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GREAT SCHOLARLY AUTHORITIES AND SMALL NATIONS – THE FORMATION OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES ON FRANJO TUĐMAN AND THE HOMELAND WAR*

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The causes for the emergence of the narrative on the equal assignment of blame and the reasons why this narrative has become dominant in Western historiography are ascertained in this work. The fundamental objective is to analyse the perspective from which Western European and American political and academic circles view the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Croatia's role in the events which transpired from 1990 to 1995. With some individual exceptions, writers from Europe and America have generally taken the stance that the war in the territory of Yugoslavia was a civil war. Herein the insistence on the civil nature of the war in Croatia is also aimed at proving the equal culpability of all warring sides (Croatian and Serbian) for its outbreak. By the same token, it is apparent that Western historiography and current affairs analysis makes very little use of scholarly works generated by Croatian historiography, which are generally in agreement that in 1991 the Republic of Croatia was subject to aggression. The standpoints of Western historians and others (so-called “Balkan experts”) do not substantially differ from the policies which the United States and the European Union implement toward Croatia and the countries of the former

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Yugoslavia. This points to the conclusion that historical research in the West is under the great influence of the views of political elites.

Key words: Homeland War, collapse of the SFRY, Serbian aggression, equal blame, Franjo Tuđman

The equal blame narrative between scholarship and politics

In historical scholarship, as in other academic disciplines, there are paradigms which are rooted in research, but also on the authority of individual scholars or scholarly communities. Thus, with regard to Croatia's Homeland War, two firmly firmly-ensconced narratives, or paradigms, emerged which are mutually exclusive. The first, tentatively called the "Croatian narrative," stipulates that in 1991 the political leadership of Serbia and Montenegro at the time, with the help of the Yugoslav People's Army, perpetrated aggression against the Republic of Croatia with the objective of conquering a part of Croatian territory. This narrative has been accepted by a great majority of historians in Croatia, and it received something of a codification in the Croatian Parliament's Declaration on the Homeland War.¹

The other narrative is based on the thesis of equal blame. According to this narrative, the collapse of Yugoslavia and the conflict in Croatia were equally the fault of the Serbian and Croatian sides. The theory of equal blame for the war in Croatia is today the dominant narrative at the global level, which a part of the academic community is attempting to transform into a dogmatic truth. The adherents of this theory are diverse; among them one may find those who do not want to acknowledge the fact that Serbian aggression was perpetrated against Croatia in 1991, those who believed in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) as a socialist multi-ethnic utopia, as well as those who opportunistically uphold any predominant paradigm.

A crucial influence in the creation of the dominant narrative on the equal apportionment of blame between the Croatian and Serbian sides in the Homeland War was exerted by the global great powers, especially the United States and the major countries of Western Europe. From the very outbreak of the conflicts in Yugoslavia, American and European policies had two common goals: halt the war and reinforce their own political influence in the Balkans. Thus, the severe sanctioning of Serbia for the wars it was waging in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo would not have been opportune, because it would have permanently threatened its incorporation into Euro-Atlantic integration. So the narrative of Serbia's aggression against Croatia would have been inimical to American and European interests, while the narrative

¹ This declaration does not bind the academic community, however, which means that historians in Croatia are free to adopt other views on the character of the Homeland War. "Deklaracija o Domovinskom ratu", *Narodne novine*, no. 102/2000.

on equal blame was an ideal platform for the future political stabilization and reintegration of an area that was later called the “Western Balkans”. The great Western powers had strong instruments with which to impose any historical narrative and which they indeed used to make the equal blame narrative dominant. This could be implemented by means of conferring scholarships, organizing scholarly conferences, financing research, and providing support to the work of select non-governmental organizations in Croatia which advocated equal blame. This immense system placed a dilemma before many Croatian historians as to whether they should be guided by their consciences and scholarly principles or opportunistically accept the dominant narrative. Some of them could not resist the great benefits involved.

Roots of the equal blame thesis

In his famed novel *1984*, George Orwell wrote that whoever controls the past controls the future, and whoever controls the present controls the past. His potent words quite convincingly illustrate the position of Croatian historiography today to an unbelievable degree, but also explain its meandering path over the course of past centuries. Above all, it should be emphasized that until the 1990s, Croatia was generally perceived in Western historiographies in the manner in which it was presented by Yugoslav and, in the 1945-1990 period, communist historiography, full of prejudices and outright historiographic deceptions. Western historiographies only took from Yugoslav historiography what suited them from the vantage point of the “big” looking down upon the “small.” This is why a major struggle was waged in the field of historiography in the 1990s to dispel the myth of the alleged 700,000 Serbs killed in the Ustasha concentration camp at Jasenovac, and Croatian historians did much to illuminate the truth about Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac who, under the influence of Serbian and Croatian communist historiography, was seen as a butcher almost equal to Ante Pavelić in the eyes of many Western historians.² This attitude of the West toward earlier Croatian history did not auger well with regard to the Homeland War, either.

² Today, it is generally accepted that the alleged 700,000 Serbs killed in Jasenovac was a myth intended to compromise the entire Croatian nation. This myth has been harmful in many ways. Besides serving as one of the primary sources for inciting hatred of the Serbs against Croats, it brought into question the entire narrative of the antifascist struggle in Croatia. The well-argued proofs provided by many Croatian historians that 700,000 constitutes a vastly exaggerated figure for the actual victims of the Jasenovac camp put many global Holocaust research centres in an unpleasant position. In its entry on Jasenovac, *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* entry on Jasenovac states that the estimated number of victims ranges from 100,000 to 700,000, which shows that the editor took into account the Croatian standpoint, but nonetheless encountered difficulty in striking out the previously generally accepted Serbian claim. Walter Laquer, ed., *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 346.

In line with the aforementioned reasons for the creation of the equal blame narrative, it is vital to keep in mind the words of Margaret Thatcher, the former prime minister of Great Britain, who in her memoirs in 2002 ascertained that Western leaders made three crucial mistakes during the collapse of communist Yugoslavia. On this, Thatcher wrote:

“First, they tried to keep Yugoslavia together when it was clearly no longer possible to do so. This gave the Yugoslav army the impression that there would be no outside opposition to its trying to suppress the separatists by force. Second, the international community imposed an arms embargo on all the component parts of the former Yugoslavia. This deprived the Slovenes, Croats and Bosnians of the means to defend themselves and left them heavily outgunned by the aggressor. Third, the attempt at even-handedness in assessing blame for what was occurring, when the truth was that one side was the aggressor and the other the victim, led the West into something approaching complicity with the crimes being committed.”³

Thatcher vehemently opposed the policy of equal blame, because she rightly believed that it led to even greater suffering of people and that it did not help resolve the conflict between the warring sides. On the role of Europe in the events in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, she concluded: “Far from being ‘the hour of Europe’, as Jacques Poos (the then Foreign Minister of Luxembourg) proclaimed, it was the hour of Europe’s shame.”⁴

Thatcher’s conclusions fully elucidate the intentions of the Western powers and the reasons why the equal blame narrative became dominant in the historiography of Western countries. Nonetheless, besides political attitudes, there were also numerous prejudices which dovetailed with this narrative. For example, many Western historians, believing that Croatian and Serbian academic circles adopted mutually exclusive, extreme nationalistic positions, wanted to assume the role of impartial and objective third parties. However, their works have shown that most of these Western ‘Balkan experts’ were not up to the task they set for themselves. First, most of them were not very well informed of circumstances in Yugoslavia, and they were usually influenced by Balkan associates (friends, colleagues) who suggested viewpoints and the sources and references they should consult. Second, they were victims of their own prejudices. In the belief that both conflicting sides (Croatian and Serbian) were excessively underscoring their own victimhood and the guilt of others, many of the Western ‘Balkan experts’ concluded that the truth about the war in Croatia lay somewhere in the middle, and they thus created the narrative of equal blame. Naturally, this stance by Western academic circles suited the Serbian side, because it wiped away the obvious guilt for the aggression in Croatia

³ Margaret Thatcher, *Statecraft, Strategies for a Changing World* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 298-299.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

and Bosnia-Herzegovina, while it deprived the Croatian side (already weaker and internationally isolated) of its status of a victim.

Besides political interests and prejudices, one of the root causes of the creation of the equal blame narrative could also be found in the general conviction held in Western political and academic circles that Yugoslavia was an ideal framework for the political life of the South Slav peoples. Herein they were either unaware or unwilling to consider the internal problems that plagued both the first (monarchical) and second (communist) Yugoslavia. This is why Croatian and Slovenian separatism was so carelessly highlighted, implicitly placing responsibility for the conflict on those two republics, while Serbian hegemonic aspirations were never seriously considered until the outbreak of armed conflict and the perpetration of the first major war crimes by Serbian armed forces. The heart of the problem was in fact the Western view that the multiethnic Yugoslavia was an ideal solution to the area of the “western Balkans”. Thus, all they saw in the collapse of Yugoslavia from 1991 through 1995 was a conflict between the forces struggling to preserve the multiethnic Yugoslavia and separatists and nationalists driven by the “backward-looking” spirit of creating ethnic states. Even when the war broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995), Western countries, including their academic communities, maintained the stance that this state could not be allowed to fall apart (even though it was actually partitioned under the Dayton Accords), because to the West it represented the final chance to maintain coexistence and multiethnicity, and perhaps even form the core of some new Yugoslavia (Western Balkans, Yugosphere). Even though Western academic circles were not unanimous (there were, and still are, at least two different factions: the pro-Bosniak and pro-Serbian), they nonetheless agreed that the Croatian side also shared the blame for both the war in Croatia and the later war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Croatia as an example of an unwanted ethnic nation

The idealization of multiethnic nations and, hand-in-hand with this, the disparagement of ethnic nations, have a broader theoretical foundation. For over a half-century, great debates on the past, present and future of national identities have been conducted in the historiographies of the West. Although the scholarly works on nations and nationalism always stress that there are two opposing scholarly standpoints on this theme – the essentialist and constructivist – based on the number and preferences exhibited in various works, it may be concluded that currently the essentialist side is almost without a serious advocate in Western historiography. In other words, the vast majority of scholars in the West believe that national identities are imagined communities and negate that they have any positive value. When justifying this negative stance on national identities, Western historians most of cite the works of Eric Hobsbawm, the recently deceased British historian with a Marxist orientation,

and Ernest Gellner, a typical representative of contemporary liberal thought, which has transitioned entirely from left-oriented national corporatism to civic individualism. However, there is nonetheless a *differentia specifica* in their assessments of various nations, which classifies Western nations more progressive and democratic when compared to Eastern (Eastern European) nations. Hobsbawm, namely, differentiated between “nations [...] based on ethnicity, language or common history” and “liberal nation-making”.⁵ This is actually an old concept which acquired a new social role in recent decades.

Already at the onset of the twentieth century, German historian Friedrich Meinecke divided nations in the political nations (*Staatsnation*) and cultural nations (*Kulturnation*), and this same division was assumed in 1944 by British historian Hans Kohn. According to this division, Western nations (Western European, but also the United States) were political nations based on a tradition of statehood, while Eastern (Eastern European) nations were created on the basis of common cultures. The core of this division is a distinction between the Western, civic type and the Eastern, ethno-cultural type of nation which was only rejuvenated in Hobsbawm’s writings. Thus, according to this division, Western nations are based on the civil/liberal principle, while ethnic nations are based on ethnicity (“the counting of blood cells” as one may often hear today) and that is why Hobsbawm and like-thinkers see them as the true source of nationalism, chauvinism and everything negative, which is why left-liberal circles have such a dim view of national identities. From this, it not difficult to come to the conclusion that these same circles see Western nations as civic and progressive, and Eastern nations as ethnocentric, xenophobic and backward.

Hobsbawm’s view is today predominant in all Western academic communities. It was from this perspective that Western academic circles viewed the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. However, something entirely different could be read from this division imposed by the Western academic community as a general paradigm for national identities. Such a division of nations is an indicator of a typical colonial approach by the great imperialist countries to the smaller countries that were always the objects of their imperialist aspirations. It is actually a typical example of the attitude of the core toward the periphery, the West toward the East, Europe toward the Balkans (Orient). And this is apparent from Hobsbawm’s writings on the Croatian nation.

In his book *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Hobsbawm in fact mentions the Croatian nation as an example of a typical ethnic nation. In his assessment of the emergence of the Croatian nation, he cites the works of Croatian historian Mirjana Gross, and based on her research he concluded that Croatian nationalism “mirrored the opposition of the petite bourgeoisie to Yugoslavism as an ideology of the wealthier bourgeoisie”.⁶ Hobsbawm’s assump-

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Canto, 1991), p. 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

tion of Mirjana Gross' conclusion on the foundations of the Croatian nation is perhaps the best illustration of the West's stance toward the East, which is why the Homeland War is often portrayed as a tribal conflict or least a conflict between nations at a lower level of social development. Hobsbawm obviously wanted to show that the ideology of the wealthier bourgeoisie had already become predominant in Europe's west in the nineteenth century, opening the way for a multicultural civil society, while at the same time the petit-bourgeois concept of ethnic identities, focused on the creation of small ethno-national states, was predominant in the East. The sole exception in the Balkans, according to Hobsbawm, was the Yugoslav idea, which was a multiethnic idea of the wealthier bourgeoisie aimed at overcoming petit-bourgeois identities. It is astonishing that Hobsbawm, as one of the best known Marxist historians, did not see that with this interpretation, he had adopted the stance of a typical proponent of the British colonial approach toward the Balkan nations. For it is clear that the Western European type of multiethnic nation emerged as a result of the imperial policies of Western European elites and that multiethnic democracy is an ideal that has been promoted in Western Europe for perhaps a little more than a half century. On the contrary, Hobsbawm was convinced that his interpretation of the Croatian nation as the identity of the xenophobic and backward petite bourgeoisie served as a defence of his Marxist standpoints.

The consequences of such a stance toward the small nations of south-eastern Europe are very deep and painful. Among other things, such a view led to an *a priori* condemnation of the Croatian struggle for freedom and independence in the Homeland War. Perhaps it is precisely this paradoxical stance by left-liberal academic circles that conceals the secret of the West's fascination with the Yugoslav idea, a fascination which did so much damage to the creation of the modern, democratic Republic of Croatia and perceptions of its Homeland War.

Hobsbawm did not just stop by saying that the Croatian nation emerged as an expression of petit-bourgeois aspirations. He went even farther by accepting the views of Mirjana Gross that the Croatian nobility was "a nation without 'nationality,'" implying that it could not identify with the people.⁷ Moreover, Hobsbawm acknowledges the Serbs as having proto-national feelings even prior to the nineteenth century, but not the Croats, and he even faults Croatian historian Ivo Banac for his "failure to allow for this adequately".⁸ In other words, Hobsbawm actually wanted to imply that the Croats are an ahistorical nation that emerged as a result of a petit-bourgeois ethno-national movement. To be sure, he did not only characterize the Croatian national movement in these terms. He stated that in 1914 one could find many movements in Europe that stressed the linguistic and/or ethnic element, which "existed hardly or not at all" in 1870, and he listed the Armenians, Georgians, Lithuanians, Jews

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

(both Zionist and non-Zionist), Macedonians and Albanians in the Balkans, Basques, Catalans, Welsh, Flemings in Belgium, and Ukrainians.⁹ Hobsbawm additionally believed that the Croatian national movement (“nationalism”) should not be confused with the early Croatian support for Yugoslav or “Illyrian” nationalism, and he later concluded that “mass Croatian national consciousness appears to have developed only after the establishment of Yugoslavia, and against the new kingdom, or more precisely the alleged (sic!, op. R.S.) Serb predominance within it”.¹⁰ Hobsbawm’s attitudes, although clearly displaying a Marxist hue at first glance, actually more substantially reflect the typical view of southern and eastern Europe from the standpoint of the great Western European powers. In other words, Hobsbawm’s interpretation of national movements in eastern Europe was much more the vantage point of the centre looking out onto the periphery, moreover a (post-)imperial centre toward a (post-)colonial periphery, rather than how he wanted to portray it: as civic criticism of ethno-national corporatism.

The Serbian aggression against Croatia in 1991 and the international community’s response are the best examples of how the great powers could place their ideological concept above events on the ground, so the Serbian aggressor was given the green light to allegedly save multiethnic Yugoslavia, although everything pointed to the fact that it was truly a matter of aggression and occupation, while the Croatian nation, because of its desire to live in its own democratic state, was left to the rapine of aggressor forces because this desire was perceived in the West as separatism, ethno-nationalism and chauvinism, coupled with the old burden of the fascist legacy and the Marxist view that the Croatian nation by its very nature is counter-revolutionary, anti-progressive and ahistorical. Or everything happened the way it did because the West does not like small ethnic states. And so Serbian aggression against Croatia was waged with the support of the Western states, which believed that they were thus rescuing the idea of multiculturalism and social progress.

Tuđman’s original sin

In the equal blame narrative, a special role is played by the personification of crimes in the personages of the “nationalistic leaders”. In general, it is known that the first Croatian president, Franjo Tuđman, was very poorly regarded by Western politicians, but also in Western academic circles. State succinctly, he was denoted as a nationalist, with the additional stigma of being a historical revisionist and an anti-Semite. Those who stand in his defence generally say that Tuđman’s sin was actually the general Croatian sin. The Croats wanted to leave Yugoslavia, they wanted to live in peace and build their future, but

⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 106, 135.

they did not have the support of the great powers in this.¹¹ However, there are several even more important factors in the incrimination of Tuđman's life and work that are rarely considered.

First, Tuđman did not appear as the result of Western policies, that is, he did not rise to power as their exponent. No high American officials attended his inauguration, such as, for example, when US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright came to the inauguration of Stjepan Mesić in 2000, which irresistibly called to mind a sort of ordination. Tuđman was, thus, a 'home-grown' Croatian political figure. His assumption of power in Croatia demonstrated the absence of political initiatives by the great powers in the territory of the SFRY in 1990, or rather the presence of a political vacuum that emerged as a consequence of the implosion of the Yugoslav communist *nomenklatura*.

Second, Tuđman advocated the break-up of Yugoslavia and an independent Croatian state, and this was something the West long failed to accept. This is demonstrated by Margaret Thatcher's words quoted above, but even more so by the last US ambassador to socialist Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann, who began his book on the fall of Yugoslavia, *Origins of a Catastrophe*, with these words: "This is a story with villains – villains guilty of destroying the multiethnic state of Yugoslavia, of provoking four wars, and of throwing some twenty million people into a distress unknown since the Second World War"¹² For Zimmermann, the identity of these villains is not in question. Besides Slobodan Milošević, he designated Franjo Tuđman as the other major guilty party with this description: "A fanatic Croatian nationalist, Tuđman hated Yugoslavia and its multiethnic values. He wanted a Croatian state for Croats, and he was unwilling to guarantee equal rights to the 12 percent of Croatia's citizens who were Serbs."¹³

Third, during the war, Tuđman fought for Croatian interests, even though he was asked to back down many times, i.e., to be more "cooperative". After the occupation of almost a third of Croatia's territory and the establishment of the Serbian Autonomous District of Krajina, Tuđman was subjected to constant pressure to accept this as a *fait accompli*. From the end of 1991 to early 1995, it appeared as though Croatia would never manage to restore full sovereignty over its occupied territories. Thus, in the spring of 1995 the West even devised the so-called "Z4 Plan" which was, stated concisely, unworkable, unjust and unsustainable. Under such conditions, many politicians would have accepted this status quo. Tuđman instead launched the military/police operation code-named Storm, opting for yet another high-risk move. Ultimately he succeeded

¹¹ If it is even possible to compare two historical periods, Tuđman's position in 1990 may be likened to the position of Stjepan Radić, who vainly attempted to internationalize the Croatian question in the 1990s.

¹² Warren Zimmermann, *Origins of a Catastrophe* (New York: Times Books, 1999), viii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ix.

in his aim, returning the entirety of the occupied territories to the full sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia, and the success of his policies were even acknowledged by some of the leading international actors who did not otherwise hold him in high regard.¹⁴

Fourth, Tuđman and Croatia were not earnestly supported by any of the great powers. Although there was often talk of the Vatican-German-American axis which allegedly stood behind the entire process of Yugoslavia's collapse and Croatia's independence, actual international relations were quite different. The Vatican never had the influence to independently conduct such a diplomatic campaign, while Germany, afraid of evoking fears of its Second World War legacy, had to tread very carefully on the international stage. Tuđman wanted the support of the greatest global power, but the United States only saw him as an instrument of its intervention in the Balkans, and never as an ally or genuine partner. During the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, American political and academic circles actually still viewed Serbia as the Yugoslav Piedmont, which is confirmed by Zimmermann's statements cited above. Nevertheless, during the wartime years, Tuđman imposed himself as the main force who could resolve the conflict. In 1995, Operation Storm quashed Serbian designs in both Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, forcing Milošević to the negotiating table, which in turn led to the acceptance of the Dayton Accords. Croatia thus secured its continued existence, because it proved itself on the global political scene as a factor of stability. It plays this role in the territory of the former Yugoslavia even today, and became a member of the European Union and NATO as a result.

Tuđman remained in the West's poor graces until his death in 1999. Decisions made by Western countries were supposed to eliminate him from political life on two occasions. The first such decree was already issued in 1991: the arms embargo which the United Nations Security Council imposed on 25 September 1991. Even though the Security Council's decision stipulated a ban on delivery of all types of weapons and military equipment into Yugoslavia, it was clear at the time – at the beginning of the aggression by Serbia and the Yugoslav People's Army against Croatia – that this embargo only harmed Croatia, because the Serbian side held the former Yugoslavia's complete armaments in its hands. This was therefore a death sentence against Croatia and certainly a move aimed at either eliminating Tuđman or making him an outlaw at the very least. Croatia did not surrender at the time, rather it continued to arm itself via the black market, and this method remains as an argument for the incrimination of Franjo Tuđman to this day. The second condemnation of Tuđman should have been accomplished by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), also established by the UN Security

¹⁴ David Owen wrote about this unambiguously: "The victors in the Yugoslav wars of 1991-5 have been the Croats and President Tuđman" David Owen, *Balkan Odyssey* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1995), 353.

Council in 1993. As historians with academic freedom, cognizant of the freedom of speech as the foundation of democracy, we could also speak of the validity of Tribunal's judgments in various cases. However, for historical research into the stance of the international community toward the Homeland War, it is much more vital to analyze the work of the ICTY's Prosecution, and to ascertain the indictments raised by the Prosecution and against whom. There can be no doubt that the ICTY Prosecution had a specific general vision of the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the ensuing conflicts, and one precept in its work was very clearly expressed: the idea on the equal culpability of all sides, mostly the Serbian and Croatian. In line with this precept, the political leadership of the Croats and Serbs – and of the Bosniaks only to a smaller extent – had to be convicted. The judgment against several Croatian generals, Ivan Čermak, Mladen Markač and Ante Gotovina, for war crimes perpetrated during Operation Storm was supposed to be crucial for events in Croatia. The Prosecution compiled the indictment such that it practically incriminated the entire military campaign, as well as the entire military and political leadership of the Republic of Croatia headed by Franjo Tuđman. Nonetheless, on 16 November 2012, the trial chamber presided over by Judge Theodore Meron did not accept the Prosecution's arguments and the indictment failed, and Markač and Gotovina were released from custody.¹⁵ Sonja Biserko, the president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, spoke about all of these matters quite openly at the time. She said the after the acquittal of Markač and Gotovina, Serbia had to accept responsibility for starting the war and the aggression against Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and that the indictment against Generals Gotovina and Markač was politically motivated in order to strike a balance (sic!, R. S.) with the indictment against Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić. Biserko backed her view of the politicized nature of the indictment by adding that "it is very odd that Gotovina and Markač were sentenced to 24 and 18 years in prison in the non-binding first-instance judgment, but are now free," and ultimately concluded that "this means that the Prosecution was politically motivated in this case".¹⁶

Drivers of the equal blame narrative

Specifying the names of the primary drivers of the narrative on equal historical blame is quite challenging, for the number of works and monographs on the collapse of the SFRY number in the hundreds. When analyzing the creation of the equal blame narrative, the most intriguing task is to determine the members of Western academic communities who most influenced the formation of the views of Western politicians. An analysis of the memoirs of Warren

¹⁵ General Ivan Čermak was acquitted already in the first instance judgment of 15 April 2011.

¹⁶ "Predsjednica srpskog Helsinškog odbora: Srbija mora prihvatiti odgovornost za početak rata u Sloveniji, Hrvatskoj, Bosni!", *Jutarnji list*, 16 November 2012.

Zimmermann, David Owen, Richard Holbrooke and Madeleine Albright, perhaps the four best known international participants in the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, shows that during the crisis and armed conflicts these politicians were actually rather poorly acquainted with the history of South East Europe, so it is therefore unsurprising that prejudices played a major role in their activities. The latter included the already mentioned prejudices of the West vis-à-vis the East, wherein the West means Western Europe and the United States, and the East means of the countries of Eastern Europe which had freed themselves of communism in the 1990s. Actually, the participation of the academic community in the debate surrounding the causes of the collapse of the SFRY and the wars waged from 1991 to 1995 was surprisingly scant. In their consideration of Yugoslavia's collapse, most of the media, but also politicians, made use of the works of journalists, such as Robert Kaplan, Tim Judah, Marcus Tanner, Misha Glenny, Allan Little and Laura Silber, Mark Almond and others. It is not only peculiar that the primary analysts of communist Yugoslavia's collapse were journalists, but also that the level of discourse conducted among them was quite low and surprisingly non-academic, i.e., it was limited to mutual accusations of supporting Serbian or Bosniak policies. It is similarly fascinating that almost none of the more distinguished current affairs writers or scholars in the US and Europe were accused of advocating the Croatian side, because (it would appear) none such existed.

Some of the aforementioned politicians testified to the influence of these journalists. For example, in his memoir *To End a War*, Richard Holbrooke wrote that Robert Kaplan had considerable influence on the American public at the onset of the war, and even on President Bill Clinton himself.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the entire series of individuals Holbrooke thanks in his acknowledgements for their help in writing the book does not contain a single historian. It is also interesting that the persons mentioned from the former Yugoslavia include two Bosniak politicians, Ejup Ganić and Haris Silajdžić. Since Silajdžić is a historian by profession, it may be concluded that this is the only person from academic historical circles who had any influence on Holbrooke's decisions.¹⁸ However, Holbrooke's book is worthwhile due to one other detail. Holbrooke felt the need to discuss the book *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* by British writer Rebecca West. The fate of this book during the period when Yugoslavia broke apart is an interesting subject for a separate scholarly study. It was originally written in 1941, but it was re-issued on the eve of the outbreak of armed conflict in the 1990s. Those who read this work with admiration and reverence included the already mentioned journalist Robert Kaplan, so it was very likely that he was the key individual who revived interest in this book in the 1990s, which is why it became mandatory reading for all Westerners who wanted to become involved with the crisis in Yugoslavia. Holbrooke, however,

¹⁷ Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.-375.

had an entirely different impression of this book, so different that he in fact dedicated a chapter to it at the beginning of his memoir called “Bad History, or The Rebecca West Factor”.¹⁹ Moreover, Holbrooke openly wrote, “According to numerous press reports, the book had a profound impact on President Clinton and other members of the Administration shortly after they came into office”.²⁰ This statement, considered in the context of research into the creation of the dominant narrative on equal blame, is quite important, as it demonstrates that at crucial moments in the crisis in Yugoslavia, US policy at the highest level was influenced by the writings of a single journalist and a book from 1941.

Holbrooke actually went on to describe how the idea of ancient ethnic conflicts inherent in the Balkans and the very mentality of its various peoples created a stance in the US that nothing could be done. Among the individuals responsible for such policies, he particularly underscored the influence of Lawrence Eagleburger, a former US ambassador to Yugoslavia who in 1992 became the US secretary of state. In September 1992, Eagleburger described his own stance – also the stance of the Bush administration – thusly: “I have said this 38,000 times, and I have to say this to the people of this country as well. This tragedy is not something that can be settled from outside and it’s about damn well time that everybody understood that. Until the Bosnians, Serbs and Croats decide to stop killing each other, there is nothing the outside world can do about it”.²¹ A similar stance by American and European diplomats was described by Madeleine Albright as well: “Initially, the crisis was viewed by the Europeans and the senior Bush administration alike as a European problem that could and should be settled by Europeans. Diplomats from the continent anxiously shuttled back and forth arranging cease-fires that did not stick and predicting an end to the violence that did not come. These efforts were undercut by the theory—widespread in Europe—that Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks were so intent on killing each other that it was pointless to try to stop them”.²²

However, near the end of the war, works from the academic community appeared as a counterpoint to the superficial, sensationalist and generally biased articles written by journalists and current affairs writers, and they explained Yugoslavia’s collapse and the outbreak of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina with well-backed arguments. Among these academically-trained individuals, certainly the most influential was Noel Malcolm, who published his

¹⁹ In this chapter, Holbrooke also criticizes Kaplan’s views: “West’s openly pro-Serb attitudes and her view that the Muslims were racially inferior had influenced two generations of readers and policy makers. Some of her other themes were revisited in modern dress in Robert Kaplan’s widely acclaimed 1993 best-seller, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, which left most of its readers with the sense that nothing could be done by outsiders in a region so steeped in ancient hatreds”. *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²² Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 179-180.

book *Bosnia: A Short History* in 1994. Malcolm was one of the rare historians who can be found cited in the memoirs of the aforementioned participants in political events; specifically, he was praised by both Holbrooke and Thatcher.²³ Besides Malcolm, Thatcher also made use of the book by Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of Ethnic Cleansing* (1995).²⁴ The others from the political quintet analysed herein (Zimmermann, Thatcher, Holbrooke, Owen and Albright) did not cite anyone from academic circles whose expertise was worth mention.

Historians thus began to appear in public as experts to a much lesser degree than journalists and current affairs writers, practically at the end of the war. Besides Noel Malcolm and Norman Cigar, the better known Western experts on the former Yugoslavia included John Lampe, Sabrina P. Ramet, Robert M. Hayden, Mark Thompson and Holm Sundhausen, who were known, but their influence on the public and policies in the West in comparison to the aforementioned journalists in the 1990s was considerably smaller. Over the past several years, the Western historians who did the most to shed light on the collapse of communist Yugoslavia were Charles Ingrao and Sabrina P. Ramet. They deserve praise for including historians from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia in the academic discourse on these events. It is particularly noteworthy that Charles Ingrao launched a major project called the Scholars' Initiative (2001-2009) with the aim of researching the collapse of the SFRY. This project encompassed dozens of scholars from the US and Europe, among them numerous Croatian, Bosniak and Serbian historians. However, these efforts by Ingrao and Ramet to take a balanced stance on this problem, to include all views, necessarily led to a conclusion that pointed to the theory of equal blame.

Conclusion

The thesis on equal blame imposed by Western academic circles as the dominant narrative on the war in Croatia is actually rooted in the stance that this interpretation of the Homeland War is the best foundation for reconciliation and reintegration of the territory of the former Yugoslavia, so it is apparent that it has a clear political purpose. All of this points to the conclusion that the standpoints of Western historiography may be understood only if viewed within the framework of the general policies concerning the territory of the former Yugoslavia implemented by the United States and the European Union.

What comes out of an analysis of the memoirs of certain major representatives of Western countries (the US and EU member states) who participated in settling the crisis and halting the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is

²³ R. Holbrooke, *To End a War*, 23; M. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, 300.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

that their views were mostly influenced by current affairs writers and journalists, and only by the academic community to an astoundingly small extent. The influence of Croatian historians and historians from the former Yugoslavia in general was virtually non-existent. It would therefore appear that in the West, the views of the academic community cleaved to the views of the political sphere and the media, even though one would expect that the situation would be just the opposite in developed Western countries.

The equal blame thesis is topical to this day. It can only seem a just and sound approach by misinformed Western politicians and intellectuals. However, the post-Dayton peace demonstrates the numerous problems which have ensued precisely from the fact that Serbia was never unambiguously proclaimed the aggressor in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the end, one must agree with George Orwell: who controls the present controls the past, and who controls the past controls the future. The West has the power to impose whatever historical narrative on Yugoslavia's collapse that it wishes. It is precisely for this reason that the great Western powers have a responsibility to the Yugoslav successor states, and this is why they must rise above the prejudices that often bind their elites.

Große wissenschaftliche Autoritäten und kleine Nationen: die Bildung der historischen Narrative über Franjo Tuđman und den Kroatienkrieg (kroatisch: Heimatskrieg)

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Beitrag werden die Ursachen des Entstehens des Narrativs der geteilten Schuld und die Gründe dafür, dass dieses Narrativ dominant in westlichen Historiographien wurde, erforscht. Der Autor analysiert die Perspektive, aus der westeuropäische und amerikanische Politik und akademische Gemeinschaft den Zerfall der Sozialistischen Föderativen Republik Jugoslawien und die Rolle Kroatiens zwischen 1990 und 1995 betrachten. Autoren aus Europa und Amerika, außer gewissen Ausnahmen, vertreten die Meinung, dass der Krieg auf dem Gebiet Jugoslawiens ein Bürgerkrieg war. Beharren darauf, dass diesem Krieg der Charakter des Bürgerkriegs immanent war, hat auch den Zweck, die geteilte Verantwortung der Konfliktseiten – der kroatischen und der serbischen – für den Kriegsausbruch zu beweisen. Das Narrativ der geteilten Schuld entstand einerseits als die Folge der pragmatischen Politik des Westens gegenüber dem Gebiet des ehemaligen Jugoslawiens und andererseits wegen zahlreicher Stereotype über dieses Gebiet, die in westlichen Historiographien seit

Jahrzehnten existieren. Obwohl einige einflussreiche Einzelne, beispielsweise Margaret Thatcher, darauf aufmerksam machten, dass dieser Zutritt umstritten war, blieb er doch auch weiterhin dominant. Das Narrativ der geteilten Schuld hat seinen Ursprung einerseits in politischen Interessen und Vorurteilen, andererseits aber auch in der allgemein verbreiteten Auffassung der westlichen politischen und akademischen Kreise, dass Jugoslawien den idealen Rahmen für das politische Leben der südslawischen Völker darstellte. Die genannten Kreise betrachteten deswegen den Zerfall Jugoslawiens 1991-1995 nur als einen Konflikt zwischen den Mächten, die für die Erhaltung des multiethnischen Jugoslawiens kämpften, und den Separatisten, bzw. den Nationalisten, die von dem „rückschrittlichen“, nach der Gründung ethnischer Staaten strebenden Geiste geführt wurden. Sogar nachdem dem Ausbruch des Kriegs in Bosnien und Herzegowina (1992-1995) behielten die westlichen Staaten und ihre akademischen Gemeinschaften die Auffassung, dass es zum Zerfall dieses Staates keinesfalls kommen darf (obwohl er laut dem Abkommen von Dayton eigentlich geteilt war), weil dieser Staat, nach der Meinung des Westens, die letzte Chance für die Erhaltung des Zusammenlebens und der Multiethnizität darstellte, ja sogar auch den potenziellen Kern eines neuen Jugoslawiens (des Westbalkans, oder der Jugosphäre). Der Einfluss des Narrativs der geteilten Schuld kam besonders deutlich in der Arbeit der Anklagebehörde des Internationalen Strafgerichtes für das ehemalige Jugoslawien (ICTY) zum Ausdruck.

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