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YUGOSLAVIA - DISMANTLED AND PLUNDERED:
The Tragic Senselessness of the War in Yugoslavia and
the Myths that Concealed It

MA thesis

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CONTENTS:

1.	Introduction	3
2.	A Nation-building Alchemy: Making Myths, Memories and Identities	10
2. 1.	Myths and Their Role in the Nation-building	11
2. 2.	Memory and Identity: Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction	23
2. 2. 1.	Present-shaping Past and Past-shaping Present	23
2. 2. 2.	Collective Amnesia and Organised Oblivion	27
2. 2. 3.	Forced Remembering	31
3.	Yugoslav Destructionology: Theories of Dissolution	35
3. 1.	The Ancient Hatred of the Clash of Civilisations	36
3. 2.	Elites: Manipulating, Profiteering, Staying in Power	40
3. 3.	Breakdown and Break-up: Siamese Twins?	42
4.	Bad Boys Running Wild: The Senselessness of the Yugoslav Tragedy	47
4. 1.	Why Were the Gangs Essential for Making War Possible?	48
4. 2.	The Villains: Masterminds, Petty Warlords, and Bandits	52
4. 2. 1.	Slobodan Milosevic and his Inner Circle	52
4. 2. 2.	Radovan Karadzic and <i>Republika Srpska</i>	56
4. 2. 3.	Vojislav Seselj and the Chetniks	58
4. 2. 4.	Zeljko Raznjatovic – Arkan	60
4. 2. 5.	Franjo Tudjman and the HDZ	61
4. 2. 6.	Mate Boban and "Herceg-Bosna"	64
4. 2. 7.	Dobroslav Paraga and the HOS	65
4. 2. 8.	Jusuf Prazina – Juka	66
4. 2. 9.	Fikret Abdic and Cazinska Krajina	68
4. 2. 10....	And the Rest	69
4. 3.	Mafia inc.: Looting, Racketeering, Smuggling	70
4. 4.	War-zone -- A Free Trade Area	75
4. 5.	Violent Highlanders, City-loathers, Revenge-seekers, and Patriarchal Women-haters	79
5.	From Myths to War and from War to Myths: The Ninth Circle of the Yugoslav Hell	82
5. 1.	Heavenly People versus Genocidal Ustashe	84
5. 2.	“European” Victims and “Balkan” Aggressors	92
6.	Conclusion	99
	Bibliography	103

1. Introduction

In 1991 the country I was born in ceased to exist. The exceptionally violent and bloody manner in which this happened gave many experts and even more numerous "experts" an opportunity to demonstrate their wisdom, stemming from the privilege of generals-after-the-battle, and to scientifically prove that Yugoslavia was an artificial creation and that its collapse was inevitable. Three most common theories explaining what has happened were the theory about "ancient hatreds" between the Yugoslav nations, the theory about manipulative elites who destroyed Yugoslavia to grab power in the successor states, and the theory about the increasing insecurity, following the total breakdown of socialist regime, which caused the outbreak of hostilities. Without harbouring any illusions that I will be able to present the ultimate and indisputable explanation of what "really happened" with the former Yugoslavia -- why it has collapsed and above all, why in such a violent manner -- this thesis will attempt to sketch an alternative point of view, showing how tragically senseless Yugoslavia's collapse actually was.

The Yugoslav hell was not unleashed because of some alleged "millennial national identity" and consequent "historical right to full sovereignty"¹ nor because of "traditional discrimination" and "genocidal terror"² supposedly threatening the Serbs, and even less so because Yugoslav peoples suddenly decided that they do not want to live with each other anymore. Nor was it unleashed because of nationalism. By highlighting countless episodes and events, noticed by numerous other authors, researchers and, most importantly, the UN Commission of Experts which compiled thousands of pages of material about the war, I intend to show that the driving force behind the destruction of Yugoslavia was not nationalism, but greed (both for political power and material gains). Nationalism *is* a powerful force, which indeed fuels many wars, but its ability to ignite a war out of some completely intangible reason should be seriously questioned. In the case of Yugoslavia, nationalism was rather used as a mask under which a thorough criminalization of post-

¹ "Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia," in *Yugoslavia through Documents: From its Creation to its Dissolution*, ed. Snezana Trifunovska. Dordrecht: M. Nijhoff, 1994, p. 251

² As defined in the 1986 Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (*Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti*, or SANU). Memorandum was written in 1986 as a team work of a group of most prominent Serbian intellectuals. It was basically an extensive list of Serbian national grievances, interpreting the post-1945 history as an anti-Serb conspiracy. According to the Memorandum Tito (half Croat, half Slovene) and his right hand Edvard Kardelj (a Slovene) engineered Yugoslavia according to the policy of "strong Yugoslavia, weak Serbia." For this reason, Serbs were divided among several republics, and Vojvodina and Kosovo were carved out from the "Serbian historic territory." Serbia was allegedly exploited by other republics, Serbs faced discrimination all over the country, in Bosnia and in Croatia their culture was being systematically destroyed and in Kosovo, they were victims of an organised "genocide." Parts of Memorandum are quoted in Olivera Milosavljevic, "The Abuse of the Authority of Science," in *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis*, ed. Nebojsa Popov. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000, p. 279

Yugoslav societies was hidden. War provided the perfect smoke screen behind which the ruling elites and the criminal underworld, hand in hand, grabbed total political and economic power in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Hercegovina. It diverted the attention of the general public to the threat, coming from the demonised "other" (Croat, Serb, or Muslim) for as long as possible, or better said, for as long as there was something left to rob.

Of course, to describe the tragic events between 1991 and 1995 just as an orgy of looting, plundering and stealing would be to grossly oversimplify what was happening. Moreover, it would completely disregard the senseless destruction of Vukovar, the horror of Manjaca, Omarska and numerous other concentration camps, the ghastly massacre in Srebrenica, and the near eradication of the Serbian population in Croatia. The war in former Yugoslavia was a complex interplay in which nationalistic intellectuals, opportunistic and unscrupulous politicians, members of the criminal underworld, and numerous would-be-losers in the case of peaceful democratisation (secret service and federal army employees, and numerous "VIP's"³ in economy, media and state bureaucracy) worked hand in hand for their own political and material profit. Their nations, to which they publicly pledged allegiance and whose well-being and prosperity they were promising to protect, were never on their minds. This is perhaps the most tragically ironic aspect of the Yugoslav wars, namely that the majority of people in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Hercegovina for ten years in a row gave their electoral support to people who brought nothing but calamity on them and who got rich at their expense. They did so believing that these same people were the only ones they could trust, solely on account of the fact that they were of the same ethnicity. More than five years after the end of the war and with names like Franjo Tudjman, Mate Boban, Radovan Karadzic, Milan Babic, Alija Izetbegovic, Fikret Abdic and Slobodan Milosevic forever removed from electoral lists, many people who blindly supported them for so long still refuse to acknowledge that greed has no nationality. Like so many times in the past, the truth about what was happening has been obscured by myths.

A logical and necessary objection to such an assertion would be that it is rather ridiculous to claim that facts could have been replaced by myths after 1991 in the same way it happened, for example, with the Kosovo battle after 1389. The sheer amount of information available and the speed and ease with which it is spread nowadays as compared to six centuries ago is enough to seriously challenge the possibility of millions of people being led to believe something which was obviously not true. Yet, the facts speak otherwise, as the fourth part of this thesis will show. Even more so, this is not even as surprising as it might seem.

³ In Yugoslavia, VIP did not stand for Very Important Person, but for *Veze i poznanstva* (Connections and Contacts).

In the late 1980s, the process of creation of new Croatian and new Serbian national identities started. While it is true that the Croatian reconstruction of national identity was a reaction to the threat coming from the process which was already under way in Serbia, by 1990 both processes exhibited a number of common characteristics. Among the most important ones were what Paul Connerton calls "the forced forgetting,"⁴ and the consequent invention of new social memories, which are crucial for the existence of any given society. In order to change a social identity, a social memory needs to be appropriated through official adoption of new commemorative techniques, introduction of new bodily practices and veneration of newly (re)discovered national heritage. The process will be most successful if these pillars upon which the new social memory will rest are not completely new, but have their origin in the national "Golden Age."

The construction or reconstruction of national identity is an almost regular side-effect of any rapid social change (French and Russian revolutions, the unification of German and Italian states, the unification of East and West Germany), a civil war being a rapid social change par excellence. Since aggressive and intolerant nationalism became a distinctive feature of both Croatian and Serbian post-Yugoslav identities,⁵ I believe there exists sufficient ground to further challenge the predominant view that nationalism caused the war in Yugoslavia. Rather, the war radicalised the societies involved and caused the majority of Croats and Serbs to acquire a nationalistic world-view.

Contrary to the now popular belief in its artificiality, I claim that the post-1945 "Yugoslav" identity, based on the "Brotherhood and Unity" slogan (myth?), had grown exceptionally strong roots. The only way the initiators of the new social changes could erase the common memories and the "Yugoslav" identities,⁶ and substitute them with new ones effectively enough was to write them down in blood. Although the war of course played a very important role in imagining the new national communities, one of its primary goals was, to quote Robert M. Hayden, to "make real, existing communities unimaginable."⁷

Almost a full decade after the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia officially ceased to exist, following the Slovenian and Croatian proclamations of independence, and five years after the Dayton agreement ended the war, it is about time for the myths created during the

⁴ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 12

⁵ Of course, numerous manifestations of nationalism could have been observed in both Serbia and Croatia also prior to dissolution of Yugoslavia, but they can hardly represent a match to the virtually total nationalisation of population in both republics once the war has started.

⁶ I use "Yugoslav" identities as reference not just to people who defined themselves as Yugoslavs, but for the sake of simplicity also as reference to Yugoslav Serbian, Yugoslav Croatian, Yugoslav Muslim and other national identities within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It should be noted that there are enormous differences between, for example, Yugoslav Serbian and post-Yugoslav Serbian identities.

⁷ Robert M. Hayden, "Imagined Communities and Real Victims: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in Yugoslavia" in *American Ethnologist*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1996, p. 783

war to be demystified. My thesis will hopefully represent a modest attempt to show why this is necessary, how it should be done and what could be the consequences of such an enterprise. I will limit my research to the Croatian and Serbian perspective of the collapse of Yugoslavia, and explore the myth-making and nation-building associated with these two national communities. By limiting my research only to Croats and Serbs, I do not intend to imply in any way that a research of post-Yugoslav Slovenian or Macedonian, or even more so Bosnian Muslim (the most "Yugoslav" ethnic group in former Yugoslavia) nation-building, together with accompanying myths, would be less interesting and challenging.

My choice stems first from spatial limitations, and second from the fact that of the three nations most actively engaged in the war, Serbs and Croats were those whose actions were more often offensive rather than defensive. Since nation-building as a rule requires predominantly positive image of a social-identity-in-the-making to be presented to the would-be-members, myth-making and concealment of the truth switched into overdrive in both Serbia and Croatia. The war was thus presented, in the Serbian case, as a defensive war of Serbian people, facing genocide by Croatian fascists and Bosnian Islamic fundamentalists, and in the Croatian case, as a defensive war of the Croatian state, threatened by Serbian occupation. Their participation in the war was thus presented as just, clean and defensive. These newly composed myths were linked to the traditional historic myths on which the old, pre-Yugoslav incarnations of Serbian and Croatian national identities were based. They included, above all, the Serbian myth about Serbs as "Heavenly People," and the Croatian myth about Croats as *Antemurale Christianitatis*. And while ordinary Serbs and Croats were preoccupied with adapting to the new social reality, adopting new habits, values, vocabularies and dreams, simultaneously struggling to survive through the almost complete pauperisation of both Serbia and Croatia, the warlords on both sides were growing rich.

The majority of people in Croatia and Serbia will have to come to terms with the fact that what was happening between 1991 and 1995 was neither a glorious "homeland liberation war" nor was it a third and final Serbian uprising against the Catholic and Muslim oppressors (the last remnants of, respectively, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman occupation?). Rather, it was an unjust, dirty and aggressive criminal rampage, fought only nominally for the national good. In fact, the only benefits were harvested by a limited number of well positioned individuals and groups.

The myths connected with World War II and especially with the civil war fought during it,⁸ and which were generated by the Yugoslav Communist authorities after 1945,

⁸ Croatian Ustashe, Serbian Chetniks and all other nationalistic, anti-communist military formations were lumped together as collaborators of Fascist occupators. Their anti-communist and therefore pro-fascist position was stressed, and their nationalistic side obscured and officially forgotten, making it possible to present all victims of the civil war as victims of the anti-fascist liberation war. This in turn made it possible to

prevented the necessary post-war catharsis and left numerous wounds unhealed. Half a century later, these wounds were used by dealers with death and other people's misfortune to divert attention from their own misdeeds. Killers and robbers became national heroes, and shameful crimes were presented as national victories. In order to develop into truly open, tolerant and democratic societies, peoples of Croatia and Serbia need to avoid repeating the mistake made after 1945. They have to learn to see through the newly composed myths, go through the necessary catharsis and then sincerely say their long overdue *mea culpa*, following the examples of two well known public figures, Djordje Balasevic and Dubravka Ugresic.⁹ They need to come to terms with the fact that the International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague is not putting "Croats" and "Serbs" on trial for the sole reason of their nationality, but is judging criminals who need to answer for their crimes.¹⁰ The sooner the majority of Croats and Serbs realise that these same criminals committed crimes not only against their "enemies" but also against them, the easier the complete awakening will occur. Then, the time will finally come to stop looking back, but ahead instead.

In the first part of my thesis, I will set up a theoretical framework which will cast some light on the process of forging post-Yugoslav Croatian and Serbian national identities. With the help of writings by Anderson, Connerton, Connor, Gillis, Hosking, Judt, Schopflin, Smith, Sutton and others, I intend to examine how myths are employed in the process of nation-building, how the past influences and shapes the present and how in turn the present appropriates the past. I will examine the process and the methods by which the social memory is confiscated in order for a society to experience a "collective amnesia," which is a necessary precondition for consequent forced remembering and (re)creation of new social identity, bases on a (re)created common memory. The more total the aspirations of the new regime, the stronger the forced forgetting will be and the more traumatic the adjustment of personal memories and individual identities to the modified common

brush the war time hatred and violence between members of various ethnic groups under the carpet, instead of openly dealing with the trauma and eventually healing it.

⁹ Balasevic, a Serb from Novi Sad, is one of the most popular pop singers from the territory of former Yugoslavia, who, mostly due to his uncompromising non-nationalistic and pacifist orientation, continues to enjoy popularity all over the former Yugoslavia and is still the only performer who managed to hold concerts in all Yugoslavia's successor states. In 1993, he released a song *Krivi smo mi* (We are to Blame), in which he sang that criminals, generals and psychopaths are not responsible for the war, but rather all the ordinary people, who kept silent and let them take control. Djordje Balasevic, *Jedan od onih zivota* (One of Those Lives). Pan Records, 1993.

Similarly, Ugresic, a Croatian Tadjman-era dissident writer, forced to leave Croatia because of her "non-patriotic" views, placed responsibility for the war on herself, because she kept silent and did nothing to prevent or stop it. Dubravka Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies. Antipolitical Essays*, trans. by Celia Hawkesworth. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998, p. 188

¹⁰ Maja Freundlich, vice-president of the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Community) and columnist of *Hrvatsko slovo* (a right-wing Croatian newspaper) wrote that a bitter joke is circulating through Croatia: "In the Hague, everyone is presumed innocent, until it is proven beyond doubt that he is -- a Croat." Quoted in "Shit of the Year 2000," *Feral Tribune*. www.feral-tribune.com/arhiva/latin2/shits2000/page3.html

identity. This process is especially traumatic during a war, which as a rule maximises the distress and insecurity, makes people much more susceptible to propaganda and intensifies the need to belong to a group, coupled with the urge to view this group as morally good.

The second part of my thesis will present three major theories, which try to explain the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia. I will juxtapose their strengths and weaknesses, try to define the rationale behind them, and try to critically examine where, if that was the case, they went wrong. As already stated above, these three theories are "ancient hatreds," "manipulative elites" and "increasing insecurity" theories.

The third part of my thesis will hopefully present enough evidence to back my assertion that the so-called "ethnic" war in former Yugoslavia in essence had very little to do with ethnicity, religion, and nationalism. They were, of course, widely used to justify the war, but had very little, if anything, to do with the reasons for which the war broke out. All the propaganda and hate-speech, produced in vast quantities by both Serbian and Croatian media, all the nationalism-backed outbreaks of violence on football stadiums and all Memorandums, "Meetings of Truth"¹¹ and chessboard flags¹² notwithstanding, the war would not have broken out without gangs of criminals actually starting with their "kill, steal and burn" campaign. The money, made through sales of the "war booty," sanction-breaking, arms selling and renting,¹³ oil smuggling, extortion and racketeering in besieged cities, "taxes" and "duties" imposed on the passage of humanitarian convoys and fees collected for the evacuation of refugees were much more important to those who started and led the war than were some alleged nationalistic goals. The best proof that profit-making and not nationalism was the prime mover during the war is the fact that all warring sides extensively traded with each other throughout the war, weapons, ammunition and oil being the most common objects of trade.

Of course, if this were widely known at the time, the war would have lasted incomparably shorter. To keep the war going, elites-cum-mafia needed two things: first, a large enough amount of cannon-fodder, that is soldiers who really believed that they were fighting for liberation of their state or for survival of their nation, and second, a silent majority, which believed that their leaders were really waging a defensive war in the name of their nation and which was large enough to prevent an electoral defeat or anti-regime revolution. For this purpose, nationalist propaganda was enlisted, obscuring the truth about

¹¹"Meeting of Truth" were "spontaneous" mass rallies happening all over Serbia and Montenegro throughout 1988 and 1989. In fact, there can be no doubt that they were organised by Milosevic and his men, since the logistics (transportation, food and water, technical equipment) were always provided in a not-so-spontaneous manner. Under the pressure, applied by the crowds on these meetings, party leadership in Vojvodina and in Montenegro was forced to resign and was substituted by Milosevic's cadres.

¹²Traditional Croatian red, white and blue flag, with the red and white chessboard-like symbol in the middle. It was also an official flag of the Ustashe-run NDH, and after the 1990 election, it again became the official flag of Croatia, causing furious resentment among the Croatian Serb population.

¹³ During the war between Croats and Muslims in 1993, the Serbian army was renting their tanks to the Croats for thousand German Marks per day. Tim Judah, *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, p. 250

war by newly composed myths, which were given legitimacy by being based on the already existing historic myths, employed in the nineteenth century when modern Serbian and Croatian national identities were created. The examination of these new myths, the reasons for which they were created, the effect they had and their relationship with previous myths, and examination of the real situation they were trying either to hide or to make seem irrelevant will represent the fourth part of my thesis.

In the conclusion, I will look at Croatia and Serbia today. I will discuss the need for both Croats and Serbs to come to terms with what was really happening between 1991 and 1995 and to learn to see through the newly composed myths. The 1945 mistake must not be repeated. I will conclude my thesis by trying to show why it is essential for Croats to challenge the myths about "Homeland Liberation War" and for Serbs to realise that the "Heavenly People," like Cain, have been cast east of Eden for their sins.

2. A Nation-building Alchemy: Making Myths, Memories and Identities

Nations are always engaged in the process of (re)building. Each new generation questions the reasoning behind a sense of national belonging, inherited from the previous generation, readjusts it and forms its own perception. Corrections are usually minor and perhaps hardly noticeable, yet they exist. But in times of major and rapid social changes, corrections are much more noticeable, and significantly modified perception of national belonging and consequently of common national identity will emerge. Such change, together with the unavoidable erasing of existing memories and substituting them with new, invented or appropriated ones, is not something new for the peoples of ex-Yugoslavia.

After the Second World War, the memories of war-time ethnic hatred and of violent civil war were officially "erased." State propaganda, dispersed through the educational system, media and mass culture (especially literature and films), instead presented a myth, based on the "Brotherhood and Unity" slogan. The picture it presented testified about mass support among all Yugoslav peoples for the joint struggle against invaders and "domestic traitors," as numerous non-partisan, ethnically based military formations during the war were called. Extreme hardship of the first post-war years in war-devastated Yugoslavia made many people highly susceptible to believe in anything promising a better future. The enthusiasm which thus accompanied the adoption of new Yugoslav identity(ies), together with all the accompanying myths, can hardly be regarded as surprising.

Similarly, the rapid collapse of Yugoslavia's socialist system in the second half of 1980s made people very vulnerable and thus again very susceptible to propaganda, offering and promising a change for the better. Nationalism was far from being the only ideology people of Yugoslavia were ready to follow at the time. It was not hidden under the carpet where communist authorities had brushed it four decades before, waiting like a predator for a partial relaxation of a Yugoslav "totalitarian" system to break free and push the country back into the chaos of ethnic violence. The exceptional popularity of the last federal Prime Minister, Ante Markovic, and of his reform program showed that an alternative path was available and could have easily been followed. Unfortunately, it has been blocked by the elites in Slovenia, the richest, and Serbia, the biggest republic, without whom there could be no Yugoslavia and who had by then only their own parochial interests on their minds. Nationalist craze swept over Yugoslavia not because its people were somehow predisposed to it, but because it was the only alternative to the decaying self-management offered to them by those in power in two republics, crucial for the

federation's existence.¹⁴ To help them consolidate their power, a different set of myths was employed, presenting the common identities held since 1945 as false and advocating new or modified ones. In this process, an exceptionally interesting interplay of past and present could be observed: while past strongly influenced the way the present was shaped, the present in turn modified the popular perception of the past. Nationalism, assisted by myths, influenced the change of the social memory and consequently also the change of national identities of Yugoslav peoples. This chapter will attempt to explain why this was possible, what its consequences were, how this change came about and what is the relation between myths, memory and identity.

2. 1. Myths and Their Role in the Nation-building

As stated above, nations are always engaged in the process of rebuilding. Nation-building is a recurrent activity, which involves endless reinterpretations, rediscoveries and reconstructions. This, however, always happens within a limited extent, restricted by tradition. The values, myths, symbols and even the holy places each new generation chooses to praise as its national essence can be different from those worshipped by the previous generations, but they cannot be invented completely anew. They have to be based somewhere in the nation's past. The past defines the nation's present and directs it towards its future. Yet, the present needs and the future goals in turn influence the way "the past" is reconstructed and that is why the myths occupy their central role in the nation-building.¹⁵

Myths are very tricky to deal with. What might appear as only a story or a legend to an outsider, might be the one and only historic truth to the insider. Identities of all nations are to a considerable extent built on myths. Dismissing those myths as something with no relation at all with reality would be quixotic to say the least. Even more so because the line separating myth from real history, or "the really made-up" from "the really real," can be very thin sometimes.¹⁶ Mythical account of an event, which is supposed to be perceived as historic, will be more believable if it stems from a genuine historic root, regardless of how big (or small) its role in the overall context of the myth. For example, Croatian *Antemurale* myth stems from Pope Leo X reference to Croats as *Antemurale Christianitatis*. Even though historic evidence clearly shows that Croats did not play an exceptionally important role in stopping the Ottoman advance into the central Europe, the belief that this was the

¹⁴ Rise of nationalism in Croatia was a very different case from Slovenia and Serbia. In these two republics, the Communist Parties were nationalist forerunners, while in Croatia, nationalist agenda was picked up only by the emerging opposition.

¹⁵ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, pp. 206-208

¹⁶ Joanna Overing, "The Role of Myth: An Anthropological Perspective, or: 'The Reality of the Really Made-Up'" in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schopflin. London: Hurst & Company, 1997, p. 3

case became a crucial pillar on which modern Croatian national identity was built. Similarly, virtually all Serbs today are convinced that their medieval empire was destroyed when (what they perceive as) their army suffered a crucial defeat on Kosovo polje, despite the fact that evidence largely contradict most claims of the myth (both myths will be discussed in more detail below). The need for the myth to have its origin in an indisputable historic event diminishes the further back in time we go. Examining the genuineness of the origin of the myth is therefore of far lesser importance than the research of the way myth is interpreted within a given nation and of the moral myth offers to its members. In order to understand the role of the myth in nation-building, these two aspects need to be carefully scrutinised.

When a society experiences a rapid transformation in which its social and political arrangement is seriously modified (for example a revolution, or unification or dissolution of a country), both its future and its past are seriously questioned. New traditions are "invented" (invention should not be total, if it is to have an effect, but based on traditions popular before the regime just overthrown took power, preferably in the society's "Golden Age"), erasing the traces of the *ancien regime* and legitimising the successor. To successfully perform this task, these traditions and the accompanying myths need to, as Zerubavel puts it, "project an aura of traditionality," while at the same time offering an inspiration for the future.¹⁷

Myths are one of the most important pillars on which the system of morality and values of societies, and especially of nations, rests. In other words, myths are a set of beliefs a society has about itself. As such, they attempt to monopolise the right to prescribe the content and the limits of individual set of beliefs the members of society can have. Such monopoly is necessary for the existence of community. Members do not have to perceive the myth as historically accurate. It is enough that they accept the content and the message of the myth and the myth will successfully perform its main task of establishing connection between members of the society and creating boundary between this and other societies. Sharing the same myth is one of the most important elements, distinguishing members from non-members.¹⁸ Myths and mythic histories bring the collective heritage back to life and are therefore essential in identifying "who we are." *Our* myths produce *our* rituals and sacred practices, *our* feasts and celebrations, *our* memorials and monuments, *our* parades and pilgrimages. All of them commemorate important events and people from *our* past.¹⁹

¹⁷ Yael Zerubavel, "The Historic, the Legendary and the Incredible: Invented Tradition and Collective Memory in Israel" in *Commemorations: The Politics of National identity*, ed. John R. Gillis. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 105-106

¹⁸ George Schopflin, "The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths" in *Myths and Nationhood*, pp. 19-20

¹⁹ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 202

The collective heritage can distinguish members of a particular community from non-members. Thus, for example, the exceptional importance given in Serbia to *krsna slava*, a ritual that clearly separates Serbs from non-Serbs. Unlike Roman Catholics and other Orthodox peoples, Serbs do not celebrate individual name days, but instead the whole family celebrates the day of the family's patron saint.²⁰ Collective heritage can also separate the present members of a community from the previous generations if such separation is viewed as necessary (e. g. if political system changes). Almost immediately after the 1990 elections in Croatia, the new authorities returned the monument of Croatian most popular *ban* (governor), Josip Jelacic, to the main Zagreb square, demonstrating a clear difference between "communist" and "democratic" Croatian national identity. During the 1848 revolution, Jelacic calculated that siding with Vienna against the revolutionaries (the fact that Croatia was ruled from Budapest has reasonably significant importance) would be in Croatian interest. To his disappointment, his loyalty to the Emperor did not bring any benefit to the Croats, let alone the autonomy they were hoping for. After World War II, his monument was removed because the new Yugoslav (revolutionary, needless to say) authorities could hardly tolerate a memorial to a "reactionary servant of anti-revolutionary terror." In 1991, the statue of "one of Croatia's greatest sons" was returned to its original place.²¹

Rituals and symbols through which myths are articulated and acted out constitute an extremely important mode of communication between the members, more important than language itself. This is especially true if two or more communities share the same language.²² For example, Serbs in Croatia and Croats spoke not only the same language (the Croatian version of what was known as Serbo-Croatian prior to 1991), but even the same dialects. That is, Serbs and Croats in Slavonia spoke the same dialect, different from the dialect spoken by both Serbs and Croats in Lika, Kordun and Dalmatia, and *significantly* different from any dialect spoken in Serbia. Thus, when professing a different ethnic origin became an issue in Croatia in the late 1980s, symbols played incomparably greater role than the language. For example, crossing oneself in a "proper" -- that is Roman Catholic or Orthodox way -- became exceptionally important for both Croats and Serbs. Serbs started using a three-finger greeting (raised hand, with thumb, and index and middle fingers stretched out, symbolising the Orthodox way of making a sign of the cross, for which three fingers are used). By using the same symbols and participating in the same rituals, an individual confirms her/his belonging to the society/community/nation.

Having control over myths, symbols and rituals is one of most important conditions for controlling the whole society. By stressing certain memories, diminishing the importance of others, and propagating certain symbols, values and behaviour, those in

²⁰ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 44

²¹ Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 90-93

²² Schopflin, "The Functions of Myth" in *Myths and Nationhood*, p. 20

control can reinforce solidarity and mobilise the masses.²³ It was no accident at all that Slobodan Milosevic chose the celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of the Kosovo battle (at Gazimestan, the scene of the battle, on June 28, 1989, attended by over a million Serbs) to proclaim that "today, [Serbs] are again in battles and facing battles. These battles are not armed battles yet, although such battles are not yet excluded."²⁴ Controlling myths is made easier by the fact that myths do not need to stay the same for members of society, nations included, to continue to feel connected. Myths just need to keep on reassuring them that they are unique and different from others. The exact content of myths is not of crucial importance.²⁵

Likewise, the nationalistic elites who control the production and distribution of myths do not need to believe in them, since this has no decisive influence on the effect their propaganda has on their listeners. In fact, they often do not believe, and Slobodan Milosevic is an excellent case in point, as chapter four will show. What matters, if myth is to have a desired effect, is the nature of the mass instinct the myth is meant to appeal to.²⁶ For instance, when Yugoslav communist authorities after World War II declared that 1.7 million Yugoslavs have died during the war, they were perfectly aware that this figure was much too high (the real number of victims was, according to most believable estimates, just over a million). The inflated figure was produced primarily for external use, since it was trying to provide Yugoslavia with the highest possible war reparations.²⁷ Yet, it resonated especially well among the Serbs, who as the biggest nation also had the highest number of victims. This reinforced the myth about Serbs as a martyr nation, which always has to go through an ordeal before rising again like a Phoenix to the even greater glory.

The importance of myths for nation-building can hardly be overestimated. No nation can exist without a "Golden Age" it can look back at for inspiration, and without mythical heroes their "descendants" can be proud of. Myths, or mythic versions of history, offer a symbolic framework through which a huge mass of people who do not know each other can be mobilised to act as a community. Myths provide the glue with which a mass is turned into a nation, whose members possess a sense of belonging and identity, unity and integration, uniqueness and autonomy. Myths point out future goals by providing examples from an ideal "Golden Age," generating emotions and inspiring actions. But the problem with enlisting myths for short-term political goals is that they, or rather their consequences, are impossible to control. As Smith writes, "the fires generated by mythical past burn for several generations, long after the events that first stimulated their

²³ Ibid., p. 22

²⁴ Olivera Milosavljevic, "Yugoslavia as Mistake" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, p. 69

²⁵ Walker Connor, "The Nation and Its Myth" in *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, vol. 33, no. 1-2, 1992, p. 49

²⁶ Ibid., p. 50

²⁷ Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 152

acceptance."²⁸ Two excellent examples of playing with fire which later burst out of control can be found in Serbia -- the SANU Memorandum and Milosevic's reference to the battles.

Despite its militancy, it would be a mistake to interpret the Memorandum as a call to arms. Serbian intellectuals did call for a serious transformation of Yugoslavia, but they hardly had a transformation like the one, which started in 1991 on their minds. Even the above quoted Milosevic's threat with armed battles, stated during the celebration of the Kosovo battle anniversary, should be treated with caution since it is far from certain whether Milosevic planned a war already in 1989. Rather, it is more likely that he believed that a mere threat would be enough to bulldoze through his plans for Yugoslavia's reorganisation. This, however, does not diminish neither his responsibility, nor the responsibility of Serbian nationalistic intellectuals for what happened later. First, certain Serbian myths clashed with certain Croatian myths, sparks started to fly, and soon, certain armed Serbs clashed with certain armed Croats. This was hardly surprising, given the fact that much more connected, rather than separated the Serbian and Croatian myths.

Schopflin divides myths into several categories (I will provide examples of both Serbian and Croatian myths for each of his categories):²⁹

1.) Myths of territory: They claim that a particular territory represents an unalienable heritage of the nation, because it is where the nation first became a nation, or because it occupied it during its finest hour. It is also the land where the nation existed in its purest form, before coming into (damaging) contact with foreigners. Such myths offer an exceptionally powerful imperative for the nation to defend this territory, this national sacred space, to the very end.

In the Serbian case, Kosovo, beyond any doubt, represents such territory. But a much more interesting example is the so-called Krajina or the Military Frontier in Croatia. Although established already in 1527, the Military Frontier of the Habsburg Empire became a well-defined territory with special, highly autonomous status in 1630 when the Emperor Ferdinand II, in a document entitled *Statuta Valachorum*, granted the Krajina population freedom from feudal obligations, freedom to elect their own leaders, freedom to practice their Orthodox Christianity and complete autonomy from the Croatian nobility in exchange for their military services.³⁰ Yet, as the title of the document shows, the majority of Krajina's population at the time were not Serbs, but Vlachs (predominantly Orthodox Christian speakers of a Latin dialect). Serbs started to settle in the region in larger numbers after the 1690 exodus from Kosovo and southern Serbia. Patriarch Arsenije III led over 30,000 people to Habsburg lands, after the Ottomans defeated the Austrian army, which had pushed as far south as Kosovo. Many Serbs, fearing reprisals for their

²⁸ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, pp. 200-201

²⁹ Schopflin, "The Functions of Myth" in *Myths and Nationhood*, pp. 28-34

³⁰ Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia. A Short History*. New York: New York University Press, 1994, pp. 72-73

assistance to Austrian army, fled.³¹ Serbs gradually became the majority population of Krajina (especially after the Vlachs started to abandon Latin for Serbian and started to identify as Serbs in the early nineteenth century) and Krajina, in the Serbian mythical version of history, came to be seen as *the* Serbian land and the Krajina Serbs as the *true* Serbs, continuing to lead the traditional, proud warrior life-style, unlike the subjugated Serbs in Serbia proper. During the 1991-1995 war, the officials of the Serbian Orthodox Church praised the Krajina Serbs as the only true Serbs and wondered "whether Serbia and Montenegro will ever become Serbian states."³²

Not surprisingly, the same territory was claimed by Croats for reasons similar to the Serbian claims over Kosovo. Knin (the largest town in Krajina and its capital after the region "seceded" from Croatia) had been the centre from which the first Croatian medieval kingdom arose in the early ninth century and remained its capital until King Kresimir IV (1058-1074) moved the capital to the coastal town of Biograd. In the nearby town of Nin, the first Croatian bishopric was established in 830.³³ When the Croatian forces retook Knin on August 5, 1995, a Croatian flag was almost instantly raised over the fortress in Knin. When President Tudjman arrived in the town a couple of weeks later, riding on the so-called "Freedom Train," he enthusiastically kissed the flag, symbolising that "the cradle of Croatian nation" had been reunited again with "our beautiful homeland."³⁴ The importance of this act is perhaps difficult to explain rationally, but its importance for the Croats nevertheless cannot be underestimated.

2.) Myths of redemption: The essence of such myths is an idea that through its exceptionally tragic history, a nation paid for its sins and was redeemed. These myths are closely connected with experience of foreign domination and of sacrifice. Especially popular in Eastern Europe, these myths typically tell stories about how Eastern European nations saved Western Europe, as the last bastion of Europe and Christianity, by stopping the onslaught of "the barbaric hordes from the East." At the same time, they offer a convenient and noble excuse for perceived political, cultural and economic backwardness vis-à-vis Western Europe. They also justify the lack of individual responsibility, since "history," "bad destiny" or "the will of God" are to blame for the suffering.

Not surprisingly, such myths play a central role in both Serbian and Croatian mythic history. The most important Serbian myth -- the myth of Kosovo battle -- is a typical redemption myth, since military "defeat"³⁵ was explained as a conscious choice of heavenly glory over earthly power. In Serbia, the battle is considered to be the most

³¹ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 46

³² Radmila Radic, "The Church and the 'Serbian Question'" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, p. 266

³³ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 12-13

³⁴ *Lijepa nasa [domovina]* or "Our Beautiful [Homeland]" is the title of the Croatian national anthem.

³⁵ According to the scarce historic sources, the battle ended without a clear outcome, with leaders of both camps -- Serbian Prince Lazar and Ottoman Sultan Murad I -- being killed and both armies retreating after suffering heavy losses. Branimir Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*. London: Hurst & Company, 1999, pp. 38-39

decisive moment in Serbian history, since it marks the destruction of the glorious Serbian medieval empire and the beginning of subjugation by the Ottoman Turks. The mythical account of the battle, known to virtual all Serbs, is not based on historic documents and largely contradicts most of the known facts. Serbian medieval empire in reality started to disintegrate immediately after the death of its greatest ruler, Dusan Silni, in 1355. The army which faced Ottomans on Kosovo was not exclusively Serbian, but a coalition of Christian armies, which included units of Bosnian King Tvrtko, and most likely some Albanian and Wallachian units. Not did all Serbian despots, who divided Dusan's empire after his death, join the battle. Lazar Hrebljanovic, now remembered as *the* Serbian leader at the time, was in fact only one of many. The battle also did not mark the end of Serbia, since the kingdom (or remnants of it) continued to exist for another seventy years after the battle.³⁶

The mythic version of the event, popular and widely accepted in Serbia since the nineteenth-century national revival, in which it played a central role, was immortalised in an epic song, "The Fall of the Serbian Empire." The song explains that on the eve before the battle, Saint Elias visited Prince Lazar and asked him to choose: if he wants to rule on Earth, he would win the battle, but if he wants to have a Kingdom in Heaven, he and his army would be annihilated. Lazar chose the latter, and the myth transformed an (alleged) military defeat into a moral victory.³⁷ The idea that honourable defeat is better than a shameful life was not a Serbian invention and is a part of many myths, especially of those connected with nation-building. Its close connection with Christianity (in Serbian monasteries and churches, Lazar, who became a Serbian saint, is depicted while having his last supper before the battle, in which he died, surrounded with twelve apostle-warriors) gives the myth its *raison d'être* -- a promise of resurrection. The myth thus promises to Serbs that they will have their glorious state again. By choosing the Kingdom in Heaven, the Serbs -- the Heavenly People -- will always emerge victorious in the end, no matter how hard the present situation is.³⁸

The fact that the battle happened on the day of summer solstice, the day dedicated to Vid, the pre-Christian Slavic god of war and sun, added another mythical dimension to the event. With Kosovo battle acquiring a central position in the nineteenth-century Serbian national revival, the pagan god Vid started his gradual transformation into a Christian saint. By 1913, when Serbia re-conquered Kosovo again, *Vidovdan* (St. Vid's Day) entered church calendars as an official national and religious holiday, completely reconciling two of the most important pillars of Serbian nation-building -- the Kosovo myth and Orthodox Christianity.³⁹

³⁶ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 31-34

³⁷ Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, pp. 11-13

³⁸ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 34-37

³⁹ Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, pp. 82-85

Similarly, although in a much less dramatic manner (Croatian medieval statehood, unlike Serbian, had not been completely destroyed by the Ottoman onslaught), the myth about sacrificing themselves for the protection of Europe plays a prominent role in Croatia also. The first significant battle between Croatian and Ottoman armies was on Krbavsko polje in 1493. It ended, similarly to the Kosovo battle, without a clear winner. Croats managed to hold the Ottomans back for a few more decades, earning in 1519 a commendation from Pope Leo X, who described them as *Antemurale Christianitatis*, or the ramparts of Christendom, laying the foundations for the myth. Throughout the sixteenth century, Croatia continued to lose territory to the Ottoman Empire, leading the nobles in Croatian *Sabor* to lament that only "the remains of the remains" of Croatia are still under their jurisdiction.⁴⁰ The claim that the Croats held the Ottomans back any more than the Serbs, cannot withstand historical scrutiny, yet it did play an exceptionally important role in the forging of modern Croatian national identity.

3.) Myths of unjust treatment: The central motif is the tragic destiny of a community. It is its fate to suffer, and it cannot do anything to change it. Connected with this motif is the belief that others, for example the rest of Europe, are indebted to the suffering group and should be grateful to it.

Suffering played one of the most important roles in the Serbian nation-building. The Kosovo battle and the epic songs, connected with it, are full of references to suffering. The most notable example is an epic song *Smrt majke Jugovica* (The Death of the Mother of the Jugovic Boys), who died broken-hearted after learning that her husband and all nine sons have died on the Kosovo battlefield.⁴¹ Needless to say, the almost five centuries of Ottoman rule are described (not completely accurately) as one long period of suffering. Serbian suffering in both World Wars (though being very real and truly substantial) has been similarly magnified through historic myths. The SANU Memorandum's myth-making presented the Serbian experience in Socialist Yugoslavia as suffering, since Serbia was the only republic without a right to control its whole territory (due to autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina), since Serbs were the only Yugoslav nation forced to live in several republics (which was obviously not true), and since Serbs were allegedly exploited and discriminated against just for being Serbs.⁴² Worst of all, other nations in Yugoslavia showed no gratitude for the sacrifice Serbs made in both World Wars for "liberating" them, and after exploiting them for 45 years, they decided to secede from Yugoslavia.⁴³

Some very notable references to suffering can be found in earlier periods of Croatian history (for example, the above quoted statement about only "the remains of the

⁴⁰ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 29-37

⁴¹ Milne Holton and Vasa D. Mihailovich, *Serbian Poetry from the Beginnings to the Present*. New Haven: Slavica Publishers - Yale Centre for International and Area Studies, 1988, pp. 98-102

⁴² Milosavljevic, "The Abuse of the Authority of Science" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 279-281

⁴³ Dragoljub Zivojinovic, "Serbia and Yugoslavia: Past, Present, and Future" in *Serbia's Historical Heritage*, ed. Alex N. Dragnich. Boulder: Columbia University Press - East European Monographs, 1994, pp. 61-62

remains" of Croatia not being occupied by the Ottoman army). But none can compare with the perceived suffering of Croats under the "Serbian occupation," as the periods of 1918-1941 and 1945-1991 came to be known after the Croatian secession. The Croatian "suffering" should not be understood literally. Rather, Croats suffered symbolically. Because the nature of the Ustashe-Croat relation was never openly discussed, but simply "forgotten," Croats, despite being recognised as equal participants in the brotherly struggle against Fascism, continued to be viewed as collectively guilty for the Ustashe atrocities, especially by many Serbs. This semi-subconscious bias against the Croats came into the open in 1971 when the *Maspok*⁴⁴ was crushed. Despite similar movements in Slovenia and Serbia (following the clampdown in Croatia, purges also swept through Ljubljana and Belgrade, bringing the reform process in Yugoslavia to its end), the purge was exceptionally thorough and massive in Croatia, making anything which could be potentially understood as a manifestation of Croatian nationalism an absolute taboo. In the period from 1971 to 1990, Croatia was known as "the Silent Republic." The mass hysteria, which swept through Croatia in 1989 can offer some idea what was the extent of trauma, caused by this anathema on the mere reference to anything Croatian, among the Croats. In that year, a Zagreb rock band, *Prljavo kazaliste*, released an otherwise very innocent-sounding and, at least seemingly, completely apolitical song, entitled *Mojoj majci* (To My Mother). The refrain, however, featured an iconoclastic verse "You Were the Last Croatian Rose," which (literally) rocked Croatia. *Mojoj majci* became the biggest hit in the history of Croatian pop-rock.⁴⁵ Croatian silence was broken. The winner of the elections held the following year was the *Croatian Democratic Community* (or HDZ - *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*), which representatives' nationalistic electoral rhetoric was loud enough to compensate for almost two decades of silence.

4.) Myths of election: According to these myths, a nation has been given a special mission either by God or by History, due to its unique virtues. These myths also point out that a given nation is much more "European" and therefore culturally and morally superior to some other nations.

This myth, with its origin in the above-mentioned commendation of Pope Leo X, was a very important part of Croatian history, and was given an especially crucial role in the post-Yugoslav Croatian nation-building. During the 1990 electoral campaign, during the secessionist drive, and during the war, virtually all Croatian public figures repeatedly

⁴⁴ *Maspok* stands for *masovni pokret* (mass movement) and is a name under which the 1968-1971 nationalist-cum-liberal movement in Croatia is popularly known. It started as a liberal reform process of the young Croatian Communist Party leadership, and soon got out of their control, acquiring mass following and nationalistic orientation. It was crushed in 1971, with many ringleaders arrested and Croatian party purged.

⁴⁵ *Prljavo kazaliste*, *Zaustavite zemlju* (Stop the Earth). Jugoton, 1989.

stressed the "Europeness" of Croatia as opposed to "Oriental," "Byzantine" and "Balkan" nature of Serbs.⁴⁶

The myth about the Serbs as "Heavenly People" is a typical election myth. Also, the "historic mission" the Serbian nation allegedly had to liberate the other South Slavs, especially from the Austro-Hungarian "occupation" was pointed out on numerous occasions by Serbian politicians and intellectuals. For instance, Zivojinovic argues that during World War I, the Serbian government was offered by Great Britain the possibility to create Greater Serbia after the war, including the whole of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Montenegro, Vojvodina, Slavonia and parts of the Dalmatian coast (the remainder of what was not promised to Italy). Yet, the Serbs, according to Zivojinovic, did not want even to consider it, since they were faithful to their commitment to the Yugoslav state. Serbs were made to pay terribly for their loyalty to the Yugoslav cause, suffering terrible losses in the war, and were "rewarded" by having to give up, Zivojinovic writes, its democratic constitution, independent statehood, its flag and its anthem, for creating a state for Croats and Slovenes who "invested [neither] their blood [nor] money" in its creation.⁴⁷

5.) Myths of military valour: They are connected to the previous category. They are of special value for nation-building, since they homogenise the nation, diminishing the role of individuals and praising collective (heroic) deeds. This myth is exceptionally strong among the Serbs and was fed by their rebellions and uprisings against the Ottomans, and by their victories in the two Balkan wars and the two World Wars. The importance of the myth was not lost on Slobodan Milosevic. On March 16, 1991, the day when Milan Babic, leader of the Serb rebels in Croatia, proclaimed independence of Krajina from Croatia, Milosevic stated in the Serbian Parliament that he hoped "that they won't be so crazy as to fight with us, because if we don't know how to work, at least we know how to fight."⁴⁸ Popov writes that for Serbs, war is a way of life. The significance attached to the warrior life-style in Serbian national identity most likely made a decision to participate in the 1991-1995 war much easier for many Serbs.⁴⁹

Croats, for understandable reasons (in World War I, they fought in the Austro-Hungarian army, and their participation in the partisan struggle in World War II has been significantly, although not completely justly, obscured by the Ustashe factor) could not construct a similar warrior-nation image. Yet, following their 1995 victories and the retaking of the occupied territories, this element gained noticeable prominence.

⁴⁶ A good example is President Tudjman's speech in the *Sabor*, when the new Croatian constitution was promulgated. Among many other things, Tudjman stated that Croats always belonged to Central and Western Europe, as opposed to half-oriental Serbs who were "waging media, psychological and economic war on others." Franjo Tudjman, "We Stand Before a Great Historic Test" in *Yugoslavia Through Documents*, pp. 237-240

⁴⁷ Zivojinovic, "Serbia and Yugoslavia," in *Serbia's Historical Heritage*, pp. 55-59

⁴⁸ Quoted in Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997, p. 129

⁴⁹ Nebojsa Popov, "Traumatology of the Party State" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 81-84

6.) Myths of rebirth and renewal: These are linked both to Christian themes of rebirth and of the Second Coming, and to pagan motifs like the rise of Phoenix from the ashes. The main idea is that the present situation is bad or shameful, and through a (possibly) painful process of purgation, a better future will be created. These myths have exceptional importance in cases when a group or a nation has been involved in a war of aggression, or in some particularly gruesome act like ethnic cleansing. By trying to convince themselves and others that a process of purification and rebirth has taken place, the members of the group can claim that they are not responsible for the past misdeeds. Rebirth thus creates a new beginning in which the sins of the past can be forgotten and forgiven. For such myths to become a fact, consent of the victim is absolutely necessary.

This is precisely the myth, which became the order of the day in Serbia after Milosevic was overthrown. Exceptionally helpful in development of such myth in Serbia were the Western governments, whose representatives have been repeating for years that everything will miraculously get perfect in the Balkans once Milosevic is removed. The majority of people found the refuge from both collective and individual guilt in a convenient sentence: "It is all Milosevic's fault." Given its central role in today's Serbia and the exceptional need for Serbs to deal with the truth behind it and thus come to terms with their past, I will return to this myth and deal with it at greater length in the last part of this thesis.

In Croatia, the "historic" memory of the NDH (the Independent State of Croatia, established during World War II) went through a process of rebirth, acquiring in the post-1990 mythic history a central space as an important link in the historical continuity of the Croatian state, which was interrupted only by two period of subjugation, first by the Serbs and later by the communists. Prior to 1990, the NDH was reasonably viewed as the interruption of Yugoslavia's continuous existence.⁵⁰ Croatian President Tudjman, for example, described the NDH as an expression of the historical longing of the Croatian nation for a state of its own.⁵¹ The burden of the collective guilt for Ustashe crimes Croats carried for 45 years came to be seen as completely unjust and imposed on the Croats by the Serbs, who wanted to completely devalue any manifestation of Croatian independent statehood to prevent Croats from asserting their right to it again. This undeserved denomination of the NDH, the new Croatian authorities and significant part of the Croatian public concluded, compensated for individual excesses committed in the name of the NDH, and made it possible to again view it as an important episode in Croatian history.

Schopflin identifies two more categories, but they are not of crucial importance for understanding the 1991-1995 war. They do, however, play a crucial role in nation-building

⁵⁰ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, pp. 228-229

⁵¹ Predrag Lucic and Ivica Djikic, "Tudjmanovo desetljeće" (Tudjman's Decade) in *Feral Tribune*, available at <http://www.feral-tribune.com/latin2/1999/743/desetljece.html>

and the ethnogenesis myth also has a very central position in Serbian attitude towards Kosovo. Yet, since they were not employed for the purpose of war-time propaganda, I will just briefly mention them:

7.) Myths of ethnogenesis and antiquity: They help answer the question "who are we," and are also used as self-legitimation to establish primacy over a certain territory, using the "we-were-here-first" argument.

8.) Myths of kinship and common descent: They explain that members of a group (nations included) are biologically connected (most common reference is to blood) and this forms a clear border between members and non-members.

All mentioned myths share the same, most important feature: they have to construct coherence among the members. Since coherence is challenged by different obstacles at different times, different myths are employed to cope with particular challenge, while protecting the integrity of the group.⁵²

Anzulovic points out the danger brought by myths, which characterise certain nations as heavenly and others as demonic. They distort perception of reality and oversimplify the truth, picturing each and every individual member of a given nation as having precisely the features ascribed to the nation as a whole.⁵³ This is typical of myths, popular among the nations, which at some point in history lost their high rank position (e.g. a glorious empire or kingdom of their own) and were subjugated by another people. They often need centuries to come to terms with the changed situation and with the loss of former greatness.⁵⁴ Serbs reacted to the Ottoman conquest with their myth about Prince Lazar's choice and the myth about Heavenly Serbs, always engaged in a mythical struggle against a demonic enemy (Ottoman or Habsburg Empire, genocidal Croats, the Third Reich, Albanian terrorists, or most recently NATO), but who are, if not militarily, then as chosen people at least morally victorious in the end.

Myths are therefore truly of exceptional importance for nation-building. But it is equally true that only certain myths can perform this task successfully. As Fulbrook points out, to have nation-building potential, myths have to resonate with popular collective memories and offer an answer to the present needs.⁵⁵ It is the importance of collective memories and present needs for the nation-building I now turn to.

⁵² Schopflin, "The Functions of Myth" in *Myths and Nationhood*, p. 35

⁵³ Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, p. 180

⁵⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, trans. by Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 4

⁵⁵ Mary Fulbrook, "Myth-making and National Identity: The Case of the G.D.R." in *Myths and Nationhood*, pp. 73-74

2. 2. Memory and Identity: Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction

2. 2. 1. Present-shaping Past and Past-shaping Present

According to Connerton, the way we experience the present depends heavily upon our knowledge of the past. Different pasts influence different perceptions of the same present. In turn, present influences -- or even distorts -- what we perceive as the true past.⁵⁶ The logical consequence is the parallel existence of several "pasts," or, as Smith calls them, "invented traditions," each "remembered" according to our present needs. To make a past suitable for a desired form of nation-building, some of its segments need to be remembered and some forgotten. Some segments, if no appropriate ones exist, are simply invented, as long as they can be convincingly infiltrated into the succession of real memories.⁵⁷

For example, during the Yugoslav wars, the memories some Serbs, especially those living along the Dinaric mountain range in Croatia (the centre of Ustashe terror), had about W.W. II killings, made them very prone to believe that history was repeating itself. At the same time, nationalistic propaganda and hate-speech generated in Serbia proper exaggerated the war-time terror, creating "memories" of Ustashe crimes even among the people who were not their victims. In Croatia, the memories of the same experience went through a similar process, but with different goals. Minimising the extent of the Ustashe massacres became the most popular pastime in post-election Croatia, because the pro-independence course of the new Croatian authorities needed more acceptable and popular memories of the last incarnation of Croatian "independent" statehood to legitimise their political goals. The memories of the greatness (literally, if the size of its territory is concerned) of the NDH in turn fuelled the secessionist goals of the Croatian diaspora, which financed the Tudjman / HDZ electoral campaign.⁵⁸

The most important factor shaping our memories is our current identity. Identity depends on memory, and memory in turn depends on identity. Both change in time, and both change interdependently. Memories are revised to suit current identities, and identities are tailored according to the memories. Both identity and memory are therefore political and social constructs.⁵⁹ No society can exist without a common, shared memory. If members of the society do not share the same memories, they will not be able to share the same experiences of the present and even less so have the same expectations of the future.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, p. 2

⁵⁷ Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, pp. 177-178

⁵⁸ It is estimated that Croat émigrés contributed a lion's share of four million dollars the campaign costed, greatly contributing to the HDZ's electoral victory. Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 84

⁵⁹ John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship" in *Commemorations*, pp. 3-5

⁶⁰ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp. 3-4

This is especially true for the nations. Memory, especially of the nation's "Golden Age," defines a nation as a collective subject and helps the members feel that they are, to use Sutton's expression, "an achievement of history."⁶¹ Nations cannot exist without a suitable past (which, as stated above, explains the present and predicts the future) and if such is not readily available, it has to be discovered, appropriated or invented. Several "pasts" can be suitable for the purpose of nation-building:⁶²

1.) The past, or its segments, can be used by elites to manipulate mass emotions, and to generate and control mass mobilisation. For example, during the 1990 election campaign in Croatia, all HDZ's election posters were marked by a fat letter "H" (for *Hrvatska*, or Croatia), decorated with medieval Croat ornamentation. The party was also using the old Croatian chessboard flags at the rallies, bringing the memories of past Croatian glory back to life.⁶³ In Serbia, the relics of Prince Lazar were taken out of their resting place and sent on a long tour around Yugoslavia's Orthodox monasteries. Millions of Serbs came to pay respect to the remains of one of their greatest heroes, many of them decorated with Chetnik symbols such as the double-headed white eagle, symbol of the royal Karadjordjevic dynasty. Prince Lazar concluded his journey on June 28, 1989 at Gazimestan, the scene of the Kosovo battle, on the same place where he was killed exactly six hundred years ago, with more than a million Serbs coming to celebrate both the anniversary and Milosevic's "coronation" as the president of Serbia.⁶⁴

2.) The past can be used to legitimise unpopular social changes and policies, by appealing to the traditions of "our ancestors." Support for war in both Serbia and Croatia was generated through references to "heroic past." The Croatian *Antemurale* and the Serbian warrior-nation myth both did a successful job (to be discussed in detail in chapter five).

3.) The past which can provide examples of some exceptionally virtuous deeds can inspire new, similar ones in the present. The example of the Serbian Relief Fund, which operated during W. W. I and raised funds for the Serbian war effort, was used to appeal to Serbs during the hardship of life under sanctions to forbear through the personal misery for the national good. As Milosevic explained to them, "this [was] the price [they had to] pay for supporting the Serbs outside Serbia."⁶⁵

4.) If certain territory is contested by two or more nations, the past can be used as justification for the claims to this territory. Croats claimed the area, which used to be part of the Habsburg Military Frontier, on account of their historic right to it, since it used to be the centre of their medieval state. Serbs claimed the area because they represented a majority of population there, but also because of the history of complete autonomy from the Croatian *Sabor* during Habsburg rule. Vuk Draskovic, former prominent (extremely

⁶¹ David Sutton, *Memories Cast in Stone*. Oxford: Berg, 1998, p. 120

⁶² Anthony D. Smith, "The 'Golden Age' and National Renewal" in *Myths and Nationhood*, pp. 36-38

⁶³ Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 226

⁶⁴ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 71-72

⁶⁵ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 260-261

nationalistic) novelist and the most popular Serbian opposition leader in the first half on the 1990s wrote an open letter to a Zagreb newspaper in 1986 in which he claimed that at least 1.5 million Serbs were slaughtered in the NDH. During the 1990 election campaign in Serbia, he stated that Serbia was everywhere where the Serbian graves lay.⁶⁶

The biggest danger in invoking the past for legitimising present policies is that the idealised past can become a fixation or even a national obsession. In times of a rapid social change (such as the collapse of socialist system in Yugoslavia), such obsession can obscure the real needs of the present (for example, democratisation and economic liberalisation) and instead push the nation into chasing the utopian dream about resurrection of the ancient empire in its greatest territorial extent. The greater and more glorious the past appears, the easier it becomes to mobilise masses to try to bring it back to life for one more time.⁶⁷ The difficulty is that today, with well defined nations and well defined states occupying the territories of someone else's glorious past, this inevitably leads to conflict or even war.

Common, or social, memory has a great influence over individual memory. People will often recall a particular memory through contact and interaction with other members of their group. In order to communicate effectively with them, we need to remember the same things they remember. Our personal memories, if we want to truly be a part of a given society, need to be in tune with the persons, places, dates, language and symbols characterising our community. They can exist only in the mental space, provided by the community. Being actually present when the event, which is "remembered" took place, or even being alive at the time, is neither important nor necessary.⁶⁸ For instance, in the last decade it was virtually impossible to be a "true" Croat without remembering the *Maspok*, or a true Serb without "remembering" the Kosovo battle. In making this possible, commemorative ceremonies play the most important role (interactions with other people, and education, media, religious services and culture also serve the same, commemorative purpose).

Commemorative ceremonies remind a community of its identity and explain its past as some sort of "collective autobiography." They are more than just distributors and preservers of collective memory. In order to be truly effective, they must become a way of life -- members of community need to become habituated to them.⁶⁹ Nation-building is therefore impossible without commemorations. July 14, the date of the fall of the Bastille, became a holiday of exceptional importance soon after the French Revolution. The importance of July 4 in the USA can also hardly be underestimated. Similarly,

⁶⁶ Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, p. 104

⁶⁷ Smith, "The 'Golden Age' and National Renewal" in *Myths and Nationhood*, pp. 38-39

⁶⁸ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp. 36-38

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71

commemoration of "truly Germanic heritage" started in Germany soon after its unification. All new nations are most vulnerable and fragile at the very beginning, hence the need to endow them with an inspirational "moment of glory."⁷⁰ Such a "moment" can also fuel the sense of "historical debt" -- present generations should feel indebted to their predecessors for their sacrifice and should uphold their values and, if needed, make similar sacrifices to protect their heritage.⁷¹

National heritage is what makes each nation unique. To create its own, unique identity, each nation seeks out or invents its own distinctive heritage, which it is not ready to share with any other nation. It is always *our* heritage, exclusive to *us*, and as a rule, it is superior to *theirs*. Consequently, *we* are also more civilised and therefore superior to *them*. Heritage can be passed only to descendants -- to the same blood. Outsiders can admire it, but can never share it. Similarly, since *we* have such an exceptional national heritage, we feel little need or interest to know anything about other people's heritage. It is enough to know that it is inferior to *ours*. The element of superiority should not be understood in absolute terms. Even the nations which feel inferior in comparison to others and know that others despise or mock their "pathetic" national heritage, will view it as superior in the sense that they are the only ones capable of seeing its true value, thereby increasing their self-esteem vis-à-vis the *others*, who just do not understand. For example, only black people can understand black history, and only Scots understand Scottish life. The difference between heritage and history is therefore that heritage is a social, not scientific category. It needs to be accepted by virtually all insiders, while being completely inaccessible to outsiders.⁷²

Each nation's perceived past is therefore one of the most important factors shaping where the nation stands today and what is the direction it is likely to take in the future. At the same time, the present situation and needs shape the way the past is perceived. The well-known saying "history is written by the victors" could be slightly modified without losing any of its accuracy by proclaiming that "history is written by the masters of the current social order." They decide which examples from the past are appropriate for providing a model and inspiration for the present needs (even when they in fact serve only the needs of the nation's elites, they need to be presented as having a nation-wide importance in order to generate mass following). By doing so, they make the past dependent on the present. Yet, since only a limited number of appropriate pasts are available, the present also depends on (the interpretation of) the past(s). Evoking a certain past and using it to justify the present action is possible only if one, extremely important condition is fulfilled: the majority of a community's members need to be manipulated or forced into "forgetting" the past which legitimised the previous community's existence

⁷⁰ Gillis, "Memory and Identity" in *Commemorations*, pp. 8-9

⁷¹ Sutton, *Memories Cast in Stone*, p. 142

⁷² David Lowenthal, "Identity, Heritage, and History" in *Commemorations*, pp. 46-49

(under the previous regime, or in the previous state, or during the previous social or national identity). The process in which memories are confiscated is the theme of the next section.

2. 2. 2. Collective Amnesia and Organised Oblivion

The existing collective identity cannot be destroyed and substituted with a new one without a process of organised, or forced, forgetting taking place. Everything good characterising the previous identity, or state, political system or a way of life connected with it, needs to be forgotten to make the transition to the new identity, new state, new political system or new way of life possible. In former Yugoslavia, this process has gone by silently, virtually unnoticed. Overshadowed by the horrors of the war, such as ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, hundreds of thousands of refugees, tens of thousands of killed and wounded, and destruction of towns and villages, the "killing" of the common, Yugoslav memory has not been added to the long list of the war crimes committed. Yet, it should have been.

The memory, produced by four decades of life under the "Brotherhood and Unity" slogan and shared by the majority of Yugoslavia's people, created a perception of existence in which a repetition of 1941-1945 civil war was considered virtually impossible. With this memory intact, elites in Serbia would most likely had much less success in convincing the Serbian people that they were again threatened by genocide. Systematic campaign of creation of a new social memory generated in Serbia support for policies, which in few years led to the destruction of Yugoslavia. The rationale was, to use Hayden's term again, to make Yugoslavia "unimaginable" by confiscating and destroying all memory Serbs had of it. In some parts of Yugoslavia, especially in the ethnically mixed areas of Bosnia and Croatia in which people coexisted peacefully, a war or a threat with war was needed to destroy it. The old memory assured people that the most important "national" division was between the good and the bad, or between the honest people and the criminals, regardless of whether they were Serbs, Croats or Muslims. The war (including the verbal war, which started at least two years before the actual one) destroyed this memory, making the division between Serbs, Croats and Muslims, regardless whether they were honest people or criminals, the most important one. Without the imposition of new national memories, it would be much more difficult to persuade the majority of Yugoslavia's people that what was happening was a hate-generated ethnic war, rather than elite-provoked theft of monstrous proportions. Ethnic cleansing was just the most effective and deadly tool that could be possibly used in the process. The tragic results of its efficiency are well known and have been widely documented. The social memory, shared by a majority of Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians and other former "Yugoslavs" has been written anew and adopted to the new geo-political circumstances. In the forth chapter I will

discuss why it was necessary to destroy the common Yugoslav memory and substitute it with a variety of post-Yugoslav memories, as well as what this process to a very large extent managed to hide. In the following paragraphs I will discuss the process of forced forgetting.

Connerton argues that any attempt to break completely with the existing social order and to substitute it with a new one demands that a process of forced forgetting take place. The more total the aspirations of the new regime, the more harsh and complete this process will be. State apparatus employs various means for this goal. In the not-too-remote past (for example, after W. W. II), contemporary writers were proscribed, historians were dismissed from their posts and denied public access, people were silenced and removed from their jobs, all becoming invisible. Schools spread the new dogma, media reflected and described the new reality, all making it increasingly difficult for people to remember the politically undesirable past.⁷³ Today, in the age of electronic media, the process can take place much easier and much faster. Non-stop bombardment from the TV screens that, for example, Ustashe were again slaughtering Serbian women and children, or that communism was an ideology forced upon Croats by Serbs, can make the majority of people inclined to believe that this was true, and that 45 years of peaceful coexistence under the regime, widely accepted in all Yugoslav republics, had been a lie. Yet, to make the majority actually believe that this was so, a war was needed. A war, especially a civil war, is the most drastic, most extreme form of a rapid social change, during which all good aspects of the *ancien regime* need to be forgotten to make way for the creation of a new social order, the most "perfect" to date.

Koonz argues that forced forgetting had been pushed to its extremes in the communist states, where regimes imposed "an organised oblivion" -- a single allowed and officially imposed narrative which praised the leaders and demonised their enemies -- upon their citizens.⁷⁴ Yet, this imposition can be truly effective only if people whom the imposition is targeting really do have some grievances towards the previous regime, or have some traumatic or shameful experience they are personally inclined to forget. In most Eastern European communist states, this has not been the case and the official vilification of previous regimes and of class enemies failed to have the effect the authorities desired. Conflicting sharply with very different individual memories, organised oblivion in most cases produced only cynical and alienated citizens instead of forgetting.⁷⁵ As already discussed, individual memory is conditioned by a social memory. If the two are in conflict, if the individual memory continues to nostalgically recall something banned from the social memory, then the individual and social identity will be in conflict too, and in a case

⁷³ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp. 12-15

⁷⁴ Claudia Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory" in *Commemorations*, p. 258

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259

when the social identity equals the national identity, a consequence of the conflict will be a non-loyal member of a nation. In other words -- a traitor. As Ugresic points out, when memories are being erased, any nostalgia, regardless of how trivial and harmless it is, is considered extremely dangerous and subversive.⁷⁶ There can be no nostalgia without memory, and if too much memory has survived, chances are that the new regime -- eventually -- will not.

In Yugoslavia, where post-1945 forced forgetting was needed not only to legitimise the new authorities, but also served as a bandage over the exceptionally traumatic war-time experience, results were exceptional. With most people who would be inclined to resist the imposed forgetting either dead,⁷⁷ emigrated or sent for "re-education" to *gulags* like Goli otok, the remaining majority of Yugoslav people actually welcomed the new beginning and the new set of memories, created through organised forgetting of the old ones.

Anderson points out such interdependence of remembering and forgetting by analysing Ernest Renan's work *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* In it, Renan made reference to "Saint Barthelemy" (Saint Bartholomew in English, a massacre of Huguenots on August 24, 1572, organised by Valois dynast Charles IX) which the French were "obliged already to have forgotten" in order to become French. Yet, despite presenting the forgetting of the unpleasant aspects of French history almost as a civic duty, Renan, by merely mentioning the "Saint-Barthelemy" without explaining what the event was all about, assumed that his co-nationals actually remembered what they were supposed to forget. Similarly, in the USA educational system teaches young Americans to remember the 1861-1865 war as a civil war between "brothers" through forgetting that it was actually a war between two separate alliances of states.⁷⁸

Remembering through forgetting was exceptionally widespread after W. W. II. The Germans were singled out as convenient scapegoats for all the horrors of the war and all the willing assistants in the "occupied" countries washed their sins away using the same excuse -- "The Germans did it!" In fact, most of occupied Europe not only failed to resist the Germans, but actually assisted them. There was some resistance, of course, and in some occupied countries the situation was much worse than in others. Yet, the only way Nazis could have spread their rule over most of Europe so fast was by most of Europe letting them do it. Regimes in Norway, France, Baltic states, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and Belgium (not to mention fascist regimes in Spain and Italy, and the

⁷⁶ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, p. 225

⁷⁷ A telling example is the Bleiburg episode. Around 50,000 people, many of them Ustashe or people associated with their regime, or members of Slovenian White Guard, but also many people fleeing the uncertainty of the coming communist regime, tried to escape into Allies-held Austria. At Bleiburg, on May 15, 1945, they surrendered to the British troops, who disarmed them, packed them on trains and sent them straight back to Yugoslavia, where they were executed virtually upon arrival. In the following months, many pits and caves all over Slovenian and Croatian Karst became mass graves. Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 169-170

⁷⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and the Spread on Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991, pp. 199-201

enthusiastically *anschlussed* Austria) collaborated with them, all using the opportunity to settle the score with an unpopular ethnic minority or to readjust "unfair" borders. After the "liberation," quite naturally, everyone wanted to identify with the victors. This led to creation of post-war European myth about the exclusive German guilt and about the brave resistance of just about every other European nation.⁷⁹

Two types of memories developed: the first about what "they" did to "us," based on over-production of remembrance, and the second about what "we" did to "them," based on intensive forgetting. For more than four decades, for example, a wall-sized photomontage at Auschwitz commemorated "6,000,000 Poles slaughtered by the German Fascists" and at Mauthausen, the exhibit presented Austria as the first victim of Hitler's aggression, despite the fact that per capita ratio of Nazis was higher in Austria than in Germany. Even in Germany itself, the majority of people built what Koonz calls a "memory wall" around them, finding in forgetting an escape from the double burden of traumatic defeat and even more traumatic realisation about the crimes committed by "the Germans." Declaring a "Zero Hour," the Germans constructed their post-war identity, based on a new beginning -- a notion which will be discussed in the next section --, characterised by rejection and consequent forgetting of the past.⁸⁰

A similar "Zero Hour" was proclaimed all over Eastern Europe after the fall of communism. Again, the most popular slogan became that someone else was to blame, that communism had been imposed on "us" by someone else and that "we" had nothing to do with it. In fact, Eastern Europe has seen little active (only three prominent examples in 45 years in all the Eastern Bloc countries combined), or even passive resistance to the communist systems (and the Red Army, which in most cases backed the ascension of communist regimes to power was *not* the most important factor). For the most part, people just adopted and started to collaborate. Came 1989, many of those aspiring to fill up the power vacuum and grab her/his fifteen minutes of fame by acquiring a distinguished position in the new order, suddenly discovered her/his long-term dissidence for which s/he was "terribly persecuted" under the "totalitarian" regime.⁸¹

The same thing happened even in post-Yugoslav states, although the liberal socialism practised in Yugoslavia since mid-1960s left very little manoeuvring space for real dissidence. Even people like Vojislav Seselj and Dobroslav Paraga⁸² were able to

⁷⁹ Tony Judt, "The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-war Europe" in *Daedalus*, vol. 121, no. 4, fall 1992, pp. 84-86

⁸⁰ Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion" in *Commemorations*, pp. 260-262

⁸¹ Judt, "The Past is Another Country," pp. 101-102

⁸² Post-1990 leaders of two most radically nationalistic political parties in, respectively, Serbia and Croatia. They both organised very brutal and effective paramilitary units under their direct command. Seselj is still the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, while Paraga lost his position to Ante Djapic in 1993, after being put on trial in front of the military court on charges of trying to overthrow the legal order. Robert Stallaerts and Jeannine Laurens, *Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Croatia*. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 1995, pp. 169-170 (Paraga) and 192-193 (Seselj)

publish virtually everything they wrote due to the silent agreement between the republics -- whatever was banned in one republic, was published in some other. A good example of "inventing" dissidence for either political or even commercial purposes was an exhibition of Croatian national costumes, organised in Munich in December 1993. In an interview, given to Croatian daily *Vecernje novosti*, the organiser said that the exhibition was "presenting what has been suppressed in former Yugoslavia." Yet, anyone coming from the former Yugoslavia, whose memory has not been taken away by the post-Yugoslav organised oblivion can testify that in former Yugoslavia, if anything was abundantly stressed (and therefore far from being suppressed), it was the folklore (including songs, dances, *and* costumes) of *all* brotherly nations and nationalities.⁸³

Forced forgetting is much more effective if the living conditions are extremely bad or at least much worse than they were in the recent past. Being preoccupied with trying to make ends meet, people have no energy or even no need to question the validity of social memories being imposed on them.⁸⁴ That is why it was so easy for so many Serbs to believe that they were truly the victims, waging a just, defensive war, completely misunderstood by the whole world.⁸⁵ Daily hardship made it much easier to adopt as genuine a "memory" in which the "images" of the good sides of living in multi-national Yugoslavia were suppressed by the "images" of injustices and suffering Serbs were presumably exposed to. The next section will explore the process in which people "remember" something which they have never actually experienced.

2. 2. 3. Forced Remembering

After collective amnesia has taken place, it is time for new social memory to develop through the process of similarly organised, or forced, remembering. The black hole, which has appeared in the memory, has to be filled up, and a new, modified "national history" is imposed on a nation, which underwent a rapid and thorough social change. Especially in the case of revolution (and the collapse of Yugoslavia may also be considered as a revolution of a kind), the post-revolutionary remembering is driven by the need for a complete break with the past and consequently for a new beginning. By producing memories in which the old regime is presented as absolutely backward, tyrannical and unjust, the new era is given a saintly glow and an exclusive copyright to define the future. This is what has happened after the French and American Revolutions. Their leaders have made a considerable effort to reject the past and construct a radically different future, urging their subjects to forget everything that came before. Jefferson thus proclaimed that

⁸³ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, pp. 131-132

⁸⁴ Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion" in *Commemorations*, pp. 262-263

⁸⁵ Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 304-308

"the dead have no rights" and the leaders of the French Republic declared 1792 to be the Year 1.⁸⁶

Yet, starting completely from the scratch is impossible. Even the Year 1 after the revolution and after the abolishment of the *ancien regime* and of everything it represented has to be based on some prior context. It is impossible to expect something from the future without recollecting anything from the past. Since the most recent past is discredited (it was the past created by the regime we do not want to have anything with), the directions and the context need to be found further in the past.⁸⁷ An ideal point of reference is the "Golden Age." To be suitable for such a task, the "Golden Age" needs to be: first, authentic -- it needs to be well documented, believable, reconstructed from within and not imposed from outside, and above all, it needs to be distinctively *ours*; second, inspirational -- all members have to be able to identify with it and it needs to provide them with examples of such mythic/heroic/sacred value, that they can be motivated to try to repeat them; and third, capable of future reinterpretation -- that is, members have to be convinced that the past glory can truly be achieved again.⁸⁸

A break with the past is most clearly demonstrated with the adoption of "new" bodily practices and "new" commemorative ceremonies. In theory, they can be completely new and invented by the masters of the new social reality. Yet, to resonate well with the masses and to have the widest possible effect, it is much better if they imitate the old traditions (ideally, connected with the "Golden Age") and if the nation "spontaneously" rediscovers them, of course, with enthusiastic assistance of the new authorities. Ceremonies, parades and mass gatherings are organised in places with a special position in the national memory, and these places extend their ancient credibility and the holiness of their existence to the new rituals and to the new regime. Thus Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi tried to legitimise his unpopular regime by organising an exceptionally lavish celebration of the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire on the site of the ancient capital Persepolis. Thus the cult of Masada in Israel, commemorating the heroic defence and the fall of Masada during the Jewish revolt against the Romans in AD 73.⁸⁹ And thus Milosevic's choice to celebrate his ascendancy to the Serbian "throne" at Gazimestan, on six hundredth anniversary of the Kosovo battle.

New bodily practices are among the most important new rituals. They can include, but are not limited to, new style of clothing, new or modified language, new gestures and especially new greetings, and even new gastronomic orientation (cleansing all inappropriate dishes from the menu). The main reason behind them is to create a new, clear border between members and non-members. Anyone who did not adapt to the new

⁸⁶ Gillis, "Memory and Identity" in *Commemorations*, pp. 7-8

⁸⁷ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp. 6-10

⁸⁸ Smith, "The 'Golden Age' and National Renewal" in *Myths and Nationhood*, pp. 55-59

⁸⁹ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, pp. 51-52

vocabulary (not just in language, but in all bodily practices), should be viewed at least with suspicion.⁹⁰ For instance, in Croatia a process of "purification" of language started in 1991. All words suspected of sounding "too Serbian" were eliminated and instead, numerous archaic ("truly Croatian") or completely new ones were introduced. The national flag and the coat of arms were changed, the traditional chessboard substituting the red star. The main slogan in the Croatian army became *Sve za Hrvatsku* (Everything for Croatia), bringing back memories of Ustashe slogan *Za dom spremni* (Ready for the Homeland). In Serbia, Chetnik uniforms and insignia, together with the characteristic long beards returned. A "traditional" Serbian greeting was invented (the already mentioned three-finger greeting). In both republics, the most extremely nationalistic political parties took the names of their most nationalistic predecessors from the past (Serbian Radical Party and Party of [Croatian State] Right).

In the process of remembering again what was in turn forgotten under the previous regime, not surprisingly, borders between right and wrong, good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate, and moral and immoral get blurred, if not completely erased. In post-1989 Eastern Europe, everything which could be somehow marked as anti-communist sharply increased its market price. For example in Romania, general Antonescu, the war-time Romanian leader who was executed in June 1945, became for many a hero whose responsibility for massacres of Jews, Roma and other people cannot darken the respect he now enjoys on account of his anti-Russian position. Anti-communists, who collaborated with Nazis in Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia and Slovakia are re-emerging from the 45 years long oblivion, their resistance to communism a virtue important enough to make their collaborationist sins unimportant enough.⁹¹ In post-Yugoslav Croatia, the shameful NDH episode came to be remembered almost as a crown jewel in the history of Croatian independent statehood, which was only occasionally tarnished by one or two excesses of few over-enthusiastic Ustashe soldiers. In few Croatian towns, streets were named after Mile Budak, the Minister of Education in Ustashe government, "famous" for his solution to the question of Serbs in Croatia (one third should be killed, one third expelled and one third converted to Roman Catholicism).⁹²

The cyclic process of remembering through forgetting (or forgetting through remembering) inevitably effects different people in a different way. Among those old enough to have lived through the previous cycle, some could be very pleased and truly enjoy the change. The new regime might again sanction the memories confiscated by the previous regime and confiscate those which were imposed by it. In Yugoslav case, some people in Croatia and the overwhelming majority of the Croatian diaspora, returning home after 46 years of exile, could finally reconcile their personal memories with the emerging

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 10-12

⁹¹ Judt, "The Past is Another Country," pp. 102-103

⁹² Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 126

new Croatian national memory. Their old flag was flying again, Ustashe symbols could be seen sprayed over the walls with authorities showing no intention to try to find those responsible as they were doing few years ago, even the portraits of Ustashe leader Ante Pavelic could be seen here and there.⁹³ The Serbs in Croatia, whom the Serbian nationalistic poet Matija Beckovic called in 1989 "the remnants of the slaughtered people,"⁹⁴ were in the same period for the first time officially encouraged (by the authorities, media and intellectuals in Serbia) to "remember" how were they being slaughtered.

While some were given the opportunity to rediscover and regain their long-lost past, others had to go through the same process the other group had gone through after 1945. Each cycle of remembering - forgetting thus seemingly benefits some while harming others. In fact, both groups, regardless whether they are allowed to remember again or forced to forget (or vice versa, forced to remember or allowed to forget) have little to look forward to. As Ugresic writes, the most important "political battle is a battle for the territory of collective memory."⁹⁵ Whoever controls the collective memory, controls the people and has the power over them. The people, no matter which group they belong to, are just pawns in the game, completely controlled by those who control the memories.

The confiscation of the common memory was not the most tragic aspect of Yugoslavia's destruction. Unfortunately, the competition for this title is too serious. But it is undoubtedly, and completely undeservedly so, the most ignored one. The common Yugoslav memory was destroyed so that Yugoslavia could be destroyed and vice versa. The two processes were intermingled in a vicious spiral, leading directly to the war. In the next chapter, I will turn to various theories, explaining the outbreak of the war in Yugoslavia.

⁹³ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, pp. 227-228

⁹⁴ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 93

⁹⁵ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, p. 228

3. Yugoslav Destructionology: Theories of Dissolution

In the last decade, numerous scholars have tried to explain the process of Yugoslavia's destruction, using numerous different arguments. In general, their findings could be grouped together into three main theories. All of them offer some valuable insight and two of them very convincingly explain what were the reasons and conditions which made the Yugoslav break-up possible, but all of them make the same mistake by listing nationalism as *the* force behind it. All three theories also fail to satisfactorily explain how it was possible to actually destroy Yugoslavia and, above all, in such a bloody manner, when a poll conducted throughout the country in autumn of 1990 showed that 61 per cent of its people completely disagree with the idea that Yugoslav nations should create states of their own.⁹⁶

The most infamous theory is the one about "ancient hatreds," which basically claims that the nations of former Yugoslavia have hated each other since time immemorial and have always been at each other's throats. Its most well-known advocate is Robert Kaplan, whose ideas reportedly had decisive influence on former US President Bill Clinton and consequently on the initial US policy of disinterest towards the conflict. Closely connected to it is also Huntington's idea about "The Clash of Civilisations." According to this theory, the war was almost logical and inevitable, since the line separating the Western Catholic civilisation from the Eastern Orthodox and Muslim civilisations, runs along the border between Croatia on one side and Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia on the other. The "ancient hatreds" theory is completely defenceless if juxtaposed against any objective historic account of the peoples of former Yugoslavia. Yet, it is important to consider it since, its incompatibility with facts notwithstanding, it was widely used by Serbian and Croatian war-propaganda machinery, fuelled by respectively Serbian myth of genocidal Croats and Croatian myth of Serbs, always plotting to subjugate the Croats.

The second, much more credible theory blames the political elites for the destruction of Yugoslavia. The elites used nationalism to break up the federation in order to first grab and then consolidate their power in Yugoslavia's successor states. War rallied "their" ethnic groups -- the nations of the newly formed nation-states -- behind them. The elites spread their propaganda through the controlled media, manipulating the public and convincing them that they should sacrifice their personal welfare for the sake of their nation's survival. Despite being correct in principle, this theory leaves many questions unanswered. The majority of Yugoslav peoples were well educated, well travelled and rational people, with access to international media. They worked and studied with, befriended and even married members of other ethnic groups. How was it possible that so

⁹⁶ John Mueller, "The Banality of 'Ethnic War,'" in *International Security*, vol. 25, no. 1, summer 2000, p. 46

many of them really believed that Ustashe were on the loose again, or that the Islamic fundamentalists were waging a jihad in Bosnia? How could normal people have turned into vicious killers? In fact, propaganda was a necessary, but far from sufficient condition to push Yugoslavia into war. The first blood was drawn by people who had anything but their nation's welfare on their minds. Without this blood, propaganda would have never reached the critical mass and there would have been no explosion.

The third theory locates the causes for the war in the increasing insecurity, caused by the political, economic and social breakdown of the Yugoslav socialist regime. The standard of living was deteriorating, unemployment was rising, hyperinflation seemed unstoppable, the regime was corrupt and the political system exhausted. This situation made the majority of people prone to believe that "someone" was exploiting them, that they were being treated unjustly and that something radical had to be done to change this. While such insecurity by all means also represents a necessary precondition for eruption of violence, it is again far from sufficient. Otherwise, there would have been war also in other ethnically mixed post-communist countries like Bulgaria and Romania. Insecurity did make people more susceptible to propaganda, but not enough to mobilise them to go to war.

3. 1. The Ancient Hatred of the Clash of Civilisations

Using a work by the author of the indisputably most idiotic statement about the Balkans ever made (namely, that "Nazism can claim Balkan origin [since it was] among the flophouses of Vienna, a breeding ground of ethnic resentment, close to the Southern Slavic world, [that] Hitler learned to hate so infectiously")⁹⁷ as a reference in an academic work is perhaps not the best idea if this work is to have any academic credibility. Yet, Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts*, despite its record-breaking number of inaccuracies, over-simplifications and unthinking remarks per page cannot be overlooked and ignored. The impact this book had on Bill Clinton and some members of his administration was, according to numerous press reports and even according to an insider like Richard Holbrooke, enormous.⁹⁸ Kaplan describes the war in Yugoslavia, or rather in the Balkans (where "men have been isolated by poverty and ethnic rivalry, dooming them to hate"⁹⁹) as just another chapter in an endless "struggle that pits Catholicism against Orthodoxy, Rome against Constantinople, and the legacy of Austria-Hungary against that of Ottoman Turkey."¹⁰⁰ The villages of Bosnia are, according to Kaplan, "full of savage hatreds, leavened by poverty and alcoholism," which testifies that the violence of 1990s was "no accident."¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*. London: Macmillan, 1993, p. xxiii

⁹⁸ Richard C. Holbrooke, *To End a War*. New York: Modern Library, 1999, p. 22

⁹⁹ Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*, p. xxiii

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22

The chapters of Kaplan's book, dedicated to Yugoslavia are packed with references to "communal hate, taking root with a vengeance," "ancient battles which never ceased to be fought" and "anger, frustration and violence."¹⁰²

The idea about the "ancient hatreds" found an interested audience in the White House, where it formulated a perception that outsiders can do absolutely nothing to stop the conflict but to wait for the "Yugoslavs" to get tired of fighting each other again. As Lawrence Eagleburger, the Secretary of State in the first Clinton's administration said, "Until the Bosnians, Serbs and Croats decide to stop killing each other, there is nothing the outside world can do about it."¹⁰³

Similarly controversial, though not equally influential was Huntington's idea about the clash of civilisations, proclaiming that world politics was entering a new phase where the main source of conflict will not be ideology or economy but the differences in culture - or in other words, in civilisation. Where civilisations meet, the battles of the future (and already of today) will be fought. The most important factor defining a civilisation is religion. Consequently (simplifying his argument to a certain extent), future conflicts will be between different religions. The main fault line in Europe, separating Western Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) from Orthodox Christianity and Islam, follows, in the Yugoslav case, the historic border between Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, with Croatia and Vojvodina in the "West" and Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia proper in the "East." The war in Yugoslavia was therefore, according to Huntington, a logical and inevitable consequence of tensions which necessarily appear along the division line.¹⁰⁴

Huntington's theory is very valuable in explaining the hidden motivations behind the Western European support for Slovenia and Croatia (despite the fact that their record in the process of Yugoslavia's destruction was not much cleaner than the Serbian one), the almost unconditional Russian backing of Serbia and the assistance of Islamic states to Bosnian Muslims.¹⁰⁵ But its simplifying black and white lenses hardly offer any valuable insight into the complexities of the Yugoslav war. At different times during the war, Serbs fought against Croats, then Serbs against Croats *and* Muslims, then Croats assisted by Serbs fought against Muslims, and lastly, completely unexplainable with Huntington's theory, Muslims fought other Muslims (government forces fought against the forces of Fikret Abdic, who proclaimed autonomy of "his" Cazinska Krajina). Serbs betraying other Serbs (Milosevic abandoning the Bosnian Serbs) is also irreconcilable with the picture Huntington presents.

¹⁰² Ibid., quotations from pp. 27, 35 and 48

¹⁰³ Holbrooke, *To End a War*, p.23

¹⁰⁴ Samuel P. Huntington et al, *The Clash of Civilisations?: The Debate*. New York: Foreign Affairs, 1996, pp. 1-9

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 14-15

Yet Huntington's and Kaplan's ideas cannot be completely disregarded. Words like "always" and "inevitably" had a very prominent place in both Croatian and Serbian war propaganda. Publishing companies in both republics issued numerous books and booklets in the years before the outbreak of hostilities and during the war itself. Since they generally brought to life old, well-known historic documents, these publications seemingly had nothing to do with propaganda. But the fact that they appeared immediately prior to the outbreak of the war or during it, and that they usually presented a "reader's digest" version of *all* documents which could possibly hint at Serbian hegemonism or Croatian genocidal tendencies, places them straight into the domain of propaganda genre.

The late Croatian President Tudjman compared Serbs to a "cancer, destroying the Croatian national being at the very heart of Croatia."¹⁰⁶ In a booklet issued in Croatia in 1992, the publisher collected a number of Serbian documents and extracts of statements made by Serbian politicians and intellectuals between 1844 and 1986. All these documents supposedly prove how Serbs have always planned to implant this "cancer" into the "Croatian national being." This "cancer," or the presence of Serbs in Croatia, was a justification used in the nineteenth century to plan and in the twentieth to create a Greater Serbia. The authors of the booklet dismiss all those sections of the published documents that do not confirm their thesis about an "eternal" Serbian plan to incorporate historic Croatian land into Serbia, as a Serbian attempt to hide "their true motives with a series of historic and demographic falsifications" while in fact "Greater Serbian ambitions [...] have been smouldering for over a century," leading to 1991 - 1995 war.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, another publication issued during the war in Croatia, blamed the war on persistent Serbian hegemonistic aspirations over Croatia. The booklet traces the beginning of these aspirations to the second Serbian uprising against the Ottomans in 1815 after which Serbia gained autonomy and started to develop its modern statehood. The latter was based on the idea of Greater Serbia within the borders of the fourteenth-century empire of Tsar Dusan.¹⁰⁸ These aspirations were finally realised in 1918 when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established, which, according to the authors, was in fact Greater Serbia in all but name, since Serbs were privileged and Serbia economically exploited other regions.¹⁰⁹ Serbs, they argue, continued to dominate and exploit the other nations also in socialist Yugoslavia, outmanoeuvring the federal constitution, continuing to rule the country as their private property.¹¹⁰ When the forces of democracy took over Croatia and wanted to put an end to Serbian exploitation, the authors claim, the Serbian army

¹⁰⁶ Mariana Lenkova, editor, *"Hate Speech" in the Balkans*. Athens: International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, 1998, p.39

¹⁰⁷ Ante Beljo, editor, *Greater Serbia: From Ideology to Aggression*. Zagreb: Croatian Information Centre, 1992, pp. 6-8

¹⁰⁸ Dusan Bilandzic et al, *Croatia Between War and Independence*, Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 1991, pp. 11-15

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-43

attacked Croatia, starting a war of aggression, ethnically cleansing Croatia and trying to annex its territory in order to realise their almost two centuries old plan.¹¹¹

An analogous process of publishing a selection of old documents again to legitimise current policies was taking place in Serbia. A telling example is Krestic's book *Through Genocide to a Greater Croatia*. Krestic, claiming to have reached his conclusions after several years of study of Croatian history, states that Croats have "always" hated Serbs and that their hatred was intensifying until it reached genocidal proportions during W. W. II. Ever since the revolution of 1848, Croat politicians have, according to Krestic, striven to create an ethnically pure and exclusively Catholic Greater Croatia.¹¹² On the background of the anti-Serb demonstrations in Zagreb in 1895 and 1902, the pogrom against Serbs in 1914 and 1915, and the 1941-1945 genocide, the Croatian constitution of December 22, 1990, which transformed Serbs from a constituent nation into a national minority, was just a transitional step to a new chapter in the eternal drama of Croatian genocide against Serbs. Krestic concludes that Croatian hatred for Serbs is manifested in Croatian insistence that the Croatian nation has exclusive political and historic rights to the territory of the Republic of Croatia. Given this hatred, the war hardly came as a surprise, since in Krestic's opinion Croats believe that Croatia can become a truly Croat state only through the complete annihilation of Serbs.¹¹³

Anzulovic also writes about the importance of the myth of genocidal Croats for the justification of Serbian participation in the war. Serbian aggressiveness was to a large extent a result of their (real or imagined) fears, especially the fear of vanishing (either literally through genocide, or culturally, since the Serbs in Croatia started to abandon Cyrillic script for Latin, and already spoke the same dialect of Serbo-Croatian language as the Croats did).¹¹⁴ The SANU Memorandum did not fail either to point out that "the subtle and effective politics of assimilation and national inequality in Croatia systematically tried to erase every trace of Serbian national presence" in that republic.¹¹⁵

Arguments that the other side has always been plotting against "us" with the goal of either complete subjugation (of Croats by Serbs) or outright annihilation (of Serbs by Croats) have been abundantly present on both sides. Newspapers, magazines, TV, numerous books and public appearances of various politicians all assured both the Croats and the Serbs that they were in danger, creating an atmosphere in which the outbreak of the war was possible.¹¹⁶ In this respect, Kaplan is (almost) right. Many Serbs and Croats

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 70-73

¹¹² Vasilije D. Krestic, *Through Genocide to a Greater Croatia*. Belgrade: BIGZ, 1998, p. 57

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 79-84

¹¹⁴ Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, pp. 106-109

¹¹⁵ Milosavljevic, "The Abuse of the Authority of Science" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 280-281

¹¹⁶ See Drinka Gojkovic, "The Birth of Nationalism from the Spirit of Democracy," pp. 330-334 and 340-342, Aleksander Nenedovic, "*Politika* in the Storm of Nationalism," pp. 539-547, Rade Veljanovski, "Turning the Electronic Media Around," pp. 577-586, and Zoran Markovic, "The Nation: Victim and Vengeance," pp. 600-607, all in *The Road to War in Serbia*. See also Tanner, *Croatia*, pp 263-266, Silber

believed by 1991 that, respectively, "Croats" and "Serbs" really hated them and that this hatred had existed virtually forever. The belief in the persistent hate of the "other" was indeed a powerful motivator and made it possible to generate even more hate in turn. Yet, this hate was far from being "ancient." It is impossible to trace its origins, regardless of what Krestic or the Croatian Informational Centre try to imply, either to 1815 (in Serbia) or to 1848 (in Croatia). A few isolated outbursts of ethnic violence (even the long and gruesome episode from W. W. II was an exception and not a rule, occurring in a time when the whole Europe was one large killing field) cannot outbalance the usual long periods of peace and cooperation separating them, just like an occasional flue, disrupting every few years an otherwise perfect health, cannot serve as a justification to declare such person to be chronically ill. The "ancientness" of the Yugoslav hatred was of extremely recent origin. The next theory tries to explain who produced it, to what aim, and with what means.

3. 2. Elites: Manipulating, Profiteering, Staying in Power.

Gagnon argues that the war in Yugoslavia had nothing to do with the alleged hatred between Yugoslav nations, but was entirely a result of manipulation from political elites. The elites provoked the conflict to create a political environment in which the public was mobilised against an outside threat instead of being engaged in a political revolt against the status quo within the society. A regime, under whose rule the economy has collapsed, the standard of living has deteriorated, and which offers absolutely no solution for the future, would in normal circumstances be voted out of office, or in little less normal ones, overthrown by popular revolt. According to this theory, in order to stay in power in Serbia, Milosevic and his clique worked first to create an atmosphere of ethnic hatred and mistrust, and then to start a war. The war was used as an excuse to prolong their rule, since any challenge to their position could be and was classified as anti-Serbian and treacherous. Exactly the same argumentation was used also in Croatia after the war had started.¹¹⁷

Bennett agrees that none of the reasons for Yugoslavia's collapse were ancient, especially since mass media, one of the most decisive factors, is a relatively new phenomenon. The Yugoslav media originally served the communist regime(s) of the Yugoslav republics. By the late 1980s these regimes had already turned into nationalistic ones, and the media, still in their service, started to deliberately fan the flames of hatred to divert attention from the complete inability of current leaders to stop the economic and

and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp 120 and 142 and Christopher Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse: Causes, Course and Consequences*. London: Hurst & Company, 1995, pp. 121-126 and 147-149.

¹¹⁷ V. P. Gagnon jr., "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia" in *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3, winter 1994-1995, pp. 133-135

social disintegration of the country. Far from being inevitable, Bennett claims, it was remarkably difficult, just as it would be for any other state, for Yugoslavia to fall apart. Its disintegration was definitely not in the interest of the majority of its people and only the horrors of war (or the fear of possible war, when one appeared very likely) were able to convince them otherwise. Milosevic was the most important actor in the process of "convincing." By crushing all opposition to his rule and bringing the media firmly under his control, Milosevic put his machine in motion, inventing enemies of Serbs all over Yugoslavia and presenting himself as the only defender of the Serbian nation. Since 1987, the propaganda offensive he ordered was so intense that many ordinary Serbs after a couple of years truly believed that their brethren in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo were about to be annihilated. In Croatia, the nationalistic HDZ swept to power, offering itself as the only protection Croats could count on against the Serbian offensive. They continued to repeat this slogan over the next ten years, inventing enemies and threats to Croatia at a pace not slower than in Serbia.¹¹⁸

Silber and Little also claim that there was nothing natural about Yugoslavia's death. They state that Yugoslavia was "systematically and deliberately killed by people who had nothing to gain and everything to lose" by a peaceful democratisation. They also place the largest share of guilt on Milosevic, who deliberately used nationalism to grab power and then strengthen his position. Playing with dangerous populism, Milosevic managed to convince most Serbs that systematic exploitation and near-genocide had always been the cause of their misfortunes. Successfully presenting himself as their saviour, Milosevic managed to hide that he had no solutions and answers to offer in respect to the economic and political hardships. The creation of a permanent crisis, which was able to disguise that he had no real political agenda to display, became *the* political agenda of his regime.¹¹⁹ Obradovic and Pesic are two more in the long list of authors who see the war as a creation of the regime, with the sole purpose of preserving it as long as possible.¹²⁰

Gagnon argues that political elites would create a conflict or even a war if this would benefit them politically and materially and preserve their rule, regardless of almost inevitable harm to the population under their authority. For this to happen, elites need to convince the public that they suffer in spite of the efforts of the elites to prevent it, and not because of the policies elites undertook. Furthermore, elites need to leave an impression that nobody else could do a better job in trying to prevent harm to the society than they do, and that outside actors are to blame for all the calamities. Once a war has started, Gagnon explains, it can be used as a perfect excuse for the continuously worsening living conditions in the society. It would be a little farfetched to claim that any ruling elites,

¹¹⁸ Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, pp. 5-13

¹¹⁹ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 25 - 27

¹²⁰ Vesna Pesic, "The War for Ethnic States," pp. 29-41 and Marija Obradovic, "The Ruling Party" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 430 - 448

including Milosevic's government, would go as far as to start a war to hide that they have absolutely no remedy for the collapsing economy, but if a war does start, it hides virtually everything, from elite incompetence to theft of state and private property by the elites and people close to them. Provoking a war has one more benefit for the elites. It helps to convince the masses that the nation as a collective being is threatened, putting the interests of the group above the interests of the individuals. The members of the nation are therefore convinced that they should sacrifice themselves for the common good by enduring the daily hardships and not disrupting the rule of those who are "protecting the national interests."¹²¹

The war in Yugoslavia was therefore, according to this theory, a result of a deliberate and rational strategy, planned and executed by the coalition of conservatives in the Serbian Communist Party, the orthodox Marxist intellectuals, the nationalist writers and parts of the Federal Army leadership. The importance of the full control over media this coalition had was exceptional and without it, the outbreak of the war would not have been possible.¹²² By provoking a conflict, this coalition managed to deflect demands for a political change in Serbia. The opposition was silenced since any attempt to challenge the status quo could be and was described as a threat to the national interests. Such argumentation was used both in Serbia and in Croatia.

Although this theory explains very accurately how and what happened, and with which purpose and what consequences the political elites in former Yugoslavia provoked the conflict, it leaves many questions unanswered. How was it possible to convince people that some other people with whom they had lived peacefully for 45 years were really planning to exterminate them just because they were of different ethnicity? How was it possible that Milosevic's propaganda in just a few years managed to destroy what Titoist "propaganda" had been building for over four decades? How could the Yugoslav people so easily switch from "Brotherhood and Unity" to ethnic cleansing? Obviously, for elite manipulation to work, certain preconditions needed to exist. These preconditions are what we turn to now.

3. 3. Breakdown and Break-up: Siamese Twins?

The third of the three main theories locates the reasons for Yugoslavia's break-up in the complete breakdown of its socialist system. The deteriorating standard of living, the increasing insecurity and the total lack of vision displayed by most of those in power (with the notable exception of Ante Markovic, who unfortunately came along too late to make a difference) made people susceptible to believe that someone else was truly exploiting them, and most of them rallied behind those leaders who were most convincingly

¹²¹ Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict," pp. 136-141

¹²² Ibid., pp. 142-143

promising to protect them. Without the breakdown, the theory claims, there would have been no break-up.

This is, beyond doubt, Woodward's point. In 1960s and 1970s, she writes, Yugoslavia was truly a workers' paradise. Its economic growth, standard of living, quality and availability of consumer goods and relative freedom all put Yugoslavia well ahead of other socialist countries. Already since 1955, the country's borders were open to its citizens, to foreigners and for trade with both East and West. The country was receiving substantial assistance from Western governments and loans from international financial institutions due to its independent position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Most important of all, far from being an artificial creation, held together by Tito's charisma or by its "totalitarian" system, both of which presumably kept ethnic animosities in check, Yugoslavia was, as Woodward claims, a very successful and complex federation which provided governmental protection of social and economic equality and shared sovereignty among its nations.¹²³

Yugoslav problems began, in Woodward's view, with the changes in the international environment. The recession in the West, which started in 1975 and led to a world-wide economic depression in the 1980s, also reached Yugoslavia. Its government fuelled the economic growth in the 1970s through massive loans. Following the second oil price rise in 1978-1979, the interest rates for the US dollar sharply jumped, almost doubling the Yugoslav debt to \$20 billion. To handle the debt, the government had to introduce austerity measures to cut the consumption of imported goods, and to liberalise prices. For the first time since 1945, workers started to lose their jobs. Due to the recession in Western Europe, many Yugoslav Gastarbeiter had to return home, further increasing the previously virtually non-existing unemployment rate.

The international factor is, of course, only a part of the answer, Woodward suggests. Until the appearance of Markovic in 1989, no Yugoslav politician could master either courage or ability to undergo the desperately needed economic reforms. The continuously worsening economic conditions instead intensified the quarrels between the republican leaderships and the federal government over the federal budget, taxation, and jurisdiction over foreign trade and investment. Being unable or unwilling to find a solution for the whole country, the republican authorities, especially when it became clear that elections were inevitable in the near future, devoted all of their energies to convince their domestic power bases that "the others" were to blame for everything. The result, Woodward concludes, was a complete breakdown of the social and political order, and the rise of nationalism.¹²⁴

¹²³ Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995, pp. 21-22

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-51

Crnobrnja joins these arguments, finding the reasons for Yugoslavia's collapse in the nature of its system, which left the country completely unprepared for the changes in the international security and international economy. When these happened, Yugoslavia, unable to adopt, imploded, due to the inability of the communist authorities to deal with the challenges. This inability created a power vacuum, which was instantly filled with populist nationalists, selling easy explanations to the people eager for a change.¹²⁵

Gow agrees that the economic shock and the complete inability of Milka Planinc and Branko Mikulic's governments¹²⁶ to deal with it brought Yugoslavia to its knees. The "artificial prosperity" generated through foreign loans abruptly ended when in 1980 IMF imposed rigorous terms on Yugoslavia for new, badly needed loans. Yugoslavia saw a series of "stabilisation" plans, which as a rule failed to stabilise anything. One of the principal measures to improve the balance-of-payments was to increase exports and to reduce imports -- a measure which disproportionately benefited Slovenia and Croatia at the expense of the less developed republics, intensifying the inter-republic quarrels. Following the IMF applied pressure to continue to devalue the dinar, Yugoslavia entered hyperinflation, which by 1989 exceeded 1400 per cent. Diminished domestic demand led to decline in Gross Material Product, which fell from 7.5 per cent annually in 1978 to -1.3 per cent in 1982. By 1988, unemployment reached 20 per cent. Strikes, previously unheard of, became a daily occurrence through the second half of 1980s. The worsening situation sharply eroded popular trust in the leadership and opinion polls showed that support for the party fell from 49.8 per cent in 1980 to just 22.9 per cent in only two years.¹²⁷

This created an atmosphere of localism and hostility, and a pressing need for finding scapegoats. In Serbia, the new party leader Slobodan Milosevic¹²⁸ managed to channel the streams of the emerging revolt first towards the "old guard" in the party leaderships in Serbia, Vojvodina and Montenegro. The so-called "meetings of truth," massive semi-spontaneous gatherings, forced the "old guard" into resignation, with Milosevic's men filling their posts. Since these changes hardly remedied the crises, the revolutionary powder keg was not defused, and Milosevic kicked it in the garden of the next door neighbour(s), embracing the Memorandum as his political platform.¹²⁹ In Slovenia, authorities acted in a different way, but with the same bad effect on Yugoslavia. In 1985, the Slovenian parliament changed the republican legislation, declaring itself to have a legal right to disregard decisions of the Federal Government if these were against Slovenian interests. In 1987, the Slovenian authorities thus refused to implement federal

¹²⁵ Mihailo Crnobrnja, *The Yugoslav Drama*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1994, pp. 7-9

¹²⁶ Planinc was a Yugoslav Prime Minister from 1980 to 1984, and Mikulic her successor until December 1989, when he and all his ministers resigned, admitting their powerlessness to stop the hyperinflation and improve the economy. He was succeeded by Ante Markovic.

¹²⁷ James Gow, *Legitimacy and the Military: The Yugoslav Crisis*. London: Pinter Publishers, 1992, pp. 60-63

¹²⁸ Milosevic became Chairman of the Serbian League of Communists in 1986.

¹²⁹ See chapter five of this thesis.

restriction on wages. Throughout Yugoslavia, republican authorities became predominantly interested in squeezing as much as possible from the federation and sending back as little as possible. Since 1986, most republics regularly failed to pay their dues to the Federal Budget.¹³⁰ This naturally intensified the crisis and made economic recovery virtually impossible.

In democracies, such a situation would be dealt with by a normal competition between various political parties proposing various solutions. In highly decentralised, one-party Yugoslavia, the situation instead pushed the republican elites into a struggle to save and control their own piece of economic pie from rotting away with the rest of the decaying federation. This in turn accelerated the worsening of the crises. By 1989, Yugoslavia was on the brink of a popular revolt. In just ten years, GNP fell from +5.1 per cent to -15 per cent, unemployment was above twenty per cent, and savings of about 80 per cent of the population were depleted.¹³¹ The time-bomb was set. The only question remained was who was going to be blown away by it -- will the Yugoslav people dismantle the communist system and the ruling elites, or will the elites dismantle Yugoslavia and its people?

At first glance, there seem to be hardly anything to criticise regarding this theory. The conclusion that the rapid deterioration of the economy and the nearly complete collapse of the state institutions pushed Yugoslavia to the brink of a popular revolt is completely accurate. So is the explanation (shared with the "manipulative elites" theory) that the elites, instead of waiting to be washed away by the accumulated frustration and rage, used nationalism to channel them towards other republics and nations, or towards the Federal Government. Especially the so-called Serbian "meetings of truth" came to be generally viewed as a proof of the mobilising power nationalism had in Yugoslavia, because of the frighteningly huge masses of people who would turn up to these events, characterised by open demonstration of hatred towards other nations.

What this theory forgets, or overlooks, is that meetings and war are still worlds apart. Attending the popularly-called *struja, voda i sendvici*¹³² meetings, where one can freely and explicitly curse Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Albanians is one thing. Actually shooting and killing them is a completely different one. Both are separated by an enormous step not too many people are generally ready, willing or able to make. Yugoslavs were not an exception. Wars, the Yugoslav one included, do not "just happen," even if all circumstances and preconditions are such to make the war seem almost inevitable. The crisis in the country, the elites which wanted to politically survive through it by blaming someone else and the memories of W. W. II massacres, kept alive especially in some parts

¹³⁰ Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, pp. 77-79

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-76

¹³² *Struja, voda i sendvici* stands for electricity, water and sandwiches. These, along with the free transportation and paid day-off from the work -- meetings were *always* organised on a working day -- were provided by the Serbian government for each gathering. Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 58

of Yugoslavia were all necessary ingredients for the Yugoslav time-bomb. But the bomb would never go off without a proper detonator. Who was used as a detonator, who ignited it and why, and who really profited from the explosion is the theme of chapter four.

4. Bad Boys Running Wild: The Senselessness of the Yugoslav Tragedy

One of the most tragic aspects of the war in former Yugoslavia was its complete futility. A war, fought for creation of ethnically homogeneous states and for territorial expansion at the expense of another state is tragic enough and its consequences usually horrible. In the case of Yugoslavia, the fact that all the horrors happened, to a large extent, so that a few thousand individuals could profit under the pretext that they lead a war for the benefit of "their" nations, makes everything even more tragic. I believe that this chapter will present enough evidence to back my claim that what the masterminds behind the war in former Yugoslavia truly cared about was the enlargement of their bank accounts. Enlargement of their states was subordinated to this goal and pursued only as long as it was beneficial to it.

All three theories discussed in the previous chapter offer explanations *why* it was possible for the madness to spread like a wildfire but none of them managed or even tried to explain *how* it was possible for so many people to accept this madness and even to start participating in it. The answer none of these theories attempted to seek out, is simple: it was not possible. Alleged ancient hatreds can be real and can truly reach a boiling point, elites can manipulate as much as they possibly can, assuring the masses that the "others" are out to get them, and normal social and political order may break down completely, but this still is not enough to push average people into a Hobbesian war of all against all. It is obviously enough to make them really believe that the "others" want to annihilate their nation but it is not enough to make them grab a gun, knife or stone¹³³ and actually kill someone.

But certain people (to be discussed in the second section of this chapter) needed the war, wanted the war and caused the war by letting loose the murderers, psychopaths, criminals, sadistic killers, professional assassins and other social outcasts. You can find them in every society but they are usually kept in check (as far as it is possible). In Yugoslavia they were let loose to run amok, many of them having (disgustingly as it may sound) the time of their lives, pushing the country into its worst nightmare since 1945. Of course, the war soon started to live a life of its own and the desperation, thirst for revenge, and in the end the sheer madness, which inevitably accompanies a prolonged war, took over. These led to some of the most gruesome massacres, from which even the most unscrupulous vultures could hardly make any profit, showing once more, even from this shameful and revolting perspective, how completely senseless the war was.

¹³³ Sudetic writes about hordes of hungry, desperate and revenge-prone refugees inside the encircled Srebrenica area. Sometimes thousands strong, these hordes would be following close behind when Muslim forces from Srebrenica attacked the near-by Serbian villages. When the village defences collapsed, they would rush in, killing all the survivors with knives, bats, hatchets or stones, and filling their bags with whatever food they could lay their hands on. They came to be known as *torbari* (*torba* = bag), the bag people. Chuck Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance: One Family's Story of the War in Bosnia*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999, p. 157

Just as it is clear that the war was senseless and completely avoidable, there can be little doubt that it was not "ethnic." As the remainder of this chapter will show, the enemies, allegedly defined strictly according to ethnic criteria, traded with each other, and formed and broke military alliances according to temporary needs of individual units, and not always consistent with their stated military objectives of "their" side. Numerous fighters also fought in the "enemy" units against their "own" nations. As Woodward states, individual enrichment and political aspirations were far more important than protection of national interests. The military strategy alone shows that war was not fought because of ethnic hatred or even to conquer the territory a given side claimed on account of alleged historic or ethnic rights. Most often armies fought in order to conquer towns or regions of significant strategic or economic importance, and not so much for control over territories where their co-nationals lived.¹³⁴ Rather than "liberating" their historic territories, warring armies often targeted oil depots, factories, warehouses, electric power plants, mines and similar. Irrational "ethnic" war most often followed a surprisingly rational pattern.

4. 1. Why Were the Gangs Essential for Making War Possible?

A popular misconception regarding the war is that a large majority of Yugoslav people were actually ready to go and fight. As already discussed above, many analysts and observers, both abroad and within the former Yugoslavia, concluded from the mass participation on the "meetings of truth," where slogans like "We Want Weapons!" could be heard, that all the participants were actually willing or capable to use the demanded weapons.¹³⁵ In fact, especially in large cities in Serbia and in the whole of Vojvodina, unpopularity of the war among ordinary Serbs and their reluctance to participate became clear almost in the very beginning. Less than half of the Serbian reservists appeared, when they were ordered to report for duty. In Belgrade, less than 15 per cent did so.¹³⁶ The conscripts often staged mutinies, refusing to go to the front. One exceptionally notable episode of protest featured a soldier, who in September 1991 at Sid, a town in Vojvodina near the border with Croatia, instead of continuing towards Vukovar, turned his armoured personal carrier around, headed with it straight to Belgrade and parked it in front of the Federal Parliament building. The independent weekly *Vreme* was full of stories about Serb units being driven without a leader into Croatia and then getting lost in the cornfields of Slavonia.¹³⁷ General Veljko Kadijevic, the Federal Defence Minister between 1988 and 1992, complained during the Slavonian campaign in autumn 1991 that a large number of

¹³⁴ Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, pp. 271-272

¹³⁵ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 163

¹³⁶ Mueller, "The Banality of 'Ethnic War,'" p. 48

¹³⁷ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 269-270

troops, which reached the front, used the first opportunity to abandon it.¹³⁸ During the attack on Vukovar, officers complained that their soldiers disobeyed orders and refused to leave the safety of their armoured vehicles. This resulted in a humiliating (for those leading the campaign) realisation that what used to be the fourth largest army in Europe was incapable of defeating a single small town, defended by a handful of ill-equipped soldiers.¹³⁹ During the course of the war, more than 150,000 Serbs emigrated or went into hiding to avoid being drafted.¹⁴⁰ If Milosevic and his associates wanted the war to really take off, something had to be changed immediately. Instead of unwilling and ineffective regular soldiers, paramilitary criminal gangs were sent to the front, unleashing hell, and at last, making the war possible.

Not surprisingly, a result of this decision was an almost complete confusion with regard to who was doing the fighting and who was commanding. Military formations on all sides included units of a regular army, various militias, special forces consisting of expatriate Croats, Serbs or Muslims, and of foreign mercenaries, local forces, operating only in the area where their home towns or villages were located, regular police units, and bands of armed civilians. Many of them did not wear any distinctive uniforms or insignia, and the commanding officers often freely moved from one unit to another. The result of this situation was substantial confusion, in which the chain of command was significantly blurred. Sometimes even the insiders hardly knew whose orders they were supposed to obey. On numerous occasions, various paramilitary units apparently operated under no control and command whatsoever. This was perhaps a result of deliberate strategy, since it helped to conceal direct responsibility for the committed crimes.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, given the nature of a large number of military formations, it is also possible that this confusion regarding who was in charge simply represented a very genuine reflection of the overall confusion.

When the conflict in Croatia started, the newly established Croatian army did not have more than 15,000 soldiers. Number of Federal Army troops (which from the very beginning openly sided with the Serbian side) in Croatia was 80,000, but in the first month of fighting alone, more than 30,000 of them either deserted or surrendered to Croatian forces. The motivation to fight and the effectiveness of the remainder was questionable, to say the least. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, regular Croatian forces participated with around 60,000 troops, which rarely fought outside of "Croat" areas of the republic. Muslim regular army had by 1994, when it reached its largest extent, 70,000 soldiers, but only 44,000 of

¹³⁸ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 185

¹³⁹ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 177

¹⁴⁰ Mueller, "The Banality of 'Ethnic War,'" pp. 47-48

¹⁴¹ United Nations Commission of Experts, *Final Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, Part III: General Studies, Section A: The Military Structure of the Warring Factions and the Strategies and Tactics Employed, available at http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/comexpert/REPORT_TOC.HTM

them were actually armed. Federal Army had 80,000 troops stationed in Bosnia-Herzegovina at the beginning of the conflict there, but only 35,000 of them were an actual fighting force.¹⁴²

According to the findings of the UN Commission, a large majority of the crimes committed in the course of the campaign of ethnic cleansing, were carried out by the most marginal elements of society, who formed numerous paramilitary units. They were influenced, encouraged and armed by their political leaders, who used aggressive nationalism, historic grievances and desire for revenge for that purpose.¹⁴³ The importance of possible material gains as a motivating factor was also exceptional, as it will be shown later in this chapter. Most of the fighting, especially on Serbian and to a slightly smaller extent Croatian side has been therefore done by paramilitary units. The UN Commission identified 83 paramilitary units, operating during the war. Fifty-six of them operated on the Serbian side, thirteen on Croatian and fourteen on Bosnian Muslim side. Though most of them consisted of armed local men, who grabbed arms after becoming prey to the aggressive nationalist propaganda, a very significant element in all of them represented members of the criminal underworld and convicts, released from prisons exactly for the purpose of participation in these units. Between 4,000 and 6,000 paramilitaries fought on the Muslim, between 12,000 and 20,000 on the Croatian and between 20,000 and 40,000 on the Serbian side.¹⁴⁴

These numbers present Lawrence Eagleburger's already quoted statement about outsiders being unable to do anything until the Yugoslavs decide to stop fighting each other in a very awkward light. Far from being an uncontrollable and unstoppable total war, involving four to five million people,¹⁴⁵ the conflict rather resembled a criminal rampage of no more than 66,000 thugs. When Croatian and Bosnian authorities managed to root out or at least significantly diminish the paramilitary presence on their side and build up a real, disciplined and trained army, the Serbian defences in Croatia and parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina collapsed like a house of cards, when the Croatian-Muslim counter-offensive started. A presumption that a timely, effective and determined international intervention would bring the conflict to a quick end, and that it would represent militarily a far lesser problem than the international community, for political reasons, fancied to believe, is therefore well in place.¹⁴⁶ This is another aspect from which the Yugoslav war seems so tragically senseless.

¹⁴² Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part I: Introduction

¹⁴³ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Part III: General Studies, Section B: Ethnic Cleansing

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ According to the 1991 census, the combined population of Serbs, Croats and Muslims was around 15.7 million of which, men of fighting age amounted to at least four to five millions. Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 316-317

¹⁴⁶ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 30

The war in former Yugoslavia was therefore not really an ethnic war. "Serbs," "Croats" and "Muslims" were not engaged in a conflict where each and every member of one ethnic group was fighting against all members of another group. In fact, quite often, members of a particular ethnic group played a very significant role in fighting on the side of the "enemy" ethnic group or even committing atrocities against people of the same ethnicity. Jovan Divjak, a Serb, was a Deputy Commander of the Bosnian government army throughout the war.¹⁴⁷ One of the most notorious and vicious paramilitary gangs, operating in support of the Croatian government, was lead by Jusuf "Juka" Prazina, a Muslim. His gang committed crimes against both Serbs and Muslims, and ran a concentration camp for both ethnic groups (to be discussed in more detail in the next section).¹⁴⁸ Drazen Erdemovic, a Serb who participated in the massacre in Srebrenica and who surrendered to the War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague testified that his unit, which killed more than a thousand unarmed civilians on a poultry farm in a village of Pilici included Croats, Slovenes and Muslims.¹⁴⁹

Rather than being involved in an "ethnic war," Mueller believes, ordinary people of all three nationalities unwillingly came to be controlled and victimised by small bands of armed thugs. These gangs, most often consisting of people with criminal background, were recruited by political leaders, who needed a war to preserve their political positions for as long as possible. Without the gangs, roaming around and terrorising people, the outbreak of a conflict of such a scale as we witnessed could not be possible. Since the gangs were terrorising predominantly the people of different ethnic origin -- the people who did not represent the newly formed power bases of their bosses -- the war came to be seen as a war between different nations, and not as a campaign of terror performed by a limited number of criminal gangs it actually was. Mueller thus concludes that under "appropriate conditions," something similar to what happened in Yugoslavia could happen virtually anywhere, since the people who terrorised Yugoslavia can be found in every society. Whether they will be given a free reign or kept in check, depends on the people in power and their interests.¹⁵⁰

Mueller, despite being right about the decisive impact the gangs had on the ignition and spreading of the war, oversimplifies reality and overstates his argument by claiming that what happened in Yugoslavia could happen anywhere. In theory, perhaps it could. But in reality, the "appropriate conditions" (the ones discussed in the previous chapter) which made it possible for the gangs to run wild in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, are virtually

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 17

¹⁴⁸ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part II: Major Special Forces Working in Support of the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), and the So-called "Bosnian Serb Republic" and "Serb Republic of Krajina," Section C: Paramilitaries Operating in Support of the Croatian Government

¹⁴⁹ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, p. 340

¹⁵⁰ Mueller, "The Banality of 'Ethnic War,'" pp. 42-43

impossible to occur in a significant part of the world. Mueller also makes no attempt to explain what was the rationale the political leaders followed when unleashing the gangs and what did they try to achieve by this, which is what this chapter will attempt to explain. Mueller also fails to satisfactorily explain how it was possible for a large majority of ordinary people to look at the gangs not as criminals, but as representatives of their ethnic group and thus endorse them as their natural protectors against "the others." I will try to answer this question in the next, fifth chapter.

4.2. The villains: Masterminds, Petty Warlords, and Bandits

Even a quick look at the biographies of the majority of the most notorious people, who are regularly mentioned among the first when those responsible for the war crimes committed in former Yugoslavia are listed, reveals an interesting characteristic shared by most of them -- a pre-war criminal record. Ranging from Radovan Karadzic's frauds to Arkan's bank-robbing and assassinations, most of the people who turned Yugoslavia into a living hell did not lead exactly honest and law-abiding lives in peacetime. Even Milosevic, whose high-ranking position supposedly "protected" him from the temptation to break the law for personal gain, did so in a very remarkable manner. In January 1991, he ordered \$1.7 billion to be taken from the Federal Reserves (located in Belgrade) and distributed to Serbian companies, which used them to pay the overdue wages to their workers. In this way, Milosevic gave a decisive push to his electoral campaign, "buying" himself a victory on the expense of the rest of the federation.¹⁵¹ This feature is not shared by all main villains, who played a decisive role in the bloody destruction of Yugoslavia (notable exceptions are Seselj and Paraga), but it is common enough to conclude that many of them simply continued to do what they were already doing in peacetime. The difference was that they managed to increase their dishonest activities to monstrous proportions, thanks to the fact that for the first time in their lives, the law was not trying to restrain them. This time, *they* were the law.

4.2.1. Slobodan Milosevic and his Inner Circle

Slobodan Milosevic is virtually always the first to be mentioned, when the usual suspects for the crimes committed during the war are rounded up. The former Serbian *vozd* is currently in the centre of dispute between the International War Crimes Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia in the Hague, and the Serbian government. The former wants him extradited to Hague where he could answer for the war crimes committed under his orders,

¹⁵¹ Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 121

and the latter wants first to put him on trial on charges of corruption and abuse of power. What is striking regarding this dispute is that it is completely unnecessary. Both types of Milosevic's (presumed) crimes are inseparably connected. Milosevic masterminded the war above all to acquire total power in Serbia and abuse it for his personal gain. Absolute opportunist and political chameleon, Milosevic changed his orientation and switched his allegiances with remarkable speed during the last fifteen years.

Milosevic started his meteoric ascent towards becoming the most popular Serbian leader in modern history on April 24, 1987 in Kosovo. Obedient apparatchik, carefully treading in the footsteps of his long-time friend and mentor Ivan Stambolic, one of the most powerful communists in Serbia, Milosevic slowly progressed through the apparatus hierarchy. Succeeding Stambolic first as director of Serbia's gas conglomerate *Tehnogas* and later as director of one of the biggest banks in Yugoslavia, *Beobanka*, he soon followed his mentor into politics. When Stambolic became head of the Serbian League of Communists, Milosevic took over his previous post as the head of Belgrade League. When Stambolic became Serbian President two years later, Milosevic was again automatically promoted to his previous post. Milosevic used this new position, which in fact made him the most powerful person in Serbia, since he had the ultimate say regarding membership in the League, to create a power base of his own.¹⁵²

In April 1987, Stambolic sent his protégé to Kosovo, where for some time already, local Serbs were protesting that they were terrorised by Kosovo Albanians, who were allegedly trying to push them out of the province. Milosevic's visit was used as an opportunity for demonstrations. The Kosovo Serbs, supplied with a truckload of stones, prepared in advance, provoked a confrontation with the police (the majority of whom were Albanians), who used batons and tear-gas to push them back. Milosevic, closely followed by a TV camera, pronounced his by now legendary sentence, explaining to the Kosovo Serbs that "no one [had] the right to beat [them]." After the evening news, virtually all Serbs knew about his promise and he was soon enthroned as a new Serbian "tsar."¹⁵³

Realising all too well how powerful and destructive an angry crowd can be, Milosevic almost instantly adopted a vocabulary, which gave him power to inflame the crowd even more and to make it follow his rule -- nationalism. Yet, it is likely he never really believed in what he preached. During the demonstrations against his rule in Belgrade in March 1991, he did not hesitate even a bit before ordering the army and the tanks to the streets, violently crushing the protest and showing the Serbs that he actually meant that no one but he had the right to beat them.¹⁵⁴ Milosevic built his popularity by presenting himself as a defender of *all* Serbs, but this was similarly just a propaganda trick. When a peace agreement was signed in Croatia on January 3, 1992, ending the

¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 83-85

¹⁵³ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 44-47

¹⁵⁴ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 174

conflict there, and according to which UN peace-keepers were supposed to enter the Serb-held parts of Croatia in place of the Federal Army which was to withdraw, the authorities in Knin refused to accept it. Milosevic instantly cut all ties with them and set about (politically) liquidating those in Knin who were opposing him.¹⁵⁵ When leadership in Pale (capital of *Republika Srpska*, Serbian statelet in Bosnia-Herzegovina) similarly refused to accept a peace agreement in August 1994, Milosevic ordered a complete blockade of Bosnian Serbs. The Serbian media started a campaign against the Pale leadership, calling them war profiteers and criminals (which was a refreshing change in the Serbian propaganda, since it contained a significant amount of truth). The Belgrade - Pale rift, deep and seemingly unbridgeable, made numerous Serbs on both sides of the border, which was never meant to be, confused. Milosevic's promise that all Serbs would live in one state seemed hardly compatible with his latest efforts to build for himself an image of peacemaker in the West, in order to ease the pressure of sanctions on Serbian people before their frustration and desperation turn against him. For Biljana Plavsic, one of the Bosnian Serb leaders, Milosevic's sanctions were "a dagger in the back." For Milosevic, it was just one more move which helped him to stay afloat when everyone else was drowning.¹⁵⁶

Milosevic is currently a "tenant" in the Belgrade's central prison, where he will remain until the process against him begins. He will have to defend himself against the charges that he misused his position, systematically violated federal legislation and caused financial instability in the country, all with the purpose of enriching himself and his associates. The biggest problem for the prosecution represents the lack of clear evidence. Milosevic, former businessman and head of a bank, knew well how to hide traces of his illegal financial transactions, and according to the prosecutors, numerous bank accounts in Cyprus, Switzerland, Germany, China, South African Republic and some other countries are loaded with money, which Milosevic has put aside for his golden years. The current governor of the National Bank of Yugoslavia, Mladen Dinkic, stated that the sale of the state-owned company for mobile telecommunication alone generated 200 million US dollars, which have disappeared without a trace.¹⁵⁷ The estimates about the overall amount of money and gold Milosevic illegally transferred out of the country to his bank accounts abroad range from several hundred million to a few billion US dollars. A large part of this sum was made in the gold mine Bor, which was run, according to the new authorities in Belgrade, by Milosevic and his close associate, former Deputy Prime Minister Nikola Sainovic (also wanted by the Hague), as if it was their private company. None of the

¹⁵⁵ Milan Babic, the leader of the Krajina Serbs, was told by Borisav Jovic, a Serbian representative in the Federal Presidency (until its dissolution) and at the time Milosevic's closest associate, that if he does not accept the peace plan, "[they] will be forced to get rid of [him]." Babic, well aware of the occasional political assassinations in Serbia demanded an explanation, and Jovic assured him that they would do it legally, through his parliament. Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 203

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 340-343

¹⁵⁷ "Balkanski 'jezdec apokalipse'" (The Balkan Horseman of Apocalypses) in *Dnevnik*, April 2, 2001.

money the mine made between 1991 and 2000 ended in the state budget, where it was supposed to go, but instead in numerous bank accounts abroad, passing first through a complex net of companies, banks and private accounts to bypass the international sanctions against Yugoslavia.

Milosevic's financial malversations are also being investigated by prosecutor Carla Del Ponte in the Hague, currently examining 25 boxes of documents, delivered to them by Cyprus Central Bank alone. Between 1998 and 2000, Swissair transported 6,8 million US dollars worth of gold from Belgrade to Switzerland. The cargo was officially registered as copper. The gold was sold there and the profit sent to a small Cypriot company, MCC Overseas Trade Ltd. So far, the staff of the company has refused to admit who its owners were. According to the data, collected so far, about 200 people, all leading figures in Milosevic's regime, were involved in what cannot be described as anything but robbery of the country they were elected to lead.¹⁵⁸

In March 2001, the new Serbian authorities, following an information, supplied by an anonymous source, raided one of the Belgrade banks and found more than 600 kilograms of 93% pure heroin in its deposit boxes. The street value of such quantity is about \$20 million. The heroin was apparently seized from smugglers by customs officers during Milosevic's rule, but it was not destroyed as it should have been. Instead, it became a contribution to the black fund, run by Milosevic and his closest associates. Two of these are almost certainly involved. One is Mihalj Kertes, Milosevic's associate back from the 1980s, when he was one of the organisers of the "meetings of truth." Until last October, when Milosevic was overthrown, Kertes was the head of the Yugoslav customs service. When the police searched his apartment, they found automatic weapons, \$1.5 million in cash, and a small amount of heroin, identical to the one found in the bank. The other man is Rade Markovic, Milosevic's head of the State Security Service, currently in custody awaiting murder charges. Markovic's security service had a contract for the deposit boxes where the heroin was found.¹⁵⁹

Milosevic, probably realising that his rule was coming to an end, most likely ordered a "removal" of numerous crucial witnesses. The responsibility for these acts will most likely soon be added to the indictment against him. Among the most notorious cases were the disappearance of his former long-time friend and mentor Ivan Stambolic, and assassinations of Defence Minister Pavle Bulatovic (presumably one of the leading figures in the sanction-busting import of oil), notorious paramilitary leader-cum-gangster Zeljko Raznjatovic - Arkan, former head of police Radovan Stojicic, a senior official of the United Yugoslav Left (party of Milosevic's wife Mira Markovic) Zoran Todorovic, mafia boss Zoran Sijan (another prominent figure in oil smuggling) and one person, who had nothing to do with them, but got to know too much, an independent and highly critical

¹⁵⁸ "Zlate Slobove jame" (Sloba's Gold Mines) in *Dnevnik*, March 13, 2001. "Sloba" is short for Slobodan.

¹⁵⁹ Ian Traynor, "Milosevic Ally Linked to Heroin Stash" in *The Guardian*, March 16, 2001.

journalist Slavko Curuvija.¹⁶⁰ When the question is posed, then, who Milosevic really was -- an orthodox communist, a crazed nationalist, a completely incompetent statesman, or an unscrupulous criminal -- the answer is, I believe, clear.

4. 2. 2. Radovan Karadzic and *Republika Srpska*

Radovan Karadzic, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, is perhaps an even better example of a leader who used nationalism to provoke war and orchestrated horrible war crimes for personal gains. A man, who was hailed by his followers as the "greatest leader since Karadjordje,"¹⁶¹ in fact turned *Republika Srpska* into a corrupt den of gangsters, where a small group of privileged individuals was making millions of US dollars while the ordinary Serbs were barely able to survive. The Serbian military disaster in the summer of 1995 was an inevitable result of this situation (to be discussed in more detail in the conclusion).

Karadzic, like so many "Bosnian" Serbs, who participated in destruction of what used to be their homeland, was a *dosljak* (a newcomer) and not *starosedeo* (an old, or original inhabitant). He was born in June 1945 in Petnjica, a small, backward village high on Mount Durmitor in Montenegro. As a teenager, he moved to Sarajevo where he enrolled in university and graduated in psychology. During the student protests in the late 1960s, many of his colleagues believed that he was a secret-police informer. Soon after graduation, he began working in a treatment centre at the psychiatric clinic of the main Sarajevo hospital, Kosevo. According to testimonies, he often supplemented his income by issuing fake medical and psychological evaluations to healthy workers who wanted early retirement or to criminals, who tried to avoid punishment by pleading insanity. In 1984, he and his partner Momcilo Krajisnik (who was later to become Serbian speaker of the pre-war Bosnian Parliament and afterwards speaker of the Parliament of *Republika Srpska*), then manager of a mining enterprise *Energoinvest*, managed to get a loan from an agricultural-development fund and used it to build themselves houses in Pale, a Serb populated village above Sarajevo turned into a ski resort for Communist establishment (later to become a capital of *Republika Srpska*). The two were arrested for fraud and spent eleven months in jail, before their friend Nikola Koljevic (he became a member of the Bosnian pre-war Presidency, during the war occupied the post of Vice-president of

¹⁶⁰ "Balkanski 'jezdec apokalipse.'"

¹⁶¹ Karadjordje was the leader of the first Serbian uprising against the Ottoman rule in 1804 and founder of the Karadjordjevic dynasty. The 1992 BBC documentary *Serbian Epics*, directed by Paul Pawlikowski, featured a gusla (traditional Serbian instrument with a single string, played on with a bow) player/singer, performing a song, composed in a traditional style and commemorating Karadzic's departure to Geneva peace talks. The song included the following verses: "Hey, Radovan, you man of steel! / The greatest leader since Karadjordje! / Defend our freedom and our faith, / On the shores of Lake Geneva!" Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 43

Republika Srpska and committed suicide in the autumn of 1996) managed to bail them out.¹⁶²

In 1990, Karadzic was chosen to be the president of the Bosnian branch of the Serbian Democratic Party, which already operated in Knin. Karadzic owed his election to a fellow-psychiatrist Jovan Raskovic, the head of the Knin branch. During his inauguration speech, he stated that the Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina needed to have equal cultural, religious and economic rights with other nations and that his party would correct all wrongs committed against the Serbs.¹⁶³ If one looks at how the ordinary Serbs under his rule lived and compares it with how he and his partners lived, one cannot avoid the impression that Karadzic either blatantly lied, or had a very perverse sense of humour. Indeed, under his leadership, Bosnian Serbs really had the same equal cultural, religious and economic rights as Muslims and Croats -- that is, they had none.

A very telling example is Pale itself. Before the war, it had a population of 6,000. During the conflict, it filled with Serbs, who left Sarajevo and over 20,000 people lived there, packed in the hotels and ski chalets. There were virtually no jobs in the town, and only one little market where smuggled goods were sold at inflated prices. Throughout the Serbian held territory, less than 10 per cent of the pre-war industries continued to operate, and even those with jobs were rarely paid. Even when they were, they were most often given food and other necessities instead of money. Many people survived only owing to their small patch of land on which they managed to cultivate some meagre quantities of food, or on help, sent by the relatives working abroad. People and especially refugees with no land of their own hardly made the ends meet. In a sharp contrast, Karadzic and his partners lived like kings, showing a remarkable ability to make money from other people's misery. As already mentioned, food, but also medicine, gasoline and cigarettes were "imported" exclusively by Pale nomenclature and sold at highly inflated prices. The notorious TV Pale, set up with the equipment stolen from BBC at the beginning of the war, and having exclusive access to the Serbian side of the front-line made an exceptional profit by selling footage to agencies around the world. To get the best price for their products, auctions were held and footage sold to those who presented the highest offer. The same tactics were employed by the Pale International Press Centre, conveniently headed by Karadzic's daughter Sonja. News agencies, which refused to pay were in turn refused access to Serbian held territory. Money was also made on people who worked as Gastarbeiter in Western Europe. To avoid having their houses and property "nationalised," or to avoid being recruited when visiting their homes or their relatives, they had to pay considerable sums of money to the Pale clique.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 83-84

¹⁶³ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 209

¹⁶⁴ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 220-224

As the war lingered on, more and more Mercedes were parked in front of the government building in Pale, the city in which virtually no one could afford to drive because of outrageously expensive fuel. In September 1993, a group of soldiers rebelled, demanding the arrest of the war profiteers, but the mutiny had no real effect, apart from triggering a few attempts to find an occasional scapegoat. For example, the former Prime Minister of *Republika Srpska*, Vladan Lukic, was accused of organising the disappearance of 3.5 million German Marks, set aside for the illegal import of oil, and Branko Ostojic, a former Deputy Prime Minister, of allegedly stealing 5.5 million Marks, similarly intended for oil. Five thousand completely new Volkswagen Golfs, stolen by the Bosnian Serbs from the Sarajevo Volkswagen factory at the beginning of the war similarly disappeared without a trace, with someone in Pale (it is almost impossible for Karadzic not to be among those involved) pocketing over 90 million German Marks.¹⁶⁵

In 1996, Karadzic had to give up his leadership position and go into hiding, fearing arrest and extradition to the Hague. The International War Crimes Tribunal has indicted him for genocide and crimes against humanity, but he is still regarded as a hero by many Bosnian Serbs. I have no doubt that sooner or later, justice will catch up with him and that he will answer for the atrocities he orchestrated. Yet, to make this possible sooner rather than later, the people, whose leader and protector he claimed to be, need to realise that he was more than anything else a bandit, willing to destroy more than four million ordinary lives, led by pre-war citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina (including the Serbian ones), to cash the profit.

4. 2. 3. Vojislav Seselj and the Chetniks

Vojislav Seselj is perhaps an unlikely candidate to appear on the list of people who masterminded the war with intention to profit personally from it. If a single most fanatical nationalist had to be chosen among all the people in the former Yugoslavia, who publicly demonstrated the highest possible degree of intolerance and open hatred towards other nations, Seselj would undoubtedly be the one. He was born in 1950 in Eastern Herzegovina and grew up in Sarajevo. Completing his doctoral thesis on Marxist justification for war and the use of guerrilla tactics at 26, he became the youngest PhD in Yugoslavia. On May 22, 1984, he was arrested for writing an article, in which he criticised Tito and proposed a complete reorganisation of Yugoslavia, which would be dominated by a "justly" enlarged Serbia (it incorporate Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and parts of Croatia). He spent 22 month in prison, where he was allegedly tortured and beaten. According to his friends, as a consequence Seselj came out of prison "emotionally

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 252-253

disturbed." He turned into an ultra-nationalist, started carrying a gun and often interrupted theatre performances he viewed as anti-Serb. In 1990, he became a leader of a newly formed Serbian Freedom Movement, which soon merged with Vuk Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Movement. After only a few months, Seselj was expelled from the party for his extreme nationalistic views. After only a week, Seselj formed a new party, called Serbian National Renewal, which soon changed its name into the Serbian Chetnik Movement and finally became known as the Serbian Radical Party (name of a pre-1941 Serbian nationalist party). Between 1991 and 1993, Seselj was an obvious protégé of Milosevic, since he and his party were the only "representatives" of the opposition with access to state TV. This contributed to Seselj electoral success. In parliament, his party unconditionally supported the ruling socialists and especially Serbian participation in the war. When Milosevic endorsed an international peace plan in 1993, Seselj turned against Milosevic, branding him as traitor, and called for a vote of no confidence for the government. Milosevic stroke back and on the following elections, Radical Party received for 44 per cent less votes than in 1991.¹⁶⁶

Seselj started to organise paramilitary units in late 1990. Their activity was for the first time recorded on May 2, 1991, when they attacked a police patrol in Borovo selo, a village near Vukovar, killing twelve Croatian policemen and wounding twenty.¹⁶⁷ In August 1991, Seselj told *Der Spiegel* that his troops were operating in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Known sometimes as "Seselj's Chetniks" and sometimes as "White Eagles" (a name originally used during W. W. II by an orthodox anti-communist youth organisation), their activities during the war are widely documented.¹⁶⁸ Seselj's troops were recruited mainly from working-class city dwellers with little military training apart from the regular army service. They were often drunk when in action and soon became infamous for their brutality. Their military effectiveness, however, was never highly praised. Looting represented a regular feature in their campaigns.¹⁶⁹

In 1991, an internal memo of the Federal Army described Seselj's units as dangerous to the army morale, since their "primary motive was not fighting against the enemy, but robbery of private property and inhuman treatment of Croatian citizens." During the 1994 election campaign, Seselj and Milosevic publicly accused each other of war profiteering and being responsible of war crimes. Forty of Seselj's close associates and members of his Chetnik units were arrested on charges of murder, rape, kidnapping, illegal arms possession and profiteering. According to the findings of UN Commission, Seselj

¹⁶⁶ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part II: Major Special Forces, Section D: Paramilitary Forces Operating in Support of FRY and the Self-proclaimed Serb Republic in Croatia and BiH

¹⁶⁷ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 141-142

¹⁶⁸ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part II: Major Special Forces, Section D: Paramilitary Forces Operating in Support of FRY

¹⁶⁹ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 245-246

regularly organised convoys of trucks, which transported plundered goods from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Serbia, where they were sold on black market.¹⁷⁰ If even a notorious nationalist like Seselj could not resist harming his alleged Greater-Serbian cause by using the conflict to increase his bank account, there can be even less doubt regarding the next name on the list -- Arkan.

4. 2. 4. Zeljko Raznjatovic - Arkan

Zeljko Raznjatovic, known as Arkan was born in 1952 in Brezice, Slovenia, as a fourth child of a Federal Army officer. He made his first steps towards becoming the lord of the Serbian underworld when he was only fourteen, when he was arrested for theft and burglary. At sixteen, he was sent to a home for juvenile delinquents. After his release, he went abroad and made an international "career" as a bank-robber. He was wanted in several European countries on charges ranging from robbery to murder (in 1974 he killed a restaurant owner in Italy). He was caught and imprisoned in Belgium, Netherlands and Germany, but in all cases managed to escape from the prison.¹⁷¹ In Sweden, armed members of his gang stormed the courtroom during the process against him, making it possible for him to escape for one more time. When he was imprisoned in Yugoslavia, he was approached by a man from the Yugoslav Secret Service, who offered him amnesty if he becomes their assassin. He was sent back to Western Europe with various fake passports, reportedly executing a number of prominent figures in Albanian and Croatian diaspora, including a former executive of Croatia's oil company *Ina*. In exchange, Yugoslav police ignored all foreign warrants for his arrest. He was also well paid for his services, which enabled him to build a small castle in Belgrade, surrounded by high walls and monitored by cameras, and to be a regular guest in the most expensive Belgrade restaurants and casinos, to which he always drove in his pink Cadillac. In the late 1980's, he became a leader of fan organisation of Belgrade's top football club, Red Star. He transformed the horde of hooligans and violent, mostly unemployed (and unemployable) young men into a well trained militia, which in a few years transformed into Arkan's Tigers, the most ruthless, vicious and brutal paramilitary organisation, operating in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁷²

The list of crimes and atrocities, committed by Arkan and his Tigers is seemingly enormous. They were involved in the war even before it actually started. Arkan was sent to Knin to discuss with the local Serb leaders the details regarding their uprising and the

¹⁷⁰ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part II: Major Special Forces, Section D: Paramilitary Forces Operating in Support of FRY

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 97-98

possibilities for Belgrade to supply them with weapons. Tigers were sent to Slavonia when it became clear that the regular army was embarrassingly ineffective. Their brutal efficiency made them known and feared all over Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tigers would move into a town or village, terrorise local population (killing, raping and torturing some and expel the rest) and then loot. Everything which could be possibly removed and sold was taken away. Afterwards, houses were often burned or destroyed with explosives.¹⁷³

During the war, Arkan became a leader of Belgrade underworld, which experienced an exceptional growth, due to the international sanctions imposed on the country. Arkan reportedly made millions of dollars only by selling goods, looted in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, on Belgrade black market. He was also among the leading figures involved in the smuggling of oil into Serbia. Since Milosevic has agreed to turn over state-owned gas stations to people who could bring oil into the country, Arkan soon became a proud owner of several gas stations. According to the estimates, Arkan himself made 30,000 US dollars from every tanker load of oil, delivered to Serbia in his organisation. He made additional money through his shopping centre, detective agency (user-friendly name for a racketeering organisation), bank, and organisation of boxing matches, with inevitable betting, reasonably organised by Arkan himself. He is also reported to run a facility, where persons kidnapped for ransom were kept.¹⁷⁴

Arkan was killed on January 15, 2000, shot by two masked gunmen in the lobby of the Intercontinental Hotel in Belgrade. The explanation that Arkan's death came as a result of mafia war is very plausible. But in the light of his boasting, following the International War Crimes Tribunal's indictment against him, that the Tribunal is not after him, but actually wants him as a witness since, in his words, he knows a lot and has seen a lot, the other explanation that Arkan has been eliminated precisely because of that, is even more believable.¹⁷⁵

4. 2. 5. Franjo Tudjman and the HDZ

Tudjman's Croatia was to a large extent almost a mirror image of Milosevic's Serbia. Croatian involvement in the Bosnian war was as shameful as the Serbian one. Despite the fact that Croat military units started their campaign for the creation of ethnically homogeneous "Herceg-Bosna" (Croatian mini-state in Bosnia-Herzegovina) only in April 1993, Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic discussed the division of Bosnia-

¹⁷³ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 184-185

¹⁷⁴ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part II: Major Special Forces, Section D: Paramilitary Forces Operating in Support of FRY

¹⁷⁵ Srdjan Staletovic, "A Criminal and a Witness" in *Institute for War and Peace Reporting Web Page*, January 18, 2000, available at <http://www.iwpr.net>

Hercegovina as early as March 1991 at their secret meeting in Karadjordjevo.¹⁷⁶ A shameful record regarding Bosnia-Hercegovina, however, was not the only similarity. Tudjman and his associates turned Croatia into the same pauperised state, ruled by a small, corrupt, privileged and greedy clique.

In 1998, the newspaper *Jutarnji list* published an interview with Ankica Lepej, an employee in one of the Croatian banks, who decided to break the rules of confidentiality and tell the public that Ankica Tudjman, the president's wife, had 210,000 German Marks in her bank account -- money which was never declared when her husband took a public office. Instead of satisfactorily explaining how they got the money, the Tudjman family made sure that Ankica Lepej immediately lost her job, and that the journalist, who made the interview explained herself in front of a court. During his presidency, Tudjman became the proud owner of an impressive villa, accompanied by 1,400 square meters of property in the prestigious Zagreb neighbourhood Tuskanac. The villa alone is estimated to be worth 10 million German Marks. Yet, Tudjman bought it for only 214,000 Marks in 1992. President Tudjman's younger son Stjepan became owner of a chain of high-class restaurants in the centre of Zagreb soon after his father's electoral victory. Two years ago, he also became a co-owner of the film company "Patria Film" and owner of "Anterra," the biggest rent-a-car company in Croatia. His sister, Nevenka, founded a company called "Netel," which soon became one of the biggest importers of cigarettes, drinks, and of household and sport equipment. Her son, Dejan, founded "Kaptol Bank" with only 1,000 German Marks initial capital, soon transforming it into an institution with over ten million Marks of capital. He is also owner of the Central National Fund, one of the main funds participating in the national voucher privatisation.¹⁷⁷

After Tudjman's death (on December 11, 1999) and the electoral defeat of his party, HDZ, (in January 2000), some 830 tape recordings, containing the late President's authentic conversations with other top politicians were discovered. Tudjman had been recording confidential conversations since the winter of 1995, allegedly due to his obsession with his special role in Croatian history. Being a historian himself, he apparently did not want any of his "historical" decisions to be forgotten in time. However, numerous people Tudjman talked to during the decade of his rule more than anything else now wish exactly this - oblivion. One of the transcripts, for example, reveals how one of the most influential papers in Croatia, *Vecernji List*, was privatised. The paper was bought by a company called Caritas Fund, based on the Virgin Islands. The company was set up by a group of prominent HDZ figures, who financed it by taking loans from several Croatian banks. The loans were never paid back. One of the most important people behind this phantom privatisation was Ivan Pasalic, the HDZ vice president of the Croatian *Sabor*. He boasted to Tudjman how he had created a huge smoke-screen which would hide that HDZ

¹⁷⁶ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 131-132.

¹⁷⁷ Lucic and Djikic, "Tudjmanovo desetljeće" (Tudjman's Decade).

was actually controlling *Vecernji List*. Another tape features a conversation between Tudjman and his Minister of Finance, Borislav Skergo. Skergo explains some details surrounding the sale of the Croatian state telecommunication company to Deutsche Telecom for \$850 million. He confirms that \$100 million of this sum was instantly transferred to an Irish bank to be used by the HDZ during the January 2000 elections.¹⁷⁸

The new Croatian government, formed after the January 2000 elections, changed, among many other state services, the heads of the state Custom Office. A commission was established to investigate the work of the custom officers during the 1995 - 2000 period and came up with alarming results. The HDZ government opened over 200 border crossings in Croatia (for comparison, Hungary which is double the size, has only 65 crossings and no sea coast, which represents almost a third of the Croatian border). Of these only 20 have technical capacity and enough personnel to perform custom duties. The rationale behind such a huge number of border crossings was to make smuggling and contraband easier by "legitimising" it with the help of false custom declarations. One of the most drastic cases was a car importer, *Zadarcomerc*, owned by the tycoon Ante Jurevic. In 1998 alone *Zadarcomerc* failed to pay \$2.5 million in custom duties, which was covered up by the head of the regional custom service, Branko Ganzulic, himself. *Zadarcomerc* nevertheless made all their customers pay all due custom fees when they bought cars from the company, with the profit being split among Jurjevic, Ganzulic and the local HDZ office in Zadar. Similar deals were made with the tobacco company *Tvornica duhana Zadar*, the company for import of building materials *Prigorska promet*, another car importer *MPower*, and the newspaper *Slobodna Dalmacija*. The overall amount of duties which went to private pockets instead in the state budget exceeded \$ 400 million.¹⁷⁹

When privatisation started in Croatia, a popular joke in the country became to refer to Croatia as a land owned by 200 families. The joke tried to point out that the privatisation benefited only roughly 200 people, whose most important characteristic was loyalty to President Tudjman and to his "state-building mission." The result of this is today's bankrupt Croatia, with destroyed economy, 50 per cent of the population claiming to live below the poverty line, 350,000 unemployed and at least an equal number who work without receiving wages. One of the most notorious cases was the privatisation of *Slobodna Dalmacija*. The only independent daily in the first years of Tudjman's rule and consequently very unpleasant for the regime because of its persistent criticism, was sold to the tycoon Miroslav Kutle, who had strong connections at the very top of HDZ establishment. Kutle's take-over profited him and the government at the expense of the

¹⁷⁸ Drago Hedl, "Tapes with Tudjman Cronies" in *Institute for War and Peace Reporting Web Page*, April 9, 2000.

¹⁷⁹ Zeljko Rogosic, "Hrvatska - drzava organiziranog sverca" ("Croatia - A State of Organised Smuggling") in *Nacional*, no. 271, January 25, 2001

Croatian public, which lost the only independent daily in the country. The government could stop worrying about the persistent criticism, and Kutle further increased his wealth by completely stripping *Slobodna Dalmacija* of its assets. The newspaper, which used to produce \$500,000 per month, under Kutle generated a debt of \$65 million.¹⁸⁰

In 1997 a scandal rocked Croatia when it became public that in August 1996 five people (among whom Kutle and Pasalic, *Sabor's* vice president) "borrowed" from Dubrovnik Bank \$3.5 million from the money allocated to help Dubrovnik hotels through the bad tourist season. The deal became publicly known because of a quarrel between the five people involved. Another incident involved Nikica Valentic, Croatian Prime Minister from February 1993 until November 1995, who became infamous due to his conviction that the Croatian economy could be stabilised only by cutting wages and pensions. After losing his job, he established a concern called *Niva*. He did so with the help of a "loan" of \$8 million from *Privredna banka*. To this day not a single dollar has been paid back. Under the HDZ rule Croatia's foreign debt skyrocketed to \$9.5 billion. The state budget doubled from \$3.3 billion in 1994 to \$6.8 billion in 2000 while at the same time the GDP, the economic growth and exports decreased leaving a negative balance of payments. Domestic and foreign debts and the unemployment rate were the only economic indicators that increased.¹⁸¹

4. 2. 6. Mate Boban and "Herceg-Bosna"

The similarities between Serbia and Croatia are not limited only to their governments. The most notorious Serbian anti-heroes also seem to have their alter egos among the Croats. Mate Boban, the Bosnian Croat leader who declared a separate Croat state in Bosnia-Herzegovina (called "Herceg-Bosna"), did his best to follow Karadzic's example, but was ousted in December 1993 under US pressure to make possible the creation of a Muslim-Croat federation in Bosnia-Herzegovina in March 1994.¹⁸² Still, he and Karadzic got along reasonably well. When they met in Graz, Austria, on May 6, 1992 to discuss how to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina between Croatia and Serbia (following the example of their "mentors"), they found out that they did not have any major disagreements regarding the division¹⁸³

Boban, a former clothing store manager, ran "Herceg-Bosna" virtually as his private domain. He stuffed all public offices with people associated with his party (the

¹⁸⁰ Srdjan Kaic, "Kraha i igara" ("Disasters and Games") in *Feral Tribune on line*, available at www.feral-tribune.com/arhiva/latin2/1999/746/abeceda.htm

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 321-322

¹⁸³ Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 200

Bosnian branch of HDZ), dismissing virtually all Muslims and "unfaithful" Croats.¹⁸⁴ Armed forces operating under the command of Boban's men participated in ethnic cleansing, of which looting was an inseparable part. A typical example represents the attack on Medak area, a collection of small villages on a narrow strip of Serb held territory, surrounded on three sides by territory held by Bosnian Croats. The attack occurred on September 9, 1993. The local Serb residents were killed or expelled and hundreds of houses destroyed. Domestic animals, personal belongings, vehicles and farm equipment were looted. What could not be taken away, was destroyed. The attack on Medak was, according to the UN Commission, not a military necessity, nor was it conducted with the goal of acquiring territorial gains, since the Croatian forces retreated from the area voluntarily after only a few days.¹⁸⁵

Despite disappearing from the political maps after the Muslim-Croat Federation was established, a phantom "Herceg-Bosna" continued to exist as a virtual state within a state, ruled from its self-declared capital of Mostar, rather than from Sarajevo. In 1999 a group of prominent Bosnian Croat officials came under investigation for suspected involvement in illegal privatisation and other types of economic criminal activity which allegedly cost the Federation and its citizens roughly \$50 million. Due to the non-transparent, party-dominated judiciary, the case was dismissed for lack of evidence.¹⁸⁶ Six years after the end of the war, Croatian Bosnia remains to a large extent a criminal-run society. Its "capital" Mostar and towns like nearby Stolac are free havens for gangsters, where the Federation's police has no entry, leaving the mafia, which smuggles weapons to Kosovo, cigarettes to Italy and stolen cars all over the Balkans, a free reign.¹⁸⁷

4. 2. 7. Dobroslav Paraga and the HOS

If his party had been as popular in Croatia as the Radical Party was in Serbia, Dobroslav Paraga would have been the Croatian "version" of Vojislav Seselj. Paraga emerged in the spotlight in 1990 when he formed the extreme-right Croatian Party of Right.¹⁸⁸ Paraga and

¹⁸⁴ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 293-294

¹⁸⁵ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Part IV: Substantive Findings, Section D - Medak Pocket Investigation.

¹⁸⁶ Janez Kovac, "Twelve Arrests in a Single Day Mark Bosnian Corruption Clamp-down" in *Institute for War and Peace Reporting web page*, October 12, 1999.

¹⁸⁷ Nick Thorpe, "Croat Town Now a Criminal Haven," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2001, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

¹⁸⁸ The Croatian name of the party, *Hrvatska Stranka Prava*, does not cause the same confusion its English name does. The "right" in the name refers to the Croatian right to independent statehood, and not to the fact that the party belongs to the right wing of political spectrum. The original Croatian Party of Right was created in mid-1800s and was lead by charismatic Ante Starcevic. Starcevic was a fierce opponent of Austro-Hungary and demanded a unification of Dalmatia, Slavonia, Istria and Slovenia into an independent Croatian State. Initially very hostile and intolerant to Serbian presence in "Croatia," Starcevic moderated his views in the last years of his life, realising that independent Croatia could be created only through cooperation

his party were committed to the creation of Greater Croatia, which would include parts of Croat-populated Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina and Montenegro.¹⁸⁹ The Croatian Party of Right was basically a fascist organisation, promoting extreme xenophobia, adopting the Nazi-style salute used by Ustashe and forming its military wing, which came to be known as the HOS (*Hrvatske Obrambene Snage*, or Croatian Defence Forces), a brutal and very effective paramilitary unit, which operated both in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since Paraga and the HOS presented both a domestic threat to Tudjman and a constant reason for criticism from abroad, Tudjman ordered the HOS to disarm and disband in November 1991. Paraga was arrested for "representing a threat to the constitutional order." In 1993, Paraga was again arrested and put on trial for allegedly conspiring to overthrow the government.¹⁹⁰

When the fighting started in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the HOS re-emerged and set up its headquarters in the town of Ljubuski. Its troops consisted of both Bosnian Croats and Muslims, as well as Croatian émigrés and foreign mercenaries. Muslim fighters joined in because HOS leadership pledged to fight for the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The HOS soldiers wore Ustashe-like black uniforms, decorated with the Croatian chessboard coat of arms. After its commander, general Kraljevic, was killed in August 1992, the HOS merged with the regular Croatian army. During its existence the HOS ran concentration camps where civilians were killed and tortured and was engaged in exceptionally brutal campaigns of ethnic cleansing, which were regularly followed by extensive looting. Numerous reports testify that HOS members looted and stole from civilians in the regions they operated. The HOS would enter a town or a village, and then systematically pass through all houses and apartments, taking away money, jewellery, documents and electronic equipment (TV sets, video recorders and similar). It was proven that in the town of Kakanj HOS members confiscated the apartments of Serbs and Muslims they had chased away and then rented them out to Croat refugees.¹⁹¹

4. 2. 8. Jusuf Prazina - Juka

Yet, even the HOS was hardly a match for the forces of Jusuf Prazina, known as Juka. Juka was a renowned underworld figure and racketeer in Sarajevo before the war, and was arrested five times for criminal activities. Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities, he

between Croats and Serbs. After his death in 1895, the party was taken over by Josip Frank, a Jewish convert to Catholicism, and extreme chauvinist and Serbophob. After 1918, Frank and his party were, quite understandably, persecuted as "enemies of the state." They went underground and by 1929 gradually transformed into the Ustashe movement, lead by Ante Pavelic. Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 102-106.

¹⁸⁹ Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, pp. 170-171

¹⁹⁰ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 265-266

¹⁹¹ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part II: Major Special Forces, Section C: Paramilitaries Operating in Support of the Croatian Government.

transformed his gang, initially consisting of 24 men, into a paramilitary unit called "Vukovi" (The Wolves). In time, he came to command close to 3,000 well-armed men. In the beginning Juka's unit proved essential for the defence of Sarajevo, which was virtually undefended. In reward, in the summer of 1992 Juka was named the Head of Special Forces by the Bosnian government. Sarajevo's defence however was not the top priority for Juka. His gang instead engaged in persistent harassment of civilians in Sarajevo. They looted houses, racketeered "protection," stole cars, controlled the black market on which they sold goods stolen from UN humanitarian supplies, and raided the city's warehouses and shops. In a notorious "action" Juka and his people looted the Yugo Sport warehouse, stealing 20,000 pairs of shoes. By September the Sarajevo government had no doubt that Juka was much more harmful than useful. He was dismissed from his position and in October a warrant for his arrest was issued. Juka retreated to Mount Igman which was at the time the only connection between Sarajevo and the rest of the government-held territory. From there Juka's unit attacked government army positions. They were also hijacking vehicles and kidnapping civilians for ransom. Nationality was never an issue and Juka was not choosy in this respect.¹⁹²

In early 1993 Juka joined forces with the Bosnian Croat army, and when the fighting between Bosnian Croat and Muslim forces started, he actively fought on the Croat side. According to the reports, Juka and his men killed at least 700 Muslim men in the Mostar area only. There Juka continued with his favourite activities -- looting houses, stealing cars and letting out appropriated apartments. For his service to the Croatian cause he was rewarded with a villa on the Dalmatian coast. He lived there until the fall of 1993 when he moved to Liege, Belgium. On December 3, 1993, he was killed by one of his own bodyguards.¹⁹³

4. 2. 9. Fikret Abdic and Cazinska Krajina

Another well-known Muslim, who never acted as if he was participating in an "ethnic" war, was Fikret Abdic. In the 1980s Abdic was the head of the conglomerate *Agrokomerc*, one of the biggest food-producing factories in Yugoslavia. Thus, bringing steady and substantial income to the people in the otherwise poor and underdeveloped north-west corner of Bosnia-Hercegovina, Cazinska Krajina, Abdic was adored and popularly known as "Babo" (Daddy). In 1987, however, he was jailed for issuing \$300 million in unbacked promissory notes, which helped to boost *Agrokomerc's* rapid expansion. This was one of the biggest scandals in Yugoslavia's economic history and it toppled the Bosnian Party leadership. Nevertheless, Abdic's supporters never abandoned him, claiming that he was

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

used as a scapegoat in the power struggle within the Communist Party. He reappeared in public life in the November 1990 Bosnian elections. Popular equally among Croats and Serbs, Abdic received 1,010,618 votes, defeating Alija Izetbegovic (847,386 votes) in a run for the Muslim place in the three-head Bosnian presidency. Lacking support within the Muslim political party, *Stranka Demokratske Akcije* (SDA, or Party for Democratic Action), Abdic gave his position to Izetbegovic. In exchange, "his" man Alija Delimustafic became Interior Minister.¹⁹⁴

Abdic was always much more interested in business than in politics and as such he was quite understandably very sceptical regarding Bosnian independence. This soon soured his relations with the SDA. When the war broke out, he left Sarajevo and returned to Velika Kladusa, the seat of *Agrokomerc*. Cazinska Krajina was soon cut off from the rest of the government-held territory by a rapid Serb advance in western Bosnia-Herzegovina. Surrounded by Serbian territories on three sides and Croatia on the fourth, Abdic soon started cooperating with Serbs and the supply route for Kninska Krajina passed through "his" territory. This again brought a steady income to the people in Cazinska Krajina, who continued to worship him.¹⁹⁵

Cazinska Krajina soon became the busiest market in the republic, bringing together Muslims, Croats and Serbs in a search for profit. Official enemies traded fuel and arms with each other. Abdic's partnership with Serbs and Croats annoyed the government in Sarajevo. In turn, miffed by Sarajevo's attempts to oust him, Abdic proclaimed autonomy of Cazinska Krajina on September 26, 1993. In the meantime, *Agrokomerc* was revived as a food-processing company for products supplied by Serbs from Kninska Krajina. Abdic's "government" made millions of dollars through sanction-busting. Since his Autonomous Province was not under embargo, imposed on Bosnian Serbs, Abdic imported far more fuel than the province could possibly use and sold it to the Serbs. Much of this fuel was sent even to Serbia proper. In August 1994, Abdic's reign ended. The Fifth Corps of the Bosnian Federation Army, which was stationed within Cazinska Krajina, grew strong enough to stage a revolt. Abdic's forces were defeated and he was driven out of the province, joined by 30,000 of his followers who decided to flee with him.¹⁹⁶

4. 2. 10. ... And the Rest

In the shadow of the big names like the ones discussed above lurked a wide range of smaller bandits, all willingly participating in making the war possible and then enjoying the freedom to do whatever they wanted, enriching themselves in any possible way, hidden

¹⁹⁴ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 210-211

¹⁹⁵ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 192-193

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-246

by the cover of confusion and the desperation of the war. An attempt to make a complete list of all those who actively participated in the war with the sole intention of enriching themselves would be most likely unsuccessful, due to, on one hand, the nature of the war, which effectively covered many traces, and, on the other, to the large number of perpetrators involved. I will present just some of the already documented and proven cases to illustrate that looting and profiteering cannot be disregarded as just another side-effect of the war. On the contrary, on numerous occasions it was the most important reason why people grabbed guns and made the war really possible.

Perhaps the most illustrative example is a paramilitary unit called "Vikendasi" (The Weekenders). They would gather on Friday afternoons, grab their arms and make short raids from Serbian held territory into parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina under governmental control, looting, plundering and vandalising villages and isolated farms. By Sunday evening, they would cease and return to their homes, selling the stolen goods during the "working week."¹⁹⁷ "Vatreni konji" (The Horses of Fire) was a Croatian gang, consisting of 58 men, who became notorious for their sexual crimes. They would rampage through unprotected Serbian villages, looting property, raping and killing. They also took numerous women as captives and held them as sex slaves, making money from their suffering.¹⁹⁸ During the ethnic cleansing of Bosanski Novi, a paramilitary gang called "Rezervna rebra" (The Spare Ribs) took control, raiding Muslim and Croat owned cafes, shops, restaurants and private homes. After two weeks of rampage in which many people were arbitrarily killed, the Spare Ribs announced that transportation would be organised to take all non-Serbs to Croatia. However, before being allowed to leave, all people had to sign over their property to the newly established Serbian authorities. When the buses for evacuation finally arrived, those allowed to leave faced the final insult, being forced to pay outrageously expensive "bus tickets."¹⁹⁹

A unit lead by Dragan Vasiljkovic, popularly known as Captain Dragan rose to "prominence" during the war in Croatia. Vasiljkovic was a pimp in Sidney and a military instructor in Tanzania and Angola, before sensing an opportunity to make considerable money in his former homeland. Although his men were mostly volunteers from the Knin area, Vasiljkovic was a paid professional, who offered his services strictly for payment. When the influx of money started to dry out by January 1993, Captain Dragan packed his bags and disappeared.²⁰⁰ The Final Report of the UN Commission of Experts is literally packed with references to numerous other criminal groups, "fighting" on all three sides and known under names like the Kninja Turtles (combination of Knin and Ninja Turtles, heroes of US comics and movies), Red Baretts, White Pumas, Montenegro Guard, Sooty

¹⁹⁷ Mueller, "The Banality of 'Ethnic War,'" p. 50

¹⁹⁸ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part III: Other Identified Paramilitary Groups.

¹⁹⁹ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 226-228

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Alley, Black Swans, Yellow Ants, Rambos, Black Shirts and numerous others, named after their leaders.²⁰¹

Not all of the paramilitary leaders were "new kids on the block." Mirko Jovic, one of the organisers of Milosevic's "meetings of truth," became a leader of a paramilitary unit of his own when the fighting started.²⁰² Nasim Oric, to some a hero who defended Srebrenica for three years, and a vicious and ruthless gangster to others, used to be Milosevic's personal bodyguard before the war. While commander of the Muslim army in Srebrenica, Oric and his men raided Serbian villages in the area. They ran a black market in Srebrenica on which they were selling UN humanitarian aid, which passed through their hands, since they were *the* authority in the town. Only a minimal portion was distributed to the starving people in the encircled town. At least on one occasion, a hungry mob tried to raid Oric's warehouse, in which he was stockpiling reserves of food. Oric's men opened fire, killing at least one person.²⁰³ Oric's men terrorised civilians in the city, allegedly killing one family because one of Oric's officers fancied their house for himself. In April 1994, three teenage Muslim girls escaped from Srebrenica, passed on foot through a minefield and surrendered to the Serbs, explaining that they had been gang-raped by Oric's men.²⁰⁴ The numerous and diverse crimes, committed by these and numerous other paramilitary gangs with, above all, the goal of personal benefit, will be discussed in the following section.

4. 3. Mafia inc.: Looting, Racketeering, Smuggling

Looting is an almost regular side-effect of any war, and is inevitable when mercenaries and paramilitary units are involved in the fighting. Looting was, like in all other parts of the world, an essential part of most military campaigns in the Balkans through history. Goths, Langobards, Avars, Slavs and other barbaric tribes were attacking the Byzantine Empire over many centuries, most often entering its territory, pillaging as much as possible and retreating.²⁰⁵ When the Fourth Crusade was assembled in 1202, Venice, which had for a long time wished to subdue Zadar, a thriving city on Dalmatian coast, was finally given an opportunity to do so. To pay to the Venetians for the transportation across the Adriatic Sea, Crusaders (who did not find the obligation even the least unpleasant) attacked Zadar, massacring the population and looting everything in sight, including the churches. They then moved on towards Constantinople, where they participated on probably the largest

²⁰¹ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part III: Other Identified Paramilitary Groups.

²⁰² Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict," p. 152

²⁰³ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 223-224

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 245

²⁰⁵ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 7-8

looting campaign in history.²⁰⁶ Looting was also very widespread during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and it appears that it often had a bigger importance than territorial gains or defeat of the enemy, since paramilitaries looted even people of the same ethnic group.²⁰⁷ During World War II, the situation was similar, with all sides equally involved in looting. In the case of Tito's partisans, looting reached such proportions that it often threatened to compromise the war objective and played straight into the hands of their opponents, whose propaganda presented partisans as bandits.²⁰⁸ Exactly the same problem was caused by looting during the 1991-1995 war.

I do not intend to imply that looting was the sole or even the most important purpose for the 1991-1995 war. But once the fighting began, a very significant number of those involved, just like the Crusaders eight centuries ago, or like the numerous gangs and para-units during the Balkan Wars eight decades ago, found a completely different reason for participating in the war from the reason those who sent them there proclaimed they had. Naturally, many people who participated in the fighting on all sides, were either aggressive nationalists, fighting for Greater Serbia or Greater Croatia, concerned patriots, believing to be defending their country or to be protecting their nation, or simply scared ordinary people, trying to defend their homes and families. But the criminals, fighting basically to squeeze as much money as possible out of other people's misery, soon acquired a dominant position on all warring sides. Criminal activities, corruption and lack of real dedication to the cause were exceptionally widespread among the Serbs, inevitably leading to their military disasters in the summer of 1995.

A war, in which the normal civil order is completely destroyed and the only law acknowledged is the law of guns, offers exceptional opportunities to well-organised criminal gangs. Apart from looting, there is money to be made through extortion and racketeering, through "duties" and "taxes" imposed on passage of humanitarian convoys and on evacuation of refugees, through arms trade, through performance of paid military services for the official "enemy," through forced prostitution, through black market in the besieged cities and through holding prisoners for ransom. UN Commission of Experts lists looting, theft, and robbery of private property, as well as forced expropriation of real property as elements of the organised campaign of ethnic cleansing.²⁰⁹ But the scope, persistence and, above all, the demoralising effect of these criminal activities, which seriously undermined the alleged war objectives show that those who engaged in them followed an agenda of their own. As such, they, just like Milosevic, acted in the "interest" of their ethnic groups only for as long as this served their own purposes.

²⁰⁶ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 19-20

²⁰⁷ Judah, *Kosovo*, pp. 18-19

²⁰⁸ Popov, "Traumatology of the Party State" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, p. 85

²⁰⁹ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Part III: General Studies, Section B: Ethnic Cleansing

A "military" action of a paramilitary gang usually followed a pattern, which could be, as Mueller proposes, divided into four stages. He names them take-over, carnival, revenge, and occupation and desertion.²¹⁰

1.) Take-over: Recruited by political leaders who, as already discussed, needed the war to divert any challenge to their rule, and usually backed by artillery and air force provided by the regular army, groups of well-armed thugs appeared in areas where the civil order and law no longer functioned. Using force against unarmed and frightened civilians, they took control. The members of other ethnic groups were rounded up and intimidated at best, or massacred at worst. In both cases, looting and robbing took place. The people of the same ethnic group were (generally) left alone, otherwise the myth-making, which presented the gangs as fighters for their nations and which was produced by the propaganda machines of the political leaders that had sent the gangs in action, would have not been convincing. Nevertheless, if people of the same ethnicity as the gang members opposed the conduct of the thugs or tried to protect their neighbours or friends of different ethnic origin, they were classified as traitors and treated in an even harsher way.

2.) Carnival: Becoming the absolute masters of the area, the gangs engaged in carnivals of looting and destruction, as well as raping, torturing and murdering. Some of the local population joined in, opportunistically stealing the property of their neighbours who were either killed or chased away.

3.) Revenge: Many victims joined similar gangs, composed of their co-ethnics. Seeking revenge and compensation for the stolen and destroyed property, they attacked villages inhabited by members of the same ethnic group to which the gang that attacked them belonged to, opening a new circle in the endless spiral of violence.

4.) Occupation and desertion: With all people of other ethnic groups gone, and with little left to loot, gangs started to terrorise the people of their own ethnicity. Profiteering completely pushed away the political aims of the war and openly became a prime concern. Corruption and nepotism spread, harming the war effort. Ordinary people tried to migrate to a safer place, leaving their villages and towns under the control of fanatics, criminals, murderous drunks and revenge-seekers.

The Serbian take-over of the town of Prijedor is an excellent example. According to the 1991 census, the town's population was 44 per cent Muslim, 42.5 per cent Serb and 5.6 per cent Croat (the remainder were Yugoslavs - 5.7 per cent and "others" - 2.2 per cent). The greater Prijedor area had a total population of 112,470. By 1993, this figure was reduced by 52,811 people (43,330 Muslims, 3,131 Croats and 6,350 others) who were either killed or expelled. Serbs took power in the town on April 30, 1992. Simo Drljaca, the head of the local branch of the Serbian Democratic Party, and commander of 1,775 well-armed men, became the town's master (in 1993, he became a Deputy Interior Minister

²¹⁰ Mueller, "The Banality of 'Ethnic War,'" pp. 53-57

of *Republika Srpska*). Immediately after the take-over, the movement of non-Serbs was limited and their communication with the outside world cut off, since the telephone system no longer operated. Non-Serbs were dismissed from their jobs and their houses searched for weapons. Many "suspicious" persons were either shot on the spot or taken to "interrogation" from which they never returned. In May, the ethnic cleansing started. Many non-Serbs were taken to concentration camps. Their homes were pillaged and afterwards many were blown up. Many women, whose husbands had been taken away, were raped. The remaining non-Serbs (almost all of them women, children and elderly) tried to leave, but were allowed to do so only after they had signed over their property to Serbian paramilitaries.²¹¹

Serbs, who refused to participate in the terrorising of non-Serbs or tried to help them were brutalised. One Serb was shot for refusing to put on a Serb uniform. Some were detained together with Muslims in the notorious Omarska concentration camp in the Prijedor area.²¹² According to the local newspaper, the looted property of the non-Serbs expelled from Prijedor (cars, trucks, agricultural vehicles, furniture, electronic equipment), was stored in local warehouses for a certain period of time. Its estimated worth amounted to several billion German Marks. Thanks to the "activities" of certain well-positioned local "distinguished gentlemen," most of the stolen goods disappeared relatively quickly, either sold in Serbia or expropriated by private individuals. Similarly, assets of local industries and agricultural cooperatives, which could make life much easier for the local Serb population if allowed to operate, were stripped and sold off. Tens of electric motors, assembly lines, and other valuable objects disappeared from the Ljubija mine outside Prijedor and from other local enterprises, effectively closing them down and leaving local Serbs practically without any employment possibility. In the first months after the Serbian take-over, at least six thousand heads of cattle were stolen and sent to Serbia.²¹³

Looting and plundering were not the only ways to make money at the expense of victims. When non-Serbs were being expelled from Bijelina, they had to pay 500 German Marks per person to phoney travel agencies, which were organising one-way "excursions" to the Serbian-Hungarian border.²¹⁴ In Bosanska Raca, Arkan's forces controlled the only bridge over the river Sava. Everyone who wanted to cross the bridge into Serbia had to pay between 500 and 800 DM. Similarly, on the river Drina, which forms a larger part of the border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, Serbs operated small boats which would

²¹¹ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Part IV: Substantive Findings, Section A: The Study of Opstina Prijedor, a District in North-Western Bosnia: Alleged Genocide and Massive Violations of the Elementary Dictates of Humanity.

²¹² Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 236-237

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255

²¹⁴ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part IV: Analysis of Reported Paramilitary Activity by Geographic Location, Section A: Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bijelina county).

take refugees across for 1,000 DM per person.²¹⁵ Numerous gangs run facilities in which captured women were kept as sex slaves and were subject to indescribably inhuman treatment. Their captors would either take money and give them to the "customers" who raped them, or they would provide rape victims for free, since it was, as Borislav Herak (one of the managers of one such facility, known as Sonja's cafe in Vogosca; convicted in the Hague for 35 murders and 14 rapes) said, "good for raising the fighters' morale." Many women kept there were killed. Miro Vukovic, another manager, would tell the "customers" that they could do with women whatever they liked and that he preferred if they did not bring them back, since they "did not have enough food for them anyway."²¹⁶

In many places, people who were chased from their homes had to sign documents that they "voluntarily renounce" all of their property and present it to the very people who were forcing them to leave at a gun-point.²¹⁷ Often, people were kept as prisoners until the ransom was paid for them. In Zvornik, 174 Muslim men were kept, tortured and beaten, until a ransom of 2,000 DM was paid for each of them.²¹⁸ The soldiers of the Croatian army (even of the regular one) often supplemented their incomes by stealing (Croats described it as "requisition") vehicles from the Muslim refugees, entering Croatia.²¹⁹ Humanitarian aid was another, similarly popular "supplement." Djordje Radovic, the head of a humanitarian aid organisation, operating in Sarajevo, complained about the difficulties one had to face if trying to get humanitarian relief into the besieged city. Eight per cent of the goods were confiscated by the Croatian army in Kiseljak (Croat-held town on the western edge of Sarajevo), thirty-three by the Serbs in Ilidza (neighbouring Serb-held suburbs of Sarajevo), twenty per cent by the Bosnian army, and twenty per cent were taken for the Bosnian state reserve. Thus, out of every thirteen tons of goods, only four reached the people they were supposed. Radovic's explanation was that the conflict was simply "a war of criminals" in which logic was impossible to find.²²⁰

Of course, looting and profiteering in themselves do not offer a sufficient proof that personal interests played a much more important role in the Yugoslav war than alleged national(istic) interests. Unlawful profiteering at the expense of victims has been a widespread occurrence during many wars and conflicts and there has been nothing especially exceptional in the Yugoslav one in this respect. Even the enormous extent of the profiteering and the involvement of some of the most prominent masterminds behind the

²¹⁵ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part IV: Analysis of Reported Paramilitary Activity by Geographic Location, Section A: Bosnia-Herzegovina (Bosanska Raca)

²¹⁶ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part IV: Analysis of Reported Paramilitary Activity by Geographic Location, Section A: Bosnia-Herzegovina (Sarajevo county)

²¹⁷ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part IV: Analysis of Reported Paramilitary Activity by Geographic Location, Section A: Bosnia-Herzegovina (Zvornik county), Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 204

²¹⁸ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III. A: Special Forces, Part IV: Analysis of Reported Paramilitary Activity by Geographic Location, Section A: Bosnia-Herzegovina (Zvornik county)

²¹⁹ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 209

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 251-252

war, as well as many units who actually did the fighting and pursued the campaign of ethnic cleansing, cannot really be enough to support such a claim. I therefore turn to the next section, in which I will describe certain war-time activities which undoubtedly prove that defeating the enemy was for an exceptionally big number of those involved incomparably less important than making personal material gains, very often in cooperation *with* the enemy.

4. 4. War-zone -- A Free Trade Area

One of the rules in any war, which should never be broken if one intends to defeat the enemy, is that one should not do anything which might improve the enemy's position, increase the enemy's strength and enlarge the enemy's chances to win. Selling one's own weapons to the enemy is undoubtedly one of the first things in the list that must not be done if the above stated consequences are to be avoided. The list also includes selling fuel to the enemy and supplying them with food, water and electricity. It is not very recommendable either to rent one's military services to one's enemy in cases when the enemy engages in a war with a third party, even if this third party is one's own enemy as well. However, all these "absolutely-do-not-dos" were committed during the 1991-1995 war by all three warring sides, and with such extent and with so many people involved that they cannot be dismissed as isolated and insignificant episodes. On the contrary, the amazing persistence and breadth of these acts show that a tragic and perverse pattern existed indeed. The war lasted for so long because it was in the interest of a significant number of people, who were pulling the strings during the war, to make it last. For many people involved, winning the war was of secondary importance. The primary importance was to exploit to the maximum all the opportunities that business in a war zone -- in a free trade area par excellence -- offered.

Almost from the very beginning of the war in Bosnia certain areas were marked off as zones for free trading and black-marketeering, and were thus largely spared the horrors of the war. One such area was Cazinska Krajina, ruled by Fikret Abdic, and already discussed above. Serb general Djordje Djukic, stationed in western Bosnia, said that for 18 months during 1993 and 1994, army units under his command "moved" exclusively on the fuel supplied by Croats through Cazinska Krajina.²²¹

A similar arrangement was made in regard to the Tuzla region. Tuzla is a town in north-east Bosnia, roughly 50 kilometres away from both Serbia and Croatia. Through the large part of the war, it was almost completely surrounded by Serb forces, who nevertheless never tried to take it. The town suffered virtually no bombardment, in sharp

²²¹ Stevan L. Burg and Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention*, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1999, p. 138

contrast to other besieged cities. The reason was that Tuzla was one of the most important points where goods, arriving from Serbia to be sold to government-held Bosnian territory, and goods travelling in the opposite direction, were traded.²²² In the summer of 1993, when the fighting between Croat and Muslim armies started, the Croat forces cut the only road connecting Tuzla with the rest of the government-held territory. In theory therefore, Tuzla was completely surrounded by enemies who wanted either to take it over, or to starve it into submission. Yet, while it was true that life for the people in Tuzla became much harder, lack of food never seemed to be a problem. Even Macedonian cigarettes never disappeared from the town's market, obviously thanks to a regular supply across the "enemy lines." Supplies from Croatia and Serbia also never ceased to arrive. The only effect the complete encirclement had was that the prices went up, increasing the profit of alleged crazed nationalists, supposedly caring only about driving the Muslims out of Tuzla.²²³

Vares and Ilijas are two neighbouring small towns, about 40 kilometres north of Sarajevo. Vares was held by Croats and Ilijas by Serbs. Nevertheless these two towns entered into a very comfortable business relationship early in the war. Boro Jakic and Zdravko Barkic, the heads of Vares trade company *Veleprodaja* contacted their pre-war business partner Brane Damjanovic from Ilijas and the trade took off again. Every week four deliveries of cigarettes, sugar, oil, flour and other products would arrive to the *Veleprodaja* warehouse. Jakic, Barkic and Damjanovic had strong connections with their local authorities. In Vares, *Veleprodaja* was given an exclusive licence to trade. When Jakic travelled to Pale to meet with Velibor Ostojic, then a Minister of Trade in Pale government, he received an official police escort. When UNHCR officials came to Vares to inquire how much humanitarian aid needed to be delivered to the town, local officials refused the offer, saying that they had more than enough supplies of their own. The last thing they needed was humanitarian aid coming into the town, removing their monopoly and lowering the prices. *Veleprodaja* traded also with the Muslim side. As a result, Serbian supplies ended up in the storages of the Muslim troops, which were fighting the Serbs.²²⁴

In Sarajevo, business followed a similar pattern. Kiseljak is a majority Croat town on the edge of Sarajevo and at the time was a seat of the Bosnian Croat army. Throughout the war, Croats in Kiseljak traded both with people in Sarajevo and with the Serbs besieging it. Serbs would sell the goods to Croats, who would add their provision and sell them further to the Muslim mafia in Sarajevo, who were operating a cartel system which kept the prices in the city astronomical. A food item, for example, which normally would

²²² Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III: The Military Structure, Strategy and Tactics of the Warring Factions, Part II: Summary and Conclusions.

²²³ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 247-248

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 248-249

cost half a German mark, was sold in Sarajevo for fifteen. Having no other option but to give in to the extortion, organised by a gang combining Muslim-Croat-Serb profiteers, ordinary people in Sarajevo had to depart from their life-long savings in order to survive.²²⁵

Serbs and Muslims often traded without Croats as middlemen. In the besieged Srebrenica, Naser Oric, who regularly raided Serbian villages in the area, monopolised the black market, supplied exclusively by Serbian goods and confiscated humanitarian aid. Caravans of horses would track over Zlovrh mountain bringing salt, cigarettes, razor blades, oil, flour, fuel, tooth paste, soap and other goods to Srebrenica. Salt, essential for preserving meat and vegetables for the winter was an exceptionally sought after item, and Oric, who had the monopoly on the deliveries, set the prices. Usually a pound cost about ten dollars, but occasionally it reached even as high as fifty. When Oric learned that some other group was trying to arrange a deal to buy salt from the Serbs, he did not hesitate to ambush them and to kill the potential competitors.²²⁶

Trade often had a decisive impact on who was to fight whom. Despite the fact that the Croatian Defence Council and the Bosnian government forces fought together in defence of Sarajevo, Serbs seldom shelled the positions defended by Croat units who were their trading partners.²²⁷ When in May 1992, government forces tried to break the siege of Sarajevo by attacking Serb forces from behind, they were fought back and compelled to retreat not by the Serbs, but by their nominal Croatian allies from Kiseljak who would hate to see a nice business arrangement go to waste (it should be reminded that this was five months before the first clashes between the Croat and Muslim armies, and almost a year before the outbreak of a full-scale war in April 1993).²²⁸ Silber and Little also trace the origin of the Croat-Muslim conflict in a mafia dispute over oil smuggling. The conflict erupted on October 25, 1992, in the town of Prozor in central Bosnia. It is true that the tensions were already running high in the region, after the territories, which Croats perceived as "theirs," started to fill up with Muslim refugees. It is also true that the region was ruled by Dario Kordic (indicted by the Hague Tribunal for genocide and crimes against humanity), an extreme nationalist-cum-gangster convinced that Muslims are Croats of Islamic faith and that all of Bosnia belongs to Croatia, which undoubtedly increased these tensions. Yet the conflict erupted only when two rival mafia gangs, one Croatian and the other Muslim, tried to eliminate each other and acquire a full monopoly over the fuel trade in central Bosnia. The mafia clash soon became viewed as an "ethnic" conflict

²²⁵ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 295-296

²²⁶ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 243-244

²²⁷ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex III: The Military Structure, Strategy and Tactics of the Warring Factions, Section L: The Territorial Defence Forces of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina

²²⁸ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 206-207

making its origin and essence completely irrelevant and opening another bloody and entirely unnecessary chapter in the Yugoslav drama.²²⁹

The trade, which most directly revealed the "non-ethnic" face of the war in Yugoslavia, was the arms trade. Since Serbs "inherited" the lion's share of the weaponry of the former Yugoslav People's Army, they were most often selling, while Croats and Muslim were lining up as their customers. The fact that these same weapons were later used by Croat and Muslim units in their attacks on Serbian positions was no obstacle whatsoever.²³⁰ Business was exceptionally lively in Cazinska Krajina. A commander of one of the Croat units bought an anti-aircraft gun from a Serb. When he told him that he was going to use the gun against Serbs, his supplier answered that he could not care less.²³¹ Serbs from Kninska Krajina did not sell weapons only to Fikret Abdic (their business partner in whose company *Agrokomerc* they processed their crops), but also to the Fifth Corps of the Bosnian Government Army and therefore to the enemy of their fellow Serbs in Bosnia.²³²

A senior officer from the Bosnian Serb army in Ilijas sold a few pieces of heavy artillery to the nearby Muslim village. After that he packed his belongings and moved to Serbia with his family.²³³ Sudetic, who spent a lot of time in Bosnia during the war, described the illegal gun market in a bar of a hotel near the Mehmed Pasha bridge in Visegrad. The market was operating in the fall and winter of 1991, therefore during the war in Croatia, but before the outbreak of hostilities in Bosnia. The sellers were people from Radovan Karadzic's Serbian Democratic Party, and the buyers "prominent" local Muslims, Sabanovic brothers being typical representatives. One of them spent time in prison in 1970s for murder. By 1991, both brothers became "respectable businessmen," owning a couple of grocery stores in Visegrad. In 1991, they joined Izetbegovic's Party for Democratic Action and entered the arms distribution business. They would buy from Serbs and then sell on to other local Muslims.²³⁴ It is impossible to assume that the local representatives of Karadzic's party could not imagine that the Muslims would soon be using these same weapons against their fellow-Serbs. This only shows again that for many people involved, personal gains had an absolute priority over alleged national ones.

Judah writes that several hundred million German Marks were made through arms trade. But this was not the only way inventive "businesspersons" with abundance of weapons could make money. In Herzegovina, Croat units rented tanks from the Serbs for 1,000 DM per day, when they were fighting with Muslims. In turn, during the Croat-Muslim clashes in Mostar, Muslims paid Serbian units to shell Croat positions. Serbs,

²²⁹ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 293-294

²³⁰ Mueller, "The banality of 'Ethnic War,'" pp. 57-58

²³¹ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 243

²³² Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, p. 138

²³³ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 248

²³⁴ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 89-90

however, proved to be exceptional entrepreneurs and doubled the profit by warning Croats to clear out in exchange for a certain fee, before shelling their positions with exactly the number of projectiles the Muslims had paid for.²³⁵

Plundering, black marketing, racketeering the refugees, selling weapons to the enemy and the numerous ways to make profit during the war explain much of what was happening during the war in Yugoslavia and help make sense from some seemingly completely irrational events. Yet, they cannot and do not explain all, or even most of the horrible crimes committed. Personal gain was the most important motivating factor for a significant number of crucial figures responsible for the outbreak of the war, and also for many of those who participated in numerous paramilitary units. But it cannot explain in any satisfactory way the destruction of Vukovar, the bombardment of Sarajevo, the concentration camps established by all three involved sides, the massacres in Gorazde and especially in Srebrenica (where between 8,000 and 10,000 unarmed civilians were killed), the exceptionally wide-spread sexual crimes and especially rapes, the turning of Kninska Krajina into a wasteland by the advancing Croatian army, and the senseless destruction of towns, villages and infrastructure. Various supporting theories, which try to make some sense out of this senselessness are listed in the next section.

4. 5. Violent Highlanders, City-loathers, Revenge-seekers, and Patriarchal Women-haters

Different authors have provided numerous explanations for many seemingly irrational and inhumanly violent episodes from the war. Unfortunately, due to the spatial limitations, these explanations cannot be discussed in detail. They nevertheless deserve to be at least acknowledged.

Some authors argue that the war in former Yugoslavia was not so much a war between nations as one between rural and urban cultures. Bombardment and destruction of cities was, according to this theory, a result of deep-seated stereotypes and uneasiness among people who never understood the urban way of life and the urban outlook even if they settled in cities. These stereotypes were based on collective memories, traditionalism and a more patriarchal general view of the world. Bozidar Vucurevic, one of the commanders of the units shelling Dubrovnik stated that Dubrovnik was "a Latin town built on Serbian rocks", and that "life within it was always whorish [leaving no] room for an honest Serb." He added that if they destroyed Dubrovnik, they would build "an even

²³⁵ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 249-250

prettier and older Dubrovnik" if needed. In 1993 Radovan Karadzic stated that "we from Durmitor mountain are a free people, and we have often felt that towns are like prisons."²³⁶

The uneasiness about the cities was not limited only to "enemy" cities but was transcending ethnic lines. In 1992 Sonja Karadzic, Radovan Karadzic's daughter, complained how disappointed she was with Belgrade and its "liberalism" (people of all ethnic groups continued to live there side by side, and the resistance to the current regime was very noticeable). She concluded that young people in rural areas were much healthier and did "not think about such things."²³⁷ On one occasion Dragoslav Bokan, an ultra-nationalist politician and leader of Seselj's Chetniks declared that Belgrade "does not belong to Serbdom," and that it "betrayed Serbdom." Another unidentified person described Belgrade as Tito's whore, because the city wanted to be Yugoslav, cosmopolitan and democratic, and the only thing it did not want to be was Serbian. When searching for cannon-fodder, ready to kill and die in the name of his nationalistic rhetoric, Milosevic did not turn to people in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Nis. He addressed the people in villages and small towns (which were much more rural than urban), and the opposition to urban life, urban culture and artificiality of cities became a vital part of the nationalist propaganda of his regime.²³⁸

Another closely related theory blames the violence mainly on the highlanders, living along the Dinaric mountain range (Kninska Krajina, Dalmatia, Hercegovina and Montenegro). The arguments backing this theory seem very plausible. Already Jovan Cvijic, the famous Serbian nineteenth-century geographer and anthropologist, described the Dinaric men as energetic, impulsive and prepared to die for their nation. The Dinaric mountains were, according to him, "consumed with a burning desire to avenge Kosovo and to revive the Serbian Empire." Each Dinaric peasant felt as "his own ancestors the heroes of his nation's history" and dreamt of killing "lots of Turks to avenge his ancestors." This is of course an exaggeration, born by the nineteenth century spirit of rising nationalism, especially strong among the Serbs in this historic period, due to the fact that many of their perceived brethren were still under Ottoman or Habsburg rule. Nevertheless we cannot disregard these claims as completely baseless. The Dinaric range has always been the most inhospitable (harsh climate, very little arable land) and backward region of South Slav lands, where people live divided in clans, observing their strict, patriarchal life-style.²³⁹ The poverty of the people engaged in a daily struggle to survive combined with isolation and preservation of a tribal social structure, helped to create a cult of violence, supported by preservation of numerous pagan traditions, wide spread illiteracy (well into the twentieth century) and popularity of heroic folk songs (as essential instrument of

²³⁶ Sretan Vujovic, "An Uneasy View of the City," *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 131-135

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Eric D. Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and Destruction of Alternatives*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, pp. 13-14

²³⁹ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 65-66

education). This cult of violence was glorified by nationalist ideologies as a heroic lifestyle, dedicated to freedom and independence, something that the city dwellers and the people from the plains had allegedly lost.²⁴⁰ As Sudetic points out, for example, the cult of arms, especially knives and rifles, is of an exceptional daily importance, and even blood vendetta survived well into the twentieth century.²⁴¹

The Dinaric mountain range has been the scene of some of the most violent episodes in recent South Slav history. In 1847, Montenegrin *vladika* (prince - bishop) Petar Petrovic Njegos wrote the epic poem *Gorski Vijenac* (Mountain Wreath), which came to be regarded as one of the greatest works of *Serbian* (since at the time Montenegrins were regarded as Serbs) literature. From a contemporary point of view though, the poem can be seen as a glorification of ethnic cleansing (one of the verses speaks about the need to "cleanse the country from infidels") and genocide. It describes a real event from the end of seventeenth century, known as the "Christmas Eve Massacre of Muslims." The verses are clear and telling: "We burned all Turkish houses / That there might be no abode nor trace / Of our infidel domestic enemy," and "The slaughter lasted one day and one night / The Crnica river was filled with Turks / There is no longer in our district / Any trace of Turkish presence / Except for headless corpses or ruins."²⁴² The Great Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878, which ended with the Congress of Berlin, started with rebellions and massacres in Hercegovina.²⁴³ During W. W. II, the Dinaric range was again the scene of the most violent and bloody fighting and the centre of both Ustashe and Chetnik activity.²⁴⁴

The legacy of Dinaric violent traditions was blamed also for the violence and destruction committed between 1991 and 1995 in northern Bosnia and even in Slavonian plains, because of the fact that many Dinaric highlanders migrated to the lowlands after 1945 in search of a better life. Many authors claim that *starosedeoici* (the original inhabitants of various ethnicities) never had any problems co-existing with each other and remained calm even when the war erupted. Those who grabbed the guns and started destroying the environment they were never able to adopt to were *dosljaci* (the newcomers).²⁴⁵

Many of the atrocities committed, especially in the later stages of the war, were a result of desperation, hunger and thirst for revenge. Sudetic describes the appearance of the so-called *torbari* (the bag people) who would attack villages in search for food, killing all the inhabitants along.²⁴⁶ People from villages which were ethnically cleansed, whose homes were destroyed and whose family members killed, would often use the first

²⁴⁰ Anzulovic, *The Heavenly Serbia*, pp. 45-49

²⁴¹ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 89-90

²⁴² Anzulovic, *The Heavenly Serbia*, pp. 51-53

²⁴³ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 81-82

²⁴⁴ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 153-160

²⁴⁵ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 244-246; Popov, "Traumatology of the Party State," *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 91-92; Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp.139-141

²⁴⁶ Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 157-159

opportunity to get "even" with any unfortunate member of the nation to which the gang that terrorised them belonged. This self-accumulating circle of violence is a possible explanation for the most gruesome massacre of the war - Srebrenica. First, Serbian paramilitary gangs attacked Muslim villages, killing, plundering and burning. The surviving Muslims retreated to Srebrenica, where, completely encircled, they were at the edge of starvation. In search of food and revenge they would join the attacks, led by the paramilitary units of Naser Oric, against unprotected Serbian villages in the area. On December 14, 1992, two villages were burned and sixty-three Serbs, who did not managed to escape, massacred. Survivors and relatives of the killed were waiting for two and a half years to get their revenge. When their turn came, the revenge was horrible and up to 10,000 Muslims in Srebrenica are estimated to have been killed.²⁴⁷

Finally, authors like Ugresic and Papic explain the exceptionally widespread violence against women during the war as a result of the general attitude towards women in patriarchal Yugoslav society, which was pushed to its extremes by the war and the associated social disintegration and breakdown of law and order. Given the scope of the crimes committed, there can hardly be any doubt that sexual violence was a part of a vicious plan, designed to maximise the terror and thus drive as many people as possible away from their homes. The Serbian army allegedly operated in Bosnia according to a plan called RAM, which stated that Muslim morale and desire for battle would be crushed more easily by raping Muslim women, especially minors and even children.²⁴⁸ Yet, the realisation of such a plan would not be possible without a sufficient number of men with a fundamentally patriarchal mind-set, in which women are presented as hardly more than objects, designed to serve a particular goal. Already marginalized and victimised, especially in the more traditional parts of the country, women suffered even more and were completely depersonalised in the war, given only two roles to play: either of national "birth-machines," or of targets through which other nations were attacked. In both cases, women's bodies were used as an essential instrument of male war strategy.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 73-75; Sudetic, *Blood and Vengeance*, pp. 253-255

²⁴⁸ Commission of Experts, *Final Report*, Annex IV: The Policy of Ethnic Cleansing, Part Two: Ethnic Cleansing in BIH, Section III: Planning and Implementing the Ethnic Cleansing Campaign, Point A: Preparing the War.

²⁴⁹ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, pp. 113-126, Zarana Papic, "Women in Serbia: Post-communism, War, and Nationalist Mutations," in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, pp. 153-169

5. From Myths to War and from War to Myths: The Ninth Circle of the Yugoslav Hell

As discussed in the previous two chapters, the political elites, threatened by the economic and social disintegration, which undermined their political authority, used Yugoslavia's ethnic diversity to divert attention from their own incompetence and found a convenient scapegoat either in other ethnic group(s) or in Yugoslavia's federal arrangement. Most often, these two excuses were combined into a claim that a particular ethnic group had created the existing federal structure so that it could exploit and subordinate other nations. To make their claims resonate better with their targeted audience, the elites connected them with real or mythical episodes from the past, giving their newly coined conspiracy theories a "historical" dimension. Yet, while this was undoubtedly enough to stir up the passions and increase the distance and mistrust among various nations, it was not enough to push Yugoslavia into a war. For this to happen, criminal paramilitary groups had to be employed, terrorising the civilian population and proving beyond a doubt that "the others" truly represent a grave threat to their personal security and to the existence of their nations.

In turn, the only way to persuade the majority of people that what was happening was "truly" an ethnic war and not a rampage of criminal gangs, was to create new myths, which were used to present an appropriate image of the war. Members of the political elites and the media under their control thus presented the war in a way, which would appeal to the largest segment of the population under their rule and generate support both for the elites and for the war itself. In the Serbian case, the war was presented as another episode in the old Serbian struggle against the genocidal Croats and their "Turkish" (Bosnian Muslim) partners. As Heavenly People, the Serbs would inevitably win this struggle, the propaganda proclaimed, offering strong incentives to Serbian people to join the war. On the Croatian side, mythical presentation of the war pictured it as the final and ultimate Serbian attempt to subjugate and annex parts of the "historic Croatian land." All the Croats should therefore feel obliged to stand up to defend their homeland, just as their ancestors did on numerous occasions in the past, and if necessary, sacrifice their lives on the altar of the sacred Croatian soil.

Simultaneously with the creation of myths that obscured the truth about the Croatian and Serbian involvement in the war, new post-Yugoslav Croatian and Serbian identities were forged. The new political elites and their "servants" among the intellectuals and the media, people whom Ugresic describes as the Great Manipulators, proclaimed that Yugoslavia was above all a lie and a prison of nations. Then they set about dismantling it through production of hatred, lies and madness. A process, which can be defined as a new national homogenisation, started, meaning to *cleanse* the nation from all foreign (that is

dirty) additives (like improper words, habits *and* people).²⁵⁰ This process, this struggle for the creation of a new national identity which would be *liberated* from the bonds of the imposed (according to the claims of the Great Manipulators) Yugoslavism, became, as Ugresic writes, an all-round excuse for war crimes, madness, hatred, profiteering and territorial ambitions. After 1945, the new Communist authorities forbade all memories of the crimes and atrocities their side committed and replaced the confiscated set of memories with a new one in which all the horrors were remembered as committed *only* by the enemy: German and Italian Fascists and their Ustashe and Chetnik servants. After 1991 the same pattern was repeated. The new post-communist²⁵¹ (but equally authoritarian) authorities declared that they were waging a war for freedom and justice against vicious fascists who, naturally, were responsible for *all* the crimes and horrors committed. *Our* side was just and innocent, simply a defenceless victim. Thus, the only thing, Ugresic concludes, for which there was absolutely no place in the aggressive propaganda glorifying *our* just struggle, was shame. What in other circumstances would represent a total moral defeat and an ultimate reason to feel ashamed, was celebrated as a collective triumph which the members of new nation-in-making should feel proud of.²⁵²

5. 1. Heavenly People versus Genocidal Ustashe

As stated above, the war was presented in Serbia as a just and defensive struggle of innocent Serbian people, threatened by a genocide, planned by Croatian Fascists and their Islamic Fundamentalist assistants. This picture was presented by the Serbian media, and supported by the Serbian political elites, and a large number of Serbian intellectuals, artists, and representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church. To make it credible, it was symbolically linked to the central Serbian historic myth, the myth about Serbs as Heavenly People. In this way the old myth extended its "ancient" credibility to the new myth, which was being made. The official presentation of the war thus became a dogma (like the Heavenly People myth itself), which cannot and must not be questioned. As Thompson writes, war could only be sustained if the majority of Serbs truly believed that "their" army was fighting a just war in the interest of all Serbs.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, pp. 39-41

²⁵¹ It can be argued how "post-communist" they actually were. In Serbia, Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia just slightly modified its name, and Milosevic and his new communist-turned-socialist government continued to rule more or less in the same way as before. In Croatia, both Tudjman and his first Defence Minister Spegelj were former communists and high ranking officers in the Federal Army. After the elections, the reforming Croatian Communist Party rapidly lost many of its members, many of whom joined the HDZ.

²⁵² Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, pp. 193-195

²⁵³ Mark Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina*. London: Article 19 - International Centre Against Censorship, 1994, p. 51

A part of the Serbian society had been speaking the genocide-is-threatening-us language well before the war even started. At first, its main target was the Kosovo Albanians. They were allegedly terrorising the Serbs in the province, forcing them to leave, which is what many Serbs indeed did in the 1980s. Exactly how much their departing was connected with backwardness and poverty in Kosovo, and how much with the real Albanian pressure, is still a question of debate, but it is not of crucial importance for analysing the conflict-prone language, developing in Serbia in the mid-1980s. The SANU Memorandum, written in 1986, was the first occasion on which the term "genocide" was used. The Memorandum warned that the Serbs were facing "genocide," "genocidal terror" and "neo-Fascist aggression" in Kosovo. In the following years, "genocide" became the most abused and misused word in the Serbian war propaganda vocabulary. At the time the Memorandum was written, the Serbs in Croatia were still considered to be "only" victims of "discrimination and of subtle and effective politics of assimilation," since they, according to the Memorandum, did not have the right to "use their language and alphabet or to form political or cultural organisations."²⁵⁴

The effect the Memorandum had on the ordinary Serbs was a result of the authority and prestige enjoyed by its sixteen authors (all well-known and respected Serbian academics). The Memorandum "scientifically" confirmed the popular Serbian self-perception as victims, and reinforced the conviction that other Yugoslav nations were plotting against them (a view widespread in Serbia since the 1974 Yugoslav constitution, which thoroughly decentralised the federation). It is difficult to judge what the real intentions of the authors of the Memorandum were. In 1986, nationalism and criticism of the "Brotherhood and Unity" policy were still a taboo. This was true also in Serbia and most of the members of the Serbian League of Communists sharply criticised the Memorandum. Populist scoring of political points was therefore hardly the intention of its authors. Most likely, they expressed their genuine concerns over what they perceived as a threat to the Serbian nation. Serbs *were* moving out of Kosovo, and in Croatia, they *were* abandoning the Cyrillic script and *were* speaking Croatian, rather than Serbian dialect(s). Where the Memorandum was dangerously wrong was when it attributed quite normal and logical patterns of migration from less to more developed regions, and (partial) assimilation to genocide and discrimination.²⁵⁵

At roughly the same time, the Serbian Orthodox Church started to get involved in politics. Its officials started to send petitions to the Serbian and the federal authorities, demanding protections of "the spiritual and biological being of the Serbian people in Kosovo." The church newspaper *Pravoslavlje* (Orthodoxy) regularly published articles, describing alleged crimes committed by the Kosovo Albanians against the Serbs. The newspaper also started a series of articles, which featured detailed stories about the mass

²⁵⁴ Milosavljevic, "The Abuse of the Authority of Science" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 279-280

²⁵⁵ Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, pp. 114-118

killings of the Serbs in the NDH, and about the Ustashe concentration camps. In 1984, the then-Patriarch German dedicated a new church in Jasenovac (location of the most infamous Ustashe concentration camp). On the occasion, he called upon people to forgive, but not to forget. In 1998, Dragomir Ubiparipovic, a priest from Sarajevo, wrote an article about "cultural and religious genocide against Serbs in Sarajevo." He supported his claim with the fact that all tourist brochures about Sarajevo deliberately promoted mainly Islamic cultural monuments.²⁵⁶

When Milosevic became a champion of the Serbian nationalism, the Serbian Orthodox Church gave him its full support. On June 28, 1989 (six hundredth anniversary of the Kosovo battle), the church periodical *Glas crkve* (Voice of the Church) published a "Proposal for the Serbian Church and National Program." The Proposal, similarly to the Memorandum, lamented about half a century of economic subordination, underdevelopment, partitions and political inferiority of Serbs. Then it turned to praise the new Serbian authorities who were the first to be able to "correctly use the great democratic energy and spiritual potential" of Serbs, making it possible for them to again freely determine their own fate.²⁵⁷

The Association of the Serbian Writers, which appeared in the early 1980s as a very liberal-minded centre of resistance to the communist regime, also joined the nationalistic camp, especially after Milosevic's 1986 ascent. The Association also first picked up the Kosovo cause, but soon moved also to Croatia, expressing concern over the fate of Serbs in that republic, in which "political demonism has destroyed all reason."²⁵⁸ Poets and writers played an exceptionally important role in the promotion of hatred and intolerance. The already quoted Matija reference to the Croatian Serbs as "the remnants of a slaughtered people" had an enormous effect among the Serbs. Beckovic was also among the first to demand that Serbs in Croatia be armed. Radovan Karadzic, one of those most responsible for the genocide in Bosnia, was a poet (and psychiatrist). Nikola Koljevic, his close associate and his Vice President, was also a poet and one of the leading Yugoslav experts on Shakespeare. Bozidar Vucurevic, another poet, became one of the paramilitary warlords in eastern Hercegovina and was a commander of troops, which were bombing Dubrovnik. One of the most prominent Yugoslav novelists Dobrica Cosic became a hard-line President of the third, rump Yugoslavia in 1992.

The most popular Serbian opposition leader in the first half of the 1990s, Vuk Draskovic, was also a novelist. In 1982, he published his most well-known work, a best-selling novel entitled *Noz* (The Knife). Most of the novel takes place during World War II in Bosnia, and is full of exceptionally graphic descriptions of scenes in which sadistic

²⁵⁶ Radic, "The Church and the 'Serbian Question'" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 248-256

²⁵⁷ Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, pp. 121-122

²⁵⁸ Gojkovic, "The Birth of Nationalism from the Spirit of Democracy" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 340-342

Croat and Muslim Ustashe are massacring innocent Serbs. Branislav Lainovic, who became a leader of a brutal paramilitary unit, called the Serbian Guard, organised by Draskovic's party Serbian Renewal Movement, stated that even before the war, he used to beat up many Croats and Muslims because of *Noz*. Vojislav Lubarda's trilogy *Transfiguration, Repentance and Ascension*, Nedjo Sipovac's *Springtime in the South* and *Summer on the Mountain, 1941*, Jovan Radulovic's *Golubnjaca* (name of a pit in Croatia, where bodies of massacred Serbs were thrown) and Slobodan Selenic's *Timor Mortis* (Fear of Death) similarly described killings of innocent Serbs by Croatian and Muslim Fascists. None of these works made even a slight reference to innocent Croats and Muslims, massacred by Chetniks and other Serbian paramilitary troops, and to numerous pits into which Croatian and Muslim bodies were thrown.²⁵⁹

Gagnon argues that the Serbian League of Communists under Milosevic (who became its head in 1986) responded to the challenge threatening their rule (popular discontent over the worsening living conditions) by endorsing nationalism. By promising to defend "the national dignity of Serbia," Milosevic and his circle managed to transform the pressure to change the political system into a pressure to change the Yugoslav federal arrangement and, later on, republican borders. To do so, Serbian authorities, with the help of the controlled media, began an aggressive campaign of "production" of alleged Serbian enemies. This created a strong nationalistic backlash in other republics, especially in Croatia, reinforcing the initial claims of Milosevic's propaganda regarding the reemerging anti-Serb sentiment in Croatia. Following the HDZ electoral victory in Croatia, Serbian authorities intensified their denigration of Croats. The state media in Serbia were full of stories, warning the Serbian readers that Ustashe had returned.²⁶⁰

With elections in Serbia approaching, and wanting to make sure that they avoid electoral defeat suffered by Communists in Slovenia and Croatia, Milosevic and his associates engaged in what Woodward called "a psychological warfare" (psychological warfare was practised also by Slovene authorities since 1987, although in a less aggressive manner than in Serbia, and also by the HDZ in Croatia since 1990). Psychological warfare soon turned into a real war. In Yugoslavia, every nation was a minority, and constant bombardment with references to exploitation, threats and victimisation quite naturally resulted in the creation of dangerous paranoia. Influenced by propaganda, many ordinary people began to "recall" their own unpleasant experiences with people from other nations and to realise just how much "truth" was actually in various stereotypes they had always regarded as nonsense (i. e. all Croats are Ustashe, or all Serbs are barbaric primitives).²⁶¹ Fear, intensified with a number of staged violent confrontations (like in Plitvice, Pakrac

²⁵⁹ Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, pp. 128-140

²⁶⁰ Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict," pp. 151-157

²⁶¹ Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, pp. 228-229

and Borovo selo, where Seselj's paramilitaries ambushed and killed twelve Croatian policemen on May 2, 1991) made most of the people chose sides and give their support to those promising to protect them.

When the real war started, psychological warfare intensified even more. To present the Serbian involvement in the war as a just and defensive struggle against the demonic enemy and thus as a worthy replica of glorious events from the past, quotations from folk songs and proverbs, and citations from various literary works, especially from *Gorski Vijenac*, were added to the militant speeches. Thus, a genre of "war propaganda folklore" was created, easing the transformation of the truth about the war into a myth.²⁶² In August 1991, when the war in Croatia was well under way, Croatian Serbs organised a festival of music and dance in the village of Strmica. Milan Martić, the President of the "Republic of Srpska Krajina," was sitting in the first row, listening to succession of singers, accompanied by bagpipes and guslas. One of them was singing: "Krajina, our Mother / We won't leave you to the Ustashe." The already mentioned BBS documentary *Serbian Epics* featured a Serbian soldier playing gusla and singing: "Oh, Sarajevo down in the valley / The Serbs have encircled you."²⁶³

The media played a decisive role in presenting the mythical perspective of the war and in convincing people to accept it as the truth. Among them, Serbian Radio and Television (RTS) was by far the most important and influential. With the pauperisation of the Serbs, newspapers lost much of their audience. For example, *Vecernje Novosti*, an extremely pro-government daily, sold over 300,000 copies in the late 1980s, but only 27,000 by August 1993. Press, nevertheless, continued to influence the educated urban middle class.²⁶⁴

The most prestigious Serbian daily used to be *Politika*. It used to be a public forum in which everyone, who wanted to count on public support, simply had to appear if s/he wanted to be taken seriously. *Politika* used to enjoy high credibility, and always featured a prominent number of editors and journalists, who were inclined to "disobedience." After 1987, Serbian authorities started to get directly involved in the paper's editorial policy. Gradually, most of its staff was dismissed and substituted with people loyal to Milošević. The daily was soon transformed into an important element of Milošević's propaganda machine.²⁶⁵ When the Serbs in Croatia proclaimed autonomy on July 25, 1990, *Politika* hailed the Serbian uprising (the same word, uprising or *ustanak*, is used to refer to the Serbian rebellions against the Ottoman Empire in 1804 and 1815) and quoted the then Krajina leader, Jovan Rasković, that he would not "negotiate with Ustashe." The reminder of the issue featured numerous articles about the crimes Ustashe committed during W.W.

²⁶² Olga Zirojević, "Kosovo in the Collective Memory" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 208-209

²⁶³ Judah, *The Serbs*, pp. 42-43

²⁶⁴ Thompson, *Forging War*, p. 64

²⁶⁵ Aleksandar Nenadović, "Politika in the Storm of Nationalism" in *The Road to War in Serbia*, pp. 537-542

II. In the following month, *Politika* was full of headlines such as "Serb children held as hostages," "Ustashe are destroying Yugoslavia," "Attack on the Serb people," "Scenes from 50 years ago repeated," "1941 started with same methods," "Genocide must not be repeated" and similar. Articles often pointed out that unarmed Serbs were defenceless and left to the mercy of the vicious enemy.²⁶⁶ Articles, describing Serbian involvement in violent occurrences, were entitled "We shall resist," "Protecting the Serbian people," and "Serbian unity saving Krajina," stressing its defensive character.²⁶⁷ Even when it was openly agitating for the war and called on Serbs from Serbia proper to go to fight in Croatia, *Politika* stressed that their mission was defensive, since they were going to "defend our people from Ustashe." When the war in Bosnia started, *Politika* reprinted a series of First World War propaganda posters communicating the idea that "Serbia needs your help."²⁶⁸

Daily newspapers, despite being very important, could not match RTS, which became *the* most important means for spreading Milosevic's propaganda. In the summer of 1991 the entire RTS management was dismissed and the institution was transformed into a tool of the ruling party. RTS journalists, hand-picked by the regime, prepared scores of reports from the war zones, each presenting Serbs as unarmed victims of genocide. Croat and Muslim victims and refugees were never mentioned, and the atrocities committed by the Serb army and paramilitaries were also carefully omitted. Numerous documentaries, produced by RTS, drew parallels between W.W. II and the current war. In October 1991, three million Serbs (more than 60 per cent of the population over 10 years of age) named RTS evening news as their main source of information.²⁶⁹

RTS coverage of the war rarely featured actual footage from the war zone. Most often, journalists would read a report while the viewers would gaze into a map, a photograph or into an archive film, most often from before the war. The true horrors of the war were rarely seen. Instead, appropriate images were supplied by commentators, referring to Serbs "fighting for freedom" and "protecting their native soil" against "evil-doers," "cut-throats," "Ustashe," "*mujahedins*," "Fascist terrorists" and "Islamic extremists." According to RTS news, the Serbian side never attacked, but was only responding to attacks. When Serbs took over a town or a village, they "liberated" it. According to the reporter Rade Djokic, even Sarajevo was not under Serbian siege. Rather, the Muslim authorities were "holding Sarajevo under siege from within" and the Serbs only defended "their centuries-old hills around Sarajevo." RTS therefore constructed a parallel reality, according to which forces from Serbia proper never attacked Bosnia, in

²⁶⁶ Thompson, *Forging War*, pp. 70-73

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-81

²⁶⁹ Veljanovski, "Turning the Electronic Media Around," pp. 577-580

which Serbs were always innocent and "almost" defenceless victims, and in which Serbs never killed innocent people and destroyed villages and towns.²⁷⁰

Given the almost exclusive monopoly on information by RTS, it is not very surprising that the majority of its viewers took the "reality" it was presenting for granted. For example, in July 1992, the Institute for Political Studies conducted a survey in Belgrade (where people had access to number of alternative sources of information, as compared to the countryside where RTS was virtually the only one). 1,380 respondents were asked who was bombing Sarajevo. Of those who answered, 38.4 per cent said that the Muslim-Croat forces were bombing it, 22.5 per cent said they did not know, and only 20.5 per cent answered that the Serbian forces were responsible for the bombing. The power and influence of RTS were demonstrated by another survey. On April 9, 1993, 70 per cent of respondents said they were against the Vance-Owen peace plan in Bosnia, just as Milosevic was against it and just as RTS was telling them that they should be. During the following two weeks, Milosevic changed his mind and became a vocal supporter of the plan and RTS started to highlight all the benefits the plan would bring to the Serbs. A survey conducted on April 27 showed that only 20 per cent of respondents were still against the plan, while 39 per cent were in favour.²⁷¹

The media, however, were not the only tool Milosevic's regime used to construct a parallel reality from which all references to Serbian war crimes were deleted. The Serbian Orthodox Church also played an important part. When Arkan's and other paramilitary units were massacring the Muslim population in Zvornik in early April 1992, Patriarch Pavle wrote in *Pravoslavlje* that "Serbian people were not aggressors in the Bosnian conflict" and even if some of them truly committed crimes, they did so only because they were acting "aggressively in self-defence." Dragan Terzic, the editor of *Pravoslavlje* wrote an article, warning that Serbs would again become slaves as they were for almost five centuries if they allow *mujahedins* to govern them. A theologian Bozidar Mijac wrote that God was on the side of the Serbs, because just like in 1389, Serbs were fighting to defend their souls, soil and religion. The Kosovo battle was recalled also by an article, published in July 1993, which declared that the Almighty God and His Justice, and all of the Serbian saints, led by Saint Sava, were standing beside the proud Serbian people, who choose to defy the threatening forces.²⁷²

Explaining who was building a parallel reality and obscuring the truth about the war, and how they did it, is only one half of the answer. What remains unclear is why did the majority of Serbs actually believe what they were told. Part of the explanation may be hidden in a survey conducted in October 1990 in Serbia. The results showed that most of

²⁷⁰ Thompson, *Forging War*, pp. 102-111

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127

²⁷² Radic, "The Church and the 'Serbian Question,'" pp. 260-267

the people were exceptionally worried, insecure and afraid, since they believed that the future would bring only more poverty, conflicts and war. The passivity, apathy and lack of individualism, generated by 45 years of life in a communist run society made most of the Yugoslavs inclined to believe that they were truly the victims. The survey confirmed this perception, with 27.5 per cent of the people stating that they were frightened for themselves and their families, and further 66.4 per cent responding that they were worried. Most respondents (52.2 per cent) felt completely powerless to change anything on their own. The research also showed that most Serbs supported an authoritarian rule, that they preferred conformism, were resistant to change, and were unwilling to take risks.²⁷³ Vuk Draskovic once described an encounter he had with a Serbian peasant during the election campaign in the early 1990s. Draskovic explained to the man why Milosevic and his Socialist Party were dangerous for Serbia and why it was essential that they lose the elections. The peasant agreed with everything Draskovic told him. The latter then asked him whether he could count on his vote, since he obviously believed that it would be better if Milosevic was really removed. To Draskovic's surprise, the peasant replied negatively, explaining that he would vote for Draskovic when he was in power.²⁷⁴

The devastating economic conditions in Serbia during the war (forty per cent of the factories stopped working, coupons were introduced for rationed supplies of flour, oil, sugar, detergent, fuel and other products, a record-breaking hyperinflation depleted the savings) made people concerned only about the survival of their families. Seeking out the "truth" about the war was far from being a top priority. Moreover, the myth which completely confirmed the self-perception most of the Serbs grew up with (namely, that throughout history, Serbs were *always* on the right side, engaged in a heroic struggle against tyranny and oppression), did an exceptionally important thing for most of them, and this should not be underestimated. In a time of complete personal humiliation and powerlessness, the myth about the Heavenly People liberating again the enslaved and terrorised brethren, gave many Serbs the only thing that kept them going through the hardship – collective dignity. Having nothing else to hold on to anymore, many Serbs held on to a lie.

The exceptional success with which the truth about the war was substituted with its mythical presentation is a result of a combination of several factors, and most likely, if any one of them was missing from the equation, the result would not be so astonishing. First, one should not underestimate the almost absolute lack of immunity against intoxication with propaganda, characteristic for people who live in conditions of *total* economic and social collapse. To illustrate what I mean by total, a short reference to Serbian hyperinflation should, I presume, suffice. For over two years, Serbs lived under circumstances in which what most people perceive as normal life was completely

²⁷³ Obradovic, "The Ruling Party," pp. 442-444

²⁷⁴ Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia*, p. 21

impossible. By January 1994, hyperinflation reached 313,563,558 per cent monthly. Annually, this amounted to unbelievable 851,000,000, 000,000,000, 000,000,000, 000,000,000, 000,000,000, 000,000,000, 000,000,000, 000,000,000 (all together 78 zeros) per cent.²⁷⁵ The second factor was almost complete monopoly on information Milosevic's regime had. Pauperisation made it virtually impossible for majority of people to seek alternative sources of information, since they either could not afford them or were completely preoccupied with trying to feed themselves and their families. The third was the church, especially in rural areas the pole around which a large part of village life was spinning. As discussed above, the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church played a very important role in explaining the Serbs that they were again involved in a "heavenly" struggle for their "souls, soil and religion." And last, the aura of the Serbian heroic past, which embraced the official account of the Serbian participation in the war through numerous references and ties made with the myths and mythic history depicting it, cast all the doubts away. When "Heavenly People" are fighting "the Genocidal Ustashe" and "the Turks," does an individual Serb really have a luxury of choosing sides? I would argue that s/he does, all odds against notwithstanding. I will discuss the decision of most Serbs not to do so (that is, not really choosing, but simply accepting the role ascribed to them by the elites), its consequences and the need for Serbs to come to terms with it in the conclusion.

5. 2. "European" Victims and "Balkan" Aggressors

The Croatian nationalism was a relative latecomer. Unlike in Serbia and Slovenia, where a nationalistic agenda was picked up by the ruling Communist Parties, the Croatian Communists, thoroughly purged after 1971, were to a large extent Orthodox-Marxist supporters of Yugoslavism and "Brotherhood and Unity" policy. Led by the hard-core apparatchik Stipe Suvar, the Croatian authorities for three years tried to oppose Milosevic's nationalistic onslaught on the Yugoslav federal arrangement with Titoist-Marxist vocabulary, taking extreme care never to cross the Rubicon of nationalistic rhetoric. The three years of holding back the desire of many Croats to fight fire with fire resulted in the 1990 emergence of Franjo Tudjman and his Croatian Democratic Community, the indisputable winners of the elections held that year. From the very beginning, Tudjman and his party adopted an exceptionally aggressive nationalistic tone, which clearly set the boundaries between (allegedly) "European," civilised, democratic, developed, educated and Catholic Croats on one side, and (allegedly) "Balkan," primitive, authoritarian, backward, illiterate Orthodox Serbs on the other. Since it was, according to the HDZ officials, impossible for two nations, so different and so incompatible, to live

²⁷⁵ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 268

together in one state, especially since the “culturally inferior” nation was trying to subjugate the “culturally superior” one, Croats had no other option but to declare independence of their historic homeland.

Slaven Letica, one of the closest Tudjman’s advisors between May 1990 and March 1991 wrote an article in March 1989, in which he claimed that in Yugoslavia two cultures and two political models had developed -- the monistic (one party) authoritarian model, linked to Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, and the pluralistic democratic model of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. The newsletter of the HDZ featured an article, explaining that the party would return Croatia to Central Europe to which it had always belonged, except in the recent past when it was “subordinated to an Asiatic form of government.”²⁷⁶

In a speech delivered to the Croatian Parliament when the new constitution was promulgated on December 22, 1990, President Tudjman stated that within Yugoslavia, Croatia was “endangered by dogmatic-communist, Yugoslav-unitarist and greater-Serbian-hegemonistic forces.” He also added that Croats had been developing their national identity and statehood since their first independent medieval state and that the Croatian state never ceased to exist until 1918. In his long speech he similarly did not fail to stress again that Croats always belonged to Central and Western Europe, since they were a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as opposed to half-oriental Serbs, whose culture was a combination of Ottoman and Byzantine influences. The lawlessness, incited by “some republics, waging media, psychological and economic war on others,” left Croatia, Tudjman stated, no other option but to assert its right to independent statehood again.²⁷⁷

Almost immediately after the HDZ electoral victory, a rebellion started in the predominantly Serb-populated Kninska Krajina. The local Serbian police refused to wear the new Croatian uniforms, decorated with the new (old) Croatian red-and-white chessboard sign, which substituted the red star on the Croatian flag. Despite the fact that the “chessboard” was a symbol of the Croatian medieval state, many Serbs associated it with the NDH period, when it was used as official state insignia. Refusing to acknowledge the new republican authorities, the Krajina Serbs soon proclaimed autonomy of their region and used force against the attempts of the Croatian police to retake control of the area. The Yugoslav Federal Army openly sided with the insurgents, sending two MIG fighters on one occasion to intercept two Croatian police helicopters, headed for Knin. Croatian media mocked the Serbian rebels, portraying them as drunken hillbillies, wearing Chetnik hats and characteristic long beards. Since the Serbs used trees to blockade the main roads, leading to Knin, their rebellion was dubbed *balvanska revolucija* (the log revolution).²⁷⁸ *Vecernji list* described the event as “terrorist revolution” and referred to the

²⁷⁶ Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in the Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics” in *Slavic Review*, vol. 51, no. 1, Spring 1992, pp. 8-10

²⁷⁷ Franjo Tudjman. “We Stand Before a Great Historic Test” in *Yugoslavia through Documents*, pp. 237-240

²⁷⁸ Thompson, *Forging War*, p. 161

insurgents exclusively as “Great Serb terrorists,” “Chetnik terrorists” or “Chetnik hordes.”²⁷⁹ A cartoon in Zagreb daily *Vjesnik* depicted a Croatian car bound for Europe, stopped by a pile of logs, guarded by a bunch of armed ruffians wearing Serbian hats.²⁸⁰ Despite being dismissed as an action of a few drunken primitives, *balvanska revolucija* in fact virtually cut all road and rail connections between Dalmatia and the rest of Croatia, and the new Croatian leadership and the republic’s media soon substituted mockery with graver description of the situation.²⁸¹ Especially after the outbreak of the open war, statements that Croatia was a victim of “Yugo-Serbian Chetnik-Communist aggression” provided justification for the inability to deal with the “drunken hillbillies.”

The new Croatian constitution declared Croatia a sovereign state based on a “millennial national identity of Croatian nation and the continuity of its statehood” during more than 1,300 years, and on “the Croatian nation’s historic right to full sovereignty.” This historic right was based on a number of historic events, one of the most important and relevant being the fact that the Croatian *Sabor* never sanctioned the decision, made by the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (a body of representatives of all three nations, which on October 29, 1918 proclaimed independence of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina from Austria-Hungary) to unite with Serbia and Montenegro.²⁸² The references to “millennial statehood,” terminated only by the Serbian “occupation” in 1918 became a central point of the HDZ pro-independence campaign. These references sometimes went to ridiculous proportions. *Hrvatski Politicki Leksikon* (Croatian Political Lexicon) thus states that the consequence of the Serbian occupation was that the name of the Croatian state disappeared from official usage after thirty-five (sic!) centuries of continuous existence. The occupation also allegedly separated Croatia from Europe, Western civilisation, Western markets and economy, and Catholicism, destroying the Croatian language, economy and historical heritage, and pushing it into the backward, repressive, tyrannical Serbian-ruled prison-state.²⁸³

When independence was proclaimed, one of the main reasons given was the claim that Yugoslavia no longer functioned as a state based on the rule of law and that its federal system did not make it possible to resolve the politic and economic crisis.²⁸⁴ The Declaration of the Establishment of Independent Croatia further stated that “the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia imposed a centralist, totalitarian system” on Croatia. This

²⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 179-180

²⁸⁰ Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, “Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans,’” p. 12

²⁸¹ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 233-234

²⁸² “The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia” in *Yugoslavia through Documents*, pp. 251-252

²⁸³ Hrvoje Sobic, *Hrvatski Politicki Leksikon* (Croatian Political Lexicon), part II. Rijeka: Tiskara Rijeka, 1993, pp. 1094-1096

²⁸⁴ “Constitutional Decision on the Sovereignty and Independence of the Republic of Croatia” in *Yugoslavia Through Documents*, pp. 299-300

was a statement, hardly supported by facts,²⁸⁵ yet it was pointed out repeatedly when the Croatian authorities were justifying Croatian secession. Usually, a claim that the “imposed Communist system” hindered Croatia’s political, economic, cultural and other interests was added.²⁸⁶

Just like in Serbia, the media played the most important role in spreading the “mythical” presentation of the war. Despite promising before the elections that they would provide for complete freedom of speech and free press, the HDZ government soon showed that it had no intention of keeping its promise. The State Radio and Television (HRT), and the main daily newspapers, *Vjesnik*, *Vecernji list* and *Slobodna Dalmacija* were purged (the first two in 1991, and the last in March 1993 after being taken over by the HDZ tycoon Miroslav Kutle). Editors and reporters were dismissed, and new ones took their places, perfectly aware to whom they should be thankful for their promotion. Some of the old ones, who quickly “converted” from dogmatic supporters of the Yugoslav communism to extreme Croatian nationalists, kept their jobs, especially if they denounced a few “disorientated,” “unpatriotic” or “Yugo-nostalgic” colleagues. Two notable converts were Milan Puljiz from the Croatian Radio and Josip Jovic from *Slobodna Dalmacija*. Two of the most prominent among the new “wave” were the HRT reporter Silvana Mendusic, who stated that she was “fighting for Croatia with a microphone in hand” and Dunja Ujevic from *Vecernji list*, who wrote that she would even “lie for the sake of her homeland.” Many journalists lost their jobs because of “improper” ethnic origin. Milovan Sibl, the head of HINA (the Croatian News Reporting Agency) justified this by stating that journalists of mixed origin “cannot provide an objective picture of Croatia” because “they hate Croatia, they hate President Tudjman and everything he stands for.”²⁸⁷

The Croatian media presented the war as a struggle of a small democratic state, trying to assert its right to independent statehood. Even more often, a reference was made to regaining the forcefully terminated independent statehood. These efforts were opposed by the Communist dictatorship in Belgrade, whose army invaded Croatia with the intention to annex part of its territory and create a Greater Serbia. To boost support for the war, HRT programmes were full of stories, featuring heroic “Croatian sons defending their homeland” or devoted “Croatian mothers, sending their sons of to the homeland liberation war.”²⁸⁸ A series of most popular Croatian pop and rock performers joined the effort and

²⁸⁵ Tito himself was a half-Croat, half-Slovene, born and raised in Kumrovec, a village not far away from Zagreb. A number of the most prominent political figures of the Socialist Yugoslavia were also Croats. For example, Vladimir Bakaric, one of Tito’s closest assistants during the war and the first post-war decades, Stipe Suvar, who became the head of the Yugoslav League of Communists, and the Yugoslav Prime Ministers Milka Planinc and Ante Markovic, to name just a few.

²⁸⁶ “Declaration of the Establishment of the Sovereign and Independent Republic of Croatia” in *Yugoslavia Through Documents*, pp. 301-302

²⁸⁷ Thompson, *Forging War*, pp. 136-147

²⁸⁸ Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 264-265

produced an album of patriotic songs, inviting Croats to do whatever they could to help the homeland.²⁸⁹

From the very beginning of the war, the media completely subordinated their *raison d'être* (to impartially inform and report the truth) to the needs of the state propaganda and did their utmost to present Croatia as an innocent victim. Initially, this presentation targeted predominantly the international community, and the Croatian authorities hoped that the image of “democratic Croatia, victimised by a brutal communist aggressor” would help to bring about an international recognition. The Croatian media coverage thus deliberately centred on the siege and the consequent destruction of Vukovar, and on the bombardment of the ancient city of Dubrovnik, listed as a part of UNESCO’s World Heritage. Woodward argues that the Croatian authorities deliberately placed sharpshooters on Dubrovnik’s medieval walls to provoke the Serbian forces to shell them. Bennett also confirms that Croatian soldiers within Dubrovnik would provoke shelling to provide HRS with appropriate images, which could be and were used to pressure international community into recognising Croatia.²⁹⁰

There can hardly be any doubt that Croatia was a victim. A part of its territory was occupied, many of its towns and villages were bombed and some completely destroyed, many Croats were killed and many more forced to flee their homes. Yet, the drive to present Croatia as a victim and nothing but a victim was so forceful that it pushed aside all ability to critically and realistically evaluate the situation, making it virtually impossible for the majority of Croats to imagine that their side could commit crimes and be an aggressor. The collective emotion of feeling like a victim, generated by the government and the media, and endorsed by the public, was strong enough to almost completely cast aside the rational evaluation of the facts, supplied by foreign and independent Croatian media and by increasing international criticism of Croatia during the Croat-Muslim conflict. Every objection to the virginal Croatia image of victim was perceived as anti-Croatian and therefore pro-Serbian, and a treacherous attack on the young Croatian state.²⁹¹ For example, on October 23, 1993, UN forces discovered the bodies of 15 Muslim civilians in the central Bosnian village of Stupni Do. The investigation revealed that they were killed by Bosnian Croat forces, which shot them at close range and then set them on fire. HINA reported that “Muslim and some foreign agencies reported the alleged massacre of civilians in the village of Stupni Do” and then added that Stupni Do was a centre from where Muslim forces were attacking Croatian villages, including Koplari, attacked on the very day of the alleged massacre. HINA thus first acknowledged the other point of view,

²⁸⁹ Three at the time top Zagreb rock bands also contributed their songs. Psihomodo Pop recorded *Hrvatska mora pobijediti* (Croatia Must Win), Parni Valjak explained that *Kekec* (a popular Slovenian book and movie character) *je slobodan, red je na nas* (Kekec is free, now it is our turn) and Prljavo Kazaliste contributed *Lupi petama i reci, evo, sve za Hrvatsku* (Stamp your feet and say I give everything for Croatia).

²⁹⁰ Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*, p. 236, Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, p. 169

²⁹¹ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, pp.72-77

seemingly satisfying the criteria for impartial journalism, and then transformed the victims into villains and the villains into defenders of allegedly threatened Croatian villages.²⁹²

In general, the coverage of the Croatian participation in the war in Bosnia continued to present Croats as victims. According to HRT reports, they were only defending “themselves and their centuries-old hearths” against Serbian and Muslim forces, which were expansionist, aggressive and genocidal. The media practically never criticised the extreme nationalism of the leadership of “Herceg-Bosna” and insisted that forces from Croatia proper never participated in the fighting in Bosnia, despite the fact that many foreign journalists provided proofs for just the opposite. The crimes committed by the Croatian forces were regularly concealed. When this was not possible (like in the case of Ahmici massacre, where Croatian paramilitaries killed at least 104 Muslim civilians), the media blamed “certain criminals, wearing black uniforms and Ustashe symbols,” trying to put the responsibility for the atrocities on Croats. On other occasions, the press reports about the crimes against the Muslims, committed in the Croat controlled parts of Bosnia, were appropriately surrounded with articles like “Muslims wound seven children.” Often, when Croatian crimes were acknowledged, Sarajevo leadership was blamed for them, since “Muslim victims were a necessary part of the hellish plan for an Islamic Bosnia.”²⁹³

The impact of “the victim” propaganda was so strong that even a confession of a Croat, who participated in committing atrocities against Muslims or Serbs could not harm it. In September 1997, *Feral Tribune* published an interview with Miro Bajramovic, a member of the notorious Croatian paramilitary unit called “Jesenska kisa” (Autumn Rain). Bajramovic described how his unit killed at least 86 Serbs in one village during the attack on Krajina. The reaction was rage among the Croatian public. However, the rage was not provoked by what he and his units did, but because what he said was generally considered to be a lie. The Croatian minister of Interior commented that Bajramovic either saw too many films and now his imaginations was playing strange games with him, or he was lying for some unknown purpose. The leader of one of the opposition parties complained that such statements undermine the Croatian image of victim.²⁹⁴

The creation of a myth, which concealed the truth about the war, followed in Croatia a pattern similar to the one used in Serbia. The ruling elites, state-controlled media (especially the television and few most influential newspapers, which were all staffed with reliable cadres), numerous intellectuals and popular public figures joined to create a black and white “reality” in which Serbs (and later Muslims) were inevitably the villains, and Croatia and the Croats innocent victims. Unlike in Serbian case, in which the alleged threat to the Serbs was to a large extent pure fabrication, Croatian propaganda had a lot of

²⁹² Thompson, *Forging War*, pp. 148-149

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-184

²⁹⁴ Ugresic, *The Culture of Lies*, p. 65

ready-made material to use. After all, between July 1991 and January 1992, Croatian towns and villages were burning, Croats were a large majority of people forced to flee their homes, and the Serbian forces undoubtedly had the upper hand in the fighting.

Yet, what is striking is how willing victim Croatia actually was. Many authors have written that Croatian authorities on many occasions provoked violent clashes and destruction (Vukovar and Dubrovnik are often quoted as typical cases) in order to receive an international recognition of Croatia as a compensation for its “suffering.”²⁹⁵ In cases where the conflict stubbornly refused to begin (like in western Slavonia, where local Serbs and Croats were used to coexist peacefully with each other), Croatia special forces were employed to provoke one. Thus a few days before the massacre of Croatian policemen in Borovo selo on May 2, 1991, a small unit of the HDZ commandos, led by Gojko Susak (who was to become Croatian Defence Minister), sneaked to the village during the night and fired a few shoulder-launched Amburst missiles on Borovo selo.²⁹⁶ A HDZ assassin killed Josip Reihl-Kir, a Croat and a police-chief in Slavonia, trusted by both local Serbs and Croats, and who for months on managed to keep the region calm by repeatedly assuring both sides that they have nothing to fear from the other.²⁹⁷

When in early 1993, Croatian army re-conquered parts of Dalmatia (around Zadar), the action was hailed as a first step towards complete liberation of “occupied territories.” However, virtually not a single similar action followed until the summer of 1995. Despite describing the retaken territory as essential for connecting Dalmatia with the rest of Croatia, this soon proved not to be the case, since Serbs continued to control all the rail and road connections further to north-west. Instead, this territory provided an essential back-up to “Herceg-Bosna.” Only few weeks later, the Muslim-Croat war started in Bosnia and the area around Zadar was the natural route through which the Bosnian Croat army was supplied with arms, fuel, fresh troops, and wages (the income of Bosnian Croat police and army forces is coming from the budget of the Republic of Croatia even today). Instead of defending or liberating its territory, Croatian authorities, the democratic leaders of a country, which was supposedly a defenceless victims, devoted its material and human resources to carve up a Croatian state in Bosnia, and to eventually annex it to Croatia.

²⁹⁵ Lucic and Djikic, "Tudjmanovo desetljeće" (Tudjman's Decade), Tanner, *Croatia*, pp. 265-268, Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, pp. 178-179, Bennett, *Yugoslavia's Bloody Collapse*, pp. 171-172

²⁹⁶ Silber and Little, *Yugoslavia*, p. 140

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144

6. Conclusion

Ten years ago, both Croats and Serbs were told by their leaders that they were terribly exploited in Yugoslavia, and that they were facing at least culturecide, if not outright genocide. They were promised the brightest possible future, respectively, in independent Croatia and in Greater Serbia. These would finally become their true homelands, their leaders proclaimed, in which they would finally be their own masters, no more exploited, threatened and terrorised by other nations. Then these leaders set about dismantling Yugoslavia, first in a “democratic,” legal way, through referenda (on which voices of ethnic minorities did not matter), elections (on which only one party had a real chance of winning), take-overs of federal institutions (like Serbian leaders did with the Federal Presidency) and, the most democratic of all, through “meetings of truth.” Failing to reach a satisfactory agreement regarding who gets what (or who gets the right to plunder which part of a dismantled country), a quarrel erupted in which both sides employed ruthless “persuasion experts,” who used the opportunity to fill their pockets with whatever they could lay their hands on in the process. And the people, the very people who were promised wealth, bright future and regained dignity were pushed into poverty, sad replica of the darkest past (1941-1945) and humiliation. And yet, many Croats and Serbs still believe that “somebody else” is to blame because these promises did not come true. Even after the political changes in both countries and with the coming of democratic forces to power, the majority of people of both nations still think of themselves as innocent victims, rather than believing that they have something to be ashamed of.

Most of them continue to believe that “their” side was a victim, and that all the horrors and all the atrocities were committed only by “the others.” Even if some Serbs or Croats acknowledge that the role their homelands played in the war was aggressive, rather than defensive, they blame it on the corrupt and greedy politicians, crazy and primitive highlanders, obsessed nationalists or criminal gangs. There is always someone else to blame, and to a point, this is understandable. It is true that numerous extremely nationalistic intellectuals, artists and writers contributed a lot to fanning of nationalist passions in the late 1980s. It is also true that a limited number of people with unlimited power in both Croatia and Serbia made a decision to go to war, and kept the war burning for as long it suited their interests. Above all, it is true that ordinary Serbs and Croats rarely participated in warfare and were even less often involved in committing atrocities. Yet, this does not pardon them from the “crime” of making all this possible by not preventing it. The opposition to war in both republics were virtually non-existent and only an odd anti-war protest was occasionally staged in Belgrade or Novi Sad, or in Zagreb or Split. Most people, just like people usually do anywhere in the world (like, for example, they did all over Europe during the Nazi or Communist “occupation”), simply adopted to the new circumstances and waited for it to pass. As the graffiti I saw in Belgrade said, *kad*

ce da prodje ova demokracija, pa da opet zivimo kao ljudi (when finally will this democracy end, so that we can again live like [normal] people).

The “democracy” of life under Tudjman’s and under Milosevic’s regime has passed, and the normality is truly returning to both Serbia (until recently officially isolated from the rest of the world) and Croatia (until the change of the government under unofficial embargo). The memory of true Croatian and Serbian role in the war, confiscated by the imposition of a mythic, parallel reality in which the aggressors were remembered as victims, however, did not return.

Zarko Korac, a psychology professor at the University of Belgrade, was asked if Serbs would experience a catharsis after the war and acknowledge their responsibility for what happened. His negative reply is thus hardly surprising. Korac said that instead, many Serbs would say that they did not know, and others will reply that the Serbs did nothing the others did not do to them.²⁹⁸ Looking at Serbia after Milosevic's downfall, one cannot but admit that Korac was right. Despite cooperating with the International War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague to the extent that they do extradite the indicted Bosnian Serbs they arrest on their territory, the new Serbian authorities have been so far reluctant to do likewise with suspects from Serbia proper, including the most wanted one, Slobodan Milosevic. When asked by a Croatian journalist on a press conference whether Serbian government plans to apologise to Croatian people for aggression, committed by Serbian army, the new Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic answered that when he looks at over a million of Serb refugees from Croatia and Bosnia, he gets the feeling that someone should apologise to Serbs instead.²⁹⁹

The reluctance to face the truth regarding the Serbian participation in the war and to deal with its consequences is not only the feature of the new authorities, but is also shared by a large part of the public. With over a million refugees from Croatia and Bosnia living in Serbia, with having to cope with the harsh consequences of years of life under sanctions and almost completely destroyed economy, and with more than 200,000 of the youngest and best educated emigrated and most likely lost for Serbia forever, everyone trying to convince the Serbs that they were not *the* victims will face an extremely difficult task.³⁰⁰ The Serbs had many reasons to look the other way and live according to the “see no evil, hear no evil” rule.

Yet, this can never go on indefinitely. At some point, the piper has to be paid. It does not matter who has ordered the music. A contribution is sought from all those who stood by and listened. The excuse that paramilitary thugs and criminals, who committed all the atrocities, and that Milosevic and his corrupt clique, who have sent them to do so were the only ones to blame, is not good enough. I am not proposing that each and every Serb

²⁹⁸ Judah, *The Serbs*, p. 248

²⁹⁹ “Obtoznice v javnost” (The Indictments Made Public), *Dnevnik*, January 19, 2001.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 309-310

who has actively or passively contributed to making the war possible (not only by supporting the government, which orchestrated it, but also by not opposing it) should go to the Hague and explain her/his case there. Rather, they should go through a purgatory of their own, exorcise their demons and face the responsibility. As Serbian scholar Miodrag Popovic wrote, Serbs need to emancipate themselves from the blind slavery of their historic heritage, so that they could finally become not what their myths tell them they should be, but instead what *they* want to be.³⁰¹

The situation is almost identical in Croatia. The new Croatian government is extremely troubled every time the Hague Tribunal opens a case against another “Croat,” rather than trying to calm down tensions and protests of Croat nationalist die-hards. The official “reality” regarding the war is still that Croatia was a victim, and never attacked anyone. The *Sabor*, in which the former opposition controls a firm majority and the HDZ nationalists now represent only a minor opposition party, adopted a declaration in December 2000, in which it is clearly stated that “Croatia was not involved in any aggressive military operations.” Its role in the war was therefore strictly defensive. Vesna Pusic, president of the HNS (*Hrvatska narodna stranka*, Croatian People’s Party), member of the new government coalition protested and declared in *Sabor* that opposite was the case, namely that Croatia was an aggressor in Bosnia. Her coalition partners were even louder than the HDZ deputies in attacking and criticising her for her “blasphemy.” Pusic was also verbally attacked and abused on numerous protest, organised by Croatian nationalists for daring to oppose the official dogma about Croatian innocence.³⁰²

If Croats truly want to turn their country into what they and their authorities have claimed it was for the last ten years, namely open, democratic, civil and tolerant society, they will also have to come to terms with the consequences of Croatian policies in Bosnia. Even the untouchable operations “Storm” and “Lightning,” in which Kninska Krajina and western Slavonia were again brought under Croatian control, need to be scrutinised and the numerous crimes committed during them acknowledged and punished. Above all, Croats need to come to terms with the fact that, in their case, the victims became aggressors, who ran concentration camps, massacred innocent civilians, destroyed towns, villages and numerous historic buildings (the famous Mostar bridge being one of them).³⁰³ Regardless of a mass of evidence to the contrary, the image of Croatia and Croats as victims survived. Similarly preoccupied with daily struggle to survive (although in not such an extreme way as Serbs), similarly bombed with one-sided media campaign, and

³⁰¹ Quoted in Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, p. 8

³⁰² Igor Lasic and Boris Rašeta. “Herceg-Bojna” (Herceg-War), *Feral Tribune on line*, www.feral-tribune.com/arhiva/latin2/2001/806/operacija.html

³⁰³ Lucic and Djikic, "Tudjmanovo desetljeće" (Tudjman's Decade)

similarly misunderstood by the whole world that they, the *Antemurale Christianitatis*, cannot be the bad guys, since they have always been and are again defending the European civilisation³⁰⁴ from the onslaught of the Asiatic hordes, most Croats simply could not come to terms with the fact that they truly do not have a lot to be proud off.

As I have already stated elsewhere, a full decade after the beginning of the war in the former Yugoslavia and almost six years after its conclusion, and with democratic governments in power in Zagreb and in Belgrade, the time has come to unmask the truth about the war, hidden by the myths created by those who waged an “ethnic” war above all to benefit themselves, and not their alleged “ethnically” defined supporters. The time has come to strip those responsible for the terrible crimes of their “defenders-of-our-nation” alibis. In stead of protesting in their support, “their” people should be the first to demand that they be punished. Failing to do so in 1945 left too many skeletons hidden in the Yugoslav closet, and the Great Manipulators rattled with their bones, making noise loud enough to divert attention of the ordinary people and to conceal their plundering campaign. The Serbs and the Croats, whose new national identities were similarly built by hiding numerous skeletons in their new national closets, should perhaps avoid giving history a chance to repeat itself.

³⁰⁴ Tudjman stated that history would place him “right next to General Franco as a saviour of the western civilisation (sic),” quoted in Lucic and Djikic, “Tudjmanovo desetljeće” (Tudjman's Decade)

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