinje. It enveloped the small towns of Lastva, Klobuk and Zupci and included the hamlets of Arandjelovo, Župa, Gornji Orahovac, Konjsko, Bogojević Selo and Gornje Grančarevo.

The Habsburg Monarchy had controlled the Adriatic coastline since the end of the Napoleonic Wars and had faced resistance to their authority in neighbouring Krivošije in 1869 by local men who did not want to be conscripted. The regime was temporarily defeated and conscription not introduced until years later. General Stjepan Jovanović, who had long military experience in the Kotor region including Krivošije, led the Habsburg military campaign in southern Hercegovina in 1878<sup>6</sup>. At that time, Klobuk had a medieval fortress where the rebels held out until they escaped over the border one morning before dawn. The fortress withstood three days of artillery bombardment by Jovanović, who described the military action against Klobuk in terms of 'destruction and annihilation' (*Zerstörung und Vernichtung*)<sup>7</sup>. In 1881, the Habsburg authorities again faced insurrection again led by Stojan Kovačević<sup>8</sup> from the area around Gacko<sup>9</sup>. Resistance to conscription was again the chief cause of rebellion. General Jovanović thought that 'to allow culture to develop at all, first of all strong garrisons have to be established in southern Herzegovina and in the district of Cattaro for at least several years'<sup>10</sup>. The local inhabitants thus needed garrisons to remind them military power of the Habsburg state and to bring them to culture.

Orthodox by religion, the people living on the *Ostgrenze* had deep connections with neighbouring lands through trade, transhumance<sup>11</sup> and faith. When shepherds moved their flocks, they tended to go into the cooler high hills often traversing an official state border. Illiteracy levels were high<sup>12</sup> and leadership by the clergy and oral traditions through epic poems and gusle music remained strong. The view of the people of Eastern Hercegovina by the new occupiers was highly ambiguous<sup>13</sup>. According to one Prague newspaper in 1878, this was an ancient refuge area for insurgents and had never submitted to the authority of the Porte<sup>14</sup>. With their steep dry mountains, unusual rock formations, fauna and narrow valleys, the regions between Hercegovina and Montenegro were of great interest to ethnologists, geologists and botanists<sup>15</sup>. Many admired the contrast between the rugged hills and more fertile patches of land in the valleys. Slovene officer Jernej Andrejka feared the 'tough guys' (*korenjaki*) of the region<sup>16</sup>. Military engineer Daniel von Salis-Soglio described the local people as 'belligerent and cruel'<sup>17</sup>, but other sources such as the popular *Skizzenbuch* by Milena Mrazović saw the region's rebellious traditions as romantic. She depicted the 'poor shepherds who lived a precarious existence and kept their traditions'<sup>18</sup>. To deal with the problem of a rebellious population, in the 1880s Baron Vladimir Nikolić had proposed a resettlement of the region with Tyroleans who would potentially be more loyal to the regime<sup>19</sup>. The Montenegrins also had a reputation for their fighting qualities, a trope which had existed since (at least) the Napoleonic Wars<sup>20</sup>. In the nineteenth century, this was often seen as a positive if directed against the right adversary. In 1878 the *New York Times* informed its readers 'the whole history (of Montenegro) is a most inspiring (sic) and heroic one and had it but possessed its "sacred bard" would have ranked with the annals of the immortal Greek cities which in populations were not larger. The spirit of resistance and defiance has been transmitted from father to son... The farmers are said to leave their flocks for the skirmish with their ancestral enemies, with something of that gladness for battle which belongs to a more vigorous age of the world'<sup>21</sup>.

### **Defending the Eastern Border of the Habsburg Monarchy**

After 1878, the Habsburg *Ostgrenze* with Montenegro became heavily militarised and included many smaller outposts and forts as well as the main garrisons. The primary role of

the Trebinje, Bileća and Avtovac garrisons was to guard the frontier and to safeguard this troublesome region which had rebelled in 1878 and 1881. In 1876 Charles Yriarte has assessed the strategic importance of the valleys to the mountains: 'Être maître de Trébigné, c'est posséder toute l'Herzégovine méridionale'<sup>22</sup>. Salis-Soglio believed that the visibility of the fortress at Gliva would impose the reality of military power on the local people<sup>23</sup>. Viennese soldier Richard Neutra, who later emigrated to California and became a well-known Modernist architect, was stationed for some time in a frontier post called Kravica which he described as an 'unbeknown outlying fort' where he commanded a dozen men<sup>24</sup>. Regiments based in the region spoke most of the monarchy's myriad languages and came from faraway Čáslav, Brno, Komárno, Orăștie, Sopron, Békéscsaba and Jihlava<sup>25</sup>. An American author who was in Trebinje in 1908 left her impressions: '(a)s we leave, a company of soldiers marching in the road parts and we have the novel sensation of riding between ranks of armed men! There are soldiers everywhere and forts on all the heights'<sup>26</sup>.

One response to rebellion and discontent was infrastructural investment. The Central European Monarchy spent the next forty years building up the *Ostgrenze* region, initiating a *Kulturkampf* that Robin Okey has referred to as the Habsburg 'civilising mission'<sup>27</sup>. Although it was a centuries-old trading route, a new road had already been built between Dubrovnik and Trebinje in 1868 that had increased the speed of contact between the coast and the hinterland<sup>28</sup>. After the occupation, the new authorities built hospitals, schools, parks and an agricultural training centre in Lastva, where the local growers managed to avoid the scourge of phylloxera which had previously ravaged Dalmatian vineyards and provoked widespread migration to the New World. This region proved an excellent place to grow apples, chestnuts, plums and grapes<sup>29</sup>. Tobacco had long been cultivated in this area and was particularly prized within the Monarchy. In the Lastva valley downstream from Trebinje, fine wines were cultivated from the Žilavka grape which were imported across Europe<sup>30</sup>. By 1910 Trebinje had a population of 4615 (with about 3,000 staff in the garrisons at its peak). Just under half of the inhabitants of the town were Muslims, Christians made up slightly over half (both Orthodox and Catholic) and there was a small Jewish minority<sup>31</sup>. Although Trebinje itself lay in a fertile river valley, the new authorities had an uphill struggle to tame the adjacent limestone landscapes, irrigate the land for new crops and introduce machinery. The balance of soldiers to civilians often meant that life could seem a little dull, especially for

those who were used to different standard of living in Central Europe. Cafes, hotels and shops opened in the town and an upbeat regimental march 'Gruss an Trebinje' was composed by Franz Sommer. Czech scientist Karel Absolon found the soldiers exceptionally helpful to him as he attempted to chart and describe Karst phenomenon such as caves and sinkholes, getting them involved in his research 'to relieve the tedium of a Balkan garrison'<sup>32</sup>.

A railway link from Hum to Trebinje, vital for the military, had been completed on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1901<sup>33</sup> despite the challenges of high temperature, the bura winds, a lack of fresh water for the workers<sup>34</sup> Construction was also hampered by malaria, endemic sandfly fever<sup>35</sup> and the threat of fatal snakebites to draft animals<sup>36</sup>. Despite resource and effort, many contemporaries were struck by the incongruous and incommensurate distance between the culture of the occupation and the local people<sup>37</sup>. During the insurrection in Avtovac in the 1880s, the garrison found its telegraph line had been cut by the rebels<sup>38</sup>. Vladimir Dedijer<sup>39</sup> recorded that the authorities paid the crowd to cheer the arrival of Franz Ferdinand in Trebinje in 1906<sup>40</sup>. The *Ostgrenze* forts were not an easy military posting and not always safe for soldiers even in peacetime. The wise practices of local shepherds who found cool places and took in water as they rested (and thus avoided fatalities) were not adhered to or followed by the occupiers<sup>41</sup>. In 1909, the soldier Geza Bassarits from Sopron was killed by a poisonous viper (*vipera ursinii*)<sup>42</sup>. Michael Ludwig Edler von Appel received over 80 sandfly bites in one night and fell ill a week later<sup>43</sup>. Heat exposure killed over 20 soldiers in July 1903 causing a national scandal when it was revealed that men were marching over dry terrain with heavy backpacks in temperatures of 40 degrees<sup>44</sup>. Protesting about their posting in Hercegovina, soldiers were involved in drunken riots in January 1904 in Bileća<sup>45</sup>. Water was always scarce in Herzegovina and the garrison network itself required a lot of resource<sup>46</sup>. Captain Georg Veith, based in Bileća, remembered the challenges of the terrain during the war and in particular recalled the difficulty of finding adequate grazing land for his horses during the autumn<sup>47</sup>.

### **Towards the Crisis of 1914**

When the Habsburg Monarchy took control of Bosnia and Hercegovina, it greatly increased its Serb Orthodox population who remained at just over 40% of the total population until

1918. In the villages around Trebinje, Bileća and Avtovac, this proportion was much higher and villages towards the Montenegrin frontier were almost entirely Orthodox. Whereas the Muslim and Catholic population eventually came to accept the new regime, the Orthodox population remained hostile and bitter about their lost opportunity to create a state with all their brethren. As well as rebellions against the Viennese monarchy<sup>48</sup>, discontent about the control of the Habsburg state was discernible in the writing of intellectuals and radicals<sup>49</sup> and in establishment of activist cells such as *Mlada Bosna* (who eventually turned to direct action and violence). Poverty of opportunity and dislike of Habsburg authority caused that some individuals opted to leave the region altogether. John Marich recalled his journey as a fourteen year old from the small village of Bijograd to Dubrovnik in 1895 from whence he set off for a new life in the United States: 'For centuries the people of my homeland knew the well-worn paths over the peaks and summits from Trebinje to the Adriatic Sea. It is better to say that they were forced by the enemy to know these paths of escape'<sup>50</sup>. After the declaration of war in 1914, some Bosnian Serbs returned to fight against the hated oppressor<sup>51</sup>. In the Kotor bay area, men joined the Montenegrin army as volunteers rather than serve in the army of Franz Joseph<sup>52</sup>. Spasoje Sredanović from Vučija, already in his 30s by the outbreak of war, crossed over the border to serve with the Montenegrin army, thus avoiding the fate of seven of his relatives who were hanged by the Habsburg authorities in August 1914<sup>53</sup>.

Relations between the occupiers and the Orthodox people in the *Ostgrenze* region developed during a particularly challenging period. The annexation of Bosnia and Hercegovina in 1908 angered Serb nationalists and the loss of Sandžak in 1912 (which was partitioned between Montenegro and Serbia) worried the Habsburgs. By the time of the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, Montenegrins and Serbs were often feared as particularly violent. Some Serbian subjects opted to move to the Habsburg state during this time. A register in Trebinje was taken on 28<sup>th</sup> July which indicated that five Muslim families who settled there were allowed to remain<sup>54</sup>. The Habsburg reading public followed the Balkan Wars correspondents who sent vivid first hand reports of the fighting back home. In particular, reports created a clear image of Balkan 'cruelties', often specifically Serbian cruelties (*Serbengreuel*)<sup>55</sup>. An image of paramilitaries, referred to as 'komitadjis' emerged from the reports of the Balkan Wars, but was also used through the war years by Habsburg combatants to refer to all armed Serbs whether regular

soldiers or not<sup>56</sup>. The death of the Franciscan priest Luigi Palić in Gjakova in Kosovo drew a lot of press attention<sup>57</sup>. Although Palić had had his vestments ripped off and was thrown to the ground, he said to his persecutors: 'No, I will not renounce my faith and will not break my vows'. He was then beaten numerous times and bayoneted by a Montenegrin soldier, eventually dying from a punctured lung<sup>58</sup>. Across the Monarchy, there were almost daily reports of atrocities committed by Serbs and Montenegrins in the two years before June 1914, including the mass hangings of Albanians in Gjakova<sup>59</sup>

Prior to the early summer of 1914, the Orthodox population was contained by the Habsburg authorities even if they did display an uncomfortable political affinity for Serbia and Montenegro. Nevertheless, in the years before 1914 and also during the war, Serbs were constructed as the antithesis of Habsburg civilisation in terms of political organisation as well as their general demeanour and behaviour<sup>60</sup>. The porous nature of the *Ostgrenze* therefore worried Habsburg authorities even before the Sarajevo assassination. Salis-Soglio noted the problem of robberies on the road to Bileća<sup>61</sup>. In 1909, one newspaper reported on the problem of smuggling in the border region<sup>62</sup>. After accidentally straying across the Montenegrin border, two Habsburg officers were arrested near Vršuta in July 1910. When they complained about their rough treatment, Nikola's government apologised<sup>63</sup>. In May 1914, the speleologist Leo Weirather had been arrested and tried for espionage because the extensive fieldnotes he had made in the border region were written in his personal code words. He was only released days before the crisis developed<sup>64</sup>. Weirather had previously aroused the suspicion of the Montenegrin authorities as well. Daringly, one of Sarajevo assassins, Muhamed Mehmedbašić, had managed to escape over the border to Montenegro and subsequently escaped from imprisonment in Nikšić<sup>65</sup> before he could be extradited to face charges. Richard Neutra recalled a ban on sellers of fruit during the war in Lastva close to the border: '(s)ome peasant sitting by the roadside ...selling watermelons. I did not know then that cholera was endemic and the sellers and their wares out of bounds and medically contraindicated'<sup>66</sup>. Soldiers often contracted endemic diseases during their posting and these problems challenged the smooth running of the state's military machine. Neutra himself caught malaria while in Hercegovina<sup>67</sup>.

After the assassination of the Habsburg heir Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914, anti-Serb and anti-Montenegrin sentiment reached a high point. Across the monarchy, patriotic demonstrations took place in favour of war. Recalling those days in Vienna, novelist Stefan Zweig felt that collective emotions were being directed by the press<sup>68</sup>. A poem entitled ‘thunder of battle’ published in newspaper *Slovenec* on July 27<sup>th</sup> threatened to ‘make a cold home for the Serbs on the willows’ (*Dom hladen vam postavimo ob vrbi*)<sup>69</sup>. This sentiment was transmitted as ‘*Srbe na vrbe*’ or ‘*Srbe ob vrbe*’ (hang the Serbs on the willows)<sup>70</sup> which has been a recurrent anti-Serb slogan ever since. In Vienna, the slogan became the equally unsophisticated ‘*alle Serben müssen sterben*’<sup>71</sup>. Serb-owned property in Sarajevo was gutted by angry rioters<sup>72</sup>. In Trebinje, the angry mob is reported roamed the streets and threatened Serb-owned businesses. They are recorded as having shouted ‘*Na vješala vlaška pašćad!*’ at Orthodox prisoners (which would translate as ‘Vlach<sup>73</sup> (Serb) dogs on the gallows’)<sup>74</sup>.

If the security situation on the Habsburg-Montenegrin border was already tense before the assassination, it dramatically deteriorated in late June 1914. The Governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Oskar Potiorek, who had survived the bullet intended for him on 28<sup>th</sup> June, was determined to crack down on internal dissent. Potiorek had visited Trebinje just a couple weeks before the Sarajevo assassination to review the security on the Eastern border<sup>75</sup>. He, along with many other leading figures in the military, was impatient to resolve the problem of Serbia with force. In this respect, his views intersected with many in the Habsburg ruling elite although not all were convinced that war with Serbia would bode well. As the mastermind behind the first and second offensives against Serbia in 1914, Potiorek eventually had to retire early in 1915 because of Serbian victories. During the Drina Campaign in August 1914, he issued stern advise to his troops to ‘wipe out’ villages that harboured *komitadjis* and publicize the event<sup>76</sup>, a command which led directly to widespread atrocities against civilians in the Mačva region of Serbia<sup>77</sup>. Also mindful of the threat posed by the Montenegrin border, Potiorek commanded that ‘around Avtovac a number of Hercegovinian villages should be set alight’<sup>78</sup>. In the Trebinje Garrison, the commander Rudolf Braun was an advocate of extreme force against the Orthodox population. Clearly conceived as a civilizing duty, he told the newly arrived Richard Neutra in 1914 ‘with scarcely subdued excitement in his voice that every man...was welcome at this crucial moment’<sup>79</sup>.

After the declaration of war with Serbia, the authorities in the *Ostgrenze* garrisons began to review their security arrangements. On August 4<sup>th</sup> it was forbidden to burn lanterns during the night. The security of bridges and railway station was deemed to be imperative<sup>80</sup>. Shepherds lead their flocks over mountainous passes over state borders and this practice was effectively terminated during the war years 1914-18<sup>81</sup>. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, Montenegro declared war on Austria-Hungary which exacerbated the concerns about the security of the *Ostgrenze*. Although King Nikola was a great admirer of the elderly Emperor Franz Joseph, he felt duty bound to support Serbia, which had been at war with the Habsburg Monarchy since the last days of July. In total 103 Serbs were hanged without trial between June and August 1914 in Trebinje alone<sup>82</sup>. Other people were hanged at the railway station at Hum or killed in paramilitary operations. Men from the villages near the border including Lastva, Zubci and Klobuk were especially high among the casualties<sup>83</sup>. Hanging was the standard form of execution in the Habsburg Monarchy in 1914, but only inflicted on the over 20s. It was a very swift procedure because of the use of a device which was intermediate between a garrotte and traditional gallows and could be inflicted upon both women and men. Furthermore, only a close examination of a corpse could determine whether the act was self-inflicted or not. By 1914, public executions had become less frequent in the Habsburg Monarchy as elsewhere in Europe. Other Serbs were interned in camps within the Habsburg Monarchy<sup>84</sup> or expelled from the territory and their homes. Wayne Vucinich remembered the fate of his relatives: ‘When World War I broke out and Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia in 1914, families in Bileća Rudine were faced with special hardships. At the beginning of the war, Austria-Hungary ordered frontier villagers to withdraw into the interior’<sup>85</sup>. The *Bosnische Post* published lists of people who had forfeited their Habsburg citizenship, many of whom came from this region<sup>86</sup>. Jonathan Gumz has argued in his book on ‘Habsburg Serbia’ that the collective effort of the Serbs to fight against the invasion was a novel phenomenon which triggered widespread distrust within Hercegovina<sup>87</sup>. He carefully documents the persecution of Orthodox people during the summer of 1914 within the monarchy. Executions took place only days after the Montenegrin declaration of war on Austria-Hungary on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1914. In effect judicial executions look strongly like a military action to neutralise a troublesome region.

The Habsburg authorities in Trebinje and Bileća feared signals sent to the Montenegrins<sup>88</sup>. One garrison memo described the population of Dubočani close to the border as both 'hostile and unreliable' and called for a guard to be mounted at Kosijerevo<sup>89</sup>. In turn, Montenegrin raids on their neighbour became very daring. In early August 1914 they occupied several villages close to the frontier and captured Habsburg officers<sup>90</sup>; 'Petar Radoman, whom the police had considered one of their own, greeted the Montenegrin troops entering the village of Lastva: "Welcome, Montenegrins. I wish you good fortune. Long live the King and Montenegrins!"'<sup>91</sup>. No doubt Habsburg soldiers were afraid because of the reputation of their adversaries for savagery<sup>92</sup>. During the Balkan Wars, it had been frequently reported in the Habsburg press that the troops of King Nikola had cut off the ears and noses of their Albanian enemies<sup>93</sup>. There is no doubt that fear of Montenegrins was absolutely genuine in these circumstances. Even Richard Neutra who learnt Serbian and showed exceptional empathy towards local people, was worried (as he put it) that 'twelve men from Bosnia and a young officer aspirant (i.e. himself) from our distant metropolis (were...) facing the mountains and mountaineers of Montenegro, who had knives with which to cut our throats, pistols, guns and matches'<sup>94</sup>. Captain Emil Stettner and his colleagues based at the Bileća garrison documented war crimes and torture committed by their Montenegrin adversaries. When they found the corpse of a dead comrade, they deduced he had had a fire lit under his head<sup>95</sup>.

One of the ways in which Orthodox culture was kept alive during the Habsburg period was through religious practices such as pilgrimages<sup>96</sup>. In August 1913, an annual pilgrimage to the Orthodox Church at Kosijerevo<sup>97</sup> was forbidden due to fears of an outbreak of cholera<sup>98</sup>. The following August, the monastery was set alight by local *Schutzkorps* who burnt books and manuscripts<sup>99</sup>. Paramilitary groups, mostly consisting of Muslims in the *Ostgrenze* region, had been formed at the outbreak of war to police the local population<sup>100</sup>. They were recruited and resources by the state, but not uniformed. Sometimes the *Schutzkorps* were mistaken for rebel bands. Such was the confusion about their role and actions that at the outbreak of war, army personnel were cautioned not to fire on the *Schutzkorps* (who would be wearing yellow armbands) accidentally and to proceed with '*kaltblütiger Vorsicht* (cold-blooded care)'<sup>101</sup>. Orthodox Churches were deemed suspicious because church bells could be used to warn the enemy<sup>102</sup>. The actions of individual priests exacerbated mistrust of the

Orthodox. When the Habsburg army captured Loznica in Serbia in August 1914, they captured enemy intelligence, which led to the arrest of 101 Orthodox priests in Bosnia and Hercegovina<sup>103</sup>. Vidak Parežanin, a priest from Lastva was hanged in early August 1914. Just before his execution, he shouted out ‘Long Live King Petar’<sup>104</sup>, a defiant gesture reminiscent of Guglielmo Oberdan’s execution in Trieste in 1882 which had been used as an anti-Habsburg protest<sup>105</sup>.

Soldiers subsequently expressed regret at the atrocities against Orthodox people in 1914 in memoirs written after the events with some benefit of hindsight. Contemporary commentators have also been struck by the extreme callousness of the 1914 executions<sup>106</sup>. Dione Neutra recalled her husband Richard’s hatred of the retribution against the Serbs in an interview conducted in 1978 after his death: ‘He talked about the people he met (i.e. in Trebinje)... how his commander was a sadist, who was able to play out his sadistic tendencies... He was just a small town clerk in Vienna, but then he became his commander<sup>107</sup>...apparently he (i.e. Neutra) felt a great feeling of injustice about things, executions which he commandeered (sic) of the native population and so on’<sup>108</sup>. In the collections of the Prague-based photographer Zikmund Reach there are images of the hangings of Trebinje that might have been taken and then carefully preserved as a kind of protest against the executions<sup>109</sup>. Certainly, there are an extraordinary number of graphic images of hangings from 1914 that have survived in archives in the region. Looking back on the time he spent in Bileća during the war, Dalmatian Antonio Budini also expressed regret about the ‘horrible’ executions of local men by the ‘fierce’ Colonel Stettner<sup>110</sup>. If we examine a source written at the time, there was clearly defensiveness about the atrocities against Serbs. Ludwig Thallóczy insisted that it was a myth (*Legende*) that there had been a lot of ‘hangings from trees’ although he did concede that policy towards the ‘komitadjis’ had been arbitrary<sup>111</sup>. Perhaps also mindful of the impact of the executions of Serbs both on the regime’s reputation and morale of troops, Braun asked for evidence of atrocities (by Montenegrins....) and to be collected and even photographed<sup>112</sup>.

Close to the garrison, there was an attempt to preserve Central European culture during the war, despite the shortages and tension caused by the crisis in the vicinity. On August 18<sup>th</sup> 1914, Trebinje prepared for the eighty-fourth birthday of the Emperor Franz Josef. Richard Neutra recalled ‘a milling crowd of soldiers on furlough, Serbian peasants and lots of girls

had got together for the celebration and preparations had been started for the fireworks in the evening. I looked forward to a good time, all dressed up in my best linen uniform with my calvary saber clanking and clattering on the pavement at every step'<sup>113</sup>. The classical repertoire was played in the town and in the officers' messes in Bileća where they were treated to a sentimental performance of Rudolf Siczynski's 1914 song 'Wien, du Stadt meiner Träume'<sup>114</sup>. On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1914 'Kapellmeister Riedl and his orchestra played pieces by Beethoven, Swendsen and Grieg, and 1,200 Krone was collected for charity'<sup>115</sup>. Many local Serbs remained loyal to the Habsburg state and even prided themselves on their military prowess. Captain Gojkomir Glogovac from Bileća received the Military Order of Maria Teresa, the highest recognition for bravery that was bestowed in the First World War in 1917<sup>116</sup>.

### **Military Contingency or Intent to Destroy?**

In 1914, Habsburg military officials had the legal power to execute suspicious individuals<sup>117</sup>. According to Jonathan Gumz, the army 'took Serb civilian hostages and threatened them with execution if Army regulations were undermined by Serb civilians. The *Dienstreglement* recommended this general course of action for securing lines of transport and communication, but clearly the Army was operating at the margins of the *Dienstreglement* here'<sup>118</sup>. Later in the war, representatives of the Habsburg regime still planned to settle the frontier region with communities whose loyalty could be trusted<sup>119</sup>. Much of the literature on the Balkan Fronts during the First World War is focussed either on the incompetence of Austria-Hungary and the fragility of Franz Joseph's Empire or alternatively on the annihilation of and genocide against the Serb people as a whole. Examining different theatres of war in the Balkan should help us to better understand the atrocities against Orthodox Serbs, but also to understand the expectations and fears of Habsburg troops. For John Lampe, the persecution of Serbs in the Drina Valley was the first instance of what he refers to as "active ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia and Hercegovina<sup>120</sup>. Geoffrey Wawro has written at length about Habsburg military incompetence in his splendid monograph *A Mad Catastrophe*, but also discusses Ludwig Thallóczy's plans to alter Serbia the autumn of 1914. Thallóczy wrote Potiorek in late October 1914 to recommend "the West Europeanization of the Serbs with a strong hand" the moment the kingdom was defeated in battle' revealing the extent to

which some Habsburg officials wanted to control the Orthodox population <sup>121</sup>. A concentration on the failures of the Habsburg military campaigns in the Balkans in 1914 could distract from the intentions of those in power who wanted to crush Serbia and severely undermine the sources of Orthodox power and culture in Bosnia and Hercegovina through propaganda and deed. It could also be the case that the Habsburg regime was both incompetent and determined to annihilate a domestic and foreign threat in 1914. Regime efficiency was little barrier to the Istanbul government in 1915 or extreme Ukrainian nationalists at the end of the war. Clearly there were many individuals with a clear vision of a strong, harmonious multi-confessional state under the Emperor and these individuals who probably constituted the vast majority of Habsburg subjects at any given time. But at the same time, there were individuals, concentrated in the armed forces - most notably Oskar Potiorek - who wished to destroy the roots of Serb life in the *Ostgrenze* region. Military contingency bled into an intent to destroy a discernible group, namely an ancient ethnic/religious community descended from medieval *župe*.

When Austria-Hungary did finally invade Montenegro in January 1916, it launched its victorious attack from Trebinje with Rudolph Braun at the helm. Italy had initially remained neutral against the Habsburg Monarchy in 1914 in return for a guarantee of no direct attack on Montenegrin territory and a further guarantee of its own security in the Adriatic<sup>122</sup>. King Nikola quickly capitulated and went into exile. Ultimately, the Habsburgs were forced to abandon the town, their war graves<sup>123</sup>, their business and building projects in 1918. After four hard years of war, Trebinje, Bileća and Avtovac (and their garrisons) were taken by the Serbian army in October 1918 and subsequently incorporated in the new state of Yugoslavia. Travelling in the region in December 1918, Harold Temperley described the Trebišnjica river as 'a series of deep green, pale lakes extending for miles, like a necklace of jade on a dull green string'. Despite the tranquillity of this landscape, the small villages and towns of this region had experienced an assault on their way of life and tradition in 1914 and for decades before which had long term consequences not only for this region but for the wider Balkans<sup>124</sup>.

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2 Despite gaining recognition for its statehood, the Montenegrin authorities resented some of the stipulations of the Berlin Treaty Congress, especially Article 29, which limited their authority at the expense of Austria-Hungary, see Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, 10.

3 Grandits, "Violent social disintergration", 110.

4 On the Uprising, see Ekmečić, *Ustanak u Bosni*.

5 Freeman, *Sketches* 261. See also Terzuolo, "The Garibaldini in the Balkans", 110-126.

6 Oršolić, "Sudjelovanje dalmatinskih postrojbi", 303.

7 Korać, *Trebinje*, 10.

8 Kovačević was to achieve the status of a legendary *hajduk* (bandit).

9 "Die Kämpfe unserer Truppen 1881—1882" *Oesterreichischer Soldatenfreund*, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1893, 272-4.

10 Pachauer, "Austro-Hungarian Fortification", 151.

11 Dedijer, "La transhumance".

12 Even as late as during the First World War, one soldier noted that the local soldiers were 'quasi tutti analfabeti' Budini, *Le memorie di guerra di papa*, 87.

13 "Das Barackenlager in Aftovac bei Gacko", *Neue Illustrierte Zeitung*, 19. February 1882, 327.

14 "Die bosnisch-herzegowinische Okkupation", *Prager Abendblatt* 1<sup>st</sup> October 1878, 1.

15 See for example, Gejza von Bukowski, "Beitrag zur Geologie".

16 Andrejka *Slovenski fantje*, 337. See also Kerchnawe *Unser letzter Kampf*.

17 "kriegslustiger und grausamen Bewohnern", Salis-Soglio, *Mein Leben*, 136.

18 Preindlsberger-Mrazović, *Bosnisches Skizzenbuch*, 332. Mrazović described her own work as 'an attempt to furnish some insight into the soul of an unknown and therefore despised people', see Hawkesworth, *Voices in the Shadows*, 25

19 Kraljačić, *Kalajev režim*, 106.

20 See in particular, Vialla de Sommières, *Voyage historique*.

21 'The Black Mountaineers', *The New York Times* February 15<sup>th</sup> 1878, 4.

22 Yriate, *Bosnia et Herzégovine*, 265.

23 Pachauer, "Austro-Hungarian Fortification", 151.

24 Neutra, *Life and Shape*, 103.

25 On language in the late Habsburg military see, Scheer, "Die k.u.k. *Regimentssprachen*", 75-92.

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Richard Neutra thought that ‘communication issues’ hampered the efficiency of the garrisons around Trebinje, see Welter, “From the Landscape of War”, 219.

26 Hutchinson, *Motoring in the Balkans*, 225; Another contemporary remarked that ‘the mountain pass leading to Trebinje bristles with forts old and new’, see Holbach, *Dalmatia*, 160.

27 Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*.

28 Planskizze von Trebinje, 3/1/1870, AT-OeStA/KA KPS GPA Inland C VII Trebinje, 2. Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.

29 Hoernes, *Dinarische Wanderungen*, 71.

30 Henderson, *A British Officer in the Balkans*, 40.

31 Huseinović & Babić, *Svjetlost Evrope*, 66.

32 Absolon “Z výzkumných cest po krásech Balkánu”, 622-624.

33 In his memoir, Alfred Jansa remembering the pleasure of travelling to Trebinje on the train, see *Feldmarschalleutnant Alfred Jansa*, 200.

34 Berdan, “Die Machtpolitik Österreich-Ungarns“, 68.

35 The sandfly is also known as pappataci. On contemporary responses to the problem see Pick, “Zur Pathologie”, 1141-1145.

36 AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Bileca, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.

37 J. Souvan, “Fastnachtsspiel: in der Hercegovina”, *Agramer Zeitung*, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1893, 1-2.

38 “Vom Insurrections-Schauplatze”, *Oesterreichischer Soldatenfreund*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1882, 211.

39 Dedijer was able to write with particular authority about the region because his father Jevto Dedijer was from Čepelica, a village close to Bileća.

40 Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo*, 133.

41 Wayne Vucinich, “Transhumance”, 73-5. The naturalist Georg Veith who did research on snakes while posted in Hercegovina is rather an exception and he was interested in adopting local knowledge and testing it against his own knowledge of the classics. During the First World War, Veith navigated through the limestone terrain asking his men to survive on the boiled roots of a plant they called *kozlac* (lords and ladies), see Georg Veith, ‘Der Feldzug von Dyrrhachium’, 254-56.

42 “Tagesneuigkeiten”, *Mährisch-Schlesische Presse*, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1909, 4.

43 Robert Doerr, *Das Pappataciefieber*, 147.

44 “Die Manöveropfer von Bilek”, *Reichspost*, 29th July 190, 1-2.

45 “Die Soldatenrevolte in Bilek”, *Neues Wiener Journal*, 4th January 1904, 4.

46 Schachinger, *Die Bosniaken kommen*, 53.

47 Veith „Der Feldzug in Albanien“, 511-548. On the problems of using military horses in this region, see „Die Schwere Feldbatterie in der Hercegovina 1878“, *Die Vedette*, 3rd July 1889, 3-5.

48 Eduard von Kählig, “Eine Erinnerung an die Bekämpfung des Aufstandes in der Herzegowina 1882”, *Danzers Armee-Zeitung*, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1907, 1-5.

49 Hajdarpašić, *Whose Bosnia?*

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- 50 Marich, *Memoirs*. 8.
- 51 Lane, *City of the Century*, 76-77
- 52 Šćekić ‘Crnogorski dobrovoljci’, 223-256.
- 53 His papers including his army records are online at [https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2020601/contributions\\_20404.html](https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/2020601/contributions_20404.html)
- 54 ‘Serbische ‘Staatsangehörige’ memo dated 28th July 1914, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Austrian State Military Archives (Kriegsarchiv), Vienna.
- 55 See for example, ‘Serbengreuel’, *Vorarlberger Volksfreund*, 19. März 1913, 5.
- 56 Schwenk, *Als Kriegsgefangener*, 34.
- 57 “Der Konflikt in Montenegro”, *Grazer Volksblatt*, 26. März 1913, 1-2; “Die Affäre Palic”, *Fremden-Blatt*, 16th December 1913, 5.
- 58 “Die Ermordung eines Franziskaners bei Djakova”, *Volksblatt für Stadt und Land*, 30th March 1913, 3. This version of events was reported verbatim in numerous Habsburg Monarchy newspapers.
- 59 “Die Lage in Albanien”, *Fremden-Blatt*, 23rd September 1913 (evening edition), 1.
- 60 ‘Ich selbst sah in Sarajevo schon heute, um 10% auf der Straße, wie im Kaffeehause die dort sitzenden Serben mit ihrem eigentümlich witternden Blick aufleuchteten’ in Thallóczy “Ein Reisebericht”, 430.
- 61 Salis-Soglio, *Mein Leben*, 150.
- 62 “Grenzüberschreitungen”, *Danzers Armee-Zeitung*, 6th May 1909, 3.
- 63 Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle*, 64.
- 64 “Spionageprozeß”, *Pester Lloyd*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1914 p. 11; “Die Verhaftung des Höhlenforschers”, *Neues Wiener Tagblatt (Tages-Ausgabe)*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1914, 14.
- 65 ‘Der Prozeß gegen die Attentäter in Sarajevo’, *Neue Freie Presse (Abendblatt)*, 13th October 1914, 2-3.
- 66 Neutra, *Life and Shape*, 104. According to Mary Sparks, pilgrims returning from Mecca to Sarajevo had their luggage disinfected in Sarajevo (putatively) to protect against typhus, cholera and plague, see Sparks, *The Development of Austro-Hungarian Sarajevo*, 106.
- 67 Welter, “From the Landscape of War”, 219.
- 68 Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern*, 252. ‘Man konnte sich des Eindrucks nicht erwehren, daß sich irgendeine Aktion publizistisch vorbereite’.
- 69 ‘Bojni grom’, *Slovenec*, 27th July 1914, 1.
- 70 Mitrović, *Serbia during the First World War*, 64.
- 71 Trotsky, *My Life*, 232.
- 72 “Grosse serben feindliche Demonstration in Sarajevo”, *Sarajewoer Tagblatt*, June 29th 1914, 1. Note the two spellings of the Bosnian capital.
- 73 The now archaic term ‘Vlach’ was used to indicate Serbs in Bosnia and Hercegovina.
- 74 Popović, *Patnje i žrtve Srba*. ‘Paščad’ is a very strong term of abuse in the local dialect, now somewhat archaic and used occasionally to convey anger.
- 75 ‘Potiorek ist gestern aus Trebinje nach Sarajevo zurückgekehrt’ *Fremden-Blatt*, 19. June 1914.

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- 76 Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*, 142. Other accounts of the first battles of the war include Schindler, “Disaster on the Drina”, 159–195; Rothenberg, “The Austro-Hungarian Campaign”. 127–146.
- 77 Holzer, “Schüsse in Sabac”, 71-85.
- 78 Ludwig Thallóczy noted in his diary on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1914 ‘Potiorek telegraphiert, daß man bei Avtovac eine ganze Menge hercegovinischer Dörfer anzünden mußte’, in Grunert, *Glauben im Hinterland*, 523.
- 79 Neutra, *Life and Shape*, 102.
- 80 ‘An der Bezirksamt in Trebinje’, Op. Nr. 9, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.
- 81 Vucinich, “Transhumance”, 71.
- 82 Holzer, *Das Lächeln der Henker*, 71.
- 83 Popović, *Patnje i žrtve Srba*.
- 84 Lukic & Mentzel, “*Popis*”, 15-69.
- 85 Vucinich “Transhumance”, 69.
- 86 R.W. Seton-Watson, “Frightfulness in Bosnia”, *The Times*, Tuesday March 30th, 1915; p. 11
- 87 Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, 55-56.
- 88 Feldpostamt, Nr 305, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1914, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.
- 89 ‘feindselig’ and ‘unverlässlich’. See ‘Allgemeine Situation in Montenegro’ Trebinje 29th July 1914, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.
- 90 “Serbia check Austria’s Advance. Chief of Staff estimates attacking forces on Save and Danube at over 250, 000”, *New York Times*, 18th August 1914, p. 3
- 91 Mitrović, *Serbia during the First World War*, 75.
- 92 Reiss, *How Austria-Hungary waged War*, 46.
- 93 See, for example, “Kriegsbriefe aus Montenegro”, *Danzers Armee-Zeitung*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1912, p. 4
- 94 Neutra, *Life and Shape*, 107.
- 95 ‘Celui-ci avait vrai semblablement été dépouillé de ses habits — comme c’est l’habitude des Monténégrins — puis on l’ avait martyrisé jusqu’à ce que mort s’ensuivît, en allumant du feu sous sa tête’ in *Recueil de témoignages*, 161.
- 96 Grunert, *Glauben im Hinterland*, 100.
- 97 At the time, the Kosijerevo Monastery was in Hercegovina, but was moved to Montenegro after the creation of an artificial lake beside Bileća in 1968.
- 98 ‘Die Cholera’ *Neue Freie Presse*, 28th August 1913, 9.
- 99 Popović, *Patnje i žrtve Srba*.
- 100 ‘Verwendung der freiwillig Einrückenden’, Res. Nr 31, Trebinje 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1914, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.

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- 101 Mostar 4th August 1914, Auf Op. Nr. 43 v. 31/7 des 6 Armeekmdo, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.
- 102 Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, 38.
- 103 Sondhaus, *World War One*, 82.
- 104 Grunert, *Glauben im Hinterland*, 517.
- 105 Thompson, *White War*, 15-16.
- 106 Miljenko Jergović, “Putovali su zemljom i vješali redom sve na smrt osuđene, od atentatora na Franju Ferdinanda, preko Čaruge, do komunista, pravaša i okorjelih zločinaca” *Jutarnji List*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2017, (online at <https://www.jutarnji.hr/> accessed 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017).
- 107 This probably refers to Captain Endlicher who had worked for the fire brigade in Vienna before the war, see Neutra, *Life and Shape*, 105. Neutra thought that ‘exercises dominated by harsh commanders’ led to difficulties, see Welter, “From the Landscape of War”, 219.
- 108 ‘To tell the truth: oral history transcript’, Dione Neutra interviewed by Lawrence Weschler in 1978, BANC MSS 84/85 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, p. 33
- 109 <https://radiotrebinje.com/zikmund-reah-covjek-koji-je-dokumentovao-zlocine/> (accessed 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017). Other Czech sources suggest a level of unease about violence against Serbs, e.g. Šrámek, *Denik zajatce*.
- 110 Budini, *Le memorie*, 132.
- 111 ‘Die Vorgangsweise gegenüber den Komitadzis war auch nicht immer konsequent’, in Thallóczy, ‘Ein Reisebericht’, 430.
- 112 Feldpostamt 305 am 30 November 1914, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.
- 113 Neutra, *Life and Shape*, 107.
- 114 Budini, *Le memorie*, 85.
- 115 Lyon, *Serbia and the Balkan Front 1914*, 221.
- 116 ‘Hauptmann Gojkomir Glogovac’, *Streffleurs Militärblatt*, 22nd September 1917, 9. He died in exile in Budapest of tuberculosis just five years later in 1922. ‘In Memoriam’, *Danzers Armee-Zeitung*, 17th March 1922, 11
- 117 3<sup>rd</sup> August, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.
- 118 Gumz, *Resurrection and Collapse*, 40.
- 119 Kraljačić, “Austrougarski planovi”.
- 120 Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 109.
- 121 Wawro, *Mad Catastrophe*, 317.
- 122 ‘Italien hat Neutralität erklärt’, Telegramm 5<sup>th</sup>, op. Nr 107, Teilbestand AT-OeStA/KA FA NFA Feste Plätze Festung Trebinje 50, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.
- 123 Freifhofkatasterblatt NR III/ Trebinje. AT-OeStA/KA VL KGräber YU 931, Kriegsarchiv, Vienna.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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