Zeitschrift für Slawistik 2022; 67(4): 628–654 DE GRUYTER

Stijn Vervaet*

Linguistic Diversity in East-Central European Minority Literature: The Post-Imperial Borderlands of Petar Milošević

https://doi.org/10.1515/slaw-2022-0031

Abstract: Most recent studies on multilingual writing deal with literature by first- or second-generation immigrants. This article responds to debates about multilingual literature by examining the asymmetrical, historically-rooted multilingualism of minority groups in East-Central Europe. It does so by exploring linguistic diversity and its effects in the novels of the bilingual Serbian-Hungarian author Petar Milošević, novels that put the Serbian minority in Hungary centre stage. It is argued that Milošević's prose fiction not only invites the reader to rethink the nature of script, standard language and cultural identity as historically contingent and multiply entangled, but also effectively refashions the cultural memory of the Serbian minority in Hungary. The novels' broader relevance lies in their foregrounding of the minority's cultural and linguistic doubleness, both in relation to the nation-state in which they live and to the external homeland. As such, they also potentially illuminate the position of other linguistic minorities in former Habsburg borderlands.

Keywords (5): multilingual literature, ethnic minority literature, biscriptuality, Habsburg borderlands, cultural hybridity

1 Introduction

As Leonard Forster (1970) has shown in his seminal work, European literature from the Middle Ages to the Avant-garde has had a long tradition of poets who for a variety of reasons wrote in more than one language or in a non-native language, or who combined several languages in one literary text. Nevertheless, the dominant view since Romanticism has been that an author can only express their ideas

***Corresponding author: Stijn Vervaet,** Stijn Vervaet, University of Oslo, Institute for Literature, European Languages and Area Studies, Postboks 1003 Blindern, 0316 Oslo, Norway, E-Mail: stijn.vervaet@ilos.uio.no

Open Access. © 2022 Stijn Vervaet, published by De Gruyter. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

in their "mother tongue".[1] Recent literary criticism has challenged these received notions by demonstrating how "migrant," "diasporic" or "exilic" writers unhinge the host language in which they write (Seyhan 2001; Yildiz 2012).[2] Arguing along similar lines, Ottmar Ette (2005) coined the notions *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben* (writing-between-worlds) and *Literatur(en) ohne festen Wohnsitz* (literature(s) without a fixed abode), which capture what is at stake rather well. Even though there are important differences between writers who personally experienced migration or grew up as second-generation immigrants on the one hand, and minority writers in East-Central Europe on the other, the work of the latter could in many respects be described as a form of writing-between-worlds.

Indeed, the multilingual and multi-ethnic nature of borderlands in East-Central Europe challenges the minority writer to tackle issues that are similar to those that in the past two decades have increasingly attracted scholarly attention as epiphenomena of globalization and migration, including language shift and maintenance. In their introduction to a volume on imperial borderlands, Bartov and Weitz mention three characteristics of East-Central European borderlands: they are most often (1) "places in-between where identities are malleable and control of the territory and population is under dispute," (2) "geographically and culturally distant from the seat of power, and states spend great energy trying to subsume and integrate them," and (3) "constructs of the political imaginary and products of ideological phantasies" (2013: 1). In East-Central Europe, borderlands were the direct result of imperial politics, that is, of state-supported (or forced) migration, colonization, and the (re-)population of border areas devastated by wars between the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian empires. The dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918 and the establishment of nation-states after Woodrow Wilson's principle led to the "ethnic unmixing" of peoples in Central Europe (Brubaker 1996: 148–178) that gave entirely new dynamics to these imperial borderlands. Capitalizing on late imperial practices of identity ascription and classification (see Stergar and Scheer 2018), the drawing of hard national borders at the Peace Conference in Versailles in 1919 created a new legal category: the national minority (Brubaker 1996; Zahra 2008). In terms of their citizenship, those minorities belonged to the new nation-states, but their ethnic nationality bound them to

1 On the history of the metaphor of the "mother tongue" and the accompanying "invention of the native speaker," as well as a whole range of tropes that aimed to naturalize those two notions, see Bonfiglio 2010.

2 I use quotation marks to indicate the insufficiency of terms such as "migrant writer", following Azade Seyhan, who pointed out that "descriptions such as exilic, ethnic, migrant, or diasporic cannot do justice to the nuances of writing between histories, geographies, and cultural practices" (2001: 9).

an external homeland; cut off from their cultural and linguistic centres, they ended up in a situation that Rogers Brubaker aptly describes as a triadic nexus: a relational interplay between nationalizing states, national minorities, and external national homelands (1996: 55–76). Due to the new nation-states' tendency to homogenize their population – "the ethnic unmixing of people" in Brubaker's terms (1996: 148–178) – minorities were looked upon with suspicion, as citizens whose loyalty towards the new nation-state was in doubt (Zahra 2008). Thus, tensions regarding linguistically-framed loyalties to the nation that started developing under empire were now replicated and played out within and between the new nation-states (Barkey 1997; Brubaker 1996; Judson 2016: 884).

Starting from the assumption that linguistic minorities are crucial for an understanding of the post-imperial dynamics of East-Central European borderlands, this paper approaches the interplay between former imperial borderlands and individual and societal multilingualism in East-Central Europe by investigating it through the lens of the literary works by a self-declared minority writer.[3] As a bilingual author writing in Serbian and Hungarian and a literary historian who taught Serbian and Croatian literature at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Milošević (1952–2021) was certainly well positioned to comment upon the challenges faced by a minority writer, and indeed did so in several interesting interviews.[4] His prose fiction shows how topics that are defining for the minority's everyday life – ranging from individual bilingualism, language choice and shift, majority-minority relations, and identity politics – bear on the author's intentions and feed their novelistic imagination. As I will try to show, an investigation into linguistic diversity in Milošević's prose fiction unavoidably leads to broader questions of the historical co-development of multilingualism, minority patterns of national (self-) identification, and empire.[5] Zooming in on the region north of Bu-

3 My approach to minority literature in this article, seeing it as quite literally the literature of a linguistic/ethnic minority, means that I do not follow Guattari's and Deleuze's (1975) concept of minor literature and the political or revolutionary potential it releases by reworking a major language from within. For the genealogy of minor(ity) literatures as well as divergent understandings of the concept, see Domínguez et al. 2018. For a critique of minor literatures as a product of Enlightenment thinking, see Tihanov 2014.

4 Milošević has also described himself as a member of the "northern Serbian diaspora". See Gikić-Petrović and Milošević 2008: 882, 886–887.

5 Certainly, multilingualism is not necessarily the most felicitous term since it suggests the existence and interaction of clear-cut, discrete languages. In this respect, it does not capture the whole spectrum of (post-)imperial linguistic issues, which also includes writers representing Derrida's "monolingualism of the other" – from Sándor Petőfi/Alexander Petrovits, who embraced Hungarian instead of the Slovak spoken in his family, Stanko Vraz who as a member of the Illyrian movement opted for Croatian instead of Slovene, all the way to Kafka who as a Prague Jew chose German

dapest, mainly the town of Szentendre/Sentandreja and the neighbouring village of Pomáz/Pomaz, Milošević's novels take a decidedly local focus. Moreover, by narrating and reflecting upon various aspects of the multilingualism of the Serbian minority in Hungary, they portray a habitus and linguistic practices typical of other linguistic minority groups in East-Central Europe and as such have a broader relevance.

The protagonists and narrator of Milošević's novels usually belong to the Serbian minority in Hungary, whose forebears fled Kosovo and southern Serbia during the Habsburg-Ottoman wars and in 1690 settled in the Kingdom of Hungary upon the invitation of Leopold I, who granted them collective, non-territorial rights (see Ilić [Mandić] 2014, Ch. 5; Jelavich 1983: 148–150). They settled mostly in Baranya (in and around Mohács, Siklós, and Pécs), Bács (Baja, Szeged, and Subotica), and in settlements along the Danube (from Mohács and Baja in the south to Csepel Island, Pest, Buda, Szentendre, Esztergom, Komárom and Győr in the north). Even though these regions are not perceived as borderlands at all nowadays, as they are close to Budapest, they were, at the time of the settlement of the Serbs and other ethnic groups, certainly depopulated borderlands subject to imperial colonization policies. Because of their multi-ethnic character that was retained until recent times, they could still be seen as former Habsburg borderlands forming a symbolic periphery within the Hungarian nation-state. The point about non-territorial rights is important because it qualifies Bartov and Weitz's second characteristic of borderlands as "geographically and culturally distant from the seat of power" (2013: 1) quoted above. Implemented through the Serbian Orthodox Church and its representatives, the imperial privileges essentially boiled down to religious and educational autonomy – which was abolished only in 1912 (Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 68–72). The way in which these rights were regulated was rather atypical of the Habsburg Empire and was in many respects more reminiscent of the Ottoman millet system.[6] Namely, all representative power was transferred to the Serbian Orthodox Church and its metropolite (interestingly, Orthodox groups in Galicia did not receive such autonomy). Just as in the Otto-

as literary language. "Monolingualism of the other" creates layers of commonality and overlaps before the unmixing of languages and which are impossible to disentangle or to assign to a discrete language. Thanks to Vladimir Biti for drawing my attention to this point.

6 The Ottoman Empire organized its population into religious communities. Even though Islam was the privileged religion, the Empire recognised three non-Muslim millets – the Orthodox Christians, the Armenians, and the Jews (the so-called religions of the book, i.e. the Koran) – which received legal, non-territorial autonomy relating to civil issues that were perceived as belonging to the realm of religion, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and education. See Barkey and Gavrilis 2016.

man Empire, this ecclesiastical autonomy was non-territorial and included educational autonomy, implying that the Orthodox Church was responsible for and in control of primary schools. Secondary schools were in the hands of the state; here education was in Latin and later in Hungarian (Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 68; Jelavich 1983: 148–150). The politics of national homogenization after the First World War led to a bilateral agreement between Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes offering Hungarians living in Yugoslavia the possibility to move to Hungary, and Serbs (and Croats) living in Hungary the option to settle in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (so-called *optanti*) throughout the 1920s. It was only in 1923 that the position of minorities was regulated by law; this time, however, no collective rights were provided (Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 74–75).

The settlement and subsequent history of the Serbian minority in Hungary appears as a leitmotif in Milošević's novels. However, unlike the oral history of the community, in which this event has gradually taken on the dimensions of a "founding myth," a kind of "point zero for the Serbian minority" that becomes reinforced through "the official discourses of schools, the Church, and national historiography" (Ilić (Mandić) 2014: 65), Milošević treats it precisely as such – as a *myth* that provides the novelist with interesting raw material.[7] Etienne Balibar points out the paradox that, even though "the linguistic community induces a terribly constraining ethnic memory," nevertheless "the linguistic construction of identity is by definition *open*" (1991 98; quoted in Seyhan 2001: 8, original emphasis). This tension might explain why Milošević walks a tightrope between widespread discourse regarding minority endangerment and attempts to find ways to articulate the minority position beyond traditional notions of authenticity.[8]

In what follows, I will explore how and to what effect Milošević's novels stage linguistic diversity ("Sprachdifferenz", see Dembeck 2014, 2017) and demonstrate how his textual play with reflections upon biscriptality, language contact and language use relates to the broader cultural historical context of the former Habsburg borderlands. I will illustrate my claims with examples from Milošević's no-

7 Miloš Crnjanski will capitalise on this myth in his *Migrations I and II*, developing it in line with the "official discourses" Mandić refers to.

8 Sociolinguist Monica Heller (2006) has pointed out the increasingly pragmatic ways in which linguistic minorities in the wake of economic globalization at the end of the 20th century have started to move beyond the traditional notions of authenticity that traditionally underpinned their politics of identity. Heller (2006: 5–6) uses the metaphor of the kaleidoscope to describe the interaction between linguistic nationalism, economic conditions, and social institutions – each of which can in themselves be described as constantly evolving patterns: "Give the kaleidoscope a turn, and linguistic nationalism moves to the background, and economic changes come to the fore" (2005: 6). On endangerment as a typical trope of discourse on minority languages, see Moore et al. 2010.

vels revolving around the Serbian minority in the surroundings of Budapest, especially *London, Помаз* (*London, Pomaz*); and *Mi же Sentandrejci* (*We're from Szentendre, after all*), with a few references to *Bitka za Sulejmanovac* (*The Battle for Sulejmanovac*) and *Websajt stori* (*Website story*). I argue that these novels do more than merely give the reader an idea of the asymmetrical multilingualism of national minorities in East-Central Europe. By revisiting a cultural and literary canon traditionally anchored in a strong Herderian notion of language and identity, they effectively refashion the cultural memory of a former Habsburg borderland in general, and that of the cultural and literary tradition of the Serbian minority in Hungary in particular. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of culture's in-betweenness, I will demonstrate how Milošević's novels give the reader a sense of the doubleness and hybridity of linguistic minority cultures in East-Central Europe.

2 The Intricacies of Biscriptality and Orthography: From East-West Dichotomy to Imperial Politics

All of Milošević's novels stand out with their simultaneous use – in different ways and to different extents – of Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, a feature that has also been pointed out by other scholars (e.g. Stepanov 2004). One of the works in which this is most obvious is the novel *London, Помаз*. As Monika Schmitz-Emans (2017: 223) points out, multiscriptality in a text can either function at an aesthetic level – that is, as the self-referencing of the semantic chain – or it can have practical purposes, such as strategies to attract publicity, for example in advertisements. The manifest use of multiscriptality, she notes, can have a certain "irritation effect" (*Irritations-Effekt*) on the reader (Schmitz-Emans 2017: 223). Indeed, the mixing of the Latin and Cyrillic scripts in Milošević's novel *London, Помаз* cannot fail to attract the attention of the reader. Functioning as "stumbling blocks" (*Stolpersteine*) that create the "effect of foreign bodies" (*Fremdkörpereffekt*), the text's biscriptality "confronts the reader with the boundaries of her own reading experience, building a riddle within the text, a resistance inducing speculative projections" (Schmitz-Emans 2017: 223). But, after an initial irritation and curiosity, the reader gradually comes to accept and accommodate to the combination of both scripts, at some point realizing that it "does not hamper the spontaneity and breeziness created by the narration's light-heartedness and wittiness" (Stepanov 2004: 290). While most of the text of *London, Помаз* is set in Serbian Cyrillic, the author uses Latin script for all loanwords, including prefixes and suffixes of foreign origin. As a consequence, the text systematically marks the differ-

ence between "Eastern" or "Orthodox" roots of a stem, prefix or suffix (loanwords from Greek and Russian are rendered in Serbian Cyrillic) and words or syllables of "Western" (Latin, French, German, English, Italian, Hungarian) origin, which are in Latin type. The following excerpt from the very end of the novel provides a good illustration of this:

> Сви су се потрпали у кола. Lauda, слепи Паче, Дугачки Саво, Ичвич, хармоникаш, violinist i tambouraш, док је bőgős с contrabassом сео у gep[ä]ck. Црна, тешка limousina прошла је кроз ноћни Помаз као gondola, а bőgős је чучао у отвореном пртљажнику, наслоњен на contrabass као на весло. (2014: 108)

> They all crammed into the car. [Niki] Lauda, Blind Ducky, Long Savo, Ičvič, the accordionist, the violinist and the tamboura player, while the bassist with his contrabass took his place in the luggage compartment. The black, heavy limousine traversed Pomaz at night like a gondola, with the bassist kneeling in the open boot, leaning on his double bass as on a paddle.[9]

It turns out that the whole vocabulary for the members and instruments of the local pub orchestra are of foreign origin. Some of it, such as *хармоникаш*, *violinist*, *tambouraш* and *contrabass* display their foreign root and Serbian/Croatian suffix, as in tambouraш (by this logic, *хармоникаш* should have been spelled harmonicaш), pointing to a history of the gradual domestication of foreignisms, while others, such as bőgős (Hungarian for bass player, in Serbian and Croatian spelled as *begeš*) and Gepäck (luggage compartment, usually spelled *gepek*) more clearly refer to their foreign origin, functioning almost as code-switches while suggesting an aura of untranslatability. While the gondola evokes Venice, a city that plays a key role in the novel, the limousine refers to the cars used by the Hungarian secret service; we will shortly return to the abundant use of nicknames (Niki Lauda, Blind Ducky, Long Savo, Ičvič) in the novel. This play with etymology could suggest that all languages, including Serbian, are heterogeneous by definition (cf. Lyons 1981: 24–27), and that it is virtually impossible to think of any language as a pure and homogeneous unity. But more is at stake here. As Schmitz-Emans reminds us, "das unkonventionelle Schriftbild korrespondiert dabei oft mit inhaltlich-thematischen Ausrichtungen, wie sie auch durch literarische Mehrsprachigkeit assoziiert werden: Zur Darstellung kommen Kulturdifferenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen auf synchroner und diachroner Ebene" (2017: 223). Along those lines, Milošević suggested in an interview that the device of using both scripts was intended to show the duality of Serbian culture, that is, its simultaneous belonging to "two civilizations," pointing out both its "Western" (implying Slavia romana/latina) and its "Eastern" (Slavia byzantina) origins (Stepanov

9 All translations from Milošević's work are by the author – S.V. – unless indicated differently.

and Milošević 1995: 79).[10] Certainly, this game with the two alphabets is possible precisely because of the tradition of biscriptality – defined as "the simultaneous use of two or more writing systems, including different orthographies, for (varieties of) the same language" (Bunčić 2016: 55) – in contemporary Serbian.

The tension between "East" and "West" suggested by the toying with biscriptality is echoed in a different way in the plot of the novel, which narrates the ups and downs of the love story between the protagonist Ičvič (from the Serbian village Pomaz/Pomáz in Hungary) and Mrs Twist (from London). After a 17-year hiatus since their falling in love in the Slovak Tatra mountains, they accidentally meet in the Basilica of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, where Mrs Twist convinces Ičvič to visit her in London while her husband is away on business. However, in London Ičvič feels that he has been placed in a rather denigrating position – he has to hide from Mrs Twist's children and husband, which leads to some rather comical scenes. At the same time, as an "Eastern European," he feels himself alienated and unwelcome in London, more than once confronted with British Balkan stereotypes about the war in Yugoslavia as well as about post-communist Central Europe in general. East and West thus acquire very palpable geopolitical connotations, and the protagonist decides to leave London and move back to Pomáz. But this East-West dichotomy does not mean that the narrator glorifies his hometown: quite on the contrary, the protagonist does not hide his ambivalent feelings towards Pomáz and his co-nationals.[11]

As the author jokingly recalls in an interview, a crucial incentive to write this novel in this precise fashion was that he was able to do so thanks to a change in technology: "Before, I had two typewriters, one for Latin and another one for Cyrillic, so I ran from one to the other. But now I could switch between alphabets [...] changing text written in Cyrillic into Latin by pressing a single key" (Stepanov and Milošević 1995: 82). Equally important, he reminds us, was that he wrote the novel during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s that unfold as its backdrop, when issues of belonging and the use of language and script as national identifiers had much more far-reaching consequences than the novel's playing with Cyrillic and

10 Historically, in certain periods, the use of different orthographies for the same language has also been characteristic of Bosnia (the use of *bosančica*, *arebica*, Latin and Cyrillic) and Croatia (the use of Glagolitic, Latin, and Cyrillic); see Bunčić et al. 2016: 167–180, 198–200, 209; Marti 2012. In this respect, biscriptuality is by no means only a feature of Serbian, but rather an index of the extent to which the whole South-Slav language continuum has been shaped by competing empires and churches.

11 He feels ashamed, because the fact that their house in Pomáz does not even have a bathroom prevented him from going along with Mrs Twist's idea of moving to Hungary, once his own request for a passport was rejected by a Hungarian police officer (2014: 31, 43). For a fine reading of the novel as a narrative of ethnic minority identity and migration, see Prelić 2020.

Latin (Stepanov and Milošević 1995: 81) might have. Before turning in more detail to how this playing with biscriptality and orthography relates to Milošević's literary staging of the life of linguistic minorities in former Habsburg borderlands, I will briefly outline how this figures in his other novels.

In the title of the novel *Mi же Sentandrejci* (*We're from Szentendre, after all*, 1997), Cyrillic is reserved only for the Slaveno-Serbianism *же* – a particle still used in contemporary Russian to emphasize the word that precedes it, but obsolete in contemporary Serbian.[12] In the novel, the use of Cyrillic is limited to three brief scenes: one depicting a dialogue between "the last Serb from Szentendre" and Saint Peter in "Heaven" (*Nebesa*, Milošević 1997: 5–6), as well as two conversations between some of the main characters of the novel who at the end of the book end up in "Paradise" (*Raj*, Milošević 1997: 137–138) and "Hell" (*Pakao*, Milošević 1997: 139–140). Ironically alluding to the trope of minority endangerment, the setting of these scenes suggests that the Cyrillic alphabet has moved to otherworldly spheres, together with the last Serbian speakers from Szentendre. In the novel *Bitka za Sulejmanovac* (The Battle for Sulejmanovac), which is for the most part in Latin script, Cyrillic is reserved only to render direct discourse between characters and sometimes for their internal speech. Here as well, mixing Latin and Cyrillic is used to parody discourses of endangerment and nationalist understandings that perceive the Cyrillic script as standing in a one-to-one relation with Serbian identity, as in the following example: "Које изумирање, молим те лепо, када, ево, чак и усмено чувамо родну ћирилицу и свој идентитет," rekli su ćiriličkom artikulacijom glasova ("'Begging your pardon, but how can you talk of dying out, when, look, we even orally safeguard our native Cyrillic script and our identity,' they said with a Cyrillic articulation in their voices." Milošević 2000: 5).

In *Websajt stori* (2002), which was first published online and could be seen both as the final sequel of the Szentendre tetralogy and as a metatextual commentary on the preceding three novels, Milošević "as a kind of Web-Vuk" (5) designs his own script, which he calls *internetica* (internet script).[13] In this e-book avant la lettre, the narrator/author presents his "third Serbian alphabet" ("tretje srpsko pismo"), once again – perhaps ironically? – as a response to technological developments.[14] Allegedly, his first computer had no diacritical signs, so he developed a series of clusters to replace the graphemes needed for typical Slavic sounds. At

12 The title could equally be rendered as "Because we're from Szentendre" or "Yet we're from Szentendre."

13 In Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, names of scripts typically end with the suffix -ica: *latinica*, *ćirilica*, *bosančica*, *arebica*, *glagoljica*.

14 The original online version is still accessible at http://www.rastko.rs/rastko-hu/WebsajtStori/index.htm (17 Augustus 2022).

the same time, he presents his invention as an attempt to resist and offer an alternative to what he calls "crippled script" ("sakatica"), that is, Latin script without diacritics as widely used to write emails in Serbian (*Websajt stori*, 6; 73–74). Calling his script "the third Serbian alphabet" implies two predecessors: Vuk Karadžić's Cyrillic, and Ljudevit Gaj's Latin alphabet, which was initially designed for the Kajkavian variety of Croatian and only thereafter intended for the whole "Illyrian language" (see Marti 2012: 292–293; Bunčić et al. 2016: 209). More importantly, this tactic also seems to suggest that both before and after Karadžić's language reform, there were – and will be – different ways of writing Serbian, thus accepting the very idea that spelling is a contingent phenomenon, based on conventions.[15] As such, Milošević's "third Serbian alphabet" seems to be going against the grain of a nationalist current that has been gaining strength in Serbian society since the 1990s, one which insists on the Cyrillic alphabet as the only acceptable way to write Serbian and claims that the alphabet itself is "under attack" (see Jovanović 2018).

Moreover, the choice for Latin as the basis of his new spelling also calls to mind a whole range of non-Cyrillic orthographies used for variants of Serbian, or of South Slavic varieties/languages more broadly, on the territories of the Habsburg Monarchy. Highlighting the "simplicity of the system" (jednostavnost sistema), Milošević points out that "as consonant changers, only two letters are used: the *h* and the *j*. 1. When combined with the letters *c*, *z*, *s*, the letter *h* has the function of the *hašek* on the *c*, *s*, and *z* in the Latin script. 2. When combined with the *d* and the *t*, the *j* functions as a softening indicator, as in *lj* and *nj*" (2002: 72). At first sight, the digraphs remind us of English: s+ h = sh = š, c+h= ch= č, etc. However, the use of *j* to create digraphs for the palatal *nj* and *lj* as well as *ć* (written as *tj*), and, to a lesser extent, the use of *h* to create the digraph *sh* for *š*, is a throwback to orthographic traditions predating Gaj's spelling reform that used the Latin alphabet as well as grapheme-phoneme correspondences modelled after Italian or Hungarian spelling to write varieties of Serbo-Croatian (Croatian, Bunyev, Serbian, Bosnian) (see Marti 2012; Bunčić 2016: 209).[16] An interesting case in point is the

15 Karadžić's 19th-century language reform was based on efforts to standardize vernacular Štokavian; his spelling was based on the phonemic principles proposed by Johann Christoph Adelung, with each phoneme corresponding to just one grapheme to represent it. See Bunčić et al. 2016: 210–211.

16 As Klára Korompay (2012) has shown, orthographic borrowings between Hungarian and Slavic were not always unidirectional. After adopting the Latin alphabet in the 11–12th century, early Hungarian orthography, known as the Chancery orthography, borrowed important elements from German, Italian and French spelling, especially the use of digraphs for phonemes that had no equivalent in Latin. However, in the 15th century, Hungarian orthography also took over some elements from the Hussite spelling reform and its introduction of diacritics, doing away with the digraphs.

spelling developed by Maria Theresa's administration to communicate with the Bunyev and Serbian peasant population in the Banat to map the use of agricultural lands, woods and wetlands held in socage. The orthographic solutions developed by the imperial administration to write the local vernacular drew heavily on Hungarian spelling (see Udvari 2003, I: 60–61, II: 24–26). However, the link between orthography and imperial politics does not end at the imperial administration's attempts to control and subsume its newly acquired territories. Long after Maria Theresa, it was echoed by a politics of spelling and translating proper names with palpable consequences for the minority subjects in these borderlands, as I will show in the next section.

3 What's in a Name? Translating Names, Nicknames and Stereotypes

Milošević's playing with orthography inevitably led him to a peculiar practice, originating in the legislation of late Dualist Hungary, that imposed the transcription of non-Hungarian family names, thereby adapting them to Hungarian pronunciation, and the translation of non-Hungarian given names, which in official documents led for example to transcribing Milošević as Milosevits and "translating" Petar into Péter.[17] In *London, Помаз*, Beba Babić, Ičvič's latest lover, who fled the war in former Yugoslavia, remarks: "The Serbs in Hungary have the habit of writing their names in a very bizarre way in official documents. With Latin script, and in Hungarian spelling!" ("Срби у Magyarској имају обичај да своја имена, у званичним documentима, пишу јако чудно. Latiniцом и magyarским правописом!" 2014: 54). Not in the least perturbed by these spelling habits, Ičvič replies: "So what? Regardless of the spelling, our family names have the typical ending in -ić, -vić, which Hungarians pronounce as -ič, -vič" (2014: 54).

Referring to the "alphabetic chaos in Szentendre's cemetery," ("azbučn[i] hao[s] na sentandrejskom groblju") the narrator of *Mi же Sentandrejci* clarifies:

These two competing orthographies co-existed for a while in the 16th century and interfered in the practices of scribes; contemporary Hungarian uses diacritics only to indicate vowel length.

17 Here it might be useful to point out that Serbian orthography, also when using the Latin alphabet, requires the transcription of foreign names in a way that reflects their (approximate) pronunciation rather than using their original spelling, turning Petőfi into Petefi, for example. See Bunčić et al. 2016: 210–215.

> In Szentendre, Serbs were born and died in a weird fashion, as two-named creatures, which often caused confusion in administration both earthly and heavenly. During his lifetime Nikola, on his deathbed Miklós. Ljubica died, but Amália was buried. Dragutin joined God's truth, but under the name of Károly. A funeral service was held for Kosta, but Szilárd was put into the burial pit. …ić or …vić died, but …ics or …vics was buried, which Hungarians read as …ič, …vič. In the birth record, the priest wrote in Cyrillic the Serbian name that the godfather gave him, while the clerk at the municipality noted in Latin script the Hungarian form from the special annex of the academic handbook for foreign Christian names, so that everyone in their personal documents carried this official variant with them until the grave. (Milošević 2015: 19)

In his study on the nationalization of names and naming in Transylvania, historian Ágoston Berecz (2020, esp. Ch. 1, 7, 8) has pointed out that the tradition of translating given names was widespread among the social and cultural elites of Dualist Hungary.[18] For example, members of non-Hungarian (often nationalist) elites signed letters to their friends in Hungarian with a "translated" version of their name and did not mind their name being spelled differently in Hungarian or Romanian newspapers; a similar practice was also visible in bilingual environments, for example on shop signs displaying the owner's name in different versions (Berecz 2020: 44–45). Certainly, there were some clear class differences in this respect, largely relating to literacy: illiterate peasants did not "translate" names of other ethnic groups but incorporated them as loan names (Berecz 2020: 46). But, most importantly, Berecz notes that "members of the minority nationalist intelligentsias also seldom challenged the official practice of adapting minority first names until this practice became enforced on the entire population, systematically affecting their kin peasantry" (2020: 44). Indeed, at the end of the 19th century, Hungarian post-1867 Magyarization policy led to an institutionalized practice of (re-)naming its minority subjects, to which end it issued formal guidelines on how to magyarize their family names (Berecz 2020, Ch. 5) and how to translate Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Bunyev, Slovak, German, Ruthenian, and Greek given names (Berecz 2020, Ch. 7). Specifically, the Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Public Education asked the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to compose a list of non-Hungarian Christian names and their corresponding Hungarian names that were henceforth to be used in official documents (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia 1914).[19] In practice, however, implementing this policy proved difficult for a variety of reasons (Berecz 2020: 159–167).

18 Berecz (2020: 44) locates the origins of the tradition to treat non-Hungarian given names (especially those pointing back to the same biblical or early Christian figures) as translatable in earlier diglossia in Latin, pointing out that this practice corresponded to the wider European norm.

19 The first edition of *Mi же Sentandrejci* even refers to these "translation guidelines" (1997: 19).

The forced Magyarization of given names became a bone of contention for minority nationalist intelligentsias throughout the Kingdom of Hungary and beyond, receiving even criticism from intellectuals in the Austrian half of the monarchy. Indeed, as Berecz points out, "the conversion of given names was no longer an uncontentious practice on the world scene, as becomes clear from a pamphlet by the great Graz-based linguist Hugo Schuchardt, who criticized the new Hungarian law on the civil registry on this count" (2020: 44; see Schuchardt 1895). Derrida can help us understand both the paradox of the earlier custom of translating proper names in multi-ethnic regions and the emerging protest against the state's treatment of names as translatable. For Derrida, the tension between translatability and untranslatability is typical of the proper name (and of the signature, for that matter). As Derek Attridge puts it,

> The proper name is another instance of the mutually constitutive co-occurrence of the singular and the general: on the one hand the distinctiveness of proper names is that they function *outside* of the language system, they are supposed only to refer and not to mean, they are wholly untranslatable, etc.; on the other hand, their 'properness' depends on their occurrence within a system of differences, they have to be repeatable (and therefore falsifiable), and they can never be prevented from slipping into the functions of common nouns. (1992: 19)

Perceived and practised as translatable, and hence open to appropriation, non-Hungarian given names emerge as specific, double(d) objects, resulting from long-term cultural entanglements between Slavic (as well as German and Romanian) and Hungarian, and formalized and enforced by Hungarian imperial legislation. In the chapter "The Battle of Proper Names" in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida (1998: 107–118) connects Lévi-Strauss' obsession with the proper names of the Nambikwara to colonial violence, a link enforced through the power of writing. For Derrida, neither "signatures [nor] proper names [...] could begin to function if they were not able to survive beyond the death of the person whom they identify; death is therefore structurally implicit in every occurrence of a signature or a proper name" (Attridge and Derrida 1992: 19). It is thus no coincidence that Milošević not only locates this nexus in the minority's identity papers but refers to minority subjects' double inscription at birth and death by the state and the Orthodox Church – the former a representative of (post-)imperial power, the latter the guardian of the non-territorial religious privileges that act as a reminder of the millet system. Importantly for my argument about borderlands, Dualist Hungary was not the only state that tried to control its minority subjects through a specific policy of translating names: similar regulations were imposed by Prussia on its Polish minority and by imperial German authorities in Alsace-Lorraine/Elsaß-Lothringen (Berecz 2020:160–161).

The continuum from translatability to untranslatability, that is, the tension between the antitheses of meaning (signifying) and reference (pointing), recognizing and appropriating, naming and classifying, is evoked by Milošević's "naming policy." An overwhelming majority of his characters either has a nickname as a supplement to their name, or, as in the case of Mrs Twist and Ichwich, have no proper name at all, but are known only by their (at times derogatory) nickname. As the narrator in *Websajt stori* reminds us, "Ichwich [...] is the usual nickname for Serbs, emerging through the imitation of the sound of typical Serbian surnames ending on *-ić*, *-vić*. [...] The nickname "Ičvič" was used from the 19th century onwards in Hungarian satirical and humoristic periodicals, and from there it became part of oral speech, or vice versa" (66). Indeed, the nickname Ichwich recalls practices of ethnic stereotyping that, as Nancy Wingfield (2003) has argued, in the long 19th century in the Habsburg Monarchy preceded nationalist practices of othering (Us/Them constructions), of inclusion and exclusion, that in the long term resulted in the creation of national enmities. Importantly, in the pre-national era, ethnic stereotypes "had functions other than the homogenization of particular cultures and the exclusion of the Other from the public sphere"; initially, they had an "orientational function in complex societies" (Vári 2003: 39–40).

While the choice of Ichwich as the name of a protagonist indeed seems to mirror the use of majority-minority stereotypes, Mrs Twist could be seen not only as referring to the one who is twisted between her husband and Ichwich, but also as an inversion of (or response to) East/West stereotypes that became especially virulent during the 1990s.[20] A case in point with Mrs Twist's "Western" ignorance of the Balkans is her concern that Ichwich's village Pomáz would be drawn into the Yugoslav wars, to which Ichwich ironically replies that this was indeed the case, since local Serbs, following Serbian news on satellite TV, were being brainwashed by Milošević's version of the war, instead of listening to the stories of war deserters and refugees that flooded Budapest or taking notice of the student protests in Belgrade (2014: 25–26). Ichwich is likewise "twisted" between Mrs Twist and his Serbian lover Beba "Baby" Babić from Belgrade (another common nickname), but, in a move of duplication, also between Beba Babić and his Hungarian lover Jazzi, the owner of a jazz café in Óbuda.

The local characters from Pomáz are known only by (often derogatory) nicknames such as čika Tić ("Uncle Tich"), Slepo Pače ("Blind Ducky"), and Dugački Savo ("Long Savo"); here nicknames seem to function as an index of familiarity,

20 Moreover, since Mrs Twist is the nickname attributed to her by the protagonist, her naming could be seen as an example of the minority stereotyping the majority.

evoking the suffocating atmosphere of the small town in which everyone knows each other and nothing can be hidden from the community's view. In *London, Помаз*, reflecting upon the typical students of the Serbo-Croat high school in Budapest in socialist Hungary, the narrator concludes that the Serbian and Croatian minority's position in Hungary has changed little compared to that of the 19th century-writer Jakov Ignjatović: "A doubled periphery, said Uncle Tich about Jaša Ignjatović, the writer from Szentandreja" ("Duplована периферија, рекао је чика Тић о Јаши Игњатовићу, писцу Szentандреје" 2014: 47). Hailing from small villages (not necessarily far from Budapest), those minority students culturally, socially and economically belonged to the province of (post-)socialist Hungary, which in turn was peripheral in relation to the West. In *Mi же Sentandrejci*, the local Serbian minority community is so small that it essentially functions as an extended family.[21] The trope of the double periphery also returns with respect to the minority's language use, its relation to the centre, and its perception by speakers of the standard language. In *London, Помаз*, dialect is reserved for the direct speech of Granny Koviljka, including features such as mixing Ekavian and Ijekavian, -ov, -ev endings instead of the -o in past participles ("Ђе си опет разбацав fußöckle? Надавалаб ја теби да си мој! Виђев би ти шта је ред!" [Where did you throw your socks again? I'd teach you a lesson if you were mine! You would see what order is!] 2014: 43). When he was young, Ičvič also used "Pomaz discourse" ("помашки дискурс") in conversations with his grandmother: "Твој Исус је, мајко, утекав. Није остав ође после ускрса да лечи људе и диже мртве из гроба!" ([Your Jesus, grandma, has gone. He didn't stay here after Easter to cure people and resurrect the dead from the grave] 2014: 78). These forms are classified by the Belgrade norm as wrong, or as regionalisms and archaisms (cf. Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 112ff.) – terms pointing to the temporal and geographical remoteness of the minority. In *Mi же Sentandrejci*, the speech of the older population sounded "to people from Belgrade and Novi Sad […] like Old Church Slavonic" (2015: 13).[22] For his part, the narrator in *Mi же Sentandrejci* ironically calls visitors from the Serbian external homeland "pilgrims" (2015: 13), pointing both to the mythologization of the Serbian minority by those visitors and to expecta-

21 Milošević is well aware of the comical effects of the "community as family" on the minority writer's relationship with his local readership. An ironical echo of such a conflict opens the novel *The Battle for Sulejmanovac*, in which characters from Szentendre complain to Ichwich about his representation of the Serbian community in his TV documentary about Szentendre as being on the edge of extinction.

22 Glavata Nata also uses these non-standard forms, including present tense forms ending on -du in the 3rd person plural ("ne znadedu da divanidu srpski?" [Don't they know to speak Serbian?] 2015: 95).

tions of national unity projected on the minority on the part of the external homeland. But the encounter between Glavata Nata and the Serbian minister from Belgrade, who wanted to teach the local priest a lesson in patriotism, shows that such expectations are usually frustrated (2015: 30–31).

What is "weird" about the minority from the outsider perspective of visiting Serbs from Serbia (such as Beba Babić) or to majority Hungarians, is, however, perfectly "normal" to the minority subjects themselves. The bilingualism of Hungarian Serbs at the Metropolitan's dinner table in Szentendre is described from the perspective of Nata, who, growing up, comes to understand that local, well-educated Serbs prefer Hungarian for technical terms, for whispering about women, intellectually refined discussions, and for fine humour, but choose Serbian for more vulgar jokes or talk about food (2015: 95–96). When she grows older, Glavata Nata "understood that the Serbian burghers and intellectuals from Szentendre use Hungarian words as Tolstoy's Russian aristocrats French. As a higher style." (2015: 96). Effectively deconstructing received notions of so-called balanced bilingualism, Milošević highlights minority speakers' distinct communicative practices and repertoires (on these notions, see Spotti and Blommaert 2017): "There are many things that Serbian intellectuals in Hungary don't know how to say in Serbian, while for other things they believe that the Hungarian word expresses them more precisely. That's at least how it seems to them, and that's no wonder, Glavata Nata understood. After six classes in the mouldy Serbian school on the main square, the educated burghers learned and passed everything else – high school, university, and doctorate – in Hungarian" (2015: 96). Such an understanding of bilingualism neatly illustrates what François Grosjean calls "the complementarity principle" (2010: 28–38), i.e. "bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life often require different languages," a principle that is, moreover, "rigidified in diglossia" (Grosjean 2010: 29). In the final section of this essay, I will demonstrate how the intricacies of biscriptality, the politics of naming and the bilingual minority's language use in Milošević's novels converge in what I will call the minority's doubleness and its strategies of cultural hybridization and mimicry.

4 The Doubleness of Minority Culture: Icons on Glass, Urban Folk Songs, and Literature as Hypertext

Commenting upon received notions of multiculturalism and majority/minority relations in globalized Western societies, Homi Bhabha notes that “the challenge is to deal not with them/us but with the historically and temporally disjunct positions that minorities occupy ambivalently within the nation’s space” (1996: 57). Even though Bhabha’s thoughts revolve around migrant culture within the (post-)colonial metropolis, his conceptualization of minority culture can serve as a helpful starting point to rethink minority-majority relations in post-imperial borderlands. Moreover, as Vladimir Biti has convincingly argued, the post-imperial can be interpreted “as the less-investigated European announcer of the comparably better researched non-European post-colonial constellation” (2018: 21). As indicated above, the key metaphor Milošević uses to capture the minority’s ambivalent position within the nation’s space is that of the double periphery. With the example of *Mi же Sentandrejci*, I will now illustrate how Milošević gives the reader a sense of the minority’s cultural ambivalence.

As suggested by the novel’s subtitle, “A Family Novel in Reverse” (porodični rikverc-roman), the novel takes as its starting point the family as a nucleus, taking not a founding father but a founding mother, Glavata Nata, as protagonist. The narrative not only builds upon the founding myth of the “northern Serbian diaspora”, but in a vivid way includes many intriguing elements from the minority’s political fate in the interwar and socialist eras. Both the story of the “optanti,” those who in 1923 chose to move to Yugoslavia as “participants of the migrations in reverse” (Milošević 2015: 13), and the imprisonment of Glavata Nata’s father by the Hungarian secret service could be read as examples of generational memory, that is, as stories passing on the memories of the three or four generations currently living. At first glance, the novel seems to be a written version of oral history. According to Jan Vansina, oral history is characterized by what he called the “floating gap” between the oldest events remembered and the oral memory of living generations (cf. Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 64–65; 232–256; Assmann 1999 [1992]: 48–51). “Sometimes, especially in genealogies, the recent past and origins are run together as a succession of a single generation” (Vansina 1985 [1961]: 23; quoted in Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 65). As Marija Mandić (Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 67–73) has demonstrated, the oral history of the Serbian minority suppresses the 18th and 19th centuries, precisely the period that was crucial for the development of the bourgeois, urban culture of the Serbian minority in Szentendre (and also in other settlements in Hungary, like Buda, Pest, and Győr). This happens due to oral history’s focus

on the founding myth of origins (the "great migrations" and the arrival of the Serbs in Hungary), on the one hand, and the more recent generational or communicative memory, which does not reach beyond the span of ca. 80–100 years (Assmann 1999: 48–56; Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 232), on the other. In the novel, however, Milošević elegantly brings to the fore precisely those periods that are marginalized by oral memory.[23]

The old urban song that gave the novel its title – "We are from Szentendre, famous all over the world" – is reminiscent of the minority's heyday as a merchant and middle class in the 18th–19th centuries. In his seminal text "The conquering Balkan Orthodox merchant," Traian Stoianovich (1960: 264–267) pointed out the crucial role of immigrants both from the Balkans and from Germany in the recolonization process of Hungary, which was depopulated and devastated after the long war between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. Noting that "before the French Revolution, Hungary was virtually without a native Magyar middle or merchant class" (Stoianovich 1960: 265), he emphasizes their role in getting trade on the rails again. The role of the Serbian merchants from Szentendre (as well as from Buda and Pest) was not a myth, but something that left palpable traces both in the material culture and architecture of the town and in its popular musical heritage (see Ilić [Mandić] 2014: 71–72). In his posthumously published study of the South-Slav folk songs in Hungary, Tihomir Vujičić classified folk songs according to dialect groups: *kajkavian*, *čakavian*, and *štokavian*, after the word for "what" – *kaj*, *ča*, or *što*. Within Štokavian songs he points out the "lyrical poetry of merchants, clerks, and artisans, among which there can be found plenty of examples of a sort of 'Slaveno-Serbian' Biedermeier" (1978: 18). The song *Mi же Sentandrejci* belongs to this group, as "a bourgeois song in Slaveno-Serbian, a kind of hymn of Szentendre" (1978: 304–305).

The novel's reference to the song "Mi *же* Sentandrejci, slavni celog sveta" echoes Vujičić's characterization as "the local hymn," (Milošević 2015: 17) and firmly situates the heyday of the Serbian minority in Hungary in the 18th and first half of the 19th century, the era of economic and cultural prosperity that gave birth to cultural forms different from the folk songs that Vuk Karadžić would later canonize as the allegedly authentic basis of Serbian language and culture. As Vujičić notes in his foreword to the Hungarian reader, in this period "there developed a western-like bourgeois literacy, poetry and prose literature (whose cultivators had close personal ties and friendships with the Hungarian literature of the

23 In this sense, my argument differs from that of Rada Stanarević (2014), who reads *Mi же Sentandrejci* as a confirmation of the epic, following Hegel's concept of the novel as a modern, bourgeois epic.

reform era). Many churches were built, and an essentially western, primarily religious form of painting came into existence. The upper patrician [bourgeois] class used a kind of Old Slavonic and Serbian mixed language, whereas lower social strata kept to their manifold dialects" (1978: 15; on Slaveno-Serbian, see Albin 1970).

Another key symbol of the minority's hybrid culture is the icon on glass that emerges first in *Mi же Sentandrejci* and later returns in *Bitka za Sulejmanovac* and *Websajt stori*. In these novels, Mr Moler paints icons on glass, painted on two sides. In contemporary Serbian, his name sounds like an ironic nickname, since "moler," a Serbian rendering of the German *Maler*, refers to a handworker painting buildings or walls rather than to a painter in the artistic sense (which would be *slikar*); when *moler* is used in contemporary Serbian to refer to an artistic painter, then it always has pejorative connotations. Historically, however, *moler* was the name for an icon painter (and still is in the scholarly literature); adding *moler stapar* to their name was one of the ways in which icon painters working on glass signed their work (see illustration in Škorić 2000: 34). Painting icons on glass was originally a Catholic tradition, taken over and adapted by Orthodox Serbs in Hungary, first in Szentendre, at the beginning of the 18th century. Dušan Škorić (2000: 7) points out that these icons typically emerged in border regions where Western and Eastern Christianity met, but that their reception varied, depending on the relations between the two churches. Serbs in Dalmatia came into touch with icons on glass through contact with the Republic of Venice; in Szentendre, Serbian Orthodox church officials even asked local icon painters to imitate these Catholic icons and adapt them to the Orthodox canon, in order to counter the influence of these "western" icons among their flock. In the Militärgrenze, where the Uniate church was active, such icons were far less popular, while south of the Danube they were regarded as "Swabian" (švapske) (Škorić 2000: 7).[24] Due to their increasing popularity among the lower classes – among other things, because of the flashy colours and recognizable folk clothes in which the saints were represented – icons on glass came partly to replace traditional icon painting until the second half of the 19th century, when they lost their popularity to printed icons in richly decorated frames from Vienna and Budapest (Škorić 2000: 11).

24 "Swabian" is here not to be confused with the ethnonym, but was at the time widely used as a pejorative indication of "westerners," i.e. of people or artefacts hailing from the Habsburg lands. As such, "Swabian" was not limited to German speakers at all, but also used by Serbs south of the Danube to indicate Habsburg Serbs (see Konstantinović 2003, Vervaet 2013: 149). At some point, this ethnonym started functioning in Serbia and Bosnia as a metonymic label for Germans in general and, by extension, as the possessive adjective for people, objects and practices from, or ascribed to, the Habsburg Monarchy.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha advances a notion of hybridity that stresses the impossibility of disentangling different cultures; because traces of another culture are always already present, it is impossible to reduce a culture to an essence. In his essay on culture's in-betweenness, Bhabha argues that "the fatality of thinking of 'local' cultures as uncontaminated or self-contained forces us to conceive of 'global' cultures, which itself remains unimaginable" (1996: 54). Drawing on Bakhtin's dialogism, he continues:

> Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the 'authoritative', even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign [...], mak[ing] possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialect that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole. (1996: 58)

It is in this sense that Mr Moler's icon on glass, one of the leitmotifs of the novel, can be interpreted: as a symbol of the Serbian minority culture in the lands of the Hungarian Crown. Painted on both sides (see Škorić 2000: 29–33), it is impossible to cut its two sides apart without damaging the whole, just as it is impossible to disentangle the Catholic and Orthodox tradition that jointly produced the icon. Moreover, since Mr Moler paints on both sides (41), the image on the one side shines through the other, evoking, once again, the doubleness of the minority culture, as well as the impression that a kind of inverse mirror image filters through. Mr Moler practices a specific technique known as reverse glass painting (German: *Hinterglasmalerei*, painting behind glass), which was also practiced by other Orthodox populations living together with Catholics in the Habsburg Monarchy, for example by Romanian Uniate communities in Transylvania, especially in the village of Nicula (Wendt 1953: 56–61). One of the earliest attestations of this procedure in Serbian literature, Milošević reminds us in *Websajt stori*, can be found in Venclović's writings, in which he describes glass icons and refers to them as originating from Portugal ("strana ljuzitanska"; Pavić 1972: 283, quoted in Milošević 2000: 71).[25]

In re-imagining the cultural history of the Serbian minority through the lens of the literary culture of the Hungarian Serbs, Milošević does not restrict himself

---

25 Gavril Stefanović Venclović was a Serbian Orthodox priest, preacher, writer, poet, illuminator, and icon painter active in the first half of the 18th century in the Habsburg Monarchy. Using a mix of Serbian vernacular and Church Slavonic in his writings and Bible translations, Venclović is presented in Serbian literary history as the predecessor of Vuk Karadžić's language and spelling reform (see Pavić 1966, Milošević 2010: 100–103).

to references to popular urban culture but, through a web of intertextual references, constructs an own literary tradition. The protagonists of this tradition are authors who played an important role in the cultural and literary life of the Serbian minority in the Hungarian borderlands: Gavril Stefanović Venclović and Joakim Vujić, the pre-Romanticist founder of the Serbian theatre in Pest and later of that in Kragujevac (see Milošević 2010: 186–188); the 19th-century realist Jakov Ignjatović and the late Romantic poet Laza Kostić – hence the choice of the Santa Maria della Salute in Venice as the meeting point between East and West, Ichwich and Mrs Twist, in *London, Помаз* – and the 20th-century modernist Miloš Crnjanski, born in the Banat. All of them are polyglots who, to differing degrees, share with Milošević's protagonists the experience of former Habsburg borderlands.[26] In *Mi же Sentandrejci*, Venclović in particular attracts the reader's attention. The novel quotes one of his letters (2015: 43; Pavić 1966: 21),[27] and, in his conversations with Glavata Nata, Mr. Moler imitates Venclović's elevated language (2015: 37, 43, 83).

Towards the end of *Mi же Sentandrejci*, Glavata Nata's father recalls a meeting with a strange visitor, a young man "from the south", looking around in Szentendre, peeping into gardens and windows, staring at its church towers, raved that "the bells keep quiet, there are no bells, they took them away" (2015: 119). Milošević gives an ironic turn to this cameo appearance of Miloš Crnjanski – and, for that matter, to his avatar from the *Diary about Čarnojević*, whose narrator and protagonist is parodied in the following quote from the very end of the novel (Crnjanski 1996 [1921]: 424–425).[28] The parody is generated mainly by a shift in narrative perspective. In Crnjanski's *Diary about Čarnojević*, the protagonist recalls how, on a visit to the town of his mother's birth after the war, he asked one

26 Maximizing the potential of intertextuality, *Websajt story* functions not only as an Internet and hyperlink novel but also as a lexicon novel. Its 57 short chapters resemble lemma-like vignettes, many of which are devoted to authors who play a role in the Szentendre trilogy, such as Ignjatović, Kostić or Venclović, as well as to Danilo Kiš, Vasko Popa and László Krasznahorkai, who are listed as "co-authors" (2002: 81). This postmodern device was perhaps inspired by Milorad Pavić, a scholar of 18th-century Serbian literature whose *Dictionary of the Khazars* was subtitled "A Lexicon Novel."

27 Потајно вас прошу, ако може бити, тамо близу села Помаза, код оне воде што је зову Сулејмановац да би кјелицу коначну справио. (2015: 43; Bitka za Sulejmanovac 2000: 19; Pavić 1966: 21). This quote will later serve as inspiration and as the point of departure for Milošević's novel *Bitka za Sulejmanovac*.

28 The original from Crnjanski reads: "Pitao sam nekog, da li poznaje gospodina Jašu Ignjatovića, ali me starac pogleda, i reče tiho, mađarski, da ga ne poznaje. [...] Svud me dočekaše vrtovi. Crkve su bile prazne i hladne, kašljao sam u njima. Crkve su bile prazne i mračne, a prozori prašnjavi i mutni kao moje oči. [...] Zvona su zvonila, jer sam ja udesio da stignem kad zvona zvone" (1996: 424–425).

of the locals whether he knew Mr Ignjatović, while in Milošević's novel, it is a minority member who narrates the encounter. Sentences that are in the first person in Crnjanski's novel are here in the third person, and vice versa. Turning the minority member into the observing subject and the visitor from the external homeland into the observed object, Milošević inverts the hierarchy between the two. The visitor's question about "Mr. Jaša Ignjatović" makes Glavata Nata's father suspicious and leads him, in a twisted move of minority mimicry, to answer in Hungarian that he does not. He later justifies to his daughter why he answered as he did; the dialect features in his speech, typical of Szentendre (highlighted in italics), once more underlining the minority perspective:

> He got on my nerves. He asks me whether I know mister Jaša Ignjatović. As if I didn't know that Jaša already died long ago. You're not gonna bait me, man, I said to myself. I tell him quietly in Hungarian that I don't know Jaša. He waves, dissatisfied. He wants to go to the churches. But the churches were empty and cold; he coughed in them. (120)

> *Išo* mi je na živce. Pita me da li poznajem gospodina Jašu Ignjatovića. Ko da ja ne znam da je Jaša već odavno umro. Al *neš* ti mene *zafrkavat*, mislim se u sebi. Kažem mu tiho ma*džarski* da ne poznajem Jašu. Ovaj odmahuje. *Oće* u crkve. A crkve su bile prazne i *ladne, kašljo* je u njima.

Rather than merely reiterating and uncritically reinforcing Crnjanski's pathos-ridden trope of the empty churches, a metonymy for the alleged death of the Serbian minority in Hungary (1995 [1924]), Glavata Nata's father fakes ignorance, playing the role of a Hungarian citizen even if expected by a visitor from the external homeland to take up the position of the suppressed, Magyarized Serb. "Problematiz[ing] the signs of racial and cultural priority," the minority subject disrupts the external Serbian national discourse, as they can be authentic only through mimicry: "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1994: 125, 127). By foregrounding mimicry as a feature of the minority habitus, Milošević recalibrates Serbian and Hungarian (and, by extension, East-Central European) cultural history and the literary canon as an intrinsically hybrid tradition rooted in a local culture of conviviality. Ironically encompassing the myth of the arrival, *Mi же Sentandrejci* at the same time highlights minority urban culture as a prism through which histories of conviviality as well as politics of suppression and assimilation become visible.

5 Conclusion: Between Historical Contingency and Discourses of Endangerment

At the very end of *Mi же Sentandrejci*, when all the participants of the theatre performance to mark the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the Great Serb Migration have left, the Hungarian secret police notes a suspicious car wreck near the Danube beach in Szentendre. When they dredge it out of the mud and open the luggage compartment, a big load of small glass pieces falls out. Upon inspection, experts report it to be the pieces of a glass icon representing the church towers, parts of the iconostas, portraits of Orthodox saints, and even individual faces of inhabitants of Szentendre. They conclude that the painter must have used a peculiar method, painting on both sides of the glass, so that it becomes impossible to tell "which side is the original, and which is the front side and which is the back" (2015: 144). Since the glass painting dates back to the early 20th century, they declare it worthless and the police let the dredges throw the broken icons back into the river. The sunken glass icon of Szentendre (Milošević 2015: 45–46, 144) thus becomes a metaphor for the endangerment of minority culture, which, given its dwindling numbers, is destined to a kind of Atlantis-like fate.

Indeed, Heller's (2006) kaleidoscopic view of linguistic minorities, as well as Balibar's (1991 paradoxical tension between the rigidness of ethnic memory and the limitless potential of alternative constructions of identity in and through language, nicely capture the double connection in Milošević's oeuvre between the tropes of minority identity endangerment and the irreconcilable call of literature. To a certain extent, tropes of endangerment such as "the last Serb from Szentendre" – which also became the title of Hungarian translation of *Mi же Sentandrejci* (*Az utolsó szentendrei szerb*, 2018) – might be considered a defining hallmark of self-declared ethnic minority literature.[29] It is in this sense that Milošević's obsession with ethnic origins, the national tradition, and the extinction of the local community can be understood. Language is heterogeneous, but it is still clear what is standard and what is a dialect; history is revised and rewritten, but still with the national (Serbian) as its structuring principle; the village/family is metonymically staged as a national community; tradition (including the literary canon) is parodied, but not deconstructed.

29 Milošević's novel *Tinja Kalaz* (Kalaz is Still Smouldering, 2013) which revolves around a father-son relation and, shifting away from founding myths and toward an evocation of modern and urban culture in Budapest, is much less obsessed with the withering away of the ethnic minority community.

However, by carefully expanding the trope of the double(d) periphery as the key characteristic of the Hungarian Serbian community's historically and locally embedded minority culture, Milošević makes an interesting move. The trope of the minority's dual identity, its "doubleness", is in Milošević's tetralogy not limited to its appearances in the language of the novels, ranging from the alphabet and spelling to issues of the transliteration and (alleged) translatability of names. This doubleness also emerges in the characters' language choice and use, in the tensions between standard language and dialect, in the minority's cultural heritage and literature, and in its gestures of mimicry (towards the external homeland as well as the nationalizing homeland).

Akin to Azade Seyhan's claim that migrant writers "smuggl[e] intellectual goods across borders and transplan[t] them into foreign soil," turning their texts into a depository of "fragments of different histories and languages, traces of cultural accents, and images of lost geographies" (Seyhan, 28; 30), Milošević's work could be said to destabilize both the literary culture and the self-image of the Serbian "external homeland" and, through self-translating or rewriting his novels in Hungarian, that of the Hungarian "nationalizing state." Smuggling aspects of Serbian minority culture into both majority cultures, he turns the minority's doubleness into an advantage.

Acknowledgment: Research for this article was supported by the Research Council of Norway Grant "Probing the Boundaries of the (Trans)National: Imperial Legacies, Transnational Literary Networks, and Multilingualism in East-Central Europe" (275981).

References

Albin, Alexander. 1970. The Creation of the Slaveno-Serbski Literary Language, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 48(113). 483–491.

Assmann, Jan. 1999. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen.* München: C-H. Beck.

Attridge, Derek & Jacques Derrida. 1992. *Acts of Literature*. New York: Routledge.

Balibar, Etienne. 1991. The Nation Form: History and Ideology. In Étienne Balibar & Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities,* 86–106. London: Verso.

Barkey, Karen. 1997. Thinking about Consequences of Empire. In Karen Barkey & Mark Von Hagen (eds.), *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building: The Soviet Union and Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires*, 99–114. Boulder/Colo: Westview Press.

Barkey, Karen & Gavrilis, George. 2016. The Ottoman Millet System: Non-Territorial Autonomy and its Contemporary Legacy, *Ethnopolitics* 15(1). 24–42.

Bartov, Omar & Eric D. Weitz (eds.). 2013. *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*. Bloomington (Ind): Indiana University Press.

Berecz, Ágoston. 2020. *Empty Signs, Historical Imaginaries: The Entangled Nationalization of Names and Naming in a Late Habsburg Borderland* (Austrian and Habsburg Studies 27). New York: Berghahn Books.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1996. Culture's In-Between. In Stuart Hall & Paul Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 53–60. London: Sage.

Biti, Vladimir. 2018. *Attached to Dispossession: Sacrificial Narratives in Post-Imperial Europe* (Balkan Studies Library 21). Leiden: Brill.

Bonfiglio, Thomas Paul. 2010. *Mother Tongues and Nations: The Invention of the Native Speaker* (Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs 226). New York: De Gruyter Mouton.

Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Bunčić, Daniel, Sandra Luisa Lippert, Achim Rabus & Anastasia Antipova. 2016. *Biscriptality: A Sociolinguistic Typology* (Akademiekonferenzen 24). Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.

Crnjanski, Miloš. 1995 [1924]. Mrtva Sent-Andreja. In *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog*, Vol. 9. 94–97. Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog.

Crnjanski, Miloš. 1996 [1921]. *Dnevnik o Čarnojeviću*. In *Dela Miloša Crnjanskog,* Vol. 2. 363–426. Beograd: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog.

Deleuze, Gilles & Félix Guattari. 1975. *Kafka : pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Minuit.

Dembeck, Till. 2017. Multilingual Philology and National Literature. *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 5(3). 2–12. https://cms.arizona.edu/index.php/multilingual/article/view/123 (30 September 2022)

Dembeck, Till & Georg Mein (eds.). 2014. *Philologie und Mehrsprachigkeit* (Beiträge zur neueren Literaturgeschichte 315). Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.

Derrida, Jacques 1998. *Of Grammatology.* Transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Domínguez, César, Giovanna Di Rosario & Matteo Ciastellardi. 2018. On Writing a Comparative Literary History: Delocalizing Minor Literatures in European Languages in the Age of 'Big Data'. *Arcadia* 53(2). 278–307.

Ette, Ottmar. 2005. *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben: Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz*. Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos.

Forster, Leonard. 1970. *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (The De Carle Lectures at the University of Otago, 1968). London: Cambridge University Press.

Gikić-Petrović, Radmila & Petar Milošević. 2008. Da li nas iko sluša? Razgovor sa Petrom Miloševićem. *Letopis Matice srpske* 481(5). 879–887.

Grosjean, François. 2010. *Bilingual: Life and Reality*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP.

Heller, Monica. 2006 [1999]. *Linguistic Minorities and Modernity: A Sociolinguistic Ethnography* (Advances in Sociolinguistics). London: Continuum.

Ilić [Mandić], Marija. 2014. *Discourse and Ethnic Identity: The Case of the Serbs from Hungary* (Studies on Language and Culture in Central and Eastern Europe 23). München: Verlag Otto Sagner.

Jelavich, Barbara. 1983. *History of the Balkans, 1: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jovanović Mladenov, Srđan. 2018. Assertive Discourse and Folk Linguistics: Serbian Nationalist Discourse about the Cyrillic Script in the 21st Century. *Language Policy* 17(4). 611–631.
Judson, Peter. 2016. *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*. Cambridge/Mass: Harvard University Press.
Konstantinović, Zoran. 2003. "Nemac" und "Švaba" in der serbischen Literatur. In Gabriella Schubert & Wolfgang Dahmen (eds.), *Bilder vom Eigenen und Fremden aus dem Donau-Balkan-Raum*. 169–178. München: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft.
Korompay, Klára. 2012. 16th-century Hungarian Orthography. In Susan Baddeley & Anja Voeste (eds.), *Orthographies in Early Modern Europe*, 321–350. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Lyons, John. 1981. *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Magyar Tudományos Akadémia. 1914 [1893, 1909]. *Nem-magyar keresztnevek jegyzéke*. (List of non-Hungarian Christian names). Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia.
Marti, Roland. 2012. On the Creation of Croatian: The Development of Croatian Latin Orthography in the 16th Century. In Susan Baddeley & Anja Voeste (eds.), *Orthographies in Early Modern Europe*, 269–320. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Milošević, Petar. 2000. *Bitka za Sulejmanovac*. Novi Sad: Matica srpska/Budimpešta: Izdan.
Milošević, Petar. 2002. *Websajt stori.* Beograd: Narodna knjiga. Original online version accessible on http://www.rastko.rs/rastko-hu/WebsajtStori/index.htm (17 August 2022)
Milošević, Petar. 2004. Razdoblja srpske i hrvatske književnosti u Mađarskoj. In Miodrag Maticki, Vesna Matović & Slobodanka Peković (eds.), *Književnost na jezicima manjina u Podunavlju,* 129–133. Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost.
Milošević, Petar. 2010. *Storija srpske književnosti*. Beograd: Službeni glasnik.
Milošević, Petar. 2014 [1994]. *London, Помаз. Zrenjanin*: Agora.
Milošević, Petar. 2015 [1997]. *Mi же Sentandrejci. Porodični rikverc-roman.* Zrenjanin: Agora.
Moore, Robert, Sari Pietikäinen & Jan Blommaert. 2010. Counting the Losses: Numbers as the Language of Language Endangerment. *Sociolinguistic studies* 4(1). 1–26.
Pavić, Milorad. 1996 [1966]. *Gavril Stefanović Venclović: Crni bivo u srcu. Legende – besede – pesme.* Beograd: Prosveta.
Prelić, Mladena. 2020. Ičvičevo putovanje. Reprezentacija identiteta u romanu London, Помаз Petra Miloševića. *Etnoantropološki Problemi* 15(1). 175–198.
Schmitz-Emans, Monika. 2017. Mehrschriftlichkeit. In Till Dembeck & Rolf Parr (eds.), *Literatur und Mehrsprachigkeit: Ein Handbuch,* 221–232. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag.
Schuchardt, Hugo Ernst Mario. 1895. *Sind unsere Personennamen übersetzbar?* Graz: n.p.
Seyhan, Azade. 2001. *Writing outside the Nation*. Princeton (N.J): Princeton University Press.
Spotti, Massimiliano & Jan Blommaert. 2017. Bilingualism, Multilingualism, globalization, and Superdiversity. In Ofelia García, Nelson Flores, & Massimiliano Spotti (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Society*. 161–178. Oxford: Oxford UP.
Stanarević, Rada. 2014. Mi že Sentandrejci. In Rada Stanarević. *Hijazam i hipostaza*. 43–54. Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga.
Stepanov, Milan & Petar Milošević. 1995. Ne smeta nam latinica u ćirilici. Intervju: Petar Milošević. *Almanah: Srpske narodne novine*. 79–84.
Stepanov, Milan. 2004. Zbrka u nebeskoj administraciji. Jezičke i ortografske osobenosti proze Petra Miloševića. In Miodrag Maticki, Vesna Matović & Slobodanka Peković (eds.), *Književnost na jezicima manjina u Podunavlju,* 287–292. Beograd: Institut za književnost i umetnost.

Stergar, Rok & Tamara Scheer. 2018. Ethnic Boxes: The Unintended Consequences of Habsburg Bureaucratic Classification. *Nationalities Papers* 46(4). 575–591.

Stoianovich, Traian. 1960. The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant. *The Journal of Economic History* 20(2). 234–313.

Škorić, Dušan. 2000. *Srpske ikone na staklu*. Sombor: Ivakskomerc.

Tihanov, Galin. 2014. Do 'Minor Literatures' Still Exist? The Fortunes of a Concept in the Changing Framework of Literary History. In Vladimir Biti (ed.) *Reexamining the National-Philological Legacy: Quest for a New Paradigm?*, 169–190. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Udvari, István. 2003. *A Mária Terézia-féle úrbérrendezés forrásai magyarországi délszláv népek nyelvén*. 2 Vols. Nyíregyháza: Nyíregyháza Főiskola.

Vári, András. 2003. The Functions of Ethnic Stereotypes in Austria and Hungary in the Early Nineteenth Century. In Nancy M. Wingfield (ed.), *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe* (Austrian Studies Vol. 5), 39–55. New York: Berghahn Books.

Vervaet, Stijn. 2013. *Centar i periferija u Austro-Ugarskoj. Dinamika izgradnje nacionalnih identiteta u Bosni i Hercegovini od 1878. do 1918. godine na primjeru književnih tekstova*. Zagreb/Sarajevo: Synopsis.

Vujičić, Tihomir. 1978. *Muzičke tradicije južnih slovena u Mađarskoj = A Magyarországi délszlávok zenei hagyományai*. Budimpešta: Preduzeće za izdavanje udžbenika.

Wendt, Heinrich C. 1953. *Rumänische Ikonenmalerei: Eine kunstgeschichtliche Darstellung*. Eisenach: Erich Röth-Verlag.

Wingfield, Nancy M. 2003. Introduction. In Nancy M. Wingfield (ed.), *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe* (Austrian Studies Vol. 5), 1–16. New York: Berghahn Books.

Yildiz, Yasemin. 2012. *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Zahra, Tara. 2008. The "Minority Problem" and National Classification in the French and Czechoslovak Borderlands. *Contemporary European History* 17(2). 137–165.