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THE CELEBRATION OF A VIOLENT PAST: ABOUT SOME LOCAL SOURCES OF THE RECENT WAR IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA[*]

Bosnia-Herzegovina is the site of a striking number of World War II monuments erected on or in the immediate vicinity of mass graves. These memorials are bones of contention and generate violent inter--ethnic animosity. This article gives an extensive description of the trials and tribulations of one of these war monuments and the Serb and Croat communities involved. It addresses an aspect of ethnic cleansing that has hitherto been the focus of very little research, i.e. the destruction of mass graves. It is hypothesized that mass graves and the related commemorative ceremonies constitute a key to understanding the stagnating ethnic identification and the recent revival of war violence in rural Bosnia-Herzegovina. The article advocates a more systematic inquiry into the local sources of the war in this part of the former Yugoslavia.

Keywords: political anthropology, war, Bosnia-Herzegovina

> *Far from simply serving to divert hostile impulses in a harmless direction, human ritual is employed to exhort people to war and violence (...) as long as intergroup hostilities have existed, rituals have been used to express them* (David Kertzer 1988).

> *... the conditions that lead to (large-scale) violence require a micro foundation based upon social organization in rural and small-town life...* (David Laitin 1995).

> *Bosnia-Herzegovina was a mass-murderer's dream come true, a mighty necropolis of empty mass graves, high and dry, waiting to be filled* (Brian Hall 1994).

Introduction

Late in the summer of 1992, just before nightfall, a loud explosion resounded in Bijakovići. Bijakovići is one of the hamlets of Međugorje, the parish in western Herzegovina that has expanded since the start of the alleged Marian apparitions there in the early 1980s into a pilgrimage centre of world-wide importance (cf. Bax 1995). I was just about to get up from the table and see what happened when the huge hands of my host, Franjo B., pushed me back in my chair. "It is nothing... we'll stay inside", he said emphatically. In bed that night, I thought it over. Apparently Franjo did not want me asking any questions. For that matter, not one of the family members in the room had paid any attention to the explosion. It was as if everyone was prepared for it, and then simply continued on about their business.

We were working on the land the next morning when I brought it up again, but Franjo acted as if he did not hear me. It was not until the lunch break, when I said I would go to have a look in the direction of Šurmanci, the hamlet I thought the sound of the explosion had come from, that my landlord and friend reacted. At the end of the afternoon, he said, he would show me what had happened.

Without a word, we drove toward Šurmanci in his old Volkswagen. I was familiar with part of what barely deserved being called a road, for I had been there a year before the war. Since I was then so insistent, my previous host and I had gone to see a war monument. But before we got very far, we were startled by a volley of rifle shots — coming according to my informant from Chetnik sentinels — and we had no choice but to beat a hasty retreat.[1]

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[1] The term *Četnici* [Chetnik, Chetniks] originally referred to the legendary and often glamourized Serb buccaneers and gangs of bandits from the era of the Early Ottoman rule who, or so the story goes, rose up at regular intervals in an effort to cast off the despised Turkish yoke. In both of the world wars, Chetniks were a para-military organization of Serbs who saw it as their formal task to support the regular Serb troops and maintain law and order in the region. In practice, however, it was not unusual for them to operate in small, independent units led by war lords and terrorize the Croatian and Bosnian Croat countryside. As such, they were extremely disliked by the Croat community. After the World War II, these mini-armies soon fell into decline. Later, however, Chetnik resistance groups were known to play an active role, especially in the eastern Bosnian countryside, where they were the "strong arm" of regional ultra-nationalist Serb movements. Up to this very day, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina still call

About half way there, we turned into a side road. Unlike the first part, it was nice and smooth. We made another turn and a few kilometres further on we stopped at what looked like a huge parking lot in the middle of nowhere. The Neretva River flowed past at the bottom of the ravine to the left, and steps had been hacked out in the mountainside to the right, leading to a shapeless mass of stone that lit up brightly in the setting sun. We silently climbed the partly ravaged staircase — sixty-eight steps, I remember. It stopped at a plateau with the remains of a monument. "Friends blew up this blasted Chetnik thing", Franjo informed me with a torrent of curses. And he added emotionally in his schoolboy English: "We killed the dead because they kept them alive" — an ultimate form of ethnic cleansing, I thought.[2] He spit with contempt on the remains and turned away. He barely gave me time to film and to take photographs.[3] On our way back in the car, I felt the tension growing between us, and did not say a word. The road was so bad that the cooling-system pipe on his old Polo broke, and as I started asking questions while he repaired it, the "bomb" really burst. "Why, why, why... you always want to know why!" Hadn't I ever noticed that people didn't want to answer my questions about Šurmanci? (I had.) Hadn't I ever noticed that no taxi, or anyone at all, ever wanted to go to Šurmanci? (I had.) Hadn't I ever noticed that the people here all acted as if Šurmanci didn't exist? "Look at the road. It is almost impossible to drive down that road. Everyone from around here tosses their garbage alongside the road. There are no signs telling you the way to Šurmanci. At the church, all the hamlets are listed on the big tablet — not Šurmanci. In all the guidebooks for tourists, the hamlets here are described — not Šurmanci. You can buy postcards and slides of almost every spot around here — not of Šurmanci." Franjo concluded his tirade, alluding to my not being more perceptive, by saying: "To us here, — Šurmanci is dead... we want to forget."

A few days later, Father Leonard, one of the Franciscan parish priests, revealed a bit more of the secret. He told me people wanted to pretend Šurmanci did not exist because it reminded them of oppression, humiliation and forced labour. During World War II, he explained, many Serbs from the vicinity, especially from nearby Žitom, were killed by local Ustashi, as the Serbs invariably call the Croats, and tossed into the ravine at

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their Serb compatriots *Četnici*. For more information about Chetniks past and present, see Čopić (1964), A. Đilas (1991), Tomasevich (1975) and Malcolm (1994).

[2] At first sight, "killing the dead" seems an odd expression. For the outsider, it is important to know that in the Bosnian countryside, the deceased continue to be part of the kinship group. Via them, their progeny can lay claim to the use of land and water and to the produce of fruit and olive trees. It is not until *all* the traces of their lives have been wiped out that these claims cease to exist.

[3] In the following year, after I had collected more extensive visual material about ravaged war monuments and mass graves, all this material that was so valuable to me was destroyed by a warlord from the vicinity. He had probably been informed about my activities, which might have compromised him. Using the threat of violence, he forced me to hand over my entire collection.

Šurmanci.[4] And from the establishment of the communist Tito regime after World War II, their descendants and other relatives had been taking every opportunity to remind the Croats of what had happened. The monument at Šurmanci was the largest and most painful reminder. Father Leonard concluded: "Here almost every village and neighbourhood has a painful reminder like that."[5]

A few weeks later — by then I had left — Međugorje was startled by a few enormous explosions. Villagers from Žitom, who were said to be fanatic Serbs, had blown up the crucial part of the bridge over the Neretva, destroying the most important connection between the Brotnjo Plateau and Mostar. Pursued by a group of Croat *rezervisti*, the people of Žitom fled with their families high into the Velež Mountains, where they settled in a former Muslim village now controlled by a Serb military unit.[6] For the time being, the long tradition of violence and enmity between two rural communities in the region was brought to a halt.

Since the outbreak of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1992, a great deal of attention has been focussed on what the underlying causes might have been. How is it possible, observers have wondered, that people who lived side by side in peace for decades on end suddenly developed such fierce animosity? The answer is often sought in the recent past: Tito's policy, aimed at the integration of Yugoslavia's many peoples and nationalities, failed; and the spectre of ethno-nationalism was revived by

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[4] The *Ustaša* [Ustashi] movement is also said to have originated in a distant past, when "intrepid Croat warriors took arms against alien rule". According to authoritative historical sources, however, the Ustashi movement emerged in response to the hegemonic aspirations of the Serbs in the first decades of the twentieth century. At the start of the 1940s, the movement became the official "strong arm" of the fascist Independent State of Croatia (*NDH*). In fact, many of the units operated independently and cruelly terrorized the Serb people of Bosnia-Herzegovina. After World War II, the movement was largely liquidated by the new communist government. Nonetheless, a number of cells continued underground, especially in western Bosnia-Herzegovina, the birthplace and traditionally the centre of the movement. Still today, Serbs from the region call every Croat an *Ustaša* (plural: *Ustaše*). More information on this movement's past and present can be found in Jelić-Butić (1983), Ristić (1966), Banac (1984), Hory & & Broszat (1965), Križman (1983), Paris (1961), Starčević (1971), Tolstoy (1986) and Tomasevich (1975).

[5] When the communist regime in the former Yugoslavia began to disintegrate in 1982, people started to speak hesitantly and sometimes even to write about the World War II mass graves and monuments and their background. Official, government-propagated views always seemed to have an unofficial counterpart sustained by the less powerful segment of the population, and diametrically opposed to the official version (cf. Glenny 1992, Brey 1993, Rathfelder 1992, Reissmüller 1992, 1993, Denich 1991, Soldo n.d.). It nonetheless remained a highly sensitive subject, and when the "big war" broke out in Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1992, the openness once again became a thing of the past.

[6] *Rezervisti* refers in popular usage to all the militias that were active in the recent war, including the independently operating war lords with their men as well as the reserve troops from the old state or federal army, the gangs of soldiers who had deserted and roved about the countryside plundering, and the "weekend militias", which were bands of relatives and neighbours who went out to pillage and raid in hostile territory.

extremist political leaders at the top (cf. Glenny 1992, Slapšak 1993, Anstadt 1992, Irvine 1993, Pleština 1992, Schöpflin 1993, Brey 1993, Thompson 1992, Peternel 1993, Parin 1993, Denich 1994, Meštrović 1996, Čale Feldman 1993, Hayden 1993a). Explanations of this kind certainly have their merits, but in one important respect they fail: they do not clarify why and how hostility was perpetuated. Šurmanci's monument for the dead and the related enmity between the people of Međugorje and Žitom provide an interesting opportunity to shed more light on this aspect. The case illustrates in detail that in actual fact this animosity never ceased to exist, but had been deliberately preserved and regularly nourished by collective rituals. For decades, the enmity was concealed by political terror and hidden behind the official communist rhetoric viewed in Western circles as the only truth. For a better understanding of the war in Bosnia--Herzegovina, more research is urgently called for at the local level and focused upon such ritual markers as war monuments cum mass graves (also see Denich 1994).

Gatekeepers and peasants

On the east bank of the Neretva River, where numerous roads lead from the mountain villages to the age-old trade route from Mostar to the Adriatic, there are a couple of small towns. These *vratari* [gatekeepers], as both the towns and their inhabitants are called locally, were founded in the early decades of domination by the Ottoman Empire, between 1470 and 1550. They were small garrison strongholds that oversaw the communication between the mountain villages and the market centres along the river. The predominantly Muslim population earned a living collecting tribute for the various authorities, maintaining law and order in their area, and charging tolls on all the traffic of passengers, goods, and animals between the market centres and the peasant communities (Balić 1992, Vego 1981). In view of their function, it is no wonder the gatekeepers were unpopular with the peasants and the merchants from the towns. They were regularly ambushed by gangs of revengeful peasants, who were just as regularly disciplined by the garrisons. Their wealth made the gatekeepers attractive to gangs of roving bandits (Koljević 1980, Balić 1992, Wilson 1970).

Žitom was one of these gatekeepers; it controlled almost the entire Brotnjo Plateau. Žitom is still associated with a winepress (*preša za grožđe*), as the precious grape juice from the plateau was appropriated there, and the worthless peel remained behind.

When the Ottoman Empire began to waver in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a group of Serb rebels from Montenegro took advantage of the opportunity to conquer the rich town of Žitom, banish or murder the local population, and occupy the luxuriant settlement themselves. However, the whole area soon fell under Hapsburg rule. In

their efforts to pacify and incorporate the mainly Croat peasant popu-
lation, the Hapsburgs were only too happy to use the militarist
Montenegrin Serbs (Soldo 1964, Vego 1981). Ever since then, Žitom has
been a symbol of Serb oppression and exploitation for the Croats of the
Brotnjo Plateau.

In 1929, after the foundation of the Serb-dominated Kingdom of
Yugoslavia, hostilities soon escalated and the region became the site of
more and more bloodshed. Groups of East Bosnian Chetniks, originally a
loosely organized auxiliary of the national police, began to terrorize the
population of the Brotnjo Plateau. With Žitom as their home base — and
soon with the support of *mjesni četnici* (local fighters) — they would
pillage the plateau. They raped women, stole cattle, destroyed vineyards
and water cisterns, burned houses and barns to the ground, and viciously
penalized any resistance (Soldo n.d.). An elderly informant from
Međugorje — at that time a twelve-year-old child — compared those
calamities to the recent hostilities: "Nothing has really changed... the only
thing is that the horses have become tanks and armoured cars."

The officially authorized reign of terror of the Chetniks evoked a
Croat counterpart: supported by nationalistic political circles from Split
and the surrounding area, Brotnjo peasants organized vigilante and
resistance groups. Međugorje became the centre of the new Ustashi
movement for the Brotnjo, battling a perpetual mini-war with Žitom (Soldo
1964 and n.d.).

In the early years of World War II, this regional violence formation
was incorporated into a war figuration of national proportions. Backed by
the Axis powers, the Independent State of Croatia (the *NDH*) was founded
(1941), and Bosnia-Herzegovina was to be part of it. With the help of the
para-military Ustashi organization, and not infrequently the overt support
of the Roman Catholic clergy — the young state took every opportunity to
cleanse Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina of Serb elements. In addition to
forced conversions to Roman Catholicism, mass deportations and
massacres were among the means used to that end (see Alexander 1979,
Ristić 1966, A. Đilas 1991, Maček 1957, Tomasevich 1975, Jelić-Butić
1986).

In Međugorje, the Ustashi headquarters of the Brotnjo, "preparations
were made for action". Reportedly in conjunction with groups from
Čapljina, Humac, and Široki Brijeg, plans were made to cleanse the
peripheral regions of the Brotnjo. Žitom was high on the list in this
connection. "In the late summer of 1942, the time had come", one of my
most belligerent informants told me. All the people of Žitom — insofar as
they were not in active battle somewhere else — were taken prisoner and
herded into a colossal bunker built into a cliff by the Germans. The plan
to close off the entranceway and leave them there was abandoned, or so
my informant told me, when a "better" option came up. A column of
lorries packed with Serb prisoners and under German command changed

hands near Žitom, and the Brotnjo Ustashi were now in control. They added their "shipment" from Žitom and headed toward Šurmanci. There, far from the inhabited world, the prisoners were slaughtered like cattle and tossed into the ravine — nobody knows exactly how many people died there.

Like the other hamlets involved in atrocities of this kind, Međugorje was severely punished. In the end, the outcome of the reprisals carried out later by Tito's Partisans, was that the parish of Međugorje lost about half its population and suffered considerable material losses (Maček 1957, Craig 1988, Anonymous 1986).[7] This was not the end of it, for, concealed behind official communist rhetoric, Međugorje was to go through a lengthy period of subjugation and humiliation after World War II.

Forced labour and humiliation

The liberation committees set up by Tito and his Partisans in World War II to serve as local authorities in the liberated territories were not adverse to the use of violence. In the post-war period as well, as the new "civil society" was constructed, violence, intimidation and terror continued to be integral policy components (see Alexander 1979 and Ristić 1966). Numerous newly created official positions at the federal, national and local levels were "awarded" to "liberators of the people". Formally expected to carry out party politics, in actuality they ruled as potentates whose main aim was to accumulate wealth and settle old accounts (see Alexander 1979, Soldo n.d., M. Đilas 1977).

Former Partisan commander Stojan Stojanović was the first to visit the ghost town of Žitom after World War II. Together with a few other young men who were members of the same clan, he had been able to escape the heinous revenge the Ustashi took on his native town. The men had joined a Montenegrin Partisan unit. Their power and influence had mushroomed in the course of the post-war cleansing campaign to eliminate the Ustashi movement in the region. In view of their success, they were put in charge — allegedly by the party — of the administrative, economic and demographic reconstruction of Žitom.

Within little more than a decade, by the early 1960s, it was as if a miracle had taken place in the ravaged town. Almost all the houses had

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[7] The Partizans headed by Tito were the newest of the three resistance movements active on Yugoslav territory during World War II. It was predominantly Serbs who joined this generally well-organized communist military and political organization. Very few Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina played a role. After the war this organization was able to consolidate its power and establish a federation of socialist republics, initially following the Russian example. Almost all the important government positions were occupied by ex-Partizans. Especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it was not unusual for them to rule as local potentates. More extensive information can be found in A. Đilas (1991), M. Đilas (1977), Parin (1991), Maclean (1990), Roberts (1973) and Tomasevich (1975). For specific local circumstances see also Smilan (1977) and Soldo (1964).

been rebuilt and were now occupied by relatives of the former residents, the bridge over the Neretva had been repaired, the roads had been repaved, and a new small Serbian-Orthodox church had even been built.

Whence this "miracle"? Some sources mention considerable government funding supplemented by special Soviet aid earmarked for their sorely afflicted Serb brothers (Vego 1981, Soldo 1964). In another publication (Smilan 1977), references are made to continual assistance from Serb emigrants and *Gastarbeiter*. Still another source emphasises the energy and the Partisan mentality of the local population (Dragan 1978).

In addition to these possibly correct and relevant explanations, Soldo (n.d.) notes another point that deserves special attention here. After World War II, he observes, the Brotnjo Plateau — like other regions in Bosnia--Herzegovina — was carved up into a number of unofficial provinces (*kolonije*) "ruled" by local (Serb) Partisan leaders: a power constellation that was still in existence at the outbreak of the most recent war.[8]

Stojan Stojanović and his fellow clan members controlled Međugorje and the adjacent neighbourhoods of Bijakovići and Šurmanci. The villagers themselves contributed greatly to the reconstruction of Žitom and the prosperity of its inhabitants. Up to the late 1960s, every household that had been linked to the Ustashi movement — according to the authorities, that included all the Croat households in the region — had to make "reparations" or pay off "war debts" to the Partisan Fund, which was in actuality managed by the Serb establishment. Whoever refused to do so was accused of subversive nationalistic conduct, invariably resulting in imprisonment (Soldo n.d.).[9]

By the end of the 1960s, these "policies" made way in theory for a policy aimed at the promotion of "brotherhood and unity", but served, in fact, to reinforce ethnic animosity. The republic's government in Sarajevo made funds available to "promote the cultural legacy", and local authorities could submit proposals in this connection.[10] In Međugorje, the population was confronted with this "promotion" in the spring of 1970. It took quite a bit of prodding on my part to get a few of the villagers to tell me about it. "A van of armed men came: "Chetniks" from (Žitom). They stopped at the crossing where the late Đuro Šivrić's house used to be. Further down the

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[8] In 1992 I was informed about the existence of extensive documentation material on these ethnically based hostilities in the region. A reporter from *Mostarski List* had accumulated a collection of documents based upon his own investigations in the archives of the newspaper, awaiting an appropriate moment to publish them. I was able to read and leaf through some of them and make copies of certain parts I felt were extremely salient. When I wanted to continue my investigative work in 1993, the newspaper building turned out to have been completely destroyed, just as almost all the buildings in the centre of Mostar.

[9] Almost all the young men of Međugorje at the time spent some time for this reason in the jails of Mostar, Sarajevo or some other town in the former republic of Bosnia--Herzegovina.

[10] Cf. *Mostarski List*, 12 March, 1968.

road, they blocked off part of the mountain with little red flags... Later we heard explosions, and that evening we saw part of the mountain had been blown up. Then we had to come and work, chopping stones and carrying them away. But no one came. That is why the police from Čitluk took the people from their homes. A lot of men fled to the mountains, but when they came back home at night, the police came and took them away."

Bit by bit it became clear to the local people that the "Chetniks" were building a monument to their World War II comrades, and that the people from the Brotnjo Plateau — alleged Ustashi — had to do the actual work.[11] For almost three years, the people of Međugorje, Bijakovići and Šurmanci did all they could to sabotage the work, but the authorities continued to force them to do their share in building the monument. Without exception, obstruction led to arrests, which meant either paying a fine or doing a few days of forced labour.[12] Soon, the building site was popularly referred to as Goli Otok, taking its name from the notorious state prison on an island off the Adriatic coast (Soldo n.d.).

After the unveiling ceremony on April 27, 1973, the humiliation continued. The authorities never had trouble finding a reason to punish someone, especially considering the way the villagers were prone to act. Garbage discarded alongside the road had to be removed, potholes in the surface of the road had to be repaired, there had to be more and better parking space. There was an almost endless succession of acts of sabotage and punishment, with annual peaks around April 27. That was when thousands of the detested "Chetniks" would come from far and wide in their automobiles to gather together and celebrate the past; Partisan heroism, anti-Fascism, and party loyalty were the main themes on these occasions. The visitors were loud-mouthed, or so I have been told, and uncouth, and this evoked local objections, which in turn incited the authorities to do their best to "get matters back to normal", for example, by ordering villagers to clean the streets.

Toward the mid-1980s, some years after the alleged Marian apparitions, which attracted masses of pilgrims, this complex of ethnic animosity faded into the background. "It was thanks to the power of the Mother of God", said Father Leonard, though others felt it was "thanks to the economic boom in Međugorje from which the authorities benefited from as well". Whatever the case may be, there were no further large-scale ceremonial events near the mass grave of Šurmanci.

In 1992, when the Serb-controlled state monopoly over the organized means of violence disintegrated, the monument near Šurmanci

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[11] According to some local informants, in the beginning of the 1960s a modest monument had been built at the same spot. However, I was unable to uncover any further details.

[12] Father Širo, who was serving the parish at the time, also had to haul stones as punishment for giving a sermon in which he compared the parishioners to the Jews who had to make tiles for the Egyptian oppressor.

"disintegrated" as well. "But the memory lives on — on both sides", lamented the parish priest.

Discussion and conclusion

Western ethno-theory still seems to dominate the study of ethnicity and other forms of collective identity in the social sciences. It is based on the premise that cultural affiliations reflect blood ties and have a predetermined quality of inevitability. It is assumed that people are who they are and what they are because they were born to be so, and that membership in a group is given at birth and can never be changed (Linnekin & Poyer 1990; see also Bringa 1993). It will be clear that this is only one of many possible models for conceptualizing and experiencing cultural differences and similarities. For different peoples have different notions and ideas about what determines who they are and to which category of people they belong. In peasant societies, people locally define and construct their identity according to their own perceptions and experiences, in interaction with other local or neighbouring groups; this may be in congruence or at odds with the official state forms of categorization.

In his important article "Identification in Expanding Circles" (1994), Abram de Swaan tries to break away from these rather narrow Western and static notions by focusing on identification. Social identification, he argues, involves a dialectics of inclusion and exclusion, and a dynamics of competition between groups; it is an ongoing process which tends to expand and include ever-more people. Human beings entertain multiple and shifting identifications in concentric and intersecting circles. Wider identifications, the author claims, are re-enacted and intensified in the primary setting of family and peer groups. Adopting a historical and developmental perspective, De Swaan describes and explains how social identifications were restricted to kinship groups until the advent of agricultural society and the emergence of identifications based on proximity. Only in the mass politics of urban-industrial society were social identifications extended to larger entities, such as class, race, and nation. Today, an identity with Humankind in its entirety is emerging. This ultimately encompassing identification, De Swaan observes, lacks the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and rivalry, but may yet be vitalized by a sense of global threat and common human destiny.

De Swaan's approach seems much more adequate not only for historical and cross-cultural research but also for coming to grips with the dynamics, ambivalencies and ambiguities of cultural categorization. However, the author fails explicitly to explore the mechanisms and factors causing stagnation in or even reversal of the overall process of expanding identification (cf. also Mennell 1989). Šurmanci's mass grave monument and the related annual commemorations, described above, seem to

constitute such a stagnating mechanism. "Officially", in accordance with the government's policy, the ceremonies were explicitly non-ethnic: it was the "victims of Fascism" who were commemorated, without any reference to their ethnic background. But since the Serbs were locally in power, "unofficially" things were different. Thus, by systematically enacting the past, the mutual identifications of Serbs and Croats were kept alive, which, in turn, virtually precluded the possibility of social identification on a higher level of social inclusion, that is, in terms of Bosnians or Yugoslavs.

Šurmanci's mass grave monument and the related ceremonies also constituted a most powerful reservoir, so to speak, of traumatic memories and feelings of hatred (cf. Kertzer 1988). As long as the state monopoly over the organized means of violence was kept intact, these memories and feelings remained relatively suppressed. But when that monopoly collapsed at the beginning of the recent war, they turned into viciously violent behaviour. Thus, it may be hypothesized that mass graves and related ceremonies constitute a key to understanding the stagnating, ethnic identification and the recent revival of violence in rural Bosnia- -Herzegovina (cf. Denich 1994, Das 1990, Hayden 1992, 1993a, Volkan 1988).

Šurmanci's war monument is not the only one of its kind. To date (end of 1998), I have been able to trace sixteen similar "ritual centres". In each case, they are a symbolic expression of the long-term power and dependency relations between Serb power centres and the Croat communities dominated by them. And in each case, these emotionally charged sites were blown up by small militant groups of Croats shortly after the recent crumbling of the power apparatus, thus destroying the last territorial ties and claims of the opponent. The assumption would thus seem justified that there is evidence here of a more general pattern, characteristic of western and southern Herzegovina, of ethnically based antagonism between pairs or clusters of village communities.

If this assumption is well-founded, it can also open new options for a better understanding of the recent war in this part of the former Yugoslavia. It can then become clear that the bloodshed did not come out of the blue, nor was it the direct result of some fifty-year-old spectres that were revived by extremist political leaders at the top (cf. Denich 1994, Hayden 1993a). Instead, it constituted a temporary intensification and expansion of an ongoing process of maintaining and reproducing extremely passionate ethnic antagonism — a process that mainly unfolded at the local level where mass graves and related commemorative ceremonies played a key role (cf. also Denich 1994). It can also become clear that the term war as it is used in Bosnia-Herzegovina should not be taken to mean the same thing as in other parts of the world. The generic term *rat* not only pertains to violent processes between regular armies at the national or state level, but also to more private feuds between families and clans, as well as to all the more flexible and temporary violent operations at intermediary levels of societal integration. Thus, any

discussion about the recent war in the former Yugoslavia should pay due attention to this conceptual complexity and phenomenal interconnectedness — rather than to attempt to arrive at some neat, tidy set of distinctions and definitions (cf. also Meštrović 1996).

There is one intriguing question that should be addressed here: Why did Western circles up until recently know virtually nothing about this more general pattern of ethnically based antagonism? A partial explanation can be sought in the effective concealment strategies of the communist regime under Tito. Every effort to draw public attention to nationalistic differences was relentlessly suppressed or depicted by the strictly censored Yugoslav state press as "manipulation by capitalist powers", "undermining activities on the part of subversive elements", or simply as the work of "gangsters". Virtually without a word of criticism, Western European intellectual and political circles accepted this version as the truth. Any critical inquiry into the recent past of Yugoslavia was punishable by a lengthy prison sentence (Balić 1992, Kideckel 1993, Ramet 1984). In addition to Stalinist communists, the infamous political prison at Goli Otok, situated near a popular tourist island in the Adriatic, was predominantly populated by historians, journalists, and authors who had shed a critical light on the former Yugoslavia's recent past (Balić 1992, Soldo n.d.).

This Western unawareness was not alleviated by any anthropological or ethnographic studies at the local level. On the contrary; in their impressive review article written in 1983, Halpern and Kideckel did not mention a single publication about local-level political relations and processes, for the simple reason that there were none. The study of nationalism in Yugoslavia was politically dangerous and thus taboo in anthropological circles, and that of ethnicity long remained confined to analyses of the cultural content of ethnic identity (e.g. Hammel 1969, Lockwood 1972, 1975, 1978, 1981) or focused on the politically relatively innocuous inter-state level (e.g. Beck and Cole 1981, Sugar 1980). And as late as 1991, in anthropological circles the phenomenon of ethno-nationalism in former Yugoslavia was dismissed as "folk ideology" (cf. Šimić 1991). It was not until the recent outburst of violent warfare that anthropologists focused on the region became painfully aware of their selective attention and of its consequences for their perception of the local roots of the war (e.g. Kideckel 1993, Halpern 1993, Šimić 1993, Denich 1991, 1993, 1994, Hayden 1993 and 1993a, Despalatović 1993, Ballinger 1994, Bowman 1994).

Norbert Elias noted repeatedly that social developments are characterized by a combination of regularity and randomness, explainability and pure chance. On lower levels of integration, occurrences that might be regular and explainable on a high level become erratic, unpredictable, and dependent on random circumstances and personal quirks. Ever since the Middle Ages, the processes of state formation and state development in Western Europe have exhibited regularity and

structure, development in a certain direction, and can be analyzed and interpreted as such (Elias 1982 and 1989; see also Wilterdink 1993). It is from this perspective, characteristic of Western Europe, that the developments in former Yugoslavia in general and in Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular are generally examined and evaluated, using terms like erratic, irrational, pointless and inconsistent. The case of Šurmanci shows that what might seem random and unpredictable on a higher societal level demonstrates a large extent of regularity and explainability at a local level. The conclusion seems obvious that for a better understanding of the recent problems in Bosnia-Herzegovina — and possibly for the present problems of violence in Europe in general (cf. Laitin 1995) — attention should be more intensely and systematically devoted to processes and developments at lower levels of social integration.

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SLAVLJENJE NASILNE PROŠLOSTI: O LOKALNIM IZVORIMA RECENTNOG RATA U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI

SAŽETAK

U Bosni i Hercegovini nalazi se iznimno veliki broj memorijalnih spomenika žrtvama Drugoga svjetskog rata podignutih u neposrednoj blizini masovnih grobnica. Ti su spomenici predmet razdora i izazivaju međuetnički animozitet. U radu se opisuje sudbina jednoga od tih spomenika oko kojega se spore Srbi i Hrvati. Članak se bavi aspektom etničkoga čišćenja koji dosad nije bio u središtu istraživanja — uništavanjem masovnih grobnica. Pretpostavlja se da se masovne grobnice i s njima povezane komemoracije mogu tumačiti kao ključ za razumijevanje nepromjenjive etničke identifikacije i nedavne obnove ratnog nasilja u ruralnoj Bosni i Hercegovini. Autor se zalaže za sustavnija istraživanja lokalnih uzroka rata u tome dijelu bivše Jugoslavije.

Ključne riječi: politička antropologija, rat, Bosna i Hercegovina