

# BAD MEMORIES

Sites, symbols and narrations of the wars in the Balkans

Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso









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Contributions to the conference “Bad Memories”  
held in Rovereto on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2007



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## **Bad Memories. Sites, symbols and narrations of the wars in the Balkans**

*Luisa Chiodi*

This volume collects the contributions to the international conference *Bad Memories. Sites, symbols and narrations of the wars in the Balkans* organised by Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso<sup>1</sup>. Thanks to funding from the European Union and from the Autonomous Province of Trento, we discussed the issue of war in Europe moving from the analysis of the places of memory of World War II in former Yugoslavia. This study led to the documentary *Circle of Memory* and to the conference held on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2007, in Rovereto, Italy.

Starting from the paradigmatic example of Yugoslavia, our journey in twentieth-century Europe brought us to reflect on building memory after the disastrous failure of the slogan “never again war” and to look for interlocutors with whom to share our considerations. First, we visited some of the most important memorials of World War II in the Balkans; as a result, we discovered the extraordinary experience of a group of architects and sculptors who, in the Yugoslavia of the 1960s and 1970s, developed original representations of the past and of the victory over Nazi-fascism.

Tito’s Yugoslavia placed great importance on commemorating World War II. Much political and intellectual energy was invested in building thousands of monuments and memorial sites in the whole country, celebrating the great Partisan epic and the building of a new society. Indeed, Tito’s communist regime had not been imposed because of Soviet tanks, but following a victorious war of national liberation.

On the other hand, in the Balkans, World War II had both the characteristics of a liberation struggle and of a civil war. In the attempt to leave that tragedy behind, Tito’s regime based the reconstruction of the country on the idea of “brotherhood and unity”, suggesting that communists were the only ones who could overcome the painful divisions

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<sup>1</sup> The full conference dossier, including the preliminary materials, can be downloaded from the following site: <http://www.osservatoriolbalcani.org/convegno2007>. A copy of the documentary *Circle of Memory* can be obtained by writing to: [segreteria@osservatoriolbalcani.org](mailto:segreteria@osservatoriolbalcani.org)

caused by foreign imperialists and “internal traitors” belonging to all ethnic groups.

Public commemorations were not only resulting from public policies adopted by the regime to legitimate its political project. Yugoslav society itself had a strong need and desire for memorial sites. World War II had taken the lives of over one million people, and survivors frequently showed the need for places of private and public mourning.

Where the regime had been hesitating, civil society had organised to demand the building of memorials. The most important case we focused on was that of Jasenovac, a major extermination camp in Europe. Here, after many years of oblivion, the Yugoslav government responded to the needs expressed by the survivors and by the relatives of the victims and built the monument, *The Flower of Cement*, by Bogdan Bogdanović.

The official narrative of World War II sought to emphasise the ethnic balance between victims and executioners. However, in places such as Jasenovac, this interpretation diverged with local memories as the victims of Croatian *ustashe* had been Jews, Roma and political opponents, but most of all Serbs. The building of a giant cement flower presented the regime with a great opportunity not only to commemorate but also to set aside what had happened in that place.

Although the pressure of civil society had surfaced in places such as Jasenovac, not everyone had the possibility to mourn the dead. The defeated had no space for expression and the regime did not intend to publicly recognise their sufferings. The official historiography, shaping the education of generations of students and visitors of war museums, only presented brave partisan heroes fighting cruel external and internal enemies, towards whom there could be no compassion.

When the crisis of the communist system became irreversible, memories of the defeated came back to the surface. Once the system that had created the official World War II narrative started to crumble, the narrative, with its blank pages, became the subject of furious public debate. Unfortunately, the revisiting of Yugoslav historiography did not open new democratic spaces but served as a tool to justify new violence.

The papers collected in the first section of this volume contribute to the discussion on the role of the communist regime in hampering the political evolution of the post-war Yugoslav generations. These generations, in fact, were not allowed to elaborate an independent outlook on the past and, without access to tools for critical analyses, they ended up accepting pre-

defined identities which are, as emphasised by Rada Iveković, potentially murderous<sup>2</sup>.

Starting from the 1980s, the ruling classes of various Yugoslav republics, determined to divide the country, started to use the memory of the war to stir up resentment for the evil suffered in the past, and to raise the fear for its possible repetition. Instead of bringing to the public discussion the pages that the communist regime had left blank, this operation contributed to re-activate the past traumas.

The skilful use of fear mobilised thousands of people to create «war at home»<sup>3</sup> by turning against one another because of ethnic identity. Nationalist control and manipulation of the media made civil society particularly vulnerable and helpless before the nationalist drift.

## The Yugoslav experience and today's multicultural society

The Yugoslav experience continues to raise important questions about our current condition. If ethnic cleansing meant radically denying cultural diversity in Yugoslavia, today's Europe seems unable to confront the challenges presented by a multicultural society.

So far, in Italy, xenophobic media campaigns did not have dramatic consequences because of the political and economical stability and a strong local civil society, which has a sixty-year tradition of participation.

However, the public sphere of a democratic country is vulnerable to demagogues. In the past few years, we have experienced how the public use of history, also in Italy, can hamper a mature critical review of World War II historiography. The continuing challenge remains of guaranteeing an open debate that could allow reconciling, understanding each other's motivations, accepting responsibilities and prosecuting crimes.

Thus, our research focused on transforming the memorial areas of World War II in Yugoslavia and on the rewriting of history during and after the wars of the 1990s. We knew that some of those sites, through time, had also become sites of memory of the communist system that had created them.

<sup>2</sup> Rada Iveković, *La Balcanizzazione della ragione* (The balkanisation of reason). Roma: Manifestolibri, 1995

<sup>3</sup> From the title of the book by Luca Rastello, *La guerra in casa* (The war at home). Torino: Einaudi, 1998

Because of the central role those monuments had acquired during Yugoslav history, they were targeted during the 1990s, damaged or simply neglected if their dimensions did not allow their demolition. As everybody knows, in Mostar, the iconoclastic fury towards the symbols of the past even involved the symbols of Ottoman history.

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the issue of the commemoration of the victims and heroes of the new wars emerged once again. The nationalist governments of the 1990s somehow repeated the communist regime's attitude, imposing their version of history and silencing all alternative ones.

However, today, no one can gain the monopoly of public truth and the need to keep memory alive keeps strong. Together with the growing temptation to forget the responsibilities for the wars that brought the dissolution of Yugoslavia, significant pressures exist for critically examining the past and building new memorial sites.

Therefore, in this volume's second section, we have collected the papers from the representatives of some of the most interesting documentation centres on the wars of the 1990s: Vesna Teršelič, Mirsad Tokača and Nataša Kandić. Their contributions let us understand the importance of collecting data and information, in order to allow a historical reconstruction of the wars of the 1990s, safe from ideological manipulations. This most recent postwar experience in the Balkans places great significance on rigorously collecting data; in particular, where conflicting versions of recent history oppose each other; and, where in the 1990s, in some ways, these opposing histories caused memory to short-circuit.

Our research also highlighted the commitment of those struggling to find a place to bury their dead and grieve over the losses they have suffered, while also reminding the international community of its responsibilities. Once again, the need to commemorate often goes along with the wish that no one should again suffer a similar violence. However, the risk remains high of raising new illusions.

Great efforts are still needed to spread a new political culture based on the rejection of war as an instrument to solve national and international conflicts. Just as the communist regime glorified the war of liberation, the nationalist forces continue to consider war an instrument of emancipation for their particular ethnic group.

This volume's final section presents analyses of what the Balkan experience reveals about the future of Europe. The end of Yugoslavia raised some important issues on replacing an authoritarian political system with

an apparently anachronistic project to construct nation-states. The experience of European integration, in recent years, showed us how old member states also do not easily renounce their sovereignty or overcome their perspective of nation-states, and therefore slow down the birth of a politically unified Europe.

Recent considerations of EU enlargement towards the south-east have been continually shadowed by fears of uncontrolled migratory flows and of the political instability in the new post-communist member states. However, our research has confirmed our conviction that south-eastern Europe should be brought back into the political project of European integration after the Cold War; that is back into the historical process seeking to overcome war and to build a public debate on common interests. Despite the predominance of economic and legal-bureaucratic requirements, the European integration process remains a fundamental goal in the political visions for the Balkans. As a result, in recent years, some countries of this area have made a few important steps forward in the democratisation process.


In conclusion, besides escaping the obsessive «circle of memory», one should emphasise the fundamental need to deconstruct the architecture of the rhetorical memory. The relationship between past and present, in fact, constantly brings about new challenges. As the renowned historian Tzvetan Todorov reminds us: «The obsessive repetition of “never again” after the First World War did not prevent the break out of the Second one. To hear the detailed narrations of past sufferings of one side or the heroic resistance of the other might warn us against Hitler and Pétain, historical figures of World War II, but may lead us to ignore current dangers – since these narrations neither threaten the same people, nor show the same features. The past becomes the curtain that shadows the present, instead of revealing it and becomes a justification for inaction»<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, “Les usages de le mémoire” (Gli usi della memoria), in *Quaderno di Relazioni Internazionali*. Milano: ISPI, n. 4 - Aprile 2007







## **Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso** *A think-tank on South-East Europe, Turkey and the Caucasus*

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It was established in 2000 in response to the demand for in-depth knowledge and debate coming from the Italian civil society organisations working in South-East Europe during the 1990s. International aid workers; scholars and researchers; journalists; students; local, regional and national authority's officials; business professionals; South-East Europe's and Caucasus citizens; tourists and travellers use Osservatorio's services and participate as dialogue partners.

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**WORLD WAR II.  
POLICIES OF MEMORY  
IN YUGOSLAVIA**





## Monuments' Biographies. Sketches from the former Yugoslavia

Heike Karge

This brief analysis will examine a rather simple issue: if and how monuments help us to understand the past. First, an interesting quotation from Robert Musil, the Austrian writer who died in 1942, and who wrote a small essay on monuments, which was published almost fifty years after his death. In this essay, Musil states: «There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument»<sup>1</sup>. And further: «They are erected in order to be seen, to attract attention. At the same time, however, they possess something that destroys any attentiveness»<sup>2</sup>.

James Young, the well-known American scholar, who has extensively worked on Holocaust monuments, tries to explain this with the following words comments on Musil's quote: «This "something" is the intrinsic solidification, which is also innate to all other pictures/images [...]. A monument turns/transforms a malleable memory into stone»<sup>3</sup>. Thus, does a monument, in fact, imply the end of memory? Moreover, in light of this question, does a monument tell us anything about collective memories of past generations?

In order to discuss these issues, I would like to embark on a rather brief excursion into the concept of collective memory. Then, I will try to argue with the help of visual material relating to World War II memorials, which I have collected during my research stays in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, that "reading", "understanding a monument" can be exceptionally helpful in order to understand past societies. The important thing is, however, not to rely in the analysis simply on the monument as it is there, in the landscape, but to take into account the whole biography of a monument, its birth, its growing, and sometimes, finally, its decay.

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs<sup>4</sup>, whose writings have been retrieved half a century after his death in 1945 in the Buchenwald concentration camp, provided an analytical framework to understand and to ex-

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Musil, *Monuments. Posthumous papers of a living author*. Colorado: Hygiene, 1987

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*

<sup>3</sup> James E. Young, *The texture of memory. Holocaust memorials and mourning*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Collective memory). Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1950

plore collective memories in the past and in the present, and to help us, thus, to “read a monument”.

According to Halbwachs, who introduced the term “collective memory” into scholarly debate, collective memory is not a pure metaphor. Instead, Halbwachs emphasises that memories, which individuals possess, are always and necessarily collectively framed. One might also say: collectives or communities do not have a memory, but these very collectives and communities determine the memory of their individual members.

Additionally, Halbwachs has emphasised that the process of collective remembering is an effort to reconstruct the past, or past events. Collective memory is thus, not the past itself, but an activity that takes place in the present and that is directed towards certain aspects of the past. These aspects, this certain interest in the past, is - according to Halbwachs - socially framed. I will return to these social frames later.

Last, but not least, Halbwachs has emphasised that collective memories appear to be bound to representations: material representation, such as textbooks or street names, tell us what a certain society wants its members to remember of the past. Of course, these material representations include museums and monuments. Finally, the past is also present and represented in the commemoration days that a society chooses in order to express its relation to the past, to honour great historical figures, or to mourn the dead.

The French historian Pierre Nora has designated all these representations as *lieu de mémoire*, as “sites of memory”. The American scholar Jay Winter uses a different approach towards the analysis of these sites of memory: for him, practices of commemoration that take place at these very places, at the sites of memory, stand in the centre of analysis.

A few examples can be found in my area of research, the former Yugoslavia. Attaching collective memory to representations can be seen in the Stone Flower monument done by the sculptor Bogdan Bogdanović at the former Jasenovac concentration camp in Croatia. At a different *lieu de mémoire*, Kragujevac memorial park in central Serbia, numerous monuments including the monument to the Shot Pupils and Teachers shape memories of the victims of the civilians of Kragujevac who have been shot in October 1941 by German occupying forces.

Jay Winter emphasises that the process of collective remembering is not only bound to a monument, to a place of memory, but also to very concrete practices of remembering. For example, I examined a commemorative event in 1963 in Kragujevac, a medium-size town in the centre of Serbia.

The gathering by the Kragujevac residents represented, on the one hand, an effort by the political elite of the socialist Yugoslavian state to build a patriotic collective memory out of the experiences of World War II. On the other hand, this coming together of the inhabitants of Kragujevac, of the sons and daughters, of the grandchildren of those who were shot here by German troops in October 1941, was not only a political act. This was at the same time an opportunity to mourn their dead and to publicly remember them, as individuals, or within a group.

A photograph of this commemoration provides an image of a moment in the public space of the 1960s, that is a bygone present, a present that is not ours anymore. This aspect is important, since I would doubt that one would find a similar picture of the commemoration of the dead pupils and other inhabitants of Kragujevac now that Yugoslavia has broken up. Still, practices of remembering are taking place there today, but they have a different meaning, a different intention, and, most of all, a different “size”.

Here, we return to Halbwachs, who emphasised that every process of remembering, of collective remembering, is socially framed. According to him, individuals and collectives remember only what, in a given present, possesses a “social frame”, a reference framework. Accordingly, they forget those things that have been running out of these frames; that are not important any longer to the members of a given society, or not desirable or functional to political elites.

Forgetting and silencing is not only visualised in the absence of a monument, or a commemorative act. The forgetting, the silencing of certain aspects of the past is more inherent to every monument itself, as the German historian Reinhart Koselleck has formulated with the concise sentence, quite similar to Musil’s statement: «*Zeigen heißt Verschweigen*»<sup>5</sup>.

Reinhart Koselleck, one of the most important contemporary historians, has intensively worked on traditions and transformations of war monuments. He argues that every representation of the collective memory necessarily, and always, includes forgetting, silencing: «It is in the inner logic of a monument that every visualization hides another thing. The test question to raise is therefore: what is concealed?» The most obvious and most widespread silence of modern monuments dedicated to the heroes and victims

<sup>5</sup> «Showing means silencing», cfr. Reinhard Koselleck and Michael Jeismann, *Der politische Totenkult: Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne* (The political cult of dead: war memorials in modern times). Munich: Fink, 1994

of World War I and World War II relates to the military enemy or, more precisely, the dead of the opposing side on the battlefield.

For example, the Victory monument in the National Park Tjentište-Sutjeska in Bosnia and Herzegovina created by Miodrag Živković was inaugurated in 1971. This monument commemorates the fighting and the victory of the Yugoslavian partisans in the Battle of Sutjeska in summer 1943, the thousands of soldiers fallen here – *nota bene* just their own soldiers, the Yugoslavian partisans.

The silencing and forgetting of those soldiers that fell on the other side is, however, not unique to eastern and south-eastern European war monuments. As Koselleck emphasises, everywhere in Europe in the twentieth century, World War I and World War II monuments were silent about the military enemy, and, more precisely, its fallen, its dead. During the nineteenth century, the military enemy had been treated differently.

Koselleck, thus, highlighted in his works those absent messages, silenced by the material representations of collective memories, thereby pinpointing those messages and meanings to be excluded from public remembering. This important scholarly perspective has been broadened by other scholars such as James Young or Jay Winter, whose research on war monuments does not consider only the constructed monuments, but more the processes and practices leading to the building of this or that monument. If we follow Young or Winter, monuments possess, quite similarly to us human beings, a biography. They pass through processes, phases of growing, of being, of transformation, and, finally, through processes of physical or mental decay.

## Practices of remembering

Monuments evolve out of a number of activities, and they always require the will to remember, either the will of a political elite, of an interest group, or of an individual. Individuals or a group of people who want to remember must organise themselves; they need to collect money, to develop plans and ideas about the monument's appearance and to decide where to place it. Frequently, the group of stakeholders must publicly campaign for the realisation of the monument and for support. This phase, which can span one or more decades, is, in my view, one of the most interesting elements for understanding past societies and their collective memories.



I have called this phase – before a monument is inaugurated – “in the retrospective” that is, the time span before a monument is actually built. Differently from this, the “prospective” view looks at the site again, but after the construction of a monument.

Let us first look into the retrospective that is after a certain historical event has taken place, but before commemoration by a monument. I try to distinguish here between three practices:

- former practices of remembering;
- former practices of forgetting;
- unrealised practices, i.e. Representations that were never built, but for which plans and sketches have been developed.

With regard to the former practices of remembering, one may ask, for example, if there had been any earlier forms of commemorating a certain historical event or its victims. If so, who gathered? What was remembered? Who built provisional monuments?

For example, in the beginning of the 1950s, long before the construction of the Stone Flower memorial at the former Jasenovac concentration camp, the local branch of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia built a provisional wooden monument to remember the concentration camp victims. Photographs of the location in Kragujevac where civilians were killed in October 1941 indicate that Christian crosses were erected at this place still in wartime. The crosses were removed only a few years later, since Christian crosses did not fit into the patriotic and socialist war narrative later constructed by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

Silencing the horrors of concentration camps in the public space of the 1950s and early 1960s is, again, not unique to eastern and south-eastern Europe, but existed at that time in almost all parts of the politically divided Europe. However, one may distinguish here between a politically prescribed forgetting on the one hand – in the former Communist bloc – and a publicly accepted amnesia on the other side of the Iron Curtain, in western Europe.

Finally, the unrealised practices, remnants, representations of a past are to be found today only in archives, or in limited academic writings; thus, these representations that never happened to become realised are lost for the public, for the current collective memory. Interesting examples I have discovered include a draft project in 1952 for a future memorial park in Jasenovac, by Nikola Nikolić a former inmate of the camp. Also, I have found a project submitted in a mid-1950s call for tenders to design a memorial park in Kragujevac.

## Monuments' biographies after their construction

We should also examine more closely the different monuments' biographical phases; that is, the time after the monument was built. Because my examples all originate from the area of former Yugoslavia, one should remember that not only time has passed by, but that, additionally, a political system change took place, accompanied by wars. Halbwachs identified a double change of the social frames: the passing of time and the change of a political system. Both the passing of time, and the political change (including war) brought at least two distinct developments relating to war monuments on the territory of former Yugoslavia: elimination of war memorials and change of their meaning.

In the Luscani village near Petrinja, Croatia, the local monument to the memory of the 113 fallen fighters and 284 civil victims of World War II in Luscani was destroyed after the military action *Oluja* in August 1995. Only the empty pedestal is still there, as an unintentional monument for what was intended to become forgotten with the act of destruction. Destruction of a monument is one of the most obvious means of destroying memory, of forcing forgetting.

In 1991 in Bjelovar, Croatia, some people completely destroyed the local monument built in 1947 to the memory of the 25 fallen fighters and 269 civil victims of World War II. The bronze statue was first melted down, and then sold. During the 1990s in Croatia, almost 50% of the monuments to the "National Liberation War", as World War II was called in the socialist Yugoslavia, have been damaged or destroyed.

Another practice is "overwriting": to write over the surface of the initial monument and to transform its meaning and message. For example, the Sutjeska Panorama at the information centre panorama in the National Park Tjentište-Sutjeska in Bosnia and Herzegovina was devastated during the 1990s and disfigured by graffiti.

In Budrovci, in Croatia's Djakovo municipality, the local monument to the liberators, dedicated to the local fighters and the soldiers of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Macedonian Division in World War II, was placed in front of a school building. However, it has been utterly rededicated in the second half of the 1990s and, today, the monument honours the memory of the Croatian fighters of the civil war of the 1990s in Croatia and bears the Croatian national coat of arms. There is no hint, anymore, that once this was a monument for the soldiers and victims of another war.

The monument's location, in front of a school, leads therefore to the following questions: what may pupils, our children, learn from this kind of overwriting of meaning, from replacing one message, one truth, with another? Will they learn that we can simply chose the past we want to remember, according to changes of the political climate? Alternatively, does the example demonstrate, as I would argue, our own inability to endure the existence of more than one truth, of more than one version of the past, of the ambivalence of remembering?


The possibility of placing different memories side by side, of enduring different pasts without erasing one or the other is demonstrated by a photograph, which I took in summer 2003 in the centre of Sarajevo in Bosnia. The image shows the partly damaged, devastated monument to the memory of those soldiers of Yugoslavia who had fallen for the liberation of Sarajevo in World War II. In the summer of 2003, a banner was placed at the top of the original, the older monument, confronting the viewer with a different, painful memory: The banner shows coffins of the identified victims of the Srebrenica massacre, photographed one day before the first funeral ceremony in Srebrenica in spring 2003.

Monuments may help us to remember, as well as they may prevent memories. Beyond monuments, their showing and silencing, there are, however, the people, who have lived through the catastrophes of the twentieth century, and who are able to speak out, to remember.

This brief essay is about monuments, and their biographies, but I would like to close with the people, who live on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and who lived through World War II as well as the wars of the 1990s. Both wars have left their marks on the people living there, individually traumatic and painful. I met an old couple in a village nearby Jasenovac. The man was sent to the Jasenovac concentration camp, as a child, and later on to Germany as a forced labour worker, for which he still has not received any compensation. The couple has lost one of their sons in the last war. The woman mourns in black.

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## **Between Memory Politics and Mourning. Remembering World War II in Yugoslavia**

*Wolfgang Höpken*

Wars are fundamental disruptions of experiences, both for the individual and for society as a whole. Usually they are such fundamental breaks of continuity that it is hard to integrate them into the established biographical narrative and the collective memory. Therefore wars, in particular for those on the losing side, often produce a memory crisis.

Many examples for this exist, both inside and outside the Balkans. The Weimar Republic, for example, did not manage to come to terms with the experience of the lost World War I and, during the inter-war period, the war of the armies was replaced by a war of memories over how to interpret the lost war and integrate it into the narrative of German history. The so-called “Asia Minor Catastrophe” that after 1921 led to the exodus of hundreds of thousands Greeks similarly shattered the Greek’s conventional understanding of their national history and hardly could be integrated into the narrative of the “Megali idea”, which until then had been the backbone of Greek historical self-perception. Without a doubt, the Yugoslavian wars of the 1990s have also produced such a memory crisis, making it difficult in almost all of the post-Yugoslavian republics to come to a reasonable consensus about how the wars should be interpreted.

In all societies throughout the ages, wars therefore have played a crucial role in memory. Again, for the individual memory as well as for the collective one. Jay Winter observes that, always and everywhere, remembering a war has to fulfil two different functions. On the one hand, from a top-down approach, remembering a war always is part of an official memory politics, trying to create and to foster a certain identity among the society and its citizens. To remember those who died in a war creates the community of the living. In particular, since the age of the nation-states, publicly remembering a war reminds the society to be ready for “defending the nation”.

Remembering a war, on the other hand, always goes beyond official memory politics; it always has to offer an opportunity for those who had survived the war to mourn and grieve about the losses of their sons and husbands. To quote Jay Winter, remembering a war, «uses collective expres-

sions, in stone and in ceremony, to help individual people to accept the brutal fact of death in war»<sup>1</sup>. As he has put it in the title of his book on European memory of World War I, memories of war always are «sites of memory and sites of mourning»<sup>2</sup>.

Both dimensions of war memory are linked together, but both also, as in the Yugoslavian example, can be in tension. The official memory might serve the needs of the population for grief and mourning, but it also may ignore or neglect this need; the population may integrate the official war memory into their biographical memory, they may adapt it or they may reject it and create a subversive memory of their own.

### The “big narrative” of the war in Tito’s Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia is no exception to these axioms. Not surprisingly, the memory of World War II played the crucial role in the official politics of memory during the entire period of Tito’s Yugoslavia. The narrative of the war was *the* basic source of its legitimacy and identity, legitimising both the state as Yugoslavian and its political order as socialist. Representing the war in words and symbols should help to create a common and committing identity, which was *Yugoslavian* and *socialist*, and should contribute to the society’s political and national integration. Thus, the memory of World War II was nothing less than the country’s belligerent founding myth.

Because of this function as founding myth, the war stood in the very centre of all forms of memory production. It was a major subject of historiography and school textbooks. Even in 1980, the last year of Tito’s rule, out of 219 Yugoslavian books on history, 125 books concerned World War II. Literature and films, in particular during the first two decades after the war, made World War II a topic for heroic narratives and performances. The war also dominated public historical symbols. Almost all state holidays were linked with the war; symbols of the partisan war permeated the topography of cities and villages and created an architecture of memory, which displayed in everyday life the official narrative of the war. Party and the veterans organization carefully controlled the prestige of this war memory.

<sup>1</sup> Jay M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European cultural history*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*

“Respecting”<sup>3</sup> the heritage of the partisan war was a common obligation, “discrediting” it by questioning its official narrative could even become a criminal act, evoking sanctions or even repression.

The “big narrative” of the war was characterised by four features. In the first place, the “big narrative” was a fixed and extremely stable - almost hermetically sealed - narrative, which hardly could be changed, neither by daily political influences nor by academic discourses. While Yugoslavian historiography made considerable progress in many fields, sometimes also going beyond official political interpretations, the historiography hardly had the room for manoeuvre to extend the official war narrative. Certainly, historians professionalised this narrative over time, but even the slightest deviations repeatedly caused political interventions, at least until the early 1980s.

Secondly, the war narrative was selective and highly biased. The “winner” created the narrative, marginalising and discrediting all other political and military forces outside the partisans to “collaborators, quislings and traitors”. This binary pattern of interpretation – coded in a language of “us” and “them” – excluded all those who did not fit into this pattern.

The third aspect was that the “big narrative” was a picture, which created a binding hierarchy, privileging the “fighter”, that means the partisan, over the “victim”. The partisan stood in the very centre of commemoration displacing others who were victims of the war. Jews or civilian victims, for example, were not ignored, but they were marginalised. Fight and heroism, not the victim’s fate, formed the backbone of this official memory and its moral. The so-called *prvoborac*, the fighters from the uprising’s early days, stood at the top of this hierarchy. The 16-year-old communist youth organization member, who during the last weeks of the war assumed some functions among the Partisan Army, thus could become a “fighter”, who gained a higher memorial dignity than the civilian who had suffered from *ustashe* or *chetnik* violence or the Jew who had become a victim of the German policy of annihilation.

Lastly, the war narrative was a picture of the war that ignored the ethnic dimension of war. Those referred to as partisans, collaborators and occupiers were defined in a language of “class”, but not of ethnicity. The war’s character as an ethnic confrontation, not just as a war of liberation or a class war, totally faded away from the official narrative. Many of the par-

<sup>3</sup> The Serbian word *negovanje* (to pay respect), has almost a sacral meaning

tisan monuments reveal how official memory sought to ignore the ethnic dimension. For example, the famous memorial in Sutjeska obviously uses a neutral, unspecific language that differs from the post-World War I monuments, which portrayed soldiers clearly identifiable as Serbian soldiers and thus illustrating the interpretation of World War I as a “Serbian war of liberation” for all other Yugoslavs. This followed a general post-World War II European tendency that reflected the condition noted by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck: the unprecedented violence of World War II could only be symbolised in an abstract language. However, in Yugoslavia, this abstraction also supported the goal of narrating an ethnically neutral war. Whenever this principle was violated, the reaction was party criticism and sanctions.

### **The “floating gap” between private and official memory**

Such a war narrative, of course, showed little sensitivity for the ambiguities of people’s experiences during the war. Only one part of history and, thus, only one part of the society, was commemorated, others were excluded. The overwhelming public commemoration of the official narrative, in words and symbols, contrasted with the silencing of many personal experiences. The “primary experiences” of the individual and the “secondary institutionalised” memory in public thus fell apart; the Belgian ethno-historian Jan Vansina’s description of a “floating gap”<sup>4</sup> between private and official memory could also refer to Yugoslavian war memory.

To make the picture not too simple, at least three qualifying aspects should be mentioned. First, the selective, highly hierarchical character of the official memory, excluding many experiences from public commemoration, was not specific to Yugoslavia. All over Europe and not only in the east, World War II memory followed, in many aspects, the same selective pattern. In France, the Vichy regime was long ignored, and General de Gaulle’s politics of memory clearly constructed a hierarchy of those he considered members of the resistance. In Germany, initial World War II memory revolved around the role of Germans as victims and not as perpetrators. Nevertheless, when this pattern changed substantially after the early 1960s, the official memory long excluded certain groups, such as communists,

<sup>4</sup> Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985



gypsies, homosexuals or forced labour workers, who only very recently were integrated into public commemoration.

In addition, in “western” memory a “floating gap” between private and public memory was visible. The Belgian historian Pieter Lagrou compared World War II memories in France, the Netherlands and Belgium and noted that collective memories of World War II were «framed in such a way, that they offered the individual only a particular memory that was often outside his or her experiences. The inevitable result was some form of alienation between private memory and public discourse». In western Europe, the memory of World War II never gained a similar role as a legitimating tool for the political order as in Yugoslavia, and, of course, the memory was much more open to a discursive revision. However, the structural bias of the memory was quite similar.

A second qualifying remark is necessary in order not to be too simplistic about World War II memory in former Yugoslavia. Without any doubts, the World War II memory in former Yugoslavia was biased, closed and hermetic; nevertheless, the memory was not free of outside influences or developments. Furthermore, the ruling party, to a certain degree, had to respond to the people’s need to grieve and mourn. In principle, some groups, such as former chetniks or ustashe were denied this right for mourning, at least in public; but, for others, the party had to adapt its public commemoration to these needs. For example, Heike Karge’s dissertation revealed how Jasenovac – always a very difficult place to remember for the party – was upgraded to an official *lieu de mémoire*, largely by grass-roots pressure<sup>5</sup>.

World War II memory also was affected by the development towards a radical federalism, which after the early 1970s delegated almost all powers to the various Yugoslavian republics. This process did not touch the basic elements of official memory. In all republics, the partisan narrative remained unchanged and continued to be the major tool for state legitimacy. At the same time, however, the picture of World War II, as the entire historical memory, also became increasingly “federalised”; its “Yugoslav” character was not lost, but this Yugoslav character more and more faded away in favour of a memory increasingly linked to the individual republics and their constituent nation.

<sup>5</sup> Heike Karge, *Steinerne Erinnerung – Versteinerte Erinnerung? Kriegsgedenken im Sozialistischen Jugoslawien* (Stone memory - Frosen memory? War memorials in socialist Yugoslavia). PhD thesis discussed at the European University Institute. Florence, June 2006

A last qualifying aspect: the image of World War II in official memory certainly was biased; it favoured the partisans and neglected all others; it ignored the diversity and the ambiguities of individual experiences; and it was immune towards the war's ethnic dimension. With all that, however, the image also was an offer for reconciliation to the society. If, as Lucian Hölscher observes, forgetting may sometimes be a precondition for the survivors to coexist, then the official memory also offered a frame for the people to forget about their violent experience. We still do not know very much about how deeply rooted the experience and the memories of the war really were within the communities during the postwar decades. Some, such as Bart Max in his long-time study of the Herzegovinian village of Medjugorje, have argued that the competing memories and experiences of chetniks, ustashas and partisans were kept alive into the 1960s, and frequently emerged in inter-communal conflicts. In general, however, the war memory rather quickly stopped dividing society and burdening the daily coexistence. One might argue that the official narrative helped to do so.

I therefore do not subscribe to the widespread assumption that a suppressed memory was carried throughout the postwar period and then, after the end of socialism, suddenly exploded in order to be recognised. This is too simplistic. For me, it seems to be more the case that the official narrative increasingly lost its socialising power. It turned into a "cold" memory, increasingly losing any cognitive quality and its ability to integrate the society. Finally, when the state and the socialist system ended, also the memory lost its functions. This created a memory-vacuum, which then could be filled by the ethnic entrepreneurs appearing on the scene after the late 1980s.

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## Private Memories, Official Celebrations

Nicole Janigro

*That may give you an idea – some idea, at least – of the copiousness of the information included in the Encyclopedia of the Dead by those who undertake the difficult and praiseworthy task of recording – in what is doubtless an objective and impartial manner – everything that can be recorded concerning those who have completed their earthly journey and have set off on the eternal one. [...] So that everyone will be able to find not only his fellow men but also – and more important – his own forgotten past.*

Danilo Kiš, *The Encyclopedia of the Dead*<sup>1</sup>

In the history of our memory, childhood recollections play a singular role: they are destined to variations in colour, to semantic changes, to sudden burials, fleeting resurrections. However, their tonality often remains the same, impermeable to successive layers. In the school rooms of Yugoslavia in the 1950s, the recent slaughter permeated all war accounts and the reports of those survivors who had fought, who had been imprisoned and tortured – I was particularly struck by stories of children run through with bayonets; to me, every airplane seemed to announce a new war.

Even though narrations did not leave any doubts about who were the good and the wicked, they hardly had a mere political connotation, so school readings were pervaded by the tragedy of humans encountering horror: «Thus step by step, with briefest pause between / The croak, the knife, the thud; the queue pace / Nearer, nearer still. Strained on a rack, / I backed, felt on my lips the bitter taste, / Another's blood, and thus became the third / Who waited at the pit till it – occurred.» The poem *Jama*<sup>2</sup> was the best known work, recited, sung and depicted by the Croatian Resistance and continues to be compulsory in schools despite the revisionism of the post-communist period. The poem still appears to be a symbol capable of poetically condensing pits, *foibe* (sinkholes) and quarries covered by lime.

<sup>1</sup> Danilo Kiš, *Enciklopedija mrtvih* (The Encyclopedia of the Dead). Zagreb: Globus, 1983

<sup>2</sup> Ivan Goran Kovačić, *Jama* (The Pit). Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Hrvatske, 1948. «Korak po korak pošli smo; stali opet: / Krkljanje, udar, pad i opet korak. / Začuh zvuk jače. Ukočen, ko propet, / Stadoh. Na usni tuđe krvi gorak / Okus očutjeh. Sad sam bio treći / Što jamu čeka u redu stojeći»

The *leitmotiv* of blood, of the blood that «laughs like a raving madman», also hosts the mud and fog, which envelop the stations of the cross and the death marches of the Pannonian plains, from the peasants revolt to the beginning of the twentieth century – Krleža's Brabant who owes much to Bruegel's hallucinated landscapes and whom we find again in the *Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh*<sup>3</sup>. Petrica, the jester loved by children, plays his *mandola* in a corner of Antun Augustinčić's monument dedicated to the peasants revolt; a revolt represented at that time as the proto-history of the liberation fight, a symbol capable of condensing the fight of humanity against the oppressor.

When certain issues were raised at home, one encountered vague gestures, subtly ominous silences: in one family out of three, memory was divided. Everyone was unique from their point of view: the breaking up of alliances; the overturning of fronts; and the infinite crossroads caused by the intersections of the world conflict with local situations. Furthermore, the official use of memory did not envisage the possibility of ceremonies or acknowledgement to commemorate one dead person – the legitimate dead were plural and politically correct, all the others were figures driven into oblivion.

This also fed the infinite controversy over numbers: the multitudinous dead are never enough, some are always too many and others too few, their number has become one of the ways to wield political hegemony. The official speech of national self-managed communism had decreed which were to be the visible corpses and which had to remain invisible. Having “more” dead gives more rights to my side, and, therefore, to my national and/or political component. (This matter biased the peace negotiations after World War II, but the issue lasted in Yugoslavia until the beginning of the wars of the 1990s, particularly in the case of the Serbian-Croatian mixed commission of historians for the Jasenovac concentration camp.)

In the meantime, collective memory proceeded among anniversaries of dates and battles, factory inaugurations, opening ceremonies, conversions of places of worship into museums and of places of massacres into places of worship. Socialist Yugoslavia had, like all revolutions, a new calendar – as Rada Iveković reports in the interview given to Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso<sup>4</sup>; and all children only had one Father Christmas: *Djeda Mraz*.

<sup>3</sup> Miroslav Krleža, *Ballads of Petrica Kerempuh*. Ljubljana: Pri Akademski založbi, 1936.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. interview by Andrea Rossini, *Generazione jugoslava* (Yugoslaviav generation) <http://www.osservatoriolbalcani.org/article/articleview/8114/1/245/>, 10<sup>th</sup> August 2007; and <http://www.osservatoriolbalcani.org/article/articleview/8115/1/318>, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2007

Mourning is only private, “exceeding” memories are kept in diaries, letters, they end up in novels and tales which, especially after Tito’s death, dwell upon taboo episodes of the partisan period (Bleiburg; Sremski Front) and absolve the figure of the internal enemy (deported to Goli Otok<sup>5</sup>).

## Individual recollection and public memory

The end of intra-Yugoslavian wars of the 1990s resulted in a dramatic re-emergence of the conjugation of individual memory (the “self”) and of collective memory (the “us”). In socialist Yugoslavia, public memory was (despite regional/local accents) the collective memory of “us” – us winners, partisans, communists, us “united brothers”; therefore, something that transcended nation and religion and belonging to the same national-territory. Because brothers had also been enemies, generalising meant “neutralising” and consequently ignoring certain aspects of the civil war that had been part of the larger war fought in the region.

In addition, memory was also public, because the individual reasons and motivations, the deep desires of the individual – be it a partisan, a chetnik or a ustashе – were never considered: they were all one-dimensional men and only had one gender, that of the *macho*. Public narration presented an image that lacked all links and connections between the motivations of the “us” identities and the reasons of the “self”. In this respect, the Yugoslavian leadership endorsed the ideology of the new socialist man; however, in Balkan political and cultural history, recognising oneself in a primarily collective identity represents an element of permanency. The Yugoslavian state’s political positions and collections of nationalities, combined with the region’s century-old struggle to escape the great powers’ control, directly tied the destinies of the *homo balcanicus* to the collective fate of the southern Slav. Hence a *weltanschauung* became rooted, often converted into official ideology, according to which the individual’s existence found a meaning only and primarily when meeting and relating to History, rather than history. In the case of Yugoslavia, this represents the decisive element of continuity, yet among the many disruptions in the

<sup>5</sup> Dunja Badnjević, *L’isola calva* (Goli Otok, The naked island). Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008. The daughter of a protagonist of the Liberation war, twenty years after her father’s death, tells her long journey in search of a denied memory

changeover from communism to nationalism: it is not easy to reinvent a post-communist, nationalist identity, and renounce the tradition of a collective theorem.

In this way, the history, myth and mythology of one's nation still nourish the tormented individual identities. And the call to "sacrifice" in the name of an ideal – be it the working class, the party, the nation – has continuously been evoked and recalled to legitimate the great loss of human lives in the inter-Yugoslavian wars of the 1990s. The obsession with memory nourishes writing of memoirs, as if the prolixity and precision of tales could restore the meaning of lives interrupted by history. Diaries pop out of attics<sup>6</sup> and the retrieved years reveal historical setbacks that seem science fiction<sup>7</sup>; yet again, a dance of death shuffles the destinies of victims and executioners. While politics, but also political journalism, seem to be condemned to a predictable and anaemic repetition, literature becomes, together with cinema, the place where it is possible to find the space to remember, to talk about defeats and losses, to name and elaborate be- reavements.

Every flat can hide a secret; as for example, in the novel *Elijah's Chair*<sup>8</sup>, where Richard Richter finds a letter, written by his mother a few days before Christmas 1941, to the father of the baby growing inside her. His name is not Richter but Jacob Schneider; his biological father came from Germany, he was Jewish and communist. Looking for his father, Richard will arrive in a besieged Sarajevo, where identities and lives explode in the air, where everyday reality offers tragic sceneries and the doubts of the individuals intertwine with the collective question: «Can this be the type of life ordered by the gods?» Finally, the past comes back and traps him in his encounter with Simon, the oracle-fortune teller whom Richard Richter meets on his way to Oedipus, in Sarajevo.

The orphaned feeling after Tito's death, the carve-up of Yugoslavia, a corpse which will never be buried, the childhood memories that, for those older than fifteen, go back to a country which no longer exists. And now, the trauma of a war changed people's external landscape and hit their mind; even when it did not physically involve them. The written page satisfies the

<sup>6</sup> Irena Vrkljan, *Dnevnik zaboravljene mladosti* (Diary of the forgotten youth). Zagreb: Ljevak, 2007

<sup>7</sup> Slavko Goldstein, *1941. Godina koja se vraća* (1941. A year which comes back). Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2007

<sup>8</sup> Igor Stiks, *Elijahova stolica* (Elijah's chair). Zagreb: Fraktura, 2006

task to preserve memories and affections, to tell about migrations and show nostalgia. This task cannot be carried out by monuments, by houses shattered more than once and by shifted frontiers.

*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*<sup>9</sup> is the family album, the collage of hundreds of fragments, which mix very different genres. Photos, diaries, quotations, dreams, notes, letters, answering machines are the material used to record everyday life, to nourish an amateur activity like autobiography: every piece has a number, like the objects in collections; like the little pieces of paper that help Richard, the English artist, to learn German articles; like the short biographies of disappeared Jews that schoolchildren stick to stones for the installation *The Art of Memory*.

People wish to leave a trace where one has lived for centuries, as in the case of Krajina and Kosovo. People need memory to become concrete and intact, something tangible, especially where the living, as in Srebrenica, disappeared in the woods, and became pieces for experts to identify. The living can maybe be reconciled by counting all the dead, beginning again from the omnipresent dead and thinking that one can do something for the dead (as in the still strong traditional cult of the dead).

Individuals' need to remember is transformed into public use of memory when different political elite officially use memory to manipulate the infinite personal tragedies; history becomes again the vampire that sucks real lives. Today, numbers are very popular again, public festivals celebrate a victory that for somebody else is the memory of a slaughter. One cannot easily avoid attaching every death to a nationality and avoid the fact that creating a museum or a monument builds a tale that asks for vengeance; in the meanwhile, though, it is the wounded memory that asks to be cured with a net of tales because, as Ricoeur says, «one doesn't remember alone, but with the help of others».

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<sup>9</sup> Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (trans. Celia Hawkesworth). London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1998; New York: New Directions 1999





**«Dobar dan. Kako ste? Ja sam dobro, hvala. Jeste li dobro putovali?»  
What language is this?**

*Nenad Šebek*

When I started my education, in Belgrade, I studied my mother tongue under the name “Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian” and I even have a school certificate to that effect. At half-term, I moved to Dubrovnik where my school certificate says that my mother tongue was now called “Croato-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian”. When I joined the BBC in 1986 as a journalist of the World Service, I was working at the “Yugoslav” language section and we were not allowed to name the language that had become politically too sensitive. In 1991, the service was split into two languages – Serbian and Croatian, the name of the country was now taboo. Other foreign broadcasters avoided the language name minefield by saying that they were transmitting in “South Slavonic languages”. During the early 1990s, at gatherings of liberal intellectuals from the former Yugoslavia (in Vienna, Berlin, Budapest, wherever), the *lingua franca* would initially be English, until someone would break the ice and say «How about we speak...» then a pregnant pause while figuring out how to call the language, and a face-saving formula - «...our language». Foreigners working in the country often called the language “JNA speak”, because it was the official language in the JNA, the Yugoslav People’s Army. I also heard the phrase “Našili”, a combination of *naš*, meaning “ours”, and Swahili.

And so, I became multilingual: on top of my English, German, some Russian and the one language that I was born into, I gained another four, as things stand now. I am eagerly awaiting to get Vojvodinian or Southern Serbian, which would make things very simple for me: instead of the usual seven cases, down there they use two or three at most.

Why do I start my discussion of history with linguistics? Well, because for better or worse, the two *are* intertwined and related. What is more, they are even more closely related to the topic we are trying to discuss here: *the memories in short circuit*. Just as we seem to be having short circuits when it comes to linguistics and happily put on the mantle of multilingualism overnight; in a similar way, we are often prey to a different danger: to having a short circuit when it comes to historical memory. We tend to become goldfish; you know that by the time they make a round in their glass bowl,

they forget the scenery and five seconds down the line all is new, and nothing is remembered.

I have had the opportunity or rather misfortune to watch the country that I knew as mine descend into an *inferno* of rape, plunder and slaughter. I watched it first-hand when covering the wars for the BBC from north to south: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and finally Kosovo. It was an ugly sight. Not just because of the carnage, but also because of why it happened and how it happened insulted every moral fibre in my body or the body of any decent human being for that matter. One of its ugliest elements, for me personally, was that while the inspiration might have come from the generation of my parents, it was mostly spearheaded by my generation, and the generation after ours was its biggest victim.

### **A corrupted historical memory**

Another ugly element was watching how everything that my generation was taught became corrupted and abused in order to spread the seed of hatred. I am not saying that what I was taught at school as history - primarily the history of World War II - was true; far from it. It was blatantly obvious, even in high school that the history books and teachers were glossing over and giving a spin to many things. I am also aware that coming from a family in which my father was interned, and my mother and uncle were in the Partisan movement, I was brought up to one "historical truth", with or without inverted commas, depending on how you look at it. I am, I was fully prepared to accept that many of the things I was taught were either polished versions, semi-truths or even blatant lies. What I was not at all prepared to was to see it all changed by 180 degrees and go in the opposite direction, leaving behind burnt out wasteland. What was good became bad, what was bad became good. One year you were hiding the picture of an ustashe uncle, next year you were magnifying it, framing it and hanging it up at the place of honour in the living room. One year it was a shame to go to church on Sundays, next year wild horses couldn't drag you out of a church where you were a fixture as familiar as the cross. One year you were the local secretary of the Communist party, next year you were spitting on it and swearing that all your life you were only trying to actually destroy that party from within. One year you were a partisan general and the next you were shooting at recruits wearing the same cap that made you famous. In heaven's

name, where did basic human decency go? Or is *that* basic human decency something that became a faint historical memory, something that was short-circuited in our brain?

In my previous life as a journalist<sup>0</sup> going to war-torn countries, I always went to bookstores and asked for the latest dictionaries and history books for primary schools. What I saw would have been the greatest comedy in human history had it not been achieved at such a tragic price. What were the youngsters taught in '92, '95, '98 and, yes, today too in 2007? The years of a common, reasonably stable and reasonably happy country and nation (nation as in people with the passport of that country in the British sense of nationhood, not the current *Blut und Boden* kind of nationhood) which was called Yugoslavia has disappeared in every sense of the word apart from those chapters devoted to «the darkest period in our – fill in Croat, Bosniak, Serbian, as you will – history». «The dungeon [...], the slaughterhouse of our youth [...], the place of repression for our poets [...], the regime that tortured our national heroes and saints». For heaven's sake, have we turned into goldfish? Is there anyone who actually remembers? Has Orwell's 1984 actually been a prophecy come true? Do we have wires inside our heads instead of grey and white brain cells and have those wires been short-circuited?

Yes, I know, way too many questions, and no solutions. Well, with all due apologies to my current job, I am in essence a journalist and it is a part of my nature to know all the questions, not necessarily the answers. Let me pose a couple more questions, and I might try to come up with one of the many answers that we need. The “mother of all questions”, I think, is that the way we treated the past history is relevant for our future. Well, I would dare to say that the answer is right there, staring at us; all we need to do is to look. If that is the way history was used and abused in the past, it can very well be done again unless we draw the right conclusions from this recent past, the bloody 1990s.

### **The Joint History Project: teaching history in an alternative way**

Since I promised a sort of solution, here it is. The Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe (CDRSEE) has produced and is implementing throughout the region a set of alternative and complimentary history workbooks. The aim of the project is to try and revise ethnocen-

tric school history teaching by avoiding the production of stereotypes, by identifying attitudes that encourage conflict, by suggesting alternative teaching methods, and by promoting the idea of multiple interpretations of one event. History that instils values of academic rigour and critical analysis would serve as a solid basis for democracy, reconciliation and tolerance in South-east Europe. The goal of the Joint History Project (JHP) is to encourage debate; celebrate diversity; and recognise shared suffering and achievements through a participative approach to history teaching, in order for students and teachers to develop the understanding and the skills needed for a sustainable peace and a democratic future.

To date, the workbooks have been produced in the English, Serbian, Greek, Croatian, Bosnian, Albanian and Macedonian languages, with the Turkish language edition scheduled for completion in 2008. In addition, an edition of the books in Japanese is under way, with a launch due in the summer 2008. All of the editions have been presented to the public and eight press conferences specifically dedicated to the JHP workbooks have taken place in Athens, Belgrade, Zagreb, Brussels, Tirana and Skopje with a press conference to follow in Nicosia in 2008.

I am not saying these are the best history books written. I am not saying they are perfect, they are not. But I am claiming that they are the best thing around, I will claim that they were written honestly and without malicious intentions, I will say that they are a small miracle. They were written by about sixty historians from the eleven countries of South-east Europe who agreed on every single word inside them. I lay claim to the fact that this was not a solution conjured up by American, Norwegian and Italian historians and politicians who think they know what is best for that dark corner or Europe – the Balkans. It was conceived, created and is being implemented as we speak by the people who do not want to be goldfish, by the people who do not want to have a short-circuited brain.

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**THE WARS OF THE 1990s.  
MEMORIES IN SHORT  
CIRCUIT**





## Commemorating Srebrenica *Ger Duijzings*

With only a few thousand inhabitants, the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica has acquired an almost global reputation. Its name has become synonymous with what is considered the worst single atrocity in Europe after 1945: the massacre of at least seven thousand Bosniak men in the aftermath of the Serbian takeover of the “Safe Area” of Srebrenica on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1995. The United Nations (with Dutch troops in a dubious key role) failed to prevent this bloodbath, which has led to a series of investigations and reports, the first of which was published by the UN, followed by official reports in France, the Netherlands, and recently in Republika Srpska. I was involved in the largest Dutch inquiry, carried out by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD). My primary task was to provide an anthropological and historical background account to the events in Srebrenica in July 1995. As part of that, I conducted numerous interviews with Bosniaks and Serbs, as well as Dutch battalion (*Dutchbat*) soldiers, in order to find out how the massacre could happen within the context of local events and conditions. I took a wide historical angle, covering two centuries and looking at the legacies of previous wars and episodes of violence, in particular the historical memories that existed about them. My aim was not to write a comprehensive history, but to critically look at the ways important historical episodes were remembered and represented, used and instrumentalised, before and during the war.

It is clear that historical memories and myths helped to fuel the Bosnian war. One cannot fully understand particular events such as the Srebrenica massacre, if one ignores the various *perceptions* of history that existed among local players. It is sufficient in this context to point at Ratko Mladić’s references to the Kosovo battle (1389) a few days before he launched the attack on Srebrenica, or his references to the First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813) when he had conquered the town. When the Serbs marched into Srebrenica’s town centre, Mladić presented the takeover as a revenge for the historical defeat suffered at the hand of the Turks almost two centuries before. I believe that this combined imagery of the Kosovo battle and the First Serbian Uprising is relevant for an understanding of the ideological context behind the massacre of Bosniak men in 1995, and the mental map of at least some of those people who orchestrated and

committed these crimes. It is indeed plausible that Mladić's world-view was permeated by national epics and "great" Serbian traditions, romanticising the fight against the Ottoman Turks. Epic elements were part and parcel of the discursive patterns, which he and other Serbian nationalists employed to "explain" recent and more distant events and justify their decisions and actions.

Yet, in my final analysis, I was cautious not to draw a straight line of causation from myths to violence, as some other authors have done. To cut a long argument short, I argued that on the Serbian side the collective remembrances of distant events, and the powerful myths that had grown out of them, fed into the living memories of more recent local events, such as those of World War II, when the *ustashe* carried out massacres against the Serbian population in and around Srebrenica, and those at the start of the Bosnian war, when around one thousand Serbs in this particular part of Bosnia were killed in Bosniak attacks. This blend of historical myths, collective memories and living local and personal remembrances formed the breeding ground for the Serbian desire at vengeance that showed itself with such destructive power in July 1995.

In this presentation I would like to extend my analysis to the postwar period: I want to look at the 'afterlife' of the massacre, the ways in which it has been commemorated, and see what potential effects this may have. Given the sheer brutality and scale of the massacre, and the bitterness that exists among its survivors, it is clear that reconciliation will be more difficult to achieve than elsewhere in Bosnia. In addition, the chance that the Srebrenica massacre will be used as a new emblem in future conflicts is very real. However, Srebrenica is much more than just a local problem. For Bosnia as a whole, the massacre remains a controversial and divisive issue. Its legacy rests heavily on the country where the two most important war criminals sought by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Mladić and Karadžić, both indicted in relation to Srebrenica, are still at large<sup>1</sup>. In the eyes of some people, the memories of the massacre, and the Serbs' failure to face it and apprehend its perpetrators, affects Bosnia's prospects of becoming a "viable" state.

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<sup>1</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2008 Radovan Karadžić was arrested in Belgrade after thirteen years in the large  
*[Translator's note]*



## The difficult establishment of a shared narrative

More generally, some people argue that if Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats cannot reach consensus on how to remember the recent past, and fail to develop mechanisms to establish a shared narrative about the war, it is difficult to see how the country can continue to exist. The question of how to remember and commemorate Srebrenica, one of the most dramatic episodes of the war, but also many other events, seems to be crucial for Bosnia's future. It is normally understood that establishing the facts, and opening up the discussion across the established lines of division is the only road to peace and reconciliation. I thought along very similar lines when I wrote my local history of Srebrenica, investing much time and effort not only to describe how these historical experiences are represented in nationalist discourse but also to critically examine them, to distinguish fact from fiction, and weave a more inclusive and accurate narrative that would do justice to both sides. I tried to dovetail Bosniak and Serbian sources, correct and defuse the nationalist simplifications and distortions on both sides, and describe the nuances and complexities of local historical events. Although I do not claim that there is only one historical truth, my conviction was that out of these divergent and often mutually exclusive histories, it is possible to shape a more inclusive and truthful version of events.

Here, I would like to point at the limitations of such a historical inquiry, especially in what it can possibly achieve in the short term. One characteristic of the postwar situation is a deep mental gap between the two communities, Bosniaks and Serbs, in how they look at what has happened during the 1990s. This is visible in the books that Serbs and Bosniaks published during and after the war, describing the events and commemorating the victims on their own side, ignoring the victims at the other side. Their perspectives seem to be wholly incompatible: though similar in style and rhetoric, using the language of victimisation at the hands of "the Other", the official Bosniak and Serbian accounts of the war tell completely different stories, which are very hard to match. Even though I tried to merge these narratives into an overarching one, in the hope that perhaps this would produce a version that would be acceptable to both sides, the actual divisions persist in how Serbs and Bosniaks perceive the war. Commemorative practices, beginning with the commemorations and subsequent burials of victims of the massacre at the Potočari Memorial Centre, and the counter-commemorations organised by local Serbs in places such as Bratunac and Kravica, seem to indicate the lack of common ground undermines any attempt to reach consensus and bring the two communities together.

The situation is further characterised by a high degree of involvement of the international community. Srebrenica stands for the failure of the international community to prevent the largest massacre in Europe since World War II. The two most crucial international actors are the ICTY in The Hague and the Office of the High Representative (OHR). The ICTY plays an important role in establishing the facts and reconstructing what has happened in Srebrenica during the war. The events have been investigated in a series of trials, including the trial of Naser Orić, the former commander of the Bosniak resistance in the enclave. One of the ICTY's most crucial results has been labelling the Srebrenica massacre as genocide: the one and only verdict for genocide, or complicity in committing genocide, was pronounced in relation to Srebrenica (in the Krstić case). Secondly, the Office of the High Representative has played a crucial role in shaping the memories of this event, and determining how the massacre is commemorated. Obviously, the issue of remembering Srebrenica cannot be properly understood without considering the actions and interventions in the local arena by the OHR and ICTY.

## **Divided memories**

Clearly, these war's memories are managed very differently by Serbs and Bosniaks, and other actors, depending on their different war experiences, interests and political objectives. All actors remember and commemorate some episodes, while other events are concealed or forgotten. First of all, for the Serbs, remembering and commemorating important events from Serbian history (such as the Kosovo Battle, the First Serbian Uprising, and World War I and II) was intrinsic to the pursuit of war and camouflaging the economic and political interests at the basis of the attempts to ethnically cleanse and control (eastern) Bosnia. During the war, many events important to Serbian national history were constantly rehearsed and remembered in the local media. As soon as the war entered its second year, regular ceremonies were organised to bury and commemorate the victims of the war. Between May 1992 and January 1993, Bosniak units attacked Serbian villages, killing about one thousand Serbs, civilians as well as soldiers. The Bosniak attacks became a source of major indignation, confirming, in the eyes of local Serbs, that the Serbian nation had always been a "suffering" nation, threatened with genocide and extinction.

This view absolutely ignored the immense suffering the Serbs themselves had inflicted on the local Bosniak population right at the start of the war, when

the Yugoslav Army and Serbian paramilitaries carried out a ruthless ethnic cleansing campaign, assisted by many local Serbs. Yet, nine months after the start of the war, the Serbian feelings of being under threat had become understandable: Bosniaks had managed to carve out their own territory, attacking Serbian villages and pushing the Serbs back into a small pocket around Bratunac. Only ten villages in the area of Srebrenica remained in Serbian hands, while around thirty villages and seventy hamlets had been brought under Bosniak control. Feelings of revenge shined through in the pages of the local Serbian newspaper *Naša Riječ*. Especially after the attack on the Serbian stronghold of Kravica, in January 1993, the call for revenge was strong. As one local chronicler of the war wrote, Serbs were looking forward to the day of vengeance, to be able to avenge this humiliating defeat and finally settle accounts with the Bosniaks. This could have happened in early 1993, when Mladić pushed the Bosniak forces back into Srebrenica, but the creation of the UN “Safe Area” in April 1993 prevented major bloodshed.

When the Serbs finally attacked and took Srebrenica in July 1995, they celebrated this as the liberation of Srebrenica. The euphoria of having beaten “the Turks” mixed with grief over the dead that had fallen during the war, and revenge for what the Bosniaks had done in 1992 and 1993. In the immediate postwar years, when Srebrenica was a Serbian Democratic Party (*Srpska Demokratska Stranka*, SDS) stronghold, the Serbs’ commemorations in July combined these two elements: celebrating the liberation of Srebrenica and mourning the Serbian dead. Monuments were erected and plaques were unveiled to commemorate those who had been killed. This was part of a wider effort to inscribe the new political order in the landscape: streets and schools were renamed, Orthodox churches were built, mosques were torn down, and a World War I monument (commemorating Serbian victims of that previous war), which a local peasant had been hiding for at least fifty years was put back in place. The massacre of July 1995 was completely denied, or rationalised away as killings that were a result of combat, at least in the discussions I had with local Serbs in 1998.

Bosniaks, despite suffering more victims, even before the July 1995 events, made no effort to create a commemorative culture, at least not in the enclave of Srebrenica. Sheer survival was the most crucial issue for Bosniaks living in Srebrenica during the war, and deaths (as a result of shelling, disease, or hunger) were a common and almost daily phenomenon. In addition, everyday life in the “Safe Area” was characterised by social and political cleavages, especially between the original inhabitants of

the municipality, the local *mafia*, and the refugees that had come from elsewhere. A strong sense of community could not develop in such a social environment. The Bosniaks of Srebrenica only started to commemorate their dead, in an organised way, after the end of the war, remembering the victims of the massacre but also those who had been killed before July 1995. Apart from the commemorative protests on the 11th of each month in Tuzla, women also returned to Srebrenica as soon as possible. The first large local commemoration, in Potočari, took place in July 2000, at the fifth anniversary of the massacre. Apart from a large number of representatives of the international community, Alija Izetbegović also attended the event and set foot on Republika Srpska territory for the first time after the war. No Republika Srpska representative was present.

At this point, UN Mission Head Jacques Klein suggested a cemetery to be constructed in or near Srebrenica, similar to military cemeteries in France or elsewhere in Europe. In addition, the idea was proposed to transform the battery factory in Potočari, where many women had seen their men for the last time, into a memorial complex, with an education centre and a museum. These plans have now indeed been realised due to intensive lobbying of the association of families of missing persons, the political and legal interventions of the High Representative, and financial sponsorship of the international community. Initially, politicians of the Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije*, SDA) opposed these plans: they were pressing the survivors to forget about Potočari and choose Kladanj, in Central Bosnia, where the SDA had already started to build a monument. Nevertheless, in line with the wish of the great majority of the families, High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch set aside land for a cemetery and memorial complex in Potočari near Srebrenica. In March 2003, the first group of six hundred Bosniak victims of the massacre were buried in Potočari. Several hundreds followed later that year and in 2004. The local Serbs' answer to this has been to open their own "remembrance room" (*spomen soba*) in nearby Bratunac in April 2004, with hundreds of photos of relatives killed during the war, an initiative started and sponsored by the Serbian war veterans' association. This leaves us with a situation of sharply divided memories and separate commemorative practices, whereby each side is unwilling to recognise the suffering that has occurred on the other side. In addition, the situation is uneven: Bosniak suffering – which is much vaster to be sure – is recognised and validated by the international community, while Serbian victims are largely ignored.

## The commemorative arena

I would like to call this a commemorative arena, where outcomes are not decided in advance. For all the actors and sides caught up in this arena, different issues are at stake. For the relatives of those who were killed in the massacre, the Potočari Memorial Centre and the “return” of the dead and their burial in Potočari makes an important step towards the return of the living. The way in which the reburials and commemorations are managed and secured locally largely determines the prospects of successful return for Bosniak returnees into an area now inhabited predominantly by Serbian internally displaced persons (IDPs). For the survivors, the Potočari Memorial Centre is also a form of non-violent redress for what was done to them: in their eyes, local Serbs should be forced to live with the signs of a crime committed by Serbs or in their name. Some Bosniak politicians have a slightly more calculating approach to the issue and instrumentalised the responsibility and accountability of the international community in order to press for reconstruction and compensation payments, from which the families usually profit least. They identify the UN and *Dutchbat* as the main culprits and use the massacre to make them pay for their mistakes.

This approach helps to conceal sensitive issues: the massacre is de-contextualised and made into a generic symbol of Bosniak victimisation, which diverts the attention away from the fact that Srebrenica was an important centre of Bosniak resistance. From here, attacks on Serbian villages were carried out. An even more delicate issue is that the Bosniak resistance in Srebrenica received very little support from the SDA-led government in Sarajevo, partially because Srebrenica’s warlord Naser Orić was hostile to local SDA leaders. The Sarajevo government used the Srebrenica enclave to keep Serbian troops tied to the ground elsewhere. In June 1995, Bosniak forces were ordered to launch an attack on Serbian positions around Srebrenica, which was used as a pretext by Mladić to attack the enclave. It can be argued that this is one of the circumstances that brought the massacre closer. The fact that SDA politicians never use the term *šehidi* (martyrs who died in combat) for the Srebrenica victims is salient in this respect. Even though most of those massacred were unarmed civilians or prisoners of war when they were killed or executed, many had previously been active fighters, resisting the Serbian onslaught under very difficult conditions. The resistance element is blotted out from the story in order not to raise the painful and controversial issues about indirect Bosniak or SDA responsibility.

The local Serbs, on the other hand, through counter-monuments and commemorations, try to convince themselves and the outside world that the Bosniak attacks on Serbian villages are key to the whole Srebrenica story. Even though the Serbs ignore the fact that the Bosniak attacks on Serbian villages resulted from a ruthless Serbian campaign of ethnic cleansing, most do not continue to deny the massacre, which can be seen as the start of a process of facing the past. In addition, the Republika Srpska report on the Srebrenica massacre (2004) was a step in the right direction. Yet, the fact that Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić have not been arrested will continue to thwart attempts to bring closure, for Bosniaks as well as Serbs.

Instead of regarding these divided memories and commemorations as necessarily detrimental to creating a shared understanding of the war, they could be seen as an understandable legacy of the war. Instead of imposing an official narrative from above, a mistake made in Yugoslavia after World War II, it seems better to allow free expression to these contrasting memories. A shared understanding will probably never be possible, particularly with regards to such turbulent and violent episodes: as the 1990s have shown, reminiscences of and perspectives on World War II are very different among those who experienced that war, even after fifty years, because experiences of violent conflict are often very personal and subjective. We need to recognise that a plurality of voices and a multitude of perspectives is normal in such situations. Open expression of differences will hopefully lead, at some stage, to the creation of a shared public space (which is not the same as a homogenised public space) in which different perspectives and views will be debated. Monuments and commemorations may split communities and solidify divisions, and even fuel future conflict, but if designed and managed properly, they can also help to overcome the losses and traumas of war. Instead of inciting memories of ethnic or national victimisation, as political and religious leaders may feel attracted to do, monuments and commemorations can assist in bringing closure for the people most concerned, and that should be – as far as I can see – their main function.

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## Ascertaining Facts for Combating Ideological Manipulation

*Vesna Teršelič*

After the war, apart from directly helping the victims, the most important action is to ascertain the facts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, I think maximum support should be given to the work done by Mirsad Tokača and his Research and Documentation Center: they document the victims of the war; list all their names; and confirm the circumstances of each and every death or disappearance. This is an excellent starting point and exactly what we have been doing since the end of World War II.

In the documentary produced by Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, we have seen how a void expands: once the public memory created around nice words such as “brotherhood and unity” has been destroyed – which was a factor in what happened – an atmosphere was created where politicians could prepare wars and where blood could be spilled again. Honestly, I am always discouraged at the difficulty in our countries to verify specific events. The work of the Research and Documentation Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a great endeavour that encountered much resistance. First, the political class resisted, because confirming facts hinders ongoing manipulation, for example with the numbers of victims.

Credible reconstruction of events shapes possible talk about the massacres, the victims’ destinies, and the topography of the crimes. Developing monuments, commemorations, museum exhibits; choosing names for streets, institutions, or schools; and certainly writing historiography, and school textbooks can demonstrate what happened, above all, to the victims. Light can be cast on episodes of resistance as well as on cases of solidarity.

Overall, focusing on the crimes committed is not enough, but the perpetrators should also be identified. Because I am Croatian, I would like to focus on what happened with the interpretation of World War II at the end of the 1980s and the crisis of the historic narrative produced by the Communist Party.

The first aspect to consider is the destruction of antifascist monuments, which began after Franjo Tudjman and his party HDZ<sup>1</sup> had been elected, and resulted from the nationalist wave that exploded in the beginning of

<sup>1</sup> *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica, Croat Democratic Union [Translator’s note]*

the 1990s. Around 3,000 monuments had been damaged or destroyed, and street and school names began to be changed. In the documentary of *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, we have seen how the antifascist rhetoric during the communist regime had also been expressed through architecture and construction of monuments. Monuments have become such a relevant part of everyday life of Yugoslavian citizens that once the system had collapsed, they were obliterated: at least one monument was desecrated in each community. This phenomenon has still not ceased although it has lost intensity compared to the early 1990s.

The second aspect concerns the interpretation of history by the communist regime, as seen in the museums created before Croatia's declaration of independence. Those museums sought primarily to glorify the heroism of partisans and rarely considered the faith of victims, in any case not all the victims.

In the various representations of antifascist resistance, either on national or local level, some were somewhat ideological and, because of this, negatively perceived by some groups of survivors. After the collapse of the regime, these museums were closed one after another, and all the collections, photos, and documents were archived in the Croatian Museum of History, often in inadequate conditions. At present, those collections can not be accessed in any Croatian museum.

Jasenovac is an exception for different reasons. This museum is in an area which was under the control of Serbian rebel forces and the UN between the end of 1991 and 1995. Following the military operations by the Croatian police in May 1995, the refugees temporarily transferred part of Jasenovac's collection to the USA, trying to keep it safe. A few years later, the collection was restored and the museum was finally reopened.

The documentary of *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso* shows how victims' names and nationality are hand-engraved on glass in the museum of Jasenovac. In the three years before the exhibit reopened, a heated public debate developed over this issue. One basic question was about the necessity to write down the nationality next to the victims' names. Should the disappeared have an imposed identity that they would not relate to? The opinion prevailed that nationality should be expressed, and I personally think it was the right choice, because the victims of Jasenovac were killed without considering how they declared their own identity, but precisely because they had been identified as Serbs, Roma, or Croatian antifascist.



In regards to crimes related to this particular war, the important aspect is that people were not killed, maltreated, or expelled because they declared themselves Croat, Serb, Bosniak, but because someone else saw them as such and therefore wanted to kill them. In this sense, Jasenovac was an important victory: the exhibit now features the names of more than 70,000 killed. Unfortunately, this is not enough to resolve the controversy surrounding this memorial. In its original version at the time of Yugoslavia, Jasenovac was different because it extended over both banks of Sava river. Now, one part of the memorial is in Croatia and the other in Bosnia and Herzegovina, more precisely in the Republika Srpska. Currently, the monument built on the south side of Sava reports 800,000 victims. This means that if in Croatia the number of victims of the ustashe concentration camp is set at 70,000, in Republika Srpska the number is more than ten times larger.

In addition, the symbols representing the victims cause a problem: the symbol of the Orthodox church exists for the Serbs, the wheel symbolises the Roma, the Star of David identifies the Jews, but no symbol represents the Croatian antifascists. Clearly, the narrative about the crimes committed during World War II is still to some extent a challenge. I would like to emphasise that currently in Croatia the museum of Jasenovac is the only permanent exhibit dedicated to that period. At present, there is no exhibit of the antifascist resistance, and not only the resistance organised by the Communist Party, but also of the Croatian Farmers Party (HSS), which fought against the fascists, although differently from the partisan units.

## **The difficulty of dealing with recent historical events**

Croatia still faces the challenge of documenting and presenting the massacres and killings of some groups of victims. Among these are Serbian and Jewish genocide victims during World War II, and the antifascists who were victims of the Nazi and Ustashe. Another group comprises the still unknown victims of partisans. Furthermore, the violence committed in the aftermath of the war has not been sufficiently documented. Relative data has not been ascertained, and therefore they have not been recorded in any museum, monument, or tombstone. The most striking among these cases is that of Goli Otok.

Documentation of recent events and the war in the 1990s has just begun. Already two monuments remembering the more than 15,000 victims on the Croatian side have been created. The victims who were Serbs in Croatia have not been completely identified because of the lack of confirmed data or the necessary capacity to collect the information. The centre for documentation of crimes of war, Documenta, which I direct, will look into this issue in the near future.

In a few years from now, if someone would want to build a common monument for all the victims of war in Croatia during the 1990s, there would be a strong opposition. When considering different groups of victims, there are differences in how these persons had been tormented and killed, and this opens much room for debate. At the same time, I would like to emphasise that Croatia, with the exception of Jasenovac, has no museums in the actual places of suffering and death, which would document the actual topography of the crimes; for example, as was done in Berlin. Furthermore, even in Jasenovac, there is no clear reference to all the responsible for the crimes. Obviously, there is the photo of Pavelić, the major culprit of those atrocities; but there is no discussion about the role of the institutions, such as the Catholic church, nor is there any mention of the trial of Dinko Šakić, the commander of the concentration camp. His trial was concluded in the 1990s, and Šakić served his sentence in Croatia. There was not sufficient room in the exhibit, but I hope that something concerning this issue will be added. Having said this, the new museum of Jasenovac is an important experience, which should serve as an inspiration.

Historiography should also be considered. The crisis of the official interpretation produced by the communist regime has also seriously affected the academic research on World War II, the massacres after the war, and the war in the 1990s. An increasing number of young scholars choose to research these important issues, but nevertheless we continue to lack academic results. Consequently, there are problems with school textbooks, even though this is not as serious as in some other countries around the region.

With respect to history, for the past seven years in Croatia, a choice can be made from among five different textbooks. None is ideal, but one can increasingly talk of different interpretations of facts. A problem is that young researchers prefer to research the Middle Ages rather than the twentieth century, because with every new interpretation of the past, the public reacts strongly.

This happened with the fifty-page supplement on the war in the 1990s for the history textbooks. The Education Ministry has ordered the supplement in order to end the moratorium on the teaching of history in Eastern Slavonia, an area of Croatia reintegrated into the Croatian education system ten years ago. Although the programme of the ministry has foreseen for the past two years the teaching of history, most schools still do not give lessons on this war primarily because it is difficult for the teachers to confront the subject.

After the supplement was integrated in the history textbook, and reviewed by experts, the 50 pages provoked a big public debate. The ministry rejected the textbook. However, we at Documenta have published it and now we are preparing the promotion of the volume in the areas particularly affected by the war. The textbook is not ideal but it is nevertheless a valid effort to interpret the war in the 1990s.

We would like academic research to focus primarily on these areas and to expand in scope. I have to emphasise the continually insufficient ascertaining of data about deaths and disappearances during the war in the 1990s; particularly, but not only, concerning the Serbs in Croatia. At this moment, the urgent task is to confirm the facts in order to be able to competently analyse the violence committed and to clearly demonstrate who was responsible.

In conclusion, I hope that in the future there will be cooperation in investigating the events on the territory of former Yugoslavia and also in Italy. I am personally interested in what happened in Gonars (Udine) during World War II because my grandfather was one of the internees. I also believe that there is room for mutual enrichment that comes through ascertaining facts and verifying events.

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## The Importance of Every Victim

### Mirsad Tokača

I will begin my paper with a joke. In Bosnia, we have two characters who often appear in jokes, Mujo and Fata. One day, upon returning from the market earlier than expected, Fata catches Mujo *in flagrante delicto* and becomes furious. She starts yelling at him: «Are you betraying me?» He replies: «But no, Fata, I swear not!» She responds: «Yeah, sure, you betray me!» They go on like this, her yelling and him denying, until finally he says: «Dear Fata, who do you believe more, me or your eyes?»

Why is this joke important? Do we believe more our eyes or what we are told? This is the question we asked ourselves when we started our research on the civilian victims of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Is it possible to dismantle the politico-ideological matrix of collective memory, to make sure that victims of wars are no longer used as simple background elements of ideological narratives? What needs to be done to change the relationship with the past? What needs to be done to overcome a deeply rooted, heavily ideological manipulation? (I deliberately avoid saying communist because all ideologies manipulate memory). During the 1990s, I lived the war in Sarajevo. I knew suffering up close. I know what that tin can means<sup>1</sup>. I understand the meaning of that message and decided that, in order to avoid ideological and mythical narratives of the war, it is important to focus on the identity of the victims.

Another contributor to this volume referred to “numerology”. In Bosnia, many of the myths created during communism in the 1950s have found fertile ground even after the war of the 1990s. Nothing has changed, on the contrary: the numbers of victims have grown. New myths of the past were constructed, and, unfortunately, the international community had done nothing to improve the situation. Confronted with this, we asked ourselves what we could do. I remember very well, as if it was yesterday, the words of the first High Representative, Carl Bildt, in his inaugural speech upon arrival in Sarajevo: «Forget the past, look to the future». Today instead, we are talking about the past, but this is only an impression. In reality, we are talking about the present and the future. Ignoring the past, as it was done for

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<sup>1</sup> The author here refers to the monument by Nebojsa Ćerić: a can of meat in a box of humanitarian aid, appearing in the documentary *Circle of Memory* [Translator's note]

50 years in the countries of former Yugoslavia, is very dangerous: the past you ignore today returns as a boomerang.

In the documentary by Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso we saw the grandness of the memorials that Tito had built in former Yugoslavia. However, the monuments dedicated to the actual victims are very few, almost none. With exception to the monument of Kragujevac and partly that of Kozara, all the others celebrate the great, miraculous, magnificent victory of the communists and the partisans over the fascists. There is no trace of the crimes committed by the partisans over what today we call “local communities”; no textbook mentions Bleiburg or the crimes of the liberators.

From here, I derive the crucial question I addressed to the High Representative: will we survive our history? Or, shall we let this moment of mythomania, of discrimination of the victims to continue? What does “discrimination of victims” mean? Some streams of thought have many possible definitions of the concept of “victim”. In my view, not much discussion is needed: every person who died in a war is a victim. Thus, ending the manipulation with the numbers of victims is important.

When the Research and Documentation Center began its research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, popular discourse referred to more than 200,000 victims, which subsequently rose to 350,000. Had we not commenced and completed our project, in ten to fifteen years the number would surely have increased by a few more hundreds of thousands; similar to the crude lies concerning World War II where the number of victims reached 1,700,000 or 700,000 persons were killed only in Jasenovac.

### **The importance of objective estimation of victims**

In reality, we do not need more victims in Bosnia. There are already 100,000. All the rest is a result of fiction. Over the past four to five years, we have tried with our work to explain the “content” of this number. There are strong images coming through the window of memory, places where people were killed, places of burial.

We have visited more than 400 cemeteries, collected 97,920 names of victims, and for 55,000 of these we have found a photograph. In this way, we have restored the identity to the victims. We have created a sort of “electronic memorial” accessible to everyone. By making the data public, we have

surprised politicians, who treated us as if we have stolen something from them. We toured entire Bosnia showing the public the identity of victims, their photos, in order to see who these people were and to explain, both in the cases of civilians and soldiers, the circumstances of their death, what their professions were, if they were married, if they had children, and so forth.

In the end, everybody accused us of being foreign spies, mercenaries who live off national interest. I am proud of having threatened so many national interests. I threatened the national interest of Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats, and some other peoples, and by doing this I feel like I have united Bosnia and Herzegovina, at least gathering its victims in one place. We all lost the war in Bosnia. Although according to some, there were winners, in reality we have all been defeated.

In our view, finding the facts creates the best way for avoiding any manipulation with the victims. At the Research and Documentation Center, we have produced the charts that I call the “charts of death”, which represent the results of our research. They include statistics of the persons killed or disappeared between 1991 and 1995, their ethnic identity, and the ratio between civilian and military victims. Important to this project was considering all the citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to overcome the barrier between “my” and “their” victims, and to be able to talk of “our victims”.

This compelling and ambitious project was financed by the Norwegian government. No EU country wanted to take part. It is still difficult to convince the government to finance an independent NGO in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EU has ignored one of the region’s crucial problems. This is European history. It is not Bosnian, Serbian, Slovenian, or Croatian: it is the history of a region with 25 million people in Europe. It should be clear to everyone that not a step forward can be made until the data is collected in systematic mode. I do not mean the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which has performed and continues to perform a fundamental role. Beyond just rights protected by criminal law, we also have other rights; that is, the liberty to collect the data and to talk about the facts. The academic community attacked us many times. I had to defend our right to do this research. In the times of Tito, I would have ended up in jail, since the party and the state had exclusive control over our past and no one could even contemplate thinking of anything different from the official version of history and the memories approved by the party. I am saying this from personal experience, because I belonged to Tito’s Pioneers.

When I started this work, I was told: «What are you doing? Do you want to make a census of chetniks and ustashe?» They pressured me with this question, but my response was: «I am doing a census of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina». Tito's great error was exactly that he did not count either chetniks, or ustashe, or *domobranici* ("defenders of the motherland", Slovenian collaborators), or the so-called "local traitors". After sixty years, we find ourselves with the photos of the ustashe hanging again on the walls, and with re-inflamed fascism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia. Instead, we should have faced the process of reconciliation, by recognising every victim, despite the circumstances under which he/she had been killed.

There are organisations in Bosnia, which recognise the need of a Commission for Truth and Reconciliation after the South African model. In reality, we need our own model, which we believe we have already started creating. We are aware that these are just the first steps. In 2008, we will start a project called "monuments and memory" in order to show what is happening in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which monuments are being built and who again celebrates the crimes that have been committed in the name of victory.

In the end, confronting the past means confronting oneself. When we understand that this task awaits every citizen in former Yugoslavia as well as in the rest of Europe, we will move ahead. My feeling is that the citizens of Bosnia have reacted positively to our work. As a consequence, not a single politician during the elections mentioned the number of 200,000 dead, not a single one. This means that the citizens are already exercising certain pressure on the politicians. I have said it many times in public debates: «OK, if you talk of 200,000 persons, give us at least 100,000 names. You can not talk of 200,000 victims without accounting for each human being».

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## **Serbia Without Monuments**

*Nataša Kandić*

Confronting the issue of memory of events in the former Yugoslavia after 1991 is an immensely difficult task. First, because I come from Serbia where there is not a single monument dedicated to the victory, heroism, or the victims of this period. Obviously, the fundamental challenge is how to shape the memory of the killings and destruction between 1991 and 1995, and subsequently in Kosovo from 1998 to the end of 2000.

We still seek the base on which to construct official memory. Essentially, the authorities' method is the official political interpretation of the past and of certain specific events. The second method frequently used to create official memory involves the various books that celebrate the "heroes" such as Radovan Karadžić, Ratko Mladić, and specific "offensives", as some authors define the episodes where Serbs were, from their point of view, the victims.

What happens with the methods that seek to construct a single, official memory? Until now, there have not been opposing versions of history because the verdicts of The Hague tribunal, which constitute the most credible accounts of past events, have not yet reached the public opinion and the authorities. Thus, they are not considered and are not used for interpreting the past and related events.

In this respect, it is useful to share an example of the official interpretation of recent history in Serbia. For years, Srebrenica has been presented as an incident which took the lives of several hundred people, but which involved only a minor number of killings. According to this version, the Muslims ran into the forests where they clashed among themselves because some wanted to surrender to the soldiers of Republika Srpska, whereas others felt this was wrong and wanted to fight.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in Serbia in 2003, almost all of its members were known associates of Slobodan Milošević and his so-called "option" for the territories of former Yugoslavia. Very often, they declared that around 200–300 Muslims lost their lives in Srebrenica, under unknown circumstances. Obviously, many others continually pointed out that several thousand people - almost 8,000 - have died in Srebrenica. Such objections were always confronted with the argument that the data were not correct. Furthermore, they

claimed that the 3,500 persons who appeared on lists of victims were actually people listed for humanitarian aid. They asserted that forty per cent of these people were alive; but on the lists of the The Hague tribunal and the different organisations in Bosnia, they were listed as disappeared.

In July 2003, during the ongoing trial for the killings of women and children in Kosovo, one member of the police unit “Scorpions”, a witness, told me that this unit had participated in the execution of prisoners in Srebrenica, and that there were videotapes.

Right after the events in July 1995, around hundred copies of the execution had been produced, but when the unit commander heard of it, he ordered their seizure. One or two copies perhaps remained hidden. In 2004, I started to talk publicly about the existence of the videotape. Occasionally I would get information from some members of the Scorpions, who were telling me they had heard of the tape, that it was somewhere in Germany, that it had ended up in Switzerland, but no one really knew who had the tape and who had produced it.

In November 2004, I was contacted by one of the Scorpions – he was not the one who told me the entire story – to tell me he had the recording, that he kept it safe, and that because of this he was the target of different security services. He feared that others who had copies of the tape intended to sell them. He wanted to give me his copy because he knew it would be used for publicising the facts. Therefore, I could use his copy only after he would have left Serbia.

The strangest thing was that for over two years the tape was in Bosnia, where the gravest crimes had been committed. What is most difficult to comprehend is that someone, who should have never been involved, helped purchase the tape. The example of this videotape demonstrates that the commercialisation of recordings of cruelty was a businesses related to the war in former Yugoslavia.

In November 2004, I had the tape in my hands. I immediately showed it to the war crimes prosecutor, making it clear that it could not be used before the author had left the country. In May 2005, with help from The Hague tribunal staff, he was out of the country, and on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2005, prosecutor Geoffrey Nice presented three or four images from the film in the trial against Slobodan Milošević.

That very evening, I presented the tape to the Serbian public. The B92 television network transmitted the complete version, other networks

transmitted only a few images, while the director of RTS (the major Serbian channel and the most important place to broadcast the tape) cut me off and told me that the film showed only one side of the story. The director asserted that to be able to influence the process of reconciliation, RTS had to consider both sides. I responded that had he taken a better look he would have seen that the tape did actually show both sides, both the faces of the victims and the executioners. After I told him this, he broadcast eighteen seconds of the film. With this story, I want to highlight that the tape played a crucial role in confronting a pre-determined interpretation of the past and specific events thereof. The recording of the execution of six young Muslims from Srebrenica was aired on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2005. All the responsible were arrested the next day. However, something strange happened with public opinion, the reactions were incredible. Even today, I still believe that those reactions of the public were caused by what each person saw with his/her own eyes; whereas the authorities, even though they had the responsible persons immediately arrested, continued the political game, even after the disclosure of the tape.

For the first time, hundreds of citizens called the Humanitarian Law Centre to thank us for showing them that the real story of Srebrenica is not about how Muslims killed each other in the woods. To the contrary, they saw with their own eyes what had happened to boys 16 to 17 years old. They saw the brutality; saw that those responsible wore the Serbian police uniforms. After this, they would not accept any official version telling of a group of criminals, which took arms and armoured vehicles and went on to kill six young people from Srebrenica.

This video had an unprecedented role exactly for the construction of memory. This tape will determine a part of the official memory. The interpretation of a “small incident” taking place in the woods will not hold. This is the only thing that has happened in Serbia to have strongly influenced what we call “construction of historic memory”. All the rest remains in the realm of biased political interpretation.

### **Collecting the data for constructing memory**

What prevails in Serbia is the image of Serbs as victims and refusing to consider the findings from The Hague tribunal. Facts are subject to nation-

al interpretation. For years in Serbia, as well as in other countries, only similar political interpretations have been taken into account.

Exactly because of this risk, some organisations for human rights – and here with me are Mirsad Tokača and Vesna Teršelič – have united behind the following conviction: facts must be produced and that helps creating a shared memory, which opposes any attempt of revisionism.

Firstly, Mirsad Tokača initiated a census of all the victims, either killed or disappeared. Then, last year we at the Humanitarian Law Centre have started compiling the names of the victims, who lost their lives or disappeared in Kosovo. The same type of work should also be done in Croatia.

We have also reached the firm conclusion that the process at The Hague - which will end in 2010 and will produce a relevant legacy - will not be enough to contrast the various political interpretations. Because of this, in 2006 we, as civil society organisations, have begun consultations on how to verify the truth about the past and the crimes of war. So far, we have organised ten meetings both at national level and in the other countries of the region, where we presented the need to establish a Regional Commission for ascertaining the facts and making them public. All the data collected by the war crimes tribunal should be taken into account; in addition, a credible image of “the other” should be constructed by using public testimonies by the victims. We are fully convinced that only such an institution will be able to create a minimum of a shared memory of the past, based on data, that no one can contest.

However, I would like to add that over 130,000 people have been killed in this war and perhaps 20,000 have disappeared. Monuments have been built all over the region: more than 3,000 have been built in Kosovo, there are also many in Croatia and Bosnia, but not in Serbia. If you remember, Milošević very often stated that Serbia was never at war. As a consequence, in Serbia there are no places of killings of Serbs. There are places where people lost their lives because of NATO bombing, but there are no places where Croat, Bosniak or Kosovo Albanian forces killed people on Serbian territory, except in Kosovo. Thus, constructing memory through the monuments that commemorate this past, would be difficult.

Serbian human rights organisations have consistently repeated not only to the Serbian, but also other governments, that for the sake of Serbia's democratic future, for the future generations, it is vitally important that a place of remembrance, which should serve as a warning, exist in Serbia.

This should be an exhibit of Slobodan Milošević during the trial at The Hague. The exhibit should first pass through all the countries of former Yugoslavia before returning here, where the war has started, to serve as a warning that no country should ever have such a government.

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**THE 21st CENTURY.  
MEMORY AND OBLIVION  
IN EUROPE**





## What Future for the Past?

*Wolfgang Petritsch*

Speaking about the past – more essentially, how we speak about the past – shapes the future of a country. This is too often forgotten. Thus, I want to try to approach the issue of the conference from this viewpoint and by starting with lessons from Europe's recent past.

The date of 9<sup>th</sup> November is very symbolic for Europe and also for the Western Balkans. Most people would know about *Kristallnacht* (the night of broken glass): what a terrible euphemism for Nazi Germany's large-scale and brutal *pogrom*, that took place on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938. This barbaric day symbolises the darkest chapter of the twentieth century European history and a process that culminated in the Holocaust.

In 1989, 61 years later – again on a 9<sup>th</sup> November – the Berlin wall came down. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) opened checkpoints in the Berlin Wall, allowing its citizens to freely travel to West Germany. Spontaneous “people power” started demolishing the Berlin Wall, the symbol of Cold War in Europe. A new chapter in European history was thus opened; some even envisioned «the end of history».

Roughly around this time, not far away from the demolished Berlin Wall, on the territory of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a fundamental crisis of the state system, combined with a breakdown of intra-society communication, had come near to its culmination. Within a few weeks, an implosion of unprecedented dimensions swept away the foundations of this state. At its 14<sup>th</sup> Congress, the once all-powerful League of Communists of Yugoslavia dissolved along Republic and ethnic lines. The bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia began.

This crisis in the south-eastern region of our continent soon turned into a big crisis for the European integration project. Europe failed to act adequately and consistently; consequently, the much-touted «Hour of Europe» (Luxemburg Foreign Minister, Jacques Poos) triggered one of the worst crises in post-Cold War Europe.

Yet, another “anniversary”: on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1993, *Stari Most*, Mostar's magnificent old bridge built in 1566 by the Ottomans, collapsed after several days of bombing by Croat forces (the General in charge stood trial in The Hague's ICTY). The traces of the Berlin Wall are mostly gone, Germany is reunited; Bosnia's destroyed physical infrastructure is more or less rebuilt,

so is the bridge in Mostar. Questions, however, remain: has trust between the ethnic communities been rebuilt? Is “truth and reconciliation” on the political agenda? Have the root-causes of the conflict been addressed by the political elites and by the civil society? Questions abound and there are no easy answers. All in all, the record is not encouraging so far.

Thus, is the time ripe for “truth and reconciliation”? Are the people, affected by a traumatic civil war, ready to really engage in the necessary soul searching? As the European experience of the twentieth century shows, rebuilding a bridge, a house, is mainly a matter of money. Therefore, physical reconstruction, overcoming the worst destruction, can start immediately, and so it did in the Balkans. However, rebuilding trust between the former warring parties and finding a way to deal with the divided past in a constructive way needs time and effort. It needs much time and continuous efforts of all parties and actors involved in the process, it requires enormous political will and the readiness on the part of both the elites and the so-called ordinary people for self-reflection and self-criticism.

## Lessons from Europe

When looking at the lessons from the dark side of Europe’s history, the examples of Germany, Austria, Spain clearly demonstrate how different the transition from dictatorship to democracy can be. While the German and Austrian examples are better known, Spain is lesser studied — and is, above all, quite different. Only a few days ago, the forty-year dictatorship of Spain’s General Franco has been formally condemned by the democratically elected parliament in Madrid.

The Spanish fascist dictator Franco died in 1975. Yet, after his death and the transition to democracy there was no purge, but rather an officially sanctioned exercise in collective amnesia. Spain’s fascist past, the civil war and its thousands of victims, all this was subordinated to the peaceful transition to democratic rule and economic recovery. In the Spanish case, elites made this “pact of oblivion” in order to ensure political stability, fearing that any attempt to sully the reputation of Franco and purge the military and security forces would lead to a destabilising crisis of the divided Spanish society.

The Spanish parliament took more than thirty years to approve a highly controversial “historical memory” law, which acknowledges in the most com-

prehensive form to date the atrocities of the Franco regime. Only now, all symbols of the fascist regime from 1936–1975 have been ordered to be removed from public buildings. Local authorities are obliged to search for mass graves from the 1930s civil war. Finally, official “recognition” of Franco’s victims is possible in Spain. This is said to spell a new start for the country.

The Spanish example, if taken as such, clearly demonstrates that the process of confronting the past and overcoming the ghosts of history, first of all, needs time. Nevertheless, time alone cannot heal the wounds: this is another lesson from the Yugoslavian tragedy. Confronting the past needs a proper environment, a stable state and dedicated political stakeholders such as the current Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who, it seems, is ready to free Spain from the lingering wounds of its past.

This effort is also intrinsically linked to the socio-economic progress in the country itself. Today Spain is a prosperous society — in spite of all its problems between the main “ethnic communities”. Obviously, politics has managed to balance the tricky equilibrium between the various groups. Clearly, membership in the EU, not the least substantial financial support from Brussels, has provided the framework for a successful transformation.

In short, the EU’s success story has changed the parameters for the political classes in Europe and created a framework for active involvement in the politics of overcoming civil wars and the subsequent political division and economic underdevelopment.

## **Facing the past in the Western Balkans**

In the countries of the Western Balkans, the process of coming to terms with the past has not yet begun. The Western Balkans’ societies are still waiting for a fresh beginning, an impetus that Spain received when it was accepted into the European integration process in spite of its fascist ghosts of the past. Obvious reasons for the delay in the states of former Yugoslavia include unresolved status issues (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina), belated state-building, renegotiations of the national question, political instrumentalisation of the past, political elites engaged in the expansion of their power-base; in sum, an enduring socio-political crisis and frustrated search for “identity”.

Some rather obvious contextual factors affect the extent to which political class and people in the Western Balkans consider facing-the-past processes trustworthy and legitimate. Those factors range from the shape

of the post-war environment and the extent to which people believe they will benefit by dealing with the past and the degree of trust that people have in the state and in politics. This is compounded with a pervasive feeling that their “collective being” is under threat. A careful examination of the Western Balkan societies after the crisis of the 1990s indicates that these factors excessively hinder the necessary process of “healing”:

- the post-war environment is still dominated by ethno-nationalist arguments and mistrust of “the Other”;
- most people do not really believe that facing the past will bring them any benefits or change their dismal status. They thus stick to divisive narratives and self-victimisation;
- after more than 15 years of “politics imposed on people’s everyday lives”, people have a rather small degree of trust in the state and in the political elite;
- the irrational fear of «losing our own identity» prevails in the environment where “the Others” (Albanians, Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs; not to speak of the Roma) are still demonised.

### **From political instrumentalisation towards a “re-politisation of the memory”**

One must also consider the political instrumentalisation of the issue of memory. Over the past years, we could observe in Central Europe, notably in Poland, the tendency for a new and highly problematic way of ideological “house cleaning”. New and constitutionally dubious efforts sought to remove the remnants of the old communist elites, who – actually or allegedly – took advantage of the tumultuous (and indeed problematic) transition from communist rule to democracy and market economy. An Institute for National Remembrance (but scarcely based on the rule of law) promotes “national values”, thereby espousing authoritarian methods and nationalist rhetoric.

This is just one illustration of the fact that even successful European integration does not automatically guarantee the abuses of history for sinister political gains. No doubt, help in remedying the situation could be found in a set of stringent rules, based on European, and thus universal, values (Copenhagen Criteria, European and UN Human Rights and other relevant covenants), which take into account the specificities and sensitivities of Europe’s diverse ethno-linguistic set-up.

After a war, with its unspeakable atrocities and, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, genocide, there is an (understandable) tendency to exclusively reduce the past to those gruesome facts. The “victimisation of history” would be as wrong-headed as mere oblivion. We deeply appraise the desperation of the victims, their need to be listened to, the recognition of the suffering and, above all, the necessity to bring the perpetrators to justice. However, the exclusive focus on the atrocities and the suffering may contribute to a certain “de-politisation” in post-conflict societies. Again, the context matters. The broader picture, including a clear perspective on the future, is needed in order to avoid repetition; to give sense to history and, last but not least, to make reconciliation feasible.

At this point, politics returns to the game and thus the need for a novel form of facing the past at the political level: a sort of “re-politisation of the memory”. To leave behind the pain and trauma of the past and approach reconciliation in a deeper sense of the word, therefore to establish a new narrative, one needs to address the structures of political power, inequality and exclusion that constituted the framework perpetrating the violence of the old order.

Ordinary people can start to move towards a shared future only if their everyday life stops constantly reminding them of their past pain. Only if political stakeholders stop reinventing and manipulating the past for their own purposes will they create conditions for reconciliation. For people to move together along the path of reconciliation, a sustained effort must be made to transform the structures and circumstances of everyday life that embody and perpetuate the old divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between perpetrator and victim. Only when people feel that the evils of the past will not return and believe that ‘things are moving in the right direction’ will they be in a position to loosen the bonds of the past, relinquish the impulse for revenge and readjust towards the future. To make this possible, a proper political framework has to be established, including stable statehood, a functioning economy, and accountable politicians. Without the latter, the necessary transformation of everyday life cannot be expected to be sustainable.

The need for a constructive “politisation of the memory” as a way to bypass widespread tactics of manipulation of the past for short-term goals, as is still the case in the Western Balkans, has one crucial limit: the political elites themselves. As long as irresponsibility and egotism, ethno-nationalist argumentation, and well-directed misuse of the past based on the principle of constant accu-

sations of the “others” for all the ills, remain the striking characteristics of Western Balkans’ politics, there will be no determined and accurate confrontation of the past. The many ghosts from the past continue haunting society.

### **Searching for the coexistence of past and future: concluding remarks**

In summary, some general thoughts about the past will be formulated. The past is not something fixed with an independent existence, a fixed set of events. The past is the remembered past, and as such it is something that is constructed and reproduced in a multitude of ways. In other words, what we refer to as the “past” is our historical memory of a particular period of the past, and our particular memory is just one of a range of alternative memories (or interpretations) that could be held. Therefore, by “dealing with the past” we are referring to an individual process comparable to that of forgiveness.

Thus, individual revisiting of the past remains essential. Exploring the deeper worlds of our memories and doing our best to understand our own fears and prejudices, requires self-criticism, courage and intellectual perseverance. However, at the end, only confronting ourselves with the content of our fears and prejudices enables us to become conscious of our past and, therefore, think more freely about our future.

Only the coexistence of past and future can guarantee a normal present, a present in which the past is seen as a positive part of its own memory, and where the future is seen as a common place for all citizens. Ignorance, prejudice, fear and the inability for honest communication and meaningful dialogue are ingredients for new confrontations, both rhetorical and real.

The past is a construct, let’s de-construct it in order to build a common European future with a common narrative.

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## **A European Memory for the Balkans?**

*Paolo Bergamaschi*

It is easy to be involved in a geographic area during a conflict or an emergency. It is more difficult to continue being involved when the spotlight turns off and the attention of the media and public opinion wane. Although I am involved full time in international relationships and can access privileged sources of information, I must admit that I regularly visit the web site of Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso to look deeper into certain issues. Emergency interventions are crucial, but problems can be solved only if work continues after the emergency. This is precisely what Osservatorio intends to do in a time in which the Balkans have been transformed into a ghetto with no exit.

I do not think it is merely accidental that such an important initiative as Osservatorio was conceived in Trentino. Probably, only a borderland can express such a strong awareness towards the Balkans. It is precisely in borderlands, that differences are softened and lessened and coexistence is enhanced. In borderlands, unfortunately, nationalisms rule, stressing diversity and justifying the birth of frontiers and the construction of walls. Because I frequently ended up in former Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1990s, I still remember the birth of the Slovenian-Croatian border as a gaping wound.

In the beginning, the border resembled a game with an improvised officer in a booth who observed cars passing by. Then a barrier arrived, always pulled up but present. Then, the border continued developing into a little container next to the road; to an area of levelled ground; to barbed wire; and to breaking off of century-long relations. However, I also had some wonderful moments when, in my monthly missions from Italy to Strasbourg, I witnessed the gradual dismantlement of the border between Germany and France, actually more on the German side, in the days in which the Schengen agreement became effective. Precisely this agreement, which represented a moment of relief for us, became a nightmare for the south-eastern European countries. The introduction of the compulsory visa to enter the European Union countries and the reduction of free movement due to the new borders created some cages that hinder the cultural, social and political growth of the new generations of the post-Yugoslavian area and lead to nationalist indoctrination.

Last week, when returning from Moscow to Brussels, I read the interesting preliminary document for today's conference. I do not know how

long it took to shoot the documentary *Circle of Memory*, but it would have taken Andrea Rossini years to do the same thing in the countries of the former Soviet Union, given that the Soviet regime had utilised – similarly, but much more – the celebration of World War II, when the Russians lost more than thirty million people. In communist mythology, the fight against nazism represented a fundamental element of the ideology that held the Soviet society together during the Cold War.

National identity is built through symbols and myths or, even better, through the mythmaking of historical episodes. Nationalism is seen as the affirmation and exaltation of one's identity through the re-reading and re-interpretation of history to the detriment of other identities. Nationalist regimes do not accept the dismantlement of frontiers because their power is based on contrast and separation. They need a closed and self-referential world.

Justification for the actions and misdeeds that we commit today can always be found if we readjust and re-examine history through the lens of nationalism. Those who have been highly wronged feel history owes them something. Sometimes, they do not accept, or rather even deny, the possibility that other people, as well, have had tragic and painful experiences which still affect their current reality

In this context, international justice plays an important role, if it does not become the justice of the victors on the vanquished. International justice is a fundamental step for a truly shared memory, which can help recognise misdeeds on both sides. How is it possible to live in a country with two different versions of history, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Would it have been possible to build a common European house if such an effort had not been made? I really doubt it. Will it be possible one day to see the emergence of a shared memory between Serbs and Kosovars, between Israeli and Palestinians, between Armenians and Turks? Difficult, but not impossible, and the European Union should take up the challenge and get involved. Only if we manage to project peace and stability over the borders can the creation of a shared memory become a truly successful project.

Engaged in casting light on all the events that have devastated south-east Europe in the 1990s, research centres are another important element, as proven by other contributions to this volume. The search for truth bases itself also on their precious work, which cannot be subject to the aims and interests of the usual people at power.

Returning to the countries in South-East Europe, the European Union has already taken some steps forward, although it must consider the wear-



ness due to its enlargement, which has gradually exhausted the boost given by the integration process. In particular, action should move around four measures:

- intensification of cross-border programmes;
- operative effectiveness of the agreements to simplify visas;
- twinnings between cities, regions and provinces;
- further development of the *Erasmus* projects for students.

Increasing exchanges is the best way to make room for the inclusion into the Union of the countries resulted from the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The European Union is devoid of a discourse able to contrast the rhetoric of the expanding nationalist parties that, around the continent, are exploiting changes brought by the integration process and offering, as an alternative, a return to the past. This weak point can become a strong point if we manage to give a heart and a soul to our hopes based on the reality of what happened in the Balkans.

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## **Extinction of Historical Memory and Nazi Resurgence. A shared memory?**

*Franco Juri*

In a country where history has been torn apart by civil and political conflicts, by an occupation and liberation war, shared memories seem difficult and often impossible. Every event or historical phenomenon is inevitably brought into focus by different memories; in other words, by different, often opposing, interpretations. Traumatic phenomena leave profound wounds that result in chaotically differing points of view or make them incompatible and totally differing and make perspectives diverge irreparably. These wounds move on from generation to generation and deform into a one-sided understanding of history, holding history as a hostage of ideology or of a particular perception of society and politics.

Historical memory becomes stratified into complex layers of perception, which converge with difficulty into an unambiguous shared memory. History, an academic discipline that inquires into the past following reliable research paths, can partially offer (if it is not influenced by ideological prejudices, political interests or nationalist ambitions) the methodological instruments to – fairly, accurately and convincingly – achieve objectivity, historical truth, fact and its plausible contextualisation.

### **A forgotten attempt between Slovenia and Italy**

In 1993, the Slovenian and Italian governments created a mixed historical and cultural commission with illustrious scholars from independent parts of the Slovenian and Italian academic world. These scholars were to outline a shared historical memory by analysing the complex relationships between Slovenia and Italy from the end of the nineteenth century to 1954, when the London Memorandum was signed. Despite all the political obstacles, that commission – which politicians considered more a symbolic and political gesture of goodwill rather than a serious effort to find some answers to the many open issues in the border relations between the two nations – concluded its work in 2000 and presented an approximately forty-page, common report of the main facts of the Italian-Slovenian relations.

Why did a mixed commission of fourteen renowned historians, jurists, sociologists, and intellectuals “only” produce forty pages after seven years? In reality, those forty pages are priceless, if we consider the nationalities represented, the different branches of learning and the different positions of the commission members. Seven years of conferences, meetings and drafts were needed for both sides to legitimate every word, phrase, every fact, figure and to conscientiously consider any ambiguity.

Despite the different approaches and the concrete difficulty of a full agreement, this text is a finished document and, as such, a methodological example and a precedent, a starting point for further historical research capable of overcoming the barriers of prejudice. The joint document, for the first time, also addressed issues previously considered taboo on both sides.

This report is one of the rare examples (maybe the only one so far) of a joint search to comprehend the painful and complex history of the relations between two nations in border areas. Sadly, this document of exceptional scientific, but also political, significance was practically censored and ignored, or at least deliberately unmentioned, especially by Italians. In 2001, the newspaper *Il Piccolo* of Trieste published the text, and the *Corriere della Sera* printed some excerpts. Later, only the Italian Communist Party of Friuli-Venezia Giulia offered it as didactic material in secondary schools, but the offer was ignored. The report reputed some stereotypes that served as a base for the new revisionism, a revisionism also accepted among some in the Italian left. This new revisionism uncritically endorsed the old theory of Slavic expansionism (sadly repeated by the Italian President of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, during the *Day of Remembrance*<sup>1</sup>). This theory was considered responsible as much as, or maybe more than, fascism for the tragic events that took place in the Upper Adriatic. In Slovenia, the report, also translated into Italian and English, was published officially by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in some local and national newspapers.

The conclusions – as unified as possible considering historians of different background, language and philosophical and political sensibility – do not actually satisfy any nationalism, neither Italian nor Slovenian, because the violence and abuses documented (fascism, ethnic cleansings,

<sup>1</sup> In Italy, since 2004, the *Day of Remembrance* commemorates every year on 10<sup>th</sup> February the victims of the *foibe* (see note 2) and of the Giuliano-Dalmatian exodus [*Translator's note*]

war, concentration camps, repression, resistance, *foibe*<sup>2</sup>, communism, forced emigrations, etc.) are contextualised in their historical birth. As such, they can hardly be exploited politically or nationally.

On this point, Umberto Ranieri, at the time Foreign Undersecretary, unfortunately commented in an interview that he would consider the report unacceptable if it offered any historical interpretation which did not endorse the theories of a systematic anti-Italian ethnic cleansing in Istria and in Trieste after World War II. National-popular media operations such as Negrin's film, *Il cuore nel pozzo* (The Heart in the Pit, *T.N.*), offer an interpretation of these theories inspired by the tragedy of the *foibe* in line with the hagiographic and melodramatic version, and full of historical falsifications.

The report provides an opportunity to comprehend the complex reality of our region. Unfortunately, political interests got the better of this attempt to share a more complicated history.

## A shared national memory?

Spain represents now, more than any other European and democratic country, the difficulties of building a shared historical memory within the same nation. Only the silence bargained after Franco's death was shared because it allowed democratic transition. However, today the memory of the civil war still, or again, divides the country. On 28<sup>th</sup> October 2007 (strangely coinciding with the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Rome) the Pope beatified 498 priests killed during Spain's civil war by the Republican Army and by the communists. For the church and some Spaniards, they were Christian martyrs, deserving beatification. For others in Spain, they were victims of the war, a war initiated by Franco's military *coup* actively supported by these priests after an explicit and deliberate decision of the Spanish *curia*. Almost at the same time of the beatification, the Spanish parliament promulgated a new law on the rights of the victims of francoism. Emotions in Spain are still intense, even excessive, when touching the delicate topic of the war, which

<sup>2</sup> The term *foibe* refers here to natural sinkholes of the Karstic area of the Alps, where twice, in September 1943 in Istria and in May 1945 in the area of Trieste, Gorizia, Capodistria and Fiume, thousands of people, mainly Italians, were killed and thrown into natural sinkholes by the Yugoslavian partisans for political reasons, ethnic and social retaliation [*Translator's note*]

overthrew the constitutional republic and established a dictatorship. What type of shared memory is then possible in that country?

### **A shared national memory? The Slovenian case**

More than sixty years after the end of World War II, historical memory continues to divide even a small country like Slovenia. In 1991, Slovenia was born as an independent state by basing its independence on a profound reassessment of its own historical memories. Those memories layered in forty-five years of Socialist Federal Yugoslavia obviously could not remain the same ones on which the new national myths were based. However, the successive governments of the newly independent state tried to stay away from excessive historical revisionism and avoided complete rehabilitation of the collaborationist and pro-nazi elements of the *Domobranci* movement<sup>3</sup>.

Pressure from this point of view has considerably increased in the last years (paradoxically, or not, within the EU and NATO) and has been, emphasised deliberately by the centre-right government, ideally close to the ideals of the protagonists of collaborationism. And today, a burning issue is the dreaded historical rewriting to be carried out on history textbooks. Official television news inform us daily about the mass graves that continue to emerge when digging up the bones of the thousands hastily executed in the immediate postwar period.

The church clamours for the rehabilitation of Bishop Rožman from Ljubljana, whom Yugoslavian tribunals condemned for collaborationism with the German and Italian occupiers and inspiring the *vaške straže* (the village guards), anticommunist paramilitary cells of the collaborationist pro-nazi-fascist Army.

Therefore, in Slovenia, two irreconcilable historical memories are still clashing. One interprets what happened in Slovenia between 1941 and 1945 as a liberation war, fully legitimate and an integral part of the great anti-Hitler European coalition: a war of resistance against collaborationism, sustained then by the highest ranks of the Slovenian church, and zealous ally of the nazi-fascist occupier. The supporters of this historical interpre-

<sup>3</sup> After the Italian armistice in 1943, the pro-German-occupation bourgeois forces of Ljubljana formed the Slovenian territorial defence force (*Slovensko Domobranstvo*) [Translator's note]

tation stigmatise the horrors carried out by the occupier and by their local collaborators and consider *domobranci* and *belagardist* (Slovenian collaborationists of Catholic influence) collaborationism as a treason of the nation. The only legitimate war was the popular fight for liberation.

The other historical memory, instead, considers wartime events as a civil war between Slovenians, caused primarily by communism and its revolution that, according to this point of view, compelled the church and those who opposed Soviet communism to support Italian and German power and fight resistance guided by the communists. The supporters of this memory emphasise and stigmatise postwar mass executions. For them, figures such as that of Bishop Rožman should be fully rehabilitated and the *ex-domobranci* should be considered and respected as anti-communist combatants accredited with all the rights and honours once given to partisans. The current government recently promulgated a law partially endorsing this thesis by equating the merits of the *domobranci* and those of the partisans.

Of course, a shared memory should try to contextualise both truths. There were both collaborationism and liberation wars, there were both nazi and *domobranci* crimes, but also postwar abuses and atrocities in the name of a revolutionary power or, more simply, of revenge.

The emotional and strongly ideological attitudes on both fronts clash against the attempts to reconcile the diverse historical memories. Today, an increasingly visible bias against antifascism tends to relativise the responsibilities of nazi-fascism and of its collaborators and to increasingly criminalise the Partisan movement. This may also be due to European silences and even attempts to equate communism and nazism. Recent Slovenian examples include overturning the conviction of the deceased Bishop Rožman and bringing a legal action against ex-partisans such as the famous combatant and politician Mitja Ribičič, under investigation for crimes against humanity as an alleged culprit of the slaughters of *domobranci* in the immediate postwar period. No charge against him has yet been proven. However, politicised enquiries in the government-controlled mass media, primarily public television, seek to criminalise the liberation movement.

This tendency resonates with parties in the government coalition that have strong connections with anticommunist postwar emigration. After the birth of the independent Slovenian state, these parties consider Socialist Federal Yugoslavia as an “enemy and occupier” state founded on

an aberrant ideology. These parties feel that the ideology's historical source should finally be dismissed and refuted; they continue to deliberately accuse the centre-left opposition alliance of sympathy for the old Yugoslavian system. This attitude causes contradictory reactions that are confused and inclined to rehabilitate Yugoslavian titoism and its authoritarian myths in an uncritical and mainly iconographical way. This reaction is especially found among the young, not supportive of the opposition parties generation, who have little historical memory and are preoccupied by the consequences of the impending dismantlement of the welfare state due to widespread neoliberalism.

### **The paradox of Zmago Jelinčič**

Zmago Jelinčič, the nationalist and xenophobic leader of the Slovenian National Party (SNS), obtained almost twenty percent of the votes in the first round of voting for Slovenian president. His voters were mainly between 18 and 30 years old. Jelinčič's success has a particular recipe. First, he uses the classical codes of the European far right, which hinge on hate and intolerance against Roma, foreigners in general, black people, Italians (derogatorily called *lahi* by Jelinčič), homosexuals, etc.. Moreover he exploits the cult of weapons and militarism and the local irredentist model with absurd territorial claims especially towards Croatia (according to Jelinčič, Slovenia should reclaim the whole of Istria and the city of Rijeka and ask for a new peace conference for former Yugoslavia to redefine its borders). However, the nationalist leader also endorses radical anti-clericalism; a strong, albeit vague, social welfare interest; euro-scepticism; and an enormous admiration for Tito, whom he considers a very great leader. His eccentric homage to Tito took shape in 2006 with the dazzling inauguration of the bust of the marshal in the courtyard of his home, which is also the seat of the SNS.

The paradox is clear: Tito and the titoist system would probably have used the most severe possible legal punishment for personalities such as Jelinčič with his nationalist ideas and his declared hate towards another Yugoslavian nation. Now Jelinčič grotesquely grabs and instrumentalises some of the iconographic historical memory of Yugoslavia to blow on the ashes of nostalgia and lost myths and to entertain the new dissenting generations. Tito's ghost and xenophobia are starting to go hand in hand, con-



fusing again the boundaries of historical memory, which should be shared and appreciated in the proper context.

## The rebirth of nazism in the East

The wars that tore apart Yugoslavia in the 1990s have brought back to life, liberating their worst synergies, many of the ghosts and of the macabre ideologies of World War II, ideologies that, in certain cases, have also been legitimated by the new “democratic” authorities. Its most clear example is the cynicism and arrogance with which Vojislav Šešelj currently faces the judges in The Hague. Although behind bars, Šešelj provides a troubling example because other personalities similar to Šešelj can be found throughout Europe. One continues to assign to the Balkans (especially to former Yugoslavia) the sad distinction of throwing historical memory into chaos; however, something even more gruesome is happening in the society of the so-called “new Europe”.

Hungary with its far right and newly constituted Hungarian guard, inspired directly by nazism, xenophobia, anti-Roma and anti-Semitic ideas, shows that the inclusion of the eastern countries, once considered reformist and advanced, into the European Union did not produce there the expected radical democratic change. Hungary’s developments are not an isolated case. The Slovakian premier Gašparovič protested to Prague for the Czech government’s tolerance towards the Czech guard, a far-right paramilitary movement similar to the Hungarian paramilitary, which spreads nationalist hate focused on Slovaks and Roma.

The case of the Kaczynski twins in Poland and of their far-right allies – now in opposition but ready to come back in a disastrous *neo-laissez-faire* economic context – demonstrates the anti-democratic involution, which the EU enlargement did not manage to prevent. Perhaps the expanding neoliberalism sought and imposed by the European Union, increasingly distant from the welfare state, causes dissatisfaction and frustration manifested as neo-fascism and neo-nazism in different national contexts, especially among young people.

Uncontrolled privatisations and systematic deviation from a model in which public control was, or should have been, determinant in the strategic and social sectors created situations of strong social stratification and serious conflict. A neoliberal model unable to solve the great issue of pover-

ty and social inequality has been imposed on Romania, a country important for western contractors, for NATO and for the natural gas and oil pipelines. The logical consequence of Romania's legitimate entrance into the club of wild capitalism has been the mass emigration of the most impoverished part of the population into Italy, which then caused phenomena similar to those that inspire the various Hungarian or Czech guards. An example would be the *Ronde Padane* associated with the Northern League. Historic memory seems to be buried under piles of prejudices, fears and ignorance. This explosive mixture should not be underestimated in Hungary, in Italy, in Slovenia or elsewhere in Europe.

FRANCO JURJ was recently elected Member of the Slovenian Parliament at the September 2008 elections. Since 2000 he has been working as journalist and cartoonist for several Slovenian and foreign medias, and for the *TV Koper-Capodistria*. In the past years he served as Undersecretary and Ambassador for the Slovenian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.



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## An Active Memory for Responsible Citizenship

Vittorio Prodi

To implement the European project, the discussion about memories is important and should be an unavoidable part of the young generations' education on responsible citizenship. Twentieth century European history must deal with what Hannah Arendt effectively defined as the «banality of evil»; absolute evil perpetrated by “normal” people who have forsaken their ability to think. People such as Eichmann «conscientiously doing their daily duty» have contributed to the slaughter of millions of people.

In her most famous book, Hannah Arendt writes that Eichmann saw himself as a «law-abiding citizen», «he was totally sure that he was not what he called an *innerer Schweinehund*, a dirty bastard in the depths of his heart, and [...] he would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to – that is to ship millions of men, women and children to their death with great zeal and the most meticulous care»<sup>1</sup>.

In my opinion, working on and expiating the memory of a violent past involves understanding completely the mechanisms that turned common people into criminals, that pushed them to abandon their critical capacity and ability to resist. As Giuseppe Dossetti observed when analysing the slaughter of Marzabotto<sup>2</sup>, this work also involves understanding how mechanisms varying from “de-humanisation” to “reification” create violence. In this way, the work on memory connects indissolubly to the present.

Remembering is not enough. As demonstrated in the former Yugoslavia, memory can be used to divide. In order to understand, one should remember that we do not deal with events totally unrelated to our time; the risk of history repeating itself is always high. To avoid co-responsibility in future horrors, one should clearly acknowledge the difficulty of creating a memory that does not measure itself against the present. The memory of our violent past should relate to what surrounds us, it should become an offer of dialogue and an exchange of ideas on the present.

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*. London: Penguin edition, 2006 (originally appeared as a series of articles in *The New Yorker*, 1963)

<sup>2</sup> Introduction by Giuseppe Dossetti to Luciano Gherardi, *Le querce di Monte Sole: Vita e morte delle comunità martiri fra Setta e Reno, 1898-1944* (The Oaks of Monte Sole: Life and death of the martyr communities between Setta and Reno). Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986

## The Peace School of Monte Sole

Monte Sole suffered one of the most brutal nazi slaughters in Italy and has become the seat of a peace school that deals precisely with these issues of memory. The Monte Sole region is a triangle of hills south of Bologna, on the Apennine between Tuscany and Emilia, between the valley of the Reno and Setta rivers. In this region, between 29<sup>th</sup> September and 5<sup>th</sup> October 1944, when the Allied front was already very near, nazi soldiers, with the help of Italian fascists, committed the “massacre of Marzabotto”, killing more than 800 people especially women, elderly and children.

In this place of tragic violence, the Peace School Foundation of Monte Sole was officially created in December 2002, after a long period of contacts between local institutions and the civil society. The German Land of Hessen very significantly participated in the long journey which culminated in the school. The Foundation Board of Directors permanently includes a representative from Land Hessen in order to emphasise the completion, in Monte Sole as in many other European villages, of the path to reconciliation that characterised the years after World War II.

From its conception, the Peace School Foundation has been supported by belief in the urgent need to work on memory and peace. This work is rooted in the painful history of the Marzabotto massacre, which still permeates so strongly the area of Monte Sole. The current need to act for peace comes precisely from the reflection on the violence suffered and on its dehumanising force.

The Peace School Foundation chose to avoid making memory a mere “monument”, something to remember and simply celebrate. The school seeks to make memory active, that is, to make it live in the present to improve the future. Moreover, the goal is to enable timely recognition of violence and thus avoid resorting to it again.

Peace education finds its core concerns in an intense analysis of the issue of memories and histories such as those in Monte Sole. The school is set in a “special” place, a place symbolising the reconstruction of the mechanisms of the terribly cruel violence that took place there. When we investigate thoroughly these mechanisms, then we can recognise and identify them, and acquire the means to avoid becoming accomplices.

Thus, the Monte Sole region represents the ideal context in which to transform the didactic work into personal experience for the young participants. Every activity offered by the school includes a visit to the ruins of the villages that

suffered the destructive violence of the Nazi Army. The Monte Sole region allows people to look for and discover the traces of the violent past, which marked it and becomes itself a silent witness of those terrible events. At the same time, it shows how its wounds can be healed by nature, by time and by our care.

For many years in Monte Sole, young people from conflict areas have met young Italians and Germans and have walked together on this path of analysis and knowledge; an experience that is, first of all, a meeting among different humans. Starting from the visit to these places, these young people move on to the “memory workshop” where through readings and reflections in small groups, they ask the radical, difficult-to-answer question: how was it possible? They investigate the issue of eruption of violence and examine individual and collective responsibility, education, propaganda, etc. Finally, they deal with the central matter of human rights, of mutual recognition and of the co-existence of diversities. They embark on a path opposite to that of de-humanisation, they seek to acknowledge others with full human dignity.

From its beginning, the Peace School has found that working with young people is particularly important in order to provide them with the instruments and opportunities to reflect seriously upon history and violence and thus become aware citizens.

## The memory for the future

Those, like me, who have the honour to act in the political world, must have a vision of the future, while clearly thinking of where they come from and which achievements may have cost human lives. Today, a debate on historical memories can only be a guidepost in the search for a peace that could bring together those with different histories and make the most of these histories through the most ambitious version of the EU project.

The values of democracy, peace and individual liberty but also that of justice and social solidarity must guide us in our daily work and in the building of a new world order.

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For decades, World War II has been commemorated throughout Europe so as to prevent the return of war, and the European integration process was launched to ensure a lasting peace.

After the collapse of communist regimes, this political project suffered a dramatic setback with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Wiping out the illusion that war, and genocide could never happen again in Europe, the breakup of Yugoslavia showed how the very memory of violence can be used to prepare the ground for a new carnage.

This volume collects the speakers' contributions to the conference organised by Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso to reflect upon memory politics moving from the paradigmatic case of today's Balkans.