

ENDRE HÁRS, WOLFGANG MÜLLER-FUNK, URSULA REBER, CLEMENS RUTHNER (Hg.):  
*Zentren, Peripherien und kollektive Identitäten in Österreich-Ungarn*. A.  
 Francke Verlag: Tübingen 2006, 295 pp. ISBN 3-7720-8133-9.

Over the past few years, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy seems to have been the focus of various interdisciplinary (historic, literary and cultural) research, most of it inspired by cultural and post-colonial studies. Numerous compilations have been published on the topic and at least two web sites published containing expert articles on the balance of power, the construction of collective identities, the perception of the Other and the Self and cultural memory in Central Europe up to 1918<sup>1</sup>. In this article, we take a closer look at a compilation of scholarly essays published in 2006 year titled “Zentren, Peripherien und kollektive Identitäten in Österreich-Ungarn”<sup>2</sup>. As the four editors of the compilation have elaborated in the introduction (pp. 1–15), the collected essays examine “das Verhältnis von Zentren und Peripherien in der Kultur der späten k.(u.)k. Monarchie vor dem Hintergrund gesellschaftlicher Machtverhältnisse. Auf diese Weise sollten Logiken von realer und symbolischer De- und Reterritorialisierung sichtbar gemacht werden: Infrastrukturen der Herrschaft (Wirtschaftssystem, Unterrichts- und Verkehrswesen, Militärapparat etc.) ebenso wie narrative Konstruktionen von (ethnischer, sozialer, geschlechtlicher u.a.) Identität und Differenz in Texten der habsburgischen Kultur/en, die ebenfalls der Denkfigur von ‚Zentrum‘ und ‚Peripherie‘ verpflichtet scheinen”<sup>3</sup>. According to the editors, the concepts of centre and periphery could be used both in concrete terms (i.e. in the economic and military sense of the word) as well as in terms of imaginary constructions. Consequently, any area “where any great deal of culture is being produced (publishing houses, museums, media)” can be considered the centre (metropolis), whereas the periphery is the area where such products are being placed/consumed (p. 1). This is an interesting thesis, but not necessarily undisputable and not every author whose work has been included in the compilation would support it. The editors of the compilation are fully aware of the fact that the centre-periphery dichotomy raises “a question which is almost impossible to answer – whether it can be understood as a category that determines the *internal* organisation of the studied phenomena, or is

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to MÜLLER-FUNK, Wolfgang; PLENER, Peter & RUTHNER, Clemens: *Kakanien revisited. Das Eigene und das Fremde (in) der österreichisch-ungarischen Monarchie*. Tübingen: A. Francke 2002; FEICHTINGER, Johannes; PRUTSCH, Ursula & CSÁKY, Moritz: *Habsburg Postcolonial. Machtstrukturen und kollektives Gedächtnis*. Innsbruck et al.: Studienverlag 2003. Additional scholarly articles on the topic can be viewed at the following two excellent web-pages: [www.kakanien.ac.at](http://www.kakanien.ac.at) and [www.spacesofidentity.net](http://www.spacesofidentity.net). As the evidence of an increased interest of the Dual Monarchy in Russia is the following compilation of essays: *Художественная культура Австро-Венгрии 1867–1918. Искусство многонациональной империи*. Санкт Петербург: АЛТЕЙЯ 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The compilation is the result of a scientific research project financed by the Austrian Fund for Scientific Research (Projekt FWF 14727) and contains a collection of works from the final round-table held in October 2003 in Klosterneuburg (Vienna) under the umbrella of the aforementioned project.

<sup>3</sup> HÁRS, Endre, MÜLLER-FUNK, Wolfgang, REBER Ursula & RUTHNER, Clemens: „Zentren peripher: Vorüberlegungen zu einer Denkfigur“, pp. 1–15, quote on p. 1.

instead an additional category of its *external* analysis” (p. 2). The editors have therefore decided to give an overview of already existing theories developed by thinkers which have resorted to this dichotomy. This way, the reader is able to get an insight into an interesting *patchwork* of different approaches to understanding, applying and developing the centre-periphery concept in this compilation: from the world system theory by Immanuel WALLERSTEIN, through the concept of imaginary geographies (*imaginäre Geografien*), all the way to post-colonial studies and its critics. Skimming through the various articles in this compilation, the reader will see many different ways the authors have understood these concepts of Austria-Hungarian centre/s and periphery/ies.

In his essay, Wolfgang MÜLLER-FUNK (pp. 17–39) analyses the heritage of Enlightenment and Romanticism and the influence of its most dominant narratives on the imaginary and discursive construction of what was culturally different and foreign. Accordingly, he considers the eras of Enlightenment and Romanticism as two phases of the same long-term process which crystallized two different perceptions of the Western European Other. In an interesting analysis, he juxtaposes two authors from two different contexts, both describing the world on the periphery of the Western European civilisation: Gabriel GARCÍA MARQUEZ and Joseph ROTH. The famous Balkans expert Gabriella SCHUBERT analyses the peripheral position that the Balkans was given on the cognitive map of Western Europe (pp. 41–53). In contrast with the more positive view of Central Europe, an array of negative features has been attributed to the Balkans since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the public, scientific, journalistic discourse in Western Europe, making it a dark side of the European self-consciousness as opposed to the positive image of the civilised West. Schubert concludes her excellent article with a brief retrospective of the image that the very people from the Balkans created of themselves, in other words, of the ways the periphery constructs its own identity against the self-proclaimed centre, Western Europe.

Depicting Wallerstein’s understanding of the centre-periphery dichotomy as a starting point, Andrea KOMLOSY, an economic historian, studies the interior (economic) peripheries in Austria-Hungary and their link with the centre (pp. 55–78). She argues that existing regional inequalities within the Habsburg Monarchy, thanks to the economic advantages of the inter-regional division of labour, represented a factor of cohesion rather than division within Austria-Hungary. Günter DINHOBL’s essay (pp. 79–96) very clearly and originally elaborates on the relationship between the discursive construction of centre and periphery on the one hand, and economic and geo-political realities on the other. He goes on to analyse imperialism and the discursive structuring of space from the point of view of the railway construction in the Habsburg Monarchy.

Also great is the essay by Joachim von PUTTKAMER (pp. 97–110) on the Hungarian education policy in two peripheries of the empire – today’s Slovakia (Felvidék) and Transylvania (Siebenbürgen; Erdély) – during the time of the *Ausgleich* (1867–1914). Von Puttkamer shows that the periphery does not necessarily need to be a passive recipient of the cultural production of standards defined in and applied by the centre, as the editors presuppose. On the contrary, it actively participates in the process of the symbolic production of culture. The essay by Hannelore BURGER (pp.

111–127) further elaborates the education system in the peripheral areas of the Monarchy, focusing on the multi-lingual education system in Bukovina, as compared to the (mono-)linguistic policy in Vienna. The author claims that, thanks to the multi-lingual schooling system in Bukovina, the process of internal colonisation never took roots, as opposed to the political assimilation of minorities with mother tongues other than German, which was going on in Vienna and Lower Austria.

In the article “Schneidige Husaren, brave Bosniaken, feige Tschechen. Nationale Mythen und Stereotypen in der k.u.k. Armee” (pp. 129–143), Daniela STRIGL in an original manner explores the myth about the Habsburg army as an unyielding ligature holding together the multi-ethnic empire. Her research on national stereotypes is based on material about the Austro-Hungarian army, mainly taken from the humorous magazine *Die Muskete* and literary works depicting the Habsburg army. Waltraud HEINDL (pp. 145–158) offers a refreshing view on the aspirations of national movements to spread national ideology and strengthen the state by promoting national heroes and idols. Based on articles on historical topics and history textbooks from the Austrian half of the Monarchy, she re-/deconstructs male and female heroes and their role in the national project. Amália KERÉKES and Péter PLENER studied literary texts considering the social periphery of Vienna and Budapest, as well as the utopian vision of the future in Austrian and Hungarian journalism and literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While statistics make an effort to bring some order and predictability in social reality, the concepts of stability, security and progress that the centre spreads about itself and its periphery are given an upside-down mirror image in utopian literature and criminal novels or feuilletons. Georg ESCHER (pp. 177–192) distinguishes two stereotypical female figures in the literature of multiethnic Prague at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Czech maid from the countryside, seducing the German poet living in the town, and the lustful Jewish girl or prostitute from the Jewish ghetto in Prague’s old town. Escher demonstrates the way these two female types were interbred in the contemporary literature of the time with the gender based imageries of the town and the existing ethnic and national stereotypes about Prague’s citizens. A different approach to “gendered periphery” can be observed in the essay by Alexandra MILLNER (pp. 193–206). Millner focuses on (popular) articles from Vienna newspapers, which approach female subjects from a typically male perspective and comment on them from a statistical, sociological, ethnographic, psychological etc. point of view. In her essay, she reveals the utterly ambiguous male way of thinking about the feminist discourse at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. she exposes the numerous inconsistencies of centrally located discourses about the margin and marginality.

Endre HÁRS (pp. 207–218) analyses the travelogues of a famous Hungarian politician, writer and historian, Károly EÖTVÖS. Hárs claims that in his texts “Notes of the count Károly Gábor”, “Travel around the lake Balaton” and “The end of the Balaton journey”, Eötvös put upside-down the relationship between national centre and periphery in Hungarian imaginary geography, praising the area around the lake Balaton, which on the imaginary map of the Hungarian homeland had in fact the role of an insignificant province. Ursula REBER (pp. 219–238) shifts the focus to the representation of Montenegro in the Austrian and German history and travelogue discourses in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Montenegro

seems to have been an extremely attractive destination for both fictional and real journeys, as certain authors that enthusiastically describe the natural beauty of Montenegro even never set foot on its territory.) They described this part of the world as the ultimate point of Europe, a stronghold of resistance against the Turks and hence, a pro-European part of the Balkans. Edit KIRÁLY's essay (pp. 239–253) is devoted to Felix KANITZ. Király demonstrates that Kanitz is somewhere in between the imperial science and sincere sympathies for the periphery. By discovering and describing unknown places and arguing in the true spirit of unwavering belief in progress, he operates within the framework of a colonial scientific discourse. On the other hand, he describes the Balkan countries as places he is truly in love with, as countries with a history of their own, and not exclusively characterised by cultural otherness or an emptiness that civilisation ought to fulfil. Clemens RUTHNER (pp. 255–283) in his detailed article claims with full right that Bosnia is probably the only area of Austria-Hungary which can be studied within the framework of the (post)colonial paradigm, while avoiding to do so in a voluntary and over-stretched manner. He endeavours to prove his thesis by linking historical discourses on Bosnia under the Habsburg rule with the Austro-Hungarian imagery of Bosnia.

The compilation is concluded with a literary essay by Dragan VELIKIĆ about Central Europe (pp. 285–289). The importance of this collection of scholarly essays for studying cultural, gender and ethnic identities in Central and South Eastern Europe cannot be underestimated. Due to its original methodological approaches to culture, history and literature and its interdisciplinary character, the compilation is highly inspirational and worthwhile reading.

Ghent

STIJN VERVAET