The Discourse of Progress in Italian Travel Writing on Montenegro

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This article investigates a dominant discourse in Italian travel writing about Montenegro in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the "discourse of progress." Employing a diachronic approach and an imagological analysis, it examines the emergence of various paradigms about Montenegro in Italian travelogues and explores the potential motivations behind this new discursive practice. The study aims to identify the key elements of this discourse and the principal authors, especially journalists and scholars, who contributed significantly to its emergence. At the center of our argument is the notion that the authors' depictions of their experiences in Montenegro were significantly influenced by the main purpose of their visit—to report on the homeland of the future Italian queen Jelena Petrović Njegoš. Consequently, the marriage of the Savoy-Petrović dynasty, which marked a period of heightened relations between Italy and Montenegro, played a crucial role in how this small Balkan principality was presented to Italian readers. By examining these accounts, we aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the representation of the Balkan regions in nineteenth-century travel writing, moving beyond the dominant paradigms of "demi-Orientalism" and "Balkanism" espoused by scholars such as Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova.

Keywords: Italian literature / travel writing / imagology / Balkans / Montenegro

Introduction

The surge of scholarly interest in travelogues through the lens of discourse analysis has been significantly influenced by postcolonial studies. Pioneering work by Edward Said, particularly his 1978 book *Orientalism*, laid the groundwork for critical examinations of travel narratives. Said exposed how colonial powers constructed the "Orient" as the quintessential "Other." Building on this foundation, scholars like Larry Wolff argue that seemingly neutral geographical terms like

"Eastern Europe" are also imbued with symbolic meaning. As Wolff explains, the concept emerged during the Enlightenment to highlight cultural differences and bolster Western intellectual superiority (Wolff 357–359), mirroring Said's critique of "Orientalism" where knowledge production justifies potential domination. However, Wolff nuances this concept, suggesting a "demi-Orientalism" at play in Eastern Europe (7). This implies a more complex dynamic compared to the absolute "Othering" of the Orient. While critiquing power imbalances, Wolff acknowledges a concurrent desire to understand and potentially integrate Eastern Europe into a broader European identity.

Particularly relevant to the Balkans and interpretations of travel writing about Southeastern Europe are the analyses by Bulgarian theorist Maria Todorova. Drawing on Said's research, Todorova introduces the concept of "Balkanism." Similar to Orientalism, Balkanism approaches the Balkans' heterogeneous, dynamic, and complex reality from an uncritically essentialist standpoint, resulting in "a discourse about an imputed ambiguity," rather than the "imputed opposition" found in Orientalism (Todorova 17). Todorova argues that, unlike the Orient, the Balkans are reframed as Europe's "incomplete self." Both Orientalism and Balkanism historically signify the antithesis of the European ideal, characterized by cleanliness, order, self-control, sense of law, justice, and efficient administration (119).[1]

Slovenian anthropologist Božidar Jezernik's comprehensive work *Wild Europe* (2004) provides the most extensive overview of themes found in travel writing on the Balkans and Eastern Europe by authors of various nationalities. Jezernik's analysis of ethnological and anthropological research documented in Western European travelogues from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century reveals how perceptions of the Balkans evolved over time and in relation to the peoples described. Todorova's approach, which avoids a common stereotype of the Balkans in the West (Todorova 115), suggests the need for a nationality-based analysis.

This study examines the portrayal of Montenegro in nineteenth-century Italian travelogues. While these accounts, written predominantly by journalists and scientists, may lack the overt literary qualities of more artistic works, they provide valuable material for discourse analysis. Our research has two main objectives. First, we aim to illuminate alternative discourses about Balkan countries, particularly Montenegro, that

[1] For more information about Orientalism and Balkanism, see Bakić-Hayden and Hayden; Fleming; Čolović; Berber; Raspudić; Ristović.

emerged during this period. Second, we seek to identify the factors that influenced these discursive shifts. By examining these Italian accounts, we hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how nineteenth-century travel writing represented Balkan regions beyond the dominant paradigms of "demi-Orientalism" and "Balkanism."

Italian travelogues on Montenegro published until the last decade of the nineteenth century

Up until the nineteenth century, Montenegro was, for Italians, an almost entirely unknown land. Seen from a political standpoint as part of Europe under Turkish domination, which was underdeveloped in terms of both its economy and its infrastructure, it did not seem a particularly attractive destination for travelers, given the potential dangers and difficulty of the journey (Popović, "Putopisno upoznavanje"). As such, in the first half of the nineteenth century, only one book describing a journey to Montenegro was published in Italian. This was the work by Bartolomeo Biasoletto (1793–1858), a botanist from Trieste, who visited Montenegro while escorting Friedrich Augustus II of Saxony in 1838, and who published his account three years later. The singularity of his experience, as well as the general perception of Montenegro at this time in the works of the few foreign visitors, is best summed up by the author's own words on his feelings as he left Montenegro: "We turned with pleasure to look back from a distance at the harsh but wonderful places we visited in Montenegro and which we were so afraid of, almost wondering if we had really been there at all" (Biasoletto 117).

The increasing political importance of the territory of Montenegro for the Great Powers in the nineteenth century, as part of the so-called "Eastern Question," meant there was also increased demand for information on Montenegro through eyewitness accounts, which in turn led to an increase in the number of foreign visitors. Up until the 1870s, that is, during their own struggle for both national liberation and unification, Italians began to learn more extensively about Montenegro, notably through translations, whether full or partial, of the works of French and German authors who had visited the country. In those accounts, the country is presented through a demi-Orientalizing discourse, which has at its core the perception of Eastern Europe as a space "between Europe and Asia, between civilization and barbarism," situating it as clearly subordinate to Western Europe (Wolff 357, 360).

Montenegro is thus viewed in their works as a rather exotic place that is home to people with strange customs and unusual social arrangements.

During the Montenegro-Turkey War (1876–1878), which resulted in the recognition of Montenegrin independence by the Ottomans at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Italian travelers were able to provide direct insights into the conditions in Montenegro. At that time, both the journalist Eugenio Popovich (1842–1931) and the Italian MP Alfredo Serristori (1833–1884) wrote about Montenegro, producing travelogues that glorified the patriotism of the Montenegrins and attempted to encourage Italian support for them at this decisive historical moment.[2] As such, their depictions were, understandably, focused on highlighting the military skill, courage, and high moral values of the Montenegrins, which helped to make the *heroic discourse* about Montenegro dominant in Italy. The glorification of the struggle for freedom and independence which the local population was engaged in, and their aspirations towards creating their own nation-state, meant that these Balkan warriors were no longer viewed as mere primitive butchers, but rather as brave and respectable heroes (Šistek 265).

A few years later, the botanist Antonio Baldacci (1867–1950) and the Dominican friar Vincenzo Vannutelli (1841–1900) also wrote about Montenegro in Italian. Their descriptions of the socio-cultural space of Montenegro largely follow the contours of the standard demi-Orientalist discourse. In their works, Montenegro is viewed as a curiosity on European soil, considered a difficult country to reach, where the cultural space is significantly contaminated by oriental influences, and whose ruler is seen as being closer to a medieval feudal lord than a contemporary leader.

Italian travelogues on Montenegro published between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

The sudden increase in Italian interest in Montenegro at the end of the nineteenth century can be directly linked to the dynastic marriage between the House of Savoy and the Petrović dynasty. This union with a small, poor Balkan principality of roughly 200,000 inhabitants was motivated by a confluence of factors, both eugenic and political. The widely-held belief that earlier consanguineous marriages had genetically

[2] For more on this subject, see Popović, “Ratni dopisi” 389–401; Popović, “Parlamentare” 671–679.

"weakened" the House of Savoy directed the choice of a princess with "healthy blood" (Barneschi 15). Additionally, the Italian court and its diplomats envisioned the marriage as a strategic move to bolster Italy's political and economic influence in the Balkans, potentially leading to closer ties with Russia (Sircana; Burzanović, *Crna Gora* 202, 207).

The announcement of the royal couple's engagement in Cetinje (August 1896) sparked a wave of Italian journalistic interest in Montenegro. Journalists flocked to the country, eager to explore and report on various aspects of life for Italian audiences. Their investigations materialized not only in newspaper correspondence but also in a rapid succession of monographs on Montenegro. Following the wedding ceremony in Rome (October 1896), scientists and other professionals also visited Montenegro, subsequently publishing their impressions in travelogues. The dynastic marriage thus played a decisive role in shaping Italian perceptions of Montenegro. A significant shift in discourse is evident in works published between 1896 and 1906, compared to travelogues written on Montenegro just a decade earlier.

The key role in creating this new image of Montenegro following the events of 1896 was played by the *discourse on progress*. This discourse focused on analyzing the Montenegrin government's efforts to make Montenegro more similar to developed European countries. Descriptions of the small Balkan principality emphasized its increasing urbanization, building projects, and advancements in culture, legislation, and various aspects of social development.

While prior travel writing about Montenegro primarily focused on its natural beauty, the authors visiting the country at the end of the nineteenth century shifted their focus to the reforms enacted by Montenegrin ruler Nikola I after the 1876–1878 war and the recognition of Montenegrin independence by the Ottomans at the Congress of Berlin (1878). Turning their attention to the realities of urban life in Montenegro, as evidenced by their descriptions of the places they visited, these writers explored the impact of these reforms. Given that all the visitors spent at least some time in Cetinje, their works, as might be expected, contain numerous descriptions of the Montenegrin capital.

The journalist and author Giuseppe Marcotti (1850–1922) published his account in 1896, although he had visited Cetinje approximately a decade earlier. Describing the unpaved streets and the few, modest, tiled, and plastered houses of the Montenegrin capital, he suggests that it resembles a "respectable Italian town" (Marcotti 76). Another writer and journalist, Armando Perotti (1865–1924) finds in this small town of only two thousand inhabitants a simplicity in the construction

of houses, broad streets, and a concern for cleanliness that makes him describe the Montenegrin capital as a "city of dreams." Patrick Mac Swiney de Mashanaglass (1871–1945), President of the National Committee of Catholic Scholars of Great Britain and Ireland,[3] presents Cetinje as a small town where educated foreigners from the upper classes can partake in various activities and live comfortably. He contrasts this group with those who depict the town as a place of unwanted exile, labeling them as individuals who lack inner wealth and therefore cannot fully appreciate its offerings (Mac Swiney de Mashanaglass 217). Several authors emphasize the frenetic construction activity in Cetinje. They describe the erection of diplomatic missions, churches, cultural and historical monuments, theaters, schools, and even a tennis court. This flurry of construction paints a picture of a town undergoing a radical transformation into a modern European capital. Vico Mantegazza (1856–1934) who was the correspondent for the Florentine newspaper *La Nazione* and whose book on his visit to Montenegro went through three editions within fifteen years, compared the Montenegrin capital, with its two thousand inhabitants, to metropolises like Belgrade and Sofia of thirty years prior (Mantegazza 97).[4] Meanwhile, the correspondent for the Milanese newspaper *Perseveranza* Mario Borsa (1870–1952) was able to worry that the presence of the court, the state apparatus, a single club, and the various cultural facilities, all in such a small place, might "contaminate the people and their customs with conventionalism" (Borsa 22).[5] Nine years after the wedding of the royal couple, in 1905, the Florentine journalist Silvio Ghelli (1866–1924) went so far as to argue that Cetinje was, in fact, an excessively modern city, with "too many tailcoats, top hats, and military decorations" on show (Ghelli 56). During the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), a notable shift in the discourse on Montenegro took place. Perceptions underwent such a dramatic transformation that one author questioned how this collection of "thirteen huts" could ever have been considered a true capital city in the European sense (Guarino 17).[6]

Even in their descriptions of the towns in the interior of Montenegro, the Italian authors emphasized just how much progress had been

[3] For further insights into this author and his travelogue about Montenegro, refer to Burzanović and Popović, "Montenegro."

[4] For Mantegazza's other books and works on Montenegro, see Burzanović and Popović, "Vico Mantegazza."

[5] For further information about this book, refer to Popović, "Montenegro."

[6] For a deeper exploration of the Balkanist discourse on Montenegro and the underlying motivations behind its emergence, see Popović, "Establishment."

achieved. They highlighted improvements in the road infrastructure, the construction of new buildings and factories, enhanced telegraph and telephone connections, and the opening of cultural and educational institutions as compelling evidence of this progress. However, their impressions were far from uniform. For Mario Borsa, who visited Rijeka Crnojevića—a small town on Lake Skadar—the sight of clean houses adorned with flowers and the nineteenth-century stone bridge (which he believed to be of Roman origin) prompted him to compare this charming town to places in Switzerland. In contrast, Giuseppe Marcotti expressed reservations, particularly regarding the subpar quality of available razors and the local custom of shaving outdoors. Nevertheless, he cautioned readers against assuming that the "sophistication of the civilized world" did not extend to the town. He highlighted its vibrant trade and the availability of both Italian liquor and English biscuits in local shops.

The description of Podgorica, the largest city in the principality, allowed the authors to, on the one hand, highlight the contrast with the capital, Cetinje, in terms of the mixture of peoples and cultures found in the larger town, but also, on the other hand, to emphasize the progress that had been made since administrative control had been taken on by the Montenegrin authorities in 1878. For Mario Borsa, Podgorica embodied a liminal space, a crossroads between East and West. He found it a bustling trading center with a distinctly Oriental character. However, the lack of cleanliness and the large number of beggars left him with a negative overall impression (Borsa 68, 74, 91). Despite these drawbacks, he acknowledged efforts to improve the economy and raise cultural standards in the city. Borsa considered Nikšić, also incorporated into Montenegro in 1878, to be the principality's most prosperous town. He lauded its institutional and economic development, even dubbing it the "Florence of Montenegro" due to the purity of the local dialect (86–87).

Botanist Antonio Baldacci, who dedicated much of his life to studying Montenegrin flora, observed the positive impact of Montenegrin rule extending beyond Podgorica and Nikšić. He noted a decline in traditional violence along the coast, with practices like blood feuds, robberies, arson, and attacks being successfully curbed. This starkly contrasted with the "anarchy in full bloom" across the border in the Pashaluk of Skadar, where tribal warfare and caravan attacks remained commonplace (Baldacci, *Crnagora* 93–94).

Geographer Guido Cora (1851–1917) sought to extend the narrative of progress beyond Podgorica and Nikšić, emphasizing the

benefits of the new administration for all of Montenegro compared to Turkish rule. He turned his lens to northern towns like Andrijevica and Kolašin, highlighting their rapid economic and urban development. This advancement was manifested through the construction of factories, restaurants, cafes, and attractive houses, alongside the establishment of postal and telegraph services, and a diverse range of cultural institutions.[7]

Travel writers' perspectives were often influenced by their political beliefs, sometimes bordering on prejudice, for example in the context of open opposition to Italy's support for Austria-Hungary as part of the Triple Alliance. For instance, in Mantegazza's descriptions of Montenegro's towns, including details about restaurants, services, and the quality of food and drink, we can discern his fondness for the small Balkan principality. Conversely, when discussing regions under Austrian administration, he portrays Italy's historical rival for Adriatic influence in a decidedly negative light (Mantegazza 82). Austrian-controlled Kotor, which had long been hailed as the bridge connecting Montenegro to the West—both economically and culturally—is dismissed by Mantegazza as a neglected border post unsuitable for foreign visitors. Mario Borsa goes further, characterizing Kotor as a "wretched town made dirty by soldiers, sailors, merchants, porters, and prostitutes" (Borsa 18). Both Marcotti and Cora romanticize Venetian rule over the eastern Adriatic, perceiving it as a civilizing force in stark contrast to Austrian administration. Silvio Ghelli considered all the towns on the Dalmatian coast, including Kotor, exclusively through the prism of ongoing Austrian-Italian rivalry.

In the context of Montenegro's progress after two decades of peace, Italian authors frequently highlighted culture and the rule of law. These twin themes, largely absent from previous travel writing accessible to Italian readers, became cornerstones in depicting the principality's rapid civilizational advancement. According to Italian travel writers, this transformation signified that a coalition of tribes, which had recently united to resist Turkish invaders, had evolved into an organized nation with well-defined goals related to legal governance and the promotion of cultural pursuits.

Giuseppe Marcotti observed that the spirit of civilization had "begun to warm" the wild mountains of Montenegro. During his stay in the Montenegrin capital, he witnessed the construction of a national

[7] Cora first published this work in the magazine *Nuova Antologia*, in three parts, and then as a monograph. All citations are from this later publication.

theatre, the Zetski dom, and anticipated the opening of a museum (Marcotti 84, 95). Mario Borsa, who began his career in journalism as a theatre critic, provided detailed descriptions of the Zetski dom and its performances. He found the actors to be primarily amateurs or second-rate Serbian troupes, performing comedies and historical dramas by Prince Nikola and Serbian playwrights.[8] Borsa also visited the two reading rooms within the theatre, frequented by both intellectuals and ordinary citizens (Borsa 39). He described their historical paintings and busts of Russian Tsars, alongside one of Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of printing press (39–40). Highlighting Montenegro's cultural heritage, Borsa noted the upcoming 400th anniversary of the first printing house in the South Slavs, established even before the one in Oxford (33). Further evidence of this rich tradition came from Podgorica's reading room, where he saw a book printed in 1540 using the typographical set created by Božidar Vuković Podgoričanin (1460–1539), a Montenegrin nobleman who worked as a printer in Venice (69–71).

The authors were keenly interested in the cultural content available to Montenegrin readers, and so they noted which periodicals could be found in Montenegrin reading rooms. Giuseppe Marcotti observed that guests at the Hotel Cetinje had access to approximately thirty different newspapers, spanning Slavic and other European languages. Mario Borsa provided a more detailed account of periodicals in Zetski Dom, where he encountered journals from the South Slavic regions, as well as Russian, German, French, and Italian publications; he even listed titles of the latter. Among the Montenegrin newspapers, this author specifically mentioned those published in Cetinje during that period: the semi-official newspaper *Glas Crnogorca* (The Montenegrin Voice), the literary monthly *Luča* (The Torch), and the church and school newspaper *Prosvjeta* (Education). To delve deeper into Montenegrins' literary preferences, Borsa also visited the city's bookstore. Notably, he observed that the majority of works available were in German and Slavic languages, leading him to conclude that the Montenegrin cultural public was not familiar with the contemporary currents of European philosophy and literature.

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[8] Despite theatre activity in Montenegro having commenced a decade earlier, the Zetski dom theatre officially opened its doors in 1896. This momentous occasion coincided with the celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the Petrović Njegoš dynasty's rule. It is noteworthy that Montenegro established its first domestic professional theatre with a permanent ensemble only in 1910 (Milunović).

In his writings on education and literature in Montenegro, Manfredo Cagni (1834–1907), a general, travel writer, and collector of folk sayings, attributed the delayed development of written Montenegrin literature to the centuries-long struggle for freedom, which had kept Montenegrins apart from intellectual pursuits (Cagni 95). However, he foresaw a promising future: rapid advancements in high schools and higher education, provided that new struggles did not hinder progress. Guido Cora echoed this sentiment, listing the newly opened schools and cultural institutions and making the observation that the arts have become more “favored” than before (Cora 35).

The progress Montenegro achieved in the field of law was recognized by Italian authors in the adoption of the General Property Code in 1888. This code, commissioned by Prince Nicholas I, stands as one of the most substantial compilations of legal regulations concerning property rights.[9] Its author, the esteemed Dalmatian professor Valtazar Bogišić, is extensively featured in travelogues, delving into his background and accomplishments through biographical accounts and anecdotes from his travels or personal interviews. Vico Mantegazza and Mario Borsa particularly praised Bogišić’s ability to blend customary law principles with modern legal practices. Borsa even referred to this collection of legal regulations as a “monument” to Montenegrin “young civilization” (Borsa 115). Both Mantegazza and Adolfo Rossi (1857–1921), correspondent for *Corriere della Sera*, introduced several Montenegrin proverbs from Bogišić’s work, which aided him in conveying the concept of justice to even the least educated Montenegrins. In his travelogue, Rossi described Bogišić’s code as pivotal in transforming Montenegro into a modern legal state. Silvio Ghelli further emphasized its significance by including an extensive interview with Bogišić in his book, where specific provisions from the code were discussed.

Beyond the innovations introduced by Valtazar Bogišić’s 1888 code, Italian travel writers also referenced and highlighted specific provisions from earlier legal texts. For instance, Giuseppe Marcotti analyzed elements from the Code of Danilo I (1855).[10] Meanwhile, Silvio Ghelli reminded readers of Montenegro’s initial strides toward establishing the rule of law, taken by Montenegrin Bishop Petar I in the early nineteenth

[9] This code had an impact on theory, practice and legislation in Montenegro and abroad (Danilović).

[10] The norms of this code of 95 articles regulate the rights of man and citizen, the position and rights of princes, the position and rights of courts, the obligations of citizens in protecting the state and numerous other issues related to social, political and economic life (Pavićević).

century when he enacted the Stega—the region's first written legal framework (Ghelli 46).

To illustrate Montenegro's transformation into a legal state, the authors detailed its court system, listing the available first and second-instance courts. However, their travelogues presented a curious detail about Montenegrin judicial administration. As a last resort, dissatisfied litigants could personally appeal to the prince, who would then convene under the shade of an elm tree in the courtyard of the former ruler's residence, surrounded by conflicting parties and curious onlookers, to reconsider court decisions. Unlike some earlier visitors who saw this practice as emblematic of Montenegrin backwardness, late nineteenth-century authors perceived it as a unique blend of tradition and modern legal practice. Mario Borsa further noted that the process had evolved. Instead of meeting every petitioner face-to-face, the prince now relied on a book of complaints to select cases for personal consideration. Other complaints received written responses, which Borsa described as sharp, humorous, and well-judged, suggesting they warranted separate publication. This royal practice also underscored Montenegro's educational progress; despite having established its first elementary school only in 1834, the society had already transitioned from oral communication with the ruler to written appeals.

Both Silvio Ghelli and painter Hermann Corrodi (1844–1905) witnessed trials in Cetinje and recorded their observations on the Montenegrin legal system. While Corrodi focused on the trust that subjects placed in the prince as the undisputed supreme judge, Ghelli noticed changes in the location of hearings. He observed the gradual decline of the custom of holding court under the elm tree and described the newly established courtroom. Ghelli nevertheless highlighted the continued practice of subjects appealing to the prince, who, within a few hours, could confirm or modify dozens of lower court decisions, bypassing procedures, lawyers, records, and fees (Ghelli 24). Ghelli even saw advantages in this system, praising its swiftness and affordability for citizens.

Vico Mantegazza also idealized Montenegro's rudimentary legal system, emphasizing the absence of lawyers and various formalities such as court files and proceedings (Mantegazza 209). The author justified the prince's involvement in court processes by citing the need to prevent potential injustices stemming from "old prejudices," especially due to insufficiently educated judges (210). Ghelli supported this notion by recounting the case of a peasant who appealed a court-ordered high compensation payment to Prince Nikola. After appealing directly to the prince, the peasant received a reduced fine.

Thus, despite praising Montenegro's progress and modernization, the authors also harbored conservative views, highlighting the perceived benefits of Montenegro's political and legal lag compared to Italy. Giuseppe Marcotti, for instance, expressed apprehension about the Civil Code's impact, likening its introduction to opening "Pandora's Box" due to the potential rise of lawyers (Marcotti 227). Mantegazza emphasized the merits of Montenegro's gradual modernization, comparing the absolutist rule of its prince with Italy's parliamentary monarchy. He saw Italy's political life as plagued by "miserable and fruitless conflicts between political parties," while viewing Montenegro's absolutist government as "the main factor in the strength and power of the country" (Mantegazza 204). Polemical stances toward Italy were also evident in Adolfo Rossi's work. He criticized the Italian parliament for spending days debating permissible holiday activities, contrasting it with the Prince of Montenegro who simply issued decrees to his subjects (Rossi 74–75). Vico Mantegazza even believed that a premature shift to a constitutional system in Montenegro would be detrimental, potentially causing more harm than any external military threat (Mantegazza 270).

These authors' views suggest they perceived Montenegro as a society insulated by its rugged mountains, spared the ills of a developed and corrupt world. However, they worried that civic and legal advancements might erode this perceived moral purity.

Attitudes towards military modernization were also divided. Thus Adolfo Rossi, Vico Mantegazza, and army officer Eugenio Barbarich (1863–1931)[11] reported on the establishment of a military school in Podgorica, a four-month training course in Cetinje, improved officer training in Italian academies, new regulations, and even a military orchestra (Rossi 74–75). In contrast, Giuseppe Marcotti expressed a different perspective. Rather than focusing solely on firearms proficiency, he advocated for attention to traditional warfare techniques, especially dagger handling. According to Marcotti, mastering hand-to-hand combat would be crucial in the inevitable wars of the future (Marcotti 210).

The modernization process that took place in Montenegro in the depictions of Italian authors was also evident in the lifestyle of the Montenegrin ruling family of Petrović-Njegoš. For instance, Rossi observed that the prince's residences featured modern furniture imported from European countries, while the palace kitchen boasted

[11] For his works on Montenegro, see Popović, "Crnogorske teme."

a French head chef. Vico Mantegazza further noted that the prince's daughters traveled to Vienna and other European metropolises to purchase fashionable gowns. By portraying the royal family in this manner, the authors were trying to meet the expectations of the Italian public, and perhaps those of the fashionable circles that did not look with much sympathy on the decision of the Italian heir to the throne to marry a princess from such a small, poor and politically weak country.[12]

Nevertheless, the authors were eager to highlight the prince's family's ability to strike a balance between modernizing tendencies and the preservation of folk traditions. Mario Borsa, for example, acknowledged how the ruling dynasty seamlessly blended the refinement of court ceremonies with the "primitive simplicity" of the people. He illustrated this point with a description of an engagement celebration ball that included both a waltz and a traditional Montenegrin dance, as well as performances by Roma musicians (Borsa 31). Beyond court ceremonies, Italian writers documented festivities for the common people. Borsa described a "people's dinner" hosted by Prince Danilo after the Italian prince's departure. During this unique gathering, food was served on leaves instead of plates, and cutlery was absent. The festivities culminated with the traditional folk dance known as the *kolo* (144).

The significance of the author's perspective in portraying Montenegro and their deliberate intention to shape a specific perception is exemplified in this quote from Mario Borsa:

> You will have noticed that I was generally very favorable and that I viewed Montenegro optimistically. This is partly because of my character and partly the result of my intention. I wanted to search here, find and see everything that this country has done in the last eighteen years since the last war to improve its material and spiritual conditions, and to renew its economic and civil life, which will not be exclusively the life of shepherds and warriors. To come up here simply to note that there was no railway, no electric light, no wealth, no comfort, no refinement, seemed to me both naive and mean-spirited. Some have done so before and some continue to do so. They probably have their reasons, and maybe this is one of them: speaking ill of others is always easy and flattering because it makes you look superior and independent. *Malignitati falsa species libertatis inest!* as Tacitus said at the beginning of his stories. (150)

[12] One of them was the Italian writer Edoardo Scarfoglio, who published several articles criticizing the prince's decision. His article "Le nozze coi fichi secchi," published under the pseudonym Tartarin in his journal *Il Mattino*, led to the seizure of issue number 269 of this periodical by Italian authorities (Barneschi 123).

Conclusion

Italian travel writing on Montenegro during the period from 1896 to 1906 underwent a significant shift in discourse. In contrast to earlier, demi-Orientalist depictions, a new discourse on progress emerged, one that is inclusive in nature. This paradigm aimed to present Montenegro to Italians as a nation that, having secured its territory and political aspirations, experienced remarkable and rapid development, laying the groundwork for future advancement in all areas. While rooted in some factual observations (Burzanović, "Moderni sviluppi" 174–176), this discourse also reflected the desire to portray Montenegro as a worthy homeland for the Italian queen. This need arose from discontent among certain Italian social circles regarding the prince's choice of a bride, given her humble origins in a politically less influential country.

Journalists who visited Montenegro in August and September 1896—Adolfo Rossi, Vico Mantegazza, and Mario Borsa—played a pivotal role in shaping this new narrative. Although not all Italian authors explicitly justify their overwhelmingly positive portrayals, their optimistic perspectives and expectations can be attributed to the celebratory context of their visit. Italy and Montenegro, newly bound by dynastic ties, shared various political and economic goals, creating an atmosphere conducive to favorable representation.

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Diskurz o napredku v italijanski potopisni literaturi o Črni gori

Ključne besede: italijanska književnost / potopisi / imagologija / Balkan / Črna gora

Članek raziskuje prevladujoči diskurz – »diskurz o napredku« – italijanske potopisne literature o Črni gori v poznem 19. in zgodnjem 20. stoletju. Z imagološko analizo ob diahronem pristopu preučuje nastanek različnih paradigem o Črni gori v italijanskih potopisih in morebitne motive za to novo diskurzivno prakso. Cilj študije je prepoznati ključne elemente tega diskurza in opredeliti glavne avtorje in avtorice, predvsem v novinarstvu in znanosti, ki so prispevali k njegovemu razvoju. Argumentacija temelji na domnevi, da je na to, kako so avtorji in avtorice prikazovali svoje izkušnje v Črni gori, pomembno vplival poglavitni namen njihovega obiska – poročati o domovini bodoče italijanske kraljice Jelene Petrović Njegoš. Dinastična poroka med Savojci in Petrovići, ki je zaznamovala obdobje intenzivnejših odnosov med Italijo in Črno goro, je bila ključnega pomena za predstavitev te majhne balkanske kneževine italijanskim bralcem. Z analizo tovrstnih pričevanj želi članek prispevati k bolj diferenciranemu razumevanju načinov, na katere so bile v potopisih 19. stoletja predstavljene balkanske regije, in preseči prevla-

dujoči paradigmi »pol-orientalizma« in »balkanizma«, ki sta ju vzpostavila Larry Wolff in Maria Todorova.

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