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The treatment of local inhabitants of Slavonia by Austro-Hungarian authorities before, during and after the Great War

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Abstract

Do the signing of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise and the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy pose even greater problems for the already oppressed people of Slavonia and Baranya? Double economic and political oppression, Austrian absolutism, and Germanization, as well as severe economic crisis felt in the already poor Slavonian villages all contributed to the growing dissatisfaction and resentment among the people in Slavonia. Economic instability, shortages, social and political unrest, and the consequences of the war left their mark on the economy of Croatia, including Slavonia and Syrmia. There were many wounded soldiers and soldiers in general who had returned from the battlefields, many widows, and orphans. An insecure, socially dysfunctional living and working environment became a norm. The research aims to investigate whether decasyllabic poems written by local inhabitants of Slavonia, particularly within the *bećarac* genre known for its lucid content, can offer objective insights into the relationship between the authorities and their subjects, and provide a basis for drawing new conclusions. The corpus used in the analysis consists of the records of verses written by Slavko Janković and manuscript of couplets by Luka Lukić. The research methodology involves a systematic analysis of the decasyllabic poems. The poems will be examined to identify themes and motifs that reflect the historical context and experiences of the people of Slavonia. A qualitative approach will be employed to interpret the verses, focusing on the content related to the relationship between the authorities and the population, socio-economic conditions, political oppression, Germanization efforts, and the impact of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Great War. The analysis suggests that *bećarac* can indeed contain objective information and offer a deeper understanding of the historical context and the experiences of the local population. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the region's history and provide a basis for drawing new conclusions about socio-political dynamics of the time.

Keywords: Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; *bećarac*; Luka Lukić; Slavko Janković; World War I.

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1. Introduction

This paper describes different social and political events in the Tripartite Kingdom, i.e., Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia, more precisely in the area of Slavonia and Baranya in the period before the beginning of World War I (WWI), during the Great War and just after WWI. Tripartite Kingdom and Hungary and Austria within the Dual Monarchy are correlated, and the position of the Croatian people is described with regards to the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, and then the Croatian-Hungarian of 1868. By analysing decasyllabic couplets written down by Luka Lukić and Slavko Janković, the paper also brings the details of WWI, describing the relationship of Slavonian soldiers with the emperor, different circumstances in the battlefields and outside the battlefields, social and public turmoil, destitution, the climate of fear and doubt caused by the great demise of the male population and the occurrence of military deserters, the so-called Green Cadres. Finally, the paper mentions the elimination of the great monarchical empires and new possibilities for the Croatian people which were created by entering the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Whether the Croats prospered by entering the new state, or if they found themselves in an even more difficult position, and whether they finally realized their demands for economic, business, and political power and independence, this analysis of verses will show.

2. The relationship between the great forces and the Tripartite Kingdom before the WWI

Since the Ottoman conquering of Slavonia in 1526, until it was freed in 1687, and until 1848, Slavonia lived a separate life from central Croatia and Zagreb, i.e., Croatian parliament and the ban (*a type of governor*). The area encircled by rivers Sava, Danube (Dunav), the lower part of Drava and Ilova, which was named Slavonia until the arrival of the Slavs, was in Roman times a border country. Slavonia had always been a transit country for many conquerors. Considering the politics towards the people of that area, the attitude towards them was no different in the 19th century.

In the 19th century the Croatian area found itself embroiled in the hostile relationship between Hungary and its neighbouring Austria. There was a crisis in Hungary which reached its peak in 1848 through the ambition for an independent state, which was contrary to what its “adjoint parties” wanted, that is Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia, as well as the minorities in Hungary (Germans, Slovaks, Romanians, and Serbs), which openly gravitated towards Vienna. Revolutionary events of 1848 affected Croatia as well. The Croats demanded civil freedoms and the abolition of feudal relationships which hindered economic and social development, they rejected mere underscoring of freedom and equality, and wanted a concrete solution for social problems. Amidst these events, the 18-year-old Franz Joseph was

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installed in Austria, the emperor of then multi-cultural and multi-ethnic empire. It was time to put to rest the disagreements that had lasted between the two countries for a few centuries. A solution was needed.

With the goal of regulating the relations between Pest and Vienna, the solution was in the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which established the foundation for a new constitutional structure (see: Beuc, 1985; Horvat, 1989; Šidak, 1968). This document created the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, an association of two unique and inseparable countries, Austria and Hungary and their sister countries, Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia, founded on the basis of equality of both members. Joint, as well as autonomous affairs were agreed upon. In the parliamentary monarchy, the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph became the joint ruler, and he was crowned as the Hungarian-Croatian king in Hungary. He appointed the prime ministers and served also as the head of military forces (Heka, 2007, p. 863). The emperor called the parliament in session and passed laws in conjunction with the parliament as the legislative branch, he had the authority to approve the administration's bills before they were sent to the parliament for a discussion, and then he sanctioned them into law. He retained influence over church politics, he appointed judges and heads of departments, i.e., he supervised the overall functioning of the state. The dualism was apparent only in domestic affairs, while in the most important matters of sovereignty, the Dual Monarchy was a centralized state. The person of the king was inviolable, every offence of his person was considered treason, and at the same time the king had no liability. The state politics were in fact the king's politics (Heka, 2007, p. 874). It was the classic pronounced Austrian absolutism. What was the position of the Croats in the dual entity?

Soon after, according to the outline in the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, in 1868 the Hungarians entered a Croatian-Hungarian Compromise, in which they acknowledged Croatia as an "associated party"; it got the status of a nation, the use of native language for political purposes, separate territory with borders and complete autonomy in domestic affairs. Joint affairs were dealt with in the joint parliament and government which was accountable to the parliament. However, the resistance of the people towards this document was much more intense than the one towards the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (Heka, 2007, p. 867). Specifically, Hungarian interests were indorsed only by those who were in danger of disempowerment following the abolition of urbarial and other rights in Slavonian counties. Most Croats were dissatisfied with the Compromise because they wanted a status equal to the one Hungary had, that is a trialism. The Austrian emperor considered this "Croatian question" as a domestic matter of Hungary, but he certainly wanted their relationship in order.

Although the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise stated as much on paper, in practice it was a different matter altogether. Citing the act of coronation by the Crown of Saint Stephen which asserts that the king is only Hungarian, the Hungarians frequently denied statehood to other sister countries, and the Compromise was often interpreted in different ways, so the

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Hungarians could use it as constant tool in public-legal dispute and political strife within different parts of the monarchy. The Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia, and Dalmatia was often presented only as a part of Hungary. Article XV from 1870 proclaimed as a criminal act every action directed against the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise, which caused even bigger disputes between unionists and those opposed to the Compromise, which further burdened political life in Croatia.

By establishing a Dual Monarchy in 1867, and then via the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise in 1868, there arose double economic and political subjugation for the Croats. History of Slavonia cannot be separately interpreted from the rest of Croatia because the same events affected Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, the whole of so-called Tripartite Kingdom. A new centralization of government set in when Vienna won over the revolutionary movement in 1850 and when neo-absolutism and a new organization of the administration were introduced. County reforms divided Slavonia into two counties, and the large and small aristocratic county assemblies, which were inconvenient for the king and his orders, were then dismissed. Their administrative powers were assigned to large county prefects who were named by the emperor himself (Beuc, 1985, p. 263). County prefects and deputy-prefects were subordinate to the emperor in Vienna. In this way the military-political apparatus functioned within the Dual Monarchy until its collapse in 1918.

3. Games without frontiers

In Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the stronger side always used its position to occasionally outmanoeuvre its decrees; Austria did this to Hungary, and Hungary to Croatia. It was sometimes the Hungarians that protested against this practice, complaining against Vienna, and sometimes the Croats, opposing the decisions of the Hungarian government. The area of Slavonia was at that time still organized as the world's largest military camp, so-called Military Frontier, creating in this way a society that was in many ways different from the society in the parent-country. The population of the Frontier was comprised of a heterogenous population of Krajina who were native Croats and defected Croatian serfs, Vlach newcomers in the XVII century and Serbian refugees, which came to live there at the end of the XVII and beginning of the XVIII century, and while in the civilian part of Croatia family cooperatives were being abolished, in the Frontier the cooperatives subsisted because of military service. The inhabitants of the Frontier learned of strictness and military discipline because the regular military term lasted up to 12 years, and military obligations up to a man's 60th year of life. "It seems that the military life was not too burdensome for the young people, because they could serve close to their homes, and it was important to the military authorities that the families were happy, that they had many children and that there was economic stability (Janković, 1970, p. 125)".

The area of the Frontier was rich in forests and their exploitation, and the appetites of both Austria and Hungary were largely directed to it. Austria requested the elimination of the

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Military Frontier and its incorporation to the Civil Croatia (*Banska Hrvatska*), while Hungary opposed this and obstructed the process in every way. The army, seeing how it was used to this lifestyle, also campaigned with the people against the abolition of the Military Frontier, which finally happened in 1873 by king's proclamation that eliminated the hundred-years-old Military Frontier. All border regiments were demobilized, and a special civilian administration was introduced. Croatian-Slavonian military frontier was finally in 1881 via emperor's proclamation united with Civil Croatia and therefore returned to the administration of Kingdom of Croatia, which ended the territorial discontinuity of Croatia. Territorial discontinuity was overcome, but that was not the case with social differences between the Military Frontier and the Civil Croatia.

How Janković (1970, p. 128), as a collector of poems of a corpus through which we hear the voice of the local population of Slavonia and Baranya, interpreted these “games without frontiers”, is best shown in the following record:

“It was not easy to rule this great mixture of peoples. If you wanted to retain the domination of one or two nations, injustice and discontent were inevitable. If democracy prevailed, the state would probably fall apart. The politicians believed it was enough to have control over the military and a majority in the parliament, and therefore the legal conditions were formally met. They forgot that nations were not children and that the French revolution had opened the eyes of millions of people. Parliamentary majority was achieved through a designed election law. Women did not have the right to vote, and men gained the right when they came of age (24 years old). In addition, a man of age had to have been in service or he had to pay a certain amount of taxes (tax census). A young academic could not vote, but a rich illiterate could. It was easier to deal with the rich. They want to guard their fortune and were because of that less challenging. In this way the government, using the election law, public voting, terror, corruption, etc., achieved parliamentary majority, and it was all... *legal*. The politicians continued to believe that it was crucial to control the military, and the way to achieve this was by officers raised in the German ethos. Seemingly the generals and officers can do as they please, and the army *must* obey. And seemingly everything was in order! The army was equipped with the latest weaponry, well trained, the officers were completely loyal in keeping with the Austrian ethos, the manoeuvres were showing excellent results, and the soldiers returned home after serving their military term with a large colourful form: in the middle was a multicolour picture of a soldier with a photograph of the head of the *bakezer* (soldier) affixed to it.”

Most of the people considered this to be just for show, which is easily discernible. There are numerous poems to prove this. In the midst of all this turmoil and in the eve of WWI, which was unexpectedly prolonged, no one was keen on dying for the interests of the central government. Austro-Hungarian rulers, initially Franz Joseph, then his successor Charles, naively expected the Slavonians to fight for them, although they manifestly exploited and neglected them. The respect towards the ruler was in decline, they were the subjects of their poems, in which they expressed their dissatisfaction and their general opinion of the whole situation.

*Rule, emperor, but not like my dear,
do not make my dear a soldier.*

*Emperor, do not take a son,
Whose mother is a widow.*

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*King Charles, don't make a ruckus,
the Hungarian crown is not for you.*

*My beloved is not a real soldier,
but a reservist, only in case of need.*

*Captain, let go of my lamb,
One doesn't make a difference anyway.*

*I pray to God, and I will pray to Our Lady
Not to take my beloved to the army.*

*Emperor, king, let go of my flowers,
One does not mean anything.*

(Janković, 1970, pp. 135-143)

4. During WWI

During WWI, Slavonians were seemingly loyal aides to both emperor Franz Joseph until 1916, and to his successor Charles, in defending the survival of the state. However, whether this was truly the case, can be seen in the verses that follow.

*My beloved is with the king's guard
Serves the emperor and complains to me.*

*I could be anything, but just not this
Just not on the emperor's list.*

*My girl, do not cry,
You look good in the Home Guardsman's shirt.*

*It thought my father would get me a wife,
But the Germans gave me a gun instead.*

*White colour, blue and yellow
the Germans took my beloved for a recruit.*

*It is nice to see a soldier,
But not to be one.*

(Lukić, Varoške pjesme [Varoš songs])

In the army the official language was German, and Hungarian in some regiments, so called honveda, and the Croats also had their Home Guard regiment, or more precisely, four regiments. In Zagreb there was the 25th infantry regiment, in Karlovac the 26th, in Sisak the 27th, and in Osijek the 28th. Recruitment was conducted according to territorial affiliation, so the Šokci and people of Syrmia were mostly sent to the 70th infantry regiment, with the headquarters in Nagyvarad. There they anguished under German command, but they also had conflicts with the Hungarians. They called them “zipcigers”. The rest of the the Šokci and people of Syrmia served in the 28th infantry regiment with Croatian command.

*In Osijek there is a chain bridge,
On it, the Home Guardsman walk.*

*In war there are guys and soldiers,
all darlings, young zipcigers.*

*I sure will live through some misery,
from Osik to Nađvarad.*

*They asked me, in which army is your beloved?
Home Guardsman in the 28th.*

*Oh, my youth, where will I spend you,
In the barracks on the Romanian side.*

(Lukić, Varoške pjesme [Varoš songs])

On the global level the Great War extended on three fronts, the Western, the Eastern, and the Balkan front. Slavonians within the Dual Monarchy participated in defending both Austria and Hungary in two fronts, the Eastern and the Balkan front. The poems are evidence

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of numerous unhappy moments which they shared with their family, speaking of the horrors of the battlefield, different means of warfare, weaponry, deliberate wounding, capture and intentional surrender to the enemy, the attitude towards them as prisoners of war, etc.

*My mate sent mi two postcards
Where the beloved fell in Russia.*

*White blouse and green button,
My beloved was wounded by a bomb.*

*They ask me, where my dear is...
In Russia, they captured him.*

*Three men wrote me from Serbia,
That my beloved was captured in Niš.*

*Russian emperor, may you never see God,
For you imprisoned my beloved!*

*My dear mother, my darling was wounded,
Wounded by a machinegun.*

*My beloved was hit by a bullet,
Right between his black eyebrows.*

*Russia, bloom but never bear fruit,
Cause you hold prisoner the one love.*

(Janković, 1970, pp. 135-143)

But as the war continued, and crises overtook all spheres of human life, the male population in villages was dwindling, many of them killed, wounded, missing. The deceased soldiers were replaced on the front by recruits, which inevitably caused a lack of work force. The work in villages was being done by infirm elderly, children, and women, which led to mass employment of women, who were now in a completely novel work situation. There was an atmosphere of great fear and doubt.

*Varadin, may thunder strike you,
You hold my beloved as prisoner.*

*Dear God, a battle is under way
There is no one without tears in their eyes.*

*Dear God, and this war,
Will my beloved return from the army.*

(Janković, 1970, pp. 135-143)

What it was like during the Great War was recorded by Janković (1970, p. 137): “Soldiers are happy when they are lightly wounded in the battlefield. First the hospital, and then the recovery leave. And then quickly back to the front. There are almost no men left in the villages. Poor women. The soldiers attempt to wound themselves. There is a residue of gunpowder on the wound. Then they shoot through the *komis* (soldier bread). Or they transfer venereal disease to each other. Thousands of patients. They are infected with trachoma. You hear that the soldiers are quick to surrender, if only they get the chance.”

*Goodbye, goodbye, my dear,
Tomorrow Russia will banish me.*

*My beloved extended his leave,
He deceived that he got married.*

(Janković, 1970, pp. 135-143)

Discipline in the army slowly loosened, they found the smallest exit holes. There was no bread, and the need was great. Better-off older individuals (reklamant) and those who owned more land were relieved from the army in order to increase crop productivity. Crop yield had to be controlled. 1917 was especially difficult when it comes to the production of food

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provisions. They were obtained via stamps throughout the country. Austro-Hungarian government adopted a directive on the requisition of crops, especially wheat. According to this directive all grains had to be registered after harvest. The farmer was left a minimum amount of grain, depending on the sowing needs and the number of people per household. The rest had to be given over to the authorities at a low buying price, as recorded by Janković (1967, p. 21), who adds that “We eat corn bread... and worse.”

*Emperor Charles and empress Zita, I am poor, and I am mad again,
Why do you go to war, when you have no wheat. I come home, and I eat uncooked cabbage.*

(Janković, 1967, pp. 135-143)

Forced sale of crops further burdened the pauperized Slavonian. There were different ways to burden the farmers to bear the biggest part of the sacrifice, which in turn had other negative effects. Armies that took centuries to create started falling apart, doctors were helping people avoid the army, corruption was becoming more common, grey economy started to flourish, there was a big difference between market price and maximum price, the state had no time to ask for the price, so money was printed as needed, there was inflation, and the prices of groceries went through the roof.

*Now the banks are in competition with each other, My beloved, when you return from the war,
My dear is loved by Italian women. Bring me three golden rings.*

(Janković, 1970, pp. 135-143)

There was more hunger, duties to the state were substantial, and there was word that some soldiers came back home at the request of their wives, so others tried to do the same. In war all is allowed. As the poems record, every means was taken advantage of.

*I cannot wait for noon, Do not fear the army, my beloved, My slippers are gold,
To get another plate of stew. My pretty face will buy you out. My beloved is home on my request.*

*Day is long, and komits small, I had a little gold,
It is difficult for the one whom the state feeds. And I gave it to the emperor for the soldier.*

(Janković, 1970, pp. 135-143)

As soon as discipline was reduced during the war, Slav soldiers started surrendering on the Russian battlefield, and soldiers on leave stopped returning to the battlefield (Janković, 1967, p. 21). Military deserters, so called “komits”, were suddenly a common occurrence. In history they are known as the Green Cadres. Janković (1970, p. 137) states: “Any way of saving your life was searched for. It can be heard that soldiers, when they go on leave from the front, never come back. They hide at home. At first some were shot, but they still kept increasing in numbers. They returned them to the front.” The demise of soldiers was intolerable, and the people were especially wary of dying for other’s interests. The soldiers knew that they were essential to the emperor, but the same was true the other way around, so they tried to come to a compromise on both sides. Janković (1970, p. 138) explains: “The determination to avoid

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the battlefield slowly ripened, even if the price was being shot. They escaped from the train cars at the first station and returned home during the night. Warrior – state – morale was in decline, and anti-state sentiment was on the rise.”

*Hey, you komit, I would curse you too, Long live Zita,
If my dear himself was not a komit. She would not allow the shooting of komits.*

*Emperor Charles, ask your Zita,
If komits can marry.*

(Janković, 1970, pp. 135-143)

Janković (1970, p. 138) says of the Green Cadres: “These were all peaceful farmers who did not want to die for a country they did not love.” And concludes that “this state was slowly and surely decaying, and they were contributing to this by being passive.”

5. After WWI

When WWI ended in 1918, so did the imperialistic systems in Eastern Europe, and Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as a multi-national, multi-cultural, and multi-religious country, ceased to exist. The Croats and the Poles were no longer subjugated to Vienna (Jakovina, 2013).

Živaković-Kerže (2014, p. 63) explains that the area of Slavonia and Syrmia in 1918 was fraught and permeated with the effects of war which were the most obvious in the first few years after the war – there were many wounded, and those returning from the battlefield, as well as widows and orphans, many newspapers stopped being issued, many associations stopped operating, pre-war political parties ceased to exist almost completely, many investments were lost. Croatian lands lost to the war some 500,000 people, of which 100,000 died. Bilandžić (1999, p. 47) concludes that material losses and human sacrifice were so great because the war was total, spreading through all areas of social life in the involved countries.

*Italy, soaked in blood, Galicia, bathing in blood, My little lamb wounded near Drina,
Where my beloved was killed. Where my beloved was killed. Shot by a machinegun.*

*My poor faraway slaves, My beloved wrote that he was in hospital,
I, young, will lie in the grave with you. Poor him, complained that his arm was hurt.*

*Where did my grapes scatter,
All through the Carpathians, its mother is sorrowful.*

(Lukić, Varoške pjesme [Varoš songs])

Boban (1992, pp. 14–16) states that in the Balkan area in 1918 a new Yugoslavian entity was created, that is the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and from 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in which Croatian territories were integrated. The capital city was Belgrade, and Croats, as opposed to being the smallest and poorest part of the Dual Monarchy, were now the second biggest and economically developed nation. Živaković-Kerže (2014, p. 62)

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explains that “the new state gathered within its borders areas with various economic and social characteristics, that were formed during the previous period of separate development.” The first years and the decade after 1918 were marked for Slavonian areas by economic instability, destitution, social and political turmoil, and the consequences of war made a significant mark, not only in the area of Slavonia and Baranya, but on the whole economy of Croatia. Živaković-Kerže (2014, p. 63) concludes that “there were various factors influencing the difficult state of the economy, like poorly prepared and implemented agricultural reform, the demise of numerous economic entities whose owners were large estate owners, some of whom became after the demise of the Dual Monarchy foreign citizens, and the unsuitable unitarian-centralistic politics of the new centre of the newly created state.”

Poorly prepared agricultural reform in Croatia, Slavonia, and Baranya was initialized just before the end of WWI and the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which was followed by a spontaneous agricultural revolution that was manifested in forcible seizing of land and plundering and burning of material goods and castles. Seeing that there was economic inequality throughout the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, the agricultural reform was not completed, and agrarian problems as well as the problem of the agrarian reform continued to be a great issue for the state. Živaković-Kerže (2014, p. 66) states that “besides the hunger for land, there was also a hunger for agricultural inventory. Until the end of 1919 there were many directives and decrees with which the state attempted to take complete control over the implementation of the agricultural reform and gain a powerful tool of political pressure over the farmers.” The political goal of the agricultural reform was to pacify the dissatisfaction of the farmers, who were the most numerous and most dangerous class to the new order. The state tried to placate them, and the most suitable tool turned out to be the promise that they will be given some land, because, as Živaković-Kerže (2014, p. 66) notes, “the Croatian farmer valued land over everything else, as the breadwinner that provided him survival, and he showed that in these uncertain times, by expressing his disrespect towards any land-ownership associations.” Therefore, in order to avert any social unrest, the order was being salvaged with the agricultural reform. Živaković-Kerže (2014, p. 66) notes that there was a deal to “give land to disabled people, widows, orphans, and others. However, land was not given to them if they were harmed on the side of Austro-Hungarian, but only to those who were on the side of Serbs and who were injured in Serbian wars for liberation.” The intention of the new state in which Croatia, Slavonia, and Baranya found themselves was more than obvious. Živaković-Kerže (2014, p. 68) concludes that “colonization was an integral part of agricultural reform; it had a clear national (Greater Serbian) goal. Volunteers from Serbia had an advantage in colonization, those who had never lived in the area near Drava, Sava, and Danube. Moreover, the awarding of land was only an introduction for a change in the composition of the population of Slavonia, Syrmia, Baranya, Bačka, Banat, and Bosnia, because the colonization was equally inseparable from the agricultural reform and the volunteer question. Volunteers had an advantage when it came to colonization and obtaining land within the agricultural reform. The divided land that

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belonged to landowners needed to be inhabited by an element that was nationally aware and resistant (Serbs who were gravitating to Greater Serbia, and who were definitely Orthodox.” It was clear to the Catholic population that they needed to adjust to the new conditions in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

*I am miserable, and my mother-in-law even more,
We will have to repurpose some sacks into clothes.*

(Lukić, Varoške pjesme [Varoš songs])

Subjugation and double standards that they lived through in the Dual Monarchy were replaced by the same thing with a different prefix. The new agrarian politics in which stronger political interests won became the new reality for the war-torn Slavonian farmer. The territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy had to pay much higher taxes than the more central parts of Serbia, the traditional, century long trade lines of Slavonian and Syrmian merchants were discontinued, wheat trade in Slavonia and Syrmia was in decline after the establishment of the privileged export joint stock company which purchased wheat at a determined price, since 1927 the export of wood was especially in decline, which was particularly detrimental to the economy of Slavonia and Syrmia, but also to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Živaković-Kerže (2014, p. 72) concludes that “instead of a fair and legal trade there was illegal chain trade which immediately set in motion a rigged game of dumping prices and forcing out merchandise from the shops against deficit and debt. It was a time of hiding merchandise in order to create the impression of shortage in the marketplace and in this way to enable the rising of prices. All of this that happened in the ten-year period after WWI had a negative effect on trading and commerce and the state in cities and major marketplaces’ economy (Donji Miholjac, Osijek, Vukovar, Vinkovci, Županja, and other) was characterized by a fight for survival. It was especially difficult for craft because the centralized state government abolished autonomous care and supervision of the development of crafts in Croatia. All this pointed to a stagnation because the newly established state was focused on the import of foreign craft products.” Gradually the rich economy of Slavonia and Baranya dried out and was rushing into inevitable demise.

6. Conclusion

Today there are differing opinions (See: Watson, 1909; Šarinić, 1972; Jellinek, 1882; Ferdinándy, 1906; Jeszenszki, 1889) on whether the joint state of Croats and Hungarians was a real union or a unique Hungarian state, in which the Triune Kingdom existed as an autonomous province. Both historical events and practice proved many times that the two members were not equal, especially in the legislative and executive branch as stated by Heka (2007, p. 966) who says that Croatia did not have statehood even in regard to Austria. Legally, the Triune Kingdom was practically a “state within a state”, but in practice it did not realise its rights, and instead turned into an autonomy. Seeing that the Triune Kingdom was not financially independent, and the Hungarians frequently interfered in its domestic affair by

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infringing on the provision of the Compromise, all this pointed to a collapse of the 816-year-old Hungarian-Croatian state, regardless of the seeming commitment and loyalty of the Triune Kingdom and during the Great War. This finally happened with the ending of WWI and the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918.

When the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy ceased to exist as an imperial system, Croatia had an open path to joining a new Yugoslavian association of states, that is the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which in 1929 became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In it, Croatia managed to preserve the Croatian territory, but in a badly prepared agricultural reform it lost more than it gained. An integral part of the agricultural reform was the colonization which had a clear national (Greater Serbian) goal. Volunteers from Serbia had the advantage in colonization, those who had never lived in the area near Drava, Sava, and Dunav. Moreover, the awarding of land was only an introduction for a change in the composition of the population of Slavonia, Syrmia, Baranya, Bačka, Banat, and Bosnia.

Subjugation and double standards that they lived through in the Dual Monarchy were replaced by the same thing with a different prefix. The new agrarian politics in which stronger political interests won became the new reality for the war-torn Slavonian farmer. The territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was economically and politically in a much inferior position than the more central parts of Serbia. Ultimately, the poorly managed politics gradually dried out the rich economic surface of Slavonia and Baranya and lead it into inevitable downfall.

The cited sources showed the described and analysed historical facts as such, and the verses are more evidence of the same. Although they are seemingly simple and short, decasyllable verses, the so called *bećarci*, summarise the unique account of the historical events which were truthfully and honestly written by their authors, who coexisted with all the events in their surroundings.

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