# Post-totalitarian Elements and Eichmann's mentality in the Yugoslav War and Mass Killings

*Vlasta Jalusic*

In the large body of literature about the Holocaust and Nazi totalitarianism today, the extinction of the European Jewish population is treated as an unparalleled act that cannot and should not be repeated. "Never again" has become the motto of commemorations of the victims of Nazi terror in general and as such it represents the heart of the politics of memory, which, through awareness of the Holocaust's warning, has attempted to create conditions in which the repetition of such an unparalleled crime would be impossible. However, in spite of the persistent claims in the genocide scholarship of its uniqueness and in spite of the refusal to compare itt to contemporary genocides, the Nazi Holocaust has inevitably been linked to the events in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. the Rwandan genocide, in particular—owing to the number of victims and the way the crime was accomplished—has emerged as the most suitable case for emphasizing a "crucial similarity,"[1] while the name "Srebrenica" has become associated with "the worst massacre in Europe after the Second World War." Conserving the Holocaust as a unique or paradigmatic case of genocide or using it as an ultimate standard of moral condemnation obviously has had no eff ect, since the new events have evinced similarities to the Holocaust, as well as their own uniqueness. The "never again" politics helped neither in the understanding nor the prevention of genocidal developments because one could not simply learn from the past to prevent future "repetitions."[2] In both these more recent cases it seemed as if the "unparalleled" had reappeared, except that the killings on the soil of the former Yugoslavia turned out to be exceptional in the European context.

After the reports of the massacre of Srebrenica in the summer of 1995, questions emerged reminiscent of those after the Second World War: How was such a thing possible? How could it have happened "again" (in the middle of "civilized" Europe)? Why would people kill their co-citizens, sometimes their neighbors and acquaintances? These disturbing questions implied a broader frame: Is it possible to explain and (eventually) understand such events? Could we possibly prevent them, if we knew their origins and recognized them in time? How can we help ourselves with the lessons from the Holocaust and totalitarianism?

These questions not only touch upon the issue of "definitions" of genocide, for example, or of the potential for a catastrophe such as the destruction of European Jews. They also struggle with the moral and political problem of how to make the conditions, "origins," or

---

[1]  Mahmood Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda (Princeton, and Oxford, 2001), 5.

[2]  On the question of the difference between the Holocaust and genocide, and of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, concerning scholarly discourse, see A. Dirk Moses, "The Holocaust and Genocide," in The Historiography of the Holocaust, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke, and New York, 2004), 547. On the comparison of the Holocaust with the Rwandan genocide, see Nigel Eltringham, Accounting for Horror: Post Genocide Debates in Rwanda (London, 2004), 51–68.

elements of such events "visible," how to "see" that they take place in order to make those who can or should prevent them "recognize" them, in the sense of providing adequate legal arrangements and/or initiating action. This chapter will engage with some of the above questions concerning the background of crimes and mass murders in the former Yugoslavia, while aiming at an understanding of the case through the perspective and the legacy of Hannah Arendt's thought.

## The Arendtian Legacy and Post-Totalitarian Temptations

In spite of a growing literature on the "social construction" of both ethnicity and war in the former Yugoslavia, there still exist two interconnected and widespread explanations of the origins of war and mass killings. One is a thesis commonly voiced that people were "manipulated" by politicians, while the other involves the "in the beginning there were nationalisms" thesis that is partly connected to the former one. Manipulation and propaganda were seen as the reputed reasons for nationalist support, and the increasing emphasis on nationalisms, which erupted immediately after Tito's death, were then seen as the proper impetus for war. Social scientists have time and again fallen into the trap of seeing nationalism as a kind of biological, essential, or natural force, which, as some kind of an ever-present virus or contagious disease, "attacked" people in the former Yugoslavia or resulted from "ancient hatred," resulting in war and killing as their almost inevitable outcome.[3]

Such one-dimensional explanations are among the main reasons that I would like to point to some features of Arendtian political thought that might illuminate our understanding of some of the terrible events in the former Yugoslavia. The ideas about nationalism as "the origin" bear a resemblance to the presumption, rejected by Arendt, that an ancient hatred toward Jews—that is, an "eternal" anti-Semitism—was the main cause or a even a single explanation for the Holocaust and Nazi totalitarianism, a thesis which has been, in the case of German anti-Semitism, recently advocated zealously by Daniel Goldhagen.

Arendt refused monocausal explanations in attempting to create an understanding of the paths toward totalitarian domination and its novel crimes. On the one hand, she was thinking in terms of elements of totalitarianism, which she traced back to history, as she was trying to understand them, on the other hand, while taking into account something that mainstream social scientists' methods did not consider: human action, human plurality, spontaneity, and the capacity to begin anew—exactly those elements of the human condition that totalitarianism was about to destroy.[4] This enabled her to argue about totalitarianism in a non-determinist and non-causative way, to retrace and discuss the elements that she found to be crucial in its development, but to state clearly that it did not automatically spring from one single element, or even from a set of them, and that it

---

3   There are too many examples to list to them all but one might be the following: "To a historian, today's Balkan crises are rooted in, above all, the crippling dependence of all Balkan peoples on the ideology and psychology of expansionist nationalism." See William W. Hagen, "Balkans' Lethal Nationalisms," Foreign Affairs 78, no. 4 (1999): 52.

4   Ernst Vollrath, "Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking," Social Research 44, no.1 (1977): 166.

(the tragedy) was thus not inevitable.[5] Anti-Semitism, imperialism, racism, and the decline of the nation-state were considered as important elements but not single causes. They would only "eventually crystallize into totalitarianism."[6] In the absence of causal relations, not only was the issue of individual guilt for the crimes strongly emphasized but also that of the individual and collective (political) responsibility for not preventing totalitarian developments as well. This approach, combining elements and underlining human agency in bringing about the political phenomena, resulted in a series of insights and lessons that are important for understanding the Yugoslav case.

Furthermore, Arendt did not consider totalitarianism and its threats—although they constituted an absolute novelty—to be a fixed and unchangeable evil structure. On the contrary, she immediately started to think about the possible "repetitions" and new, post-totalitarian predicaments.[7] Although it is true that the Holocaust and the most extreme forms of totalitarian domination have already passed, it remains a fact that totalitarian elements—for example racism, bureaucracy, the decline of the nation-state, and various forms of totalitarian solutions—"can survive the system in the form of several temptations."[8] Arendt thought that the "unparalleled" new crimes that happened under Nazi-totalitarianism (such as the constructed superfluity of humans and the destruction of plurality, exemplified in the extermination camps) became a precedent, and thus it was more likely than before that they would happen again,[9] once the "threshold" of "everything is possible" has been breached.[10] However, they will not necessarily appear in their cruellest form;[11] they will not "repeat" the identical event: "the true predicaments of our time will assume their authentic form . . . only when totalitarianism has become a thing of the past."[12]

This new situation and the new predicaments were closely connected with the new context emerging after totalitarian experience, with the broken tradition in all itssenses, and especially with the impaired standards of political thinking and moraljudgment. There are two important issues for the present analysis linked to this new context. One is related to the role and the power of ideologies—such as anti-Semitism, racism and, associated intrinsically with them, nationalism—and to the role of their transformed successors. The other applies to the potential for new crimes, brought about by totalitarianism, along with the "nature" of evil and the issue of responsibility.

---

5   Arendt considered the title, given by the publisher to The Origins of Totalitarianism, to be inappropriate since it conveyed the wrong impression that her intentions were to clarify "origins" and "causes." Hannah Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," in Essays in Understanding 1930–1954, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York, 1994), 403.

6   Ibid.

7   She started to think about possible new forms of totalitarianism in the essay "Ideology and Terror," included in the 1958 revised edition of Origins, and she continued with that on the basis of observations of post-Second World War changes in Germany, of the consequences of the "thaw" in the Soviet Union, of the experience of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. and the experience in the United States with McCarthyism.

8   Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (London, 1986), 459.

9   Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (New York, 1977), 273.

10  Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Stanford, CA, 1998), 181ff .

11  Perhaps, in the future, we will see "large sections of population become 'superfluous' even in terms of labour," or we will have to face "the use of instruments beside which Hitler's gassing installations look like an evil child's fumbling toys." See Arendt, Eichmann, 273.

12  Arendt, Origins, 460.

## Racism, Anti-Semitism, Nationalism, and the Power of Ideologies

Racism, anti-Semitism, and nationalism can be explained as interrelated modern ideologies: modern anti-Semitism is a special and principally a totalitarian variety,while the other two represent the ideologies of imagined communities (of race and of the nation-state). Basically, they each embody sets of attitudes, beliefs, and activities that produce and legitimize exclusions from, and inclusions into, imagined communities and are essentially linked to the establishment of boundaries between the imagined communities and "the Others." They are thus, as noted by Arendt, intrinsically connected to the rise (and decline) of the nation-state and its mechanisms of power. Though the ideas of race and nation can overlap, since, as noted by Balibar, "discourses on race and nation are never far apart," nationalism and racism do not represent the same or co-derivable phenomena. There exists an ambiguous relation between them: nationalism can be seen as a determining condition for the production of racism, and racism might become a parameter to define nationalism.[13] This, however, does not necessarily imply that racism is an inevitable consequence of nationalism or that nationalism is impossible without latent racism.[14] The difference between them is not between the "normal" and "extreme" in terms of degree. Both being exclusive ways of human conduct, they nevertheless represent two different types of approach to the issue of political organization: if nationalism tends to articulate itself in terms of state objectives (either in statebuilding or through an ideology such as "self determination") then racism attempts to overcome the state framework.[15]

This interrelation and opposition—namely, that racism can not be considered as a simple "intensification" of nationalism—was clearly observable in the relationship between Nazi racism and German nationalism, where racism exceeded and actually destroyed the nationalist project and became a goal in itself. Arendt has shown how the intersections between both phenomena in the German case and in other Pan-nationalisms and movements operate to form a new, "advanced" type of nationalism, the so called "tribal (völkisch) nationalism," with "race" as not only an indispensable part of its structure but its final target. This type of nationalism does not represent an "excessive" or "ultra" nationalism, but it shows a split between "traditional" nationalism, aiming at one's own state, and tribal nationalism, having as its goal an achievement of some kind of organic, racialized nation, transcending the boundaries of the nation-state. Tribal nationalisms were thus simultaneously an addition to and modification of nationalism: they were used as powerful ideologies by those peoples who understood themselves as rootless, but as an organic national body, surrounded by a world of enemies such as Germany or Russia and dispersed over the home country's borders. They believed in the chosen nature of their own race or people against others, adopted racism as the ideology

---

13  Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities (London, 1991), 37–8 and R. Miles, Racism after Race Relations (London, 1993), 59.

14  Balibar and Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class, 37–38.

15  Racism is thus not an "'expression' of nationalism, but a supplement to nationalism, or more precisely a supplement internal to nationalism, always in excess of it, but always indispensable to its constitution and yet always still insufficient to achieve its project, just as nationalism is both indispensable and always insufficient to achieve the formation of the nation or the projectof the 'nationalization' of society." Ibid, 54.

of their national unity, and shared with overseas imperialism a hostility against their "narrow' (nation) state."[16]

This transformation of nationalism through the open establishment of a common ground between racism and nationalism, shown in the phenomenon of tribal nationalisms, was an ideal site for totalitarian policies themselves. It represented, together with anti-Semitism as its central component,[17] a superb means for the destruction of reality (in Arendt's terms the "world" itself ) and thus for undermining the common ground of thinking and judgment. These movements have found an ideal "Other" in the fabricated image of the international Jew  "in general," the"elusive enemy,"[18] representing the paradigmatic case of neo-racism, "racism without race," and needing no pseudo-biological concept of race or nature, since culture or some other type of ideological production can sufficiently replace it.[19] Only here anti-Semitism became a "pure" ideology, an "outrage to common sense,"[20] in the sense of total fabrication. However, totalitarian policies are "far from being simply anti-Semitic or racist or imperialist or communist." They "use and abuse their own ideological and political elements until the basis of factual reality, from which the ideologies originally derived their strength and their propaganda value. . . have all but disappeared."[21] This peculiar "self-manipulating" moment in the ideologies of racism and tribal nationalism, hardly comprehensible to those whose political action as above all an instrumental activity or manipulation of others, might cast light on the means by which totalitarian threats might adapt and become "ideologically" functional in the long run. They do so not by building an "instrumental" world where everything is "under control" but by creating what Arendt called "images," a "reality" frame, independent of the world, which starts to operate through its self-perpetuating logic as "truth."[22] These images function similarly to Erving Goffman's strong discourse, a frame that, once established, is very hard to resist, since it functions as reality ("The Truth") itself regardless of any "real basis" in truth. Since it is already permanently "in action," such an image can finally have perfectly real effects on the people's behaviour and actions. It can justify and normalize all possible deeds, including ethnic cleansing, or genocide. The "real" in respect to ideology is thus no longer its content or its attempt at indoctrination, but "self-manipulation," intense "social constructionism," productivity,and creativity. Modern ideologies adopt the mode of fabrication, without needing to "indoctrinate" or to constitute a "deep" conviction or belief. They seem rather to be a superficial set of fabricated policies of "everyday," "simple," and "obvious" truths. If we approach it this way, then such an "image" comes close to the Arendtian description of the evil as banal: it is nothing deep but is, as she

---

16  See Arendt, Origins, 227–243.

17  Richard Bernstein, Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 67.

18  Omer Bartov, "Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews, and the Holocaust," American Historical Review 10, no. 3 (1998), 771–816.

19  Balibar and Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class, 22–23.

20 Arendt, Origins, 3–10.

21  Ibid., xv.

22 In "Lying in Politics," she spoke about such an imaginary enterprise as "image making as global policy." In Hannah Arendt, Crises of the Republic (New York, 1972), 18–19. About image making as a policy see also "Home to Roost," in Hannah Arendt, Responsibility and Judgment, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York, 2003), 257–275.

once put it, after reconsidering her claim about radical evil in totalitarianism, "spreading like a fungus on the surface."[23]

## Between "Structure" and "Intention": The Banality of Evil and the New Crimes?

These considerations are closely connected to the issue of the role played by ideologies in the motives of perpetrators, and in the attitudes of bystanders in instances of totalitarian temptations and mass murders. Arendt tackled this issue with the articulation of her "banality of evil" thesis and presumably reduced the role that she had previously attributed to ideology. She challenged the predominant interpretations of genocide and crimes against humanity in terms of anti-Semitic indoctrination and anticipated the later discussions and results of historical scholarship.[24] It is usually understood that the "banality of evil" thesis confirms and belongs to what is called the structural-functionalist holocaust interpretation camp, which insists on modern structures as the origin for crimes "without motives" as a key-factor. This stands in contrast to the ideological-intentionalist interpretation that insists on the power of indoctrination (presumably of ideologies) and on the evil intentions of the perpetrators.[25] However, taking a closer look at Arendt's analysis reveals the misunderstanding and misinterpretation behind such assumptions,which do not help us to think about the new experiences. With her analysis of thoughtlessness, Arendt in fact went beyond this dichotomy (although she insisted that she had abandoned the role of ideology in favor of the banality of the perpetrator).[26] I will try to show later how illuminating this can be for understanding the power of ideologies—racism and nationalism—in the case of the massive crimes in the former Yugoslavia.

In Eichmann, Arendt revealed a new type of perpetrator, one who committed a novel sort of crime, without traditional motives of hatred and without needing to be a monstrously fanatic, deeply indoctrinated anti-Semite. He appeared "banal"and "thoughtless" in the strict sense of the word, someone who was not able to think about

---

23  Hannah Arendt, "Letter to Gershom Scholem," in The Jew as Pariah, ed. Ron H. Feldman (NewYork, 1978), 150.

24  Hans Mommsen, "Hannah Arendt's Interpretation of the Holocaust as a Challenge to Human Existence: The Intellectual Background," in Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem, ed. Steven E. Aschheim (Berkeley, 2002), 225–6.

25  This debate was renewed with the publication of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners (New York, 1996) maintaining that the main cause of the Holocaust was the German ideology of anti-Semitism. For more about this debate, see A. D. Moses, "Structure and Agenc yin the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and his Critics," History and Theory 37, no. 2 (1998), 194–219, 202ff .

26  Arendt apparently changed her mind regarding the role and power of ideology when reporting about the process against Eichmann. She claimed that in Origins she had overstated the influence of ideologies on the individual. In her letter to Mary McCarthy on September 20, 1963, she wrote that anti-Semitism itself gets lost in the process of extermination and instead the "movement" itself takes the lead. It seems, however, that Arendt unconsciously held two notions of ideology: the first concerns the role of ideology as indoctrination and is close to the Marxist notion; the second underlines ideological productivity—of totalitarian movements and policies, fabricating the frame of "reality" that is comparable to Foucauldian productivity and power of discourse. Later, she returned to this ideological productivity—as early as in Eichmannin Jerusalem—when claiming that Eichmann had been living in the world of "self-deception"common to millions of Germans and thus living in a kind of a "fabricated truth." She noticed the power of the image when trying to withstand incomprehensibly brutal attacks on her book about Eichmann. Many of those who attacked the Eichmann book were actually dealing with a fabricated image of it and not with what she really wrote. Hannah Arendt-Mary McCarthy. ImVertrauen: Briefwechsel 1949 – 1975 (Munich, 1995), 233–4, 238–9.

what he was doing, although he "knew quite well what it was all about."[27] The main
controversy provoked by this case became the issue of the intentionality or non-
intentionality of his evil deeds, the question of whether Arendt, by detecting his
thoughtlessness, had really absolved Eichmann of his deeds and ,instead, blamed the
victims (Jewish councils). In addition, there was the question of whether (and if so, why)
she "changed her mind" and abandoned the concept of "radical evil" for that of
"banality."[28] One of the recent (and paradigmatic) opponents of Arendt, Yaacov Lozowick,
maintains that Arendt unjustifiably placed the main emphasis on the functional and not
on ideological causes and completely overlooked the historic fact that Eichmann, together
with his bunch of fellow bureaucrats, was an indoctrinated anti-Semite. Thus he was,
contra Arendt, very much aware of his mission, and of what he was doing when sending
transports of Jews to the concentration camps. This proves his evil motives and
personality and the non-banality of his deeds, and "cuts the ground from beneath"
Arendt's thesis that he was a banal perpetrator.[29]

Arendt's point, however, was not at all that Eichmann was not conscious of the effects
of his actions in the casual sense. On the contrary, she pointed to the fact that he was very
much aware of the consequences of his deeds.[30] Her specific definition of
"thoughtlessness" was not "mindlessness" or stupidity; it was rather based on the
difference between knowing and thinking (analysed more closely in The Life of the Mind).
Thoughtlessness represents a special kind of mentality—not the absence of rational and
instrumental thinking but of the judging ability and activity, imagination itself. It emerges
under conditions of inverted human order and represents a shield against reality—in fact,
a constructed world of self-deception.

By raising the issue of banality and Eichmann's thoughtlessness, Arendt was not only
pointing to a novel type of crime ("crime against humanity" or, beyond that, "against
diversity" and not solely genocide)[31] and proclaiming Eichmann a "hostis generis
humani." She was also pointing to their universality and to the enormous potential for
future repetition,[32] as the massive circumstances behind the development of such a type

---

27 Arendt, Eichmann, 287.

28 Among recent critiques of the Arendtian "banality of evil" thesis, see Yaacov Lozowick, Hitler's Bureaucrats:
The Nazi Security and the Banality of Evil (London and New York, 2002), and Richard Wolin, Heidegger's
Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse (Princeton,NJ, 2001), 31–69. An
excellent clarification of the relation between radical and banal evil is given in Bernstein, Hannah Arendt,
137–153. For overviews of the reception of Arendt's book on Eichmann and the debates about the main
issues, see: Richard I. Cohen, "A Generation's Response to Eichmann in Jerusalem," in Hannah Arendt in
Jerusalem, ed. Aschheim, 253–277; Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World (New
Haven and London, 1982), 328–377; Jennifer Ring, The Political Consequences of Thinking, Gender and
Judaism in the Work of Hannah Arendt (Albany, 1997); Hans Mommsen, "Hannah Arendt's Interpretation of
the Holocaust as a Challenge to Human Existence: The Intellectual Background"; Susan Neiman, "Theodicy
in Jerusalem"; and Dana Villa, "Apologist or Critic? On Arendt's Relation to Heidegger," in Hannah Arendt in
Jerusalem, ed. Aschheim, 224–232, 65–90, and 325–337. On the intellectual anchorage and universalist
effects of the notion of the banality of evil, see Richard H. King, Race, Culture and Intellectuals 1940–1970
(Baltimore and Washington, D.C., 2004), 173–195.

29 Lozowick, Hitler's Bureaucrats, 230. Lozowick repeats Yehuda Bauer's judgment, which, however, forgets
that Arendt never claimed Eichmann's deeds as 'banal' but the perpetrator himself (see King, Race, Culture,
and the Intellectuals, 189).

30 Arendt, Eichmann, 212ff , 22, 277–8.

31 She considered the Holocaust a crime against humanity "committed on the body of the Jewish people." See
Eichmann, 7.

32 See King, Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 192.

of thoughtless perpetrator could only spread and evolve on a global scale. Additionally, she stopped judging evil deeds by "intentions" and will but focused her attention on the factual effects of deeds.[33] Evil deeds and their new perpetrators do not necessarily have to look or be represented as monstrous in order to have immediate monstrous consequences. They do not have to be acts of an evil "will" or of any will at all. As our contemporary circumstances show, they might even present themselves as good and as fighting against presumably monstrous evils, which can be fabricated in the form of an elusive enemy.

Departing from the lessons about the power of ideologies, the banality of evil, and thoughtlessness I have outlined, there are two issues I would particularly like to tackle when turning to the Yugoslav case: first, the question of nationalism and the role of racism—as powerful ideological means for the mass mobilization and justification of violence and killings. Then, I would like to elaborate on the relation of racist and nationalist ideologies to the direct mobilization for the commission of crimes and to raise the question whether thoughtlessness represents a part of the general "structure" or frame that enables such crimes to happen in our time.

## Elements of Racism: Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia was a paradigmatic new case in which race thinking, not directly connected to any assumed 'biological' formulation, began to play an important role in the preparation for war, and where the combined elements of race production, mass mobilization, and terror influenced ethnic cleansing, mass murder, and post-conflict state building. However, racism in particular was overlooked or sidestepped by most analyses,[34] while mobilization, war, and genocide were debated in terms of excessive (ethnic) nationalism, ancient hatred, and elite manipulation. Except for a few authors, there are few references to racism in the literature about the war and the killings in the former Yugoslavia.[35] Even those analyses that account for elements of racism and refer to 'racist dimensions' speak mainly about ethno-nationalism, ultranationalism,[36] extreme nationalism, or, like Branimir Anzulovic in his book Heavenly Serbia, about ethno-tribalism, which comes closest to noting racist elements and the issue of tribal nationalist mobilization.[37]

---

33 See Neiman, "Theodicy in Jerusalem."

34 Julie Mertus, "The Role of Racism as a Cause or Factor in Wars and Civil Conflict," in International Council on Human Rights Policy: Consultation on Racism and Human Rights Geneva, (December3–4), 1999, (http://www.ichrp.org/ac/excerpts/50.pdf ), accessed 13 May 2005, 1.

35 Michael A. Sells' The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London,1998) explores "religious mythology, extreme nationalism, and racialist theory" in the case of Bosnia (xv). See also David Bruce MacDonald, Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia (Manchester and New York, 2002), 122ff . and Aleksa Djilas, The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919–1953 (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 107, who both underline the importance of racial differences in the process of distinction making between the Serbian and the Croatian groups.

36 See J. A. Irvine, "Balkan Authoritarian Ultranationalist Ideology and State-Building in Croatia, 1990–1996," in Problems of Post-Communism 44, no. 4 (2001): 30–44.

37 See Branimir Anzulovic, Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Gencide (London, 1999). Other exceptions besides Julie Mertus's writings are Branka Magas's refl ections on Milosevic's Serbia as a fascist state in terms of the only remaining "post-Stalinist" state (among the post Yugoslav republics) that "remained largely intact to be turned to a racist, even genocidal project"; in Magas, "Milosevic's Serbia and Ethnic Cleansing: The Making of

One reason for the prevailing omission of racism in this literature is certainly its non-conceptualization as a relevant explanatory moment for the Yugoslav case and the stress instead on biological racism, which thus does not link it with what is usually seen as nationalism or excessive nationalism.[38] Another incentive might resemble the academic avoidance of the question of massive popular participation in the Rwandan genocide, since it raises unpleasant questions about indifference, conformism, and collaboration[39] and does not tackle the issue of widespread racist thinking among intellectuals. Racism might thus be subsumed under the more "respectable" cover of nationalism or "culture." As Etienne Balibar has suggested, a strong emphasis on the distinction between nationalism and racism or Nazi-racismcan conceal the racist elements within nationalism itself (especially underlining the difference between "normal" and "excessive" forms).[40]

In what sense can we speak of the power of racism in the 1980s and 1990s in the former Yugoslavia? It should be understood in relation to tribal nationalism as explained within its broader and transformative aspect and be tested against the above described role and power of totalitarian ideologies. Racism was, of course, not the "cause" of war/s in the sense of being the only element that led to the conflict.[41] Nonetheless, not unlike modern anti-Semitism, which, as Arendt noted, arose from a relatively unimportant political phenomenon to became a powerful transformative ideology, in the former Yugoslavia a new, transformed sort of racism emerged: it grew out of the nationalist soil and cemented various elements and discourses, including nationalist ones, together. Its mobilizing force and role are close to the tribal nationalism described in the first part of the chapter. It is a paradigmatic case of racism without race: race here is a social construction, a result of the essentialization of characteristics attributed to the group(s) (racialization) and primordialization of identities, rendering them natural and unchangeable. This process of racism was, to be sure, connected to nationalism, and it grew up on its own terrain.

Elements of racism in post-Tito Yugoslavia began to unfold with the help bothof the masses and the rising elites, there being a need of popular support for their policies in the 1980s, and in view of the democratic multiparty elections in the1990s.[42] These elements

a Fascist State," Against the Current 52 (September/October, 1994). Similarly, some analyses speak about chauvinism, "bordering on racism," "racist reasoning," and about depictions of the Other that are linked to racist metaphors. See Robert M. Hayden, "The Triumph of Chauvinistic Nationalism in Yugoslavia: Bleak Implications for Anthropology," Anthropology of East Europe Review 11, nos. 1–2 (1993). As well as the exceptions, one must enumerate the problem of Orientalist approaches toward the Balkans. See Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans (New York, 1997) and Dusan I. Bjelic and Obrad Savic, eds., Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation (Cambridge, MA,2002).

38 Such an approach keeps nationalism and racism strictly apart and insists on the fundamental difference between them. On the basis of the claim that the Holocaust was about biological racism, one can then refuse all comparisons and claims, for example, that the "Balkan ethnic cleansing" was "fundamentally different" from the Holocaust, which was a "program of biological extermination based on racist eugenic theories." The fundamental difference is that it "does not require mass extermination but rather mass removal." See Hagen, "Balkans Lethal Nationalisms," 8 (my emphasis). Such "particular" treatment of "ethnic cleansing" as a local peculiarity and a "lesser evil" actually legitimizes it and its methods of annihilation—similar to a very problematic scholarly tradition from the first part of the twentieth century.

39 Mamdani, When Victims become Killers, 8.

40 Balibar and Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class, 46–7

41 Mertus, "The Role of Racism," 1.

42 In an apparent paradox, they coincided with the opening of the public space and the emergence of wide press and other media freedom and made possible the public revival and competition of the old debates about the

were crucial for the subsequent radical divisions. The consequences of race thinking and racism first came into view in connection with policies and police repression in the Serbian autonomous province of Kosovo (the Serbian "sacred land" that had an Albanian majority—a non-Slavic population) in the early 1980s, long before the beginning of the war. The Kosovo problem was the core of the process of the destruction of Yugoslavia, and during the process of escalation it became an "abstraction," a myth. It was there that the relations were first racialized and that the difference was framed in terms of quasi-biological differences and, so to speak, "written on the body." To understand the racialization of relations in the former Yugoslavia, one must consider the attitudes toward Kosovo Albanians, since the "Kosovization" of Serbian politics later spread to the whole of Yugoslav politics.[43]

Albanians were the target of Serbian race-thinking even at the beginning of the twentieth century: they were, on the one hand, dehumanized and represented as a wild, anarchic tribe without history and state—similar to apes and sleeping in trees—"European Redskins" who could not govern themselves, a sort of strange, resistant element that should be exterminated. On the other hand, they were treated actually as "lost Serbs," the worst converted characters, who had been assimilated through a process of Albanian violence, rape, killings, and property theft, since this was the only way to explain the preservation and even the demographic growth of Albanians.[44] In 1937, a Serbian academic, Vaso Cubrilovic, prepared a memorandum to the "solution of the Albanian question." He raised the alarm regarding the "demographic explosion" of the Albanian population and suggested that all methods for marginalizing the Muslim-Albanian population had so far failed and that one should introduce methods which would correspond to the "Western approaches": the introduction of laws that would make the life of Albanians in Yugoslavia unbearable, followed by mass deportations.[45]

The proposed measures had the character of ethnic cleansing avant la lettre, and they point to a very problematic scholarly tradition from the first part of the twentieth century, which, based on racist premises, advocated population transfer and exchange as normal "policy solutions."[46] Not surprisingly, the discourse of "planned resettlement" was restored in the 1980s through intellectual and scientific discussions of the necessary

voice and standing of particular nations. This shows that—contrary to the common liberal belief that governments are the foremost producers of nationalist propaganda and that free speech is the best "antidote"—under conditions of incipient democratization and openness of public debate, nationalist myth-making and ethnic confl ict can befostered and that nationalist and racist ideas can be sold successfully in the "marketplace of ideas." The instances of the media in Yugoslav and Rwandan demonstrate that the impact ofnationalist and racist propaganda depends on the "demand," and the masses are not just the innocent victims of elites. See a convincing analysis by Jack Snyder and Karin Ballentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," International Security 21, no. 2 (1996): 5–40.

43  See Julie Mertus, Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War (Berkeley, 1999), 8–9.

44  See the chapter on Albanians in I. Banac, The National Question in Yugoslavia (Ithaca, 1984) and OliveraMilosavljević, U tradiciji nacionalizma ili stereotipi srpskih intelektualaca XX veka o 'nama' i 'drugima'[In theTradition of Nationalism, or Stereotypes of Serbian Intellectuals about 'Us' and 'Others' in the XX Century](Belgrade, 2002), 218ff . It is signifi cant that the so-called "race betrayal" is also a key themeof the famous epic poetry written by Njegoš, The Mountain Wreath. The Slavic Muslims were seen as "turkifi ed" by having converted to Islam, and this "was not simply to adopt the   mores of a Turk, but to transform oneself into a Turk. To convert to a religion other thanChristianity was simultaneously to convert from the Slav race to an alien race." Sells, The BridgeBetrayed, 45.

45  Wolfgang Petritsch, Karl Kaser, Robert Pichler. Kosovo, Kosova: Mythen, Daten, Fakten (Klagenfurt,1999), 113–128.

demographic policies to hinder the supposed "demographic genocide" of Serbs in Kosovo. Dobrica Cosic, a member of the Serbian Academia of Sciences, a novelist and confirmed dissident, who became president of Yugoslavia in 1992 and belonged among the intellectuals who formed the new Serbian Kosovo platform after Tito's death, stated in 1991: "Planned resettlement and population exchanges, while most diffi ult and most painful, are still better than a life of hatred and mutual killings."[47] In this process, Albanians were represented once more as dangerous, sly intruders who threaten "our" families, women, property, graves, and tradition and who can conspicuously misuse their own sexuality and rape or attempt to rape "our" women from sheer "separatist" motives. Here, the image of the "Other" was successfully combined with the image of an intruder, a settler, who is occupying and taking over "our land." This image of the intruder or settler acquired the status of an elusive enemy, which could later be applied easily to the Muslim population in Bosnia, who were targeted as "Turks."[48]

Through the prototype of the racialized Other, Albanians were not the onlyc ase of racialization. In the second half of the 1980s, the "clash of civilizations" loomed large— one could see derogatory images of a presumed Balkan and uncivilized enemy throughout Yugoslavia. The "Balkan man" was depicted as lazy, indifferent, and violent; and contrasted with images of a diligent, hard working, honest,c ivilized non-Balkan man. West-east and north-south divisions paved the way for the Europe-Balkans dividing line in these boundary drawings. They divided Yugoslavia itself and helped to reinforce the already existing Western racist-cultural prejudices and images that conditioned later problematic responses to the massmurders. The Slovenian and Croatian media and cultural elites tried to classify themselves as more civilized than the others and to place themselves on the "European" side of the demarcation line between Europe and Yugoslavia. They did soby enforcing an image of the "Balkans" as violent and macho, lazy and backward, fatalist, fraudulent, and cunning. The "North" or "West" saw itself as defending and cherishing European culture against the sinister backdrop of the wild, dark, orthodox, oriental, and Islamic Balkans. Yet the "eastern" part of Yugoslavia, on the other hand, worshipped its own putatively ancient, traditional, hospitable, and "anti-fascist" values. From that perspective, Slovenians were characterized as feminized, weak, exploitative, cunning, selfish, and calculating, whereas Croatians were positioned as more Western but also as Nazi-followers, and the supposed similarity of Croat and German characteristics of evil with bellicose traits emphasized (Croats who "speak Croatian but

---

46 The measures—the agreed transfer of the 200,000 Albanians, Turks, and Muslims from Kosovoand Macedonia to Turkey—were not carried out, owing to the outbreak of the Second World War and for other reasons. However, between 90.000 and 150,000 Albanians left Kosovo at that time. Petritsch, et al,. Kosovo, 128. On the issue of "ethnic cleansing," see Tone Bringa, "Averted Gaze: Genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina," in Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide, ed. Alexander Laban Hinton (Berkeley, 2002), 204–5 and Milosavljevic, Utradiciji nacionalizma. Bringa rightfully problematizes the terms "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" in the Yugoslav conflict, showing how the use of "ethnic cleansing" (denoted as a "lesser evil") supported nonintervention policies and the relativization of crimes and how the term genocide was misused by the Serb leadership and propagandists. Ibid., 203–4.

47 Olivera Milosavljevic, "The Abuse of the Authority of Science," in The Road to War in Serbia:Trauma and Catharsis, ed. Nebojsa Popov (Budapest, 2000), 302.

48 Mamdani shows how the Rwandan genocide took place as a 'native genocide' and how the Tutsi were constructed as 'settlers' to be targeted as intruders and not neighbors. Mamdani, WhenVictims, 10ff .

think 'German'").[49] Albanians, Muslims, and Roma were in the worst position. In fact, to all those who shared a Slavic language, Albanians represented the "'Other' within."[50]

## Tribal nationalism

The racialized picture created more room for the revivals of the old nationalist debates in the 1980s, with racial images assuming an inseparable part. The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, produced in 1986, was a paradigmatic example of such a problematic "national programme." It united racial and national components and declared that the federal organization of theYugoslav state endangered Serbian national substance, and biological survival itself, claiming that the Serbs were victims of discriminatory policies and of an anti-Serbian coalition and conspiracy wherever they went. It demanded a change in the constitutional order by recalling the old historic and mythical ideas of Greater Serbia. Supposedly this would have enabled the unimpeded cultural unification of all Serbs, starting with the abolition of Kosovian autonomy. It was the basis for a mobilization of the Serbian population in all parts of the former Yugoslavia. The point of departure was created by the revival of conservative nationalist-organicist thought in Serbia.[51] This line of thought from the turn of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, following Charles Maurras and Joseph de Maistre's ideas and combining these with the race ideas of Gustave Le Bon, was amended by the works of new ideologists like Dobrica Cosic. The result was combined with ideas of Christian collectivism, Pan-Slavism, "missionism," and the chosen nature of the Serbian people ("Christ's immortal people" in the words of the orthodox priests).[52] All this had an explicitly anti-Western perspective, since the history of Serbia has been seen as a conspiracy of the West against itself. But at the same time, it had as its aim the "salvation of the West." This reinvention of Serbian nationalism was crucial for the development of a specific "national revolution," the leading role of which was taken over politically by Milosevic in 1987.

This prewar and interwar development would be more comprehensible, if we distinguished, as Arendt did, between two types of nationalisms, although—in the case of Yugoslavia we are discussing—the boundaries between these are not as clearly delineated as hers: between state-building nationalism and tribal or völkisch nationalism, which has Pan-national features, and presents itself as a continuously "unfinished" project, aiming at the extension of the national body against state-building. In the face of the assumed threats and seemingly enormous ethnic hatreds ,in Yugoslavia it was constructed as a "defensive nationalism" and as a drive toward a "natural," organic community (Volksgemeinschaft), which would include all its members against any "artificial federation." As such, it had difficulty accepting the presence of the "Other." In fact, the

---

49 Milosavljevic, U tradiciji nacionalizma, 252ff .
50 See Slavenka Drakulićc "We Are All Albanians," The Nation 268, no. 21 (June 7, 1999); FrankeWilmer, The Social Construction of Man, The State and War: Identity, Conflict and Violence in Former Yugoslavia (New York and London 2002), 101.
51 For an exhaustive elaboration on this, see Mirko Dordevic, Srpska konzervativna misao [Serbian ConservativeThought] (Belgrade, 2003).
52 Radmila Radic, "The Church and the 'Serbian Question,'" in The Road to War in Serbia, ed. Popov, 251.

advocates of "defensive" and "positive"nationalism demanded an "ethnically clean state"; and they accepted—through revivals of the old debates—the alleged "voluntary re-settlement." However, these old ideas became politically useful only when it seemed as if the enormous ethnic hatreds and "old hostilities" had "suddenly" recurred in Yugoslavia and when the politics of self-victimization and blaming others became everyday practice.[53] The consequence was that a solution could not be imagined without changing the ethnic composition or affecting "a humane, planned resettlement of population,"[54] or what came to be known as ethnic cleansing.

Tribal nationalism is thus not the same as ethno-nationalism. If we understand ethnonationalism as an endeavor for autonomy and/or independence on the part of the population/s, which is already part of a constituted "nation"—in the name of their own identity (already existing or in the process of construction),[55] then tribal nationalism does not have the same features as ethno-nationalism. Ethno-nationalism still represents a state- and polity-building endeavor, in spite of its homogenizing potential and exclusivist features. Though both these versions of nationalism include the potential for racist exclusion and do not have a "pure" appearance, they are to be distinguished in terms of their legitimization and their methods of understanding the state and citizenship. In the former Yugoslavia, tribal nationalism had to be seen as an addition to and modification of nationalism, which was, like German tribal nationalism at the beginning of Nazi-rule, successfully hiding its racist core and expansionist face under the "respectable cover of ationalism."[56] This is why it was—here as well—"rather difficult to distinguish between mere nationalism and clear-cut racism."[57] All seemed to be similar to the "general national feelings," and in the multinational state everyone had—finally—the possibility to express his or her feelings loudly and publicly. To distinguish between these elements was even more difficult in the case of Milosevic's Serbia, where an additional "respectable cover" existed—not nationalism but the "saving" of Yugoslavia, which extending over the core of "Greater Serbia" provided him with international support. This kind of tribal nationalism with its racist kernel was misread to a large extent both by the international academic community and international actors as a "defense" of the Yugoslav state, although its propaganda was, almost from the inception, openly anti-state and genocidal.

To be sure, nationalist revivals and racist elements as parts of tribal or ethn-onationalisms did not only exist in Serbia or among Serbs. Hierarchical images of "us" and "them" and myths of common origin and national mission, as described above, developed in Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia as well. No one was "innocent" in this regard. In Croatia, where Tudjman and his Croatian Democratic Alliance came to power in the first multiparty elections in 1990, tribal nationalists,

---

53  In the words of Radovan Karadzic, Bosnian Serb leader, "We cannot live with the Muslims and the Croats, for there is too much hatred, centuries of hatred. Serbs fear the Muslims. They cannot live together. Because of genocide committed against them (the Serbs), they have to defend themselves." These words have been picked up by the Western media, and "ancient hatred" has become a mantra of which the consequence has been the fatalistic notion that the war cannot be stopped (see Bringa, "Averted Gaze," 197).

54  Olivera Milosavljevic, "New and Old Nationalisms," Helsinki Files 11. The Balkans Rachomon. (http://www.helsinki.org.yu/fi les.php?lang=en), accessed June 20, 2005, 42–5.

55  Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture, ed. Guido Bolaffi , Raffaele Bracaletni, Peter Braham andSandro Gindro (London, 2003), 103–4.

56  Arendt, Origins, 167.

57  Ibid., 165.

reviving national myths as well as Croatian fascist symbols (Ustasa symbols), completely overcame the state-building process and embarked on a total national revolution, thus representing an ideal confirmation of the correctness of Milosevic's "pre-emptive" steps and Serbian mass mobilization across all of Yugoslavia. As Croatia was very soon dragged into war and lost nearly a third of its territory, the homogenization was almost unanimous. This brought about powerful mobilization and expansive military action (not defensive alone but military engagement in Bosnia) as well. Soon there were enemies all around who were demonized. Not only the Serbian enemy but the Muslims as well were acquiring clear racial features of the "Other," the "intruder," the "Turks," and the convert among other derogatory designations.[58]

However, to state that there were "universal" tribal nationalist and racist elements in the leadership goals and among parts of the population of all the republics at the time, and not only in Serbia, does not mean that they were all "identical" and that they all had equal weight or the same power. This would lead us to a type of relativist discourse (they were all "equally" bad), which was quite common among interpreters of the Yugoslav war. Such talk was basically connected to the alleged ancient hatreds among "Balkan men"— and probably accounted for many of the totally missed opportunities for intervention on the part of the international community. Not everybody was prepared for the war, and the least prepared were the Bosnian Muslims, who were viewed both by Serbs and Croats outside and within Bosnia either as an "artificial" ethnicity or as a group of national traitors, thus representing the most politically weak and potentially superfluous group in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The strongest and the most sustained mobilization of the population or war, and for processes that might be compared with those of totalitarian movements and developments, existed in Serbia; and the Serbian population in other places— such as Kosovo, Croatia, and Bosnia—was successfully mobilized for tribal nationalist goals as well. Together with the racist and völkisch ideology, this could bring about conditions for genocidal developments and outcomes. Military engagement and the bloody war in Bosnia, the partition of which was secretly agreed on between Milosevic and Tudjman in 1991, started to function within a larger plan of "ethnic cleansing." As well, the strife between the two "nationalist" tendencies in Serbia (the dominant expansive tribal one and the other, promoting what is called a "modern Serbian state") could never really be resolved and left the Serbian question open, since many never had given up the tribal nationalist objectives.[59] By this, of course I do not mean to deny that similar developments took place in Croatia, for example, or that they would not have been be possible, under certain conditions, in any of the other Yugoslav nations (for example in Kosovo after 1999). On the contrary. But though the elements were present everywhere, they would not necessarily crystallize into the same murderous events. Tribal nationalisms have used race thinking and racist endeavors to fix and naturalize hierarchic

---

58 Tudjman suggested to Western diplomats that Croatia was fighting its war against Muslim fundamentalism. Bringa, "Averted Gaze," 241. For more about the development of Croatian nationalism, the Ustasa legacy and extremist developments, including racist dimensions, see Irvine, "Balkan Authoritarian Ultranationalist Ideology and State-Building in Croatia."

59 This is one of the reasons that the prime minister, Zoran Djindjic, who had been the representative of "modern liberal nationalism," was assassinated in 2003. Latinka Perovic, "The Sociopolitical and Ethno-religious Dimension of Wars in Yugoslavia," in The Violent Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Causes, Dynamics and Eff ects, ed. Miroslav Hadzic (Belgrade 2004), 123–4.

images of simple, logical race relations, the images of which were more than a product of "domestic" Yugoslav fabrication: such images were also nurtured by European and global clashes. They legitimized special demographic policies, exclusion, and subsequent ethnic resettlement as "lesser evils," and that paved the way for the ethnic cleansing and attempted annihilation of certain groups. Even the idea of legitimate "removals of populations" and ethnic cleansing itself created a condition of "inverse order," where one could first imagine, then easily "slip" into excesses and, finally, plan genocidal endeavors. Tribal nationalisms show a general trend: every nationalism, be it defensive or whatever, indulges in racism, in fact, if and when it denies universal equality and common humanity. Tribal nationalisms have their place among those policies and movements, which, from the position of "scientifi cally" supported race thinking, reorganize populations as separate bodies in the name of "cleanliness" and "purity." Such developments take place at all times when equality is perverted "from a political into a social concept," "the state into an instrument of the nation" and when parts of the population can be defined as "separate bodies."[60] Although the point of transgression—as shown by Arendt—is inherent in the sovereign structure of the nationstate itself, such a point of transgression does not play a decisive role as long as it is limited politically. Whether these elements are going to develop into genocidal events does not depend on the "nature" of nationalism—on its being "good"or "bad," "aggressive" or "defensive," Slovenian, Serbian, Albanian, or whatever it might be—but on its limitation by the state as a political institution, by the rule of law and constitutional government and by citizens' actions and judgment. As soon as we move out of the nation-state frame, as a polity framework one can expect the deadly fusion of racism and nationalism. In Yugoslavia the state, though authoritarian, ceased to exist. With the spreading of the tribal-nationalist shield against it, so did the ground for thinking and judgment. This had lethal consequences wherever the state could not be reconstructed, as was the situation in Bosnia, since nothing could have replaced it in time: neither the international community nor even less the UN protection.

## Srebrenica and Banality

They told us that the Muslims were scum, more or less. That you would do well to have nothing to do with them. That actually the women and children were always nice . . . But the men with their big mouths, you should have nothing to do with them. The lads told us that Serbian men were better to deal with than Muslim men. They were much better disciplined.
    —Dutch/ UN soldier in Srebrenica.
    In 1993 a UN "safe area" with a few hundred peacekeepers was created in the eastern Bosnian town of Srebrenica to protect the remaining Muslim population gathered in that part of partitioned Bosnia after the Bosnian Serb Army occupation. In spite of this status, in July 1995, the enclave, together with more than 20,000 refugees, fell into the hands of Bosnian Serb troops under the leadership of General Ratko Mladic. Between 7,000 and 8,000 men aged twelve to sixty were killed within a very short time span. The weak UN

---

60 Arendt, Origins, 138, 231.

battalion of Dutch soldiers was neither able nor willing, nor possessed of the mandate, to protect the enclave and the population. In that situation almost no one acted or judged, and the Dutch battalion commander, receiving no help from UN headquarters, under the circumstances even made an agreement with the Bosnian Serb general Mladic about the "transfer of the population." His soldiers stood by while Mladic's troops separated the men from the women and children. Before the well-organized executions of Muslim men, young and old, were carried out, Mladic proved efficiently the (non)earnestness and (non)willingness of the UN forces to protect the Muslim population. After kidnapping a group of Dutch soldiers, he threatened to kill the hostages if there were a NATO bombing. Air strikes ordered against him were cancelled by UN headquarters. Consequently, the unprotected enclave fell into the hands of Bosnian Serb militias, the Serbian secret police, and paramilitary troops. They immediately began the work of selection, transportation, and execution, under the pretext of organizing a "transfer of population" to the Muslim territories only. Those responsible in the UN did not take seriously warnings about the danger of a massacre, nor did they immediately report the early evidence of killings. The Dutch commander even evaluated Mladic's action as an "excellently planned military operation."[61] The probable estimate of the number of the genocide victims is 7,536, but only a few of them were identified.[62]

How was it possible that mass killings such as the one at Srebrenica took place? Why would people organize and mobilize for violence and killing? Were their motives racism and nationalism? The terrible role of the Serb Bosnian military leaders, professionals who "organized, planned and willingly participated in genocide or stood silent in the face of it"[63] must be queried along with the roles of immediate perpetrators like the soldiers, paramilitaries, and volunteers. Questions must beraised also concerning the role of the bystanders supposed to be protectors, such as the UN Dutch battalion, and the role of the international community as well.What happened to them? Why did they not act? [64]

There is no doubt that, after occupying the Srebrenica territory, the Bosnian Serb military leaders under the command of General Mladic intended to kill eventually as

61  Samantha Power, "A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide (London, 2003), 417.

62  Helge Brunborg, Torkild Hovde Lyngstad and Henrik Urdal, "Accounting for Genocide: How Many Were Killed in Srebrenica?" European Journal of Population 19 (2003): 244. About the Srebrenica case, see David Rhode, Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica (New York, 1997); Michael N. Barnett, "The Politics of Indifference at the United Nations and Genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia," in This Time we Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia, ed. Thomas Cushman and Stjepan Mestrovic (New York, 1996), 128–162, Jan Williem Honig and Norbert Both, Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime (Harmondsworth, 1996); David Rieff , A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis (New York, 2003); Julija Bogoeva and Caroline Fetcher, Srebrenica. Ein Prozess, Dokumente und Materialien aus dem UN-Kriegsverbrechertribunal in Den Haag (Frankfurt am-Main, 2002). For detailed research into the UN Dutch battalion role in Srebrenica, see the report of The Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD), Srebrenica – a 'safe'area. The fall of a Safe Area Reconstruction, background consequences and analyses of the fall of the Safe Area. (http://213.222.3.5/srebrenica/), accessed September 5, 2005. A deeply shocking BBC documentary about the mass atrocities in Srebrenica is A Cry From the Grave.

63  Slavenka Drakulic, They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in The Hague (London, 2004), 75.

64  These issues were thoroughly worked out by Arne J. Vetlesen, who develops a typology of bystanders to genocide and defines groups of bystanders: those directly in charge of the situation and those responsible in the loose sense of being cognizant of genocide through television, radio, newspapers, and other public media, but not directly involved in it (neither by profession nor by formal appointment) and then asks a question about the status of (non)action in such cases. See his "Genocide: A Case for the Responsibility of the Bystander," Journal of Peace Research [Special Issue on Ethics of War and Peace] 37, no. 4 (2000): 519–532.

many men as possible of fighting age and that the plan was carried out as a well-planned and rapidly organized military operation. Overall, 17,342 members of military units and 1,988 members of the police, regardless of their function, were in one way or another involved in the events of Srebrenica's mass killings.[65] Also evident are the "unclear mission" of the UN peacekeepers, the grave mistakes, the absence of judgment, and the many omissions of the UN headquarters in Zagreb. Their situation as the supposed protectors of Srebrenica, yet who saw their mission as absurd, was obviously an impossible one. But this cannot answer the above questions.

An attempt to explain the involvement of direct perpetrators and collaborators in the organization of the massacres might oscillate between two interpretations.The dominant one is that people participated, used violence, and killed because of fanatical nationalism and hatred, and because they were manipulated by elites. Yet, despite the power of tribal nationalist ideologies and their persuasive effects on the elites and masses, analyses of the genocide and "ethnic violence" from Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Sudan, and Australia, suggests that ethnic hatred itself might not be as a powerful tool for direct mobilization as is usually maintained.[66] This reveals a contradiction in any explanation that insists on the ideological intentionalist interpretation. Hatred, desire for vengeance, and a desire for ethnic cleansing might be involved here, though they are not in the initial plan.

On the one hand, there is no doubt that patterns of war, genocide, and rape in the former Yugoslavia were present in the public conduct—as described above—before the real violence took place, and the war started. Tribal nationalisms with their neo-racist features created a discursive script for violence and facilitated its normalization, crystallizing in practices of "ethnic cleansing." But these developments were neither natural nor the result of simple indoctrination. They emerged out of the transformation of reality itself. The belief that abuse, manipulation, and "evil" were on the side of the power elites and politicians only, who skilfully and consciously used racist and tribal ideologies, while the people (or "masses") were just obedient, innocent, naturally good and/or misled by leaders like Milosevic in Serbia or Tudjman in Croatia is similarly questionable. Too many facts contradict such a conclusion. First, among the crucial conditions for Milosevic's successful policy in Serbia (as well as the effects—later, in the war—of Tudjman's policy in Croatia) were an elite-mob connection and a mob mobilization. The "meetings of truth" supporting Milosevic in the second half of the 1980s were well-organized and-sponsored public rallies held all over Yugoslavia with the aim of removing non-coordinated party leaders. This was a pretext for the successful mobilization of the Serb population outside of Serbia and for the total division later in Bosnia. Something very close to the totalitarian manipulation of elements was generated "until reality vanished." The masses, as well as intellectuals, media, and the general public, participated in the fabrication of their own and ultimate "truths" and myths, and in a total reorganization of memory. Second, mobilization was perpetrated through the

---

65  See James D. Fearon, and David D. Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity," International Organization 54, no. 4 (2000): 845–878

66  Mamdani, who made a detailed analysis of the Rwandan mobilization for genocide, sees such reasoning as a great problem in academic writing, which likes to see genocide as "designed from above" and hesitates to acknowledge the action and initiative from below. Mamdani, When Victims become Killers, 8.

mobilization of thugs, hooligans, and football fans, who introduced violence, ritual, and symbolic warfare and, finally, served as a resource for the paramilitary troops for the war. They became the "weekend warriors."[67]

Similar to what Arendt described as the German case under Nazi rule, circumstances of "inverted order" were created, in which "the battle for destiny" of the Serbian people was at stake. In Bosnia, this caused the rapid development of total divisions and policies of ethnic separation, especially since, after the multiparty elections, power was divided exclusively along ethnic lines. Such self–deception was the reason that large parts of the Serbian intellectual and political elite could claim—by the middle of war—that Serbia was "not at the war," "that (war) was started by destiny, not by them" and "that it was a matter of life or death for them, who must annihilate (their) enemies or be annihilated."[68] For similar reasons after the war, there was a strong denial in Serbia of events like that at Srebrenica and a mass mobilization against the extradition of war criminals, both in Serbia and Croatia. The background for such an inversion was constructed by a racialized reality, and a majority mentality similar to Eichmann's thoughtlessness, or, as PrimoLevi called it, the "will not to know."[69]

Contrary to the insistence on ethnic hatred, and racist and ideological indoctrination or blindness, studies of genocide and mass violence have suggested that "ethnic" violence was neither a "motive in itself " nor a development from the masses after being duped by the elites: "Rather… [it] can be a cover for other motivations such as looting, land grabs, and personal revenge, and the activities of thugs set loose by the politicians."[70] The personal motivations that lie behind genocidal violence between and among neighbors might have little to do with ideology as a "motivation resource." This has been proven in the context of collective violence in traditional warfare, where comradeship not hatred is the dominant battle motivation, and the main actors are "terrifyingly normal men" whose killing is "more or less a product of modern culture."[71] Within the inversion of order and rules (when killing is no longer necessarily a crime), there are certain "pleasures of war" that are inculcated, encouraged, and maintained in the tradition of warfare and killing to make warfare attractive and psychologically endurable.[72]

Concentrating on the way perpetrators and collaborators were mobilized for genocide, J. Mueller argues that the factual mechanism of violence in the former Yugoslavia was "remarkably banal" and that it did not reflect deep, historic passions and hatreds. It seems that the immediate violence was rather "the result of a situation in which common, opportunistic, sadistic, and often distinctly non-ideological marauders were recruited and permitted free rein by political authorities."[73] The Hague criminal tribunal trials have provided much material in support of such claims. Not surprisingly, the usual attitude of

---

67  Such was the case of the Belgrade Red Star football club fans, who became the real "warriors", the so called "Arkan's Tigers," and engaged in the war in Bosnia. See Ivan Colovic, "Football, Hooligans and War," in The Road to War, ed. Popov, 373–396.

68  See Arendt, Eichmann, 52,

69  Primo Levi, If this is a Man/The Truce (London, 2003), 386.

70  Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction," 874.

71  Glenn Gray, The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle, Introduction Hannah Arendt (Lincoln and London 1970; reprint 1998), xviii

72  See Joanna Bourke An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare (London,1999), 13ff .

73  John Mueller, "The Banality of Ethnic War," International Security 25, no. 1 (2000): 43.

the defendants was one of "not guilty," since they had had no "intention" of perpetrating mass murder or war crimes. Slavenka Drakulic, who belongs among those authors who have increasingly begun to think in terms of the "banality" of perpetrators, introducing terminology used by Arendt in Eichmann in Jerusalem,[74] has analysed profiles of the perpetrators convicted of genocide and war crimes in the Yugoslav war and the Srebrenica mass murders. She shows that there is nothing monstrous about the perpetrators as people and that they are not evil nor beasts. Rather, they are "ordinary people" who became involved with violence and organized executions through professional or other decisions and took small steps in their lives without much reflection. "Ordinary thinking man" was neither inevitably a nationalist nor a madman, just someone who, when "given a chance to kill on apparently legitimate grounds and, in addition, to enrich himself by looting his victims, . . . did not think twice."[75] In fact, not only were they not necessarily fanatics, their motives simply did not count. But this was no Balkan peculiarity. Other instances of collective violence show similar features. Such perpetrators exist in all societies, thus similar events could, under the right circumstances, happen almost anywhere, including in Western societies. Furthermore, being aware of this fact (and not demonizing the perpetrators), one can go on to claim that the tragedies that overcame Bosnia, Croatia, and Rwanda could have been avoided. They could perhaps have been manageable with "different policing and accommodation procedures," if there were no monstrous and fatal evil supposed to be hidden behind them but simply human action and omission, and if they were not inevitably seen as springing automatically from a single cause or origin. These tragedies were the result neither of "inevitable historic necessities" nor of "ancient hatreds," but were provoked by the human actions of political leaders, local extremists, or thugs whose violence got out of control.[76]

Yet, if the mechanism of violence itself is banal, if the perpetrators are not stimulated by their hate, what is the role of widespread and seemingly overwhelming ethnic hatred, racist images, and ideologies of tribal nationalism that I have also been discussing? What role does racism play in the process of mass killing and of crimes against humanity, if it is not the immediate trigger? The provisional answer might be that such tribal nationalisms, racist ideologies and images provide, above all, a rationalizing frame for perpetrators who have primarily banal motivations but not the immediate thrust to act. These bring about the idea of extinction of the "other," demonstrate his superfluity; but it is up to the "banally evil" agents to carry out the more or less dirty task. Perhaps one can assume that racism (like anti-Semitism) gets lost in the process of extermination, and the "movement" itself takes the lead.[77]

However the dilemma does not really consist of a necessary choice between evil intentions, fanatical beliefs, and banal, mindless perpetrators or coalitions of the elite-masses. Rather one might think about the fact that both the elite and the masses share a common "ontological ground" which is actually banal and banally produced as well.[78] This

---

74 For example: Tim Judah, The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia (New Haven, 1997), 228–238 and Mueller, "The Banality of Ethnic War," International Security 25, no. 1(2000): 42–73.

75 Drakulic, They Would Never Hurt a Fly, 167.

76 See Mueller, "The Banality of Ethnic War," 67ff .

77 See footnote 27.

78 Fearon and Laitin, "Violence and the Social Construction," 86.

is not a fixed and unchangeable culture or "ancient hatred." On the contrary, it is a constructed reality, a fabricated framework, which includes discursively constructed "scripts," myths of common origin, and easy historic explanations about "Us" and "Them"—foreigners, evildoers, and thus our enemies—which can be employed in present situations not only to produce feelings of fear and danger but to be an effective shield against any other reality. Here, emotions of hatred need not be included in the common picture, which is taken for granted, although, to be sure, they might exist beyond the common picture. Such a shield, a fabricated truth or image, seems to function as a process of ideological interpellation. It is not an essentialist demiurge but reproduced and manipulated by the actors themselves, left, so to speak, for their own personal use. Individuals are not indoctrinated but eventually come to occupy the "common ontological ground," which they coordinate and reshape with their own actions and omissions. This fabricated reality, as I tried to indicate in the first part of the chapter when talking about the Arendtian notion of ideology, is itself "banal." It is superficial, "thought defying," as Arendt wrote to Gershom Scholem, and facilitates self-deception. Such a banal "reality" might, of course, be diverse, but the hierarchic images of racialized relations, established through the tribal nationalist engagement, are sufficiently convenient, especially as they do not have to show their straightforward racist face but can be hidden—these days—under the respectable cover of cultural differences.

Not only the perpetrators and their collaborators but also the international professionals and bystanders have been caught in the self-made trap of such realities. This element belongs to the overall picture of bystander indifference and the conduct of the Dutch battalion. The Dutch soldiers were trained to accept an incredibly rigid and homogenized image both of the situation in the "Balkans" and of Bosnian Muslims, who were shown as the worst of the "Balkan men"—depicted literally as "the Other."[79] Faced with a situation without resources and under threat of their lives, they could easily disavow not only their professional but also their human responsibilities. To be sure, not only the Dutch soldiers shared a well-established, differentiated image of the Balkan populations. The message of the UN and the Dutch government was clear: Bosnian Muslim lives were not as valuable as those of UN soldiers. This has made the event at Srebrenica—like the genocide in Rwanda one year before—"more than a crime" but an event that "shamed humanity."[80]

## Conclusion: The Yugoslav Elements—Old and New

What happened at Srebrenica had elements both of administrative mass murder and features of face-to-face killing and massacre. In this sense, it reminds us of both the Holocaust and the administrative massacres from colonial times. The "administrative" aspect of the mass murder lies not only in the perfect planning and organization of the killings, which took place in a very short time span, but in the interwoven test of stories:

---

79  NIOD, Srebrenica – a 'safe' area, (http://213.222.3.5/srebrenica/toc/p2_c08-s003_b01.html), accessed September 5, 2005.
80 See Mark Huband in Roy Gutman and David Rieff , Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know (New York and London 1999), 314, and Vetlesen, "Genocide: A Case," 531.

of the deeds and guilt of the immediate perpetrators; stories of the deeds and nondeeds, responsibility, and guilt of those who were directly in charge of the situation in the UN protected area, and stories about the part played by the international military and administrative structure responsible for protecting the lives of the Muslim refugees. The path toward the mass murder of Srebrenica, called "the worst massacre in Europe after the second WorldWar," demonstrates how in Bosnia, through silent or open agreement with policies of "ethnic cleansing" and step by step, conditions involving "holes of oblivion" were established for a dreadful "solution" to the problem of those who had been rendered superfluous (in this case the Muslim population), and how judgment, responsibility, capacity, and readiness for action to prevent the murders could simply retreat from sight. The mass murder had been organized in such a way that even ordinary people, the population in general, either supported the perpetrators or directly participated in the killings, and was thus organized into guilt in the Arendtian sense. Finally, the outcome, while taking place within regional borders, offer lessons much broader than local or regional ones, and poses questions similar to those arising from the crisis of the European nation-state in the first half of the twentieth century. The outcome crystallized worldwide changes in the global policies of superpowers: the dawning of the era of so-called "humanitarian interventionism" and of the wars against terror.

These events were not only "repetitions," since novel elements and new forms emerged: in Bosnia, mass rape was part of the enterprise of annihilation of the Other, and cases of forced impregnation of women from the other ethnic group demonstrated a post-racist imagery in the annihilation practices. The killings, as illustrated by the shelling of Sarajevo, took place either before the very eyes of the "international community" and millions of virtual witnesses or, as in the case of Srebrenica, even with the collaboration ("standing by") of international forces, who were supposed to protect the population under threat. Srebrenica and the siege of Sarajevo, where Bosnian Serbian soldiers and weekend fighters served eight hour shifts of shelling daily, before the eyes of the international community, were among the unprecedented examples of the functioning of post-totalitarian elements under new circumstances. They both reflect more than just a war and a crime perpetrated as a consequence of racist endeavour. Was the mass murder of Srebrenica in Bosnia not the test case of the potential universal features of tribal nationalisms, the banality of evil, thoughtlessness, and of Eichmann-mentality in the post-totalitarian age within Europe itself—despite their relegation to the Balkans? Only here, apart from the direct perpetrators, the global bystanders, Eichmann's children, in the words of Günther Anders,[81] have also been included in the common picture. As Arendt enlightened us, the new predicaments might not look like the cruellest, at least not at first sight, but they might have the cruellest consequences imaginable.

---

81  This is the title of Günther Anders's (Stern) not widely known book in German, Wir, Eichmannsöhne, Brief an Klaus Eichmann (Muenchen, 1988) [We, Sons of Eichmann: A Letter to Klaus Eichmann]. Anders, Arendt's first husband, closely analyses the procedures of self–deception within a modern society of unlimited fabrication. He describes this problem in terms of a discrepancy between Herstellen (fabrication, the technically feasible) and Vorstellen (imagination), whereby the unimaginable (Unvorstellbare) always tends to be fabricated if we fear to think about the consequences of our actions. See 24 ff .