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BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE OPPRESSOR: GLORIFICATION OF CRIME AND CONTEMPT FOR VICTIMS AS THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANITY IN POST-YUGOSLAV SOCIETIES

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Abstract

The glorification of one's own crimes and the contempt for victims of others is a common denominator of sociopolitical existence in post-Yugoslavian societies. Religious institutions, primarily the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have contributed to the creation of such an atmosphere in their respective areas. Dealing with this type of aberration is their primary contemporary challenge.

Key words: glorification of crime, contempt for victims, post-Yugoslavian societies, Serbian Orthodox Church, Catholic Church in Croatia and in Bosnia in Herzegovina, radical evil, culture of killing

Birth of the Folk

In the text entitled "Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism" Tonči Kuzmanič argues that in the 1990s, something more and worse than the war took place in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, depicting it as a radical evil.¹ Kuzmanič claims that adopting a distinction between these two concepts means understanding the essence of the Yugoslav conflict, because the war, unlike the radical evil, has a certain sociopolitical

¹ Tonči Kuzmanič, „Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism“ in *The Violent Disintegration of Yugoslavia*, ed. Miroslav Hadžić (Beograd: Centre for Civil-Military Relations, 2004), 81–92.

logic.² In contemporary political science, war assumes that at least one of the conflicting parties is an internationally recognized legal entity, that is, a state which by military means seeks to achieve certain strategic, territorial, conquering, economic, and other goals.³ Radical evil, on the other hand, indicates the inconsistency of the achievement of these goals or the complete lack thereof, and often manifests itself as a bloodbath that becomes a purpose in itself.⁴ “The difference between War and Radical evil is important, above all, because with its help it is possible to depict more accurately (or to depict it at all) the essence of butchery (e. g. Sarajevo, Srebrenica, killing Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats in Croatia, etc.).”⁵

According to Kuzmanič, only through this distinction does the logic of sociopolitical developments that took place in the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the last decade of the 20th century become clear, for this clearly indicates that crimes against humanity carried out under the aegis of ethnic cleansing were not the result of any political aberrations or excesses, but rather the result of complex ideological projects that found their ultimate statement in something that, according to Dejan Jović, can ultimately be understood as ethnototalitarianism.⁶ Jović notes this is an ideology and doctrine that aims to create an ethnically pure and absolutely sovereign state, treating ethnic community as a homogeneous community, implying it as a single political entity regardless of the state borders that may divide it.⁷ Church institutions, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have largely succumbed to such an ideological concept, which consequently, according to Vjekoslav Perica, have developed a specific ethnic-religious utterance, which he calls ethnoclericalism.⁸ According to Perica, ethnoclericalism is specifically a Balkan contribution to contemporary religious fundamentalism, based on the idea of a nation constructed on an ethnic aspect, and of the concept of a church whose clergy are the leaders of that ethnonational community, but who do not hold

² Kuzmanič, *op.cit.*, 82–85.; Charles-Philippe David, „War and Peace“, u *International encyclopedia of political science* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011.).

³ Kuzmanič, „Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism“, 86.; David, „War and Peace“, 2725–27.

⁴ Kuzmanič, „Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism“, 85.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 85, 95. ; Dejan Jović, *Rat i mit [War and Myth]* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2017), 283–323.

⁷ Jović, *Rat i mit [War and Myth]*, 309.; See also: Branko Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“ (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, 2019), 71.

⁸ Jović, *Rat i mit [War and Myth]*, 283–323.; Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 214–17.; See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 143–45.

themselves responsible for their own political activities in the way that secular leaders are responsible.⁹

The beginning of the ethnototalitarian and consequently ethnoclerical ideological concept can be found in Kuzmanič's thesis that the policies that led to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia do not have a nationalist but a populist (folkish) essence, because they did not strive for the establishment of a nation or national state, but of the ethnically, very narrowly profiled sociopolitical subdivision (*Volksgemeinschaft*).¹⁰ The establishment of folkish communities or folk (people), was carried out by the so-called populist (folkish) elites who perceived themselves as someone who conceived that folk (people), who gave birth to it and who are now obliged to guide it through life.¹¹ "Populists relate to People as a possible product-child on whose creation-birth there is still more to be done, as "fathers," but also as midwives-shepherds."¹²

The Serbian Orthodox and Croatian Catholic episcopate found themselves largely within this discourse, and very quickly, in the form of the midwives-shepherds, began to impose themselves as part of the respective populist (folkish) elites. Consequently, the conversion of religious institutions into that which Perica calls ethnic churches began, the key feature of which is the advocacy for strong homogeneous churches in a strong homogeneous state, between which exists an intense and firm cooperation for the preservation of ethnic identity.¹³ Therefore, from today's distance, as Kuzmanič suggests, we can say that the birth of a folk (people) was not a side effect of the post-socialist period, but was a clearly defined, planned and prioritized goal.¹⁴ In this sense, the radical evil that was at work in the 1990s can no longer be understood as an aberration of armed conflicts, but as a basic component of the said process of birth of a folk (people).¹⁵ The expulsion, torture, mutilation, slaughter, thus appear as the key programmatic content of the populist (folkish) ideologies, of which, as Viktor Ivančić says in his text "Killing Culture: Or, Dead to Rights," devastation became the foremost creative act, wherein liquidation

⁹ Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 215.

¹⁰ Kuzmanič, „Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism“, 88–98.

¹¹ Kuzmanič, 93–94.; See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 145.

¹² Kuzmanič, „Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism“, 94.

¹³ Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 215., See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 145.

¹⁴ Kuzmanič, „Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism“, 95.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 84, 95.

is the only creation.¹⁶ Religious institutions in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, whether they wanted to admit it or not, met the demands of populist (folkish) ideologies, while resistance to the radical evil coming from their ranks was either individual or insufficiently serious.

Establishment of the Culture of Killing

When, in April 1987, in Kosovo Polje, during the meeting between Kosovo Serb representatives and delegations of the League of Communists of Serbia headed by Slobodan Milošević, as the Kosovo Serbs contended with the police of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo, Milošević told the mob: "No one should dare to beat you!" That was a statement that, practically, brought him out from a relative political anonymity to the forefront of social turmoil in the former Yugoslavia. But the problem with that now famous statement, says Ivančić, does not lie in the fact of protection of the defenseless people against the executive branch of the state, but in the fact that regardless of what Milošević actually said, this phrase, in the minds of the recipients, took on a whole new meaning: "We have to start the beating!"¹⁷ The nature of this unspoken commandment was quite in the spirit of that time, given that at that moment, Yugoslav society, for already a couple of years, was living in an atmosphere of constant deterioration of interethnic relations and of multiplication of ethnonationalist narratives, creating by that the preconditions for future violence, which, concluding with the year 1991, escalated into full-blown conflict.¹⁸ "The great Serbian interpellation, the greatest this-century undertaking of Serbian politics and even more culture—the invocation/ production of the enemy, all those irredentists, separatists, Ustasha, *balija* [demeaning name for Muslims from Bosnia], and the like—finally began to bear fruits."¹⁹ In such an atmosphere, says Boris Buden, Tuđman, Croatia and the whole of the Croatian people fell into the orbit of the Serbian people's aspiration gathered around the factor Milošević,²⁰ resulting in that which Ivančić calls a collective expedition into the realm of brutality and terror.²¹

¹⁶ See Viktor Ivančić, Hrvoje Polan, i Nemanja Stjepanović, *Killing Culture* (Beograd: Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst, 2019), 19.

¹⁷ Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *op.cit.*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14–16.; Ivan Čolović, *Smrt na Kosovu polju [Death on Kosovo Plain]* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX. vek, 2016), 386.; Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 143–44, 156–58.; Boris Buden, *Barikade 2 [Barricades 2]* (Zagreb: Arkzin, 1996), 87–90.

¹⁹ Buden, *Barikade 2 [Barricades 2]*, 87.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

²¹ Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 14.

If we combine Ivančić's and Kuzmanič's theses, this expedition would mean a civilizational step backwards for the societies emerging from the breakup of Yugoslavia, because those societies, instead of devoting themselves to the idea of creating a national state, mired themselves in the concept of nationalism, which, in addition to its anti-citizens aspirations, contains also anti-state aspirations.²² This led to the situation in which the renewal of post-Yugoslav national cultures freed from the communist imperative of brotherhood and unity was carried on the muscles of radical evil through the processes of a totally executive nature.²³ According to Ivančić, this can be clearly seen from the methods by which, during the 1990s, the aforementioned national cultures tried to establish themselves by *expelling* foreign words from the language, *destroying* books printed in alien script, *purging* libraries of undesirable literature and *pruning* the curricula of undesirable textbooks, *shelving* undesirable movies and television shows, *banning* undesirable music on the radio stations, *censoring* the theatre repertoire, *preventing* the translation and distribution of books we have no use for, *banishing* the artists we have no use for, *demolishing* the monuments we have no use for, *ostracizing* the noncompliant intellectuals, *hindering* intractable works of art, *sluicing* the literary canon, and *eliminating* unreliable staff from the institutions of culture.²⁴

The establishment of such criteria has led to a complete transformation of the meaning of the word culture as one that implies the enlightening and broadening of horizons, becoming its exact opposite, manifesting itself as a worldview of a narrow-minded and limited world.²⁵ This *ideally-closed* world Radomir Konstantinović calls *palanka*,²⁶ describing it as the world that opposes any kind of activity that would cause its evolution, its change, because the characteristic of *palanka*'s history, culture and mentality is summed up in its distinct uniformity and the spirit that opposes the spirit of the times.²⁷ Adapting to these conditions, religious institutions in the former Yugoslavia began to agitate for political options made up of a homogeneous ethnic entity and active believers, aiming to strengthen the idea of patriotism and traditionalism, considering

²² Kuzmanič, „Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism“, 91.

²³ Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁶ *Palanka* is a word of Turkish origin for a small town with an inert life style of conformism and narrowmindedness.

²⁷ Radomir Konstantinović, *Filosofija palanke [The Palanka Philosophy]* (Sarajevo: University Press-Magistrat, 2009), 19–23.

the religious institution as the central axis around which this new social ideology should rotate.²⁸ It is assumed that only through one's own church and one's own state is one people able to shape itself as a proper nation, for the church institution, along with the state, are key features of a particular national identity.²⁹ In this sense, a nation is perceived as a sociopolitical molasses, unable to make its historical point unless its center is an independent national religious institution protected by a strong state led by a ruling elite composed of members of the same ethnic community and faith.³⁰

It is precisely within this civilizational and spiritual vacuum, further pressured by the burden of radical evil, that the *renewed* national cultures in the territory of the former Yugoslavia have grown. Their distinct self-orientation and rejection of coexistence with others resulted in these cultures finding their ultimate sociopolitical expression in destruction, establishing themselves primarily as *negative* identities, therefore, as those primarily articulated through the denial of the other. Distancing from neighbors has thus become a process of production and self-renewal of national culture, insisting on the revision of the smallest cultural details, which, as Emir Imamović says, through the narcissism of small differences, has grown into a *Nazism* of great similarities.³¹ In other words, when the knowledge of the distinct similarities among ethnic communities in the former Yugoslavia became intolerable, then the bearers of the *renewal* of national cultures began to establish a language of violence,³² thus confirming Kostandinović's thesis on *palanka's* consciousness, that the power of violence occurs wherever the powerlessness of articulation comes to light.³³ Consequently, continues Konstandinović, this leads to the discovery of the necessity of *Nazism in the spirit of palanka*, even as its utmost contradictory necessity, through which the impossibility of the *palanka* spirit is touched in the most tragic and bloodiest way.³⁴

If we take a closer look at this, we would discover that in the Croatian case, this extreme contradiction, that impossibility of the spirit of *palanka*, as Ivančić notes, takes the form of what

²⁸ Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 215–17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 215–216.

³¹ Emir Imamović Pirke, „Ja nemam razloga da šutim [I have no reason to remain silent]“, *Novosti*, December 31, 2011., <http://arhiva.portalnovosti.com/2011/12/ja-nemam-razloga-da-sutim/>., See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 97.

³² Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 42–48.

³³ Konstantinović, *Filosofija palanke [The Palanka Philosophy]*, 321.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Buden calls *Ustasha culture*.³⁵ Buden defines the *Ustasha culture* as a kind of self-destructive element of Croatian nationalism, within which the nationalism begins to corrupt itself, turning itself into its own gravedigger, for it destroys the presumptions of the nation's reproduction.³⁶ In the Serbian case that would be *Chetnik culture*, of course. Ustashism and Chetnikism therefore appear, to use Buden's thesis in both these cases, as a stage of culture that emerges at the moment of its final decadence and decay, wherein the culture is no longer able to articulate anything other than the fact of its own identity essence located somewhere in the past, which is why such cultures can consequently be understood as dead cultures.³⁷ A similar cultural death threatens the religious institutions in the former Yugoslavia, primarily the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Croatia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, because they, having taken the shape of ethnic churches by aiming to become state churches in ethnically homogeneous states, came to the sort of climax of their purpose of existence.

By successfully ethnicizing the religious segment within the ethnically cleansed territories, the institutions concerned have not achieved their goal *de jure*, but they have achieved it *de facto*, influencing thereby the sociopolitical movements within *their* states. The structures of these ecclesial communities today are intensely involved, both in the creation of deterioration of interethnic relations and in the production of ethnonational myths that serve the further reproduction of ethnototalitarian ideologies. In addition, in recent years, the Serbian Orthodox and Croatian Catholic episcopate have been actively involved in the process of historical revisionism, and in revitalizations of the Ustasha and Chetnik movements. Of course, it should be noted that this is not about drawing a parallel between the Ustashism and Chetnikism of the 1940s and their contemporary versions, because it is necessary to take into account the historical difference between their version in that time and their current versions.³⁸ However, Buden points out, one should not be misled into thinking that this is merely nostalgia for the past, because today's supporters of the Ustasha and Chetnik movements are active subjects of these ideologically compact and practically effective policies that directly create our reality.³⁹

³⁵ Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 106.

³⁶ Boris Buden, „Ustaška kultura danas“ (STav-Cenzura Plus, 2016.), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDFaUuWO4EY>.

³⁷ Buden.; Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 106.

³⁸ Buden, „Ustaška kultura danas“.; Boris Buden, „Ima li hrvatski jezik šanse preživjeti?“, Telegram.hr, 2018., <https://www.telegram.hr/price/ima-li-hrvatski-jezik-sanse-prezivjeti-pricali-smo-s-filozofom-borisom-budenom-koji-bas-i-nije-optimistican/>.

³⁹ Buden, „Ustaška kultura danas“.; Buden, „Ima li hrvatski jezik šanse preživjeti?“

Generally speaking, this kind of atmosphere in post-Yugoslav societies is the result of national cultural *renewal* created within the framework of radical evil, which did not aim at a higher dimension of sociopolitical development (civic society and national state), but remained exclusively focused on satisfying its limited ethnonationalist needs, reproducing itself in the *palanka's* spirit, thus stimulating the development of narrow-minded ethnic communities. In that sense, Ivančić concludes that the construct of a *renewed* national culture is nothing but a volubly embellished form of cultural self-destruction, which, through the killing of culture, led to the (re)generation of the culture of killing.⁴⁰ The greatest problem with this sociopolitical situation, however, lies in the fact that societies created by the breakup of Yugoslavia, even after thirty years since the beginning of the conflicts between them, are unable to cope with the fundamental aberrations that formed them. Consequently, from this cultural deadness, the ideology of glorification of their own crimes and contempt for others' victims, rises. Church institutions have joined this circle by fostering a concept of self-victimization and the evil memory ideology, which is a classic misrepresentation of theses, wherein the victims of one's own people are exaggerated, and the crimes of another people are used as justification for a crime committed by one's own people, bringing thereby the worshiping of violence to its narrative climax.⁴¹

Coronation of Violence

“Leaving aside the frankincense fumes, the heartrending wail of church organs, and other pompous liturgical set-pieces, the sanctified name of national culture flaunted on banners was but one of the more powerful ideological watchwords for the indispensable and uninhibited elimination. In the advanced stage of nationalist ideology, the relevance of the Other was summed up in his being unwelcome. No other aspect was acknowledged to exist.”⁴² The quoted sentence leads to the nucleus of what Ivančić sees as a culture of killing, manifesting as the pure elimination of the other, which also implies that the act of elimination is not treated as a crime, but as an integral part of the ideological program of *renewal* of the national culture.⁴³ A kind of monograph of the implementation of radical evil in the creation of post-Yugoslav folkish communities, the book "Killing Culture" clearly illustrates the logic of the cohesion and

⁴⁰ Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 81, 106.

⁴¹ Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 45–48.

⁴² Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 20.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19.

functioning of such sociopolitical creations. What began with the cleansing of one's own culture from others—by *expelling* foreign words, *purging* of libraries, *shelving* of undesirable movies, *banning* undesirable music on the radio stations, *censuring* the theatre repertoire, *banishing* the artists we have no use for, *demolishing* the monuments we have no use for, and the like—ended in ruthless torture and slaughter throughout the former Yugoslavian territory. In this context, Miroslav Volf, in his book *Exclusion and Embrace*, will say that the development of such ideologies has grown on the idea of returning to the pristine purity of our linguistic, religious, or cultural past, which seeks to shake away the dirt of otherness collected on *our* march through history.⁴⁴ Within this intention, Volf stated, before the others are physically excluded from the living space we hold as ours, there comes a serious process of public denial of their humanity, in accordance with which they are attributed with abusive terms—dirty, lazy, evil, parasites, bastards, and the like—that represent them as the inferior beings unworthy of regret.⁴⁵ By establishing the rhetoric of inhumanity as something acceptable, the boundaries of morality are relativized, and the establishment of violence comes in the position of becoming part of the social worldview.⁴⁶ Bringing others to the level of mere object unworthy of being covered by human rights creates in those who condemn them the impression of general innocence and irresponsibility for their fate,⁴⁷ leading to an act that Ivančić calls the *transition from words to bodies*, meaning from verbal discrimination to physical torture.⁴⁸ It could be stated that with this, the coronation of oppressors as national reformers officially began, culminating at the end in the proclamation of war criminals as ethnonational icons.

Therefore, what began as a verbal devaluation of others, as already stated, has evolved into their symbolic expulsion, to be finally ended with their physical elimination, making it quite clear how the process of transition from the killing of culture to the culture of killing functions, as the two endpoints of the evolution of the *renewal* of national cultures at post-Yugoslav territories, wherein criminals are honored and victims are banished from memory. The decadence

⁴⁴ Donald L. Horowitz, quoted according to Miroslav Volf, *Isključenje i zagrljaj* (Zagreb: Step Press, 1998), 76.; Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 51–52.

⁴⁵ Volf, *Isključenje i zagrljaj*, 78.; See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 51–52.

⁴⁶ Volf, *Isključenje i zagrljaj*, 79.; See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 51–52.

⁴⁷ Volf, *Isključenje i zagrljaj*, 79–80.

⁴⁸ Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 14.

or civilizational flaw of the project of *renewal* of the national culture is particularly striking when one considers the examples from the book *Killing Culture*, indicating that some of the most cruel forms of torture and killing were carried out in places whose original purpose was of a cultural and educational nature, such as palaces of culture, movie theaters, and schools. Ivančić collectively depicts these places as *culture vulture units*, spots wherein cultural activities have given way to those of a criminal kind and which, as such, form the very heart of the project of *renewal* of the national culture.⁴⁹ When to this perverted version of national cultural development is added the religious aspect combined with the respective violent ideologies, it directly means that to the cultural objects as the killing fields of human relations are added the church premises as the killing fields of spiritual unity, reaching thereby the peak of folkish spirituality. The ideological monster that emerges on this occasion, as Ivančić notes, is articulated through the sheer cultural brutality decked in the ceremonial garb of liturgical celebrations,⁵⁰ and as such presents itself as the beginning and end of any sociopolitical reality, the ultimate concept of folkish existence, a kind of *palanka's* eschaton. In this sense, Konstantinović will say that the spirit of *palanka* elevates its own reality above the world, because reality for it is just another name for eternity, the framework whereat the constant repetition of the same takes place, meaning a permanent affirmation of the *palanka's closed-eternal* principle as the principle that defines beginning and end, the heaven and earth of the whole *palanka* world.⁵¹

Accepting such an ideological pattern, which contains the imperative of living in one's own, hermetic world in which there is no place for others, according to Željko Mardešić, leads to the emergence within the church institutions of *the ideologized defenders of their own infallibility and of other people's sinfulness*, who, in this case, refuse to see how behind such sacralized folkish formulations a pure secular self-interested politics is hidden.⁵² With this, Mardešić continues, God is pushed to the front line of sociopolitical events so that his holiness could cover the unrighteousness that takes place in the background in the form of frauds, threats,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁵¹ Konstantinović, *Filosofija palanke*, 88.

⁵² Željko Mardešić, *Rascjep u svetom [The Rift in the Sacredness]* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2007), 653.; See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 52.

war, violence, and death.⁵³ Therefore, Mardešić claims, the religious organizations that contribute to the creation of such an atmosphere in society bear full responsibility for it, as bearers of justifications of the policy of discrimination, and as stimulator of activities that dominated through the bloody and dramatic historical events.⁵⁴ In this sense, the responsibility of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church in Croatia, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the bloody Yugoslavian denouement, is unquestionable, because, *nolens volens*, they have contributed to the development of folkish ideologies that have grown beyond the mere respect for the material and spiritual goods of their own people, and, as Ivančić notes, ends in the ideology of the complete elimination of others and careful branding of members of their own tribe.⁵⁵

The line of demarcation between these two sides was drawn by the force of violence, by the strategy of radical evil, aiming to establish a fast and hard cultural boundary between the people of the Yugoslavian territories, whatever it takes. “Violence becomes more feral precisely because cultural differences must constantly be produced—in order to provide a *spurious rationale* for it.”⁵⁶ However, despite the numerous efforts of the Croatian and Serbian political imaginarium about the essential difference between the Croatian and Serbian people, this kind of differentiation is hardly sustainable, because on the basis of culture, some clear and insurmountable boundary can hardly be determined.⁵⁷ Exactly for this very reason, to these two political imaginaria, the religious aspect is of particular importance, because it is practically the only factor by which this division is fully visible.⁵⁸ “That division between Serbs and Croats (who share the same language) along religious lines—the Orthodox and the Catholic respectively—has remained crucial to this day.”⁵⁹ Consequently, identifying Croats with

⁵³ Mardešić, *Rascjep u svetom [The Rift in the Sacredness]*, 653.; See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 52.

⁵⁴ Mardešić, *Rascjep u svetom*, 654.; See also: Sekulić, „The Pretense Veil of Christian Vulgarism: The Phenomenon of Ethnoreligianity in the Contemporary Societies of the Former Yugoslavia [unpublished PhD dissertation]“, 52.

⁵⁵ Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 19–20.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁷ Snježana Kordić, *Jezik i nacionalizam [Language and Nationalism]* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2010), 209–10, 238–40. Neven Budak, *Prva stoljeća Hrvatske [The First Centuries of Croatia]* (Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1994), 57.; Sima M. Ćirković, *Srbi među europskim narodima [Serbs among European Peoples]* (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2008), 9–10.; Irina Ognyanova, „Religion and Church in the Ustasha Ideology (1941-1945)“, *Croatica Christiana periodica* 33, izd. 64 (2009.): 161.

⁵⁸ Sekulić, *op.cit.*, 68.

⁵⁹ Kordić, *Jezik i nacionalizam*, 210.

Catholicism and Serbs with Orthodoxy became vital to the identity of these peoples. In this context, according to Žarka Kovač, quoted by Ivančić, the war in the former Yugoslavia contained elements of a fratricidal conflict, because the tendency was to mutilate the other person to such an extent that the abuser does not see in the victim his own brother.⁶⁰

Thus, according to Kovač, it was the war of Cain and Abel.⁶¹ In this, the impulse and level of bestiality shown by the oppressors in the 1990s is hidden.⁶² Ivančić, in his aforementioned text "Killing Culture: Or, Dead to Rights," quotes the extensive number of examples of the ways torturers have brutalized their victims, whose point was not only to defeat their hated enemy, but it was primarily an act of *oppressive larpurlartism, brutalization for brutalization's sake*, in order to put the victim in a completely humiliated position, to devastate that human being as a person.⁶³ In this process of humiliation and devastation, among the perpetrators of radical evil, the great importance of the religious factor is noticed, manifesting in the fact, as Ivančić states, that the *proper* sacred sites were carefully spared the sights of carnage, while the other people's sacred sites were scenes of the most cruel crimes,⁶⁴ striving thereby to exterminate the victims at all existing levels, both the physical and spiritual ones. "It never occurred to the protagonists of sadistic dissipation, which also took place in former culture centers, to butcher and ill-treat foes 'of another faith and nation' in their own places of worship. Serbs did not torture Bosniaks and Croats in Orthodox temples, Croats did not maltreat Serbs and Bosniaks in Catholic churches, Bosniaks did not set up their orgies of cruelty in mosques. [...] This, however, did not apply to the 'alien' ones: to kill, rape, or maim Catholics in a Catholic house of prayer, or the Orthodox in an Orthodox one, or Muslims in a mosque, meant to debase the victims further by desecrating what was 'theirs.'"⁶⁵

People from church institutions, if they were not at the same level with these nationalist strategies, remained silent, or quite rarely were insufficiently loud, so that the general role of religious institutions could not be interpreted in any other way than as an adherence to the concept of radical evil as a necessary path towards the renewal of the national communities. The same can be said for the responsible people in the executive branches of states who have gained

⁶⁰ Ivančić, Polan, i Stjepanović, *Killing Culture*, 67.

⁶¹ Ibid.,

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 63-64.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

their sociopolitical shape through the breakup of the Yugoslav federation. The toponyms in which the radical evil took place have become the epicenters of a sort of all-out national *renewal*, wherein the material and spiritual inheritance of the newly born cultures of killing intersect. In this sense, Ivančić will say that in the atmosphere of moral dystopia where the universal moral laws are trampled upon by the supreme ideal of blood and soil, the difference between the concept of the camp and the concept of national culture is erased.⁶⁶

Thirty years after the beginning of the mentioned *renewal*, post-Yugoslavian societies are still unable to deal with the aforementioned fact and to break out of the role of oppressor, but, moreover, they are increasingly intensifying the relativization of the that fact, wherein, as Ivančić notes, the fatal intimacy between revisionism and victimology (on a larger scale, just such an intimacy has been fostered for decades by Croatian and Serbian *authorities* as regards the trauma by the name of Jasenovac) is demonstrated,⁶⁷ whose ultimate goal is to suppress the memory of the victims that *we* caused, and to exalt the sacrifices *we* made. This led to the legitimization of a certain paradox according to which all have been victims and no one has been perpetrator, opening thereby the gap under the normalization of interpersonal relations, both within and between post-Yugoslavian societies, ultimately manifesting itself through the act of hand-kissing of the convicted war criminal by a church dignitary, by painting war criminals on icons in churches, naming streets, educational and cultural institutions after them, erecting monuments in their honor and the like.

Accordingly, we can conclude that the *renewed* national cultures today largely rest on the sacralization of their own and the demonization of others' crimes. One's own crimes are mystified and enveloped in theories of justified and even holy war, the fates of the victims caused by these crimes are interpreted as God's punishment and God's justice, biographies of the war criminals turn into hagiographies, the iconography of the crime flourishes—the blood on hands is presented as a holy water, the army helmet as an aureole, the military camouflage uniform as a pure white robe. Namely, by sacralization of the results of the culture of killing, the zenith of folkish ideologies has been reached, according to which it seems that the *promised land* is exclusively the one formed within the ethnonationalistic purgatory, by an act of ethnic cleansing. In such lands, there is no place for the beaten, because, as Ivančić states and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

photographs of Hrvoje Polan confirm, they are excluded from the memory, causing thereby the occurrence of the reflex of denial.⁶⁸ Ivančić presents this through the *musealization of denial* as an activity that in the places where victims were tortured, erects the monuments to torturers.⁶⁹ “If they are on the sovereign territory of the side that supplied prison guards, persecutors, and killers, not a single establishment photographed here bears any kind of memorial to warn of the crime and commemorate the victims.”⁷⁰

In post-Yugoslavian societies, the memory of the victims is missing at all levels, both at the level of the *thrones* that defined the rhythm of crimes and at the level of the *altars* that were their spiritual support, establishing thus a firm connection that does not allow the memory to penetrate to the sociopolitical reality of the societies concerned.

Return of the Oppressed

The breakthrough of memory as an overture to the true commemoration of the victims begins with the act of repentance and the process of redemption, which in the states that emerged from the breakup of Yugoslavia, got stuck in the limbo between the concept of self-victimization and the memory of evil ideology. When we add to this the ongoing historical revisionism—fostered from the most radical political options, additionally encouraged both by certain circles of church dignitaries and the silent approval of the political establishment—it becomes quite evident that the culture of killing lives its life to the fullest. Dealing with the past as an antidote to the culture of killing and a precondition for establishing a culture of memory as a state project, according to Nerzuk Ćurak, who Ivančić quotes for this occasion, should start with the erection of a monument to one’s own guilt, creating thereby groundbreaking conditions that can help to avert future violence.⁷¹ The first step to the admission of one’s own guilt lies in what Kuzmanič sees as an acceptance of the fact that the aspect of radical evil in the territory of the former Yugoslavia was not only a side-effect of the military activities, but an integral part of the populist (folkish) ideologies to which slaughtering and butchering were an integral element.⁷²

According to Kuzmanič, only in this way will it be possible to stop serving those who were the bearers and creators of torture and slaughtering missions, and who are hiding behind the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 20, 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁷¹ Ibid., 31.

⁷² Kuzmanič, „Disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and its Legacy: Populism – Not Nationalism“, 84.

people.⁷³ This will not necessarily mean the abolition of the people, because, as Ivan Šarčević directs us by referring to Karl Jaspers, there are different degrees of guilt—*criminal guilt* that carries the burden of a material crime, *political guilt* relates to members of a state, people, or party to the power of which we are, as a collective, subordinate, and which we enable to exist, *moral guilt* concerning the responsibility of a person for their own actions before of their own conscience, and a *metaphysical guilt* to which God is the sole adjudicator and which in the broadest sense relates to a crime against humanity in general⁷⁴—which suggests to us that there is no collective, but only individual responsibility. This means that regardless of the fact that the criminal state, party and individual crimes fall on the burden of the people or of a certain collective, everyone has a different guilt or responsibility that he or she should accept,⁷⁵ while everything else is just an excuse and demagoguery. Only after clarifying and accepting these settings does a certain society come to the possibility of creating a framework for victims to exit from a position of humiliation and dehumanization, from a world of intense relationship with and dependence on their tormentors.

In his text “We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?,” Jürgen Moltmann provides a kind of draft for the recovery of victims of violence, their exit from the position of helplessness and worthlessness.⁷⁶ His main thesis in this sense is that to this day in the churches and in the public, we know how to deal with the perpetrators, but we are speechless in light of the suffering of the victims.⁷⁷ The perpetrators are called out by name while the victims remain mostly anonymous, Moltmann claims in this context.⁷⁸ Therefore, his key question is: “In the justification of the sinner we have only our trespasses for which we pray

⁷³ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁴ See Ivan Šarčević, *Zečevi, zmije i munafici* (Sarajevo-Zagreb: Synopsis, 2014), 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, “We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?“, in *Comfortable Words: Essays in Honor of Paul F. M. Zahl*, ed. Todd Brewer i John D. Koch (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2013), 125–30.; Jürgen Moltmann, “Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]“, in *Opasna sjećanja i pomirenje: Kontekstualna promišljanja o religiji u postkonfliktnom društvu [Dangerous memories and reconciliation: A Contextual Exploration of Religion in the Post-Conflict Societies]*, ed. Srđan Sremac Zoran Grozdanov Nikola Knežević (Rijeka: Ex libris, 2012), 85–91.

⁷⁷ Moltmann, “We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?“, 125.; Moltmann, “Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]“, 87.

⁷⁸ See Moltmann, “We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?“, 125.; Moltmann, “Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]“, 87.

in view, but where is the sacrifice for the victim before whom we are guilty?,"⁷⁹ thereby introducing us the very center of this issue, which hits the soft underbelly of our sociopolitical reality. By stating that Jesus Christ did not see sinners and perpetrators, but rather victims of injustice and violence,⁸⁰ Moltmann in an easy way breaks the chains of the concept of self-victimology and the memory of evil ideology that has come to life in the former Yugoslavian territories and that is generated from certain circles of the Croatian Catholic and Serbian Orthodox episcopates. By arguing that justification, first and foremost, means the creation of justice for the victims of evil and only then for the perpetrators,⁸¹ Moltmann makes a complete reversal of the Christian consciousness in the former Yugoslavian territories, devoted to the sacralization of their own crimes and the demonization of others' crimes.

The path of recovery and way out of the state in which radical evil is accepted as a kind of cultural renewal, according to him, leads through dual ways: (1) the classical way that will bring justice through the sacrament of penance and the forgiveness of sins that includes three steps—(a) the recognition and confession of sins, (b) the movement away from the ways that have allowed the perpetration of evil or omission of the good, (c) the restoration of the perpetrator to a new and rectified community with their victims;⁸² (2) and the alternative way, which is Moltmann's proposal of a new ritual and sacrament aimed at the justification of the sinner's victims, which is also divided into three steps—(a) the victims of injustice and violence must not only bring to light their pain, but even more the humiliation they have endured, therefore, they need a free space wherein they will be heard and encouraged to find their dignity again, (b) they need to rise up from the humiliation they have experienced, that is, they need a reversal where their own humiliation is brought out of the depths of shame and into the

⁷⁹ Moltmann, "We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?," 126.; Moltmann, "Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]," 87.

⁸⁰ Moltmann, "We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?," 126.; Moltmann, "Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]," 88.

⁸¹ See Moltmann, "We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?," 126–27.; Moltmann, "Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]," 88.

⁸² Moltmann, "We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?," 127–28.; Moltmann, "Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]," 88–90.

affirmation of life, (c) they need to free themselves from the desire to respond to the evil with evil, which would lead to the paradox wherein a victim becomes a perpetrator.⁸³

According to Moltmann, today's German public legal system leaves the victims in the lurch, because while the perpetrators are primarily concerned with the judicial authority that can give them psychotherapeutic help, the victims can count mostly on the help of private societies and various associations, leading to a disproportion to which the perpetrators of the crime may hope for amnesty, while victims do not have this option, which in the end, in one bureaucratically cold way, makes them the victims of that amnesty also.⁸⁴ Thereby, the victims are doubly denied. The same could be applied on post-Yugoslavian societies.

In post-Yugoslav societies, the situation is almost identical, especially since the victims are drowned in a sociopolitical condition that Ivančić has described as a state of permanent denial, according to which victims of violence have no prospect to come to the possibility of articulating their own status in broader social contexts, because there is no mention of them in the public discourse, unless they are used as bargaining chips in the promotion of official folkish ideologies. In this way, denial becomes one of the key elements of popular ideologies, which is generated from the highest level of state and religious establishments (altars and thrones), thwarting thereby any possibility of social development towards official acceptance of the guilt for the atrocities committed against others. This further leads to an additional consolidation of the *palanka's* kind of unanimity, which at the secular level strengthens the ethnototalitarian demand that supports the existence of folkish communities against a pluralistic democratic society, while at the spiritual level, it strengthens ethnoclerical pretensions against libertarian religious discourse. In short, it maintains the conditions, both for the very survival and for the smooth growth and development of the culture of killing, which in post-Yugoslavian societies cruelly affirms the fact that beauty resides in the eye of the oppressor.

⁸³ Moltmann, "We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?," 128–29.; Moltmann, "Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]," 90–91.

⁸⁴ Moltmann, "We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?," 130.; Moltmann, "Opraštanje grijeha ... a tko opravdava žrtve? [We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins, but Who Justifies the Victim?]," 91.