

“Der Balkan” in der *Krone*: Austria between “frontier Orientalism” and *amnesiac nationalism*

Introduction

Nineteenth-century Austrian diplomat, foreign minister and leading figure of the Restoration Fürst Metternich is “credited” with the postulate that the Balkans “started” in what is today’s Vienna’s third district (Winkler 2011). Since then, the question as to where the geopolitical area (loosely) designated – and mostly imposed on south-eastern “others” – as *the Balkans* borders Central Europe and Austria has become a cultural trope. The Balkans thus imagined are mostly negatively connoted, constructed as a projective screen or ideological reservoir of purported backwardness and various dangers – all in (relative) geographical proximity.

After the political space between the Adriatic- and the Black Seas had played arguably *the* decisive role in the history of the late Habsburg Empire and its demise, the Balkans’ relevance to Austrian imaginations of both “self” and “other” has not abated over the last century either. I here examine the most recent “chapter” of a much longer history¹ of Austrians thinking and writing about their south-easterly neighbors. I do so through close analysis of the country’s most widely-read and politically influential newspaper, the tabloid daily *Kronen Zeitung* between 2009 and 2017. As we will discover, this corpus of data is particularly significant to the wider endeavors reflected in the present special issue. An EU-member since 1995, Austria continued to rank amongst member-states with the most pronounced, exclusively national identifications (Rathkolb 2005, 58), leading one commentator to conclude that 15 years after the country’s EU-accession many Austrians had not “yet arrived properly” in the European Union and to ascribe some responsibility for this

identificatory delay to the *Kronen Zeitung*'s popularity and EU-skepticism (Filzmaier 2010, 121; 124). As the guest editors have illustrated, processes of EU-integration and potential further enlargement carry the “weight of the European colonial past” and the “EU’s relations with the Mediterranean region” are partly shaped by the latter’s historical construction as “an epistemic and geopolitical site of knowledge production”. In what follows, I demonstrate that it pays analytical dividends – against the backdrop of Europe’s current crises – to examine how (formerly) colonial relations and pasts “silently inscribed in the European integration project” (guest editors, introduction) are also re-inflected in a particular, often particularly EU-skeptical medium in one of the historical hearts of Central Europe today.

This discussion unfolds in a succession of steps. Following a contextual, methodological and theoretical outline, my analysis reveals recurring topoi and other argumentative characteristics in the *Kronen Zeitung*'s recent coverage of “the Balkans”. I draw attention to both historical-discursive continuities and significant shifts evident in the body of data being examined, whilst revealing dominant discursive tendencies and occasional counter-discourses within it. Thematically, concerns with the recent refugee crisis – and its widely perceived impact on Austria via the “Balkan-route” – will take center-stage. At the same time, the analysis probes deeper, showing how quotidian, mediated representations of “the Balkans” in Austria’s most widely read newspaper purport to explain complex crises and at times rearticulate a “frontier Orientalism” (Gingrich 2005) that has long defined Austria’s relations with the regions and peoples to the country’s south-east. The article concludes by reflecting on an *amnesiac nationalism*, and its post-imperial entanglements, currently contributing to a re-shaping of the European Union from within.

Contextual-, methodological and theoretical outlines

This analysis focuses on a large corpus of data comprising daily coverage, and readers' letters to the editor, published in Austria's most widely read newspaper over an eight-year period from 2009 until 2017. This timeframe is highly significant, for it saw a number of era-defining transnational crises (i.e. from the aftershock of the 2008 financial crisis; the protracted debt- and austerity crises across the Eurozone, particularly in Greece; to the much-discussed refugee crisis since 2015 and the polarization this has triggered in Austria and beyond²). The newspaper in question requires further contextualization.

The *Kronen Zeitung* (or *Krone*) has acquired the somewhat questionable reputation of being the "world champion in circulation" relative to population size, given that it has over time consistently reached some 40% of Austria's population. A tabloid daily, its market-dominance has been described as "internationally unique", reaching some 43,3% of the population in 2000, at a print-run of 1,08 million copies a day (Rathkolb 2005, 241)³. The paper's influence has been widely observed. For instance, discourse analyst Ruth Wodak (2016, 198) recalls the *Kronen Zeitung*'s "celebration" of Jörg Haider's and "his" Freedom Party's (FPÖ) "victory" already "four days prior" to the 1999 national elections. At the latter, the FPÖ subsequently received some 27% of the vote, leading to the FPÖ's inclusion in a coalition government with the center-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the temporary imposition of a number of diplomatic "sanctions" on Austria by her then 14 EU-partners. Given that Haider's rise to political prominence would have been "hard to imagine" without the *Krone*'s implicit ideological support (Rittberger 2009, 50-52), and in light of not only Austria's but indeed Europe's subsequent *Haiderization* (Wodak 2016, 18), which describes a neo-nationalist shift towards right-wing populism, the wider significance of the paper in question is difficult to overstate.

Critical commentators have described the *Krone*'s ideological tendencies as neoliberal, EU-skeptical and xenophobic. Reinhold Gärtner (2009, 62), for example, has drawn attention

to a caricature published in the paper in the early 1990s, which juxtaposed a “small Austrian” (recognizable by traditional costume) to two giant rats displaying the words “foreigner” and “criminality”. Michael Rittberger offers historical contextualization, tracing the origins of a xenophobic “style” in the *Krone* to the period after 1986, i.e. the year that saw both the infamous “Waldheim controversy” and Haider’s rise to the top of the FPÖ’s ranks. Henceforth, Rittberger summarizes, the *Kronen Zeitung* began to articulate a populism against political elites, embracing “the new neoliberal paradigm”, and – with rising unemployment – formulating an exclusivist discourse vis-à-vis “foreigners”. In each of these respects, there were considerable overlaps with Haider’s politics. After 1995 a discursive “demonization” of foreigners continued, at one point leading to a veritable conflation in the paper’s representation of sub-Saharan African migrants with drug-related criminality. (Rittberger 2009, 46-56) All this having been said, it would be wrong to assume unfaltering consistency. Instead, the *Kronen Zeitung* has also shown occasional ideological switches and ambivalences. For instance, Armin Thurnher (2000, 40) – editor of the Viennese weekly *Falter* reflecting on the protests against the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in early 2000 – detected a “paradox” in the fact that even the *Kronen Zeitung*, having helped the FPÖ’s rise to prominence and power, eventually warned against the party’s inclusion in a government coalition. More recently, with regard to the paper’s position on the European Union, close analyses of the *Krone*’s relevant coverage, commentaries and readers’ letters have shown them to be overwhelmingly EU-skeptical, sometimes positively EU-phobic, but to also allow space for occasional (pro-European) counter-discourses (Karner 2010; 2013).

It is against this backdrop that my central research questions arise: in the context of the defining events of recent years (i.e. post-2008), which “self- and other-[re]presentations” (Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009, 114) and broader sense-making narratives – with regard to Austria’s south-easterly neighbors – have featured in the *Kronen Zeitung*? How are “the

Balkans” depicted, and what rhetorical-interpretative work is performed thereby? As already anticipated, I examine these questions through a large corpus of data, comprising a personally compiled *Kronen Zeitung* “archive” stretching from April 2009 until March 2017. This very sizable collection of materials includes frontpage headlines, coverage of domestic- and European politics, journalistic commentaries, and daily readers’ letters to the editor. The significance of readers’ letters has been recognized as capturing diverse social actors’, or so-called ordinary citizens’, public argumentation on “sensitive topics” (Lynn and Lea 2003, 430). Offering insights into the everyday negotiation of political positions and bottom-up responses to diverse issues, analysis of readers’ letters can act as a methodological corrective to an otherwise exclusive focus on the top-down interpretations and blueprints offered by the “primary- and secondary definers” (Hall et al. 1978) that are politicians, experts and the media respectively.

The full corpus of data underpinning this article consists of 1125 A4 pages of thematically pre-selected (and then digitalized) newspaper text and images, the majority of which includes more than one article, several opinion pieces or multiple readers’ letters. For the purposes of the present discussion, this body of data was examined with the aid of a Corpus Analysis Toolkit enabling the compiling concordances.⁴ Across the entire data set, the search term and German noun “der Balkan” generated a total of 116 hits, with a steep increase in the term’s occurrence recorded since 2015, and the highest frequencies in its usage occurring in March 2016 (19 times), November 2015 (15 times) and October 2015 (6 times).⁵ In subsequent analytical steps this sub-set of data (i.e. the 116 items containing the term “Balkan”) were treated as qualitative data, with each item being carefully contextualized (i.e. read against the backdrop of the events and issues out of which each item of text had emerged) and a thematic analysis of the entire sub-set then revealing a number of recurring issues and concerns. Finally, in order to illuminate prominent discursive/ argumentative

features – and their longer histories – evident in the sub-set, these principles of qualitative data analysis were complemented by core-concepts borrowed from critical discourse analysis and relevant historical and anthropological literature.

This calls for further contextualizing remarks about the theoretical and historical strands guiding this discussion. In the most general terms, the data and discussion presented here resonate with observations of the “consciousness-raising”, often politically polarizing effects of social crises, whether structural or “merely” perceived (Karner 2011). With regard to the more fine-grained analytical insights developed below, two key-concepts feature prominently. The first is the critical discourse analytical conceptualization of *topoi* as “content-related rules for reaching conclusions”⁶ (Wodak 2016, 68). *Topoi* are “parts of argumentation that belong to the obligatory premises ... explicit or inferable ... justify[ing] the transition from the argument to the conclusion” (Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009, 22) and thereby commonly enable strong, often circular claims immune to counter-evidence.⁷ The second key-concept invoked in this discussion is the recent anthropological notion of *grammars of identity* (Baumann and Gingrich 2004): not content with the somewhat trivial observation that identifications presuppose difference through the drawing of boundaries, this more nuanced idea insists on investigating the “logics” governing the inter-relationships between in- and out-groups in a given context, cultural practice or discursive claim. Whilst Baumann and Gingrich outline three distinctive grammars, which they characterize as “orientalist”, “segmentary” and “encompassing” respectively,⁸ I treat this as an open-ended list capable of generating new analytical momentum and interest in how inter-group relations are constructed in a given context.

Finally, there is important scholarship on the *longue durée* of Austrian ideas of self- and otherness in relation to “the Balkans”. This includes work on nineteenth century constructions of hierarchical *topoi* of Austrian/ “German superiority” and of a purported

“civilizing mission” vis-à-vis external, threatening (i.e. Russian/ Slavic) “others” (Reifowitz 2001; Promitzer 2003; Wingfield 2003; Reynolds-Cordileone 2015). It also extends to André Gingrich’s (2005) work on *frontier Orientalism*: unlike in Edward Said’s original formulation, Gingrich argues that Habsburg Austria, in the late imperial era and against the backdrop of the initial occupation (in 1878) and subsequent annexation (in 1908) of Bosnia and Herzegovina, distinguished a “threatening” and hence “bad Muslim alien” (i.e. Ottomans) from the purportedly “good”, servile, loyal (because colonized) internal Muslim (i.e. “the Bosniak”); consequently, the Orient came to be seen as “both threat and opportunity” (Heiss and Feichtinger 2013, 149ff). As we will discover, some of this history of ideas plays an important role for an understanding of more recent and current Austrian constructions of “the Balkans”.

Topoi of nostalgia, corruption and criminality

Nostalgia is a cultural and political feature of our era. Its Austrian forms include the well-known topos of postwar Austria as an “island of the blessed” that has since gone into purported decline: first formulated by Pope Paul VI as a description of Austria, by then economically affluent and politically stable, in 1971, the notion that the country *was* until recently such an “island of the blessed” is now encountered in complaints about political developments, domestic and international, since the 1970s that allegedly culminated in Austria’s EU-accession in the 1995 and the country’s experience of globalization, migration and multiculturalism (Liessmann 2005, 59; Karner 2010). This topos juxtaposes nostalgic constructions of the recent past to a present found anxiety-inducing and threatening by many. Such views pervade many readers’ letters published in the *Kronen Zeitung*, of which the following – which appeared on Austrian National Day in 2016 – was a paradigmatic example:

I am proud of our Austria, which my parents and grandparents helped build after the war ... our Austria became a country worth loving and living in ... That Austria had few debts, no unemployment, everyone could afford a flat, the police controlled crime, one had no need to be afraid – and there were no economic migrants either ... And today? Are we still proud of our Austria? We have the highest [sic!] unemployment, social security mainly for those who have never paid into the system, uncontrolled immigration. Politicians are not doing enough about this, for fear of the Left. I am still proud of Austria, of the provinces, the small towns and villages, the wonderful scenery, but not of things as they are in Vienna ... Where is today's Prince Eugene of Savoy who saves us from the wild hordes? (*Krone* reader, October 26, 2016, 42)

Though “the Balkans” are not explicitly mentioned here, the historical allusion to Prince Eugene and hence to fighting a “danger” from the south-east is revealing. There is much else that is also noteworthy about recurring positions such as these: deictic references to “our” country as a core-feature of banal nationalism (Billig 1995); the recent historical rupture here postulated between a romantically mis-portrayed postwar era and a similarly misconstrued, thoroughly dystopian here and now respectively; economic and cultural “pessimism” and “welfare chauvinism”, i.e. entitlements being ascribed to a nationally defined in-group only (Hainsworth 2000, 10; Gingrich 2006) that are characteristic of today's neo-nationalisms; concurrently, a perception of a geographical contrast between urban and rural settings, which evaluates the former negatively and echoes the trope that all things disconcerting about present circumstances (i.e. crime, unemployment, an allegedly dysfunctional ethnic pluralism, all features commonly attributed to “the Balkans”, as we shall see) supposedly “begin” in

Vienna; and long-established cultural memories of the battle of Vienna in 1683. The latter pose the question as to who today's "wild hordes" are supposed to be.

Such accounts are more than nostalgic (mis-)representations of the recent past. They formulate strong criticism of the perceived state of Austrian politics and society, in which "the Balkans" are depicted as a stereotypical, negative "other" that Austria today allegedly has come to resemble. This manifests in readers' letters bemoaning corruption:

Deeply corrupt, Austria turns out to be a "Balkan state". (*Krone* reader, March 18, 2015, 32)

Not a day passes without new details about corruption and bribery ... We complain about the Balkans, but we are the Balkans. (*Krone* reader, September 10, 2011, 22)

Nostalgic accounts of the past and criticisms of the present can also be tied to semi-apocalyptic predictions for the imminent future, in which "the Balkans" once again play a prominent discursive role:

Unemployment will get even worse ... on 1 January 2014 when Rumanian and Bulgarian citizens can start enjoying their freedom of movement and employment within the EU ... When one reads the paper... one could be forgiven for thinking that we already live in Eastern Europe or in the Balkans. (*Krone* reader, October 25, 2013, 26)

Underpinning such accounts is a binary, "Orientalizing" *identity grammar*, enabling the construction of "the Balkans" as a source of various threats to the national in-group. Concerns

about crime, and its projection onto the cultural and geographical space beyond Austria's south-easterly borders, feature prominently. Recurrently, "the Balkans" are reduced to a topos of criminality and danger. For example, a *Kronen Zeitung* article on 3 December 2014 (p. 12) described a "*Balkan-Terrorachse*" (Balkan terrorist axis) and its connections to "homegrown Islamism". On 28 January 2015, the paper (p. 2) reported on "people-smuggling" (*Schlepperei*) from the Balkans, following this with an account, published on 15 February 2015 (p. 2) of the then Minister of the Interior starting a campaign against "mass-emigration from the Kosovo". A topos of criminality again manifested in the paper's depiction, on 28 November 2015 (pp. 14-15), of the Balkans – and quoting a UN report – as the "number one route for the drugs mafia" smuggling narcotics "from Afghanistan via the Balkan-route to Europe". Less than two months later, the Balkans featured again as a crucial node for international criminal networks, in this case for the people-smuggling of "hundreds of illegals ... from Iraq ... via the Balkans and Austria ... to Finland" (*Kronen Zeitung*, January 12, 2016, 3). Yet, "the Balkans" are discursively not only tied to fears of criminality. They also, as the next section demonstrates, can be put to other interpretative uses.

Historical analogies and the civilizing-*topos*

The use of historical analogies, whilst rhetorically useful, has been shown to be historiographically deeply problematic, for analogies "reduce complexity", "short-circuit critical reflection", and self-interestedly aim for "instant legitimacy" (Müller 2002, 27)⁹ for the argumentative position being advocated. In the sub-set of the data considered here, historical analogies appeared with regularity. Their discursive purposes included the articulation of criticism of events in "the Balkan region" and the formulation of "positive self-presentation[s] and negative other-presentation[s]" (Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009, 23). In

the terms of the present analysis, the latter express a binary or “orientalist” grammar of identity.

One illustration of the rhetorical use of historical analogies emerged in the context of the earlier stages of the Greek debt-crisis. It is important to stress that commentaries and many readers’ letters published in the *Kronen Zeitung* have been profoundly critical of the Eurozone’s Greek “bailouts”; such criticism has manifested in regular depictions of Greece as a “bottomless pit” and of the “bailout programs” as allegedly futile but enormously costly if not outrightly dangerous to the Eurozone’s more stable economies (Karner 2013, 257). When, in November 2011 Greece’s then Prime Minister Papandreou announced his intention to let a Greek referendum decide on whether to accept the terms of the “EU-Rettungspaket”, and against the backdrop of the paper’s strong criticism of Papandreou’s reported plans, columnist Ernst Trost argued through the following historical comparisons and contrasts:

In antiquity the Greeks arguably saved European civilization through their victories over the powerful Persians. In the winter of 1940 Greek resilience was decisive for the whole continent again: when they bravely repelled Mussolini, Hitler was provoked to militarily intervene (sic!) in the Balkans in 1941, thus delaying his attack against the Soviet Union by a month, and his “Operation Barbarossa” got stuck in the Russian winter. It seems as though the Greeks still derive some European indebtedness to them from this. And Papandreou appears to emulate General de Gaulle, who always sought to legitimize unpopular decision through referenda. (*Kronen Zeitung*, November 3, 2011, 3)

Reasoning through analogy – with particular reference to “the Balkans” – became even more apparent in another major crisis, when a columnist compared the early stages of the conflict in

the Ukraine to “1914 und 1990 auf dem Balkan” (*Kronen Zeitung*, March 11, 2014, 4). The (implicit) trope of the Balkans as a *Pulverfass* (i.e. tinder box or powder keg) reappeared in the same columnist’s reflections on the origins of World War I (*Kronen Zeitung*, July 26, 2014, 4).

Related analogies and a paternalistic discourse postulating a persisting “backwardness” for Bosnia in particular featured in Christian Hauenstein’s reporting from the region:

Bosnia is akin to a country in puberty ... bordering on autism ... Its political caste refuses external advice and the help the EU has been offering for nearly two decades. Bosnia is still only at the starting line of its path to Europe, whilst other former-Yugoslav states have either already joined the EU or are candidates for accession ... People ... from Bosnia’s three ethnic groups are haunted by centuries of war ... Yet, other parts of Yugoslavia also disintegrated in the most recent war. There has even been some dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. In Bosnia, this is currently unthinkable. The situation there resembles the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians ... Europe should show interest in this country plighted by poverty, unemployment, corruption and organized crime ... Although historically Islam in Bosnia was liberal, now the most impoverished gravitate towards Imams and mosques financed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar offering social and medical support. (*Kronen Zeitung*, November 1, 2013, 4-5)

Again, we encounter a discursively “rich” assessment, whose argumentative features require commentary. First, in broad historical terms, one here detects continuity with the long-established, paternalistic topos of a “civilizing mission” (Reifowitz 2001) mentioned earlier

and its successive re-application to Bosnia in particular. Second, the analogy drawn here is synchronic rather than diachronic, with persisting ethnic tensions in Bosnia being likened to the conflict in the Middle East. Third, and concurrently, this statement makes strong claims about history, formulating a topos of primordial hatred (i.e. “haunted by centuries of war”) that is presented as an essentializing (pseudo-)explanation for the country’s current challenges. Fourth, we encounter an instance of the aforementioned *frontier Orientalism* (Gingrich 2005), whereby Bosnia’s “historically liberal Islam” is contrasted to the specter of Islamic radicalization whose roots are located much further afield. Finally, and more tentatively, we arguably here also see traces of a wider topos – typical of the New Right – that suggests that at least in some contexts (i.e. Bosnia or the Middle East in the case at hand) multiculturalism may be “inevitably flawed” (see Auinger 2017, 125).

Thus we arrive at the crucial juncture of recent years, the refugee-crisis in 2015/2016, when Austrian interest in “the Balkans” experienced a dramatic renaissance. This was of course reflected in Austria’s most widely read newspaper.

The Balkan-route ...

Reporting a “flood of illegals”, the Kronen Zeitung employed the term “Balkanroute” as early as 2 December 2011. When the refugee crisis started in earnest in 2015, the paper’s initial framing of the daily arrival of Syrian and other refugees via Austria’s south-easterly borders portrayed a “wave of refugees”, amidst which the military, the police and engaged citizens (still) managed to provide order among the potential for “chaos” and despite what were described as unreasonable “demands for pocket money” by some arrivals (Kronen Zeitung, September 21, 2015, 10-11). On 21 October 2015, the paper reported (p. 6), not without empathy, that “the cold and rain make people’s escape across the Balkans in the direction of

Europe torturous”. Also worth noting was the (inadvertent) geographical deixis at work, seemingly locating the Balkans *outside* of Europe. By 30 October 2015, the Krone (pp. 2-3) seemed to conclude that the country was facing a “mass influx” (*Völkerwanderung*) that could “not be stopped at present”. Less than a month on, a reader’s letter conflated “asylum-seekers from Africa, the Balkans and other under-developed countries [sic!] where there is no war” and all of whom were now purportedly “making their way – easier than ever before – to the promised land” (Krone reader, November 22, 2015, 40).

While early reporting on the crisis had thus centered on the “flood metaphor” (also see Kopytowska, Grabowski and Woźniak 2017) and on a topos of the state-attempting-to-order-chaos, the discourse soon shifted and combined with EU-skepticism. As early as 23 September 2015, the Kronen Zeitung (pp. 4-5) reported that then-Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz (subsequently Austria’s youngest ever Chancellor) had demanded that “refugees of war” and “economic migrants” be distinguished at the EU’s external borders, that Greece should do more to help manage the *Asylkrise*, and that the “protection of the *Außengrenze*” become an additional condition for the Greek “bailout”. On 6 October 2015, the paper (p. 5) reported that then Chancellor Werner Faymann was to meet Merkel and Tsipras on the island of Lesbos to discuss the construction of “hotspots”, which would enable those “not granted asylum-status, arrivals from the Western Balkans (sic!) to Pakistan, to be returned to their countries of origin quickly”. A few months later, on 9 March 2016, the Krone (pp. 2-3) attributed blame for an observed shift from the Balkan-route to an “alternative refugee route” via Italy: responsibility for this, it was claimed, lay with the EU (and, notably, not with its constitutive member-states) and its internal “wrangling”.

Key to the shift afoot was the fact that as the crisis unfolded, the Balkans – and the refugee route crossing them – were increasingly imagined as a place of, or trajectory for, danger. Some of this occurred subtly. On 11 October 2015, the Kronen Zeitung republished

an article by Karin Kneissl that had first appeared in the Austrian quality daily *Die Presse*. An expert of the Middle East, who subsequently became Austria's Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, Kneissl here argued that many among the refugees arriving via the *Balkanroute* were young men escaping inequalities and hence motivated by the "interplay of testosterone and a quest for higher status"; "age-old, evolutionary roles persist in times of globalization", she postulated, and in circumstances such as those at hand "angry young men make history". However, the real turning-point was reached in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015. In the context of the paper's participation in the *Je suis Paris* "movement", it reported on 16 November 2015 (p. 2) that "two attackers last lived in Belgium, [whilst] one of perpetrators arrived via the Balkanroute and Austria". The Balkans now came to play a decisive discursive role in some "instant explanations" offered of the atrocities perpetrated in the French capital. On 16 November (p. 3) Krone columnist Kurt Seinitz observed that "Paris was struck by the IS from afar. At stake are now the 'welcoming culture' and the utterly uncontrolled movement across Schengen-Europe. Bad news for Angela Merkel, the CSU demands consequences ... The terrorist atrocities in Paris can also be traced to Belgium, where the proportion of jihadists is the highest, the result of ... political neglect ... (also needed) are new recipes against growing alienation, in our shared Europe of Christians and Muslims." This particular moment of acute crisis thus led to a rare instance of a European, rather than national *deixis* (i.e. "our shared Europe") being articulated in the *Kronen Zeitung*. At the same time, we again encounter traces of a *frontier Orientalism*: there is a clear acknowledgment that ("good") Muslims are part of Europe, whilst those are similarly clearly delineated from the very real danger posed by jihadists (i.e. the discursive position of "the bad Muslim"). Concurrently, arguments such as these also began to formulate criticisms of Europe's dominant politicians (i.e. German Chancellor Angela Merkel) and existing structures (e.g. Schengen) even more vocally. A reader's letter published a few days

later, arguing that “not just France but all of Europe has a huge problem with violent Islamism, which was welcomed like the famous Trojan horse (i.e. ‘Refugees welcome’)” (*Krone* reader, November 22, 2015, 41), was symptomatic of these now increasingly prominent discursive features. In the aftermath of the sexual attacks in Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2016, the Balkan-route would once again come to occupy a significant explanatory role, as it was via the Balkans, it was argued, that this particular danger of growing sexual violence had arrived. Columnist Peter Gnam summarized in due course that “the prediction that some young, single men who arrived via the Balkan-route ... could turn into a problem has sadly come true” (*Kronen Zeitung*, January 28, 2016, 2).

Overall, the polarization evident across much of Europe since the refugee crisis, pitting neo-nationalist reactions against multiculturalism and civil society attempts to aid refugees’ integration, also manifested in the *Kronen Zeitung*. The following two, mutually juxtaposed readers’ letters published on 6 October 2015 (p. 31) are pertinent here:

The silent majority of some 1,700,000 in Vienna or more than 8 million across Austria do not think that the message of “Refugees welcome” was or is the right signal.

The solidarity concert “Voices for refugees” attended by more than 150,000 people shows that ... we do not want xenophobic slogans, barbed wire along our borders, but we want to support people fleeing terror and death.

In light of subsequent events, to which we turn next, the first of these readers’ letters can be seen as an example of the now dominant discourse, the second as an instance of counter-discourse.

... and its closure

On 24 February 2016 the Kronen Zeitung (p. 4) reported on the so-called “West-Balkan-Conference” taking place in Vienna. In the context of the closure of the “Macedonian border”, and since Austria had not invited Greece to the conference, this led to a major diplomatic row with Greece. A few days on, then Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann was quoted as saying, in negative intertextual reference to Merkel’s much more upbeat and widely-quoted statement early in the refugee crisis, that “we cannot handle this, [Austria] can’t be Germany’s waiting room” (Kronen Zeitung, March 2, 2016, 2-3). By now, disquiet about the local impact of the refugee crisis and support for the closure of the “Balkan-route” had come to be articulated along with criticism of German- and European policies. Columnist Claus Pándi, for instance, criticized “German non-sense” as follows:

“Vienna Balkan-Conference divides Europe”. This headline in the ... allegedly quality paper Süddeutsche Zeitung is of course complete non-sense. Europe has been divided for a very long time ... With its financial might Germany has been deciding for years on the EU’s direction. From the financial crisis to refugee policy: Supermum Merkel has always called the shots ... Just because the world’s allegedly most powerful woman refuses to change course, the rest of Europe need not continue the rest of the journey, to its bitter end, as a second-class passenger ... The fact that ... the Greeks ... whom we supported throughout their debt disaster, now end their friendship with us due to our refugee policy is a shame but not a major problem. We don’t hold grudges, but we remember who our friends are, when the going gets tough. (Kronen Zeitung, February 26, 2016, 2)

Arguments for the closure of the Balkan-route¹⁰ were not only levelled against European- but also against domestic detractors. The following reader's letter was a case in point:

Whilst all of Austria is breathing a sigh of relief over the now lessening stream of refugees, there are sadly a few who oppose this. Amongst them the Green party migration speaker Alev Korun – presumably of migrant background herself – criticizes the closure of our borders and on the Balkans. Of course, she offers no alternative answer as to how this avalanche of refugees from the Middle East to Central Europe could otherwise be handled. (*Krone* reader, March 18, 2016, 34)

Such arguments accomplish more than the articulation of support for the closure of the Balkan-route: subtly, opposition to Austria's Green Party, and its commitment to an inclusive multiculturalism, also resonates in statements of this kind.

In due course, as the Balkan-route's closure had become a *fait accompli*, the *Kronen Zeitung's* coverage of the issue became increasingly dominated by a “we-were-right-after-all” topos. On 13 March 2016 (pp. 46-47) the mayor of Schärding in Upper Austria was quoted as blaming a local increase in radical politics on the “EU's confused refugee-politics” and as reporting an improvement since the “de facto closure” of the Balkan-route. Two days later, the then coalition's emerging consensus to close off all “refugee routes” to Austria was reported (*Kronen Zeitung*, March 15, 2016, 2-3). On 14 April 2016 the *Krone* (p. 4) declared that “unofficially even the Germans are now grateful for our closure of the Balkan-route” and on 12 May 2016 (p. 6), following the Greek Foreign Minister's “reconciliatory visit” to Vienna, that “behind closed doors the Greeks even admit that they benefit from the Balkan-route closure”. In an interview with Sebastian Kurz soon thereafter, the latter stated that “I was also criticized when I organized the Balkan-route closure through the Balkan-conference. Soon

thereafter the EU confirmed precisely this” (quoted in *Krone Bunt*, June 19, 2016). And on 7 August 2016, *Krone* editor-in-chief Klaus Herrmann (p. 2) stated that it had been “precisely the closure of the Balkan-route” that had “saved Europe from an explosion of the wave of refugees (sic!) with all its consequences”. A little more than a month later, a similar argument was combined with renewed EU-skepticism, declaring a state of “EU-bankruptcy in refugee questions” and presenting national decisions as the only workable solutions (*Kronen Zeitung*, September 18, 2016, 5). Finally, in its Sunday supplement *Krone Bunt* on 25 September 2016 even Donald Tusk was quoted as saying that European citizens had been made to wait “far too long for the Balkan-route closure and the agreement between the EU and Turkey”. This also points towards the final theme to be discussed here.

“Frontier Orientalism” rediscovered

There have been instances of a re-appropriated *frontier Orientalism* (Gingrich 2005) in the *Kronen Zeitung*’s coverage, in addition to the ones already mentioned. Frontier Orientalism, as discussed earlier, differs from British and French colonial representational regimes captured by Edward Said. Part of the Habsburgs’ historical experience of much closer proximity to “the Orient”, of their self-declared “colonial and cultural mission” in the Balkans and their perceptions of the latter as “both threat and opportunity” (Heiss and Feichtinger 2013, 149ff.), frontier Orientalism separates a dangerous, more distant Oriental “other” from a servile, “colonized Oriental” closer to “home”.

In contemporary discourse, examples of the former – i.e. a more distant yet threatening “Oriental other” – manifest most clearly in perceptions of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Turkey and widespread Austrian opposition to any prospect of Turkey’s possible future EU-accession. Part and parcel of this are perceptions and topoi of various threats. Typically, Turkey’s size,

political trajectory and ambitions are acknowledged and at least partly feared. For instance, the aforementioned Karin Kneissl (in *Krone Bunt*, March 6, 2016) summarized Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's ambitions as including the construction of the biggest airport world-wide in Istanbul; to act as the protector of Europe's Muslims; to steer events "between the Balkans and the Middle East"; and for "every Turkish woman to give birth to four children". By contrast, there are also images of "another" Balkan, or even Orient, closer to home, purportedly more familiar and more reliable: thus, on 30 April 2016 the *Krone* (pp. 6-7) quoted the Bulgarian president's description of Bulgaria as "a pro-European factor of stability in the Balkans", and one particularly significant given Bulgaria's border with Turkey.

A similar ambivalence between ascribed, problematic otherness and simultaneous closeness emerged in the *Kronen Zeitung* of 5 July 2016 (pp. 4-5): "Balkan-countries" (i.e. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia) were here associated with youth unemployment and primordial ethnic conflict and hence portrayed as a perennial cause of deep concern (*ewiges Sorgenkind*). This echoes the shared focus in the special issue on the more or less "silent" re-articulations of former colonial relations in some of today's European integration efforts. At the same time, Sebastian Kurz was quoted as saying that "whatever happens in the Balkans affects us". Images of the Balkans as an area of potentially uncontrollable danger close by, articulated through the aforementioned trope of the powder keg, reappeared in Kurz Seinitz's reporting (*Kronen Zeitung*, October 1, 2016, 6-7) on Bosnia and the Republika Srpska's separatist ambitions. Employing metaphors of dangerous chain reactions and historical analogies, it was here postulated that "once again, the whole Balkan region could start sliding" and the question was posed as to when "the powder keg might explode".

The ambivalence that defines (contemporary) frontier Orientalism revolves not only around fears about future conflict. It also arguably manifests in versions of (Austrian) EU-

skepticism, which – though conscious of the economic benefits of EU-membership to Austria – are at best wary of the Union’s further enlargement to the south-east. Reporting on EU-level discussions of this, the *Kronen Zeitung* recently (20 January 2018) had this to say: “The EU is meant to grow further. Well, if only it can take it ... if we also absorb Serbia and Montenegro ... [T]he Union is yet to come to terms with Rumania’s, Bulgaria’s and Croatia’s accession.” Once again, “the Balkans” were here imagined, however subtly or inadvertently, as a space of profound problems, if not outright dangers, whose geographical proximity cannot be helped, but whose political closeness, it appears, continues¹¹ to cause widespread anxieties.

Concluding remarks

The “discovery” of the “Mediterranean”, starting in the 1960s, and then of “Europe”, as sites of anthropological investigation has long been traced, as has the subsequent shift – reflective of European integration – away from the former and towards the latter (Goddard, Llobera and Shore 1994). This article has captured a related, yet separate and currently unfolding process: how in the face of more fully-fledged, yet often contested European integration “the Balkans” are (re)discovered as an area for discussion and problematization; and in the case at hand not in the academic realm but in a tabloid newspaper and in the face of growing pre-occupations with the re-fortification of national boundaries towards “the south-east”.

The data discussed here offer insights into some of the forms “amnesiac power” assumes in Europe today. Topoi of various others’ assumed criminality and the purported dangers they pose have a much longer history than covered by the data examined above (Vyleta 2012); they are also often applied in non-reflexive fashion. As such, the topoi and the identity grammars they are premised upon (e.g. the other’s construction, in Orientalist fashion, as the in-group’s diametrical opposite; or conversely, the other’s expected

assimilation into a dominant majority) are part of what Michael Billig (1995) described as a *banal nationalism* structuring much thought and social practice and enabling the nation-state's routine reproduction. Such reproduction usually lies beyond social actors' conscious reflections. More recently, Paul Gilroy's (2004) accounts of the "ethnic absolutism" and "postcolonial melancholia" afflicting many Europeans' thinking and much European politics today also pertain to the level of the banal, i.e. in the sense of being not-noticed, but politically ubiquitous and consequential.

Yet, there is another, less frequently remarked upon dimension to banal nationalism, which Billig (1995, 43ff.; Skey 2009, 331) depicts as an episodic transformation into its "hot"-, more consciously articulated and explicitly mobilizing variant. Such "heating" of (banal) nationalism is often tied to the experience of crises (Karner 2011). The data analyzed above provides insights into widespread perceptions of acute current crises, most notably crises tied to migration flows and their anticipated, experienced or claimed local consequences. In such circumstances, as we have seen, amnesiac power – which here includes stereotypes with a much longer history and the discursive manifestations of highly asymmetrical power relations – assumes greater prominence and can be observed with particular clarity. That social actors bemoaning crises are aware of social changes affecting them is a given. Whether the same actors articulate their positions also with conscious awareness of the nationalist discursive work they thereby often perform, in line with the conceptual difference between a now "hot" and previously "banal" nationalism, is an important question that transcends my present remit and awaits further investigation. Put differently: crisis-consciousness is not the same as, or should not be assumed to automatically entail, self-awareness regarding the details and implications of one's argumentative positions.

Detecting amnesiac power requires a reading of widely circulating discourses "against the grain", with a view to uncovering that which is not being said or, at most, implicitly

acknowledged. In the case of the interpretative and mobilizing positions examined here, we have re-encountered an omission that was already evident in the late nineteenth century (Judson 2006): namely the glossing over of the deep multicultural entanglements and of regular, lived “crossings” of the boundaries the logic of (banal) nationalism seeks to reify. Where the latter operates with a binary identity grammar that clearly delineates the (Austrian) “self” from various (“Balkan”) others, connoting them in diametrically opposed terms, it also exercises an amnesiac power forgetful of the often much more complex and ambivalent identities that have shaped (Central) Europe to this day.

The discrepancies between nationalism’s discursive “orderliness” and the “messiness” of lived experience (Judson and Zahra 2012) notwithstanding, deeply essentialist and at times paternalistic positions of the kind examined here possess an undeniable interpretative and discursive-political utility for many in current crisis contexts. But, seen in their context and broader historical terms, such positions also constitute another manifestation of amnesia: the *longue durée* family histories, so common in many parts of Austria, that have often crossed and spanned the ethno-linguistic boundaries reified by nationalist politics since the nineteenth century, are forgotten in many of the accounts and positions examined above. Put differently: “the Balkans” are indeed not only a neighboring cultural and political space that can be put to interpretative and mobilizing use by a range of social and political actors, especially in moments of widely perceived crises. “They” are and have long been also much closer to “home”. “The Balkans” are part of “home”, and to many Austrians part of their own family histories. To some among them, this is a forgotten part. Akin to the workings of *banal nationalism*, amnesiac power is arguably the most effective form of power. Its ubiquity and taken-for-grantedness call for particular scrutiny and debate.

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Notes:

¹ The most crucial parts of this history stretched from the nineteenth-century “nationalization” of the region, which included the politicization of the Habsburg Empire’s internal “language frontiers” (Judson 2006; King 2002; Reutner 2009), to the later impact of fascism and national socialism on inter-ethnic relations in the region (Pirker 2017; Promitzer 2003; Priestly 1996).

² This builds on discussions of the construction of “urgency” in media-, social media- and political responses to the “refugee crisis” of 2015 (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2018).

³ All translations from German are the author’s.

⁴ Thanks are due to Stuart Moran and the University of Nottingham’s Digital Research Team for financial and practical support in digitalizing the media archive and enabling its systematic analysis.

⁵ There are limitations to this strategy: the geographical-cultural inexactness of the search-term “Balkan” entails diverse delineations and associations in the enunciations employing the term; alternative search-terms – such as particular countries commonly subsumed under “the Balkans” – would generate different hits and reveal interpretative-argumentative positions that only partly overlap with what is presented here. For example, although the Greek debt-crisis or the EU’s negotiations of Turkey’s possible future accession feature in the data examined, the terms “Greece”, “debt” or “Turkey” would have generated different, considerably larger sub-sets for analysis. Also, it must of course be remembered that different countries commonly associated with “the Balkans” occupy very different positions and recent histories vis-à-vis the EU: Greece joined in 1981, Slovenia in 2004, Rumania and Bulgaria in 2007, Croatia in 2013; Serbia and Montenegro are now in accession-negotiations, those have stalled with Turkey; Albania and North Macedonia are candidates, Bosnia a potential candidate.

⁶ This is a clumsy English rendering of the German “inhaltsbezogene Schlussfolgerungsregeln” (Wodak 2016, 68). While *topoi* sometimes follow an “if ... then” pattern of argumentation, I here use their broader definition as “warrants ... where evidence is not provided or where appeals to presupposed common-sense are made” (Wodak, Kwon, Clarke 2011, 606, 614)

⁷ Also relevant here are Reisigl and Wodak’s (2001, 15) observations of the “colonial paradigm”: they discuss this as an example of how critical discourse analysis may be productively applied to the study of racism, as a political phenomenon with context-specific, historical conditions of possibility.

⁸ To simplify Baumann and Gingrich: *orientalist* grammars construct mutually exclusive categories of “self” and “other” as inverse mirror images of each other (i.e. “we” see ourselves as rational, “they” are non-rational, emotional, spiritual etc.); *segmentation* works with sliding scales of inclusion/ exclusion, whereby local opponents become allies when faced by a common enemy; *encompassment* imposes an overarching category of (all-)inclusion that is structured along hierarchies of relative (dis)similarity to a dominant center.

⁹ Also see Ruth Wodak’s reflections (2016, 39) on *Topoi der Geschichte*.

¹⁰ This decision continued to shape Austrian politics until the 2017 parliamentary elections, from the which the previous Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) would emerge as the country’s new Chancellor.

¹¹ The longer history of such fears also includes Austria’s Cold War experience and widespread self-understanding at the time as a last bastion, then bordered by the Iron Curtain to the East, against atheistic communism (see Forlenza 2017).