

“Our Turks”, or “real Turks”? Czech perceptions of the Slavic Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina *

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Experience has taught us that even a Turčín [Turk] has good qualities, not to mention the fact that our indigenous Mohammedans make up one Serbian nation with us.
(Josef Holeček, *Bosna a Hercegovina za okupace*, 1901, 43)

Josef Holeček, a journalist and writer known for his affection for the Southern Slavs, opened his book titled *Bosna a Hercegovina za okupace* (Bosnia and Herzegovina under Occupation) with a chapter describing how he met Omer – an “honest Turk”. The coachman working for Herzegovinian Muslim elites did not make a positive first impression: he looked defiant and spouted a stream of Serbian words. During their conversation, his appearance and voice gradually softened, and the author soon understood that the rough exterior hid a good and healthy core (1901, 7, 14–16). Still, as we later learn, something differentiated Omer from his Christian brothers: when provoked, he looked like “a true Turkish fanatic” (44).

Holeček’s depiction of Omer illustrates the continual fluctuation that characterized the Czechs’ views of the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Between the 1870s, when Bosnia and Herzegovina came to the attention of the Czech public, and the World War, these views underwent various changes. So did the Czech opinions of the “true”, i.e. Ottoman, Turks: when Holeček wrote about the Southern Slavs’ struggles with the Ottoman Empire in 1876, he depicted their Turkish enemies as cruel and treacherous, almost beyond villainy, mentioning “an evil person or even a Turk” (1876, 27). Twenty-five years later, he admitted that even the (Ottoman) Turks had some positive qualities and many of their weaknesses resulted from the impact of the West (1901, 47). However, although the events of the 1870s affected Czechs’ perceptions of both the Ottoman Turks and the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the complexity of the Czechs’ relationship to the Slavic Muslims cannot be seen as a simple linear development; rather, this article argues, their views can at any time be best defined as ambivalent.

In post-colonial studies, ambivalence designates “the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized”

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(Ashcroft – Griffiths – Tiffin 2007, 10–11). Although the concept is mostly used for the colonized population's relationship to the colonizers, oscillating between, or incorporating both, rejection of and complicity with colonialism, it also refers to the colonial discourse with its patronizing attitude towards the colonized. The latter understanding of ambivalence, describing an approach which is simultaneously (cl) aiming to elevate the “indigenous people” and to capitalize on them, can be extended to other contexts of power, beyond the strictly colonial relationship.

Since Central and South East European historical experience substantially differed from Western imperial projects, it is usually not studied in the framework of colonialism, imperialism and Orientalism. Leaving aside older critiques of Czech capitalist expansion (Nečas 1987), mainstream Czech historiography does not pay attention to Czech colonial ambitions. “Orientalism” is mostly mentioned in value-free descriptions of 19th-century Czech art (Štembera 2008). Notable exceptions include studies of Czech travels to Egypt (Storchová 2005) or the impact of Orientalism on Czech attitudes towards the Balkans (Šístek 2011).

The absence of a “Czech” colonial empire and the resulting reluctance to view the Czech past as connected with colonialism underline the need to examine the Czech relationship to Muslim “Others” within the context of societies that lacked overseas colonies. Andre Gingrich's concept of “frontier Orientalism”, which refers to “nearby intruders at ‘our’ border”, who “are dangerous, almost evenly matched rivals, but not exotic subalterns, servants, and slaves”, rather than to “distant subjugated overseas colonies” seems like a useful lens through which to approach the Czech case (2015, 62). According to Gingrich, Austrian popular culture distinguished the “bad Muslim” (Ottoman Turk) from the “good Muslim” (in Bosnia-Herzegovina) who helped to defend the Austrian homeland: the former, violent and aggressive before 1683, was later portrayed as defeated and humiliated, while the latter could be used against the new (Slavic) enemies before and during World War I (1996, 106–109).

This article examines Czech views of the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as compared to the prevailing opinions about the Ottoman Turks at that time. Although they were sometimes distinguished by the unambiguous labels “Ottomans/Ottoman Turks” (*Osmané/osmanští Turci*) and “Turkified” (*poturčenci*), both groups were often called “Turks” (*Turci* or *Turčini*) or “Muslims” (*moslemíni, mohamedáni*), and by names which became clear only from the context. Looking at both groups together in terms of Gingrich's contrast between “good” and “bad” Muslims can shed light on Czech perceptions of the inhabitants of Bosnia-Herzegovina who were both Muslims and Slavs. This study focuses primarily on travel accounts and other non-fiction works published in Czech between the 1870s and 1918 and written from personal experience, and thus accepted as truly portraying the Muslim population. A brief summary of the Czechs' opinions on the Turks in the second half of the 19th century in the first part of the article provides a background against which the distinct features of the Czech views of the Slavic Muslims are outlined in the second part of the contribution. The core of the article, its third part, is devoted to images of Muslim women who, according to Gingrich, hardly figured in the “frontier” version of Orientalism.

19TH-CENTURY STEREOTYPES OF “THE TURK”

Czech views of the Turks in the late 19th century drew on existing pre-conceptions, based largely on the stereotypes of “the Turk” as the arch-enemy of Christendom, which have survived from early modern times. Although the Czech lands never fell under Ottoman rule, “the Turkish threat” had been present in early modern Czech history even before 1526, when the Czech lands became a part of the Habsburg Empire. The actual battles did not occur on Czech territory with the accompanying effects on the civilian population, as was the case in neighboring Austrian or Slovak areas, but the Czechs participated in the wars with the Ottoman Empire and paid taxes to support them. As a result, “the Turk” was a relevant “Other” for early modern Czechs and has become the subject not only of numerous pamphlets and learned treatises, but also part of the folk tradition (Rataj 2002; Lisy-Wagner 2013). Given the less direct experience with fighting, however, Czech folk culture had retained only weak memories of “the Turkish threat”; folk ballads with Turkish themes, for instance, were not particularly dramatic and often had an optimistic, defiant or humorous side (Sirovátka 1968, 102–108).

The Turks became an immediate concern again in the 1870s, when the Czechs passionately followed the news about the uprisings in the Ottoman Balkans, their suppression, and the ensuing Russo-Turkish war. A number of pamphlets were published, reviving the stereotype of “the terrible Turk”: the Turks were described as vengeful, treacherous and cruel monsters, torturing Slavs and lusting for (especially Slavic) women. Pictures of extreme violence, with the Turks impaling enemies’ bodies on sticks, cutting their heads and limbs, and blood spouting to the sky, were common in both fiction and non-fiction works of the late 19th century. In this period, relevant for the construction of Orientalist stereotypes, the Czech views of the Turks were closely connected with nationalism: the resurrection of anti-Turkish rhetoric corresponded to an upsurge of Slavic solidarity and Pan-Slavism. With the increasing emphasis on Slavic kinship, the fate of the Slavs – Bulgarians, Serbians, and Montenegrins – who lived under Ottoman rule gained in importance for the Czechs. As a result, the image of “the Turk” ceased to be a mere historical reminiscence of the “Turkish threat” of the distant past or a proxy of a generalized enemy image, but became relevant for national (Pan-Slavic) awareness. This fits one of the features of frontier Orientalism, which “can attain a central role for the nationalisms it feeds” (Gingrich 2010, 78).

At the same time, the number of Czech men (women did not publish travelogues on the Ottoman metropolis) who visited the Ottoman Empire started to increase in the second half of the 19th century. They traveled mainly as tourists and in their accounts, they referred to the same works that had shaped their travel impressions; these ranged from early modern Czech travel accounts, especially the 16th-century *Přihody Václava Vratislava z Mitrovic* (*The Adventures of Baron Wenceslas Wratislaw of Mitrowitz*) to famous Western travelogues (including Byron), contemporary exotic novels, such as those of Pierre Loti, to various versions of the *Thousand and One Nights*, popular among travelers to the Middle East everywhere in Europe. Despite similar inspiration, when compared to their French and British counterparts, the

Czechs seemed to be less interested in politics, despotism and slavery, and focused mainly on the character of the Turks.

The Czech travel accounts presented rather diverse images of the Turks. Reproducing older stereotypes, they depicted the Turks as bloodthirsty, violent and vengeful, and occasionally as lustful. For some, the Turks were Asian barbarians or fanatics (Wagner 1889, 189; Guth 1896, 128; Svátek 1909, 24–25). Nonetheless, late 19th- and early 20th-century travelers to Istanbul showed that the Turks' (former) strength and violence were not their primary worries any more: their major criticism and complaints concerned the constant requests for *baksheesh* and bribes. Reflecting more modern attitudes, they portrayed the Turks as lazy, indifferent and fatalist, lacking education and civilization, but also as exotic and intriguing. Religion was seen as a source of the Turks' difference and interpreted in contradictory ways: on the one hand, it was responsible for the fatalism and fanaticism of the Turks; on the other hand, it inspired their charity, kindness towards animals and sincere religious devotion. The travelers further praised Turkish hospitality, some appreciated the shopkeepers' unobtrusiveness (Štolba 1918, 101; Klaus 1910, 223–224) or emphasized that the Turks accepted refugees; their willingness to do so, as well as their tolerance, could serve as examples to many "civilized nations" (Wagner 1889, 193–194). Only rarely did the positive evaluation of the Empire and its inhabitants set the tone of the whole travel account. As one traveler wrote, the social life of the Turks is much friendlier, more intimate and more sincere than that of the Czechs. They do not have social classes, and aristocracy by birth is almost unknown to them. Hypocrisy, deceit and falsehood are not so common as in our society; in contrast, we find justice, charity and hospitality more often in the Turkish character than among the Czechs. Compared to the Czechs, the Turks are also more content. "Isn't a pleasant harmless carelessness with a cup of coffee better than drinking spirits in our pubs?" he wondered (Klaus 1910, 197–198, 223).

Although such strong praise was exceptional, "the Turk" as depicted by the Czech travelers was neither a fearful enemy, nor a completely negative figure. The Czech travelogues lacked some of the concerns such as inter-racial mixing (Heffernan 2011, 158–162) that were essential for British travel narratives on the Ottoman Empire, but they created similarly heterogeneous images of the Turks, affected perhaps more by current Western imagery than by the Czechs' past involvement in "the Turkish wars".

THE TURKIFIED SLAVIC (BR)OTHERS

After the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 (Okey 2007; Ruthner – Reynolds – Reber – Detrez 2015), the Czechs were able to benefit from the Austro-Hungarian imperial enterprise and some did so. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Czechs founded factories and construction firms in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Czech capital participated in financing local businesses, and branches of Czech financial institutions were established in Sarajevo (Nečas 1987). The Czechs served as clerks in the Austro-Hungarian administration of the occupied lands and Bosnia-Herzegovina provided work for many Czech teachers, doctors, architects, officers and skilled and unskilled workers.

The increasing interest in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the occupation is manifested in the two major Czech encyclopedias of the second half of the 19th century: František Ladislav Rieger's *Slovník naučný* (1860–1874) and Jan Otto's *Ottův slovník* (1888–1909). Rieger devoted six pages to Bosnia (822–827); while Otto's entry on Bosnia (with Herzegovina), written by six authors, had 16 pages (428–444). The latter developed the information provided by the former, including that related to the local “Mohammedans”; they considered themselves descendants of the Serbs, either of the old Bosnian nobility who had converted to Islam in order to keep their estates, or of town-based craftsmen and traders; they called themselves Turks (*Turčini*), but had not forgotten their origins and national language. In fact, the begs were supposed to have preserved the purest Serbian language, even though they soiled it by mixing Turkish words in it (Rieger 1860, 824; *Ottův slovník* 1891, 432). *Ottův slovník* added further details on the Muslims: although the Bosnian Mohammedans were affected by fatalism and fanaticism, their Slavic origin was evident from the fact that polygamy did not spread among them. Until the occupation, they had been the worst enemies of their Christian brothers as reflected in local idioms, according to which it was a sin to kill a dog or an ox, but to kill a Christian was a merit, and one could do what he pleased with an Orthodox, provided one washed one's hands afterward (1891, 432–433). These idioms, together with other information, were repeated in later travelogues (Zavadil 1911, 28).

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, the relationship to the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina was affected also by the Czechs' participation in the occupation and suppression of the armed resistance of the local (mainly Muslim) population. The resulting negative views of the Muslims were reflected both in the memoirs of the Czech participants in the campaigns and in folk culture. Accounts of the Czechs who took part in the conquest of Bosnia-Herzegovina revived the stereotype of the “terrible Turk”: in an anonymous account from 1883, the local Muslims were described as barbarians and beasts, who tormented captives, forced them to kiss their feet and cut off the heads of dead enemies (*Povstání v Bosně* 1883, 74–80). A decade later, Edmund Chaura compared the local Muslims to cannibals: “we stood in full armour against the abominably cannibal enemy and I do not exaggerate, the Zulus, Bagirmis, Nyam Nyams, Bechuans, Hottentots and similar South African tribes have behaved with more chivalry towards European travelers than Bosnian Turks towards us” (1893, 37–38). And yet, most of these people had Slavic blood in their veins, “poisoned in a Turkish way”, he sighed (103). Another participant of the campaign, Ignát Hořica, in an account published long after his death, depicted a much more complex image of the Muslims. In his book, Muslims occasionally cut off the heads of their enemies, but they are brave and defend their country against invaders; both sides of the conflict appear equally violent. Even when he wrote about a “Turkish fanatic” who is executed for murder, the author showed that this act was a reaction to murders committed by the Austro-Hungarian army. Hořica believed the war to be absurd: “How many men of the beautiful and healthy Slavic tribe were annihilated in a short time! It was also a war of brothers against brothers, and [look] how it was conducted!” (1909, 47). Although such an opinion was not common among the participants of the campaigns of the late 1870s and early 1880s, Hořica's work shows that Czech views

of the Slavic Muslims did not develop linearly, from negative to positive images, but sometimes combined the two.

Once the opposition against the occupation was suppressed, Austrian elites started to perceive Bosnian Muslims as potential allies against the Slavs. For the Czechs, in contrast, the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina became a force that should be persuaded to unite with their Slavic brothers. Obviously, the Czechs made an effort to differentiate the Slavic Muslims from the Ottoman Turks. They emphasized that the Muslims and Christians of Bosnia-Herzegovina spoke the same Slavic language and had preserved many habits and customs from their common Christian past: sincere hospitality, faithfulness in friendship and brotherhood of choice (*pobratimství*); even if they called themselves Turks, the Muslims often did not know Turkish and they felt real patriotic love for their country (Třeštík 1897, 21–22; Toužimský 1882, 119–123; Daneš 1909, 92). Others noted that the Muslims and Christians of Bosnia-Herzegovina had common interests and legal consciousness, which “betrayed” the Muslims’ Slavic origins (*Dvacet let práce kulturní* 1899, 15).

The Czechs who visited Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1890s and 1900s mentioned the animosity and even cruelty which the Muslim Slavs had shown towards Christians in the past (Třeštík 1897, 20; Zavadil 1911, 28). In this context, the main characteristic ascribed to the Muslims was “fanaticism”: their deep, even fanatic devotion to Islam was astonishing, although many of them had little idea about Mohammad’s teachings (Třeštík 1897, 21–22), and their religious fanaticism made them cruel enemies. Interestingly, according to some travelers, the same fanaticism also gave them moral support against corruption coming from “civilized” Europe (Daneš 1909, 92). As Holeček put it, as long as “the strong bases of the pure Mohammedan family life remain on the whole unshaken and as long as the society is based on undisturbed family life it is not lost” (1901, 63). Family habits were for the Czechs the most significant and telling aspects of the Muslims’ Slavness: Muslims shared with their Christian compatriots a patriarchal mentality, they were monogamous, did not use the right of the Hanefite rite to four wives, rarely divorced and their family life was orderly, showing exemplary companionship and mutual respect among its members (Třeštík 1897, 22; Toužimský 1882, 123). Holeček went so far as to claim that, “in truth, one does not find among the Western Christians either so much conjugal love or so much family love as among the Mohammedans” (46).

These views display the ambivalence in the Czechs’ perceptions of the Slavic Muslims: as Slavs they were seen as relatives, yet, as Muslims, they traditionally belonged to the (Turkish) enemies of the Slavs. The “Turkish heritage” also made them more backward than their Christian (br)others, to use the concept coined by Edin Hajdar-pasic for the Muslims of Bosnia, who had the potential of being “both brothers and Others” (2015, 16).

WOMEN IN THE ORIENT

One of the main differences between classical and frontier Orientalism, according to Gingrich, is the place of women: in contrast to the male erotic fantasies about Muslim women typical of the former, the latter pays no attention to women, apart from

“our” women threatened by the “bad Muslim” (2015, 63). From this perspective, the Czechs apparently belonged to the sphere of classical Orientalism: they were not only intrigued, but often fascinated by Turkish women. Travelers to the Ottoman Empire without exception dealt with this subject because “the Turkish woman, about whom we hear and read so much in Europe, is certainly something particularly attractive to every foreigner in the land of the crescent” (Svátek 1909, 51). Two approaches mingled in the descriptions of Turkish women: emphasis on women’s subordinated position and oppression (Hálek 1925, 192–196; Svátek 1909, 7) and attraction for mysterious women as sexual objects. Both were connected in the notion of the harem, which could be described both as a prison (Kaminský 1909, 94–95; Guth 1896, 137) and as a realm of sexual phantasies (Svátek 1909, 166, 242; Klaus 1910, 229).

Most travelers agreed that Turkish/Muslim women were beautiful, at least when young, as “princesses from a fairy tale” (Štolba 1918, 121), with beautiful ivory-like faces, soft lips and bright eyes full of longing (Svátek 1909, 49). The more modern or coquettish ones wore only very light veils, which allowed the travelers to admire their exotic beauty (Jiřík 1913, 34; Svátek 1909, 56; Raušar 1903, 130); after 1908, it was even possible to see women on promenades without veils (Klaus 1910, 229–230). In the harem, women lived like slaves, completely segregated from the world and dependent on men; consequently, they were uneducated (only rich families had female governesses for their daughters), they could not choose their husbands, were considered men’s property, had to obey their male relatives, first fathers and then spouses, and spent their lives in idleness, merely taking care of their appearance. When travelers reflected on relations in Muslim families, they portrayed them as lacking love, and provided details on marriage as a contract, wedding, divorce and heritage laws, although some noted Muslim women’s comparable independence regarding their own property (Svátek 1909, 53–54).

When Svátek mentioned that “we hear and read so much [about the Turkish woman] in Europe”, it was not mere rhetoric (1909, 51). Czech perceptions of Turkish women’s lives were undoubtedly shaped by Western Orientalist authors such as the popular Pierre Loti. The author of one travelogue, Jiří Guth, translated Loti’s *Les Désenchantées* (*The Disenchanted*, 1906) into Czech under the title *Harémy kouzla zbavené* (Harems deprived of magic), but travelers mentioned Loti’s other novels as well (Svátek 1909, 106–109). Czech travelogues represented a masculine view of Oriental eroticism and the depictions of Turkish women show little originality: women symbolized the Oriental, the exotic and the different (Lewis 2004). Yet, the Czechs did not simply take over Western views. For instance, in contrast to British travelogues (Goldsworthy 2006, 30), Czech travelers did not identify the Ottoman Orient with femininity and the West with masculinity. Perhaps the character of the Czech encounters with the “Turks”, which were even in modern times prevalently perceived as Ottoman aggression, together with the memory of the Ottoman army’s strength, revived as the Czechs followed the uprisings in the Balkans and the Russian-Turkish war in the 1870s, prevented attributing effeminacy to the Ottoman Empire and its men.

Compared to the attention paid to women by visitors of Istanbul, in travelogues to Bosnia-Herzegovina Muslim women figured less prominently. Slavic women as

a whole were occasionally depicted as victims of (Ottoman) Turkish lust, at times as fighters, but most often as wives or mothers. Muslim women also appeared mainly in the context of the family, which, the travelers noted, was patriarchal; women's role was limited to the family, but the conjugal relations were distinguished by mutual respect (Holeček 1901, 49–50; Třeštík 1897, 22). According to *Ottův slovník*, Muslim women in Bosnia-Herzegovina had more freedom than Ottoman Turkish women: in Bosnia, even elite women wore only light veils allowing their features to be seen, and in Herzegovina, they did not put on veils at all (1891, 433).

Occasionally, however, Czech travelers alluded to the same imagery, which was used for the description of Ottoman Turkish women, and the travelogues often included similar pictures of women in Oriental clothes. This Orientalizing perspective on Slavic women was widespread among the participants of a trip to the Southern Slavic lands, including Bosnia-Herzegovina, organized by the Czech Tourists' Club in 1897. One of the accounts of the trip described local Muslim women in the same way as others have depicted women of Istanbul: they were lazy and vain, led an idle life in segregation and were so stupid that one could not have a conversation with them (Velcl 1897, 95). Another account of the same trip mentioned that the tourists wanted to see a harem and the female participants were allowed to satisfy their curiosity thanks to a Czech female physician in Mostar, Bohuslava Kecková, who enabled them to enter several local harems (Buchar 1897, 57, 71).

The Orientalist imagery characterized the work of a prolific writer and journalist Bohumil Havlasa. Havlasa participated in the fighting in Bosnia in 1875 and wrote newspaper articles, stories and novels about his real and imagined experiences before he died as a volunteer in the Russo-Turkish war in 1877. One of his novels, *Péri*, takes place during the 1875 insurgence in Bosnia-Herzegovina, when the hero-narrator, a Czech supporter of the Christian insurgents, is captured by the “bloodthirsty demons”, the Mohammedans of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The author uses multiple ethnic designations for the Muslims, including Mohammedans, Muslims, Ottomans, Turks and *Turčíns*, “trueborn Turks” and “Mohammedan Southern Slavs”. He depicts both sides of the conflict as equally violent: a Muslim village is destroyed by the Christian insurgents while a Christian village is annihilated by the “Turks” (1901, 96). The story is reminiscent of a medieval romance: the narrator is imprisoned in the house of the local notable Ibrahim, whose nephew Ahmed is portrayed as handsome and proud (15). Although Ahmed saves the Christian prisoners from the fanatical crowd, the narrator runs away with Zékie, nicknamed *Péri* (“Fairy” in Turkish), boasting: “I have captured the gem of the enemies” (73). Trying to explain to himself his attraction for Zékie, he wonders about “Ottomanism, a character from the harem world. Orient, Orient! Whether rightly so? Whether this explanation was sufficient? I do not know” (104). When Zékie helps to save the Christian prisoners, Ahmed is furious: he swears that he will not try to prove that even a “Mohammedan” can behave in a “European” way anymore, but will just seek revenge (145). In the end, most of the “Turks”, including Zékie, are killed or captured, but the author-narrator saves the life of Ahmed, showing the complicated relationship between a Christian Czech and a Muslim Bosnian.

When considering the impact of Orientalist stereotypes on Czechs' perceptions of Slavic Muslims, the views of women are of particular interest. While Gingrich does not take into account women as producers of Orientalist discourse, women's role in the classical colonial project was undeniable. A lot of attention has been devoted particularly to British women traveling to the Orient, marginalized by the mainstream male imperial discourse, yet often supporting the imperial and ethnocentric ideology (Yeğenoğlu 1998). In the Czech case, the Austro-Hungarian imperial project concerned women who were employed by the government in Bosnia-Herzegovina alongside men. The first Czech female physicians hired by the Habsburg government to look after (particularly Muslim) women in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Anna Bayerová and Bohuslava Kecková, on the whole, supported the Empire's mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, even if Bayerová was at times at odds with her superiors. Bayerová found both Muslim men and women more "Oriental" than their Christian counterparts. She praised the location of the Muslims' houses, but mockingly described their tasteless decoration and their owners' lack of interest in useful gardening, or their love for onion and garlic (1893, 1–2). She complained that she had to devote a lot of time to her "Mohammedan" female patients not only in strictly medical matters, but also in order to improve their eating habits and "cultivate them" physiologically (Nečas 1992, 35). Concurrently, in a way reminiscent of the colonizers' patronizing attitude towards the colonized, though under different circumstances, Bayerová clearly felt responsible for her Muslim patients. This was also the case of her colleague Kecková, who was somewhat less critical of the Muslims; she made an effort to teach several young women to read, write and count, and came to the conclusion that local Muslim women were not less talented and diligent than Christian ones, but were held back by the impact of Islam and their husbands (1895, 14).

Other Czech women only got superficial impressions of the local population on their visits to Bosnia-Herzegovina: Máša Absolonová, who traveled from Sarajevo to Montenegro in 1912, depicted even Orthodox Christians she met in the mountains of Bosnia-Herzegovina as backward, attributing their situation to the lack of education under Ottoman rule (1912, 305–306). While crossing an area inhabited mainly by Muslims (*moslemíni*), she met crowds of "indigenous" people going to the market. She saw Christian men ride in saddles, while women trudged on foot along their horses. Further, she came across "a whole cavalcade of Turks, headed by a veiled Turkish woman bejeweled by gaudery and trumpery, gold and beads, proudly seated straddled in a Turkish saddle ..." (305). Absolonová's somewhat condescending views display the positioning of a Czech woman vis-à-vis the local people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, both Christian and Muslim, while simultaneously differentiating between the two groups.

A similarly exotic image appeared in the travelogue of Růžena Svobodová, a respected woman writer who traveled through Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1911. Svobodová was intrigued by the Muslims whom she alternatively called Turks, Mohammedans and Serbian Mohammedans; she was impressed by their piety and showed great respect towards their religious habits. Yet, when describing her visit to a Muslim family in Mostar, she could not avoid using stereotypical images of the Muslim

women, their excessive fondness of jewelry, lack of education and superstitiousness, as well as references to the harem and Oriental tales: “Do you know The Thousand and One Nights, I ask. No, she doesn’t and she has never heard about them. I explain to her what kind of book it is and think to myself: ‘Well, you yourself are a Djamile or Safir or even Shehrezade’” (1911, 82). Thus, while Svobodová was clearly fond of Slavic Muslim women she met, their appeal seems to have resulted at least in part from their perceived “Orientalness”.

CONCLUSION

Although the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires were neighbors, the actual frontier and the experience with the Turkish wars were more distant for the Czechs than for other Central and South East Europeans. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Czechs’ relationship towards the Ottoman Turks and the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina does not neatly fit the concept of frontier Orientalism. Given the 19th-century Czech society’s aspiration to be integrated in (Western) European culture and its less direct concern for the Ottoman Empire, the Czechs’ views of the Turks were influenced by the Western Orientalist discourse.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, in contrast, the Czech position was closer to the Austrian civilizing mission and their frontier Orientalism: it lacked racial aspects and concerned close Muslims living in nearby occupied territories, though the similarity was complicated by the fact that the local population was Slavic, like the Czechs themselves. Czech perceptions of Slavic Muslims were ambivalent, as reflected also in the unsettled terminology used to denote the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their views oscillated between identifying the Muslims with the Ottoman Turks, and viewing them as Slavic (br)others. Although a shift can be followed between the works resulting from the military campaigns of the late 1870s and early 1880s on the one hand and later travelogues on the other, the attitudes did not develop in one direction and continued to oscillate well into the 20th century: the Muslim Slavs were fighters like the Turks and devoted to their families like other Slavs. The ambivalence concerned also Muslim women, who were portrayed as different from (Ottoman) Turkish women – as members of the family rather than sexual beings – but, concurrently, were often seen through Orientalist lenses. Such views were expressed by both men and women. Thus, despite the different conditions, Czech women participated in the construction of the stereotypes of Muslims in a way comparable to women representing colonial empires.

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"Our Turks", or "real Turks"? Czech perceptions of the Slavic Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina

Frontier Orientalism. Czech Orientalism. Slavic Muslims. Ottoman Turks. Muslim women.

The article examines Czech views of the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and compares them to their opinions on the Ottoman Turks. It asks to what extent Czech perceptions of these two groups correspond to the distinction between "good" and "bad" Muslims suggested by Andre Gingrich in his concept of "frontier Orientalism". Special attention is devoted to images of Muslim women who, according to Gingrich, hardly figured in the frontier version of Orientalism. Czech experiences with the Ottoman Empire differed from those of other Central and South East Europeans, and Czechs' views of the Ottoman Turks were influenced by Western Orientalist discourse. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, in contrast, the Czechs' position was closer to the Austrians' civilizing mission and their frontier Orientalism, but it was complicated by the fact that the local population was Slavic, like the Czechs themselves. Thus, Czech perceptions of the Slavic Muslims were ambivalent and oscillated between identifying the Muslims with the Ottoman Turks, and viewing them as Slavic brothers. The ambivalence concerned also Muslim women, who were portrayed as different from (Ottoman) Turkish women, but at the same time often seen through Orientalist lenses.

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