

Anthropologists Facing the Collapse of Yugoslavia

Bojan Baskar

In extreme situations such as war, genocide or refugee crises, anthropologists, who are usually closer to afflicted people than other scholars, face the crucial questions of the utility and responsibility of anthropology. However, anthropologists in particular are susceptible to the way of reasoning that concludes that anthropology as a science (or even as a technique or art) does not offer any answers to these questions. Some become engaged trying to help one way or the other, yet not as *anthropologists*, since they hold that as an anthropologist one is powerless to help . . .

Such a conviction is adopted by those who believe that war or genocide is not an issue of anthropological science. Is it possible that a mathematician, faced with a refugee crisis, becomes involved as a *mathematician*? His or her expertise might be helpful in developing a methodology of estimating the number of refugees that reaches hundreds of thousands. Yet this contribution would more accurately be described as an *application* of his or her professional competence while he or she gets involved, for example, as a citizen or perchance as an intellectual . . . Why should not a similar stance apply to an anthropologist who can get involved as a citizen out of compassion, or for some other reason? And at the same time making their anthropological knowledge available if there is some demand for it, for instance if a 'translation from one cultural code to another' is needed? Such an argument would surely deserve a firm refutation.

In the case of tragic extreme situations it can be clearly observed that the dichotomy of fundamental and applied research, the one so successfully rooted in anthropology, is not sufficient since it lacks a very important dimension. This dimension can't be conceived of either as applied or as fundamental, pure, uninterested in application, because utility is far from being reducible to application. Thus the idea that the boundary between fundamental and applied research should be declared nonexistent is not a solution. Georges Guille-Escuret has termed this element, this third dimension of anthropology, as engaged anthropology (Guille-Escuret, 1996).

The advocates of applied anthropology tend to reduce the utility of anthropology to the utility for the indigenous people (e.g., economic projects that benefit the locality), yet nevertheless are bound in course of their work to face the tasks that would be more accurately described as engaged anthropology (e.g., mobilizing of public opinion, public opposition to governmental decisions or policies, etc.). The advocates of 'pure', fundamental research are, on the contrary, often convinced that anthropology as a whole is fulfilling its task by simply performing its 'normal' academic job. Some among them might claim that fundamental research in social sciences, by its mere existence, occupies the space that would otherwise be invaded by other discourses, in the first place the moral and the religious ones. The shortcoming of such an enlightenment reasoning lies in

its indifference to agencies that compete for this space; it is not interested in the question what is actually happening with this space: is it shrinking or expanding? Is the authority of social sciences in society – or the authority of anthropology – gaining strength or is it diminishing? Scientific ideas are not spread by themselves, by their own impetus, as Descartes believed, but need help to spread and to be brought into effect – as Spinoza knew.

Is anyone at all exempted from the point of view of their nation?

In a book that reflects upon the purpose and utility of anthropology, Georges Guille-Escuret, influenced by the genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia, lists the generating of a 'powerful discourse on atrocities' among the important tasks of anthropology (Guille-Escuret, 1996: 49). Personally, I rather don't dare to believe that anthropology (or any other discipline or a complex of disciplines) is able to produce such a discourse; yet the fact that a few anthropologists who won't give up the hope do exist is filling me with hope. In any case, I agree that anthropologists are far from doing everything they can in order to give hope a chance.

In this article I will touch upon some of the early responses of anthropologists regionally specialized in the former Yugoslavia – particularly in Serbia – to the disintegration of the country and the wars that followed. First of all I will try to show that anthropologists did not understand what was happening, because they did not know – or did not want to know – how to observe the behavior of the population related to respective national ideologies and in the context of the interrelatedness of the West and the Balkans. It is by no means my intention to deny the individual insights that anthropologists have contributed. Likewise I am reluctant to side-step those who in my opinion have done well but for lack of space cannot give them the attention they deserve, since the article will focus on the explication of what has *not* been done by anthropologists.¹ Limited space also does not permit a proper exposition of my views on what anthropology of the region should do to become more relevant in academia, and more worthy of respect in the eyes of decision makers as well as the afflicted people of the region. Scholars from other disciplines, particularly historians, have often clearly stated that the recent wars in Yugoslavia were not inevitable. This opinion was shared by the large number of former Yugoslav citizens appalled by the passiveness, indifference and ignorance of Western Europe and the USA. Anthropologists who conducted fieldwork in Serbia, perhaps with a very few exceptions, were not among them and as far as I know have never taken a firm stand that anthropology could have contributed something to prevent the war (or at least prevented its further spreading, or that anthropology could do something to prevent potential similar genocide projects of some future Serb regime).

One of the rare attempts by any Western anthropologist to use their professional competence to directly stand up to – if not the massacres themselves than at least to their spreading to the then peaceful ethnically mixed areas – was undertaken at the time by Jonathan Schwartz (1993) who described his effort as a form of applied (and urgent) anthropology: 'The civil war in other multi-ethnic regions of former Yugoslavia makes urgent ethnographic reporting from regions that remain peaceful' (Schwartz, 1993: 94). 'All the more reason for returning to the places which are still at peace. If representing conflicts and tensions can lead to dialogue and mutual understanding, then our reports

from the field ought to be both open and reflective. As long as we are able, we can provide evidence that ethnic, linguistic and religious plurality does not lead inexorably to civil war' (1993: 98). Despite his praiseworthy endeavor, Schwartz's ambition was indeed a modest one and very telling about the limitation and prejudice of contemporary anthropology. In order to make the anthropology of the regions of the former Yugoslavia more relevant, at least two requirements should be met beforehand: firstly, anthropologists should not desperately cling to their fieldwork experience and should qualify the research of local events in much broader and more complex contexts; secondly, they should be capable of confronting national myths and ideologies in general and those that inspire and legitimate war and genocide in particular. As a corollary, anthropologists should have been able to identify the true destroyer of Yugoslavia – not a very difficult task which was nevertheless too difficult for nearly all anthropologists that undertook research in Serbia at least up to 1995.

As I grew up and live in a country (Slovenia) that used to be one of the republics of the federated socialist Yugoslavia, I find it necessary to refer briefly to some circumstances enabling a better understanding of the position I am speaking from. The Yugoslavs have long been known to be rabid and complicated nationalists, so one is wise to apply caution when listening to what Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Bosnian Muslims, Kosovo Albanians, Macedonians and Montenegrins have to say about one another, and not just to trust their word. Consequently, the same applies to me. As a native – or a 'former' native, whatever that may mean – the readers are entitled to suspect me to be heavily biased in my comments. As a citizen of that 'egotistic little country' that had been first to abandon Yugoslavia and thus responsible, according to many, for all the calamities that followed, I might a priori be suspected of being an anti-Serb (or better yet, an anti-Croat?).

Of course it would be a naiveté of a special kind to imagine that the 'Westerners', with their 'view from afar', are not entangled in the Balkan labyrinth and thus a priori more objective. Only within the horizon of the simplistic dichotomy of the 'cosmopolitan' and the 'native' anthropology is it possible to assume that Western ethnographers gracefully remove the veil of nationalist appearances and immerse straight into the native culture. But how can one tell the difference between the 'appearance' and 'reality', between national ideology and culture, in modern nations such as Serbia whose identity consists of nationalism?

There are several answers to the question why anthropologists specializing in Serbia did not confront Serb nationalism, at least not in the early phase of Milošević's wars. The reasons ought undoubtedly to be searched within the fundamental assumptions and prejudices of anthropology itself. Be as it may, there is plenty of evidence that the mentioned specialists had accepted the axioms of afore-mentioned Serb national ideology and believed its copious myths. In this regard, anthropologists were doing no better than travelers in Yugoslavia, Western peace-negotiators or UNPROFOR commanders. However, they were doing substantially worse than historians – for the simple reason of history being a discipline that requires discerning historical facts from mythologies. Only *bad* historians are allowed to be taken in by nationalist fallacies, whereas anthropologists like to behave as if this distinction were irrelevant in anthropology.

The words that American scholar Branimir Anzulovic chose to describe the actions of American state secretary advisers Lawrence Eagleburger and Brent Scowcroft (both served in Belgrade and learned Serbian) could easily be used to refer to many an anthropologist:

'But close exposure to an area, as Professor Albert Lord proved, does not necessarily contribute to the sound knowledge of it. It is much easier, and sometimes profitable, to accept the myths dear to the dominant group than to learn the complex reality of a country too heterogeneous to survive' (Anzulovic, 1999: 213).²

Let me give just one illustration of such myopia. The anthropologist Bette Denich in her article written in the first years of the war (Denich, 1993) without even slightly doubting the truthfulness of the Serb media campaign reproached Croats and Slovenians (but, curiously enough, not also Bosnian Muslims) that they did not believe the lamentations of the Kosovo Serbs in the middle of the eighties. She even asked herself: 'It is important to know why the Kosovo Serbians were so widely disbelieved. Why should the sincerity be doubted of these groups of people whose dress and physical appearance showed them to be predominantly peasants? Why should not such people, in evident distress, evoke sympathy on the part of the general public?' (1993: 48). A true *pons asinorum* for any emic-minded anthropologist! Her answer is the following: it was because the Slovenian and Croat disbelievers were manipulated by their republic's mass media which was in turn under total control of their nationalistic communist leaders! The laments of the Kosovo Serbs are epitomized in an 'emic' form that unbinds the anthropologist from taking her own stand regarding the truthfulness of the laments: 'They cited, over the years, numerous forms of intimidation, harassment, physical attacks, threats, and property damage. Of special emotional impact were claims of rape by Albanians of Serbian women and girls' (1993: 48).

When I recently reread Denich's invaluable contribution to the understanding of the Yugoslav catastrophe I became briefly alarmed that I (as a Slovenian) was indeed manipulated at the time and for this reason did not believe that the Kosovo Albanians really terrorized the Kosovo Serbs. Of course I remember the Serb media campaign. The historian Noel Malcolm, who by his own admission strives to be equally critical of both the Serb and Albanian national myths, describes this campaign in the following way. It started with the controversial 'Martinović case': the man was brought to the hospital in Prishtina in 1985, where a broken beer-bottle was removed from his anus. He claimed that he had been attacked by two masked Albanians, probably with the motive to drive him off his land; the police found the story hard to believe; the journalist from the Belgrade newspaper *Nin* who had led the campaign published a 485 pages book on this issue a year later. This followed a book on rapes of Serb girls and old women in the villages and nunneries which was published in Belgrade in 1984 by an Orthodox archimandrite, Atanasije Jevtić. The book set off the media campaign on the systematic rape of the nuns in Kosovo. The only serious study of this issue was carried out by an independent committee of Serb lawyers and human rights experts in 1990. Their statistical analysis showed that the frequency of rapes in Kosovo was far the lowest in Yugoslavia and that in 71 per cent of the cases the victim and the assailant were of the same nationality. Between 1982 and 1989 there were thirty-one reported cases of rape or attempted rape of Serb women by Albanian men (Malcolm, 1998: 338–339).

None of the above mentioned (and other) information by Malcolm was new to me since it had been relayed by the Slovenian (and not only Slovenian) media. Nevertheless, I would not like to rule out the possibility that a certain number of Serbs quit Kosovo due to the pressure of Albanians, but the number of those who might have left for this reason

will be virtually impossible to establish since they had left, if they had left, in the circumstances of ferocious and venomous anti-Albanian propaganda that no doubt had also aimed to force the Kosovo Serbs to move, in order to create a pretext for introducing different methods of solving the 'Albanian question'. The Slovenian and Croatian public, by the way, was familiar with the lies of this propaganda from previous episodes. Today the role of Serb propaganda and the Serb Orthodox church in the psychological conditioning of Serbs to genocidal acts is widely known. While we do not necessarily expect from social sciences the correct predictions (and do not as a rule measure the scientific value by the frequency of correct predictions), ought we not to expect from anthropologists, the sworn fanciers of empirical facts, at least the ability of not describing the current social reality through the eyes of the perfectly obvious nationalist, indeed racist, propaganda?³

Finally I would like to stress that I find no particular pleasure in citing similar or even more scandalous claims about Yugoslavia by different anthropologists. In the special issue of the journal *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* (Kideckel and Halpern, 1993), titled *The Yugoslav Conflict*, which was published at the incentive of the East European Anthropology Group at the American Anthropological Association, one can read cynical comments about crazed Yugoslavs, along with ridiculous forecasts and quoting the propagandistic numbers of Serb victims of the Ustasha state, as serious scientific data. Furthermore, the perfect accord of the positions of anthropologists with the positions of their governments at the time, the most audacious generalizations from micro-regions to the whole of Yugoslavia . . . All these grave lapses occurred among the dominant group of anthropologists who comprized the core of the 'Special issue': the specialists for Serbia proper.⁴ None of them raised a question of the role Serb ideology and myths had played in the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Would it not be legitimate to expect from the ethnographers to follow, for instance, in the eighties, at the grass-roots level the emergence of diverse actors that started 'rising national conscience' throughout the 'Serb territories' by spreading the feeling of menace from the Ustashes, Islamic fundamentalism and the 'Albanian demographic war', and proclaiming the Serbs to be 'biologically endangered' and 'exposed to the genocidal activities'? And further to follow the establishing of new Serb cultural societies that aimed to inflame ethnic hatred and remind the Serbs of their 'burning wish to take revenge for Kosovo'? Likewise the renaissance of the interest in the *gusle* singing and the invasion of discourse of the local politicians by the folklore motives? Is it not legitimate to expect that anthropologists, along with following particular nationalisms and the confrontation of diverse nationalisms in the ethnically mixed regions, would mobilize against such processes by pointing them out, by publicly criticizing the indifference, the lack of information and the pro-Serb bent of their governments, as well as the shameful connivance of domestic social scientists? Or is this the job only of others, such as historians or philosophers?

The conclusion that the 'native' anthropologists made perhaps a better job out of the pressing questions than the 'cosmopolitan' ones might therefore sound somewhat like a paradox. It is true that nearly all the Serb ethnologists in the beginning of the nineties, when the operation of transplanting the Serb heavenly kingdom to earth was in progress, turned apologists of endangered Serbdom. There were very few exceptions among them, such as Ivan Čolović who reacted to these trends already in the eighties precisely by the anthropological analysis of the uses of Serb folklore mythologies in

the politics of conquest. The number of Croat ethnologists or anthropologists who decided not to serve the ruling regime was much higher than with their counterparts in Serbia, and some among them have also undertaken the task of dealing with the questions mentioned.⁵

Serb National Ideology

In certain aspects the situation of anthropologists specializing in Serbia much resembles the situation of anthropologists who specialized in Sicily. In both cases we have to deal with the failure of anthropologists who had been misled by the national (or potentially national) ideology in which the native informants were very much at home. They mistook it for the Sicilian culture *tout court* (in the Sicilian case), or assumed it as an 'emic', i.e. unverified point of departure for the interpretation of social reality (in the Yugoslav case). In both cases the key role in fashioning the national ideology was played by the leading national ethnographer of the nineteenth century: Giuseppe Pitrè in framing the so called Sicilianist ideology (with its inevitable apology of the mafia character as a Sicilian character trait) and Vuk Karadžić in framing the Serb ideology (with its inevitable celebration of the *haidukness* and folk heroic epics as the noblest expression of the Serb *Volksgeist*).

It is not a coincidence that before the juridical revelation of the organizational structure of the *Cosa Nostra* (by the investigating judge Giovanni Falcone and his first *pentito*, Tommaso Buscetta), the least erroneous perspective was held by the anthropologists who were aware all along that the mafia legitimated and reproduced itself with the help of the Sicilian ideology and that *mafiosi* were specialists in manipulating the Sicilian cultural codes (Schneider and Schneider, 1976). They have also from the beginning conceived of Sicily as a region in which peripheral roles were continuously assigned in the framework of the world-systems of the last four centuries. The use of the notion of *ideology* in anthropology along with a nondeterminist and nonessentialist understanding of *culture* learnt from Eric Wolf was the necessary condition which enabled the Schneiders to become alert to the (potentially) national Sicilianist ideology. Subsequently, they were able to grasp the Sicilianist apology of the mafia in its function of the feeling of inferiority, due to the peripheral position and particularly to endemic violence in the region (which Sicilianism tried to deny by blaming malicious foreigners who wanted unjustly to denigrate the Sicilians).⁶ Eric Wolf in his last book (Wolf, 1999) went a step further by undertaking the comparative analysis of German national socialism as an extreme response by a particular society to a social crisis. In this work the concept of ideology is one of the central concepts, reflected also in the subtitle of the book. Wolf understood ideology as 'unified schemes or configurations developed to underwrite or manifest power . . . ideologies become programs for the deployment of power . . .' (1999: 4). Thus it does make sense to use the term national ideology (Wolf actually makes use of a term from German ideology) without implying the notion of a nation as a homogenous entity. I am talking about the Serb (national) ideology in a similar sense. Although in certain contexts the notion might sound rather clumsy (if not irritating for certain anthropologists), it grasps well the idea of 'unified schemes', elaborated and interacting in a series of expansionist contexts of diverse Serb political regimes.

'Chrysanthemum and the Sword' Anthropology

In the case of Serbia and other Balkan nations we are also dealing with the periphery. In the first decades of this century awareness of the tremendous dependency of the small Balkan nations on the European great powers was considerably more alive among contemporary commentators than it is today. They were a great deal more aware that the Balkans were a peripheral area where the European great powers were enforcing their antagonistic interests, drawing the borders of the emerging small nations and inflaming conflicts and hatred among them in order to gain a better control over them. This feeling of semi-colonial dependency and the derived inability to create their own destiny often found its expression in the Balkan nations in the thesis that they were the product of Western powers, that history had evaded them, that they were not the actors of history. In its radicalized form this thesis says that the Balkanites are for this reason *not responsible* for their actions. In the Serb ideology, where after World War II the Orthodox rhetoric was replaced by the officially Marxist rhetoric of anti-Westernism, the irresponsibility for one's own actions became a virtue, it became a character trait of the valiant warriors.

Considering the current enthusiasm of anthropologists for globalization and world interconnectedness it therefore seems paradoxical that anthropologists who wrote about the war in Yugoslavia flatly neglected this dimension of the Balkan dependency. While the feeling that they had been 'cheated by the history' (Christian Giordano) developed both with Sicilians and small Balkan nations, in some other aspects, however, the Serb case contrasts with the Sicilian one. In the mid-nineteenth century Serbia hit the road of belligerent expansion and soon started to perceive herself as a unifier of the South Slavs, as a 'Balkan Piedmont', whereas Sicily had been annexed by Piedmont. While in the eyes of Westerners Sicily became chiefly a country of the Mafia's *omertà*, of banditry, racketeering and kidnapping of travelers, and often simply 'Africa' for northern Italians, Serbia to the contrary won a lot of admiration and an aura of glory in the West. For a small and peripheral, yet expansionist and militarist nation, torn between the West and the East, between Herderian romantic nationalism and the nationalism of the Serb Orthodox church, the positive image in the eyes of the European powers proved to have been a powerful magnifying mirror of her identity.

Serbia had won the glory and sympathies of the West first and foremost with a series of anti-Ottoman revolts and wars (that were at the same time territorial conquests at the expense of other South Slav nationalities and Albanians) and in World War I when attacked by the much stronger Austro-Hungary (and Bulgaria). The second important source of the Serb glorification in the West, i.e. the romantic enthusiasm for the Serb folk poetry as an expression of the Serb *Volksgeist*, is closely related to the first, as this enthusiasm concentrated on heroic epics from the Dinaric area (where it is, like several other cultural forms, shared by the Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Montenegrins and Albanians). During the nineteenth century the whole Slavic-speaking Dinaric heroic epics were quite successfully appropriated and 'nationalized' by the Serbs; the songs were organized into a corpus, the *haiduks* were turned into romantic national liberation fighters, while the most blood-thirsty and intolerant songs were concealed from eminent Western admirers. The feedback that Serbia has received from the West over the last century and a half has generally

encouraged her to heroism, expansionism and the glorification of her folk culture – with a consequence that the Serb Heroic Song was usually considered (and still is!) the most valuable Serb contribution to humanity.

Actually it is even more curious that the West was to a certain extent willing to celebrate the Kosovo myth, i.e. not only the Herderian aspect of the Serb national identity but also its Eastern Orthodox one. This myth, the myth of the heavenly Serbia, similarly 'nationalized' in the course of the nineteenth century, has received some attention in Western Europe and the USA, notably at the beginning of World War I (Radulovic, 1999: 147–149). It has been much celebrated, above all in England, due to the voluminous cult travelogue through Yugoslavia that Rebecca West wrote just before World War II and titled *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons*. (Before the battle of Kosovo the grey falcon of Kosovan myth offers Prince Lazar the choice between a heavenly and an earthly kingdom.) The travelogue 'is still very popular with English speaking tourists in Yugoslavia, and still shapes significantly their perception of that country' (Allcock, in Young, 1991: xix).

West's travelogue has been quoted by numerous journalists and publicists who have written about the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In his memoirs, *Balkan Odyssey*, David Owen when describing his role with the EU peace envoy to Bosnia-Herzegovina admits that he had read West's travelogue previously and skipped through the book right before departing on the mission (Owen, 1998: 40). With Owen having been so familiar with Rebecca West, Radovan Karadžić probably had a much easier job in persuading him that Serbs needed more territory than Muslims, with the help of the 'anthropological' argument that the former had always been peasants while the latter were crowded in towns.

A Serb translation of the travelogue was first printed in 1988, and then in 1990, in Belgrade, in the period right before the latest Serb wars when a lot of chauvinistic literature had been published in the 'Serb territories' all round Yugoslavia. Before that Rebecca West was little known. She had been listed among undesirable authors since she did not return to Yugoslavia after World War II because she could not come to terms with communism and Tito. (In her view, the English should, surprisingly, have supported the royalists, i.e. the chetniks of Draža Mihajlović who predominantly collaborated with the Nazi occupying forces.) The travelogue was translated by Nikola Koljević, the university professor of English literature in Sarajevo, a Shakespearean specialist, one of the closest co-workers of Radovan Karadžić and subsequently accused of war crimes by the Hague Court. In the foreword to his translation of the travelogue, Koljević referred to West's travelogue as a 'racial prose'. The virtues of this prose were 'strongly illustrated by the concise characterization of a sample of our people that the English lady had encountered' (Koljević, 1990: 9).

This remark by Koljević points tellingly to the connection between 'the Western gaze on Serbia' and the *caractérologie* (i.e. ethnopsychology, *Völkerpsychologie*) of the Serbs or the Yugoslavs. (To a certain extent it also points to the indirect link of both with racism.) The preoccupation with the Serb national character and the *caractérologie* of the Yugoslav psychic types has been assigned an important role since the beginning of the twentieth century up to present. (The most powerful and fascinating tradition of Serb ethnopsychological studies arises from the geographical school of the well known geographer Jovan Cvijić.) The strong and continuing impact of this discipline on the Serb national identity should by all accounts be related to numerous wars that Serbia led over

the last century and a half. The 'enemy's national character' needed to be known, and the enemies that were never lacking needed to be characterized by essentialist traits. It should also be related to the Serb 'Piedmont' mission or ambition to absorb all the South Slavs into unitarian Yugoslavs, i.e. Serbs. Therefore an invention of a general Yugoslav man and the division of him into several 'psychic types' and 'variations' was needed.

The 'characteriological' hall of mirrors reflecting and enhancing Western glorification of the Serbs and the messianist Serb self-glorification had, in addition to building the myth of the Serb invincibility, actually encouraged and inflamed the self-perception of the Serbs as a military and heroic nation and nourished militarism. In one of his first war declarations reserved for domestic use, Milošević declared that 'we Serbs might not know how to work, but we know how to fight', while general Colin Powell had before the NATO attack warned the Pentagon against the 'invincible Serb warrior', and this was *after* the capitulation of the Bosnian Serbs and *after* the Croats had easily expelled the Krajina Serbs. This is not to say that anthropologists did not believe these wisdoms of ethnic psychology. Thus Eugene Hammel in his prediction of the past events wrote: 'No sensible observer of the Yugoslav stage could have failed to anticipate the reaction of the krajina Serbians to the Croatian declaration of independence, accompanied as it was by erosion of Serbian cultural privileges and autonomy' (Hammel, 1993: 41). Unless armed uprising is considered a normal and universal human reaction to erosion of cultural privileges and autonomy (because this precisely was the point, but much more important point was the Serb loss of control over the police force in Croatia), why should it be anticipated then in the case of the Krajina Serbs? Because it is widely known that they are belligerent? Because it is known that such is their national character and they cannot help it? Is Hammel's argument in such a perfect harmony with Serb ideology that there is even implied in it the apology of Serb irresponsibility for their actions? Croats should have known what they were doing, they should have known that Serbs will revolt and should have been more diplomatic (because they are more mature? more European?), while the Serbs do not need to know anything . . .

Too many wars to forget war

Shortly before completing this article, I came across a very recent monograph related to Serbia and the recent Yugoslav wars by a Dutch anthropologist (Port, 1998). After having read some parts of it with great interest, I felt somewhat embarrassed. I would assuredly prefer to focus in this article on the laudable achievements of anthropologists instead of caustically commenting on their failures, but I did not manage to do it since I believe that such serious failures as those described above ought to be denounced.

Mattijs van de Port's study of Serbs frequenting Gypsy bars around Novi Sad is a scholarly work to be recommended to anyone searching for answers to the questions related to the Yugoslav catastrophe. Port started his fieldwork three months before the first news of the war in Yugoslavia came out of Slovenia and he obviously did not have any difficulties in discerning the propaganda of the Serb mass media. Particularly striking is his courage to be critical of his informants, even those who became his friends. In the same vein, he is critical of the state of Serb anthropology. It is not difficult

to infer from the book that he had engaged in disputes with his informants and colleagues.

At the parties in Gypsy bars, Port sees a celebration of irrationality. He is interested in how people incorporate the lessons of the war in their lives. How is the knowledge, derived from the experience of 'the beast that lurks in man', taken into account in their vision of society? I was immediately tempted to relate this irrationality, celebrated in bars where Serbs indulge in regressive identification with Gypsies (who embody a condition they might also join when the war breaks out), to the plethora of irrationalist currents in the Serb culture, and these currents to the numerous wars. And I was glad to see that this observation was not news for Port.

Furthermore, Port's interpretive scheme has powerful implications for studying the 'transnational' context of the Serb wars, for instance the shared experience of frequent wars and their ultimate lessons with neighboring nations. The first and especially the second Yugoslavia was, to a certain extent, a country whose ideology celebrated this shared suffering and the atrocities experienced by all sides as a unifying principle. This ideology cannot be reduced either to the Serb national ideology or to the hegemony of Serb national ideology over Yugoslavia. Therefore, focusing only on Serbia and Serb nationalism does not suffice. Serb nationalism was not the only protagonist: being the main culprit or the initiator of violence is not the same as being the only actor.

When studying local or regional integrations, anthropologists are normally expected to take into consideration not only social arrangements, but also political, economic, demographic and environmental factors. Their focusing on the diversity of the modes of subsistence often led them to cultural determinism in its different varieties, stressing the decisive role of either geographic environment, transmission of culture or long-term continuity of historical experience. In their attempts to explain the 'violent Dinaric character', anthropologists made use of all the three explanatory schemes. Some were stressing the paramount significance of transhumant pastoralism as a *genre de vie*, others concentrated on the particular enculturation reflecting a violent pastoralist cultural pattern, others again brought to the fore the centuries-long (if not millennial) exposure to violent social interactions. While none of these factors should be discarded a priori, explaining Serb ethnic wars by a pastoralist cultural pattern or 'anti-urban bent' of Serb (if not Balkan *tout court!*) culture is obviously doomed to a parody.

Those who have a similar interpretation of the 'Balkan violent temper' should consider the fact that already before World War II Serbian autocratic regimes had, in their conception of ethnic cleansing, anticipated such a cultural determinist reaction and made it part of their plans. In a document on the expulsion of Albanians, proposed in 1937 by Vasa Čubrilović, the following measures were anticipated:⁷

If necessary, arms have to be issued to our colonizers. The good old chetnik action has to be placed in those areas, and helped discretely in its tasks. Above all, a wave of the Montenegrins from the mountains has to be released in order to provoke a mass conflict with Albanians in Metochia [. . .] The whole case has to be presented in a calm manner as a clash of phrathies or tribes, and given, if necessary, an economic meaning. If need be, it is possible to incite local riots which would be suppressed in blood by the most efficient means, though less by military force than by colonizers, Montenegrin tribes and chetniks (Čubrilović, 1991 [1937]: 113–14).

There are several other instances of state conquest cynically disguised as tribal conflicts, in addition to the most recent one, with putative Montenegrin tribes gathering at 'tribal meetings' and threatening the withdrawal of their 'tribal territories' from Montenegro, if the latter were to separate from Serbia. It perfectly suited the Milošević regime when Western journalists, politicians and social scientists competed in depicting the Yugoslav wars as the settlement of tribal disputes, thus legitimizing their unwillingness to acknowledge the responsibility for what those 'noncivilized Dinaric mountaineers' from Krajina, Bosnia and Montenegro were doing. This misapprehension was of enormous help to Milošević in his show of peace-maker. Depicting war as an accomplishment of anti-urban savages from the Dinaric region is also a standard interpretation by the Belgrade opposition, which is desperately interested in situating the evil in the rural area, in order to be capable of believing in its own innocence.

Unfortunately, the instrumentalist theories of war also have their shortcomings. One may reasonably claim, for instance, that the terror should not be seen as 'externalization of the warrior side, but as adopting rational tactics of terror' (Todorova, 1997: 137). Nevertheless, what remains of the rationality of these tactics when the terror turns into genocide, when their objectives become so profoundly irrational? Another obvious shortcoming of these theories is that they do not account for the reasons why people willingly or passively accept manipulation. Thus their proponents are liable to argue that 'ancestral ethnic hatreds' are just a fallacy of cultural determinists, while in reality all the hatred was induced through manipulation immediately before the demise of the second Yugoslavia. In this particular case, unfortunately, the 'cultural determinists' are closer to the truth. There have been for a long time intense ethnic and/or religious hatreds – with a due addendum that they were not general: not every national group hated all other groups, and not every national group was hated by all other groups. On the contrary, the majority of dyadic relations among all the groups were not hostile. Albeit neighbors and now incapable of agreeing about the precise border of their respective states, the Croats and Slovenians were never involved in real hostilities, they never threatened each other with arms. The Orthodox Macedonians from the south-east extremity of former Yugoslavia do not have any problems with having an amicable attitude towards Bosnian Muslims from the center or Catholic Slovenes from the north-west extremity, etc. In her remarkable book about the Balkans, Maria Todorova (1997) reminded her readers that the Balkans were not a powder keg since the war in Yugoslavia did not burn down the whole peninsula. It did not even burn down the whole of Yugoslavia! It is only some dyadic relations that were burdened with hatreds, or merely with the painful memories of massacres, and the recent wars revolved around these very axes. A seldom acknowledged fact: although Macedonia is considered by most Serbs part of Greater Serbia, and a substantial Serb minority lives there, Milošević left Macedonia aside without attacking it.

I cannot see how the dimensions of these hatreds can be comprehended other than in their development over the long term. I have difficulty believing that any anthropology, which is not simultaneously anthropological history, can do justice to the war-torn Yugoslav Balkans.

Bojan Baskar
University of Ljubljana

Notes

1. Excellent if somewhat debateable is the monograph on Medjugorje in the context of the Herzegovinan vendetta, Serb *chetnik* revanchism in the time of the Tito's Yugoslavia and the production of miracles that summoned religious tourists and broke the circle of violence until its restoration in 1991 (Bax, 1995). It is unfortunate that Tone Bringa (1993; 1995) clings to such extent on her fieldwork experience and declines to say anything about the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, using the argument that the war did not come from her village, so she has got nothing to say about it. This is a pity, since her monograph is rich with subtle insights on diverse aspects of the Bosnian multi-ethnic reality.
2. Personally, I do not share the opinion that Yugoslavia could not survive because of its great heterogeneity. This conviction was widespread, actually it became a *locus communis*, in Slovenia and Croatia.
3. If I speak of the Serb propaganda and not the propaganda of the Milošević regime, it is because the propaganda of the Milošević apparatus (like many other dimensions of his rule) shows clear continuity with numerous former autocratic regimes in Serbia. The Serb TV and newspaper *Politika* were 'Milošević like' even before the putsch within the Belgrade communist party unit. Serb TV had already been waiting for Milošević, and broadcasted his putsch, in a manner that gained worldwide attention only years later.
4. These anthropologists are: B. Denich, J. Halpern, E. Hammel, R. Hayden and A. Simic. Halpern is the only one who managed to avoid pro-Serb bias and serious lapses.
5. The two fine monographs, one Croatian and one Serb, are Žanić (1998) and Čolović (1994). The essays collected in the later are available in different European languages.
6. For the analysis of the anthropological approaches to Sicilian mafia, cf. (Baskar, forthcoming).
7. V. Čubrilović (1897–1990) was an influential Serb historian and politician in the first as well as the second Yugoslavia. After the World War II he became a member of the Serb Academy of Sciences and Arts and several times a minister in Tito's government.

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