Appropriation of past as a political weapon

Nationalist utilisation of the Kosovo Battle in ex-Yugoslav wars[1]

ELMIR CAMIĆ

Only one year after Francis Fukuyama euphorically proclaimed “the end of history” (Fukuyama 1992), Micha Glenny declared its “rebirth” in Central and Eastern Europe and especially in the Balkans (Glenny 1993). Nationalist ideas which became very popular in that region at the end of the 1980’s, ended in military conflicts and a breakup of the Yugoslav Federation. It is impossible to explain the brutality of wars between the former neighbours without considering the decisive role that glorified conceptions of history played in mobilisation and radicalisation of wide masses. Although all parties involved in these conflicts used distorted perceptions of the past as powerful weapons to legitimate their own political goals, I will focus here on the most momentous case: the appropriation of Serbia’s defeat from the hands of Ottoman Empire at the battle of Kosovo Field from 1398.[2]

According to the cognitive hermeneutics (Tepe 2007) the term ‘appropriation’ here denotes an interpretation of a historic event which is adapted to the political value system of the interpreters, in order to appear like its support. At the same time the knowledge about the real historic facts and relations is irrelevant or secondary. In this way, one and the same historic occurrence can be

appropriated by diverse ideological and political positions with different contents and messages.

Serbian nationalist politicians and intellectuals exploited the primarily epic narrative from the 18th and 19th century to present the current crisis as an essential step to the predestinated mission and destiny of the Serbian people. In doing so, historical facts have been reinterpreted and devised selectively for the purpose of the contemporary conflict. Firstly, I will present the historical facts about the battle and its epic interpretation that developed in the following centuries. After that, I will illustrate its appropriation for political purposes in the 1980's and 1990's.

Historical facts and epic narrative of the battle

There are only a few certain facts about the battle of Kosovo.[3] On the 28th of June (of the Gregorian calender) 1389, a battle took place at the Kosovo Field between the armies of the Ottoman Sultan Murad I and the Serbian sovereign Lazar Hrebljanović. Both armies were of ethnically mixed origin – many Christian and even Serbian vassals fought for the Ottomans and on the other side within the ranks of Lazar there were also Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian troops (Petritsch 1999: 31-2). The outcome of the battle is unclear to the present day (MacDonald 2002: 69, Judah 1997: 31-2, Sundhaussen 2003: 364-5). The Ottoman army retreated after the combat and Lazar's followers became vassals to the sultan. What we can claim for sure, is that this particular battle was not a determinator in the forthcoming Serbias fall under the Ottoman rule, 70 years later (Sundhaussen 2000: 65). In this respect, the controversial battle of 1389 was not won by either side (Malcolm 1998: 75-78, Bieber 2002: 96). In addition to high casualties on both sides the only extraordinary thing was that both Lazar and the Sultan died and that was the aspect that fired the imagination of the posterity and offered a proper background for literary and political appropriations.

Shortly after the fall of Serbia, an abundant epic legend about the battle spread out. It is hard to say who were the originators of the legend, but what we know is that these stories maintained as part of Serbian oral tradition for hundreds of years and were written down in the 18th century.[4] Because of that, we come across many different and uncanonised versions of the same story. Nevertheless the essence of the plot[5] remains unchanged: In the evening before the battle against the Ottomans, Lazar receives a letter from the Virgin Mother from Jerusalem. In the letter, he is being offered the choice of either winning the battle and keeping the 'earthly empire' or gaining the 'heavenly empire' which will be granted to him by God himself, if he lost the forthcoming battle and his own life. So Lazar is being offered heavenly kingdom in exchange for the earthly one. He naturally decides in favour of the heavenly, eternal empire. He arranges a Last Supper where he accuses his son-in-law Miloš Obilić of betrayal. The next day Lazar and his whole army get killed after a dramatical and heroic fight against the numerically superior Ottoman enemy. Miloš, who was supposedly have had betrayed Lazar, proves his innocence by stabbing the Sultan to death. Then he gets executed and becomes a martyr and one of the greatest heroes ever known in Serbian history. According to the epic story, the real traitor is Lazar's other son-in-law: Vuk Branković. The epic narrative states that Vuk orders his troops to retreat early from the battlefield and in this way, consciously causes the defeat of the Serbian army. After the battle Lazar gets resurrected rather like Jesus Christ and takes his place as a saint beside God, but Vuk gets banned by God's revenge.

Reinterpretation of historical facts in epic narrative and its functions

Now I will demostrate the fictional appropriation of historic facts in this particular epic narrative. It has been spread out by the Serbian Orthodox Church and it served primarily to maintain the religious

identity of Serbian people as the Serbian Orthodox Church at that time was under threat of Islam under the Ottoman rule. That helps us see, why Christian elements dominate the plot[6] and why analogies between Lazar and Jesus are being drawn so explicitly (MacDonald 2002: 70). Both Lazar and Jesus have a special relationship with God, they both have been given choice of life and death, they both chose death for a higher good. They both knowingly arrange Last Supper foreseeing their betrayal, they die a martyr death, resurrect and get the salvation for their souls and finally give their community a higher meaning. The Kosovo battle became a key event in Serbian history and religious art. Due to those religious parallels between Lazar's death and the Passion Christi, Kosovo later became so called 'the Serbian Golgotha' (Nitsche 2003 and Emmert 1990).

To clarify workings of epic story I would firstly like to concentrate on a few historical inconsistencies and contradictions concerning this particular narrative. For example, Lazar's choice is in an evident conflict with the betrayal of Vuk Branković. Lazar's choosing of the heavenly empire implies the defeat on the battle field. In this case, there is no need for a betrayal at all. On the other side, Lazar's decision does not play any part in final outcome of the battle, if Vuk was already planning an early retreat from the battlefield (Sundhaussen 2003: 367-8). The betrayal of Vuk Branković and a few other elements of this epic story are what I would call deliberate misinterpretations of historical facts. Firstly, in view of historians Vuk did not in fact betray Lazar, but at least we can prove his existence as a historical figure. That is not the case with many other figures of this epic story. Even the real existence of the great hero Miloš Obilić is controversial as we do not have enough evidence of it (Bieber 2002: 96-7)[7].

A further transfiguration can be found in the omission of the participation of Serbian vassals in the Ottoman and Bosnian, Albanian and Croat troops on the Serbian side. The epic story

depicts only Serbian Christians and Ottoman Muslims as two confronting parts, which accentuates the religious tone of the story again. The most common and apparently most incomprehensible reinterpretation is the depiction of a Serbian defeat which has not been confirmed by historians. There are many other examples in which historic defeats on the battlefiled were reinterpreted into military victories but in this case, we have a battle that wasn't really won by either side, but at the same time was represented as a tragical defeat. The question is why?

First of all, the epic story can be seen as a simplistic explanation of the loss of Serbian sovereignty in two ways. We can argue that the betrayal and the exchange of earthly for heavenly empire are contradictory in their essence. But both aim to conceal Serbian political and military defeat. The epic story presents Serbs as a heroic nation, who fought against the largely outnumbering Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans in this case, play the role of a morally crushed side which would not win the battle without Vuk's betrayal. This logic is created as a way of strengthening Serbian group characteristics. The interpretation of Lazar's decision to favour a heavenly empire does not exclude the possibility of his defeat on the battleground whatsoever, but also offers a possibility of a victory: Lazar could have won militarily, if he had chosen to. The defeat is presented as an act of his own free will because no victory on the battleground and its rewards could withstand the eternal bliss that Heaven offers. The religious analogy of the material–spiritual opposition within the story reinforces the religious but also political position of the Serbian Orthodox Church under Ottoman rule (Redjep 1980: 134 and Greenawalt 2004: 50). The message to the Serbian people was that the loss of Serbian sovereignty does not necessarily mean the end of Serbian orthodox spirit. Their earthly leaders are in heaven ruling the world hand in hand with God himself. And the church – as God's representative on Earth – presents itself like a guardian of the Serbian faith and national identity.

These religious appropriations of historical facts explain why the epic narrative about the Kosovo battle clearly topped other more important fights against the Ottomans (Lauer 1995: 141-2). The death of Lazar allowed the reinterpretation of sovereignty loss into a moral victory and therewith guaranteed the privileged position of the church within the Serbian population. Now, how does fictional appropriation of historical fact as political means works and how is it utilised in modern politics?

Exploatation of the past for political purposes

It is in our human nature to create stories, to pick certain elements of the past events, to turn them into semi-true stories and give them a fictitious tone. Each nation has specific historical events that they use as a point of reference at times of crisis and as stories of a groups origin. However it gets critical when the fictional appropriation of the past is accompanied by mentality, which I will define here as illusionary.[8] The illusionary mentality finds its expression in times of social upheavals and crises. When current social norms, ideals, and values lose their validity, then the result is often a tendency to use those illusions as a means of orientation for the people, who find themselves without a sense of direction. When feelings of helplessness prevail, people develop fear of the future. If the situation is percieved as a threat to their lives, they tend to turn to those illusionary images because these offer them a sense of comfort, security and orientation. Central characteristics of this mentality are overwhelming feelings that block rational thinking, selective perception, and the inability to make connections between cause and effect. Closely related to this is also the supposition of a cyclic course of history that gives the impression that the present has a teleological continuity with the past (Cassirer 1946 and Hübner 1985). Such images have fatal political consequences, especially if those interpretations of history implicate metaphysical justifications which then are projected to the current situation. The political goals

then gain their legitimacy through a higher authority – for example God or a historic law. People feel as if there is certain historical mission to be fullfiled, and this is exactly what inspires unjustified belief of superiority of one group (or nation) over another. In such "master narratives" (Middell et al. 2000 and Jarausch 2005) historical events become political tools created in such a manner to offer simple solutions for those groups with the intention to reinforce self-respect, whilst utilising human fears and the need to release them (White 1990: 7-10).

Just because of its theological and religious implications, the epic narrative about the Kosovo Battle is suited for utulisations of this kind. Despite the literary beauty, it can be used as a powerful and potentially dangerous tool of political legitimatisation, especially at revanchist and expansionary policies. In this case, unfounded historic parallels are being drawn between present and the distorted picture of the past. Religious components of the epic narrative allow the mythmakers to legitimize contemporary political goals by metaphysic justifications.[9] Therefore we find that the Kosovo legend was refreshed at every point of political crisis in Serbian history since the 18th century: at the uprisings against the Ottomans, at the Balkan Wars at the beginning of 20th century, during the First World War and in the Yugoslav Kingdom. The intensity and the setting of focal points varied, depending on the concrete situation and political objectives.[10] In socialist Yugoslavia the story of Kosovo battle played a secondary role because there were other past elements which seemed more relevant to the present situation – for example the fighting of Tito's partisans during the Second World War. (Camić 2006: 373-5)

Now I will skip to the political utillisation of the Kosovo legend in the late 80's and 90's of the 20th century and to the events that lead to one of the greatest bloodsheds, that have ever occurred in Europe, since the Second World War. In order to unterstand how it was

done, it becomes necessary at this point to outline the social and political background of that period.

Social and political background of Yugoslavia's disintegration

There were various factors that contributed to widespread social crisis in former Yugoslavia which reached its critical level at the end of the 80's. Firstly, growing economic crisis threatened the relatively high standard of living.[11] Secondly, the socialist system lost its greatest integrative and stabilising figure with Tito's death in 1980, this in turn shaped a symbolic vacuum.[12] After the sudden and unexpected collapse of the Eastern Block, Yugoslavia lost its decade-long exceptional strategic position between the two blocks in Europe, which acted as a constitutive part of the Pan-Yugoslav collective identity. The crisis produced a state of confusion within the Yugoslav population (Sundhaussen 1994: 419-421), especially within the Serbian majority. The imminent disintegration of Yugoslavia affected them the most because 40 percent of the Serbian population lived outside of the so called "close"[13] Serbian republic (Sundhaussen 2003: 353).

Political and intellectual elites found this particular political and economic climate oportune for realisation of their ambitions for power. They filled the existing gap of orientation with extreme nationalist ideologies which offered a new security and solidarity for the population. Nationalism presented simple explanations for the causes of the crisis for each ethnic group blaming the other ones. As I said already, I will refer here only to the Serbian nationalist ideology.[14] Basic ideas of the new Serbian nationalism emanate from the Memorandum, which was issued by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, published in 1986 as a reaction to the Albanian aspirations for Kosovo's autonomy early in the 1980's. The memorandum, which was produced by certain members of Serbian intellectual elite,[15] stated that systematic discrimination against Serbs was carried out during socialist Yugoslavia. It also stated that

a genocide against Serbs in Kosovo was being carried out by Albanian majority (Sundhaussen 2002: 361-2 and 2000: 81-2). It described that these atrocities were part of Albanian agenda of ethnic cleansing in order to establish ethnically uniform Albanian state. In response to that, Serbian nationalists proposed the formation of an independent unitary Serbian state which was to join large territories and areas of the other Yugoslav republics (Bieber 2005). Taking into consideration the multiethnic population of former Yugoslavia, this could only be achieved by military intervetion – in other words by war. Therefore, the mobilisation of the population for the nationalist political goal was at the same time a mobilisation for a war.

Ideological appropriation of the battle for political legitimating and mobilising aims

And yet again – the Kosovo Battle played a key role in the legitimation of Serbian political goals. To reinforce its nationalist ideology, an appropriated view of history – which was based on the epic narrative – reduced almost the whole Serbian past since 1389 to the images of suffering and opression. The time before the Kosovo Battle was presented as a flourishing Golden Age, when the Serbs achieved an amazing degree of power, wealth and prosperity (Sundhaussen 2007: 27-40). In this interpretation, they sacrificed their empire for Europe and Christianity and weakened Islamic influence that it might have had over the rest of Europe. What came after was a barbarous attack of the Ottomans and 500 years of the 'Turkish tyranny' (Zirojevic 1998). With the regained sovereignty in the 19th century, the Balkan Wars and the First World War, a 100-year-long period of Serbian resurgence came until the Second World War and socialist Yugoslavia brought back the suffering. A 'cultural', 'demographical', and 'economic' genocide of Serbs during Tito's Yugoslavia was perpetuated by the Albanian population[16] (Sundhaussen 2002: 362). According to this nationalistic view of

history, the oppression that the Serbs suffered in Yugoslavia was just another genocide in a whole line of genocides since the Kosovo Battle.[17] However, I would like to note that there is no evidence that during the Ottoman rule and especially during the time of socialist Yugoslavia that genocide in any shape or form was exercised over the Serbian population (Sundhaussen 2002: 367-8)[18]. In this case as it seems the historical facts do not count, but emotional political fabrications about history do. However, in the nationalist view a nation threatened by genocide is implicitly allowed to anticipate its own elimination with preventive measures, for example with ethnic cleansing. In this way a war of agression can be masked as war of defence, perpetrators are stylized into victims.

In fact, every war in the modern Serbian history was interpreted as a revolt against the oppression which originates from the Battle of Kosovo: the uprisings against the Ottomans, the Balkan Wars and both World Wars. The war was unterstood as a basic characteristic of the Serbian national identity, not only in its component part, but in its essence (Höpken 1999: 377 and Čolović 2003: 310). Serbia came off as winner from all these wars which was hardly compatible to the target role of a victim. The Serbian intellectual and later president Dobrica Ćosić explained it in his thesis that the Serbs always lose in the freedom what they have won in wars (Judah 1997: 138). Here the war got affirmed again, as a desired social condition because Serbia cannot lose in it.

Altogether the political elites created an impression of a historic continuity between medieval Serbia and the new situation. The war and suffering were presented as the two basic attributes of the national destiny and the Serbian history as a permanent change between death and resurrection. The appearance of continuity was advanced by the fact that the date of the battle, 28th of June recurred with important events for Serbian history (Petković 2003: 99-102). The invocation of the same date seemed to give it

something like magic power which emanates from the Battle of Kosovo and controls the history of Serbian people.

The tensions between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians in the 80's as well as between the Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims in the 90's were presented as a crucial episode in a century-long conflict between Christianity and Islam. They were not political conflicts anymore, but a part of a historical mission of Serbia to renew its glorious Empire after 600 years of suffering (Sarmadow 1996). This argument gave a higher meaning to the military conflicts; it receded the inhibition threshold for violence and advanced the willingness for war.

Medial spread and different components of the appropriation

The utilisation of the Kosovo Battle was accompanied by a controlled propaganda campaign of media brought into line by ruling nationalists. In this way contents of the selectively interpreted history were reproduced in public.[19] The media followed prescribed terminology and used quotations from the epic songs as arguments and made them relevant to day to day politics. Distorted Kosovo Battle issues also became part of popular culture, such as literature, film, or music. In this way, mediaval history and its political appropriation found its way to everyday life (Popović 2003 and Kaser/Halpern 1998).

The greatest example of how the legendary battle was reproduced in the media is its 600th anniversary 1989 (Bieber 2002). In the months before, the Serbian Orthodox Church carried Lazar's remains through many of Serbian cities and displayed them in public.[20] The event was broadcast on TV and was on the covers of every national paper. After centuries the bones were then brought back to their primal gravesite at the Ravanica Monastery. The culmination of the anniversary took place in form of the celebration on June of 28th at the Kosovo Field, where one million Serbs gathered together. Since this event Slobodan Milošević has been regarded as the undisputed

and broadly accepted leader of the Serbian national movement. In his speech[21] at the Kosovo Field, Milošević accentuated the heroism of the Serbian warriors and their willingness to make sacrifices 600 years ago. He pointed out several times, that the betrayal and disparity of the leadership was the main reason for the 1389 defeat and the suffering that was inflicted upon Serbian people for centuries after that. Finally, he drew parallels to the present political situation and declared that Serbia is involved in new wars and battles now. They were not armed ones yet, but in Milošević's words such "cannot be excluded" (http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/spch-kosovo1989.htm, viewed at 25th of October 2010).

The message was clear: Serbia was ready for a war. It was to be a war against oppression, national discriminitation and forecoming genocide. During the fight, unity must prevail within the leadership and within the people for that is the only way that guarantees victory. In this argument, any opposing opinion will be considered as a betrayal. In the following weeks the media proclaimed Milošević as a new messiah, who was to lead the Serbs back to the power that they had possessed in the times before 1389. He was compared with Lazar, whereas any domestic oponent to the nationalist agenda was to be set in the same cathegory as the traitor – Vuk Branković. The nationalist argument was that the betrayal of any kind will result in suffering and will act as an obstruction to the renewal of the great Serbian empire supported by God himself. That's because any attempts of political opposition will be brought to the point of liquidation (MacDonald 2002: 71-2).

The idea of national unity was supported by a strong anti-individualism (Čolović 2003: 310). An individual act exclusively as a replaceable member of the collective, his existance is worthless unless he fights and is willing to sacrifice his life for the nation. The nation transcends individual life and has a chance of victory, only if everyone is willing to sacrifice for it – as Miloš Obilić did in the epic

narrative. Every front-line soldier was expected to act in the same way. Heavenly empire and deathless glory were to be won.

As we can see, any role in the political crisis can be replaced through a figure from the epic story (Bieber 2002: 102-3 and Čolović 2003: 310): Milošević through the saint Lazar, every domestic opponent through the traitor Vuk Branković and war criminals such as Arkan or Ratko Mladić through the hero Miloš Obilić. It wasn't different considering the enemies.[22] In political and media language use, the Bosnian Muslims were called 'Turks'. In this way, they were stigmatised as a direct descendants of the Ottomans, who in the nationalist interpretation of history, tyrannised Serbs for centuries. Since the majority of Kosovo Albanians were also Muslims, they too matched the demonised image of the Ottomans from 600 years ago (Sundhaussen 2000: 71). This makes it possible to understand the statement of the Serbian general Ratko Mladić, when after his troops marched in Srebrenica, and killed over 8000 Bosnian Muslims on July 11th 1995 said: "I give this town as a Vidovdan gift to the Serbs, we have finally got revenge on the Turks".[23]

Transferring of the conflict to sacral dimensions

The illusionary mentality makes it possible to recreate the same battles, the same heroes and the same enemies in a symbolic way, over and over again. They only get reincarnated in the form of other people. The illusionary mentality makes it possible for time not to run linearly. It makes it possible to eliminate the distance between the past and the present (Sundhaussen 2003: 355-6, Čolović 1994: 91-3). The purpose of the utilisation of the Kosovo Battle was to present the past-Yugoslav wars as the same battle which was fought 600 years ago, when Serbs felt as an 'antemurale christianitatis' threatened by Islam. Because of this function and their sacrifice, they became in nationalist eyes the chosen people and their empire "the Heavenly Serbia" – a term which became usual in 1990's (Anžulović 1999 and Čolović 308-310)[24]. From the uniqueness of

their nation a guaranty arises that they must be on the right and fair side in the wars. In a reverse conclusion, the enemies are automatically at fault and they fight against the will of God. The universalisation of the conflict reaches in this way its highest level adding to it a sacral dimension. It is not about politics any more, it is about essential, transcendental values, about mankind itself and about an existantial battle between Good and Evil. Victory in this battle is worth dying for. All victims are justified. The victim-centred[25] perception of their own history released a strong enthusiasm for war within wide parts of the Serbian population. The nationalist utilisation of the Kosovo battle and the corresponding cult generated a public atmosphere which was based on resentment (Bieber 2002: 107). As Liah Greenfeld has pointed out "resentment not only makes the nation more aggressive but represents an unusually powerful stimulus of national sentiment and collective action, which makes it easier to mobilize collectivistic nations for aggressive warfare than to mobilize individualistic nations, in which national commitment is normally dependant on rational calculations" (Greenfeld 1992: 488).

Just because of these consequences, distorted perceptions of the past adopted on a political value system should be viewed critically, although they approach certain human needs. Therefore the current, mostly functionalist methods of their research have to be supplemented by adding a normative dimension that includes a comparison of appropriations and the historical facts.[26] Since the past is a constitutive characteristic of every – individual or collective – identity, we cannot avoid any references to the history for general orientation and motivation aims. But a scientific and educative supported coming in terms with the past is expected to raise recipients' awareness of those ideological appropriations of the past which imply the illusionary mentality.[27] This objective presupposes a large autonomy of the science to the politics.

Two decades after the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia the succession states are far away from achieving that goal. Nationalist appropriations of the past are an integral part of curriculums of elementary and high schools. University professors and other historians still embrace the role as an extended arm of the nationalist political elites.[28] The domination of chauvinist concepts of the past in education and medial discourse have a disastrous influence on the socialisation of new generations, who are growing up with the conviction that their own ethnic group is superior to the other ones and it has an exclusive, historic right to the disputed territories, which can be enforced through violence. In this way the battle over the past reproduces present ethnic conflicts into the future. The result of the historic impact to the arguments of everyday politics is a never ending "ravage of myths" (Lauer 1995). The only way to interrupt that fatal cycle is through a basic consensus of the past, which would establish a discursive reference culture (Dörner 1995: 65) accepted by all ethnic groups. Without of it a peaceful shared existence in the Balkans is impossible.

REFERENCES

Anžulović, Branimir (1999): Heavenly Serbia. From Myth to Genocide, New York.

Bašić, Natalija (2004): Krieg als Abenteuer. Feindbilder und Gewalt aus der Perspektive ex-jugoslawischer Soldaten, Gießen.

Bieber, Florian (2005): Nationalismus in Serbien vom Tode Titos bis zum Ende der Ära Milošević, Vienna.

Bieber, Florian (2002): Nationalist Mobilization and Stories of Serb Suffering. The Kosovo Myth from 600th Anniversary to the Present. In: Rethinking history 6: 95-110.

Behschnitt, Wolf D. (1980): Nationalismus bei Serben und Kroaten 1830-1914. Analyse und Typollogie der nationalen Ideologie, Munich.

Brunnbauer, Ulf (ed.) (2004): (Re)Writing History. Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism, Münster.

Camić, Elmir (2010): Mobilisations nationalistes et mythes politiques dans les guerres de l'ex-Yougoslavie. In: Monneyron, Frédéric / Mouchtouris, Antigon (ed.): Des mythes politiques, Paris, 86-104.

Camić, Elmir (2006): Tito als politischer Held. Ein Anwendungsversuch des theoretischen Analysemusters von Peter Tepe. In: Mythos. Fachübergreifendes Forum für Mythosforschung 2 – Politische Mythen: 194-213.

Cassirer, Ernst (1946): The Myth of Strate, New Haven et al.

Cohen, Leonard J. (1997): Prelates and Politicians in Bosnia. The Role of Religion in Nationalist Mobilization. In: Nationalities Papers 25.3: 482-499.

Čolović, Ivan (2003): Symbolfiguren des Krieges. Zur politischen Folklore der Serben. In: Melčić, Dunja (ed.): Der Jugoslawien-Krieg. Handbuch zu Vorgeschichte, Verlauf, Konsequenzen, Wiesbaden et al., 308-316.

Čolović, Ivan (1994): Die Erneuerung des Vergangenen. In: Stefanov, Nenad / Werz, Michael (ed.): Bosnien und Europa. Ethnisierung der Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main, 90-103.

Denich, Bette S. (1994): Disrembembering Yugoslavia. Nationalist Ideologies and the Symbolic Revival of Genocide. In: American Ethnologist 21: 367-390.

Dörner, Andreas (1995): Politischer Mythos und symbolische Politik. Sinnstiftung durch symbolische Formen am Beispiel des Hermannsmythos, Opladen.

Dragović-Soso, Jasna (2003): ‘Saviours of the Nation’. Serbia’s Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism, Montreal et al.

Durić, Rašid (1996): Der nationale Mythos in der serbischen Literatur und Politik. In: Österreichische Osthefte 38.1: 3-21.

Emmert, Thomas (1990): Serbian Golgatha. Kosovo 1389, New York.

Francis Fukuyama (1992): The End of History and the Last Man, New York.

Glenny, Micha (1993): The Rebirth of History: Eastern Europe in the Age of Democracy, Harmondsworth.

Greenawalt, Alexander (2004): Kosovo-Myths. Karadžić, Njegoš, and the Transformation of Serb Memory. In: Spaces of Identity 3: 49-65.

Greenfeld, Liah (1992): Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity, Cambridge.

Hehn, Paul N. (1975): The Origins of Modern Pan-Serbism – The 1844 Načertanije of Ilija Grašanin: An Analysis and Translation. In: East European Quarterly 9: 153-171.

Höpken, Wolfgang (2000): Gewalt-Grenzen. Über Kultur, Feindbilder und Gewalt auf dem Balkan. In: Sabrow, Martin (ed.): Grenz-Fälle, Leipzig, 45-66.

Höpken, Wolfgang (1999): Krieg und historische Erinnerung auf dem Balkan. In: Behring, Eva et al. (ed.): Geschichtliche Mythen in den Literaturen und Kulturen Ostmittel- und Südosteuropas, Stuttgart, 371-379.

Höpken, Wolfgang (ed.) (1996): Öl ins Feuer? Schulbücher, ethnische Stereotypen und Gewalt in Südosteuropa, Hannover.

Hübner, Kurt (1985): Die Wahrheit des Mythos, Munich.

Jacob, Therese A. von (1825/26): Volkslieder der Serben. Metrisch übersetzt und historisch eingeleitet, Leipzig.

Jäger, Friedrich (2001): Bosniaken, Kroaten, Serben. Ein Leitfaden ihrer Geschichte, Frankfurt am Main et al.

Jarausch, Konrad H. (2005): Rückkehr zur Nationalgeschichte? Antwort auf die Krise der nationalen Meistererzählungen. In: Klein, Christian / Saeverin, Peter F. / Südkamp, Holger (ed.):

Geschichtsbilder. Konstruktion, Reflexion, Transformation, Cologne, 259-280.

Jovanovits, Katharina A. (1951): Die Heldenlieder von Kosovo, Zurich.

Judah, Tim (1997): The Serbs. History, Myth and the Deconstruction of Yugoslavia, New Haven et al.

Kaser, Karl / Halpern, Joel, M.: Historical Myth and the Invention of Political Folklore in Contemporary Serbia. In: The Anthropology of Eastern Europe Review 16 (1998), Online at http://condor.depaul.edu/~rrotenbe/aeer/aeer16_1.html#Kaser_Halpern (viewed on 25th of October 2010).

Kolstø Pal (2005): Assessing the Role of Historical Myths in Modern Society. In: Ibid. (ed.): Myths and Boundaries in South-East Europe. London 2005, S. 1–34.

Lauer, Reinhard (1995): Das Wüten der Mythen. Kritische Anmerkungen zur serbischen heroischen Dichtung. In: Ibid. / Lehfeldt, Werner (ed.): Das jugoslawische Desaster. Historische, sprachliche und ideologische Hintergründe, Wiesbaden, 107-148.

MacDonald, David B. (2002): Balkan holocausts? Serbian and Croatian victim-centred propaganda and the war in Yugoslavia, Manchester / New York.

Malcolm, Noel (1998): Kosovo. A Short History, London.

Megill, Alan (1995): Grand Narrative and the Discipline of History. In: Ankersmit, Frank / Kellner, Hans (ed.): A New Philosophy of History, Chicago, 151-173.

Middell, Matthias / Gibas, Monika / Hadler, Frank (2000): Sinnstiftung und Systemlegitimation durch historisches Erzählen. Überlegungen zu Funktionsmechanismen von Repräsentation des Vergangenen. In: Comparativ 10.2: 7-35.

Mirosavljević, Olivera (1998): Der Missbrauch der Autorität der Wissenschaft. In: Bremer, Thomas et.al. (ed.): Serbiens Weg in den

Krieg. Kollektive Erinnerung, nationale Formierung und ideologische Aufrüstung, Berlin, 159-82.

Mrkich, Dana (1989): Kosovo: Songs of the Serbs, Ottawa.

Naimark, Norman M. / Case, Holly (ed.) (2003): Yugoslavia and Its Historians. Understanding the Balkan Wars of the 1990s, Stanford.

Nitsche, Peter: (2003) ‚Das serbische Golgatha'. Das Kosovo als Gedächtnisort und nationaler Mythos. In: Jaworski, Rudolf et al. (ed.): Gedächtnisorte in Osteuropa. Vergangenheiten auf dem Prüfstand, Frankfurt am Main, pp. 139-156.

Noritsch, Andreas (ed.) (2002): Den Anderen im Blick. Stereotype im ehemaligen Jugoslawien, Frankfurt am Main.

Petković, Srđan (2003): Der nationale Diskurs unter Einfluss von Kriegspropaganda, Kirche und Folklorismus. Zur Entwicklung serbischer Wahrnehmung. Online at http://deposit.ddb.de/cgi-bin/dokserv?idn=969853394&dok_var=d1&dok_ext=pdf&filename=969853394.pdf (viewed on 25th of October 2010).

Petritsch, Wolfgang / Kaser, Karl / Pichler, Rudolf (1999): Kosovo. Mythen, Daten, Fakten, Klagenfurt et al.

Popović, Tanja (2003): Die Mythologisierung des Alltags. Kollektive Erinnerungen, Geschichtsbilder und Vergangenheitskultur in Serbien und Montenegro seit Mitte der 1980er Jahre, Zurich.

Redjep, Jelka (1980): Die Erzählung von der Kosovo-Schlacht, Münchener Zeitschrift für Balkankunde 3: 127-167.

Sarmadow, Ivelin (1996): Mandate of History: Serbian National Identity and Ethnic Conflict in Former Yugoslavia. In: Micgiel, John S. (ed.): State and Nation Building in East Central Europe: Contemporary Perspectives, New York, 1-38.

Schmitt, Oliver J. (2008): Kosovo. Kurze Geschichte einer zentralbalkanischen Landschaft, Vienna et al.

Schlotzer, Stefan (trans.) (1996): Serbische Heldenlieder. Übersetzt von Stefan Schlotzer. Mit einem Kommentar von Erika Beermann, Munich.

Shenk, Gerald (1995): God with Us? The Roles of Religion in Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia. In: Calließ, Jörg: Der Konflikt der Kulturen und der Friede in der Welt, Loccum, 79-86.

Steindorff, Ludwig (2000): Konzepte der Nationalbildung bei Kroaten, Serben und Bosniaken. In: Lienau, Cay / ibid. (ed.): Ethnizität, Identität und Nationalität in Südosteuropa, Munich, 159-165.

Sundhaussen, Holm (2007): Geschichte Serbiens, Vienna et al.

Sundhaussen, Holm (2003): Die ‚Genozidnation': serbische Kriegs- und Nachkriegsbilder. In: Buschmann, Nikolaus / Langewiesche, Dieter (ed.): Der Krieg in den Gründungsmythen europäischer Nationen und der USA, Frankfurt am Main et al., 351-371.

Sundhaussen, Holm (2000): Kosovo. Eine Konfliktgeschichte. In: Reuter, Jens / Clewing, Konrad (ed.): Der Kosovo-Konflikt. Ursachen, Verlauf, Perspektiven, Klagenfurt et al., 65-89.

Sundhaussen, Holm (1994): Ethnonationalismus in Aktion. Bemerkungen zum Ende Jugoslawiens. In: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 20: 402-423.

Sundhaussen, Holm (1992): Nationsbildung und Nationalismus im Donau-Balkan-Raum. In: Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte 48: 223 –258.

Tepe, Peter (1988): Theorie der Illusionen, Essen.

White, Hayden (1990): Die Bedeutung der Form. Erzählstrukturen in der Geschichtsschreibung, Frankfurt am Main.

Žanić, Ivo (2003a): Das politische Imaginarium der kroatischen Nationalgeschichte. In: Melčić, Dunja (ed.): Der Jugoslawien-Krieg. Handbuch zu Vorgeschichte, Verlauf, Konsequenzen, Wiesbaden et al., 287-294.

Žanić, Ivo: Zur Geschichte der bosniakischen Mythologie. In: Melčić, Dunja (ed.): Der Jugoslawien-Krieg. Handbuch zu Vorgeschichte, Verlauf, Konsequenzen, Wiesbaden et al. 2003, 295-300.

Zimmering, Raina (2000): Mythen in der Politik der DDR. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung politischer Mythen, Opladen.

Zirojević, Olga (1998): Das Amselfeld im kollektiven Gedächtnis. In: Bremer, Thomas et al. (ed.): Serbiens Weg in den Krieg. Kollektive Erinnerung, nationale Formierung und ideologische Aufrüstung, Berlin, 45-62.

NOTES

---

[1] The following article is an edited version of my lecture "Nationalist Mobilisation and Political Myths in ex-Yugoslav Wars" which I gave in September 2008 on the international symposium "Des myths politiques" in Perpignan. For the French translation see Camić (2010).

[2] For political utilisations of the past in Croat and Bosniak nationalisms see Žanić (2003a and 2003b).

[3] The most complete and ‚neutral' illustration of the battle is presented by Malcolm (1998). For other descriptions see Jäger (2001: 68-71), Schmitt (2008), Judah (1997) and Petritsch et al. (1999).

[4] For the genesis of the written narrative and corresponding social background see Greenawalt (2004). Generally for the rich Serbian epic poetry see Jovanovits (1951), Mrkich (1989) and Schlotzer (1996).

[5] A short essence of the plot is expressed in the epic song *Propast carstva srpskoga* (*The Downfall of the Serbian Empire*) which can be regarded as a representative for the whole Kosovo-cycle. For the English translation of the most important elements see Judah (1997: 34-5), for the german translation see Durić (1996: 7-10).

[6] Greenawalt points out that national and political elements do not appear in the narrative until the late 18th and 19th century (Greenawalt 2004: 52-3). See also Hehn (1975).

[7] For comprehensive comparison of historic facts and their later interpretations see Malcolm (1998: 58-80).

[8] For the used term of ‚illusion' see Tepe (1988).

[9] Sundhaussen refers to an alliance between theology and politics in the utilisation of the Kosovo Battle (Sundhaussen 2000: 72).

[10] For the metamorphoses of the appropriations in diffrent historic ages see Bieber (2002) and Greenawalt (2004).

[11] When I say a high standard of living, I mean in comparison with other Eastern European countries at that time.

[12] For the decade-long impact of the institutionalised Tito-cult with the purpose to legitimate power of the Yugoslav Communist Party and stabilise the political system see Camić (2006).

[13] This means the so called ‚closed' Serbia – without Vojvodina and Kosovo which had a status of autonomous provinces in socialist Yugoslavia.

[14] For other nationalisms in former Yugoslavia see Sundhaussen (1992), Behschnitt (1980) and Steindorff (2000).

[15] For the role of intellectual elites in the process of arising nationalism see Dragović-Soso (2003). At the same place the main matters of the 'memorandum' are discussed in detail (ibid: 177-89).

[16] Albanians are an ethnic majority in Kosovo.

[17] According to general genocide topics in ex-Yugoslav wars see Denich (1994).

[18] At the same place Sundhaussen remarks correctly that the systematic persecution and elimination of Serbs by the fascist Croat state NDH in the Second World War can be regarded as genocide. On the other side, there are no connections between the situation of Serbs in the NDH and the Ottoman rule over Serbia or the Kosovo topic.

[19] For a comprehensive review of the nationalist propaganda and its functions see Čolović (2003).

[20] For the close connection between Serbian Orthodox Church and the nationalism in the 1980's see MacDonald (2002: 72-73) and Petković (2003: 223-254). For general reviews of the role of religion in the ex-Yugoslav wars see Cohen (1997) and Shenk (1995).

[21] An English translation of the speech is available online at http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/spch-kosovo1989.htm (viewed on 25th of October 2010).

[22] For a general review concerning concepts of enemies in ex-Yugoslav wars see Bašić (2004), Noritsch (2002) and Höpken (2000).

[23] Vidovdan is the Serbian name for St. Vitus Day on June 28th. The original and complete quotation is available online at http://www.genocid.org/procitaj67 (viewed on 25th of October 2010). I assumed the shortened and apposite English translation from a presentation of Jelena Obradović (available online at http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/english/ecebb/ecebb_coursedescriptions_07_08/obradovich_lecture_on_kosovo_and_myth.ppt, viewed on 25th of October 2010).

[24] Čolović presents a good review of Serbian messianism and describes the nationalist efforts to cause the uniqueness of Serbs, not only compared to their neighbours but also to the Western nations (Čolović 2003: 308-311).

[25] Sundhaussen points out that the victim theme had a double-meaning: on the one hand as a 'victim' of strange rules, on the other hand as a 'sacrifice' for a higher good – such as Christianity (Sundhaussen 2003: 363).

[26] Zimmering applies for a similar methodical issue in Zimmering (2003: 31-2). Generally for the differences between functionalistic and enlightening paradigms in the research of political myths see Kolstø (2005).

[27] We can take the example of the denazification in Germany after the Second World War.

[28] For the role of historians in the mass radicalisation during the Yugoslav disintegration see Naimark / Case (2003), Höpken (1999), and Mirosavljević (1998). Generally for political utilisation of the history science and education in Southern East Europe see Höpken (1996) and Brunnbauer (2004).