



# Rural Reactions to Modernization: Anti-Modernist Features of the 1883 Anti-Hungarian Peasant Uprising in Croatia

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In the post-Compromise Croatia–Slavonia (1868–1914) several peasant uprisings indicated a deep crisis in the rural world. Previous literature abundantly discussed the economic and social motives of these protests and interpreted the tensions as signs of the peasantry’s national awakening. In the present article, through a rereading of archival documents related to the 1883 protests, I draw attention to the perplexity of peasants when they should have identified national symbols. I argue, that the attitude of the peasants towards symbols turned against every kind of power symbol regardless of its link to a given nation. Adding a layer of nuance to the canonical explanations of peasant unrest allows us to draw attention to popular sensibilities to the ever-expanding state’s intrusion into rural areas and to the state’s modernizing interventions perceived as coercion. The ways in which the peasantry responded with hostility and violence to spaces, symbols, and figures associated with modernization make it very clear that modernization was seen by the peasantry as a potential danger (hence the anti-modernist epithet of the 1883 events). Thus, we should abandon the assumption that elite imaginations of modernity and modernization simply trickled down to the peasantry or that peasants accepted the teleology of modernization without criticism or anxiety. This article is also an attempt to read peasant rumors as historical sources independently of their truthfulness at the factual level, concentrating rather on what they tell us about the peasants’ fears and motivations and the strategies they used to cope with rapid changes in their lifeworld.

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Austria–Hungary’s autonomous kingdom, the post-Compromise Croatia–Slavonia experienced peasants’ protests, a clear indicator of a deeply troubled agrarian society,<sup>1</sup> roughly once every decade (namely in 1871, 1883, 1895/97,

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1 The transformation of the rural world of late nineteenth-century Croatia included the dissolution of the so-called *zadrugas*, farming cooperatives on estates owned commonly by extended families, as well as the abolition of the Military Frontier and the privileged status of soldier-farmers with it in 1881, the introduction of more capitalistic practices in agriculture, and new cadastral surveys along with a new tax system. As the list suggests, an extreme level of adaptation was required to make rural life endurable.

and in 1903). Given its broadness and supposedly nationalist undertones, the 1883 uprising, which has been characterized as both anti-Hungarian and anti-modernist,<sup>2</sup> stands out in terms of historiographical discussion. The seminal monograph by Dragutin Pavličević<sup>3</sup> and two exhaustive articles by László Katus<sup>4</sup> have meticulously reconstructed the social insecurities and the political loyalties that motivated the uprising, but none of the discussions in the secondary literature attempted to analyze the so-called anti-modern origins of what happened or, in a broader sense, peasant perceptions of change. In the present article, I intend to complement the abovementioned aspects and identify rural reactions to modernization<sup>5</sup> through a rereading of archival documents related to the 1883 protests.<sup>6</sup> With modernization, a greater emphasis is put on the state's presence in the rural context.<sup>7</sup> It is also an attempt to read peasant rumors as historical sources independently of their truthfulness at the factual level, concentrating rather on what they tell us about the peasants' fears and motivations and the strategies they used to cope with rapid changes in their lifeworld. As Irina Marin put it in relation to protesting Romanian peasants in 1907, "Many peasants may have misunderstood rumors/news, but that is not the point. The point is how they used this information to serve their own purposes." Peasant mythologies, Marin argues, facilitated coping and control and helped members of the peasantry

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2 This term is used but not explained in the secondary literature in Hungarian about the 1883 events. See Sokcsevits, *Horrátország*, 392–94.

3 Pavličević, *Narodni pokret*.

4 Katus, "A mezőgazdaság," and Katus, *A Tisza-kormány*.

5 One cannot shirk the task of providing some sort of definition of the polysemous and overused term "modernization." As my research interest concerns the experiences and emotional responses of peasants to the new, however, I do not need precise conceptualizations. I argue, rather, as Shulamit Volkov did in her seminal *The Rise of Popular Antimodernism in Germany*. Volkov claims that "popular antimodernism emerged as a reaction to the process of modernization, not to one or another of its manifestations," and that it was a profound and "generalized hostility towards all forces that seemed to weaken the traditional economy and society and threaten old life styles and values." I will argue that the ideas of modernization, first and foremost the salutary nature of progress, had an analyzable reception among members of the peasantry. However, to narrow the scope of the investigation in order to ensure that it remained feasible, I concentrated on reactions to urban modernization (urban–rural controversies) and reactions to spectacular technical modernity. Volkov, *The Rise of Popular Antimodernism*, 10.

6 HR-HDA-78-6 Zemaljska vlada. Predsjedništvo. 1881–1883: Boxes 181–84. In the following: HR-HDA-Pr.Zv.

7 I borrow in this essay an idea found in a volume of the series *Rural History in Europe*, according to which the state's attitude towards the agrarian world can be described as "integration through subordination," given that subordination "to the values and production logic of manufacturing industry is a major consequence for the farming population and agriculture of the state's modernising efforts." Moser and Varley, "The state and agricultural modernisation," 26.

reclaim at least a sense of agency in a situation of extreme vulnerability.<sup>8</sup> Reports about allegedly irrational peasant behavior fueled by rumors, alcohol, and the psychosis of mass violence have long been considered unusable for historians, which gives us a chance to make a contribution about bottom-up perceptions of and fears related to modernity, as well as resistance to it.

### *The 1883 Anti-Hungarian and Anti-modernist Peasant Uprisings*

The 1883 uprisings started in Zagreb following the violation of the language use terms of the Hungarian–Croatian Compromise of 1868<sup>9</sup> by Antal Dávid, head of the Zagreb Finance Directorate, who changed the coats of arms on the fronts of the buildings under his authority from an exclusively Croatian version to a bilingual Hungarian–Croatian one. He also organized quasi mandatory Hungarian language training courses for officers, and in the meantime, the Hungarian State Railways introduced Hungarian as an official language on its lines on Croatian soil, claiming that it was, although owned by the Hungarian State, a private company, and as such, it could decide freely about issues of language use.<sup>10</sup> The conflict around language brought to the surface various political grievances and social tensions. The protests soon spread to rural areas, where several suppressed tensions came to the fore. The rural population was also able to use the issue of the coats of arms as a pretext for expressing profound dissatisfaction and despair. The protests took months and eventually were put down by military forces.

In 1883, peasant violence was aimed mainly at big, modern national networks (railway, telegraph, and post and finance offices), symbols of urban lifestyle and culture (urban clothing, books, new measures and meter sticks, and members of the local intelligentsia, who were regarded as alien to the village), or other symbols of state control (coats of arms, flags, civil registers, and other official documents). In spite of the clear complexity of the phenomena, historians often saw these acts of aggression exclusively as signs of the national awakening

8 Marin, *Peasant Violence*, 42.

9 Like the Austro-Hungarian Settlement of 1867, the Hungarian–Croatian Compromise was also concluded to redefine the legal statuses of nations within the Empire. Although the document recognized Croatia–Slavonia as an autonomous political nation with its own territory, it granted limited home rule to Croatia mainly by the fact that the country's finances were controlled by Budapest. Internal affairs were autonomously managed, while foreign and military policy were integrated into the dualist system of post-Settlement Austria–Hungary.

10 Sokcsevits, *Horvátország*, 392–94.

among the peasantry,<sup>11</sup> and they assumed that the peasantry's former, spatially narrower but in its content broader set of identities was gradually replaced by a dominant attachment to the nation. This vision of the nationalization of the peasantry has since been nuanced and criticized in many ways,<sup>12</sup> though the Croatian and Hungarian secondary literature has yet to consider the relevance of historiography concerning doubts about popular nationalism in relation to peasant uprisings in Croatia. This consideration would have two major benefits: first, we could reintroduce aspects that have been excluded by the nationalist explanation, such as, in this case, the popular sensibilities to modernization, and second, we could use the vast range of methodological findings and ideas offered by the highly productive “history from below” approach.

If we cannot be sure about the level of the peasantry's allegedly rising national consciousness, it is safer to declare that by 1883 modern mass politics started to reach the villages. First, the so-called Party of Right (*Hrvatska stranka prava*), the main opposition party in the Zagreb parliament by the 1880s, and twenty years later the Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*) gradually engaged non-voting masses in political activities. In a future broadening of this research to subsequent events, the latter is of particular importance, since the Croatian Peasant Party's ideologues, Stjepan and Antun Radić, built up a worldview that was based on the sharp separation of urban and rural societies, and this vision deeply influenced the Croatian public and political discourse in the first quarter of the twentieth century. According to Marc Biondich, Stjepan Radić's biographer, the most striking feature of late nineteenth-century Croatian society was the popular assumption that political or economic oppression was always a form of aggression by the city against rural communities, with the underlying belief that this happened because the city was alien to the people. This anti-urban agenda was of course intrinsically a part of a nationalist one, as the tax collector, the recruiter, the officer, or the railway official were seen as embodiments of both the cruel economic exploitation and the main obstacle to Croatian national unfolding: the Hungarians.<sup>13</sup> My intention, again, is to highlight the anti-urban traits of these intertwining factors, without questioning however the relevance of the national agenda.

Although the perception of the city as alien to the “authentic” national culture of rural communities was a common phenomenon in the multinational

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11 As described in Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*.

12 See most importantly: Van Ginderachter and Beyen, *Nationhood from Below*.

13 Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 21–25.

Habsburg Lands, one rarely finds discussion, in the secondary literature, of the fact that uneven urbanization among the nations of the empire meant uneven access to modern achievements, and this inequality led to the crystallization of the idea that modernization is not only a privilege but also an instrument of power. Because of this spectacular nature of modernization's political implications, we can assume that popular critics of the ideas of progress and the teleology of modernization were more frequently and clearly formulated in contrast to the general view that modernization is such a complex phenomenon that it could be grasped exclusively by high intellectuals, if ever. Our task is to distinguish between overlapping anti-urban, anti-Hungarian, and anti-modern feelings in order to become better acquainted with popular perceptions of modernity.

Although the real electoral success did not come for the Croatian Peasant Party until after World War I, this was due to the fact that, before the introduction of universal suffrage, it was simply not possible to see or gauge the extraordinary popularity of the party. The party program, however, was formulated in 1903, hence the two-pole vision of society was built on experiences of the Settlement period. Rural hostility to urban modernization is thus a factor that has a real significance in political and intellectual history, a significance comparable even to the significance of nationalism.

The available sources pose a common problem of rural history: the reports about the peasants' dissatisfaction do not offer the peasants' voices directly. Rather, these voices are mediated by government and military officials who were appointed to visit the rebellious villages and gather information about the details, actors, and motivations behind the events. The act of recording accounts (allegedly) given by peasants means filtering, reorganizing, and thus distorting the information. I would contend, however, that these sources still offer some insights into the prevailing mindset among the peasantry, even if with some inaccuracy and bias. In order to provide some balance and compensate for the fact that the reports were authored by representatives of power, I gave credit to statements allegedly made by peasants and described in the reports as irrational, and I attempted to draw clear distinctions between the information provided by the reporter on the one hand and speculation on the other. By focusing on pieces of information considered insignificant and irrational by the authors of these reports, I was able to distance the narrative somewhat from the interpretive schemes provided by the contemporary bureaucracy.

Also, some outstanding figures among the officials in charge seem to have made a palpable effort to understand villagers instead of simply judging or lecturing them, and they thus probably gained more trust in the community. (As will be detailed below, it was rare for villagers to show much trust in an urban and/or power figure, particularly after the protests were suppressed by the military.) One agent who managed to win some trust among the villagers was Ognjeslav Utješenić Ostrožinski (1875–1885), count of Varaždin county and government commissioner delegated to investigate the origins of the unrest. Due to his long conversations with peasants, in which he showed honest interest, Utješenić's reports which reconstruct these conversations are of a particular importance to this investigation. He was convinced that if the administration had turned "to the poor peasantry of Zagorje [region surrounding Zagreb] with an open heart and gentle soul," further violence could have been avoided.<sup>14</sup> He insisted on informing insecure villagers about delicate questions which were central to the conflicts, such as taxation, coats of arms, and laws and decrees, in order to dissipate unfounded concerns about them. According to a document in which he requested the reimbursement of his travel costs, Utješenić visited 21 villages and spent time among the inhabitants of each.<sup>15</sup>

Utješenić's sensitivity to the worries of the peasant world is also proven by the books he had previously consecrated to rural phenomena, such as the dissolution of the *zadrugas*<sup>16</sup> and the special status of the peasant soldiers living in the so-called Military Frontier (see footnote 1).<sup>17</sup> In her monograph on the beginnings of the processes of modernization in Croatia, Mirjana Gross describes Utješenić's favorable judgment<sup>18</sup> of *zadrugas* as a manifestation of a traditionalist mindset, and she is perplexed by the fact that this "great modernizer" could have held such a view. She explains this contradiction as a consequence

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14 Report of Ognjeslav Utješenić to the government from the village of Zlatar. September 2, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3653/1883.

15 HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 4580/1883.

16 Utješenić, *Die Hauskommunionen*.

17 Utješenić, *Die Militärgrenze*.

18 Utješenić considered the *zadrugas* beneficial, and he regarded the introduction of capitalist practices into the world of agriculture rather dangerous, given that—he argued—it had led to extreme polarization and pauperization in Western Europe. The lack of Croatian industrial sites alarmed him less than the way in which Western industrialization had taken place. All in all, private property in his eyes was not a guarantee of greater productivity. On the contrary, he believed that *zadrugas* could provide shelter against pauperization and thus lead to better economic performance. According to him, Western civilizers threatened traditional community bonds and morals and were toxic to South Slavs in general.

of inner dilemmas, and she describes these alleged dilemmas in a dramatic way, offering a portrait of Utješenović as an intellectual and practicing politician who was “crucified” between modernity and traditions. Gross’s perspective, however, magnifies this contradiction, as she considers the belated spread of capitalism the main reason why Croatia was “backward,” and the only salutary way out of this backwardness, in her assessment, would have been to adopt Western patterns of modernization. According to her model, land ownership in these communities was a striking example of the periphery’s backwardness.<sup>19</sup> Utješenović, however, wasn’t convinced that catching up to Western standards was a must, and thus he was free to choose which features of modernization were desirable and which were better avoided. This explains why he was tireless in his struggle for railway and highway connections for his county, on the one hand, but was against the unrestrained modernization of agricultural production on the other. Although his reports about peasant turmoil cannot reflect his vision of the changing world in the same depth as his books, it is interesting that he could be on the same platform with peasants when they resisted the efforts of the modernizing elites and wished to find their own ways between conserving the old and adopting the new. Utješenović, who seems to have had something of an idealistic view of the peasantry, can be seen as the opposite extreme from the mighty bureaucrats. His often biased and paternalistic comments still help balance the images offered in the other sources.

On the basis of the aforementioned sources and keeping in mind their different authorships, I defined three overlapping domains that give us the opportunity to reconsider the events from the perspectives outlined above. First, I consider rural uncertainties with regard to national symbols.<sup>20</sup> This disorientation in the use of symbols sheds light on the general (that is, independent of national bonds) despair against political power. In the two following sections, I investigate two sub-cases of this general animosity towards the prevailing power relations, namely anti-urban feelings based on the perception of the city as a space of dominance and fear generated by big national networks, which were increasingly intruding into the rural sphere.

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19 Gross, *Počeci Moderne Hrvatske*, 216–19.

20 In this, an article by Stefano Petrunaro provided the model for me: Petrunaro, “Popular protest.”



*“The peasants shout themselves/their selves [...] in the diatribes against Hungary.”*<sup>21</sup> *The Symbols and the Rhetoric of the 1883 Uprising*

At first glance, 1883 was the year when Croatian peasants started to use political and national symbols (mainly flags and coats of arms) as clear signs of their engagement with the national paradigm. This vision was reinforced by the fact that the spark that inflamed the smoldering tensions was the placement of bilingual coats of arms on the facades of public buildings. As a reaction to this (according to the secondary literature), first city dwellers and later the peasantry also attacked visual symbols of Hungarian rule, destroyed bilingual inscriptions, tore apart Hungarian flags, and shouted anti-Hungarian rhymes.

As Stefano Petrunaro stresses, archival documents give a very different picture about the visual coding and decoding of symbols among peasants.<sup>22</sup> The most striking feature of the reports is indeed the highly ambivalent behavior and perplexity of peasants when they should have found the right targets of their anger. In the vast majority of villages, not a single Hungarian coat of arms, inscription, or flag could be found, and when peasants invaded cities, they had difficulty identifying ideal or typical national symbols which would have represented a national “other.” In the overwhelming majority of the cases, what protesters found was the so-called *common* coat of arms, a state symbol that contained both Hungarian and Croatian iconographical elements (most strikingly, the Croatian “chessboard” and the crown of Saint Stephen), but in several cases, the coat of arms that was destroyed was exclusively Croatian. Considering that the official Croatian coat of arms contained the crown of Saint Stephen and the Hungarian coat of arms contained Croatian–Slavonian heraldic elements, it wasn’t all that easy to differentiate between the two. As far as flags are concerned, it seems clear that the Croatian national colors were not yet identifiable for many in 1883. Even a decade and a half later, in 1897, orthodox ecclesiastical flags were sometimes torn to shreds, even though these flags had the same colors as the Croatian tricolor. In 1883, we see no trace of the common practice of 1903, when peasants wore ribbons and cockades with the Croatian national colors and carried around red, white, and blue flags.<sup>23</sup> In

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21 “Távirat Zágrábból” [Telegraph from Zagreb], *Nemzet*, September 3, 1883.

22 Petrunaro, “Popular protest.”

23 Petrunaro, “Popular protest,” 509–10. Contemporaries emphasized mainly the nationalistic hatreds, but the disorientation of peasants was also clear to them. See the below the citations from Frigyes Pesty, *Száz politikai*, 33.



a rather confusing manner, peasants frequently vandalized flags that they had found in churches and sometimes (though less often) also icons and sculptures that they also identified as symbols of power and dominance.

In Hrastovica, the mob broke into the church because they assumed that the priest was hiding Hungarian flags inside, but when they didn't find any, they broke a statue of Saint Florian because they thought it was holding "some kind of coat of arms."<sup>24</sup> The report from Gornja Stubica suggests that the peasants tried to destroy any and all objects that had possible symbolic meanings. A group of approximately sixty peasants pulled down the common coat of arms from the municipality's facade with bars and then demanded that the official turn over the Hungarian blazon, which they claimed he had hidden. In other words, they were perfectly aware of the fact that the coat of arms they had destroyed was not the Hungarian one. They then tore the signboards down from two local shops and the tobacconist's store, smashed them, and claimed that they were also blazons ("grb," in Croatian). This vandalization of symbols of power was topped by the fact that the protesters confiscated not only the shopkeeper's money and cigarettes but also a portrait of Emperor Franz Joseph.<sup>25</sup> Common coats of arms were damaged in Dubrave, Gomirje, and several other villages. One of the reports written by Utješenić constitutes a particularly telling source about a peasant community that had reached the limits of its tolerance for change. Utješenić claims in his account to have calmed the dwellers of Sveti Križ who had gathered around him on the church square only by assuring them that there would be nothing *new* regarding the blazon-issue and that "no one intends to place any other coat of arms than those that have already existed here."<sup>26</sup>

In Marija Bistrica on August 26, 1883, peasants from the region tore down the official Croatian-language signs and the blazon after the Sunday mass because they were, the peasants insisted, "practically the same as the Hungarian coat of arms."<sup>27</sup> This reflection suggests that the attack was more than some irrational act of the illiterate masses and that the logic behind it was not strictly or exclusively of a "national" nature. The remark indicates, rather, that peasants identified every state symbol as Hungarian, and by "Hungarian," they meant

24 A press report is cited in Pavličević, *Narodni pokret*, 265.

25 Report of the Stubica prefecture to the sub-county of Zlatar. August 29, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3454/1883.

26 Report of Ognjeslav Utješenić from Zlatar relating to the events of several villages. September 2, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3653/1883.

27 Pavličević, *Narodni pokret*, 265.

a distant, hostile center of power, drawing upon a significant distortion and broadening of the original term to express a wide range of phenomena that were troubling to them.

The high number of attacks against local Croatian officials and members of the rural intelligentsia also indicates that any member of the state bureaucracy could be targeted, regardless of the person's nationality. This is all the more striking when hostility was aimed at people who in no way could have been linked to Budapest, such as local teachers, priests, and popes. In the case of these members of the rural communities, it is not always easy to understand the logic according to which they were on occasion called Magyar or *magyarón* (a pejorative term referring to politicians and people who were seen as being friendly to Hungarians or Hungarian interest) or how it would have been possible for Hungarians to bribe or corrupt them.

In this context, the term “Magyar” or “Hungarian” became so widely used that it almost lost any real meaning. It becomes impossible to say if it actually referred to a specific national affiliation—in which case its use to denominate local Croatian elites or the Croatian coat of arms would have been absurd—or was simply a general label applied to comparatively unfamiliar people who exercised some authority over the peasantry. For the latter, an extra term was available, the expression “*magyarón*,” which a priori made it possible to use it for people of any kind of nationality. As the two terms were used in very different contexts, we can also assume that state symbols, such as coats of arms, were not always simply misinterpreted by accident, but rather were deliberately labeled Hungarian to place a clear emphasis on the perceived widening gap between the rural world and the ruling circles.

The term “Magyar” was turned upside down in the most ironic way in Senj, a little town on the Croatian littoral. The town had no Hungarian inhabitants and was renowned for its struggle to remain an economic equal of Fiume (Rijeka, Croatia), the only seaport that belonged directly to Hungary in the era. For this reason, Senj was a notorious hub of political opposition.<sup>28</sup> According to a report by Major Izidor Vuich, an adherent of the Party of Right, Josip Gržanić “inflamed people against every bureaucrat, and he did so by revealing the addresses of all those who respected or agreed with the laws of the great government, and said that *they are all Hungarians*, and he denigrated with this

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28 Eszik, “A Small Town’s Quest.”

name every peace-loving and honest citizen who did not desire any turmoil.”<sup>29</sup> The insinuation that people who had a history of fighting Hungarian rule were somehow “Hungarian” themselves shows once again that the term was malleable. The report then declares that the main motivation for the uprising was “hatred of the laws.” In other words, there seems to have been a general hostility towards the governing circles.

This widening and distortion of a term is not a unique phenomenon. According to the research of Irina Marin, early twentieth-century peasants in North Romania called themselves “students” due to a similar distortion of the expression. The participants in the 1907 jacquerie, many of whom were illiterate, defined students as urban rebel elements and identified themselves with them in turn, which led them to recite chants like “we are the students.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, workers on strike in Lower Austria in 1905 called the workers transported from today’s Hungary and Slovakia to break the strike “Krowoten” (that is, Croats). In the given context, Krowoten was definitely a derogatory term to designate transitional dwellers in the city who spoke a Slavic language.<sup>31</sup> This latter example clearly shows the nationalist logic of the scapegoating process, but it also reveals how unelaborated these terms were at that stage. The same can be said about the peasants protesting in Croatia–Slavonia: nationalism’s vocabulary came to them via the press or agitation led by the Party of Right, but they also used this new vocabulary to narrate social collisions.

To the extent that one can venture conjectures concerning peasant experiences, while the state was increasingly becoming visible (and threatening) in rural life through tax collection and cadastral surveys, the government’s Magyarizing policies (which started becoming stronger in 1879) couldn’t really be perceived in rural areas. Local representatives of the state were not Hungarians, in large part because tax collection was made a municipal duty, and the financial authorities also employed locals. Therefore, when people identified state power with Hungarians, there was a missing link in the chain, replaced sometimes with the use of the term “magyarón,” but more often, the equation was completed with the help of rumor and insinuation.

There were plenty of rumors that spread wildly throughout the weeks of the protests. These rumors were in general a specific mixture of pieces of accurate

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29 Izidor Vuich’s report about the conditions in Senj. August 29, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3442/1883. My emphasis.

30 Marin, *Peasant Violence*, 39.

31 Morelon, “Social Conflict,” 661.

information, elements of popular imaginary, wishful thinking, and, in contrast, the greatest fears of the peasantry. Independently of their content, we can see these rumors as collective interpretive frameworks which gave a rationalizing opportunity in a situation of uncertainty and crisis. As sources, they reveal how peasants interpreted their reality, and thus their level of “truthfulness” matters little. Given that one of the functions of rumors was to inflame peasants and legitimize violence, it is not surprising that many of the rumors concerned the new, unbearable taxes.<sup>32</sup>

In 1883, the most common rumor besides concerns over taxes<sup>33</sup> was that local bureaucrats and intelligentsia would *sell* the village to Hungarians and *sell* the church, the belltower, the lands, or even the villagers. This fear is such a recurrent element in reports that Stefano Petrungraro called it the silver thread of the movements.<sup>34</sup> This rumor created a direct—however imaginary—link between local representatives of the power structure and the distant center in the Hungarian Kingdom, and it made it possible for the peasantry to organize its hostile feelings towards symbols and persons in a logical arrangement. According to the rumor, the sign that an alleged sale was going to take place would be a flag hung out during the night on a public building, from which Hungarians would recognize that they were free to seize the village. Destroying flags thus seemed a preventive act of self-defense.

This rumor not only thematizes the dependent status of the Croatian (and Serbian) nation, it also links betrayal to cash flow and reduces it to an act of sale, ignoring the various real ways in which Magyarization could have been taking place around them.<sup>35</sup> The agrarian society, which was being forced to adopt capitalist practices, experienced a rise in its costs since they were counted in cash. This rise in costs had various reasons, including excessive taxation, economic crisis since 1873, and a lack of financial infrastructure, which thus

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32 On the role of rumors in peasant movements see Marin, *Peasant Violence*, 39–41.

33 Sometimes even fears concerning taxes fears also suggest anxieties concerning the state’s intrusion into the countryside. Especially after 1897, when the news about the law of civil marriage spread in the villages, rumors about taxing marriage, birth, and other family events circulated in great numbers. Clearly, the fear was about the state invading the private sphere. Petrungraro, *Kamenje i puške*, 46–50; 68.

34 Petrungraro, “Popular protest,” 506.

35 We can assume that if the real reason for fear had been Magyarization, the subject would have been education and language use. I have not found a single sign of this kind of fear in the archival documents. Admittedly, this may be a consequence, at least in part, of widespread illiteracy. Around 1880 in Croatia–Slavonia, ca. three quarters of the population was illiterate. Under such circumstances, everything unknown coming from urban centers or any kind of (state) power could be understood as some form of Magyarization. Župan, “Kulturni i intelektualni razvoj u Hrvatskoj,” 273.

made the peasantry vulnerable to usury. A specific factor among these causes was the introduction of a new system of measurement and new scales. The peasantry saw the literate upper class, to which it most frequently referred as Hungarian (and sometimes Jew—see the discussion below), as responsible for these changes.

In conclusion, the attitude of the peasants towards symbols either turned against every kind of power symbol regardless of its link to a given nation or was simply anti-Hungarian, if with a very broad understanding of “Hungarian” as a term that applied to every kind of power perceived as hostile. Nationalist motivations were still a relevant factor, but they were less relevant than the secondary literature has tended to claim.

Finally, the wave of protests gave the peasants an opportunity to express their frustrations with specific acute problems. In these cases, the act of pulling down the coats of arms served as a well-known choreography to express dissatisfaction. In Nova Gradiška for instance, the turmoil was stirred by a fire that destroyed the beech forest which had been set aside to be cut down for the benefit of the villagers. In his report, the municipal officer shared his view that the otherwise peaceful people, who were loyal to the dynasty, became agitated by the news arriving from Zagreb and then were further distressed by the disastrous fire. Thus, when they pulled down blazons and flags, they imitated the events in Zagreb, about which they had read in newspapers, but the true reason for their despair was the very real financial consequences for them of the fire.<sup>36</sup>

Adding a layer of nuance to the canonical explanations of peasant unrest, which have tended to see this unrest as a symptom and proof of national awakening, is not my ultimate end in this inquiry. In the discussion below, I examine how political measures regarded as novelties and political actors regarded as alien to the village gave an anti-modernist and anti-urban tinge to the protests.

### *Anti-urban Peasant Violence*

In the summer of 1883, several people were insulted or even attacked because of their clothing. The prefect in a village of the former Military Frontier named Gora was said to have embezzled money collected as taxes and used it to

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36 Report of the municipal officer from Nova Gradiška. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3072/1883.

purchase boots.<sup>37</sup> Boots were considered a privilege enjoyed by urban people, and the reports frequently mention that wearing boots might well make one a potential target of violence. In the neighboring village, Maja, a person was killed because he was wearing a specific urban coat, the so-called *kaput*. *Kaputaš*, the term derived from the name of the coat, became a derogatory term with which to refer to city dwellers, and the *kaputaši* were often simply identified as tax collectors. According to one report about the new tax burdens, “All of this feeds upon the wretched peasant, and he, therefore, sees every civilized person as his enemy and torturing demon. That is why one heard the slogan during the disorders that all *kaputaši* should be killed.”<sup>38</sup>

The opposition of the “wretched peasant” and the “civilized person” shows that the traditional divide between the rural and the urban population took on a new meaning with the acceleration of urban modernization and the increasing social value of cultural habits associated with “civilization” towards the end of the nineteenth century. This divide was defined not only by the stark difference between urban and rural lifestyles and values, the differences between a close community in rural settings and a looser urban society, or the disparities in the occupational sector, but increasingly by uneven access to innovation and by the resulting economic inequalities and differences in mentality. For this reason, in this section, I consider attacks against members of the village intelligentsia as expressions of anti-urban resentment. Partly because they had been educated in urban environments, all educated people were treated as alien to the village community, and they were also seen as personifying the city’s dominance over rural communities because they were able, thanks to the new social capital and technical skills they had acquired in the city, to assert a significant measure of control over villagers. Furthermore, they represented the intention or need to change the traditional lifeworld of the peasantry, or in other words, they were seen as embodiments and tools of a process of modernization, threatening to many members of the rural communities.

In addition to violent acts committed against people dressed in urban attire, the reports also mention urban figures who allegedly appeared in villages as instigators and occasions when peasant masses intruded into the city. In each case, these figures—the urban gentleman on the one hand and the enraged peasant on the other—serve to shift responsibility. When peasants claimed to

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37 Report from the villages of Gora, Kraberčan, Klasnić, Maligradac, and Maja. September 9, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 183. 3821/1883.

38 The report is cited in Biondich, *Stjepan Radić*, 25.

have seen “gentlemen” who manipulated them, their allegations also served to assert their innocence and legitimize acts of violence, much as allegations by the burghers of the city concerning angry peasant mobs served essentially the same functions.<sup>39</sup> What is important here is not whether there was any truth in these allegations so much as the logic behind them: the actors found the other party deserving of blame according to the rural-urban opposition.

Peasants who went to fairs in cities around August 20 broke things in urban space and sometimes used violence to intimidate or rob citizens. According to one report, “The disturbance, which at first was against the coats of arms, has begun to have a dangerous communist-like character. Instigators, who are said to be from Hungary, agitate people to commit crimes against property.”<sup>40</sup> In such cases, the urban-rural opposition was also aggravated by the cooperation of the burghers with the authorities, for instance in Krapina, where “a couple hundred peasants wished to pillage, [...] but the citizens [of the city] stood up against them, supporting the gendarmerie. One of the gendarmerie patrols clashed with the mob, and the rebels ran away as a result.”<sup>41</sup> The gunfire of the gendarmerie killed a peasant, and the city dwellers feared vengeance as the news spread that “the rest of them escaped to the mountains, as it is said, to gather and attack Krapina when there are several thousands of them.”<sup>42</sup> The story illustrates that rumors had a role in urban contexts as well. An essential element of any rumor is an exaggeration, such as the vision of thousands of angry peasants, as well as unfoundedness: the peasants did not return to Krapina. The atmosphere of mutual fear between the rural and the urban population, however, is palpable.

In the villages, elegantly dressed, literate, educated people were seen as hostile strangers who because of their professions had contacts with the city, such as the teacher,<sup>43</sup> the priest, the pope, the bureaucrat, and the merchant.

39 Two examples from Nova Gradiška and from Zlatar: The prefect’s report from Nova Gradiška. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3072/1883; Ognjeslav Utješenović’s report from Zlatar. September 2, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3653/1883.

40 One should not miss the irony of the fact that, according to the author of the report, anti-Hungarian riots were provoked by Hungarian instigators. “Zágrábból jelentik” [Reported from Zagreb], *Nemzet*, September 2, 1883. A

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 The foreignness of teachers in rural communities is illustrated by a Croatian text in which only the word “teacher” is written in German: “*Da sam ja vlada, ja bi objesio i Lehrera i popa i sve činovnike [...]*” That is: “If it were up to me, I would hang the teacher, and the pope, and all the bureaucrats [...].” The source cites a peasant from the small village of Brđani, a certain Filip Pavlović. The district prefect’s report to Ramberg, Petrinja. September 22, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 183. 3983/1883.



These people were accused of being traitors who shared sympathies with the Hungarians, they were searched through when protesters were searching for objects that were symbolic representations of power. The latter included the aforementioned coats of arms and flags, any kind of written documents (often decrees and orders), maps, and the newly introduced scales and tools used to measure things (new weights and measuring sticks).

The destruction of the new measuring instruments seemed the most barbarian and irrational act in the eyes of the elites, who believed unconditionally in progress. One senses the tone of indignant incomprehension in the words of Frigyes Pesty, a contemporary historian, politician, and public intellectual. His comments are worth citing because they reflect the force of the dominant discourse about modernization and progress:

It is truly great naivety to presume that the Croatian people's spirit was disturbed by the sight of the Hungarian state coat of arms and Hungarian inscriptions. These people pulled down Croatian coats of arms, and those without any inscription. [...]—this is a sign of the fact that the capability of reading has not yet spread enough among these people, and also a sign that they have long been manipulated by instigators. These people even revolted against the metric system and want to return to the old measures. I'm wondering if these people even know what they want.<sup>44</sup>

The opinion detailed by Pesty was far from unique. In a travelogue, one finds a similar judgment about Bosnians who were not impressed by the civilizing Austro-Hungarian administration: “They don't need culture forced onto them, they are averse to the inventive efforts of progress.”<sup>45</sup> The belittling of the peasants as people who were allegedly unable to recognize their own interests in progress and thus unable to show self-determination is a gesture that can be linked to the modernizing elites in general.<sup>46</sup>

Hatred of the metric system posed a problem for historians as well.<sup>47</sup> Even those who approached the subject with empathy assumed that ignorance played a role in the rejection of the new system of measurement. This kind of

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44 Pesty, *Száz politikai*, 33.

45 Solymossy, “Úti rajzok,” 309.

46 This attitude is also present in the multitude of sources in which instigators (students from Zagreb, activists of the Party of Right, foreigner socialists, etc.) have the leading part. The underlying idea of these texts is that the peasantry was not able to make its own decisions. See also Marin, *Peasant Violence*, 50.

47 An outstanding exception—although in a very different, West European context—is Alder, *The Measure of All Things*.

interpretation developed by Rudolf Bićanić in 1937 was reiterated in Dragutin Pavličević's aforementioned monograph. According to the explanations offered by Bićanić and Pavličević, the rejection of the metric system was motivated mainly by fears of an economic nature, as peasants were convinced that taxes would further rise with the introduction of the new system of measurement. As the "Hungarian" system of measurement was introduced at a time when taxes were already going up, the erroneous conclusion was that the new system was itself the cause of this financial burden. Also, the agrarian crisis resulted in decreasing crop prices, which were also mistaken for a consequence of the use of a new system.<sup>48</sup> The illiterate peasants, furthermore, couldn't doublecheck or monitor the process of conversion, and as they lacked trust in the authorities, they assumed that they were being constantly duped.

However, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the act of breaking of measuring sticks and scales wasn't isolated from other acts, including the destruction of maps and documents of the cadastral surveys and attacks on surveyors and engineers if they happened to be present in the village. The stakes of destroying measures were higher than the mere tension release, as indicates a telegraph from Zlatar that urged reinforcements. The document reveals that when protesters clashed with the police, four peasants were killed, but the peasant mass stayed together and remained determined to search for and destroy every measuring stick in Zlatar and its surroundings.<sup>49</sup>

As a matter of fact, measuring things was a peasant experience way more complex than the impression of being deluded by the conversion or damaged by the change. The ongoing cadastral surveys resulted, mainly in the territories where these surveys were completed by 1883, in a new kind of tax and ever greater financial burdens. The basis of tax assessment was defined by surveyors who frequently abused of their influence over vital issues (namely, they could be bribed to rank lands into lower categories of tax assessment).<sup>50</sup> In the process of dissolving *zadrugas* and administering land titles, these officials had the same role and the same opportunities to use corrupt methods in order to fill their own pockets. According to Antun Radić, who would have preferred to conserve common property, peasants couldn't benefit from the dissolution of *zadrugas*,

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48 Pavličević, *Narodni pokret*, 14.

49 Telegraph from Zlatar to ask for reinforcements. August 26, 1883. HR-HIDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 181. 3306/1883.

50 Pavličević, *Narodni pokret*, 60.

only “the engineers, the merchants, the creditors, and the bureaucrats.”<sup>51</sup> Obviously, engineers are on this list not as technical professionals, but as potential exploiters.

The peasantry thus saw for themselves that cadastral surveys were not merely technical or scientific processes. On the contrary, they were tools with which the centralizing state extended its control over rural areas. Given the lack of suitable sources, it is not easy to study the history of emotions related to measuring things in general and cadastral surveys in particular. However, the vehemence of reactions to land surveys suggests that the very process of measuring land was seen as an infringement on an intimate attachment to this land. A report from Ogulin written by an especially emphatic official begins with more emotion than usual official records. “I came among them, and I have to say that I was deeply moved by the sorrow of these people, how they admit their mistakes and beg for pardon.” The author of the report then gives an account of the burdens, unbearable difficulties, and fears of the peasants. The fears primarily concerned the new taxes, and the report emphasizes one such concern in particular: the peasants claimed that a new kind of tax would be introduced. “Taxes will come,” they claimed, “that no one has ever heard of before, they will measure our dead, and we will have to pay according to the weight of the body.”<sup>52</sup> The anxiety expressed through this rumor is not only of a financial nature. It is a symptom of the pervasive fear that the state, through its rationalizing and measuring practices, was going to intrude violently into the private sphere of families, including the intimate process of grieving. This rumor clearly indicates that, even if exaggeration is an inherent characteristic of rumors, the ever expanding state’s modernizing campaigns provoked fearful and hostile reactions.

The peasant reception of the idea that the engineer is an iconic figure of modernization also has to be taken into account.<sup>53</sup> Given that mass media frequently made progress a theme, it is ironic to assume that propaganda succeeded in making peasants realize their identities as members of a nation while somehow failing to affect their knowledge of technical and scientific developments and ideas of modernization. As it so happens, this was the era in which technical drawings and engravings were often published in popular newspapers as visual

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51 Cited in Pavličević, *Narodni pokret*, 38.

52 Report of the district authority from Ogulin. August 30, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 181. 3457/1883.

53 According to François Jarrige, the engineer, the scientist, and the industrial entrepreneur were the “heroes of progress.” Fureix and Jarrige, *La modernité désenchantée*, 57.

markers of engineering performance. These drawings were accessible to the illiterate public. Technical innovation was spectacularly managed by a group of intellectuals of a new type, as much in rural areas as in cities. The tools they used, which were frequently seen as diabolical wands, became targets of violence in various localities in Europe.<sup>54</sup> At the turn of the century, a newspaper titled *Dom* (Fatherland), which was expressly published for a peasant public, lamented the alleged overuse of the term “progress.” According to an article authored by Antun Radić and published in *Dom*, this word was used over and over again in every book and paper, and people educated and illiterate, intelligent and ignorant alike were speaking about it, and everything that wasn’t seen as progressive was instantly judged as wild and backward. Radić described modern man as a figure “with a telegraphy on his one ear and a telephone on the other,” but that didn’t mean that he was good in spirit. While Radić considered the ubiquity of ideas of progress evident in peasant circles, with regard to modern achievements, he concludes that “we, peasants, readers of *Dom*, can remain humans without them.”<sup>55</sup> *Sloboda* (Liberty), a newspaper made partly responsible for the spread of the ideas of the Party of Right, wrote at length about “soulless engineers” (*bezdušni inženiri*). Unfortunately, the editorial was heavily censored.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, when Pavličević affirmed several times that the metric system was rejected because everything that came from the Hungarian Kingdom was rejected *regardless of the progressiveness of the phenomenon*,<sup>57</sup> he overlooked something important. Namely, the peasants were not at all indifferent to the question of whether something was or wasn’t modern or progressive. On the contrary, the peasantry was at times particularly sensitive to anything new on the one hand, while it used the symbols of modernity (e.g. new measuring implements or engineers) for its own purposes on the other. The agrarian society at the end of the nineteenth century clearly realized that the new things that were being introduced (whether something as concrete as a new kind of scale or something abstract, like a new system of measurement) radically transformed its lifeworld, and the peasantry experienced modernizing intervention as a form of coercion. The assumption that villagers misunderstood the significance of the metric system is no more convincing than the assumption that they simply reinterpreted this system and its uses with respect to their own interests. The

54 As has happened a century earlier in France: Alder, *The Measure of All Things*.

55 Radić, “Što je ‘napredak?’” *Dom*, December 27, 1901, 424–25.

56 *Sloboda*, September 19, 1883, 1.

57 Pavličević, *Narodni pokret*, 67, 94.

reception of the symbols of modernity, like the reception of the symbols of “national” belonging, was also a negotiation over the benefits and utility of this “modernity” in rural areas. The destruction of measuring instruments allowed peasants to express their distrust for the new, which, as Peter Burke suggests, was not at all irrational or extremely conservative. Rather, it was a strategy based on the bitter experience that the price of change is often paid by common people.<sup>58</sup>

While historians have had little access to peasant emotions of the nineteenth century towards surveys and measurements (acts of aggression against engineers, for instance, were not considered as expressions of critical attitudes towards modernity, but rather merely as a sub-case of irrational hostility against the intelligentsia), contemporary officials and authors of fiction<sup>59</sup> may have been more sensitive to feelings of loss related to modernizing campaigns. The district official in Nova Gradiška, for instance, openly warned the newly arriving financial officer to respect local traditions and “not to introduce any innovations, because there had been already enough of them, and I know well that people have not been able to get used to the previous ones.”<sup>60</sup> Clearly, the tolerance of change of communities in rural areas had its limits.

A specific sub-case of aggression against a local intelligentsia is the great number of assaults against Jews. Antisemitic aspects of the 1883 uprising were often regarded as marginal, and they were explained by the impact of a significant antisemitic wave in the Hungarian Kingdom,<sup>61</sup> namely the notorious Tiszaeszlár lawsuit, a blood libel which ended with the acquittal of the (Jewish) defendant but nevertheless fueled hostility towards Jews all over the country and maybe even beyond. Amongst the archival documents, I have found three pamphlets that refer to the Tiszaeszlár lawsuit, one of which was printed, so it could have been spread in large numbers.<sup>62</sup> However, it seems unlikely that flowing against anti-Hungarian (and anti-modernization) sentiments, there was any widespread

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58 Burke, *Popular Culture*, 209.

59 Although I cannot, in this essay, offer anything resembling a thorough discussion of the questions that arise here as they are treated in works of fiction, it is worth noting how measuring things is a recurrent subject of writings dealing with conflicts over civilizational processes. In the Austro–Hungarian context, the best known example is the Nobel-prize winning novel by Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge*. I would also mention Daniel Kehlmann’s *Measuring the World* and Brian Friel’s *Translations*.

60 Ladislav Mihanović district prefect reports from Nova Gradiška. October 8, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 183. 4320/1883.

61 Pavličević, *Narodni pokret*, 80.

62 Handwritten pamphlets: HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3072/1883. The printed one is the attachment of a county report, which dwells on the fears of Jews in the region, and in addition to the pamphlet, it contains a local Croatian-language paper that reports the Hungarian legal case. The count proposes the

sympathy for Hungarians as victims of the supposed crimes committed by Jews. This implausible interpretation would rest on an overestimation of the information flow between Hungarian and Croatian rural communities, which were separated by a serious language barrier, as well as an overestimation of the solidarity between these two populations. It seems far more likely that the antisemitic acts of violence, which were not exactly sporadic, were manifestations of anti-capitalist, economic arguments used to blame and vilify the Jewry.

In addition, as Christhard Hoffmann stated in his study “‘The New’ as a (Jewish) Threat: Anti-modernism and Antisemitism in Germany,” this was the very historical moment when the Jew became the symbol of modernity and the urban type.<sup>63</sup> Stereotypes about the Jewry had long been dominated by notions of backwardness and poverty, but the second half of the nineteenth century brought change. The threats posed by modernity came to be seen as threats posed (at least in part) by the Jewry. As Hoffman shows, of the elements of modernity, three in particular were identified as Jewish in the antimodernist and antisemitic intellectual discourse in Germany. The Jew became the personification of the capitalist, the urban archetype, and the intellectual.<sup>64</sup> The medieval figure of the usurer was complemented by the latter not only in intellectual narratives but also among those who were the losers in the processes of industrialization (artisans, craftsmen, peasants, retailers) in general.<sup>65</sup>

Many antisemitic atrocities committed in 1883 were claimed to be acts against usury, but they also seem to have been fueled by the anger of those who felt excluded from the benefits of literacy, as writing was in their eyes an instrument used by the powerful to dominate the powerless and pervert the truth.<sup>66</sup> As Utješonović detailed, the vulnerability of the debtor was further reinforced by the fact that documents concerning loans were written and certified by the money lender, often a Jewish person, while the people borrowing

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confiscation of the latter. Also attached was an antisemitic comic which arrived from Hungary in a great number of copies but was confiscated by the authorities. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 184. 4580/1883.

63 Hoffmann, “‘The New’,” 105.

64 Ibid., 101.

65 Jews, of course, could be made scapegoats for practically anything. One finds a telling example in the village of Slunj, where peasants claimed that the attack on the local post office was the idea of a certain David Rendeli. Rendeli himself lived in the same building and also kept a shop and a bar in it, but by a distorted logic, he was said to have invented the attack so that he would be able to call for military help, and the soldiers arriving to restore order would eat and drink and spend their money in his shops. Report of the district authority of Slunj to Ramberg, September 21, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 183. 3981/1883.

66 Fónagy, “Kollektív erőszak,” 1179.

money (namely, members of the peasantry) had no control over the process. In disputed cases, the mere word of a peasant was countered with written and signed documents, so the peasant could never win.<sup>67</sup>

It is telling that in a world turned upside down, where peasants could assert control over the intelligentsia of the village, these peasants seized the power of the written word in symbolic ways and thus created new power relations related to literacy. These symbolic acts frequently consisted of imitations of everyday acts of writing, but under the control of the peasantry. In Stubica, for instance, angered villagers made the instructor Vjekoslav Satler write and sign a document in which he declared himself Croatian and promised to serve only Croatian interests.<sup>68</sup> Priest Andro Čižmek was also made to sign the same paper, as were the officials of the municipal office and the tax collector, who happened to be there that day. The peasants then went to the bar, where they forced the barman to give them drinks and sign the document.<sup>69</sup> A similar effort was made to reach all the literate inhabitants in the community of Zlatar, and according to the same choreography. In the morning, villagers made the notary, the village doctor, and the prefect sign a document confirming that they were Croatian, and then the villagers scattered. Peasants gathered again that afternoon and dragged the teacher from the schoolhouse to make him sign the declaration, and later, two other clerks from the municipality had to do the same.<sup>70</sup>

Forms of behavior discussed in this section reveal that modernity's distinguished space (the city), distinguished figures (engineers, educated people, bureaucrats), and distinguished symbols (maps, written documents, measuring tools) had complex interpretations among the peasantry that offer a perspective from which we can arrive at a "from below" understanding of shifting attitudes towards the processes of modernization in the late nineteenth-century rural sphere in Central Europe.

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67 Utiešenović, count of Varaždin reports to the government, Krapina. September 18, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3866/1883. In the same report a suggested solution is cited: "The village of Ivanca humbly asks for the creation of saving banks in villages, where it would be possible to obtain a loan with moderate interest."

68 It is worth treating the ethnonym "Croatian" with caution. As in the case of "Hungarian," it could mean many different things. One plausible solution is that it meant simple people as opposed to members of the middle or upper classes.

69 The municipality of Stubica reports to the sub-county of Zlatar. August 29, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3454/1883.

70 Telegraph from Zlatar. August 29, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 181. 3313/1883.



*Enmeshing the Countryside: The State's Intrusion into the Rural World*

Finally, the state appeared in rural spaces not only through its human agents but also through its new networks, which were increasingly enmeshing the whole country. While treated as a different case in this study, as symbols of state power, networks were in reality part of the context outlined above. A telegraph officer could have easily been an educated person from the city, was certainly a man of letters, and wore clothes with strong symbolic meanings (a uniform), and the railway was obviously also a newly (and rapidly) emerging way of creating and maintaining direct ties to political and economic centers, i.e., cities. One finds evidence of anger against state networks in the sources, mixed together with a number of other sensibilities, resentments, and hostilities. In Ivanca, for instance, where peasants vandalized the telegraph wire, they also planned to expel Jews from the village on December 24 and attack anyone who was wearing black boots.<sup>71</sup> Ivanca peasants committed or planned to commit acts of physical aggression against networks, urban people, Jews, and clerks at the same time. In this section, I shed light on the irritation felt, in rural communities, at big state networks. As attacks against the extensive state networks were a far more significant part of the 1903 uprising, this section confine itself to evoke the possible roots of the acts of violence committed in 1903.

Three features of the growing state networks seem to have been significant in relation to the malcontent among the peasantry: the often uniform elements of these networks were seen as instruments of the homogenizing nation-state; in networks, the mutual dependence of network nodes reduces autonomy;<sup>72</sup> finally, in regions where agrarian mechanization did not even start to unfold,<sup>73</sup> the networks were often the only visible technical innovation. These three features were, of course, preceded by the practical benefits of damaging networks: breaking the flow of information to the political centers and also the impeding troop movement facilitated the maintenance of a state of emergency.

The railway and the telegraph were often targeted even in 1883, as were post offices. These three networks had a role in the question of language use as well (Magyarizing tendencies affected these institutions first). Moreover, the railway

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71 Report to the Royal Telegraph Directorate. August 29, 1883. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 184. 5582/1883.

72 The sociologist Alain Gras describes these increased dependencies in relation, for instance, to the electrical grid: Gras, *Grandeur et dépendance*.

73 Katus, "A mezőgazdaság."

policy became a neuralgic point in Hungarian–Croatian relations. Railway lines built according to the interests of Hungarian foreign trade and the consistent disregard of Croatian traffic and trade needs made the railway a real emblem of exploitation. Damaging railway lines thus had practical, economical, and national motivations, added to which the railway network was a spectacular modern achievement, and a strong visual marker of the homogenizing state.

Railway buildings were constructed according to a type design, and they thus became the first public buildings that created uniformity in the countryside throughout Transleithania. They represented state presence and were not adjusted to local architectural or spatial arrangement traditions. On the contrary, they exhibited the superiority of the (modernizing, homogenizing) center. The contrast was often spectacular between local conditions and the railway buildings, as expressed by Rezső Havass, president of the Hungarian Association of Geographers and main theorist of Hungarian imperial ambitions towards the Balkans. When traveling to Fiume by train, Havass found the countryside uninteresting: “Dugaresa is [...] an insignificant little place. Houses are built of wood and covered by reed. The next station is Generalszki Sztol. Also an insignificant place. [...] Third station, Touin. Small place. Next station Ogulin, a town with 2,000 inhabitants.” The unique things that caught his eye were railway buildings, which, in contrast were all “built with charm, taste, and show cleanliness and practical arrangement,”<sup>74</sup> that is, they reflect the achievements of the modern state in the fields of culture, hygiene, and engineering. This contrast was obviously perceived by locals as well, but they presumably had emotional attachments to the wooden houses (their homes) and certainly some resentment for the railway stations.

Infrastructural networks not only represented the state in rural areas, they also re-hierarchized rural space. Distance to smaller or larger centers became a determining factor in the prosperity of different localities. This dependence on infrastructure became spectacular with the rearrangement of transport routes and the decline of certain towns as a result. By damaging railway lines, villagers could find temporary relief from this increased dependency. The direct link to the center, however, sometimes gave hope. The aforementioned inhabitants of fire-damaged Nova Gradiška, for instance, expressed several times their hope that the emperor Franz Joseph would indemnify them “once the train arrives.”<sup>75</sup>

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74 Havass, “A károlyváros-fiumei vasútvonal,” 156–58.

75 Report of the municipal officer from Nova Gradiška. HR-HDA-Pr.Zv. 78. 6. Box 182. 3072/1883.

Whether it was threatening or promising, infrastructure that created direct links to centers made it obvious that innovation was also an instrument of power, and this may explain, at least in part, why elements of this infrastructure often became targets of discontent.

When networks recreated relations of dependency and hierarchies, they required mental adaptation and flexibility. This was just as true on the national level, as it was related to interurban public transport, which, as András Sipos notes in his introduction to an almanac of Hungarian urban history, was “not only a technical and institutional innovation but also a social one. Infrastructure meant greater comfort, saving time and labor, but it also required manifold learning processes and adaptation. An attitude had to be formed, [...] which accepted as natural that everyday life depends on centralized supply systems, and this went hand in hand with unprecedented bureaucratic regulation and control of individual life.”<sup>76</sup> This control of individual life by increasingly influential urban centers found concrete manifestation in networks and the roles these networks played in the regulation and homogenization of everyday life were often rejected in rural areas. In the microcosm where bureaucrats had already been seen as personifications of a hostile power, new networks with their employees in uniforms became easily identifiable with the same concepts of the enemy.

In conclusion, networks became irritating factors due to their symbolic role in making the state present in rural areas, due to their symbolic importance as embodiments of modernity, and also because they increased ways in which a given locality was dependent on other communities and, in particular, urban centers. The spread of these networks did not simply mean the growing presence of technical innovations in the rural sphere, but also “decisions made between alternatives in the specific fields of influence,”<sup>77</sup> or in other words, the new hierarchies. In 1883, the construction of these new networks had only just begun, so the reactions of people in rural areas to their presence were rather vague. Further research is required to follow the future development of these feelings and responses.

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76 Sipos, “Bevezetés,” 11. On urban spaces and networks in late nineteenth-century Vienna see Meißl, “Hálózatok és a városi tér.”

77 Sipos, “Bevezetés,” 11.

## *Conclusion*

The 1883 peasant uprising in Croatia has been described in the secondary literature by two main attributes: anti-Hungarian and anti-modernist. In this essay, I add a layer of nuance to the former and complexity to the latter. Stresses affecting the peasantry were partly caused by modernizing campaigns, and the struggle to cope with modernization was a social process with a significance comparable to the significance of processes of national awakening and the transition in rural communities to capitalist practices. The archival documents suggest that these three processes were deeply intertwined. This intertwining was reinforced by the ways in which modernizing elites were regarded as representatives of a national other, and the separation of the anti-Hungarian and the anti-modernist features of the uprising served exclusively analytical purposes. Anti-modern gestures were indeed often dressed up in romantic anti-capitalist or, more frequently, nationalist costumes, partly because the vocabulary and the symbolism of nationalism was accessible and made it easier to grasp complex phenomena of other nature as well.

The archival documents concerning the peasant uprising in Croatia in 1883, which offer first and foremost insights into the state's perspective on the events, can also be read for the glimpses they provide into prevailing perceptions among the peasantry concerning modernization. Rumors and behaviors mentioned or described in these documents and characterized, both in the documents and in the secondary literature, as irrational can be interpreted as reasonable responses to the very real threats of modernization for rural communities. Specifically, the ways in which the peasantry responded with hostility and violence to spaces and figures associated with modernization and various symbols also associated with this process make it very clear that modernization was seen by the peasantry as a potential danger. Thus, we should abandon the assumption that elite imaginations of modernity and modernization simply trickled down to the peasantry or that peasants accepted the teleology of modernization without criticism or anxiety.

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