

CONFLICT OF A MEMORY CULTURE IN WESTERN BALKANS

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ABSTRACT

Cultures of remembrance that are officially affirmed by national elites in the Western Balkan countries, that is in the former Yugoslavia, are a source of ongoing conflict. Various collective memories and mutually antagonized interpretations of the past, show that Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, Macedonians, Montenegrins and others who lived together for centuries and decades within a single state, after all interpret and remember their common history in completely different ways. Their social narratives about the past and dominant cultures of memory are predominantly selective, one-sided, intolerant, exclusive.

After a long time, they lived together members of different ethnic, religious and national backgrounds and their historically unfinished and unsuccessful attempt to form a common Yugoslav culture and unique Yugoslav identity, a difficult civil war occurred, ethno-nationalism escalated, and people who were very close and very similar to one another, tried to create as much difference and distance between themselves through violence. All national communities that participated in the wars of the 1990s, emphasized defending national culture as one of their main tasks. The warring parties sought to destroy everything that reminded them that different people, their neighbors and friends of a different religion were living there. Today, three decades after these conflicts, they are still prisoners of their attitude to history. The culture nevertheless brings them together and inspires them to understand themselves more and to cooperate better.

Keywords: Culture of memory, Political Views on the Past, Changing Facts in History, Ethnonationalism, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Rarely do European scholars, such as those living in Western Balkans, have such a great opportunity to explore and verify in their immediate social environment the claim of one of America's leading politicians, Francis Fukuyama, that the most difficult struggles between many countries in the contemporary world are historical narratives. Although much greater attention of the professional and general public in 2020, when the commemoration of 75 years since the victory over fascism has misunderstandings about historical memory in current relations between Germany, Poland and Russia, the case of

the former Yugoslavia is in many ways specific. It refers not only to the controversial memories of World War II, but also to much older events. Specific antagonisms are triggered by a conversation about their recent past.

Conflicts with memories, collective memories, cultural symbols, monuments, interpretations and interpretations of historical events have been for decades, a daily and ongoing preoccupation with the political, scientific and cultural elites of national communities that lived in the common Yugoslav state for almost the entire 20th century, but have parted in bloody armed conflicts (1991-1995), when more than 130.000 people were killed and about 2.000.000 were expelled and displaced. Armed conflicts ended with the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords (1995), but have continued for 25 years in the fields of culture, history, mass media, scientific debate. Historical discussions strongly influence political, social and cultural orientations of all national communities, and collective memory is not only a storehouse of mutual misunderstandings and divisions, but also a constitutive element of political culture that affects the instability of the state structure and the poor quality of social relations.

Exploring the consequences of the disintegration of the Yugoslav multinational and multicultural state, American anthropologists Joel Halpern and David Kajdikel identified the problems of rebuilding separate nation states after the civil war and the destruction of a common nation-state. "Even as the conflict subsided, the successor states of Yugoslavia are facing new difficulties, not the least of which is the creation and maintenance of modern states with limited resources" (Halpern & Kajdikel, 2002). The newly independent states have continued to challenge each other and clash in political, diplomatic, media and economic views on the regional present and the future, but they still have the greatest misunderstandings, the most difficult dialogues and the most complex relations on issues of common past.

National communities that have lived together or as neighbors for centuries, under different political regimes, different ideologies, under different empires, forms of government, although differing in religious affiliation (Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims), they have still very similar cultures, a mixture of different influences, ancient Slavic, ancient, Celtic, Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Turkish, Austro-Hungarian and Germanic cultures. First of all, the cultures of these nations are the result of their interactions with each other. Throughout history, they have often fought wars between themselves, scrambling for territories and resources, fighting on the side of various allies, but in the early 20th century they made many concerted efforts and sacrifices to form a common Yugoslav state and, apart from territorial integration, to shape up and strengthen the so-called Yugoslav culture as a common value, a collective identity, a culture that embraces and unites Slovenes, Croats, Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Macedonians, as well as local Jewish, Albanian, Roma and other minority populations, also Yugoslav citizens. However, that ideological project failed.

There are numerous reasons and many interpretations of the reasons for their divergence and conflicts, the range of historical, social and geopolitical factors, the most notable being the inability to overcome the differences between the ethnic groups that have lived in this region for centuries. However, in the book *Death of Yugoslavia* (1996), Western researchers Laura Silber and Allan Little argued that the war in Yugoslavia was planned and conducted by the Yugoslavs themselves, it was not historically inevitable, that the common state did not die a natural death, but deliberately and systematically destroyed by people who had nothing to gain but who could lose everything by the peaceful transition from state socialism to market democracy" (Silber, & Little, 1996). On the other hand, local scientific authorities (Mirjana Kasapovic, Milan Matic, Nenad Kecmanovic, Vladimir Vujcic, etc.) argue that the characteristics

and forms of political culture of ethnic communities in the former Yugoslavia have led to its breakup and civil war, and are certainly one of the main reasons due to which, even today, Balkan societies, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are divided and the state s and political system unstable. Researchers cite as key arguments the fact that Serbs, Bosnians and Croats never jointly, massively and permanently advocated for a common state, and survived only thanks to authoritarian political regimes (Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Kingdom of SHS and Tito's SFRJ). The controversy is that the common state, as well as those formed by its dissolution, were created by the free will of all citizens, whether they had internal recognition, the consensus of all constituents. The fact is that in their long historical duration, the Balkan people have not been able to continuously build modern political identities. A "land of paradox and ambiguity" in which ethno-nationalism, which generated civil war, was merely a "dormant concept".

Some anthropologists and sociologists (Joel Halpern, David Kajdikel, Radmila Nakarada, Nenad Kecmanovic, Mirjana Kasapovic, etc.) find that the Yugoslav people inhabit a region where ethnic boundaries overlap and intertwine, and experience the common past quite differently (Halpern & Kajdikel, 2002; Nakarada 2011). Although naïve people, without much education, believe that the past is dead and that history has no influence on the present, it is true, on the contrary, that everything that people once thought, what they once felt and what they once did, exists today as part of what we think, feel and do. People are not only communities of blood kinship, psychic characteristics, common language¹, customs, constitution and law, but also of

¹Serbs, Croats, Bosnians and other nations spoke a common language, but Yugoslavia nevertheless disintegrated. Switzerland or Belgium, which are multi-lingual countries, have survived thanks to their shared identity. Multinational states can more easily survive the crisis of a political society if they have a strong and political and cultural identity, shared memory and cultural history.

jointly experienced feats and tribulations, nations are "communities of memory". That is why it is very important questions of how people remember, what they remember and what impact it has on current events and processes in society. What is the political affirmation of the past? How do historical facts and cultural and political identities interconnect?

WICH HISTORY IS TRUE?

After the death of Communist Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito (1980) and the demise of a one-party state that had been authoritarian governed since the end of World War II, members of the political, scientific and cultural elites of each of the Yugoslav people began to speak openly and loudly that their national, ethnic and cultural identities were endangered at all times, disadvantaged and subordinate to others. They wrote and published books claiming that official history was not true, that the Communist authorities forged it for ideological needs, and that after the demolition of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the first democratic elections in Yugoslavia (1990), they could no longer live together and that everyone should go their own way. In atheist Yugoslavia, religious identification of the population was officially not at the forefront, and then suddenly became paramount. With the first democratic elections, political parties based on ethnic principles emerged, religious identities were of great importance, and each nation also wanted to mark its ethnic space and create their own state.

Each side emphasized the defense of national culture as the most important political task. Thus, belligerent ethnic nationalism quickly flared up, and culture under the influence of politics became a "detonator of hatred in the Balkans," as Belgrade anthropology professor Ivan Colovic believes. "Speech on culture becomes the talk of an isolated, homogeneous, complacent and vulnerable national community" (Čolović, 2008). However, Colovic believes that the conflicts that arose from the intercultural

communication of the Balkan peoples, especially in the former Yugoslavia, are not the result of insurmountable differences, as the ideologists of nationalism claim. "In contrast, closer to the truth is the conclusion that these conflicts are the fruit of unbearable similarity, a similarity that is perceived as a hostile provocation, as a threat to the greatest national good, a unique and indivisible way of existence, a national identity" (Čolović, 2008).

Indeed, this Freudian "small-difference narcissism" toned down political processes, determined the intensity of war conflicts, caused ways to kill and expel one another. The monuments of common culture, and especially the religious and cultural objects of the enemy side, were brutally burned and destroyed. In the 1990s, more than 3,000 religious sites, mosques, Orthodox and Catholic churches, as well as numerous cemeteries, museums, libraries, etc. were destroyed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The warring parties sought to remove anything that reminded them that their neighbors and their different faiths and cultures were living there. The long life together of members of different ethnic and national backgrounds often ends up as a civil war, with the escalation of ethnonationalism, which is accompanied by intolerance, anti-individualism, stereotypes and prejudices, extremism. The enemy becomes someone very close, similar, so most often they try to make as much difference as possible through violence. Balkan and Eastern European History Specialist and Associate Professor at the Department of History of the University of Montreal, Max Bergholz, in the book *Violence as a Generative Power: Identity, Nationalism and Memory in a Balkan Community* believe that extreme violence and brutal killing of neighbors is a catalyst and trigger for ethnic identification (Bergholz, 2018).

Acts of extreme violence have constituted an "antagonistic perception of identity" - the nature of violence has changed the way survivors perceived themselves! The tribal conception of identity, as noted by French-Libyan writer

Amin Maluf, prevails all over the world, turning people into stingers when they feel that their tribe is threatened. That's when fanatics, xenophobes come to the fore in "making cakes". "Because of the established way of thinking and expression, so deeply rooted in all of us, because of this narrow-minded, exclusive, religiously-suppressed notion that reduces one's identity to a single identity, proclaimed with passion" (Maluf, 2003). Too much attachment to a collective identity in relation to respect for human rights, universal values, richness of diversity results in negative emotions towards other groups, entities, and not just specific individuals who are considered to be a danger or have committed a crime. Ethnonationalism did much harm in the 20th century. Millions of people have been killed as victims of ethno-nationalism.

Two distinguished scientific researchers, Zlatko Kramarić of Croatia and Angela Banović-Markovska of Northern Macedonia, point to the intricate interplay of local people. "Traces of some other different identities /cultures / traditions are always inevitably present in every separate identity / culture / tradition" (Kramarić & Banović - Markovska, 2013). Rich cultural backgrounds, different traditions and historical heritage have made this part of the Balkans a place of "live interaction". The history of the Western Balkans is extremely complex, and this is mostly true of the former Yugoslavia. Its history is like an endless roundabout, like a whirlwind, a chronicle of friendship and hostility, brotherly love and brotherly hatred, great cultural achievements, shared enthusiasm, creativity, idealism, but at the same time cruel nationalism, devastating chauvinism, wars in the name of culture, religion, state and ethnic boundaries. Their history is a chronicle of mutual trust and distrust, a magnificent effort and sacrifice to build a better society, but also anger that destroys everything, ethno-national restraint, unfinished murderous projects. A chronicle of unification and disruption, specific Balkan civilization and authentic Balkan barbarism. Chronicle of multi-ethnic hugs

and multi-ethnic rapes, slaughter breaks, pause in hatred, bonfire of delusion. Their history is an elusive compromise on times gone by.

Two decades of the 21st century have passed, Yugoslavia is long gone, and the memory of it is interpreted in its own way by every newly created state. Formerly a common language², each national community calls it its own, considers the common culture its own, finds blame for the problems only in other nations, and proclaims its only victim. They build new monuments, write new histories, invent new symbols. They want to change everything, to differentiate themselves as much as possible, from the recent past to the oldest times. Leaders of national political parties manage to manipulate the cult of the past and make people selectively turn to historical memory and revive old hostilities, constructed and revived memories of two world wars, killing each other, and suppressing and ignoring positive experiences, examples of multiethnic agreements, cooperation and happiness. It is as if the politicians of the Balkan states have become the rulers of the collective memory, which should forget parts of history, that those historical aspirations for common life and common culture are viewed solely as wrong and tragic, as an argument against the memory of common life, but also used against the idea of rebuilding the old state or creating a new form and a stronger interconnection, alliance, association and cooperation of the regions or as a common address in the European Union. Croatian scientist from Mostar, Mile Lasić, emphasizes that the peoples of the former Yugoslavia are still facing a painful process of self-liberation from the illusion of fascism and Nazism, de-victimization and victim-transaction, from the curse of the culture of selective memory. "Academic and religious communities, the media and political leaders must help in this" (Lasić, 2015).

²The author of this paper understands that there is disagreement among scientists from the university centers of the former Yugoslav republics with the term "common language".

The culture of memory is not in the function of planning for the future. Dealing with the past turns into memory wars, political propaganda, the instrumentalization of casualties, the schooling of hostilities. Each of the warring parties remembers only their victims, collective suffering and crucifixion, repairing their self-image, feelings of honor and pride, but does not explore their responsibility and guilt, there is nothing in common memory. Famous Balkan writers Ivan Lovrenovic and Miljenko Jergovic believe that political tensions between people are constant, that inter-ethnic divisions have become permanent, images of history are opposed to one another, and there is a dark need to constantly renew the memory of the evil they have done to each other. "The wrongly buried, dark past has the characteristic of always going back and defining the lives of generations" (Lovrenović, & Jergović, 2010). Reducing and justifying crimes committed by compatriots, dehumanizing the opposing party, depriving the enemy of dignity even to have recollection and memories, the political aim is to continue the war and conflict in a different way, by different means. In November 2017, Andreas Ernst published an article in the Swiss journal *Noah's Cirher Zeitung*, which emphasized that for 20 years or more, no nation and no country of the former Yugoslavia has been engaged in their own, but others' crimes and that there is no confrontation with war events without taboo. "There is no distinction between collective guilt and collective responsibility", Ernst observes that Slovenes and Croats, as victorious parties do not see a need for self-reflection, but cherish the memory of their "pure war", with particular emphasis on the difficulties in the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo, which were violently ended by forces from outside, with the intervention of the NATO alliance.

If the people in this part of the Balkans do not already have a unique memory of shared history and do not fully recognize or wish to accept historical facts, how do they treat the victims of the

conflict? Do they feel collective pain, respect for the dead and innocent? Do they have universal compassion or do they have a political, ideological memory, selective, fictional, constructed about this matter? How do you remember the victims of each other's wars in a constant dialogue with the glorious and shameful past? Do they divide into "victims" and "criminals", divisions into afflicted nations and wicked nations? How do they summarize the terrible accounts in which the defeats of one side is - the victory of the other, the crying of the one is - the joy of others, the aim to war for one - the survival of other, the war prey for one - the hearth of others, memories? Issues like these are a huge burden in the public sphere. Counting the dead, using and manipulating them, the irresponsibility of the media and playing with political correctness! University of Constantine culturologist Alaida Asman warns about the abuse of the dead as a factor in strengthening political goals. "Where history stands in the service of identity-building, where citizens adopt it and politicians invoke it, one can speak of political memory" (Asman, 2011). Alaida Asman believes that it is necessary to separate the use of memory from its specific abuse. "What the victims cannot forget is that the descendants of the perpetrators of the crime must not forget" (Asman, 2011).

Contrary to the view that local barbarities reflect the oblivion and disrespect of the dead, some Balkan cultural scientists (Jovan Cvijic, Vladimir Dvornikovic, Bojan Jovanovic, etc.) claim that in the local tradition it is the deceased (the "famous and martyred ancestors") who give greater respect than the authorities of faith, knowledge, spirit, or law. With ideological talk of the dead, politicians mobilized the inhabitants for an onslaught, revenge, war, thus endangering the fates of living and future generations. If we look at messages from history textbooks, memorials, memorials, etc. Obviously, cultures of memory are opposed, reflect collective victimization, deny or ignore the suffering of other nations. Victims of politics and culture of war over territories,

religious, national, ideological motives and reasons, for generations of victims, geopolitical processes, local disasters.

There is a widespread belief that the fate of the Balkans³ is defined by the constant outbursts of collective memory, that its contemporarily is impossible with too much history present, that the future is excluded - looking back. Associations in the Balkans are twofold; national elites have misused the myth of Balkan ancient heroism and insubordination, while using the same term to describe a set of real or fictional practices imbued with primitivism, passion and violence. Anthropologists note that in the late 1980s and during the 1990s, the story of national autochthony in the Balkans was reinforced, as evidence of which country, who first came upon it and made the greatest sacrifice, spoke of "ancestral bones". "Blood and soil", "spiritual cradle" and the like. Famous Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova, in the influential and most cited book on the Balkans, *Imagining the Balkans*, emphasizes that the cultural West has produced a "Balkans bugaboo", a negative perception of it creating aversion to everything is Balkan, especially because of the war in the former Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century (Todorova, 1997). Even some Balkan people have begun to use the term to designate their closest neighbors as primitive, cruel, undemocratic.

National identifications and historical actualization of national ideas of the national community in this part of the Balkans take different paths, often ignoring the criteria of civilizational pluralism. "The difference between 'us' and 'them', between our culture and some other culture, is seen here as the difference between the only true and authentic culture and the various forms of false, artificial culture or culture at some lower stage of development" (Čolović,

³European historiography for the Balkans often states that the area is inhabited by peoples obsessed with history, who builds identities on myths, and that these peoples are incapable of facing contemporary problems and facing the future (H. Sundhaussen, "Europe Balcanica: Der Balkan als historischer Raum Europas, 1999. David A. Norris, "The Balkan myth, the issue of identity and modernity", 2002).

2008). In public and diplomatic speeches by representatives of the international community and the European Union, which seeks to discipline local states and adapt them to their standards, the Balkan nations are too concerned with history and not enough with economics, law, modern technologies. The Balkans live more in the past than in the future. However, the revitalization of history is seen as a condition for progress, not as a "compromise with the past," but rather as a confrontation with the driving forces of history. It is important to understand the real causes of the events, the roles and responsibilities of specific actors, to learn how to keep the mistakes from happening again and to improve the quality of life and peace. The task is to strike a balance in memory cultures in a reasonable dialogue with the past, not to be a reservoir of future conflicts and a continuing conflict potential. "Talks on the dark sides of the national past cannot and should not cease, but not be a source of hatred and revenge" (Vuković, 2019).

VIOLENT IDENTITY CHANGE

In order to understand politics, economy, history, social life in the Balkans, it is necessary to understand the cultures of its inhabitants. Authentic mix of culture, history and politics. French-Bulgarian historian Cvetan Todorov emphasizes that culture is a form of collective life. "Culture rests, at the same time, on shared memory (we learn the same language, the same history, the same traditions) and on the rules of common life (we take into account the laws in force in our society), it is turned to both past and present in the same time" (Todorov, 2014).

The term culture of memory begins to develop from the first half of the 20th century in the fields of history, sociology, psychology, literature, later and political science, and this syntagma includes the public use of the past, ways of its revival, interpretation, determination, construction, social transfer of knowledge about the past, inventing, repressing, fixing, mechanisms

of social transmission and processing of knowledge about the past. We can talk about the cultural, social and political dimensions of memory. The content area of the culture of memory includes a network of beliefs in the common origin of members of a particular social group, common symbols and myths, memories of the most significant events in history, as well as orientation towards the past. This is how identities are determined.

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, in a significant work *Memory and His Social Conditions* (1925), emphasized that identity is not the result of memory but its assumption, memories arise before and are formed on the basis of social ties, group loyalties, identities. Halbwachs emphasized that we always adapt past to the current circumstances and goals, "we remember in the present." These are the contents of the collective consciousness whose presentation is subject to certain conditions and mechanisms, which is why the concept of social memory is discussed.

Sociologist from Serbia Todor Kuljić identifies two dimensions of memory culture: 1. as a storehouse and bearer of memory (the culture of memory consists of patterns of inheritance, transmission, planned or spontaneous forgetting or suppression of memory in accordance with the interests of certain social groups; within the ideological use of the past we speak of "the politicization of memory"); 2. as more or less conscious of the individual / collective relationship to events and processes of the past, individuals and social groups use the past to build identity and distance themselves from others (Kuljić, 2006; Kuljić, 2014). If we look at this "storehouse" of memories, we will notice the potential problem of the way of "storage" of experiences, impressions, facts, images of events, contexts ... Are the objects of memory stored in such a way so that certain facts are overstated and others suppressed by political motives and needs, media through processing, historiographical and scientific non-objectivity, beautification by folk poets, the power of mythology? In the Balkan traditions, ancient stories and

myths from ancient times play a large role, and significant authority is represented by folk poets and their testimonies on historical battles, national themes, historical roles of heroes and the like. The question is how complex everything that enters the storehouse of memory culture is, how long it lasts in the same meaning, how it is used in public space, and for what purposes.

The culture of remembrance contains patterns of reworking the past in the context of daily consciousness, repression, relativization, inventing, planning forgetfulness, etc., which make up individual and collective constructions, that is, images of the past that individuals and groups create in certain situations in order to interpret the present with the help of the past. vision of the future, and define and strengthen your own identities. This is not a critical rethinking of the past to explain the causes, context, causal phenomena. Even the most adverse events and outcomes should receive reasonable explanation and create positive effects on the national picture of history. The selective culture of remembering national defeat translates into victories, justifies or diminishes the mistakes and shortcomings of leading government officials. Instead of complete events, fragments are mostly extracted, the same details are emphasized and repeated. Taking into account Cvetan Todorov's claim that in totalitarian states truth is systematically sacrificed to the "fight for truth", but that in democratic states care for the truth must not be sacrificed, it is not easy to list the states that we can claim to be consistently and absolutely committed to democratic principles. Collective memory, as a set of public memories promoted by the state, is also one of the most important elements of political culture. Reviving and institutionalizing memories from the past gains strength for social order and national identity, shapes an individual's relationship with the community and politics, and influences public opinion. The notion of collective memory, according to certain authors (Mark Bloch, Susan Sontag, Reinhart Kozelek, Rudolf Burger), is not acceptable; Instead of the phrase "memory

culture", critics point out, the word - ideology - should stand. "What was said in the politicized 1960s and 1970s, using terms such as 'myths' and 'ideologies', was referred to in the 1990s as 'collective memory'" (Asman, 2011).

Under the phenomenon of collective memory, we consider oral and written knowledge, a whole mosaic of different content that shapes images of the past necessary to preserve national identity, and at the same time extremely important for the dimensioning of political culture. Four types of collective memory are most often emphasized: mimetic (transfer of concrete, practical knowledge from the past), material (memory of things and transfer of material objects from the past), communicative (transmitted through language) and cultural (historical consciousness, transfer of meaning and meaning from the past). Todor Kuljić distinguishes two forms of collective memory: communicative and cultural memory. The first is transmitted verbally, conversations about the past within families and between generations, while the second form of memory refers to the institutionalization of the content of the past through dominant culture, through history textbooks, national and state holidays, museum exhibits and the like. Thus, there are tangible (monuments, museums, books, etc.) and intangible memories (myths, symbolic heritage, narratives of fateful historical events, exemplary figures, heroic exploits).

During the two world wars and the last civil war in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, in addition to millions of human casualties, the goals of brutal destroying and destruction were also bridges, factories, hospitals, schools, cultural monuments. Let's single out one example. During the bombing of Belgrade in April 1941, Nazis systematically destroyed the National Library of Serbia. It was the largest treasure-house of movable cultural heritage, containing material that spanned a thousand years, with 500,000 library units, 1,300 medieval and 1,700 Oriental manuscripts. Hitler's aviation destroyed everything. The Balkan tragedies

also destroyed religious monuments, burned books, stolen archives. Local history has many examples of barbaric efforts to destroy a nation, its culture, its identity. Enemies not only killed soldiers and civilians, but also killed libraries, museums, galleries, theaters, even cemeteries. In early 2017, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage and warned members of extreme religious groups and terrorists that such attacks could be treated as war crimes. In the 1990s, over 3,000 religious buildings, mosques, Orthodox and Catholic churches were destroyed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, among which the most famous are the medieval mosques of Ferhadija and Arnaudija in Banja Luka, the Orthodox Basilica and the Zitomislic Monastery in Mostar, the Catholic Cathedral of the St. Joseph in Derventa and others. The Jewish Cemetery was damaged during the war in Sarajevo, while the ancient Clock Tower was mined in Banja Luka. In Mostar, Croatian soldiers demolished a stone bridge⁴ in 1993, built by Turkish builder Hajrudin in the mid-16th century. In Kosovo and Metohija, more than 40 Orthodox churches and monasteries in Prizren, Pec, Djakovica, Srbica, etc. were destroyed in 1999 and 2004.

Political elites determine what the official version of the country's past is. Control of public space for political and ideological ends. History is read not only in school textbooks, but also in the names of cities, monuments... Instead of naming streets, city squares, schools, museums, libraries and other cultural institutions to preserve the memories of a multi-ethnic and shared life in the Yugoslav state, instead of witnessing significant people and events that marked the history of the 20th century, ethno-national political elites tried to tear down, erase, hide everything. In almost every city in Western Balkans, at the end of

the last century, there were massive changes in the name of city streets. For example, in Zagreb between 1990 and 2010, approximately 500 street and square names were renamed. Two times more in Belgrade. The same practice took place in Ljubljana, Skopje, Podgorica, Split, Pristina and other cities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina (perceived as "small Yugoslavia"), three national communities (Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats) have changed many cultural and historical characteristics of the cities where they live as majority nation after the war and in which they have political control. In Sarajevo, 420 pre-war street names have been renamed, 244 streets have been renamed in Banja Luka since the war, and very similarly in Mostar. Instead of the names of anti-fascist WWII fighters or artists from time when living together, these streets are now named after ethnic heroes, religious leaders, symbols of national history, etc.

Cross-political and cultural divisions are eclectic in science, academia, and books, textbooks, studies, scientific research are exposed to abuses, forgeries, unbiased and selective representations of historical processes. Political elites without responsibility and without competence seek a solution to contemporary political crises in the politicization of the past! In this dishonest act, they are helped by false history experts, publicists, tabloid media. One of the world's greatest historians, Eric Hobsbawm, warns of the danger of a situation in which the people of Central and Eastern Europe live disappointed in their past and even more in their present and uncertain future. History is "raw material" for ideologies that emphasize national and ethnic characteristics and issues. "The past is important, perhaps even an essential element for these ideologies. If there is no suitable past it can be invented" (Hobsbawm, 1996; Hobsbawm, 2002; Hobsbawm, E. i Rejndžer, T. 2011). Counterfeit pasts, projected identities, emerging nations, and fictional traditions are reactions to emerging situations. The goal of inventing tradition, Hobsbawm argues, is to manipulate current issues to

⁴The bridge over the Neretva River during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the border between the Bosnian and Croat peoples. It was renovated in 2004 and in 2005 it is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Unfortunately, Mostar remained a politically and nationally divided city.

establish historical continuity, to relate to the past, to impose stable, formalized actions, to ensure immutability. This is accomplished with the help of symbols, rituals, traditions that have been invented, constructed to look ancient, very old, and in fact much younger, mostly from recent production. Fascism mobilized the masses, calling for a total social transformation, but also emphasizing a return to "traditional values". The past invoked by the Nazis and fascists was fictional, their "traditions" were in fact "artificial creations" - the intention to impose certain values and forms of behavior by practicing symbolic and ritual content and repeating actions.

Many local and international scholars have noticed such phenomena in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, inventing traditions and designing identities in order to distance themselves from each other, and above all to build states and in them new identities, new history, tradition. Serbian sociologist and communicologist Branimir Stojkovic emphasizes that in the post-Yugoslav period in identity politics, where "narcissism of small differences" is expressed, the emphasis is placed on linguistic exclusivity and inventing tradition, stories about the indigenous peoples of the Balkans, ancient origins etc. British political scientist Sabina Rajdel in *The Book Thinking of the Balkan Peoples: Identity Politics Between Conflict and Integration* analyzes identity policies in Southeastern Europe that, along with other features of identity, are always invoked in language. Wanting to show the existence of certain ethnic-national identities, Rajdel emphasizes that claims that Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats speak different languages best identify how far these identity policies are far from objective.

Inventions of tradition are reactions to new situations. It is constructed by political and cultural elites to legitimize nation-states. In order to disassociate and make boundaries with their people in the ethnically and religiously mixed territory of Western Balkans, political elites ignored scientific truth and objectivity, brutally violated historical facts, forged the past,

inventing and fabricating, mobilized populations. It has been confirmed that the fictional, false, artificial "past" becomes an extremely powerful mobilizer of political and social action. Also, as Alaida Asman concludes, unambiguously explaining and exaggerating history in the form of monuments and sacred sites cannot be reduced to falsified historical facts, since they themselves become "historical facts". The effective potential of interpreted and learned historical experiences is crucial when creating collective images of oneself. "It is not merely a 'myth' in ideological-critical terms, but is, in a much broader sense, a cultural construction that strongly influences the present and the future" (Asman, 2011).

Content memories define political and media rhetoric. If, by misusing the history of the national community, they mobilize and focus on action against one another, convinced that they are fighting for culture, identity, religion, language. Scientists, journalists, intellectuals or artists who irresponsibly become textbook warriors, terrorists against the truth, aggressors of culture, motivational speakers about historical hatred, monuments, cemeteries, facts, truth! To write and talk about the terrible tragedies in the Balkans 1914-1918, 1941-1945, 1991-95. and 1999, to let readers and the public know all about e.g. Jasenovac or Srebrenica camps, the massacre in Kragujevac, or Kulen Vakuf, the mass graves of Tomašica or Kazan, the Srem front or Bleiburg, Kozara, Kadinjača, Foča, Koricanske stijene, Sijekovac and all other places of great suffering in former Yugoslavia, except many facts, must examine fears, weeping, hatred, silence, ideas, to try to understand how one can celebrate killings, persecutions or humiliations of closest neighbors, godparents, relatives. A land full of blood and parasites... Flags, holidays, dates that are a joy to one, are insults, sadness to other. In this part of the Balkans, memories are crying, memories are being remembered, the past is screaming. "Therefore, even if they wanted to, the subjects of this region of complex ethnic

misogyny, often perceived as 'handicapped' by their heterogeneity, could not remain indifferent to the controversial character of selective memory and abuse of oblivion of historical facts" (Kramarić & Banović - Markovska, 2013). Political scientist from Sarajevo Nerzuk Ćurak believes that Bosnia and Herzegovina lack an appropriate culture of remembrance as an institutional manifestation of the political community. "We must simply create the conditions for all places of sorrow to be our shared memories. And not that every garment is separated and vengeful only for the crime that was committed against 'his people'. All those killed innocently in Bosnia and Herzegovina are our people" (Ćurak, 2018).

TOGETHER TO RESPECT AND COOPERATION

In the processes of rehabilitation of the old and the formation of new national and political identities in the countries that originated in the territory of former Yugoslavia, conflicting views on common history are apparent. There are dominant memory cultures in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, which in comparative analysis show large differences in the interpretation of the same events. The problem is even more complex in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, where more religious and ethnic communities live, whose historical narratives are profoundly different. Thus, there is drama in the Balkan countries regarding collective identities.

Just as the Yugoslav authorities were unable to form and consolidate the Yugoslav nation throughout the 20th century, so in the multiethnic and multicultural states of Western Balkans today there are enormous difficulties in creating a single political nation, a unique national identity, in affirming cultural, religious and political togetherness. In these countries there is no awareness of the "collective we", common customs and tradition, language, cultural symbols, public holidays and the like. There are also problems regarding integrative national consciousness, public interest, loyalty to the

state, constitutional patriotism, politics of memory and culture of memory.

Selective remembrance cultures in which the political and cultural elites of people will not test their responsibility for misunderstandings and conflicts in the past testify that there is no strong enough will to build lasting peace and prosperous cooperation between national communities, and without that there is no strengthening of a democratic society, economic progress for citizens.

The culture of people of Western Balkans is the result of mutual influence throughout history. Elements of one nation's culture are also present in the culture of others. The only thing that differentiates them is religion, but in history it has not only always been a cause of conflict, but also a driving force for cooperation, solidarity, shared success. The history of Western Balkans, without any doubt, is very complex and can be a source of conflicting potential, but it also represents a great wealth of different cultures, identities, traditions, myths, offers a lot of inspiration for scientific research projects and works of art.

In today's world, fraught with the effects of globalization, social and migrant crisis, when many questions the future of multiculturalism and interculturalism, even common civilizations, examples from the former Yugoslavia can help scientific researchers and humanists to analyze weaknesses and benefits of mutual coexistence of different cultures. It is necessary to strengthen social awareness of responsibility, a culture of dialogue and democratic principles in dealing with conflict situations. Multicultural societies can more easily survive as political communities if they succeed in forming cultural traditions and shared political identities. The solution to a conflict is not to negate its political, cultural and religious differences, but to respect different and complex identities and enhance its political culture.

A commitment is needed to talk openly and constructively on all topics, a culture of dialogue about the political

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affirmation of a common past and a common future. To collectively remember the past, instead of selective and subjective views, to nurture memorials, dates - anniversaries, great historical figures in the field of culture and art, their works that arose from cultural interaction, as places of meeting and responsibility.

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