Waking the Dead (Who May Never Die): Ethnonationalist Politics of Dead Bodies and Graves in the War- and Post-War Serbia

Budeci mrtve (koji nikad ne umiru): etnonacionalisticka politika mrtvih tela i grobova u ratnoj i poratnoj Srbiji

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> Our talk about the dead has long ago become akin to the pulling of the lever on a jack-pot machine, from which all anxiously expect a flood of riches (Lovrenovic 1999).[1]

Abstract

The paper explores the stages and situational deployment of the narratives of graves, bones, and dead bodies in the Serbian public sphere before, during and in the aftermath of several nationalist wars of the 1990s. I will seek to demonstrate that the nationalist narratives "resurrecting" the dead served, first, to divide, that is, ethnicisize the memories of the previous wars, resulting in the classification of victims ("ours," Serb) and perpetrators ("theirs", Croat, Muslim, Albanian). The wars of the 1990s, which included ethnic expulsions, genocide, burials and reburials in mass graves, served to re-confirm the alleged continuous certainty over the apparently fixed and pure ethnicity of victims (Serbs) as well as their enemies. The main thesis of the paper is that the unprecedented in the region inter-ethnic violence of the 1990s served less to confirm or continue the pattern of past brutalities, but, rather, to remove all reminders of the everyday life experiences of trans-, multi- or inter-ethnic coexistence and, most importantly, to eradicate the presence of "Others" within most individuals who had grown up in the former Yugoslavia. Following the theses of Benedict Anderson and Arjun Appadurai, I show that ethnicization of the dead accompanies the simultaneous processes of nationalization of collective memory on the one hand, and ethnic un-mixing on the ground on the other, becoming the dominant culture of the political practice of state-building. The paper questions the foundation of much of Western-assisted efforts at promoting reconciliation in the post-Yugoslav region, which rarely seek to revisit the Yugoslav "forbidden" past revealing the "intolerable sameness" or proximity between the identity of Others.

I. *Introduction*

This article explores several stages and forms of deployment of the dominant narratives of

graves, bones, and dead bodies in the Serbian public space before, during and in the

aftermath of the several nationalist wars in which this country was involved during the 1990s.

The essay focuses on the malleability of forms of the nationalist discourse – from its early,

almost exclusively literary manifestations, to its direct deployment in the service of state

propaganda. Its second and methodologically relevant focus is on the actors of this

nationalist discourse, which deserves a more detailed elaboration. One should bear in mind

that the themes of the nationalist use of WWII massacres of Serbs, and other related topics,

have been repeatedly taken up by several antinationalist and antiwar-minded authors in

Serbia (Gojkovic 1996, Radic 1996, Colovic 1997). Most of these studies are ethnological

and descriptive in method, which allowed the authors to, first, depict "thick" (in the sense that

Clifford Geertz defined description) and multifaceted layers of this discourse and its long

presence in the public arena and, next, present the authority of this discourse as a resource

to mobilize public opinion to support or at least be passively consternated about the calls for

a "delayed" revenge for past injustices or a "preventive" struggle against future assaults from

the "anti-Serb nations". Complementing this approach, I am focusing on the instances of the

graves and bones discourse from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge and

intellectuals. I am focusing on diverse social actors of the Serbian nationalist discourse

whose common characteristic is their temporary empowerment, by the dominant political

institutions of the time, to step outside of the customary spheres of their work and influence

(in academic institutions and literary establishments) and merge it with the role of political

spokespersons. The process I am referring to is commonly described as politicization of

knowledge and its institutions, and has been outlined as both a problem and possible

advantage of intellectual engagement by Karl Mannheim, Julien Benda, and Antonio

Gramsci. In the Serbian context, as in other similar historical and political settings in Europe, local intellectual actors have been granted, because of their role in the war-mongering or war-alarming discourse, (always temporary) political visibility. The thesis on the temporary political empowerment of intellectuals will be supported by a deliberate choice of different institutional settings, and, thus, different initial positions, of the actors of Serbian nationalist discourse.

Before I move on to the depiction of deployment of the bones and graves discourse I will introduce some useful lines of theoretical framework, which will help in tackling the relationship between the historical past and present. I will be relying primarily on Benedict Anderson's general theses on "imagined communities," and his particular emphasis on the move from *simultaneity* to *linearity* of the perceptions of time.

In his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson proposes that national, i.e., nationalist consciousness may gain ground and replace the perceptions of the community that correspond to what he calls the "dynastic realm," once the cyclical experience of time is replaced by the linear one (Anderson 1991). The latter is associated with a move of a homogeneous and harmonious human collective toward its improvement and "progress". However, while Anderson shows that the linear presentation of a nation's history as a self-perfecting development of a horizontally linked community "upwards" and "further" results, to a great degree, from the "protean" responses and adaptations of nationalism to modern capitalism and advances in book printing, the spread of newspapers and serial novels (Anderson 2000), we can also observe that the nation's glorious march forward to its future "final fulfilment" is inevitably strengthened by certain circularity and simultaneity of the "crucial" elements from its (imagined as homogeneous) past. In other words, just as

Anderson observes that the Biblical sacrifice of Isaac could be identified as both prefiguring and simultaneously present with the death of Jesus Christ only through a vertical linking of both events to the "Divine Apex" (and the very fact that we put it in quotation marks shows our belonging to the linear secular time) (Anderson 1991: 23-24), the progress-linked martyrdom of the modern nation, exemplified in, for example, the ubiquitous tombs of Unknown Soldiers, cannot be imagined without the simultaneous presence of what otherwise would be seen (in a "perfectly" modern vision) as unrelated events. Battles of "historical" importance are a case in point, as it would be impossible, for example, to argue that the battle of Poitiers in 732 or Kosovo in 1389 are *the* crucial events for understanding the (linear) developments of France or Germany in the first case, or Serbia or Yugoslavia in the second. Yet, at different times they had been temporarily elevated from their pre-modern functions to fulfil the presumably same as then, role of a "fateful simultaneity" with the goals and events of modern nations and their states. In other words, it seems that the dissemination of the linear perception of time and related (although not causally, as Anderson warns us) belonging to a nation cannot be deemed significant if it does not accommodate a possibility to treat certain events from its "unique" previous ages *as simultaneous to the linear passage*. Thus, there could exist a "pocket" of imagination of a constant overlap between the modern linear progression of time and the past "fateful" events, where the latter float as an aura around those actions that are perceived as a joint linear "effort" of a known-to-all-its-members horizontal community. The "auratic" events serve as a sort of a constant reminder of the nation's virtues or temptations that manifest them.

It is this combination of the simultaneous and linear time of the nation that allows certain events or their fragments happening in the present to be interpreted as if they were

identical to those that took place in the past: analogies are justified by the presumably unmistaken sense of truth that derives from "auratic" experiences of the national collective consciousness, i.e., its unchanging repertoire of virtues that guide its members to pursue a correct action. In short, while national (ist) consciousness is difficult to imagine without a modern forward-looking state polity, its self-homogenizing cultural "motors" (the ones that dominate the culture of modern states) can and do connect major events in the "progressive," dense, i.e., historically dynamic national "life" to some static past in which certain events appear to last solely as prefigurations of what is to come. This simultaneity, invoked by modern nationalism, is, of course, "damaged" or "defective" in comparison to what the stasis of simultaneous events was in the eyes of, say, medieval worshippers. Nevertheless, the pulls and pushes of what we can now call "an incompletely linear time" allow for establishing connections between a variety of past events and everyday life realities that may be otherwise, under some routine conditions, considered as distant or even absurd and impossible to connect. This explains why in times of dramatic political and social change these "static" events may become "radically present" or absent, and used to forge and perpetuate fears and hostilities, or assist the reframing of hostilities and their termination. At different times, the choice and treatment of "permanently present" events to be inserted in the life of a nation may differ, too: what Mircea Eliade calls "traditional archetypes" (that may include even collective hallucinations), assimilated from some collective imaginations, may become completely absent, less relevant, or ridiculed (Eliade 1974). In Mircea Eliade's studies the processes of removal or displacement of "traditional archetypes" are of secondary importance: this task requires a different combination of sociological and anthropological tools, and, perhaps, also a "radical" deployment of nationalism before the eyes of a

5

researcher who has inadvertently become its target.

Apart from Anderson's anthropological perspective, there are relevant sociological approaches to the issues of the relationship between the imagination, on the one hand, and practices of ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations in everyday life, on the other (which are not necessarily at all times congruent), and its impact on ethnonationalist violence. The selected approaches share Anderson's assumption that the primary aspiration of violent mobilization is the building of a culturally (primarily ethnically) homogeneous state. In his research on the patterns of violence in the former Yugoslavia during the wars of 1991-1995, sociologist Anthony Oberschall suggests, as part of his strong argument against the presentations of the Balkans as a unique powder keg, that in the communities he studied in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia there existed two modes of inter-ethnic relations: a peace-time mode, which was rooted in the individual inhabitants' everyday life experiences, and a war-time mode, which was, to some extent, informed by the memories and other narratives of the WWII-era massacres and exodus. In order for the second mode to become dominant, i.e., to cause what would be otherwise considered an abnormal behaviour, such as separation between people of different ethnicities, the communities had to be exposed to some kind of a shock, usually a sudden arrival of an armed group of people in the village. Oberschall shows how difficult it was, in fact, to induce the sense of separateness in the inhabitants of ethnically mixed villages, even those in whose vicinity armed battles were being waged for months (Oberschall 2000)[2]. Tone Bringa, a Norwegian anthropologist working for more than a decade in central Bosnia, shows that only violence instilled a sense of separateness between the people of different ethnicities (Bringa 1995). These two studies are invaluable for a critique of primordial and simplistic instrumentalist approaches to nationalism, due to their depiction of a

variety of inter-ethnic ties and especially the density of trans-ethnic of multiethnic components of identity that were manifested by individual persons, thus introducing a yet-to be-developed conception of *individual persons as multiethnics*.

Several local authors, such as Dusko Sekulic, a Croatian sociologist now living in Australia, showed, based on the longitudinal studies of census identifications and other opinion-polling surveys, that ethnonationalist identities prevailed in the former Yugoslavia only after a concerted political pressure from above. Sekulic demonstrates that the disappearance of personal identifications as "Yugoslavs" from the census during certain "crisis" periods emerged as a consequence of the introduction of political and economic uncertainty and threats in the discourses and actions of political elites (Sekulic 1994, 1997). In this way, Sekulic also supports the thesis on the destruction of all identities that could serve as alternatives to ethnonationalist one, which precedes the homogenization of a nation prior to violence.

In Serbia, whose political and military leadership carries principal responsibility for orchestrating the dissolution of Yugoslavia as a "war option only," radical switches to the fearful or defensive mode of inter-ethnic relations proceeded at a different pace and in different forms from the ones outlined above. The wars were taking place "out there" but the inhabitants of Serbia, primarily Serbs, had to be turned into *separate people* by means of being homogenized by the fear of other ethnics (their neighbours) and expectations of the war coming to their doorsteps. The narratives of bones and graves have played the role of a master narrative in creating the siege mentality in Serbia since the late 1980s. I would also argue that they produced a more virulent level of national consciousness – a kind of nationalist psychosis -- in detaching many people of Serb (but not only Serb) ethnicity from

their own everyday life experiences, which was prior to the wars imbued with a wealth of multi- or inter-ethnic cultural modes (Devic 2000, Gagnon 2001). This level of nationalism, as a consequence of violence and the narratives that shroud and justify it, is often understudied by many, especially new researchers of the region who tend to assume that the degrees of inter-ethnic violence lie in direct proportion to the degrees of separateness and pre-war hostilities between what they identify as ethnically homogeneous cultures.

The virulence and multitude of stages of the "bones and graves" stories in Serbia, which served to represent Serbs as past and eternal victims of their Croat and Muslim neighbours, is a testimony to the degree of pressures put upon the pre-war everyday life experiences that had to be distorted in order to forge and maintain a sense of "pure" Serb groupness by means of fears and threats, i.e., elaborate depictions of future mass deaths of Serbs. In my concluding remarks I will introduce theses on the causes of the use of extreme brutality in inter-ethnic violence, developed by Arjun Appadurai, which may be of help in further debunking of the thesis on the primary role of "old" and "suppressed" inter-ethnic hostilities in triggering modern ethnonationalist violence.

II. *The Artistic (Re-) Birth of Bones and Graves in the Early 1980s*

As noted in the beginning of the essay, the focus on several different, temporarily empowered intellectual actors of the nationalist discourse, would allow me to follow, on the one hand, the trajectory of the "instigating", most powerful actors of the nationalist political agendas, and, on the other, to connect the use of different themes of Serbian graves among themselves, despite the different categories of their political impact. Furthermore, it would also allow for linking them to developments in the neighbouring and "dependent" or "competing"

nationalisms (Croatian and Bosniak or Muslim). The linking of the different uses of the theme of Serb victimhood and martyrdom, in fact, serves to elucidate the picture of "grand" trajectories of the main nationalist strategists.[3]

In the early 1980s, three years after the death of President Tito, a theatre play "Golubnjaca" ("Pigeonhole", depicting the sudden discovery by a group of playing children of a deep pit into which Croatian Serbs were thrown during the Second World War – and the victims turn out to be the kids' relatives) was condemned as "an incitement to inter-ethnic hatred", and its further staging prohibited by the League of Communists, first in Vojvodina, then still constitutionally autonomous province of Serbia, and subsequently in several other republics. While the play itself was far from being a masterpiece of dramaturgy or literature, it staged a turning point in the ways in which the WWII atrocities by the Croatian Ustashe or Serbian Chetnik (both Nazi-collaborators) were perceived by Yugoslav audiences. But it was not the author of the drama, or theatre director, or actors who pushed for this change. It was the interplay between the increasingly ideologically rigid Leagues of Communists in several (but not all) republics (arguably with an exception of Slovenia and Serbia until 1987) and the newly established pan-Yugoslav Committee for Protection of the Freedom of Speech whose founding and most prominent activists were also members of the Association of Writers of Serbia. In their earliest activities, the Association defended prosecuted writers and academics regardless of the theme of their proscribed work, or their residence or ethnic background. The "Golubnjaca" play marked the beginning of the presentation of Serb ethnicity as "belonging to mass graves" -- as cyclically continuing from the past into the current, post-Tito, historical moment. This new stance also presumed an anti-Serb position of, at first, all Communist leaderships, then, Kosovo Albanian, Slovenian, and Croatian leadership in particular (in that

sequential order), and, at last, most non-Serbs in Yugoslavia.

However, the dissemination of particular ways in which mass graves and bones were treated in "Golubnjaca" in the Serbian public arena did not happen at the time of the play's theatre performance, or in the immediate aftermath of its banning: its theme and its "heroic" defence by the Serbian Writers' Association were given huge publicity only few years later, in the context of the politicization and abolition of the autonomy of Kosovo, i.e., during the climb to power of Slobodan Milosevic and his faction in the League of Communists. From the perspective of a sociological inquiry in the impact of the graves and bones discourse, "Golubnjaca" becomes important precisely because its shows that the content of the play *may* or may *not* have been used to stir up a political, or any public attention or incite interethnic fears and resentments. The play itself became irrelevant once it was brought back into the public light by new activities of the Association of Writers of Serbia in the late 1980s. The fact that "Golubnjaca" was forbidden from public performance was taken, at this later stage, as a proof that the "discovery" of pits in the play was an ominous sign that the "anti-Serb" League of Communists were being indifferent to or even supportive of the repetition of the Serb cycle of martyrdom. Furthermore, the very fact that the banned play was about the war-time pits as mass graves of Serb civilians, was taken as an evidence of, in the words of Matija Beckovic, the existence of pits as "the Serb sole ethnically clean settlements" [4](Gojkovic: 383-383).

Thus, only after the climb to power of Slobodan Milosevic in 1987-1988, the Serbian literary elite picked the selected effects of "Golubnjaca" as enormously potent in creating an atmosphere of a latent threat to Serb ethnicity *in the absence of and prior to the start of actual violence* in 1991. This initial repertoire also assisted the development of a marketplace

of ethno-nationalist knowledge and interpretations of the history and current times of

Yugoslavia. Since 1987-88 and the rise to power of Slobodan Milosevic, the newly created

sombre fair of ethno-nationalist literature and academic research has absorbed and

temporarily skyrocketed to celebrity or even political positions, dozens of academics, artists

and journalists.

III. *The Kosovo Battle Grave*

Since 1987, The Serbian Orthodox Church has acted as the primary sponsor of the

"return" of the remains of the Kosovo medieval martyr-hero Tsar Lazar to his "home" in the

Gracanica Monastery near Pristina[5]. In the course of 1988, however, the carrying of Tsar

Lazar's remains became directly linked to the approaching sixth centenary of the Battle of

Kosovo that was going to be organized as a grand spectacle by the Serbian and Yugoslav

authorities (Radic 1996: 276-278). From this time on, one could follow the increasing

politicization of the activities of the Serbian Orthodox Church: after the rise to power of

Slobodan Milosevic in 1987, it understood well the signals for the opening of ethno-nationalist

culture market. One could safely hypothesize that the Church's relentless effort to maintain a

political role in Serbia, including the post-Milosevic, current stage, is directly proportional to its

sense of insecurity and mistrust in the population's religious loyalties.

As for the Association of Writers of Serbia, since the end of 1987 it started supporting

the protests of Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins against the discriminating behaviour of the

Province's Kosovo Albanian leadership, and the violent assaults and pressures to expel

Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo that were allegedly made by ordinary Albanians.

Curiously, the Belgrade writers rarely, if ever, went to Kosovo to witness these violations of

human and civil rights of local Serbs and Montenegrins. Instead, they held numerous poetry readings and wrote petitions in their Belgrade club, developing a genre of the Kosovo martyrdom, the largest portion of which was the cult of virtuous mass deaths of Serbs at the site of the XIV-century battle that was lost to the advancing Ottomans (Djordjevic 2002). As in the previous case of the delayed deployment of the themes from "Golubnjaca," the initial complaints of Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins were first depicted only in the form of a letter to the Serbian Writers Association's main newsletter "Knjizevne novine", and were published without a comment in 1986. The deployment of the theme of Kosovan Serbs' suffering and its linking to the medieval Kosovo started in the late spring of 1987 – some months after Slobodan Milosevic visited (for the first time in his life) Kosovo Polje and delivered his ominous promise to the demonstrating Serbs and Montenegrins ("From now on, no one will dare to beat you!") in reaction to the brutal treatment of demonstrators by the local police.

During this period, and especially between 1987 and 1989, following several visits to Kosovo of Slobodan Milosevic and his subsequent coup in the League of Communists of Serbia, the Kosovo myth has not only surpassed in the poetic epic flamboyance its previous XIX and early XX century versions of the link between the blood of dead heroes and the "Serbianness" of one's homeland, but it has also undergone transformations. It increasingly started using the linkage between the Serb heroes' bones and the soil in which they lay as a reminder of many more such fields or pits in the neighbouring Croatia, and a warning about the future (nearly inevitable) appearance of new mass graves that would be filled with Serbs. This radicalization of the horizons or frontiers of Serb graves and bones accompanied the period of preparations for the first multiparty elections that were held solely on the level of individual Yugoslav republics in 1990. The media in the meantime acquired a new role of the

promoters of particular and potentially competing political programs; the demand for nationalist intellectuals' "facts," especially those depicting threats to Serbs' collective physical safety, increased accordingly.

IV. *On Deaths and Graves after Violence*

Following the signing of the Dayton peace accord in 1995, the leadership of Bosnian Serbs in the parts of Sarajevo that were under their control during the war, ordered its military personnel and their families to leave the areas, while announcing to the civilian Serb population that they would be at the mercy of the "Mujahedin" Bosnian state should they decide to stay. In response to these warnings, dozens of Serb families decided to leave and take along their dead family members, after exhuming them from their graves. The journalists were quick to jump on these shocking images, and films depicting old barely closed wooden coffins sticking out of cars and trucks have been shown around the world. Who could have resisted the temptation of depicting the exhumation and exodus of the Serb dead as a barbaric but nevertheless "natural" demonstration of the impossibility of normal coexistence between the Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia! Indeed, one could not put most of the blame on the foreign commentators for forgetting to mention a "discomforting" for nationalist imagination historical fact: that the ancestors of both the exhumed and living Serbs in Bosnia had laid in Orthodox graveyards next to the graveyards of their Muslim neighbours in the hundreds of towns and villages across Bosnia and Herzegovina during the long Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Yugoslav times, and that following World War Two they were also laid to rest in secular, mixed graveyards. How unnatural, indeed, albeit *differently,* would the most recent exhumations appear if the reports had bothered to mention these prosaic chunks of a

long non-violent history!

Since 1995, the Commission for Missing Persons of the Republika Srpska, which is different and separate from the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Federation's Commission, has engaged in the exhumations of many graves of local Serbs who lived and died on the territory of the Bosnian Federation during the war (Suljagic 2000). Officially, as part of its search for the two thousand missing Bosnian Serbs, the Republika Srpska's Commission is exhuming graves of the persons believed to be Serbs who died during the war on the territory of the Bosnian federation in order to examine the causes of their death. The commission has the right to exhume the grave of any person whose family was not present at the burial since the family's absence is taken as a reason to believe that causes of death may have been falsified. In several cases that have been reported by the families of the exhumed, these graves were dug up without their knowledge, and did not contain any persons reported as missing. There are, however, other cases where family members of the deceased Serbs have asked the Commission of Republika Srpska to exhume their relatives buried on the territory of the Federation in order to investigate the causes of their death.

V. *Yugoslav President at the Grave of a Poet*

Following the 2000 change of regime in Serbia, Vojislav Kostunica, the first post-Milosevic president of the rump Yugoslavia, paid one of his first international visits – to Bosnia. The purpose of his trip was the participation in the ceremony of the burial of the remains of Jovan Ducic, a Bosnian Serb poet, in his tome town of Trebinje. In the socialist Yugoslavia Ducic was recognized as an author of sophisticated love poetry, but the return of his remains was prohibited due to his war-time propaganda efforts in support of the Chetnik

leader and Nazi collaborator Draza Mihajlovic and the Serbian quisling regime leader Milan

Nedic. Ducic, a diplomat in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, spent the war years in the United

States (where he subsequently died), where, along with his propaganda activity he also wrote

a number of virulent anti-Croat and anti-Muslim texts. The return of Ducic, "liberated" from his

socialist-era nationalist stigma, to his birth place, now on the territory of the Republika Srpska

entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was depicted in the anti-nationalist media in Serbia and in the

Bosnian Federation as "The Ducic Affair" (Lovrenovic and Konstantinovic 2000, Cvijanovic

2000): Kostunica was criticized for failing to visit the Bosnian capital and leadership in

Sarajevo prior to his landing in Trebinje, and for making his first visit to Bosnia marked by

honouring an ardent Serb nationalist. Fewer observers noticed, however, the emergence of a

new, post-Milosevic, treatment of "our" (co-ethnics') graves and bones. While in the late

1980s, the remains of the Kosovo medieval martyr-hero, the defeated Tsar Lazar, were

carried by the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church around almost the entire

country (the event that was endorsed, in the beginning, by a contemptuous indifference of the

League of Communists), the Serb nationalist poet travelled in 2000 from the U.S. to Bosnia

with only one stop in between – in Montenegro. The representatives of Milosevic's party were

conspicuously absent at the ceremony, although it was the Socialist Party of Serbia, along

with other nationalist parties, which planned the reburial of Ducic's remains since the late

1990s. It so happened that the Socialist Party and its leader had been in the meantime

defeated in the 2000 elections, and expunged from the ruling coalition in Serbia: hence,

Ducic "returned' to the company of different, "democratic nationalists". The ceremony

featured the top leaders of Republika Srpska, Vojislav Kostunica with his entourage from

Serbia, and the representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The trajectory of Ducic's

remains, as well as the cast of the ceremony, seems to demarcate the new geopolitical reality of the post-2000 Serbia and its Bosnian offspring. It also highlights the remarkable malleability of the nationalists' use of events and actions, where it was possible for Jovan Ducic's remains to be planned for reburial by the "socialist" organizers of the 1991-1995 re-mapping of Bosnia, but to be finished by their apparent opponents.

VI. *The Post-2000 "Normalizing Nationalism"*

What kind of a dominant cultural context of the discourse on wartime bones and graves does the post-2000 Serbia represent? Just as Anderson's image of a forward moving national community cannot survive without the cultural "motors" that draw into it and homogenize-linearise a cyclically appearing past,[6] in Serbia, the pressures to reform and re-integrate into the norms of international economic and political order have so far proceeded without a broad public debate about the most recent wars and violence, and the ensuing sequence of events that threw Serbia into the state of international isolation for a decade.

The survival of the narratives of the Serb (only) victimhood is a manifestation of the inability of post-Milosevic's elites to break away from the war-time cultural frames. In the period following the October 2000 change we find a seemingly paradoxical situation: greater openness to the West is paralleled, according to different surveys, with the persistence (if not rising) of ethnic stereotyping of Serbs' ethnic neighbours and a lack of publicly expressed and supported accounts of the recent past of Serbia. The Milosevic period's wars and war crimes against the neighbouring countries of former Yugoslavia are addressed by the dominant media and politicians solely as part of fulfilling Serbia's obligations toward the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and not the issue that could or should

be problematised culturally, or socio-psychologically. In many ways, the defensive culture of ethnonationalism is still there, most manifest in the commentaries on the work of the ICTY versus Slobodan Milosevic, where individuals rarely conceive of the court as anything more than instrument for punishing Serbs. Alternatively, the ICTY is perceived as a national sports entertainment. In both cases, the events that serve as bases for the Court's charges and trials are not seen as bearing any relation to a viewer's immediate political environment or perceptions of culture and identity.

Several public polls conducted in 2001 found out that 52.5 percent of respondents in Serbia could not name a single war crime committed by Serb forces in Bosnia, Croatia, or Kosovo. Nearly half, however, could name at least three crimes committed against Serb civilians by other forces. The former Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic and his chief military commander general Ratko Mladic - the two leaders most wanted by the war crimes tribunal - are still considered the two "greatest defenders of the Serb nation," according to the poll.

Defensive, ethno-centred identification can be observed also in the sphere of popular perceptions of Serbia's relation to the West from where funding for "democracy" and "economic reconstruction" is to be received. The image of living under the US (especially) and EU dictate, i.e., doing "what the West forces us to do" is not projected only by the parties now in opposition, namely, Milosevic's Socialist Party and Vojislav Seselj's (by now awaiting his trial in The Hague) ultra right-wing Serb Radical Party, but it has also routinely coloured interviews with a number of other actors in the Democratic Opposition (DOS) coalition.

The post-2000 Serbian nationalism was defined by one of the leading members of the Serbian (then still "Yugoslav") short-lived Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (appointed

by Vojislav Kostunica)[7] as a 'European' branch of nationalism, which extols its own nation above others *because it is a product of a democratic process* (Stojanovic 2000). Because of its "democratic birth" it provides necessary integrative glue for its "core-nation" and binds all citizens into a legitimate polity worthy of loyalty and patriotism.[8] In this picture, the blame for the decade of nationalistic wars is put on the shoulders of the ousted authoritarian regime, while Serbs are presented as principal victims of Milosevic's policies. The latter are portrayed as the legacy of Communism, which had supposedly created an unnatural break in the Serbian history. The "bête noire" of communist totalitarianism thus becomes a mantra and an alleged antipode of the European Serb "democratic nationalism" (Ilic 2001).

These latest endeavours in Serbia to "normalize" its nationalism by endowing it with integrative and "participatory" features reflect two defensive agendas. One has to do with the continuous denial of the new Serbian authorities to open a public debate on war crimes committed by Serb forces in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The other may reflect the intent to co-opt members of the local civic scene – the long time anti-nationalist and antiwar activist forums -- into the ranks of newly victorious parties. While the antinationalist activists are still being criticized for their "patriotism deficiency" (if not "treason," as the language of the Milosevic era would have it), i.e., their supposedly "unnatural inability to criticize other nations",[9] they are simultaneously invited to establish an alliance with the victorious "democratic nationalists."

In the post-Milosevic context of a "refurbished" nationalism, the narratives of graves and bones in Serbia often emerge as *anti*-mass grave discourses, since their focus combines the story of the Serbian victimhood with the denial of the war crimes committed by the Serbian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, or their magnitude. The most revealing

signs of the current Serbian leadership's inability to deal with the issues of war crimes come into view precisely when some political factions of the "inner circle" decide to momentarily lift the multilayered cover-up of the wartime murders of civilians. When a truck full of human bodies was found in the Danube river near a town Tekija in Serbia in the beginning of 2001, and the bodies were identified as those of Kosovo Albanian civilians murdered by the Serbian police in the spring of 1999, the local antinationalist forums greeted the media attention paid to the event as a long-awaited beginning of the public debate on the Serbian involvement in the war crimes. A similar reception was given to the showing of the documentary film on the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of Bosnian Muslim civilians by Bosnian Serb forces. The span of the dominant media focus on these events, however, did not last longer than few weeks: the antinationalist critics of the former and current regimes were correct in their observation that;

> (F)ormer authorities would like to legitimize their crimes and atrocities committed by their Bosnian and Drina underlings, while the current authorities would like to sweep under the carpet terrible consequences of a barbarian cycle of violence, for further insistence on examination and punishment of crimes would cause them more trouble on the 'pragmatic' level, for they could not protect their 'protégés' from the Hague justice, and on the 'ideological' level for its kitsch illusion about possible existence of a good nationalism," (Pancic 2001).

VI. *The Unimaginable Community of Uncertainty*

The thesis underlying my representation of the Serbian narratives of the wartime "bones and graves" as an element of the ethnonationalist politics, also addresses the goals of

the extraordinary violence in the former Yugoslavia. In this perspective, ethnonationalist violence was not the result of a fury of nationalist passions long repressed by communism, as many journalists and politicians would have it during the 1990s. Instead, the wars in the former Yugoslavia have been about the forcible reversal of Benedict Anderson's process of "imagining": their goals were the "unmixing" of peoples whose continuing co-existence was a proof of a possibility of an ethnically heterogeneous cultural and political space, such as the former Yugoslavia had been. This existing heterogeneity was the prime target of the extreme nationalist violence in the former Yugoslavia. In other words, the pre-existing diverse social reality:

> was counter to the political ideologies that won the free elections of 1990. Thus extreme nationalism in the former Yugoslavia has not been only a matter of imagining allegedly 'primordial' communities, but rather of making existing heterogeneous ones *unimaginable* (Hayden 1996: 783, italics mine).

The representations of dead bodies and graves as markers of an allegedly primordial territory of a nation (as a "sum" of its ethnic bodies) serve to further substantiate the "truth" about the "purity" of ethnic nation, which was allegedly violated by such "historic crimes" as communism or the Yugoslav state, which both, allegedly, forced the practices of ethnic mixing on an otherwise "normal", i.e., ethnically "clean" populations. Hence the instances of ethnonationalist violence and war crimes, even though officially condemned in the states whose actors practiced it, are simultaneously justified as attempts to "restore" the boundaries of national community.

Arjun Appadurai explains the conditions for ethnonationalist group violence as

"mechanisms for producing persons" in the context where "primary cultural features" of a population, which may include language and speech styles, clothing, or residential patterns, are recognized to be weak indicators of ethnic differences (Appadurai 1998: 241-242). Without diminishing the role of local sociologists and ethnologists in depicting the conditions under which ethnonationalist divisions and violence were made possible and instigated (Sekulic 1994, 1997), Appadurai's approach helps to understand how extreme brutality in inter-ethnic violence is directed against any possible reminders (such as communication with neighbours or relatives of different ethnicity) of common trans- or inter-ethnic forms of coexistence and, moreover, of the presence of "others" in the very person of a (potential) murderer. Appadurai broadens the standard critique of primordialism in the studies of modern ethnonationalist violence, which focus on the role of media propaganda, prejudice and collective memories that apparently spread a sort of heightened consciousness of the presence of ethnic "others." Appadurai suggests, instead, focusing on uncertainty or lack of precision in determining the ethnic features of individuals, i.e., the firmness of ethnic boundaries.

In the war space of former Yugoslavia, where large populations, as elsewhere, developed and practiced complex social identities that transgressed, erased, and mixed visible ethnic markers, bodily brutalities, which included mutilations, rapes, burials and reburials in unmarked mass graves, served to create a certainty over the allegedly obvious "ethnic otherness" of enemies. The real, peace time confusion and porousness of ethnic boundaries in the regions where the worst ethnocidal crimes were committed by the Serbian forces, needed to be eradicated – and only brutal mass deaths seemed to have had the effect of drawing the 'primordial' borders. Following this perspective, ethnonationalist

agendas had been based not on the apparent obviousness of interethnic hostilities and injustices, or intolerable proximity of "others", but on their opposites: the lived experience of the uncertainties over larger ethnic group labels of the populations. In the end, only the death of individual persons, who, if left alive or unmutilated, would be a constant reminder of ethnic impurity and uncertainty, could make the tension over this uncertainty (temporarily, at least) bearable.

VII. *Epilogue and To Be Continued*

Stjepan and Dubravko: uncertainty over cultural boundaries as an alternative to nation-building culture and official multiculturalism

Three years ago in the city of Jajce in Bosnia, two celebrations of the return of the remains of Stjepan Tomasevic, the XV century last Bosnian king, were staged: one by the Croatian Democratic Alliance (HDZ), the deceased president Tudjman's party, and another one, by the local Franciscan clergy, in whose monastery the king's remains had rested prior to being taken to Split, a city on the Dalmatian cost, during the war. The friars refused to participate in the ceremony orchestrated by the HDZ, publicly calling it a harmful politicization and ethno-nationalization of the occasion that they (the local Franciscans) wanted to depict as primarily a pan-Bosnian cultural event.

Dubravko Lovrenovic, a Bosnian historian born in Jajce, who was involved in the organization of the Franciscans' ceremony of the return of King Stjepan Tomasevic's remains, writes:

It is true, indeed, that it is not the Croatian (state) flag that flies over the Jajce fortress, but a historical flag of the Croat people in Bosnia-Herzegovina; but it is

no lesser truth that this fact does not ease the feeling of a gaping void which I, a person born in Jajce, carry inside me while walking, as a stranger, down the streets of this Bosnian Pompeii with a surplus of history and a shortage of life (Lovrenovic 1999).[10]

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[1] In the original: "Nas govor o mrtvima odavno je, naime, postao povlacenje rucice na kockarskome automatu, iz kojeg svi groznicavo ocekujemo da pokuljaju skudi".

[2] Oberschall's study rests on an extensive field work conducted in 1998 in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade, Bihac and Banja Luka among fifty to sixty political officials, academics, refugees, local and foreign NGOs and international multi-governmental organizations.

[3] In this way, it can be allowed to link the post-festum uses of the theater play Golubnjaca, initially performed and banned in 1983-1984), to the 1988-1989 carrying around the country and exhibiting of the remains of the Serbian medieval martyr-hero Tsar Lazar, and to the exhumations and reburial of the remains of Serb civilians killed by the Ustashe or other local Nazi collaborators, from the pits in Bosnia Herzegovina in 1990.

[4] Matija Beckovic, an already well-established poet, delivered this metaphor in 1989: six years after the banning of "Golubnjaca", two years after the rise to power of Slobodan Milosevic, and during the strike of Kosovo Albanian miners in the pits of the Trepca mines. The virulence of the nationalist rhetoric at the time was already so advanced that few people cared to notice the morbidity of the "invitations" to Serbs to "re-visit" "their" pits, exemplified by Beckovic's numerous addresses. He also became (in) famous by his warning to non-Serbs that they are not allowed to mention the word "pits" in the presence of Serbs, as Serbs keep pits as their "exclusive dominion".

[5] The Serbian prince was defeated as part of a medieval "coalition" of Serbian, Bosnian, and Albanian feudal lords) in the battle against the Ottoman Turks.

[6] The episodes I present in this article support Anderson's image of a linear movement (progress) of national communities, which supposedly exist in their homogeneous form since a common ancient past – the image that is still dominant and congruent with other motions of modernity. I wanted to show here that nations (their actors in charge) also produce narratives about the nations' numerous cycles (e.g., of martyrdom and heroism): while

these may carry some pre-modern features, they can be perfectly integrated in the nation's self-image of its linear movement

[7] The ambition of the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation was, according to its homepage, "to dig deeper into the past, beyond the most recent violence and seek out the historical reasons for Yugoslavia's collapse as much as who did what to whom during the wars of secession that followed." The commission's performance, from the start, was not promising. It received a $20,000 annual budget from the authorities only in January 2002. Its office was staffed by one secretary, with two computers and an internet connection. Two of the prominent members of the Commission, law professor Vojin Dimitrijevic and historian Latinka Perovic, well-known for their anti-nationalist stance and activism, left the Commission at its start, doubting whether it could and should engage in broad historical work, rather than assisting the public in facing Serbia's role in the past wars and ethnic cleansing operations in the neighboring countries. They also doubted whether the Commission could perform its reconciliatory role, while not having experts from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Kosovo among its members, and not guaranteeing safety to the witnesses of war crimes from these countries who would be eventually invited to testify. When the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia officially ceased to exist in February 2003, and was replaced with the union called Serbia-Montenegro, the Commission was dissolved before it was ready to open its first case.

[8] What a perfect use of Anderson's imagined community this image of a European nationalism makes!

[9] This is the characteristic that was given to local antinationalists by a member of the now defunct Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, the same one who launched the thesis on Serbia's "European brand of nationalism".

[10] "Istina je i to da se na jajackoj citadeli ne "vihori" hrvatska (drzavna) zastava, nego povijesna zastava hrvatskog naroda u BiH, ali nista manja istina nije ni to da mi kao rodjenome Jajcaninu ona ne umanjuje osjecaj jecece praznine dok danas kao stranac prolazim tim bosanskim Pompejima s viskom povijesti a manjkom zivota".