HAILING THE SERBIAN “PEOPLE”:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CENTRAL ROLE OF THE KOSOVO MYTH IN THE
CONSTITUTION OF SERBIAN ETHNO-NATIONAL IDENTITY
AND THE NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA
by
CHRISTINA M. MORUS
(Under the Direction of Kevin DeLuca)

ABSTRACT
Throughout the fifty years in which Josip Broz Tito was the leader of Yugoslavia, ethnic tensions had been nearly non-existent. Throughout the region, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks had shared the same schools, places of employment and residences, and had a common language. For the most part, people’s ethnic and religious identities were subordinate to their identity as Yugoslavs. Yet, by the end of the 1980s, ethno-national consciousness became a part of the daily lives of many Yugoslav people. For this to be possible, peoples’ Yugoslav identity had to become tertiary. This project examines the role of rhetoric in discounting the pan-Slavic identity among Serbs and in constituting an exclusive, racialized, and highly politicized Serbian people in its place. I critique the rhetorical strategies of Serbian cultural elites and analyze the public discourse of Slobodan Milosevic with an eye to the ways in which politics and culture worked in conjunction toward a common end. In doing so I posit the effects of constitutive discourses on the polarizing national identities that rapidly replaced the largely unified Yugoslav identity, thereby legitimizing the mass violence that characterized the break-up of the Yugoslav
Federation. Through essential discourses of historic victimization, the way in which Serb identity was situated in relation to Yugoslavia and the rest of the world at large was increasingly polarizing. Discourses of historic persecution and Serbian “racial” superiority led to the rhetorical constitution of a Serbian people for which ethnic division was normalized and war was justified in the name of a mytho-historic righting of wrongs. Narratives surrounding the mythic 1389 Battle of Kosovo and a mythologized version of WWII worked in conjunction with a slanted version of Yugoslavian history to constitute a modern Serbian people, while also creating a threatening other. This type of polarization was used to politically charge Serbian ethnic identity.

INDEX WORDS: constitutive rhetoric, identity, myth, racialization, reconciliation, ethnic violence, Yugoslavia, Milosevic, Kosovo
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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PRELUDE

“Never Again”:

Evil is not Extraordinary

“I have a gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust could be more than an aberration, more than a deviation from an otherwise straight path of progress, more than a cancerous growth on the otherwise healthy body of the civilized society; that, in short, the Holocaust was not an antithesis of modern civilization and everything (or so we like to think) it stands for.”

~~Zygmunt Bauman Modernity and the Holocaust

The first image the world saw of the Bosnian death camps was of a single man, his sunken eyes peering out hauntingly from a barbed wire barrier. As his tattered pants hang precariously from his sharp hipbones, his skeleton protrudes from his emaciated body. The images that followed portrayed groups of men, mostly Bosnian Muslims of various ages, penned like farm animals. Some appear exhausted and starved while others, not yet broken, still have enough energy to look frightened and angry. Although it is dangerous to associate every atrocity of this nature with the Holocaust, images from these camps invoked Auschwitz in the minds of those who saw them. Hence, when these photographs were published in August of 1992, the camps gained international attention as another Holocaust.

Stories of the beatings, mass rapes, starvation, mutilation, brutal murders and other extreme forms of torture going on inside the camps began to emerge. The Serbian guards, who largely lacked official police and military training, carried out these acts of “interrogation” with
zeal.¹ Often the prisoners knew their torturers previous to the war as friends, neighbors, teachers, students, coaches and colleagues. Although the UN eventually managed to close some of the camps and arranged for the transport of many surviving prisoners to neutral territory, they were not in time to save the thousands of Bosnian Muslims who were raped, tortured, murdered and maimed beyond recognition.

In the spring of 2001, I made an exploratory, six-week trip to The Hague, Netherlands to observe the war crimes trials at the U.N.’s International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). I focused my attention on the trial of Dusko Sikirica, Damir Dosen and Dragan Kulundzija. This case tried the culpability of three commanders from the Keraterm concentration camp where Bosniaks were imprisoned and often tortured to death from 1992 - 1995, a period of “ethnic cleansing” in the former Yugoslavia. Witness after witness told stories of tortures to which they were subject at the hands of these three men– beatings with metal pipes, broken bones, forced sex acts, starvation, and humiliation. All manner of physical and mental abuse imaginable were levied on their victims.

What initially struck me about these testimonies was the way in which the accused men were described as going about their daily work as if it were any other job. Showing-up for shift work, keeping records, following protocols and reporting to their superiors, these men went about their routines in a fashion that can be viewed as a rough equivalent to what Hannah Arendt (1963) called the “banality of evil.” I longed to hear that they were somehow coerced, that they had been brainwashed, that they were insane or that they were some incarnation of demon. I was confounded as I was confronted with the fact that these were just men doing their jobs. As I heard daily the stories of inhumane torture as told by the witnesses who had somehow survived

¹ The photographs and stories of prisoner abuse that surfaced from Abu Gharib prison in Iraq are hauntingly similar, to the detail, to the survivor stories and official testimonies from those who witnessed the Bosnian camps.
it, I struggled to reconcile the horrific nature of these stories with the seemingly benevolent, ruggedly attractive faces of the three accused men sitting in the courtroom. I wanted them to look like animals, to stink of evil, to laugh insidiously when their victims told the stories of their pain – anything to differentiate this brand of “evil” from my own daily existence. Instead, they appeared to be “normal,” average men, two of whom were roughly my own age, thus reinforcing an idea I had wanted to badly to deny - “evil” does not exist as an inherent, tangible quality or a “black cloud” that overwhelms a willing receptacle, but is instead the result of a series of banal choices made by ordinary people.²

In the following chapters I examine some of the conditions that made these choices available to ordinary people in the former Yugoslavia. I look to the rhetorical strategies and tactics that normalized the violence that took place and try to understand how ordinary people could come to regard lifelong friends as enemies to be eradicated. I was compelled to follow this subject specifically as I sat in the ICTY courtrooms and listened to story after story of women raped repeatedly by their neighbors and classmates, men beaten and tortured by their colleagues and in-laws and repeated testimonies from people who had witnessed the murder of their family members by people who had been well known to them.

It was initially challenging to clearly see the most pertinent questions involved in this project, and so easy to get sidetracked by stories of human misery. But, through months of watching trials and talking with survivors, the pertinent elements of this project took shape. As I watched the proceedings at the ICTY and talked with people from the former Yugoslavia, a pressing set of questions emerged with regard to the cultural climate of mass violence in the former Yugoslavia and the way in which it was enabled.

² Before the trial’s end, the three would plead guilty to lesser charges. Kulundzija was granted early release due to the overwhelming mental strain caused by the survivor’s vivid testimonies.
I don’t pretend to understand or explain why mass violence happens or why it happened in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Violence happens everyday, and I have no real idea why or how. What I have learned and what I hope to share is the fact that mass violence is not somewhere else far away, not in primitive places, not a result of some black cloud of evil, but of a series of choices made by people, made by you and me. Violence happens everyday and some people do nothing while some people do violence, and sometimes doing nothing is doing violence.

People have often asked me why I would choose to make a career out of such “morbid” subject matter. When I was twelve years old, my obsession began. I thought I could change the world, confront evil, fight the black cloud. Now, I can only say that I looked “evil” in its face, ready to see the devil, and saw instead my own human reflection. I can “never again” look away. I am transfixed by the humanity of it. Perhaps that is the deeper lesson of the well-worn Holocaust memorial mantra “never again.” It is certainly not “never again” will we as a human race allow such inhumanity to occur on such a broad scale (…Cambodia, East Timor, Guatemala, Rwanda…). Or “never again” will we as an international community allow for government sponsored mass atrocity (…Sudan, Eritrea, the “liberation” of Iraq…). Maybe what “never again” really means is that once we have recognized our own capacity for violence, once we see it reflected back onto ourselves from the mirrored “face of evil,” one should be vigilant and “never again” look away.

Primo Levi said he wrote about Auschwitz because he can’t not write about Auschwitz. Perhaps this is not because Auschwitz is anomalous as much as because in Auschwitz, we see the true soul of every human being laid bare. We are all Nazis, we are all kapos, we are all musselman, we are all them, they are us and for that reason, “never again” can I look away.
And what next?

Those who’ve wounded the night – had already murdered the day.

Will they at least feign repentance?

What will happen when they come to, when they wake up from this high-caliber dream?

What kind of visions will they weave then?

Will all the children they tortured and killed and crippled begin to speak through their children?

When the tainted iron is taken away from them, will that sediment of groundless hatred finally be sifted out of their consciousness?

Will they at least know how to mourn their own dead as they bury them armed in full regalia?

Will they at least, standing at their own graves, teach their children not to grow up seeking revenge?

Will the sense of justice everyone is born with prevail in them as well?

I am only one of many whose eyes beheld unrelenting misery everyday,

whose entrails faced their incandescent barrels,

whose skin was flayed by their truncheons.

I am only one of many who still carries this heaviest of burdens wedged into the furthest reaches of my heart, these horrid scars, hoping that, in time,

they will be rooted out and fade.

~~ Rezak Hukanovic, The Tenth Circle of Hell: A Memoir of Life in the Death Camps of Bosnia
FIGURE 1

This physical map of the Balkan region was produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.
FIGURE 2

This political map of the Former Yugoslavia was produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Finding a Purpose Through Personal Encounters

“Here are men who knew each other well, neighbors who greet each other in the street, friends of many years standing who, suddenly, poisoned by patriotic fanaticism, become fierce and bitter enemies. How to explain such cruelty, such sadism, among people who only yesterday lived in brotherhood with their victims of today? Why, among them, such a thirst to hurt, to injure, to humiliate human beings…?”

~~Elie Wiesel, *The Tenth Circle of Hell: A Memoir of Life in the Death Camps of Bosnia*

In July of 1995, in the Bosnian municipality of Srebrenica, the world witnessed the biggest mass murder in Europe since WWII. Bosnian Serb forces laid siege to the Srebrenica enclave where tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslim¹ civilians had fled from Serb attacks in eastern Bosnia (BBC Online, Srebrenica Timeline, 2/20/03). Although Srebrenica was considered a U.N. protected safe-area, Bosnian Serb forces relentlessly shelled the town for five days. When it was clear that neither the U.N. nor the loosely organized and poorly armed Bosniak army would mount a defense, Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic entered Srebrenica with the intention of “ethnically cleansing” the municipality and claiming it for “Greater Serbia.”

¹ The term “Muslim” is somewhat misleading when it comes to the Bosnian Muslims. Largely secular, the Muslims of Bosnia are mostly culturally Muslim, celebrating Muslim holidays, but are not typically devout. In fact, in 1967, Muhamed Filipovic, a Bosnian Muslim philosophy professor, argued that Bosnia’s Muslims should be referred to as “Bosnjaks” in order to reinforce their culture and identity not through religion, but through an ethnic classification like Serb or Croat. Filipovic was promptly expelled from the communist party and fired from his university position. The following year, Bosnian Muslims were recognized as an ethnic group, but as “Muslims” and not as “Bosnjaks” as Filipovic had proposed (Judah, 2000, p.155). In 1993, some Muslim Slavs began calling themselves “Bosniaks” to differentiate their religious identity (Muslim) from their ethnic identity and to counter charges that they were only a religious group and not a “genuine” nation like Serbs and Croats. The use of the term may have come too late in the game however, as it failed to make the desired impression (Gjelten, 1995). Both the term “Muslim” and the term “Bosniak” are in current usage, and I use both throughout this project.
On July 12th, 1995, Serb forces began to separate Srebrenica’s Muslim men from the women. Over the next 24 hours, all Muslim men and boys between the ages of 12 and 77 were taken away for “questioning,” while 23,000 Muslim women and children were packed onto buses and forcibly deported to Muslim held territory. As many as 5,000 unarmed Muslim men were herded into warehouses and school buildings and were systematically executed. Of those 15,000 men who tried to flee Serb forces by escaping through the forest by foot, as many as 3,000 were hunted down like animals. A few thousand of Srebrenica’s Muslim men survived to tell the story of what happened after they were separated from their families. Some of them survived the perilous journey over the mountains and through the forest to Muslim-held territory, while a handful of the men who had been left for dead in the warehouse massacres had also miraculously survived. Still, in the end, in the short time it took the Bosnian Serb forces to over-run Srebrenica, nearly 8,000 unarmed Muslim men and boys were killed, some by Serbs who had been their friends, neighbors or colleagues before the war had broken out.

Throughout the fifty years in which Josip Broz Tito had been the leader of Yugoslavia, ethnic tensions had been nearly non-existent – a blip on an otherwise peaceful multi-ethnic landscape. Just ten years before the massacre, Srebrenica had been an ethnically mixed municipality with the Serb to Muslim ratio being largely equal. Throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Serbs and Muslims had shared the same schools, places of employment and residences, and had shared a common tongue. They had intermarried and celebrated birthdays and holidays together. For the most part, ethnic consciousness was poorly developed among many Bosnian people as their ethnic and religious identities were subordinate to their identity as Yugoslavs. Yet, by the end
of the 1980s, ethnic and national sentiments became a part of the daily lives of most Bosnian people. People who have lived along side one another relatively peacefully for so long do not suddenly, collectively and without prompting start hating one another to the point of killing their neighbor (Hampson, 1993, p. 25). For this to be possible in the former Yugoslavia, peoples’ Yugoslav identity had to become tertiary. So how is it possible that polarizing national identities so quickly subsumed the communal Yugoslav identity?

To transform a society living in relative harmony into a nightmare of violence and hatred, it is necessary to shift the way people view themselves in relation to the world around them. To bring about such a totalizing change, a society’s socio-historical context must be discursively altered to rearticulate the collective subjectivity of the people who comprise that society. In this vein, Maurice Charland (1987) notes that a collectivized “people” are “interpellated” as, “political subjects through a process of identification in rhetorical narratives that ‘always already’ presume the constitution of subjects” (p. 134). Charland implies that a “people” are called into being through a series of narratives that position the “people” as subjects within history.

In the former Yugoslavia, it was necessary to break-down the collective Yugoslav identity in order to rearticulate exclusive ethno-national identities as characters situated within a historical imperative. The necessary rhetoric was manifest in myth and narratives that “awakened” ethno-national consciousness through a reinterpretation of history in which Yugoslavia had stripped the people of their primary national identities. This re-constitutive discourse, in merging with common parlance, allowed the readjusted notion of identity to seem natural while the Yugoslav identity seemed like a forced
enslavement of “true” identity by comparison. Hence, as the pan-Slavic identity broke down into ethno-national identities, ethnic violence emerged as a manifestation of an inevitable historical progression. Perpetrators became freedom fighters, protecting the people and righting the wrongs of history.

Serbian ethno-nationalism was the first to rear its head and would set the tone for the nationalisms that were behind the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation. Serbian cultural values and foundational myths were rearticulated in such a way as to discount the Yugoslav identity as one in which Serbs were subjugated and to value an exclusive, “racialized” and politically charged Serbian ethno-national identity. Serbian ethno-national identity was highly “racialized” in the sense that it was increasingly presented as exclusive, hierarchical, and based on racial characteristics that were “born in the blood.” As such, nationalist Serbia can be viewed as a “racial state” (Goldberg, 2002) whose existence was validated through the production of an essential Serb identity that can be read as “whiteness,” while non-Serbs were the racialized “other.”

Through essential discourses of historic victimization, the ways in which Serb identity was situated in relation to Yugoslavia and the rest of the world at large was increasingly polarized. Discourses of historic persecution and Serbian “racial” superiority led to the rhetorical constitution of a Serbian people for which ethnic division was normalized and war was justified in the name of a mytho-historic righting of wrongs. Narratives surrounding the mythic 1389 Battle of Kosovo and a mythologized version of WWII worked in conjunction with a slanted version of Yugoslavian history to constitute a modern Serbian people, while also creating a threatening other. This type of polarization was used to politically charge Serbian ethnic identity.
With this project, I examine the role of rhetoric in discounting the pan-Slavic identity among Serbs and in constituting an exclusive, racialized, and highly politicized Serbian people in its place. I critique the rhetorical strategies of Serbian cultural elites and analyze the public discourse of Slobodan Milosevic with an eye to the ways in which politics and culture worked in conjunction toward a common end. In doing so I seek to determine the effects of constitutive discourses on the polarizing national identities that rapidly replaced the largely unified Yugoslav identity, thereby legitimizing the mass violence that characterized the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation.

The shift in Serbian identity from pan-Slavic to ethno-national is a complex process that relied on a return to mytho-historic narrative to awaken people’s consciousness to their historic subjugation. Discourses that implied a subjectivity of victimhood were essential to Serbian ethno-national identity. The position of victim is a powerful one. Dusan Kecmanovic (2002) points out that the title of “victim” beckons assistance from those who feel obligated to help the weaker. Further, being a victim means having the right to reprisal. This is why it is sometimes an advantage to be the victim than the winner in a conflict. Fostering the status of victim means that in later conflicts you can claim the position of “revolutionary” or “freedom fighter.” Julie Mertus (1999) further points out that once a person takes on the identity of a victim, any action taken can be justified as defensive. The battle to separate the Serbo-Croatian language into three distinct languages is indicative of the importance of being the victim in the struggle for identity that ensued as the Yugoslav Federation crumbled. As each side fought to distinguish a separate tongue, each claimed their people and culture had been subjugated within the amalgamated language.
**Language Racism**

Under Tito, the language most widely spoken in the region was standardized and labeled “Serbo-Croatian.” Before the end of the Yugoslav Federation, 83 percent of the population shared this common language. Yet, with the emerging national identities of the late 1980s, “Croatian,” “Serbian,” and “Bosnian” each came to be locally recognized as separate languages. While there are slight regional differences in certain words (for example the Croatian word for bread is *kruh*, which comes from the Germanic word, and the Serbian word is *hleb*, which comes from Turkish), the regional and literary differences are more accurately viewed as accents with the main differences resembling those of British and American differences in the English language. While these differences may seem minor, the emphasis placed on the uniqueness of the languages is representative of what Freud called the “narcissism of minor difference” that marks the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Speaking to the similarities in ethnic origin, and language among the Yugoslav people, Svetozar Stojanovic (2003) points out, “it is exactly in such situations that mutual hatred and other blind and destructive passions usually peak” (p. 167). For both Serbia and Croatia, linguistic purism as a way of differentiation became an important aspect of national identity. “If we speak the same language it means that we share the same or similar community memories. Therefore to differentiate between us and them...we have to differentiate our languages.” (Basic-Hrvatin, 1996, p. 69).

The push to separate the language came from Matica Hrvatska, the leading institution of Croatian culture. This group sought to convince Croats that their culture was being stripped from them by Serbs as the language had been “Serbianized,” and that Croats were consistently exploited by Serbs throughout history (Udovicki, 2000). To
Croats, the “Serbo-Croatian” language represented a political tool used to repress Croats and deprive them of their national culture (MacDonald, 2002). After independence, in 1991, Croatian writers and linguists pushed to reclaim “Croatian” as a distinct language. The zeal to “de-Serbianize” the language led to revisions of texts in “pure” Croatian. A bill was introduced in Croatia to impose fines and prison terms upon those who used words of “foreign” (Serbian) origin. The reformulation of Croatian language was exclusivist, and was intended to create an artificial division between Serbs and Croats (MacDonald, 2002).

In Croatia, a “linguistic racism” emerged, leading to the invention of new words that are not related to the Serbian words and to the “re-discovery” of old words that were allegedly lost from the language upon its amalgamation. The Croatian language was revamped with “idiosyncratic neologisms and restored archaisms” in order to build up the differences from Serbian (Ramet, 2002, p. 164). For example, in Serbo-Croatian, and presently in Serbian, the names for the months are traditionally Roman – juni, juli, septembre, octobre, etc. – while in Croatian they have been changed to reflect the meaning of the month – octobre is now listopad which means “leaves are falling” and decembre is now prosinac which means “begging for gifts.”

This push by Croats served as proof positive in the Serb nationalist rhetoric that re-emerging Croatian fascism was a threat to the Serbs (Judah, 2000). Serbian cultural preservation projects rose proportionately as old Serb literature, folk heroes and

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2 I take this term from Dr. Miljenko Kovacecic from the University of Zagreb. Dr. Kovacecic was my language instructor in Zagreb and was kind enough to discuss Croatian linguistics with me on several occasions in June 2003.

3 While my first teacher, a Bosnian woman living in the United States, encouraged me to learn both, emphasizing that the differences are quite small, my tutors in Croatia would often act as if they could not understand a student if he/she accidentally used a “Serbian” word. A visitor to Croatia quickly learns the gravity of the faux pas of asking what a particular word is in “Serbo-Croatian,” instead learning to ask what that word is in “Croatian.”
traditions, and religious practices were revived to counter the Croatian push for individuation. “Pure” Serbian became the official language in Serbian schools. Additionally, an interesting phenomenon occurred within the school systems. In Croatian schools, there was a push to purge non-Croat heroes and literary figures from the texts, while simultaneously “Croatizing” historic figures like Marco Polo. At the same time, in Serbian schools, non-Serbs were purged, as history’s villains were transformed into Croats and “Turks.” Further, the problem of the language in the Serb minority schools in Croatia became a major point of contention. While the Croatian government had passed laws that all schools in Croatia should be taught in official Croatian language, the Serb minority proclaimed that they were the victims of a cultural genocide, as their language and traditions were being stripped from them. This “crisis” became proof of the genocidal threat against Serbs in Croatia and was a contributing factor to the Serbian push for an autonomous Serb region within Croatia.

Recognizing the problems arising from the division of languages, in 1996, the U.N. made a conscious decision to put an end to language racism. Being unable to substantially differentiate among the languages, the U.N. has now officially named the language group Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S), ordered alphabetically in an effort to avoid privileging one “language” and hence culture over another. The Tribunal further combats language chauvinism in that it offers simultaneous translation solely in B/C/S with no attempt to suit a Croatian witness with a Croatian-language translator or a

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4 “Turk” is a derogatory term used in the Balkan region to refer to all Muslims regardless of national origin.
5 The process of linguistic revolution was proven to be truly farcical when, during the 1995 Dayton Accord negotiations, participants had a choice of simultaneous translation into “Serbian,” “Croatian,” or “Bosnian.” Yet, while there were three channels from which to select, there was only one translator for all three. Interestingly, none of the three parties seemed to care, as for them it was the principal, not the language that mattered (MacDonald, 2002, p. 199).
Serbian witness with a Serbian-language translator. Still, the way one refers to the language is indicative of his/her politics. The labels are still taken quite seriously by many people living in the region.

The impact of these language politics on the individual’s struggle to negotiate his/her identity became more clear to me during my extended tenure in The Hague in 2003. I shared an apartment with my language tutor, Ana Petrovic, a 22-year-old student who had grown up in Belgrade. Ana’s mother is from Zagreb, Croatia, and her father is from Belgrade, Serbia. For much of her life, Ana was a Yugoslav, speaking the Serbo-Croatian language, and not considering herself to be of mixed ethnicity. She spent summers on the Croatian coast with her family and winter vacations skiing in the Bosnian mountains. Yet, upon the collapse of Yugoslavia, a dual identity was suddenly thrust upon her. She was now forced to renegotiate her identity with attention to the political and ethnic orientation of the person to whom she was speaking.

Ana highlighted the frustration and confusion she felt in this situation as she told the story of a dinner table faux pas made while visiting her mother’s family in Zagreb in the mid-1990s. Her uncle, a strong supporter of Croatian nationalist leader Franjo Tudjman, had begun to treat her with suspicion and contempt. At the dinner table one night, when she nonchalantly asked for the *hleb* (bread) to be passed to her, Ana’s uncle slammed his fist on the table. Rising in anger he shouted at Ana, “We have no *hleb* in this house! We only have *kruh*!”

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6 The Tribunal’s metal on this matter was tested when staunch Serbian nationalist Dr. Vojislav Seslj was brought before the ICTY for his arraignment in February 2003. His translator was Croatian, which led Seslj to insist that he could not understand and to demand that he be suited with a translator that spoke his language. Recognizing his tirade as racist the Tribunal refused his request.
With the economic crisis at its peak, and the financial opportunities in Yugoslavia waning, Ana’s mother, a successful civil engineer, was forced to move the family to Budapest, Hungary. In Budapest, Ana attended the Yugoslav school. After her first year at this school, the school’s building was divided into a Serbian school and a Croatian school. Classmates who had previously been friends were no longer allowed to associate with one another. Ana was forced to choose with which of these nationalities she would identify. This struggle with identity troubled Ana, and she often spoke of feeling stateless. Even today when she visits family in the former Yugoslavia, Ana is careful to change her accent whether she is in Belgrade or Zagreb so that she will not be mistaken for the “wrong” ethnic group.

Ana’s story is not unique. Many ex-patriots from the former Yugoslavia that I spoke with in The Hague noted that they had identified themselves as “Yugoslav” throughout their lifetimes, and were suddenly confronted with questions of identity that were not familiar to them as Yugoslavia crumbled.

Beyond the troublesome issue of negotiating one’s own shifting identity is the dangerous and pressing problem of re-negotiating one’s relationship to the community in the midst of this emerging national and ethnic consciousness. As I talked to war survivors in both Croatia and BiH, a common theme that consistently emerged was the sudden alienation of their friends and neighbors. Serbs, Croats and Muslims alike mentioned the way in which the wars had revealed the “true nature” of their neighbors from differing ethnic groups and made apparent the fact that they could not live side-by-side in peace, despite the fact that they had been doing so successfully for years before the wars of the 1990s. In fact, in both witness testimonies at the Tribunal as well as in
conversations with people from the region, it is common to hear people speak predominantly of ethnic harmony during the Tito years. People tell of how families of different ethnicities celebrated birthdays and holidays together with their neighbors and how someone in their family or close social circle was of a mixed marriage. All Yugoslav peoples went to school together, lived together, worked together and intermarried with little regard for ethnicity. This is not to say that prejudice was absent under Tito, or that no one was intolerant of interethnic relations. Still the picture that emerges is one in which intergroup prejudice was not the accepted norm, and was not widespread (Wilmer, 2002, p. 158). Yet, throughout the 1980s a definite rhetorical shift occurred. By the onset of the wars of the 1990s, it became increasingly common to place one’s ethnic identity before his/her Yugoslav identity. Ethnicities were essentialized, racialized and politicized and the result was an overwhelming lack of trust and respect that opened the door for the normalization of extreme violence.

Through my conversations with Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats I recognized a distinct pattern that reflected this change in self-identity that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s (depending on the region). While to many people in the region the change seemed natural, to outsiders it seemed as though the change was remarkable. A US State Department Foreign Service Officer with whom I spoke had been stationed in the Balkans periodically from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. She related to me a story of a respected Serbian journalist with whom she had been friends. In 1987, the journalist had spoken of the “crazy nationalists” within Serbia and how ridiculous the notion of Serbian superiority over Croats and Bosniaks had seemed. By 1991, the same journalist had become a strong supporter of Milosevic and a staunch Serb nationalist herself. The
State Department Officer was shocked at the sudden change in the journalist, especially because the journalist acted as if she had felt this way all along. It was as if her Yugoslav identity had never existed, or that it had been a delusional state from which her Serbian consciousness had awoke. How were these suddenly immediate matters of identity made present in the consciousness of Yugoslav people? How had the communal pan-Yugoslav identity so quickly shift to the divisive nationalist identities that allowed for the normalization of the mass hate and violence that consumed Yugoslavia?

The role of rhetoric in the constitution of identity can shed some light on these questions. It is a result of specific rhetorical strategies that a people are called into being, and the people are defined rhetorically. Charland (1987) claims that collective identities depend upon rhetoric to call them into being and “‘peoples’ in general exist only through an ideological discourse that constitutes them” (p. 139). As Michael McGee (1975) says, “the people are the social and political myths they accept.”

Julie Mertus (1999) claims that to understand war, we need to understand history as fact, myth, and experience. More than factual truth, which may be an important aspect of courts of law, it is the “more or less truth,” taken as fact by those who live it, that must be examined in order to understand the process of normalization behind a collective subjectivity that embraces ethnic hatred and violence. This “more or less truth” is relayed through myth and narrative and is often propagated through popular storytellers like the media. The violence in the former Yugoslavia was enabled through narratives that created a threatened and therefore justified Serbian people while also creating a threatening other. This type of essentializing rhetoric was used to foster a national identity predicated on the politicization of Serbian ethnic identity.
Still, Mertus (1999) notes that individuals should not be absolved of agency with respect to their truths pointing out that people are not blindly led to these beliefs; rather, individuals seek out the truths that best fit their perceptions of right and wrong, good and evil. Hence, the Serbian people came willingly to accept the series of myths that nullified their Yugoslav identity. Predicated on the myth of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, these narratives constituted the Serb people through myths of a common history of subjugation coupled with the promise of redemption for the Serbs. Serbian history is portrayed as a predetermined set of events from the Turkish invasion onward all leading to the present moment in which the promise of Kosovo was to be fulfilled. Further, through these narratives, modern Serbs were inserted as heroic characters charged with fulfilling the destiny of their people. As the Kosovo myth is the primary myth from which other constitutive narratives of Serbian identity radiate, it is important to understand how the Kosovo myth connects to the narratives it feeds.

The Kosovo Myth and its Descendents

The 1389 Battle at Kosovo Polje has become the foundational myth for Serbian culture. As the legend goes, the Ottoman Turks defeated the Serbs who, despite being badly outnumbered, fought heroically to their deaths. Although the historic details have been blurred by years of various versions of the story, three themes have emerged that have stayed with the tale from its early oral tradition, through its 19th century literary standardization, to the present day.

As the Battle of Kosovo marks the beginning of 500 years of Turkish domination, the first of these themes is centered on the historic victimization of the Serbian people. This theme was extended in the modern nationalist rhetoric to demonstrate how historic
events such as WWII and Serbia’s alleged economic disadvantage within Yugoslavia stem from a history of victimization. Branching from the historically subjugated status implied by the first theme, the second theme that emerges from the Kosovo myth is the theme of an Islamic Fundamentalist threat (and Serbia as the barrier between Islam and Europe). Seeded in the Turkish domination of the region, this theme leads to the denigration of Kosovar Albanians (who are largely Muslim) and Bosnian Muslims (who are seen as traitors to the Serb race because of their conversion under the Turks) and to the implication that each of these groups is part of a larger Islamic threat. This theme of threat is later expanded to include the immanent threat from Croats who, following their alliance with the Axis powers in WWII (to the detriment of the Serbs), and given the fact that they were traditionally Catholic (while Serbs were traditionally Orthodox) were presented in modern nationalist rhetoric as a genocidal threat waiting to happen.

Justified by their longstanding inequality and the clear danger encroaching from the other groups in the region, the third theme highlighted by the Kosovo myth is the promise of redemption. Because of the suffering heaped on the Serbs by so many others throughout time, the Serbs were justified in using any means to reclaim their “rightful” place in history. This theme allowed for a politicized Serbian identity to emerge as the Serb people were allowed to feel as if it was their duty to reclaim Kosovo and create a “Greater Serbia” \(^7\) in which all their Serbian brethren could be safe and free.

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\(^7\) The idea of “Greater Serbia” originated with Serbian politician Ilija Garasanin in the nineteenth century. In the context of the times, the concept made sense, but it has been taken out of context in the ensuing years both by Serb nationalists who abused the idea of “Greater Serbia” in the interest of an aggressive and racist political agenda, and by Serbia’s enemies who demonized Garasanin as a “founding father” of Serb nationalism. (See Judah, 2000, p. 56 – 61)
These three themes were central to 19th century literature and were prevalent again in the nationalist rhetoric of the 1980s. Serbian literature had a long tradition that combined the heroic nature of the Serbs with the historic victimization of the Serb people. In this genre, the identity of the individual was subsumed by a collective ethno-national identity. Individuals were essentialized and placed in racialized ethnic categories: noble Serb, dangerous Croat or “Turk” infidel (Srebrenica report, prologue, chp4, sec1). While depoliticized during Tito’s time, the reinvigoration of the Kosovo myth by the intellectual, political and cultural elites in the 1980s constituted a nationalist Serbian “people” in the form of a teleological narrative in which Serbs were charged with the fated duty of finishing the story in a pre-determined fashion.

WWII

After the Battle of Kosovo Polje, the events of WWII were a major point of revisionist history for the constitutive narratives that hailed the modern Serb people. Serbia was definitely at a disadvantage for much of WWII, but the stories of history from the Serb perspective often situate the Serbs as innocent lambs sent to the slaughter. During WWII, a group of fascist Croats known as the Ustashe sided with the Axis powers and undertook a final solution of their own. Like their “Aryan” counterparts in Nazi Germany, the Ustashe created a series of concentration camps in which Serbs, gypsies and anti-fascist Croats were imprisoned and executed. In the largest and most notorious of these camps, Jasenovac, it is said that as many as 70,000 to one million people perished. Bogdan Denitch (1994) points out that the Ustashe massacres in WWII became more than mere historical facts; they became a major part of the modern political landscape. Narratives of the Ustashe atrocities became almost as politically powerful as
the Holocaust in Israeli politics, and were just as often manipulated for narrow political ends.8

At the same time, a group of Serb nationalists known as the Chetniks were also vying for control of the region, and committing atrocities of their own. Notably, the atrocities of the Chetniks are not commonly part of the mythic WWII history, except in the context of praise for what has come to be seen as the defense of the Serb people. However, a highly mythologized version of Judeo-Serbian friendly relations has made its way into popular narrative.

In the midst of WWII there was also a third party struggling to gain power – the communist Partisans led by Croatian/Slovenian Marshall Josip Broz Tito. As Croats and Serbs alike became disenchanted with their respective nationalist movements, the ranks of Tito’s Partisans swelled. Before the end of WWII, Tito’s Partisans liberated the region, and a new, united nation of South Slavs was born. As Tito was aware of the violent outcome of Serb nationalism in the past, he paid careful attention to ensuring that the largest and most populous Serbian Republic was not able to dominate the Federation. These measures would become the impetus for the third ring of modern constitutive narratives wherein Serbia was portrayed as having been horribly subjugated both economically and culturally within Yugoslavia.

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8 For the Serbs, Jasenovac stands as a symbol of Croat extermination policies. In the recent wars, Jasenovac was frequently invoked as a reason for the 1990’s conflict. Although the existence of Jasenovac is not up for debate, the number of Serbs killed there became a point of contention. The Serbs often inflate the number of deaths to suit their own purposes, claiming as many as 1.1 million Serbs perished there. Conversely, under Tudjman, the Croat claim is that the actual number is closer to 70,000 (Rogel, 1998, p. 48). Numbers were an essential aspect in the re-ordering of history for both Serbs and Croats in the 1990s. The numbers that a given person held as true marked the side of the conflict on which he/she stood. For example, if one were to claim that 700,000+ Serbs were killed at Jasenovac concentration camp during WWII, he/she would be immediately recognized as a Serb nationalist who hates Croats, and supports Milosevic. Yet if one were to cite “only” 60,000 Serbs as having perished at Jasenovac, he/she would be pegged as a Croat nationalist who despises Serbs and their beloved Milosevic (Kaplan, 1996, p. 5-6).
As the legacy of Tito’s Yugoslavia slowly imploded throughout the 1980s, the foundational myths and cultural values upon which Yugoslavia was predicated crumbled along with it. From the vacuum left by the loss of a meaningful pan-Slavic identity emerged identities organized along ethno-national lines. In some of the republics (Croatia and Serbia/Montenegro in particular) an exclusive form of nationalism emerged. Exclusive versions of national identity were predicated on discourses of a noble “we” and an evil and threatening “other.” In Serbia, the battles and struggles of history became the fodder for modern political ideologies. A nationalistic reinvigoration of the mythos surrounding the 1389 Battle of Kosovo became a central rallying point for Serb nationalism, as did the “recovered memory” of the WWII Usatshe crimes against the Serbs.

Beginning in force after Tito’s death in 1980, nationalist Serbian intellectuals began a movement to reinvigorate the essentializing and racist themes of 19th century literature in order to legitimize their claim that Serbia was under the threat of impending genocide from both the Muslims in Kosovo and BiH and from the Croats. This soon led to the propagation of a Greater Serbia, which extended Serbia’s territory beyond its borders so that all Serb people could live in a single state and thus Serbs would be free from the threat of domination and genocide. At the center of this quest was Kosovo, which was reinvigorated as the “heart of Serbia.” Still, despite a growing faction of support from Serbian intellectuals and cultural elites in the early 1980s, Serb nationalism was not widely popular.

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9 This threat was an extension of the eternal “Turkish” threat embedded in early literature.
10 The Croats were portrayed as both “slaves” to the Pope as well as the aggressors in WWII.
By the mid-1980s, the nationalist movement began to gain ground. In 1986, 212 prominent Serbian intellectuals, Orthodox priests and army officers produced a publication for public debate called “Against the Persecution of Serbs in Kosovo.” The document highlighted the Albanian harassment of Serbs in the region as well as the alleged raping and beating of Orthodox nuns at the hands Albanian Muslims (a completely unsupported and unsubstantiated claim) (Srebrenica report, prologue, chp4, sec1). That same year, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) drafted a Memorandum claiming that Tito had purposely subordinated the Serbs both economically and culturally within Yugoslavia. The Memorandum further stated that the Serbs were under direct threat from the Kosovar Albanians who were planning genocide against the Serbs. Finally, the Memorandum advocated a Greater Serbia to be taken by force if necessary. While still in draft form, the Memorandum was leaked to the Serbian press, causing tension within the Serbian and Yugoslav Communist leaderships. Signed by 216 prominent intellectuals, the public attention the SANU Memorandum received showed that the nationalist insurgency in Serbia was beginning to become a mainstream movement.

Within the Serbian press there also emerged an increasingly strong pro-Serbian nationalist slant. By 1987, reports appeared in the Serbian press that spoke of forced exodus and discrimination against the Serbs in Kosovo, and a creeping threat of Islamic Fundamentalism. An organized media campaign “exposed” alleged anti-Serb prejudice in Bosnia. Party elites began to appeal openly to nationalism. During this time, the Serbs within Kosovo grew increasingly anti-Albanian, anti-Yugoslav, and pro-Serb nationalism. Given that the nationalist swell throughout Serbia was centered on Kosovo
as the “heart of Serbia,” the president of Serbia, Ivan Stambolic, who was still a devoted
communist and Titoist, recognized the need to reign in Kosovo’s agitators. He sent his
deputy, Slobodan Milosevic, to meet with the Serb nationalists in Kosovo.

Through his visit to Kosovo, Milosevic fostered a revitalized Serbian subjectivity,
hailing the Serb people through a constitutive rhetoric that capitalized on the mythic
power of the Kosovo mythos. After the stage had been set by seven years of nationalist
priming first by Serbian intellectuals, then by the Orthodox leaders and finally, by the
increasingly nationalist slant of the Serbian press and popular culture, the time was right
for a leader to emerge and lead the Serbian people to their redemptive destiny. Overnight
Milosevic became both a hero to and leader of the Serbian people.

Simplifying history and essentializing ethnic identity, nationalist Serbian
intellectuals and cultural elites engaged a series of constitutive narratives to hail a
racialized and politicized Serb people from the vestiges of the crumbling Yugoslav
identity. Serbian nationalist rhetoric relied on the central themes of the Kosovo mythos
as highlighted in the Serbian literary tradition to project Serbia’s history as a teleological
progression. In all, this constitutive discourse, engineered by Serbian cultural elites and
transmitted through the Serbian mass media, offered solutions to present problems that
slated the present moment as the predetermined outcome of Serbia’s fated historical
progression. Hailing the Serb people through myth and narrative, this constitutive
rhetoric charged the Serb people with the ancestral obligation to complete the story
according the prescribed and indelible guidelines.
Chapter Summary

This project critiques a range of significant texts to suggest that the violence in the former Yugoslavia was enabled through constitutive discourses that called a politicized and racialized Serb nation into being through teleological narratives highlighting Serbian subjugation as an essential aspect of a historical trajectory leading to the inevitable Serbian redemption promised in the Kosovo myth. The variety of texts offered implies a multitude of sources for rhetorical invention at work in the constitution of the highly exclusive Serbian identity.

Chapter Two provides the reader with a brief overview of Balkan history in order to contextualize the analyses that follow. In Chapter Three, Petar Petrovic Njegos’s nineteenth-century epic poem *The Mountain Wreath* is analyzed to demonstrate how the dominant themes of the Kosovo mythos were foundational to Serbian culture. These themes were then re-politicized in the 1980s to constitute a modern Serbian nation. As *The Mountain Wreath* is required reading for Serbian school children even today, it has had an influence on Serbian culture and hence deserves attention.

Chapter Four considers the role of Serbian intellectuals in hailing the Serb people. Through deliberate rhetorical choices that fused intellectual authority with a teleological mythos, nationalist Serbian academics and cultural elites initiated the call to the modern Serbian people with an appeal to the subject position of victim. Their rhetoric was predicated on the themes of the Kosovo mythos. As the 1986 Memorandum from the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) is regarded as one of the primary documents upon which modern Serbian identity is based, this document is analyzed to determine the ways in which the Kosovo mythos is narratized to hail the Serbian people.
This chapter also offers an analysis of public statements made by three of the highest-ranking Serbian intellectuals turned politicians. These three include: Dr. Biljana Plavsic,\textsuperscript{11} Dr. Radovan Karadzic,\textsuperscript{12} and Dr. Vojislav Seslj.\textsuperscript{13}

Chapter Five positions the figurehead of Serbian nationalism, Slobodan Milosevic, in his role as reformer and redeemer. Milosevic positioned the Serbs as history’s victims continually under threat from the Muslim other and positioned himself as Serbia’s savior. This subjectivity of victimhood then allowed for the justification and normalization of the ensuing violence, under the banner of righting the wrongs of history. Through a critique of several of his more famous speeches and staged media events Milosevic’s role in the rhetorical constitution of the Serbian people is analyzed. A master of the rhetorical situation, his influence over the Serbian mass media is also considered. Yugoslav media had once boasted the most free, reliable and trustworthy media of the formerly communist Eastern European nations, but with the rapid decline of freedoms and increased totalitarian control over media institutions, Yugoslav media became a state run mechanism for constituting the genocidal subjectivity of victimhood. At his own trial in The Hague, shown daily on Serbian television, Milosevic continues to use Serb victimhood to play to Serbian audiences at home. These same target audiences twice elected Milosevic as president, not in spite of, but because of his nationalist rhetoric.

\textsuperscript{11} A geneticist and former professor at Sarajevo’s University, Plavsic was the president of the break-away Bosnian Serb Republic, and used her scientific authority to speak to the genetic inferiorities of the Bosnian Muslims. In February of 2003 Plavsic entered into a plea agreement with the Tribunal and is currently serving her sentence. She is the only woman to have been tried at the ICTY to date.

\textsuperscript{12} A Freudian-trained psychiatrist and self styled poet, Karadzic portrayed the various ethnicities in Jungian archetypes, he also held the Bosnian Serb presidency for a time and is still one of the ICTY’s most wanted still at large.

\textsuperscript{13} The youngest person to graduate with a doctorate from Sarajevo’s law school, Seslj called himself the “Chetnik Duke” and delighted in propagating the basest form of nationalist appeals. Seslj’s ICTY trial is ongoing.
The modern discourses in the region, in conjunction with the stories now being told by witnesses at the ICTY, are still colored by the cultural framework of mass violence. The final chapter posits some critical conclusions with regard to the construction of Serbian identity and the normalization of violence, and suggests some avenues for future research.

I envision multiple audiences for this project. For rhetorical scholars this project offers an avenue for the field of rhetoric that has not as yet been thoroughly explored. The role of rhetoric in mass violence and the possibility of a rhetorically pro-active approach to peace is a relatively new avenue for the discipline and one that I hope will continue to be pursued. I hope that this project will add to the body of rhetorical scholarship in such a way as to propose new directions for the discipline in the future. I further foresee an audience of scholars with an interest in peace and conflict studies and genocide studies. As the role of rhetoric in incidents of mass violence is underrepresented, I hope to call attention to the study of rhetoric as an important aspect in the quest to understand and prevent future incidents of mass violence.

With this project I additionally imagine an audience of scholars interested in Slavic studies at large. In as much as the mythic history and Slavic literary tradition play a role in my analyses, I hope that this project will add to the body of scholarship that seeks to broaden the understanding of Slavic history and modern issues in the region.

Finally, I envision a lay audience for this project that is interested in war, peace and global conflict. While there are some aspect of this project that employ field specific concepts, I have tried to explain myself and keep my language accessible with the
thought that this project may be useful to various lay audiences who have an interest in the topics at hand.

In many of ways the rhetorical factors involved in the violences that took place in the former Yugoslavia are common to incidents of mass violence throughout the world. There are undeniable parallels that cannot and should not be ignored. This project can help to illuminate the role of rhetoric in the normalization of violence, in order to promote greater understanding of the power of rhetoric to shape dangerous identities. In this way, this project may help in the implication of an “early warning” system to call attention to “hot spots” of mass violence. In other ways Yugoslavia is anomalous and worthy of study in its own right not merely as representative of a particular series of violent phenomena. In the ensuing chapters I hope to shed some light on the rhetorical processes that enabled the normalization of violence in the former Yugoslavia and is still enabling stubborn residual nationalist factions throughout the region today. This project may also have larger implications for rhetoric in that I seek to propose a rhetorically pro-active approach in the aftermath of mass violence. I promote the possibility that rhetoric may be consciously crafted in projects of peace through healing campaigns that seek to create a united identity that allows divided people to move into the future together.
A Yugoslav joke from 1991:
Q: Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic are on the deck of a ship off the Adriatic coast. Suddenly a tidal wave washes both overboard. Who will be saved first?
A: Yugoslavia

Early History

Only relatively recently have the Balkans secured independence from the domination of expansive empires and foreign conquerors. Throughout the past two millennia, the region has intermittently suffered and flourished under various rulers, each of whom introduced a new religion, a new culture, and a new political system. Previous to WWI, the Balkan region was subject to a variety of violence, peppered with periods of relative peace. After the split of the Christian Church in 1054, the Serbs became Orthodox Christians, and the Slovenes and Croats followed the path of the Roman Catholic Church. At the end of the 12th Century, the first independent Serb state was formed and lasted under dynastic rule for two centuries (Nikolic, 2002). These two centuries proved important to the modern Serbian national consciousness because this time period would feed the myths and legends that proclaimed that the glory of the Serb nation had been cut short by the Turkish invasion.

In the thirteenth century, the Hapsburgs extended their empire to the northern and western regions of what would later become Yugoslavia. During the fourteenth century,
the Ottoman Turks invaded the southern and eastern portions, successfully ruling much of the territory for nearly 500 years. On 28 June 1389, St. Vitus Day, at the Battle of the Kosovo Polje (field of blackbirds) the Turks defeated the Serbian forces in a battle that became a symbolic nationalistic rallying point for the Serb claim to historical victimhood in modern times. This battle has placed Kosovo Polje and St. Vitus Day at the center of Serb mythology. The battle has become the most precious subject of national poetry, myth and legend in the history of the Serbs (Nikolic, 2002, p. 21).

With the Turkish takeover, many Serb people, mainly of Orthodox faith, migrated to regions of southern Hungary, Bosnia, and Dalmatia (on the Adriatic coast). With the fall of Serbia as a sovereign state, the Serbian Orthodox church became an important community for Serb people, allowing them to keep a part of old Serbian culture intact. During this time, a slow conversion to Islam occurred in the south, often in the interest of survival, while the western territories remained under heavy Catholic influence. Modern Serbian hostility toward the Bosnian Muslims stems in part from a revised history of conversion that locates Bosnian Muslims as traitors to their Serbian brethren and to the Christian faith (Scharf & Schabas, 2002).

A series of “great wars” between 1591 and 1791 pitted the peoples of these regions against one another as the ruling authorities fought to defend and/or increase their territory. The Turkish influence in the Balkans decreased rapidly at the end of the 17th century. As the Ottoman Empire weakened into the “sick man of Europe,” Austria-Hungary assisted in the Ottoman downfall in the Balkans, arming the Ottoman sultan’s Balkan subjects for rebellion against him (Rogel, 1998, p. 5). In 1878, the defeat of the Turks by the Bulgarians, with Russian support, finally wiped out the last vestiges of
Turkish rule. Slovenia and Croatia stayed under the rule of Austria-Hungary, which also took control of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

![The Balkans Map](image)

**FIGURE 3** This map was retrieved from the BBC News Yugoslavia education website

Until 1918, the concept of “Yugoslavia” was little more than an idea (Rogel, 1998). Two brief Balkan wars in 1912 & 1913 re-shuffled those territories not under Austro-Hungarian control. The Albanian dominated Kosovo, a historic rallying point for the Serbs, fell under Serb control. In 1914, Austria-Hungary sent the emperor's heir, archduke Franz Ferdinand, to deal with the unsettled region. His assassination in Sarajevo on the 28th of June 1914 (again St. Vitus Day) was the infamous spark that ignited WWI. The Serbs fought WWI on the side of the Allies, and as such upon the signing of the Treaty of Corfu on the 6th of January 1919, were allowed to play a major role in the new Kingdom of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. This new Kingdom, ruled by the Serbian dynasty Karadjordjevic, embodied the nineteenth-century intellectuals’ dream to have a united nation of south Slavs, free from foreign domination (Silber & Little, 1995).
In 1929, King Aleksander I renamed his dominion the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (South Slavs), and commenced with a monarchy favoring the kingdom’s Serbs. The privileged position of the Serbs caused resentment amongst the Croats and Slovenes. The tensions between the groups escalated, fueled by the assassination of the Croat leader in 1929. With the assassination of King Aleksander I in 1934, the Fascist movement in Croatia was vindicated, and the Ustashe party, a Nazi-like party that pleased the Third Reich, was formed. As German troops invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Ustashe welcomed them. The Serbian King was ejected, and the Croat Ustashe, under Ante Pavelic, were rewarded with an ostensibly independent state incorporating Bosnia. Serbia fell under the control of the Nazis, while the Italians occupied Montenegro.

In the midst of WWII, a series of civil wars in the region resulted in widespread atrocities on all sides. Carole Rogel (1998) notes that, “throughout occupied Yugoslavia during WWII, there was incredible fratricidal fighting and killing” (p.48). As the Serbs were considered untermenschen by the Nazi regime, the Ustashe proved to be willing
executioners, imprisoning, torturing and murdering Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and anti-fascist Croats with a zeal that, at times, surprised even the Nazis. Williams & Scharf (2002) note, “according to German military reports, the passion with which the Ustashe pursued the genocide of the Serbs seemed excessive even in the eyes of the SS” (p.42). It is from Pavelic, a Croat, that we hear the term “cleansing” for the first time.

The internal struggle for power in the region continued throughout WWII. Tito’s communist sympathetic Partisans and the Serb nationalist Chetniks fought against the Nazis while also fighting with one another. As WWII drew to a close, Tito’s ranks swelled with Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks, some disenfranchised supporters of the German cause. With the support of the Allies, the partisans liberated Sarajevo, and communist Yugoslavia was born, declared by Marshall Tito in 1943 (Silber & Little, 1995).

Marshall Tito

Throughout his years in power, Tito fought hard to suppress resurgent nationalism, exiling and/or imprisoning known nationalists (Silber & Little, 1995). Tito united the newly liberated Yugoslavia, controlling nationalistic tendencies through a federation of six republics with equal power – Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia (with two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina, with a large Hungarian minority, and Kosovo, with a considerable Albanian minority), Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. The seat of government was located in Belgrade, the capital city of Serbia. Most of the republican borders were drawn up taking ethnic, historic and economic factors into consideration (Judah, 2000, p. 138). As the Serbian republic was by far the largest, and WWII backlash was a concern, the formation of the two autonomous provinces helped to ensure the popular slogan “a weak Serbia, a strong Yugoslavia” by limiting the power of the Serbian
republic. Tito created a constitution that provided for a system of checks and balances among the republics to ensure the peaceful coexistence of and equality among the various ethnic groups within Yugoslavia.

![Yugoslavia Map](image)

**FIGURE 5** This map was retrieved from the BBC News Yugoslavia education website

Tito dealt with the residual WWII tensions in the region with a swift and violent backlash against those identified as Ustashe and/or “anti-partisan.” The matter of WWII was then “swept under the rug” and was no longer publicly dealt with as it was considered an unhealthy source of ethnic conflict that stood in the way of a united Yugoslavia. From that point forward, national identification along republican lines was discouraged in favor of a pan-Slavic identity. People were encouraged to identify themselves primarily as Yugoslavs, and the national mantra of “Brotherhood and Unity” was the order of the day. Tito managed to hold ethno-national tendencies in check and no single province wielded power over the others.

Yugoslavia differed from other Eastern European communist regimes in that Tito enjoyed a great deal of popular support, being viewed as a liberator. While the Soviet army liberated most of Eastern Europe, Tito's partisans liberated Yugoslavia (Silber & Little, 1995, p. 28). Tito’s Yugoslavia was independent from the Soviet Bloc, though
initially closely aligned with the Soviet brand of communism. Yet in 1948, Tito’s persistence in acting independently of the Soviet authority led to a break in relations with the Soviet Bloc and to Yugoslavia’s ejection from COMINFORM (the organization of Eastern European communist nations). This break led to a violent purge in Yugoslavia, separating those perceived to be Soviet loyalists from those loyal to the Yugoslav federation. Upon the break with COMINFORM, Tito’s Yugoslavia distinguished itself in its search for a unique brand of communism. Its main features were workers’ self-management, the concept of “social property” as opposed to state property, and nonalignment with the international community.

The West supported Tito for his brave stand against the Soviet Bloc (Kurspahic, 2003). Tito’s unique brand of communism coupled with his rejection of the Soviets gained him the attention of the West, as Yugoslavia became a pawn in Cold War politics (Rogel, 1998). Yugoslavs enjoyed freedoms and economic prosperity not familiar to the other Eastern European communist countries. Free to travel to and work abroad, the people enjoyed relative economic prosperity, and the Yugoslav media enjoyed a relative freedom and openness in reporting (as long as the ruling party was not openly criticized) that earned several of its newspapers international status for their high standards in international news reporting.

The media of Yugoslavia were more abundant, varied and unconstrained than in any other communist state (Thompson, 1999, p.7). While the Communist Party controlled the media, individual agencies were granted a certain amount of latitude not necessarily allowed in other communist states, and as a result were highly regarded as respectable by the general population, and the international community. By 1989 there
were nine TV stations, 202 radio stations (with news comprising 28% of broadcasting output) as well as 27 daily newspapers, 17 major news magazines, and a large output of books. Until 1989, most of these institutions were owned under the concept of “social property” (Thompson, 1999, p. 9).

Though Yugoslavia enjoyed a large influx of western financial support, allowing for a relatively high standard of living, Tito’s Yugoslavia remained aligned with neither the East nor the West and by the early 1960s Tito was viewed as the leader of those Third World countries eager to proceed independently of colonial powers. The independent nature of Tito’s Yugoslavia, coupled with the relative freedoms of the people led many to feel a great affection for Tito, yet his violent purges and efficient secret police also led many to fear him.

Marshall Tito died in 1980, at the age of 88, with no successor. Tito had been one of the few communist leaders who could rely on the mandate of the people. There was no one of this caliber to step into his shoes, and the unity of the multi-ethnic state began to show cracks (Srebrenica report, chp2, sec2). Many people expected this to be the end of Yugoslavia, but the Yugoslav Federation held on for another ten years. According to the terms of the revised 1974 constitution, the leadership was constitutionally organized on a rotational pattern, with an eight-member presidency (one from each republic and both provinces) whose leader would rotate annually. As the Soviet Bloc disintegrated, Yugoslavia was no longer a priority for the West. As the nation lost its strategic importance to Washington, the financial assistance began to run dry (Silber & Little, 1995). With no strong leader to hold the federation together, and an emerging economic crisis stemming from the collapse of communism, bids for power emerged, and a
nationalist political agenda ruled the day for those fighting to ascend. Robert Kaplan (1996) notes that Yugoslavia deteriorated gradually throughout the 1980s, becoming poorer, meaner, and more hate-filled each year (p.7).

Infighting ensued among the Yugoslav leadership as the leaders quarreled bitterly over how the country should proceed. A series of divisive political battles over the issue of centralism versus federalism plagued the leadership (Rogel, 1998). Republican and provincial leaders put their local and ethnic interests above those of the country as a whole (Judah, 2000, p. 156). In this atmosphere of political and economic upheaval, the victimization ideology caught on quickly amongst the Serbs, beginning in Kosovo. Stories began to circulate about the ‘persecution’ of the Kosovo Serbs (Judah, 2000, p. 156). The Serbian media fed this rumor mill, fabricating dozens of stories for every actual occurrence. As the largely pro-nationalist direction of the Serbian press came to a head, events in Kosovo were frequently reported as if the Serbs there were under attack. Some reports were taken from sources known to be unreliable while others were completely made-up.

One of the most famous incidents to be used for nationalist ends is the case of a Serbian peasant farmer from Kosovo, Djordje Martinovic. In May of 1985, Martinovic was found in his field with a broken beer bottle lodged in his anus. The Serbian press excitedly reported the incident as an act of aggression by Kosovo Albanians who wished to drive Serbs out of Kosovo even calling the event “reminiscent of the darkest days of Turkish impalement.” (Meanwhile, the Albanian press claimed that Martinovic was caught in a bizarre act of masturbation.) The Martinovic Case (as it came to be known) was the primary obsession of the Serbian press for the ensuing months and even years.
Several books were written about the incident claiming that it was evidence of the perverse nature of the horrors that the Albanians inflicted on the Serbs. Given the massive impact of stories like this, Serbs were soon called upon to protect themselves against their enemies throughout Yugoslavia (Mertus, 1999, p. 8).

The initiators and bearers of the early resurgence of Serbian nationalism were numerous cultural, and academic elites as well as some church leaders (Nikolic, 2002, p. 12). The influence of the intellectual elites of nationalist affiliation was very strong, particularly because of the corresponding role of the media (Nikolic, 2002, p. 41). Hate speech was masterminded and, in the early 1980s, was first publicly used and promoted by Serbian intellectuals in the most prominent national, cultural, and educational institutions, and then recycled into political and public discourse (Nikolic, 2002, p. 36). To this effect, Warren Zimmerman, the former U.S. ambassador to Belgrade, commented that “the breakup of Yugoslavia was a classic example of nationalism from the top down” (Williams & Scharf, 2002, p. 43).

The prominent Association of Writers of Serbia played a large role in the expansion of Serbian nationalism. Among the most active of these writers was Dobrica Cosic who, thanks to his nationalist writings, earned the title “father of the nation” (Nikolic, 2002, p. 23). Many intellectuals who later became major political players in Milosevic’s nationalist Serbia got their start under Cosic’s tutelage. In addition to the contributions of Serbian writers in the resurgence of nationalism, academics also stepped onto the scene, drafting the 1986 SANU Memorandum. The Memorandum’s claims of collusion by Croatia and Slovenia against Serbia, and the exploitation of Serbia’s wealth by Tito revived the idea of a Greater Serbia.
Ivan Stambolic, then the president of Serbia, condemned the memorandum, denouncing its chauvinistic and divisive tendencies, but the memorandum’s open criticism of the Serbian leadership had already laid doubts about his ability to lead. The SANU Memorandum proved to be substantially divisive and would ultimately guide the policies of Slobodan Milosevic, still just a dot on this troubled political landscape, in later years. How Milosevic would rise through the ranks to wield ultimate power in Yugoslavia is an important aspect of the story of this troubled region.

The Rise of Milosevic

Slobodan Milosevic was born in 1941 in the town of Pozarevac, Serbia, during the height of the Nazi occupation, and grew up in united communist Yugoslavia under Tito (Scharf & Schabas, 2002, p. 5). In his high school years, Milosevic began to excel academically, and attracted the attention of both the Communist Party higher-ups as well as the attention of the outspoken and politically motivated Mirjana (Mira) Markovic, who would eventually become his wife. While at the university in Belgrade, Milosevic headed the ideology section of its party branch.1

Most accounts of Milosevic’s rise to power attribute much of his drive and success to Mira Markovic, his lifetime partner (Scharf & Schabas, 2002). Mira viewed “Sloba” (as she affectionately called him) as a vehicle for her political ambitions and he seemed to be intrigued by her family history.2 From the time Mira & “Sloba” met one another, they were an inseparable pair with strong political ambitions. After high school,

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1 When Milosevic was in law school in Belgrade, his father, with whom he had little contact since his youth, committed suicide, as would his mother some years later. This led ICTY security officers to keep Milosevic on a suicide watch when he was first apprehended.
2 Mira’s mother had been a notorious anti-Nazi resistance fighter who was eventually caught and put to death, while her father became Tito’s close colleague. Mira visited her father on Tito’s private island each summer.
both attended the university at Belgrade, and both became active members of the communist party, the singular road to success in Yugoslavia during the 1960s. Milosevic graduated with a law degree in 1964, though he never actually practiced law opting instead for a career in banking and politics. It was while at the university that he met his close friend and his most crucial political contact, Ivan Stambolic. Stambolic was the kum, or “best man” at Milosevic’s wedding (an honor considered to denote a friendship closer than family ties) (Judah, 2000, p. 161).

From Milosevic’s first positions in the Belgrade city government, he would always be just one step behind Stambolic, with Stambolic boosting Milosevic’s career at every turn. In 1968, Milosevic began work for Technogas, Serbia’s utility gas company, under the executive direction of Stambolic. When Stambolic left Technogas for a political position in 1973, Milosevic was made the company’s director. By 1978, Stambolic was the prime minister of Serbia, and Milosevic was appointed the head of the largest state-run bank, Beobank. In 1984, Milosevic was chosen as the Belgrade Communist party chief, as Stambolic became the Communist party leader of Serbia, one of the most powerful positions in the country (Scharf & Schabas, 2002). One year later, as Stambolic was poised to become the president of Serbia, Milosevic was to succeed Stambolic as Serbia’s Communist party leader.

To pave the way for his appointment, Milosevic cultivated his relationship with the Serbian media, in particular garnering the support of Belgrade’s leading newspaper, Politika, and of TV Belgrade. Milosevic’s active cultivation of media support avoided the traditional threats of punishment for uncooperative journalists (Scharf & Schabas, 2002). Instead, Milosevic courted the media, giving them the stories and soundbites that
allowed a rare glimpse into Yugoslavia’s political process. One of the most significant aspects of Milosevic’s rise to power was his relationship to the media (Nikolic, 2002, p. 36).

For much of the 1970’s and 1980’s, Serbia had boasted some of the finest publications and journalists in the socialist countries. Indeed Politika, the largest circulating newspaper in Yugoslavia, was one of the best dailies in Europe. …As soon as he came to power, however, Milosevic identified two main targets among the Serbian media: the first was Politika, the second, Radio Television Belgrade. (Hampson, 1993 p. 3).

Throughout his career, Stambolic rewarded his trusted friend Milosevic, whom he viewed as closer to him than a brother. While others warned Stambolic of Milosevic’s impending betrayal, the trusting and loyal Stambolic never saw it coming. As Serbia’s president, Stambolic publicly spoke out against the divisive nationalist themes evident in the SANU Memorandum as he attempted to “walk a tightrope between the yearnings of the Serb intellectual community and his own desire to discourage ethnic nationalism” (Scharf & Schabas, 2002, p. 10). In 1987, when a group of Serbs from Kosovo were becoming increasingly and vocally dissatisfied with their treatment at the hands of the region’s ethnic Albanian majority, Stambolic sent Milosevic to quell the unrest, in a move that is retrospectively the defining moment of Milosevic’s political career (Scharf & Schabas, 2002).

Initially, there was nothing about this visit to suggest that it would change the course of history, but for the first time, Milosevic would take on the persona of protector of the Serbs (Silber & Little, 1996, p. 37). Upon his arrival, he was met by a large group
of Kosovo’s Serbs who complained of mistreatment and beatings by the area’s mostly Albanian police force. Milosevic responded first with a phrase that began Milosevic’s explosive political career, “No one will be allowed to beat the Serbs again! No one!”

Peter Maas (1997) notes that “as with most myths, the versions of what was actually said differ slightly according to who is telling the tale” (and, I would argue, also differ according to translation). Still, what ensued is a famous address, steeped in nationalism, whose continuous rebroadcast over Serbian television catapulted Milosevic into the Serbian leadership, turning him overnight into a Serb national hero.

A few months later, in September 1987, the Serbian press took advantage of another unfortunate incident to ignite the nationalistic fever smoldering beneath Serbian politics. A psychologically disturbed JNA soldier of Albanian ethnicity opened fire in his barracks one night, killing four men. Although those killed included one Serb, two Muslims and a Croat, the event was reported in Serbian newspapers and television reports as an incident of ethnic violence against Serbs. Milosevic used his budding relationship with Belgrade TV chief, Dusan Mitevic and the press at large to bolster ethnic tensions and prove the “genocidal plan” of the ethnic Albanians against the Serbs. The Serbian media seized the opportunity to indulge in an orgy of anti-Albanian propaganda (Judah, 2000, p. 162). Soon after, in an atmosphere of hysteria, Dragisa Pavlovic, the Belgrade Party Chief, called the media bosses to a meeting in which he warned against the dangers of resurging nationalism (Silber & Little, 1996). Without saying so, this decree became a battle cry against Milosevic, who quickly responded in kind calling the media under his influence to denounce Pavlovic.
On September 18, 1987, the Eighth Plenary Session of the Communist Party was called to discuss the Pavlovic/Milosevic split, and the Milosevic machine took the public airwaves by storm. For two days, debates raged. Heightening the tension was the fact that, for the first time in Yugoslav history, this political meeting was televised, allowing the people into the workings of the Communist order. Later, following a twenty-hour debate, Milosevic called for a “vote of no confidence” to determine the future of Stambolic’s presidency. When the vote was against Stambolic, Milosevic looked at his lifelong mentor and on national television, he dismissed President Ivan Stambolic, saying “I’m sorry old friend, but your position has become untenable” (Scharf & Schabas, 2002, p. 11). From that point on, Milosevic, with the guidance of his wife, Mira Markovic, used the Serbian media to whip “Serbia into a nationalist frenzy” harnessing nationalist sentiment to establish control over the Serb government, (Scharf & Schabas, 2002, p. 11) and eventually ousting Stambolic as an impotent leader without regard for the fate of the Serbs and their nation. After months of hanging-on and lurking in the shadows, Stambolic was officially dismissed on December 14, 1987.

After succeeding Stambolic as the leader of Serbia, Milosevic’s brand of nationalism cloaked in a reformed flavor of communism, and termed the “Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution,” became the height of political and cultural fashion. With the help of Mira, who had taken a position as a professor of Marxism at Belgrade University, Milosevic was able to gather around himself a large group of supportive intellectuals who had come to see him as a Serbian messiah (Judah, 2000, p. 162). For the next two years, Milosevic staged numerous rallies throughout Serbia with the goal of stirring nationalist tendencies toward “re-uniting” Serbia with the revocation of the autonomous status of
Kosovo and Vojvodina through a new constitution. These rallies were widely publicized in *Politika* as well as on TV Belgrade, and their voluntary participation was widely exaggerated. The new constitution went into effect in late March 1989, giving Serbia control over Vojvodina and Kosovo, and making Serbia the strongest of the republics. On March 28, 1989, Serbia’s political elites turned out to celebrate the new constitution and the day was declared a new national holiday in Serbia (Silber & Little, 1996, p. 69).

In his bid for power, Milosevic consciously played the nationalism card, first in Serbia and then in Yugoslavia at large. When it became apparent that his goal of stepping into Tito’s shoes as the new leader of a united Yugoslavia was not attainable, Milosevic proceeded to project his power over the rising consciousness of Greater Serbia (Silber & Little, 1995, p.26). The ascent of the nationalist Milosevic government in Serbia spurred an anti-Serb based nationalism in the other republics (Scharf & Schabas, 2002, p. 17). In 1990, each of Yugoslavia’s republics held elections. Slovenia’s government was formed from a multi-party coalition, with former communist Milan Kucan as its president. In Croatia, the Croatian Democratic Union, a nationalist party led by Dr. Franjo Tudjman, won a decisive victory. Ironically, in this period, Bosnia alone was striving to keep Yugoslavia together (Judah, 2000, p. 165). Bosnia’s election yielded a governing body made up of all three major constituent ethnic groups in approximate proportions to their actual representation in the republic with the Bosnian Muslim, Alija Izetbegovic, as president. In Serbia and Montenegro, the Communist parties were returned to power, with the Milosevic friendly Momir Bulatovic as the president of Montenegro, and Milosevic as the elected president of Serbia (Rogel, 1998).
Milosevic’s efforts to maintain a unified Yugoslavia under Serb dominance was met with resistance from the Slovene and Croat republics, who wished to see Yugoslavia converted to a loose confederation of independent republics, thereby diffusing Serb control. In the spring of 1991, Milosevic blocked Stipe Mesic, a Croat, from his assumption of the federal presidency, despite the fact that under the constitution, it was Croatia’s turn to assume the position (Scharf & Schabas, 2002). At this point the tensions among the republics reached a critical mass and new negotiations over the fate of a united Yugoslavia proved futile. Croatia and Slovenia declared independence on June 25, 1991 (with Croatia making the provocative choice to adopt the Ustashe flag, much to the dismay of its Serbian inhabitants).

Since few Serbs lived in Slovenia, it was not a part of the vision of Greater Serbia. As such, the fight over the republic’s secession was brief. Croatia, however, had a sizable Serbian population. With a revised historical claim to the land, Croatia was a major part in Milosevic’s promise of a Greater Serbia and was not allowed to slip away as easily. The poorly armed and hastily organized Croatian forces were no match for the Serbs who, under the auspices of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), were better armed, better trained and better organized. The Croat forces took heavy casualties and Croatia was quickly forced to cede a third of its territory to the Serb forces. As the fighting ensued, the first incidents that would later be counted as war crimes occurred in the city of Vukovar.

During this time, the situation in Bosnia was growing increasingly more tenuous. Despite the fear of war, on March 1st, 1992, the people of Bosnia overwhelmingly voted for independence. On April 6th 1992, the new Bosnia was recognized as an independent
nation. \(^3\) On that same day, the Bosnian Serbs, under the leadership of Dr. Radovan Karadzic, proclaimed an independent “Republika Srpska” within Bosnia, and, with the full military support of the JNA, immediately attacked the largely unarmed Bosniak and Croatian populations. This push gave the Serbs swift Serb control of over 70% of the region.

\[\text{FIGURE 6} \quad \text{This map was retrieved from the BBC News Yugoslavia education website}\]

During this time, Milosevic relied on a capable propaganda machine to gain support for his nationalist objectives and to mobilize paramilitary forces to participate in ethnic cleansing. He played on feelings of victimization, and used the same rhetoric to imbue western policy makers with myths of ancient hatreds, a Bosnian civil war in which the Serbs were not involved, and the myth of equal warring factions (Williams & Scharf, 2002, p.15). Bosnian Serbs, following the lead of the propaganda conglomeration of Serbia proper, executed an aggressive nationalist agenda of their own, succeeding in rallying a majority of Bosnian Serbs to the cause of a Greater Serbia (Rieff, 1995, p. 19).

\(^3\) At that time, Bosnia was made up of three main “ethnic” groups. The Bosniaks (historically Muslims) made up 43%, the Serbs (historically Orthodox) made up 31% and the Croats (historically Catholic) made up 17%. It is important to note here that, while these “ethnic” distinctions were mainly based on religion, a 1985 survey found that only 17% of the region’s inhabitants considered themselves to be believers at all, and interfaith marriage was extremely common (Williams & Scharf, 2002).
Ethnic cleansing ensued with Croat and Bosniak populations being driven out of the occupied regions. A campaign of terror took shape through mass executions, seizing, burning and looting of property, and the establishment of brutal rape camps and savage concentration camps. International response was slow and clumsy, with UN peacekeepers, who were too lightly armed to take any real action, often relegated to bystanders to genocide or even as assistants to genocide in the case of the Srebrenica enclave.

Throughout much of this conflict, the West stood by impotently, offering late and ineffectual diplomatic solutions and weak military assistance as the violence raged on. Yet, as early as 1993, when it was determined that massive crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Convention were occurring, the United Nations voted to establish a criminal tribunal to hold accountable those most responsible for the atrocities occurring in the former Yugoslavia. Rooted in Article IV of the Genocide Convention, which stated that an international penal tribunal was to be established for such crimes, and based on the previous post-WWII war crimes tribunals, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established on February 22, 1993. The Tribunal’s immediate tasks were to resolve the remaining issues of the Dayton Peace Accords, and to deter new atrocities (Fatic, 2000, p. 41-2), an aim that wholly failed considering the time frame for some of the most horrific events.

Having in mind a general time line of major historical events in the region, we can proceed to three case studies that critique the role of mythic narratives in Yugoslavia’s violent demise. The preceding chapter was intended to offer the reader some historical perspective on a region that is often shrouded in confusion and myth. The next chapter
examines the role of myth and legend in Serbian national consciousness. Through an analysis of the role of Serbian nationalist literature in reconstituting Serbian national identity, the three primary myths that stem from the Battle of Kosovo will be explored in relation to their influence on the reemergence of Serbian nationalism, predicated on a racialized and politicized ethnic identity.
CHAPTER THREE

Kosovo Fever:

Early Serbian Literature

And the Ignition of the Kosovo Myth in Serbian Ethno-National Identity

“Kosovo is not merely another part of Serbia... Kosovo is the very heart of Serbia; our entire history lies there!”

~~Slobodan Milosevic, Interview with TV Belgrade, May 1992

FIGURE 7 This historical/political map of Kosovo was produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
On June 28th 1989, Slobodan Milosevic addressed the hundreds of thousands of Serbs who had gathered to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje. Addressing the masses from a stage perched above the crowd at the mythic location of the famous battle, Milosevic fused six hundred years of history. Using imagery that invoked the sense of Serbian national pride long associated with the battle, he blended the past and present to re-tell the traditional Kosovo story with a modern cast of characters. Milosevic did not stumble upon the power of the Kosovo myth to incite Serb nationalism. Stories of this famous battle had been central to Serbian culture for centuries. The battle of Kosovo symbolizes a national death: the end of the mythic glory of the medieval Serbian state and the beginning of five hundred years of Ottoman occupation. The Serbs characterize this period as one of enslavement and a “deep national sleep” (Greenawalt, 2001, p. 1). Milosevic and other prominent Serbian nationalist elites capitalized on the culturally treasured story of Kosovo, so central to Serbian and Yugoslav identity to foster Serb nationalism. The destruction of Yugoslavia was predicated on the legend of this battle. As such, understanding the constructive and destructive power of the Kosovo mythos is key to understanding the mass violence that erupted in the region in the 1990s.

The legend of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo Polje serves as a foundational myth upon which Serbian ethno-national identity has been built. Although both the exact date and the precise unfolding of events are historically disputable, this has not hampered the fervor with which this famous battle has dominated the constructive discourses of Serb identity. As embedded in Serbian national consciousness as “George Washington and the cherry tree” and the “cowboy” myth of western expansion in U.S. culture, the themes
encapsulated by the Kosovo mythos have been a part of Serbian cultural education from
nursery school through adulthood for centuries.

Early Slavic literature provided fertile ground for the instantiation of the Kosovo
myth as a primary foundation of Serbian national identity. The three themes central to the
Kosovo myth, the historic Serbian subjugation, the promise of redemption and the eternal
threat of Islamic fundamentalism to Serbian being, were central to early literary texts.
Still, while the legend of Kosovo has always had a certain literary, mythic and sometimes
religious currency with the Serbian people, the immediate political importance of the
legend has waxed and waned with the times. During the Tito years, which depended
upon a culturally and politically unified Yugoslavia, the Kosovo mythos was largely de-
politicized. As the positive aspects of the myth were highlighted (strength of character
and perseverance despite hardship) and generalized to the larger Yugoslav population, the
more divisive aspects were downplayed.

As the popularity of Serbian nationalism surged in the 1980s, the increased
politicization of the Kosovo myth coincided with the essential racialization and
opoliticization of Serbian ethnic identity. Serbian nationalist rhetoric has sought to
simplify and essentialize Serbian ethnic identity in order to classify “Serbness” as an
immutable biological category. Hence, Serbian ethnic identity has been racialized and
politically charged through the propagation of the Kosovo myth as historic evidence of
Serbian victimization. Race is the most exclusive form of identity, defining groups by
characteristics that are seen as indelible, immutable and trans-generational. Race
characteristics are “born in the blood.” Although skin color tends to be the most outward
manifestation of race in American culture, contemporary race scholars demonstrate that
race is not really about skin color, but about the assignment of certain indelible traits to a particular group (Weitz, 2003, p. 20). The categorical lines between race and nation are fluid and permeable, as racial historian Eric Weitz (2003) points out:

Members of an ethnic group typically share a sense of commonality based on a myth of common origins—a common language, and common customs…Ethnic groups develop into nations when they become politicized and strive to create, or have created for them, a political order—the nation state—whose institutions are seen to conform in some way to their ethnic identity, and whose boundaries are, ideally, contiguous with the group’s territoriality (p. 21).

This chapter traces the role of the Kosovo myth as the focal point of Serbian national consciousness as it grew more racially politicized in the 1980s. Myth plays a central role in the process of identification with a collective subject position. As such, I begin by positing the role of myth in national identity formation. As a reinterpretation of the Kosovo mythos became the basis for the propagation of the Serbian subjectivity of victimhood in the former Yugoslavia, I then examine the centrality of Kosovo to Serbian ethno-national identity. Further, as Petar Petrovic-Njegos’s epic poem, *The Mountain Wreath*, is regarded as a primary source for the instantiation of the Kosovo mythos, this chapter proceeds with an analysis of the relevant dominant themes within Njegos’s epic poem that would form the basis for the essentialized Serbian identity emergent in the nationalist discourses of the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, given the fact that the re-politicization of the Kosovo myth was a deliberate task taken on by nationalist intellectuals and cultural elites, I conclude this chapter with an initial discussion of early efforts to politicize Serbian ethnic identity through a teleological view of history that re-
invigorated the more divisive aspects of the Kosovo myth. In its entirety, this chapter serves as an initial orientation to the Kosovo myth, partially contextualizing the Kosovo mythos as it pertains to later analyses.

**The Role of Myth in Identity Formation**

The formation of Serbian national identity is not particularly unique in its foundations. Serb national identity was hailed through constitutive narratives that identify the Serb people with a collective subject position. The markers for racialized Serbian national identity were discursively relayed through an intricate series of myths. Myths are stories that have acquired a symbolizing function that is central to the cultural functioning of the society that produces them (Slotkin, 1985, p. 16). All nations shape their images of themselves, at least in part, through myths. Myths allow individuals to understand their nation’s role in history and the specific place on the timeline in which the nation currently finds itself. A national myth serves to unify a vision of a “people” serving as “social glue” (Nimmo & Combs, 1980, p.2).

Maurice Halbwachs’ (1950/1992) notion of social memory further allows one to identify a connection between myths, symbols, and identity formation. These “social memories” create the rhetorical conditions that legitimate the existing social order. The way language is used to discuss past events serves to re-affirm that order. Barbie Zelizer (1995) elaborates on the political relevance of memory in identity formation,

By definition, memory presumes activities of sharing, discussion, negotiation and often contestation. Remembering becomes implicated in a range of other activities having to do with identity formation, power and authority, cultural norms, and social interaction...Its full understanding thus requires an
appropriation of memory as social, cultural, and political action at its broadest level (p. 214).

Essentially, myths normalize the current ideological framework through narrative, a process of identification with a textual position (Charland, 1987). Similar to Bormann’s (1972) concept of fantasy themes, myth involves a story line with characters that the audience can easily identify with as it furthers a shared rhetorical vision – a lens through which to view the world. As individuals come to identify with the characters in the story, they learn to play-out their roles within it. Stories interpreting foundational myths play a crucial role in identity formation, as Julie Mertus (1999) notes,

Our identities as individuals and members of groups are defined through the telling and remembering of stories. Real or imagined, these stories shape our understanding of ourselves as heroes, martyrs, triumphant conquerors and humiliated victims. (p.1)

Kenneth Burke (1947/1989) notes that myths can be used to explicate “principles” or “firsts;” essentially defining the beginnings of social and political order. Myths circulate within a given public, lending a sense of shared history, values and culture while legitimizing the current political order. Barthes (1957/1972) maintains that myth is “de-politicized speech” allowing the status quo to seem to be the “natural” order of things. In this way, myth comes to create a shared sense of identity and reinforce cultural values. It makes little difference if one is “later allowed to see through the myth, its action is assumed to be stronger than the rational explanations which may later belie it” (Barthes, 1957/1972, p. 130).
The myths surrounding the 1389 battle at Kosovo Polje lie at the heart of Serbian national identity, and the way the Serbs portray their role in history (Sell, 2002). For Serbia, the central myth is one of heroic struggle, against seemingly hopeless odds, followed by betrayal and defeat. Yet there is also the eventual promise of rebirth and triumph. Like all myths, Serbia’s foundational myths contain a kernel of truth along with many exaggerations and falsehoods (Sell, 2002, p. 70). As a national foundational myth, the Kosovo myth helps to animate Serbian identity in the present by defining that identity through a collective past, making present cultural values seem timeless and immutable.

It is also important to note that, while discursive constructions of social identity propose a given “in-group,” they also discursively assert an excluded “out-group” (DeCillia et. al., 1999). Like other nationalisms, the Serb variant had a long-standing mythic enemy whose threat waxed and wanted depending on the intensity of the nationalistic tendency at any point in time. The Serbian mythic enemy is the “Turk,” and the genesis of this enmity is the mythos surrounding the lost battle of Kosovo Polje. The Kosovo myth serves not only to create the Serb nation, but also to define the enemy of the Serb nation by positioning Muslims as a threat to Serb being. The way that the Kosovo myth emerged as the dominant foundation for Serbian ethno-national identity is an important one for exploration.

**The Mountain Wreath and the Emergence of the Kosovo Myth**

The Kosovo myth is central to the ethno-politicization of the Serbian subjectivity of victimhood. Hence, it is important to contextualize the emergence of Kosovo as a focal point of essential Serb identity. The legend focuses on three figures - the Christ-like Serbian prince, Knez Lazar; the traitorous Vuk Brankovic; and the hero, Milos Obilic.
According to the myth, on the eve of the battle, the prophet Elijah appeared to Knez Lazar, who was to lead the Serbs into battle. Elijah offered Lazar a choice between winning the battle and having an earthly kingdom or losing the battle and instead having an eternal kingdom in heaven (Doder & Branson, 1999). Lazar chose the heavenly kingdom. To fulfill the prophecy, on the day of the battle, Vuk Brankovic, the traitorous Serb military leader, withdrew his troops at the last minute. This act of treachery left the Serbs badly outnumbered by the Turks, and so the Ottoman Turks came to dominate the Serbs for over five hundred years. Lazar’s choice became the explanation for Serb suffering throughout history. Still, the myth implies that Lazar made the right choice. While the Serbs would suffer domination at the hands of the Turks on earth, they were the spiritual victors, and hence morally superior.

But the story does not end there. Milos Obilic, the hero of the story, in an inspirational and self-sacrificing act, leaves the subjugated Serbs with a glimmer of hope. Obilic feigns loyalty to the Turks, pretending to abandon his Prince Lazar. Once he gains access to the Turkish camp, Obilic bows to kiss the feet of the Ottoman Sultan Murad, only to reveal a hidden dagger with which he kills the Sultan, thereby sacrificing his own life for the Serbian cause. Though many details of the battle are disputed, including which side actually emerged victorious, one historical fact about the historic battle is known with certainty – both Knez Lazar and the Ottoman Sultan Murad were killed in battle. The narrative that has evolved from this singular certainty has provided the foundational myth for the Serb nation, supplying a central symbolic source for modern Serb identity.¹

¹ For a factual account of the Battle of Kosovo based on historical documentation of the events, see Tim Judah (2000) The Serbs (p. 30 – 37).
The genesis of the legend of Kosovo can be traced to an early oral tradition of epic poems and legends that began as stories passed down through families and communities. Throughout the Ottoman occupation, the Serb people “kept their national spirit alive through the support of the Orthodox church and the practice of orally transmitted epic song” (Greenawalt, 2001, p. 1).

In this way the Kosovo memory became an organizing principal, an inspirational link to medieval statehood that guided the Serbs through unimaginable hardships until, finally, in the course of the nineteenth century, they threw off the Ottoman shackles, and channeled national memory into a modern state (Greenawalt, 2001, p. 1).

Judah (2000) points out that generations of foreigners have noted the importance of the epic poem to Serbian culture. As far back as the 1400s, explorers in Slavic lands recorded details of excited performances that merged history with myth. Recited from memory, these epic poems were sung both in public and at home. This oral tradition was the tool of social memory transmission for the pre-literate Serbian culture. Weaving tales of past heroes with contemporary politics, these poems “bridged an historical gap,” transmitting Serbian cultural foundations through the generations (p. 41). Often the subject of these tales would center on the Muslim “alien,” and the need to maintain brotherhood with Serbs from the “Black Mountain” (Montenegro) to “Old Serbia” (Kosovo) (p. 41).

In the nineteenth century, when nationalist tendencies were emerging in Europe at large, the oral tradition of epic poetry was again prevalent in Serbian literary tradition. Noel Malcolm (1999) notes,
The idea that this folk-poetic tradition supplied the essence of a special type of historical-national self consciousness for the Serbs is, in fact, a product of the 19th century when national borders influenced by prevailing European ideologies took the elements of the Kosovo tradition and transformed them into a national ideology…there is no doubt that there would have been many Serbs who understood these songs as expressing something about the historical origins of their predicament as subjects of the Turks (p. 79).

It was during this time period that Vuk Karadzic, a Serbian linguist known for his reformation of the Serbian language, published the first substantial written collection of epic poetry. The best-known poem from this collection, “The Downfall of the Serbs,” tells a story of the Battle of Kosovo that had been passed down to Karadzic from his father (Judah, 2000, p. 54). This rendition of heroism and defeat stands as one of the most widely accepted accounts of the mythic battle.

When these epic oral poems took written form in the nineteenth century, the Kosovo myth was standardized and “definitive” accounts, such as Vuk Karadzic’s, were widely circulated. Similar to Benedict Anderson’s (1983/1991) attribution of national consciousness to the advent of print-capitalism, the standardization of the Kosovo myth in a popular literary form allowed Kosovo to occupy a primary place in the “imagined community” of Serbian people bound by their historic victimization. Anderson notes that nations are “imagined communities”

… Because members of even the smallest nation will never know each of the other members...yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...

Communities are to be distinguished...by the style in which they are imagined...
regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the
country is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship (p. 6-7).

The Kosovo myth articulates a comradeship based on a common enemy and a
communal sense of historic victimization. In validating the essentialized nature of this
imagined community, stories of the Kosovo battle and defeat reinforced foundational
myths of nation and ethnic identity in an increasingly politicized capacity. Thematically,
these stories are concerned primarily with the martyrdom of the defeated Serbs and their
great courage in the face of the Turkish onslaught.

Serbs still perform their epic poems, but today they are often relegated to folk
festivals. However, it is important to note that during the rise of Serbian nationalism in
the late 1980s and early 1990s, these folk traditions once again moved to the forefront of
Serbian culture. The performance of epic poetry became a vehicle for the politicization
of Serbian ethno-national identity. Judah (2000) cites a particularly poignant incident in
1991. On the eve of the war in Croatia, in the Serbian-dominated Krajina region of
Croatia, an organized folk festival became a riotous political event with the main
attraction being the performance of anti-Croat epic poetry. The crowd left in a euphoric
state, ready for war and convinced of their inevitable, divinely sanctioned victory. The
resurgence of epic poetry also played a prevalent role in bolstering the spirits of the
Bosnian Serb troops in the 1990s. As the war in Bosnia reached a boiling point, old epic
poems were reconstructed to reflect modern battles. Judah (2000) points out that the
Serbian soldiers were singing both old songs, lamenting Turkish domination, as well as
creating new ones praising Radovan Karadzic (the nationalist political leader of the
Bosnian Serbs in the 1990s), and promising a Serb victory over the Bosnian nation (p.
43).

While there are numerous poems centering on the Kosovo mythos dating from as
early as 1402, it is Montenegrin writer Petar Petrovic-Njegos’s 1847 epic poem The
Mountain Wreath that would, as Serbian Historian Olga Zirojevic (1996) notes
“(engrave) the Kosovo oath into the into the collective consciousness of the Serbian
people as a whole… even in those regions which were not subjugated by the Turks” (p.
195). The Mountain Wreath is an epic poem told through a dramatic series of
monologues and dialogues. It is a powerful story of battle peppered with themes of
victimhood (at the hands of the Turks) and the promise of redemption. The distinction
between the Christian “in-group” and the Muslim “out-group” are made clear in the poem
through the assignment of what Richard Weaver has famously referred to as “ultimate
terms” (Weaver, 1953). “God-terms” are used in reference to the in-group, and “devil-
terms” in reference to the out-group. Haig Bosmajian (1973) notes that in defining an
“enemy” it is essential to characterize that enemy as so completely other that “they will
be looked upon as creatures warranting separation, suppression, and even eradication,”
(p. 6). Ultimate terms serve to essentialize the “evil other” as threatening or corrupt in
some way and to define the “noble we” by antithesis, hence they lay the rhetorical
groundwork for polarizing policies rooted in essentialized notions of identity.

The Mountain Wreath focuses on the Ottoman domination of Serbia and
Montenegro. The hallowed ground of Kosovo plays a central role. Njegos’s story
concerns the attempts of his ancestral uncle, the character “Bishop Danilo,” to bring order
to the region, and to assert independence from Ottoman rule. Composed in the style and
meter of the traditional Serbian oral epic poem, *The Mountain Wreath* lays out a dark version of Serb history. The story makes apparent that the primary enemy of the Serb nation is not the Ottoman Turks, but a threat from within from those who have converted to Islam. At Danilo’s insistence, the Serbs in the story first try to reason with the Muslim leaders to bring them peacefully back into the Christian fold. Yet, when this fails the men formulate a more extreme strategy. The final catalyst comes when Danilo and his loyal Serb leaders all have the same dream. In this dream Milos Obilic, the hero of Kosovo, appears flying above them on a white horse. This heroic image charges the Serbs with the Kosovo memory, sparking a massacre in which the Muslims are sacrificed for the purification of the Serbian ancestral land.

Erna Paris (2001) points out that the story Njegos tells was either a conflation of several events, or altogether fabricated as no such event is documented in contemporary sources (p. 360). Still, Judah (2000) notes the influence of this poem should not be underestimated, calling *The Mountain Wreath* the missing link to understanding the way in which Serbian national consciousness was molded and how ideas of national liberation became linked to acts of killing one’s neighbor and burning his village (p. 77). The process of purification through human sacrifice offered in Njegos’s story would be repeated almost to the letter in the 1990s. An analysis of *The Mountain Wreath* makes apparent the central themes of the Kosovo mythos that would later play a crucial role in the racialization and politicization of Serbian ethnic identity.

**A Closer Look at *The Mountain Wreath***

*The Mountain Wreath* opens with a monologue by the character “Bishop Danilo” which foreshadows the Turkish domination of all of Europe.
The Dragon see with seven mantles red,

Wielding two swords and crowned with two crowns;

Great-grandchild of the faithless Turk, with Koran!

Behind him hordes of that accursed breed,

That they may devastate the whole wide earth,

As locusts pestilent lay waste to fields!

Had not the Rock of France its onrush curbed,

Arabia’s flood had surely deluged all! (Njegos, 1970, p. 65).\(^2\)

This segment warns of the Turks’ insatiable hunger for domination and power.

The dragon represents Islamic power while the two heads symbolize the double domination of Europe and Asia. The color red represents a vicious and unholy danger. The images in this segment are not difficult to decipher. The image of “hordes” of an “accursed breed” works as “devil terms” to identify the Turks as subhuman, as does the “locust” metaphor. The reference to Muslims as a “breed” places them on par with dogs, a metaphor that would be repeated in the 1990s to justify the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims from “traditionally” Serb parts of Bosnia. The image of the locust serves a dual purpose. It reduces the Muslims to insects that are at best an annoyance to be exterminated and at worst a threat to the prosperity of the Serbian way of life. Further, the locust metaphor is a biblical allusion to the curse of pestilence, a plight descending on the Christian land of the Serbs and damaging Serb land and culture with its impurities. Muslims are presented as an impending threat that will “lay waste to” and “devastate” not only Serbian culture, but the entire world. Similarly, the Turkish invasion is likened to a

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\(^2\) All of the quotations from *The Mountain Wreath* used in this chapter have been taken from J.W. Wiles 1970 British-English translation. This is the most widely used and accepted English translation of the document to date. Wiles was careful to keep the meter of the epic form and the spirit of the language.
“flood” (a devastation of likely biblical allusion) from “Arabia,” despite the fact that the Turkish people are technically not Arabic.

Further, the assertion that the Muslims are a “godless” hoard, as throng of heathens coming to engulf the godly Europeans, implies that those who are not Christian are unclean – savage in a sense. The Muslims are an impure mass whose tide threatens to taint the enlightened Christian Serbs. The Muslims are repeatedly as a singular mass revoking them of any sort of individual personhood. In contrast, the Serbs are portrayed as “godly” and hence individual, and thereby worthy of sympathy.

As in this segment, Serb-Muslims are referred to as “Turks” throughout The Mountain Wreath in order to emphasize their identity shift following their “traitorous” conversion to Islam (Paris, 2001, p. 360). The idea that world the “great-grandchild of the faithless Turk” would lead world domination implies that upon conversion to Islam, a person becomes a part of a new race of people whose characteristics will be passed-on through generations. The use of the word “Turk” to stand-in for Islam as a whole essentializes all Muslims into a single, easily identified racial category. In this way the term “Turk” has become a sort of historical “devil term” that carries on the force of a racial slur denigrating Muslims throughout the region even today.

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3 The significant rhetorical resonance of the term “Turk” deserves some explanation. The reign of the Ottoman Empire was far-reaching, and sometimes frighteningly violent. Given the barbarism of the Turkish takeover of places like Armenia, and their long-standing animosity with Russia, the “Turk” came to represent the image of the non-Christian savage. Replete with its forced conversions to Islam, the Ottoman Empire is looked at as a period of terror and national humiliation in many Central and Eastern European cultures, and the word “Turk” has become synonymous with “Muslim.” Further, the domination of the Ottoman Empire became a metaphor for the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. To this day, despite Turkey’s secular government and attempts to align with the European community, the residual connotation of the term “Turk” resonates negatively in some contexts and is often used to cast dispersions on Muslim people in Europe. Though the negative implications of this assertion has waxed and waned with the times, it is enjoying a certain renaissance recently as “Turk” has taken on the implication of a terrorist threat inherent in all Muslims.
Initially, the Serbian characters in *The Mountain Wreath* are conflicted about their purpose because many of the Turks they are fighting are Serbs who have been converted to Islam by the invading Ottoman Turks. Yet, lest any soldier waiver in sympathy, *The Mountain Wreath* repeatedly emphasizes the fact that once a person is converted to Islam, he is loyal to his “Turk” brethren and no longer feels a sense of loyalty to his Serbian heritage. The poem goes on to offer evidence of the Muslim threat, describing violent acts against Christians, which prove the converted people’s lack of loyalty. In the following scene, two Serb brothers lament the necessity of killing Muslim Serbs. Their cohort reprimands them for their sympathies, reminding the brothers that the Muslims are savage in nature and loyal only to one another:

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But err thou not, nor e’er be thou deceived:
If thou into their hands should ever fall,
They would upon the instant take thy head;
Or, holding thee in life, would bind thee fast,
And make great sport of torturing thee!
Raven plucks not eye from Raven,
And Turk is ever brother unto Turk;
Strike while thou hast arm to strike,
And tears shed not in empty lamentation.
Upon the Devil’s road have all set out,
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In this segment, the Muslims are presented as savage creatures who “make sport” out of torture (an interesting irony considering it was the Serbs who seemed to make
sport of torturing the Muslims in the 1990s). This image presents Muslims as a threat not only to the Serbian/Christian way of life as in the previous segments, but also individualizes that threat by highlighting the harm that these Turks will render on the body of the Christian individual. The Muslims are then compared to Ravens, birds that have a biblical association with evil. This metaphor both emphasizes the innately evil nature of the Muslims, highlighting the pure and godly nature of the Serbs and again dehumanizes the Muslims.

Further, this segment renders converted Muslims of Serbian ethnicity completely other to the Serbs in the same sense as those born Turkish. Further, by labeling the converts “Turks,” this segment severs any ties the Christian Serbs may feel to the converted people. By likening those who have converted to those who have taken the “Devil’s road” and by proclaiming Islam to be a “false religion,” this segment de-legitimizes the Islamic faith. Additionally, this assertion fuses religion and ethnic affiliation through the implication that upon conversion one becomes a Turk and is no longer a Serb. The implication is that once one has converted to Islam that person is completely other and hence a threat to Serbian culture and moreover to Serbian being. In this sense, the segment suggests that Muslims will be loyal to their religious affiliation and should not be spared out of a false sense of brotherly bond.

This theme of innate disloyalty inherent in conversion to Islam became the impetus for the murder of many Bosnian Muslims in the 1990s. Muslims were often portrayed as nationless traitors aligned with the Turks. This type of rhetoric stems from a close connection between national identity and religious affiliation. While Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes have long had established and mutually recognized ethnic identities
intertwining national identity with religion (so that Croat & Slovene implied Catholic, and Serb implied Orthodox), Bosnia’s identity was a more difficult question. Bosnia was a religiously mixed state, nullifying the comfortably amalgamated label of nation/religion that had become accepted in the region. Bosnians simply do not fit neatly into ethnoracial categories. In the 1981 census, 20-25% of the population in Bosnia identified themselves as “Yugoslav” instead of providing an ethnic or national identity; and 15.3% of marriages identified themselves as “mixed” (Weitz, 2003, p. 203). In the urban centers, 30% of marriages were “mixed” (Malcolm, 1994, p. 222). Further, because Bosnian Muslims (the narrow majority in the state) were largely viewed as Christians who had been subjected to Turkish conversion, the pan-Slavic nationalist tendency was to assert that Bosnian Muslims were merely wayward Serbs or Croats, descendants of those who had been converted, and who now needed to be brought back into the fold. From this perspective, Bosnian national identity was not natural because it was not based on a historical lineage, as were the identities of Croats and Serbs (Weitz, 2003). Muslims were seen as, at best, “wayward” and, at worst, as a sort of evil threatening other to be done away with.

Other sections of the text offer further evidence for the essentially dangerous and foreign nature of the converted Muslims. In the following passage, for example, two Serbian brothers talk about the smell of the freshly converted Muslims with whom they have recently met for peace talks.

(Serdar Yanko)

How these Renegades do smell!

Rogan! Hast thou mark’d it well?
(Knez Yanko)

How should I fail to mark it!
When, by my luck, I have to sit amongst them,
Then ever with both hands my nose I hold:
I sure should vomit if I did not so!
I sleep o’ nights right out upon the edge;
For close to them I ne’er could live till morn.
Thou seest now how far away they are,
Yet even here their odours vile we smell-
I’ faith, each one is a reeking infidel! (Njegos, 1970, p. 137-8).

The images in this segment further dehumanize the Muslims, and separate the “good Christian” from the “evil infidel.” This differentiation is presented as obvious through the very scent of the “infidel” and borne out by his behavior. Turks are proclaimed to smell different from the clean and godly Serb. The smell of the Turk makes it impossible to live among them. References to their noxious odor once again collectivizes the Turks and creates a sub-human enemy who poses a threat to the very way of life of the Serb heroes depicted in the story. Dehumanizing images are common in rhetoric that seeks to create a clear enemy, or to justify hatred of an out-group. This type of rhetoric is similar to the Nazi implications that Jews were more animal-like, often having horns. Nazi rhetoric further referred to Jews as vermin, rats and parasites. Animalistic images of the Turks are prevalent throughout The Mountain Wreath. Many of the same images would emerge in the nationalist discourses that sought to racialize Serbian ethnic identity in the 1980s and 1990s. Prominent Serbian intellectuals like
Biljana Plavsic and Vojislav Seslj often referred to Muslims as filthy dogs, and the inhumane conditions in which many Muslims were forced to live during the war only reinforced that image in the minds of many Serbs.

*The Mountain Wreath* further denigrates the Muslim “other” through caustic critique of Muslim cultural practices. As the protagonists are intermittently exposed to the “godless” cultural practices of the “Turks” and see their compatriots fall prey to the savage violence of these disloyal countrymen, the threat becomes more present and the subject position of victim is further ingrained. Upon observing a Muslim wedding at which several of the guests appear to be Serbian, several Serbian men comment in disgust:

*(Knez Yanko)*

What a diabolic wedding,

To have no blessing from the church,

And copulate like any cattle!

*(Serdar Yanko)*

‘Mongst them there is no nuptial crowning,

They make only a kind of contract,

As if they simply hired a cow;

Within the house no partner is the wife,

They hold her like a slave for selling,

And they tell you: Woman is for man;

As some sweet fruit or like roast lamb;

While such she be, let her keep safe at home;
Be she not so, then throw her out of doors!

(Knez Rogan)

In God’s great name, oh! What a breed of dogs!
How drunk with evil and iniquity!
Where comes the Turk, there law doth cease to be;
His heart’s own lust – that is his only law,
What he desireth not is writ not in the Koran! (Njegos, 1970, p. 163).

This segment highlights the “godless” nature of Muslim cultural practices to distinguish the Christian in-group from the Muslim out-group. This segment offers animalistic images of Muslim marriages as it portrays Muslims as ignorant creatures who copulate like “cattle.” This image is justified by the implication that, like animals, Muslims have “no blessing from the church.” Just as in this segment, the nationalist rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s often referred to Muslims as dogs. Further, much like the rhetoric of the old American South that placed white women on a pedestal to be protected and treasured as pure, this segment implies that, in Serb culture, women are regarded as “jewels” to be protected and respected. There are references to “nuptial crowning” and the implication that marriage is a partnership in Serb culture whereas marriage is a form of slavery or property ownership in Muslim culture. Similarly, images of women as oppressed and disrespected within Muslim culture were often recycled in modern discourses. The contentions that Muslim women are treated like caged animals and are disrespected and regarded as property by Muslim men were propagated by Serbian

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4 This assertion is not born out by the gender relations in the Balkan region at large where male machismo and female subordination is evident in everyday interactions particularly among Serbs.
nationalist rhetoric as justification for “liberating” Muslim women by exterminating the men in many communities.

The last section of this segment associates Turks with fundamentalism by proclaiming that they are loyal only to the Koran and not to the laws of god or man. Muslims are referred to as “drunk” with evil, and as lustful. This again implies that women should be protected from Muslim men, whose lusts are dangerous to the “pure” Christian women. This type of rhetoric marks the Serb women as pure while the Muslims are the sadistic, inferior and dangerous race that is waiting to taint and defile the pure Serb race. This implication sets Muslims apart from Serbs through the inference that Muslims cannot be trusted to follow the laws of a “civil” society and hence must be separated from Christians for the good of civilization. When the racialization process would rear its head again in the 1990s through the discourses of prominent Serb intellectuals and politicians, this “purity concept” would again come into play. Geneticist and politician Biljana Plavsic asserted that the Muslims were from racially inferior stock that had been genetically degenerated for hundreds of years, further implying that this degenerate racial stock could taint and harm the pure qualities of the Serbian race.

The alleged Muslim disregard for women in conjunction with the assertion that Bosnian Muslims were (a depraved breed of) fundamentalist danger further presented Muslims as an impending threat to Serb women. Peter Mass, (1997) a foreign correspondent for several prominent British and American newspapers, was in the Balkans from 1983 – 1995. He recounts an encounter he had with a Bosnian Serb family who was taking shelter in Banja Luka. This family was deeply affected by the war and was anxious to return to their village that had been “cleansed” of Muslims early in the
fighting. When Mass asked the woman why the Muslims in her village had been forced out, she replied,

Because they were planning to take over the village…The names of Serb women had been split into harems for the Muslim men…Their bible permits them to have harems and they were planning to add Serb women to their harems after they had killed our men” (p. 113 – 4).

While, in truth, by 1980 many Muslims in Yugoslavia were only nominally religious in their beliefs and practices, these types of centuries old literary images were often used to conjure-up “memories” of Muslims as a Turkish fundamentalist danger, and hence a threat to be eradicated. Malcolm (1994) notes that talk of a “fundamentalist threat” in Bosnia was particularly inappropriate as the Bosnian Muslims were, at that point, “among the most secularized Muslim populations in the world” (p. 221). In the secular environment of the post WWII era, primarily elderly people attended worship services for each of the three main religions. In fact, Udovicki and Stitkovac (2000) point out a saying that was common in the Muslim community, “There’ll be time to go to mosque when you get old” (p. 177).

Refugee stories from Bosniaks who were given safe-haven in Pakistan offer further evidence of the truly secular nature of Bosnia’s Muslims. Feeling a sense of solidarity with Bosnia’s Muslim community, Pakistan offered asylum to fleeing Bosniaks. Yet, once there, both the Bosniaks and the Pakistanis got quite a shock. Mertus et al. (1997) note, “dressed in short shorts and t-shirts the secular Bosnians could not fit into traditional Islamic Pakistan.” Mutually frustrated and in a culturally awkward situation, the Bosnians had neither a chance nor a desire to assimilate. They were
“tucked away” out-of-sight and away from the general population in a “Hajji complex” until a more suitable host nation was found for these shockingly irreverent “Muslims” (Mertus, et al., 1997, p. 28). While small scale attempts at fundamental agitation were present in Bosnia in the 1980s, this

Could have had little effect on a population of 2 million Muslims, the absolute majority of who did not think of themselves as religious believers and only followed some practices of Islam as a matter of culture and tradition. (Malcolm, 1994, p. 222)

The Serbian nationalist practice of presenting Muslims as a fundamental threat born out by historical record highlights Zelizer’s (1995) concept of “retrospective normalization” in which historical events are rearranged in order to allow actions in the present to seem as if they have been justified by a historical chain of events. The 1980s nationalist rhetoric retrospectively normalized violence against Bosnian Muslims through the historicization and politicization of literary images such as those found in Njegos’s poem. In the 1986 SANU Memorandum, as well as in Belgrade’s main newspaper Politika, the essential nature of the Muslim threat was retrospectively normalized through the language used to talk about current events. For example, with regard to the Serbian farmer, Djordje Martinovic, who had allegedly been attacked by a gang of his Muslim neighbors, both the Memorandum and Politika used the phrase “reminiscent of the darkest days of Turkish impalement” to describe the attack. “The Martinovic Case,” as the incident would come to be called, was hailed repeatedly to prove the aggressive intent of Muslims against Serbs, and was used by Serbian nationalists as evidence justifying the need for a Greater Serbia where Serbs would be safe from such attacks from Turks.
Intensifying the sense of urgency behind the pursuit of a Greater Serbia, widely distributed pamphlets, films (T.V. & cinematic – such as “Genocide Against the Serbs in Krajina”) and posters (with such slogans as “Only Unity Saves the Serbs”) proclaimed that great acts of cruelty awaited the Serbs unless they went on the offensive and launched a preemptive attack with the end goal of uniting “Greater Serbia.” One such brochure claimed that “‘Serb skulls have been halved, brains have been split, bowels have been torn out,’ and it adds that Islamic warriors made necklaces out of the eyes and ears of dead Serbs” (Maas, 1997, p. 88). This type of melodramatic propaganda was often supported by the falsified news stories that dominated the Serbian press during the late 1980s and 1990s. In conjunction with the rhetoric of Serbian cultural elites, these images provoked intense fear among the Serbs who came to see Serbian acts of aggression against the Muslims as protective.

Another aspect of The Mountain Wreath that became a central foundation for Serbian ethno-political identity is the mytho-historic claim to Kosovo as the land where Serbian blood was shed. Robert James Branham (2000) observes that the “nation is a social construction, rather than a geographic or demographic entity…[and] to identify oneself as a member of a nation is to place oneself within a ‘people’ mythically connected by blood, belief, custom or heritage” (p. 16). The bond between blood and soil is certainly an important aspect of Serbian ethno-national identity as it is often used as proof of entitlement to land throughout the region. A Serb mourning the destruction of Kosovo highlights the mythic connection of blood and soil in the following passage:

O Land, thou art accurst, and fallest all to ruin!…

My Land, I see thee delug’d in our blood,
Now thou art nothing more in very truth
Than heaps of bones and mouldering tombs,
Whereon our youth, resolv’d and without fear,
Holds solemn festival with War and Death!
O Kossovo, Thou Field of ever tragic name,
No heavier doom had Sodom in her flame! (Njegos, 1970, p. 123).

This section laments the loss at Kosovo Polje through the politicization of the bodies that lie there. In highlighting the tragedy of Kosovo, this passage enforces the image of Serbian subjugation and instantiates the Serbs as historical victims. The choice to capitalize “Land” speaks to the particular reverence of Kosovo in Serbian culture. The biblical allusion to Sodom calls to mind a “fouling” of sacred land. This allusion draws further distinction between the Christian and the “infidel” by attributing responsibility for the “deluge of blood” and “heaps of bones and mouldering tombs” to the entire Islamic tradition.

The metaphoric link of blood to soil is a common theme in the propagation of a racialized ethno-political Serb identity. The symbolic significance of dead bodies and how they are used to propagate popular myths play a part in reordering meaningful worlds (Verdery, 1999). The link between blood and soil would later be the impetus for demands for a Greater Serbia to include Kosovo and to expand into the territories of Croatia and Bosnia. As Serbian nationalist and academic Vuk Draskovic succinctly states, “Serbia is wherever there are Serbian graves” (Verdery, 1999, p. 98). With this statement Draskovic implies that because it was “faithful” Serb blood that had been shed
in defense of the Balkan region that the blood of the fallen Serb “heroes” had eternally marked the territory for the Serbs.

In one of the final scenes of the *The Mountain Wreath*, the heroes describe the victory they have just achieved by driving these converts away from Serb soil. Toward the end of the poem, the promise of redemption for the faithful comes into play. This scene celebrates violence against Muslims in a fashion hauntingly similar to the way that some towns would later be “cleansed” in the 1990s (Weitz, 2003, p. 194).

And servants three of thine – most trusty three –

With Borilovitch-Vuk, the falcon hearted,

Did last night fall a-fighting with the Turks.

All those who heard ran fast unto our help;

As quick as water fighters ran together;

Though broad enough Cetinje’s Plain,

No single eye, no tongue of Turk,

Escap’d to tell his tale another day!

We put them all unto the sword,

All those who would not be baptiz’d;

But who paid homage to the holy child

Were all baptiz’d with the sign of the Christian Cross,

And as brother each was hailed and greeted.

We put fire to the Turkish houses,

That there might be nor stick nor trace

Of these true servants of the Devil!
From Cetinje to Tcheklitche we hied,
There in full flight the Turks espied;
A certain number were by us mow’d down,
And all of their houses set ablaze;
Of all their mosques both great and small
We left but one accursed heap,
For passing folk to cast their glance of scorn. (Njegos, 1970, p. 209).

This segment proclaims, “all those who heard ran fast unto our help; As quick as water fighters ran together.” Hence, through the unity of the loyal Serb brethren, they were able to defeat the enemy. Through this reverent reference to the power of unity to defeat evil, this segment calls to the Serb people to unite to fight the Turkish enemy. This call to unity became a central aspect of Slobodan Milosevic’s rhetoric in the 1980’s and 1990s, as unity would become the rallying cry of necessity under the “dangers” faced by the Serb people in modern times. Milosevic blamed disunity for all the ills that had befallen the Serbs throughout history and cited unity as the only way for Serbs to rise to their rightful place in history.

Additionally in this segment of The Mountain Wreath, the delight these characters take in driving the converted from Serbian soil posits the possibility of making the “fouled” land “pure” again by “cleansing” the region of infidels. The term “cleansing” as a euphemism for removing Turks makes a repeated appearance throughout the text, as does the blatant assertion that Turks are other to the Serbs. Once these Turks are made completely other and their threat is obvious, the protagonists are relieved from the moral obligation associated with committing atrocities against them. In this vein, Julie Mertus
(1999) notes, “Once we see ourselves as victims, we can clearly identify an enemy. Steeped in our own victimhood, we no longer feel bound by moral considerations in becoming perpetrators” (p.1).

While it would be far too simplistic to draw a direct causal line from Njegos’s adoration of the burning mosques to the violence against Bosniaks in the 1990s, the significant impact of a literary tradition highlighting themes of violence against Muslims as admirable must not be discounted. Stories encompassing the Kosovo myth played a crucial role in normalizing the violence against Bosnian Muslims in the 1980s and 1990s. During the recent wars, both Croats and Serbs claimed a historical right to parts of Bosnia, with little regard for the claims of Bosnian Muslims. Serb nationalists no longer entertained the idea of conversion as a way of dealing with Muslims, opting instead for “ethnic cleansing” to reclaim the territories that had been “historically” Serb. Muslims, by their very being, came to be seen as a threat to the Serbian future and it required the full power of the state and its security forces to remove them (Weitz, 2003, p. 204).

*The Mountain Wreath* highlights several main themes that were re-invigorated through the ethno-political rhetoric of the 1980s. The poem portrays the Serbs as history’s victims and enforces the ideal of Serbs as under threat by Islam in such a way that the mythos enacted by the poem would be called upon in a more present fashion, and used to invoke a sense of ancient duty for modern action. *The Mountain Wreath* cements the centrality of the Kosovo myth to the identification with the imagined Serbian community. It essentializes both Serb and Muslim identity and places them in diametric opposition. Modern nationalistic discourses highlighted these essentialized subjectivities
as immutable realities borne out by a series of historical assaults on the Serbs from a variety of enemies.

*The Mountain Wreath* is still celebrated as one of the premier Serbian literary achievements. Njegos is held in Serbia as a literary figure as esteemed as Shakespeare in English literature (Popovic, 1970), and *The Mountain Wreath* has been memorized by Serbian school children from the 19th century onward. In fact, in 1904, on the 515th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, Gavorilo Princip assassinated the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand sparking WWI in an act consciously imitating Milos Obilic. It is said that Princip knew *The Mountain Wreath* by heart. Elsewhere such literature would likely have been the subject of great debate and critique due to its lack of cultural sensitivity, yet in Serbia, *The Mountain Wreath* and other such stories are still shaping the worldview of Serbian school children (Judah, 2000, p.78). Although *The Mountain Wreath* is read in the spirit of great literature, its treatment of Muslims and themes of Serbian victimization at the hands of the Turks highlight foundational myths of Serbian culture. The negative images of Muslims presented in the poem have been integrated into the common discursive lexicon throughout the region. Yet, the politicization of the Kosovo myth is not the “timeless tradition” that nationalist discourses seek to imply. The re-invigoration of the divisive aspects of the Kosovo mythos was the result of the deliberate agenda of Serbian intellectuals and cultural elites that began in force in the 1980s.

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5 Curious as to whether this widely believed contention was an exaggeration, I asked in the course of my interviews with Serb nationals living both within and outside of Serbia whether each person had read Njegos’s *The Mountain Wreath* as students, and whether they had been asked to memorize it. Every one of them who had attended Serbian schools answered both questions with a resounding affirmative.
The Kosovo Mythos Re-politicized

The first quarter of the twentieth century saw a new wave of literature centered on the Kosovo mythos. As the century progressed, the epic poem as a literary form remerged in Serbian literature. The recycling of this traditional form made way for a “war-like propaganda folklore” that embodied a teleological “presentation of war under the guise of eternity” by extrapolating present political and economic conflicts from mythic historical narratives (Colovic, 1994, p. 96). The use of a traditional literary form to politicize Serbian identity underscores the tendency of Serbian nationalist rhetoric toward a teleological view of history. MacDonald (2002) points out that a teleological understanding of history proved to be of central importance for Serbian nationalists leading up to the wars of the 1990s. From this perspective, the present-day wars fought by the Serbs could be viewed as a continuation of former ones, while today’s leaders are imbued with ancestral authority.

In this sense, Katherine Verdery (1999) refers to nationalism as a sort of ancestor worship in which national heroes define the nation as a noble lineage (p. 41). She further notes that different temporal and ancestral conceptions accompany differences in how human agency is understood and enacted. When history is viewed from the perspective of a shallow time line, with emphasis on family history reaching back several generations, a strong sense of individual agency results, as in the United States. Conversely, a time line viewed from the perspective of a deep past with a collective descent from an “eponymous ancestor,” favors a politically drawn-out, and collective sense of agency, as is evident in the emergent nationalist rhetoric in Serbia (p. 117-20).
The 1980s saw a major resurgence in teleological Kosovo references in the interest of the nationalist agenda. At the time, the Battle of Kosovo was hardly a blip on the radar of a popular consciousness that had become, at least publicly, largely pan-Slavic. Yet public sentiment changed as the Kosovo pendulum began to swing from literary mythos to politically charged impetus for a Serbian ethno-political identity rooted in victimhood. The popular and politically active Serbian novelist, Dobrica Cosic, is a prime example. Cosic was “one of the first Serb intellectuals to travel the road from communist – and a high-ranking one at that – to extreme nationalist” (Weitz, 2003, p. 199). Cosic, who would come to be known in the Milosevic years as the “father of the nation” was one of the first cultural elites to raise the nationalist question with regard to Kosovo in 1968. He hailed the Kosovo mythos as he disavowed any discussion of promoting Yugoslavia’s Muslims to the status of a nation as dangerous and senseless. He further warned of separatist tendencies of the Muslims in Kosovo and Bosnia.

Cosic propagated pan-Slavic history as a series of seamless events in which the Serbs were consistently victimized. He spoke of the “Serbian ‘Calvary, humiliation, and exodus’ words that conjured up biblical stories but also the promise of ultimate redemption following great sacrifices” (Weitz, 2003, p. 199). Despite being dismissed from Tito’s central committee for inciting nationalism, Cosic remained active in the political scene, gaining the support of reform-minded intellectuals.

While exiled from influential political circles, the ethno-political bent of Cosic’s novels went largely under the radar of the broader public. Yet, Cosic’s works still struck a chord in the hearts of some of his readers. Cosic gathered the loose strands of Serbian identity and reconnected them with the old ideals of the Serbian nation. The main
character of his novels was often a peasant, tied to the (Serbian) soil, and determined to fight and die for his land rather than live in a position of domination (Paris, 2001, p. 352). Cosic’s first novel, *A Time of Death*, offers a version of Serbia’s position in WWI. The novel shows Serbia as a victim betrayed by all its allies and left alone to withstand the attacks of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian armies as well as of the Vatican itself (Ramet, 2002, p. 155).

Cosic’s literary career had long fused writing and politics, but he did not become a major political player until Tito’s death after which he launched an aggressive campaign to reintroduce the Kosovo mythos back into the mainstream of Serbian political thought (Paris, 2001). In the early 1980s, Cosic was responsible for motivating a small group of Kosovo’s Serbs to demand government action regarding the condition of the Serbs in Kosovo. The group had little success at first, but after three years and three petitions, the group succeeded in obtaining the signatures of 50,000 people.

In 1983, Cosic began bringing intellectuals together for Monday meetings at *Klub Knjizevnika* (The Writer’s Club) to discuss the future of Serbia within Yugoslavia. *Klub Knjizevnika* soon became a school of Serbian nationalism regularly visited by most of the people who would later figure prominently in Milosevic’s government. An active member of *Klub Knjizevnika*, Vojislav Seslj, who later emerged as the leader of Serbia’s most extreme nationalist party, called Cosic a “role model for all of us younger dissidents” (Judah, 2000, p. 157). From 1983 to 1985, the group focused on two things, delegitimating the pan-Slavic values of Tito’s time and propagating a politicized nationalistic Serbian romanticism. The main themes of the meetings were most often the oppression of the Serbs in Kosovo, the economic exploitation of the Serbs by the
Catholic Slovenes and Croats who were said to hold a genocidal plan for the Serbs, and the alleged threat of fundamentalist Bosnian Muslims. The image of Bosnian Muslims as faithless “Turks” whose loyalty was questionable at best was emphasized. The main mouthpiece of the group, a weekly magazine called *Knjizevne novine*, was edited by Milorad Vucelic, later the head of Serbian television under Milosevic. The magazine focused on the endangering of the Serbian nation from all sides. Its sophisticated style and prominent intellectual contributors gave the magazine an air of legitimacy.

In 1984, while talking about the “burdens of the past and the challenges of the future,” Cosic demanded that Serbian intellectuals take a stand on “societal and national issues” (Milosavljevic, 2000, p. 276). On May 23rd, 1985, Cosic called together a select group of intellectuals with the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) to discuss various national and social problems. At this now infamous session of the SANU Assembly, the decision was made to draft the document that would come to be known as the SANU Memorandum. Surprisingly, although Cosic’s ethno-political motivation and nationalist ideology are often cited as major contributing factors to the document, he was not officially one of the sixteen SANU members chosen to draft the Memorandum.

Analyzed in detail in the next chapter, the SANU Memorandum posited the Serbian economic, political and social position within Yugoslavia as intentionally subjugated and asserted this subjugated status through a teleological telling of history thematically centered on the Kosovo mythos.

The teleological resurgence of the Kosovo mythos culminated in the massive 1989 public commemoration of the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Olga Zirojevic (1996) points out that three times as many people as in any previous
commemoration years on record attended the commemoration events in 1989. The main celebration in Kosovo swelled to 300,000 people in 1989, including as many as 7,000 immigrant Serbs from the USA and Canada, as opposed to just 100,000 people in 1939. At smaller celebrations in places like Knin and Dalmatia there were as many as 100,000 people in attendance in 1989 as opposed to just 10,000 in 1939. In all, Zirojevic (1996) notes that the commemoration events in 1989 were attended by a total of two million people, and were strategically televised to include those who could not attend personally. Zirojevic further notes that the distinctly political character of the Kosovo myth is markedly more evident in speeches delivered during the 1989 commemoration events. While the speeches delivered in 1939 (also a major commemoration year) were composed mainly of historical quotations, placing the battle in a distant historical past, the 1989 speeches were rooted “in the context of political idiom of the more recent post-World War II history of Yugoslavia” and centered on the theme of Kosovo as “the heart of Serbia” (p.207). The 1989 commemoration worked to evoke a mythic Serbian identity through an amalgamation of history and the present. The broader relevance of this event will be treated more fully in a later chapter.

A Few Closing Remarks

This chapter’s analysis of the emergence of the Kosovo myth as central to Serbian national consciousness contextualizes the prevalent use of the Kosovo mythos in the Serbian nationalist discourses that will be presented for analysis in the ensuing chapters. The Kosovo mythos is an important foundational aspect of Serb ethnic identity. Just as myths serve to shape a person’s understanding of self, so does the Kosovo myth shape the Serbian view of “Serbness” in that the themes offered present a point of communion for
those invested in the “imagined community.” Reasserting history through a teleological application of the dominant themes of the Kosovo mythos, Serbian nationalist rhetoric has sought to racialize Serbian ethnic identity. By positioning Serbs as victims deliberately singled-out throughout history and as uniquely alone in their victimization, nationalist rhetoric positioned Serbian identity as essential and immutable, thereby racializing that identity.

Literary treatments of the Kosovo myth provided narratives through which Serbian people could identify themselves and their position in society as well as the position of their culture in a broader global context. The politicization of the Kosovo myth began with common literary themes as “starting points” to create a point of communion through a shared sense of victimization. Nationalist rhetoric recycled the same themes of victimhood, redemption and threat that are evident in such prominent literary texts as *The Mountain Wreath*. These themes had circulated in Serbian culture for centuries, reinforced through literary texts, but were strategically politicized for a nationalist agenda in the 1980s.

*The Mountain Wreath* provides useful insight into the genesis of themes of historic victimhood, the promise of redemption and the eternal threat of the Muslim “other.” As *The Mountain Wreath* shows, the Kosovo mythos is predicated on the inclusive construction of Serbian identity as history’s victims, and on Muslims as the fundamentally threatening “other.” The mythos also encompasses the idea of a promised redemption for the suffering inflicted on the Serbs throughout history. When this mythos was de-politicized in the Tito years, the theme of victimhood was portrayed as perseverance under hard conditions, and the idea of redemption was manifest in the
independent state of Yugoslavia as a united pan-Slavic nation free from foreign
domination. The literary texts encompassing the mythos were contextualized as mythic
history, important to literature, but not at the forefront of political thought. Yet the
nationalist discourses of the 1980s changed this united interpretation of the Kosovo myth
to reflect a purely Serbian agenda.

Hailing the Kosovo mythos, the early nationalist rhetoric of prominent
intellectuals like Dobrica Cosic equated modern Bosnian Muslims with the mythic
historic Turkish threat. This primed the public for the normalization of violence against
the Bosnian Muslims through a process of dehumanization that set the Bosnian Muslims
apart as “other” with a vehemence not unlike the Nazi campaign to dehumanize the Jews.
Most nefariously, in the midst of the conflict, Serb nationalists ordered Bosnian Muslims
to mark their homes with white sheets for easy identification, so that the threatening
“other” could be easily identified for removal. Further, in some regions, Muslims were
ordered to wear white armbands, reminiscent of the yellow star the Nazis forced the Jews
to wear. Like the Nazis, Serb nationalists radically oversimplified issues of identity,
obliterating the complications of class, locality, mixed marriage, and religious conversion
and reducing all Muslims to an ultimate “biological” category from which there was no

The next chapter examines the ways in which the Kosovo myth was politicized
through an analysis of the 1986 SANU Memorandum. The Memorandum served as the
basis for much of the nationalist rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s and was the guiding
document for Slobodan Milosevic (Sell, 2002; Silber & Little, 1996; Judah, 2000). An
examination of the SANU Memorandum allows for a deeper understanding of the ways
in which the Kosovo mythos was politicized in the interest of creating a politicized ethno-racial Serbian identity steeped in historic victimization.
CHAPTER FOUR

Intellectual Authority:

The cultural elite and the racialization of Serbian ethno-national identity

“Lying is an aspect of our patriotism and confirmation of our innate intelligence. We lie in a creative, imaginative and inventive way.”

~~ Dobrica Cosic, Serbian novelist, academician, and honorary “Father of the Nation”

Serbian intellectuals and cultural elites played a prominent role in initializing the extreme nationalist mindset that increasingly polarized Yugoslavia throughout the 1980s. Even before Slobodan Milosevic seized the opportune moment at his initial 1987 appearance in Kosovo, venomous nationalism was gaining ground in elite circles (Weitz, 2003, p. 195). Capitalizing on their positions of privilege and on implied intellectual authority, Serbian academics and cultural elites engaged in a sort of cultural pedagogy. Their rhetoric hailed the Serbian “people” (McGee, 1975; Charland, 1987), constituting Serbs and “Serbness” as definite categories with historical, racial and political boundaries. Serbian intellectuals educated Serb people as to the “genetic inferiorities” of Bosniaks and to the historic dangers posed by non-Serbs, rhetorically positioning non-Serb subjectivity as that of “other.” This cultural pedagogy was also enacted through the teleological re-telling of history in which the Serbs were constantly threatened by those to be cast out.

Through a determined historical revisionism employing the use of foundational myths, the leading Serbian nationalist intellectuals and cultural elites reinvigorated the
themes of the epic poetry of the 19th century throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Their rhetoric invoked the centuries-old literary tradition that centered on the Kosovo myth as the focal point of Serbian identity, placing the defeat of the Serbs at Kosovo Polje as the beginning of the historic subjugation of the Serbian people. In pining for a mythic past, this rhetoric bound the imagined Serb community through a simulacra of an authentic Serbian history in which the Serbs were an eternally suffering people, entitled to an emerging glory promised to them at the battle of Kosovo. The WWII Ustashe atrocities against the Serbs offered further evidence of the historic subjugation that had culminated in the economic and social disadvantage of Serbia within Tito’s Yugoslavia. As such, the ethno-religious identities that had faded in importance during Tito’s rule were reinvigorated as primarily political identities. Although undercurrents of this ideological shift were evident in elite circles in the early 1980s, it was a single document, published in 1986, that has come to represent the renaissance of Serbian nationalism in common culture.

In 1986, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (SANU) drafted a Memorandum maintaining that Serbia’s economic hardship was a result of a deliberate policy pursued by Tito. The Memorandum refers to the Serbs as the “most victimized and oppressed people in Yugoslavia.” Later used as a guiding document for the policies and public declarations of Slobodan Milosevic, the Memorandum warns of an impending Serbian genocide in Kosovo if extreme measures are not taken and concludes that the Serbs’ suffering deserves compensation – “the borders of Serbia must be redrawn so that all Serbs throughout Yugoslavia can live in an expanded Serbia.” In addition to providing the foundation for the nationalist rhetoric that propelled Milosevic’s rise to power, key
points of the Memorandum figured significantly in the rhetoric of such prominent intellectuals-turned-politicians as Vojislav Seslj, Radovan Karadzic and Biljana Plavsic.

The SANU Memorandum’s September 24th, 1986 publication in the Serbian newspaper Vjecernje Novosti is retrospectively the precipitating event that awakened Serbian national consciousness, calling forth a collective subjectivity through narratives of historical subjugation. Maurice Charland (1987) implies that collective identities are constituted through a series of narratives that position the “people” as subjects within a text (p. 138). This resonates with Michael McGee’s (1974) contention that the “people” are constituted through the social and political myths that they accept. As individuals come to identify with the narratives’, they begin willingly to emphasize those characteristics that the narratives value.

Further, the narratives of constitutive rhetorics are teleological, presenting a story with a predetermined but as yet unfinished ending for the constituted subjects to realize. British cultural studies scholar David Bruce MacDonald (2002) points to David Campbell’s theory of “historical teleologies” to understand how certain narratives shape a culture’s view of history. Campbell’s theory allows for the idea that conflict is constructed in the present even as history is used as a resource for the contemporary struggle (p. 133). Hence, through constitutive narratives of Serbian nationalist identity, Yugoslavia comes to be seen as the antagonist standing in the way of the inevitable flow of Serbian history, while the oppressions of the Federation must be overcome so Serbia can regain its rightful place in history. This is the crux of force behind constitutive narratives. They are oriented toward action in that they politicize the identities that they
constitute and charge the constituted subjects with a goal to be attained to complete the story in the prescribed way.

The SANU Memorandum hails the Serbian people through a discourse rooted in mythic narratives that clearly define a “we” and an “other.” The discursive force of the Memorandum to demarcate an “in” group and an “out” group comes from the inherent intellectual authority of its authors. Similar to Thomas Lessl’s (1999) discussion of the “priestly voice” of science, the rhetoric of prominent Serbian intellectuals was afforded cultural capital stemming from the perception of authority implied by their esteemed education and professional knowledge. Lessl (1999) points out that social demarcation is part of the role of the institution of scientific culture. Scientific rhetoric can demark the “we” and the “other.” (p. 147). The narratives of scientific discourse are constitutive in that they employ mythic stories to relay cultural values. The scientific context affords the narratives authenticity, affirming the association between science and intellectual morality. The famous SANU Memorandum is an amalgamation of constitutive discourses incorporating the intellectual authority to legitimize the politicization of Serbian identity as an essential subjectivity centering on the Kosovo mythos and reverberating throughout history.

This chapter critiques the role of Serbian intellectuals and cultural elites in constructing an exclusive and politically charged Serbian identity. As Serbian intellectuals gained political status, their rhetoric fused their implied authority with the Kosovo mythos in an effort to promote and politicize the subjugated position of the Serb people and the immanent threat that was posed by non-Serbs. Serbian philosophy professor Olivera Milosavljevic (2000) notes, “Whenever the government needed
assistance, there were enough active academicians available to proffer expert opinion and scientific verification of the inevitable correctness of the policies implemented” (p. 287). To understand the role of intellectual authority in constitutive discourses of Serbian ethno-national identity, I begin this chapter with an examination of the Memorandum’s central claims, asserting that the dominant mythic themes that emerge in the document were part of a deliberate teleological reordering of historical events. This chapter then dissects several important pieces of the second half of the Memorandum. I offer a close reading of the document in order to assert the Memorandum’s influence on the constitutive discourses offered by prominent Serbian intellectuals.

Finally, I provide an analysis of representative public statements from Vojislav Seslj, Biljana Plavsic and Radovan Karadzic in order to draw critical conclusions regarding the ways in which the Memorandum’s themes were enacted in the public rhetoric of prominent Serbian nationalist intellectuals. Analyzing the SANU Memorandum in conjunction with public statements made by Seslj, Plavsic and Karadzic allows for a critique of the role of Serbian intellectuals in the construction of an essentialized Serb “people.” Hence, this essay allows for a deeper understanding of the effects of accepting a teleological view of history, rooted in a mythos of victimization, on the emergent nationalism and mass violence in the former Yugoslavia.

The SANU Memorandum’s Claims and the Strategies & Tactics of the Academy

The specific narratives highlighted in the SANU Memorandum are typical of the historical narratives employed by Serbian nationalists throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Centering on the repeated betrayal and victimization of the Serbian people, the key narratives fit neatly inside one another, radiating out like circles, one inside the other,
eventually encompassing all of history. The innermost ring represents the most recent
stories of the Serbs’ oppression within the Kosovo province and the threat of an
impending genocide. The next ring of stories focuses on Serb oppression within Tito’s
Yugoslavia. Beyond that there is the Serbian experience in WWII under the Ustashe. The
next layer is comprised of those stories centering on 500 years of Turkish domination
culminating in the nationalist literature of the 19th century. Finally, the largest outer ring
that envelops the entire structure of narratives is the mythic Battle at Kosovo Polje.

When these narratives are strung together, representing an inevitable historical
progression, an overriding teleological narrative emerges, culminating in the promised
redemption of the Serb people. History is presented as if it is a predetermined storyline
that has led to this very moment in time. A sense of historical obligation constitutes the
Serb “people” in the present as they are charged to meet their destiny as characters fated
to fulfill the final act of the predetermined narrative. The Kosovo mythos is the tie that
binds this collection of narratives.

The Kosovo mythos offers a point of communion representing a comradeship
based on a common enemy and a communal sense of historic victimization. It solidifies
its own centrality to the individual’s identification with the imagined Serbian community.
It essentializes both Serb and Muslim identity and places them in diametric opposition.
Modern nationalistic discourses highlighted these essential subjectivities as immutable
realities borne out by a series of historical assaults on the Serbs from a variety of
enemies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Kosovo mythos was grounded in
early literary texts highlighting three major themes that were foundational to Serbian
national identity. These themes included the historic Serbian subjugation, the impending
threat of Muslim fundamentalism and the promise of eventual redemption. While these themes were intentionally de-politicized in the Tito years in the interest of “Brotherhood and Unity,” the SANU Memorandum re-politicized the Kosovo mythos.

To understand the impact of the SANU Memorandum, it is important to understand the way the arguments within the document are structured. The Memorandum is broken into two main sections with enumerated points of discussion in each.¹ The first part of the Memorandum deals with the economic and political system of Yugoslavia and calls for 1) an integrated federalism for the Yugoslav republics, 2) a reassessment of the 1974 Constitution, and 3) a full equality of all Yugoslav peoples. This section of the Memorandum asserts that, “decentralization is leading to the disintegration of Yugoslavia” and it attacks the “various economic policies that had been pursued since the 1960s” (Judah, 2000, p. 158). It places the blame for Serbia’s economic trouble on the federal reforms of 1965, and further blames the Constitution of 1974 for the deepening economic and political crisis in the region after Tito’s death. The authors assert that the 1974 Constitution placed Serbia at an unfair disadvantage by allowing for two autonomous provinces within Serbia, Kosovo (with an Albanian majority) and Vojvodina (with a Hungarian majority). The first half of the Memorandum is encumbered by the dense language of economics and was largely ignored by the broader public. What caught the public’s attention was the xenophobic second half of the Memorandum, which portrays Serbia as the victim of a conspiracy orchestrated by Tito’s communist regime.

The second half of the Memorandum concerns the condition of the Serbs in Kosovo and Croatia. The document accuses Kosovo Albanians of raping Serb women, beating nuns and perpetrating genocide through a deliberate policy of exponential

¹ See Milosavljevic, 2000, p. 282-3
population growth. Further, the second half asserts that over the last twenty years, hundreds of thousands of Serbs have been forced to leave Kosovo (Paris, 2001, p. 354). This section of the Memorandum makes specific recommendations for Serbia’s future. It includes 1) the unveiling of the political crisis, 2) a call for an end to practices of silencing Serbian politicians and intellectuals who question “Serbo-phobic” Yugoslav policies, 3) the defeat of anti-Serb aggressions in Kosovo, 4) the cancellation of the social debt of the Serbian people for their alleged historical guilt of economic privilege between the World Wars, and confirmation of Serbia’s historic contribution to the creation of Yugoslavia, 5) full national and cultural integrity of Serbian people no matter where in the region they reside (call for Greater Serbia), 6) a modern social and national program for the Serbian people that would inspire future generations, 7) open confirmation that the internal organization of the Serbian republic was imposed, 8) increased support for Serbia’s economic and national interests, 9) fundamental reforms in democratic socialism, and 10) open mobilization of the entire intellectual and moral energy of the Serb people in creating a program for its future. (Milosavljevic, 2000, p. 282-3).

The SANU Memorandum capitalizes on the historic victimization of the Serb people. According to the Memorandum, Tito had denied the Serbs the right to economic development and had denied them their own language and knowledge of their cultural history (Milosavljevic, 2000, p. 282-3). It characterizes the Yugoslav state as discriminatory, leaving the Serbs in a politically and economically inferior position and

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2 Yugoslav census data does not support allegations of Albanian population growth, and only one incident of rape by an Albanian against a Serb has been officially reported to date. Further, the assertion that Serbs were forced to flee Kosovo was somewhat of a “false cause” fallacy. Kosovo was (and still is) the least developed, most economically disadvantaged place in Yugoslavia. Many people left Kosovo in search of better lives elsewhere. Serbs were more often able to leave because they had more opportunity and faced less discrimination outside of Kosovo than did the Albanians.
an unequal status on all levels. Further, the Memorandum claims that a historic revisionism has brought about a Federation-wide “Serbo-phobia” that seeks to find its ultimate expression in genocide. It charges that the Serbs in Kosovo have been the targets of this genocide, describing the current situation through a historical lens and describing Kosovo as Serbia’s biggest defeat (Sell, 2002, p. 45). The Memorandum additionally hails the Serb people through the Kosovo narrative as it assumes a common past and charges the people with the task of creating a common future that will fulfill the redemption narrative.

For this analysis, several sections from the second half of the SANU Memorandum have been chosen representing the propagation of the core constitutive narratives of Serb identity. These segments were selected based on their continued thematic use in the public rhetoric of nationalist Serbian politicians, intellectuals and cultural elites throughout the 1980s and 1990s. An analysis of the historical teleologies evident in the mythic discourse of the Memorandum makes clear the way in which the Serbian subjectivity of victimhood and the hatred of the Muslim “other,” which appear as historically immutable facts, have been the product of the current generation of academics and politicians working to create an illusion of inevitable conflict (MacDonald, 2002).

Serbian professor of psychiatry and ethno-nationalism Dusan Kecmanovic (1995) offers five thematic classifications useful in deconstructing the mythic discourses

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3 For English translations of the original Serbian text I used several sources. I first obtained the English translation that had been published by SANU from the Peace Palace Library in The Hague. After choosing selected pieces for analysis, I checked with both an online translation of the Memorandum, and asked my language tutor, Ana Petrovic, to check the translations against the original. While there are slight variations, it seems that SANU’s English translation best captures the original in the spirit of the language. That is the version I refer to throughout this chapter unless otherwise noted.
embedded in the narratives within the SANU Memorandum. These themes systematically recur throughout the Memorandum, illustrating the aspects of the Kosovo mythos that are common throughout the various layers of narratives within the document. The first is the theme of “damage” highlighting how frequently a group has been deprived. The second is the theme of “threat” from both internal and external forces. The third is the theme of “the universal culprit” where a group is targeted as responsible for the ills that have befallen the nation. The fourth theme is that of a “plot” against the group where enemies are located throughout the world. And the fifth is that of “victim and sacrifice” where a group is seen as having made great sacrifices with the promise of an eventual redemption for their trouble. These classifications are especially useful in analyzing the way in which the narratives present in the Memorandum used history to politicize Serbian identity and solidify the historically victimized Serbian “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991).

Much as Kosovo is a “unifying symbol” for Serb culture, Kenneth Burke’s (1941/1973) renowned “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle” offers a discussion of unification devices that can further add to an understanding of the politicization of Serbian national identity. Burke notes that Hitler’s unifying symbols had four important features that we can see in varying degrees in the Serbian nationalist rhetoric: 1) inborn dignity – that we see when the “Serb” is elevated above others in nobility and courage, 2) projection device – that is evident in the scapegoating of Bosnian and Albanian Muslim populations, 3) symbolic rebirth – an important theme in much of the mythos behind the Serbian identity of victimhood and the proposal of redemption, and 4) commercial use – in blaming the former system for the economic ills of the Serbs. Burke further notes that within Hitler’s rhetoric, a great importance was placed on blood as the bond of a people.
As historian Michael Ignatieff (1993) points out, this has also been typical of post
communist governments after the fall of the Soviet Union. Serb nationalist rhetoric relied
on the “bonds of blood” and frequently appropriated the imagery of kinship rooted in
nationalism as a rhetorical foundation for the legitimacy of the politicization of the
Serbian identity of victimhood and for the legitimacy of the quest for a Greater Serbia.
The concepts offered by Kecmanovic, Burke and Ignatieff are each useful in
understanding the constitutive appeal of the narratives offered in the Memorandum. In
light of these thematic elements, the next section of this chapter offers an analysis of the
ways in which the dominant themes of the SANU Memorandum were useful in
politicizing Serb national identity through a teleological view of history that positions
Serbs as historic victims, beginning with the repositioning of the Kosovo mythos as
central to modern Serbian national identity.

**The Memorandum Dissected**

Approaching the Memorandum first from the inner most circle of the co-centric
system of constitutive narratives it contains, the immediate threat to Serbs within Kosovo
figures prominently. References to Kosovo as a central unifying symbol of the Serb
nation in modern times are of central importance to the Memorandum. Narratives
focusing on the centrality of the Kosovo myth to Serbian identity played a crucial part in
the public appeal of the SANU Memorandum, which notes, “Kosovo's fate remains a
vital question for the entire Serbian nation… Kosovo represents one of the most
important points in the central Balkans…” (p. 130). Allusions to the historic Kosovo
defeat were dressed in the tenor of an immediate threat. Referring to Kosovo, the
Memorandum states,
The expulsion of the Serbian people from Kosovo bears dramatic testimony to their historical defeat. In the spring of 1981, open and total war was declared on the Serbian people, which had been carefully prepared for in advance in the various stages of administrative, political and constitutional reform. This open war has been going on for almost five years. It is being waged with a skillful and carefully orchestrated use of a variety of methods and tactics, with the active and not just tacit support of various political centres in Yugoslavia... Moreover, we are still not looking this war in the face, nor are we calling it by its proper name…The Ballists' rebellion in Kosovo and Metohija at the very end of the war, which was organized with the collaboration of Nazi units, was militarily put down in 1944-1945, but as we now see, it was not politically quelled. In its present-day physiognomy, disguised with new content, it is being pursued with greater success and is getting close to final victory. (Memorandum, p. 127).

By referring to the current problems in the Kosovo region as bearing testimony to the “historic defeat” at Kosovo Polje, this segment begins by directly hailing the Kosovo mythos. Tito’s policies on Kosovo had culminated in a graduated allowance of rights for the Albanian population there. Rooted in the Constitution of 1974, and continuing until Tito’s death in 1981, the Kosovar Albanians “experienced unparalleled progress in the fields of science, education and culture” (Mertus, 1999, p. 17). When Tito died, it seemed unlikely that those reforms would move ahead any further. Political unrest among Albanians in Kosovo was reawakened.

The reference in this segment to “the spring of 1981” is an allusion to a student protest in Kosovo that erupted into a political movement. What began as a simple
demonstration by Kosovar-Albanian students in Pristina who were demanding better food service erupted into a month-long mass revolt. The sub-standard conditions of the Albanian students was offered-up by the protesters as a symbolic metaphor for the subjugated status of Albanians in Kosovo, and of Kosovo within Yugoslavia. Thousands of Albanians from throughout Kosovo representing all walks of life took to the streets to demand that Kosovo be given the status of a republic on par with the other Yugoslav republics (Mertus, 1999). This revolt led to an increasingly organized and politicized Albanian community, which received various levels of support from the Yugoslav republics. The politicization of Albanian identity culminated in the political mobilization of Albanians throughout Yugoslavia, all demanding a free Kosovo.

The reference to this incident in the above-cited segment of the Memorandum implies a narrative of modern threat to Serbs in Kosovo. This narrative asserts not only that the Albanians pose a threat to the Serb minority in Kosovo, but also that this threat is the result of a deliberate policy aimed to subjugate the Serbs in the region. In stating that the 1981 revolt had been orchestrated through the “support of various political centers throughout Yugoslavia,” this segment of the Memorandum asserts a “plot” (Kecmanovic, 1995) against the Serbs from the whole of Yugoslavia. The implication that this policy was a deliberate act against the Serbs that had been “carefully prepared for in advance” refers to Tito’s progressive policies toward Kosovo that began with the autonomous status of the Kosovo province within Serbia. As Kosovo occupies a primary place in Serb cultural memory, the autonomous status of Kosovo and the threat of Kosovo becoming an independent republic were easily portrayed as a deliberate attack on Serbs who felt a historic and cultural connection to Kosovo as a sort of “holy land.” The fact
that the Kosovar Albanians are primarily Muslim makes for an easy historical link to the threat of fundamentalism inherent in the 19th century national literature that glorified the Kosovo mythos.

Finally, this segment consistently engages a teleological view of history demonstrating that the “damage” (Kecmanovic, 1995) caused by the long line of injustices against Serbs in Kosovo has lead to the present danger the Serbs face. This segment demonizes the Albanian Muslims by linking the Kosovo mythos to WWII, associating the present-day Albanians with the global devil term “Nazi,” and then by linking WWII to the present. Highlighting the theme of “threat” against the Serbs, the last lines point out that while this Nazi/Albanian fundamentalist threat was put down at the end of WWII, it had only gone underground to regroup. The fundamentalist/Nazi threat to the Serbs is presented with a sense of urgency as it is “getting close to its final victory.” The threat is presented as an inevitable part of history’s progression as it is presented as merely an extension of WWII.

The beginning of the second half of the Memorandum is rife with direct references to Kosovo. Viewing the present situation in Kosovo through a historical lens allows the Memorandum to frame the situation as an immediate threat with the urgency of an impending genocide, while still asserting that this genocide has been in the works for generations.

The physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide of the Serbian population in Kosovo and Mehotija is a worse defeat than any experienced in the liberation wars waged by Serbia from the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 to the uprising of 1941… (Memorandum, p. 128)
The Memorandum uses words like “genocide” to create a panic. “Genocide” is clearly a term used to incite fear and politicize Serb identity in the interest of protecting themselves and the Serb nation against yet another victimization. Through this instantiation of fear, the need to take action to protect oneself seems justified (Mertus, 1999). This segment continues the mentality of historic victimization as it references other historic defeats. References to a “worse defeat” than a list of others allow history to appear to be a seamless string of events with the Serbs as consistent victims. Further, in calling the Serbs’ action in wartime “liberation wars,” Serbs are painted as a people who have the need for war thrust upon them and who only wage war in an effort to redeem themselves and break free from history’s subjugation. Victims are justified in protecting themselves, in waging war in their own defense. Hence, the Kosovo mythos is hailed once again in the exemplification of struggle against great odds in the hope of redemption for the Serb people through these wars of liberation.

Noel Malcolm (1998) points out that it was not only intellectuals that were caught up in polemical disputes about Serbian historical victimhood. Sensational materials advancing constitutive narratives that bound the Serb people through fear of the other were also appearing in the popular press. A dramatic instance of this, mentioned in the Memorandum, is “The Martinovic Case,” which became a national scandal thanks to Belgrade news magazine NIN (p. 338).

On May 1st, 1985, a 56 year-old Serb farmer, Djordje Martinovic, was rushed to the hospital to have a beer bottle removed from his anus. The bottle was broken and his injuries were severe (Malcolm, 1998, p. 338). Martinovic claimed two masked Albanian men who were determined to drive him from the district had attacked him in his field.
The resulting media reports on both sides were rife with wild accusations. The Albanian press claimed Martinovic was injured accidentally while engaged in a bizarre act of masturbation while Serbian reports blamed Muslims for an act of “Turkish impalement” (Judah, 2000, p. 156). While authorities in Kosovo hoped that the story would die out, the Belgrade press continued its sensational campaign for the next two years. The NIN journalist who first reported the story later wrote a book called The Martinovic Case which sold 50,000 copies. Malcolm (1998) points out that the book’s popularity “gives some idea of what a fever-pitch Serbian public opinion had now reached” (p. 338). The Martinovic Case was further cited in the SANU Memorandum as evidence of the impending genocide against the Serbs in Kosovo; describing the attack as “reminiscent of the blackest periods of Turkish impalings” (p. 340). The Martinovic Case became an ideograph (McGee, 1984) for a mytho-historic narrative that portrayed Albanians as brutal, cruel, and inhumane and portrayed Serbs as innocent victims who wished only to tend to their beloved soil.

The direct Kosovo references within the Memorandum reach their crescendo through biblical allusions that place the Serbs on par with the Jews with regard to their historic victimization. In this segment we begin to see the narrative elements of the Serb experience in WWII emerging alongside of the modern Kosovo narrative.

During World War II, more than 60,000 Serbs were expelled from Kosovo and Metohija, but it was after the war that this exodus reached its highest proportions: in the last twenty-odd years, upwards of 200,000 Serbs have been forced to leave. It is not just that the last of the remnants of the Serbian nation are leaving their homes at an unabated rate, but according to all evidence, faced with a physical,
moral and psychological reign of terror, they seem to be preparing for their final exodus. Unless things change radically, in less than ten years' time there will no longer be any Serbs left in Kosovo, and an "ethnically pure" Kosovo, that unambiguously stated goal of the Greater Albanian racists, already outlined in the programmes and actions of the Prizren League of 1878-1881, will be achieved. (Memorandum, p. 129-30).

In this segment the writers are presenting a direct link between the Kosovo mythos and WWII atrocities. The line then extends to modern occurrences, offering historical evidence of an impending threat to the Serb nation. Further, this segment presents Albanians as an immediate physical threat to Serb being. The use of statistical evidence presents the information in such a way as to allow the threat of genocide against the Serbs in Kosovo to seem to be rooted in scientific fact. More importantly, through the biblical allusion to “exodus,” this segment ties the Serbs to the Jews as history’s victims, run out of Egypt, exterminated in Germany and forced to fight for their historic claim to Israel.

Narratives of the Serb condition in WWII had a two-pronged approach for the singular purpose of highlighting the victimization of innocent Serbs. The primary WWII story, to be dealt with later, centers on a Serbian genocide at the hands of the fascist Ustashe. The secondary WWII narratives focus on the historically benevolent relationship between the Serbs and the Jews. These secondary narratives sought to gain world sympathy by playing on the fact that the Serbs had been victims in WWII, just as the Jews had been, and that, like the Jews in Israel, the Serbs were now fighting a fundamental Muslim terror for the historic claim to their ancestral land in Kosovo and
Bosnia. P.J. Cohen (1996a) quotes Serbian author Vuk Draskovic who in his essay “To the Writers of Israel” proclaimed that “‘every foot of Kosovo’ had become ‘Jerusalem,’ and that Serbian and Jewish suffering were indistinguishable and that Serbs were really the ‘thirteenth lost and most unfortunate tribe of Israel.’” (p.116). Serbian nationalist discourses sought to link the Serbs to the Jews both in their victimization in WWII, hence demonizing the Croats, and in their fight against Muslim fundamentalists for their historic claim to the Serbian “holy lands,” hence demonizing Bosniaks and Muslim Kosovar Albanians. The link between Serbian historic subjugation and Jewish historic subjugation made repeated appearances throughout the rhetoric leading up to the war.

To further this connection, a group of prominent Serb intellectuals formed the Serbian-Jewish friendship society in 1988. The project was predicated on the myth of a traditionally friendly Judeo-Serbian relations stemming from the supposed Serb support of the Allied cause in WWII. The aim of the Judeo-Serbian Friendship Project was to parallel the plight of the Jews in WWII to the plight of the Serbs under threat from the Kosovar Albanians. This identification with the Holocaust did, at least initially, lend creditability to the identity of Serbian victimhood both within Serbia and abroad. The fact that Serbia joined the Allied cause only for the last six months of WWII seemed to matter little when evoking the myth of an eternal righteousness validated by fighting against the Nazis. This myth of universal Serbian anti-Nazi resistance would be transformed into history and used against the Croats and as proof positive of the benevolence of the Serbian agenda (Paris, 2001). This wisdom was further used in the 1990s to turn Jewish sympathies away from Bosnian Muslims by reminding the Bosniak sympathetic Jewish faction that the Bosnian Muslims had their own SS force under the notorious Jew hater
“The Grand Mufti” (Cohen, 1996b, p.114). Yet, Cohen (1996a) contends that the WWII Judeo-Serb alliance has been largely exaggerated.

Serbian propaganda has constructed…the concept of an unambiguous and deeply ingrained historical friendship between Serbs and Jews…the history of Serbian-Jewish relations, however, reveals a more complex and sinister picture. (p.64)

Cohen (1996b) offers a fairly detailed history of Jewish/Serbian relations from pre-Ottoman times to WWII. He notes various Jewish expulsions and laws passed to the exclusion of Jewish people in Belgrade specifically, and offers articles from several news agencies to support this contention.

Not only does the Memorandum go to great lengths to connect Kosovo’s Serbs with the Jews of Israel as kindred spirits in the fight against the Fundamentalist threat; after establishing the threat emanating from the Muslim population in Kosovo, the Memorandum uses that momentum to then link this threat to Serbs in the rest of Yugoslavia. The Memorandum details the threat posed to Serbs by Croats. The document refers to the genocide of Serbs by the Croatian Ustashe in WWII, and equates this to the alleged genocide occurring in Kosovo against the Serbs in the present. The Memorandum further asserts that the Serbs in Croatia are facing a danger not known in history except during the time of the Ustashe. Thus, there is sort of a “slippery slope” fallacy here that maintains that Serbia’s subjugation evident in Kosovo is representative of the victimization of Serbs throughout the region.

Kosovo is not the only area in which the Serbian people are feeling the pressure of discrimination… Lika, Kordun, and Banija have remained the least developed

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4 Cohen points out that while Mufti was indeed a notorious Jew hater, Mufti’s SS unit became the only SS unit in history to mutiny in an act of resistance that would come to be known as the “револта на Хорватите.” (Cohen, 1996b, p.115).
parts of Croatia... where the Serbs, as newcomers, members of a minority and second-class citizens, have been very susceptible to assimilation. Indeed, the Serbian population in Croatia has been subjected to a subtle but effective policy of assimilation... Then there is the insistence on the official language, which bears the name of another national group [Croatian], as a personification of national inequality... The integrity of the Serbian nation and its culture throughout Yugoslavia presents itself as the most crucial question of its survival and progress. (Memorandum, p. 130-1).

This segment offers assimilation as evidence of the threat posed to Serbs in Croatia. It puts forth the assumption that those Serbs living in Croatia who have culturally assimilated have been forced to do so, and that this assimilation is in fact a negative turn of events. Further, terms like “inequality,” “discrimination,” and “second-class citizen” instill a sense of subjugation into the Serbian national consciousness. Consequently, as Charland (1987) notes that new collective identities are constituted on the backs of existing identities that have lost their force, the space for a Yugoslav identity is eradicated in favor of the preservation and reinvigoration of national identities. The “damage” to Serb culture and “threat” to Serbs in the present (Kecmanovic, 1995) are particularly highlighted. Further, a plot against the Serbs is implied in that the cultural assimilation of the Serbs in Croatia is indicative of a cultural genocide plotted by the Croats. Assimilation is seen as an eminent threat that infringes upon the survival of the Serbian nation and its culture.

As this segment begins to universalize the threat to the Kosovo Serbs to Serbs living throughout Yugoslavia, the imagination of the Serb community as a nation outside
of geographic boundaries becomes apparent. Here we begin to see that the concept of the Serbian nation, in the rhetoric of Serb nationalists, is not one bound by geography, but is instead one bound by blood, making way for an ancestral conception of national boundaries (Verdery, 1999; Ignatieff, 1993). The blood of the Serbian victims of WWII plays a particularly crucial part in the Memorandum’s construction of the Serbian nation. Narratives equating the present day Croats with Ustashe fascists of the 1940s are particularly important to the modern politicization of Serbian national identity as historically subjugated victim and are highlighted in the following section.

Except for the time under the Independent State of Croatia, the Serbs in Croatia have never before been as jeopardized as they are today. Solution of their national status is a question of overriding political importance. If solutions are not found, the consequences might well be disastrous, not only for Croatia, but for the whole of Yugoslavia. (Memorandum, p. 133).

In this segment, history is used to legitimize the imminent threat posed by the Croatian nationalists in the present. The WWII Ustashe is a sort of “universal culprit” (Kecmanovic, 1995) for Serb suffering and extensive damage done to the Serb nation is highlighted. The Ustashe were easily reinvigorated as an antithetical point of identification for the Serbs serving as a “projection device” (Burke, 1941/1973) for the unification of the blame for Serbian suffering in WWII. This interpretation of the Croatian people as a fundamental Ustashe threat had such a renaissance partly because Tito had allowed the Ustashe atrocities to be whitewashed in an effort to create a unified Yugoslav “brotherhood” and to quell residual nationalist tendencies still festering after WWII. Instead of creating a usable history through which both Serbs and Croats could
come to terms with their violent past, WWII was sanitized in the history books (Judah, 2000). Narratives of WWII focused on Tito’s partisans and their victory over the Nazis. As there was no historical narrative detailing the Ustashe’s WWII atrocities in the collective consciousness of either Serbs or Croats, both sides in the interest in nationalism easily manipulated WWII history in the years before the wars of the 1990s.

Verdery (1999) notes that these “skeletal inhabitants” were the first troops mobilized in the recent Yugoslav wars in the campaign to revise history (p. 99). As scientists discovered remains in various locations, authorities often claimed, with little proof, that these bodies were those of Serbian victims of the Ustashe in WWII. The remains were then re-buried in a ceremony that used revisionist history to stir the cauldron of nationalism. This “orgy of historical revisionism” is justified as rectification of communist censorship regarding WWII and Ustashe activities (Verdery, 1999, p. 113). Svetozar Stojanovic (2003) attributes this lack of historical context to 70 years of communist rule in which

The communist rulers acted as if history (both the events and the story about the events) began with them. They forced this idealized image on the whole society through education and propaganda. Our un-historicization played into the hands of ideologizers. The culprits for it were our better historians too, who quite deliberately left the twentieth century and especially the history of Yugoslavia to official communist historians – in order that they themselves would be left alone to deal with earlier times without any ideological constraints. (p. 169)

Stojanovic blames the Titoist manner of glossing over historical events and painting them in a somewhat forced pan-Slavic light for the easily malleable history that
emerged from the WWII era to become the fodder for nationalist ideologies in the present. This critique of Tito’s policies on historical preservation is especially present in discussions of WWII Ustashe atrocities – specifically with regard to Jasenovac concentration camp. In the late 1980s, when historians and polemicists engaged in one-sided, undocumented revisions of the war dead, much of their venom was focused on the Jasenovac concentration camp (Ramet, 2002, p. 53). Rarely did these Serb revisionists take time to count other nationalities of war dead within the region. What is left out is the fact that many of the first victims of the Ustashe were Serbs of Jewish or Roma descent as well as anti-fascist Croats. For modern Serb nationalists, “Ustashe” became synonymous with “Croat” and the Serbs came to be their sole victims. Other Ustashe victims bore a double insult, as they were then victims of social amnesia, dropped from historical memory to create a version of WWII in which the Serbs were the sole targets of Ustashe aggression.

Through the primary WWII narratives of Serb oppression, Jasenovac became a potent modern symbol of Serbian victimization. For many Serbs, maintaining a high number of Jasenovac deaths was central to their self-identity, as a high number proved that they had suffered a Croat-inspired genocide during WWII, marking Serbs primarily as WWII victims while obscuring their participation in any perpetration of violence. Further, Jasenovac attested to the genocidal tendencies of the Croat nation, and their willingness to annihilate Serbs past and present. This allowed Serb nationalists to support their agenda for the necessity of an ethnically pure Greater Serbia. Milosevic and the Serb nationalists elevated Jasenovac to a myth of such cultural currency that it became a unifying symbol second only to Kosovo Polje (Weitz, 2003, p. 198).
While it is important to note that the Croatian nationalism that emerged in the 1990s was in part a response to the Serb nationalism that had already began to target Croats, it is also important to recognize that the emergent Croatian nationalism reinforced the images of the impending Croatian threat offered in the Memorandum. When the equally nationalist Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, revived Ustashe symbols as current cultural icons, the memory of Jasenovac initiated by the Memorandum was made all the more substantial and present for the Serbian people.

The reification of Jasenovac as the unifying symbol of Ustashe crimes and hence a part of the historical legacy of Serbian victimhood stirred up tensions between Croats and ethnic Serbs living in Croatia. The impending “threat” and historical “damage” (Kecmanovic, 1995) highlighted by the “recovered” memory of the Ustashe crimes served to politicize the bonds of blood shared by Serbian people throughout Yugoslavia. Recalling Vuk Draskovic’s words, “Serbia is wherever there are Serbian graves,” the mythic link between blood and soil so embedded in the rhetoric of Serb nationalists provided the justification for a Greater Serbia.

In the next segment for analysis, the Memorandum uses the common themes embedded within all the Memorandum’s narrative categories to suggest that Serbs will only be safe and prosperous and will only end the cycle of historic victimization by linking the Serb nation through a physical unification of all territories where Serbs live.

The status of the Serbian nation is rendered particularly acute by the fact that a very large number of Serbs live outside Serbia, and particularly outside Serbia proper; in fact this number is larger than the total number of members of some other national groups. According to the 1981 census, 24% of all Serbs, or
1,958,000, lived outside the territory of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, a number much larger than the number of Slovenes, Albanians, or Macedonians in Yugoslavia taken individually, and almost the same number as the Muslims. There are 3,285,000 Serbs who live outside Serbia proper, accounting for 40.3% of their total number. In the general process of disintegration which is taking place in Yugoslavia, the Serbs are the most sorely affected. The present course being taken by Yugoslav society is completely at odds with the one followed for decades and even centuries until the common state was formed. This process is aimed at completely breaking up the national unity of the Serbian nation. The case of present-day Vojvodina and its autonomy is the best illustration of how everything has been subordinated to such goals. (p. 133)

This segment provides support for reviving prominent Serbian minister Ilija Garasanin’s 1844 concept of “Greater Serbia.” By offering statistical evidence of the large numbers of Serbs who live outside of Serbia proper, the Memorandum calls to the disparate Serbs to unite as a people. This segment legitimizes its call to action by implying an existing plot against Serbia from throughout Yugoslavia and through the consistent construction of Serbs as victims. Further, this segment implies that history is a predetermined storyline through the assertion that the very concept of Yugoslavia disrupted Serbia’s centuries-old historic course. In this sense, this segment embraces the circle of narratives that focus on Tito as deliberately subjugating the Serbs within Yugoslavia. These narratives aim to delegitimize Tito and Yugoslavia in that they present Yugoslavia as being “Serbo-phobic.” They utilizes Burke’s (1941/1973) concept
of the “commercial use” of unifying symbols in that these narratives capitalize on the Yugoslav system as the source of blame for the ills of the Serb nation.

Additionally, this segment hails the Kosovo mythos in highlighting the historical damage and impending threat to Serb culture within federated Yugoslavia. According to the Memorandum, “No other Yugoslav nation has been so rudely denied its cultural and spiritual integrity as the Serbian people. No literary and artistic heritage has been so routed, pillaged and plundered as the Serbian one….” Inspired by the contentions put forth in the Memorandum, widely distributed pamphlets, films (T.V. & cinematic – such as “Genocide Against the Serbs in Krajina”) and posters (with such slogans as “Only Unity Saves the Serbs”) circulated throughout the region in the late 1980s. They proclaimed the message that great acts of cruelty awaited the Serbs unless they went on the offensive launching a preemptive strike with the end goal of uniting Greater Serbia (Maas, 1997, p. 88). This claim to a Greater Serbia was further legitimated by the argument that the “‘promised land’ of Greater Serbia rested on no less a moral foundation that the right of the Jewish people to the state of Israel since both people’s were history’s victims.” (Cohen, 1996a, p.116) (a twisted mix of Nazi lebensraum ideology and appeal to the sensibilities of those fighting for Israel). The Memorandum went on to say

In less than fifty years, for two successive generations, the Serbs were twice subjected to physical annihilation, forced assimilation, conversion to a different religion, cultural genocide, ideological indoctrination, denigration and compulsion to renounce their own traditions because of an imposed guilt complex… the Serbian people must be allowed to find themselves again and become an historical
personality in their own right, to regain a sense of their historical and spiritual
being, to make a clear assessment of their economic and cultural interests, to
devise a modern social and national programme which will inspire present
generations and generations to come. (p. 138)

This segment continues to assert the Serbs as eternal victims, using the language
of fear to bring the document to its final, foregone conclusion. Using essentially
demonizing terms like “annihilation,” “assimilation,” “conversion,” and “genocide”
juxtaposed with the assertion that Serbs have lost their identity and as such must reassert
it again brings the politicization of Serb national identity to its zenith. This segment then
offers the Serbs a chance to regain their “historical and spiritual being” with the promise
of a “symbolic rebirth” (Burke, 1941/1973) that will “inspire generations to come.” This
section carries on to call the Serb people to action saying:

The Serbian people cannot stand idly by and wait for the future in such a state of
uncertainty…Naturally, Serbia must not be passive and wait and see what the
others will say, as it has done so often in the past. (Memorandum, p. 140)

Toward the end of the Memorandum, the promise of redemption embedded in the
Kosovo mythos is brought to bear. Serbian national identity is politicized in that the Serb
people are charged to reclaim their nation in the face of yet another impending
subjugation. The sentiment that “Serbia must not be passive…as it has so many times in
the past” highlights Kecmonovic’s (1995) theme of “victim & sacrifice.” After arousing
passions and invoking fear throughout the document, this section of the Memorandum
asks Serbs to take their fate into their own hands to end their subjugation before it is too
late. It is up to the Serbs to ensure the “symbolic rebirth” (Burke, 1941/1973) of the Serb
nation promised to them through the mythic Kosovo oath nearly six hundred years ago. Hence, the Serbian people are charged with completing the Kosovo narrative that has constituted them (Charland, 1987).

The Intellectual Turn

Louis Sell (2002) notes “The SANU Memorandum constituted the intellectual underpinning for Serbia’s destruction of Yugoslavia” (p. 46). From the battle of Kosovo Polje to the WWII Ustashe atrocities against the Serbs to Serbia’s supposed economic victimization under Tito, the Memorandum fixes Serbian subjectivity as a string of victimizations in which each slight against Serbia flows from the last. It is as if history were a single seamless narrative in which the Serbs were constantly the tragic heroes. In highlighting the Serbian subjectivity of victimhood through an invigoration of the Kosovo mythos as history’s focal point, the Memorandum scripts history in such a way as to obscure the complexities of the past. Serbian Economics professor Ljubomir Madzar contends, “the key diagnoses and evaluations contained in the Memorandum were diametrically opposed to the intellectual trends and latest findings in world economics,” (2000, p. 181). Still, the Memorandum launched a new virulent vocabulary into the public discourse. Serbian Social Scientist Jasminka Uдовicki and Macedonian journalist Ivan Torov (2000) note,

Phrases such as ‘genocide against the Serbs,” “the Serbian Holocaust,” “Serbian martyrdom,” “the tragedy of Kosovo Serbs,” “the Serbian exodus,” and many others entered the vernacular of politics, and particularly the media, and shaped the framework of many public discussions taking place at the dawn of the war (p.89).
By 1990, to pave the way for Milosevic’s resumption of control over Kosovo, Serbian television launched a campaign against the Kosovo Albanians who were accused of “poisoning wells and slitting the throats of children” (Mertus, 2001). *Politika* often followed these accusations with other unverified stories of Serbian women being raped by Albanian men. In the February 9th, 1990 issue of *Politika*, Vojislav K. Stojanovic, the president of the Association of University Teachers and Scholars of Serbia wrote that,

The savage Albanian terrorists are now running amok in Kosovo…attacking and destroying everything that is Serbian, breaking into homes of Serbs and terrorizing the few people who have stayed behind. The Serbs in Kosovo are gripped by the fear of terrorists armed to the teeth.

Using the language and central themes of the SANU Memorandum, Serbian intellectuals and cultural elites continued to politicize the ethnic identity of the Serbian people. Their rhetoric capitalized on their positions of privilege and on intellectual authority. Lessl (1989) presents a view of intellectual authority that posits the voice of science as “priestly” within culture. In this sense Lessl presents the “priestly voice” of elite culture in opposition to what he terms the “bardic voice” of common culture. The ability of scientists to communicate in a specialized language “elicits reverence from the ordinary individual” that perpetuates the prestige and power of the scientist (Lessl, 1989, p. 186). This rhetoric is “largely vertical, descending from above as an epiphanic Word,

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The English translations of newspaper quotations used throughout this chapter have come from several sources. Some were taken from official ICTY translations of Serbian newspaper sources, others were taken from English news items drawn from various websites cited in the bibliography of this document. When there was a conflicting translation within two secondary sources, the original source was translated for accuracy by Ana Petrovic, and the source closest to the original spirit of the language was used. Several quotations have also been taken from Tim Judah (2000) who I have found to be the most consistently reliable secondary source of English language information.
filled with mystery and empowered with extra-human authority” (p. 184). Whereas the bardic voice may be represented by such common cultural transmitters as television,

The priestly voice distinguishes itself from its bardic counterparts by insisting that its origins reside outside of ordinary human experience as revelations of spirit or nature…the priesthood is given an elite status as well as a formative role in creating a particular society’s existential consciousness (1989, p. 184).

Through his/her public rhetoric, the scientist interprets higher intellectual concepts for the general public, serving as an interpreter for a higher power. To accomplish this, the scientist often intersperses common language with key technical terms designed to evoke a desirable ethos – an air of expert authority. In doing so, the scientific “priest” mediates between common culture and the culture of elites. The elite institution that the “priest” represents portrays its ethos as the “essence of humanity,” while all paths of history lead to the historic culmination of a given scientific view. Hence, “the scientist depicts history as the unfolding of deterministic processes that lead naturally to modern science” (p. 188). In adopting the priestly voice, the scientist attempts to alter the identity of his/her audience by moving them toward the “symbolic environment” of the elite social group. In this way, the scientist portrays him/herself as the mouthpiece for a divine sort of concept – wholly real, ultimate and insoluble (Lessl, 1989, p. 189).

Lessl (1989) further notes that in his/her public rhetoric, the scientist plays a pedagogical role, educating the common culture not only in the concepts of science, but also in the ideology of the elite class. The priestly voice disseminates knowledge even as it imposes on an audience an ideological framework that is not indigenously their own (p.
“Priestly communication creates a people’s sense of identity with respect to the wholly other” (p. 184). Exploiting their positions as educators, Serbian intellectuals and cultural elites used discourse shrouded in “scientific” authority to educate Serb people with regard to the “genetic inferiorities” of Bosniaks and to the historic dangers posed by non-Serbs. Engaging the constitutive narratives highlighted in the Memorandum, Serbian intellectuals rhetorically repositioned non-Serb subjectivity as that of “other.” Their rhetoric in its authority amounted to a sort of cultural pedagogy that was further enacted through the re-telling of history from a teleological standpoint in which the Serbs were constantly threatened by those to be cast out. In removing Bosniaks and non-Serbs from positions of shared cultural privilege and positioning the Serbian people as victims, Serbian intellectuals and cultural elites initialized a campaign of fear that strengthened the Serbian imagined community.

Prominent Serbian intellectual politicians infused their public discourse with the themes embedded in the constitutive narratives of the SANU Memorandum. These themes were repeated ad nauseum. Essentialized versions of these themes in conjunction with key concepts brought back into public consciousness by the Memorandum took on a central role in the common cultural lexicon. In this capacity, Serbian national identity was further racialized and politicized as ethno-political divisions came to be seen as a historical precedent to be enacted in the present by force if necessary. The next section evaluates the effects of public statements made by prominent Serbian intellectuals-turned-politicians in instantiating the themes of the SANU Memorandum beyond academic circles. As Franke Wilmer (2003) notes,
To understand how and why identity can be manipulated…necessitates an examination of the links between…constructions of identity and the mediating forces of culture, leadership and history (p. 22).

**Enacting the Themes of the SANU Memorandum**

The role of Serb nationalist intellectuals in the normalization of mass violence was by no means a small one. Serb nationalist discourse promoted a heroic image of the nation, glorifying the medieval Serbian state and romanticizing the Serb heroes who died in battle against the Turks (Rogel, 1998). This attributed to the collective subject position of victimization, as Serb propaganda compressed and re-articulated history as a series of Serbian oppressions at the hands of various enemies, including Turks (to include modern day Bosnian Muslims), Austria, Germany, the Vatican, Croatian Ustashe and the West.⁶ “Serb paranoia dwelt on the image of Serbia as a permanent victim” (Rogel, 1998, p. 49).

Milosavljevic (2000) notes the significant impact of the amalgamation of political discourses with intellectual authority in legitimizing the racialization and politicization of Serb national identity.

The active participation of the intellectual elite provided an appearance of objectivity, specific to a scientific dialogue and not a political one. The backing of the intellectuals served only to lend more weight to the nationalist agenda, in comparison with the transparent discourse of the purely political propagandists, although the content of the declarations of both groups came down to the same. (p.290)

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⁶ Especially the United States, which Serbian propaganda presented as backing the Bosnian Muslims in an attempt to prevent offending Muslim oil-producing powers.
Many examples of public statements from prominent Serb intellectuals encompassing the general themes of the Memorandum can be found in Serbian newspapers, magazines and in transcripts of Serb TV and radio broadcasts. For this analysis, I will take into account only statements from three of the most politically influential Serbian intellectuals. This section considers the ways in which the public statements of Dr. Biljana Plavsic, Dr. Radovan Karadzic and Dr. Vojislav Seslj furthered the constitutive appeals put forth in the Memorandum. Imbued with intellectual authority these leaders spoke to two primary issues raised by the constitutive narratives embedded in the Memorandum. The first of these answered, “Why had the Serbs been eternally victimized?” while the second answered, “What can be done about it?”

In the mid-1990s, Biljana Plavsic came to share the Bosnian Serb presidency with Radovan Karadzic. The two gained popularity with Bosnian Serbs through their call for a Greater Serbia as necessitated by the historic victimization of the Serbs. This dynamic duo often subtly summoned the Kosovo mythos through rhetoric dressed in the tenor of their respective academic professions. On the other hand, Vojislav Seslj, an outspoken nationalist and leader of the Serbian Radical Party, used graphic images and blatant messages of hate to motivate his target audience. Seslj became Milosevic’s right-hand propaganda man for a period of time in the early 1990s. Milosevic used Seslj to politicize the lower classes and to appeal to the more militant nationalist factions.

A closer examination of the rhetoric put forth by these three intellectuals-turned-politicians reveals a deliberately nationalist agenda rooted in the Kosovo mythos and proffering the premises of the SANU Memorandum. In unique ways each exploited their
position of cultural privilege to politicize Serb national identity through mythic discourse cloaked in the language of intellectual authority. Biljana Plavsic will be considered first.

**Biljana Plavsic**

Dr. Biljana Plavsic was a biologist specializing in genetics and a well-respected professor at Sarajevo University. Tall and stern, her physical demeanor bears resemblance to England’s Margaret Thatcher. While there is little evidence of Plavsic’s nationalist bent prior to 1986, she is noted for her many nationalist and racist public statements in the build-up to the wars of the 1990s. Her outlandish and divisive public declarations, situated in science and hence “truth,” were continuously touted by the Serbian media and became the common currency of popular radio and television (Reef, 1995). She once told a Belgrade news magazine, “My dearest wish is to see the Drina valley cleansed of Muslims. I do not wish them any good, though in order to have my peace, I will give them something so they do not disturb me” (Gjelten, 1995, p. 150).

Tom Gjelten (1995) notes that Plavsic’s public rhetoric came to be repeated as doctrine by many Bosnian Serb nationalists.

Plavsic targeted Muslims as the blame for Serbian subjugation throughout history. She frequently demonized Muslims through references to the fundamentalist threat inherent in the Muslim “race.” She told the Serbian newspaper *Borba* on February 8th, 1993,

Rape unfortunately belongs to the war strategy of Muslims and some Croats towards Serbs. For Islam, rape is normal, for that religion tolerates polygamy.

Throughout 500 years of Turkish occupation both “begs” and “agas” were entitled
to spend the first night with a recently married woman from the “mob.” Also
under the Islamic religious tenants, the nation of a child is the one of the father…

In this statement, Plavsic uses “Islam” as a “devil term” (Weaver, 1953) to
demonize Muslims and to scapegoat them for the ugliness of war. As she
instrumentalizes the Kosovo mythos with her references to the Turkish occupation as still
influencing the fundamentalist Muslim threat in the present, Plavsic highlights the
immanent “threat” (Kecmanovic, 1995) repeatedly presented in the SANU
Memorandum. Plavsic incites fear through her suggestion that Muslims use rape as a
tactic of war. This charge was rendered in the SANU Memorandum, and Plavsic was
quick to capitalize on the emerging fear and identification with the mythic historic
subjugation that surrounded such allegations. Significantly, this quotation also represents
Plavsic’s efforts to racialize the Muslims through the act of ascribing rape as essential to
Muslim racial character. In doing so, she assumes for the Serbs a position of cultural
privilege or “whiteness” while she assumes for Muslims a position of “other.” Critical
race scholar J. T. Warren (2001) suggests that one of the central foundations of most
literature dealing with whiteness “is that whiteness functions as a cultural and social
privilege; whiteness provides fundamental advantages attributed to the white subject,
which then work to give that subject unearned leverage over others…” (p. 94).
Whiteness is a qualification of social acceptance and power. It has come to signify
elitism, normativity, appropriateness, privilege and superiority. For people outside of that
position of cultural privilege, whiteness is perceived as “a functional political entity that
preserves the markings of center and periphery among the dominant and marginalized
groups” (Jackson, et al., 2000, p. 70).
Moreover, whiteness is based on a purity concept. This means that to be called “white” assumes that one is not “mixed” in any way with other races. This purity concept also assumes that if a person is even a small part “black” (for example) that person is considered “black.” Their bloodline is “tainted” and so they are “black.”

Critical race scholar Steve Marinot (2003) notes,

Based on a purity concept, whiteness marks the hegemonic moment in a system of social categorization called ‘race,’ for which racialization delineates the modes of social inclusion within an encompassing system of categorization and in which whites are hegemonic and exclusive. The structure of racialization constitutes the process by which meaning and valuation of whiteness are derived from the demeaning and devaluation of others (p. 129).

Plavsic creates a Serb race imbued with “inborn dignity” (Burke, 1941/1973) as she paints the natural tendencies of Muslims (“and some Croats”) as impulsive, sadistic, and fundamentally threatening. She portrays Muslims as a “mob.” This image both collectivizes Muslim identity and dehumanizes the collective. The Muslim “beasts” view rape as normal while the pure Serbian girl, an individual who could be your mother or sister, falls prey to the savage drive of the mob.

Interestingly, it was not the Muslims but the Serbs who were most often the perpetrators of mass rapes during the wars of the 1990s. Plavsic’s implication that the Muslims were racially inferior in conjunction with her assertion that the Islamic child “is one of the father” played a role in this sad irony. Because the implication of race entails a hierarchical construction of difference, this hierarchy makes way for the modes of thought that allow for the acceptance of such things as slavery, based on the racial
inferiority of the slave race. This type of thinking has further made way for the normalization of a certain class of sex crimes against women of the hierarchically lower races in the interest of dissipating the sub-racial characteristics in order to make the sub-race more pure, stronger, more like the higher racial category. For example, British colonial men in the Americas “expected Indian women to change physically; over time through their relations with white men, their skin tones would ‘blanch,’ which would also signify transformed inner beings” (Weitz, 2003, p. 23).

This same twisted logic allowed for massive sex crimes against thousands of Bosniak women by Serb men in the rape camps set up throughout Bosnia during the war. Nationalist Serb rhetoric often referred to Bosnian Muslims as Serbs who have become racially impure through their relations with “Turks” and conversion to Islam. Killing the men and raping (with hopes to impregnate) the women was a form of “racial colonization” through which the Serb men could racially purify the Muslim “race” throughout Bosnia, thereby creating an ethnically cleansed and racially pure Bosnia and hence a pure Greater Serbia. Many of the Serb men who raped the Muslim women embraced the idea that they were diluting the Muslim bloodline by impregnating the women with Serb babies. Testimonies from rape survivors bear witness to these intentions as Serb soldiers often announced during the rape that the woman would now bear a Serb child.

In addition to her use of essential categories to racialize Muslims and hence politicize Serbian identity in response to the impending Muslim threat, Plavsic consistently uses her authority as a geneticist to lend to her statements intellectual authority. Her images of Muslims as genetically inferior became common discourse for
the nationalist leaders and supporters of the time. In the following quotations, her tendency to racialize Bosnian-Muslim ethnic identity is clear. On September 10th, 1993, Plavsic told the Belgrade newspaper Politika,

It was genetically deformed material that embraced Islam. And now, of course, with each successive generation this gene simply becomes concentrated. It gets worse and worse, it simply expresses itself and dictates their style of thinking and behaving, which is rooted in their genes…

She had used similar images just a few days before when she told the Novi Sad Svet on September 6th, 1993,

I would like to cleanse eastern Bosnia, but I don’t mean ethnically cleanse…the International community has started pejoratively using that term to describe a natural phenomenon, and has moreover qualified it a war crime. Even if we (Serbs) kept 70% (of Bosnia) there could be no peace. To tell you the truth, I am not well disposed toward them…Muslims are genetically spoiled material who converted to Islam. And these genes have been reinforced generation after generation. They become worse and they dictate and express the Muslim way of thinking and behaving. It is embedded in their genes.

Through these statements, Plavsic uses the authority of her position as a geneticist to dehumanize Muslims by proclaiming them to be from degenerate genetic stock. She roots her statements in intellectual authority, wrapping her narratives of impending Muslim threat in scientific discourse to imbue them with the appearance of authenticity. As a geneticist, it is assumed that Plavsic has an expertise in the function of genes. Hence, her “expert testimony” with regard to the “spoiled” genes of Muslims carries an
air of authority and authenticity – an expert ethos. By ascribing to Muslims characteristics that are essential to their being, Plavsic’s rhetoric creates Muslims as a racial group instead of a religious or ethnic group. She dresses this assessment with the appearance of scientific authority as she asserts that their essentially Muslim characteristics are passed down through their genes. Further, as she states in the first quotation that the Muslim “gene” gets more concentrated with the ensuing generations, Plavsic is furthering the idea that the threat to Serbs is more pressing now than ever before. She implies that this concentrated threat is the next logical step in a historical timeline that has necessarily led to this point when Serb heroes must step in to fulfill the final culmination of the prescribed historical narrative.

Similar to Njegos’s implication in *The Mountain Wreath* that a separation between Serbs and Muslims was the natural order of things (given that the noxious smell that emanated from the “Turkish infidel” was intolerable to the clean and godly Serb), Plavsic asserts that it is a “natural phenomenon” for Serbs and Muslims to be separated. In another image that fuses the themes of 19th century epic poetry with the modern authority of science, Plavsic refers to the implementation of this “natural” separation as “cleansing;” as if the land, and thereby the nation, is somehow dirty, but can be made pure through the elimination of Muslims. In this sense, “ethnic cleansing” becomes a mechanism for the purity of the Serbian race. Interestingly, Plavsic is careful to note to her audience the fact that the world has misinterpreted the “natural” practice of “ethnic cleansing” as something that is criminal. She notes that there could never be peace among Serbs and Muslims living together, wiping away decades of history and
intermingling, in order to remove the negative connotation from the concept of “ethnic cleansing” and to make the poorly chosen euphemism itself “clean” again.

Plavsic again uses genetic discourse to legitimize her racist essentialism a few months later in May of 1994. Plavsic is quoted in Sarajevo’s Oslobodenje (a proudly multi-ethnic newspaper with a multi-ethnic readership):

We are upset by the rising number of mixed marriages between Serbs and Muslims, for they allow genes to be exchanged between ethnic groups, and lead subsequently to the degeneration of Serb nationality.

This segment offers a solid example of Plavsic’s racialization tactics. Plavsic uses the practice of intermarriage as a “projection device” (Burke, 1941/1973). Intermarriage is the impetus for the “degeneration” of the pure Serbian bloodline. By 1990, one in four Bosnian marriages were mixed. Plavsic creates Muslims as the “universal culprit” (Burke, 1941/1973) for Serb suffering as well as infers a Muslim “plot” (Kecmanovic, 1995) against the Serbs through the implication that with intermarriage the Muslim genes degrade the Serb race. This degradation through genetic mixing also serves as proof that Serbian “inborn dignity” (Burke, 1941/1973) is diminished through the practice of intermarriage. Additionally, through references differentiating Muslim genes from Serb genes, as if they are of different quality and make-up, Plavsic employs the authority of biological discourse to further racialize both Muslim and Serb identity, and to naturalize this separation. Hence, Plavsic’s conception of “nation” is genetically determined, and not based on the state within which one is born. This conception of nation justifies the pursuit of a Greater Serbia in that the borders of the state do not define the nation.
Plavsic’s “priestly” genetic discourses point to a definable cause for the historic ills of the Serb nation. The degeneration of the Serbian bloodline began with those Serbs who had converted to Islam under the Turkish occupation, thereby defiling the pure Serbian race. This degeneration has become increasingly concentrated and prevalent in the ensuing years, leading repeatedly to betrayal, cowardice and animalistic tendencies. It is these qualities, passed down through the genes for generations that have weakened the Serbs and allowed them to be dominated. Hence, if the Serbs unite to take back their land, cleansing the land of these enemies, the Serbs could become pure again and would regain their place of strength and dignity in the world.

Plavsic’s nationalist rhetoric did not end upon the end of the war. In her 1996 speech to the Seventh Annual Convention of the Serbian Unity Congress in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Plavsic declared:

The four-year war is behind us now. For the Serbian people it was an ancestral and defensive warfare. We suffered casualties, but there were no massive or planned genocide, thanks to the Serbian Democratic Party which led the people in this ancestral war for defense of bare survival.

This statement shows Plavsic’s continued attempts to teleologically contextualize the historic subjugation of the Serb people. She offers an image of the war as a defensive action necessitated by an ancestral obligation, a theme prevalent in the Memorandum. In this way, Plavsic hails the ancestral bonds of blood as evidence of historic victimhood and justification for war. The image here is of the Serbs fighting a just war in the interest of a redemption over five hundred years in the making. To her foreign audience, the war itself becomes a unifying symbol marking the inborn dignity of the Serbs and
culminating in the symbolic rebirth of the Serb people. Further, Plavsic presents her own party, SDS, as the source of redemption for the Serb people. In this sense, SDS becomes a symbol of the fulfillment of the ancient promise made to Knez Lazar at the Battle of Kosovo.

Biljana Plavsic was not the only nationalist intellectual-turned-politician to infuse nationalist politics with intellectual authority. Her presidential partner in crime, Dr. Radovan Karadzic, was a successful Freudian-trained psychiatrist previous to his political career. Though thought of as somewhat odd by those who had known him, Karadzic was said to be jovial and likeable in his younger years. He was also known, before the war, to have a great many Muslim friends and was not a noted nationalist in his early days (Gjelten, 1995).

**Radovan Karadzic**

Searching for his own identity during his university years, Karadzic joined a writer’s club and published several books of poetry. Though his early literary colleagues largely describe his poetry as immature and even laughable, the poetry published immediately previous to the wars of the 1990s is often cited as exemplary of his sadistically nationalistic bent. Sell (2002) notes that “themes of exile, death, destruction and return to a forsaken homeland pervade Karadzic’s poetry from the beginning, but his last volume, published in 1990 and titled The Black Fable (Crna Bajka), revealed an obsession with themes of blood and violence” against Muslims (p. 159). Like so many other prominent Serb intellectuals of the time, Karadzic was associated with Dobrica Cosic, who eventually recommended Karadzic for SDS party leadership.
Despite his Freudian training, Karadzic spoke of ethnicity in terms of Jungian archetypes. Karadzic’s openly propagated political ideology centered on the idea that “Serbian-ness, Croatian-ness, and Muslim-ness were essences—unchanging and immutable” (Reiff, 1995, p. 73). American Ambassador Warren Zimmerman, who met with Karadzic on several occasions as Bosnia progressed toward war, remarked that while Karadzic had a friendly and likeable manner, his language was increasingly peppered with words like “war,” “genocide,” and “hell” and he had a growing racist hostility toward Muslims and Croats (Sell, 2002, p. 160).

The son of Montenegrin peasants, Karadzic never lost his reverence for God and country life. Stemming from his Orthodox upbringing, Karadzic maintained a dogmatic view of Serbian national identity infused with the principals of Serb Orthodoxy. Sell (2002) calls Karadzic the “standard-bearer in Bosnia,” never wavering from his dogmatic and confrontational position (p. 158). For Karadzic, the existence of a single unified Serbian state was an assumed outcome sanctioned by God. “No force or power can prevent us from creating a Serb state…only God may, and God shall not do it because he is on our side” (Radio Belgrade II, March, 1993). Karadzic advocated a Greater Serbia as the spiritual fulfillment of God’s mythical promise made to Knez Lazar at Kosovo Polje.

Together with his academic and professional mentor Jovan Raskovic, Karadzic organized a series of public meetings throughout the early 1990s. Thousands of Serbs attended each of these meetings. Raskovic and Karadzic warned attendees of the impending threat and genocidal conspiracy against them by the fundamentalist Bosnian Muslims. The two psychiatrists embarked on a systematic campaign to instill fear in the Bosnian Serb community using their authority as psychiatrists to construct their ethos and
authenticate their views of an inferior and dangerous Muslim mentality. In September 1991, at a national assembly, Karadzic delivered a chilling speech that foreshadowed the coming genocidal horror against the local Muslims. “The Muslims must be careful of what they are doing,” he warned. “They might very well disappear” (Udovicki & Stitovac, 2000, p. 180).

Karadzic was a master of myth and propaganda, asserting the idea of “age-old ethnic hatred” to the detriment of the long-standing multi-ethnic Bosnia. His versions of current events often betrayed his propensity toward mythic essentialism, as he classified Serbs and Muslims into stereotypical “types” as suggested in Serbian national myth and literature, and authenticated this categorization by way of his pedigree in the function of the human mind. Two particularly gruesome events brought this rhetoric to the point of the obscene when on both the occasion of the May 1992 Sarajevo breadline massacre (when a Serbian mortar bomb crashed into a line of civilians waiting for bread) and the February 1994 Sarajevo Market Square bomb (which killed 69 civilians and injured over 200) Karadzic accused Bosniaks of bombing themselves to gain international sympathy (Silber & Little, 1996).

The bomb that dropped on the busy market place on February 5th, 1994, turned an otherwise peaceful day into mass carnage and chaos. The bomb dropped without warning (Silber & Little, 1996). When Bosniak President Alija Izetbegovic called an international news conference stating that it was a “black and terrible day” and that “we Bosnians feel condemned to death,” Karadzic quickly denied responsibility claiming that the bombing had been staged for the international media (Silber & Little, 1996, p. 309). Eventually Karadzic espoused the contention that the bodies in the street that day were
taken from the morgue by the Muslims in their effort to stage the massacre and gain international sympathy. Karadzic told Frontline’s Mark Danner,

Ice. They had ice in their ears. You know, the Muslims—they took bodies from the morgue and they put them there, in the market. Even when they shell themselves like this, no one shell kills that many. So they went to the morgue. (1994)

Karadzic delegitimizes Muslim suffering and their legitimate claim to victimhood through the contention that the Muslims staged the entire event. In this way, Karadzic can maintain his archetypal categorization of the Serbs as subjugated victims under constant threat from the Islamic fundamentalists. This inference denigrates and dehumanizes the Bosniak side by portraying them as manipulative and disloyal, even among their own people – an archetypal throwback to 19th century literary portrayals of Turks that Serbian audiences could easily believe. This contention also politicizes Serb identity through the implication that the Serbs are once again the victims in that their reputation is being soiled in the eyes of the international community. Additionally in this quotation, Karadzic uses his political status and intellectual credibility to assert that the Muslims were of a mentality that would bomb themselves for attention.

In the same Frontline interview, Karadzic continues to assert his racially essential ideology. When portraying the impending threat to the Serb nation, he states,

The Serbs did not invent ethnic cleansing. The Croats did, in World War II. When Tudjman and Izetbegovic formed a [Croat-Muslim] alliance, all Serbs were frightened to death that the same would happen as during the war, when hundreds of thousands of innocent Serbs were slaughtered.
In this quotation Karadzic is taking the newly internationally recognized “devil term” (Weaver, 1953) of atrocity, “ethnic cleansing,” and defusing its Serbian allusions by applying the term to historical atrocities against the Serbs in WWII. In doing so, Karadzic seeks to demonize modern Croats through an archetypal association with WWII Ustashe. Karadzic then takes this connection a step further by associating the Croat-Muslim alliance (established in an effort to defend Bosnia from the Serb onslaught) with the WWII atrocities. Karadzic highlights Kecmanovic’s (1995) themes of “damage” and “threat” in that he offers the thousands of Serbs slaughtered in WWII as justification for the perception of a threat in the present.

Karadzic’s blend of ethno-religious imagery and essential archetypal myth is poignantly exemplified in a speech he gave in 1996. On June 28th, 1996, at a Kosovo Polje anniversary celebration hosted by the Serbian Democratic Party for All Serbian Lands (SDS SZ) in Pale, Karadzic addressed the crowd.

[The Serb] people and their state are above all… [Republika Srpska (the breakaway Bosnian Serb Republic)] can become the most stable and most prosperous state in the region, without abandoning its hopes and intentions for unification with other Serbian states…Our achievements are great, victims are enormous, and goals sacred. The fate of this generation of Serbs is the fate of the great ones, and it should be followed bravely and deserving, like God's Will is being awaited and accepted… The recognizable Fascist symbols needed to appear in Croatia and the symbols of Islamic fundamentalism in Bosnia, and the flags of the allies from Second World War needed to be tied to the threat of repeated genocide against the Serbs, and only than our people woke up from lethargy and
endeavored for their salvation. The formation of the SDS SZ came as a response to Fascist and fundamentalist threats to the Serbian people. The people created the Party, recognizing the old symbols and rhetorics, flags and ideas because of which over 700,000 innocent Serb civilians lost their lives in concentration camps…. It took six years of political and four years of military struggle to halt the processes of division and demise of the Serbian nation in the region….We succeeded, and we continue to follow our course. The people and their state are above all, they are above us, and we will serve to our people in a way that Lord Jesus Christ stated in Gospel: "And those who want to be the first among you will serve you..." as was repeated by the SDS founder, late Jovan Raskovic. (SRNA News, 6/28/96)

The speech is loaded with religious references that imply an ethno-religious Serbian identity, while justifying Serbian aggression in the pursuit of a Greater Serbia as a sort of ancestrally sanctioned divine goal. Karadzic blends his religious superiority with his political and intellectual authority. He uses the themes of the SANU Memorandum that had become truths to Serbian nationalists. Indicative of his reliance on the Kosovo mythos, he begins by engaging the biblical myth of the Serbs as a chosen people, invoking the concept of Greater Serbia as the manifestation of the redemption promised to the Serbs in at the Battle of Kosovo. Karadzic then highlights Kecmanovic’s (1995) theme of “victim & sacrifice” as he accounts for the “great” achievements of the Serb people in the face of their “enormous” victims. In this same phrase Karadzic refers to the goals of the Serbs as “sacred,” thereby offering an allusion of religiosity that reinforces the Serbs as chosen by God.
Karadzic claims that this generation’s “fate” is the “fate of the great ones.” This implies a justifiable goal born out by an immutable historical trajectory made ever more real through ancestral bonds of blood. Further, Karadzic asserts that the fateful pursuit of a Greater Serbia is sanctioned by “God’s Will,” asserting that the Serb fate has been predetermined by God and sanctioned by the ancestors. Karadzic is proclaiming that the present moment is the apex of history, calling the Serbs to action with the idea that it is their immutable duty. This hails the Serbian people through the Kosovo mythos in its historical/religious implication, and asserts Serbian inborn dignity in that God has set this path for the “brave and deserving” Serbs through his ancient promise to Knez Lazar. Karadzic calls the pursuit of this goal the Serbs’ salvation.

The religious allusions culminate in the end of the speech with his quotation from the bible, "And those who want to be the first among you will serve you..." Karadzic uses this quotation purposefully to justify the glorification of the Serbian nation as the supreme goal, and to legitimate himself as its leader. Karadzic goes to great lengths in this speech to justify the essential politicization of Serb identity as the will of God. Through his biblical allusions and teleological references to history’s pre-determined progression at work in the present, Karadzic presents the immanent threat posed by non-Serbs, and offers a vision of Greater Serbia on par with the Resurrection.

Additionally, Karadzic brings in allusions to multiple narratives essential to Serb national identity. In a single sentence Karadzic refers to Fascist symbols in Croatia, Islamic Fundamentalism in Bosnia, the WWII genocide of the Serbs, and Jasenovac. Falling back on archetypes once again, Karadzic refers to both “Islamic Fundamentalism” as well as the “Croatian Fascists of WWII” to prove a historic trend and current threat of
“repeated genocide against the Serbs.” Karadzic points to the Croatian reinvigoration of the Ustashe flag as the impetus for the reification of Jasenovac as a unifying symbol for Serb people. He uses statistical evidence of innocent Serb deaths at the hands of the Ustashe, and reminds his audience that the formation of a Greater Serbia was a necessary response to this historical threat that was simply waiting to rear its head once again, to the detriment of modern Serbs. He then ties all these references together to imply an inevitable historical progression with one leading into the other. Karadzic’s intellectual position initially gave him authority with the Serb people, but it was his position of political power in conjunction with his essentialized and dogmatic religious piety that allowed his premises to resonate in the common lexicon of the Serb people.

**Vojislav Seslj**

Another prominent intellectual and major player in Bosnian Serb politics, Dr. Vojislav Seslj had been a brilliant student and was the youngest person ever to complete a PhD in Yugoslavia (Judah, 2000, p. 187). In the early 1980s, Seslj was a professor of law at Sarajevo University, but was arrested in 1984 for “counter-revolutionary” activities after an unpublished manuscript was discovered in his desk drawer. The manuscript advocated a complete reorganization of the Yugoslav political system with a dominant Serbia and the abolishment of Bosnia, which he referred to as a “bogus Muslim nation” (Judah, 2000, p. 187). During his 22 months in jail, Seslj became the focus of a human rights organization headed by Dobrica Cosic. Upon his release, Seslj formed a short-lived alliance with Vuk Draskovic and the two created a political party. Eventually Seslj fell out with Draskovic, formed the hyper-nationalist Serbian Chetnik Party, and placed fourth in the 1990 presidential election.
Seslj’s extreme nationalism began to gain increasing attention and Milosevic saw him as a useful tool to gain hard-line nationalist support. In 1991, Seslj was given a seat in parliament. Milosevic afforded Seslj’s Chetnik Party, now strategically renamed the Serbian Radical Party, a massive amount of TV and popular press coverage, boosting his popularity. Seslj in turn, supported Milosevic. Through Milosevic’s public support and his frequent TV appearances, Seslj’s party gained power and legitimacy (Judah, 2000, p. 188). On scheduled TV appearances, Seslj often bragged about the brutality of his armed men (“Seslj’s Men”) in dealing with the Muslim populations in Bosnia, once even claiming that his men gouged the eyes of their Croatian victims with rusty shoehorns. Milan Milosevic [no relation to Slobodan Milosevic] (1997) notes

Vojislav Seslj was second to none regarding the TV time he received in 1991, 1992 and part of 1993…The nightly TV news featured him calling for physical attacks on journalists, declaring prominent individuals as traitors, and naming spies and “bad Serbs.” Official TV commentators referred to Seslj as the “only voice of reason in a dark tunnel.” (p. 117)

Seslj’s venomous nationalist rhetoric was extreme even by the standards of the time. Milosevic supported Seslj with the strategic knowledge that Seslj could draw an entirely different segment of the population to the cause than could more mainstream politicians like Milosevic, Plavsic and Karadzic. This is because Seslj had a violent vision that, while supported by the others, could not be touted openly by a politician pandering in part to global audiences. Seslj said in plain language what many of the others tried to address in euphemism. As such, Seslj had an appeal at the most base level of society. Seslj openly focused on the wars against Croatia and Bosnia as an ancestral
vendetta and a necessity in light of the impending threat to Serb being. To this extent, at a 1991 rally for a Greater Serbia in eastern Croatia, Seslj told a group of ethnic-Serbs,

We Serbs are in danger. Croatian fascist hoards are attacking Serb women and children in our villages. Our houses are being burnt to the ground. The Croatian fascist hoards are planning genocide for the Serbs. No one is safe. The only protection is to fight for a land uniting all Serbs.

With this characteristic statement, Seslj invokes fear in his audience. He portrays the Croats as an immediate threat to all Serbs, and supports his claims by referring to the Croats as fascist. This term is a clear attempt to situate the current conflict in WWII history as the Ustashe were aligned with fascism. Seslj further highlights this threat, playing to the emotion of his audience through his claim that women and children are being attacked. Once again the idea that Serbia’s enemies are demons laying in wait to defile the pure Serbian race is highlighted. Additionally, in referring to the Croat hoards, Seslj offers animalistic and primitive images of the Croats who, like barbarian hoards of legend, or wild pack animals, are coming in a vicious mass to kill the Serbs in the region. By asserting that the Serbs are being targeted for genocide, Seslj is giving the region’s Serbs permission to attack their Croat neighbors as an act of defense. There is an implication that these barbarian hoards, this pack of wolves, must be stopped before they descend upon this defenseless Serb village.

There is further the assertion in this speech that Serbs throughout the Yugoslav region are threatened in much the same way. Hence an aggressive campaign to create a Greater Serbia is advocated as another defensive action to preempt the impending genocide. At the end of this statement Seslj hails the Serb people as he calls for uniting
all Serb lands. With this call to Greater Serbia Seslj is calling forth a Serb nation free from geographic boundaries. In doing so Seslj justifies wars throughout the region as conquests to set the Serb nation free from the oppressions faced when surrounded by so many enemies. Unity against a common enemy is Seslj’s appeal here. Seslj was not shy about calling for a united Serb land. In propagating Greater Serbia, Vojislav Seslj told *Politika* on May 14th, 1991,

> We will avenge Serbian blood and present the bill for all the crimes and a million Serbian victims to the new Ustashe movement. All Serbism: Serbism has no price! … Croats must leave Serbia…

When Seslj speaks here of Serbia he is talking not only about the boundaries of Serbia proper, but of Greater Serbia in its largest proposed form. Employing the discourse of the SANU Memorandum, he is justifying the wars in Croatia by asserting that there are Croats on Serb soil. Further, Seslj is employing WWII as a unifying symbol. He is justifying the Serbian aggressions against Croats by hailing the Ustashe atrocities, and proclaiming that a time of reckoning had come for Croats whom he rhetorically associates with the legacy of the Ustashe crimes. In the April 17th, 1992 edition of *Vjecernje Novosti* Seslj continues to link modern Croats to Ustashe atrocities. Seslj proclaimed,

> I would expel Croats …because they are utterly disloyal inhabitants of Serbia…they do their utmost to internally destabilize Serbia. They are close collaborators of the Ustashe. We shall have to retaliate because Tudjman expelled 160,000 Serbs…We cannot treat Croats in a humane way while our people are treated inhumanely.
In demanding the expulsion of Croats, Seslj is reclaiming Yugoslav territory for Serbia while he simultaneously reaffirms Serb national identity as primary over Yugoslav identity. His call to expel Croats from Serb land is a good example of the ways in which Seslj’s rhetoric provided a solid complement to Plavsic, offering concrete solutions to the problems highlighted by Plavsic and Karadzic. Seslj often spoke in graphic detail, offering instructions to torture and murder for all those interested in participating. *Duga* published Seslj’s campaign address which stated,

The Croats must have their throats cut not with a knife, but with a rusty spoon…

The Croats are cowards. Cowardice is in their genes…Bosnia is indisputably Serbian, and all those Muslim fundamentalists who disagree with that idea may pack up and leave in a timely manner. I think that by the genetic virtue of the Serbian people, they are always ready for war. Every Serb is a born soldier…nations who underrated Serbs have paid for it… (July 5th, 1991).

Here Seslj gives explicit instructions as to the ways in which Croats should be tortured. He further alludes to the ethnic cleansing that would take place when he asks the Muslims to “leave in a timely manner.” Seslj hails the Serb people, as he praises their innate bravery and invokes the bonds of blood and soil, as he presents Bosnian Muslims as fundamentalist intruders on Serb soil.

Further, Seslj invokes a scientific and genetic discourse in the tradition of Plavsic as he notes that Croats are genetically predisposed to cowardice whereas Serbs are genetically predisposed to virtue. This segment further presents Croats as “other” to the Serbs by juxtaposing the cowardly Croat with the brave Serb who has been chosen by
nature to be strong and virtuous. Hence, Seslj invokes the mythic Kosovo theme of Serbs as a “chosen people” who have been selected by God for a special fate.

While Seslj’s intellectual privilege and authority gave him access to audiences, political opportunity and media outlets to which he may never had been exposed, his discourse more closely resembles the “bardic voice” (Lessl, 1989) than the “priestly voice” engaged by Plavsic. Seslj used common language and blatantly inflammatory rhetorical tactics to gain support, and convey his message. In plain language, Seslj defined the Serb people through his call to unity, and explication of the threats that surrounded the Serbs from every direction. He then explicitly told his audience how they could be free from this threat by giving them instructions to murder and ethnic cleansing.

Conversely, Plavsic engaged the priestly voice as she shrouded her racist rhetoric in pseudo-scientific discourses. Plavsic used scientific discourse to define the Serb people as a group that has been biologically pre-determined. Further, through her priestly discourses, Plavsic educated her audiences with regard to the biological, and hence immutable, nature of the threat that surrounded the Serb people. In doing so, Plavsic offered answers as to why it is that Serbs had come to be repeatedly dominated. After she had enlightened her audience as to the reasons behind their historical suffering, she then gave them permission to retaliate against the threat around them.

Somewhere between these two poles, Karadzic’s rhetoric blends both the “bardic” and “priestly” voices. His position as a psychiatrist affords him a degree of authority when critiquing the essential personality types of both Serbs and others, though he often speaks plainly in the language of the common man. Yet there is another aspect of Karadzic’s rhetoric that sets him apart. His use of religious discourse allows him a truly
priestly voice in that his words seem to be imbued with divine authority. While this type of rhetoric would likely have been relegated to the sidelines of culture in Tito’s secular Yugoslavia, in the increasingly dogmatic and polarized atmosphere of the late 1980s and 1990s, religious animosity was making resurgence as a simple and easily defined marker of difference. Karadzic’s “priestly” rhetoric cornered the market on religious differences as demarcation of “otherness.”

Just as a university is characterized by the multitude of personalities and pedagogical techniques there to educate its student body, so does the various styles of these three cultural educators color the landscape of Serbian nationalism with their various styles of cultural pedagogy. Each of these three intellectual leaders has a unique style, each speaks to a different type of student and each, in turn, played a different role in the normalization of violence in the former Yugoslavia. Yet in the rhetoric of each is a tendency toward highlighting the Kosovo mythos through allusions to narratives of historic Serb subjugation, the impending threat of Muslim fundamentalism, and the promise of redemption of the Serbs. Each uses these themes in further proffering the discourses of the SANU Memorandum into the common cultural lexicon. Their public rhetoric in conjunction with the SANU Memorandum called forth Serb national identity and politicized that identity as a necessary defense against yet another onslaught.

After Milosevic, these three prominent Serb leaders (in conjunction with the Bosnian-Serb General Ratko Mladic7) are the largest players to be indicted at the war crimes tribunal in The Hague. While Plavsic has pled guilty and is serving her sentence,

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7 The UN considers General Mladic the commander most responsible for the July 1995 massacre in Bosnia’s Srebrenica municipality. Srebrenica was the largest single massacre in the Bosnian war.
Seslj’s trial, replete with outbursts and outrageous requests on the part of the accused, has become a media circus rivaling the Milosevic trial. Further, with residual nationalist tendencies in Serbia on the rise again, Seslj recently ran for public office in Belgrade, Serbia. He conducted his campaign from the Scheveningen prison in The Hague, making calls to Serbian radio stations that were then broadcast, and won a sizable portion of the popular vote. Karadzic, on the other hand, is still at large. His capture along with the capture of General Ratko Mladic, is the top priority for the Tribunal’s chief prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte. His pursuit by and subsequent elusion of U.N. security forces has helped resurrect Karadzic as a local hero to increasing numbers of Serbs who are coming to view the Tribunal as another aggressive act in the historic subjugation of the Serb nation.

A Few Last Words

Through a conscious crafting of history that employed a series of overlapping constitutive narratives, leading Serb intellectuals hailed the Serb “people.” Thus, the ethno-national identities that had lost their primary importance while Tito was in power were reconstituted as essentially racial and necessarily political identities. The WWII atrocities against the Serbs in conjunction with their economic and political disadvantage under Tito and the loss of their “holy land” at the hands of Albanian “Turks,” all pointed to a concentrated threat in the present and allowed for the legitimization of preemptive

8 Seslj has proven to be a difficult defendant. He claims that he does not understand the simultaneous translation provided for him when the translator is a Croat. He has further claimed that the flak jacket provided for him by the Tribunal to protect him against any possible assassination attempts is too heavy for him and is a violation of his human rights. He has been excessively abusive to the prison guards and U.N. security staff, and claims that the robes worn by the judges in the courtroom are psychologically disturbing to him as they are reminiscent of the inquisition. Seslj returned the laptop computer given to him by the Tribunal to help him prepare his defense as he claimed that the computer was rigged to give him electric shocks. Seslj’s paranoia has even led him to accuse Judge Schonberg (of Germany) of holding an inherent bias against him stemming from Nazi aggression toward Serbs in WWII.
action as the predetermined conclusion to a historical imperative. Through these
narratives, the present moment offered the Serbs the chance to play a fated role as
characters that would fulfill the promise of history and redeem Serbia’s glory.

The SANU Memorandum can be viewed as the founding document of modern
Serb nationalism. Its publication marks the political “coming-out” of Serbian nationalist
intellectuals and cultural elites, as the general public recognized the academy’s political
nature only after the Memorandum’s publication. When an unnamed sourced leaked
parts of the Memorandum to the press, the Yugoslav government widely condemned the
document. SANU was openly criticized for its divisive and openly nationalist stance. To
counter these attacks, SANU officially claimed that the Memorandum had been leaked to
the press as an unfinished document. Still, 216 SANU members had signed the
document, and openly attested to its scientific nature.

Despite the wide condemnation of the document, rising political star Slobodan
Milosevic said strategically little about the Memorandum. Later he gained complete
power by adopting its ideas. His tight relationship with the Serbian nationalist
intellectuals and cultural elites suggests a direct collusion between the Milosevic
government and the Serbian Academy. Vesna Pesic (2000) illustrates the tight
relationship between the politicians and cultural elites that boosted Milosevic’s bid for
power. By the end of the 1980s a two-sided anti-democratic coalition was in control of
Serbia’s political scene. On one side were the extreme nationalist elements of the Serb
Orthodox church in conjunction with the Serbian intelligentsia. This side’s main focus
was producing and promoting nationalist ideology. The other side consisted of the
political party apparatus in conjunction with the army and the police who fostered the
rising popularity of the nationalist ideology to secure their own positions of power. This side also incorporated Serbian popular culture as it took on an increasingly nationalist bent. Although their inner motives may have been different, these two sides of the “nationalist-communist coalition” worked together to tear down federated Yugoslavia and to recast it in their own mold. “Either Yugoslavia would become a country according to Serbian (nationalist) standards, or else Serbia would embark on a path toward creating a ‘Greater Serbia’ by force,” thereby destroying any hope of a united Yugoslavia (Pesic, 2000, p. 17).

The next chapter examines the rhetoric of Slobodan Milosevic. As Milosevic is the most public “face” of the Balkan wars, his rise to power warrants analysis. Through his public statements and private influence over the media, Milosevic played a major role in propagating Serbian nationalism and normalizing the assemblage of mass violence. His use of the Kosovo mythos placed him squarely as the new Knez Lazar sent from heaven to save the Serbs from their historic victimization.

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9 Traditional folk music made its way back into popular culture through a techno-pop infused variety of nationalist folk music called “turbo-folk.” Blending the Serbian tradition of epic poetry with strong techno dance beats, turbo-folk came to be the staple of Serbian pop-music in the late 1980s and 1990s. Topping off this nationalist amalgamation of high and low culture, Serbian army general Arkan (later famous for his brutal leadership during the ethnic cleansing campaigns) married the popular Serbian turbo-folk star Ceca.
CHAPTER FIVE

Slobo the Redeemer:

The Rhetoric of Slobodan Milosevic and the construction of the Serbian nation

“It is known that in our entire history the Serbs and the Serbian people never waged wars of conquest but only defensive wars…”

~~Slobodan Milosevic

On December 28, 2003, Serbia held parliamentary elections in which four of the candidates on the ballot were indicted war criminals. Though later officially reprimanded and sanctioned by the ICTY, both Vojislav Seslj and Slobodan Milosevic had campaigned in Serbia through a series of telephone interviews from the detention facility in The Hague. When the election was over, Seslj’s Serbian Radical Party won the largest share of the votes (28%) allowing the party 82 of the 250 parliamentary seats, with Milosevic’s Serbian Socialist Party winning an additional 22 seats. How is it that 10 years after the Dayton Accords and 15 years after the fall of Yugoslavia that staunch nationalism still holds a commanding presence in Serbia? The residual nationalist tendency in Serbia despite the best efforts of the ICTY to delegitimize such sentiments, points to the continuing currency of a Serbian subjectivity rooted in victimhood and fueled by the reinvigoration of the Kosovo mythos.

As highlighted in Chapter Three, early oral and literary traditions had infused Serbian culture with several underlying themes. These themes centered on the myth of Kosovo and highlighted the conception of Serbs as eternal victims, the threat of Islamic
fundamentalism (and other enemies), and the promise of eventual redemption. These themes were teased out again in the 1980s and amalgamated with modern discourses surrounding current events in order to “retrospectively normalize” (Zelizer, 1995) Serb nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s. While Chapters Three & Four explained the conditions that allowed for the rise of Serbian nationalism in the late 1980s and 1990s, there is still another piece of the puzzle. The allure of the front man of Serb nationalism, Slobodan Milosevic, must necessarily be analyzed in order to explain the normalization of the nationalist mindset in Serbia.

In the late 1980s, in tacit collusion with the Serbian intelligentsia and Serb media, Slobodan Milosevic subtly crafted the Serb nation through a discourse that relegated Yugoslav identity to tertiary status. He increasingly encouraged the Serbian people to identify less with the pan-Slavic culture fostered by Tito, and more with an exclusive, and highly politicized Serbian identity. From his first appearance in Kosovo in 1987, Milosevic hailed the Serb “people” (McGee, 1975) through constitutive narratives to rearticulate the subjectivity of his audience (Charland, 1987). He put forth a narrative framework that relied on a teleological view of history to present Serb history as if it were an unstoppable force, predetermined to culminate in the present moment. Milosevic painted the Serbian people as victims who were repeatedly stripped of both their land and culture, first at the hands of the “Turks” then by the Croatian Usatshe in WWII, and finally by Tito’s Yugoslavia. In this way Milosevic inserted the Serb people into this historical narrative as politically charged characters fated to fulfill the predestined story of Serb history.
Riding the wave of national unrest initiated by the controversy over the 1986 SANU Memorandum, a document Sabrina Ramet (1992) calls a “Pandora’s box of nationalism,” Milosevic implied that he would protect Serbia from the alleged genocidal onslaught approaching from the other republics. He further asserted that he would allow Serbians to realize their true potential by bringing both land and pride back to the Serbs. In this way Milosevic’s rhetoric was an excellent complement to the contentions and propositions put forth by the SANU Memorandum. Each promoted the other such that the Memorandum unofficially served as the backbone of Milosevic’s policies. In turn, Milosevic’s rhetorical choices supported the view of the Serbian historical trajectory asserted in the Memorandum. Using nationalist ideology that had been curbed in the Tito years, Milosevic offered himself as a new savior sent to lead the Serb people to their destined redemption. In fostering a strong Serb identity, Milosevic offered himself as an alternative to the “Serbo-phobic” Titoist policies.

The emergence of nationalism was vaunted as the rebirth of dignity. Serbs believed that after fifty years under the enforced slogan of “Brotherhood and Unity,” Milosevic had once again given them back their national identity, the right to say that they were Serbs. The press fanned their fervor. (Silber & Little, 1996, p.58).

Milosevic was the first communist leader in Yugoslavia to harness the power of the press. To ensure that the centrality of the Kosovo myth was “retrospectively normalized” (Zelizer, 1995) in Serbian national consciousness, Milosevic exerted influence over the Serbian mass media. With the help of Dusan Mitevic, the chief of TV Belgrade and longtime family friend of Milosevic’s wife, Mira Markovic, Milosevic used
Serbian media as an agenda setting and framing tool to create a seamless version of history that flowed into a conscious crafting of current events.

Milosevic’s appeal was remarkable in that he spoke the language of the “common man” while taking on an almost super-human persona. His ability to speak directly to the people, and to identify with his audiences through his tone and language choices was a distinct break from typically unreachable Titoist politicians. Even so, his persona was that of a redeemer to the Serb people, a Moses who had risen from among them to lead them through the desert of historic subjugation to the legendary Promised Land sworn to them at the Battle of Kosovo. In this way, Milosevic represents a masterful blend of both “bard” and “priest.”

The “priestly voice” (Lessl, 1989) descends from above, mediating between the higher power of God or nature and the audience. The “priesthood” represents an opportunity to play “a formative role in creating a particular society’s existential consciousness” (p. 185). On the other hand, the “bardic voice” is one that is submerged in the culture of the audience to which it speaks (Lessl, 1989, p. 183). “Bardic” rhetoric gains its authority – its ethos – from being one of the people – a “common man.” While the tone and style of Milosevic’s constitutive discourses of Serb identity were largely “bardic” in nature, his persona as redeemer to the Serb people was “priestly.” In this way Milosevic was a rhetorical lightening rod for both the priestly discourses of the Academy and the bardic discourses of the Serbian media. Both charged the atmosphere around him in such a way as to make the Serb people reflected in Milosevic’s rhetoric increasingly attractive.
This chapter examines the constitutive appeals and rhetorical strategies employed by Slobodan Milosevic. Through his constitutive appeals to the Serb people, Milosevic interpellated Serbian identity through a series of narratives rooted in the Kosovo mythos. I begin this chapter by examining Milosevic’s use of the constitutive discourses to hail the Serb people. An analysis of Milosevic’s first appearance near Kosovo Polje in 1987 will offer insight into the centrality of Kosovo as a unification device for the Serb people as well as insight into the way in which Milosevic appeared to break from the confines of Titoism to offer the Serbs a new future thereby adopting the “priestly” persona of a reformer and a redeemer.

I then go on to critique the role that Milosevic’s deliberate influence over the Serbian media played in his constitutive appeals. Through staged events, managed images and skillfully chosen words the Serbian media under Milosevic’s guidance contextualized current events as the apex of a predetermined historical trajectory. Polarizing views of social identity were normalized as the central themes of the Memorandum became the common currency of mass media discourses, legitimized through the rhetoric of Milosevic himself. This segment offers analyses of several statements Milosevic made at party rallies in 1988 and 1989 as well as an extensive analysis of his 1989 inaugural celebration address made on the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. In final section of this paper I provide an overview of the Milosevic-friendly Serb media from his assumption of power into the 1990s.

Through these analyses I propose that the “priestly voice” embraced by nationalist Serbian intellectuals and encompassed by Milosevic’s redeemer persona, was complemented by the “bardic voice” enacted in Milosevic’s “common man” appeal and
embraced by Serbian media outlets. This suggests a connection between the “bardic”
media depictions of these events and the formation of public opinion with regard to
Milosevic and his policies. Further, these analyses will demonstrate the ways in which
Milosevic’s constitutive rhetoric amalgamated the “bardic” and “priestly” voices to
politicize Serbian ethno-national identity, thereby legitimizing the Serbian nationalist
agenda put forth by the 1986 SANU Memorandum. An initial examination of the role of
constitutive rhetoric in the rise of Serb nationalism informs these analyses.

Constitutive Rhetoric: Hailing the Serb Nation

Nationalism had a varied history in the Balkan region, ranging from those
nationalisms colored with the spirit of democracy and a pan-Slavic vision to harshly
exclusive nationalisms predicated on the aggrandizement of a specific state through the
domination of others. Eric Wietz (2003) points out that in Tito’s Yugoslavia, national
sentiments were present in each republic, but were tempered as they were entwined with
communist ideology and a commitment to the larger entity of Yugoslavia (p.195).
Yugoslavia allowed for a controlled amount of ethno-national pride so long as the
patriotic love of nation was reserved for Yugoslavia.

While other ethnic groups in Yugoslavia saw emerging nationalism transpire in
the 1980s, it was Serbian nationalism that served as the pacesetter and as the strain of
ideology that underpinned the most extreme forms of population politics (Weitz, 2003, p.
191). Unlike the Yugoslav Federation that had been based on a pan-Slavic sense of
belonging and community, Serbian nationalism was connected with the feeling of injured
dignity stemming from a history of victimization heaped upon the Serbian nation. This
feeling was fostered through narratives highlighting various injuries portrayed as national wounds that served as a common denominator for the emerging Serbian people.

Maurice Charland (1987) proposes that a collectivized “people” are “interpellated” as, “political subjects through a process of identification in rhetorical narratives” (p. 134). He implies that a “people” are called into being through a series of narratives that position the “people” as subjects within history. The “people” exist because, as individuals, they can identify themselves with the characters in the narrative. They exist as positions in a text (p. 138). It is through historical narratives that a set of individuals can be conceived as if they were one. Historical narratives collapse time and sequential events in order to offer interpretations of events in which a people take on certain characteristics. As individuals come to identify with those stories, their subjectivity within the people becomes performative (Butler, 1990) in a sense, and in acting out that subjectivity, the choices of the individual can be limited. Individuals situated in a collective subject position often make decisions based on what is expected of one of the “people.”

Further, the narratives of constitutive rhetorics are teleological in that they present the present moment as a definitive point on a predetermined historical timeline, and have an unfinished ending that the constituted subjects are charged with completing. It is additionally important to consider the political force behind these narratives. If the narratives of constitutive rhetoric were merely stories of the past they could be dismissed as unimportant. What gives constitutive rhetorics their force is that fact that they are oriented toward action. “Constitutive rhetorics are ideological not merely because they provide individuals with narratives to inhabit as subjects and motives to experience, but
because they insert ‘narratized’ subjects-as-agents into the world” (Charland, 1987, p. 143).

Yet these identities are not formed from scratch. They are based on existent subjectivities that have in some way lost their force. As Charland (1987) goes on to point out, “constitutive rhetorics work upon previous discourses, upon previous constitutive rhetorics. They capture alienated subjects by re-articulating existing subject positions so as to contain or resolve experienced dialectical contradictions between the world and its discourses” (p. 142). The appeal of Milosevic’s constitutive rhetoric relied both on the communal mentality ingrained by Titoism and on novel appeals for a new form of individuality portrayed as a distant break from Titoist policies. The communal mentality and lack of encouragement for individuality under Tito may have paved the way for the rapid transition to a collective consciousness that embraced an extreme form of nationalism. Yet, Aleksander Pavkovic (2000) asserts that it was Milosevic’s break from communistic appeals and push for individuality that won the hearts and minds of the Serb people in that his individualism represented a break from the collective mindset that had been the status quo under Tito. Pavkovic (2000) notes before Milosevic, no communist politician in Yugoslavia had openly appealed to Serbian national traditions and national pride. Milosevic’s rhetoric offers Serb nationalism as an illusion of individuality in that the Serb nation is being treated as an individual entity, separate from Yugoslavia, and that the reinvigoration of the Serb nation is touted as every person’s responsibility. Yet, the collective conception of the Serb nation and the implication that Serbs have a seamless and shared history, stemming from what Katherine Verdery (1999) referred to as an “eponymous ancestor,” plays to the already existing collective conception of self.
The shift from communism to nationalism is not unique to Serbia. In fact, Verdery (1999) points out that this shift was common in many Eastern European former communist countries. As these countries tried to leave the communist tradition behind, there was a movement to differentiate new ideologies from the former communist ideology. This often involved a mythic conception of a shared and heroic national past. Icons of this glorified past were appropriated by those seeking power in such forms as the celebratory reburial of historic heroes, the raising/tearing down of statues, the changing of street names, and the proclamation of new holidays; thereby rearranging time and space in order to shape social memory (Zelizer, 1995; Verdery, 1999). In this way, the communal mentality fostered under communism is simply dressed in another robe instead of giving way to an individualistic culture, which is also possible given the right conditions and influences. Hence, while Slovenia moved toward an open and democratic society, Serbia and Croatia moved headlong into a sort of nationalism that represented a sense of collective national individualism.

Much of Milosevic’s constitutive rhetoric employs a “bardic voice.” Thomas Lessl (1989) situates “bardic” discourse as that “which confines itself to the world of common sense experience already integral to its audience’s identity” (p. 184). Lessl (1989) further explains, “When bards talk, it is our own voice that we hear, the faint murmuring of a collective consciousness amplified in poetic utterances and often recognizable as myth” (p. 184). While in medieval times the bard was a tribal storyteller, confirming and reinforcing cultural values through narrative, the modern “bardic voice” can come from television, or culturally central “commoners” for example whose lateral rhetoric travels “across the well traveled highways of a cultural milieu” (p. 185). Both
bardic and priestly discourses can find their voice in myth and narrative and, though each exists separately, they are often working in conjunction toward a common end. The important distinction between bardic and priestly discourses is that bardic rhetoric reminds people of who they are while priestly rhetoric reminds people of who they might become (p. 188).

The tone and style of Milosevic’s constitutive discourses allowed his audience to connect with him as a man who was one of the people and could understand them. The “bardic” appeal allowed the people to identify with him as one of their own, reminding the Serb people of who they were and had always been. At the same time, Milosevic’s discourse inspired his audience with what they could become as he invoked the promises of redemption embedded in the Kosovo mythos. Hence his rhetoric also incorporated a “priestly voice.” In this way, Milosevic’s redeemer persona was “priestly” even while the appeal of his constitutive rhetoric was largely “bardic.” Milosevic’s skillful blend of bardic and priestly appeals to Serbian national identity proved to be an instant success.

It was a novel, simple and directly personal appeal breaking the 45 years of communist-imposed taboos. The glorious past of the Serb nation and its pride was, he stressed in his speeches, the inalienable patrimony of every individual Serb, which demands of every Serb individually to prove themselves worthy of their ancestors. In the context of the alleged humiliation of Serbdom…this personal appeal proved to be very important. (p. 104).

In all, the success of Milosevic’s constitutive appeals can be understood as a proposal for a break from Titoist polices and a push for individualism that made use of the already existing communal tendency to rearticulate a collective Serb identity. This
appeal demonstrates an amalgamation of the bardic and priestly voices to reinforce
people’s identity as Serbs while offering an idealized vision of what the Serbian people
could become. To see his constitutive discourses in action, an analysis of Milosevic’s
first appearance in Kosovo in 1987 is useful.¹

The Ascension of Milosevic

The public controversy over the 1986 SANU Memorandum plagued the Serbian
communist party throughout the late autumn of 1986. Yet in early 1987, the debate over
the Memorandum soon gave way to more pressing problems in Kosovo. By the mid-
1980s, a majority of the people living in the Kosovo province were ethnic-Albanians who
were considered a national minority in Yugoslavia and thus were not afforded the rights
of full citizenship. Tension between Kosovo’s Serbian minority and the ethnic-Albanian
majority increased as a vocal group of Kosovo’s Serbs grew increasingly dissatisfied with
their position in the province (L. Cohen, 2002, p. 106). Aware that trouble was brewing,
Azem Vlassi, the Albanian chief of the League of Communists of Kosovo, had phoned
President Stambolic, urging him to personally come to Kosovo to resolve the crisis.
Stambolic, who had spoken at a similar rally the previous year, decided to send instead
his protégé, Milosevic (Sell, 2002). This choice would prove to be the defining moment
of Milosevic’s political career as well as his first public defiance of Stambolic and of
Titoist pan-Slavic principals (Scharf & Schabas, 2002).

Upon his arrival, he was met by a large group of Kosovo’s Serbs who complained
of mistreatment and beatings by the area’s mostly Albanian police force. Milosevic

¹ The English translations of Milosevic’s speeches in this chapter have been drawn from various sources.
In each case, I tried to find multiple sources for each speech/quotation and to compare it against the original
Serbian version through Ana Petrovic who checked each for accuracy. I chose the source who was most
true to the spirit of the original, and the sources are noted after each quotation.
responded with a phrase that launched his savior persona, “No one will be allowed to beat the Serbs again! No one!” Taken out of context and rebroadcast on Serbian television ad nauseum, this line became the impetus for Milosevic’s rapid rise to power.

Recontextualized in the tenor of the Kosovo myth, and generalized to the larger Serbian population, the allusion this line makes to the historic victimization of the Serbs was not lost on Serbian televisual audiences, many of whom were already feeling the draw of the redefined and politicized conception of Serbian national identity.

The television portrayal of Milosevic among the Serb crowds in Kosovo was strategically broadcast to show the Serbs as victims and Milosevic as a hero who cared about Kosovo and the Serbs. What these broadcasts failed to show is the way in which the Serb crowd had provoked the Kosovo police force, pelting them with stones and shouting inflammatory slogans. Serb TV showed only the police brutality against the Serbs gathered there, and Milosevic walking among the Serbs, listening to them and championing their cause. Hence, “the Milosevic myth was born with a lie at its core” (BBC video, 1995a)

The following day Milosevic appeared to the anxious crowd at Kosovo Polje once again.² That night Serbian TV created the Milosevic legend, showing his speech on all three channels (BBC video, 1995a). The continuous rebroadcast of this address steeped in nationalism and heavy with mythic history catapulted Milosevic into the

² Milosevic later told Christianne Amanpour of the BBC that this was the first time he had ever heard the term “ethnic cleansing.” He claimed that the Albanians were openly advocating an “ethnically pure” Kosovo. Azem Vlassi, the ethnic Albanian leader of Kosovo’s communist party, vehemently denies this claiming that both the Serb nationalists in Kosovo to whom Milosevic spoke that day and Milosevic himself were lying about the extent of ethnic Albanian aggressions against the Serbs. The Serb media showed the event through Milosevic’s eyes, and so that is how it came to be perceived in Serb history.
Serbian leadership, turning him overnight into a Serb national hero and placing him in very public opposition to President Stambolic.\footnote{While his address appeared to be spontaneous, Milosevic and his wife had spent the night before his trip to Kosovo planning how he would speak to the Serbs waiting there for him (L. Cohen, 2002, p. 108).}

No one has the right to beat our people! First of all my friends, I want to tell you that you must stay put. This is your land. These are your homes. Your meadows and gardens. Your memories. You shouldn’t abandon your land just because it is difficult to live, because you are pressured by injustice and degradation. It was never part of the Serb and Montenegrin character to give up in the face of obstacles, to demobilize when it’s time to fight…You should stay here for the sake of your ancestors and descendants. Would you shame your ancestors and disappoint your children? But I don’t suggest that you stay, endure and tolerate a situation you are not satisfied with. We will win this battle! Yugoslavia does not exist without Kosovo, Yugoslavia and Serbia will not give Kosovo away. (Scharf & Schabas, 2002, p.10)

With this short speech, Milosevic encapsulated the essential themes of Serbian nationalism. He invoked the strong bonds of blood and soil so important to Serbian foundational myths as he purposely emphasized “your land…your meadows and gardens. Your memories.” Milosevic invoked the Serbian identity of victimhood, presenting the Serb nation as one that has been consistently oppressed as he talked about the “injustices and degradation” that had been suffered by the Serbs in Kosovo. With discourse that calls to mind the relationship to an eponymous ancestor described by Verdery (1999), Milosevic referred to the timelessness of Serbian national identity, fusing past present
and future. Further, Milosevic hailed the Serb people as he praised the Serbian character, and invoked their ancestral duty to fight for what is theirs.

The scene of this confrontation is additionally significant to the effect of this speech. Speaking near Kosovo Polje, Milosevic played to the Serbian mythology that invokes Kosovo as the historic homeland of the Serbs that was taken from them by the Turks in the ultimate mytho-historic tragedy. By addressing Serb suffering in Kosovo at that moment Milosevic was addressing the mythic and historic suffering of Serbs from the Turkish domination to the present day. In invoking the Kosovo mythos, Milosevic played to the same fears and desires that had been encouraged by the 1986 SANU Memorandum. Milosevic then gave the Serbs implicit permission to resort to violent action to redress the wrongs against them. Through this narrative, Milosevic first constituted Serb identity and then charged the Serb people with completing the story according to history’s predetermined guidelines.

Milosevic further discursively constituted the Serb people as he rearticulated their disenchanted Yugoslav identity and politically charged his audience with an invigorated call to Serb identity. To the Serbs gathered there, Milosevic offered alternatives not recognized by Tito. Under Tito, Kosovo had been treated as a part of Yugoslavia and was subject to policies that reflected the “Brotherhood and Unity” mantra so ingrained in Tito’s Yugoslavia. Milosevic offered a different conception of Kosovo. He re-created Kosovo as the heart of Serbia thereby taking Kosovo away from Yugoslavia and restoring the Serb “holy land.” In doing so, Milosevic offered a seemingly more individualistic identity to Kosovo and to the Serbs. Yet, in projecting a communal ancestry and history, Milosevic used the pre-existing collectivistic mindset of
his audience. Throughout his speech Milosevic broke from Titoist policies, calling forth
the Serb people both by encouraging the Serbs as individuals, separate from Yugoslavia
and by encouraging Serb nationalism through the communal mindset of his audience.

Most important, while this speech may have had a very specific meaning to the
audience gathered to hear it, it is the various contexts in which this speech was received
by the masses that were not present that gave it its historic and mythic importance. With
the help of the carefully orchestrated TV production of Milosevic’s appearance in
Kosovo, audiences at home were encouraged to embrace the plight of the Serbs in
Kosovo as the plight of all Serbs. The site of this speech in conjunction with Milosevic’s
fusion of historical injustices with current problems in Kosovo allowed his words to
resonate with Serbian audiences watching at home. In all, the success of this speech was
predicated on Milosevic’s suggestion that there will be a better future for a united Serb
people, and the audiences at home began to feel the call of this newly constituted
collective subjectivity.

For many Serbian intellectuals and cultural elites who were already searching to
racialize and politicize Serbian identity, Milosevic’s first visit to Kosovo became the
ideal precipitating event to ignite Serbian national consciousness throughout Yugoslavia.
Milosevic’s visit to Kosovo Polje took on mythic and romantic overtones as he was
portrayed as the fulfillment of the promise of the Kosovo mythos – the new Milos Obilic
or Knez Lazar sent to lead the Serb people out of years of historic victimization like a
modern Moses leading the chosen Serb people out of their symbolic slavery and into the
promised land of a united Greater Serbia. Kemal Kurspahic (2003) notes,
The time was ripe for the birth of a leader. There was a threatened nation. There were enemies all around. There was an ongoing exodus of Serbs and even genocide against them. The nation needed a savior. And that savior appeared in the form of Slobodan Milosevic (p. 33).

This first taste of the glory of the savior’s role has been described as an “epiphanal moment” for Milosevic. The events at Kosovo Polje in April of 1987 had a profound affect on Milosevic’s behavior as a politician. Lenard Cohen (2002) notes,

When he arrived at Kosovo, he had been a cautious and reserved Titoist apparatchik offering the population vapid formulations from a lexicon of well honed and officially condoned platitudes. But when he left Kosovo, Milosevic had acquired a far more intimate appreciation of nationalist sentiments in Serbia…and the limits of existing Serbian communist methods and policies to address those concerns (p. 109).

Still, even as he appeared as a savior, Milosevic’s appeal was predicated on his ability to relate to the “common man.” He used inclusive language to denote that he is on the level with the people. He refers to “our people,” and says, “we will win this battle” demonstrating that he sees the plight of the Kosovo Serbs as his battle as well. Robert Thomas (1999) notes “the intimacy of the relationship which Milosevic established with his audiences was strengthened by his use of everyday patterns of speech and avoidance of the impersonal ‘language of wood’ used under socialism” (p. 48). Milosevic broke with Titoist policies in that he appealed directly to the needs and desire of the people. He abandoned the party policy of maintaining an ethnic balance and encouraged Serbs to see themselves as Serbs.
Further, Milosevic consciously developed a short, to-the-point speaking style that was intended to distinguish his speeches from the “jargon-filled orations of Yugoslav politicians before him” (Sell, 2002, p. 181). His rhetoric in this speech is not encumbered by intricate explanations or political language, but instead appeals directly to the passions of his audience. Milosevic addressed his audiences with short simple sentences complete with ideas and slogans that can be easily understood by everyone. Invoking the “bardic voice,” he presents himself as a leader of the people who walks among the people and speaks their language.

Milosevic’s mastery of the rhetorical situation and his persona as at once a savior and one of the people were important aspects of his mass appeal. Yet, it was his affect on the Serbian mass media that allowed him to gain widespread support. The rapid shift in public attention from the federal sense of national consciousness to the rabid nationalism that gained popularity in the late 1980s points to the central role of the collusion between Serbian media and national institutions (Popov, 2000, p. 102-3). Through his conscious influence over media content and frames, the principals first brought to public attention through the 1986 SANU Memorandum were legitimized and the politicization of Serbian ethnic identity was normalized. To move this process along, Dusan Mitevic proved to be an invaluable ally and confidant of the Milosevic regime. With Mitevic’s assistance, the press afforded Milosevic massive favorable coverage and Milosevic was rapidly able to wield influence over the most strategically significant Serbian mass media outlets.

**Milosevic and the Media**

Julie Mertus (1999) suggests that people in a given region pattern their behavior on what they believe to be true. They do not rely on outside information, but on their
own personal experiences, and on myths perpetuated by popular storytellers through such vehicles as the media (p.9). The ultimate “bardic voice” in modern culture, popular media constitutes the “people” even as it reflects their image back to them. Choices in programming and frames of reference both interpret and influence the lived reality of many people.

A variety of studies suggest that in emphasizing certain details while omitting others, news media can help shape citizens’ views by encouraging certain avenues of thought and action (Bennett, 1993; Price, Tewksberry & Powers, 1997; Shah, Domke & Wackman, 1996) (Shah et al., p. 340). The media’s attention to discrete aspects of an issue can alter the public’s understanding of the issue and its importance (citing Ball-Rokeach & Rokeach, 1987; Gamson, 1985, 1992; Gitlin, 1980; Graber, 1989; and Hall et al., 1978) (Jasperson et al., 1998, p. 206). This process of making some aspects of reality more salient in a text in order to promote a particular problem, definition, interpretation, evaluation, or judgment is known as “framing” (Jasperson et al., 1998, p. 206). Media frames are influenced by journalistic choices of language and perspectives through which a given story is publicly presented. This is not so much an effect of telling the audience what to think, rather telling people what to think about (Jasperson et al., 1998, p. 205).

Media representations and interpretations of events have a close connection to public opinion. Media frames play an important role in shaping public attitudes on key issues (Shah et al., 2002; Brewer, 2002). The way a report or series of reports frames an event(s) will often determine public opinion and acceptance or rejection of a policy decision. Television news broadcasts provide especially important guidance by
structuring a way of thinking about government policy and reinforcing consensual notions of “values.” In this sense, Barnhurst & Wartella (1998) suggest that television news initiates people into a national identity, and cite empirical research that shows that newspapers can demarcate a symbolic nation. Sandra Basic-Hrvatin (1996) elaborates on the influence of media in Serbia in particular,

> Media play an important role in the process of unification and homogenization of personal memories with collective and national memories. Public memory and hence national consciousness are colonized with a national mythology, focused by images of the enemy and popular (populist) definitions of reality. Public memory is publicly lived through commemorations and rituals as a way of collective day-to-day legitimation. Hence, television becomes the most important source for information and for cultural consumption. (p. 69).

Under Tito, people had come to largely trust the news media, in as much as they had come to resist nationalist slogans. In the Tito years, Yugoslav media was largely multinational. Although Yugoslav television never fully broke free from political control, the active participation and sharing of information from across the republics assured a constant circulation of information (M. Milosevic, 1997). Milosevic was the first Communist leader in Yugoslavia to understand the importance of the news media in shaping public thought (Gjelten, 1995, p.53). Knowing that in Serbia TV was the chief source of information for the population, Milosevic worked in conjunction with state television and print organs to create a climate of pubic opinion. Erna Paris (2001) notes that 95% of the Serbian population frequently tuned in to television news broadcasts, while Louis Sell (2002) notes that for 60% of the population the state controlled evening
television was their sole source of news. The written testimony of one of Milosevic’s closest collaborators, Borislav Jovic, contends,

For years he paid the biggest attention to the media, especially television. He personally appointed editors-in-chief of the newspapers and news programs, especially directors-general of the radio and television. …He was in direct communication with all editors who ‘fed’ the public with the news, comments and generally with information. He was deeply convinced that citizens formed their view of the political situation on the basis of what they were presented…What is not published has not happened at all – that was Milosevic’s motto. (Jovic, 1999, p.15).

One of Milosevic’s premier acts of power was to assert his influence over Radio-Television Belgrade and *Politika* publishing house, which published *NIN, Politika and Politika ekspres* (Ramet, 2002, p.162). Previous to Milosevic’s leadership, *Politika* had been the newspaper with the strongest influence on public opinion and on Serbian political evolution in this century (Nenadovic, 2000, p.537). It was widely respected as the newspaper read by the educated class. With the rise of Milosevic, *Politika* began to frame its news stories in line with the emerging nationalist ideology. Hence, *Politika* became the first news source to “break the taboo against fostering nationalism and mythomania in Serbia,” (Veljanovski, 2000, p. 566) supporting Milosevic and presenting an immanent threat to the Serbs through its choice of news frames. Its esteemed position as a respected news source meant that the stories *Politika* presented were taken as truth.

Strategically, Milosevic managed the media, not by strict censorship, but by putting major media outlets in the hands of unscrupulous and inexperienced journalists
who were satisfied to follow his line. Milosevic selected friends and allies for the top editorial positions. Those selected were skilled propagandists and were able to turn all manner of events into strategic advantages for Milosevic (Judah, 2000, p. 162). Milosevic’s active cultivation of media support avoided the traditional threats of punishment for uncooperative journalists (Scharf & Schabas, 2002). Instead, Milosevic courted the media, giving them the stories and sound bites that allowed a rare glimpse into Yugoslavia’s political process. In line with his “common man” appeal, Milosevic appeared to pull back the curtain to reveal the inner-workings of government that had been hidden from public view for so long.

On September 18th, 1987, Milosevic, in an unprecedented move, invited the Serbian media to cover a special government session. At this session Milosevic accused President Stambolic of being a dictator who did not really care about the Serbian people.

It was a shock. For the next two days, people throughout Serbia were glued to their TV screens, watching the showdown. It was supposedly broadcast live, but as the meeting went on, the speeches were delayed for the news. Then Television Belgrade began cutting speeches, Mitevic blatantly giving preferential treatment to the winning side (Silber & Little, 1996, p. 45).

On national television, Stambolic was driven from the presidency through a vote of no confidence. Immediately following Stambolic’s ousting, Serbian media began running divisive and inflammatory stories that ran directly counter to Stambolic’s Titoist policies. These stories highlighted the corruption of Tito’s regime, and the injustice toward and discrimination against Serbs both during and after WWII. Under the guise of revealing secrets of the past, the popular press ran a coordinated campaign to delegitimize
Tito’s rule and its constitutional foundations. As a part of this campaign, Belgrade intellectual journals were allowed to discuss many former taboo questions and, as a result, in 1988 open anti-communism or anti-Titoism became the latest intellectual fashion. Leading dissident intellectuals were given access to the popular media to air their – previously banned – criticism of the communist rule of Yugoslavia. (Pavkovic, 2000, p. 105).

As Milosevic encouraged this sort of media dissent from Titoist policies and practices, he came across as more individualistic and permissive then his predecessors. In this sense, he was viewed as a reformer. Further, because of this new freedom to condemn Tito’s Yugoslavia, many media outlets willingly portrayed Milosevic in the most favorable light possible. Extensive media coverage, full of human-interest stories, aimed to show that Milosevic had support from all strata of the Serbian population, young and old, educated and uneducated (Pavkovic, 2000, p. 106).

The emerging power of this new nationalist force is evident in the strategic broadcasts of Milosevic’s famous “Meetings of Truth,” which were used to increase his power base. During these displays of “street democracy,” as Milosevic liked to call them, Serbian cultural elites, community leaders and politicians would often address the crowds while the Serbian press reported the rallies, filming to strategically orchestrate an event for the viewers at home. The next section looks more closely at these rallies, and the type of attention they received in the Serbian media.

Meetings of “Truth”

After replacing Stambolic as the president of Serbia, Milosevic’s brand of nationalism cloaked in a reformed flavor of communism, and termed the “Anti-
Bureaucratic Revolution,” was the order of the day. The “Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution “ was so named to signal a definite break from the complicated bureaucratic politics of Tito’s Yugoslavia. By embracing this image of simplicity and governance for the people, Milosevic portrayed himself as a politician for the common Serbs who had been pushed under-foot by Titoist policies. Vesna Pesic (2000) points out, “this so called antibureaucratic revolution, which was organized from above by Milosevic’s party clique…drew upon the nationalist ideology of [Serbs] being threatened and hated.” (p. 20).

In connection with his “Anti-bureaucratic Revolution,” Milosevic encouraged a sort of common-man’s “street democracy.” Political mobilization began to develop through “meetings of solidarity” in which Serbs throughout the region would rally in support of the Serbs in Kosovo. Milosevic and his allies promoted the mass rallies and demonstrations to promote the new Serbian leadership. The Serbian press favorably covered these rallies, which were euphemistically referred to as “Happenings of the People” or “Meetings of Truth” (Veljanovski, 2000, p. 566). These meetings were consciousness-raising events designed to tell people the “truth” about their subjugation under Tito. People from all over the region were bussed in for the Meetings of Truth to confirm a wide base of support for Milosevic.

These rallies served as a way of allowing an empowering sort of individuality in which the right to express dissatisfaction with official policies broke from the Titoist model. (While still maintaining the communal mindset to exist under its new heading – nationalism). People were allowed to speak their peace with regard to their disenchattment with the Yugoslav Federation and to express their desire for a strong
Serbian nation. Hence, in encouraging these rallies and the taboo discussions that were taking place therein, Milosevic further appeared to be a reformer, offering Serbs an alternative to their subjugated status in Yugoslavia.

The Meetings of Truth were carefully coordinated, and well promoted media events, exploiting messages from old national myths (M. Milosevic, 1997). While the exact slogans chanted at the meetings varied from place to place, as a whole they grew increasingly nationalist, and even racist as the meetings grew in popularity, with some attendees even dressing in Chetnik regalia (Pesic, 2000, p. 21). At a November 1988 meeting in Belgrade, there were over one million people in attendance. Making a rare appearance to the crowd, Milosevic addressed this meeting, speaking in ominous tones about the impending threat to the Serb people and the eminent use of force to defend them. His constitutive appeals hail the Serb people using the appeal of the “bardic voice,” to call the people to unite and take action.

This is not the time for sorrow; it is the time for struggle. …This awareness has turned into a material force that will stop the terror in Kosovo and unite Serbia.…People will even consent to live in poverty but they will not consent to live without freedom… Both the Turkish and the German invaders know that these people win their battles for freedom. We entered both world wars with nothing but the conviction that we would fight for freedom, and won both wars…We shall win the battle for Kosovo regardless of the obstacles facing us inside and outside the country. We shall win despite the fact that Serbia’s enemies outside the country are plotting against it, along with those in the country. We tell them that
we enter every battle with the aim of winning it. (Ramet, 1992, p. 229 – 230; Judah, 2000, p. 163).

This passage begins with a phrase that extols the historic virtues of the Serbs as fighting eternally on the side of “good” while also endowing the Serb people with a sense of cultural and historic bravery. The image of the Serbs “entering the world wars with nothing but their conviction” in conjunction with the idea of “fighting for freedom” reflects an image of the Serb nation as historically heroic even against great odds. Given the fact that Milosevic was vying for power against 50 years of Titoist principals, this image serves him well. By positioning Serbs as traditional heroes who have been stripped of their national right to be heroes, Milosevic positions himself as both “every Serb” as well as the “priestly” leader of the emerging Serb people.

Additionally, Milosevic teleologically situates the present struggle within Kosovo through his reference to “the Turkish and German invaders….” This reference both allows any action taken to be seen as protective while also situating Serb identity within a historical context. This context reminds them not only that they have repeatedly been victims of aggression but also that the threats that they are now facing stem from these past aggressions. The threat from the Croats stems from the Ustashe threat while the threat from Kosovo’s Albanian Muslims stems from the Turkish threat – the ultimate threat to Serb dignity and self-determination.

Further, in this passage, Milosevic invokes the myth of a plot against Serbia through an explicit threat from outside sources. In this sense Milosevic creates a stronger bond with the audience, identifying a “we” that is being threatened by the “other.” Hence, the Serb people as victims must come together to defend Serbia. This
identification with the threatened “we” is made ever stronger in this passage as Milosevic uses inclusive language with regard to the battle for Kosovo as a unification tactic. This tactic serves not only to rhetorically constitute a clear Serbian people, but also to transform the battle for Kosovo occurring literally at that time into a mythic metaphor for the battle that all Serbs face both in the present and throughout history. In this way, Milosevic capitalizes on the Kosovo mythos, fostering a sense of national injury and asserting an impending threat to the Serb people. Milosevic interpellates the emerging Serbian subjectivity through the historical appeal to the Serbian sense of entitlement provoked by the Kosovo mythos. He legitimizes the violently nationalist tendency of his immediate audience through his encouragement of use of force despite great odds, charging the Serb people to fulfill the historically unfinished Kosovo narrative. The final line is contextualized in the tenor of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo allowing Milosevic to be seen as the heroic Knez Lazar leading his troops into battle despite the odds.

The themes presented in this speech are in line with the themes focused upon at the Meetings of Truth at large. Louis Sell (2002), who spent 7 years in the former Yugoslavia during its demise, notes that there was a distinct pattern that emerged during these rallies. In the front row sat Kosovo Serb activists dressed in traditional folk costumes. They carried pictures, posters and banners featuring images of old Serb heroes like Petar Petrovic Njegos, Gavorilo Princip, and King Petar I. The iconic banners were often littered with such slogans as “Better death then slavery” and “We will give up our lives but never Kosovo” (p. 56). Soon pictures of Milosevic were also prevalent in the crowds, as the crowds chanted his name and made up songs about him. Old folk songs were reworked playing on the homophonic quality of the name of the hero of Kosovo,
Milos Obilic and the name Milosevic. In many homes and public and personal vehicles, pictures of Tito were replaced with pictures of Milosevic.

Although the immediate audience for these rallies was deliberately selected from disenfranchised country folk who tended toward nationalist leanings, Milosevic’s larger audience was the television viewers who were seeing these events broadcast on the nightly news. For these audiences, a carefully selected cross-section of images was used to frame the events in a deliberate way, and to imply a massive attendance when in fact there may have been only a few hundred people at the early meetings. Strategically selected images are effective because unlike the explanation and interpretation necessary with non-visual media, televisual images supercede their explicative narration. DeLuca and Peeples (2002) point out that television “trades in a discourse dominated by images” and that these images “are important not because they represent reality, but create it” (p. 135). The production of these images involves the use of powerful cultural icons that functionally reduce a complex set of issues to symbols (DeLuca, 1999, p. 3).

In a unique way television brought the iconography of these meetings into viewers homes. The images presented on the nightly news were much more nuanced and carefully orchestrated than the events themselves, offering the audience very specific images and symbols to thematically represent the event. Unlike attending an event where an individual can choose what to focus on and what to hold important, a televised event selects the salient aspects of the event for the viewer and frames the event in a specific way. The crowds were skillfully filmed chanting and cheering to make it appear as if there was mass support for Milosevic, and the rallies themselves were edited in such a way as to play to Serbian cultural traditions. Slogans, images of saints juxtaposed with
images of Milosevic, folk costumes, symbols and flags from the past were the common currency of the strategic broadcasts (Veljanovski, 2000, p. 570).

The electronic media nourished myths of a “heavenly Serbia” eternally wronged. Dominant themes reflected in the crowds supporting Milosevic included the idea that the Serbs needed to defend themselves from another impending genocide approaching from the invading hoards of Kosovar Albanians and/or from the “Ustashe” Croats, and that Serbia was historically and currently the defender of Europe against the threat of Islam.4 The WWII Ustashe-run concentration camp, Jasenovac, was repeatedly invoked to strike a chord of fear in Serbs. Camera angles were strategically used to make Milosevic appear like a grand hero. When coupled with the favorable newspaper coverage from prominent and respected news sources a sense of grandeur was given to the entire event.

Rallies continued to crop-up “spontaneously” throughout the next year and due to the publicity these rallies received, their actual voluntary participation grew and the crowds in attendance grew more rowdy. From late 1987 to early 1989 more than sixty of these meeting were held across Serbia in which 3.5 million people attended (Pesic, 2000). When the crowds got out of hand, Milosevic refused to rebuke them, instead encouraging “street democracy.” As the crowds grew the banners and chants shifted to reflect a much more ominous tone. “Give us arms!” “Death to Vlassi!” “Kill the fascists!” Sell (2003) reports one local official going so far as to say “We will consider as enemies those Albanians who continue to look calmly at the suffering of their neighbors and will fight them with force if necessary” (p. 58).

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4 Louis Sell (2002) who was present at Milosevic’s 1989 speech on the anniversary of the battle of Kosovo reports seeing banners that said such things as “Europe don’t you understand we were defending your freedom too?”
At the end of February 1989, Mitevic made what he later called an “unintentionally dangerous decision” to broadcast a demonstration against Serbian nationalism that was taking place in Ljubljana, Slovenia (Silber & Little, 1996, p. 65). Mitevic purposely showed Milan Kucan (the Slovenian president) addressing a crowd of Slovenian citizens that had amassed in the city center. The crowd was expressing solidarity with the Kosovo Albanians against Serb nationalism. Mitevic presented images of Kucan addressing the crowd, but instead of Kucan’s speech, Mitevic provided a voiceover to describe the events in polemic and inflammatory terms (BBC video, 1995a). Almost immediately a crowd of incensed Serbs gathered in the main square in Belgrade chanting “Sloba, Sloba, Sloba Slobodan Milosevic.” Eventually a million people gathered in the Belgrade city center (BBC video, 1995a). While the mob chanted for Milosevic, demanding that the constitution be changed to revoke Kosovo’s autonomous status, Yugoslav Federation leaders tried in vain first to disperse then to placate the crowds. The mob grew more demanding as they stayed throughout the afternoon and into the night. After keeping the crowd waiting for 24 hours, Milosevic appeared and the crowd erupted with enthusiasm. When he finally spoke Milosevic offered a message appealing directly to the masses.

This rally shows that no one can destroy the country because the people won’t let them, the people are the best guarantee, we are going to get all the honest people in Yugoslavia to fight for peace and unity. Nothing can stop the Serb leadership and people from doing what they want. No force on earth can stop the Serb people…Together we will fight for unity and freedom in Kosovo. We have to

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5 Video footage of the event shows a city under siege from demonstrators. The crowd looks as if it envelops most of the city’s streets.
change our constitution, and this will mean progress for all people in Yugoslavia. Unity for the Communist Party and the people. (Silber and Little, 1996, p. 68).

After this address, Milosevic then told the crowds to go home and they did so. This ultimate act of power and authority sealed Milosevic’s position as leader of and savior to the Serbian people. Milosevic’s constitutive appeals here are masterful. Not only did he let the momentum build for a full 24 hours before addressing the crowd, he then gave the audience what it had waited for, a promise to fight for a new constitution and a “free” Kosovo. Milosevic hails the Serb people through his inclusive language, and his reflection on the Serb people’s strength. Although these elements of his address can be viewed on the surface as progressive ideas that separate him from the “Serbo-phobic” policies of Titoist Yugoslavia, their sub-context implies that Serbs in Kosovo (and eventually everywhere) must be united to be safe from the alleged genocidal onslaught.

Milosevic intentionally incorporated the rhetoric of a reform-minded centrist. Yet, one must look beyond the denotative meaning of his words to understand their impact. While Milosevic uses words like “Yugoslavia,” and “unity” he is actually talking about making the Serbs the most powerful republic within the federation. “Unity” became a central “ideograph” (McGee, 1980) for Milosevic, and a unifying symbol for the emerging collective Serb identity. Though his message is dressed in “peace,” “unity,” “freedom” and “progress,” these words are being used in a very specific context – the context of Serb nationalism. “Unity” is synonymous with the idea of uniting all lands historically Serb, beginning with the reclamation of Kosovo.

Additionally, “unity” and “honest people” were terms that were later used to define the “other” through antithesis. The idea that those who disagree with us are not in
favor of “peace” and “unity,” that instead we are forced to defend our borders against those “dishonest people” who hate “freedom” and “progress” was later touted by Milosevic in reference to the wars of succession and the Bosnian crisis. This type of language was a perfect set-up for Milosevic’s later tactics, which included denying that Serbia was at war, claiming that Serbia was only protecting her borders, and later claiming that Serbs everywhere were threatened by people who hate “freedom” and “unity.” Hence the only way to protect Serbs in all of Yugoslavia is to take a “Greater Serbia” by force.

Through this address Milosevic plays both to the communal tendency of his audience while also offering a feeling of individuality and independence. While Milosevic repeatedly refers to “the people” as an entity, he also says, “nothing can stop the Serb leadership and people from doing what they want.” Hence, while capitalizing on and even exaggerating the collective conception of the Serb nation, Milosevic continues to define his character as distinctly different from Titoist politicians through his assertion that Serbs are separate from Yugoslavia and can do what they want to do.

Milosevic’s redeemer persona was not predicated on doom and open hate. He had people like Seslj to carry out that task. Instead his appeal was predicated on the rhetoric of reform, and the promise of a better future, a “redemption” for the Serbs. This positive campaign garnered massive support for Milosevic. He was a “reformer” bent on reconstituting Serbian identity and giving back to the Serbs the pride and the land that history’s victimizations had stripped from them. When Milosevic finally dismissed the crowds that day, after no one had been able to disburse them for 24 hours previous, there was no doubt that Milosevic was the uncontested leader of the Serb nation.
A new constitution went into effect in late March 1989, uniting Serbia and its previously autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, and making Serbia by far the strongest of the Federation’s republics. On March 28, 1989, Serbia’s political elites turned out to celebrate the new constitution with the front page of Politika announcing that “Serbia was whole again,” and the day being declared a new national holiday in Serbia (Silber & Little, 1996, p. 69). Milosevic officially assumed the Serbian presidency on May 8th, 1989, but the inaugural ceremony was scheduled to coincide with the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje on June 28th, 1989. The ceremony was the culmination of several years of nationalist priming. Milosevic’s speech here is perhaps his most famous. Though his allusions to nationalism and reorganization of history may be lost on foreign audiences, his words were carefully chosen and the events were strategically broadcast to convey a nationalist message of Serb unity, dressed in the rhetoric of reform, which would be immediately understood by his intended audience.

**June 28th, 1989 – Slobo Takes the Throne**

In June of 1989, in the weeks preceding Milosevic’s inaugural celebration, the bones of Prince Lazar, the vanquished hero of Kosovo Polje, were carried to various monasteries around Serbia. With great ceremony these displays were televised. Verder (1999) refers to this type of veneration and reburial of heroic remains as the “political lives of dead bodies” and attests to the social and political significance of such ceremony in reinvigorating mythic historical events with a revised nationalist bent. The processions that accompanied the relics became a rallying point for Serb nationalism, merging a mythic past, a living present, and the projection of a heroic future (Weitz, 2003, p. 196). Re-burial plays a part in determining historical “truths” by giving new values to space...
and time (Verdery, 1999). The reliquary parade and all the ceremony therein set the stage for the June 28th celebration, bringing the Kosovo mythos and ensuing Serbian nationalism to its full crescendo.

The resurgence of the Kosovo mythos swelled to epic proportions with the 1989 commemoration events in honor of the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. On June 28th, 1989, hundreds of thousands of Serbs gathered to hear Milosevic speak. This date resonates throughout Serbian history as St. Vitus Day, the day Gavorilo Princip assassinated Archduke Ferdinand, and, most significantly, the day when the Ottoman Turks vanquished the Serbian army (Silber & Little, 1996, p, 71). On this day in 1989, the Belgrade daily, Politika, devoted its entire issue to the Kosovo myth. One headline proclaimed, “The Serbian people has glorified and still glorifies its heroes and recognizes its traitors.” Politika further proclaimed that the Serbs were “again living in the times of Kosovo, as it is in Kosovo and around Kosovo that the destiny of Yugoslavia is being determined.”

A total of two million people throughout the region attended commemoration events, and for those who could not attend personally, the events were strategically televised. The commemoration evoked a mythic Serbian identity through an amalgamation of history and the present. The highlight of the festivities was a lengthy and powerful speech by Slobodan Milosevic. (A full text version of the speech is available in Appendix A.)

Throughout this address Milosevic relies on the Kosovo myth and its salience to the Serb people in the present. Milosevic uses the Kosovo mythos and its dominant

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6 Ironically, this is also the date in 2001 when Milosevic was transferred to The Hague to stand trial for war crimes, a fact not missed by the residual Serb nationalists today.
themes of victimhood, threat, and redemption to legitimize his power and his agenda. In promoting this foundational myth, Milosevic positions the Serbs as victims in the heart of their own ancestral land. The “promise of redemption” implicit in his rhetoric offers the Serbs an alternative future in which Serbia is strong again. He is transformed into the “hero of Kosovo” and the “promise of Kosovo” is fulfilled through him. As Prince Lazar was resurrected, so was the Serb nation that had died with him 600 years ago symbolically reborn.

As a whole, the speech is predicated on a presentation of the Kosovo myth that first constitutes the Serb people and then politicizes their identity by calling them to action. Milosevic uses the ceremony and emotion of the occasion to emphasize the centrality of the Kosovo mythos to Serb identity. The Serb people are interpellated through this myth as they are constituted through Milosevic’s discourse. Thus, to be a part of the people, one must embrace the values of the Kosovo mythos. Additionally, this speech uses a chronological structure to demonstrate the historical suffering of the Serb people and the precarious situation they face in the present and to charge the audience with a sense of duty. In this way the battle at Kosovo Polje six centuries ago is linked to the present and future. The audience is called to action through an ancestral obligation.

Within its basic chronological organization, the speech is organized along certain thematic issues. The theme of Serbian character as non-aggressive and liberational is important to this speech, and would become central to Milosevic’s future rhetoric. This theme works to justify the subject position of victimhood while also absolving Serbia of its historic guilt. Historical details are glossed over to allow Serbian history to be a
history of martyrdom. In this way any action taken could be viewed as defensive measures justified by historical evidence of Serbian subjugation.

Further, within this speech, the theme of unity is of central importance. As the speech is structured chronologically, the unity theme is asserted thusly as well. Lack of unity is cited as the primary reason for Turkish subjugation, it is hailed as immediately necessary to restore Serbia’s historically stolen land and pride, and it is called upon as a future goal that the audience is charged with attaining and maintaining. While the speech implies a need for unity within Serbia, the sub-context implies that Serbs must be united throughout the region in a Greater Serbia. This theme of unity was central to the collective identity of the Serb “people” throughout the former Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 1990s.7

With great ceremony, Milosevic took the stage. The camera centered on his arrival. The TV spectacular was strategically orchestrated to promote the myth of Kosovo as the cradle of Serbian culture, and hence as the cornerstone of Serb identity. The excitement of the crowds in conjunction with the carefully chosen images of Milosevic, there in the historic field of the Battle of Kosovo, brought the audiences at home a purposely tailored message. Blending myth with the moment, the television commentator placed Milosevic at the center of the Serbian cultural myth of Kosovo, hailing him as the resurrected Lazar, come back to right the wrongs of history.

7 The flag adopted when the Bosnian Serbs declared the breakaway Republika Srpska demonstrates the importance of the unity principal. The flag adopted was identical to the Serbian flag but with the Orthodox cross in the center. At each corner of the cross was a Cyrillic letter. The figure was a popular nationalist symbol called the “four S’s,” and standing for the unifying Serb nationalist slogan “Only Unity Saves the Serbs.” In this way “unity” became the rallying cry of Serb nationalism.
Milosevic opened his speech by comparing Serbia in the present with Serbia 600 years ago. While this may have been appropriate to the occasion of the anniversary of the great battle, there are other layers of meaning represented here.

By the force of social circumstances this great 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo is taking place in a year in which Serbia, after many years, after many decades, has regained its state, national, and spiritual integrity. Therefore, it is not difficult for us to answer today the old question: how are we going to face Milos [Milos Obilic, legendary hero of the Battle of Kosovo]. Through the play of history and life, it seems as if Serbia has, precisely in this year, in 1989, regained its state and its dignity and thus has celebrated an event of the distant past, which has a great historical and symbolic significance for its future.

Through this introduction Milosevic hails the theme of redemption embedded in the Kosovo mythos. In turn Milosevic immediately capitalizes on the occasion, location and present situation to play the hero of Kosovo come to life. Through his statement that Serbia has “regained its state…and integrity…” Milosevic is implying that the constitutional reform that made Kosovo a part of Serbia again is the beginning of Serbia’s resurrection as the nation moves into the future. This introduction engages the priestly voice as it positions Milosevic as Serbia’s redeemer in that he has been the impetus for the reforms that had begun the process of restoring the Serbian national “state and dignity.” The entirety of this introduction fuses past, present and future thereby legitimizing the reclamation of Kosovo as well as the possibility of other such “historical” claims to land in the future. He constitutes the Serb people through his use of the Kosovo narrative and then charges them with the responsibility of future action by
invoking the ancestral obligation to Milos Obilic. His last line here ominously foreshadows the justification for the excessive violence later used in Bosnia and Croatia as he states that this celebration marks an “event of the distant past which has a great historical and symbolic significance for its future.”

In another segment of this speech, Milosevic blatantly capitalizes on the cultural themes of betrayal, threat, the historic tradition of victimization and the promise of redemption so embedded in the Kosovo mythos. He continues to project a teleological view of history in which the Serbs have continually played the part of victim, as if history has been a seamless timeline in which each tragic turn of events has flowed from the last.

The lack of unity and betrayal in Kosovo will continue to follow the Serbian people like an evil fate through the whole of its history. Even in the last war, [WWII] this lack of unity and betrayal led the Serbian people and Serbia into agony, the consequences of which in the historical and moral sense exceeded fascist aggression. Even later, when a socialist Yugoslavia was set up, in this new state the Serbian leadership remained divided, prone to compromise to the detriment of its own people. The concessions that many Serbian leaders made at the expense of their people could not be accepted historically and ethically by any nation in the world, especially because the Serbs have never in the whole of their history conquered and exploited others. Their national and historical being has been liberational throughout the whole of history and through two world wars, as it is today. They liberated themselves and when they could they also helped others to liberate themselves.
Leaping from the betrayal in Kosovo to World War II to the subjugated status of Serbia within the Yugoslav Federation, Milosevic portrays each crisis that has befallen the Serb people as a consequence of “an evil fate” following the Serb people “through the whole of history.” In referring to a lack of “unity” as a primary aspect of this fate, Milosevic is legitimizing not only the reclamation of Kosovo, but also the call for a Greater Serbia that would be more explicit in later years. In this way, the myth of Kosovo is enacted in such a way as to offer the present moment as the culmination of the promise of Kosovo to which the ensuing centuries of tragedy had been leading.

Further, in this segment, Milosevic clouds historical details, simplifying history in order to portray the Serbs as a “liberational force” that have never “exploited or conquered others.” This type of rhetoric portrays the Serbs as history’s martyrs who have been betrayed and cast aside after fighting diligently for the rights of others. The vision of an eternally self-sacrificing yet eternally subjugated Serbia justifies the reclamation of Kosovo, and later other territories, as the historical right of a nation continually wronged. This idea of the Serbs as never aggressive but always aggressed upon was repeated over and over again by Milosevic and other prominent Serb nationalists in order to justify Serbia’s aggressive actions in the present as defensive actions meant to protect a disparate and threatened Serb people from another impending onslaught.

Additionally, this section as a whole solidifies Milosevic’s role as both reformer and redeemer in that he has recognized the historic plight of the Serbs, and their continued subjugation within Yugoslavia and spoke out against the injustices of Titoism when no one else dared to. His “bravery” led the Serbs on the road to the redemption that should have been theirs 600 years ago. In the hands of Milosevic, Serbian nationalism
was redemptive and he was the representative savior – the Lazar that would not be vanquished, who would bring Serbia together again, and restore the nation to its deserved and powerful place in the world. By suggesting that he would stand up for the Serb cause in Kosovo, Milosevic became the resurrected Lazar come to redeem the eternally victimized Serb people. Silber & Little (p. 61) note, “Milosevic attained almost divine status among the Serbs…Serbs loved Milosevic for his pledge to protect them.”

The theme of Serbian unity plays a large role in this speech. Milosevic uses lack of “unity” to mark the mistakes of the past, calls on the need for “unity” in the present and charges the Serbian people with creating and maintaining a “unity” for all Serb people in the future.

Disunity among Serb officials made Serbia lag behind and their inferiority humiliated Serbia. Therefore, no place in Serbia is better suited for saying this than the field of Kosovo and no place in Serbia is better suited than the field of Kosovo for saying that unity in Serbia will bring prosperity to the Serbian people in Serbia and each one of its citizens, irrespective of his national or religious affiliation. Serbia of today is united and equal to other republics and prepared to do everything to improve its financial and social position and that of all its citizens. If there is unity, cooperation, and seriousness, it will succeed in doing so. This is why the optimism that is now present in Serbia to a considerable extent regarding the future days is realistic, also because it is based on freedom, which makes it possible for all people to express their positive, creative and humane abilities aimed at furthering social and personal life.
In this segment, Milosevic points to the disunity of past Serb leaders as the cause of the historic defeat in Kosovo. He hails the mythic power of the location and occasion to call for Serbian unity in the present. Further, while he points to disunity as the source of Serbia’s physical subjugation in the past, he equates that with the way in which disunity has put Serbia at a financial and social disadvantage in the present, speaking to the subjugation of Serbia within Yugoslavia. Additionally, this segment euphemistically refers to the emerging nationalist tendency as “optimism” and points out that this optimistic unity will lead to “freedom” for the Serb people. In this sense Milosevic’s constitutive appeals work as a sort of consciousness raising technique, helping Serbs to realize that they have been suffering under Federated Yugoslavia, and promising them a brighter future within the fold of the Serb people.

While the past is certainly an important aspect of Milosevic’s speech, his projection of the past into future objectives is also important. He uses the teleological view of historic victimization laid out so clearly at the beginning of the speech to project his version of the Serbian historical trajectory into the future.

Therefore, words devoted to unity, solidarity, and cooperation among people have no greater significance anywhere on the soil of our motherland than they have here in the field of Kosovo, which is a symbol of disunity and treason. In the memory of the Serbian people, this disunity was decisive in causing the loss of the battle and in bringing about the fate which Serbia suffered for a full 6 centuries. Even if it were not so, from a historical point of view, it remains certain that the people regarded disunity as its greatest disaster. Therefore it is the
obligation of the people to remove disunity, so that they may protect themselves from defeats, failures, and stagnation in the future.

Here Milosevic speaks to the bonds of blood and soil as he calls Kosovo the “soil of the motherland” and again highlights the theme of unity as he calls the “field of Kosovo” a “symbol of disunity and treason.” He uses the site of this speech to resonate with his audience, strengthening his message by capitalizing on the cultural, emotional and historical draw of the Battle of Kosovo. He then projects his agenda for the future as he again talks about the need to recognize that Serbia’s biggest disasters have come from “disunity” and hence the need for “unity” is pressing.

In this segment Milosevic clearly makes the term “disunity” a sort of “devil-term” (Weaver, 1953) through which the scapegoat or enemy can be defined. By taking “unity” as the “god-term” that encompasses all that is good and necessary to reform Serb culture and raise Serbs from their subjugation, anyone who then opposes Milosevic now or later can be defined as a traitor who wishes to plague Serbia with “disunity” just like 600 years ago. To Milosevic, these traitors were most often federal minded politicians, military officials, or uncooperative journalists. After constituting the Serb people throughout the speech through the Kosovo mythos and the theme of unity, Milosevic charges his audience to fulfill the Kosovo narrative in that it is the “obligation of the people to remove disunity.” Here he is empowering the people to take the fate of the Serb nation into their own hands, again appealing to that sense of collective individualism to motivate the people to action.

Milosevic ends his speech by fusing history and culture with promises of redemption for the future and the tone of reformation.
Six centuries later, now, we are being again engaged in battles and are facing battles. They are not armed battles, although such things cannot be excluded yet. However, regardless of what kind of battles they are, they cannot be won without resolve, bravery, and sacrifice, without the noble qualities that were present here in the field of Kosovo in the days past. Our chief battle now concerns implementing the economic, political, cultural, and general social prosperity, finding a quicker and more successful approach to a civilization in which people will live in the 21st century… Six centuries ago, Serbia heroically defended itself in the field of Kosovo, but it also defended Europe. Serbia was at that time the bastion that defended the European culture, religion, and European society in general…In this spirit we now endeavor to build a society, rich and democratic, and thus to contribute to the prosperity of this beautiful country, this unjustly suffering country, but also to contribute to the efforts of all the progressive people of our age that they make for a better and happier world.

Let the memory of Kosovo heroism live forever!

To conclude this speech, Milosevic once again melds past, present and future. He links the “battles” that are being fought in the present and in the future to the battle fought six centuries ago in that same place. In doing so, he politically charges his audience with an ancestral obligation and legitimizes the impending use of excessive force in Bosnia and Croatia. Further, in explicitly saying that armed battles are not to be excluded, he goes on to adopt the rhetoric of reform. Through the assertion that the “chief battle now concerns…the economic, political, cultural…” Milosevic is equating the physical battle of Kosovo and all that this foundational myth entails, with the “battle”
for a reformed society that he is waging on behalf of the Serb “people.” Hence, just as the Turks physically subjugated the Serbs, so have the Serbs been economically and culturally subjugated within Yugoslavia. As such, given this victim status, it is their ancestral duty to “fight” to restore Serbia to its rightful place. In this way, Milosevic becomes the new “hero of Kosovo,” leading his people into battle by raising their consciousness with regard to their subjugated position and then giving them permission to fight for the honor of which they have been deprived.

Additionally, this segment capitalizes on the myth that Serbia has consistently defended Europe from the “Turkish” threat, even at the cost of its own nation. This sentiment is useful in that it strengthens his claim that Serbia is an “unjustly suffering” nation. Serbia is the martyr so that the rest of Europe can breathe free, the unsung hero defending civilization, but never appreciated. This segment concludes with a final appeal to his status as reformer, hero, and redeemer.

Milosevic’s inaugural address was a smashing success. He not only promised reforms and a better future for Serbs in a political sense, he also won the hearts and minds of many Serbs as he stirred their passions. Waiting for the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo to deliver his first speech as Serbia’s leader was highly effective. First, because he knew he would have a large audience both on the ground and viewing from home. Second, because he could easily blend history and the present to lay out his agenda, which was useful given that his plans for reform were predicated on his audience holding the Kosovo myth as central to their identity and their “Serbness.” And finally, because at this location, on this day, spouting a teleological amalgamation of history and legend, Milosevic could definitively emerge as the “hero of Kosovo,” the stuff of legends come
to life. In this way, Milosevic was able to appeal to more rational audiences through his promises of reform, and could appeal to his rapidly growing, somewhat radical audience through an appeal to the “cultural center” of Serbia, the Kosovo myth.

Milosevic’s constitutive discourses allowed Serbian identity to seem natural, reinforcing their innate “Serbness” as primary. His speaking style allowed his audience to connect with him as a man who was one of the people and could understand them. The “bardic” appeal allowed the people to identify with him as one of their own, reminding them of who they were and had always been. At the same time, promises of redemption embedded in Milosevic’s discourse reminded the people of what they could become, hence allowing his audience to project a “redeemer” persona upon him. Hence Milosevic’s redeemer persona was “priestly” even while the appeal of his constitutive rhetoric was “ bardic.” With this dual appeal, Milosevic brought together the scattered and disorganized nationalist yearnings of Serbs on both elite and popular levels.

President Milosevic and Media Frames

The dominant themes of Milosevic’s early rhetoric were repeated and politicized throughout 1990s. Milosevic consistently denied that Serbia was waging an aggressive war against Croatia and Bosnia, proclaiming publicly that “Serbs have always acted in self-defense and nothing else” and that “Serbian people have never waged an aggressive war…” (Sky Television, 8/7/91). Milosevic told Milorad Vucelic of Radio Television Serbia (RTS) on May 28th, 1992 “It is known that in our entire history the Serbs and the Serbian people never wanted wars of conquest, but only defensive wars, and they succeeded in defending their freedom and independence.” Later that year Milosevic told TV Belgrade– “Serbs and Serbia have never waged a war of aggression, they have only
wanted wars of defense…everyone should enjoy the right to defend themselves, to protect their country and people…Serbia and the Serbian people are in favor of peace” (10/9/92). Further, during a radio interview with RTS on November 3rd, 1993, Milosevic said, “The Serbian people know that this nation has never waged a war of conquest. It has always fought defensive wars…in all these defensive wars we have emerged victorious.”

Milosevic continued to promote the image of the Serbs as eternally victimized, implying that Serbia is not at war and the ensuing international sanctions against it are the result of an international plot that is targeting Serbia. On October 9th, 1992, Milosevic told TV Belgrade, “It is absurd to think that those who were struggling for the preservation and integrity of Yugoslavia are now declared responsible for its breakup. Neither the Serbs or Serbia wanted the break-up of Yugoslavia; on the contrary, they fought to preserve it” (10/9/92). During the radio interview with RTS on November 3rd, 1993, Milosevic said, “The Serbian people are not the factor perpetrating the military clashes but above all a factor that is working for peace.”

Milosevic told outright lies about Serbia’s involvement in the war in Bosnia and Croatia saying, “Serbia is not at war in Bosnia. After all, if we were at war it could be easily proven. If we were the ones who carried out some kind of invasion in Bosnia-Herzegovina could anyone hide this in Serbia? It appears to me that this is understood by every one of our citizens.” (RTS –11/3/93). In this way he also further constituted the Serbian people with rhetoric that defined the values of the Serb citizenry. This is again evident when he told Serbian TV Belgrade’s Zoran Jevdovic on July 30th, 1993, “Every single one of our citizens is aware just how great a burden was shouldered by Serbia,
helping express its solidarity with our people outside Serbia.” References to Kosovo as the “heart of Serbia” also made repeated appearances in Milosevic’s rhetoric throughout the 1980s and 1990s. He told Belgrade TV on May 28th, 1992, “Kosovo is the heart of Serbia, all our history lies there…Kosovo will remain a part of Serbia and this will not be discussed under any circumstances.”

During this time, Milosevic’s popularity continued to grow, as did his influence over the media. As inflation spiraled in Serbia throughout 1992, the daily newspapers in Serbia fell out of reach of most families’ budgets, and TV became the only source of information for most people. Independent news media were all but completely crushed, as operating costs rose exponentially and the government only subsidized those newspapers sympathetic to the reigning party. While Milosevic did not actually ban the independent media, he placed prohibitive advertising rates and taxes upon them while state news agencies advertised for free. This meant that to afford publication, independent newspapers would have had to charge more than anyone could afford at the time (Paris, 2001, p. 368). “In a country where the population was so impoverished that only 8% could afford a daily paper, the official TV channel…became the single informational source” (M. Milosevic, 1997, p. 114).

The formerly sophisticated tone cultivated on TV Belgrade and its independent newspapers gave way to a closed, propagandistic approach. Those independent TV stations and newspapers that did manage to survive were eventually forced to take “extended vacations,” as were any independently minded journalists working within the state-run media outlets. Their positions were filled with inexperienced journalists and those who were proud to be “soldiers of the media army” (M. Milosevic, 1997, p. 115).
The general manager of Radio Belgrade, Momir Brkic, divided his staff into “reliable Serbs” and “unreliable Serbs.” Those in the latter category were relegated to the status of “non-Serbs” and, as in Rwanda, their names were broadcast daily on official radio and read on prime-time news as part of a hit-list for Serb paramilitary groups to “clean-up” (M. Milosevic, 1997, p. 115). At the same time that Serbian TV was conducting open slander campaigns against these “bad Serbs,” it was widely promoting the most hard-core extremists.

As the wars in Bosnia and Croatia worsened, very little coverage was offered to the Serbian people. Milosevic’s official line was that Serbia was not at war. When the atrocities of war became too widespread to deny, Milosevic presented the tested, tried and true image of Serbia as the victim, fighting to protect itself and its people throughout the region from an impending genocide at the hands of the Croatian Ustashe and the Bosnian Islamic fundamentalist terrorists. Media reports often framed scenes of brutal Serbian aggression as attacks waged on Serbs or as self-inflicted by the victims to turn the world against Serbia.

Additional to the massive amount of radio and TV time given to Milosevic himself, Belgrade television was quick to play on the fears of their Serb brothers in Croatia. The nightly news highlighted ethnic-Serb fears of “another genocide” brewing in Croatia. Images of Jasenovac and the Ustashe “attacking Serbian towns and villages in the republic” and “committing genocide against the Serbs” were recycled to support the claim that the Serbs were once again in danger (Sky Television, 8/7/91). Serb people were interviewed nightly expressing their fears of the radicalizing Croats. One ethnic-Serb man interviewed at a roadblock set-up to look for Croat militia told TV Belgrade,
“We’re scared! We have to protect ourselves from the Croats. We’ve learned from the past. We must stop history from repeating itself.” While a Serb woman interviewed proclaimed, “I am scared all the time. I carry my gun always, even when I tend the pigs. It’s a crying shame. Shame on those Croats.” These types of broadcasts heightened Serb fears and justified defensive action.

Just as Milosevic denied Serbian involvement in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, Serb TV followed suit. One of the most flagrant examples of this was the shelling of Sarajevo and Dubrovnik by Serbian forces. The images of Dubrovnik came with a commentary accusing the western journalists who had filmed it of burning tires in front of the cameras to make it seem as if the city was on fire. As for Sarajevo, for several months into the siege, Belgrade TV would show pictures of the city undamaged that had been taken months or years before the attack in order to deny that it had ever occurred. Journalist Daniel Deluce formerly of Reuters news agency noted “Serbian Radio Television created a strange universe in which Sarajevo had never been besieged and in which the Croatian town of Vukovar had been liberated” (Deluce, 2000-1, p. 16).

Another glaring example is the case of the Sarajevo Breadline Massacre. In May 1992, a Serb mortar shell landed on a busy Sarajevo street, exploding in the midst of a breadline, killing dozens of civilians. (The mark left by the explosion is still visible today). The event was immediately reported by TV Sarajevo, and was picked-up by TV stations around the world. Serbian television could not hide the event. Instead, Bosnian-Serb controlled TV Pale reported the massacre as a self-inflicted act staged to gain international sympathy and to disguise the treacherous plot of the Bosnian Muslims. Further, TV Pale insisted that the Muslims were holding Sarajevo under siege from
within, while the Serbs were simply defending themselves from their centuries-old hills around the city (Kurspahic, 2003, p. 121). It is interesting to note that a survey conducted in 1992 indicated that over 60% of Serbian television audiences expressed no doubt about the truth of the information of the TV images. Only 7% of those polled said they did not believe the images (M. Milosevic, 1997, p. 123).

Aside from spouting propaganda, slanting news stories and completely fabricating events to instill mistrust and fear of other ethnic groups, the majority of the Serbian news media completely failed to report the pockets of resistance to war and nationalism. Milan Milosevic (1997) points out that this resistance was quite strong at first, with army conscription suffering from a lack of compliance as thousands of young men fled the country. Some reserve units even openly rebelled with uprisings in three major Serbian cities. Still, none of this was reported on television. In fact, at the same time, Serb TV glamorized paramilitary gangs as the height of fashion. News documentaries and human interest stories portrayed paramilitary groups like Seslj’s Men and Arkan’s Tigers as patriots whose jobs were the lived experience of Hollywood gangster movies. The highly publicized courtship and fairytale wedding of Arkan and popular turbo-folk star Ceca only added to the glamour and appeal of the groups. With fashionable uniforms, mobster lifestyles and high cultural esteem, belonging to one of these groups became a status symbol for many young Serbian men. Further, there were instances of intellectuals who had written against the compliance of the cultural elites, but their books received no publicity, and people could not afford to buy them anyhow (Judah, 2000).

It is clear that much more attention must be paid to the role of the Serbian media in the violences of the 1990s. A full picture of the factors leading to the normalization of
violence does not seem possible without considering the role of the media in its entirety. This will necessarily have to be a further area for exploration and analysis at a later time.

**Some Final Thoughts**

The 1986 SANU Memorandum had opened the door for the reemergence of Serb nationalism. Once a leader emerged that was willing to fall in line, SANU was willing to back him and the press followed closely. After the victory of Milosevic’s “camp” there were no further attacks on the SANU Memorandum or on the Academy. The newspapers began to run stories blatantly praising the Academy. In turn, Serbian intellectuals began to publicly praise Milosevic for bringing pride and respect back to the Serbian academy and to the Serbian nation. Throughout 1988 and 1989, SANU’s presidency consistently extended verbal support for the policies of the emerging Serb leadership. Similarly, Milosevic refused to reign in even the most radical of Serb intellectuals. When pushed to comment on the very public and divisive role of Serbian intellectuals in the violent politicization of Serbs, he is often quoted as saying such things as, “What nation in its right mind would ever be ashamed of its intellectuals!” Serbian newspapers began to publish extensive statements from Serbia’s intellectual and cultural elites, and human-interest stories often glorified members of the Academy. The Serbian press, the Serbian academy and the new Serbian leadership worked in harmony, invoking both the “priestly” and “bardic” voices to constitute Serb identity and normalize ethnic violence.

Slobodan Milosevic came to power in Serbia partly through luck, and partly through his own talent for mastering the rhetorical situation. Milosevic teased out the underlying themes of victimhood, threat and redemption embedded in the Kosovo myth, and projected these themes as central to Serbian identity. From his 1987 appearance in
Kosovo, Milosevic began to foster his reformer/redeemer persona. Using the centrality of the Kosovo myth to anchor his position of power, Milosevic offered a vision of the Serbs as eternally subjugated and in need of a savior to lead them from their desert of disunity. After 50 years of a federated Yugoslavia, Milosevic stood out as a reformer given that he was willing to speak out openly against Tito. He gave people a space in which to voice their dissatisfaction, and the people loved him for it. He allowed for a new sense of individuality to emerge as people regarded their right to condemn Tito as a new individual freedom. Yet, at the same time, Milosevic capitalized on the communal mentality of a people who had been accustomed to a collectivist culture. In this sway, Milosevic placed limits of the autonomy afforded the people, and reigned-in the Serbian media.

Today, at his ongoing war crimes trail in The Hague, Milosevic is propagating myths of victimhood and courting Serbian TV. While defending himself, Milosevic seems to be running a parallel case, not responding to the accusations against him, but instead citing more “evidence” regarding a conspiracy against the Serbs. While he speaks perfect English, Milosevic speaks only in Serbian at the Tribunal, carefully choosing his words to play to the lingering nationalism within the Serbian audiences. Considering the results of the December 2003 elections, it seems to be a continually effective tactic.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion:

What Have We Learned and Where do we go from Here?

“If the pro-war word is so powerful, why should that not also be the case for the pacifist word?”

~~ Svetozar Stojanovic, Professor of Social Theory, University of Belgrade

“Our commitment to punish these crimes against humanity must be matched by our commitment to prevent them in the first place”

~~ President Bill Clinton, May 1996

Although all instances of mass atrocity are unique, this study of the effects of Serbian ethno-identity constitution on the normalization of ethnic hatred and violence in the former Yugoslavia suggests some congruent elements among campaigns of mass violence. First, to normalize ethnic polarization and hatred in a place where a unified conception of inter-ethnic national identity has been the status quo, people’s primary identity must be re-constituted in such a way as to delegitimize their former ways of knowing as a state of false consciousness.

An analysis of constitutive discourses of Serbian ethno-national identity suggests that for ethno-national violence to be normalized in a state where people have lived previously without the outward manifestation of ethnic animosity an ideology that allows such violence to seem normal must replace the previous inclusive framework. As the reconstituted identity emerges it is presented as natural and immutable and the process of
its emergence is framed as an awakening. The former identity is discounted as superficially imposed and a new conception of the “people” and the “other” is validated.

Discourses from every level of Serbian culture worked in conjunction to hail a politicized Serbian people through the implication that Serbs needed to be “awakened” to their subjugation. Hence, the constitutive discourses worked in such a way as to raise the consciousness of the Serbian people with regard to their condition. The collective Yugoslav identity that had largely been the norm under Tito was re-articulated through a rhetorical process predicated on myth and narrative to constitute exclusive ethno-national identities situated within a pre-determined historical imperative. Teleological discourses that promoted ethnic violence as a manifestation of an inevitable historical progression presented exclusive ethno-national identity as “natural.” By comparison, Yugoslav identity came to be seen as a state of false consciousness, a forced enslavement of the people’s “true” identity.

Second, the constitutive discourses through which the re-constituted “people” are hailed offer a vision of the people as virtuous victims bound together by their historic persecution as members of this group. The identification is made stronger through evidence of persecution on many fronts, both domestic and international. Yet, the out-group(s) closest to the victimized people are presented as most culpable for past victimizations and as the largest historical and immanent threat to the “people” in the present. In this way, action against the primary out-group(s) is rationalized as a defensive measure initiated to protect the “people” from further victimization. A teleological re-telling of history in which the repeated victimization of the in-group is a product of a predetermined fate that has led to a crescendo of victimization in the present moment
legitimizes any action taken by the in-group as defensive. The repeated victimization further legitimizes the perception of threat from the other(s) who must be subdued-driven away, or done away with- for the safety of the in-group.

As long as Josip Broz Tito was the leader of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav people largely identified themselves as a united nation of South Slavs. While ethnic identity was not completely washed away, it was celebrated as an aspect of Yugoslav identity that was culturally interesting, but not of significant social or political relevance. Even in the most homogenous regions like Slovenia, multi-ethnic communities lived free from the ethnic tensions that would mark the Milosevic years. In Bosnia, the most ethnically mixed region of the federation, ethnicity was of such little relevance that by the 1980s, 30% of Bosnian people were of “mixed ethnicity.” Still, the ethnic tensions that emerged during the 1980s, propelling Slobodan Milosevic to power, were not novel. Though it is a mistake to blame the violences of the 1990s on age-old ethnic hatreds, the polarizing discourses that allowed for the normalization of those violences called upon an old mythology rooted in early myths and literature to call into being a victimized Serbian nation, and hence a host of enemies to be eradicated. These myths that had been around for centuries were reinterpreted to focus on the eternal victimization of the Serbs, and were mediated through a modern lens that allowed each alleged victimization to appear to be a fated part of an inevitable historic progression.

Third, to be successful, constitutive rhetoric must take many forms. High and low culture must be engaged to both reflect and shape public opinion. This means that media frames, in conjunction with political and cultural leaders and pop-culture icons must reinforce messages that constitute a victimized in-group and point to an out-group to
blame. The more thorough the saturation, the more effective the identity shift. The framework for primary school instruction, the embrace of the entertainment media, the frames of the news media, and the espousal of prominent political and cultural figures all serve to normalize the victim/fear mindset that normalizes mass violence as a defensive action.

Media is a key element in this process. Both in the framing of news reports and in the nature of the mythology advanced in entertainment programming, the mythology that constitutes the people is propagated and reinforced. It matters little if the dominant electronic media outlet in a given culture is television or radio, so long as underlying constitutive narratives saturate the main sources of news and entertainment. News sources frame events in such a way as to fit each story into the mythology. Depending on the literacy rate of a culture, and the availability of printed news, newspapers also play a role here, especially with the educated classes, in that news stories, editorials and human-interest stories largely support the ideology that is (re)constituting the exclusive identities.

Although mass atrocity certainly occurs in authoritarian regimes, it seems to get further without detection when it is conducted with the tacit support of the people. Yet, an authoritarian framework is unlikely to capture the hearts and minds of the people. For the identity shift to be embraced it must not be forced upon the people from above. It must come about as a result of the perceived will of the people. Small groups of privileged people play a central role in the initial consciousness raising push, acting in their own self interest in fostering and playing upon the fear of the public. The constitutive ethno-national discourses are given further legitimacy when they are
espoused by culturally esteemed figures. When intellectuals, popular political figures
and pop-culture icons embrace and enact the (re)constituted identity, the identity can then
be seen to both reflect and refract the people themselves. Individuals come to identify
with the “people” as they see themselves reflected in the constitutive discourses and in
turn they begin to play a role in the constitution of the people as they begin to highlight
the aspects of their individuality that resonate with the discursive construction of the
people with which they identify.

The constitutive discourses of Serbian cultural elites and Slobodan Milosevic, and
the media frames through which the news was reported each drew from a toolbox of
rhetorical strategies through which the Serbian people were (re)constituted. The shift in
Serbian identity from pan-Slavic to ethno-national was a complex process that relied on a
return to mytho-historic narrative to awaken people’s consciousness to their historic
subjugation. Discourses of historic victimization essentialized Serbian identity and
presented a polarized view of Serbia in relation to Yugoslavia and the rest of the world.
The constitutive discourses that hailed the polarizing ethno-national identities that rapidly
replaced the largely unified Yugoslav identity, legitimized the mass violence that
characterized the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation. This process of racializing and
politicizing Serbian ethno-national identity demonstrates the elements of the
normalization of violence that can be applied to other incidents of mass atrocity.

These congruent elements of mass atrocity can be further utilized in the
conception of an early warning system for international intervention. It is important to
realize that early detection is possible if the international community is willing to pay
attention and to have a nuanced view of conflict. However, it is essential to recognize
that examining pre-existing racial/ethnic tensions in a culture as the sole indicator of the potential for ethnic violence is inadequate. Places all over the world live with a certain degree of racial or ethnic tension and never erupt into violence, while others erupt without racial/ethnic tension. Perpetrators can invent out-groups from within, like the Khmer Rouge did with the city-dwelling Cambodians, ethnicity need not be the determining factor.

Looking only for ethnic aversion is a mistake both before a conflict begins and when it is occurring. International responses to both the Bosnian and the Rwandan crises were plagued with interpretations of the events as “age-old ethnic hatreds.” This view suggests a lack of understanding of the deliberate rhetorical tactics that immediately contribute to violence as it is manifest in the moment, and suggests an over-simplified interpretation of violence in these regions. This overly simplistic and wholly unhelpful view is further influenced by the polarizing rhetoric that characterizes the discourses prevalent in the media and politics of the offending party. A belief that the conflict is a part of an ancient struggle about which the international community can do nothing resonates with the teleological view of history that normalizes the polarized ethnic identities in these regions in the first place.

Taking a more nuanced view to mass atrocity means critiquing the constitutive discourses that gave way to the polarized identities. Mass killing is rarely a first course of action. There is a clear build-up, a rhetorical preparation that takes place before the atrocities begin. Attention to shifting media frames and decreasing space for competing voices, even while the illusion of choice may still be maintained, is one warning sign. When news frames are increasingly inflammatory and competing news sources are
competing only in the degree to which their frame favors the polarized identity that is being constituted through the rhetoric of the power interests, it should be a warning light for the international community.

Further, the presence of an authoritarian system, even in conjunction with ethnic/racial tension, is an inadequate prediction standard. Mass violence is much more effective and stays under the radar much longer if the group in power is perceived to have been put in place through democratic means. Those places where mass violence is most likely to occur are those wherein a particular group is trying to impose radical changes to society and has the military (or para-military) power to back them up. When this group also has the favor of media, and the country is at a point of transition or unrest, bells and sirens should be going off within the international community. While it is true that no two instances of atrocity will be orchestrated in the same way, nor will they exhibit the same signals, most incidents of modern mass violence have made special use of media frames to constitute in-groups and out-groups, and to normalize radical agendas to change society. Special attention to these discourses of mass violence can potentially lead to a more effective early warning system before violence occurs and can allow for nuanced insight into the build-up to violence in its aftermath.

A Few Last Words

There are many facets of the violence in the former Yugoslavia that make it unique. I have taken into account several of these aspects with this project, and have offered an analysis and critique of the role of rhetoric in constituting the exclusive Serbian identity that allowed for the normalization of that violence. There are elements of this project that are specific to Serb nationalism such as *The Mountain Wreath*, the
SANU Memorandum and the largely favorable disposition of the Yugoslav people
toward their communist dictator. From this we can learn a little more about discourse
and identity in Serbia.

Yet there are many more aspects of this project that are not unique to Serbia. Of
course there are ways in which the framework for this project could have been adapted to
show the role of rhetoric in constituting the ethno-nationalist identities in Croatia or
among Bosniaks, or Kosovar Albanians over the same time period, and doing so would
certainly allow for a fuller picture of the violences that took place in the former
Yugoslavia. Still, while the Balkan wars of the 1990s deserve to be studied in their own
right, as Balkan phenomena, and their uniqueness in the context of incidents of mass
atrocity should be examined, there are many more ways that they are not unique. While
the specific texts and circumstances that contributed to the normalization of violence in
the former Yugoslavia are unique, the rhetorical constitution that allowed for the
normalization of these violences could have happened anywhere. In fact, at this moment,
other preventable instances of mass atrocity are occurring.

The significant effect of deliberate constitutive discourses, of courting favor with
the media and public, and of the delegitimization of dissent through mockery are lessons
from a rhetorical analysis of the constitution of Serbian nationalism that can offer insight
into modern instances of mass atrocity throughout the world. As Jean-Paul Sartre (1968),
points out, not all governments will be as shortsighted as Hitler’s and proclaim their
intentions. Their intentions must be inferred through their actions, and, in the aftermath it
is simply too late recognize what we have on our hands. While this project cannot offer
insight into every instance of mass atrocity or ethnic violence, we should allow that the
crises in Yugoslavia have a lot to teach the world about the modern rhetorical weapons of war.
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APPENDIX:

Milosevic’s June 28th 1989 Speech

On the 600th Anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje

Speech by Slobodan Milosevic, delivered to 1 million people at the central celebration marking the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, held at Gazimestan on 28 June, 1989. Compiled by the National Technical Information Service of the Department of Commerce of the U.S.

By the force of social circumstances this great 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo is taking place in a year in which Serbia, after many years, after many decades, has regained its state, national, and spiritual integrity. Therefore, it is not difficult for us to answer today the old question: how are we going to face Milos [Milos Obilic, legendary hero of the Battle of Kosovo]. Through the play of history and life, it seems as if Serbia has, precisely in this year, in 1989, regained its state and its dignity and thus has celebrated an event of the distant past which has a great historical and symbolic significance for its future.

Serbian Character -- Liberational

Today, it is difficult to say what is the historical truth about the Battle of Kosovo and what is legend. Today this is no longer important. Oppressed by pain and filled with hope, the people used to remember and to forget, as, after all, all people in the world do, and it was ashamed of treachery and glorified heroism. Therefore it is difficult to say today whether the Battle of Kosovo was a defeat or a victory for the Serbian people, whether thanks to it we fell into slavery or we survived in this slavery. The answers to those questions will be constantly sought by science and the people. What has been certain through all the centuries until our time today is that disharmony struck Kosovo 600 years ago. If we lost the battle, then this was not only the result of social superiority and the armed advantage of the Ottoman Empire but also of the tragic disunity in the leadership of the Serbian state at that time. In that distant 1389, the Ottoman Empire was
not only stronger than that of the Serbs but it was also more fortunate than the Serbian kingdom.

The lack of unity and betrayal in Kosovo will continue to follow the Serbian people like an evil fate through the whole of its history. Even in the last war, this lack of unity and betrayal led the Serbian people and Serbia into agony, the consequences of which in the historical and moral sense exceeded fascist aggression.

Even later, when a socialist Yugoslavia was set up, in this new state the Serbian leadership remained divided, prone to compromise to the detriment of its own people. The concessions that many Serbian leaders made at the expense of their people could not be accepted historically and ethically by any nation in the world, especially because the Serbs have never in the whole of their history conquered and exploited others.

Their national and historical being has been liberational throughout the whole of history and through two world wars, as it is today. They liberated themselves and when they could they also helped others to liberate themselves. The fact that in this region they are a major nation is not a Serbian sin or shame; this is an advantage which they have not used against others, but I must say that here, in this big, legendary field of Kosovo, the Serbs have not used the advantage of being great for their own benefit either.

Thanks to their leaders and politicians and their vassal mentality they felt guilty before themselves and others. This situation lasted for decades, it lasted for years and here we are now at the field of Kosovo to say that this is no longer the case.

Unity Will Make Prosperity Possible
Disunity among Serb officials made Serbia lag behind and their inferiority humiliated Serbia. Therefore, no place in Serbia is better suited for saying this than the field of Kosovo and no place in Serbia is better suited than the field of Kosovo for saying that unity in Serbia will bring prosperity to the Serbian people in Serbia and each one of its
citizens, irrespective of his national or religious affiliation.

Serbia of today is united and equal to other republics and prepared to do everything to improve its financial and social position and that of all its citizens. If there is unity, cooperation, and seriousness, it will succeed in doing so. This is why the optimism that is now present in Serbia to a considerable extent regarding the future days is realistic, also because it is based on freedom, which makes it possible for all people to express their positive, creative and humane abilities aimed at furthering social and personal life.

Serbia has never had only Serbs living in it. Today, more than in the past, members of other peoples and nationalities also live in it. This is not a disadvantage for Serbia. I am truly convinced that it is its advantage. National composition of almost all countries in the world today, particularly developed ones, has also been changing in this direction. Citizens of different nationalities, religions, and races have been living together more and more frequently and more and more successfully.

Socialism in particular, being a progressive and just democratic society, should not allow people to be divided in the national and religious respect. The only differences one can and should allow in socialism are between hard working people and idlers and between honest people and dishonest people. Therefore, all people in Serbia who live from their own work, honestly, respecting other people and other nations, are in their own republic.

**Dramatic National Divisions**

After all, our entire country should be set up on the basis of such principles. Yugoslavia is a multinational community and it can survive only under the conditions of full equality for all nations that live in it.

The crisis that hit Yugoslavia has brought about national divisions, but also social, cultural, religious and many other less important ones. Among all these divisions, nationalist ones have shown themselves to be the most dramatic. Resolving them will
make it easier to remove other divisions and mitigate the consequences they have created.

For as long as multinational communities have existed, their weak point has always been the relations between different nations. The threat is that the question of one nation being endangered by the others can be posed one day -- and this can then start a wave of suspicions, accusations, and intolerance, a wave that invariably grows and is difficult to stop. This threat has been hanging like a sword over our heads all the time. Internal and external enemies of multi-national communities are aware of this and therefore they organize their activity against multinational societies mostly by fomenting national conflicts.

At this moment, we in Yugoslavia are behaving as if we have never had such an experience and as if in our recent and distant past we have never experienced the worst tragedy of national conflicts that a society can experience and still survive.

Equal and harmonious relations among Yugoslav peoples are a necessary condition for the existence of Yugoslavia and for it to find its way out of the crisis and, in particular, they are a necessary condition for its economic and social prosperity. In this respect Yugoslavia does not stand out from the social milieu of the contemporary, particularly the developed, world. This world is more and more marked by national tolerance, national cooperation, and even national equality. The modern economic and technological, as well as political and cultural development, has guided various peoples toward each other, has made them interdependent and increasingly has made them equal as well [medjusobno ravnopravni]. Equal and united people can above all become a part of the civilization toward which mankind is moving. If we cannot be at the head of the column leading to such a civilization, there is certainly no need for us to be at its tail.

At the time when this famous historical battle was fought in Kosovo, the people were looking at the stars, expecting aid from them. Now, 6 centuries later, they are looking at the stars again, waiting to conquer them. On the first occasion, they could allow themselves to be disunited and to have hatred and treason because they lived in smaller,
weakly interlinked worlds. Now, as people on this planet, they cannot conquer even their own planet if they are not united, let alone other planets, unless they live in mutual harmony and solidarity.

Therefore, words devoted to unity, solidarity, and cooperation among people have no greater significance anywhere on the soil of our motherland than they have here in the field of Kosovo, which is a symbol of disunity and treason.

In the memory of the Serbian people, this disunity was decisive in causing the loss of the battle and in bringing about the fate which Serbia suffered for a full 6 centuries.

Even if it were not so, from a historical point of view, it remains certain that the people regarded disunity as its greatest disaster. Therefore it is the obligation of the people to remove disunity, so that they may protect themselves from defeats, failures, and stagnation in the future.

**Unity brings Back Dignity**

This year, the Serbian people became aware of the necessity of their mutual harmony as the indispensable condition for their present life and further development.

I am convinced that this awareness of harmony and unity will make it possible for Serbia not only to function as a state but to function as a successful state. Therefore I think that it makes sense to say this here in Kosovo, where that disunity once upon a time tragically pushed back Serbia for centuries and endangered it, and where renewed unity may advance it and may return dignity to it. Such an awareness about mutual relations constitutes an elementary necessity for Yugoslavia, too, for its fate is in the joined hands of all its peoples. The Kosovo heroism has been inspiring our creativity for 6 centuries, and has been feeding our pride and does not allow us to forget that at one time we were an army great, brave, and proud, one of the few that remained undefeated when losing.

Six centuries later, now, we are being again engaged in battles and are facing battles.
They are not armed battles, although such things cannot be excluded yet. However, regardless of what kind of battles they are, they cannot be won without resolve, bravery, and sacrifice, without the noble qualities that were present here in the field of Kosovo in the days past. Our chief battle now concerns implementing the economic, political, cultural, and general social prosperity, finding a quicker and more successful approach to a civilization in which people will live in the 21st century. For this battle, we certainly need heroism, of course of a somewhat different kind, but that courage without which nothing serious and great can be achieved remains unchanged and remains urgently necessary.

Six centuries ago, Serbia heroically defended itself in the field of Kosovo, but it also defended Europe. Serbia was at that time the bastion that defended the European culture, religion, and European society in general. Therefore today it appears not only unjust but even unhistorical and completely absurd to talk about Serbia's belonging to Europe. Serbia has been a part of Europe incessantly, now just as much as it was in the past, of course, in its own way, but in a way that in the historical sense never deprived it of dignity. In this spirit we now endeavor to build a society, rich and democratic, and thus to contribute to the prosperity of this beautiful country, this unjustly suffering country, but also to contribute to the efforts of all the progressive people of our age that they make for a better and happier world.

Let the memory of Kosovo heroism live forever!
Long live Serbia!
Long live Yugoslavia!
Long live peace and brotherhood among peoples!