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## INTRODUCTION

The wounds of conflict are still raw. A decade has not even passed since events of the wars tore apart five nations which made Former Yugoslavia.

Many of these events are still unresolved when it comes to historical disputes and tension is still present. These conflicts are due to misunderstanding and manipulation to serve the public with propaganda in hope of fuelling prejudice and nationalist sentiments. When these distortions are confronted, they can be overcome, and in order for peace to prevail, tolerance and understanding of individuals, like Nations must be respected which is the goal of reconciliation.

Dispelling public historical myths and providing reliable facts promotes team work and shared narratives of different Nations to work together and build a more stable and prosperous future.

Actions and initiatives to achieve true reconciliation include

1. Supporting and strengthening civil society
2. As mentioned above, publicly dispelling nationalistic myths
3. Writing reliable and factual literature
4. Cooperation and team building with young scholars and students
5. Making a social network devoted to promoting and strengthening reconciliation between conflict Nations through Media and personal guidance.

Myths, as a result of mythology were formed so they would help people with difficult problems, to help people understand the world around them and guide them to and through the right path.<sup>1</sup> When the word “myth” is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is some sort of made-up, fictional fairy-tale, something that probably has little or nothing at all to do with “the truth” or “reality.”

Ideologies, like a *grouping of ideas* help people to understand the world around them, which is why myths and politics are inseparable. Ideologies cannot be thought of without myths: myths concerning *chosen origins*, the *chosen land*, *death*, *saviours* and *enemies*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gavrilovic Darko, Mitovi Nacionalizma i Demokratija, Novi Sad, Fakultet za Evropske Pravno – Politicke studije, Sremska Kamenica, 2009, str. 7.

<sup>2</sup> D.Gavrilovic, nd. *ili* Grof Kristijan fon Kroko, O nemačkim mitovima , Novi Sad 2001, str 9-53; D. Gavrilovic.

The language of everyday politics is so connected and even in one view centred on mythology that without mythology it is nearly impossible to understand. In that sense, myths are considered as a form of Ideologies. As the material myths contain is so layered and can be understood in many ways, through history we can see the way politicians and National leaders have turned towards myths and centred them towards their own personal use to wake up a sense of pride, sense of belonging and also a sense of love towards their Nation, to later form *Nationalism* in ordinary men. This essay will concentrate on the five most important Nationalist myths which have been used throughout history and will provide examples of them, aiming mainly at Serbian history, however including also some examples of Croatian myths and events which did not happen in the Balkans. This essay is intended to inform of past events which brought much pain and disaster to countries of Former Yugoslavia and inspire for a better and more peaceful and harmonious future.

### **History (Beginning of Nationalistic Myths)**

The base of Nationalistic myths is found in countries of Europe and in the United States of America during the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the outcome of rebellious bourgeoisie dominating many high economic positions, but not authority. They needed a myth with which they could gather a greater mass of people in hope of forming new faith, or adequate structure of government. It was intended to be a myth that would promise stability and legitimacy, and at the same time with its strength guide people into making big changes in society. That is when ideologists start digging back into history and picking what they need for their political needs. At that time myths were strongly orientated on something that was extremely common during the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Nationalistic myths weren't only necessary in settling countries such as America and Australia but also in established countries such as England, France and Spain.

The aim of Nationalistic myths was to wake up a sense of pride in society and a need to fight for justice within their own Nation or another, just like earl Kristijan fon Kroko said: *people and nations find not only what is rationale and for them moral important, but also what is in their hearts and feelings.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> D. Gavrilovic, nd. str 9.

<sup>4</sup> Grof Kristijan fon Kroko, nd. str. 9-53

That is how ideologists woke up Nationalism in society, by feeding the ordinary man with history (or myths and manipulation) centred on what is close to his heart, his motherland, his ancestry, his pride.

### **The Five Myths**

As mentioned above, myths focused on one prominent aspect in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century – Christianity and the following five myths have been specially adapted to suit Christians in their fight for their Nation. The First myth about the “*chosen ancestry*” or “*chosen origin*” gives men a sense of nobility, then there is the myth of the “*chosen land*” and like these the myth of the “*saviour*” or hero, of course with a hero there must be an “*enemy*” as well, and last but certainly not least, the myth of glorious “*death*”<sup>5</sup>

### **Myth of the Chosen Origin (or Ancestry)**

Themes from the Bible were in a smart way orientated at forming Nationalistic myths, in this case associating one Nation as the “*chosen Nation*” or the oldest civilization. Scientists that thought of themselves as Nationalists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were extremely aggressive in their hope to unite their Nation in a sense of belonging and unity that they went to that extent of effort by even fondling through historical literature and mentioning the indicated myths, mostly in school books which were the aim to best spread Nationalistic myths because they were aimed at the generation that was yet to develop their National pride.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century far-fetched ideas were come about by analysing the alphabet, where Rowland Jones, nationality – Irish, exemplified his theory that Celts were the oldest Europeans and therefore Europe belonged to them in four different books. Etymology has a long history, and the Gaelic angle was well explored not only by Rowland Jones in the 18th century but by others such as Eugene Aram, Henry Rowlands, and James Parsons.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> More on Nationalistic myths which are based on the myth of the enemy and the myth of death you can find by Grof Kristijan fon Kroko, same as above.

<sup>6</sup> Presentation of mythical happenings, among the nations of former Yugoslavia, in school textbooks in fact have never finished. It existed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, where it praised the military past of the Serbian people, and where, for the first time the state took it upon themselves to develop the myth of brotherhood and unity because of the reconciliation of people who fought on two sides was necessary in the new State community. Communist myths were used during socialistic Yugoslavia, and during the disintegration of the country and the creation of a new national State, they returned the old nationalistic myths that were intended to develop a new sense of belonging and togetherness. – D. Gavrilovic, nd. str 14

<sup>7</sup> In the “hieroglyphics or grammatical introduction to a universal of hieroglyphic language” from 1763, and on the basis of “origin of language” from 1764, Jones outlines fundamental principles, which is further elaborated in the “IO triad” and “Gomer circles.”

This type of mythology can also be recognised in Serbian writing, especially one by the name of Drasko Scekić who in his book *Sorabi: Istorioepis* details how the first Serbian migration started around 4500 years BC and respectfully states that 5000 years BC there existed not one Serbian state, but two, which lays out ground that the Serbian Nation is so ancient that compared to the old Testament, they are older than Adam and on behalf of the authors theory of when God created the world, they are older than the world! <sup>8</sup>

### **Myth of the Chosen land**

The myth of the “chosen land” or “holly land” where one territory is raised above all, where the warfare and spirit of the people lays was a wide spread myth within south Slavic countries as it was through the whole of Europe. That “holly land” was perceived as the place of spiritual gathering for that nation, the symbol of their survival, perseverance, as it was projected as the place of suffering, tragedy and ruin, as the outcome of the presence of the “enemy.” On this basis, centuries of historical grudges have been preserved, to one day gain victory, to gain what is ones own. When this myth is mentioned in consideration to Serbia, special attention is turned to Kosovo, which is in the consciousness of Serbian nationalists, Serbian holly land. Although many south Slavic countries had similar myths of the Promised Land, the myth of Kosovo as the “Serbian promised land” is to this day a politically active subject and battle to remain as a constitution of Serbia.

The dispute over Kosovo follows back to the mid age period in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, 1389 to be exact.

During the years between 1904 and 1914, Nikola Pasic, leader of the Serbian radicals was at the top of the military action scheme to spread Serbia throughout all former territory of former prime Serbia, which included Kosovo, Metohija and Macedonia. Regardless to add, war in the Balkans broke out and the outcome of Serbia’s victory – Kosovo was once again in the constitution of Serbia. In order to concrete the nation’s conscious **that Kosovo is Serbia;** Serbians of the past battles in Kosovo were perceived as defenders of the European Christian civilization against, as frequently considered, destructive Islamic influence and frightful domination of the growing Turkish Empire during the medieval period. Much blood was spilt on the soil of Kosovo for the defence of *Europe* and *Christianity* and Serbian Lord Lazar (who the national poetry declared emperor) along with his knights was given the choice to

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<sup>8</sup> This type of mythological representation of Serbian nationalism fed the Nation in the nineties – Ščekić, Draško, *Sorabi: Istorioepis*, Srbija 1994, str. 72.

choose whether they would show resistance against the *enemy* or not and as poetry shows us this was the choice between a heavenly Empire and earthly Empire.<sup>9</sup> In this way the myth of “the chosen land,” Promised Land or holly land opens up a new aspect of myths, which are myths of *saviours*, myths of *enemies* and myths of “sacred” *deaths*.

### Myth of the Saviour

The battle in Kosovo which was fought by Serbians and their allies who were lead by Lord Lazar in 1389 on one side and Osman strength on the other, triggered not long after the battle a whole cycle of poetic compositions all in effort to hold on to Serbian national union.

A new position of dominant influence was created on a basis of elevating *heroes* that fought in the Serbian military at the battle of Kosovo - Lord Lazar:

*„bi hrabri stradalac/bezakonim agarenskimi rukama/i kraj stradanju dobro sam prima/ i mučenik Hristov postaje/...“<sup>10</sup>*

In this way these compositions formed a unity with what was most probably necessary during that time in Serbia and early Christianity – sacrifice and Nationality. He who is prepared to sacrifice his life for his Nation, his country, his people, is the saviour or hero.

But of course where there is a saviour, there must be an enemy as well.

### Myth of the Enemy

During this period enemies in the Osman strength were referred to as “*wild beast*” or *Satan*. This type of enemy generalisation was very characteristic in the mid Age. One of the four main functions in ideologies is the function of justification, actually justifying the political actions or intentions of the ideology. Now that we know that Nationalism is based also on the myth of the *enemy* even today when needed this myth is mentioned when it comes to justifying going to war or concurring new land. Examples of this can be noticed in aggressive American international politics, there is the phrase “to take the battle to the enemy”, coined by President George W. Bush right after 9/11<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> D. Gavrilovic. nd str.42

<sup>10</sup> Despot Stefan, These words were written on a marble pillar in Kosovo, Medieval Serbian writings on Kosovo, Project Rastko, Library of Serbian Culture on the Internet.

<sup>11</sup> **Rantapelkonen, Jari. "Bush's National Security Universe: Phrases of Information Technology in Dispute" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Le Centre Sheraton Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, Mar 17, 2004 <PDF>.**  
<[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p73897\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p73897_index.html)>

Croatians also have a myth of their own, which is *the myth of Drina*. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the independent state of Croatia and mainly the Ustasha emigration built on this myth. For them **Drina** is a thousand year old border between west and east, Catholic and Orthodox, light and dark. The strict Croatian Ustasha party developed a national belief in resolving all National uncertainties or problems; they opposed the existence of any other nation except for Croatian in the territories of Croatia and Bosnia & Herzegovina. Drina comes into this belief because the river alone divides Croatians and Serbians and is therefore an ideological formation as the wall of resistance. This, best describes Luburic; „Naše je ime naš program, a zovemo se Drina. Tu je cijeli naš program. Ni manje, ni više. To je program za milenije i za sve Hrvate ...Reklo se je, da gajimo kult Drine i mi se nismo branili. Zvali su nas fanaticima i nismo se uvrijedili. Optužili su nas da smo za taj program ubijali i dali se ubijati i mi smo to priznali.“<sup>12</sup>

### **Myth of death**

Unfortunately, to this day myths within the nations of the European Union exist. One of the most depressing is concerned with the myth of the enemy and the myth of **death**, and that is the myth of Langemarck. This is the youngest myth that was so misinterpreted by German Nationalists.

The battle of Langemarck was fought in October 1914 during World War One and during this battle 80,000 young men died, 45,000 of which were German volunteers (mostly students). Even though this was a great defeat, German Nationalists turned it into a victory claiming, “*Only in sacrifice can a life be fulfilled, long before the life is lived, because death is what gives it its real meaning.*”<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that other nations have had similar mythological ideas about the Promised Land and of death, Kosovo is a myth that is to this day politically active because the Serbs even now lead a battle to preserve Kosovo within Serbia. Kosovo was part of the Serbian medieval state in the 13th century, and in Kosovo the last great battle took place in 1389 against the Turks. Serbs, who then became part of the Ottoman Empire, continued to lead lives of subjects. The political status of Serbs in the Ottoman Empire began to change only in the 19th century, and it launched the Serbian revolution and war in 1804 up until 1815. After this period, a period of struggle followed within Serbian peasant society for an independent state that lasted until the Berlin Congress in 1878 when Serbia got its independence. As mentioned

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<sup>12</sup> General Drinjanin (Max Luburic called himself General Drinjanin although he never fought on the Drina), D. Gavrilovic, nd. str. 127. Napomena: Father Dominic Mandic determines the border on the Drina, in Drina.

<sup>13</sup> Grof Kristijan fon Kroko, nd. str15.

above, during the time between 1904 and 1914 Nikola Pasic, leader of the Serbian Radical Party, was almost always located at the head of state, seeking opportunities to expand through military action to the territory of Old Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia. With these plans Serbia entered the Balkan wars, and after the victory of Serbia in the First Balkan War, Kosovo again became part of the Serbian constitution. This analysis is a desire to show how the myths about death and the Promised Land were used by the Serbian authorities to justify the wars that the country participated in, and the unnumbered deaths that took place all in order for Kosovo to be again within Serbian borders in the 20th century, after two World Wars.

## **Conclusion**

When we look back into history, we should use the information in two ways, firstly to learn from our mistakes or the mistakes of others, and secondly to use the information to build a better future for ourselves and others.

A man is judged by his actions and way of thinking, not by his past – although it may play a part of who he is, it does not play a part of who he will become. We must all look back into history solemnly to learn from our mistakes and those made before ours and to make sure they don't happen again.

This is the same concept when considering Nations. Freedom, integration, liberty and justice are what make a Nation harmonious and complete. A strong Nation is built on stability and tolerance, not on myths.

Today we can see that it is in a Nations best national interest, not to alienate itself from other nations, but to unite in the aim of a perspective future for all.

The worst thing someone can do is try misinterpreting the past, which not only slows the process of growing but it also promises a future full of uncertainties.

We should all aim towards a democratic, prosperous and justifiable Nation not based on myths but on human rights, freedom and co-operation.

Young scholars and Educational institutions as well as non-governmental organizations should initiate building on personal cooperation between their own Nation and others, especially those Nations that are in direct conflict. Civil society and young people are the hope which can erase dichotomies between national, religious, ethnic and racial borders and untangle the myths of the past which continue to be an obstacle of reconciliation. These myths continue to slow the process towards reconciliation because they contain hate, misinterpretations of the past and still



strongly aim at manifesting disputes between Nations and this is unimaginable when it comes to bringing young people and Nations together again in a harmonious union. To conclude, the necessity of cooperation between scholars cannot be stressed enough, as well as the importance of similar goals, mutual understandings and cross-border discussions related to demythologizing the past in hope of suppressing Nationalistic myths and working towards a prosperous and harmonious future within Former Yugoslav Republics.

## Literature

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