The Role of Intelligentsia and Media in Creating a National Worldview: The Case of Serbia

by

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Introduction

With the collapse of the communist experiment in Eastern and Central Europe at the end of the 1980s, new social paradigms were defined to fill in the ideological void. In many former communist countries the intelligentsia, mostly subdued during the era of communism, set out to create a new national discourse for the “liberated” societies. The ideology of communism was substituted with the doctrine of a “democratic transition” and the creation of institutions of free market and plurality of political voices.

For some Eastern European countries, the “revolutions” of 1989 meant continuing the movement along the paths of Western European civilization violently interrupted by the Soviet intervention in 1945. For others, it meant reproducing the path taken by Western European nations in their development (Perović 2000: 116). Whatever the case, the dominant theory of change in East and Central Europe in the late 1980s became the necessity of joining Western Europe by means of modernization, liberalization and democratization.

The main obstacle for this transition to European mainstream became easily identified as the communist ancien régime, and the intellectual elites set out to reconstruct social paradigms and cleanse the societies from any remnants of the communist past. The fifty years of communism thus became redefined as unwilling occupation that “froze” and encapsulated East and Central Europe and put a halt to the processes of social and cultural development that went ahead unhindered in the West.

By removing communism as the main ideological frame, the elites of East and Central Europe recreated societies from former communist into contemporary nation states, substituting the congruence of state and class with that of state and nation. Starting from the assumption that the nation was suppressed under communism which was by definition a nationless system, the
intelligentsia of East and Central Europe saw the political transition from communism to democracy as a way of returning the nation to the foundation of society.

In Serbia, however, the intellectual elite launched a very different national paradigm which cannot be properly understood outside the context of the political system of the former Yugoslavia. Existing in a political vacuum between the East and the West, the former Yugoslavia functioned as a multinational federation under Josip Broz Tito’s very specific version of communism. This “socialism with a human face” was considerably less repressive than the “iron” communism of the Eastern bloc. It provided for the (at least perceived) stable centralized state run economy, generous social benefits and, very importantly, did not prevent citizens’ mobility. The dominant state ideology was, of course, that of communism, but coupled with the dogma of a successful multinational state. The individual nations’ self-determination was, indeed, subdued, but not only by the doctrine of communism, but also by that of the supra-nation, “Yugoslavness.” Thus the national elites in the former Yugoslavia did not perceive communism as the main obstacle to nation-building, but identified the “unnaturally” imposed multinational entity as the root of all problems.

As Olivera Milosavljević shows, “the moment when national programs based on the unique interests of an ethnos were defined regardless of the borders of the republics in which it lived, and of the interests of others within the community, marked the beginning of a break with the continued defense of the existence of Yugoslavia” (Milosavljević 2000a: 50). Milosavljević goes on to argue that the agents of immediate action in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia appeared only when the national programs of the intellectual elites had been accepted and put into action by the political elites, and supported by the homogenized masses (Milosavljević 2000a: 51). Furthermore, argues Dušan Janjić, in former Yugoslavia there were neither single democratic national elites nor the otherwise necessary cartel of elites that would allow the acceptance of a compromise as the ethnic principle, or national interest, appeared as a screen for a general war against all (Janjić 1997a: 25).
Another important factor to be considered is that a large part of the intelligentsia was completely dependent on the state as the economic situation in the country prevented them from becoming self-subsistent free professionals. The link between the science and the state thus led many intellectuals to consider it their task to lead the people, and to see participation in politics as a patriotic duty deriving from aspirations towards national liberation. Therefore, most intellectuals in Serbia took nationalism as the starting point for thinking about post-communism (Janjić 1997a: 27-28).

The Serbian national program centered on the image of Serbs as victims, even martyrs – and not only throughout history but also under the current “New World Order.” It focused national identity on an internally homogenous national state confronted by external opposition (other ethnic groups and nations) and based on the renewal of its mythical heritage (Janjić 1997b: 180). Building on the feelings of xenophobia and ethnic paranoia, the new Serbian national discourse held that the Serbs are in danger from everywhere and from everybody and that time has come to defend the nation. At the same time, this powerful, collectively shared self-perception was put forward systematically and repetitiously by the Serbian media, which engaged in open war mongering and racism.

In this paper, I examine the ways in which this particular national discourse came into existence and how it was created and communicated from the highest intellectual authority in the country. In order to understand fully the impact of this discourse, I also analyze the use of hate language by the Serbian media as a channel through which these nationalist ideas were communicated to the Serbian population.

In doing so, I will attempt to unpack the dominant Serbian worldview and put forward a proposition that the national discourse thus created was used to justify consequent military adventures, as the society perceived them through this constructed and twisted lens. I will further
speculate that this national discourse has opened alleys for the Serbian regime to embark on a series of bloody conflicts with silent or tacit approval of the majority of its citizenry.

Drafting the National Blueprint

“One of the burdens in writing about the Southern Slavs is the onerous necessity of telling the story from the beginning,” wrote the historian Ivo Banac (Banac 1992 in Anastasijević 1999). Especially difficult is the task of identifying the moment in history which awakens the dormant monster of nationalism. Though a variety of starting points are possible, one event is particularly salient in the shift toward the prevalent nationalistic discourse in Serbia: the publication, in September 1986, of the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, a seminal document which was intended to provide ideological guidelines for solving “the Serbian question.”

Starting as an analysis of the crisis of the Yugoslav society in general, and ending as a manifest of the Serbian national program, the Academy’s Memorandum is a contradictory document in that it attempted to reconcile two opposing motives - to explain the inefficiency and failure of the entire political system which, as such, was harming all nations in Yugoslavia, and at the same time prove the disastrous effects of such a system on the Serbian nation alone (Milosavljević 2000b: 277).

1 Though the Academy claimed the Memorandum was not an official document, it was signed by some of its most prominent members. One of the most influential intellectuals behind the document was Academician Dobrica Ćosić, regarded as “the father of the nation.” He has throughout the 1970s constructed a very specific version of Serbian nationalism, whose theme was that Serbs were the greatest victims of Yugoslavia, portraying them as a “tragic people.” In 1991, Ćosić emphasized that the historical aim of the Serbian nation was the “unification of all Serbs into a single state” and that the Serbian question concerned the “freedom and rights of the Serbian ethnic group to preserve its spiritual, cultural and historical identity regardless of current republican borders within Yugoslavia” (Janjić 1997b: 180). He went on to suggest: “Planned resettlement and population exchanges, while most difficult and most painful, are still better than a life of hatred and mutual killings” (Politika, 26 July 1991 in Milosavljević 2000b: 302). In 1992, he became the first president of the present Yugoslavia.
The *Memorandum* alleged that the Serbs were systematically politically and economically discriminated against within Yugoslavia and requested that the Serbian nation “establish a modern social and national program which would inspire both present and future generations” (Milosevljević 2000b: 283). The difficult position of the Serbian people is manifest in “genocidal terror,” “neofascist aggression in Kosovo,” “discrimination, refined and effective assimilationist policies of national inequality” in Croatia. Serbian history has come under question, “pushed into the background,” “Serbian cultural heritage is ‘alienated,’ reclaimed or declared worthless, the language is suppressed, and Cyrillic alphabet slowly disappears.” The Serbian nation is “brutally denied cultural and spiritual integrity,” its culture and literature are being “systematically disintegrated,” Serbian history is in some school programs “reduced and exposed to chauvinistic interpretations” (Milosavljević 2000b: 280-281).

As for Kosovo Albanians, they enjoyed greater minority rights than any other national minority in Europe yet were still dissatisfied with their status and were seeking to secede from Serbia and create a Greater Albania, taking with them “the cradle of Serbdom” and “Serbia’s sacred land.” In order to achieve that goal the Albanians were attempting to create an “ethnically pure Kosovo,” using institutional and non-institutional forms of pressure and discrimination against the Serbs, who were fleeing *en masse*. The high birth rate of the Albanian population was not a usual characteristic of an undeveloped province, but rather a deliberate Albanian ploy to outnumber the Serbs.

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2 In brief, the Serbs regard Kosovo as the historical cradle of their nationhood. As the political center of the medieval empire and the Serbian Orthodox Church, Kosovo is the home of many medieval Serbian monuments and monasteries. On the other hand, the Albanians trace their origins back to the Illyrians who occupied the Balkans long before the arrival of the Southern Slavs. Kosovo was incorporated into Serbia in 1912 as a part of the Serbian war effort in the Balkan wars.

3 One of the authors of the Memorandum explained the Academy’s proposed “long-term functional demographic policies” in the following manner: “The [Albanian] birth rate must be limited for the benefit of women, the family, and the local community in Kosovo, and the interests of relations in Serbia and Yugoslavia. I say this because, unfortunately, the contrast between high and low birth rates is beginning to make an impact on the political and ethnic levels, not only because of the emigration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo, but also because the great demographic pressures are beginning to extinguis
While it is difficult to directly measure the impact of any written document on a society, it is worth emphasizing that the Memorandum was created in the most important and most prestigious Serbian national institution, and as such carried much greater weight than the individual contributions of distinguished Serbian intellectuals (Milosavljević 2000a: 54). It is analyzed here as the Serbian “national program” because it had strongly, if not crucially, influenced the shaping of the Serbian public opinion and political action. As one of its writers Dobrica Ćosić ominously announced at the Academy Assembly session on 14 May 1984, “the body of knowledge that exists within the Academy should not remain confined to the professional disciplines, but should be integrated into wisdom, general experience, and collective strategic vision” (Milosavljević 2000b: 275).

The Academy of Arts and Sciences based its social role on an awareness not only of its scholarly, but also of its national mission – and on its reputation among the Serbian people (Perović 2000: 112). Referring to the significance of the Memorandum and other documents to the “reawakening” of the Serbian national consciousness in the late 1980s, the Academy’s president Dušan Kanazir said, “after the Academy’s vigorous request to rectify the errors committed against the Serbian people and to resolve more effectively the socio-political problems in Kosovo and the entire country, the Academy gained even greater moral esteem” (Perović 2000: 112).

According to Latinka Perović, “the Academy openly supported the Serbian leadership in its intentions to re-establish Serbian statehood, and with this goal in mind, immediately became the representative of the interests of the Serbian people as a whole” (Perović 2000: 115). At the same time, the regime showed that it cared about this support and, within this framework, gave the

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the Serbian and Montenegrin population [there]… It must be made known that fertility can be controlled, that it is not a gift by God or Allah about which only they can decide, but that it is rather a biological fact which can be regulated through healthy, medical and socially acceptable means” (Politika, 27 January 1989; in Milosavljević 2000b: 301).
Academy the freedom to act. In October 1989, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević announced that “as far as the Serbian Academy of Sciences is concerned, I really don’t see why it should not influence policies in Serbia… But the Academy does not play the key role here. The key role in this tumultuous time is played by the citizens of Serbia” (*Politika*, 10 October 1989 in Perović 2000: 115).

**From Freedom of Speech to Freedom of the Nation**

The Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences was not the only voice of intellectual authority to take on itself the mission of Serbian national awakening. The Association of Writers of Serbia soon followed suit by staging a series of protest meetings entitled “On Kosovo - for Kosovo” in May and June 1987. The first of these events, in which more than one hundred writers participated, was conceived “as an expression of Serbian writers’ support for efforts to resolve the foremost problem in Yugoslavia – the problem of Kosovo” (*Književne novine*, 1 April 1987 in Gojković 2000: 347).

These meetings opened up a new phase of the Association’s politicization as interest shifted from freedom of speech to the broader and more dramatic field of state politics. According to Drinka Gojković, “this brought fundamental changes to the nature of the writers’ involvement in public affairs. In the first half of the 1980s the profession defined its political attitude: the defense of poetry was a defense of the right to free speech. In the late 1980s, its political attitude defined the profession: defending Serbian people became the primary task of writers” (Gojković 2000: 331).

In a series of articles published in the Association’s journal, *Književne novine* (Literary Paper), celebrated authors took to portraying the situation in Kosovo as the Serbian Golgotha and the flight of Serbs as genocide practiced by the Albanians, with some of the best known Serbian authors
depicting Albanians in racist terms as “barbaric villains,” “cold-blooded rapists,” “indoctrinated Serbophobes” and “masters of hypocrisy” (Anastasijević 1999).4

In addition to the thematic single-mindedness, the language of the Association of Writers of Serbia during that period was characterized by lexical homogeneity. The analysis of speeches given at these meetings shows that one of the most common words used was humiliation, employed to accompany the term Serbian people. Thus, “the Serbian people in Kosovo are underprivileged, defeated and humiliated,” Serbs are “humiliated as a nation and as citizens,” Serbian interests are “completely crushed and humiliated” (Gojković 2000: 340).

As Gojković shows, the entire contents of the Association of Writers of Serbia consisted of the continuous idea that the Serbs, without exception and for all time, were only victims. In this context, nationalism was stylized into a force for democratic transformation, and the writer into a “standard-bearer of the people’s interests” (Gojković 2000: 346).

The Power of Words, the Power of Hate

In his analysis of the sources of nationalist ideology, John Breuilly argues that, in order for it to work effectively as a popular political ideology, nationalism needs simplification, repetition and concreteness. It is because nationalist ideology is particularly adaptive in these ways that it can have

4 These negative stereotypes have for a long time been a part of the Serbian national cultural heritage and as such had acquired special credibility and dignity. An ambitious volume entitled Zadužbine Kosova (The Legacies of Kosovo) published in Belgrade in 1987, is a treasury of stereotypical historical assertions by famous Serbian writers and scholars. Stanislav Vinaver, eminent Serbian intellectual, wrote in 1920: “Albanians are an untamed, rebellious element. However, this claim is also utterly wrong, as Albanians are also both the most submissive and most compliant element… Serbian nation has for centuries been fighting a bloody crusade for the extermination or assimilation, with that heroic but cunning tribe of wild instincts, uncontrollable cruelty, lack of discipline or organizational capabilities…” Stanislav Vinaver, quoted in Eparhija raško-prizrenska i dr. (Diocese of Raška and Prizren et al), Zadužbine Kosova [The Legacies of Kosovo], (Belgrade: Eparhija raško-prizrenska i dr, 1987), reprinted in Popović 1990, 9.
great popular appeal. Simplification involves above all the construction of stereotypes. There are stereotypes of the nation in terms of history or racial characteristics or cultural practices as well as stereotypes of enemies. Repetition through speeches, newspaper articles, rallies, songs, etc. is an essential part of the work of a nationalist party (Breuilly 1994: 111).

Milošević’s propaganda machinery systematically spread the feeling of overall national insecurity and fear among the people. The “enemy” and the “conspirators” were thus discovered everywhere. The media constantly repeated that the Albanians endangered the Serbs biologically and physically (with their high birth rate aimed at demographically prevailing in the province, with violence, murders, rape, and various forms of pressure in order to expel the Serbs from Kosovo). The Slovenes endangered them economically and politically (by selling expensive goods and exploiting the common state). The Croats bear an intrinsic hatred for the Serbs and are trying to exterminate them by denying the rights of Serbs in Croatia and through forced assimilation.

Serbian TV repeated over and over again that “Croatian and Muslim forces want to eradicate all that is Serb” (TV News, 31 July 1992, quoted in Mihajlović 1994: 22), while “jihad and Muslims are inseparable, they are twins” (TV News in Veljanovski 2000: 581). The West, particularly the Germans, the Americans and the Vatican, present a political, religious and

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5 Milošević’s skillful use of language for propaganda purposes had its most recent example during the NATO bombing campaign in the spring of 1999. As a part of “defending the nation,” the media were issued strong guidelines on the use of exact terms and phrases when reporting on the course of the campaign. For instance, actions of police and army forces were “defense activities” or “efforts for the preservation and defense of the country.” For enemy casualties, the following terms had to be used: neutralized, disabled, paralyzed, liquidated. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) at all times had to be called bandits, terrorists and criminals, NATO forces – aggressors, while army and police units were “freedom fighters.” Free B92, “War Times Decrees and Regulations (Analysis of the instructions of the Serbian Ministry of Information for the work of the media in the state of immediate danger of war)” [www page], [cited on 27 November 1999]; available from http://www.freeb92.net/media/war/censor.shtml. An interesting parallel here can be drawn with the list of forbidden terminology and government-sanctioned substitutes issued by Turkey’s Interior Ministry to the country’s official press immediately before the trial of Kurdish guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan. According to government instructions, guerilla had to be substituted for “terrorists,” refugees for “shelter seekers,” Kurdish nation for “formation in northern Iraq” and Kurds for “our Turkish citizens identified as
civilizational peril to the Serbs. “The Serbs are victims of a policy of revenge of the German-Catholic alliance; Serbs are not killed only by their enemies in Bosnia, but by the great powers as well” (News, 22 March 1993, interview given by Radovan Karadžić, then president of the Bosnian Serb republic, quoted in Stamenković 1994: 37). “Serbian people should primarily and finally secure what they had owned for centuries, and what will faithfully and legitimately protect them from the most immediate enemies - ideologues and warriors of Croato-Nazi and Islamic-fundamentalist ‘neighbors’ in particular, but also from the advances of Greater German, Pan-German expansionism and Neo-Turkish Great Islamists (so-called Islamic civilization)” (Radomir Smiljanic, writer and president of the right-wing association “White Rose” in NIN, 10 November 1995). “The plight of the Serbian people of 1991-1992 is in fact resistance to those who have set out to destroy it in blood or expel it from certain Yugoslav territories. It is its struggle against the renewed attempt at genocide” (Radovan Samardžić, historian and academician in NIN, 28 August 1992). “We are hated by Croatians, we are not liked by Muslims nor Slovenes, we are hated by Albanians and not liked by Macedonians… Thank God, there is enough of us Serbs, and no one can do us any harm!” (Batrić Jovanović, representative in the Serbian Parliament, in Vreme, 19 August 1991).

The conspiracy is, thus, universal and overwhelming. And such a conspiracy, which menaces the very survival of the people and the state, should be confronted by all available means: institutional and extra-institutional.

Yet, as Mark Thompson shows in his account of hate speech during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina,

People’s bedrock attitudes toward the wars are not created by the state media; rather, the media play variations upon these attitudes, which derive from other sources (national history, family background, education, oral culture). Media did not inject their audiences with anti-Muslim prejudice or exploitable fear of Croatian Kurds.” The list was obtained by Stephen Kinzer, a reporter for the New York Times, and published in Harper’s Magazine, November 1999, 24.
nationalism. The prejudice and fear were widespread, latently at least; there was a predisposition to believe ‘news’ which elicited and exploited the prejudice; without the media, however, Serbia’s leaders could not have obtained public consent and approval of their nationalist politics (Thompson 1994: 127-128).

The New Holy Book

The use of hate language in the media was systematic and methodical. In August 1988, the leading Serbian daily newspaper, Politika, introduced a column called “Echoes and Reactions” (Odjeci i reagovanja), which was open to readership’s letters and comments. The articles were published in the forms of letters, commentaries, petitions, facsimiles, documents, annotations, accompanying photographs, and advertisements. The most significant part of the page, the top right corner, was most often reserved for illustrations. It is interesting to note that what is usually called a caricature – and this was definitely the form used here – was renamed “illustration.” This renaming imposed a different relation between the visual and the written text, as the caricature obtained the status of a document and strengthened the value of the text itself as a relevant document, instead of a personal opinion or comment. Permanent visual symbols were also introduced, such as national “typologies” with recognizable folkloric costumes – for instance, the issue of February 21, 1990, shows a caricature of a man wearing an Albanian folklore hat, stepping over and strangling another Albanian while holding a poster saying “We Want Democracy” (Popović 1990).

As Latinka Perović notes, nowhere was the position of the elite expressed as unequivocally and in such a concentrated form as in “Echoes and Reactions” (Perović 2000: 110). Contributions by many experts and doctors of science, previously little known in their professional fields and now presented in this column, created the impression of a broad and united front of intellectuals. And the traditionally highly respected daily Politika became not just an authoritative tool in the hands of
powerful ideology, but an institution with a special mission, a kind of holy book, every last word of which was to be believed (Perović 2000: 110).

The authors’ signatures included their academic titles and often a short note on their professional affiliation. These explanations were never given for authors from the lower social ranks (worker, housewife), but only for those with higher political or social functions. In six months, 66 authors with Ph.D., 16 with MA degrees, 11 professors and 5 academicians contributed to the debate. Including authors’ titles and short biographies obviously emphasized their intellectual authority (Popović 1990, 77-131).

In referring to Kosovo and its importance to the Serbian nation, the most frequently used commonplace words and phrases included “Golgotha,” “Gordian knot,” “exodus,” “spiritual threshold,” “center (of statehood, spirituality),” “soul and heart,” “epopee of the Serbian soul.” Serbia is “without a foundation and without a roof,” its parts are “amputated,” it is going through a “true rebirth,” “eternal forgiveness.” On the other hand, Albanians and their allies are pouring “crocodile tears,” while spreading the “Bolshevik-Catholic-Islamic propaganda.” The constant epithets of “animal,” “bestial,” “monstrous” and “hideous” are tied to the descriptions of Albanians. They are complemented by terminological constructions or idioms from the vocabulary of daily politics, such as “de-Serbianization,” “Albanotropic poison,” “monstrous and morbid role,” “rape out of hate against Yugoslavia,” “bloody international conspiracy against Serbia,” “separatists and terrorists,” “enemies of all colors,” “wild fanatical demonstrators,” “actors of farce,” “poisons which affect only Albanian genes,” “national-separatists,” “armed gangs of Albanians,” “exclusiveness and selfishness of Albanian Muslims,” “the virus of mindlessness,” etc (Popović 1990, 124-125).

At the same time, while vilifying the enemy, Politika provided monumental space to the glorification of the Serbian nation and a specific interpretation of Serbian history. We read that
“Serbia is, after the Nile basin, the richest treasury of cultural heritage in the world, i.e. cultural artifacts created in the lap of the Serbian people” (14 May 1990); “the Serbs are the only Balkan nation to have uncompromisingly fought in both world wars on the side of the great allies” (10 February 1990); “Serbia has always been an oasis of religious and national tolerance” (14 February 1990); “Belgrade, one of the oldest cities in the world” (10 February 1990 – all quoted in Popović 1990: 128).

Significant space in “Echoes and Reactions” was also dedicated to emotional laments on Kosovo problems, such as the following elementary school homework assignment:

It is a beautiful and sunny day, almost as if it’s not winter. After a short walk I go back home for lunch. My mum says Albanians are rioting in Kosovo and destroying everything that comes in their way. I listen, and suddenly sadness envelops me. I ask myself: why...? They have their Albania, so why don’t they create their own state, their own democracy there, and decide who is to live with whom. We offer them friendship, companionship, community, and this is how they respond... I know that they are hateful, that they are the killing gang, that it is all horribly sad. Still, I feel hope and content that my people, my homeland says it will defend itself, it will not let the enemy divide us. (Politika, 9 February 1990, in Popović 1990: 122).

Another one, entitled “Notes from the Student Hall of Residence” was published in Politika on 30 January, 1990:

January is leaving Belgrade. Slowly and without any snow. The city is vibrating, living its life of a metropolis. And over there, in Kosovo, Albanian separatists seem to have embarked on a campaign against the suffering Serbian and Montenegrin people... They invented democracy tailored for one nation. Now they are drumming up some Albanians into creating an ethnically pure territory in Kosovo (purified from Serbian population). And then they will sell them the copyright. I will never forgive you this. How horrible it must be, I think in my unease... But don’t harm my people in their ancestral homes. Don’t pour salt into open wounds. If you are not on the side of justice and truth, then at least don’t disturb the raged dragon (Popović 1990: 122).

Sometimes the same contributions were published twice - such as the following lyrical passage, published both on 2 February and 6 May, 1990:
This nation has paid its price right in Kosovo, in distant times now drown in mist, it has paid its price to Europe and its civilization. Serbian people will be paying no more dues to nobody and for nothing. This nation is freed from the historical curse that has been cast on it for centuries - die so that others can be better off. Are ancestors’ bones are the glory of centuries, but also a warning of one’s own future (Popović 1990: 122-123).

A special case in point was the “logomachy” related to the use of the word Šiptar for Albanian, a word loaded with negative stereotype and meaning, and commonly used in colloquial Serbian as the synonym for hard labor, low-paid worker. As Branimir Stojković points out, while the majority of non-Serbian population in Kosovo calls itself Šëpt, which is a “self-ethnonym” used by this ethnic group to denote themselves wherever they live, in communication with others, however, they expect to be called Albanians, which is not an ethnonym, but a word derived from the name of their nation state, Albania. Using the ethnonym Šiptar by others (primarily Serbs), is considered disrespectful and an expression of hostile intentions. The message here is: we are a part of Albania, but not the one defined by the categories of ethnic but rather of nation-state identity. The term Albanian was and still is the official (constitutional) name of the nation that lives in FR Yugoslavia (but also in Macedonia). Therefore, what is internally a self-ethnonym, favorably valued, externally becomes a heteronym, unacceptable for those it relates to. On the other hand, the denoting of Serbs by Albanians as Škije (which is a heteronym as Serbs do not use this word for themselves) depicts their symbolic return to a historical situation before the Balkan wars when they were one of the underprivileged Christian minorities within the Ottoman empire. This strategy of mutual naming of Kosovo Serbs and Albanians is, in fact, an attempt to situate one another in that period of (common) past in which one national community was extremely privileged, or disadvantaged (Stojković 1999: 28-29).

Additionally, it was common practice to spell the word Šiptar in small letters, showing total disrespect for another nation by reducing its name to a collective noun. Similar practice was used in
regard to Bosnian Muslims – the word Muslim was frequently spelled in small letters, and often used interchangeably with such words as “fundamentalist,” “mujaheddin,” etc. The “enemy” was thus de-personalized, de-humanized, de-nationalized – making it so much easier for the regime to mobilize support for conducting the conflict and, consequently, for engaging in horrific military operations such as campaigns of ethnic cleansing without any significant public outcries of dissent.6

The Fruits of Apartheid

The years of segregation and consistent ethnic stereotyping through state propaganda resulted in a widely shared sense of seclusion, distrust and anxiety.

A public opinion poll conducted in 1993 in Serbia asked the participants to agree or disagree with the following statement: “All Albanians are primitive and uncivilized.”7 53% agreed, while 28% disagreed. The same survey offered a list of different groups of people, and asked the participants to choose the groups they would prefer not to have as fellow citizens. 58% stated they did not wish Albanians as fellow citizens. Albanians were outnumbered, interestingly, by fascists (86%), people who are HIV-positive (69%), drug addicts (67%), homosexuals (65%) and alcoholics (59%). The most absurd finding, though, was that 55% of the interviewees stated they did not wish to have as fellow citizens – nationalists!

Another public opinion poll was conducted in 1998, with the goal of exploring the attitude of Yugoslavia’s population to the methods of resolving the Kosovo crisis (then still only looming).8

7 The poll was conducted by Zagorka Golubović, results were published in Mihailović (1997).
The results of the research showed that 28.5 per cent of the people interviewed thought that the problems in Kosovo should be resolved peacefully, by negotiations and compromise. However, 15.7% responded that the problems should be tackled in any way possible, including the use of military force. Some of the suggestions given included the following: “Albanians should be exterminated”, “crushed”, “hit with an atomic bomb”, “all Albanians should be isolated”, “a camp should be set up for all national minorities”, etc. If we add to this group 17.4% of respondents who believed that the problems in Kosovo could be resolved by sending Albanians into exile, the number of adherents to repressive methods reaches one third of all the interviewees, outnumbering those who favored negotiations and compromise.

Yet another research was conducted in 1998 on the attitudes of citizens of Serbia towards ethnic minorities.9 The results of the poll showed widespread chauvinism and xenophobia among the population. 34.8 per cent of the survey participants approved of the following statement: “We should tend, at any cost, to preserve the ethnic purity of every nation”. Such ideas were not accepted by 57.5% of the population. Another statement also contained a xenophobic idea, but it was more “softly” formulated: “One should always be cautious with other nationalities, even when they are friendly to us”. No less than 64.1% of the respondents agreed, while the claim was rejected by 31.8 per cent of the interviewees.

The poll also surveyed the opinion of Serbia’s citizens to their own nation(s) and the nations in their ethnic environment/neighborhood. According to the results, the Serbs felt at greatest distance towards Albanians. Of the 15 character traits offered by the questionnaire, which ranged from highly positive to highly negative, they did not find a single favorable quality with the Albanians. Albanians were considered dirty, uncivilized, stupid and hostile to other peoples. Low

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9 The research was conducted by Dragan Popadić and Mikloš Biro. Results were first published in the Belgrade daily *Naša borba* in 1998 and then reprinted in Minority Rights Group.
opinion was also demonstrated toward Muslims and Croats, while best traits were reserved for the Serbs themselves.

These prevalent attitudes of ethnic distance, xenophobia, historical sense of victimization and racism that are widely spread among Serbian population have to a great extent been excited by the systematic use of language of hate in state media, under guidance and supervision of the nation’s highest intellectual authorities. As Ivan Čolović notes in analyzing the writings of Politika,

The daily torrents of hundreds of thousands of words running in the leading paper’s columns, recurring, colliding, bursting out and piling up around a name, or a code-word for power and authority, can confuse and mesmerize readers and can bring on the kind of vertigo which accompanies seeing some spectacular and terrifying natural phenomenon. It can be ascertained that this newspaper plays its role as the bulletin of the regime not only by adding or subtracting a politically appropriate shape whenever it writes about something, but also by dispensing such appropriate interpretations in an excessive, indigestible quantity which paralyzes the mind of the reader (Čolović 1999: 8).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to unravel the circumstances in which the Serbian national worldview came into being and the ways in which it was created and communicated from the positions of highest intellectual authority in the country. This prevalent national discourse helped shape public opinion and collectively shared values in Serbian society through an aggressive and long-lasting media campaign, and introduced as legitimate racist and xenophobic stereotypes, while totally “ethnifying” and homogenizing the society, and fostering an embattled, surly mentality among the population (Snyder and Ballentine 1996: 7).

The paper also attempted to show that the explosion of Serbian nationalism was not created by Milošević but merely reinforced by him. The violent conflicts that followed were thus products of deliberate elite efforts to mobilize latent solidarities behind a particular political program, which
myths were used to justify (Snyder and Ballentine 1996: 10). The intellectual elites directly influenced the shaping of the Serbian public opinion and political action, using the uncontested political and intellectual authority they enjoyed in the Serbian society in order to achieve their strategic goal, the implementation of the Serbian national program.

The direct impact of the national discourse created by the Serbian intelligentsia and channeled by the media is, of course, difficult to ascertain. However, as Drinka Gojković argues, it is useful to talk about responsibility for the public word. What is evident is that the dominant nationalistic rhetoric increased, by means of its victim ideology, the field of irrationality, in which various forms of aggression became psychologically acceptable and politically “inevitable” and “justified” (Gojković 2000: 346).

Finally, as Jacques Rupnik points out, in the ideological marketplace of post-communism, community identity (national or religious) was invoked by the political elites to fill a void. Their success was not determined by ancestral atavisms, but by political strategies of conquest (or preservation) of power, legitimated by the recourse to “national values” or to history (Rupnik 1996). “Ancient hatreds” are thus fabricated at least as much as inherited. The intellectuals, writers, artists and politicians “manufacture” hatreds. It is not “ancestral” hatred which is the cause of the war. It is the war of public words which created the hatred.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


