II

> "The Kosovo mythology operates as an alternative field of logic, history, and reality. In this alternate reality, the configurations of hate stereotypes ... make sense. ... At some point ... Kosovo mythology became so strong that those who tried to manipulate it ... found themselves slaves to the expectations and interior logic of this ideology of eternal conflict unto extermination." (Sells 2002: 67)

> "The crux of the grand narrative ... is the way in which present-day Albanians, or alternatively Bosnian Muslims, are looked upon as 'Turk-surrogates', that is, as symbolic stand-ins for the real Turks (Ottomans) who defeated (Serb) Prince Lazar 600 years ago in 1389 at the Battle of Kosovo." (Vetlesen 2005: 179)

> "The loss of power was particularly traumatic for the Serbs. ... The myths dealing with the loss of the medieval empire served to create a nationalist frenzy at the moment when ... a unique opportunity [seemed to be provided] for the realization of the central promise of Serbian national mythology, the creation of the Second Serbian Empire." (Anzulović 1999: 2)

> "Serbs began to feel the defeat in Kosovo as if it had occurred only yesterday. ... Based on the past trauma and time collapse, Serbs perceived a threat when one did not actually exist and felt compelled to act against it. Thus the collective idea that Muslims had to be exterminated slowly began to develop." (Volkan 2002: 93, 96)

The first group of statements view Serbs as a nation decisively defined by the traumatic but ennobling memory of the Battle of Kosovo. It is believed that the "Kosovo pledge" – the choice of the "heavenly kingdom" and the self-effacing heroism of Serbian fighters – which Serbs have adhered to throughout the centuries, makes them a better kind of people, brave and virtuous, unassuming but tenacious, profoundly spiritual. This account will be called *celebratory discourse.*

The second group represents a view that is in many respects the polar opposite of the first. It is highly critical of Serbs and denies them any and all of such beautiful qualities. They are depicted as a power-hungry nation prone to aggression against others, especially their weaker neighbors. In these destructive actions Serbs are propelled by a pernicious myth in whose grips they are hopelessly caught, losing any rational sense of reality. This is *denouncing discourse.*

The former discourse tends to be an insider one, set forth by Serbs, especially those who readily self-identify as such, while the latter is generally an outsider discourse, put forward from without by non-Serb observers and commentators. This preferential association between the content and the speaker's location is of course not absolute,[208] but it is both quantitatively and symbolically preponderant.

Opposed as they are, the two discourses share more than would be expected. Their common ground is marked by three basic assumptions.

Ontologization of Trauma. First, they both believe that the mythicized collective remembrance of the Battle of Kosovo is indelibly imprinted on the Serbian mind. On both sides the Kosovo Myth is construed as trauma, as *the* Serbian Trauma. Whether this is extolled or

[208] There are also denouncing insiders and an occasional celebrating outsider. Critically minded insiders (e.g. Popov 2000; Čolović 2001, 2002), while concurring in many respects with the denouncing outsiders, are free from gross oversimplifications and factual errors that abound in the latter's works. As for the sympathetic outsiders, it is worth noting that a rare example of this kind (Emmert 1990) was written well before the outbreak of Yugoslav wars.

denigrated, it is taken as a fact that Serbs have mourned the Kosovo defeat for centuries.[209] Furthermore, this thing, the Kosovo Trauma, not just passively exists but is an active factor in shaping Serbs' actions. As a result, it produces consequences in reality and affects also the lives the lives of others – whether they are seen as targets of Serbian aggression (version II) or beneficiaries of Serbian chivalrous idealism (version I).

Exoticization of Serbs. In both discourses, Serbs are essentialized into a special kind of people, a race apart. The incorporation of the Kosovo Trauma makes them different from anybody else, producing their radical alterity. Unlike other nations, Serbs glorify death and celebrate defeat. The pain of the Trauma and the thirst for revenge turns them into savage aggressors(II)/ self-sacrificing heroes(I) in their constant conflicts with various enemies. Due to the Trauma, they have remained immune to the ills(I)/ benefits(II) of Western modernity. Serbs are irrational, inscrutable and unpredictable, controlled by mysterious emotional forces working from within them. They are the Savage – whether Noble or Ignoble.

Homogenization of Serbs. The third assumption stems logically from the preceding two, and perceives the nation as a homogeneous body. It is "Serbs" who feel, remember, believe, think, sing, or imagine. There is no mention of disagreement or multiplicity of voices. Denouncers almost never speak of internal differences in opinion among "Serbs" concerning the Kosovo legacy, its interpretation or use. For the celebrators, the invocations of "every Serb" and "all Serbs" is a central element of their very discursive stance, which importantly depends on magically obliterating dissent and heterogeneity within.

Beside such internal similarities, the two arguments share one more feature: they are both currently hegemonic in their respective areas of influence. The interest in the Kosovo Myth received a strong impetus with the outbreak of wars in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. The widespread perception of Serbs as the main culprits for Yugoslavia's bloody collapse and chief perpetrators of atrocities prompted many too look for causes of such behavior in the Serbian cultural past, and to find a pivotal point in the Kosovo Myth. An unbroken line was established extending from late 14th century through 19th-century Serbian nationalism to the present day. It was postulated that the traumatic memory of the Kosovo failure which Serbs were never able to overcome, this unhealed wound, spurred them to aggression, expansionism, trampling on others' rights and, finally, genocide.

Over the past fifteen or so years in the international public opinion, including the scholarly one, Serbs have become rather firmly entrenched as *the* example of a nation going amok. They have been likened to the Holocaust perpetrators, an association which is not just an ordinary political slander but a ritual pollution, and thus cannot be shed by rational demonstrations of innocence (Alexander 2004b: 244).[210] This is the background that determines current international receptions of the Kosovo symbolism. The latter is used, almost self-evidently by now, as an explanatory tool. In a recent book about the notion of genocide (Vetlesen 2005), Serbs are the central example, and the Kosovo Myth is matter-of-factly referred to as a major trigger of their genocidal actions. For the psychiatrist Vamik Volkan (1996, 2001, 2002) Serbs and their Kosovo legacy proved particularly instrumental in building the theory of "chosen

[209] True, quite a few denouncers dispute the historical record of the Battle, or otherwise point at the spuriousness of the Trauma, as something that Serbs have made up rather than experienced. Yet this is still ontologization insofar as Serbs are held to believe in this fabrication and act upon it.

[210] See also Alexander 2004b: 246-249 for a discussion of the analogy between the Holocaust and Serbs' conduct in the 1990s wars.

trauma".[211] Šuber (2006) flatly declares Serbia is an "imperative subject" for studying interrelatedness of myth and politics, and singles out the Kosovo myth as *the* factor conditioning Serbian behavior lately. Michael Billig, in his otherwise thoroughly original book (Billig 1995), looks for the sharpest possible contrast with the bland, "banal" nationalism of the Western democracies and finds it in, whom else, Serbs.[212] Countless more examples could be cited, but the point is that the Kosovo Myth is presented in a misleadingly univocal manner, as conveying invariably a single message over many centuries: a message of unyielding collectivism, adoration of war and death, aggressive militarism, and particularistic anti-humanism.

Yet it has been curiously overlooked how much this account, minus the negative moral judgment, agrees with the most uncritical and self-congratulatory internal Serbian view of the Kosovo tradition. Western disparaging accounts portray Serbs in precisely the way the staunchest Serbian nationalists prefer to see their nation. Seen from this angle, the two sides cooperate closely. They work together in a formidable joint effort to constrain the Serbian identity to a single symbolic structure – *the* "Kosovo Myth" – and a particular version of it at that. Although they are usually articulated as a hostile response to, and in order to undercut the claims of, one another, even this apparent opposition contributes to their objective cooperation. I will return to this.

In the analysis that follows, the twin accounts presented above will be used as a foil against which to test new openings. I will take a closer look at how they were constructed and how they are still being constructed. All three shared assumptions will be challenged. To begin with, I will seek to *de-ontologize* the Kosovo Trauma, or to de-traumaticize Kosovo symbolism. The traumaticness of Kosovo for Serbs is not a fact but a social process, an "ongoing practical accomplishment" as Garfinkel would put it, which can be traced and described. Secondly, as for *essentialization,* I am convinced that Serbs are not so much different from other nations as they would sometimes like to think of themselves or as they are frequently portrayed by outsiders; and that for analyzing things Serbian the usual instruments of the social sciences will perfectly do.[213] Thirdly, it will be shown how *homogenization* is harnessed to the political usability of Kosovo symbolism in the internal political arena for purposes of exclusion, undermining the development of genuine pluralism.

It is my intention to explore the strategically important ambiguities, gaps, loops, nesting implications, loose ends, double-entendres, misunderstandings better left unclarified etc. It is such discursive plays which, I believe, are mainly responsible for the Myth's enduring power, especially a continuous shifting along the axis of *universality* vs. *particularity.*

I hope to show this to be an excellent example of how cultural structures operate within the dynamically unfolding historical contexts, in constant tension between the autonomous strength or "semiotic resistance" of sedimented and patterned cultural meanings, on one hand, and the contingencies of political, economic, and military circumstances, on the other. Cultural structures, though flexible and open-ended enough to remain meaningful over for so long and

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[211] Neither Volkan nor Vetlesen are Balkans specialists, but this does not seem to be a hindrance.

[212] "[S]urely, there is a distinction between the flag waved by Serbian ethnic cleansers and that hanging unobtrusively outside the US post office" (1995: 6). It will be a concern of this chapter to show that the Kosovo Myth can serve, and has served, not only the purposes of "hot nationalism" but of the "banal" one as well – underpinning, one might say, "the flag hanging unobtrusively outside the Serbian post office".

[213] The assumption that Serbs are profoundly different may lead to the kind of intellectual abdication van de Port (1999) openly advocates in proclaiming that "it takes a Serb to know a Serb", an idea which he claims to have arrived at by "taking seriously what Serbs tell about themselves". Here the Serbian radical-alterity- posturing happily coincides with an outsider's postmodernist destruction of social science.

through so diverse situations, have also been resistant enough not to allow for just any use that someone might wish to put them to. These structures have displayed an ability to channel interpretations into some directions at the expense of others, restricting the range of the possible. On the other hand, cultural structures cannot operate in a vacuum producing, like a machine, always the same pre-packed hermeneutic output. Finally, they do not operate by themselves but require living, thinking, acting and, especially, speaking agents.[214] Kosovo has become the main Serbian "entrenched story" (Živković 2001a: xii) – the community's most powerful communication resource because, having been told and retold in thousands of times and ways, has acquired a unique intertextual thickness.[215]

My theoretical terrain can be delineated by juxtaposing the Dragnich-Todorovich sentence quoted above – "Kosovo is many diverse things to different living Serbs, but they all have it *in their blood*" – and a seemingly similar one used by Eyerman (2002: 18) to characterize the role of slavery in the forging of African American identity: "Slavery has meant different things for different generations of black Americans, but it was always there *as a referent*" (italics added). It is in the space between *blood* and *referent* that I wish to move, from the former to the latter. A *referent* is something you can follow and describe how, where, when and by whom it has been referred to; and in this way, you may hope to re-trace in the reverse direction the passage it covered in turning into the alleged *blood*.[216]

Two reservations are in order here. First, I will only deal with Kosovo as a *Serbian* symbolic referent. Albanians, who make up the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of Kosovo as a real territory and newly independent Balkan country seeking full international recognition, also feel Kosovo to be "more than" just a piece of land. For them too, Kosovo has sacred attributes and this sacralization is similarly based on suffering and heroism. Though it would be fascinating to examine the parallels between Albanian and Serbian constructions of Kosovo as traumatic, this must remain beyond the scope of this chapter.[217] Second, when referring to "Kosovo", I will mean the symbolic, abstract meaning, not Kosovo as a real place, unless I specifically indicate so. I will not deal with the more directly political, legal or security issues involved in the Kosovo crisis since the late 1980s. The abstract and the concrete cannot of course be completely disentangled, all the more so because Kosovo as territory has been the bone of contention over which Serbs and Albanians have vied for the last one hundred and fifty years. For Serbs, Kosovo is a sacred symbol not only because of the Battle but also for the presence on the soil of real Kosovo of precious cultural monuments, most notably medieval churches and monasteries. Thus when Serbs claim Kosovo is the "cradle of Serbhood", they ambiguously refer

[214] While bewaring the mythification of the Myth itself, its purely instrumentalist alternative is no better. Thus Malcolm (1998: 80) writes that "[t]here is simply no evidence to suggest that any Serb ever drew the idea of a special 'Kosovo covenant' ... before the nineteenth century" and, in response to a Serbian author who called Kosovo tradition the "permanent connective tissue among Serbs", continues: "'Permanent' is perhaps not the most obvious choice of word for such a very recent product of nationalist ideological history". A cultural sociology cannot afford to deal so dismissively with meaning-structures.

[215] "Entrenched story" is a narrative a community comes to be stuck with, which "becomes ever more entrenched even as it is bitterly contested, for any new reference only serves to make it associatively richer". Its elasticity in interpretative and pragmatic terms is due to the fact that its elements "trail behind them a long history of previous uses" (Živković 2001a: xii-xiii)

[216] Dragnich and Todorovich's *blood* is not the only one, cf.: "Deeply rooted in the mind of the people, the Kosovo tradition is still torturing Serbian blood" (Djordjević 1991: 324 – interestingly, another Serbian American academic).

[217] For hints, see Vickers 1998; Luci and Marković 2008; Zdravković 2005; Duijzings 2000. On recent symbolizations of Kosovo Albanian victimhood see Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006.

to both the embodied place and the sacred idea, and the dynamic between an abstracting, de-territorializing symbolization and recurrent re-territorialization of "Kosovo" has been quite important in the cultural history of the notion.[218] However, Kosovo as a contemporary political issue is far too complex to be dealt with summarily.

My argument will proceed in four steps. To begin, I will trace how the apparently unitary Myth, its form finalized in the early 19th century, operated within a number of vastly different ideological-political programs in modern Serbian and Yugoslav history. Next, I will try to tease out the Myth's strategic ambivalences and the ways in which it is continuously discursively reproduced in specific instances. A discussion of the official and vernacular interpretations in the most recent period will follow, to conclude with some general implications.

Cultural structures and their contexts: the shaping of the Myth

1. The beginnings: 14-18th centuries

The Kosovo legend was spun over several centuries from elements originating in three kinds of sources, one oral and two written. The epic folk poetry about the Battle of Kosovo had been preserved and transmitted until 19th c. as a living oral tradition, at first chivalric and feudal in literary form and social location, to become more rural, popular and patriarchal with the disappearance of the native Serbian elite.[219] The two kinds of written sources involve religious writings (sermons, eulogies, hagiographies), and secular works (travelogues, biographies, chronicles). In a fine example of what nowadays would be called intertextuality, the various sources intermingled and borrowed from each other, motifs and elements flowing from one to the other in different directions. To try to set apart the "factual" and the "imaginary" within the Kosovo symbolism is difficult and, moreover, unproductive, because it is only in their conjunction that the two levels represent an active cultural structure.

What would become known as the Battle of Kosovo[220] took place on a field near present-day Pristina, on June 15, 1389, between the army led by the Serbian prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and the Ottoman forces led by the Sultan Murad. At that time, Lazar was just beginning to meet some success in his attempts to stabilize the fragmented and mutually quarrelling Serbian lands and to bid the position of the sovereign. Previously, the Serbian medieval state had gone through almost two centuries of progress and expansion under the Nemanjić dynasty, reaching its apogee under Stefan Dušan, crowned emperor in 1346. The decline was soon to follow however, and the last Nemanjić, Dušan's son Uroš, died in 1371. In the same year, the advancing Ottomans marked their first important victory against the Serbs.

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[218] In terms of O'Brien's (1987: 9-13) theory of "holy nations", distinguishing the Old Testament version (concrete and localized) from the New Testament version (spiritual and other-worldly), the Serbian case oscillates between the two. It began as the latter and slid into the former in 19th -turn of 20th century, yet occasionally reverting to the "New Testament" variety in calmer periods, while the last three decades have seen a powerful revival of the "Old Testament" kind.

[219] The oldest and first recorded folk epics were 14- or 16-syllabic *bugaršice*, but what would become canonical is the decasyllabic type (*deseterac*), usually sung with the accompaniment of *gusle* (a simple string instrument played with a bow). In spite of their aura of the only genuine representative of the folk tradition about Kosovo, poems of the latter kind were composed no earlier than mid-18th century (Emmert 1990: 122; Loma 2002: 130). Other, less consequential genres of folklore on Kosovo themes – tales, proverbs, toponyms and popular genealogies – also exist.

[220] See Emmert (1990) for a detailed account of the historical event and the legend.

Like all medieval battles, Kosovo was, strictly speaking, not fought by "Serbs" and "Turks" in national or ethnic terms, although it was redefined as such in retrospect. Its religious component was important though: it was felt on both sides to be a clash between Christians and Muslims. The Battle's immediate outcome is not clear,[221] but with the passage of time it was increasingly presented as Serbian and Christian defeat, on which basis the Kosovo Myth would be built. This was a retrospective interpretation of a military event which, however undecided initially, represented an important step in the loss of Serbia's statehood and independence to the Ottomans.[222] Although Serbian lands retained a degree of autonomy until 1459, and actually experienced some cultural flourishing, Lazar's widow was forced to accept vassalage to Turks and other feudal lords were under mounting Ottoman pressure.[223]

Whether Kosovo was "really" Serbian military defeat or not is actually not crucial. The cultural construction of Trauma congealed around the factual core of a battle and death of the ruler. The social context was favorable for a traumatic definition of the event. Under Ottoman rule, the previously initiated economic, political and cultural development was cut short. Social structure changed: native nobility disappeared, previous political institutions were dissolved, Serbian Church lost its privileged role, a new ruling group of a different faith was introduced. Serbs' ties to Western Europe were severed. The population homogenized into peasantry underwent what ethnologists have called "secondary patriarchalization" - reverting to ancient, often pre-Christian forms of social organization, economy and morality. Although one would do well not to perpetuate Serbian textbook stereotypes on the "five hundreds of Turkish yoke", a frozen time of utter darkness and misfortune, there are enough grounds to argue that for Serbs the Ottoman conquest meant a rupture, a sudden redirection of historical course. The Kosovo legend emerged as part of the collective effort to make sense of this rupture and a retrospective explanation of its roots and causes.

The legend would take its final shape only in 18th century.[224] In this long first period, several types of carrier groups may be identified that were articulating, recording, interpreting and spreading what would become the Serbian Trauma of Kosovo. At the very beginning of the process stood the mutually overlapping circles of Serbian aristocracy and the Orthodox Church, who first established the cult of Prince Lazar. Later carriers of the tale were innumerable anonymous folk singers who were telling and retelling the story of Kosovo heroes in their creations/performances.[225] They did not necessarily intend to transmit Trauma: their main concern was to tell a good story well, to entertain their audiences and at once provide them with a morally uplifting lesson of warrior virtues, in accordance with the patriarchal ethos. Further, there were Catholic travelers, monks, educators and emissaries, from the Balkans or Western Europe, who often found it in their own interest to spread the Myth. And finally, often left out of

[221] The earliest sources, both Serbian and Turkish, either just describe a bloody battle in which both commanders died, or call it a Christian victory.

[222] The possibility of a Serbian victory is actually irrelevant because the idea of Kosovo as defeat, tragedy, and drama "is so deeply engraved in the consciousness of both ordinary people and professional historians that it has become ... part of our thinking and values we have adopted" (Blagojević 1990: 14-5).

[223] Ottoman rule in central Serbia would last until early 19th century, and in Kosovo until 1912.

[224] This final shape, which we know today, appeared for the first time in two compilations originating at two remote points in the Serb-populated territories, both of them outside of Serbia proper: epic drama *The Battle of Kosovo* was created in the Bay of Kotor (present-day Montenegro); and the prose work *The Tale about the Battle of Kosovo* in the Austrian province of Srem (present-day Vojvodina, across the river Sava from central Serbia) (Emmert 1990: 123; Popović 1998: 60-68). The authorship and mutual influences of the two works remain moot.

[225] On the specific logic of epic singing, and the notions of formulae, creativity and originality in this context, see the superb study of Albert Lord (1964).

conventional accounts in spite of their importance, were the Serbian educated middle classes in the border regions of the Habsburg Empire, arising since the late 17th century after successive waves of Serb migration from Ottoman-held territories. As to the specification of the "nature of the victim", it was not quite clear who they were, and hence should feel "interpellated" by the traumatic narrative – Serbs, Orthodox Serbs, Christians?, nor did it have to be made clear, given the cultural assumptions of the times. This initial ambivalence would prove useful in later stages.

Elements of the legend. The legend is organized around two foci, personified in two towering figures: Prince Lazar and Miloš Obilić. One focus is religious, Christian, and martyrial, and the other epic and heroic.[226] They are complemented by the "traitor" Vuk Branković. There is a host of accompanying characters – the knight Jug Bogdan and his nine sons, the Jugović brothers, all killed in the battle; their mother, who died of sorrow; the Maiden of Kosovo, a girl who lost her fiance; as well as an array of lesser knights and nobles. Almost all of them are fictitious, but very much alive in the conventional reception of the myth.[227]

Prince Lazar. The cult of Prince Lazar was the embryo of the emerging Kosovo myth. Proclaimed a saint shortly after the Battle, from 1390 on Lazar was celebrated every June 15 along with the Prophet Amos (the saint to whom the day is dedicated in the liturgical calendar), with a special *Office to the Saint Prince Lazar* composed to that purpose. While several members of the Nemanjić dynasty had been proclaimed saints, these earlier saintly rulers were celebrated for having lived in deep devotion to the Christian faith, and not for dying for it (Popović 1998: 23-4). Lazar was the first to be commemorated both as a believer and a martyr, who through deliberately embracing death earned the entrance to eternal life.

Lazar's martyrdom is based on the fact that he gave his life "in defense of the holy cross". The early religious writings are responsible for presenting Lazar's death as the result of a *choice* on his part: he consciously opted to die in order to redeem himself, his people and his faith. By modeling Lazar's character closely on the figure of Jesus Christ, the church writings also introduced the theme of *reversal* of the Battle's outcome. What was a defeat in this-worldly terms becomes a triumph on a higher, spiritual level; what looked like a terrible loss is recoded as willing self-sacrifice in order to attain eternal, spiritual and therefore, in devout Christian eyes, the only true victory. In a medieval eulogy, Lazar is described as addressing his knights on the eve of the battle, calling them into an honorable death as the price for salvation.[228] The phrases employed belong to the rhetoric of the period, and the worldview they express is also recognizably medieval. We do not know if Lazar really said this to his soldiers; but even if he did, it would not make him very different from countless Christian warriors of the period.[229]

The folk tradition elaborated this symbolic baseline laid out by the Church, placing Lazar's martyrdom in a compelling narrative which it fleshed out with many details. On the eve

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[226] Some commentators add also: pagan (Loma, 2002; Popović, 1998).

[227] It can hardly be said that they live on just in the "popular" understanding, since in every Serbian city and town there are streets bearing the names of these characters, which makes them quite "official".

[228] "If the sword, if wounds, or if the darkness of death comes to us, we accept it sweetly for Christ and for the godliness of our homeland. It is better to die in battle than to live in shame. Better it is for us to accept death from the sword in battle than to offer our shoulders to the enemy. We have lived a long time for the world; in the end we seek to accept the martyr's struggle and to live forever in the heaven." And his soldiers respond: "We die so that we may live forever" (Patriarch Danilo, "Narrative about Prince Lazar", quoted in Emmert 1990: 63, 64).

[229] And not just Christian, for that matter: Ottoman sources glorify the Sultan in almost identical terms, Islamic version, as a martyr for the faith. How the Battle of Kosovo was portrayed at *both* sides of the battlefield as a "cosmic" battle and a pledge for eternal glory and salvation, is discussed in Bakić-Hayden 2004: 35-38; Emmert 1990: 88-98; Popović 1998: 24-30.

of the battle, the poem says, Lazar received a message from the Holy Virgin, transmitted by St. Elijah in the guise of a falcon, to choose between an earthly kingdom, that would bring him victory and the battle, and a heavenly one, for which he would have to die together with all of his men. Lazar chooses the latter, erects, as ordered, a church on the Kosovo Field, takes holy communion with his soldiers, and marches to death. This – Lazar's choice of death as redemption – would become known as the "Kosovo covenant" or "Kosovo pledge". The parallel between Lazar and Christ is particularly accentuated in the tale of the "Prince's Supper", which is only found in the folk tradition and is modeled as a replica of the Last Supper.

When the early Christian sources talk of Lazar's victory rather than defeat, it is always described in terms of "light", which indicates the notion's otherworldly, spiritual meaning. Besides, popular lore includes legends about his miraculous body. Lazar is here identified as the embodied symbol of the community, of Serbs' "corporate identity" (Bakić-Hayden 2004: 39) which, in the centuries after the battle, was under pressure to survive both in a physical sense and in the sense of preserving their religiously based communal identity.[230] The influence of medieval notions of the "king's two bodies" (Kantorowicz 1957) is obvious, where the spiritual body of the leader is joined with the corpus of his knights, or "the whole people", in a sacralized sacrifice for the eternal life of the community and the Christian faith (Bojović 1991).[231]

Miloš Obilić is a brave soldier and Lazar's son-in-law who at the supper before the Battle was unjustly accused of imminent treason. Faced with Lazar's mistrust, he decided to prove his loyalty by killing Murad. The next day during the fighting he went on his own to the Turkish camp, entered by pretending to be a deserter, and killed the Sultan, only to be killed himself.

Miloš Obilić is not a historical personality. How, where and when he appeared as a fictional character is still debated. Some scholars (Popović 1998: 29-42) suggest that Miloš originated in the Turkish sources, invented by Ottoman writers in order to cover and justify the embarrassing fact of Sultan's death; Serbs then took over this character of villain-assassin and turned him into a hero. Yet others (e.g. Loma 2002) argue that Serbian sources too knew of a knight who killed Murad,[232] but that everything else, including his name, was legendary. Whenever Serbs' relations with the Turkish authorities worsened, as in rebellions and wars, Miloš's figure became salient, and finally topped all others on the eve of the First Serbian Uprising of 1804.

Furthermore, Catholic Slavs of the Western Balkans played a role in the shaping and spreading of the cult of Miloš. The neighboring Catholic states, exposed to the threat of Turkish invasion, were promoting anti-Ottoman and anti-Muslim sentiments, to which purpose the figure of Miloš was ideally suited (Popović 1998: 43-70). In addition, after 15th century considerable numbers of Serbs fleeing from Serbia settled in the border regions, employed as frontier soldiers of Austria and Venice. They lived in a highly patriarchal and militarized cultural milieu, where the epic tradition was thriving. Miloš, the most epic of all Kosovo heroes, was thus prominent

[230] "[Lazar's] body incorporates the nation itself, his head the spirit of the people. Miraculously... neither rotted for forty years, just as the Serbian people have not 'decayed' into the customs and faith of their Islamic rulers" (Bakić-Hayden 2004: 39).

[231] Although in the Middle Ages, writes Kantorowicz (1957: 261) every soldier giving his life for the community becomes a martyr in the image of Christ, the king's death holds a special significance: "The sacrifice of the Prince for his *corpus mysticum* – the secular state – compared with the sacrifice of Christ more directly ...: both offered their lives not only as members but also as the heads of their mystical bodies."

[232] Military historians argue that the feat was more probably accomplished by an armored unit. Capturing or killing the enemy chief commander was a major element of medieval war tactics (Blagojević 1989: 20).

among both Catholics and the Orthodox in the Western Balkans. Finally, a major source of the narrative substance of the Kosovo myth, from which oral tradition subsequently borrowed, was the semi-legendary history of Slavic peoples (*Il Regno degli Slavi*, 1601) by Mavro Orbin, a monk from the Republic of Dubrovnik. It is in Orbin's work that the complete story of Miloš and his exploit was rendered for the first time.

Nowadays, Miloš is undoubtedly the central character of the Kosovo Myth. Although he never existed, most Serbs are convinced he did. His name is metaphorical shorthand for selfless heroism and fearlessness; the saying, "to have the heart of Obilić" means honorable courage and ability to withstand the greatest challenge. His figure is in present times the epitome of Serbhood, especially of its militant, warrior variant. It is a curious paradox then that this very personification of Serbianness should be a literary figure which among all the Kosovo characters was most directly derived from Serbs' political and cultural exchange with others – and those others most often seen as Serbs' enemies, that is, Muslim Turks and Catholic Croats and Slovenes.

Vuk Branković illustrates yet third possibility of the relation between "fact" and "fiction": he really existed, but was not at all what the legend tells of him. In the story, he is the traitor who, having first slandered Miloš to Lazar to divert the latter's attention from his own evil designs, betrayed Lazar, gave up fighting in Kosovo and went over to the Turks. Historically, Vuk Branković was the second greatest Serbian feudal lord, Lazar's son in law and master of the very land where the Battle was fought. He was not a traitor at all but, on the contrary, continued resisting the Ottomans even after Lazar's family agreed to surrender. He died in Turkish prison.

None of this helped him to escape his literary fate. It is as if the narrative of heroic martyrdom of Lazar and his knights could not do without a traitor: such a figure was demanded, one might say, by the constraints of the genre. How Vuk Branković got into the role in the first place is not entirely clear,[233] but probably has to do with the fact that he refused to obey the Lazarević family and follow their political line. The enmity between the two families continued for some time after the Battle and it was at the Lazarević court that the first allusions to Vuk's disloyalty were produced (Ljubinković 1989: 150-152; Mihaljčić 1990, Emmert 1990: 105-120). And once the motif of treason got into the legend, it could not leave it, because it was nurtured both by instrumental factors of political interests and by cultural factors of narrative coherence and familiarity. If Lazar was Jesus Christ, someone had to be Judas. The Biblical cliche of the "Judas motif" was found in many Christian legends, especially in the Middle Ages (Mihaljčić 1990: 29). And for the more heroic, epic reading of the legend, if two characters were positive, the story would lack sufficient dramatic intensity and thus would be implausible without a negative one. Both virtue and vice must have a face in order to be sufficiently alive for the vernacular cultural consumer.

As could be seen, all the early formative drives that helped shape the Kosovo Myth were not specifically Serbian but rather partook of the cultural dynamics of the times. Christian hagiography, which served as the first discursive form to establish the cult of Prince Lazar, was a major genre of medieval literature; and the practice of canonizing and religiously celebrating political leaders, preserving and displaying their holy relics were all common in European Christendom (see also Ćirković 1990: 112). Further, the Kosovo folk poems belong to the genre of heroic epic widespread in Europe of the early Middle Ages – the only difference being that Serbs, due to "secondary patriarchalization", continued singing them long after the Western

[233] The first attested source that names him as the traitor is Orbin's *History*. We do not know, and never will, if the unrecorded oral tradition preceding Orbin cast Vuk Branković in that role or not.

counterparts sank into oblivion. Even specific motifs are shared: the slandered knight, accused by his master of betrayal, who decides to prove his allegiance by a great deed, is found also in the legends of Roland or Tristan and Isolde (Ljubinković 1989: 154; Loma, 2002). Hence from the very beginning the Kosovo legend was a way of Serbs' participation in the cultural traffic with the rest of the world rather than a path leading to isolation and exclusivity.

2. Serbian modernity: 19th century

The dominant twin accounts presented at the beginning of this chapter cast the Kosovo Myth as the prime sign of Serbs' irreparable pre-modernity and anti-modernity. Nevertheless, the Myth as we know it was formed only in the 19th century, at the time when Serbia was struggling to get (back) into the history of European nations. And this was necessarily a modern struggle, which made use of modern ideas and modern ways of pursuing them.

The Kosovo legacy lived into the late 18th century as a collection of interrelated and symbolically relatively coherent bits and pieces. In Bakić-Hayden's (2004: 31) apt phrase, it was the First Serbian Uprising that "tied into the knot of collective awareness many loose strands of a long epic memory". In the decades immediately preceding the 1804 Uprising the cult of Kosovo was more widely spread and alive than ever before. As previously noted, its main centers were not in Serbia proper (which of course is not to say it was unknown there) but in the Montenegrin highlands, and among Serbs in the Habsburg Empire, whose entrepreneurial middle classes were the only modern, educated stratum of Serbs at the time. They were crucial inspirers of the Myth's first direct political use. And in spite of their modernity, they preserved the epic singing tradition they had brought with them on their migrations, so it was in Srem that some of the key folk poems about Kosovo were written down at the turn of the 19th century (1998: 147-150).[234]

The beginning of 19th century was decisive for both the Serbian nation and the Kosovo Myth. Politically, modern Serbia took its first steps, through the First (1804-1813) and Second (1815) uprisings against Ottoman rule, in a long process of acquiring independence that would be finished only in 1878. Culturally – which in this case means also politically – the crucial move in articulating and fixing the oral folk tradition was made by the ethnographer and language reformer Vuk Karadžić. He wrote down, compiled and published Serbian folk poems, dividing them into several "cycles", the central one being "the Kosovo cycle".[235] And, intentionally or not, "Vuk's work posited the Kosovo tradition as being the heart of his people's life, perceiving it, in the light of the current Western and Central European *Zeitgeist*, as a living expression of their 'national spirit'" (Bakić-Hayden 2004: 31). From the very beginning, the nation-builders felt that the Kosovo legacy can be used for political mobilization for the purposes at hand. "By the late 18th century as the spirit of revolution found an echo in the Balkans, Serbs were ready to utilize the powerful psychological factor of Kosovo in the struggle for liberation and unification" (Emmert 1990: 123). The Kosovo story had all the features Smith (1997: 56-59) lists as criteria for a "usable past", i.e. one that can help form nations: "authenticity", inspiration, and capacity for reinterpretation. The Kosovo theme was used already in the preparations for the rebellion.[236] At the outbreak of the Uprising, the leader himself, Karadjordje – who would be

[234] It is sociologically extremely interesting that a few of these key poems were at least to a degree the authorial creations of specific individuals, the well-known singers of the time who told them to Karadžić. It was only after being published that they were canonized as the stereotypical "expression of the anonymous folk genius".

[235] Himself a participant in the First Uprising, after its defeat he was forced to flee to Austria. His first collection of Serbian folk poems was published in Vienna in 1814, and several more followed.

[236] At a secret meeting an insurgent priest reportedly said: „Brothers! It has been so many hundreds of years since all our glory was buried in the dark and for all of us sad tomb at Kosovo..." (quoted in Antonijević 2007a: 135).

remembered as the „avenger of Kosovo“ – is said to have called „every Serb to arms, so that we may take revenge on the Turks, and in the name of God cast off the yoke that the Serb has carried since Kosovo to this day“ (quoted in Antonijević 2007a: 142). The epic tradition could be used to perceive and understand new situations and new tasks through the familiar images and concepts, and thus to collectively appropriate them more easily (Bakić-Hayden 2004: 36)

While Obilić's heroism and Lazar's sacrifice could incite peasant masses to join the struggle that was at once a war of independence and a social revolution, the folklore collected by Vuk Karadžić was an invaluable political asset in winning outside support for the national cause.[237] This was the time of the romanticist craze for "authentic" folk culture, and Serbian poems were warmly received and praised by some of the great intellectual figures of the day. Karadžić understood it very well that his undertaking is not just cultural but rather a national-political one, since the admiration for Serbian culture in the powerful Western Europe would help secure a more favorable stance towards Serbian political aspirations, and on the other hand, the proof of "antiquity" of national traditions would support Serbian claims to nationhood. Serbian leaders felt what the spirit of the times was, and spoke its language. It is one of the many paradoxes around the Kosovo Myth, nowadays used to mark the radical alterity of Serbs, that its final form was fruit of the Serbian desire to construct a modern national culture that will be part of the Western world (cf. Bakić-Hayden 2004: 32).

Around the middle of the century, as Serbia was gradually winning more sovereignty and building a new nation-state, some other important events took place. The adoption of Vuk Karadžić's reformed orthography and grammar supplied Serbs with a standard language they had never had. The Montenegrin poet-ruler Petar Petrović Njegoš published his epic poem *Mountain Wreath* which, though written by an individual, in its poetics and its ethics followed closely the world of the patriarchal folk poetry, and did for the popularization of the Kosovo themes more than any other work. In Serbia, new, bourgeois strata were slowly emerging. The state encouraged and supported education abroad, and at home as well public education was established in order to raise the abysmally low literacy rate. The Karadžić collections of folk songs immediately became part of the curriculum, and the importance of the educational system in inculcating the Kosovo legacy in subsequent generations can hardly be overestimated.

The ideas of European liberal and national revolutions of 1848 resonated strongly among Serbian youth, especially students, both in Serbia proper and in the Habsburg lands. One of the offshoots was literary romanticism of the 1850s and 1860s. This cultural-political movement was particularly passionate in reviving the Kosovo Myth, centered, in their understanding, on heroism and self-sacrifice for the nation. Student societies, clubs and associations idolized the Kosovo heroes and emulated the folk singer in the poetry they themselves wrote.[238]

In light of the current easy identifications of the Kosovo Myth with conservatism, Serbian chauvinism, and Orthodox clericalism it is important to situate this first outburst of Kosovo idolatry back into its cultural and political context. This reminds us of the broader spate of interpretational possibilities inherent in the Myth's contents. The radical Serbian youth were the children of their times: they were nationalist, but also democrats and modernists, as well as, in their own way, cosmopolitans. They maintained close contacts, both ideological and personal,

[237] As Skerlić writes, with a touch of sarcasm: "Folk poetry ... was, after all, the only thing the Serbian people could present to the world" (Skerlić 1925: 256).

[238] The Battle of Kosovo was the *Leit-motiv* of Serbian poetry of the 1860s, with literary magazines swarmed by poems entitled *Kosovo, At Kosovo, Oh Kosovo,* full of wailings such as "Kosovo – my bloody wound!", "Woe Kosovo!" etc. (Skerlić 1925: 155).

with democratic revolutionaries in other parts of Europe – Italy, France, and Hungary. They wanted their people to join the family of free European peoples, and the Kosovo legacy was seen not as an obstacle but a support on that road. Each free and sovereign people had to have something peculiar, something purely its own, and Kosovo was felt to be this Serbian specificity and Serbian gift to the colorfulness of the world – just the way Herder understood national cultures and their respectful coexistence.

Although the Kosovo symbolism was certainly most strongly bound with Serbian nationalism, this did not preclude pan-Slavic and proto-Yugoslav connections. Interestingly, pan-Slavism, the ideology of cultural and possibly political unity of all Slavic peoples, did not arrive in Serbia, as might be expected, from Russia but from the Slavic circles in Central and Western Europe (Skerlić 1925: 140).[239] While in contemporary Serbia attachment to Kosovo is automatically associated with attachment to Russia as Serbs' "older brother" and natural ally, in the period we are talking about this was not at all so straightforward. Playing the pan-Slavic card was rather connected with political cooperation with the Slavic peoples of the Habsburg Empire. Among the Southern Slavs, many young Croatian nationalists, wishing to see the liberation of their people from Austrian and Hungarian dominance, found the Kosovo legend to be speaking to them, too. For many of them, Kosovo could be read as a symbol of South Slavic ("Illyrian" as it was called), not just Serbian, national pride and promise of future liberation.[240]

Finally, Serbian nationalist youth was also liberal in questions of internal policy and for this reason was often in conflict with authoritarian Serbian governments. Contrary to the impression conveyed in many present-day accounts, it is not true that all Serbian elites – from princes and their ministers, to writers and poets, to Orthodox priests – maintained a single and unified front of expansionist Serbian nationalism, whose watchword was "Kosovo". In reality, nationalist authorities often harassed and imprisoned nationalist youthful activists who, along with "avenging Kosovo", asked for freedom of the press and constitutional checks on the power of the prince. In the mind of these young people, "external freedom" (national independence) did not make much sense if it was not coupled with "internal freedom" (democracy and rule of law).[241] Those who wrote most enthusiastic poems about the "bleeding sore" of Kosovo were also the ones who wrote the first liberal political programs, and suffered for that.

It is equally misleading to forget about the specific position and interests of the Serbian Orthodox Church as a social agent. Without any doubt, the Church was in this period very patriotic and very much politically involved. But this does not mean it did not have its own views of what Kosovo legacy was and how it should properly be used. For one, it did not readily assent to the thorough secularization and nationalization of the Myth. A good example is the history of *Vidovdan,* the name given in the folk poetry to the day of the Battle. Although this term is

[239] The most important figures are the Slovaks Ljudevit Štur and Jan Kolar, teachers at Austro-Hungarian colleges, as well as the famous Pole Adam Mickiewicz, whose course on Slavic folk traditions held at *Collège de France* in Paris the 1840s did much to popularize Serbian folk poetry in the West.

[240] Patriotic Croatian authors of today, anxious to expose the chauvinistic import of the Kosovo Myth, wisely omit such historical details as that students of the Zagreb Catholic seminary commemorated the Battle in 1840 (Skerlić 1925: 164); that in 1889 in Vienna celebrations of the 500th anniversary were jointly organized by Serb and Croat academic societies, and that the most famous Croatian actor of the day traveled to Belgrade to play Prince Lazar in the premiere of a play commissioned for the anniversary (Emmert 1990: 130, 208). The Croatian Romanticist painter Franjo Kikerez used to depict mythologized scenes from the history (or "history") of both peoples with the same enthusiasm: his 'Croatia' embodied as the tragic defender of Western Christendom against Islam (Žanić 1998) is equally pathetic as his "Maiden of Kosovo" (Popovich 1991).

[241] The formula was coined by Jevrem Grujić, member of the fervently nationalist Association of Serbian Youth and writer of the first liberal manifesto in Serbia, persecuted and imprisoned for his liberal beliefs.

nowadays virtually synonymous with "Kosovo", it was resisted by the Church for a quite long time. The term is the Serbianized form for "St.Vitus day", but refers basically to the secular commemoration of the Battle's anniversaries. As has been said, the Serbian Church dedicated June 15 (28)[242] to Amos and Lazar; Vitus is not a saint recognized by the Orthodox. For the more secularized nationalist audience, *Vidovdan* did not have much to do with St.Vitus either – it was just a welcome coincidence that June 15 was his day in the Catholic calendar[243]– but rather with celebrating the nation itself, through celebrating the Kosovo heroes. To make the celebration more solemn, they wanted Vidovdan to be the national *and* church holiday, but the Church refused to include it in its official calendar until as late as 1892. The Church also opposed the fervor with which young poets venerated and all but sacralized secular national figures such as Vuk Karadžić and Dositej Obradović. For the Church, this was blasphemy. When the young Romanticists openly identified the "Golgotha" of Kosovo with Jesus' Golgotha, this provoked severe criticism from the religious circles. In the bitter polemics taking place in the 1860s, Church writers expressed their abhorrence of what they saw was pervasive heathenism of folk poetry and the literature inspired by it (Skerlić 1925: 256).[244]

The 500th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo was the first to be commemorated in an independent ("resurrected") Serbian state, and provided the occasion for several important events. First, around this date the first professional historical studies of the Kosovo battle were made public, by the two founders of Serbian critical historiography, Ilarion Ruvarac and Ljubomir Kovačević. Ruvarac sifted what had been accepted as the historical record of the Battle of Kosovo and rejected most of it as product of poetic imagination or political fabrication; Kovačević demonstrated that Vuk Branković was not a traitor. Yet from our present-day viewpoint, what is equally if not more intriguing as their uncompromising critical and rationalist attitude is the fact that it stood side by side with their nationalism. Their motive in exposing myths *as* myths, which caused them much trouble amongst their myth-loving contemporaries, was in no way to spoil the collective image. Quite the opposite: they believed that by rectifying obvious untruths they were helping Serbian glory shine even brighter. Nowadays this ideological combination would look curious indeed.

An extremely important circumstance in the second half of 19th century was that the territory of real Kosovo was still in Ottoman hands. Thus in this period the appeals to the symbolic Kosovo as an abstract Trauma and spiritual pledge was easily, and deliberately, conflated with a simple call to arms, a battle cry to "avenge" and "liberate" Kosovo, and finally "settle the accounts" with the Turks. But just at this same time, and in Kosovo, Albanians were creating their own national movement.[245] Like never before, Serbian and Albanian collective aspirations began to diverge and conflict. It is from this period that the Albanian-Serbian rivalry over Kosovo dates. Open conflicts and mutual victimization of Serbs and Albanians began to feed back into the already existing traumatizing framework of the Serbian Kosovo narrative. Kosovo symbolism was significantly re-territorialized. And increasingly, the enemies to be

[242] The Serbian Church uses the Julian calendar which is 13 days apart from the Gregorian, so that anniversaries of the Battle are nowadays celebrated on June 28.

[243] Given the possibly significant role Dubrovnik played in molding and spreading the Kosovo Myth, it may also be relevant that St.Vitus is the city's patron saint. Popović however explains Vidovdan as a barely Christianized pagan holiday, based on the cult of Vid, the ancient Slavic god of light (1998: 71-87).

[244] It is helpful to remember such details today, when the Serbian Church seems to be, to say the least, much more tolerant to sacralization of the nation.

[245] For Albanian political development in this period see Vickers 1998, Malcolm 1998; a Serbian view is presented in Bogdanović 2006.

fought "in the manner of Lazar and Miloš" were identified as Albanians rather than Turks. Yet the use of Kosovo as a political slogan was not uniform: the state, by definition, had to be much more cautious and take into account foreign policy and other concerns that the cultural elites could afford to ignore.[246]

So Kosovo symbolism served somewhat different purposes for different actors: the government sought to turn a standardized, regularized version of the tradition into the institutionalized founding myth of the nation-state and dynastic rule; the cultural elites often used Kosovo to confront the government and attack its policies as inappropriate, both in internal and international arenas; moreover, within the elites themselves, the first criticisms arose of what was perceived as political abuse and unhealthy exaggeration of the Kosovo myth;[247] and finally, the Church, by defending the more traditional receptions of Kosovo, tried to reassert its position in the rapidly changing environment.

Thus while the first stage leading up to the late 18th century provided elements of the myth, this second stage rounded it off, completed its construction as a cultural structure: the narrative was there, the main characters were presented in relief, and the presumed centrality of the Myth for Serbs as a nation was slowly being impressed, through the educational system, upon everybody. This is what the 19th century bequeathed to the forthcoming generations. But what it also bequeathed was Kosovo's fundamental ambiguity: what was its "true" message; what was the proper way of preserving it; what should Serbs do about the trauma inflicted in 1389 – is there, in fact, any trauma at all? The 19th century was the first time when different social actors, pursuing various and often conflicting goals, reached for Kosovo as an inspiration, a call to arms, a spiritual reminder, an emotional bond with their fellows, or a scourge to chastise them. This multi-dimensionality and pragmatic versatility of Kosovo would remain its basic, though largely unacknowledged feature.

3. An "integralist" Kosovo: the interwar period

Real Kosovo was finally liberated - or occupied, depending on the perspective one takes - in the Balkan wars of 1912-13. After World War I, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (from 1929 Kingdom of Yugoslavia) was created, bringing together the formerly independent states of Serbia and Montenegro and territories previously held by Austria-Hungary (Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Herzegovina). The country was ruled by the Serbian dynasty Karadjordjević. King Aleksandar "the Unifier" felt it necessary to develop an ideological underpinning to his rule over the newly united South Slavs. He launched the ambitious cultural-policy project of "integral Yugoslavism", based on the idea that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are one and a single people, divided in three "tribes". He took over from the former Serbian state the Kosovo legend in the function of founding myth but sought to "Yugoslavize" it. Thus the Kosovo theme figured prominently in many of the manifestation of this political-cultural outlook, which was officially dominant in the 1920s and much of the 1930s, and was often forcefully imposed along with other King's policies (in 1929 the regime turned into a dictatorship). Upon Aleksandar's assassination

[246] The 500th anniversary celebrations, for instance, were carefully planned so as not to offend the Turks and spoil the relatively good diplomatic relations with the Ottoman state.

[247] The prominent playwright Jovan Sterija Popović, at first an ardent Kosovo promoter himself, in later years became disappointed by political instrumentalizations of the Myth and, in the foreword to his bitterly satirical play *The Patriots* (1848), warned Serbs that they would not make progress until they learned how to acknowledge their failings, not just their virtues (quoted in Antonijević 2007a: 89).

in 1934, he was likened to Prince Lazar, for sacrificing himself to the unity of Yugoslavs (Emmert 1990: 138).

Probably the most interesting form in which Kosovo served the ideology of dynastic Yugoslavism was through the then fashionable disciplines of ethnopsychology and national characterology. The importance of Kosovo for the "national soul" had already been stressed by the geographer Jovan Cvijić. In his typology of Serbian characters, Cvijić described as clearly superior the so-called Dinaric Highlander, whose warrior and state-building capacities he praised. The Highlander's soul is centered on the memory of Kosovo and upholding of the Kosovo covenant.[248] While for Cvijić Kosovo concerned Serbs alone, in the works of a major exponent of the integral Yugoslavism, Vladimir Dvorniković, it became Yugoslav. An ethnic Croat, Dvorniković deeply believed in the idea of the fundamental unity of South Slavs. For him, folk epics, especially the central Kosovo Cycle, is the true expression of the "people's psyche", the essence of the Yugoslav soul. In these poems, we hear "the voice of a people which *is becoming a nation* and which feels its state-building and Christian-cultural mission in the Balkans" (Dvorniković 1939: 537). "Our epics" is "ethically higher" than that of other peoples since it represents a stance of "struggle, resistance and ultimate sacrifice". Our people has a "powerful historical organ" and is endowed with "collective popular mnesis which hardly has an analog in any other European people" (ibid.). The exaggeration and collective conceit are remarkable indeed.

Yugoslavism found expression in the visual arts as well. The best known Croatian and Yugoslav sculptor, and for a time the dynasty's favorite artist, Ivan Meštrović, sought to embody the Kosovo Myth in marble and granite, so that its important messages, as he understood them, might permanently foster the unity of South Slavs. Meštrović produced the design for a spectacular memorial to be erected at Kosovo Field. The project was never realized however, only reliefs representing individual characters (Popovich 1991: 252).

I certainly do not wish to claim that, in the interwar period, Kosovo suddenly stopped being Serbian and became a common heritage binding the South Slavs. After all, that King Aleksandar's projects were not very successful was more than convincingly demonstrated first by his assassination by Croatian nationalists, and then in 1941 when, attacked by the Axis Powers, Yugoslavia fell apart in less than a week. But even if one concedes that it was all just plain Serbian dominance cloaked in a false Yugoslavism, it does make a difference whether the framing was more exclusive or more inclusive. It is culturally significant that an attempt was made in this direction, and that for at least some non-Serbs it made sense to see Kosovo as part of their own legacy and inspiration.[249]

4. The communist twist: after 1945

[248] "The Dinaric man burns from a desire to avenge Kosovo... where he lost his independence... From there stems the almost unlimited spirit of sacrifice... for social and national ideal" (Cvijić 1992: 34). [Every Highlander peasant] "considers the national heroes as his own ancestors: with profound national and human sensibility he participates in his thoughts in their great deeds. ... There are even regions in which the people feel the wounds of the Kosovo heroes" (p. 39-40).

[249] The non-Serb Yugoslav peoples could do more with Kosovo than accept, or reject, wholesale its dynastic version. In an article with the telling title "In defense of the real Vidovdan", the newspaper of a Croatian political party comments on the occasion of the 550 anniversary in 1939, that to conceal Serbian hegemonic policies behind the ideology of Kosovo is to betray its very ideals, which consist of "ethics and love of justice", and only when they start treating Croats in a fair and just way will Serbs become worthy of Vidovdan (quoted in Emmert 1990: 208).

It is often argued today that in communist times, between 1945 and the late 1980s, the Kosovo legacy was suppressed and forcefully forgotten. But this is not quite true: though public celebrations of Vidovdan were banned, the communists knew how to incorporate Kosovo into their ideology and make good use of it. But before they came to power, the turbulent years of World War II intervened, extremely interesting for our topic. On March 27, 1941, the government which two days before had signed the Tripartite Pact with Nazi Germany was toppled in a coup backed, to put it mildly, by the British secret service. The putschists, the public figures[250] and the public opinion in favor of the coup all explicitly referred to the Kosovo covenant as their guide, and interpreted the rejection of the agreement with the vastly more powerful Germany as a reenactment of Lazar's choice of the heavenly kingdom. Street protesters carried placards with slogans "Better war than the Pact" and "Better grave than slave". The graves were not long in waiting, as Belgrade was bombed on April 6.

During the war, the Kosovo theme became one of the stakes in the intra-Serb strife between the communist-led Partisans, the forces loyal to the King and government in exile (the Chetniks), and the quisling government installed by the Germans. All sides used Kosovo as symbolic capital in fighting cultural battles that accompanied armed ones; all of them claimed monopoly over the message and values of Kosovo and strove to sully the opponents by identifying them with the treacherous Vuk Branković. The collaborationist government used Kosovo rhetoric to denigrate the Partisans, throwing Lazar's curse against them (see e.g. Emmert 1990: 140). On the other hand, the Communist Party also liberally exploited Kosovo symbolism. In the flyer they distributed in July 1941, calling Serbs to join the resistance they were leading, the communists also used Lazar's curse (Ćosić 2004: 157). In mobilizing people in villages they often employed folk rhetoric and lines from the epic poems. They sought to establish a direct link between the Kosovo heroes and themselves, as the new resisters to foreign occupation. But the Chetniks used the same language and imagery, and which side would win a village over often did not depend on whose speaker was more convincing (Žanić 1998: 63).[251]

After the establishment of the communist regime, the Kosovo legacy was not wiped out. In a somewhat modified form, it remained an obligatory part of the school curricula. It was purged as much as possible of its religious content, and its Serbian character was played down. In spite of the profound hate of the communists for the Karadjordjević dynasty and all it stood for, their treatment of Kosovo was not totally dissimilar, at least in the intention to defuse its Serbianness and stress the (potential) Yugoslav commonality. Communists presented the Kosovo legend as part of the tradition of "our peoples", which they took as the basis of their cultural legitimacy.[252] Their cultural policy was basically populist: while officially claiming to have

[250] Speaking on the Belgrade radio, the Patriarch of the Serbian Church said that the pact was a betrayal of the Kosovo ethic, reminded Serbs that Lazar had accepted his fate for the sake of Serbia, and that the current situation demanded the same sacrifice. "This morning at dawn the question [of the nation's fate] received its answer. We chose the heavenly kingdom – the kingdom of truth, justice, national strength, and freedom" (quoted in Emmert 1990: 140).

[251] It is worth noting here how selective the "denouncing" and "celebratory" discourses are in citing historical instances when Kosovo was invoked for political purposes. Both are glad to mention Gavrilo Princip's assassination of the Habsburg heir to the throne Franz Ferdinand in 1914, since this may be seen as either terrorism or freedom fighting. But the denouncers never mention the 1941coup or the Partisans, because this was antifascist struggle and hence does not fit in the portrayal of the Myth as conducive to Serbs' *fascist* behavior; Yugoslavia's 1948 split with the Soviet Union is similarly unsuitable. Celebrators, on the other hand, tend to forget the Kosovo rhetoric of the quisling government.

[252] Being myself a pupil in Serbian schools in Titoist times, I remember we spent many hours studying the Kosovo poems and duly learned by heart large chunks of them. (*That* is how - by having learned the poems for homework -

broken with all things past, they actually retained many features of the traditional folk ethos. Within this ethos they foregrounded its agonistic strand, pitting "us" (any of the Yugoslav peoples, or all of them together) against "them" (various foreign invaders, actual or possible). Analyses of textbooks from former Yugoslavia (e.g. Rosandić and Pešić eds. 1994; Žanić 1998: 308-311) invariably point out that priority was granted to militaristic values, at the expense of the more peacetime, "soft" values of creativity, diligence, tolerance or intimacy.

5. Milošević's 'Back to the future'

The decade of the 1980s was decisive for Kosovo both as a real place and as a symbol. The ethnic Albanian majority in the province increasingly demanded more autonomy, i.e. the status of a full-fledged republic within the Yugoslav federation.[253] Political unrest was suppressed by force and no dialogue was opened. On the other hand, in this same period Kosovo Serbs began to complain they were being harassed by the Albanians and forced to move out. Hostility between the two peoples was growing rapidly and their political projects were becoming totally incompatible. The Serbian republic authorities however were not particularly receptive to Kosovo Serbs' grievances, so these were taken up first by the Church[254] and then by such institutions as the Association of Writers and the Academy of Sciences.[255] This "unofficial nationalism", increasingly at odds with the official line, made ample use of the discourse of trauma in depicting Serbian distant and recent history. It established a continuity of Serb suffering since 1389. It used the elements of the existing Kosovo legacy, in its most traumatic version possible, to make sense of contemporary developments; and vice versa, a traumatic interpretation of present-day events was used to reinforce a traumatic reading of the traditional Myth. It is in this atmosphere, and thanks to it, that Slobodan Milošević took power in 1987.[256] He aligned himself with the unofficial nationalism, but always retaining some rhetorical distance from it, as will be seen.

Milošević was lucky enough to have the opportunity to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo just at the moment he was at the height of his charisma. In his memorable speech delivered at the huge rally held at Gazimestan, the site of the Battle, on June 28, 1989 he was seemingly referring back to tradition, but in fact what he was saying was all about the plans he had for the future. He referred to the heroes of 1389 and their virtues, drawing direct parallels with the present. Earlier that year, Milošević had curtailed the autonomy of the Province of Kosovo by constitutional redesign, provoking Albanian protests whose violent suppression resulted in dozens of casualties. In the Gazimestan speech he presented this as a fulfillment of the Kosovo Covenant – not of course by explicitly boasting the dead the policy had produced, but by arguing that Serbia had reclaimed its dignity.

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most Serbs become familiar with the characteristic topoi of the Kosovo legend, and not because they "have it in their blood".) The Serbian character of the story and its heroes was made evident, but was not insisted upon. With the advent of Milošević, the substance of teaching Kosovo remained the same, but it was thoroughly Serbianized.

[253] After 1945, Kosovo was established as an autonomous province within the republic of Serbia.

[254] An "Appeal for the protection of Serb inhabitants and their holy places in Kosovo" signed by twenty one priests was issued in 1982.

[255] The actions of these three institutions during the 1980s and their political effects are analyzed in the appropriate chapters in Popov (ed.) 2000. For a more general overview of the Serbian intellectual opposition and its "nationalization" in the 1980s see Dragović-Soso 2002.

[256] A weird example of explicit traumatization for political purposes took place in 1988, when the remains of Prince Lazar were taken on a long journey through Serbian lands, being displayed, hailed and mourned in many towns and villages before arriving at the Gračanica monastery in Kosovo on the eve of the Battle's 600th anniversary. The organizer was the Church, while the Milošević authorities benevolently condoned.

Interestingly, Milošević's recasting of the Kosovo narrative was much less traumatic than that of the cultural, unofficial nationalists. Actually, his 1989 speech comes closest we get to a "progressive narrative" of the Kosovo Trauma. It is full of optimism, problems solved, difficulties left behind, and new challenges bravely taken. But the irony is, while Milošević's version of Kosovo Trauma was progressive on the surface, in reality it led to new traumas. His limitless arrogance, taken over and amplified by his followers, definitively antagonized Albanians and destroyed the last chances for a peaceful settlement. In the following years, the same happened with Serbs' relations with other Yugoslav peoples. We may only speculate today, is it possible that Milošević really believed he had "resolved" the Kosovo problem and laid grounds for a Bright Future of Serbia "and all its citizens", as he was fond of saying?

But what was really Milošević's central concern in this speech was to threaten the political opponents by invoking the treason of Vuk Branković and the "disunity" among Serbs as the "evil fate throughout their history".[257] Those who disagreed with his policies were identified with the legendary traitor. In this way the old epic tradition was used to legitimate the wholly communist practice of "differentiation", i.e. purge of dissenters, and to underwrite a forced unity of mind and action.

The political impact of the Kosovo Myth as used by Milošević in the late 1980s is usually judged simply as aggressive chauvinist mobilization. While of course this is basically correct, it is also important to remember that in that early period Milošević deliberately and skillfully mixed nationalism with socialism, or at least some kind of "welfare" rhetoric.[258] And more generally, Milošević's nationalism always came out packaged in somewhat civic and internationalist language. He never addressed his audiences as "Serbs" but always "citizens"; he never openly called for persecuting, let alone killing people of other nations; he was fond of praising "multiethnic coexistence" in Serbia. Although these rhetorical devices could be exposed as mere shams when compared to reality, they were not used in vain. Such ambiguities clearly enabled Milošević to enlist the support of many more and more diverse people than would otherwise be possible, because different constituencies could "read" differently his person, his political position, and his moves. And the masses gathering to hear Milošević at the staged-"spontaneous" public rallies that marked the period were not just Serbs inebriated with nationalist frenzy and hate: they were also people deeply disappointed with the imploding real-socialist system, desperately wishing for a change, and enjoying the feeling of new openings that Milošević had managed to create, deceptively but effectively, in the early years of his rule. He did not promise his followers the opportunity to slaughter Albanians, or anybody else – the aggression was unmistakably there, but usually implicit, and had to be read off from clues. What was promised explicitly was national rebirth, dignity, peace and prosperity. True, Milošević also promised to reclaim "our" Kosovo, but who exactly "we" were was not fully specified, nor were

[257] Naumović (2008: 70-2, 173-4, 219-227) offers an excellent analysis. Antonijević (2007b: 127-8) shows the same ploy operating in other political speeches of the period.

[258] The editorial published on the very June 28, 1989 in the leading Belgrade daily *Politika,* Milošević's chief media outlet, is revealing: "It is in Kosovo and around Kosovo that the destiny of Yugoslavia and the destiny of *socialism* are being determined. *They* want to take away from us the *Serbian* and the *Yugoslav* Kosovo, yes, they want to, but they will not be allowed to" (quoted in Zirojević 2000: 207, emphasis added). Mention of *socialism* in the same breath with Kosovo, and Yugoslavia with Serbia, is of course not accidental; nor is the strategic vagueness of "they", which may be filled with many different names, as need dictates.

the means to achieve it. When mentioning "battles" in his 1989 speech, he did so in such a way that an ordinary listener could easily choose to ignore the violent undertone.[259]

The welcome ambiguities

The foregoing has hopefully demonstrated how a continuous exchange between a cultural structure and the varying contexts in which it is enacted has produced changing but not unboundedly diverse performative effects. Contexts are analytically indispensable for two reasons. One is the necessity for actual agents to enliven the cultural structures through their practices, which is not to claim it is their instrumental action that determines the character of cultural products, or that cultural elements can be taken out of their *Gestalts.* The second reason is that cultural structures themselves have a history, which places one atop another the many layers of meaning inherited from the past usages. In every time- and space-located context this sedimented past is slightly different and therefore "the meaning" of the structure at hand cannot be known in the abstract. The Kosovo Myth was too often ascribed such a timeless, transparent and unequivocal meaning.[260]

The contextual variations however profoundly depend on the multivocality inherent in the cultural structures themselves. Several such points of tension within the Kosovo Myth can now be made explicit. As Billig has long argued, ideologies, including nationalism, become powerful precisely thanks to their contradictory and dilemmatic character (1995: 87). The tensions within the Kosovo tradition may be seen as variations on the one basic theme of universalism and particularism, as sliding back and forth between the more narrow and constricted, and the more expansive and inclusive; a dialectic between the own and the shared. As became clear, the Myth could not have emerged at all without the sustained cultural exchange between Serbs and their environment.

Some more specific ambivalences now. Take first the figure of Prince Lazar and his sacrifice. His identification with Christ makes it possible for believers to concentrate on this aspect and give the narrative a strongly religious and Christian bent (offering oneself in sacrifice in order to realize God's design and His power on earth). The more atheistically minded, at the same time, may take Lazar as an able secular leader and commander. The sacrifice of Lazar and his army can and has often been, at least since 19th century, interpreted as aimed at the future salvation of the Serbian nation and state; but a more religious interpretation is also possible and not uncommon, where the subject of redemption is a broader category - of Christians, or even the whole of humanity. Although in recent times, the message of Kosovo has often been taken to be primarily one of establishing absolute, blood-drawn boundaries between "us" and "them", this is not necessary. Lazar's sacrifice can be taken as fighting a generalized evil, or even evil within.

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[259] Though the word for "battle" Milošević used, *bitka*, is primarily related to war, it may – like its English equivalent – also denote something neutral, a struggle, an effort to achieve something. How Milošević exploits the double meaning is notable, in what is probably the most often quoted passage from this speech: "Nowadays, six centuries later, we are again in battles and facing battles. They are not armed ones, although such cannot be ruled out either. But whatever they are, battles cannot be won without resolve, courage and sacrifice, the virtues that were present at the Kosovo Field on that long-past day." This is the militaristic side, but the very next sentence reads: "Our main battle today refers to the achievement of economic, political, cultural and generally social prosperity. For approaching more rapidly and successfully the civilization humans will live in in 21st century." Quoted from: www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ilos/BKS4110/Eksamensoppgaver/BKS4110%20V07.doc

[260] Works which acknowledge the changing meanings of the Myth but without dismissing its relevance are the least frequent. Good examples are the brief analyses by Bieber (2002) focusing on the political aspects, and Bakić-Hayden (2004) with a more cultural-hermeneutical approach. Zirojević (2000) provides a condensed account of the historical background.

Further, Lazar's and Miloš's sacrifice can be understood as purely collectivist, patriarchal and pre-modern message, as the imperative for individuals to give up all that is theirs, including their bare lives, for the benefit of the collective. Yet it can also be interpreted in a much more universal manner, as an instance of a very basic ethical principle of overcoming selfishness and egoism for a noble goal. Similarly, by their self-chosen personal sacrifice both Lazar and Miloš stand out powerfully as figures, so that they can be seen as strong individual personalities who have the courage to make difficult decisions and take all the consequences – and not just as slaves to a rigidly collectivist ethos.

Against the background of ex-Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, much has been made of the presumed psychological displacement by Serbs from the original "Turks" of the epic poetry onto today's Bosnian Muslims or Kosovo Albanians. But to the extent that the Kosovo Myth teaches a lesson in unconditional resistance to the enemy Other, the enemy does not have to be Muslim at all but can be anyone perceived as stronger and unjustly oppressing. The agonistic ethos of Kosovo may be mapped onto many different situations; it is not so much the clash between "us" and specific "them" as the courage of absolute withstanding against the powerful, the heroism of fighting against all odds, for honor and justice.[261] The more unequal the battle, the greater the imperative to act this way, and the more "Kosovo-like" it becomes. So the "Turks" of today may well be Western nations and politicians, and particularly the US, because they are the most powerful and at the same time are perceived to be imposing things on Serbs.[262] We may go back to the two opposed discourses and better understand how they reinforce each other through confrontation, at least from the Serbian side: the logic is "the more the powerful Other defames us, the more we shall embrace precisely what they defame, *so as to show* how proud, courageous, impossible to buy, Lazar- and Miloš-like we are, still".

While discourses using Kosovo are almost always performative rather than descriptive, what exactly their action-implications – their illocutionary and perlocutionary effects – will be is not foreclosed. Kosovo has often been used to prompt people to go to war, but it can also inspire other kinds of action. One can plausibly fight one's own "Kosovo" in many realms of life, and without any blood spilled. As was said before, the wide diversity of historical moments and political causes in which the Kosovo covenant was invoked testify to its flexibility. A remarkable recent instance happened in 2001, when on June 28 the Serbian government, headed by the super-modernist and pragmatic Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić, extradited Slobodan Milošević to the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague. Djindjić apparently took no notice of the date but advised that it was Vidovdan and that many people would take that to heart, he felt compelled to address the public. In his speech broadcast that evening, Djindjić attempted to turn the whole Kosovo symbolism upside down: for the sake of our own and our children's future, he said, we must give up the commitment to the "heavenly kingdom" and finally opt for the "earthly" one: for life, prosperity and happiness. His attempt seems to have failed. He did not win over any of his opponents, and even some of his supporters might have been made a bit uneasy by this radical recoding of the axial Serbian story. Appeals to the "earthly kingdom" did not become any more frequent in the public sphere in the following years – on the contrary. But the irony is, it would be quite imaginable to construct a Kosovo-based argument *in favor* of Milošević's extradition: a state handing voluntarily a former president over to an international

[261] But Emmert (1990: 142) obviously overstates the matter when he claims that the Kosovo ethic is "democratic, anti-feudal, with a love for justice and social equality".

[262] Kosovo covenant was also evoked on the occasion of Yugoslavia's break with Stalin in 1948. A completely different context, enemy, even the "we": but a similar cultural-psychological logic.

court could, for example, be construed as an expression of Serbs' unconditional belief in the ideal of justice and therefore readiness to sacrifice their more immediate interests to upholding higher values. We cannot know if this alternative rendition of the argument would have been more successful, and even less if it would have helped Djindjić avoid the assassination two years later. [263]

Trauma as a speech act

Rather than attempting to give a clear-cut answer to whether Kosovo *is* or *is not* Serbian Trauma, we are now in a position to approach the question in a more fruitful way. In the language pragmatic perspective, both can be true at the same time. Trauma may be seen as a speech act, a continually discursively produced condition which stands in mutually constitutive relations with the contextual circumstances. In this sense, it is "there" as a cultural meaning-structure, Eyerman's "referent", or Živković's "entrenched story". But this does not imply that Trauma is actively *felt* by people, that it is located somehow within them, that it affects them uniformly and unavoidably, or that there is some mysterious connection between being Serbian and the Trauma.

Over the centuries, the thematic cluster of Kosovo has become a traumatizing, or at least potentially so, interpretive framework readily available to Serbs for making sense of their collective experiences. Though to call it a "master narrative" would be stretching it too far, the Kosovo legend has certainly been the most widespread, familiar, habitual and easily usable story Serbs have had to explain things to themselves. This framework, although not absolutely conditioning, still did facilitate or funnel a traumatic rendering of a series of collective events, especially during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and then again in the last three decades, that is, whenever Albanian-Serbian rivalry over real-life Kosovo re-territorialized the Myth. These events in turn provided empirical fodder which reinforced the traumatic strand in the Myth. And in periods when the traumatic interpretations were especially powerful, they would spill out into ways of narrating the situations quite unrelated to (real or symbolic) Kosovo. At such moments, the Kosovo Trauma would become metaphoric shorthand for timeless and metaphysical "Serbian suffering".

The bards of Trauma

In her interesting typology of nationalisms, Ramet (1995) uses Serbs as the example of "traumatic" nationalism, one that draws its energy "from a reinterpretation of Serbia's history in terms of suffering, exploitation, pain, and injustice" (1995: 103) and laments that "Serbia is the wronged party, the universal victim, the martyr, the Jew, the new Job" (1995: 119). Yet Ramet's claim that this dates back only to the late 1980s is unacceptable. The Trauma was not, and could not have been, invented from scratch. At that moment it already had a lengthy history.[264] Those youngsters of the 1860s did not wail for nothing.

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[263] The nationalists would never forgive Djindjić for extraditing Milošević, and in particular for doing that on Vidovdan. Djindjić's assassins, an organized crime group, said they had killed him because he was a "traitor". But criminals can hardly be expected to speak the truth, so the importance of Djindjić's radically anti-mythical attitude in all this should not be overestimated.

[264] Ramet's argument is in fact quite contradictory. She relies heavily on psychoanalysis and the concepts such as repression, projection and compulsive repetition, while at the same time arguing that Serbian traumatic nationalism arose only in 1986, as a "new phenomenon" manufactured by "elite manipulation" (1995: 103, 105). One is tempted to say that Ramet's essay is an illustration of how much one loses by not employing the theory of cultural trauma, with its injunction to clearly identify the elements of the trauma process.

But in one thing Ramet is right, and that is the major role of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and other agents of unofficial, cultural nationalism in the 1980s, in constructing an especially insistent, and occasionally quite morbid, traumatic version of Kosovo symbolism. It has already been mentioned that in that crucial period the cultural nationalists and Milošević in power had many things in common, but the division of labor was retained: Trauma for the priests and the writers, and victories and Bright Future for the government.

In those years Trauma was being produced at a rather feverish pace. It was then that some of the major publications in this regard appeared. These are worth examining in some detail. Their authors were "cultural", seemingly non-political actors – priests, theologians, poets. All of them were immediately recognized as the main exponents of the contemporary, traumatic Serbian nationalism by both their adherents and their critics. But what is more interesting is to what extent they, too made use of the ambiguous doubletalk we already encountered in various other performances, like in Milošević's Gazimestan speech.

Let us begin with the simplest, because most overt, case of Matija Bećković, the foremost poetic bard of the new nationalism. His collection of poetic essays entitled *The Service* (1990) is a veritable compendium of traumatic themes.

Here is what he says: "Kosovo is the most expensive [or: most precious, dearest] Serbian word. It was paid for by the blood of the whole people. With that price in blood it became enthroned on the throne of the Serbian language. ... As times goes by, it is more and more uncertain whether the Kosovo wound will make us heavenly or swallow us" (Bećković 1990: 47).[265] For Bećković, the Battle of Kosovo mythically and mystically instituted Serbs as a collectivity, and once this happened, nothing can ever change: "Folk poetry proves [!] that the fate of the Serbian people was resolved by just one word: *the prince preferred the heavenly kingdom.* The word was given once and for all and it can not ever be recalled" (p. 49). Furthermore, Serbs are and have nothing but the legacy of Kosovo: "Kosovo is the equator of the Serbian planet. The roof of its upper world and the foundation of the lower one. ... Kosovo is the most important thought, the greatest project of the Serbian culture" (p.49). In vain would one look for any other substance of Serbhood: "We have no firmer footing, nor more powerful spiritual focus. Kosovo is the fireplace around which the Serbian people is gathered, the mainstay around which it is weaved together, the cradle in which it was raised" (p. 68). At the same time, Kosovo is Serbs' contribution to the world – the only one, it seems, and their sole accomplishment: "[It is] the name for what is the most precious that we have given to the Christian civilization. ... Heritage and bequest of Serbian art and spirit to the humankind" (p. 49). And back to the Trauma: "Kosovo is the deepest sore, the longest memory, the most vivid recollection, the most beloved ashes of the Serbian people" (p. 68).

It could be objected that, this being poetic discourse, exaggeration and other genre-specific figures may be excused. But the problem is that this book, like others by Bećković, regularly sold in thousands of copies, is taken as a political statement. It is not meant as just an expression of the freely creative impulse of an individual, but both its writing and its reading are located deliberately within the grey zone between poetic license and political responsibility.

The next major Trauma-producing publication from the 1980s, although written decades before, belongs to the contemporary landscape since it was only with its modern edition that it became known to the general public. Its author was Nikolaj Velimirović, an anti-communist bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church active before WWII who died in emigration. Velimirović is a controversial figure in Serbia – much revered in the Church for his theological writings and

[265] Živković (2001b) offers a detailed analysis of Bećković's sinister metaphors.

for his presumed suffering in the hands of the Nazi and the communists, and at the same time heavily criticized by the liberals for his anti-Semitism and antidemocratic conservatism (Byford 2008).

In Velimirović we see much more clearly than in Bećković the operation of the universalism/particularism dialectic. The first thing to be noted about Velimirović's essays on Kosovo, entitled by the editors *Kosovo and Vidovdan* (Velimirović 1988), is how much Christian humbleness and martyrdom, and how little overt aggressiveness, one finds there. A theological-philosophical novella presents a conversation between the dying Prince Lazar, anguished by the dilemma whether his choice was right, and an angel reassuring him that the choice was not of death but of life and ultimate salvation. The martyrdom at Kosovo was necessary, because self-deserved by Serbs' alienation from God. This-worldly, bodily and material death and forthcoming suffering under the Turks is a necessary price to pay for spiritual redemption and thus the only true survival and advancement in the future. In another essay, Kosovo is again described not as a defeat but a victory: "Wrong are those who argue that Kosovo stopped the wheel of our history... On the contrary, it was Kosovo that made us a great people. It is our people's Golgotha, but at the same time our people's resurrection" (p.69). Serbs are here presented in the universalistic Christian key of redemption through suffering.

The more exclusivistic effects are accomplished by a detour: suffering "earns" a sort of moral absolution in advance: "From now on", says the angel to Prince Lazar, "*whatever happens* with your people will pull it away from the deceitful, fleeting and vacuous love of this world and elevate it increasingly towards the eternal heavenly love" (p. 34, emphasis added). Then, real life politics is reintroduced, but also by detour: "When our entire social and stately, cultural and political life is penetrated by the idea of the superiority of the heavenly over the earthly, we will have fulfilled the Prince's bequest" (p. 103). Yet – how shall we know this "penetration" is complete, how do we measure it? Further on: "Vidovdan demands purification from hate, selfishness and vanity. Vidovdan commands reconciliation with God and with the brothers." (And they are who exactly?) "Vidovdan thunders with damnation against the traitors of the people's faith and people's mission." (How do we recognize them?) Yet, it should not be overlooked that in the entire book there is hardly an objectionable line - no battle cries, no calls to spilling blood, no explicit hate or contempt of others. And this surface feature makes its messages – however they are decoded – more acceptable.

Velimirović's texts are an early example of a discursive move that would become common from the 1980s on: a rhetorical depoliticization of Kosovo, in order to wage quite political battles by ostensibly metaphysical means. In the preceding phrases we see how a rhetorical sacralization of politics opens up a dangerous space of arbitrariness. The precise content of the "Kosovo covenant", and therefore of its possible political operationalizations, are kept utterly vague. Elimination of shared and testable criteria of political performance invites the intrusion of self-appointed interpreters of what actually is the fulfillment of the Covenant. This is what prompted the ethnologist Ivan Čolović to coin his superb formula of Kosovo as "the golden bough of Serbian politics".[266]

[266] "Who manages to seize it, even if in words alone, who becomes the priest in the temple of sacred Kosovo, his is the power, too". Kosovo is the "sacred name of power", the word the authorities use to appoint and legitimate themselves, as wielding a "privilege and duty of the guardians of the national sanctity". Since power is understood as not a political institution but a "mystical union", no one really wants to inquire into the origins, history and meaning "sacred Kosovo" (Čolović 2001: 195-197).

But the arguably most powerful Trauma-engendering product of this period was the book *From Kosovo to Jadovno* by an active Orthodox bishop, Atanasije Jevtić (2007 [1987]). The book, in addition to a couple of author's essays on Kosovo themes, consists basically of documenting instances of victimization of Serbs at the hands of others, the first part being devoted to (real) Kosovo in the 1980s, and the second to the Croatian quisling state during WWII.[267] The vacillation between the universalizing (Orthodox, Christian, human) thrust and the particularization of Serbs as a special people provides the basic dynamic of the text, and is propelled by sustained doubletalk taking place between the textual surface and the implied, half-buried messages. Thus the programmatic text "The Kosovo Covenant" opens with the universalistic assertion that "all" writers on Kosovo agree that "the whole topic of Kosovo, particularly its rendition in folk poetry, is in fact a distinctly Serbian experience of Christianity" (p.375). The vacillation is sometimes felt in one and the same sentence: "This speaks to us about Lazar's, and all our people's, commitment to the Heavenly Kingdom as the enduring and imperishable, eternally meaningful substance of human life and history" (p. 389). Like in Velimirović, political implications are treated with strategic open-endedness: "We Orthodox Serbs... are fighting simultaneously for the earthly and the heavenly kingdom and in both cases it is one and the same spiritual battle that we are waging" (p.387) Or: "The liturgical moment of victoriousness, this supra-temporal time of the Heavenly Kingdom, made its appearance in our history as spiritual victory whenever Serbs manifested their Kosovo covenant and commitment, whenever they sought primarily the Kingdom of God and Eternal Justice" (p. 394). (How do we know it happened?)

At the explicit level, aggression as a response to victimization is rejected.[268] But it is at least potentially present, in the relentless production of Trauma by the sheer quantity of gory detail, by insistence on crimes against Serbs (without ever remotely mentioning crimes committed by them), and by the simple placing side by side the accounts of two very different settings, as if they were intimately connected by the metaphysical logic of Serbian suffering.[269]

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Serbhood as victimhood

Although multivocal, the Kosovo tradition does tend to funnel Serbian collective self-construction along certain paths. Kosovo does not produce them by itself, since other factors also contribute, but it does a lot to sustain them. Two of such paths are especially prominent. One, which has an elective affinity with the traumatic weave in the Kosovo Myth especially in the versions reviewed above, is self-identification as victims, and the other is verbal grandiosity.

That "we" have always been victims of evil others is, of course, not an exclusively Serbian idea. But Serbs seemed to have developed it rather elaborately and to stick to it with much enthusiasm (Jansen 2000). The most troubling consequence is the tendency to think of

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[267] Jadovno, the name of a pit where the Ustasha were throwing bodies of slain Serbs, is meant as the metonymical designation for all Ustasha crimes against Serbs.

[268] "God is our witness that we do not wish any evil to the Albanians" (p.120). In the Preface, another publicly visible nationalist bishop, Amfilohije Radović, writes that testimonies presented in the book are not meant as an appeal to revenge and hate, but as a "sound of alarm to come back to ourselves and our historical self-awareness, and an evangelical appeal to repentance and sober rationality".

[269] The three bards were of course not the only producers of Trauma in the late 1980s: "The Kosovo wounds were carried and are still carried today as their own by each and every Serb. They are incurable" (Tasić and Djuretić eds. 1991: 117). "Serbs pledged themselves to the holiness of Kosovo and they have been making it sacrifices in blood for six centuries already. They do not know why they are doing it, but they have to" (the poet Gojko Djogoin 1990, quoted in Čolović 2001: 196)

"us" in morally righteous terms, to routinely assume own moral superiority presumably wrought by suffering.[270] A corollary is a difficulty to engage in collective soul-searching, self-criticism and self-censure.[271]

The basic ambiguity of the Kosovo story, deriving from the reversal of defeat into victory effected very early on in the religious writings, has made it possible to use it for "having it both ways", as it were: to be at once a *victim* and a *winner,* and to claim moral capital on both counts – by virtue of suffering, and by virtue of coming out on top. The ruse is that, as Milosevich (2000: 74) puts it, "the martyr always triumphs". Or, in Giesen's (2004) terms, Kosovo seems to be available as *both* "triumph" and "trauma", even though Giesen presents the two as mutually exclusive.[272]

Furthermore, claim on victimhood often turns into a monopolization of it. Especially in strained, Trauma-favorable periods, the circle of legitimate victims tends to be restricted to "us". Instead of broadening the category of victims and expanding the circle of the "we" that Alexander (2004a: 1) sees as an important part of the trauma process, here we have a contrary trend of *shrinking* of the "we". The solidarity of others is not sought, perhaps it is even discouraged. This seems to be going on right now, with a perceived "lack of understanding" for Serbs on the part of the West fuelling further alienation and sinking deeper into an exclusive-victimhood language of identity. It is also manifested in the spiteful opposition of the Serbs' "celebratory" discourse to the observers' "denouncing" one.

Claiming moral superiority on the basis of the supposed purifying effects of suffering may be read as an assertion of particularism through reference to some kind of universal standards. Another paradoxical move of this kind is asserting Serbian specialness by insisting on the megalomaniac exceptionalism of Kosovo. The statements such as: "No Christian nation has in its history what the Serbian people has – none has *Kosovo*. ... Kosovo is one of its kind in the twenty centuries of the Christian world" (Velimirović 1988: 68- 69), or "How to present this spiritual meaning of Kosovo for Serbs to the public opinion, when there is no analogous example in the world heritage?" (a newspaper article from 1998, quoted in Čolović 2001: 208), or "Six centuries ago, nothing on the globe happened more important than the battle at the Kosovo Field" (Bećković 1990: 47) – are not at all uncommon, in spite of their extravagance, and could easily be heard even from ordinary people.

This is connected with the second path along which the Kosovo legacy tends to channel Serbian narratives: the tendency of grandiloquence when the nation is concerned. Somehow, Serbs have developed the belief, or at least the habit, that when talking about matters of nation and state only lofty and pompous terms are in order. A down-to-earth language of Serbian patriotism is mostly lacking. The "great", read national, has been decoupled from the "small" – the petty things of daily life, economy, work, ordinary human effort, patient building of an ordered collective life. Of course, Serbs have been doing all these things over the centuries, just as any other people, but this sort of endeavor has been kept at the side of the profane, at a distance from the sacrality of the nation. It is not easy to verbally perform as a good Serb talking about daily, this-worldly matters; there is no "sacralization of the everyday" in a Weberian sense.

[270] How both Serbs and Albanians in (real) Kosovo ground their political claims in the morality of victimhood is analyzed in Zdravković 2005.

[271] Čolović (2002: 7-9) provides an ironic summary of what, following Malkki (1995), might be called Serbian mythico-history, revolving around victimhood and moral purity.

[272] Referring to Giesen's terms does not mean I also subscribe to his view that "there is no way to imagine a land beyond the liminal horizon of triumph and trauma" (Giesen 2004: 112). Quite the contrary. I am convinced there is a way, if not "beyond", then at least *below* such high-flying notions.

The problem is that this contributes to a devaluation of Serbia's civilian accomplishments during the two centuries of its modern history and hinders the recognition of the nation's good in the democratically defined common good.

The Myth as a speech act

Not just the Trauma is continuously produced through discourse, but also the Myth itself – its existence, solidity, rootedness, Serbianness, utmost significance etc. are routinely re-created by deploying claims to that effect. Compared to the production of Trauma, the tone of this process is less emotional, and its social location is mostly academia. But perhaps this only makes its effects smoother. By being repeated so many times, and having come from the authorized mouth of the expert, the claims slide into everyone's routine way of expressing whatever they have to say.

For example: the book that purports to offer a conclusive historian's view of the Battle of Kosovo, published bilingually in Serbian and German on the occasion of 600th anniversary (Tasić and Djuretić eds. 1991), opens with these words: "*Undoubtedly* the most important event in the entire history of the Serbian people, the Battle of Kosovo..." (p.7, emphasis added). A contribution to the same volume claims: "The Kosovo commitment has become not just the national idea but that inner trait that makes a Serb a Serb" (p. 14). Another one: "The theme of the Battle of Kosovo is part of our destiny, we know it was built into the foundations of our consciousness and our culture... The Battle of Kosovo, this is *us*" (p. 49).

Not even the very sober scholars are exempt. For all her critical detachment, Zirojević (2000: 195-196) lists all the historical moments when Serbs' behavior was "determined by the Kosovo myth" without making at all clear whether she is reporting others' arguments or arguing the same herself. Or, here is how the prominent ethnologist Dušan Bandić attempts to salvage the idea of Kosovo as a continuous living tradition, against contrary evidence. In the early 1990s, his team undertook field research in rural Serbia about the actual presence of the Kosovo tradition, talking to hundreds of typical peasants, farmers with little education (Bandić 2001). The general conclusion was that the Kosovo Myth had been forgotten: knowledge of it was poor, confused and erroneous (Bandić 2001: 462).[273] But Bandić does not give up: the Myth has survived in a covert form, he argues, through its "hidden message" that lives "a secret life in rural people's consciousness" (Bandić 2001: 463, 465), and that is the belief that Serbs are God's chosen people, better (more honest, pious, generous etc.) than the others.[274] Bandić then goes on to "recognize" this hidden message of Kosovo in a wide variety of popular lore concerning Serbian identity and world politics. The connection that Bandić presents as self-evident between these manifestations and the supposedly still living Kosovo Myth is tenuous however, and counts on the complicity of the reader. Like many others, Bandić is here accomplishing a performative task: by producing statements on the vitality of Kosovo symbolism and its centrality for Serbs he hopes to produce these states of affairs as "social facts".[275]

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[273] Informants, for example, mostly knew nothing of Prince Lazar, except that he had died at Kosovo; a majority did not know what the "Covenant" was – what kingdom Lazar had chosen.

[274] But since the belief in one's choseness, which in practice usually boils down to belief in one's superiority, is found in very many nations (Smith 2003), what is then so specifically Serbian about Kosovo? Bandić prefers to sidestep this difficulty.

[275] This is how it works: "Lazar's fate is a metaphor by which Serbs represented their historical fate. They – and *this is the message of the myth* – are a chosen, heavenly people which had to pay a high price for its heavenly status. ... Such a self-characterization became deeply engraved in the consciousness of the Serbian people. .... Whenever a new 'Kosovo' would appear on the horizon, Serbs would choose a solution similar to Lazar's. ... [and] *without any*

The year 1999: the Trauma, a trauma, and the importance of registers

In 1998-99, the symbolism of Kosovo was rather brutally terrestrialized again, with the outbreak of armed conflicts between the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army and the Serbian state forces. In March 1999, NATO intervened, to prevent humanitarian catastrophe as was said, and bombed Serbia for two and a half months. The Trauma as a cultural script was now confronted with a real-life, palpable trauma of being victimized by the high-technology weaponry of the world's most powerful military machinery, in the first attack on the territory Serbia after WWII. What is more, the immediate trauma was directly connected with Kosovo as the site of the original Trauma, and the victimization was widely perceived as thoroughly unjust, because "we are just trying to keep what is ours". All the reasons were there to expect that the trauma of NATO bombardment would be experienced and narrated in a framework heavily determined by Trauma.

Indeed, we find in the official statements, from Milošević's speeches to the posters displayed in regime-organized protests (Jansen 2000) all the staple motifs of the Kosovo Myth. In his analysis of *Vojska,* the official magazine of the Serbian Army, during the months of bombing, Nedeljković (2007: 46-51) documented abundant use of mythical images.[276] Yet one must not overestimate the significance of such official constructions. Nedeljković himself (2007: 50) adds a precious footnote, based on his personal experience as a Serbian Army reservist: according to what he saw amongst his fellows, the influence of *Vojska* on ordinary soldiers was virtually nil. Protracted exposure to traumatic circumstances produced nothing but disaffection, skepticism and, finally, complete alienation from the official rhetoric.

A similar duality arises between two other sets of data collected at roughly the same time (end of 1990s-early 2000s) which reveal vastly different, even contrary ways of talking about Kosovo. For the first set we are again indebted to Nedeljković (2007: 52-66) who wished to complement his analysis of symbolic production of the nation in official discourse with individual elaborations of such mythical matrices. Between 1998 and 2000, Nedeljković collected 200 written compositions by Belgrade university students, mostly in the Ethnology department, on the topic of "Serbhood" (*Srpstvo*). Although "Kosovo" was not a required theme, most respondents wrote about it. It was discussed in emotional rather than intellectual terms, and a lot of mythical rhetoric was used: Kosovo is "the only true core of truth", "the heart of Serbia", when one goes there "one is stunned into silence, and time comes to a halt", "Kosovo is the insistent strong pain in the soul", "Serbia's cancer" (Nedeljković 2007: 60-61). What may first be noted is the contrast in which these constructions stand with the previous ethnographic data, collected only several years before by Bandić. What provides at least a part of the explanation is the differential educational levels of the two samples, but not in the direction the social scientist would assume: the almost illiterate peasants were *less* colonized by the mythical discourse than the urban college students. This again strongly supports the idea of the importance of the educational system in inculcating the allegedly inborn Serbian Trauma.

The other set of data comes as close as any to providing insight into the vernacular receptions of the symbolic Kosovo. It was collected in 2001/2002, one year after the fall of the Milošević regime in 2000 and two years after the war of 1999. In 300 interviews with ordinary

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doubt, have behaved as a 'heavenly' people is expected to do" (Bandić 2001: 461, italics added). These sentences, needless to say, are not in any way derived from the field data.

[276] Such as: Kosovo as Serbian "sacred land" that must be defended at all costs; Kosovo as Serbia's "heart" and "core"; reminders of Lazar's covenant and the heavenly kingdom; the Golgotha metaphor; assimilation of Milošević to Prince Lazar; etc.

citizens of Serbia about the recent political past and prospects for the future, one question concerned the issue of (real) Kosovo and the 1999 NATO bombing. It was in this conjunction that many respondents went back to Kosovo as symbolic legacy.[277] While for many (by no means all) of them the events of 1999 were in various ways traumatic, it is striking how much this was *not* couched in the language of the Trauma. People were familiar with the symbolic tradition and generally ready to respect it, but not to let it determine their political stands. They seemed to be caught between demands of rational positioning in the real world and moral sentiments of pride and justice that are so strongly associated with the Kosovo theme. The result was a perplexed and contradictory, but open attitude, an honest attempt to think through a difficult topic.[278] Well-known tropes, like *Serbian cradle,* were often employed in casual, even ironic manner. As one interviewee said: "Kosovo is the sacred Serbian land – I'm joking".

As a general trend, the most frequent frame to discuss the topic was a simple and assured assertion that "Kosovo is ours", however it was *not* expressed in metaphysical but rather in more political and legal – though doubtfully more commendable – terms that saw Kosovo as part of Serbia, and Serbs as the state's entitled nation. Another general trend was for interviewees to acknowledge, with a sort of aggrieved resignation, that Kosovo was "lost".[279] And if this was a trauma for them, it was of a rather mild kind and one that they had already begun to overcome.

So how do we account for the difference between extensively mythicized discourse in the first data, and uneasy realism in the second? The main reason lies, I believe, in the different framings of the discussion, resulting in two different registers people were employing in response to these framings. Nedeljković's assigned title-appeal, "Serbhood", framed the issue in a way inviting the mythologizing approaches: *srpstvo* is a very loaded word, abstract and general, with a flavor of artificiality; it is not a word one would use in daily speech (not even when talking "grand" of the nation). The other data were obtained within a questionnaire that provided a frame doubly different from the former: it was a) rational, and b) concrete, personal and experiential. Interviewees were called on to express their own personal experience, and reflections on that experience, to refer to the concrete events, dates, facts from their life and the collective life insofar as it affected them. The whole research design did not encourage generalized and empirically unfounded proclamations. Thus different discursive registers produced divergent ways of talking about the same things. Maybe even if the very same people participated in both studies, they would have talked just as differently.

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[277] The project's title was "Politics and everyday life" and its findings are presented in Golubović et al. (eds.) 2003, an English summary in Spasić 2008.

[278] Examples from some interviews: "I don't feel Kosovo to be part of my country, because in effect it is not, but essentially it is. I mean, if you take history, religion... Now many people say history is no longer important, because it all happened ten centuries ago, but it is... It has always been part of Serbia – all that we were told, the cradle of the Serbian people, this and that, but it is true. Now, what it is really... but actually it no longer is, so..." Or, another person: "And the battle of Kosovo, we pledge to Nemanja, Lazar, this and that, well, they are long gone, this is nonsense. They were fighting with maces, and now is the time of the atomic bomb", but immediately goes on to say: "Now we must try to save Kosovo, the Serbian cradle, with all those cultural monuments that are now being burned down." A clear tension between pragmatism and loyalty to tradition: "This Kosovo Myth, it has maintained Serbs for centuries... It is the heart of Serbia... Miloš Obilić, and other known and unknown heroes... But true, definitely, we cannot live of such myths".

[279] Such as: "We saw Kosovo was gone", "We were deceiving ourselves concerning Kosovo, it had been sold out long ago", "It hurts so much, but I think Kosovo will be taken away from us", "I'm very much emotionally attached to Kosovo, but I think it is lost and we'd better invest this energy into something else."

A common language in which to disagree

The long history of the Trauma as a cultural structure has produced the layered character of its meanings. Yes, Kosovo "means" something to most Serbs, probably even "matters" to them. But the contents of this are of highly diverse origin.[280] Furthermore, the layered meanings are only partly expressible in words. They may also involve a whole range of vague feelings of uneasiness, discontent and shame, provoked by the recent collective experiences. For example, remembrances of the Myth's association with Milošević's aggressive and failed policies – that is, with wars, national humiliation and international isolation – might also have become part of the Kosovo Trauma as it is experienced today, but will hardly be made explicit. So within the seemingly singular Trauma some meaning layers may be closer to the surface and more readily articulable, and others buried, tacit and possibly activated only in the mode of Herzfeldian "cultural intimacy". This would amount to more than just different "meanings", to profoundly different emotional and moral import – including outright irrelevance of the Trauma to an individual Serb.[281] What remains, and what really acts as the much-extolled "connective tissue" among Serbs, is the identical language they are all familiar with, the "entrenched" symbolism of Kosovo which rhetorically brings all of these differences together, without admitting it. The name remains the same, providing the impression of stability, and making it possible to ostensibly "revive" the myth, while in fact it is turned in nothing but "a useful cliche or linguistic stereotype, a 'reference' and argument in ideological use" (Djerić 2005: 30)

It has been pointed out repeatedly that the tropes of the Kosovo legend, especially in its epic guise, have often been used as political devices for censuring, condemning and morally polluting political opponents. We have seen how the labels of Vuk Branković or, conversely, of Lazar and Miloš, were exchanged by all kinds of political forces since the mid-19th century.[282] This practice has been so widespread in Serbian political life that the function of *internal exclusion* may qualify as an even more prominent pragmatic function of the Trauma than aggression towards others.

Nevertheless, mechanisms of exclusion may be more subtle than the explicit pollution of the opponent by calling him/her traitor. An excellent instance of this more oblique deployment was provided in 2006 by the then-Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica, a democratic but conservative nationalist. Speaking at the symbolically highly charged site of the ancient Serbian monastery of Hilandar in Greece, Koštunica said: "Everybody knows what Kosovo means to us." Let us have a closer look at this phrase. If "everybody" knows it, then those who feel they do *not* know exactly what Kosovo means to them, or to others, cannot help feeling excluded or better, completely obliterated (since they do not even belong to the "everybody"). If everybody "knows" something, then there is no need at all to articulate, discuss and argue this something. Finally, who the "us" are is similarly unclear (Serbs? all of them, or only some? and if some, are

[280] As Brubaker (2004: 56) reminds, the materials that collective identities are made of include, in addition to the more famous *mythomoteurs* and other long-term factors, "also the moderately durable ways of thinking and feeling that represent 'middle-range' legacies of historical experience and political action".

[281] When Dragnich and Todorovich begin their "blood" phrase with: "Kosovo is many diverse things to different living Serbs...", this is not acknowledgment of fundamental disagreement. What they have in mind is variation within the range of the beautiful, sublime and awesome. In celebratory discourses in general, apparent diversity of meanings is often used to enhance the effect of all-Serbian pervasiveness of the Myth, but it never includes the idea that Kosovo to an individual Serb may mean something unpleasant, irritating, silly, boring, embarrassing, old-fashioned, awkward, worn-out etc.

[282] These practices, extremely detrimental to the development of a democratic political culture, were dubbed by Naumović (2005) „quasi-ethnic identity splits".

these the patriots, the religious, the members of Koštunica's party, or his voters, or...?) Hence, by a short and seemingly innocuous phrase, all those who do not recognize themselves in it are excluded from the community. But this is done implicitly, which makes the move less conspicuous and harder to challenge: one would not really know how to protest it.[283] The main paradox involved in both "simple" and "complex" strategies of exclusion is that the Trauma, presented as what binds Serbs together, is used to produce *internal and self-inflicted traumatization* of the national polity, by deepening cleavages within and preventing their pacification.

The period after 2000 has been characterized by a series of new twists and turns on the Kosovo theme. After the war of 1999 and installment of international administration in (real) Kosovo, its status has remained unresolved, which has been conducive to a mood in Serbia in which it is quite easy to score political points by rising the rhetorical stakes in discussing Kosovo. While the unofficial, more personalized and private discourse, as the quoted interviews show, was characterized by a general rationalism and open-mindedness, the discourse produced by political elites has sought a *re-traumatization* of Serbian attitude to Kosovo. Instead of being gradually replaced by more rational and realistic, policy-oriented suggestions, the tropes of the Kosovo myth in its most traumatic cast have been liberally employed by elite actors, who were trying to outdo one another in upholding the sanctity of Kosovo. As the verbal stakes were continuously risen, it has become all but impossible to talk about Kosovo, real as well as symbolic, in anything but the most elevated tone. A whole range of positions on the issue have become discursively unavailable or excessively costly.[284] On the other hand, uttering or supporting empty phrases like "Kosovo is Serbia!", "We shall never give up Kosovo!", "Kosovo is our sacred land!" and so on, costs nothing and can bring some profit – if anything, the profit of showing that one is not sticking out. So everybody choose to repeat these phrases, without much thinking. At the same time people harbor all kinds of doubts and grudges against the symbolic prevalence of Kosovo and its mythical impingements on current Serbian policies, but are extremely uncomfortable to express them in public, or even to themselves, because the sacredness of the topic has been so extremely enhanced. This private and subdued attitude of weary irritation is almost impossible to pin down: one may feel it in muttered remarks, half-voiced comments, and grumbles overheard, on people's faces and in tone of their voices.

This came out in elections. The year 2008 was hot with passions, with (real) Kosovo's proclamation of independence in February, ensuing protests turned riots in Belgrade, including the raiding and burning of US embassy, sudden icing of Serbia's relations with the Western countries etc. The public sphere reverberated with innumerable invocations of Lazar's oath and the bequest of the Kosovo heroes, particularly in the campaign of the ultranationalists. Nevertheless, in February 2008 the incumbent democratic president Boris Tadić was reelected, and in parliamentary elections held in May a democratic coalition marked a convincing

[283] Some more examples of the same device: "A Serb is the one *whom* Kosovo *concerns*" (Bećković 1991: 68). Or, in Velimirović (1988: 71) "Those who scowl at Kosovo; those who belittle, condemn, or hate it... such *are not real Serbs*... And real Serbs ... ought to thank the Lord for having given them Kosovo, their pride and comfort." And here is Jevtić (2007): "It is impossible for the word Kosovo to be mentioned without causing profound agitation in each of us Serbs. ... *There is no Serb* who has not thought, spoken, written about Kosovo, grieved over it and resurrected through it" (pp.374, 116). Italics added.

[284] When in 2007 prominent journalist Boško Jakšić argued in his column in *Politika* for Serbia's acknowledgment of an independent Kosovo, this provoked public uproar that lasted for weeks.

victory.[285] True, Tadić and his democrats, just like almost everybody on the Serbian political scene, consider Kosovo's independence illegal and fight it as they can; but whatever one may think of their Kosovo policy, it is not extremist, and, even more to the point, it contains virtually no mythologizing rhetoric. Pointing in the same direction, polling data show that, when asked to list the most important problems Serbia is currently facing, people place (the status of real) Kosovo below "unemployment", "low living standard" and "corruption" (SMMRI 2008).[286]

If we then go back to the question – is there a Kosovo Trauma for Serbs?, the answer may be "yes", provided that we understand its proper location: it does not dwell *in* Serbs, but in the discursive space *between* them. And the Trauma itself involves a whole knot of entangled traumas, not necessarily those that bards of the Trauma strove to inculcate. The deceptive simplicity of the noun, *Kosovo,* might also hide traumas of the Yugoslav wars, including the "trauma of perpetrators"; the trauma of being caught in an irresolvable conflict with a neighboring people, Albanians; the trauma of Serbia's exclusion from European integration; the trauma of living in a faulty democracy and continuing economic stagnation. And also, perhaps, the trauma of being forced into a traumatic identity and lacking the language in which to express one's dissent without being called a traitor.

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[285] The coalition "For European Serbia" (Democratic Party/G17) won 38.40% of the vote and 102 seats in Parliament, while the ultranationalist Serbian Radical Party came second with 29.45% (78). Source: CeSID, http://www.cesid.org/rezultati/sr_maj_2008/index.jsp

[286] From mid-2005 to end of 2008 the percentage of respondents placing Kosovo among chief problems ranged on the average between 20 and 30%, with scores over 40% at only 4 points over that period, all concentrated around February 2008, and falling to 13% in November 2008. At the same time, "Unemployment" scored consistently between 45 and 60%, and "Low living standards" between 35 and 45% (more than one priority could be listed).

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Solidarizing with the kidnap victims:
On the generalization of trauma across a fragmented civil sphere

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