

## 'Imago Turci' in Christian Slovenia

*Pina Sadar*

### Abstract

Through the discourse analysis of the Turkish stories *Jurij Kozjak, slovenski janičar* (1864) and *Miklova Zala: zgodba iz turških časov* (1884), the research aims to examine the role of religion and religious otherness in the formation of Slovenian identity. The paper centres on observing the development of a specific heuristic of Orientalism—summarised by Gingrich's notion of 'frontier Orientalism' (1996)—in Slovenian literature and draws the similarities and differences with Edward Said's noted theoretical paradigm. As this mytho-literary production of 'imago Turci' presents a strong basis for contemporary debates on Islam in Slovenian public discourse, the analysis actualises the archaic portrayals of Muslims and observes their reproductions in modern contexts.

### Introduction

The discourse on Islam in the Western public sphere is often wrapped in highly negative Orientalist stereotypes naturalised with its constant appearance in media and political settings. Roots of these prejudicial Western perceptive matrixes reside in the medieval equalisation of Islam with the "process of demonization" (Housley, 2006: 136) that was fabricated by the leading clergy to protect and promote Christian identity in the European space. In renaissance and later romanticism, 'Imago Turci'<sup>1</sup> was additionally reinforced by acknowledged travel writers whose Europocentric rhetoric reduced the Middle Eastern area

to "active oppressors of women and Christians, the wielders of a false religion, and the hypocritical indulgers in sexuality, drink, and opium" (Hoeverler and Cass, 2006: 183). Analogically, the literary response to Islam in the European periphery included equally deformed representation of Muslims imbibed from alternative sources. In the absence of the travelling elite, the interaction with Muslim empires was limited to direct contacts, normally conducted through the clash of arms.

This type of Orientalist variation developed also in present-day Slovenia, which played a role of a buffer zone between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy and was therefore involved in frequent and long-lasting military encounters with the Ottoman army. The role of the Turks as the major national enemy and Slovenians as defenders of the Christian border was revitalised with the rise of nationalism in the 19th century when the formation of the Slovenian nation required its own mytho-historical narrations to homogenise Slovenians in the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991 [1983]) and consolidate its place in Christian Europe. Slovenian cultural production in that era was consequently saturated with numerous artistic recaptures of Turkish incursions. Their manifestations in literature featured an emergence of a prominent genre of the Turkish story (*turška povest*), based on heroic portrayals of Slovenians on the ground of victorious battles over the Ottoman Empire between 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. With

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Pina Sadar, Durham University, [pina.sadar@dur.ac.uk](mailto:pina.sadar@dur.ac.uk)

1 Imago Turci (Latin: Image of the Turk) is an idiom describing an ideological formulation of the Turk that primarily developed "in the context of the Church's attempt to revive the crusade as Catholic Europe's principal mechanism for holding back the advancing Ottoman Turk" (Housley, 2007: 204).

approximately four dozens of stories fitting into the definitional frame of the genre, two archetypical stories remain *Jurij Kozjak, slovenski janičar*<sup>2</sup> (1962 [1864]) in *Miklova Zala: Povest iz turških časov*<sup>3</sup> (1992 [1884]) produced by writers Josip Jurčič and Jakob Sket respectively. Their enormous popularity cemented them into the Slovenian literary canon. The novels, imbued with erroneous representations of the Muslims, have been ever since directing the trajectories of Slovenian collective perception of Islam and its adherents that is still actively pulsating in contemporary Slovenian society.

It is thus essential to explore critically the origins of the mythological conception of 'the Turk' in Slovenian literary discourse and examine the formation of Slovenian national identity on the basis of binary oppositions with the Muslim foe. Through the discourse analysis of the Turkish stories *Jurij Kozjak, slovenski janičar* and *Miklova Zala: zgodba iz turških časov*, the research aims to examine the role of religion and religious otherness in the formation of Slovenian identity. Moreover, the paper observes the development of a specific heuristic of Orientalism—summarised by Gingrich's notion of 'frontier Orientalism' (1996)—in Slovenian literature and draws the similarities and differences with Edward Said's noted theoretical paradigm. As this mytho-literary production of 'imago Turci' presents a strong basis for contemporary debates on Islam in Slovenian public discourse, the analysis actualises the archaic portrayals of Muslims and observes their reproductions in modern contexts.

### Turkish Incursions As National Fibre

The Turk has been present as the ultimate enemy in Slovenian collective memory since the beginning of so-called 'Turkish incursions' in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman army was penetrating the Austro-Hungarian lands with the aims of plunder and further expansion into the broader European territory over the next two centuries. Present-day Slovenia as the southernmost part of the Habsburg Monarchy held a role of the buffer zone between the Ottoman-occupied Balkan areas and the rest of the monarchical territory. Due to its strategically exposed location, the Ottoman raids resulted in the highly diminished population and exhausted land. Although the historical events are remembered under the name of

'Turkish' incursions, the proportion of ethnic Turks in the Ottoman army engaging in the battles in present Slovenia was less significant than suggested by the generalised appellation. The incursions to the Balkan territory were implemented by mercenary troops mostly consisting of Islamised Bosniaks and Albanians, young janissaries, captured feudal lords of South Slavic origin and representatives of privileged Christian classes and only a smaller number of Muslim Turks (Kalčić, 2007: 253).<sup>4</sup>

However, the historical inaccuracy did not restrain the Slovenian intellectual elite of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from employing the figure of the Turk in the formative process of inventive-nationalistic discourses following the March revolution in 1848 in the Habsburg areas (Baskar, 2003). Although the incursions of the Ottoman army were historically distant, they remained a "constitutive part in the process of the construction of the nation, in which the 'Turks' became a central enemy and a resistance against them a primary source from which Slovenian national identity was drawn from" (Kalčić, 2007: 255). 'Imago Turci' was disseminated through various different sources, most notably in the form of literary texts. Literature—published in newspapers or printed in books—presented a major medium not only to inform the audience but, according to Benedict Anderson (1991), also to bind them together in the mutual national entity.

Anderson's noted theoretical insight into national narratives, summarised in the concept of imagined communities, derives from the notion that the nation is not a naturally determined entity but is necessarily imagined. "[M]ember of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each live the images of their communion" (Anderson, 1991: 6). Lacking the opportunity to establish direct relationships among each other, members of a particular nation need to be connected by ideological fibre in the form of "shared memories, traditions, myths, symbols and values" (Smith, 1999: 241). This national identity is distributed through various repressive nation-building mechanisms; however, for becoming a part of a collective national subconscious, it additionally requires continuous reproduction in ideological state-apparatuses,<sup>5</sup> including literary production.

2 In English translation: Jurij Kozjak: Slovenian Janissary

3 In English translation: Miklova Zala: A Story from the Turkish Times

4 All quotes, originally produced in languages other than English, are translated by the author of this paper.

5 The term 'ideological state apparatus' is borrowed from Louis Althusser (1971) who uses the expression to describe various different institutions, including media, religious organisations and educational institutions, that disseminate ideology on a

### Literary Manifestation of Turkish Antagonism

Searching for efficient nation-building themes that would successfully unite the disparate Slovenian community into a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1991: 7), the acknowledged literary critic Fran Levstik suggested the narration of the Turkish wars. “In his opinion, the Slovenians indeed showed the highest level of independence in the period of ‘the Turks’, therefore works covering these topics should easily awake and unite them” (Kalčič, 2007: 257). Subsequently, the mytho-historical conception of heroic battles against the Turks became a prevalent literary theme for fabricating and maintaining national awareness in the period of Slovenian romantic nationalism. The prolific literary reproductions of this specific historical event resulted in the formulation of a novel genre called the Turkish story.

One of the most distinct conventions of this unique Slovenian sub-genre of the historical novel is a dramatic historical setting of the Turkish raids, usually capturing existent heroic battles of high historical significance, for example the siege of Ljubljana in 1472, the battle at Sisak in 1593 or the siege of Vienna in 1683 (Hladnik, 2009: 118). Despite the employment of specifically local topics, the narrative techniques of the Turkish story are largely influenced by British literary models and follow the format of the historical novel as defined by Sir Walter Scott (Klancar, 1946: 26). Copying Scott’s picturesque yet straight-forward prose narrative, these pseudo-factographic stories with a clear heroic element, dramatic narration and grammatical simplicity attracted a wide circle of readership from the most represented lower social classes; still nowadays it presents “one of the most persistent genres” (Hladnik, 2009: 116) in Slovenian literature.

Despite their historical setting on the grounds of the Turkish wars, the main storyline of the Turkish story usually excludes direct connections to the Turkish protagonists, preferring to employ local characters in universal situations, capturing either domestic or romantic relations. The thematisation of trivial everyday topics acts as an efficient tool for a didactic introduction of preferred values, behavioural patterns and virtues that profile the Slovenian ‘self’ and orientate it in a common ‘imagined community’. This type of intertextually suggestive narrative is clearly evident in the analysed novels.

*Jurij Kozjak* presents a classical family-themed Turkish story set in the 15<sup>th</sup> century—the times of active Turkish incursions and a war of succession of the estate and property of the died out Counts of Cilli. The story is centred on a noble youth being sold to the Ottoman army as a janissary by his own uncle. After long years of re-socialisation by a foreign foe that erases the conscious awareness of his origins, Jurij as an Ottoman soldier returns to his fatherland in order to fight against his own nation. However, his deeply-rooted Christian values prevail and Jurij heroically saves the Slovenian nation against the Turks. *Miklova Zala*, set in the same century as *Jurij Kozjak* (1487), on the other hand narrates a romance between vigorous Mirko and beautiful Zala that is disrupted by a foreign neighbour, seductive Almira, who decides to snare her competition: Zala is consequently caught by the Ottoman army and taken to Istanbul as a war trophy for the sultan. After seven years in Turkish captivity, she manages to escape with the help of a Slovenian ally and to reunite with her true love on the domestic soil.

The central characters Jurij and Zala personify the ideal-typical Slovenians, constructed with exclusively positive physical and characteristic features. While Jurij is described as “a beautiful boy like an angel from the sky” (Jurčič, 1962: 42), Zala’s pleasant appearance, suggested also by her name,<sup>6</sup> plays a significant role in the tale itself, as her beauty is desired as a war loot. In addition, both protagonists are profiled as pure youngsters with solid Christian values. The character of Zala is introduced as a “humble girl who lived only for her home and her mother” (Sket, 1992: 19) and Jurij is presented as a “good Christian and a good citizen” (Jurčič, 1962: 5). Along with being honest, loyal and selfless, he is portrayed as “brave as a lion” (ibid.: 56) what makes him the best soldier in the Ottoman army.

Those virtues are not a subject of any transformation even when exposed to long-lasting foreign influences. Although Jurij forgets about his homeland and mother tongue, his value system remains unaffected by the Turkish upbringing. In contrast to his companions, “he does not yearn for plunder and murdering of weak and unarmed people; and thus his honest heart even under foreign authority and in foreign wild company remains undimmed” (Jurčič, 1962: 56). On the contrary, Zala successfully refuses the sultan’s

subtle level.

6 Zala (slo.) – beautiful

attempts for her acculturation by forcing her into a religious conversion. Through continuous praying and persistent monologues in her native Slovene, she protects the major elements of her national identity that she prefers over any material compensation and even her own life.

### The Turkish Other

The main aspects of the Slovenian self are additionally emphasised in relation to the diametrically opposite figure of the Turk. To efficiently communicate the socially constructed myth of Slovenian identity, the selected novels, just as any other mythological narrative, adopt a simple matrix of binary oppositions. According to Levi-Strauss's studies of myths (1963), an inevitable factor underlying all mythological formations is the arrangements of meanings into a system of simple dichotomies. With this operation, the symbolic meaning "is virtually forced to be both general and easily accessible because of the simplicity of the difference between them" (Bywater and Sobchack cited in: Fourie, 2001: 152). Just as the concept of good, for instance, could not exist without defining what is bad, the Slovenian self cannot be constructed without the creation of its absolute Other who presents the negative mirror image of 'Slovenianness'. Following this representational matrix, the Turkish story relies on the play of binaries between Slovenians and the Muslim foes to transfer the ideological concept of nation in the easiest manner.

Along with the Muslim Other, the genre of the Turkish story typically features various different figures of cultural otherness, including Gypsies, witches, Jews and the residents of neighbouring countries. Jurij Kozjak is captured and sold to the Ottoman army by Gypsies, while Zala is betrayed to the Turks by her Jewish neighbour. These characters remain introduced through similar interaction of simple binaries that are engaged in the otherisation of the Turks. The Jewish characters in Sket's novel perpetually reinforce their status as "blood-suckers of our nation" (1992: 20), whereas the 'Gypsiness' in Jurčič's story is constructed with continuous repetition of negative characteristics connected to cheating, dirtiness and lying. The Gypsies act as mediators between the Slovenians and the Turks, as they speak the language of both parties, are deceitful enough to access the Turks, yet capable

of peaceful interactions with the Slovenians.

The otherness of the Turks is represented considerably more radically; as this symbolical social group does not share any significant similarities in the form of mutual religion, broader territorial identity or historical alliances, it adopts the role of the absolute Other. In contrast to the other Others, the Gypsies and the Jews, there is no direct contact between Turkish and Slovenian characters, except of military encounters. The Turks are liberated of any subjectivity and consequently presented in the form of an anonymous animalistic mass, incapable of performing any emotional act. Their highly objectified representation does not introduce them as a social group with its own culture but simply underpins their status of menace that is – in the fashion of natural disasters – destroying 'the homeland'. This idea can be illustratively accentuated through the passage from *Jurij Kozjak* describing the arrival of the Turks. After a "famous atrocious scream 'Allah, Allah!'" (Jurčič, 1962: 69) is heard, Turkish cavalymen start galloping from all sides without giving a chance for "poor folk" (ibid.) to escape. The situation is compared to a vulture who "rushes upon chickens to strangle some and scatter the others" (ibid.).

The spectre of characteristics ascribed to the Turks is limited to the production of exclusively negative meanings as their role remains reserved for emphasising the positive characteristic of the Slovenian nation through their occupation of the negative side of van Dijk's 'ideological square' (1997 [1995]). In his noted approach to discourse analysis, van Dijk defines four major strategies for ideological construction of the Other based on the "emphasis of our good things and their bad things, and conversely the denial or mitigation of our bad things and their good things" (van Dijk, 1997: 33). The representation of the Turks in the selected novels follows illustratively this ideological schema that clearly dichotomises both social groups into a crude good-bad polarisation. Subsequently, the novels "offer extremely one-sided images of the Muslim Turkish Other" (Kálčić, 2007: 257).

### Orientalising the Other

The process of binary differentiation presents a prevailing ideological operation for legitimising the unbalanced relations of power that is instituted in the

paradigm of Said's Orientalism (1979 [1978]). It refers to "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Said, 1978: 2), in which Western practices are represented as superior to Oriental ones. Although Said's academic legacy centres on the hegemonic relations between the Western colonial powers and the Middle- and Far East, the novel heuristics of the theoretical models such as 'frontier Orientalism' (Gingrich, 1996), 'nesting Orientalism' (Bakic-Hayden, 1995) and 'euro-Orientalism' (Adamovsky, 2006; Dupcsik, 2001) address a similar praxis of power distribution in the transformed contexts of the Orient and the Occident. They follow "a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised" (Bakic-Hayden, 1995: 918) and turn the concept of the Orient into a fluid signifier that 'nest' in different geographical contexts following the logics of gradation. The Orient-Occident dichotomy hence becomes the meta-pattern of the hegemonic power that can be constituted in any given political geo-space without a necessary limitation to the original Orientalist formation of hierarchal relations between the Western aristocracy and their distant colonies overseas.

In the absence of the colonial elites, Slovenia experienced the development of a specific variation of Said's concept captured in Gingrich's notion of frontier Orientalism, summarising a "relatively coherent set of metaphors and myths that reside in folk and public culture" (Gingrich, 1998: 119). Unlike the classical Orientalist matrix, mostly focusing on the reflection of distant Oriental colonies, the notion of the Orient in Gingrich's narratives remains "present in the same area that 'we' inhabit today" (Gingrich, 1996). Rather than deriving from the complex and long-term colonial hierarchy, the frontier variation of Orientalism focuses on the brief but repetitive military encounters with the Muslim empires.

Subsequently, the Oriental figure is a subject to the limited embodiment of a heterosexual soldier, whilst excluding representations of female characters. The role of highly erotised and sensual women from classical Oriental narratives remains hence reserved for "our' women that need to be defended by 'our' men from the bad Muslims" (Kalčić, 2007: 253). This aspect is highlighted in the novel *Miklova Zala*, in which the codification of the beautiful female figure as an object of sexualised male gaze is transferred

from Oriental woman to the character of Zala. Her beauty possesses a seductive element which motivates Turkish armies to attack her village; eventually, she is enslaved by the sultan to work in his harem, which presents a reconstruction of a typical Oriental cliché of an Oriental *femme fatale*.

### The Myth of 'Antemurale Christianitatis'

The limited scope of the Oriental character, entering the literary space only as a soldier from the Ottoman army, is "less frequently a Japanese, an East Indian, or a Chinese; usually he is a Muslim" (Gingrich, 1996). The Muslim identity of the cultural Other is crucial for the formation of the Slovenian self, based upon Christian identity. Therefore the ultimate literary tool of the romantic nationalism, the Turkish story, reinforces persistently "the political formula: Slovenian, a fighter for Christianity against the Turks" (Hladnik, 2009: 117).

This principle presents an essential element for the understanding of Gingrich's frontier Orientalism that is constructed on the idea of the Islamic threat to the Christendom. Whereas Islam in Said's Orientalism is mostly addressing the "imagined Islamic world in the geographical space somewhere outside Europe" (Küçük, 2011: 21), frontier Orientalism transfers its existence to the very midst of Christianity that is subsequently directly exposed to the enlarging tendencies of the Muslim empires. As a result, Habsburg-Ottoman borderlands, such as the territory of the present Slovenia, developed a significant historical myth of 'antemurale christianitatis',<sup>7</sup> presenting a "continual mission of the Christian lands to defend the Christian border, in which there is an honourable place for the self-attribution of predominance and degradation of Islamic enemy" (Baskar, 2003: 4).

In both literary texts in the focus of the analysis, the antemurale myth is expressed through the choice of lexicalisation that is victimising and praising the Christian properties, whilst enclosing the Muslim subject in the discourses of fear, menace and evil. Linguistic strategies for the representation of Islam thus employ stylistically marked lexis, including ad-

7 "The term antemurale christianitatis (from medieval Latin ante [pre- or fore] and murus [wall]), 'the Bulwark of Christendom,' was commonly used to describe Western Christendom's frontiers with oriental 'infidels'" (Jezernik, 2010: 12).

jectives, such as "furious", "angry", "bloodthirsty", "fierce", "inhuman" and "murderous" (Sket, 1992; Jurčič, 1962). Dichotomies between both parties in the concept of 'antemurale christianitatis' are moreover expressed through the "rhetorical devices" of contrasting (van Dijk, 1997: 33). This linguistic approach for the reinforcement of the biased perception of the Muslim Other can be monitored in the passage from *Jurij Kozjak: Slovenian Janissary* that describes "double screaming" (Jurčič, 1962: 73), echoing after a battle between the Turks and the Slovenians. While first shout is presented as "the wild scream of the brutal Turk who was cleaning the Christian blood from his curved sword and impatiently waiting to shed more blood" (ibid.), other screams are marked as "sad, gentle prayers of the oppressed, lonely Slovene who was asking God, not as much for himself as for his children, to protect their fatherland and old redeemed faith" (ibid.).

### The Glorification of Slovenian Military

The generalised literary reduction of Islamic doctrine to "hatred and killing the Christian and his faith" (Jurčič, 1962: 55) leads to the glorification of the Christian military who defended successfully the frontiers of Christendom (Baskar, 2003; Gingrich, 1998). The Christian victory against the Turks is additionally portrayed with mythical dimensions that stress the heroism of Slovenian troops and otherise the Muslim Other. Throughout both Turkish stories in the focus of the analysis, Slovenians are hence initially portrayed in a highly disadvantageous position. They are in an apparent minority and armed modestly with only "pitchforks, mallets and long nails" (Sket, 1992: 140), while the Ottoman army is depicted through the discourses of military predominance with a grand military body that is well-supplied with the strongest weapons. However, the Slovenian zeal to defend Christendom and the fatherland becomes the ultimate factor for the denouement of the plot that eventually leads to the victorious defeat of the Turks.

One of the key elements for an eventual Slovenian military prevalence over the Turks is the "united Christian power" (Sket, 1992: 142) that repeats itself as a strong leitmotif in the analysed literary works. The reciprocal alliance among Slovenians can be observed not only in the context of mutual defending of the Slovenian land but is also exposed through the

prism of altruistic acts in the foreign settings. Almost every Turkish story, including the selected novel, features at least one chapter about the main protagonist's experience in the oppressor's country. "In a distant foreign country Slovenian characters meet surprisingly their compatriots and through this experience expand the space of familiarity" (Hladnik, 2007: 118). For example, in *Miklova Zala*, the main protagonist is liberated courageously from the sultan's captivity on the eve of her execution by his Slovenian servant who identifies Zala's national background while overhearing her prayer. These means of rhetoric aim to demonstrate the predominant strength of an integrated national community over ferocious military encounters from the side of the Ottoman army that are performed with the lack of genuine patriotic feelings.

Therefore, the Slovenian persistent will to "endure numerous tragedies and aggression" (Sket, 1992: 142) for their fatherland is shown as a decisive moment for the discomfiture of the Turks. Emphasising this idea, *Miklova Zala* concludes by pointing out the fact that "any other nation would already despair and surrender to the unbeliever, forgetting about their religion and homeland (ibid.). However, "heroic Slovenian fathers" (ibid.), loyal to their national identity, "fought persistently and bravely for the brightest sacredness, for the religion and for the fatherland" (ibid.). Slovenian readership is hence reminded to defend and reinforce the national identity in order to continue the legacy that was paid with their ancestors' blood.

Alongside passionate patriotism, the prevalence of the Slovenian nation over the Muslim Other remains justified with the belief that a foreign menace cannot exist without Slovenian soldiers. The stories credit the real strengths of the external foes to the braveness, skills and power of Slovenian individuals. An example of this notion is the character of Jurij Kozjak. When he leaves Turkish side and joins the Slovenian forces at the end of the novel, his transferal causes a fatal impoverishment of the Ottoman army and consequently leads to the Christian victory. A similar representative pattern is employed by depictions of janissary troops in *Miklova Zala*. "Former Christian and Slavic boys" (Sket, 1992: 138) are represented as "unbeatable and the core of every Turkish army" (ibid.). The Turk "recognised the inborn bravery and fearlessness of the Slovenian army and profited from the positive virtues of our patriarchs" (ibid.). The motif of the victorious win of the Slovenian army in extremely

inconvenient circumstances due to their inherited courage and strong national awareness, functions as an ideological vehicle for reinforcing the national pride and transferring the messages of the importance of the loyalty to the Slovenia identity.

### 'Imago Turci' in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Through the canonisation of the selected novels, the crude Orientalist messages remain pulsing in the ideological setting of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Harboring the repertoire of folklorist elements and *lieux de mémoire*, the novels narrating the ideas of frontier Orientalism become "liable to nationalist political mobilisation of its topoi" (Baskar, 2003: 4), especially in the time subsequent to Slovenian independence.

After romantic nationalistic glorification of Slovenian victory against the Muslim Other as captured in the Turkish stories, the antemurale myths were erased from the official national memory in the times of the Yugoslavian federation (1947-1990), as they both encouraged discourses of Slovenian loyalty towards the Habsburg Empire and operated against the Muslim population, residing in a mutual republic. Following the fall of the former Yugoslavia, a new zeitgeist triggered "the processes of isolation of newly formed country from [...] negatively marked Balkan, in which the role of defenders of Christianity played a central role in the constitution of Slovenian distance" (Kalčić, 2007: 256). Old nationalist myths, embedded in the discourses of historical devotion to the Western European Christian identity, were revived and antemurale christianitatis additionally transformed to fit the political climate of the post-Yugoslav conflicts. The imperial loyalty and the fight for the 'real holy religion' became an emblem for "promoting a radically nationalised community, hostile to the Others" (Klemencic and Schofield, 2002: 211). The figure of the Other was no longer limited to Turkish descendants but became targeted at a larger group of Oriental 'infidels', including "the Eastern schismatics of the various Orthodox denominations" (Johnson 2002: 64) embodied in Serbs.

However, despite an insignificant proportion of Muslim population in present-day Slovenia, Muslims still occupy the position of absolute cultural Others. In the absence of direct interactions with the Turks, the Islamic otherness was relocated to the refugees

from the former Yugoslav republics. The racist rhetoric against the Yugoslav Muslims justified with the mytho-historical references to the historical memory of Turkish incursions is especially evident in current discussion surrounding building a mosque in Ljubljana. Opponents of opening the Islamic religious centre fan hate speech by revitalising archaic conceptions of Muslim foe arguing their position through the reproduction of "discourses of fatherland and differentiation" (Vobič, 2009). Through political campaigns, media publications and public speeches, the co-creators of the Slovenian public arena remind people that in the era of Slovenia's official return to Europe "whose doorstep we defended against Muslim violence already in history, nobody cannot and should not dictate what kind of ideological and political monuments we should build in our Alpine country".<sup>8</sup>

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Deformed narrations of the historical experience from the era of the Turkish incursions, illustratively presented in the selected novels, are nothing but innocent, as the allusions to the Muslim aggressor perform a crucial role in the interpretation of contemporary social reality in Slovenian public discourse. The mytho-historical reminiscence of this period remains an inevitable device for the mobilisation of Slovenian national identity that is constituted on the foundation of historical experience with the ultimate national enemy, embodied in the figure of the Turk. The opposition to the Turkish absolute Other continues to fabricate a collective consciousness through the dynamic play of binaries and through the narrations of mutual fear that homogenise the disparate Slovenian nation (Barth, 1969). Although the image of the enemy is transforming through its historical and contextual appearance, 'imago Turci' remains an essential element used for fostering integration of a Slovenian imagined community.

In addition, 'imago Turci' does not function as an internal integrative element in the context of reinforcing the nation-state model but can be similarly useful for supranational identification of the Slovenian nation. Slovenia's role in the Turkish wars "appealed to the international community for the recognition of new members and justified its honourable (defen-

<sup>8</sup> A statement by Zvone Perko, a member of a right-wing political party SNS about building a mosque in Slovenia (9 December 2003).

ce) and historical (millenary loyalty) membership in Europe" (Kalčić, 2007: 256). By reproducing the discourse of normative antagonism toward the Muslim European Other, Slovenia is analogously turning itself away from its recent historical affiliation with Yugoslav socialism and strengthening its significant role in the defence of Europe's prevalent religious identity (Lindstrom, 2003).

The central ideological mechanism for the construction of the Slovenian identity thus lies in antemurale myths of defending the frontier of Christianity, rooted in the discourses of frontier Orientalism. The heuristics of Said's acknowledged paradigm uses a specific local interaction between Muslim and Christian subjects to pattern and justify unbalanced relations of power in the manner of classical Orientalist manner of hierarchal and "ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (Said, 1979: 42). In this register, the Turks present an Oriental Other that constructs diametrically opposite Western supremacy for the Slovenian self.

The efficiency of this process is the sublime work of numerous ideological state apparatuses, including literature. The pseudo-historical accounts of the literary works, such as Jurčič's *Jurij Kozjak, slovenski janičar* and Sket's *Miklova Zala: Povest iz turških časov*, offers a negatively schematised construction of the Muslim Other, depicted through the selection of lexicon, employments of rigid dichotomies and deformed representation of historical events. The canonisation of such novels functions as an effectual ideological mechanism for legitimising Slovenian nationalism and normative antagonism toward the Muslim Other. A critical reflection of 'imago Turci' in literary texts therefore presents a significant element for understanding and resisting a hegemonic picture of Islam that fans racist national(istic) discourses in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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