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The Battle Backwards

A Comparative Study of the Battle of Kosovo Polje (1389) and the Munich Agreement (1938) as Political Myths

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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We continue the battle
We continue it backwards

Vasko Popa, Worriers of the Field of the Blackbird

A whole volume could well be written on the myths of modern man, on the mythologies camouflaged in the plays that he enjoys, in the books that he reads. The cinema, that "dream factory" takes over and employs countless mythical motifs – the fight between hero and monster, initiatory combats and ordeals, paradigmatic figures and images (the maiden, the hero, the paradisiacal landscape, hell and do on). Even reading includes a mythological function, only because it replaces the recitation of myths in archaic societies and the oral literature that still lives in the rural communities of Europe, but particularly because, through reading, the modern man succeeds in obtaining an 'escape from time' comparable to the 'emergence from time' effected by myths. Whether modern man 'kills' time with a detective story or enters such a foreign temporal universe as is represented by any novel, reading projects him out of the personal duration and incorporates him into other rhythms, make him live another 'history'.

Mercia Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane

Abstract

This thesis is a comparative work in which two historical events are defined and examined as *political myths*. The definition immediately raises problems as the habitual use of the term "myth" by historians implies falsehood. The author argues that the traditional dichotomy of *mythos* and *logos* is more problematic than is habitually understood. Rather, he argues that certain highly-resonant historical episodes are a disconcerting mixture of fact and fiction, and that their appeal to their target audience is predicated on an authority that overrides concerns about factual accuracy. Furthermore, as this is a study of civic religion and the politics of public commemoration, the thesis problematises both the status of the sacred in (supposedly) secularised societies and the role of the rational in politics.

Two cases are presented. These are the Battle of *Kosovo Polje* of 1389 and the Munich Agreement of 1938. Noted is that both events have been extraordinarily influential; that they have a paradigmatic status and an authority that has often been used to confer political legitimacy. The comparative method uses several factors: durability, factual accuracy, ownership, flexibility, level of usage and media of transmission.

The examination of the legacy of the Battle of *Kosovo Polje* study is longitudinal. It seeks to establish – to the small degree possible – what actually happened in 1389, and contrast this with the popular narrative. This popular narrative, most especially the vibrant tradition of Serbian epic poetry, is then explored at length through a well-known theory of myth analysis. Previous studies have not approached this oral tradition at length or in a systematic manner. The work then offers different examples of the agents and events inspired by the legacy of the battle, among them the most important events in the modern Balkans. It then attempts to systemise the different modalities through which the event has been instrumental.

The examination of the Munich Agreement also offers an overview of the events of the 1930s, and contrasts this with a highly simplistic narrative has been extracted from these events. This is in strong contrast to the Kosovo legacy; in that case there were few sources to indicate what happened; as regards the Munich Agreement and the policy of appeasement from which it grew, much is known, but the record is largely ignored at the expense of an inaccurate but seemingly deeply-compelling narrative. The political usage of Munich is then examined via several cases, typically conflict situations. Emphasis is placed on the statements and justifications of politicians in different periods and political cultures. Modes of argumentation are examined, and a singular pattern is detected. Finally the thesis compares the two cases, their differences and similarities, with the ambition of solidifying the concept of a political myth, highlighting the extraordinary influence of the usable past on the present.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Abbreviations

AEC   Atomic Energy Commission
ANZAC   Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
ICTY   International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
JNA   *Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija* (Yugoslav National Army)
KLA   Kosovo Liberation Army
NATO   North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NHD   *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* (Independent State of Croatia)
NSC   National Security Council
OSCE   Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
USSR   Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD   Weapons of Mass Destruction

1 Introduction

1.1 Research questions and cases

The most significant collective memories – memories that suffuse group consciousness – derive their power from their claim to express some permanent, enduring truth. Such memories are as much about the present as they are about the past, and are believed to tell us (and others) something fundamental about who we are now; they express, even define, our identity. For a memory to take hold in this way, it has to resonate with how we understand ourselves; how we see present circumstances, how we think about the future. And the relationship is circular. We embrace a memory because it speaks to our condition; to the extent that we embrace it, we establish a framework for interpreting that condition.[1]

One work, which was written on the 60th anniversary of the Munich Conference of 1938, carried the following observation in its preface:

The Munich conference, or simply Munich, belongs to the category of phenomena into which many of us, rightly or wrongly, project meanings that surpass the confines of those historical events.[2]

A list of such *phenomena* might include the Siege of Masada, (resurrected to central importance in modern Israel), the Spanish *Reconquista* (evoked by the right during the Spanish Civil War), or the Crusades (very interesting because they have had two opposing interpretations; the Western/Christian one and the Arabic/Islamic one). Such phenomena are indeed problematic for historians because they insist of breaking out of the confines of the past, which is the normal subject of historical enquiry. Like the collective memories as

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[1] Novick, Peter, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory,* Bloomsbury, London, 2001(1999), 170.

[2] Lukes, Igor, and Goldstein, Erik, (eds.), *The Munich Crisis, 1938,* Frank Cass, London, 1999, ix.

described by Novick, they are at once *historical* and *a-historical* (even *anti-historical*), collapsing the usual distance between past and present; they are indeed "as much about the present as they are about the past". To clarify this, these phenomena are on one level *historical* because they are about the past, but on another level they are also *a-* or *anti-historical* because they insist on a strong connection to the present and *continuity* with the past, and in that way, diluting and even negating its *pastness*. Their situationality – their temporal location – has become displaced.

If, as Alex Callinicos writes, the qualitative differentiation of past from present is one of the three central beliefs of modern historiography[3], then the "category of phenomena", which constitute the subject of this thesis present a formal challenge to students of history. Such differentiation of present from past is a task for historians, it is far more difficult for non-historians, whether they are practitioners of politics at some level, or merely of that elusive entity, ordinary people.

The research questions of this thesis examine the political use of the past.

How does one define a historical event that transcends its actual *situationality*, that is, re-emerges from the past and seems axiomatically relevant – often very urgently relevant – to new times and contexts? And furthermore, are the events themselves really pregnant with relevance, or is the claim being made on behalf of the events by interested parties? And if this is the case, is the claim valid? The research task of this project is to attempt to clarify and conceptualise the "category of phenomena" mentioned above. Two cases are examined in detail, they are introduced briefly here. Both are highly influential narratives, both are salient examples of the "usable past". It is their political usage that makes them worthy of selection and study. Both have been positioned as paradigmatic, in that these are two foundational events back into which subsequent events have been translated, in Marx's famous phrase.[4]

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[3] "Every society and period is a singularity, worthy of study for its own sake, and not as a source of models and warnings." Callinicos, Alex, *Theories and Narratives, Reflections of the Philosophy of History,* Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, 59.

[4] Marx, Karl, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* Project Gutenberg, 2013 (1852), available at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1346/1346-h/1346-h.htm

When NATO bombed Serbia (then Yugoslavia) in 1999, one of the ways in which NATO's leaders, especially US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, justified their actions was by evoking the failed policy of appeasement and the Munich Agreement of 1938. On the other side of the conflict, Serbian nationalists justified their actions by claiming that Kosovo "belonged" to Serbia on the basis of the famous Battle of Kosovo Polje, which was fought there in 1389. Both past events seemed to offer large reservoirs of legitimacy to justify on-going actions. One might also note the strange coincidence that the Kosovo legacy (however inadvertently) did ignite the First World War, and the Munich Conference (notoriously) tried but failed to prevent the Second.

Case 1: The Battle of Kosovo Polje, 1389

This medieval battle is the foundational event of Serbian nationalism. Not only is the year 1389 as well known to Serbs as 1066, 1492, 1776, 1848, or 1917, are to other peoples, but the date June 28th (June 15th old style) known as *Vidovdan* (St.Vitus' day) is as famous a calendar date as July 17th, September 11th, or other comparable calendar dates recalling historical events. This thesis presents an overview of the event of that day in the 14th Century, and then traces at length the extraordinary influence it has had on subsequent events, discourses, and practices. The Kosovo legacy has had, in effect, two lifetimes, one covert the other overt. The former was during the centuries of Ottoman rule of Serbdom, when the legacy lived through a vivid folk culture. The latter overt lifetime was when Serbia emerged as an autonomous and later independent polity in the 19th Century. It was in this latter period that the legacy could be institutionalised as the most usable of the Serbian past by the apparatus of a modern state. Although very much a national narrative, the Kosovo legacy has also had a large impact on international politics, most especially in the 20th Century, when it inspired the Sarajevo assassination in 1914 and was a fiercely contested legacy in the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Case 2: The Munich Agreement, 1938

The second case is the Munich Agreement of 1938. The agreement, which was conducted between the leaders of Britain, Germany, Italy and France to solve the Sudeten Crisis, has long since become notorious, and the policy of which it was an outcome – appeasement –

is one of the most negative words in the political lexicon. Below there will be an overview of the events of the 1938, and then a number of examples of the political usage of the agreement. These include the Suez Crisis of 1956, various aspects of the Cold War, the Falkland's War, and the recent wars in Afghanistan and especially Iraq. As this broad field implies, Munich – in contrast to the Kosovo legacy – is not a *national* narrative, but one that had been instrumental in multiple political cultures and contexts. This difference aside, I propose to describe both narratives as "political myths" as a basis for proceeding. This term is defined in the section below.

1.2 Myth, history, and political myth

1.2.1 Myth

Few words are as ill served by their habitual meaning than *myth*; in most common usages myth is equated with falsehood. This has caused much confusion, as myth is complex phenomenon and to equate it with falsehood does it little justice. Alas, many historians show little or no interest in engaging with myth in its complexity. If one encounters the term in the title of a historical text, it will be most likely along the lines of "The Myth of (insert subject)". Typically this means that the falsehood of (the inserted subject) is going to be dismantled by the historian and the record will be set accordingly straight. This true/false, factual/fictional sense of myth, however popular, is less than useful. Authors such as Ivan Strenski[5] and Bruce Lincoln have sought to demonstrate via their extensive reviews just how problematic myth can be, and how many (often highly compelling and convincing) definitions of myth exist. Lincoln has argued with his trademark erudition about the more troubled relationship of *logos* and *mythos*, and how one (quite arbitrarily) superseded the other in Western culture. As a form of discourse, *mythos*, Lincoln argues, enjoyed higher authority and truth claims than *logos* in classical Greece, and he continues that the tension between them is ongoing:

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[5] Strenski, Ivan, *Four Theories of Myth in the Twentieth Century History,* University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 1987.

> …our views of the lexemes "mythos" and "logos" must become more
> dynamic. There are not words with fixed meanings (indeed, no such words
> exist), nor did their meanings change glacially over time, as the result of
> impersonal forces. Rather these words, along with many others, were the sites
> of pointed and highly semantic skirmishes fought between rival regimes of
> truth.[6]

One can only hope this late in the day that the habitual usage of myth by historians that (arbitrarily) equates it with falsehood will lose its prominence, but it is unlikely.

1.2.2 Myth and history

Indeed on the basis of many writers on the subject, it would seem not. That is not so surprising, given that myth *itself* has been defined so variously. To offer just one example; both Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss have similar starting points, Sausserian linguistics and Marxism, but the myths they describe could hardly be more different; Lévi-Strauss recounts the ethnographic myths of the Americas; Barthes in his Mythologies, writes engagingly about cultural surfaces that are worlds away from Lévi-Strauss' subjects.

Barthes's contribution is formidable. He has argued creatively that myth is something that pervades culture, most especially speech, and he unerringly points out its one of its most salient aspects, its axiomatic value. Concerned as he put it, that nature and history are confused, he argues that "myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification, of making contingency appear eternal."[7] What myth does to things is that it "gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a *clarity*, which is not that of explanation but that of a statement of fact."[8]

> In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the
> complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does

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[6] Lincoln, Bruce, *Theorizing Myth, Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship,* University of Chicago Press, 1999, 18.

[7] Barthes, Roland, *Mythologies,* (Translated by Annette Lavers) Paladin, St Albans, 1973 (1957), 142.

[8] Ibid., 143 (italics added).

away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.[9]

If for Barthes, myth is a matter of *clarity*, for Bruce Lincoln – who quotes Barthes approvingly – it is more a matter of *authority*, and it is on the basis of this elusive concept that he seeks to redefine myth and its relationship to history. His approach is unorthodox but engaging, though not easy to summarise.

Foundational to Lincoln's argument is that society is constructed (and can be deconstructed) by either force or discourse; the latter can be subdivided into *ideological persuasion* and *sentiment evocation*. It is this second, which, in his view is most important: "Ultimately, that which either holds society together or takes it apart is sentiment, and the chief instrument with which such sentiment may be aroused, manipulated, and rendered dormant is discourse."[10] In his study Discourse and the Construction of Society, Lincoln compares three quite distinct narratives. By placing a Nuer myth, alongside and two acceptably "historical" narratives – the Battle of Montepari (1260) and the Stockholm Bloodbath (1520) – he argues for similarity of both *structure* and social outcome.

Following from this, Lincoln argues against the usual privileged position history enjoys *vis-a-vis* myth, namely that it has: 1, a confirmable date frame; 2, written sources 3; and only human actors. He continues: "Yet a taxonomy that forces us to separate narratives so similar in form and structure…..surely serves us ill as an analytic tool."[11] This boldly comparative approach has provided an attractive model for the present thesis.

Lincoln dismisses both fable and legend, which, he argues, have neither credibility nor authority. That is, they have a low truth claim and present themselves as purely fictive, and are accepted as such by their target audience. However, he distinguishes this sharply from myth, which he argues has *both credibility and authority*:

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Lincoln, Bruce, *Discourse and the Construction of Society, Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual and Classification,* Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1989, 11.

[11] Ibid., 24.

Having offered such a definition of Myth, it is necessary, of course, to define authority, on which the definition of Myth hangs. In part I have in mind something similar to what Malinowski meant when he described myth as a form of social charter and what Clifford Geertz meant in his characterization of religion as being simultaneously a "model of" and a "model for" reality. That is to say a narrative possessed of authority is one for which successful claims are made not only to the status of truth, but what is more, to *the status of paradigmatic truth*. In this sense the authority of myth is somewhat akin to that of charters, models, templates and blueprints, but one can go beyond this formulation and recognize that it is also (and perhaps more important) akin to that of revolutionary slogans and ancestral invocations, in that *through the recitation of myth one may effectively mobilize a social grouping*.[12]

Lincoln's most arresting assertion here is that myth has an authority that history simply does not. In subsequent work Lincoln had expanded on the problematic topic of authority, a topic most familiar from Weber's categorisation.[13] In his Authority, Construction and Corrosion (1994) he freely admits how problematic the subject is: "something – an entity? a phenomenon? a status? I have come to see as extraordinarily complex, hopelessly elusive, and almost as badly misconstrued in most scholarly discussions as it is in popular parlance."[14] He arrives at the formula that authority is "best understood in relational terms as the effect of a posited, perceived, or institutionally ascribed asymmetry between speaker and audience that permits certain speakers to command not just the attention but the confidence, respect, and trust of their audience, or – an important proviso – to make audiences act *as if* this were so."[15]

Three aspects of authority are important here. One is the legitimising effect, to gain consent "to make audiences act *as if* this were so". The second and related aspect is *asymmetry*; this is very important in the linking of present politics to past events; the

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[12] Ibid., 24-25 (italics added).

[13] See Weber, Max*, Economy and society, an outline of interpretive sociology,* edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, (Translated by Ephraim Fischoff) Vol 1, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968, 215-17

[14] Lincoln, Bruce, *Authority, Construction and Corrosion,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1994, 1.

[15] Ibid., 4.

power-wielder or spokesman rarely translates back – to use Marx's phrase from The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte – into a *lesser* narrative; the more foundational or established the source narrative, the larger the legitimacy that can be derived from it for the target narrative.

The third point is important though problematic. Lincoln notes that *authority* resembles *persuasion*, but is not necessarily commensurate with it:

> One persuades by arguing a case, advancing reasoned propositions, impassioned appeals, and rhetorical flourishes that lead the hearer to a desired conclusion. In contrast, the exercise of authority need not involve argumentation and may rest on the naked assertions that the identity of the speaker warrants acceptance of the speech.[16]

The problematic aspect here is that Lincoln is speaking about authority as embodied and transmitted via human agency, whereas I am thinking more about that which is being transmitted, that is, the selected past event being evoked, which has authority, prestige (to the degree that media and message can be separated, admittedly a problematic issue). Because this authority also "need not involve argumentation", and may have emotional or moral elusiveness: it is not merely an intellectual exercise like finding the best-fitting historical precedent or analogy (which would be classic argumentation). The cases examined below would not stand on the basis or their analogical accuracy, although there had to be some minimal degree of isomorphism. Nonetheless they are often (though not always) *very inaccurate as analogies*, but still retain the authority that grants them their instrumental value in the present. This recalls Barthes definition of myth's clarity being not that of explanation but that of a statement of fact.

Lincoln's assertion that myth has a higher truth claim than history is a bold assertion, and one that might strike a reader as strange, but it will be argued below, the way that the history (as typically understood) of the Battle of Kosovo is contrasted with the hagiography of the same event, one sees exactly this process happening; a heightening of its truth claim, a loading of the event with higher significance, the construction of paradigmatic status, an interpretation of a factual happening through a prism of mythical

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[16] Ibid., 5.

thought. However, it will be argued that a similar process – although presented in less ornate language – takes place in regard to other chosen historical events, to make them paradigmatic and unchallengeable, and in this sense, as is argued below, sacred.

Finally, one cannot touch upon the subject of myth without giving space to the foremost modern theoretician of mythology. Added to this, the late Claude Lévi-Strauss was certainly interested in history. However, it seems to me, that the relationship of history and myth is treated in an inconsistent manner across Lévi-Strauss' various writings on mythology, although some of his utterances on the subject are very provocative and compelling. But rather than outline his overall view of myth, as it constitutes a formidable and ambitious project, we will try to isolate the history/myth relationship in Lévi-Strauss. Most interestingly, Lévi-Strauss suggests that political history seems to have moved to occupy a space vacated by myth in our societies:

> On the one hand, myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place long ago. But what gives the myth an operational value is that the specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely, politics. When the historian refers to the French Revolution, it is always a sequence of past happenings, a non-reversible series of events the remote consequences of which may still be felt at present. But to the French Politician, as well as his followers, the French Revolution is both a sequence belonging to the past – as to the historian – and a timeless pattern that can be detected in the contemporary French social structure and which provides a clue for its interpretation, a lead from which to infer future developments.[17]

It is a bold assertion but one he made on several occasions. In an exchange with Paul Ricoeur, Lévi-Strauss again stated that "...nothing bears a closer resemblance – formally speaking – the myths of what we call exotic or non-literate societies than the political ideology of our own societies."[18] He repeated this in a 1978 lecture entitled When Myth

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[17] Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Structural Anthropology,* Penguin Books, London, 1963, 209.

[18] Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *"A Confrontation",* New Left Review, 1/62, July-august 1970, 68.

Becomes History[19], stating in very carefully weighed phraseology, "I am not far from believing that, in our own societies, history has replaced mythology and fulfils the same function."[20] I am not far from believing this either, and hope to show that certain signal events offer the same sort of moral navigation that myths often offer; and that such events possess an *authority* – in Bruce Lincoln's sense – that can overrule concerns about Rankean factual accuracy. This is obviously an awkward place for a historian to be, but to ignore this authority and the potentially huge political legitimacy it can confer is risk being, in Burke's worrying phrase, "wise historically, a fool in practice".

1.2.3 Political myth

Although he did not explicitly use the term *political* myth, perhaps the first person that wrote of myth as a political force was Georges Sorel in his Reflections on Violence:

> Men who are participating in a great social movement picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph. These constructions, knowledge of which is so important for historians, I propose to call myths.[21]

He is quick to point out the instrumentality of myth, "the myths are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act."[22] And one can say that this means to act at a social, shared level. In his famous work, Myth of the State (1946), Ernst Cassirer wrote "Myth is an objectification of man's social experience, not his individual experience."[23] A later writer who has absorbed both the influences mentioned above was

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[19] Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Myth and Meaning,* Schocken Books, New York, 1979, 43.

[20] Ibid. It is however noteworthy that these statements would see to assert something very un-Lévi-Straussian; namely that political history seems to be a more developed form of myth. Development, of course, is not a term of which he would approve, implying as it does that there is an evolutionally relationship between myth and history. Such teleology would be a reversal of everything that was argued, in the Savage Mind and in the conclusions of The Raw and the Cooked, both of which assert no fundamental difference between "primitive" and "advanced" mind. Whether one accepts the evolutionary direction, the idea is intriguing, and one which is embedded in this thesis, the proximity of myth and history.

[21] Sorel, Georges, *Reflections on Violence,* (Translated by T.E. Hulme) Collier Books, New York, 1967 (1950), 41-42.

[22] Ibid., 50.

[23] Cassirer, Ernst, *Myth of the State,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1963 (1946), 47.

Henry Tudor. His common-sense, and pragmatic account, amounted less to a theory that a description:

> What marks his (a given myth maker's) account as being a myth is, not its content, but its dramatic form and the fact that it serves as a practical argument. Its success as a practical argument depends on its being accepted as true, and it is generally accepted as true if it explains the experience of those to whom it is addressed and justifies the practical purposes it has in mind.[24]

This is probably one way to define a political myth; by its *utility*. If a given historical event – whether a relatively factually-accurate account, or a more heightened retelling – can be, and has been used in a political cause, then one can be justified in calling it a political myth. In his study of Ukrainian history culture, Johan Dietsch had distinguished several modes of the usage of history, based on a scheme by Klas-Göran Karlsson; *scholarly-scientific use*, *existential use*, *moral use*, and so on. Two of these, *ideological use* ("legitimacy is often produced by perspectives of unproblematic progress") and *political-pedagogical* ("deliberate comparative use in which the transfer effect between past and present is rendered simple and unproblematic") are the focus here.[25]

A historical event, no matter how well-known, retold and commemorated is not a myth in this sense if it has no political utility; the Dunkirk evacuations are one of the best known aspects of the British experience of the Second World War, but no matter how compelling the narrative, I am not aware of any political speech warning of a "new Dunkirk" or any column offering the solemn "lessons of Dunkirk" or a self-congratulatory evocation of the "Spirit of Dunkirk" (in the way that a spirit of the South Atlantic would be praised as the "real spirit of Britain" by Prime Minister Thatcher after the Falklands War (see section 3.4 below).

Christopher Flood's useful update states that; "Myth had the rhetorical force of a paradigmatic model or an analogy. It carries weight insofar as its story is plausible to its

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[24] Tudor, Henry, *Political Myth,* Pall Mall, London, 1972, 138.

[25] Dietsch, Johan, *Making Sense of Suffering, holocaust and holodomor in ukrainian historical culture.* Lund University, 2006, 32-36.

audience."[26] The word *plausible* is important and worthy of comment. Roy Rapport makes an important distinction between belief and acceptance, noting that belief is private and acceptance public, acceptance does not need belief (although it can, of course, correspond to belief) and does not even imply belief. And because myth is a social phenomenon, public acceptance – a minimum level of plausibility – can be sufficient.[27]

Barthes wrote that "Ancient or not, mythology can only have a historical foundation."[28] But that does not in any way invalidate the assertion that political myths are – to a greater or lesser extent – constructs. Bruce Kapferer is surely correct in asserting that: 'all human interpretations of events are constructions...the import of these constructions extends far beyond the issues of "did-the-events-really-happen" kind.'[29]

That said, Kapferer does argue that historians and other scholars must "demystify the distortions of myth" and most historians would agree, in fact, they commonly state that this is exactly one of their major tasks (and it is hard to dispute this). However, he insightfully qualifies this:

> While this exercise is essential, it fails to address some of the crucial ways in which myth and cosmic history achieve their emotional potency, for the critics of whatever kind adopt a mode of reasoning which is not that of the myths. The critics argue from positions outside the myths and the legends and I consider produce a radically incomplete understanding of the power of the myths in social and political action.[30]

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[26] Floor, Christopher, *Political Myth,* Routledge, New York and London, 2002 (1996), 108.

[27] See his *Ritual and Religion in the making of Humanity,* Cambridge University Press, 1999, 121-122. He also stresses that acceptance can be in sincere but that does not nullify its difference to belief.

[28] Barthes, 110.

[29] Kapferer, Bruce, *Legends of People, Myths of State, Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia,* Smithsonian Institute Press, Washington and London, 1998 (1988), xiv. Kapferer's study is highly engaging because it compares the cosmic history of Sri Lanka with the much more empirically verifiable history of Gallipoli.

[30] Kapferer, 40.

One way of approaching this disparity is presented by Pål Kolstø. Like other scholars (for example, Geoffrey Schöpflin[31]) he categorises myths; myths of *sui generis, ante murallis, mytherium, antiquitas* and so on. He furthermore seeks to "divide the research community into two camps, which for convenience may be called 'the enlighteners' and 'the functionalists.'"[32] The former treat myths as the opposite of facts, the latter "see myth-making as inevitable element of human existence and human societies."[33] It is hard to disagree; a scholar must do some double book-keeping, being aware of any factual inaccuracies (while trying to ask why these might have come into being) yet being aware, that even inaccurate myths have political usage and influence, and this must be assessed irrespective of doubts about accuracy.

I will conclude these arguments with a concrete example. The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, wrote that: "One of the things most derided and mocked by twentieth-century Polish writers and thinkers was the idea of Polish messianism…it depicted Poland as the 'Christ of nations' whose suffering and crucifixion would redeem mankind.[34] This seemed a ridiculous, self-comforting, and self-compensating fantasy."[35] One might agree, but Kolakowski continues:

> …but on closer inspection there may have been some truth in it. Poland, the first country to defeat the Red Army shortly after the Revolution, prevented Europe from falling victim to communism, and perhaps confirmed the Hegelian notion that in every historical form the seeds of its future demise can be discerned from the outset. Poland was the only country invaded by the allied armies of Hitler and Stalin; this invasion triggered the Second World

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[31] Hosking, Geoffery, and Schöpflin, George, (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood,* Hurst and Company, London, 1997.

[32] Kolstø, Pål, *Myth and Boundaries in South –Eastern Europe,* Hurst and Company, London, 2005, 2.

[33] Ibid.

[34] To show how durable this idea is; "In December 2006…forty-six members of the Polish parliament – 10 percent of the lower house – submitted a bill seeking to proclaim Jesus Christ the King of Poland and to follow the path of the Virgin Mary, who was declared honorary Queen of Poland in 1665". Bazalka, Juraj, *Nation and Religion, the Politics of Commemoration in South-East Poland,* Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, Halle, 2006, 2.

[35] Quoted in Tismaneau,Vladimir, (ed.) *The Revolutions of 1989,* Routledge, London, 1999, 59.

War. It was the first country to fight the Third Reich and one of two occupied (with Yugoslavia) that continued armed resistance against the German invaders. After the war, under communist rule, it was the first country to develop a mass movement of criticism, ideologically articulate, which culminated in 1956 in the change of leadership and first appointment of a Communist Party leader without investure by Moscow, indeed in defiance of the Kremlin….It was the first country in which the communist ideology clearly and irreversibly died away. And the first in which a mass civic movement "Solidarnosc" emerged and swept like fire over the land in 1980, nearly destroying the communist state machinery. Poland was the first…..

And so on and so forth. Having dismissed the idea that Poland is a Christ-like figure, Kolakowski (a notable scholar of Marxism) alters his language and then argues that this is, in fact, the case. Note however, that Kolakowski's tone is neither religious nor overly nationalistic. His emplotment of recent Polish history is quite laconic and factual; *there is very little factual contestation here*. Yet his historical facts seem to fit easily into a pre-existing shape.

Is this history or mythology? Surely it is both. One can find numerous modes of mythical discourse embedded in Kolakowski's text. For example, "the first country to defeat the Red Army shortly after the Revolution, prevented Europe from falling victim to communism" (*ante murallis*); "Poland was the only country invaded by the allied armies of Hitler and Stalin" (*martyrium*); "It was the first country to fight the Third Reich and one of two occupied (with Yugoslavia) that continued armed resistance against the German invaders" (myths of valour). One could even argue for a claims of *sui generis*, the word "first" is used seven times in the text). This example argues strongly that myth and mythological discourse operate even without any contestation of actual factual. "Mythos" and "logos" are equal and interchangeable in this case.

1.3 Research motivation and study definition

Where the concept of political myth might be promoted more is by moving it away from mere national story and its seemingly primitive irrationality (so evident in the treatment of Cassier and – to a lesser extent – Colovic[36], it is as much evident in the intense tone of their works, urgently trying to make sense of political disasters) and be moved into, and applied to, political cultures and systems that citizens of those cultures and systems would regard as normal, even if they may balk at certain policies and parties. This is the great value of Kapferer's comparative analysis; it shows us discourses and practices in one political culture that a "Western" reader might find alien, that is, irrational, far-fetched, primitive, but he does show that similar practices are used in Australian politics and culture, which the same reader would find normal; familiar, rational and so on.

A similar intention is central to this work and its structure. A skeptical reader might find the Kosovo Myth as it had resonated in South Slav politics and culture as alien. The same reader might not say the same about the various usages of Munich, the logic being that they happen in familiar political culture and systems, open, democratic, rational. That said, one ambition of this work is question the assumption of the Cartesian rationality of much everyday politics, in particular political discourse.

This is not to say one narrative is to be quickly conflated with the other. On the contrary, differences are noted, not only because they are important in and of themselves, but also because they are important in terms of definition of what is and what is not a political myth, or rather how broad is the scope of the concept. One of the ambitions of this thesis is too expand the definition of political myth. But for the same reason – the importance of definition – the similarities are very important.

By way of definition, this is a work of political history. Certainly other discourses and disciplines inform it, most notably various theories of mythologies and aspects of social psychology. The stress on myth in a way distinguishes it from a prominent field in which it could be located, that of memory studies. Noted above was the assertion that authority "need not involve argumentation", and may have emotional or moral elusiveness that is

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[36] Colovic, Ivan, *Politics of Identity in Serbia, Essays in Political Anthropology* (Translated by Celia Hawkesworth) New York University Press, New York, 2002.

not based on argumentation, this work is not a study in analogy and decision-making in the manner of Neustadt's and May's Thinking in Time.[37]

A note on objectivity is merited. In the section dealing with Munich, it is argued that there is a disturbing pattern of it being used as a very effective tool of military escalation. Such an assertion can only be made from a specific position; namely that the conflict *may* have been avoided, or at least other options might have been exhausted first. In dealing with controversies, many still open, some degree of evaluation is necessary. Such evaluation is, of course, subjective but if a position is taken by a scholar it should be done so openly and explicitly, in full view of the reader. The old Whig formula of using the best available materials in good faith still seems a good guide to writing history.

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[37] Neustadt, Richard, E., and May, Ernest, R., *Thinking in Time, The Uses of History for Decision-Makers,* The Free Press, New York, 1986.

2 Review of the literature

2.1 Kosovo

Several studies have been done on the Kosovo Myth and its large and longstanding influence. The Kosovo legacy has been studied by political and cultural historians, as well as other scholars in other disciplines. Political/historical studies would include the excellent volume edited by Thomas Emmert and Wayne Vucinich.[38] That volume published conference papers that marked the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in 1989. Dating from exactly the same year however, the battle's legacy had been so influential in Balkan history and more recent scholarship has changed as the object of study, it "came alive", and changed from being a distant historical and cultural tradition into a highly-contested, dynamic contemporary event. At the time of writing, it remains controversial, contested and dynamic. Many more recent studies on the topic reflect this, including especially Tim Judah's, The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia[39] and Dejan Dokic's Whose Myth? Which Nation? The Serbian Kosovo Myth Revisited.[40] However, Judah's book, as its title indicates, limits discussion of the Kosovo legacy to its negative political role.

Other notable studies include Alexander Greenwalt's Kosovo Myths: Karadžić, Njegoš, and the Transformation of Serb Memory[41] and Florian Bieber's Nationalist Mobilization

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[38] Emmert, Thomas and Vucinich, Wayne (eds.), *Kosovo: Legacy of a Medieval Battle*, Minnesota Mediterranean and East European Monographs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1991.

[39] Judah, Tim, *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia,* Yale, Nota Bene, New Haven, 1997.

[40] Dokic, Dejan*,* "Whose Myth? Which Nation? The Serbian Kosovo Myth Revisited", available at http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/3455/1/Kosovomyth2.pdf

[41] Greenwalt, Alexander*, "Kosovo Myths: Karadžić, Njegoš, and the Transformation of Serb Memory",* available at http://www.yorku.ca/soi/Vol_3/_HTML/Greenawalt.html

and Stories, The Kosovo myth from 600th anniversary to the present.[42] A more focused study can be found in Ljubinka Trgovčević's The Kosovo Myth in the First World War.[43]

A full, book-length treatment exists in Branimir Anzulovic's Heavenly Serbia, From Myth to Genocide.[44] I am strongly opposed to Anzulovic's analysis, but it has been widely discussed and translated.[45] I can see little in Anzulovic's work other than a touchy defense of Croatian and Roman Catholic sacred cows; the tone of special pleading pervades, the familiar sound of thin skin over chipped shoulder. Studies that come from other genres include engaging anthropological works such as Ivan Colovic's Politics of Identity in Serbia[46], and Ger Duijzings' nuanced study, Religion and the politics of identity in Kosovo.[47]

Much of the background on various aspects of Balkan history has drawn many well-known general works, such as L. S. Stavrianos' The Balkans since 1453[48], Michael Boro Petrovich's two volume classic, A History of Modern Serbia[49] and Vladimir Dedijer's The Road to Sarajevo, which is comprehensive overview of Habsburg decline as well as a focused study of the events that led to the Sarajevo assassination.[50] Other more focused

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[42] Bieber, Florian, "Nationalist Mobilization and Stories, The Kosovo myth from 600th anniversary to the present" Rethinking History 6:1 (2002), 95–110, available at
http://www.policy.hu/bieber/Publications/bieberkosovo.pdf

[43] Trgovčević, Ljubinka, "The Kosovo Myth in the First World War", available at
http://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/sanu/KOS_MIT.html

[44] Anzulovic, Branimir, *Heavenly Serbia, From Myth to Genocide*, New York University Press, New York, 1999.

[45] For example, Louis Sell describes Anzulovic's work as "a comprehensive and objective account" Slobodan Milošević and the destruction of Yugoslavia, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2002, 367-68.

[46] Colovic, Ivan, *Politics of Identity in Serbia Political of Identity of Serbia, Essays in Political Anthropology* (Translated by Celia Hawkesworth), New York University Press, New York, 2002.

[47] Duijzings, Ger, *Religion and Politics of Identity in Kosovo,* Colombia University Press, New York, 2000.

[48] Stavrianos L. S., *The Balkans since 1453,* New York University Press, New York, 2001 (1965).

[49] Petrovich, Michael Boro, *A History of Modern Serbia,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1976.

[50] Dedijer, Vladimir, *The Road to Sarajevo,* MacGibbon and Key, London, 1967. Recent studies like Tony Fabijancic's *Bosnia in the Footsteps of Gavrilo Princip,* University of Alberta Press, 2010, have not added anything beyond a post-Bosnian war perspective (and more sympathetic treatment of Princip) to Dedijer's classic (to be fair, Fabijancic admits as much).

works have been very useful, such as Andrei Mitrovic's Serbia's Great War[51], and Ben Shepherd's, recent Terror in the Balkans[52], which focus on the World Wars in the region. Some studies of the role of religion include Stella Alexander, Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945[53], which has been neatly complemented and updated by Vjekoslav Perica's Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States.[54] Many of the works on the breakup of Yugoslavia have not aged well – often the case of instant history – though a notable exception is Misha Glenny's The Fall of Yugoslavia.[55] David Rieff's Slaughterhouse[56], although flawed as a historical work, has a moral seriousness that makes it memorable. Some specialist studies of Serbia's political culture during the breakup include Jasna Dragović-Soso's 'Saviours of the nation'?[57] and Eric Gordy's The Culture of power in Serbia[58] are very valuable. Many of the specific studies of the Kosovo Myth cover much of the ground covered here – though in perhaps less detail. Florian Bieber's study does anticipate something stated here *passim*: that influence changes according to circumstances, (a point spectacularly missed by Anzulovic, who sees the Kosovo Myth as leading directly to genocide, as his title tells us). However, except for the anthropological studies mentioned, they do not have a theoretical background, systematic approach, or comparative method, all of which the present work does. The comparative method is important; to deal with the Kosovo Myth in isolation runs the risk of accepting its exceptionalism, which would work against the spirit of critical analysis.

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[51] Mitrovic, Andrei, *Serbia's Great War,* Hurst and Company, London, 2007.

[52] Shepherd, Ben, *Terror in the Balkans,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 2012.

[53] Alexander, Stella, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979.

[54] Perica, Vjekoslav, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.

[55] Glenny, Misha, *The Fall of Yugoslavia,* Penguin, London, 1992.

[56] Rieff, David, *Bosnia and the Failure of the West,* Vintage, Random House, London, 1995.

[57] Dragović-Soso, Jasna*,'Saviours of the Nation' Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism,* Hurst & Company, London, 2002.

[58] Gordy, Eric, *The Culture of power in Serbia Nationalism and the destruction of alternatives,* Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

2.2 Munich

Regarding Munich, and the policy of appeasement generally, there is a large and often highly-charged literature. Broadly speaking, there are two "schools" of writing about appeasement. [59] One, starting from as early as 1940, has been to write about the subject in a tone of great moral outrage, condemning the "Men of Munich" without the slightest sympathy for their political dilemma, or without any effort to understand it. This has long been called the "Guilty Men" school, named after a pamphlet that was fiercely critical of Chamberlain's government. This school has developed over the years into a huge bandwagon for almost everyone to jump on; there seems to have been an endless stream of people willing to moralise and denounce. A useful anthology of this school is Gilbert's Roots of Appeasement, which contains a list of the various works on the subject, including one by the young John F. Kennedy. Since its publication, of course, the list has grown much longer. That said, Gilbert's book is no detached commentary; his tone throughout is shell-shocked, as though he was still trying to make sense in a "how-could-this-have-happened?" tone.

The second school is one that tries to see the politics of appeasement in context, alongside the other great, divisive debates of British politics in the 1930s, namely disarmament, pacifism, and non-intervention (the latter especially in respect to the Spanish Civil War). Paul Kennedy judiciously points out the faults in both schools:

> The weakness of the older "guilty men" literature upon appeasement appeared
> to be that it denounced Chamberlain and his colleagues for a failure of

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[59] I will leave out of this discussion the various theories about cabals of reactionary aristocrats that exist, notably in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel (Faber, London, 1989) and the subsequent Merchant Ivory film *The Remains of the Day.* Although the figure of Lord Darlington was no doubt based on Lord Londonderry, who genuinely admired the Nazis, the picture painted is too crude. For example, the Frenchman Dupond is concerned only with American duplicity and his sore feet; the only voice of reason is the American Senator Lewis. The novel (narrated in July 1956) examines the pro-German leanings of a group of British patriarchs (pro-German rather than pro-Nazi as the novel recounts events from 1922). But this presumes that anti-Germanness, which is such a notable aspect of mid and late 20th century populistic British culture had long existed. As Gilbert points out, there was no British tradition of anti-Germanness – unlike the durable distrust of all things French – there was even widespread sympathy for the Germans when the French put units of North African *Tirailleurs* among the troops occupying the Ruhr. Gilbert, *The Roots of Appeasement,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968, 13-14, 72-74, 102-103.

morality and will power *without* much appreciation (or knowledge) of the difficulties under which British governments of the 1920s and 1930s laboured. By contrast, most of the later works have focused upon the seemingly compelling strategic, economic and political motives behind British policy at that time, but *without* much concern for the morality and ideological aspects of it.[60]

Some accounts do try and balance these to a certain extent. A quite recent example is In Our Time, the Hitler Chamberlain Collusion.[61] This study, plainly by two left wing historians shows some awareness of the context of the 1930s, however, is also a work that shouts with moral outrage. They argue that Chamberlain actively sought broader accommodation with the European Fascist states, in a common stand against Soviet communism (one might wonder why authors specialising in the politics of the 1930s are so surprised by this, anti-Bolshevism was a force in the world long before the Cold War). But against their arguments one can cite Chamberlain's drive towards rearmament and recorded distrust of the Germans.[62] And this is the problem; that even at this distance, historians have not necessarily agreed on appeasement.

For Gilbert, Munich was not a culmination of appeasement, on the contrary, it was the very *negation* of appeasement; "Munich was not appeasement's finest hour, but its most perverted. It was a distortion of all that all that appeasement stood for." He speaks of an old and new appeasement, the latter born at Munich:

> From 1919-1937, the public, the Press, and the politicians could all welcome agreements with Germany as leading to peace. The Munich Agreement was welcomed because it averted war. There was a deep difference between the two attitudes. At bottom, the old appeasement, was a mood of hope, Victorian in its optimism, Burkean in its belief that societies evolved from bad to good and that progress could be only for the better. The new appeasement was a

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[60] Quoted in Martel (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered, The A.J.P. Taylor Debate after Twenty-Five Years,* Allen and Unwin, Boston, 1986,155.

[61] Leibovitz, Clement and Finkel, Alvin, *In Our Time, the Hitler Chamberlain Collusion,* Monthly Review Press, New York, 1998.

[62] See May, Ernest R, *A Strange Victory, Hitler's Conquest of France,* I.B. Tauras, New York, 2000, 169-178.

mood of fear, Hobbesian in its insistence upon swallowing the bad in order to preserve some remnant of the good, pessimistic in its belief that Nazism was here to stay and, horrible as it might be, should be accepted as a way of life with which Britain ought to deal.[63]

For others such as Williamson Murray, appeasement had benefactors beyond the Fascist powers. He writes that the Irish Free State was appeased, an assertion that seems unusual; (why would a small, poor country lacking in any leverage need to be appeased?).[64] Taking another approach, Maurice Cowling writes of appeasement as a domestic policy, and a successful one, that was exported to the realm of foreign policy.[65] On Chamberlain himself (and it is important that the diatribe had been directed – to an extraordinary degree – against one man), recent works such as David Dutton's Neville Chamberlain[66] have tried to give a fairer picture, but these are compensatory in tone, and unlikely to influence the general public, or even many historians. The point here is that if the historical community cannot agree as to what appeasement was, and what it meant, is it a surprise that a long list of moralists have hijacked the idea of appeasement and applied (or misapplied) it to numerous situations? Because for most people, appeasement was, and is, as Hobsbawn puts it, "craven retreat"; it has long been removed from its original context. Several cases of this misapplication will be examined.[67]

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[63] Ibid., 185-185.

[64] "However, even with powers who posed no threat, appeasement could have the most appalling consequences, as when Britain surrendered the Treaty Ports to the Irish Republic in April 1938. The denial of those ports to the Royal Navy in the second World War led to the deaths of thousands of allied soldiers in the Battle of the Atlantic." Quoted in Boyce, Robert, and. Maiolo, Joseph A (eds.) *The Origins of the Second World War, the debate continues,* Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003, 113.

[65] Cowling, Maurice, *The Impact of Hitler, British Politics and British Policy 1933-1940,* Cambridge University Press, 1975, Introduction.

[66] Dutton, David, *Neville Chamberlain,* Reputations Series, Arnold Publishers, London, 2001.

[67] Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes,* Vintage, New York, 1996, 146.

2.3 Sources and materials

To anticipate the conclusions of this work, the two cases are very different in many respects, but also alike in other ways. This will be reflected in the choice of sources used for each.

In examining the Battle of Kosovo and its resonance, a researcher is first faced with the fact that almost no sources exist for the battle itself. The formidable hagiography that sustained the battle story for several centuries was based, to a small extent, on Church sources, but as these could be read by very few people, the story was carried though a vibrant folk culture, especially oral poetry. This poetry will be looked at below. When Serbia gradually emerged as a state, it was able to institutionalise the Kosovo legacy, and there is documentary evidence of this process, very much part of a culture- and nation-building process. As it not unreasonable to say that in an emerging society, the dichotomy between the civil and the political is far less clear than in an developed society, material reviewed will include political plans and speeches, archive materials that included diplomatic telegrams, letters, etc., but also images, the literary and artistic tradition, theater records, even the first Serbian film (made in 1911). Furthermore, some aspects of ritual, both formally religious and more secular are examined.

By contrast, in dealing with Munich the researcher is confronted with the paradox of a huge range of materials, many of which are ignored as they might weaken or complicate the popular narrative. The material is there, but beyond specialists, nobody seems interested.

The stress in the second case of this thesis will be on political statements that utilise Munich as a historical trope and political tool or mechanism. But there is a formal intent to match the specific statements with specific actions taken by the makers of the statements. These statements are largely either speeches made to "sell" a given policy as it is being created and implemented (both public and confidential), or retrospective accounts made to justify past actions, often in the form of political memoirs. Matching politicians' words

and their deeds is a perilous business, and must be undertaken with great skepticism. Therefore attention is paid, when possible, to different accounts given by the same office holder in public and private. Sources, reflecting the broad, international usage of Munich, include diplomatic cables, parliamentary records, military reports, diaries, documentary interviews, academic conferences and debates, mainly for Anglo-American sources, but also French, Soviet/Russian, Israeli, Australian and Argentinian.

2.4 Methodology

In dealing with the two cases, I use a scheme that examines them in terms of the following factors:

1. Durability

2. Factual accuracy

3. Group-centeredness and "ownership"

4. Flexibility

5. Level of usage

6. Media of transmission

To briefly explain these. **Durability** means the ability of a political myth to last a long time. Peter Novick notes that the myth of Masada – a mass-suicide by Jewish rebels during an uprising against the Romans – had no place in Jewish culture for 1900 years. But when the State of Israel was founded, Masada became its foundational myth. Officers of the Israeli Defense Forces, then as now, that country's most cherished institution, were sworn in on the site of Masada, vowing "Masada will never fall again!" Indeed the archeologist responsible for the exploration of Masada, Yigael Yadin was the second Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (one of his replacements, the legendary Moshe Dayan, was a keen amateur archeologist). In his exhaustive study, Nachman Ben-Yehuda writes that:

...commanders wanted to use the Masada as a vehicle by which to instil what they felt were important values in their new recruits: a willingness to fight to the end, nonsurrender, *a renewed link to the past*, an identification with ancient Jewish warriors, a love of freedom, a willingness to sacrifice.[68]

Yet within two generations, Masada was replaced by another, more powerful narrative, the Holocaust. It must be stated that in the immediate post war years – when Masada was sanctioned as the national narrative – the recent Holocaust was not publically mentioned or institutionalised in Israel. But this all changed, as Amos Elon wrote:

By the later Fifties, the stunned silence about the Holocaust gave way to loquacious – often officially sponsored – national discussion of its effects. It became common to speak of the Holocaust as the central trauma affecting Israeli society. It would be impossible to exaggerate the effect on the process of nation building.[69]

Today Masada is more of tourist site[70] than the centre of a heroic national story. Dormant for almost 2,000 years, the narrative was (very literally) dug up and placed into the centre of national political/cultural life, but discarded within two generations, replaced by another narrative. This is typical of political myths; they are commissioned and decommissioned on the basis of changing circumstances.

In 1906, Georges Sorel wrote that national epics cannot be:

…about things which the people cannot picture to themselves as reproducible
in the near future; popular poetry implies the future much more than the past;
it is for this reason that the adventures of the Gauls, of Charlemagne, of the

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[68] Ben-Yehuda, Nachman, *The Masada Myth, collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel,* University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1995, 59 (italics added).

[69] Elon, Amos, *"The Politics of Memory" New York review of Books,* Volume XV, Number 16, October 7, 1993.

[70] Furthermore, the large majority of people visiting Masada are increasingly non-Israelis. Ben-Yehuda, gives a figure of 646,000 non-Israelis visitors for the year 1996, as compared to only 77, 351 Israelis. Ben-Yehuda, 199.

Crusades, of Joan of Arc cannot form the subject of a narrative capable of moving any but literary people.[71]

As Wolfgang Schivelbusch argued, there had been at least one attempt to revive Joan of Arc – who had been dismissed by Voltaire in the 18th Century as *La pauvre idiote* – during the turmoil of the Franco/Prussian War of 1870. But her time had not yet come; she had to compete with the more Spartan, republican virtues of Marian, and Joan lost out; "To renounce Joan's ambiguity for Marianne's clarity was to neglect the need for martyrs that every vanquished nation feels."[72] However, later circumstances would revive the maiden. Within a generation of Sorel's (1906) dismissal, Joan of Arc was revived to become *the* symbol of France (a secular Republic) under German occupation, as witnessed by the numerous wartime speeches of Charles De Gaulle. He spoke in 1941 of: "A country three/quarters conquered. The greater part of its men in collaboration with the enemy. Paris, Bordeaux, Orléans, Reims, under enemy garrisons...treason spreading everywhere" making a forceful connection between past and present: "such was, on the face of it, France, in 1412 when Joan of Arc left to fulfill her mission; such is, on the face of it, France today."[73] From obscurity and mockery to personification of the nation (which already had an official – and female – personification, Marian). One might note that a year later, Stalin's USSR would be reviving Alexander Nevsky – and later Russian heroes like Alexander Suvorov – which took considerable ideological calibration.[74]

Although both cases examined in this thesis are examples of how the past is evoked and seen as relevant to the present, they seem to operate in two distinct, though related, modalities. The two processes are distinct – and this distinction is an important aspect of the comparative agenda of the thesis – but they do have a common functionality, using the past to legitimise present actions.

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[71] Sorel, 102.

[72] Schivelbusch, Wolfgang, *The Culture of Defeat, on National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery,* Picador/H. Holt, New York, 2004, 142.

[73] De Gaulle, Charles, *Discours et Messages, Pendant la Guerre, Juin 1940 – Janvier 1946, Libraire Plon,* 1970, 85.

[74] A wartime poster addressed the Soviet public as "grandchildren of Suvorov". See Stites, Richard and Van Gelden, James (eds.) *Russian Wartime Culture,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995.

Factual accuracy disturbingly matters less than it should in political myths. Masada is factually dubious, but this not so of anther foundational myth, Gallipoli. We know pretty much what happened, but subsequent readings make subscribers to the myth interpret the facts in self-serving ways. This leads us to **ownership** and **flexibility**, and Gallipoli is instructive about both. There is little doubt that Australians (and to a lesser extend New Zealanders[75]) "own" Gallipoli. Thousands of French and British troops died there too, but Australians have made it, to quote Robert Hughes "our Thermopylae"[76] (to be fair, the British and French have their own commemorations of other theatres of the Great War).

By flexibility I mean they ways in which Gallipoli had been interpreted by different audiences and generations. In Eric Bogle's 1972 song "And the band played Waltzing Matilda" there is a strong anti-war theme (very typical of Vietnam era folk songs). In Peter Weir's 1981 film "Gallipoli", there was a notable anti-British theme. At the most recent Anzac Day commemoration in Gallipoli, Prime Minister Julia Gillard described the Australians who fought there as: "Men who came from "the ends of the earth" in an enterprise of hope to end a far-off, dreadful war."[77] This interpretation makes it sound like a contemporary peace-keeping mission. Yet, to reflect, the young Australians who *volunteered* to fight in the Great War (Australia did not have conscription) were certainly *not* anti-British and certainly *not* anti-war; they willingly went to fight for the Empire.[78] One brief example of how Gallipoli is "versioned" for new generations is the re-publication of the first book published by a Gallipoli combatant, Sydney Loch's The

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[75] It seem that some Australian schoolgoers are not even aware New Zealand's contribution: an article in AAP.com.au stated that "Dr Crotty, a New Zealander who lectures Australian students, tells a story of one student who 'thumped the table after I'd given a seminar and complained at having a New Zealander come and tell us about Anzac'. 'He was genuinely shocked when I told him what the N and the Z stood for.' The historian said Australians had a very 'parochial' view of WW1 and were even less aware of France and Britain's involvement than they were of New Zealand's." http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/2355369/Aussies-forget-the-NZ-in-Anzac

[76] Hughes, Robert, *The Fatal Shore, The Epic of Australia's Founding,* Vintage, New York, 1986, xiv.

[77] Gillard, Julia, Speech, available at http://www.pm.gov.au/press-office/dawn-service-gallipoli.

[78] Although their motives were surely mixed, as so often with soldiers, military service offered some chance of social mobility, a rare chance to travel overseas, and real adventure. One Anzac Diarist writes of the first day of the Anzac landings April 25, 1915; "The sound of rifles has not ceased, same with ships guns till about 8 p.m. Hydroplanes and an observation balloon have been up all day. No firing going on at present. The sight of a lifetime." Will Lycett 1870-1975. Lycett, a British-born Australian, lost his father and 3 brothers in the Great War. See Anzac, the Great War Diaries, available at http://www.anzacs.net/Diary.htm.

Straights Impregnable.[79] The book had been originally published as a work of fiction to escape military censorship. However when re-published this century, its original title was dropped and replaced with the Hollywood-esque and banal "To Hell and Back". Why this act of editorial presumption, if not to make the book more attractive to younger generations?

By **level of usage** I mean the ways in which a given myth is used; is it commemorated in the public realm? Has it become a public holiday (and if so, a celebratory one like July 4th in the United States, or a more solemn one like Remembrance Day in Britain)? Is it confined to political speech, or has it become a popular theme in the arts (like Gallipoli and the Holocaust)? This leads us to the final factor **media of transmission**; folk belief, ritual, church ceremony, oral tradition and so forth.

2.5 Key concepts and definitions

2.5.1 The sacred, the secular, and civic religion

In his Culture and Imperialism, Edward Said wrote that "Every society and official tradition defends itself against interferences with its sanctioned narratives; over time these acquire an almost theological status, with founding heroes, cherished ideas and values, national allegories having an inestimable effect in cultural and political life."[80] What is meant by this "almost theological status" is worth dwelling upon. The term civic religion well describes public practices that seem to exist in a poorly-lit confusion of secular and sacred.

In this sense the gradual secularisation of Western societies since the Enlightenment has only been a partially-fulfilled project, despite what religious authors might believe. For

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[79] *To Hell and Back, the banned account of Gallipoli by Sydney Loch,* HarperCollins Publishers, Sydney, 2007. The book is edited by Jake and Susanna De Vries. Her books – it if is fair to judge by the titles – have a hagiographic air about them; *"Heroic Australian Women in War"*, *"Great Pioneer Women of the Outback"*, and *"The Complete Book of Great Australian Women"*. As is often the case with over-eager patriots, neither she nor her husband is Australian-born.

[80] Said, Edward, *Culture and Imperialism,* Vintage, London, 1993, 380.

example, the philosopher and practicing Roman Catholic, Charles Taylor can assert – with some obvious concern from his perspective – that "The presumption of unbelief has become the dominant one in more and more of these milieu and has achieved hegemony in certain crucial ones,…"[81] This may be accurate in respect to some (though not all) institutions, but this is not the full picture. I fully agree with Mircea Eliade's assertion that:

> …the man who has made his choice in favor of a profane life never succeeds
> in completely doing away with religious behavior…even the most desacralized
> existence still preserves traces of a religious valorization of the world.[82]

Civic religion, and political myths, may not be concerned with deities, but they do hold up their chosen narrative, heroes and events as revered, much in the manner of doctrinal religion. Much heritage and custom, particularly in the public/political sphere seems to preserve "religious valorization of the world" and long for the sacred. The sacred – as a category, familiar from Durkheim and elsewhere – is pervasive in human cultures. One particular aspect of the sacred is of interest here, this is, its unchallengeability. To be *unchallengeable* is an enviable status, and no culture – yet alone interested political agency – would be in a hurry to ditch it.

To place a certain historical narrative beyond challenge is to make it *functionally sacred*. This is being carried out *in extremis* by the strange contemporary practice of "memory laws" that is, passing real and binding legal statures that make the denial of a historical episode illegal. It is well-known that to deny that the Holocaust took place is illegal in Germany and elsewhere; less formally but no less stridently, to affirm the existence of the Armenian genocide is considered subversive in Turkey, and there have been several prosecutions under the controversial Penal code 301, which makes it illegal to insult "the Turkish Nation". In both cases the stakes are high; it is nothing less than genocide that is being denied or affirmed. However, another and far less familiar example of the legal sanctification of the past exists in Australia, in a case where full legal guardianship would hardly seem warranted. In his study Inventing Anzac, Graham Seal writes that the word "Anzac" (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) "was, and is, protected from misuse

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[81] Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 2007, 13.

[82] Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane, The Nature of Religion,* (Translated by Willard R. Trask) A Harvest/HBJ Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1959 (1957), 23.

by legal proscription."[83] So much of the politics of commemoration are about the construction of historical iconography, formalised and ritualised to the point of being unchallengeable. Obliviously this differs from political culture to culture, and it cannot always be read at literal level; one need only think of the formidable personality cult that surrounds Kemal Ataturk; the founder of the *secular* Turkish Republic is nonetheless *revered*. More obliviously one can point to the personality cults of communist regimes past (and in the case of North Korea) present with their "theological status".

2.5.2 The irrational and the political

In his timeless classic, The Paranoid Style in American Politics,[84] Richard Hofstadter wrote of the intrusions of the emotional and irrational into the political sphere:

> People respond, in short, to the great drama of the public scene. But this drama, as it is set before them and as they perceive it, is not identical with questions involving material interests and the possession of power. Even those who exercise power are not immune to the content of the drama.[85]

The point could hardly be better made. Politics can be and often is a theater of the irrational, or at least the semi-rational, with people's group, party or tribal loyalties and prejudices, short-circuiting their objective interests, not that *they* can necessarily be told that. The "great drama" often seems to wish for dramatic *dénouement*, heroes and villains, savior-like individuals, and so on. In his attack on revolutionary ideologues, Edmund

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[83] Seal, Graham, *Inventing Anzac, the Digger and National Mythology,* University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 2004, 4.

[84] Hofstadter, Richard, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics,* Jonathan Cape, London, 1966.

[85] Ibid., x. Not that political paranoia is limited to the United States or any given period. Other historians and writers have used Hofstadter's insights to examine paranoia in different periods and contexts. These include Eli Sagan's *The Honey and the Hemlock, Democracy and Paranoia in Ancient Athens and Modern America* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994), and Lacey Baldwin Smiths' *Treason in Tudor England, Politics and Paranoia*, (Jonathan Cape, London, 1986). That said, the modern United States is a theme park-sized gallery of political paranoia, and so many – mostly rightwing, Hofstadter's speciality – utterances are exactly full of the attributes "overheated, oversuspicious, overaggressive, grandiose and apocalyptic in vision" he describes, but pass for normal among large portions of the media and the public. Paranoid discourse and mythical discourse (as will defined below) can be co-exist most cosily; both often seek a single answer, a central conspiracy in one case, a revelation in the other.

Burke noted that "they have nothing of politics save the passion they excite."[86] This damning judgment is true of many people (indeed Raymond Williams wondered if it could not perhaps be applied to Edmund Burke).[87] In his study of leadership, John MacGregor Burns wrote of how conflict is "intrinsically compelling; it galvanizes, prods, motivates people" and leaders "whatever their professions of harmony, do not shun conflict; they confront it, exploit it, ultimately embody it".[88] Digging deeper into human psychology, Primo Levi wrote:

> Nevertheless, for reasons that go back to our origins as social animals, the need to divide the field into "we" and "they" is so strong that this pattern, the bipartisan – friend/enemy – prevails over all others. Popular history, and also the history taught in schools, is also influenced but this Manichean tendency, which shuns half-tints and complexities: it is prone to reduce the river of human occurrences to conflicts, and the conflicts, to duels – we and they....[89]

Such binary reductions – us/them, good/bad, friend/enemy – are typical patterns of mythical thought, and therefore are central to this thesis, especially the pairing of heroes and traitors (real or alleged). Furthermore, such reductions are part of the polarisations of rival groups in conflict.

The willful seeking of conflict for conflict's sake is hardly a model of rational politics, but seemingly in many cases – several with be examined in the second part of this thesis – conflict, passion and drama seem far more compelling than mere compromise. Indeed the idea of *compromise* – or even of negotiation – will come under particular attention in dealing with Munich.

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[86] Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* Penguin Classics, London, 1968 (1790), 94.

[87] Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Society 1780-950,* Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963 (1958), 27.

[88] MacGregor Burns, John, *Leadership,* Harper and Row, New York, 1978, 38-39.

[89] Levi, Primo, *The Drowned and the Saved,* Summit Books, New York, 1988 (1986), 37.

2.5.3 Historical time and age value

René Girard noted that "When a society breaks down, time sequences shorten".[90] It is difficult to prove empirically, but one can argue that time is indeed experienced in highly subjective ways by people, and the dividing of time into objective calendar units – necessary as it is – does not really indicate how time is felt and lived through by people. This is truer of historical time, in which people – or perhaps more accurately *peoples* – experience their shared sense of the past. The subjective ways in which objective time is experienced is embedded in this essay, not only in the obvious terms of conscious awareness (and deliberate evocations) of the past, but also in more social terms of acceleration of change, because the slower the rate of change experienced, the easier is the sense of continuity with the past.

People in the 20th and 21st Centuries (most especially if they are urban dwellers and well-educated) are aware of rapid change occurring, their lives are measurably different from those of their ancestors). For previous generations, especially before the Industrial Revolution, there may not have been *any* sense of progress or change; people's lives were lived much the same as those people's ancestors' lives. And as one moves back from the modern period and away from urban life, one could ask how accurate was the sense of time held by people in, say, the late medieval period? To quote Alfred Crosby on Jerónimo de Aguilar (a Spanish monk who has spent years stranded among the Maya of Yucatán, he later returned with Cortez); "This keeper of calendars, typical of his era and people, was not interested in accuracy (of time) per se but vis-à-vis tradition and the possibility of salvation."[91] As a monk, Aguilar was an educated man, but as Crosby continues; "For peasants schedules were approximate: weather, dawn, and sunset dictated their tempi." This vagueness of time[92] is worth keeping in mind when considering the transmission of events in the Balkans in the late medieval and early modern periods; how really separate were the past and the present in people's sensibilities? If there was little

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[90] Girard, René, *The Scapegoat,* John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, 13.

[91] Crosby, Alfred, *The Measure of Reality, Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, 76.

[92] From our modern perspective we accept that pre-Copernican man had a model of space different to our own, perhaps the sense of time was also different?

difference between the two, then surely the past – perhaps lacking sense of inferiority to the present – was a salient aspect of lived experience?

To apply this point to political historical consciousness, evocation of the past for the purpose of encouraging and legitimising actions, always entail temporal connection; "we-are-now-fighting-them-again-and-this-is-the-same-struggle!" In Northern Ireland, combatants and their spokesmen draw strong temporal connections to legitimise their actions; for Republicans, they often speak of centuries of British misrule, evoking the great famine of the 19th Century or even the Cromwellian Wars of the 17th. Loyalists evoke such events the Siege of Derry (1689), the Battle of the Boyne (1693) and the Battle of the Somme (1916), temporally connecting these events with the recent conflict, legitimising their own actions on the basis of their usable past.

Mark Thompson wrote of the extraordinary sense of historical continuity he encountered among a group of young Serbs during the breakup of Yugoslavia: "You would think these young engineers had lost at the battle of Kosovo in 1389, rebelled with Karadjordje in 1804, beaten the Austrians in 1914, risen against the Axis in 1941, been terrorised in Kosovo in the 1980s."[93]

But it is not only Serbs who might have their own sense of continuity and discontinuity. Rudi Giuliani was recently interviewed on Serbian television (he had been invited to consult on urban renewal and development). He was asked if he had seen the bombed buildings (referring to the NATO bombings of Belgrade in 1999). His response was to state that people have to put the past behind them. Leaving aside the question of whether or not the NATO bombings were justified, could anyone image trying to tell Mayor Giuliani that he should put the bombings of New York (only two years later that the bombings in Belgrade) behind himself?

This example illustrates that many groups can self-righteously insist that some historical event is very relevant in the here and now, while denying the same right to a rival group. One could argue that a certain group may have a *subjective* experience of time, while judging other groups by *objective* standards. Furthermore, as the above examples imply,

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[93] Thompson, Mark, *A Paper House, the Ending of Yugoslavia,* Vintage, London, 1992, 198.

this would seem to be especially the case when people are part of a conflict, when certainties are clung to, as society is undergoing violent change.

But historical time can also work in the *other* direction; not only does it resist diachronicity by shrinking the distance between past and present, it can also use the separation to *enhance* the past. That it, as a historical event is contemplated, it gains in stature by virtue of its distance, becoming, in lazy parlance "time-honoured". Time past endows prestige; to quote Graham Seal writing about Australia; "History itself imparts ever-accumulating significance to Anzac in the form of sacred time, for even elapsing, forever accreting around the icons and images of the Anzac tradition."[94] This is the logical lethargy at the core of tradition, however skeptically we may now look upon it; something gains in stature merely because it has existed for a certain amount of time and the longer it lasts the more it distinguished it becomes. This is what archeologists and historians call the "age value" of a given find or artifact, and it is also applicable to a given epoch or event.

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[94] Seal, 2004, 4.

3 Kosovo

3.1 The battle itself: what is known

Writers on nationalism often posit a Golden Age (often as imagined as real) in a particular culture's or country's history, and often, a national Catastrophe. The two, if there are two in a culture's history, need not necessarily be close; for example, the Irish or Ukrainian Golden Ages were in the early and late medieval periods, and their catastrophes in the 19th and 20th Centuries (the Great Famine and the Holdomar). If however, a culture's Golden Age happened to have been brought to an end by its Catastrophe, the two reinforce each other; the loss all the greater, the fall more traumatic. Such was the case of the Serbs.

In his study of a Serbian village in the mid-1950s, Joel Halpern noted that it was on *Vidovdan* that, "the names of all those who had died in the nation's wars are read in parish churches."[95] This shows the importance of the tradition of the Battle of Kosovo Polje in Serbian life and culture; the dead of all wars (and Serbia had fought four wars between 1912 and 1945) were remembered *through* the great battle of 1389. It was the foundational event through which all other events were experienced; it was in that sense paradigmatic.

> It is a fact that on Vidovdan, June 15, 1389, the Serbs, without help from a single European nation, defended on Kosovo Field not only the frontiers of their own territory and lives of their people, but, at the risk of losing their national independence, they also defended the interests and security of Christian Europe. In the conflict of 2 rival civilizations, the Muslim and the Christian, the Serbs checked the wave of the Turkish invasion, interposed themselves as a wall between the Turks and Europe, and enabled Europe to make preparations for its own defense. It is questionable whether the history

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[95] Halpern Joel, *A Serbian Village, Social and cultural change in a Yugoslav community,* Harper and Row, New York, 1956, 14.

of Europe would have been the same without the Battle of Kosovo and the sacrifice of the Serbian nation.

This passage by Fr. Mateja Matejic in *Kosovo* edited by William Dorich[96] is typical of the hagiography that has grown around the Battle of Kosovo Polje; a continent-saving battle, binary and symmetrical in form, fought along confessional lines; two civilizations at war to the death. Unsurprisingly on closer examination the patterns are not quite so neat. That said, a closer examination is difficult because of the lack of documentary evidence, only one or two letters that would constitute sources exist. Accounts of the battle, being rare and fragmentary, don't necessarily tell us very much, even the actual outcome.

But what can be said with some certainly is that on *Vidovdan* 1389 the Serbian Tzar Lazar with an army estimated at 15,000 – 20,000 troops faced an Ottoman army of 27,000 – 30, 000, led by Sultan Murad on *Kovoso Polje* (Field of the Blackbirds) near Pristina. Let there be no doubt that these were large armies; the famous Battle of Agincourt – fought some three decades later in 1415 – was contested by forces whose numbers are estimated at 6,000-9,000 on one side and 12,000-30,000 (much the biggest estimate) on the other.[97] Both armies – and this is a fact that is ignored by the hagiographic telling – contained soldiers of various origins; Bosnians, Albanians, Hungarians, Greeks, Bulgars, perhaps even Catalans (on the Ottoman side). In a few hours both monarchs were dead, there would seem to have been huge losses, and both sides seem to have left the field. Noel Malcolm, in his exhaustive account of the battle asks "whether, in the end, it should be characterized as a victory or a draw."[98] Indeed, early reports celebrated the battle as a Christian victory; after all the Serbs had killed an Ottoman Sultan (the only Ottoman Sultan ever killed in battle).

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[96] Doric, William, *Kosovo, The Kosovo Charity Fund,* Alhambra, 1992, available online at http://www.srpska-mreza.com/bookstore/kosovo/kosovo.htm. Dorich is a controversial figure, but the book does have contributions from serious scholars, most notably Tomas Emmert, the distinguished historian of the battle's legacy.

[97] Some of the Ottoman accounts of the battle greatly exaggerate the numbers involved, and the asymmetry of forces. There are claims that Murat's army faced hundreds of thousands. For a useful account of Ottoman accounts of the battle see, Nicolas C.J. Pappas and Lee Brigance Pappas' *"The Ottoman View of the Battle of Kosovo"* in Emmert and Kusinich (eds.), 41-53.

[98] Malcolm, Noel, *Kosovo, A Short History*, MacMillan, London, 1998, 61.

Supposedly the battle dramatically and suddenly ended the Golden Age of Serbia. The age referred to the medieval Serbian Empire. This was in indeed a very powerful polity, which reached its height under Stephan Dušan "the Mighty", when the empire covered most of the Balkan Peninsula. Dušan was the author of a famous law code (*Dušanov zakonik*) and it was during his reign that the Serbian Orthodox Church achieved autocephaly (it is very important to note the archbishopric seat of the Church was in the Monastery of Peć in Kosovo). These were formidable achievements, and Dušan even had pretenses to replace the Byzantine Empire, calling himself "The Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks".

Traditionally the Empire came to a dramatic end with the battle of 1389, and following this the Serbs underwent submergence to Ottoman Islam. In fact, the Serbian Kingdom was on the decline prior to the battle but survived it still for some 60 years, albeit in a compromised manner.[99] Michael Petrovic describes the status changes as:

> ...the medieval Serbian state – which had first been a grand *zupante*, then a kingdom, than an empire and became another conquered Ottoman province. But that medieval state continued to live the Serbian memory through four centuries of alien rule, not as it really was, but sanctified by the Church and idealized by folk poetry.[100]

Furthermore, as was stated above, the famous defeat was *not* seen as a defeat to others elsewhere in Europe at the time; the killing of an Ottoman Sultan was a cause for celebration. Indeed, King Tvrtko of Bosnia (who had sent troops to help Tzar Lazar under Vlatko Vuković) even boasted that he had *won* the Battle of Kosovo. Yet in the ensuing popular narrative, any talk of victory was rejected, but rejected with one very important qualification. It was claimed that the Serbian Monarch Lazar was visited by Archangel Elijah on the night before the battle and offered a choice. This was that he could choose to win a battle the next day, or he could lose the battle and forsake his own life but in doing

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[99] It cannot be overstressed that the battle may have shown the decline of the Serbian Kingdom through the loss of its monarch and many of its ruling Lords, but in military terms, it seems to have been more like a bloody stalemate.

[100] Petrovich, Michael Boro*, A History of Modern Serbia,* volume i, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1976, 6.

so he would gain a kingdom for his people in heaven. After agonising, he chooses to lose the battle and secure for his people a place in Heaven. From this comes the idea of Heavenly Serbia; the claim that the Serbs are a blessed, even a *chosen*, people. This is a highly exceptionalist claim, and from a critical distance one must wonder how literally it had been taken? But even among the skeptical, that is a heavy piece of ancestral baggage, it must be hard to totally ignore, most especially when there is enough "history" in the national narrative to offer evidence of compelling and often catastrophic people's experience.[101]

3.2 The battle as commemorated: the Kosovo Myth

In The Culture of Defeat, Wolfgang Schivelbusch makes the point that victory typically brings hubris and self-congratulation whereas defeat can bring a much deeper historical understanding; the defeated search more deeply and more painfully for answers. He quotes his countryman Reinhard Koselleck; "History man in the short term be made by the victors but historical wisdom is in the long run enriched by the vanquished".[102] This had indeed been the Serbian experience of the Battle of Kosovo; for centuries the commemoration of defeat seemed far deeper, seemed to speak to people more than the celebration of a victory. The commemoration of defeat is fairly rare in national narratives (we noted two in Masada and Gallipoli), but Kosovo is such a case; defeat was commemorated for centuries (commemorated even *after* alleged "revenge" had been accomplished, to run ahead of chronology for a moment). The historian Ralph Bogert has asked the probing question: "What would cause a people to perpetuate such a paradigm (of defeat) even after the historical circumstances would seemingly have allowed for its sublimation or even its retirement?"[103]

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[101] It is significant, as Ivan Čolović points out, that the term "narod" means both nation and people. In that sense it is possible to speak of a collective before the ideology and institutionalisation of nationalism. Čolović, 7.

[102] Schivelbrusch, Wolfgang, *The Culture of Defeat, on national trauma, mourning, and recovery,* Picador/H. Holt, New York, 2004, 4.

[103] Bogert, "Paradigm of Defeat or Victory", in Emmert and Vucinich (eds.), 179.

This section proposes to offer an answer to this question by examining the Kosovo Myth, that is, how the battle has traditionally been commemorated by Serbs.

For centuries, the story of the battle was transmitted by two media, church texts such as those of Constantine of the Philosopher, and through Serbian epic poetry, most especially the Kosovo Cycle, which when written down in the 19th Century became a "national" epic like the *Kalevala*, the Poem of the Cid, the *Tain* or the Song of Igor's Campaign. The latter medium was by far the most important media; simply stated, most Serbs were illiterate until the late 19th Century. Therefore epic poetry was the most common medium. It must be stated that epic poetry was a highly developed and important cultural form among Serbs, and a source of pride, identity and a very strong linkage to the past.

The British archaeologist (and at that time journalist for the Manchester Guardian) Arthur Evans, travelled through the Balkans when the rebellion in Bosnia and Herzegovina took place (1875-1878) and noted of the Serbs: "Their spirit has been continually refreshed from the perennial fount of epic song."[104] Indeed he noted one performance of epic poetry: "I have witnessed crowds surrounding a blind old singer, and every cheek was wet with tears; it was not the music, but the words, which affected them. For these songs speak to the heart."[105]

A later visitor, the famous folklorist Alfred Lord who travelled to the region in the 1920s to specifically to study the vibrant oral tradition noted; "Epic poetry in Yugoslavia is sung on a variety of occasions. It forms, at the present time, or until very recently, the chief entertainment of the adult male population in the villages and small towns."[106] The tradition was still vibrant in post-war Yugoslavia as Joel Halpern noted about the villagers of Orašac:

> The patriotism and pride exhibited by the Orašasi are characteristics of all
> Serbs. They feel themselves to be much more that simple inhabitants of

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[104] Evans, Arthur, *Through Bosnia and the Herzegóvina on foot during the insurrection, August and September 1875; with an historical review of Bosnia and a glimpse at the Croats, Slavonians, and the ancient republic of Ragusa,* Longmans, Greens and Co., London, 1877, 140.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Lord, Alfred*, The Singer of Tales,* Michell, Stephen, and Nagy, Gregory, (eds.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Second Edition, 2000, (1960), 14.

Serbia. They are the creators and defenders of their county. "We are Serbia". This binding identity with their homeland had been reinforced over generations by the chanting of heroic epic poems, in stilling in almost every child a knowledge of, and love of, his country which he retains throughout his life.[107]

And to fast forward again, the tradition of playing the *gusle* and chanting poems was notable among Serbs during the breakup of Yugoslavia. In a fascinating documentary film Serbian Epics directed by Paweł Pawlikowski, one can see chilling footage of members of the Bosnia Serb army besieging Sarajevo, barbequing a sheep, drinking *rakija* and chanting around two *guslars*:

> Oh pretty Turkish girl
>
> Our monks will soon baptize you
>
> Sarajevo in the valley
>
> The Serbs have encircled you

The same men also chant the traditional songs about the Battle of Kosovo. Later in the same documentary, Radovan Karadžić, recites his own poetry and has a lofty discussion with the Russian writer Eduard Limonov, while looking down on the besieged city. In a less self-assured time, following Western intervention and a final lifting of the siege, many Serbs left Sarajevo, Louis Sell described the following pitiful scene:

> At the end of the war in Bosnia, I witnessed a Serb singer weaving a tale of lament that described the ongoing flight from Serb-held areas around Sarajevo. The singer – not, I believe blind – accompanied himself on the traditional one stringed gusle while all around him buildings burned and panic-stricken Serbs

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[107] Halpern, 293. Note that he was writing the 1950s, but local allegiance seems far stronger than Yugoslavia's official Brotherhood and Unity.

loaded their families and belongings onto buses, cars, and wagons to flee incoming Bosnian forces.[108]

It is quite extraordinary how the poetic tradition survived (or had been periodically revived). Čolović even goes as far as to suggest that, "It is impossible to govern Serbia without poetry."[109] His argument being that the present/past connection that the poetic tradition offers:

> The explanation of this interest of Serbian politics in poetry must be sought in our very lively romantic conception of poetry as the deepest, most authentic manifestation of human, and especially national aspirations. To be with poetry, to have at one's side the dead and living giants of poetry, means to have an unbreakable connection with the people.[110]

As epic poetry is so important, and in particular the epics about the Battle of Kosovo, I propose to comment briefly on the poems and aspects of their contents, which other commentators usually overlook. Authors such as Judah and Greenawalt quote the earlier poems in which Tsar Lazar is visited the Archangel Elijah and makes his famous choice between victory on earth or defeat but a defeat with the heavenly kingdom:

> 'Lazar! Lazar! Tsar of noble family,
>
> Which kingdom is it that you long for most?
>
> Will you choose a heavenly crown today?
>
> Or will you choose an earthly crown?[111]

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[108] Sell, Louis, *Slobodan Milošević and the destruction of Yugoslavia,* Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2002, 368.

[109] Čolović, 149. One of the leading voices in the campaign against Kosovo's independence is the actress Ivana Žigon. She is well known for reading her *Prkosna Pesma* (poem of protest) in public.

[110] Ibid. It might be said that Čolović's own writing, exaggerated but insightful, aphoristic and dense is itself very poetic.

[111] The translation quoted is by John Matthias and Vladeta Vuckovic, Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, Athens, 1987, prefaced by Charles Simic, available at http://www.kosovo.net/sk/history/battle_of_kosovo.html.

Lazar, as mentioned earlier, agonises appropriately over the choice but commits himself the higher ideal:

> "O, Dearest God, what shall I do, and how?
>
> Shall I choose the earth? Shall I choose
>
> The skies? And if I choose the kingdom,
>
> If I choose an earthly kingdom now,
>
> Earthly kingdoms are such passing things-
>
> A heavenly kingdom, raging in the dark, endures eternally."
>
> And Lazarus chose heaven…

This is the core of the poems; Lazar's choice of the Heavenly Kingdom. By this choice, the Kosovo Myth claims divine right; this is the sanctioning of exceptionionalism. A group can only be exceptional *vis-a-vis* other groups; to make an exceptionalist claim is to define your group' relationship to another group; this is a political act. As authors such as Ger Duijzings have rightly stated, that Kosovo Myth is "profoundly religious",[112] in fact the religious and political combine.

A short word about the relationship of religion and politics in Serbian identity is merited. Odd as it sounds, while stressing the traditional importance of the Church to Serbs, especially during the Ottoman years, Petrovic comments that it quite indifferent to matters of doctrine:

> The role of the Serbian church had little to do with religion either as theology or as a set of personal beliefs and convictions. Rather, the Serbian church was a cultural and quasi-political institution, which embodied and expressed the ethos of the Serbian people to such a degree that nationality and religion fused into a distinctively "Serbian faith".[113]

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[112] Duijzings, 176.

[113] Petrovich, i, 10.

So political as well as profoundly religious, the poem cycle seems to imaginatively combine Christian with pre- or non-Christian themes. It is interesting to try to detach the Christian elements from the non-Christian elements, insofar as this can be done. The two may overlap, but the Christian themes seem to be programmatic and predictable, whereas the pre-Christian seem much freer and more imaginative, and are all the more compelling for that.

These Christian aspects are most recognisably the theme of martyrdom, the dramatic "last supper" scene on the night before the battle, and the mapping of the stories of Christ and Judas onto the figures of Lazar and Brankovic, and the Serbs are seen as fighting an enemy of Christianity. Indeed, many of the Christian elements of the cycle have numerical associations, the numbers 12 and 3 appear throughout the poems. These numbers have transparent religious associations, the 12 apostles and the Holy Trinity, a uniquely important symbol in Orthodox Christianity (and now a symbol of Serbian nationalism);

- The number 3:
    - Obilić is one of 3 "blood brothers"
    - The Kosovo Maiden see 3 lords who each give a gift
- The number 12:
    - There are 12 Bishops mentioned
    - Musich Stefan's army lose 12,000 men
    - They march behind 12 banners
    - (Other accounts of the battle say that 12 Serbian lords broke through the ranks of the Turks allowing Obilić to kill Murad)

By contrast, the non-Christian strain that will be traced below is provided by reference to the various birds that appear in the tale, for as I will argue, they form the most vital link to the deepest theme of the poems, the linking of earth and sky (heaven).

The present thesis is not the place for a lengthy structural analysis of the poem cycle, but I would like to at least hint at one as briefly as possible, using the ideas of Lévi-Strauss. The poems can be broken down into binaries and opposites. We have the following set of opposing pairs:

- Earth/ Heaven
- Christianity/Islam (understood as True Believer/Infidel)
- Lazar the slain leader/Murat the slain leader
- Traitor Brankovic/Hero-Assassin Obilić (a very strong bind, the assassin had been accused of treason by the traitor)

It is a core belief of Lévi-Strauss that mythical thought proceeds by trying to reconcile opposites. This seems to be precisely vindicated by what these poems are trying to do, unify defeat and victory. It was mentioned that there are the recurring numbers 3 and 12, and another aspect of the poems in the recurring images of birds, which seems to be the core of the cycle.

The poem cycle begins with a fragment, which immediately tells of a message delivered from Murat to Lazar. The first formal poem (quoted above) also begins with the transmission of a message:

Yes, and from Jerusalem, O from that holy place,

A great gray bird, a taloned falcon flew!

And in his beak he held a gentle swallow.

But wait! it's not a falcon, this gray bird,

It is a saint, Holy Saint Eliyah:

And he bears with him no gentle swallow

But a letter from the Blessed Mother

What is most interest here is the form of the message and the form in which it is delivered, a bird is carrying another bird. The messenger is a bird of prey, one often associated in Serbian culture with warriors, the falcon, the message is a sparrow (a non-hunting bird) before it is transformed into a letter.

Indeed the linkage of warrior with falcon is made explicit later; when Obilić (the man who kills the Sultan) makes a vow to his blood brother, who replies:

O Miloš Obilić, I think you must be mad!

Where do you suppose that tent is placed

But in the middle of the vast encampment

And even if you had a falcon's wings

And flew down from the clear blue skies above

Your wings would never fly you out again alive

And, in fact, Obilić is killed as soon as he assassinates Sultan Murad. The wife of another hero Musich Stefan, who will also die in the battle, wakes the night before the battle and tells her servant of a premonition:

Pity me; I've had an evil dream.

I dreamed I saw a flock of doves in flight

with two gray falcons flying on before them,

Flying right before this very castle.

They flew to Kosovo and landed there

In Sultan Murad's cruel vast encampment-

But never did I see them rise again.

Again there are birds of prey with non-hunting birds, which are elsewhere compared to the Turks. In a later passage, a new bird species in introduced:

Two black ravens fly to Krushevats

From Kosovo, that wide and level plain,

And land upon the narrow castle tower,

The castle tower of Lazarus the Tsar.

The first bird caws, the second starts to talk:

"Is this the tower of Glorious Lazarus,

These ravens then speak with Lazar's wife Militsa, telling her that her husband is slain, and while they are speaking the servant Milutin rides back wounded and Militsa asked about the battle.

The two ravens are messengers in themselves but they also herald another (human) messenger (remember that the first falcon had also heralded another messenger, by turning into a Saint). What is different in the above passage is that unlike the previous birds (including the falcon prior to its transformation) the ravens can actually *speak*.

One of the archetypical figures of the poem, the Mother of the Jugovici, hears of the death of not only her husband but also of her nine sons. She asks God to grant her the "eyes of a falcon, white wings of a swan" and her wish is granted. She is able to fly above the battlefield and sees her sons (and husband) who are compared to lions and falcons. She is later given grim confirmation of the death of one son, again by the interventions of two ravens:

Two black ravens fly up to the castle,

Their wings all red and bloody to the shoulders

And their beaks all foaming with white foam.

They carry there a warrior's severed hand

With a wedding ring upon its finger

And they drop it in the mother's lap.

From these various passages we encounter birds as message and birds as messengers, whether obscurely as premonitions or very explicitly by the birds that can speak. The heroes and heroines are praised by comparison with bird-like features. (And the headgear of Serbian heroes is described as being decorated with feathers). However, some species are presented in strange contexts; most particularity the doves, so often a symbol of peace, being compared here to the enemy. And if one were to expand the parameters of the Kosovo Myth beyond this cycle, one would find a folk tradition that stated that upon the

death of Lazar, his daughters turned into cuckoos. This is quoted in the hugely influential Mountain Wreath (*Gorski vijenac*) of Petar Petrović Njegoš, which also has striking images of birds in the context of anti-Ottoman warfare; the Ottomans are seen as an owl, gulping a bird, "as Murat gulped Serbia" (almost an inversion of the opening image of the Kosovo cycle quoted above in which a flacon carries a sparrow). Another striking bird image in the Mountain Wreath is the description of a partridge in sexual terms: "A falcon seeks to find a partridge bird/ a partridge is a slender, timid bird/ but her body is like live, darting fire".[114]Njegoš, like Karadjordje (to whom he dedicated the Mountain Wreath) was a larger than life individual and as one of the main promoters of the Kosovo Myth in the 19th Century.[115] (Both Njegoš and Karadjordje are discussed below.)

A latter contribution to this taxonomy is the eagle. This too is seen in an unfamiliar context; usually the king of winged predators, the eagle is downgraded to a scavenger (exactly like a raven or crow). For example, in a passage about Lazar's severed head, we read:

> Here before us lies a sovereign's noble head!
>
> In God's name it would be a sin
>
> If it were pecked at by the eagles and the crows
>
> Or trampled on by horses and by heroes"

In the Matthias and Vuckovic translation quoted here there is an additional poem, which is not usually in the Kosovo Cycle (although it is about the Battle of Kosovo). A beautiful poem, it seems to me to be a "key" to the central theme of the Kosovo Myth. In this poem we read about the hero Prince Marko and an eagle (or falcon, depending on translation). Marko is wounded and is being sheltered from the sun by an eagle, who also gives the wounded man water from his beak. When a *vila* (a nymph in South Slavonic folklore) witnesses this, she asks what then man has done to deserve such treatment from an eagle.

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[114] Njegoš, Petar Petrovic, *The Mountain Wreath,* (Translated by Vasa D. Mihailovichor), available at http://www.rastko.rs/knjizevnost/umetnicka/Njegoš/mountain_wreath.html

[115] See, for example, Greenwalt, Alexander, *"Kosovo Myths: Karadži , Njegoš, and the Transformation of Serb Memory",* available at http://www.yorku.ca/soi/Vol_3/_HTML/Greenawalt.html

The eagle – who very importantly is able to speak – relates that it had been at Kosovo, feasting on the flesh and blood of dead heroes. This is central, the bird that is normally a hunter (and, if an eagle, the king of winger hunters) is now behaving like a scavenger. The blood of heroes dried on its feathers and prevented the eagle from being able to fly. Marko took pity on the creature and took it away to a wood where a shower of rain washed the blood away, allowing the eagle to fry freely again:

Then God sent Marko to me on that plain

Who plucked me from the flowing blood of heroes

And set me down behind him on the back of Sharats[116].

He took me straight into the nearest woods

And put me on the green branch of a pine.

Then a gentle rain began to rain.

It fell down from the sky and washed my wings,

Washed away the blood of noble heroes,

And I could fly above beyond the forest

And join all the eagles, join my swift companions.

The core of the cycle is the tension between heaven and earth. Without the "loss" on earth, there is no right to the kingdom of heaven. Yet they remain separate realms, earth and sky. Hence surely the importance of the gallery of birds, creatures distinguished by their ability to fly, that is, travel between earth and sky (we must also try to imagine how incredible this must have seemed to the pre-Copernican imagination). One might also point to the site of the battle Kosovo Polje, which means "field of the blackbirds" (although this is probably just co-incidence). One might further point out that in traditional images of St. Vitus/Guido, he is usually accompanied by a bird. In Njegoš' poem, the hero Obilić is seen in a dream flying on his horse.

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[116] Marko's horse.

One can read the various birds as messengers and messages, interlopers between heaven and earth. To taxonomise, we have:

- Blackbird (Kosovo Polje "Field of the Blackbirds")
- Falcon (messenger/warrior)
- Swallow (message)
- Doves (cowardly/weak enemy)
- Swan (its wings are given to a heroine)

  - Raven (higher messenger)
  - Eagle (higher messenger)

To extend the parameters to include Njegoš' poem:
- Owl (Ottoman empire)
- Unnamed bird (devoured by the owl)
- Cuckoo (daughters of Lazar)
- Partridge (female "partner" to the falcon)

Most interesting are the cases of the birds (raven and eagle) given the gift of human speech. If one recalls Lévi-Strauss' myth readings, one must note that the raven is almost always an interloper (or in North American mythology, a "trickster") because – so the argument runs – it is a scavenger, not a bird of prey, that is, it is half-way between a carnivore and herbivore.

Yet the eagle, twice mentioned in the poem cycle, is seen not a carnivore, which is very unusual, but rather as a seen as a *scavenger*. However, in that final poem about Marko and a bird, the eagle regains its ability to fly (and therefore its ability to hunt again) by having the blood of heroes washed from him; he graduates from scavenger to hunter. Furthermore, this is this done by one of the only ways the sky can connect to earth, rain, which cleans the eagle of the blood of the dead men it has feasted on, and allows the bird to fly again, that is, frees the bird to be able to reach the sky. This is what Lévi-Strauss called a "mediating structure":

If we keep in mind that mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution, the reason for these choices becomes clearer. We need only assume that two opposite terms with no intermediary always tend to be replaced by two equivalent terms which admit of a third one as a mediator; then one of the polar terms and the mediator become replaced by a new triad, and so on. Thus we have a mediating structure of the following type:[117]

Life

    Agriculture

        Herbivores

        Raven; coyote

        Beasts of prey

    Hunting

Death

These poems present us with creatures that mediate between earth and sky. Of these creatures, two are higher order mediators, gifted with speech. Both are carrion eaters, scavengers, in this case, a raven and an eagle. The latter presents an identical structure:

Heaven

    Rain

        Hunter

            Eagle

        Scavenger

    Blood

Earth

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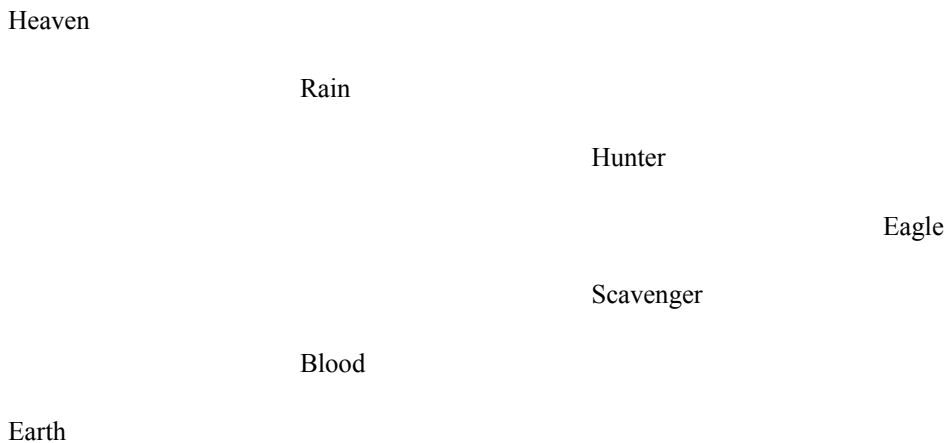
[117] Lévi-Strauss, 1963, 224.

Surely this is why the battle has been held to be a *profound defeat*; something as precious as a place in heaven for your people could not be purchased by a narrow loss in battle; the sacrifice had to be *vast*. This perhaps offers an answer to Bogert's question regarding what would cause a people to perpetuate such a paradigm (of defeat) even after the historical circumstances would seemingly have allowed for its sublimation or even its retirement? Heavenly Serbia had to be purchased by a huge loss. As an old Serbian folk proverb puts it, "If I was meant to have it good, they wouldn't have killed Lazar at Kosovo".

3.3 Serbia in the 19th Century

The following chapter traces the cultural and political legacy of the battle of Kosovo as it re-emerges in circumstances where it can be officially sanctioned, that is, when a Serbian "nation" starts to emerge in the 19th Century. This chapter is an informal attempt at *microhistory*, seeking to trace larger patterns by focusing (at least to begin with) on one or two representative lives. This is a matter of scale, that is, of trying to cover a lot of ground without getting lost in too much detail. In dealing with the 19th Century, I have in mind Hobsbawm's "long 19th Century" which stretches from the French Revolution until the First World War (he follows up on this idea by positing a "short 20th Century" 1914-1989). This model could not suite my subject more; Serbia had one of the most successful revolts of the Napoleonic period, and the cult of Kosovo and *Vidivodan* is what *ignites* (although it did not by any means *cause*) the First World War. Furthermore the period that ends 1989 also coincides with the post-Tito revival of the cult of Kosovo, most notably when Slobodan Milošević started to reinvent himself as a nationalist when speaking in Kosovo on *Vidovdan* 1989, the 600th anniversary of the battle.

Picture 1 *David and Leon Koen.*

3.3.1 The Serbian Coen Brothers

> *As on one occasion he was looking from Pancevo at the right bank of the Danube, towards Belgrade and the castle of Kalemegdan, the Polish humorist Stanislav Jerzy Lec said that where he was standing, on the left bank, he still felt at home, inside the frontiers of the old Habsburg monarchy, whereas for the other side of the river was immediately "abroad", foreign parts. The Danube was, in fact, the border between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Kingdom of Serbia.[118]*

There is something of the "normal exception" about the lives of these two brothers, and they seem to embody several of the most important aspect of Serbian experience in the mid and late 19th Century.[119] *Not least* is the fact that like the brothers, there were in effect two Serbian entities; the Austro-Hungarian ruled area of Vojvodina, and the autonomous Ottoman Serbian lands, south of the river Danube and including Belgrade.[120] Although slightly smaller demographically,[121] Vojvodina was is a sense the *older* brother, with a more educated and developed population. It had less autonomy; it was proclaimed the Vojvodina (Dukedom) of Serbia following the upheavals of 1848, but was fully integrated into Hungary after the establishment of the Dual Monarchy in 1867. Nonetheless, it was the home of the most advanced Serbian community; Serbia's main economic product – pigs – were exported via Vojvodina merchants and in rebellious times, guns were imported from there. Indeed the term for "foreign" Serbs was *prečani* (from *preko*, across) meaning those who lived across the Danube or Sava.

There were, of course, other brothers, that is, the dispersed Serbs of Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and "Old Serbia" meaning Kosovo, the lost land, site of the legendary battle and spiritual core of Serbian nationalism. A popular expression stated that; "Montenegro

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[118] Claudio Magris, *Danube*, Harvill Panter, 1989 (1986), 330-331.

[119] This chapter is deeply indebted to Vesna Adic's paper "The Tragic Story of Leon Koen, the First Sephardi Painter from Belgrade: A Symbolist and Admirer of Nietzsche" presented at a Workshop Jewish Art and Tradition, held at the University of Belgrade, 27 January–10 February 2008 and published online at http://www.scribd.com/doc/20885576/Vesna-Adic-The-Tragic-Story-of-Leon-Koen-A-Symbolist-and-Admirer-of-Nietzsche

[120] Having gained *de facto* autonomy after the uprisings of 1804 and 1815, Serbia was a *de jure* autonomous Principality (*Sanjak*) from 1832, and would become a fully independent country in 1878.

[121] They covered almost the same area, but Vojvodina had large Hungarian and German populations, unlike the more homogenous province of Serbia.

with its doughty warriors saved the Serbs form despair, the Vojvodina with its schools and presses saved them from ignorance".[122] It might also be noted that a later polity that would incorporate Serbia, Yugoslavia was – at least in its second incarnation 1945-1991 – predicated on *Bratstvo*, (brotherhood.)

Leon Koen[123] (1859–1934) was a Serbian painter, of Sephardic Jewish background. He was described as an awkward and introverted youth, and seems to have discovered his artistic talent almost by accident, while working as a tailor and dressmaker. Koen first took private art lessons, and later formally trained in Munich (while also studying philosophy). While in Munich, he became acquainted with symbolism and would be the first painter to introduce symbolism into Serbia, which was then dominated by historical painting. Much as another Belgrade Jewish painter Moshe Pijade – later a famous partisan and politician – was the first person to translate Marx into Serbian, Leon Koen was also the first person to translate the works of Nietzsche into Serbian. (Nietzsche – perhaps only superficially understood – combined with the cult of Kosovo, would be one of the influences on the angry young nationalists of the Young Bosnia movement, see below). Leon Koen suffered from severe psychological problems and stopped painting suddenly in middle age, never to return to it. Lamentably, most of his works were destroyed during the Second World War; only 15 remain, of which some are only sketches. The introverted younger Koen seems to have been strongly influenced by his older brother's formidable personality and sense of dual identity.

David Koen (1854-1915), was a lawyer and passionate Serbian nationalist, who authored, among other things 'A Sermon to Serbian Youth of Moses' Faith, a plea for Jews to embrace Serbian identity while keeping their own traditions. The older Koen was literally his brother's keeper; the painter spent much of his life living with the writer and his family. David Koen was a commissar in the First Balkan War of 1912, in which Kosovo was "liberated" by the Serbs. Koen would be killed by Bulgarians during the First World War because he admitted to writing and refused to renounce a book called *Bog čuva Srbiju* ("God Protects the Serbs – The Apotheosis of the Serbian Genius in the Light of Religion"). The Bulgarians made plans for a unified South Slav entity in Belgrade in 1860,

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[122]Quoted in Stavrianos, L.S*., The Balkans since 1452*, New York University Press, New York, 2001 (1958), 235.

[123] The typical Serbian Latin spelling is *Koen*.

their Bulgarian Legion (including their national hero, Vasil Levski) were trained by the Serbs, and even one of the first Bulgarian newspaper *Dunavski lebed* (Swan of the Danube) was published in Belgrade, financed by the Serbian government.[124] Despite this level of cooperation and mentorship, the Bulgarians would go to war with (and indeed defeat) the Serbs in 1885, and were then defeated by the Serbs in the Second Balkan War of 1913. They were again on opposite sides during the First World War. (Notable especially was the brutality of the Bulgarian occupation of areas of Serbia.)[125] By this act of heroic defiance, telling his captors "I am the author of that book, and I cannot renounce it, because all that was written there was my firm conviction."[126] David Koen earned himself a small (Jewish) space in Serbia's formidable martyrology. Leon, whose mental stability was further shaken by the death of his older brother, would self-identify as a martyr himself, although a Christian one; in later life he always carried a Serbian translation of the New Testament with him, grew a long beard and started to identify with Jesus.

During the period 1881–82 Leon Koen began taking private painting lessons with Stevan Todorovic, a renowned Serbian painter of that time.[127] Todorovic's painting Hajduk Veljko next to the Cannon (1860) was one of the national icons symbolising the Serbian struggle for independence from the Turks.

Koen's own paintings reflected his dual identity, and combined Jewish and biblical themes such as Joseph's Dream, The Finding of Moses, and the Eternal Jew, with "national" themes, such as Djuradj Brankovic and The Turks Kidnap Serbian Maidens for the Harem, which was exhibited at the World Exhibition in 1900, an early exercise in what we now call national "branding". (Among other painters whose works were displayed in the

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[124] Dmitrije Djordjevic and Stephen Fischer-Galati, *The Balkan Revolutionary Tradition,* Colombia University Press, New York, 1981, 125.

[125] See Andrei Mitrovic's *Serbia's Great War,* Hurst and Company, London, 2007, 221-232.

[126] Quoted in Mihailo B. Miloshevic*, Jevreji Za Slobodu Serbije (*Jews for Serbian Freedom*)1912-1918,* Filip Visnjic, Beograd, 1995, 8.

[127] 1832-1925, was a Novi Sad-born painter, very much of national romantic school. He trained in Vienna and Munich before establishing himself in Belgrade, where he opened a school to mentor younger painters.

various national[128] pavilions was Axel Gallen-Kallela representing Finland, and a 19 year Andalusian called Picasso representing Spain.)

It was an interesting image by which Serbia chose to present itself, that of a female victim. Serbs were known as warriors in the late 19th and early 20th Century, admired when fighting the Turks, but reviled when they committed regicide in 1903. *Rado ide Srbin u vojnike* (Gladly does the Serb become a soldier) was one of the Serbian tunes upon which Tchaikovsky based his famous *Marche Slave* or Serbo-Russian March of 1876 (the march was written to raise money for Russian volunteers who fought in the Serbo-Turkish war of that year).[129] Yet at the world exhibition, Serbia showed a feminine and vulnerable image of itself.

19th Century orientalist art produced many self-consciously exotic paintings on the theme of Harems, odalisques and slave girls. Famous examples would include Ingres' *Le Bain Turc* (1862), and his much earlier *La Grande Odalisque* (1814). The idealized images of the Orient seem to open a door onto a repressed area of Western sexuality; many of the images are of a sexual nature, as though the exotic was a license for the erotic. Many of the images may seek to portray Victorian moral outrage, but they betray Victorian sexual repression. Jean-Leon Gerom's oriental images are often eroticised, and some paintings – such as The Slave Market (c. 1884) are shamelessly voyeuristic. Other paintings in this genre, such as the The Bulgarian Martyresses, by Russia painter Konstantin Makovsky (1887), have a pointed political message, though the content is still voyeuristic. Noteworthy is the degree to which the women – all seen in subservient roles, concubines or slaves – look white and European, in contrast to their captors who are typically exotic, often with black African features, such as one of the figures in Makovsky's painting. This polarising tendency is exactly as was described by Edward Said; "the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western."[130] The motif of the "Turk" as a violator of European women was not confined to the visual arts; if it provided theatrical colour for Mozart's opera The Abduction from the Seraglio, it was more political in Turgenev's On

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[128] Some of the pavilions represented autonomous regions, such as Finland and Bosnia, rather than independent countries.

[129] Brown, David, *Tchaikovsky: A Biography and Critical Study, Volume II The Crisis Years (1874-1878)* Victor Gollancz, London, 1982, 100-102.

[130] Said, Edward, *Orientalism, Western Conceptions of the Orient,* Penguin, London, 1991 (1978), 45.

the Eve. In Turgenev's novel, the Bulgarian hero Insarov – who is mistaken for both a Serb and a Montenegrin – is the son of a woman who was later raped and murdered by a Turk (there is an actual Serbian character, Vulich in Lermantov's Hero of Our Times).

What is interesting about Koen's The Turks Kidnap Serbian Maidens for the Harem was its lack of voyeuristic elements; there is violence but not sexual. It probably provides some insight into Koen's naive personality. In another linking of Maiden and Nation, Serbia's most famous painting, the Kosovo Maiden (*Kosovka devojka*, 1919) by Uroš Predić would combine the ideals of female purity with the Kosovo legacy (the figure depicted is the maiden who attends the wounded and fallen Serbian warriors after the battle). Although a very different artist, Predić was a champion of Koen.

Koen as a Jewish painter was politically engaged – and allowed to be – in a way that, for example, the Russian Jewish painter Isaac Levitan (1860-1900, born within a year of Koen) was not, confining himself to his famous spiritual landscapes and occasionally portraiture (although one can note the exception of The Vladimirka Road, painted in 1892, which depicted the road by which convicts were transported to Siberia). Koen would also later become a set painter for the National Theater in Belgrade, which was founded in 1868.[131] In fact, a Serbian theater had already been founded in Novi Sad, Vojvodina in 1861. As in other matters such as education and intellectual life, Vojvodina's Serbian community were more advanced than their fellow Serbs in the Ottoman Empire.

According to Adic, one of Koen's national paintings (mentioned above) was probably inspired by a play he saw as a teenage in the National Theater of Belgrade, "Djuradj Brankovic".[132] This was the first play ever performed in Belgrade's theater, and took as its subject Serbia's pre-Ottoman history. Many other pieces written for the theater would also take up these historical themes. In 1903, among the concerts and plays that were performed in Belgrade's theater there were the following; "Miloš Obilić, a Historical Tragedy" (42nd showing), "Dusan, a Tragedy" (16th showing) and the Battle of Kosovo, a Historical Tragedy" (16th showing).

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[131] This awkward title, *Narodno Pozorište u Beogradu,* distinguishes it from the Serbian National Theater (*Srpsko Narodno Pozorište)* which existed already in Novi Sad.

[132] Djuradj (George) Brankovic had decidedly crossed lineage (at least to a traditionally Serbian view of things) being the son of Tzar Lazar's daughter and the son of Vuk Brankovic, the man traditionally cursed as the traitor of the 1389. Djuradj was despot of Serbia from 1427-1456, when he died aged 91.

It is also of note that when the new rival to stage – film – became established in Serbia, its first subject was also historical. The first ever Serbian film was shot in 1911 and it was a life of Karadjordje. Two early scenes are of particular interest; young George plays with other boys, organising them as Turks and Hujuks. Then a blind *guslar* comes to sing for the boys. The intertitle states that he is Filip Višnjić the famous *guslar* and singer (from whom Vuk Karadžić heard many of the songs he transcribed). The blind man sings about the Battle of Kosovo, (the intertitle informs the audience that he is singing about the defeat of Tzar Lazar in and the death of Sultan Murat "at the hand of the hero Miloš Obilić").

In the next scene the boy is minding the pigs when "he encounters a wonton Turk". Being challenged, he kills the Turk "in righteous indignation" (he even comes back into view to kick the corpse) takes his weapons and flees to become a legend (leaving the poor pigs to fend for themselves…). This was 1911, and anti-Turkish feelings were running high, they would explode into open war a year later.

In the distinction between civil society and political society, culture is usually held to be in the realm of civil society. But this depends largely on the state of development of the society in question, the degree to which its institutions are established and autonomous. It is argued here that an emerging society, the civil/political dichotomy is far less clear than in a more mature society, which will be less centralised and far more diversified. Serbia in the "long" 19th Century was certainly an emerging society, struggling for independence, developing institutions and a shared identity. This latter was done through culture, but culture was politicised to a high degree.

Many aspects of the lives of the Koen brothers were miniatures of the concerns of the emerging Serbian nation: the need to educate people and build a culture (visual, literary and dramatic), the sense of national *mission* (and the role of religion in society; which would change with the pivotal Berlin Conference; Jews were given full religious rights), the glorious past (exemplified by the pre-1389 Serbian Kingdom), the troubled relationship with the rival Orthodox and south Slavonic country Bulgaria, and above all, the search for outside models, and the related need to impress outside powers. These were very much the concerns of an emerging "nation".

3.3.2 The uprising and after

Serbs made their first bit for something that might be called nationhood, with the uprising of 1804-1813. The revolt against the *Dahias* (leading Janissary[133]) was a rebellion against local Ottoman governors, not against Constantinople as such; in fact the Sultan, Selim III – a reformer who struggled against the prevailing conservatism of his administration – supported the rebels against the Janissaries, who were beyond the central control of the Sublime Porte (a systemic problem in the late Ottoman Empire). The leaders of the revolt would repeatedly tell the Sultan that they wished to remain loyal to him, though not to his corrupt subordinates.[134]

The revolt had been provoked by the brutal Slaughter of the *Knigez* (lit. Princes, local headmen, usually the elected spokesmen of the extended families *Zadruga*, which were the backbone of Serbian economic and communal life) that was ordered by the *Dahias*; some 200 *Knignez* were murdered. The Serbian rebellion was headed by George Petrovic (1768-1817) who would become known as Karadjordje (Black George). His "black" character has often enough been commented upon: he was willing to personally administer punishment, corporeal and capital. Although an illiterate pig farmer, he was a formidable leader and warrior. No less a historian than Leopold von Ranke considered Karadjordje to be "a very extraordinary man":

> Of lofty stature, spare, and broad shouldered, his face seamed by a large scar, and enlivened with sparkling, deep-set eyes, he could not fail to be instantly recognized. He would spring form his horse, for he preferred fighting on foot, and though his right hand had been disabled by a wound received when he was a Heyduc, he contrived to use his rifle most skillfully. Whenever he appeared,

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[133] An Ottoman innovation, an elite corps of troops, typically captured slaves who were not allowed to marry but rather maintained a level of professional dedication that was ahead of their time. By the late Ottoman period however, they had become corrupt and self-serving. Their reputation for brutality was notable.

[134] Glenny, 2000, 8.

the Turks became panic-stricken; for victory was believed to be inevitably his companion.[135]

Unsurprisingly, the unlikely alliance of ill-disciplined Serbian rebels and the Sultan with their divergent agendas did break down. The Porte was happy about the *Dahias*' defeat, but was worried about the autonomy that the rebels gained, and the demands made by Karadjordje.

The rebellion was about real economic grievance, but it was, as Pavlowitch notes, not so much ideological as millennial; folk rumours predicted the return of Prince Marko.[136] The only "ideology" that Karadjordje could use was rhetoric about the Battle of Kosovo. To quote Dushan Batakovic:

> The main source of historical knowledge – apart from folk poetry, oral historical chronicles about medieval glory, the struggle against the Turks and the desire to renew the empire lost in the Battle of Kosovo (1389) – were the works of "monastic historicism", compilations of older history books made in the eighteenth century.[137]

Most Serbs were illiterate and their *history* was largely transmitted through the folk poetry, most especially the Kosovo Cycle, which was sung and chanted for centuries, and first published by the Serbian linguistic reformer Vuk Karadžić in the early 19th Century (for a lengthy analysis of the cycle, see section 2.2 above). Karadjordje further revived the Kosovo Myth by declaring himself *Kum* (Godfather) to any ninth child born in Serbia (godparentage, *Kumstvo*, was along with *Zadruga*, was vital in Serbian family and communal life). The tradition of the ninth child, goes back to the Mother of the Jugovici, a woman in the Kosovo cycle, who supposedly lost her husband and nine sons at the Battle of Kosovo. Strangely, given that he was suspicious of nationalism and not himself Serbian, Tito would revive this pattern of godparentage in Socialist Yugoslavia (for more on this, see section 3.4).

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[135] von Ranke, Leopold, *A History of Servia, and the Servian Revolution,* (Translated by Mrs Alexsander Kerr) Hamburg 1829, John Murray, London, 1847, 205.
[136] Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia, The History behind the Name*, Hurst, London, 2002, 28.
[137] Ilija Garašanin's "*Nacertanije*" A Reassessment, *Balkanica*, vol. XXV-1, Belgrade, 1994, available at http://www.rastko.rs/istorija/batakovic/batakovic-nacertanije_eng.html

As would happen often throughout the next two centuries, external circumstances – the ambitions of the great European powers – suddenly altered facts in the Balkans. Russia, which had been protector of the Christian interests in the Ottoman-controlled Balkans, first helped the Serbs but then dropped its support in 1812, when its troops withdrew to Russia to help against Napoleon's invasion. A treaty was signed between Russia and Turkey and defeated, Karadjordje fled the county. When he later tried to return during the Second Serbian Uprising of 1815-1817 he was murdered (almost certainly on the orders of his rival Miloš Obrenović). Miloš was responsible for considerable developments in Serbia's economic life (making himself very wealthy in the process), and his Pasha-like rule was eventually curbed by a movement to establish a constitution. It must be noted that in political/economic terms Serbia was notably egalitarian, especially for an agrarian culture; most famers were small holders, there was no landed gentry who ruled over vast estates like there were in Romanian Principalities or Russia or elsewhere in Europe. Nor was there an institution of serfdom.

The Defenders of the Constitution or Constitutionalists (*Ustavobranitelji*) were led by Ilija Garašanin (1812-1874) who was probably the most significant Serbian politician of the 19th Century. Garašanin was – among other achievements and frustrations – the author of a national "plan" *Nacertanije* (also translated as "project", or most accurately as sketch" from the verb *nacrtati* to draw) of 1844. The document is of large historical importance, and was very influential until 1918. From a post-Yugoslavian perspective it could be seen as either a blueprint for a Greater Serbia or for a crypto Yugoslav entity (it could not realistically be both). Politically, Garašanin was a defender of the so called "Turkish" constitution of 1838, which was written in the Port to place restraints on Miloš Obrenović (who had replaced Karadjordje; these two families – Obrenović and Karadjordjević – would violently contest the crown of Serbia throughout the century). A practical politician, he was able to maintain links with both Croatian bishop Josip Strossmayer (1815-1905) one of the leading "Illyrianists"[138] and a crypto-Yugoslav and Petar Petrović Njegoš the Prince/Bishop (*Vladika*) of Montenegro mentioned above, a great romantic poet and Serbian nationalist. Although both were Bishops, Strossmayer and Njegoš could hardly be

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[138] Napoleon had founded an Illyrian state in areas now containing Slovenia and northern Croatia. Despite these regions returning to Austrian rule, Illyrianism continued to grow as an aspiration, especially among Croats who – in marked contrast to 20th Century Croatian nationalists – saw their best chance of statehood as being part of a South Slav entity, probably under Serbian leadership.

more different; the Croat was ecumenical[139], his dream of a South Slav land (*Yugoslavia*) was driven by a wish that Western (Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) Christianity could overcome their differences (in socialist Yugoslavia, Tito would often speak very highly of him).[140] Indeed, Strossmayer was a friend of Gladstone and has been compared to John Henry Cardinal Newmann, the English catholic. Although Gladstone did admire – from a safe distance – Montenegrins ("a band of heroes such as the world has rarely seen stand on the rocks of Montenegro, and are ready now, as they have ever been during the 400 years of their exile from their fertile plains, to sweep down from their fastnesses and meet the Turks at any odds for the re-establishment of justice and of peace in those countries"),[141] these liberals seem a world away from Njegoš' Manichaean imagination. Njegoš was intolerant by temperament, a tribal-minded Montenegrin; his most famous work The Mountain Wreath (*Gorski vijenac*) praises the killing of religious converts.

The plan was a secret document, intended only for the eyes of influential politicians, and this secretive nature may have added to its gravitas; it was not published until 1905. It is, of course, anachronistic to see it in 20th Century terms; but it is worth examining because it give great insight into the political and cultural predicaments and challenges faced by Serbian leadership in the period of emerging nationhood.

The "plan", brief though the document is, touches upon some the of the most important issues facing Serbia in the mid and late19th Century; how to get free of Ottoman influence, what Western and other outside models and influences to accept, the Bosnian Question (and more generally, how to forge some unity with the scattered Serbian communities) the role of Russia[142] in Serbian affairs, and the troubled rivalry with Bulgaria. The document

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[139] For more on Strossmayer see, Marcus Tanner, *Croatia, A Nation Forged in War,* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010 (1997), 94-101.

[140] Alexander, Stella *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, 58.

[141] Gladstone in House of Commons, May 1877, Hansard, HC Deb 07 May 1877 vol 234 cc366-476.

[142] It is notable how suspicious the Serbs were of Russia, and how relatively cool they were in their pan-Slavism. For the Russians, pan-Slavism must have been a large burden on their political calculus. Referring to Russian dilemmas and its choices for involvement in the Balkans, Alfred J. Rieber writes: "The tension between Russia's obligations to the European system and to the Orthodox-Slavic population of the Ottoman Empire spawned a series of crises throughout the nineteenth century: the Greek War for Independence in the 1820s, the Crimean War, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, and the rapid succession of crises from 1907 to 1914. In each case, Russian policymakers were torn between two courses of action. One was to attempt to resolve the crisis within the context of European diplomacy; the other was to intervene unilaterally in the name of a higher allegiance to Slavic or Orthodox solidarity disguised by appeals to Russian national

speaks of a sense of national "mission"; in this, it was very much of its time, this was after all the era of Hegelian *geist*, "manifest destiny", "the Russian idea", the Greek *Megali Idea* (Great Idea*)* and of the *Forza del Destino* of numerous nationalisms. Since the upheavals of 1789, Europe was haunted by the spectre of revolution, and imbued with the spirit of romanticism. The Balkans, although less developed than Western Europe, were not immune to such influence. As Stavrianos writes, speaking of 1789 and the subsequent Napoleonic wars:

> ...there can be no doubt about the very real influence of French revolutionary ideology upon certain sections of the Balkan people. Masonic lodges and other secret organizations were established in the principle towns. Newspapers were founded dedicated to the overthrow of Turkish dominations. The revolutionary ideology may not have been transferred intact from West to East, and the concepts of liberty, equality, and fraternity may have been but barely comprehended. Yet the uprisings in Paris and the exploits of Napoleon made the subject Balkan peoples more restless, more independent and more determined to win their freedom.[143]

However, other scholars such as Djordjevic and Fischer-Galati do stress the local conditions and pressures; arguing that it is misguided to see the Serbian Revolution of 1804 as "an offshoot of the French Revolution".[144] For them, "the Serbian uprising should be considered as an expression of indigenous exasperation over the ever-increasing abuses

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interest. . . . In the 1870s, rebellions in Bosnia and the Bulgarian provinces of the Ottoman Empire once again plunged official Russia into a crisis over intervention. Alexander II was no pan-Slav; his leading ministers opposed the war. But the pressure of the vociferous nationalist-Panslav right – organized in Slavic committees, sustained by elements of the press, and buoyed by a widespread surge of sympathy from the Russian-educated public – created an atmosphere in which the government could not easily abstain from intervention without seriously compromising its honor and prestige both at home and abroad." Quoted in "Virtual War, Virtual Journalism?: Russian Media Responses to 'Balkan' Entanglements in Historical Perspective, 1877-2001", workshop paper, Kennedy Center for European Studies, Brown University, 2002. For a detailed treatment of Serbian/Russian pan-Slavism, see MacKenzie, David, *The Serbs and Russian Pan-Slavism, 1875-1878*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1967.

[143] Stavrianos, 211.

[144] Djordjević, Djordjević, and Fischer-Galati, Stephen, *The Balkan Revolutionary Tradition,* Columbia University Press, New York, 1981, 68.

perpetrated by military and political unites of the declining Ottoman Empire against the Serbian people…"[145]

Garašanin's Plan took as given that the Ottoman Empire was doomed, and that Serbdom would benefit from this and would regain its pre-1389 glory:

> The Ottoman Empire must disintegrate and this disintegration can only occur in two possible ways:

> 1. either it will be partitioned, or
> 2. it will be rebuilt anew by its Christian inhabitants.[146]

With this future in mind, the past is then evoked:

> The Serbian state which has already seen its good start, but must strive to expand and become stronger, has its roots and firm foundation in the Serbian Empire of the 13th and 14th centuries and in the glorious and rich Serbian history. It is known from this history that the Serbian rulers began to assume the position held by the Greek [i.e., Byzantine] Empire and almost succeeded in making an end of it in order to replace the collapsed Eastern Roman Empire with a Serbian-Slavic Empire. Emperor Dusan the Mighty had even adopted the coat-of-arms of the Greek Empire…

> These foundations and walls of the Serbian Empire, therefore, must be cleared of all ruins and debris, and brought to light, so that a new edifice may be constructed on this solid and durable historical foundation. Such an enterprise will be endowed with inestimable importance and great prestige among all the nations and their cabinets; for then we Serbs shall appear before the world as the true heirs of our illustrious forefathers, doing nothing new but restoring their legacy.

> Hence, our present will not be without a link to the past, but they will make an interdependent, integrated, and well-ordered whole; thus, the Serbdom, its

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[145] Ibid.

[146] Garašanin.

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nationality and the life of its state stand under the protection of the sacred historical right.[147]

Garašanin shows a certain conservative temperament; his evocation of the past is not breezy romanticism, rather it is the restoration of legal rights (and *not* an act of revolution); "Our aspirations cannot be reproached as something novel and unfounded, as revolution and coup; but all must acknowledge that they are politically necessary, grounded in ancient ages…"[148]

External circumstances would soon provide a very compelling model for Serbia and its political aspirations. The Italian *Risorgimento* – and the eventual declaration of an Italian Kingdom in 1861 – pointed the way for Serbia. Serbia would seek to become the South Slav Piedmont, the eventual center around which a South Slav entity would be constructed. Later politicians such as the Liberal Jovan Ristic (1831-1899) and Prince Michael Obrenović were very conscious of the Piedmont model; in fact, the latter knew Giuseppi Mazzani – the founder of Young Italy – personally. The question was would other Balkan peoples be attracted into such a project? As of 1844, when he wrote the Plan, Garašanin sounds like a man trying to suppress his own considerable doubts, and his language is notably unconvincing. "If we consider the revival of the Serbian Empire from this standpoint, then other South Slavs will easily understand this idea and accept it with joy".[149] His argumentation again goes back to Serbia's gloried past, in the hope that it alone will be enough to get neighboring peoples onboard:

> …no European country is the memory of the historical past so vivid as among the Slavs of Turkey, for whom the recollection is intense and faithful of the celebrated figures and events of their history. Therefore, it may be counted as certain that this enterprise will be readily accepted among the people, making unnecessary decades of activity among them, just in order to prepare them to understand utility and value of an independent administration.[150]

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[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

However progress in attracting other South Slavs into some form of unified entity was not sufficiently rapid, and as Pavlowitch notes; "Serbia offered a mixed picture at the end of the 19th century...there was progress but it was not very attractive for Serbs outside its borders, yet alone other South Slavs."[151] Serbia was not able to inspire much confidence until the early 20th Century. One of the turning points, argue Djordjevic and Fischer-Galati, was the active role played by Belgrade University, which drew many Croatian students and also Bulgarian students when the University of Sofia was closed in 1907.[152] But it was really by its later achievement of winning both Balkan Wars of 1912-13, that made it look like Serbia was sufficiently sturdy to become the Piedmont of a South Slav entity. It was in the first of the Balkan wars – in which Kosovo was "liberated" by Serbian troops – that David Koen served (in one of his speeches, Koen spoke in highly romantic terms about the Serbian national "mission" saying that "Serbia is entrusted with the key that opens the door for the miraculous crossing to the east ... Serbia is the Piedmont of the East!").[153]

It is worth dwelling on Koen's belief in the Serbian national genius. From a Jewish point of view, he was an arch-assimilationist (interestingly when he spoke of the Battle of Kosovo, he spoke in classical historical terms of it as "our Thermopylae" he avoided religious/mythic language. One must guess this was because of his different religion?). Koen belonged to the same generation as the founder of Zionism; Theodore Herzl was born in the Hungarian capital Budapest, but his family hailed from Zemun (then a separate town and part of Hungary, now part of Belgrade). Koen's *Besede* (speeches) was published in 1897, just one year after Hertzl published the *Der Judenstaat.* In this seminal work Herzl wrote:

> We have honestly endeavored everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life
> of surrounding communities and to preserve the faith of our fathers. We are
> not permitted to do so. In vain are we loyal patriots, our loyalty is some places

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[151] Pavlowitch, 73.

[152] Djordjevic and Fischer-Galati, 189.

[153] Koen, *Besede, Posvecene, Srpskoj Omladini Mojoijeve Vere,* Beograd, 1897, 62.

running to extremes; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens.[154]

Herzl could well have been describing Koen, with his loyalty running almost to extremes, and who certainly did make the ultimate "sacrifice of life".

Pivotal to this nation-building was the reform and standardising of the Serbian language, which was carried out by Vuk Karadžić (1787-1864). Karadžić was a huge figure in the history of Serbia; if only as a collector of folklore he was as important a figure as Elias Lönnrot was in Finnish culture, and the many comparable figures at this time; Herder and the Brothers Grimm in German culture, Kruetzvald (collector of the *Kalevipoeg*) in Estonian, and Andreas Pumpurs in Latvian. Indeed as Vilmos Voigt argued in is assessment of his life and achievements:

> Karadžić could stand as a stereotype of such men: the son of a peasant family, an irregular student; a man of letters, or more precisely a scribe; a volunteer when it came to war, but often ill, hardly able to walk, he still travelled widely, a customs officer, variously alleged to be an Austrian and Russian spy, and for a time President of the Serbian Court of Law; translator of the New Testament (paid from Russian sources) and at the same time of the Code Napoleon, protagonist and antagonist of Serbian and other rulers….meeting leading German scholars such as Jacob Grimm, poets such as Goethe…[155]

Common to Karadžić and these other figures across Europe was a belief that a unique "national" genius existed and could be unearthed by the tabulation and study of folk culture, a cultural "nationalism" that would, in different times and locations, become a political nationalism whenever circumstances allowed.

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[154] Herzl, Theodore, *The Jewish State,* Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1988 (1896), 76, available at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25282/25282-h/25282-h.htm.

[155] Voigt, Vilmos*,* "Primus inter pares: why was Vuk Karazic the most influential folklore scholar in South-Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century?" in, *The Uses of Tradition, A Comparative Enquiry into the Nature, Uses and Functions of Oral Poetry in the Balkans, the Baltic, and Africa,* Michael Branch and Celia Hawkesworth (eds.), School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London and Finnish Literature Society, London and Helsinki, 1994, 187.

3.3.3 Cultural revival and Vidovdan as a festival

Despite mixed success in its state-building efforts, Serbia could boast of some formidable cultural achievements. This was again typical of its time, the correlation between language and nation was one of the new ideas that Herder and others had put into circulation. Karadžić also met with Ljudevit Gaj (1809-1872) a leader of the Illyrian movement, and they agreed on a literary standard, favouring the Stokavian above the Cakavian and Kajkavian dialects of what would become known as Serbo-Croatian (a term no longer used). Numerous journals and publications came into being (one called *Vidovdan*), reading clubs were opened, and the cultural group *Omladina* (very much modeled after Young Italy) was founded in Novi Sad in 1868.

Milorad Ekmecic writes that *Vidovdan* as an organised commemoration emerged in three distinct periods, each dependent on the media used for social communication. As he puts it, "educated and illiterate men cannot depend on the same type of nationalism".[156] The three periods were: 1800-1848, 1849-1903, and from 1903 onwards. He speaks of the progression of *Vidovdan* from being something mentioned only in books to one in which there was much larger "mass" participation. The critical mass involved was a sufficient number of literate people, something that only came to Serbia after 1903, by which time 30% of the Serbian population were literate (though only if schoolchildren were included).

Prior to that, literacy rates were very low; in 1886 only 4.2 % of the population of Serbia was literate, and these people were mostly city dwellers. This drive towards literacy was impressive, as was the drive towards education in general; in 1879 the government spent 119,000 dinars on grants to study abroad, more than on parliament.[157] The artist Leon Keon was one of the recipients of such a grant.

It was in the second period (1849) that *Vidovdan* was institutionalised as a "national" day. It must be stated that Serbian was still an autonomous principality at this time; the Ottoman flag still flew alongside a Serbian one in Belgrade, and Ottoman troops were still stationed in Serbian barracks; to have a national day was premature and risky. Indeed there was a minor diplomatic incident when a lecturer spoke on June 27th 1851 in Belgrade's

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[156] Ekmecic, Milorad, "The Emergence of St. Vitus Day as the Principle National Holiday of the Serbs" in Emmert and Vucinich (eds.), 333.
[157] Pavlowitch, 65.

reading hall (that it was the night before *Vidovdan*, stressed the "last supper" aspect of the Kosovo Myth). The speaker ended with the provocative words "Yes Brothers, it is high time to go to Kosovo and fight for out lost independence".[158]

The war with Turkey in 1876 would even be declared on June 28th, and was defined as revenge for Kosovo (as was the later war of 1878, the resolution of which involved the Berlin Conference).

Vidovdan 1889 marked the 500 years anniversary of the battle, this was commemorated throughout Serbian lands, and representative of Serbian communities living abroad in London and Berlin sent telegrams of congratulation to the Serbian King and government. One from London read (in a laconic English manner); "Today anniversary of Kossovo (sic) kindly be assured of sincere sympathy with objects of Celebration".[159] Another from a certain Pavlovitch in Berlin was less upbeat, evoking Lazar and "the loss at Kosovo".[160]

The potential legitimising power of the Kosovo legacy was demonstrated by a highly choreographed gesture this same year. The Obrenenevic dynasty, which had a rivalry with the Karadjordjević dynasty (both claimed, and in turn possessed, the crown of Serbia) had suffered in prestige because of the many failings and scandals of the young king's father, the recently-abdicated Milan Obrenenvic.

> The King, regents, court, cabinet, and Metropolitan Michael went to Krusevac,
> Prince Lazar's medieval capital, and from there to Zica Monastery, where
> Alexander was anointed king. The entire observance was designed to evoke
> patriotic feelings, to link the Obrenevic dynasty with the Nemanaja dynasty of
> medieval Serbia, and to stress modern Serbia's role as the historic heartland of
> all Serbs, in and out of the kingdom.[161]

But alas, not even the legitimacy offered by the Kosovo legacy could save the young monarch, who – along with his wife – would be brutally murdered in 1903.

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[158] Ekmecic, in Emmert and Vucinich (eds.), 336.

[159] *Arhiv Srbije* (Serbian National Archive)*, Fond Ministarstvo Norodne Privrede 1882-1918.*

[160] *Fond Ministarstvo Norodne Privrede 1882-1918.*

[161] Petrovich, ii, 446.

But interestingly there were also acknowledgements from elsewhere; Czechs, Greeks and Russians marked the day in various ways. It may surprise one – considering their often bloody rivalry in the 20th Century – that many Croatians looked with some admiration at the Serbs, seeing them as an example to be emulated in their own aspirations to independence. The Zagreb newspaper *Obzor* praised the occasion: "...we Croatians – brothers by blood desire with the Serbs – today shout for joy: Praise to the eternal Serbian Kosovo heroes who with their blood made certain that the desire for freedom and glory would never die..."[162] Serbian politicians of all parties used Kosovo as a reference point (with the notable exception of the socialists, although the response of many socialists would be very different on the 600th anniversary of the battle!). The past in a sense was the present; in an article entitled *Kosovo (1389-1889)* one journal stated that:

> There is sometimes in the life of a people a special moment, a moment that the people have long waited for, a moment that has been passed from generation to generation…. such extraordinary moments are the way to measure the life force of a people.[163]

Of the many organisations that were established in the latter 19th Century, some were political in intent, even dangerously so. A secret, patriotic society, the *Narodna Odbrana* (People's Defense) was founded in Serbia in approximately 1908, the year of the Austrian annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an act that was widely resented, both by Serbs and internationally. Although their enemies were now the Hapsburgs, they still spoke about the Turks and had a dire message of survival:

> The old Turks of the South gradually disappear and only a part of our people suffer under their rule. But new Turks come from the North, more fearful and dangerous than the old...They want to take our freedom and our language from us and to crush us. We can already feel the presages of the struggle which approaches in that quarter. The Serbian people are faced by the question 'to be or not to be?'[164]

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[162] Quoted in Emmert, Thomas, "The Kosovo Legacy" in Dorich (ed.).

[163] *Orao* (Eagle) June 1889, Digital National Library of Serbia.

[164] The World War I document archive, available at http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Main_Page

Another organisation that was formed at this time was the *Mlada Bosna* (Young Bosnia). A young man form Herzegovina called Gavrilo Princip belonged to this organisation, which was inclusive, in that its members were not only Serbian. The group was interested in progressive issues such as agricultural reforms and women's rights, but it also had revolutionary tendencies. Ridding Bosnia of Austrian rule was its main aim. As the name indicates, it was modelled on Young Italy.

If the 1908 annexation was a source of anger among South Slavs, a lightening victory only four years later – that of the First Balkan War of 1912 – would prove intoxicating. Interestingly if David Koen, the middle aged Jewish lawyer took part in this as a political commissar; the young revolutionary Princip was refused entry into the army because of his small physique. Princip had travelled first to Belgrade, where he was refused entry into a *komite*, (a band of Serbian irregulars) by their leader Major Vojislav Tankosic, who was a member of the central committee of the Unity or Death (*Ujedinjenje ili smrt)* organisation. This group was led by "Apis" (Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević 1876-1917) who was one of those responsible for the assassination of the King and Queen in 1903, and would supply the weapons that were used in the Sarajevo assassination. *Ujedinjenje ili smrt* were popularly known as the Black Hand. Their newsletter – echoing the dominant political model – was called *Piedmont.* Apis, named after the ancient Egyptian bull god, was a Serbian original. The "congenial conspirator" (as his biographer calls him) was a man of enormous physique and energy, an outstanding officer, who could seemingly inspire and manipulate with a mere few words. When he bravely faced his execution for dubious changes in late June 1917, he lamented it was only two days short of *Vidovdan*.[165]

Princip then travelled to the border town of Prokuplje, where Serbs were amassing for an attack across the Turkish frontier. Again he was rejected, being told he was too small and weak.[166] One did not have to be – as Princip was – a sensitive and bookish youth, to feel deeply humiliated by this rejection. It surely left him with much to prove.

This was a moment of nationalistic fervor; Dedijer notes that even in far off Slovenia, people were naming their infants after the heroes of 1389. If the Balkan Wars were in

[165] See, Mackenzie, David, *Apis, the Congenial Conspirator: the Life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijevic,* Columbia University Press, New York, 1989.

[166] Dedijer, 197.

retrospect dwarfed by the huge war that began in 1914, it is worth pointing out that the victory over the Ottomans in the first war was seen as a huge achievement internationally at the time. And again, if in retrospect the wars have become notorious for their brutality and civilian atrocities, the first war was seen as pristine in its moral clarity, indeed the struggle was often seen in civilisational terms. J. L. Eddy, a Fleet Street editor sent a telegram (in French) to the Serbian Government: "The Hearst papers have constantly applauded the cause of Serbia against the Turkish aggression, and the expulsion from European territory the Muslim tyrants".[167] Other voices were even more expansive on the confessional and crusading aspects (as they saw them) of the Serb's victory. A letter from Alexander De' Lacour, Consul Royal Barcelona stated:

> In our land, which had been under the Islamic yoke for eight centuries, and which was watered with the blood of Christians every quarter of Spanish soil, the Balkan lands have won all the sympathies with their noble gesture, for their selflessness, and for the courage in regard to the feelings of their oppressed brothers.[168]

Of the enlisted men of the various armies (Greek, Serbian, Montenegrin and Bulgarian) who would fight Turkey, those with some level of education were indoctrinated by being told of their glorious medieval past as part of their training. As Richard C. Hall notes:

> Bulgarians learned of the empires of Tsar Simeon (893-927), Greeks learned about the Emperor Basil II (known as the Bulgar Slayer, 976-1025), and Montenegrins and Serbs learned about Stefan Dushan (1331-55). These individuals had established medieval states that briefly controlled most of the Balkan Peninsula. The modern nation states recognized these earlier ones as lineal antecedents and models to be emulated. [169]

So "history" was being handed to the troop with their rifles. Hall also comments on the extraordinary sense of historical continuity that existed among the combatants:

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[167] *Arhiv Srbije, Fond Ministarstvo Norodne Privrede* 1882-1918

[168] *Fond Ministarstvo Norodne Privrede* 1882-1918.

[169] The Balkan Wars 1912-1913*, Prelude to the First World War,* Routledge, London and New York, 16.

> At the beginning of the twentieth century, Bulgarian army commanders justified or at least excused their decisions in part on the basis of events that had occurred a millennium ago. It is remarkable that the figures of medieval Bulgarian rulers appeared in the Bulgarian decision-making process at this critical juncture. Such was the power of Balkan nationalism.[170]

But interestingly, damaged Turkish pride now also revived an interest in the Battle of Kosovo, remembered as a great Ottoman victory, to compensate the recent humiliation. In 1913 a work called *Kosova mydan muharabesi* (the Battle of Kosovo Plain) was published by a Turkish writer Ali Haydar. According to Pappas and Pappas, the work did not: "subject traditional Ottoman historiography to modern historical criticism but rather uses it as a literary device for a swan song about Ottoman power in Europe".[171] The victors and the defeated had exchanged places.

Should the Kosovo Myth not then have fallen into disuse? Nothing of the sort happened, quite the contrary. Two year after the dream of retaking Kosovo was realised, a national obsession should have been put to rest: instead the opposite happened, a local affair sparked a World War.

3.3.4 The Vivovdan assassination

Without doubt the most famous incident that occurred on *Vidovan* was the Sarajevo assassination of 1914, in which ArchDuke Franz Ferdinand and his wife[172] were killed, the event that triggered the First World War. The assassins were a group of young students with a mixed bag of political and ideological convictions. There were influenced by socialistic and anarchistic thought (the two might not seem as distinct from each other at the time as they do in retrospect; see Čabrinović's testimony below) and Nietzsche, though the latter was perhaps only superficially understood; for example, Princip liked to recite his poetry. Nietzsche, as mentioned, had been quite recently introduced into the Serbian language by the painter Leon Koen, who had studied philosophy as well as painting in

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[170] Ibid., 35.

[171] Pappas and Pappas in Emmert and Kusinich (eds.), 49.

[172] By the cruellest of coincidences, *Vidovan* was their wedding anniversary.

Munich. The outlook of the conspirators was modernistic and in many ways progressive. They wanted rights for women, and some of them – most especially Princip – were anti-religious and anti-clerical. Yet parallel to this generally modernistic strain, they were also seeped in traditional Serbian culture. In his classic account of the assassination, Dedijer wrote about the burden of the past in the environment in which the assassins grew up:

> It was true that under the influence of capitalism this burden of the past was starting to disintegrate, but the folklore of tribalism, in an impoverished and illiterate peasantry, remained alive in our century. The historic circumstances, under which the South Slavs lived, in an uninterrupted state of rebellion against foreign occupiers, facilitated the preservation of the ancient idea, expressed in the folklore epic of Kosovo, that the assassination of a tyrannical foreign ruler is one of the noblest aims of life.[173]

One of these was the famous dramatic poem The Mountain Wreath by Petar Petrović Njegoš. The poem, mentioned above, is not only considered one of the masterpieces of South Slavonic literature, it is also a text that extols the heroic ideal and the spirit of the Kosovo Myth. It is a point of pride among some Serbs even to the present day (though perhaps with a certain ironic playfulness) as to how many lines of The Mountain Wreath they are able to recite by heart. Princip knew the entire poem by heart (it's over 30,000 words in English translation). Clearly, their progressive tendencies apart, the conspirators saw themselves as embodying the ideals of the Kosovo Myth, and doing so with a level of literalness that really does highlight their youth and naiveté.

In justifying his actions at his trial, Nedeljko Čabrinović, the conspirator who threw the bomb at Franz Ferdinand (the Archduke, of course, died along with his wife as a result of being later shot at point blank range by Princip), stated that:

> I am an adherent of the radical anarchist idea, which aims at destroying the present system through terrorism in order to bring in the liberal system in its place. Therefore I hate all representations of the constitutional system - of course, not this or that person as such but as the bearer of power which oppresses the people. I have educated myself in this spirit through the reading

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[173] Dedijer, 236.

of socialistic and anarchist writings and I can say that I have read through almost all the literature of this type that I could get in the Serbo-Croatian language.[174]

He speaks of "liberal", "anarchist" and "socialist" but for all this, Čabrinović was deeply immersed in the Kosovo Myth and even seemed to have had a very personal and very problematic identification with one of the figures of the Battle of Kosovo. At his investigation he said; "Our folklore tradition tells how Miloš Obilić was accused before *Vidovdan* that he was a traitor and how he answered 'On *Vidovdan* we shall see who is and is not a traitor.' And Obilić became the first assassin who went into the enemy camp and murdered sultan Murad".[175] The accusation of treason, so much part of the myth, was real and painfully personalised for Čabrinović because his father was an informer for the Austrian police, and not only was Čabrinović aware of this, but he was aware that this was known by other people. This was a shame that must have rivaled, if not surpassed, the humiliation that Princip endured by not being accepted as capable of fighting for the Serb volunteers during the First Balkan War.

Importantly, when Princip had fired the fatal shots, he tried to shoot himself with his pistol, but was restrained from doing so, and then took poison that he taken with him, but it did little damage. Čabrinović also took poison after he had thrown his bomb, and then jumped into the Miljacka river. But the poison did not kill him either, though it did weaken him, leaving his ill for several days. It was essential to their plans that they should *die* while carrying out their deed. In this too, there were seeking to emulate the heroes of 1389.

It is impossible to consider the First World War with reference to the Kosovo Myth, firstly because the incident that provoked the reaction of the war (though not, of course, its cause) was an incident entirely linked to the myth. Secondly, the war had terrible consequences for Serbia, in some ways reinforcing the self-image of martyrdom that the cult signified. Thirdly, the manner of the diplomacy between the assassination on *Vidovdan* and the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war and attack, was so bullying that it presented Serbia with a "Kosovo Moment", an ultimatum that recalled the existential

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[174] Ibid., 326.
[175] Ibid., 320.

situation when Lazar's army of 1389 faced a similar moment of seeming hopelessness (according that is, to the traditional narrative). Within the war itself, this life-or-death pattern would be repeated by the retreat to the Adriatic, a huge event that recalled the most mythologised event in Serbian since the battle of 1389, the great retreat from Kosovo in 1660. Indeed, one of the three human columns that made the long trek over the mountains left from the Monetary of Peć. John Keegan described this huge human movement, of the defeated army led by the aged King, and the feeble army commander Marshall Putnik; "carried by his devoted solders in a closed sedan chair, along the snowbound tracks and over mountain passes."[176] He continued:

> Only an army of natural mountaineers could have survived the passage through Montenegro, and many did not, dying of disease, starvation or cold as they fell out of line by the wayside. Of the 200,000 who set out, no less than 140,000 survived to cross in early December the frontier of Albania.[177]

From Albania, created as a result of the Balkan Wars, the survivors were evacuated to the island of Corfu; the popular song *Tamo Daleko* (There Far Away) was written about their exile.

Finally the eventual settlement of the war brought a new country into existence; the long imagined Illyrian or South Slav polity, the Kingdom of Slovenes, Serbs and Croats (signed into being on *Vidovdan*, 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles). Indeed the new country's constitution (1921) was called the *Vidovdan* Constitution.

The second point – the hugeness of Serbian losses – can hardly be overstated. While the major combatants France, Germany and Britain lost on average 2-3% of their populations, Serbia between actual fighting and the typhus epidemic that swept through the country, lost 15% of its total population, including a hugely disproportionate number among its adult males.[178] The unrepentant Princip, who was kept in brutal conditions in a prison in

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[176] Keegan, John*, The First World War,* Vintage, New York, 2000 (1998), 254.

[177] Ibid.

[178] "Serbia, of whose pre-war population of five million, 125,000 were killed or died as soldiers but another 650,000 civilians succumbed to privation of disease, making a total of 15 per cent of the population lost, compared with something between two and three per cent of the British, French and German populations." Ibid., 7.

Theresienstadt (where Madeline Albright's Jewish relatives would later be killed by the Nazis; see the section 3.6 below) was deeply depressed to hear in 1916; "that Serbia no longer exists".[179] The young assassin managed to endure chains that froze at night, solitary confinement in an unlit cell, and eventual amputation of his arm for the tuberculosis that contributed to his death at 23 during the final year of the war.

One paradox emerges in this: in his memorable writings from Serbia in 1915 (which he described as "A Nation Exterminated"), John Reed noted that Serbs always justified their commitment to fighting as "revenge for Kosovo". Yet Reed also noted that in regard to the Austrian Hungarians who had laid waste to their country:

> This extraordinary lack of bitterness we found everywhere in Serbia; the people seemed to think that the smashing Austrian defeat revenged them for all those black enormities, for the murder of their brothers, for the bringing of the typhus.[180]

Perhaps this shows how abstracted "Kosovo" had become? The real horrors inflicted were considered to be avenged, whereas the ancient wrongs were still unappeasable; after all, this was 1915, three years *after* Kosovo had finally been re-taken after centuries of longing. It was in this very sense that Tudor – echoing Sorel – was correct in saying that "a myth cannot be refuted".

3.4 World War II

During the Second World War, Kosovo would become a rallying cry. Indeed, the ownership rights to the cult were contested by enemies. The war was complex and enormously bloody for all residents of Yugoslavia. However, only a simplistic post-war narrative would be tolerated, and this repression of other voices was a source of resentment that would surface after Tito's death and during the breakup of Yugoslavia. One can speak of the war as being extensively mythologised; firstly by the Communists whose official version cast everything out of sight except virtuous Partisans overcoming

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[179] Dedijer, 356.
[180] Reed, 50.

invaders and their collaborators. On a more tribal level, the two biggest groups in Yugoslavia, the Croats and Serbs took a deep sense of grievance and victimhood from the war. Sirkka Ahnonen has written of how both communities cherished their victimhood narratives; the Croats the Bleiberg massacre (in which many Croats were massacred by Tito's Partisans) and the Serbs Jasenovac (the notorious camp where tens (and probably hundreds) of thousands of Serbs were killed by Croatian *Ustasa*).[181]

The Yugoslav (the country had been renamed in 1927) government of the Serbian regent Prince Paul – under huge German and Axis pressure – agreed to a pact with the Axis powers in 1941. However, nationalist feelings drove a group of army officers to overthrow the government in rejection of the pact (knowing full well that this would lead to German retribution). They had the support of a broad range of forces, from Communists to the Orthodox Church. In the streets of Belgrade huge crowds of people chanted, "*Bolje rat nego pakt*" (better war than the pact) and "*Bolje grob nego rob*" (better the grave than slavery). The newly declared King Petar II wrote a front page message on the newspaper *Politka* addressed to "Serbs, Croatians and Slovenes", urging them to perform their duty to King and Fatherland "with faith in God and the future of Yugoslavia".[182] It was an extraordinary moment in a people's history, though perhaps a dizzy one. *Politka* carried the headlines "Joy in the whole country" and "New Regime, New Roads".[183] Churchill would later describe the "reckless, heroic defiance of the tyrant and conqueror (Hitler) in the moment of his greatest power."[184]

Giving an elegant voice to the feeling of the people, Patriarch Gavrilo of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Gavrilo Dožić, 1881–1950) gave an address on Radio Belgrade on March 27th 1941, invoking the Kosovo Myth:

> Before our nation in these days the question of our fate again presents itself.
> This morning at dawn the question received its answer. We chose the heavenly
> kingdom - the kingdom of truth, justice, national strength, and freedom. That

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[181] Ahonen, Sirkka, *Coming to Terms with a Dark Past, How Post-Conflict Societies Deal with History,* Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 2012, 153.

[182] *Politka,* 27 May 1941, Digital National Library of Serbia.

[183] *Politka,* 31May 1941, Digital National Library of Serbia.

[184] Churchill, Winston, *The Second World War Volume lll The Grand Alliance,* Cassell & co. London, 1950, 144.

eternal ideal is carried in the hearts of all Serbs, preserved in the shrines of our churches, and written on our banners…[185]

This sense defiance and *inat* (and stubborn bravery in the face of huge odds, which Serbs see as part of their national character) must have been truly inspiring, and it must be added that the Patriarch proved himself to be a man of great courage and integrity, refusing to have anything to do with the Germans (or their puppet administration) when they invaded, despite confinement and intimidation. In her study of the relations of church and state in Yugoslavia, Stella Alexander states that: "He (Gavrilo) was to spend altogether four years in prisons and concentrations camps in Yugoslavia and in Germany resisting all Germans efforts to make him collaborate with them."[186]

The contrast between the two Gavrilos – Princip and Patriarch – could not be more striking (although one must acknowledge they both shared in the very different ways exemplary courage, whatever one may think of Princip's crime). The Patriarch's interpretation of the Kosovo Myth was deeply religious, seeing it as a paragon of cherished Christian values. For the young Serbian rebel from Herzegovina – who despite his political idealism, was notably anti-religious – the Kosovo legacy could hardly have been more different; it was progressive, modern, and revolutionary. Yet both these worldviews could draw on the same well of legitimacy, and other worldviews would also attempt (with a very questionable chance of succeeding).

The collaborationist Nedić regime, which the Germans installed, tried to recover "ownership" of the Kosovo myth; it insisted that what the Yugoslav resistance movements represented *was in direct opposition* to the spirit, ideals, and the legacy of the heroes of Kosovo. On June 28th 1942 its newspaper *Nasa Borba* (Our Struggle) argued disingenuously that:

It is not dangerous to lose a battle. It is not even that dangerous to lose a state ... Such losses can be made up. It is dangerous, however, when one

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[185] Quoted in Emmert, Thomas, *"The Kosovo Legacy",* available at
http://www.Njegoš.org/orthodoxy/kosovo.htm

[186] Alexander, Stella, *Church and State in Yugoslavia since 1945,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, 11. Alexander also notes that the Tito regime was eager for Gavrilo to return to post-war Yugoslavia (he had gone into exile) because of the great prestige he enjoyed.

begins to distort the truth, warp principles, corrupt ideals, and poison traditions. Then the spirit suffers…if truth is replaced with lies, wisdom with foolishness, beauty with ugliness, patriotism with hatred of country ... blessing with damnation…[187]

This indicated just how cherished ownership of the Kosovo legacy was, even collaborating forces sought it. The most notorious of collaborationist forces, the Croatian *Ustasha*, used *Vidovdan* as a pretext to unleash their massacres of Serbs in the NHD (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*), the Independent State of Croatia, which included all of Bosnia with its large Serbian population. According to historian Enver Redzic, "The NDH repressive measures began under the guise of taking hostages to prevent a supposed 'great Serb rebellion' on *Vidovdan*."[188] A wave of arrests of prominent Serbs took place across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Redzic argues that these measures in fact became largely self-fulfilling; "These actions triggered a Serbian uprising."[189]

We need not get lost in the complex and bloody details of the war, but it was very complex and very bloody, with eventually hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavs killed.[190] (The numbers were very controversial, and arguments over the numbers killed and by whom – especially in regard to the slaughter of Serbs by the *Ustasa* – would be one of the factors in the disintegration of Yugoslav unity in the 1980s).

Of the other major combatant groups, Serbian Chetniks and Tito's Patisans, they too took inspiration from the Kosovo legacy, even when engaged in a fierce conflict with each other. Partisan leader and author Milovan Djilas noted that both groups cherished Njegoš' Mountain Wreath, which had been such a popular transmitter of the Kosovo Myth, especially in Djilas' (and Njegoš') native Montenegro:

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[187] Emmert, *"The Kosovo Legacy"*.

[188] Redzic, Enver, *Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Second World War,* (Translated by Aida Vidan), Frank Cass, London, 2003, 12.

[189] Ibid.

[190] See, Shepherd, *Ben, Terror in the Balkans, German Armies and Partisan Warfare,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 2012, a valuable study of the mindset and prejudices of the German and Austrian officer corps of the occupying forces.

The Communists in Montenegro celebrated Christmas in early 1942 (January 6 N.S.) with recitations against aggressors and traitors from Njegoš' Mountain Wreath, while the Montenegrin Chetniks celebrated that same holiday the following year but the "inspirational reading" of the episode of the Massacre of the Renegades – the Moslems – from the same Mountain Wreath.[191]

On the ruins left by the war Tito and his communists constructed the second Yugoslavia. Distrustful of all internal nationalism, Tito had little use for the Kosovo cult, preferring to establish and maintain legitimacy by constructing a large, self-serving heroic narrative of the war. As Pavlowitch notes: "The Communists had been good at enlisting in the service of their cause all the myth-making propensities of Serbian history…Like the contemporaries of the battle of Kosovo in 1389, those who had to knuckle under in the early 1940s knew how to embellish their defeats in order to restore morale and turn a brave face towards the future."[192]

Events from the Partisans' War, such as the Battle of Sutjeska, in which we are asked to believe Tito's loyal dog dived onto a bomb to save his master's life, became places of pilgrimage. Recalling a visit by Egypt's President Nasser (who like Tito, was a grandee of the Non-Aligned Movement) to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the battle, Mohamed Heikal wrote that; "The battlefield had become something holy".[193] Holy, and not without an element of hagiographic kitsch: "Tito told Nasser of a girl partisan who came to him during the thick of the fighting with a scarf on which she had embroidered his name. 'How did you get this?' he asked. And she replied: I bought it for you with a kilo of butter.'"[194] So in Country and Western terms, he lost his dog but got the girl…

One must note one bizarre appearance of Kosovo mythology after the Second World War. This was the traumatic Yugoslavian split with the Soviet Union in 1948. It was with true Stalinist poetic injustice that Yugoslavia was expelled from Cominform on June 28th 1948

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[191] Djilas, Milovan, *Wartime,* (Translated by Michael B. Petrovic) Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York and London, 1977, 150.

[192] Pavlowitch, 154-55.

[193] Heikal, Mohamed, *Nasser, the Cairo Documents, the Private Papers of Nasser,* Merton, London, 1973 (1971), 230.

[194] Ibid.

(one can only admire such attention to detail). The pattern was again discernible; the country (albeit Yugoslavia not just Serbia) stood up to a much greater power. It did not lead to actual conflict and invasion, but this was greatly feared at the time. Anton Bebler argues that not only was there huge economic and diplomatic pressure placed on Yugoslavia, but that the country might have well shared the later fate of Hungary and Czechoslovakia:

> Yugoslavia accepted (the breach with Stalin's USSR) by 1949 and withstood an economic blockade imposed by the Soviet-led bloc, as well as open threats and attempts at intimidation, "Special warfare", concentration and maneuvers of Soviet and satellite troops, etc. Yugoslavia demonstrated clearly its resolve to defend itself against a Soviet organized and led invasion which was being prepared prior to the outbreak of war in Korea. Soviet military preparations for an all-out invasion of Yugoslavia were registered by several sources and later confirmed.[195]

The split redefined Yugoslavia's unique position within the broader structure of the Cold War. Tito and his regime had to quickly redefine itself as Communist yet independent of the Soviet Bloc. Nationalism would have been the obvious tool for this, but nationalism would have meant resuscitating the grievances of the war. Therefore a more federal Brotherhood and Unity (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) was promoted over the narrow nationalisms of Croatian, Slovenia, Serbia and so on. Part of this was the Tito personality cult, presenting him a father of the (broader federal) nation. And although it seemed an unlikely tool for such as task – given that the state was secular and trying to build its own inclusive ideology and war-based mythology – the Kosovo Myth was helpful (despite the fact that Tito was himself not a Serb).

Misha Glenny notes that during the 19th Century, Karadjordje declared himself Godfather (*Kum*) to the 9th child of any family who had that many children. [196] The figure of 9 refers back to the Jugovici family, the nine sons who were supposedly killed in the battle of 1389 (their mother is a central figure in the Kosovo Cycle). This is surely a retelling of the

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[195] Bebler, Anton, *"Soviet Policies under Mikhail Gorbachev, Implication for Yugoslavian Security"*, The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, occasional papers, no 2, 1991, 3.
[196] Glenny, 2000, 576.

biblical story of Hanna, the Mother of the Maccabees (who watches her seven sons die with great bravery and dignity, before her own death)?[197] Both stories extol the courage of the Mother who refuses to grieve, despite her great pain. This tradition of *kumstvo* was indulged by Tito, who became Godfather to perhaps thousands of Yugoslav children. As the Bulgarian scholar Dimitar Grigorov, who has recently researched this topic, pointed out, Tito was not alone in this; his fellow communist Ceausescu was also Godfather to thousands of Romanian children:

> As in Tito's Yugoslavia, the Romanian leader, though the local authorities, gave presents to the parents and children, including money and firewood. The functions of the ritual on a political level were probably similar to those of Yugoslavia. The ritual had to strengthen the position of the leader.[198]

And also strengthen his regime; Grigorov point out that the first of Tito's Godchildren hailed from an area of Serbia were the Chetniks had been strong, and therefore the Communist party was unpopular.[199]

3.4 After Tito

It is tempting to see Tito's death in 1980 in end-of-an-era terms. Certainly his symbolic value as a unifier would be missed. New forces started to emerge, or at least, gain more traction on people following his death. Two are worthy of mention. The first was the alleged apparition of the Virgin Mary in the Bosnian town of Medjugorge in 1981. This is worth noting because it was part of a reassertion of Roman Catholicism among Croats. This was resented by the Serbian Orthodox Church who saw the phenomena – which quickly drew many thousands of foreign pilgrims – as a supposed re-assertion of an *Ustasa*-like Croatian nationalism (they alleged that there were mass graves of Serbs killed

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[197]Along with Elazar, who was also martyred for the same offence (refusing to eat pork) the figure of Maccabeebian martyrs is 9, like the Jugovici. The only "proof" I have is a fresco called "the Lament of Rachel" which is in church, St. Demetrios in the Monastery of Saint Marko, in present day Macedonia. The church dates from about 50 years before the Battle of Kosovo, so one can infer that this was a well-known biblical story, and could easily have been interwoven with the accounts of the battle. The fresco has recently been used in a Serbian anti-abortion campaign.

[198] Grigorov, Dimitar, "Could a Communist Leader be a Godfather?" in *Bridging the Gaps, Sources, Methodology and Approaches to Religion in History*, Pisa University Press, Pisa, 2008, 224.

[199] Ibid., 220.

by the *Ustasa* around Medjugorge). This domestic re-assertion of Catholicism and – by implication – Croatian nationalism (open Croatian nationalism had been repressed during Tito's time, especially following the "Croatian Spring" in the early 1970s) was largely fuelled by the Croatian diaspora. This diaspora nationalism was largely based on two grievances; firstly the 1946 show trial of Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac of Zagreb[200], and secondly what became known as the "Bleiburg Tragedy of the Croatian People" commemorating the massacre of Croats and Slovenes by Tito's Partisans. Vjekoslav Perica writes that the Blieburg Myth "became a Croatian equivalent to the Kosovo Myth."[201] The second incident was also related to the overlap of religion and nationalist politics; also in 1981 the revered Monastery of Peć, historical seat of the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchy was partially destroyed in an arson attack. In a foretaste of what was to happen in Kosovo's politics, Albanian separatists were blamed.

It was prior to and during the Milošević era that Kosovo – both as abstracted imaginary[202] and as a real place inhabited by real people – came back to the top of the political agenda. Kosovo was the poorest – seven times poorer than Slovenia – of Yugoslavia's regions (it was not a full republic; rather it became an autonomous region with the passing of the 1974 constitution). Trouble began there within a year of Tito's death in 1980, and deteriorated throughout the decade. The earliest protests were over a relatively minor issue, the quality of food in a university canteen. But relations between the Kosovo Albanian and Serbian communities, often strained, began to deteriorate. Following riots in 1987, Milošević visited the region still speaking in Titoesque phrases about "Brotherhood and Unity" but as elsewhere in central and Eastern Europe, the language of socialism was becoming exhausted. Milošević seemed to have quickly realised that the sense of Serbian greviance was a much stronger force.

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[200] Among many that supported Stepinac was the sculptor Ivan Meštrović.

[201] Perica, Vjekoslav, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, 30.

[202] One can point to other examples of this process, allowing of course for different circumstances. Kanan Makiya had criticized Arab intellectuals for "having elevated 'Palestinianess' to the status of a myth of victimhood in Arab culture. Palestinians are no longer real people in the Arab imagination; they have been turned into symbols of Arab suffering in all its manifold forms". See *Cruelty and Silence, War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World,* Norton, New York and London, 1994, 53.

This transformation of Milošević from grey apparchnik into fiery nationalist had been given much attention and rightly so. Not only is it of interest in the history of the destruction of Yugoslavia, which alone makes it a question of enormous historical importance, but it also raises questions that concern this work, the use of the Kosovo Myth for gaining political legitimacy and power.

The first, more historical issue is still an open debate, to what degree was Milošević responsible, but this is of limited concern here.

The second issue concerns the usage of the Kosovo Myth by someone who, at least at first glance, seem like an unlikey candidate for the task. It its different usages, it was seen as a religious or, at least, in the case of the Young Bosnians a romantic-nationalist myth ("a national religion of a higher type", as one them stated at their trial).[203] Milošević's professed politics at the time should have precluded him from either religious concerns or nationalistic feelings.

There had been rising nationalist chauvanism in Serbian throughout the 1980s; many commentators point to the publication of the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts as a real turning point in the breakup of Yugoslavia.[204] The document's contents broke several taboos, and was condemned by, strange as it now seems, Slobodan Milošević and Radovan Karadžić.

One wonders in the documents unorthodox publishing history did not add to its impact? Initially a draft form was leaked – which can only have added to its conspiratorial gravitas – and very widely circulated as *zamisdat*. In 1988 it was more formally published, first in Croatia, and finally in 1989 it was published in the popular Serbian magazine *Duga*, just before the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, which was, as Jasna Dragovic-Soso sharply puts it, "Milošević's symbolic coronation as national leader".[205]

The document saw Serbia as being severely disadvantaged vis-a-via the other republics, most especially in Kosovo:

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[203] Dedijer, 212.
[204] Memorandum, Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1986 available at
http://www.trepca.net/english/2006/serbian_memorandum_1986/serbia_memorandum_1986.html
[205] Dragovic-Soso, 221.

…the Serbian nation, for instance, was not given the right to have its own state. The large sections of the Serbian people who live in other republics, unlike the national minorities, do not have the right to use their own language and script; they do not have the right to set up their own political or cultural organizations or to foster the common cultural traditions of their nation together with their co-nationals. The unremitting persecution and expulsion of Serbs from Kosovo…

The text mixes self-pity ("Only Serbia made genuine sacrifices for the sake of the development of the three underdeveloped republics and the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo" with paranoia (three times it refers to the anti-Serb "genocide" in Kosovo). There were also, unsurprisingly, accusations of treason:

The capitulation of Serbia's political spokesmen makes one wonder, especially about their right to take such a step. We might well ask who is authorized to acquiesce to a decision which condemns Serbia's economy to long-term stagnation in the future.[206]

The document made much of horror stories about Kosovo Serbs calling the situation "open and total war…declared on the Serbian people."[207] Furthermore it made special mention of the notorious Martinović case, which is worthy of comment here.

One very salient form of mythical discourse is what Michael Ignatieff had called "atrocity myth". This is a common aspect of conflict and extreme distrust between communities. In such a conflict, one community will accuse the other of forms of violence that the accusing community find deeply repugnant and wholly unacceptable. Of course, they may have their own practices of violence which it considers legitimate. What is more, individual acts quickly condemn entire groups, as Ignatieff writes; "All members of a group are held to have such a propensity even though atrocity can only be committed by specific individuals."[208] In the circumstances of a conflict, nothing can draw such a distinctive line between two communities; they will negatively essentialise each other on

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[206] Memorandum, 1986.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ignatieff, Michael, "Articles of Faith", *Index on Censorship* 5, 1996.

the basis of practices of violence, and typically one side will see the other as beyond the pale of civilization. Furthermore, by corollary, the given group will see their own actions as, at best, purely defensive (and therefore justified) or, at worst, unfortunately excessive but still better than the horrible practices of the enemy (and therefore still justified). Exactly such a case happened in Kosovo in 1985.

A Kosovo Serbian farmer Djordje Martinović (1929-2000) was taken to hospital with injuries caused by the insertion of a bottle into his anus. He claimed to have been attacked by two local Albanians. He later recanted and said that he injury was self-inflicted, but later again said that the confession was false and had been conceded only because his children were offered employment if he confessed. There is little point here on getting lost in the legal details (which have never been established; nobody has ever been charged with his assault) but the manner in which the case – however absurd – was turned into a crusading moment in Serbian victimhood and chauvinism. Major figures, such has the veteran novelist Dobrica Cosic got involved (hiring a lawyer for Martinovic), poems were written elevating Martinovic to a new national martyr, and a leading Serbian artist Mića Popović painted a depiction of the act, basing it on Jusepe de Ribera's *Martyrdom of St. Philip*, an image of crucifixion.

The Memorandum would refer to the case in highly alarmist terms: "unprecedented violence involved, which is reminiscent of the darkest days of the Turkish practice of impalement". With statements like these (and the image mentioned above) there was a radical polaritistion taking place; Serbs were becoming Christian victims and Kosovo Albanians were becoming Turkish Islamic predators. It was exactly as Edward Said described polarizing distinctions, "the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western."[209] The Memorandum states:

> The physical, political, legal, and cultural genocide of the Serbian population
> in Kosovo and Metohija is a worse defeat than any experienced in the
> liberation wars waged by Serbia from the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 to the
> uprising of 1941. The reasons for this defeat can primarily be laid at the door

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[209] Said, 1978, 45.

of the legacy of the Comintern[210] which is still alive in the Communist Party of Yugoslavia's national policy and the Serbian communists' adherence to this policy, but they also lie in costly ideological and political delusions, ignorance, immaturity, or the inveterate opportunism of generations of Serbian politicians since the Second World War, who are always on the defensive and always worried more about what others think of them and their timid overtures at raising the issue of Serbia's status than about the objective facts affecting the future of the nation whom they lead.

The plunge into the past was emblematic of the text, Serbs were again being driven from Kosovo, Serbs were again victims of grotesque violence, again being conspired against by an "anti-Serbian coalition".[211]

Another event that contributed to Serbian suspicions about Kosovo's Albanians was a shooting that took place in the Paracin JNA barracks in 1987. An Albanian conscript named Aziz Kelmendi shot dead four sleeping fellow soldiers – only one of who was a Serb; Kelmendi later escaped and shot himself). There was no evidence that there was any political motivation for the shooting, but in the poisonous atmosphere of mutual distrust, eight Albanian soldiers were accused of helping Kelmendi. The said that they had confessed under coercion but were nonetheless sentenced to prison, for periods ranging from two to twenty years. Louis Sell reports that the funeral of the slain Serb turned into a nationalistic rally; nationalistic that is, in being both anti-Yugoslav ("No Yugoslavia" was chanted and hisses greeted the Yugoslav national anthem) but also viciously anti-Albanian "all Shiptars out of Serbia[212]".

Another event that contributed to the rising nationalism was that the relics of Prince Lazar were taken on a tour of Serbian inhabited regions of Yugoslavia, a morbid exercise in

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[210] Memorandum, 1986.

[211] This sense of being standing alone against vast forces and impending disaster are typical of paranoid politics as defined by Richard Hofstadter in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics,* Jonathan Cape, London, 1964. "He" (the spokesman using paranoid political discourse) "is always manning the barricades of civilization. He constantly lives at the turning point: it is now or never in organizing resistance to conspiracy", 29-30. It must be added that Serbs have – not least, of course, in 1389 – found themselves very much standing up against superior forces; 1914, 1941 and 1999.

[212] Sell, 41. "Shiptar" is an insulting term for Albanians.

medieval relic worship, and evidence or a revival of religious feelings or perhaps more of a willingness to display religious feelings in public. This religious revival was not confined to Orthodox; as mentioned there was a revival of religious feelings among the Catholics of Bosnia and Croatia following the apparition at Medjugorge. [213] However the orthodox revival had its political dark side; Jovan Byford had charted the rehabilitation of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, a man of viciously anti-semitic views, who has since been canonised.[214]

During this period, Milošević was reinventing himself as a nationalist to exploit this potential source of power. It might be noted that this nationalism was of a very authoritarian strain, in that way not as different from Milošević's professed communism as one might habitually imagine. As Eric Gordy wrote:

> Nationalist tendencies were correlated with impulses for Communist restoration and authoritarian forces in such institutions as the military and the academy…Not only is it a small step from Communism's false collective of the popular to nationalism's false collective of the people, it is a step that many Serbian intellectuals made before the regime did.[215]

On the six hundredth anniversary of the battle, close to a million Serbs went to Kosovo and heard Milošević speak on *Vidovdan* 1989 (this coincided with the reburial of Lazar's remains in Kosovo, at the site where Milošević gave his speech).[216] It was a pageant of nationalism, many exiled Serbs travelled from Australia and North American to take part. People wore national dress, young women dressed as the Kosovo Maiden. With the crowd chanting and comparing him to Lazar, Milošević stood in front of a banner with the

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[213] See, Bax, Mart, *Medjugorje: religion, politics, and violence in rural Bosnia,* Amsterdam, VU uitgeverij, 1995.

[214] Byford, Jovan (2004), *"From 'Traitor' to 'Saint': Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović in Serbian Public Memory"*, available at http://sicsa.huji.ac.il/22byford.pdf.

[215] Gordy, 11.

[216] Foreign diplomats were asked to be present, even a special train was arranged to bring them there from Belgrade. Most chose to stay away however. The American ambassador Warren Zimmermann wrote in his memoir that "the other ambassadors and I would be props in Milošević's theatrical performance, by our presence giving credence and approval to whatever he might say about Kosovo and its Albanian population." See *Origins of a Catastrophe, Yugoslavia and its Destroyers*, Random House, New York, 1999 (1996), 19.

Orthodox cross and four Cyrillic 'C's.[217] He was now using fighting words, explicitly linking present and past:

> Six centuries later, now, we are being again engaged in battles and are facing battles. They are not armed battles, although such things cannot be excluded yet. However, regardless of what kind of battles they are, they cannot be won without resolve, bravery, and sacrifice, without the noble qualities that were present here in the field of Kosovo in the days past.[218]

"They are not armed battles, although such things cannot be excluded yet". This sounds, in retrospect, like one of the understatements of the past century. Of course, Milošević was a consummate opportunist, and did not believe in this Kosovo mystique personally. According to his biographers, "Milošević was prone to dismiss Serbia's ancient obsession as 'Bullshit', yet he cleverly moulded it for his political purposes."[219] But given the descent into nationalism and political paranoia, many did take it seriously. The leading newspaper *Politka* stated of Milošević's speech that: "We are once more living in the times of Kosovo, as it is in Kosovo and around Kosovo that the destiny of Yugoslavia and the destiny of socialism are being determined". Not only *Politika*, but also many of Serbia's intelligentsia had committed a collective treason of the clerks.

In her detailed study of the role of Serbian intellectuals in the breakup of Yugoslavia, Dragovic-Soso argued that:

> This nationalism was inherently incompatible with the intelligentsia's declared commitment to democracy because its proposed solutions were founded upon double standards and because its discourse was based on an extreme notion of victimization, the concept of "genocide" and conspiracy theories, all of which preclude negotiation and compromise essential to any democratic process. Moreover, such nationalism inherently made the search for a savior figure

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[217] The traditional Serbian nationalist slogan; Само Слога Србина Спашава (*Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava,* Only Unity Can Save the Serbs), even if his speech ended with "*Long live peace and brotherhood among people",* it was obvious that Milošević had abandoned brotherhood and unity.
[218] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazimestan_speech
[219] Branson, Louise and Doder, Dusko, *Milošević, Portrait of a Tyrant,* The Free Press, New York, 1999, 5.

more likely and provides some insight into the adulation of Milošević in the early period of his rule.[220]

In gaining and consolidating power, he revoked Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, Milošević proved himself a master of populism. As it emerged from Turkish rule in the 19th Century, Serbia became a fertile ground for populism, with its overwhelmingly rural (and mostly illiterate) population, who had a sense of grievance and memory of oppression. Alex Dragnich notes in his study of Serbian populism:

> In passionate terms they (populist leaders) articulated the feelings of the downtrodden, the disadvantaged, and the lowly, and appealed for the correction of the alleged wrongs that had been inflicted on upon the common folk.[221]

The sociologist and *Politika* columnist Jovo Bakic sees populism as still pervasive in Serbian political culture, citing the country's large rural population; indeed he goes so far as to describe it as a "paradise for demagogues."[222] As a demagogue, Milošević was in his element. As Dragovic-Soso writes: "The dramatic events of 1988, known as the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution' and 'happenings of the people' swayed most Serbian intellectuals, like the rest of the population."[223]

These "happenings of the people" or "meetings of truth" were the occasions on which political opponents of Milošević were forced from office. Crowds of demonstrators (how spontaneous or orchestrated is still open to debate) hounded local leaders in Vojvodina and Montenegro. As Sell rightly observed: "In classic Stalinist fashion, it was the victims themselves who were required to proclaim their fate…Sogorov confessed that the Vojvodina leadership had lost the trust of the people."[224] If communist in form, they were

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[220] Dragovic-Soso, 9-10.
[221] "Populism in Serbia" in Dragnich, Alex (ed.) *Serbia and Yugoslavia: historical studies and contemporary commentaries*, Boulder, East European Monographs, 1998, 3.
[222] Bakic, Jovo, Conference paper delivered on June 12, 2007 in Bratislava, available at
http://populism.osf.sk/docs/SERBIA_revised.pdf.
[223] Dragovic-Soso, 211.
[224] Sell, 59.

nonetheless nationalist in content. And crucially, as Olga Zirojevic noted, the symbols of the Kosovo Myth were widely used in these manifestations.[225]

Plainly the legacy of Kosovo was again proving itself as a uniquely fertile source of political legitimacy. By 1992 (the year in which Czechoslovakia, like Yugoslavia, a creation of Versailles, was preparing its peaceful Velvet Divorce), Yugoslavia was disintegrating with the succession first of Slovenia, then with increasing bloodshed, Croatia and Bosnia. At this time, Milošević was under huge pressure from opposition forces in Serbia. Yet they too, sought to gain ownership of the Kosovo legacy. This opposition organised a sustained protest, timing it fall on *Vidovdan* 1992.[226] But Milošević was then too powerful to relinquish possession of the legacy as he embarked upon a project of Greater Serbia.

Milošević's Greater Serbia project, which might unify all Serbs in one state, proved to be a disaster both for Serbia's neighbours and for Serbs. Following the unresolved war in Croatia in 1991, Bosnia Herzegovina declared itself independent and descended into truly horrifying bloodshed. Bosnian cities and towns are now known for the atrocities they hosted; Sarajevo, Prijedor, Srebrenica. The leaders of the Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladic (now both in captivity and on trial for war crimes) too found the Kosovo Myth a useful wartime tool. Mladic – very importantly – would also evoke the Munich Agreement.[227] As for Karadžić, not only was he a poet himself, he was often the subject of nationalistic poems and songs that compared him to historical figures:

> *Radovane, covjec od gvodja*
> *Privi vozde posle Karadjordja*
> (Radovan, man of iron

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[225] Slogans included, "Let us not give away Kosovo, let us not give away the grave of Milos", "Kosovo is sacred Serbian ground", and "Emperor Murad, you fell in Kosovo, and so will the traitors of today". Zirojevic, Olga, "Kosovo in Collective Memory" in Popov, Nebosja (ed.) *The Road to War in Serbia, Trauma and Catharsis,* Central University Press, 2000, 206.

[226] Branson and Doder, 135. A document suggests that as many as 100,000 people took place in the protests in central Belgrade, see, http://www.bezbednost.org/upload/document/1106171306_context_analysis_of.pdf

[227] See Misha Glenny's character sketch and interview, in *The Fall of Yugoslavia,* Penguin, London, 1992, 26-29.

Our first leader after Karajordge)[228]

The paramilitaries that would become a notorious feature of the Bosnia War, also sought historical legitimacy, not least by calling themselves Chetniks (recalling not only Mikailovic's royalist Serbian troops in the Second World War, but also the longer local tradition of Turk fighting). One of their organisers, the gangster "Arkan" (Željko Ražnatović, 1952-2000) was lauded in song as a Kosovo hero:

Srpska truba ponovo se cuje

Srbin samo Arkanu veruje

Oj Kosovo od Kosovskog boja

Takvog nisi imala heroja

(The Serbian bugle is heard again

Serbs only believe in Arkan

Oh Kosovo, since the time of the battle

You did not have such a hero)[229]

When he married – with much fuss and media attention – the Turbo-folk singer Ceca, they were compared in the newspaper *Vreme* to the Kosovo Maiden and a Kosovo hero.[230] Duijzings also notes that during the Bosnian War, men who were reluctant to fight or were against the war were routinely referred to as Vuk Brankovic; war widows were compared to the Mother of the Jugovici.[231]

The Kosovo Myth took on an even more sinister aspect in Mladic's hands. *Vidovdan* was made into the official day of the Bosnian Serb army in 1992, and Mladic was lauded as a hero defending his Christian flock from the "Turks". In 1995 Mladic spoke to his troop in the town of Bijeljina; "Prince Lazar gave his army the sacrament and bowed for the Heavenly Empire…Today we are a victorious army, we do not want to convert Lazar's offering into the blinding myth of sacrifice." So Mladic was *rejecting* the Heavenly Kingdom, and within days his troops had taken Srebrenica, with appalling consequences.

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[228] Quoted in Duijzings, 198.

[229] Ibid.

[230] Ibid., 200-201.

[231] Ibid., 199.

Following the almost inevitable clash in Kosovo itself (culminating in the NATO bombings of 1999; another Kosovo moment, Serbia standing alone against vastly superior forces) Milošević was eventually driven from power. Despite the defiance, and NATO's miscalculations, Milošević still lost Kosovo. In doing so, he also lost the support of the Serbian Church.

> A few weeks before Saint Vitus' Day in 1999, Serbian military and police withdrew from Kosovo. Columns of Serb refugees followed the troops, and the new great migration of Serbs was recorded in church chronicles. By the summer of 2000, less than a hundred thousand Serbs were left in the province. Yet the Church and the shrines remained. Serb church leaders put all the blame on Milošević. The disillusioned zealot bishop Atansije Jevtic´ requested a retirement from the Holy Synod (allegedly due to poor health). The Bishop of Kosovo, Artemije, and the patriarch began tactfully collaborating with the West. In June 1999, on the occasion of the 610th anniversary of the Kosovo battle, Patriarch Pavle called Slobodan Milošević, before Western television cameras, the source of evil.[232]

Yet again the Kosovo legacy was re-contested. In post-Milošević Serbia, like an Olympic torch changing hands, the Kosovo legacy was retaken by the administration of Zoran Djindjić (1952-2003) when Milošević himself was surrendered to the ICTY, on *Vidovdan* 2001.

Was this deliberate on Djindjić's part? Although he professed it to be a co-incidence that Milošević was expelled on that of all days, it is difficult to believe. In an interview, Djindjić's deputy Prime Minister Čedomir Jovanović, did imply that it was an accident: 'I went to Zoran's place and said "Man! Today is *Vidovdan*!"'.[233] He says that they were so involved that they had forgotten even the days of the week but that Djindjić then wrote a

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[232] Perica, 163.

[233] Transcript of R92 radio interview, available at,
http://www.b92.net/info/emisije/insajder.php?yyyy=2005&mm=04&nav_id=166741

speech "that was motivated by that historic date."[234] His speech, with its historical sense of conclusion ran:

> Dear citizens of Serbia, exactly 12 years ago on this same day, one of the biggest Serbian holidays, *Vidovdan*, Slobodan Milošević called on our people to realize what he termed the ideals of Heavenly Serbia. This led to 12 years of wars, disasters and the destruction of our country. The Serbian government today pledged to uphold the ideals of the Serbian land, not so much for ourselves, not for our parents, but for our children, because by this decision, we save the future of our children.[235]

Conclusion, or was it continuation? Because whether or not the date of the arrest was co-incidence or not, Djindjić still went back to the same historical well of legitimisation to seek a blessing for his decision. It was not to be the last political act that would be centered on *Vidovdan*. Since Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008, the Kosovo Serbs have organised their own parallel political institutions. They announced their unwillingness to cooperate with the Kosovo government – unsurprisingly – on June 28th of that year.[236]

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[234] Ibid.

[235] Ibid.

[236] One might also note the appearance of a Serbian resistance group called the Tzar Lazar Guard, although they will probably prove to be a minor phenomenon.

3.5 Modalities of the myth

If one thinks of the vast different political forces and agents who used Kosovo, one might categorise them as follows:

- **Secular, modern, revolutionary** (Gavrilo Princip in 1914)

- **Religious, literalist, conservative** (Patriarch Gavrilo in 1941)

- **Cynical exploitation** (Milošević in 1989)

The exploitation could also take place on various levels (not all of them as pernicious as Milošević's exploitation):

- Banded

- Commerialised

- Kitschified

To offer examples, any visitor to Belgrade will be aware of commercailsed images of the Kosovo legacy; the same visitor may try, for example, Tzar Lazar wine. These commercialised images are in and of themselves harmless (and hardly unique to Serbia). The same visitor will note the city's ubiquitous graffiti. Nothing is more common than "1389", without comment or explanation. This is taking the exploitation up another level, at least potentially – graffiti is a salient part of many hate campaigns and conflicts. A level on, a more sinister example of exploitation concerns the football team Obilić. The team has existed since the 1920s under that name, but was owned at the time of his death by Arkan, who organised the paramilitaries who terrorised people in Croatian and Bosnia in the early 1990s. His widow – herself the popular turbofolk singer Ceca – still owns the team. In this case, the commercial and political overlap.

Yet one might point out that in terms of actual instrumental value it might not make much practical difference whether or not the usage was sincere or cynical, both spectrums can nonetheless cause real action:

Belief/Literalism ⟶ Inspiration   Exploitation

Hagiography   Instrumentality ⟵ Branding/Kitchification
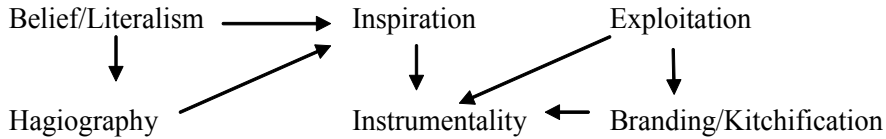
The above case study has tried to show the longitudal influence of the Kosovo Myth, and the various modalities in which it has operated, and its ability to legitimise and inspire.

"The Kosovo spirit is the 'revolutionary spirit of justice, humanity, equity, equality of rights, with a noticeably democratic and progressive quality of respect for the rights of all other people."[237] This is quoted from Emmert, who then offers similar sentiments himself:

> In these few words Stojadinovic expresses the timeless character of the Kosovo ethic. As we have noted, this ethic was nourished in the patriarchal society of the Serbian peasant during the centuries of Ottoman domination. It expressed a basic attitude toward life itself: democratic, anti-feudal, with a love for justice and social equality. For centuries it has been an essential ingredient in the historical consciousness of the Serbian people.[238]

For Anzulovic, by stark contrast, the same Kosovo legacy is a blueprint for genocide, nothing less. Can these diametric views be reconciled? In looking at the context in which the legacy was evoked, by whom, and with what degree of sincerity it is to be hoped that the above offered evidence that these views, are not as diametric as either author would have us believe, and that historical circumstances have been all important in how the myth has influenced events in the Balkans and beyond.

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[237] Emmert, "The Kosovo Legacy".
[238] Ibid.

4 Munich

4.1 Introduction, past and precedent

In a chapter entitled Truth and Stereotype, from his Art and Illusion,[239] E.H. Gombrich gives – as literally as you like – an illustration of the problem of precedent.

He uses as his examples three artists from distinct eras (an anonymous 16th Century German, Merian a 17th Century Swiss, and the 19th Century British lithographer Garland) all of who attempt to render well-known buildings, Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome and the Cathedrals of Notre Dame in Paris and Chartres Cathedral. Gombrich notes certain fairly elementary mistakes that have been made by each man. He then argues that each artist:

> …begins not with his visual impression but with his idea or concept: The German artist with his concept of a castle that he applies as well as he can to that individual castle, Merian with his idea of a church, and the lithographer with a stereotype of a cathedral. The individual visual information, those distinctive features I have mentioned, are entered as it were, upon a pre-existing blank or formulary (i.e., form). And, as so often happens with blanks, for they have no provisions for certain kinds of information we consider essential, it is just too bad for the information.[240]

His point is that an artist cannot look at a church, castle or whatever without having some *prior* sense of what a church or castle looks like, (or *should* look like) and this precedent somehow becomes, to a greater or lesser extent, confused with the "pure" visual information before him and therefore the final rendered image is a mediation of *stored* information and *new* information.

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[239] Gombrich, E.H., *A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation,* Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1960 (1956), 62.

[240] Ibid., 62-63.

Argument by analogy might only get one so far,[241] but this does indeed point to a problem that presents itself in the study of political history (or indeed, in our everyday perceptions of the world, however uncomfortable it is to generalise at this level). If, as has been famously stated, we make our history in the circumstance transmitted from the past, and that furthermore we live forwards but think backwards, we find ourselves in a sense in the same situation as Gombrich's draughtsmen; we cannot use a loaded term like *dictator* – with its highly negative semantic field – without referring back to some (or even several) dictator(s) familiar from the past. To *not* do so however would be extremely imprudent, it would imply that prior knowledge and experience count for nothing. The reverse however, can be equally dangerous; it would mean ignoring the new information before us and miscalculating as a result; it hardly needs to be said that in the political and public sphere, such a miscalculation by someone in a position of power can lead to disaster. This section of the thesis examines cases in which it is argued that this – the confusion of past and present – is exactly what happened.

4.1.1 Munich as myth

In his important study The Myth of the State (published posthumously) Ernst Cassirer wrote:

> If we study our modern political myth and the use that has been made of them we find in them, to our great surprise not only transvaluation of all ethical values but also a transformation of human speech. The magic word takes precedence of the semantic word....those words which formerly were used in a descriptive, logical or semantic sense, are now used as magic words that are destined to produce certain effects and stir up new emotions.[242]

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[241] That said, the point Gombrich is making was not confined to the visual arts. He points out that a single concept "simile" once covered both artist's stereotypes and legal precedents. He further argues that seeking to find recognisable form where there is none is a well-documented psychological process: "The draughtsman first tries to classify the blot and fit it into some sort of familiar schema...Having selected such a schema to fit the form approximately, he will proceed to adjust it". Ibid., 63-64.

[242] Cassirer, 283.

On what basis can it be argued that Munich, the now notorious agreement on 1938, is a political myth? Not certainly on the basis of any supernatural elements or agents, there are none. Nor, at least at face value, on the basis of factual contestation (unlike Masada and Kosovo); we know who took part, and what happened (or at least, we feel we do). Nor was, or is, Munich a nation-building narrative like Gallipoli and the others; Munich quickly shed its national costume and had reappeared in various other political cultures and discourses. Nor was it a heroic defeat like the others; no glory is to be extracted from it; Munich remains a cautionary tale, a "Never Again!" of – we are very often reminded – utmost relevance and urgency.

A further important contrast to the other narratives mentioned; Munich had not been institutionalised, it has not generated any rituals, and it remains confined to realms of political discourse and rhetoric. Yet, as will be argued, is had been uniquely influential narrative with paradigmatic value, but has often been used for pernicious ends.

In his study of conflict, Suganami speaks of "mechanisms" including "mechanisms as narratives". His defines this as a mini-story, with which the target audience is presumed to be familiar, so that some of the story can be left out if necessary. The point of the mechanism is functional; a certain input should lead – under some if not all conditions – to a certain output. As he puts it (in slightly unclear language); "Certain outputs…are sometimes treated as it were in 'the nature of things' that, given the inputs, they were brought about. The linkages are so familiar that there is little need felt to explain them."[243] This almost identical to Barthes definition of myth, ("giving a historical intention a *natural* justification")[244] and as will be argued through several examples, Munich as a rhetorical trope is a speech act that does indeed function as a mechanism.

This case study will therefore differ substantially to the previous one, and will be more a study of political speech, but nonetheless will still use the term myth as its framework, and will conclude by arguing that despite any number of apparent differences, Munich and Kosovo do, on more than one level, resemble each other strikingly.

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[243] Suganami, Hidemi, *On the Causes of War,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001 (1996), 166.

[244] Barthes, 143.

4.1.2 The image

Few 20th Century images are as well-known as that of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain disembarking from his plane after the Munich Conference of 1938, waving a piece of paper that bore Hitler's signature that supposedly underlined "the desire of our two peoples never to go to war again". As Eric Hobsbawm wrote:

> The very word 'Munich' became a synonym, in Western political discourse, for craven retreat. The shame of Munich, which was felt almost immediately, even by those who signed the agreement, lay not simply in handing Hitler a cheap triumph, but in the palpable fear of war that preceded it, and in the even more palpable sense of relief that it had been avoided at any cost. 'Bande du cons' the French Premier Daladier is said to have muttered contemptuously when, having signed away the life of an ally of France, he expected to be hissed at on his return to Paris, but met nothing but delirious cheers.[245]

However Chamberlain did not expect to be hissed. He too was cheered, first at the airport, then with the King and Queen on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, finally outside at Downing Street. He certainly had cause to feel that his concession of the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany was popular with the general public. Certainly George Orwell was of that opinion:

> In spite of the campaigns of a few thousand left-wingers, it is fairly certain that the bulk of the English people were behind Chamberlain's foreign policy…Like the mass of the people he did not want to pay the price of either peace or war. And public opinion was behind him all the while. It was behind him when he went to Munich…[246]

The London Times editorial of September 30th 1938 stated: "in the meantime Great Britain may well be proud that her representative, through all the heated controversies of the last

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[245] Hobsbawm, 146-7.

[246] Orwell, George, *The Lion and the Unicorn, Socialism and the English Genius,* Penguin, London, 1982 (1941), 52.

few weeks, has just one clear purpose in view – that achievement of a just solution of this problem of Central Europe without a world-wide conflagration."[247]

Chamberlain was continuing the "peace process" of his time, called appeasement, a policy of avoiding confrontation by making concessions (often, it must be said, at the expense of third parties). This was the type of thing that great powers had been doing for a long time, and continue to do today, although we might now call it *détente*, non-intervention, or something similar. As Paul Kennedy writes, "Appeasement – if, by which, we mean the older sense of an attempt to settle differences by negotiation and concession – was not a new feature in British diplomacy; as historians have pointed out, many aspects of it went back to Gladstone's time or event further".[248] Certainly Martin Gilbert locates the "roots" of appeasement as far back as Burke and Fox and the British reaction to the French Revolution.[249] So appeasement was by no means anything new in the 1930s and it was not until 1938/9 that the word took on the highly negative connotations that it has carried ever since. Surprisingly even Winston Churchill – traditionally seen as the incarnation of everything anti-appeasement – praised appeasement as a policy, and did so as late as 1950, with the rather vague proviso that it was a good policy as long as it was made from a position of strength.[250]

It is debatable whether or not Chamberlain was in a position of strength at Munich, where he had his third and final meeting with Hitler (they had met previously at Berghof and Godesberg). Chamberlain had made an agreement with a man who had no intention of keeping it (indeed who most probably thought that the conference would break up without resolution, and who would be privately furious about having even made the agreement). The following spring Nazi Germany invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia. This utterly discredited the policy of appeasement, and amounted to something like a collective "trauma"[251] for many British, both politicians and citizens. However, following the Nazi

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[247] London Times, September 30th 1938.

[248] Quoted in Martel, Gordon (ed.) *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered, The A.J.P. Taylor Debate after Twenty-Five Years,* Allen and Unwin, Boston, 1986, 147-48

[249] "Walpole, Burke and Fox were the Patriarchs of appeasement." Gilbert, Martin, *The Roots of Appeasement,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1966, 67.

[250] Ibid., 8.

[251] It is probable that a psychological reading is possible; at least in the cases of people – like the British in 1956 – who had actual experience of the events of Munich and its consequences. One could see Suez-as-

invasion of Poland, the "shame" that Hobsbawm spoke of was cleansed and dignity and honour were restored by the declaration of war on Nazi Germany. The subsequent sense of national mission and the performance not only of the British armed forces the British public in general, especially during the Battle of Britain, gave people an extraordinary sense of national pride[252] (and at the time, unity[253]) and contributed to a construction of a very powerful national narrative, one which has a very strong resonance throughout British national life and collective memory; it was in Churchill's famous phrase, "their finest hour".

The Second World War – and, very importantly, the events leading to the European war – have saturated political culture and seem to have defined the terms against which other events are measured, assessed and validated. The war had become paradigmatic. As Gordon Martel argued over twenty ago:

> Much of the rhetoric in which the political debates of the 1980s are conducted is firmly lodged in the events of the previous half-century. Images of the 1930s continue to flash past us: Hitler's moustache and Chamberlain's umbrella are still instantly recognisable…the war – and its origins – functions today as a mental and moral shorthand.[254]

This is probably still as true now as twenty years ago: the war and its outbreak have had, and continue to have, an enormous resonance throughout Western political culture, indeed are more resonance than the subsequent Cold War, which lasted some four decades. In 2003, Robert Boyce and Joseph A. Milano wrote:

> As mythology, the Second Wold War and its origins have had a profound and enduring influence on the conduct of international relations and….the

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Munich (discussed below) as a "acting out" of the trauma of 1938, to borrow this Freudian term from Dominick La Capra's use. Certainly there was mass "denial" of the general popularity of Chamberlain's actions, which was surely why he and a few easy-to-target accomplices like Halifax were so mercilessly scapegoated. See LaCapra, *Dominick, Writing History, Writing Trauma,* John Hopkins, Baltimore, 2001.

[172] Not even the iconoclastic historian A.J.P. Taylor was immune to this intoxication: "Even if the Germans came, someone should remain to lead the ultimate liberation and I wanted my sons, if not myself, to be among them. It sounds absurdly romantic now but that is how I felt in the glorious summer of 1940", Taylor, A.J.P, *A Personal History,* Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1984, 199.

[253] "No one who was alive then can forget the combination of one of the loveliest of English Summers, the relentless procession of terrible news and spirit of unity, amounting almost to exaltation, among the people" Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1986, 233.

[254] Martel, Gordon, (ed.), 11.

discipline on political science. Despite the best efforts of historians to explain the considerable constraints upon British and French governments in their confrontation with the Fascist and militarist powers of the 1930s 'appeasement' seems likely to remain a term of political derision throughout the English-speaking world. Consequently, when statesmen or journalists perceive the threat of aggression from Colonel Nasser or Ghadaffi, Slobodan Milošević or Saddam Hussein, allusions to Hitler, Munich and appeasement can be expected to follow….While, to be sure, the world has changed, the ideological battle lines of the present 'war on terror' resonate powerfully with the great power clashes of the 1930s and 1940s.[255]

This chapter will elaborate on and examine this phenomenon in detail.

4.2 In *their* time

For, as has already been pointed out, the custom of killing a god dates from so early a period of human history that in later ages, even when the custom continues to be practised, it is liable to be misinterpreted. The divine character of the animal or man is forgotten, and he comes to be regarded merely as an ordinary victim. This is especially likely to be the case when it is a divine man who is killed. For when a nation becomes civilised, if it does not drop human sacrifices altogether, it at least selects as victims only such wretches as would be put to death at any rate. Thus the killing of a god may sometimes come to be confounded with the execution of a criminal.[256]

Much of the later literature on Neville Chamberlain has been compensatory, trying to counterbalance the popular image, which is certainly woeful. Such compensation is certainly justified, not only because of its inherent interest, but because the popular narrative of the events of 1938-1940 are so powerfully entrenched. It is certainly a *battle*

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[255] Boyce, Robert, and Milano, Joseph A., *The Origins of the Second World War, the debate continues*, Basingstoke Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003, 11.

[256] Frazier, James *The Golden Bough,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2012 (1913), 227.

backwards to try to lower the temperature and shine some belated light onto what went on regarding the Sudeten Crisis and the eventual outbreak of the European war. One need only offer two quotations.

In October 1937, in an article in the Evening Standard, readers were told – in a not very convincing tone – that there was "a good chance of no major war taking place *in our time*".[257]

When eventually war did come, British radio listeners heard from their Prime Minister the following stirring speech:

> If the enemy does try and to invade this country we will fight him in the air
> and on the sea; we will fight him on the beaches with every weapon we have.
> He may manage here and there to make a breakthrough: if he does we will
> fight him on every road, in every village and in every house…[258]

"In our time" and "fight him on the beaches"; how many people would believe that the *former* statement was by Churchill and the *latter* by Chamberlain?

Despite a poor start during the First World War, which earned him the distrust of David Lloyd George, who had initially spotted and picked him, Chamberlain had over the course of the 1920s and 30s an impressive political career. He was considered an outstanding Chancellor of the Exchequer, and was admired for his diligence and quite determination. This latter aspect led to him being praised at the expense of the man whom he succeeded in Downing Street, the unenergetic Stanley Baldwin.

In retrospect, it might surprise many that Chamberlain was a pusher of British re-armament, and was commonly attacked by left wingers during the 1935 election as a "war monger", a term so often used against Churchill (the same Churchill who wrote in that same year: "One may dislike Hitler's system and yet admire his patriotic achievement. If

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257 Quoted in Dutton, David, *Neville Chamberlain,* Reputations Series, Arnold Publishers, London, 2001, 111, (italics added).
258 Quoted in Dutton, 116.

our country were defeated, I hope we should find a champion as indomitable to restore our courage and lead us back to our place among the nations.")[259]

But the allegation of warmongery was unfair. And this does lead us to another aspect of Chamberlain's character worth noting; his later efforts to prevent a war were very sincere. He had not – unlike many of his slightly younger contemporaries – served in the First World War (he had been appointed Director of National Service), but was sensitive to the horrors of conflict. In our era of the "chickenhawk", that is, civilian politicians who have never served in combat and overcompensate by leading their countries into war, Chamberlain's absence of comparable baggage is commendable.[260]

As the old saying goes, success has a thousand fathers but failure is always an orphan. This has probably never been truer about any other single historical event or person. It is hard to imagine a more sustained example of reading the past backwards. If one were to believe the popular narrative, Chamberlain pushed through a policy pretty much alone and against the wish of his government, opposition, and the mass of popular opinion. The Prime Minister himself, according to Orwell was seen as either "a dark and wily schemer, plotting to sell England to Hitler, but far likelier that he was merely a stupid old man doing his best according to his very dim lights."[261] Neither characterisation stands up to analysis.

That yardstick of contemporary political popularity claims – the Gallup poll – was first held in Britain during Chamberlain's premiership, in 1938. Polls taken in early and late 1939 and early 1940 show that the Prime Minister's administration had approval rating of 50, 54, and even 60%. These were good ratings, especially as they extend to the huge changeover date of 1940, and given that pre-war Britain was a more divided place politically than it would become during the decades of post-war consensus.

What is all of this except a triumph of hindsight bias? How many evokers of the "lessons of Munich" *really* put themselves in the situation of the British Prime Minister in 1938?

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[259] Churchill, Winston, The Strand Magazine, November 1935, quoted on http://refspace.com/.
[260] One can argue that both Tony Blair and George W. Bush belong in this category; both men had fathers who were combatants in the Second World War. Indeed, Blair's father had had the proverbial "good war" rising from private to acting major.
[261] Orwell, 51.

Was he really supposed to convince Britain, with its huge economic problems and the memory of unprecedented carnage of the Great War, to again go to war with a central European power over a country with which it has no formal alliance (Czechoslovakia had a formal treaty with France, but not with Britain)? A Gallup poll taken in March 1938; when the Government had been initially shaken by the resignation of the popular Anthony Eden (not unlike Michael Heseltine's highly dramatic – though ultimately futile – resignation from Margaret Thatcher's cabinet) and the German takeover of Austria, still showed that only 33% of voters favoured British support for Czechoslovakia in the event of German aggression with 43% opposed. [262]

Who *then* knew how pernicious Hitler's political morality was? Or indeed, how dreadful was the state that he created and how monstrous its crimes would become? Munich preceded *Kristallnacht* (reports of which would contribute to a change of mood in Britain) and of course the Ribbentrop/Molotov Pact, which shocked everyone by its utter cynicism (most especially from the German side, which had been fiercely anti-Bolshevik). Who then knew?

When Chamberlain announced that he was going to Munich to pursue a settlement, he was not hissed in the House of Commons; quite the contrary.

Of the conference itself, some background is important. Hitler had invited Chamberlain to travel to confer in Germany on September 28th. That day was the expiry date of the Godesberg Memorandum, which as an effective ultimatum to the Czech government to allow the Sudetenland to be ceded to Germany by 2 o'clock. The Czechs had refused and the French – who had a formal alliance with Czechoslovakia – mobilised their armed forces. The British also mobilised the Royal Navy and it was generally expected that war would break out.

Chamberlain was speaking in the House of Commons when the news of Hitler's offer arrived. The contents of the Prime Minister's speech had been bleak; the best he news could offer was that a German mobilisation had been postponed for 24 hours, at the request of Mussolini.

[262] Dutton, 47.

He announced that the invitation had been made and that he would go. This response of the House was one of overwhelming endorsement of the Prime Minister's intention. The scenes of relief and joy were without precedent in the history of the House of Commons. The Pathe news commentary spoke of "a gasp of amazement and satisfaction runs around the world…as if the world had suddenly seen a gleam of hope in the darkness of despair."[263]

But there were moves against him, most especially from the Labour Party. The Labour animosity manifested in two ways; firstly – as Dutton argues – it prevented him from emerging as a real national leader during a crisis and secondly one of the three authors of the damning pamphlet "Guilty Men" was future Labour leader Michael Foot (1913-2010). The pamphlet sold very well (over 200,000 copies), and was as Dutton points out, surely very widely read, passed from hand to hand. It engendered a string of ephemeral imitations. Published under the pseudonym Cato, the imitations was penned by Gracchus and Cassius. It established the level – character assassination – which has remained dominant.

Lady Luck certainly worked against Chamberlain; early events in the War, the evacuation of Dunkirk (a remarkable instance of collective cooperation, and logistical efficiency) was seen as a disaster as was – and it is hard to disagree – the Norwegian campaign. The frustrations of the Phony War, called the "Bore War" in Britain were increasingly vented on the Prime Minister. Dutton makes the important point that this was a period of great frustration for ordinary people: "The country was being subjected to innumerable inconveniences ranging from blackout to the closure of places of entertainment without the compensation of military success."[264] The Norwegian campaign embittered the military, and they were happy to speak about "betrayal" by politicians (as defeated military men often do, one need only think of first America's humiliations in Vietnam, or the great narrative of a stab-in-the-back that Corporal Hitler used as a ladder to power).

Schivelbusch speaks of a shared state of mind called "dreamland" (a term he attributes to Ernst Troeltsch referring to Germany's defeat in WWI). That is, when having suffered a

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[263] British Pathé Archive, 1938, Chamberlain, Sudeten Crisis, viewable at: http://www.britishpathe.com/video/chamberlain-sudeten-crisis-1938

[264] Dutton, 61.

defeat, a group (strangely) *embraces* the defeat, because of the huge changes it has brought about, it seems to have given a clear path to a better life, however delusional. He says this is often triggered by an internal revolution following defeat; "The overthrow of the old regime and its subsequent scapegoating for the nation's defeat are experienced as a kind of victory. The more popular the revolt and the more charismatic the new leadership, the greater the triumph will seem."[265] Although one cannot strictly call Munich a military defeat – although it did have much of the sense of humiliation of such a defeat – nor can one speak of the replacement of Prime Minister as "revolution", but the changing of leader during wartime is nonetheless formidable. More to the point, there was this huge shift in feeling, a sense of sweeping away the frustrations of the politics of the 1930s. Dutton argues that an aspect of the Guilty Men school was a revisionist and very negative view of the 1930s, one that has not really been challenged in the public imagination, aided by some classic works of the time, such as Orwell's The Road to Wigan Pier; "Such works created a strong – indeed, for many, an indelible – monochrome image of mass unemployment, dole queues, and hunger marches."[266]

And then there was the other factor in this myth construction; the man who replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister had become the most admired leader of modern times. Churchill was a lucky as Chamberlain was unlucky. There was a Teflon quality to his career that somehow he managed to shrug off errors, misstatements and poor judgments. Nor was consistency his forte: it is not that surprising that he "crossed the floor" (changed party) twice in his career. As First Lord of the Admiralty, he should have been the most targeted candidate for the mismanagement of the Norwegian Campaign, but somehow he escaped, and the Prime Minister was blamed. Some of his plans and ambitions when he did join Chamberlain's war cabinet were unrealistic; for example, his suggestion that Britain go to war against *both* the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.

The war cabinet indeed did think about a deal with Hitler (this during the war!) but Churchill was against it. However, rather than siding with his preferred candidate for replacement (Halifax who was also the more popular candidate for the position)

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[265] Schivelbusch, 10-11.
[266] Dutton, 146.

Chamberlain sided with Churchill over the issue of a possible deal with Germany; here too Chamberlain might deserve some credit.

But for all that, Churchill did seem to be a man of destiny, and saw himself in those terms (it may indeed have been a factor in his troubled relationship with another God-ordained saviour General De Gaulle). Many admirers seem to be willing to elevate him to that sacral level, he has often been referred to a "saviour".

Churchill famously said that history would be kind to him because he intended to write it. As well as being an inspiring war leader; he was also a Noble Prize-winning author. His multi-volume of history of the war was much admired, but it allowed him to use his huge prestige to become a dominant voice of the war, in ways which would naturally be self-serving. He was, above all, a politician.

One can see the symmetry of myth taking possession of this narrative; one figure is progressively denigrated while a rival is elevated. This is so powerful that no amount of accurate historical revisionism can seemingly challenge the popular narrative; at least not any time soon: Churchill is as revered as Chamberlain is defamed.

Chamberlain was scapegoated. If this term has become, to quote Raymond Williams, "a commonplace of diatribe" it is an important social/political function and ought to be properly understood. The term, based on the ancient Israelite practice of driving a goat into the wilderness so that the creature will take evil with him, was a form of sacrifice. Sacrifice has not entirely disappeared as a practice; and the fate of Chamberlain was to be a spectacular scapegoat for an episode of modern political history; all blame had been placed on his shoulders. In his study of scapegoating, Tom Douglas writes:

> There is also a process of the transfer of blame, which is more a group
> phenomenon and appears to operate at a less conscious level. Its true nature is
> often unrecognised by those who operate it; indeed, who tend to explain it in
> rational terms if asked, but whose rational observations are seldom rooted in
> objective fact.[267]

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[267] Douglas, Tom, *Scapegoats, Transferring Blame,* Routledge, London and New York, 1995, 32.

While conceding that classical scapegoating took place in small-scale communities, Douglas does note "the main exception seems to occur when public figure are pilloried for their actions and they follow a procedure of selecting a scapegoat to take the blame in their stead",[268] something greatly eased by modern mass communication.

He is seen now seen as *beyond*; he has crossed some imaginary border and his actions – though as argued here are explainable – as now seen as utterly unimaginable to the mob throwing stones and shouting abuse in his wake. René Girard once wrote that, "Mammals mark their territorial borders with their excrement. Human being have long done the same thing by that particular form of excrement that we their call their scapegoats." [269]

4.4 Second time farce: Suez revisited

The Suez Crisis of 1956 surely stands out now as the case of the misapplication of Munich. The crisis could be placed in three historical contexts; 1) European decolonisation; 2) the expansion of the Cold War into the Middle East; and 3) the developing Arab/Israeli conflict.[270] Certainly these overlapped, but it is worth trying to think of them separately for the following reason. The British media and government could have and *should* have seen the unfolding crises in these terms – though with some exceptions – failed to. (Indeed there was even a recent precedent, the nationalisation of Iran's foreign-owned oilfields by its Prime Minister Mossadeq.) Rather, the British media and government imagined that a familiar set of circumstances from the past were reborn, and they sought answers in this fourth context, the events of the late 1930s. Why this default to a past of little objective resemblance? Why was the lure of the past, that particular past, so strong as to deflect attention away from urgent, unfolding political realities?

[268] Ibid.

[269] Girard, René, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Translated by James G. Williams) Obris Books Maryknoll, 2001, 169.

[270] See Humphreys, Brendan, Predicting the Past, the Munich Template and the Suez Crises, Master's Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2007.

The crisis, to sketch it briefly here, began when the Government of Abdul Nasser Egypt nationalised the foreign-owned Suez Canal in 1956. Despite a weak case in international law (as in more recent British involvements in the Middle East) the British Government under Prime Minister Anthony Eden, rushed to arms (in covert collusion with France and Israel)[271] and invaded Egypt, only to be forced to withdraw by a rare moment of Superpower consensus. It was an important in the process of European de-colonisation – Egypt's Nasser was one of the founder of the Non-Aligned Movement – and also a mark that Britannia no longer ruled the waves. It was, as historian Alistair Horne judged it, "the shortest ('war') in history and probably the silliest."[272]

It did not seem so silly at the time however. There were very real things at risk, most of the Western world's crude oil was carried through the canal, and control of it was very important. From the point of view of the British and Egyptians, one as the former ruler and the other as the emerging ex-colony, the *symbolic* weight of the conflict was huge. Christian Pineau, French Minister of Foreign Affairs wrote, *"The Suez affair, so wounding to British honour, hardly changed the political situation".*[273] This may have been the case for the French, but Suez was a lesser event for them, rather like a minor stopover between the disaster of Dien Bien Phu and the expanding horror of the Algerian War. By contrast, for the British, the political losses were large, and more than any other event, perhaps even more than the independence of India, Suez seemed to confirm the end of the British Empire, which had been divided into "West of" and "East of Suez".

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[271] It must be said there was considerable distrust between the conspirators. Shimon Peres, who was an Israeli negotiator, speaks of "*our* French friends, and *their* allies the British" Peres, Shimon, *The Battle for Peace, Memoirs*, Orion, London, 1995, 143 (italics added). All three countries had their grievances against Nasser, the French wanted to end Egyptian support of the Algerian rebels, the Israelis were barred from using the canal.

[272] Horne, Alistair*, A Savage War of Peace, Algeria, 1954-62,* Macmillan, London, 1977, 163.

[273] *"L'affaire de Suez, pénible pour l'amour propre britannique, n'a donc pas changé grand chose à une situation politique de fait."* quoted in Lloyd, Selwyn*, Suez, A Personal Account*, Routledge, London, 1978, 253.

4.4.1 Munich on the Nile: British reactions to Suez

When the nationalisation of the canal was announced, the public outrage in Britain took on a very alarmist voice; put briefly, this was Munich again and Nasser was another Hitler. There was a challenge implicit in this; "this-time-there-would-be-no-appeasement-of-a-dictator."

It is strange that the actual armed conflict in Suez was merely a few days, and the build-up to the conflict seems somewhat disproportionate. This period, from July till the outbreak of fighting is the focus here. Between the Egyptian nationalisation of the canal and the eventual Anglo/French invasion three months passed.[274] During that time there were considerable changes in public opinion in Britain, when it became clear that the United States was not sympathetic, many people, from the power elites down were sobered. When the invasion eventually took place at the same time that the Soviets sent their army to repress the Hungarian uprising, more people refused to support the Government.[275] But this section is equally concerned with the first moment; the general reaction to the news of the nationalisation.

The headlines and Letters to the Editor of the London Times – which traditionally represented established opinion quite accurately – in late July/August 1956, Munich, Dictator, Appeasement, Mussolini, Hitler and so on were repeated constantly. For example, under the editorial "The Hinge of History" was written, "The modern world as suffered many acts, like Hitler's march into the Rhineland….quibbling over whether or not he (Nasser) was 'legally entitled' to make the grab will delight the finicky and comfort the fainthearted."[276] Two days later there was an editorial "Resisting the Aggressor" which was as sceptical of the usefulness of negotiation as its predecessor was dismissive of the

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[274] This wait was very frustrating for the military. The columnist and media commentator Anthony Howard (1934 – 2010) was completing his national service in late 1956. "So long had the wait been for 'Eden's war' that many of us (including the 350 'Z' reservists who were yanked out of civilian life a full two months earlier) were convinced that it was never going to happen." Quoted in Benson, Timothy, S. and Gorst, Anthony, *Suezcide, A cartoon history of the 1956 Suez Crisis,* The Political Cartoon Society, London, 2006, Preface.

[275] That said, the government still enjoyed a majority of 270 to 218, and according to Denis Healey, "Once the invasion began, there was a 10 percent swing towards the government." Healey, Denis, *The Time of my Life,* Michael Joseph, London, 1989, 169.

[276] London Times, August 1, 1956.

idea of legality. "So there is to be a conference. That is the net result of the three power talks in London. The news is bound to be heard with mixed feelings."[277]

A letter to the editor by the Conservative MP Julian Amery stated: "By themselves (sanctions) will no more deter Colonel Nasser that Mussolini was deterred by economic sanctions during the Abyssinian war" he concluded, "If our American Allies cannot or will not join us, then Britain and France must go ahead without them. It will not be the first time."[278]Many other letters were no less strident; (Nasser was) "A military dictator who has established a fascist police state and intimate relations with the communist dictatorship."[279]

Elsewhere in the media, this alarmist manner was frequent: "One edition warned that the British people, 'in their silent way, know better than their critics. They still want Britain Great'. The Daily Sketch echoed this tone in September with its notorious headline: 'LET THE CRY BABIES HOWL! It's GREAT Britain again.'"[280]

Beyond the Times and Sketch (which represented the higher and lower strains of the British political right) most other papers, both broadsheet and tabloids supported the government's stand on Suez, the Express, Daily Mail, Evening News, Evening Standard, Telegraph, Sunday Times, Sunday Express) whereas few opposed the government the Mirror, News Chronicle, Morning Star, People, Reynolds News and famously the (Manchester) Guardian and Observer (then, unlike now, separate papers). Excepting the Mirror, none of this latter group of papers had a large circulation.[281]

One letter in the Daily Telegraph (an even more traditionally Tory paper than The Times) later expanded on in the historical journal Time and Tide – although published when the crisis was unravelling – is especially noteworthy: "The real danger if the Nasser movement had been allowed to progress unchecked, we would have been faced with by a coalition of all Arab, Muslim, Asiatic, and anti-western states, led nominally by Egypt but really by Russia; that is a

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[277] London Times, August 3, 1956.
[278] London Times, July 29, 1956.
[279] London Times, August 31, 1956.
[280] Quoted in Sandbrook, Dominic, *Never Had it So Good, A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles*, Little, Brown, London, 2005, 17.
[281] Guardian, July 10, 2006.

division of the world in which the enemies of civilisation are stronger that the supporters".[282] This is notable not because it was written by a stereotypical, retired Colonel but rather it was written by Professor Gilbert Murray, a noted liberal internationalist, and ex-president of the United Nations Association.

Beyond the media, politicians were also using fighting words. On August 2, the leader of the opposition Labour party Hugh Gaitskell called Nasser "Hitler",[283] while ex-Prime Minister Clement Attlee, then Labour leader in the House of Lords, described Nasser as an "Imperialist Dictator".[284] Another Labour member of the Commons, Reginald Paget, described the nationalisation of the canal as "a threat to strangle the whole industry of Europe…what we had to get used to in Hitler's day".[285] In his famous diary, Harold Macmillan (then Chancellor of the Exchequer, later Eden's successor as Prime Minister) called Nasser "an Asiatic Mussolini, full of insult and abuse of the US and UK".[286] There was more considerable consensus at the time than is usually allowed.

The idea, often stated, that Suez divided opinion in Britain must be placed in context. Firstly, it should be noted that in the mid 1950s there was extraordinary political consensus in Britain. The phrase used to describe this at the time was "Butskailism". This term was a merging of the names of the previous Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Gaitskell with that of his Conservative successor, Rab Butler. There had been considerable consensus about how best to run the British economy, and none of the sharp class and ideological divisions that marked politics in the 1930s and again in the 1970s and 80s. The split in opinion led to civil marches in Trafalgar Square, but certainly not strikes, riots, or other forms of sustained mass protest. This was a surface level fracture.

The second point is that even if opinion became more divided by November 1956 (as opposed to the first moment of intoxication in July) the split was never one between equals. The division

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[282] Quoted in Lloyd, 263.

[283] *Documents on International Affairs, 1956, Issued under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs,* Oxford University Press, 1957, 58, 115.

[284] London Times, August 2, 1956.

[285] *Documents on International Affairs, 1956, 1956,* 117.

[286] *Diaries, The Cabinet Years 1950-1957,* (Edited by Peter Catterall), Pan, London, 2003, 578.

was one between people who had the power to use military force and those who were powerless to stop it.

Why were people, often well-informed opinion and policy makers, comparing an impoverished, agricultural North African ex-colony to the industrialised, militarised Germany of twenty years before? And why of all people Prime Minister Anthony Eden, a veteran of foreign affairs, and a man who was by academic training an Orientalist?[287]

4.4.2 Memoirs of the Big Three

In the preface of his autobiography Full Circle published in 1960, Eden states that "the lessons of the 'thirties and their application to the 'fifties…are the themes of my memoirs".[288] Like all political memoirs, they are self-serving. It might also be noted that there is no real documentary evidence beyond Eden's own papers used. There are no references to other memoirs, rather the ex-statesman is defining the agenda and setting the record. Given that his impressive career was destroyed by Suez, it is not surprising that the book is even more bitter and self-defensive than is usual, even for a political memoir. However, only one aspect of all this is of interest here. Throughout the book Eden constantly compares Nasser to the Fascist dictators of the 1930s. But at no stage does he try to make a reasoned or systematic comparison; rather he does so by means

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[287] Students of the late Edward Said might find this a fruitful line of enquiry. Eden had studied Persian and Arabic at college, but this did not stop him occasionally referring to Iranians as "carpet merchants" as well as his supposed allies, the Israelis, as simply "the Jews". However his prejudice was that of his time and place, and really should not be judged by our stern contemporary standards, although it should be kept in the equation nonetheless. When the two met in Cairo in February 1955 Eden (still then Churchill's Foreign Secretary) greeted Nasser in Arabic and discussed his love of Arabic poetry. Nasser felt he was being condescended to. Heikal, Nasser's Minister for Information, makes the Saidesque point that "He (Eden) had something in him of the British officers who used to sit cross legged with the desert sheiks in their tents and discuss poetry in perfect Arabic. He too, was a believer in the Bedouin and not in the cities. And that was an important factor in the development of his policies towards Egypt and Nasser." Heikal, 77. Lloyd disputes Heikal's account, doubting that Eden could ever be rude to a foreigner. Eden's secretary, Evelyn Shuckburgh quotes Walter Smart Walter Smart, once Oriental Councillor at the British embassy in Cairo and "a great expert on the Middle East"; "He says one can always speak frankly to the Bedouin Arabs, as opposed to the townspeople and sophisticated Palestinians." Shuckburgh, Evelyn, *Descent To Suez, Diaries 1951-56,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1986, 239.

[288] Eden, Anthony, *Full Circle, Memoirs,* Cassel, London, 1960, preface.

of slur[289] and guilt by association.[290] He writes from a position of constant bad faith throughout the book, blurring the potential with the actual (in contemporary language, politicians and spokesmen often speak of "capacity"). Eden seems more concerned with Nasser's style of rule; "He (Nasser) has followed Hitler's pattern, even to concentration camps and the propagation of *Mein Kampf* among his officers. He has understood and used the Goebbels pattern of propaganda in all its lying ruthlessness."[291] Indeed some of his political generalisations are childishly crude, for example: "Communist rulers are the primitive and ruthless priests of a modern religion, more skilful and more cautious than the megalomaniacal dictator, who is compelled to achieve power and fulfil his ambitions before he dies."[292]

The same is true of the account given by Eden's Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd.[293] Lloyd was writing much later (in 1978) and unlike Eden he had maintained a considerable political career (Chancellor of the Exchequer, Speaker, and later Leader of the House of Commons) following the debacle of 1956. So he was not as self-protective as Eden. Furthermore Lloyd had also read other accounts, British, French, Egyptian and Israeli and spends much time niggling over small points.

But unlike Eden at his time of writing, Lloyd had seen the course of events over the 1960s and early 1970s. These events would have included Nasser's defeats – the failure of the United Arab Republic (a merger with Syria), the military defeat in Yemen, the disaster of the 1967 war – and his death in 1970. So one might imagine that Lloyd might drop the Nasser-was-Hitler argument, but on the contrary, he will not let it go. There are numerous references to Nasser as Hitler in Lloyd's account, even in retrospect was he unwilling to change his mind. He writes of Nasser's "obsessions" his "megalomania" much like Eden does, and again uses the same easily-identifiable tags; such as Egyptian propaganda techniques, again compared to those of

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[289] His opening chapter on Suez is called "Theft", even though he admits, as was agreed at the time, that Nasser had strong legal grounds for nationalising the canal. Hence legality was not stressed by the British and French governments.

[290] "The West had been slow to read Nasser's A Philosophy of Revolution as it was to read Hitler's Mein Kampf, with less excuse because it is shorter and less turgid. But Eastern leaders had read it, and there were many who knew that, if the Egyptian had triumphed unchecked, his prowl to conquest would have wider scope and their turn in Syria, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere must soon follow". Ibid., 543.

[291] Ibid., 431.

[292] Ibid., 430.

[293] *Suez, 1956, A Personal Account,* Routledge, London, 1978.

Goebbels, and again references to Mein Kampf. Lloyd too, was obsessed with the events of the late 1930s; indeed, his fear of being called *an appeaser* is explicit in his book:

> As to the British political scene, our critics on the left would claim that it was they who had forced us to back down, but if we took no action those same people would very soon be crying 'Munich again'. We would be the 'guilty men' who had failed to stand up to Nasser, just as, according to them, the conservatives in 1937 and 1938 had failed to stand up to Hitler.

"Munich again?" he concluded, "Was that an exaggeration or an obsession?" Surely it was both. But Lloyd simply cannot let the idea go; in one bizarre passage he even makes an objectively *good* case for Nasser:

> Others preferred to compare Nasser with Mussolini. I myself thought that the comparison with Hitler was more apt, because Nasser's The Philosophy of the Revolution read like Mein Kampf. It has been argued since that Nasser had not behind him the German industrial base, its war potential and the backing of a martial race. That was true but Nasser did not need them. He had Russian support….In any case, he was a patriot of simple tastes, trying to restore self-confidence and pride of race to the Egyptians. He wished to relieve their poverty and improve their living standards.[294]

But he concludes by stating; "Almost identical arguments had been made about Hitler".

Macmillan, whose volume of memoirs Riding the Storm, 1956-59, covers the relevant time, was equally partisan in retrospect. These were written and published in 1970-71, and as stated above, Nasser was by then dead, and had proved to be a toothless tiger. Macmillan, however argues otherwise; "if one traces his tactics, they bear a considerable likeness to those of Mussolini, whom in many aspects he resembled."[295] This stubbornness was what Barbara Tuchman referred to as "cognitive rigidity", a strengthening rather than an adjustment (or abandonment) of belief when confronted with disproving evidence.[296]

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[294] Ibid, p. 191

[295] Macmillan, Harold, *Riding the Strom, 1956-1959,* Macmillan, London, 1971, 100.

[296] Tuchman, Barbara, *The March of Folly, From Troy to Vietnam,* Michael Joseph, London, 1984, 346-347.

Writing many years after the event, Lloyd (and indeed Macmillan, Eden or whoever) could well have distanced themselves from their earlier pronouncements; this is indeed one of the skills of writing political autobiography, retrospective rationalisation ("at-the-time-we-generally-thought-X-whereas-now-we-know-Y". But they did not.

Even though demonising your enemy is not an exact science, what is striking about this hit-and-miss manner of demonisation is that it is so superficial; resting only on easily identifiable words, phrases, and images. This may have been in part because Fascism was easier to identify than to define. Robert Paxton's study notes that "The most self-consciously visual of all political forms, fascism presents itself to us in vivid images; a chauvinist demagogue haranguing an ecstatic crowd; disciplined ranks of marching youths, coloured shirted militants beating up members of some demonized minority." [297] But this poses as many questions as it answers, for most of these images were not available – nothing could have been more alien in Egypt than black/brownshirts, torch-lit parades etc., certainly Nasser was given to impassioned speech-making but so are Baptist Ministers; speech-making alone does not make anyone a Fascist.

But one must pose the question; why was Nasser demonised in distinctly *European* terms? Surely an Egyptian Muslim of modest background might easily have been castigated as an "oriental" despot or "tribal" African? After all, the European colonial powers had long experience in racial/religious scaremongering; why not depict Nasser as some secularised, more modern version of a "Mad Mullah"?

Eden's individual reasons for doing so were obvious enough; he had resigned from Neville Chamberlain's Conservative government (though *not* strictly because of the policy of appeasement, indeed he had carried out the same policy[298]) and so was not tainted with

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[297] Paxton, Robert, O, *The Anatomy of Fascism,* Penguin, London, 2004, 11.
[298] For a harsh examination of Eden's lack of commitment to democracy, see Anthony Beevor's account of British actions during the Spanish Civil War. "When the Spanish war broke out, Eden was left to handle the situation virtually on his own. Stanley Baldwin, the prime minister, was ill when the war began, then became preoccupied by the Abdication crisis. 'I hope' he told Eden, 'that you will try not to trouble me too much with foreign affairs just now'… "It must be remembered that Eden did not fully recognise the dangers of Hitler and Mussolini until 1937, and that he did not speak out openly against appeasement until early in 1938. During the first part of the civil war he preferred, on balance, a 'fascist' victory to a 'communist' victory. He held a deep-rooted assumption that social upheaval automatically led to communism"… "The only circumstance likely to influence British foreign policy was a direct threat to traditional British interests, the most sensitive of which was still the route to India." Beevor, Anthony, *The Spanish Civil War*, Cassell, London, 2004 (1982), 160, 161-2, 162.

being one of the "Men of Munich" and could exploit this moral high ground. After Munich, Eden – however unjustly – became the great hero of anti-appeasement, and naturally exploited this. But there was more to it than that, he really seemed to believe what he was saying in 1956 and afterwards, as did so many others who added their voices to his.

The second point of objection is related and very important; surely the comparison of revolutionary Egypt with the Third Reich was no more than rhetoric and propaganda?[299] The passages quoted above argue that certainly among the most powerful men during the crisis, Eden, Lloyd, and McMillan seemed to be sincere, they, as noted, wrote after the events and still refused to alter their strident opinions. But even if some of it was calculated propaganda, it was propaganda that was presented in an environment of a pluralistic, "free" press, among a large and potentially very skeptical readership. The propaganda had to be convincing to them; it had to be, in Lincoln's terms *credible*.

A.J.P. Taylor's biographer, Adam Sisman writes of this obsession with the events of the later 1930s in quite exact psychological terms. "Britons" he writes, "have become dangerously and self-destructively fixated on a few years in their history. On the one hand, the 'finest hour'; on the other Munich."[300] The fact that the fixation is of such a dual nature is a little disconcerting. There is both morbid fascination (with Munich) and romantic nostalgia (for the subsequent war), but the two are so inextricably connected.

What the Suez-as-Munich trope – a confusion of nostalgia, alarmism, and cognitive dissonance – offered was something one rarely gets in ordinary life, yet alone in politics; *a second chance*. Indeed the chance it offered was two-fold, in symmetry with the "finest hour/Munich" obsession that brought it to life. This was to finally get the appeasement monkey off the collective British back, as if to say; "This time, with this dictator, we will

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Of course, the route to India was through the Suez Canal. Under Chamberlain, Eden also took the lead in recognising the Italian conquest of Abyssinia. See Carlton, David, *Anthony Eden, a Biography*, Allen Lane, London, 1982, 103-105.

[299] It was certainly politically motivated, but one does not have to doubt its sincerity. The only "non-political" comparison of Nasser and Hitler I know of is from a surprising source, Isaiah Berlin, who sees both, far too generally, as representing varying strains of nationalism (he includes the "rise of Africa" and the emergence of Israel as part of the same phenomena). See, *The Crooked Timbers of Humanity*, Fontana, London, 1991, 192.

[300] Sisman, Adam, *A.J.P. Taylor, A Biography,* Sinclair-Stevenson, London, 1994, 301.

not be fooled or compromised"; to re-quote Macmillan "This was the supreme issue…It was 1938 over again."[301] By extension, it also seemingly made possible the chance to relive a glorious past, but to do so inexpensively, without any of the original sacrifice or commitment, to engage in that thing so beloved of so many politicians; a short, victorious war.

4.5 Beyond Britain: Munich as a Cold War template

But what makes "Munich" different from narratives, which usually operate on a national level, is its ability to resonate in various political cultures. It quickly ceased to be an Anglo/Franco affair and began to emerge in other cultures. The following extract is an example of the re-application of the idea of appeasement, by a person who once enjoyed huge moral authority:

> The spirit of Munich has by no means retreated into the past; it was not merely a brief episode. I even venture to say that the spirit of Munich prevails in the Twentieth Century. The timid civilized world has found nothing with which to oppose the onslaught of a sudden revival of barefaced barbarity, other than concessions and smiles. The spirit of Munich is a sickness of the will of successful people, it is the daily condition of those who have given themselves up to the thirst after prosperity at any price, to material well-being as the chief goal of earthly existence. Such people – and there are many in today's world – elect passivity and retreat, just so as their accustomed life might drag on a bit longer, just so as not to step over the threshold of hardship today – and tomorrow, you'll see, it will all be all right. (But it will never be all right! The price of cowardice will only be evil; we shall reap courage and victory only when we dare to make sacrifices.)[302]

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[301] Macmillan, 1971, 131.

[302] Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, Nobel lecture, available at:
http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html. The passage is not chosen at random, but rather because it is quoted (with obvious approval) by Telford Taylor – the American

This is an extract from the Nobel Prize acceptance statement of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. "Munich" has obviously moved a long way from the concession of the *Sudetenland*, and now the event has become a blueprint for very different kind of human behaviour. It is now about people who prefer material comfort (which is quite a lot of people when one thinks about it) who are the new appeasers, the new "guilty men". They represented the spirit of Munich, which for Solzhenitsyn meant sickness and cowardice.

Solzhenitsyn, of course, held no political office and wielded no actual power and therefore his utterance is markedly different to similar evocations of Munich by practicing statesmen and stateswomen. His condemning of Western values is less than precise in a political context. However, in a famous address to Harvard in 1978, he denounced Western "capitulation": "Your shortsighted politicians who signed the hasty Vietnam capitulation seemingly gave America a carefree breathing pause; however, a hundredfold Vietnam now looms over you." In the same speech, he also denounced the OSCE conference (then in Belgrade) in Munich-like terms "at the shameful Belgrade conference free Western diplomats in their weakness surrendered the line".[303] In a sense, Solzhenitsyn maps Munich onto a Cold War context; the weak West against the absolute threat of World Communism. The West, he insists, is marked by nothing so much as a "decline in courage" which:

> may be the most striking feature which an outside observer notices in the West in our days. The Western world has lost its civil courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, each government, each political party and of course in the United Nations.[304]

Governments, he assures us, are run by faceless bureaucrats who "get tongue-tied and paralyzed when they deal with powerful governments and threatening forces, with aggressors and international terrorists." Again, the inability of the West to stand up to

army prosecutor at Nuremburg – in his vast study *Munich; The Price of Peace,* Doubleday, New York, 1979.

[303] Solzhenitsyn, Alexander, Harvard Speech 1978, available at:
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/solzhenitsyn/harvard1978.html

[304] Ibid.

aggressors; the Cold War is translated back into the Second World War, making *both* the West's fault:

> In World War II against Hitler, instead of winning that war with its own forces, which would certainly have been sufficient, Western democracy grew and cultivated another enemy who would prove worse and more powerful yet, as Hitler never had so many resources and so many people, nor did he offer any attractive ideas, or have such a large number of supporters in the West – a potential fifth column – as the Soviet Union.[305]

Solzhenitsyn's allegations and his Manichean imagination often flirted, as here, with the apocalyptic. But rhetorical strategies always "up" the given case; making it into a civilizational struggle; *good* versus *evil*, *us* versus *them;* all of which if typical mythological discourse.

But it was not only anti-Soviets such as Solzhenitsyn who used Munich as a trope; the Soviets themselves used it as a tool with which to denounce Western duplicity. Such was Munich's transferability. However, for Soviet spokesmen to use it was not without risk, and exposed their flank to anti-Soviet critics.

One such critic was Prince (later Sir) Dimitri Obolenski (1918-2001), the distinguished Balkan historian. A Russian exiled by the Revolution, he was *deeply* anti-Soviet but in a more discrete manner that the rather Wagnerian Solzhenitsyn (Obolenski stated frankly that he could not wish for a Soviet victory over the Nazis as he felt that Stalin as bad as Hitler). In his reticent memoir (the book is more about his illustrious relatives than the genuinely modest author) Obolenski describes a decidedly heated conference of British and Soviet historians in Stockholm in 1960. The final session was devoted to a Soviet paper on the diplomatic background to the Second World War. Its summary, Obolensky writes, "which had been distributed in advance, contained a number of severe attacks on Allied policy, listing in particular the Munich agreement"[306] as well as "the British government's alleged intention of inciting Hitler to attack the Soviet Union, and the length of time it took to launch the Second Front."[307] Fellow historian (and experienced

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[305] Ibid.

[306] Obolenski, Dimitri, *The Bread of Exile, A Russian Family* (Translated by Harry Willetts) Harvill Press, London, 1999, 242-243.

[307] Ibid.

diplomat) Sir Charles Webster (1886-1961) issued a rebuttal. According to Obolensky, Webster's manner was (one is not really surprised) "decidedly Churchillian":

> "Yes" he said, "we concluded the Munich agreement; and a regrettable thing it was, as our historians have now admitted. But you" – he added, pointing an accusing finger at the soviet audience – "you did something even worse: you concluded a pact with Hitler; and so far not one of your historians has felt free to criticise what was done. Furthermore, you have accused us of duplicity when we negotiated with you in 1939: but you don't understand the problem that faced our government and public opinion at the time. Why you" – again the accusing finger – "you had just had your purges, in which the greater part of your high command – from Marshal Tukhacheveky downward – had been liquidated. If these charges against your generals were true, it means that all your military secrets were the hands of the Germans…[308]

The Soviet translators (seemingly all young) who had to translate this unwelcome message were too frightened to include any references to the purges and the Marshall. One of the British delegation did fill in the gaps in the translation however.

One can see from the above exchange that ideologues on both sides of the Cold War division (or more realistically the US/USSR rivalry) could use Munich as a trope. In this, interestingly, Munich had evaded the traditional right/left dichotomy in politics It would be convenient if appeasement (as it is generally understood, in Hobsbawm's words "craven retreat") was a policy that had been carried out by the left, but it was not so. Chamberlain et al., were decidedly Conservative. Certainly Daladier was of the French Radical Party but headed a coalition National Front government, but he was very much the junior party in the Munich Conference, and followed Chamberlain's lead (despite private doubts and well-attested, prior warning about the entire undertaking). But this fact has seemingly not bothered right-wing ideologues from indulging in some historical amnesia and making Munich their own. A further point on this; evocations of Munich are usually world-weary and politically *realist* in tone, that is, they are dismissive of (alleged) appeasement as the self-delusion and/or ideologically naïve. Yet one could at least argue that facing the risks and challenges of its time, appeasement as actually

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[308] Ibid.

carried out by the British was indeed realist; accepting of in more modern jargon "the facts on the ground".

Note exactly the realist *tone* in an early and embryonic speech by the Cold Warrior Ronald Reagan,[309] who had no difficulty in linking the welfare state, with absolute surrender to the enemy.

In a televised 1964 speech called A Time for Choosing (given in support of Barry Goldwater, who would run unsuccessfully against Lyndon Johnson for President), Reagan drew up an alarming picture of the world as he saw it, stressing from the outset that the speech was penned by himself alone ("The sponsor has been identified, but unlike most television programs, the performer hasn't been provided with a script. As a matter of fact, I have been permitted to choose my own words and discuss my own ideas regarding the choice that we face in the next few weeks").[310]

The Vietnam War was being fought and for Reagan this was all or nothing: "We're at war with the most dangerous enemy that has ever faced mankind."[311] After attacking various pet dislikes (government spending, government itself - "a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capitol can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves") Reagan returns to the matter of the war, which he says is "a war that must be won":

> Those who would trade our freedom for the soup kitchen of the welfare state
> have told us they have a utopian solution of peace without victory. They call
> their policy "accommodation." And they say if we'll only avoid any direct
> confrontation with the enemy, he'll forget his evil ways and learn to love us.
> All who oppose them are indicted as warmongers. They say we offer simple
> answers to complex problems. Well, perhaps there is a simple answer -- not an
> easy answer -- but simple: If you and I have the courage to tell our elected

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[309] Though not that early in his life; Reagan was as Democrat until over 50 years of age, and like many a convert, had to overcompensate by moving as far to the other side of the spectrum as possible. Unbelievably, the young Reagan even tried to join the Communist Party, which rejected him on the grounds "that he could not be trusted with any political opinion for more than twenty minutes". See Morris, Edmund, *Dutch, a Memoir of Ronald Reagan*, Modern Library, New York, 1999, 158-159.

[310] Reagan, Ronald, Speeches and other Media Uses by Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the United States, available at http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/timechoosing.htm.

[311] Ibid.

officials that we want our national policy based on what we know in our hearts

is morally right.

Reagan then uses language and argumentation that will anticipate that of several future American and British statespersons, when evoking the solemn "lessons of history". (These will be dealt with in several sections below.)

Now let's set the record straight. There's no argument over the choice between peace and war, but there's only one guaranteed way you can have peace -- and you can have it in the next second -- surrender.

Admittedly, there's a risk in any course we follow other than this, but every lesson of history tells us that the greater risk lies in appeasement, and this is the specter our well-meaning liberal friends refuse to face -- that their policy of accommodation is appeasement, and it gives no choice between peace and war, only between fight or surrender. If we continue to accommodate, continue to back and retreat, eventually we have to face the final demand -- the ultimatum.[312]

The speech – which effectively launched Reagan's unlikely career – is a timely reminder of the alarmism of the Cold War, and of its moral reduction, and – if one accepts the reductionism – the *clarity* offered by the conflict (one example of the diplomatic use of "clarity is examined below).

Appeasement and Munich entered the political lexicon of the Cold War quite early, in fact, associated with two of its most dramatic (and later discredited) personalities, General Douglas MacArthur and Senator Joseph McCarthy. The unlikely figure of Dorothy Parker was accused by the California State Senate Committee on Un-American Activities of being a "Red appeaser" in 1949.[313] Although she was named as one of 400 concealed communists by Joseph McCarthy, Parker was not actually called to testify before the Committee on Un-American Activities (although she did later appear before a New York

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[312] Ibid.

[313] Meade, Marion, *Dorothy Parker, What Fresh Hell is This? a Biography,* Heinemann, London, 1988, 342.

state legislative committee investigation in 1955, but it was a lesser affair than McCarthy's show trials). Destructive as the episode of the Second Red Scare was domestically (it was also, along with the coeval Doctor's Plot in the USSR, an exemplary theatre of political paranoia), an evocation of Munich by General MacArthur was influential in an actual Cold War military conflict.

Following the dramatic fall of Pyongyang in October 1950 and the rapid advance of American and UN forces, the "American Cesar", according to Max Hastings, "made plain his contempt for the carefully drawn niceties of Washington and the UN."[314] Of a British plan to create a buffer zone, to be jointly policed by UN and Chinese forces (China had not joined the conflict at that point) MacArthur responded:

> The widely reported British desire to appease the Chinese Communists by giving them a strip of North Korea finds its historic precedent in the action taken at Munich on 29 September 1938…to give up any portion of North Korea to the aggression of Chinese Communists would be the greatest defeat of the free world in recent times.[315]

The civilizational lines here were drawn as dramatically as in the speeches of Solzhenitsyn and Reagan, the all-or-nothing tone, applied to both the Vietnam War and the earlier Korean. Post-Suez, Munich would also get a second airing back in the UK.

4.6 Falkland's War, 1982

In his diaries of the 1950s, Harold Macmillan had caustically refered to a political colleague as 'Munichois' meaning, of course, a supporter of appeasement during the 1930s. Regarding the Korea War then raging he wrote, "nor have we given enough warning against an 'Eastern Munich.'"[316] To be able to accuse someone of being an

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[314] Hastings, Max, *The Korean War*, Pan Books, London, 1987, 147.

[315] Ibid., 148.

[316] Macmillan, 2003, 34. He continues in language that will not win the sympathies of a 21st Century audience; "Whatever might be the technical advantages of not 'getting bogged down' (as the phrase goes) on

appeaser was to possess the best weapon in the arsenal, the ultimate inside knowledge or "evidence" that allowed one to outflank an opponent (or even commit moral/political blackmail). Macmillan, who despite the avuncular manner was a cynical and ruthless politician, plainly enjoyed possession of this weapon. Referring to a special session of Parliament devoted to Suez, he writes "a good many Tories (Macmillan's own party), mostly young and the sons of 'Munichites' – like Richard Wood – began to rat too."[317] For the future Prime Minister, being one of the "guilty men" was seemingly genetically transmittable, a stigma passed down from down from father to son, from one generation to another. Subsequent generations of British politicians have been happy to go to the cellar and drag out the weapon, whenever circumstances made it possible. One such possibility presented itself in 1982.

The Falkland's War of 1982 was sparked by the invasion of the inlands in the south Atlantic by the Argentinian armed forces. The inlands, called the Malvinas by the Argentinians, have been under *de-facto* British sovereignty since the 19th Century. Other powers have claimed the inlands as theirs (including the United States, Spain and France) but the only other modern and ongoing claim was by Argentina. At that time, Argentina was ruled a military junta, rightly notorious for its human rights abuses, in particular its "dirty war" against domestic opposition leading to widespread use of torture and extra-judicial killings (the "disappeared"). Under the presidency of General Galtieri the junta had reached a crisis of legitimacy, it was deeply unpopular, the economy was in deep stagnation and there were mass-protests against the government.

Speaking of the Falklands War, an adventure that – unlike Suez – was a political success for Downing Street, the late Margaret Thatcher wrote, "we were defending our honour as a nation, and principles of fundamental importance to the whole world – above all, that aggressors should never succeed."[318] Earlier in her memoir, Thatcher had written that she "drew from the failure of appeasement the lesson that aggression must always be firmly resisted."[319] She also comments on what she called the "Suez Syndrome" (a British

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Korea, I am sure that a moral defeat would mean the end of the white man's position in the East and that the moral collapse might easily spread to the West.", 36.

[317] Ibid., 598.

[318] Thatcher, Margaret, *The Downing Street Years,* HarperCollins, London, 1995, 173.

[319] Ibid., 11.

version of America's Vietnam Syndrome), which she described in morally uncomplicated terms (as was her style) an unwillingness to fight through to the end, come what may.[320] As the following quotation makes clear, appeasement, Suez and the Falkland's War were linked in her mind; "Since the Suez fiasco of 1956, British foreign policy had been one long retreat….We had come to be seen by both friends and enemies as a nation which lacked the will and the capability to defend it interests in peace, yet alone in war."[321]

This uncompromising aspect of her nature was very well weighed by Denis Healy, one of the most experienced and perceptive of her opponents (he was as the time, the Shadow Foreign Secretary).

> She saw consensus as a dirty word, because it meant a compromise between different interests or points of view. 'To me' she said, 'consensus seems to be the process of abandoning all beliefs, principles, values and policies. So it is something in which no one believes and to which no one objects.' She told the diplomatist Tony Parsons while she was still in opposition that she regarded people who believed in consensus as 'quislings and traitors'. But, though she insisted again and again that she stood for conviction against consensus, it has never been clear whether by conviction she means anything more that her current state of mind; the content of her conviction is simply the opinion she happens to hold on a particular issue at any particular time. [322]

Given the attention that the Falkland's War has recently received in retrospect, it has been somewhat surprising to find out that the Prime Minister could not necessarily count on much support from her government, even cabinet. One must also note that recently

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[320] "(Suez) was the result of result of economic and political weakness…it entered the British soul and distorted our perspective of Britain's place in the world." Ibid., 8.

[321] Ibid., 173.

[322] Healey, 489. Such assertions are seemingly backed up even by more sympathetic commentators. Extracts from a recent biography by Jonathan Aitken claim (specifically about the Falkland's conflict): "The stubbornness of her attitude and her inexperience in foreign affairs killed off all opportunities for the conflict to be avoided." Relevant to this thesis, when forced from office Thatcher blamed traitors; 'Aitken was privy to an hour-long "hysterical rant" on the "spineless, gutless Judases" and "turncoats and traitors" who she believed had betrayed her.' See The Guardian 20 October 2013, available at
http://www.theguardian.com/politics/shortcuts/2013/oct/20/margaret-thatcher-5-things-you-didnt-know

released documents indicated that the Prime Minister *may* have considered a compromise. Future research may show this to be correct. However, statements at the time were bullish; drafts of a press statement given by Defense Secretary Nott on 3 May 1982, note that "the measured and calculated military response which we have made must not be interpreted as weakness, or unwillingness to see it through."[323]

Having proved she was no Chamberlain, she implied that she was, of course, a Churchill, as one historian noted. "Invoking what she termed 'the spirit of the South Atlantic – the real spirit of Britain', Thatcher offered direct and indirect comparison between the Falklands War and her leadership of the nation, and the Second World War and Churchill's leadership."[324] Her speech is noteworthy not only because of the predictable quotation of a Churchill wartime speech (and an equally predictable attack on trade unions), she also made explicit a link between past and present: "…we rejoice that Britain has re-kindled that spirit which has fired her for generations past and which today has begun to burn as brightly as before."[325]

Thatcher's preference for military action over a diplomatic solution was transparent:

> …there were clear signs that what they (the Americans) were contemplating was a negotiation between the two sides. All of this was fundamentally misguided...But in practice the Haig negotiations, which flowed from all this, almost certainly worked in our favour by precluding for a time *even less helpful diplomatic interventions from other directions, including the UN*.[326]

American documents from the conflict show that Haig cabled from London on April 8th and stated that:

> The prime Minister has the bit between her teeth, owing to the politics of a united nation and an angry parliament, as well as her own convictions about

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[323] National Archive of Great Britain, Catalogue Ref: fco/7/4522, file no. Q 050/25,Title*, The Sinking of the Argentine Cruiser General Belgrano.*

[324] Kaye, Harvey, J., *The Powers of the Past, Reflections on the Crisis and Promise of History,* Harvester/Wheatsheaf, New York 1991, 101.

[325] Thatcher, Margaret, Speech to Conservative Rally, July 3rd, 1982, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, available at http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104989

[326] Thatcher, 1995,188 (italics added).

the principles at stake." "*She is clearly prepared to use force. Though she admits her preference for a diplomatic solution, she is rigid in her insistence on a return to the status quo ante, and indeed seemingly determined that any solution involve some retribution.*"[327]

The preference for a diplomatic solution was most probably disingenuous and only calculated to keep the US on-side, has Haig continued, "It is clear that they had not thought much about diplomatic possibilities.[328]

Strangely, the recently-published Rattenbach Report (commissioned at the time by the Argentine Government and kept secret, despite some leaks) offers evidence that the invasion of the islands was merely an attempt (one would have to say, a *very* high-risk attempt) to settle the dispute of the islands, using force to get a diplomatic solution, however unlikely.[329]

> In short, it was decided to undertake an aggressive diplomatic action in the Malvinas case, in order to reactivate the efforts for a settlement of the dispute, indicating the need to initiate studies to evaluate the feasibility and desirability of an occupation of the Islands, founded in NEED FOR AN ALTERNATIVE VALID FOR GREAT BRITAIN IF NEGOTIATIONS dilate. This was THE EMBRYO FORMAL MILITARY ALTERNATIVE.[330]

This, however poorly judged, was an interesting mirror image of the British strategy; there diplomacy was pushed aside for military action; for the Argentinians, the military action was an attempt to push a diplomatic solution. The other interesting aspect is that – despite the very different political systems in the two countries – both governments were unpopular and no doubt thought that winning a conflict would reverse that. As Healy said,

[327] Haig, Alexander, *White House, Top Secret Situation Room flash cable, 1982, The National Security Archive*, George Washington University, available at
http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB374/
[328] Ibid.
[329] See Marcaletti, Mariane, Independent 13th April, 2012, available at
http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2012/04/13/declassified-argentine-document-on-falklands-displays-a-tough-exercise-of-self-criticism/.
[330] Emphasis in original, available at http://www.cescem.org.ar/informe_rattenbach/index.html.

Thatcher believed in "miracle cures",[331] and a short war that unleashes – as it did – a huge wave of populist nationalism was one such cure. The Argentinian leadership seemed to have believed in a similar cure; there could be only winner however; the Conservative were re-elected and the Junta eventually fell. Not that winning a war necessarily guarantees re-election, as an American president would find out a decade later.

4.7 Gulf War 1

Interestingly, when the US showed some interests in resolving the Argentine/British conflict diplomatically, President Reagan offered to send his Vice President to Buenos Aries. The offer was refused by the Argentinians. When he later replaced Reagan as president, George H. Bush would have a chance to try to resolve another conflict diplomatically; as will be seen, he did not take this option.

The Gulf War as it had become known (although the term had been used previously to describe the deeply destructive Iran/Iraq War) was triggered when Saddam Hussein's Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait on August 2nd 1990. There were immediate sanctions placed on Iraq, and a United Nations Resolution 678 (there had been several demanding immediate withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait) gave an American-led coalition permission to use "all necessary means" to expel the Iraqi occupiers from Kuwait. This was done with a massive air campaign and swift land war.

Compared to the Second Gulf War (which will also be discussed below) the First Gulf War and the diplomatic efforts prior to it seem quite uncontroversial. But this does not mean that there might be unanswered questions about the conflict at this distance in time; there are in fact, but they are pale in comparison to the large and loud untruths that led to its sequel conflict; the linkage of Saddam Hussein's Iraq with the bombings of September 11th 2001, the confident claims about the existence of weapons of mass destruction, the "sexing up" of intelligence reports and so on. Still, there are significant unanswered questions regarding the First Gulf War; did Saddam believe that he had been given permission to annex Kuwait during the notorious conversation between himself and the

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[331] Healey, 491.

then American Ambassador April Glaspie, the fabricated atrocities that helped gain public support (and political support – as the senate vote authorising military action was a narrow 52-47) for a military intervention. These controversies are important not only in themselves, but within the context of this paper because they form one aspect of the justification claims for armed conflict, alongside the particular element, the usage of Munich.

During the buildup to the first Gulf War of 1991, President George H. Bush, himself a WWII veteran, evoked the 1930s both publically and in private correspondence, which he then later published. By this time, Munich had already taken on a life of its own, and displaced its original situationality. The examples discussed above show Munich's flexibility, the ability to be claimed as relevant to new contexts.

In 1998 Bush defended his actions in his and Brent Scowcroft's volume *A World Transformed.* One must briefly comment on the unusual structure of this volume. There are three narrative voices; Bush and Scowcroft both pen passages under their own names, but these are interrupted by a third "we" narrator. Unsurprisingly, some uncomfortable topics are left to the anonymous narrative. In one of "his" sections of the book, Bush tells us that he was reading "a book on World War II by British historian Martin Gilbert. I saw a direct analogy between what was occurring in Kuwait and what the Nazis had done".[332] Preparing a speech for television on August 8th 1990, Bush wrote, "I tightened up the language to strengthen the similarity I saw between the Persian Gulf and the situation the Rhineland in the 1930s, when Hitler simply defied the Treaty of Versailles and marched in. This time I wanted no appeasement."[333]

Bush pushed the Saddam=Hitler formula in much the same way as Eden et al. pushed the Nasser=Hitler during the Suez crisis. It was not the only tactic employed, however, as often, tales of atrocities made a dramatic appearance and helped prepare public opinion for war. In his scathing report on the docility of the media leading up to and during the First Gulf War, John MacArthur writes of "Selling Babies" the dubious story of Iraqi troops

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[332] Bush, George H, and Scowcroft, Brent, *A World Transformed*, Knopf, New York, 1998, 375.
[333] Ibid., 340.

taking babies out of incubators and leaving them to die.[334] MacArthur too was aware of the "Saddam-is-Hitler theme that proved so very useful to the White House" noting the Bush "had begun to model himself after the wartime Winston Churchill".[335] Interestingly, when assembling his "allies" Bush encountered another precedent, though one not soaked in the glory of World War Two: NSC diplomat Richard Hass suggested that "We may be able to do something along the lines of the Korean War model of a US-led multinational force".[336]

Korea, which ended in a stalemate that still exists, was never going to be as sellable as Munich.[337] Not that everybody was buying Munich, at least not a face value. At a meeting between himself and Mikael Gorbachev in Helsinki in September 1990, Bush recorded how he used this associative strategy of argumentation in his disagreements with Gorbachev over how to deal with Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait: "If we had offered Hitler some way out, would it have succeeded?" Gorbachev replied, not unreasonably, "Not the same situation" to which Bush replied "Only in personality".[338] Gorbachev's position, as he articulated it, was cautious, but precedent-based, he told Bush at a meeting on November 19; "On some things, of course, we have different ideas, but on this we must be together. In my heart, as yours I am sure, the preference is to solve this without blood. It can all turn out very badly, worse than Vietnam." [339]

Not that, on the evidence of this book, Bush was very interested in *situations* as such, precedent and analogies were very important to him too. Furthermore, Bush took a jaundiced view of diplomacy, which he wasn't sure had developed all that much since the era of appeasement. "I knew what had happened in the 1930s when a weak League of Nations had failed to stand up to Japanese, Italian, and German aggression. The result was

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[334] MacArthur, John, *Second Front, Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War,* Hill and Wang, New York, 1992, 37-77.

[335] Ibid., 64, 26.

[336] Bush and Scowcroft, 329.

[337] Although one could argue that the analogy was not inaccurate; the First Gulf War did indeed leave a stalemate, with Saddam Hussein still in power, albeit confined by a non-fly zone and a sanctions regime. This stalemate, however, lasted only until the invasion of 2003.

[338] Ibid., 336.

[339] Ibid., 409.

to encourage the ambitions of those regimes."[340] This coupling of Munich and a lack of faith in diplomacy was very reminiscent of the British in 1956; diplomacy was only to be *seen* to be exhausted, so the real business of military action could take place.

Privately, Bush wrote to his family from Camp David on December 31, 1990:

> My mind goes back to history: How many lives might have been saved if appeasement had given way to force earlier on in the late 30s or earliest 40s?...sometimes in life you have to act as you think best – you can't compromise, you can't give in, even if your critics are loud and numerous.[341]

In this argumentation, Bush sought justification in the past and defended new action, of which he had to convince people. "Not everyone in the Administration yet shared my feelings that it might be time to consider using force". However, as mentioned, another historical precedent haunted Bush; "I did not want to repeat the problems of the Vietnam War."[342] Bush, one suspects, was torn between the *drive* factor of Munich and the *restraining* factor of Vietnam. In hoping for a "provocation" (which would justify using force) he was even envious of Lyndon Johnson's exploitation of the Gulf of Tonkin incident; "I knew that the Vietnam War was different, but his efforts made a big impression on me, and I began to think about seeking a similar congressional vote of support."[343] One might guess that at that stage he *hoped* the Vietnam War would be different. Interestingly, his son would be even more tempted to try to stage a Tonkin-like incident when looking for a reason to invade Iraq, but he eventually used another justification.

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[340] Ibid., 303.
[341] Ibid., 435.
[342] Ibid., 354.
[343] Ibid., 371.

4.8 Munich as personal legacy: Madeline Albright's Balkan diplomacy

"While for some people, diplomacy and foreign policy are acquired interests, I had them in my blood. My father had been a diplomat and also a professor, and from childhood I was his most avid student." So states Madeline Albright in the preface of her memoir Madame Secretary.[344] Albright was born Marie Jana Körbel, in Czechoslovakia in 1937. The linkage of family (especially her father "To understand me, you must understand my father"[345]) place – pre-war Czechoslovakia and later the United States – ("There was the statue of Liberty. Holding my sister's hand, I stared in awe at the welcoming figure"),[346] "history" and subsequent career is quite frankly stated in her memoirs. Indeed they make her memoir (ghosted by her speechwriter Bill Woodward) more compelling than many of the rather predictable pieties, banalities and "buts"[347] recorded therein.

Her linkage between her original and adopted homelands reads as quite convincing and sincere; she seemed very unselfconscious and comfortable with her dual national heritage:

> Although Masaryk died when I was four months old, in every other sense I grew up with him. My family spoke about him often, and my father was deeply influenced by Masaryk's profound faith in democracy, his belief that small countries were entitled to the same rights as larger ones and his respect and affection for the United States.[348]

As stated, Albright's father had been a diplomat and academic – with an expertise in Yugoslavia, he would write a book called "Tito's Communism"; she would in fact attend Tito's funeral – and by her own account had a strong influence on his daughter. "My father talked to me about history and foreign policy whenever he got the chance, and his

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[344] Albright, Madeline, *Madame Secretary*, Miramax Books, New York, 2003, xiii.

[345] Ibid., 4.

[346] Ibid., 17. In fairness, the purple passage is quite atypical of Albright.

[347] To give a couple of examples: "There was a warm personal side to Arafat, but his politics were inflexible and, in the end, very costly to his people and the entire Middle East", "…Secretary General Boutros-Ghali, whom I respected as a diplomat, but whose re-election I felt compelled to oppose", 434-35.

[348] Ibid., 5. There are almost as many references to the Czech President Edvard Beneš (1884-1948) as there are to President George H. Bush.

convictions became mine."[349] She continues that he "could make whatever period in history I was studying come alive with stories and place any battle or conference in context."[350] However, one particular piece of history made a very powerful impact: "When he spoke of World War II, he never strayed far from the lessons of Munich: unspeakable tragedies ensue when great countries appease evil."[351]

Munich was not just any political tool for Albright, it was a central part of her personal life-history and she seems quite self-entitled and possessive in using it. For instance, when Russian President Putin turned the table on her (referring to the Chechen conflict):

> Obliviously aware of my own history, he said that Russia was acting the way I would have wished Europe had acted against the Nazis. "Instead of another Munich, we are fighting them now before they grow stronger. And we shall smash them."[352]

This "my own history" is worth dwelling on, as it will be argued that it was very much her own personal "Munich" that she brought to the table when overseeing the Kosovo War of 1999. One might say that Albright wore Munich much like she wore her distinct Stetson hat.

It may be making too much of a detail, but I believe that it is noteworthy that the topic – suggested by her father – of Albright's honor thesis was on a Czech politician that can be seen as a Chamberlain-like figure, at least from the simplistic and morally aggressive perspective of evoker of Munich.

> Zdenek Fierlinger was a Social Democrat who eagerly led his party into partnership with the Communists. The result ultimately was the death of Masaryk, the resignation of Benes, and the end of democracy.
>
> In my father's circle Fierlinger was referred to as Quislinger, after Vidkun Quisling, the Norwegian politician whose cooperation with the Nazis before

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[349] Ibid., 27.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid., 439.

and during World War II made his name synonymous with a flaccid spine and a treasonous heart.[353]

Her first chapter is called "Heroes and Villains", and in her search for "clarity" she would indeed be wilfully seeing political agents in such stark terms.

Albright was US Ambassador to the United Nations during the first Clinton administration (1993-97) and in this capacity she had some dealings with the very flawed international diplomacy that sought to deal with that conflict. She summed up her feelings about in terms of Munich; in her chapter entitled "Horror in the Balkans", she signs off by quoting Neville Chamberlain's notorious radio speech ("a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing."). She then comments:

> A year later Chamberlain's own country was at war, in part because he done nothing to help the "faraway country" and its little-known people. America and its allies may be proud that, belatedly or not, we did come to the aid of the people of Bosnia – to their benefit, and ours.[354]

This bracketing of Bosnia and Munich is important; as when conflict broke out in Kosovo in the late 1990s, these two failures (despite the spin she put on Bosnia "belatedly or not" – it was *surely* belated and a failure) seem to have provided guiding precedents. Of course, when the Kosovo crisis became internationalised in 1999, Albright was in a much more powerful position; she has become the first ever female US Secretary of State (in the second Clinton administration 1997-2001). This meant a move from a diplomatic office and environment to a more partisan political one.

To briefly fill in the background, after escalating fighting between the newly-formed KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) and Serbian forces in Kosovo in 1998, an international Contact Group was formed consisting of the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy. They convened in London and Albright was determined to confront Milošević; "We had to approve concrete measures that would expand our leverage over Belgrade. That was how Milošević had been brought to the table at Dayton, and that was

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[353] Ibid., 43.
[354] Ibid., 192.

the only language he would respond to now."[355] She was however – by her own account – underwhelmed by the degree of resolve shown by the various parties;

> I was determined not to betray the thrust of those who looked to America for leadership. At one point the ordinarily hawkish Jamie Rubin urged me to compromise on a particular measure. I glared and said "Jamie, do you think we're in Munich?[356]

In his book on the Kosovo conflict, Michael Ignatieff commented on Albright rounding on Rubin, stating that "Kosovo could not be this Administration's Munich."[357] A second Contact Group meeting took place in Bonn but Albright was unimpressed; especially by the Russians and Italians. After further Serbian escalations another track was tried "we went not to the Contact Group but to NATO".[358] Furthermore she was dismissive of a plan presented by the late Robin Cook (then British Foreign Secretary) which would have sought a UN Security Council resolution that would authorise the use of force by NATO. This could have led permanent Security Council members vetoing NATO. Diplomacy was losing out to the military option. The Secretary's own words could well have been describing 1938, not 1998. "I made the case again to my administration colleagues, arguing that if we did not act, the crisis would spread, more people would die, we would look weak, pressured, we would end up resorting to force anyway under even more difficult and tragic circumstances."[359] Milošević was described in terms that evoke appeasement: "His ambitions were not the kind that could be satisfied except at great cost to others".[360]

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[355] Ibid., 381.

[356] Ibid., 383.

[357] Ignatieff, Michael, *Virtual War, Kosovo and Beyond,* Metropolitan Book, Henry Hold and Company, New York, 2000, 6. In an exchange of emails between himself and Robert Skidelsky republished in this book, Ignatieff concludes his final contribution thus: "The fact that you do not wish to face is that every peaceful diplomatic alternative was tried and failed. Why? Because Milošević gambled that we would fold. And you seem to wish that we had. The word of that is appeasement. Yours, Michael" (87). The word "appeasement" serves not as part of an argument, but as the climax of one. This recalls Barthes' statement that myth's clarity is "not that of explanation but that of a statement of fact." Barthes, 143. "Clarity" is key here, see below.

[358] Albright, 384.

[359] Ibid., 387.

[360] Ibid.

Albright's book was published in 2003, and has certainly been aware of the controversy of the Kosovo War, language like "Some revisionists have suggested that we missed signals from Belgrade" would seem to betray an uncomfortable awareness of the tainted legacy of the Kosovo war.[361]

Her language now is more guarded than in statements she that made more immediately after the conflict. In interview given during the British television documentary Moral Combat, NATO at War (BBC, 2001), she was far more direct (and was indeed, her assistant James Rubin). The discrepancy between the earlier statements on television and the later ones on paper are important, and I believe, reveal a sense of discomfort with the entire Kosovo War and its troubled progress.

In the documentary Albright spoke in starkly moral terms: "we were dealing with such a basic evil that could not be tolerated".[362] "Milošević was the same, evil Milošević, who had started this whole thing by the way in Kosovo by denying them their rights and we just had to stand up".[363] At another point she stated: "We could not repeat the kinds of mistakes that had happened over Bosnia, where there was a lot of talk and no action and that history would judge us very severely".[364] Not repeating the mistakes of the past, having to standing up, the judgment of history; these were fighting words.

Conflicts often produce their own euphemisms, and the Kosovo war was not different. At numerous press conferences television audiences were told that a war aim was to "degrade" the Yugoslavian[365] military.

Some commentators such as Misha Glenny[366] and Maria Todorova[367] noted the use of the concept of "credibility", most especially in the when NATO discovered that its air

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[361] Ibid., 405.

[362] Moral Combat, NATO at War, BBC, 2001.

[363] Ibid.

[364] Ibid.

[365] Yugoslavia still then existed, consisting of Serbia (including Kosovo, now independent but not universally recognised) and Montenegro, now independent and fully recognised.

[366] Glenny, 2000, 659.

[367] Todorova, Maria, *Imagining the Balkans,* Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1996, 185. Her work pre-dates the Kosovo conflict, but she had noted the importance of the term in Western diplomacy.

campaign against Yugoslavia had been very poorly calculated, and dragged on for week after week. NATO could not change track, because it would lose its "credibility", especially at a time when the alliance was celebrating its 50th year, and needed a clear sense of purpose to reaffirm the reasons for its existence. (Albright's final argument, indeed her final sentence in her memoir's chapters devoted to Kosovo "The Alliance Prevails" is "NATO would have been left divided and questioning its own relevance as the twenty first century dawned.")[368]

The third term concerned particularity the Rambouillet negotiations, which were convened to get some form of agreement between representative of the Kosovo Albanians and the Yugoslavian Government. The term in question was "clarity". Seeking *clarity* was seemingly a parallel (and private, meaning that the American delegation were not disclosing this intention to the other representatives) channel, with a notably different goal in mind. In the words of James Rubin (as quoted in the BBC documentary, italics added):

> The second acceptable outcome was to create *clarity* where previously there had been ambiguity, and *clarity* as to which side was the cause of the problem, *clarity* as to which side NATO should defend and which side NATO should oppose and that meant the Kosovo Albanians agreeing to the package and the Serbs not agreeing to the package.

This meant in effect that *not* finding an agreement between parties was also a satisfactory outcome. Rubin is quite frank on this; "Obviously publically we had to make *clear* we were seeking an agreement, but privately we knew that the chances of the Serbs agreeing were quite small."

Rubin's boss, Albright, reveals the logic behind this; "if the Serbs would not agree and the Albanians would agree then there was a very *clear* cause for using force". In her personal dealings with the Albanian delegation (especially their elected chairman Hashim Thaci, KLA leader and later Kosovo's Prime Minister) Albright was desperate to get them to agree; "I was unbelievably frustrated; we needed *clarity* then and there".

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[368] Albright, 428.

Another member of the Kosovo Albanian delegation, the editor Veton Surroi described Albright's efforts to persuade the delegation thus: "She was saying; 'you sign, the Serbs don't sign, we bomb; you sign, the Serbs sign, you get NATO in; so it is up to you to sign; you don't sign the Serbs don't sign, we forget the subject'" he then emphasised "it was very explicit."[369]

This does indeed echo her own account: "'on the other hand,'" I said 'if you say yes and the Serbs say no, NATO will strike and go on striking until the Serb forces are out and NATO can go in. You will have security. And you will be able to govern yourselves.'" [370]

This was decidedly negative diplomacy; the US delegation was actively looking for a simplistic division of good versus evil: the agenda – it can at least be inferred by the above statements – was to use military force. This had been called "alibi diplomacy" [371]and it resembles the pattern found in the other cases; Suez, the Falklands, and both Gulf Wars (examined below); establish a highly visible theater of negotiation and then negotiate in bad faith. Diplomacy has been tried and found not to work; we are left with no option but the military one.

4.9 Bush Jr., Blair, and Gulf War 2

During the above-mentioned Iraq War, (like Suez, another painful episode in Western/Middle Eastern relations) President George W. Bush found himself and his administration being accused – and by a staunch allay – of an act of "appeasement". As the Washington "insider" Bob Woodward relates it:

> The President was in the Oval Office later that day reviewing a speech by
> Israeli Prime Minister Arial Sharon. Sharon had suggested that the United
> States was on the road to repeating the mistakes of Munich in 1938 when

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[369] BBC, 2000.

[370] Ibid., 403.

[371] According to Jovo Bakic, the term originates with Živorad Kovačevi, former Yugoslav ambassador to the US. Bakic, Jovo and Padur, Gazela, "The Yugoslav Succession Wars and The War for Symbolic Hegomony", in *Media Discourse and the Yugoslav Conflicts: Representations of Self and Other,* Pål Kolstø (ed.) Ashgate, Farnham, 2009, 122.

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had abandoned Czechoslovakia to Hitler.

"Do not try to appease the Arabs at our expense," Sharon said, addressing the America President. "Israel will not be Czechoslovakia"

"We're going to respond to that, yes?" Rice asked Bush.

"Of course I'm going to respond to that."

They discussed a forceful blast back. Someone cautioned, "You're going to get a headline that says: 'BUSH RAPS SHARON.'"

"Mr. President," Rice said, "he just called you Neville Chamberlain. I think it's time to say something strong."[372]

The "strong", "forceful blast back" was as follows; "Fleisher later called Sharon's comments 'unacceptable.'"[373] One wonders what a less robust response would have been like; the mere accusation of appeasement reduced a notoriously belligerent and insensitive White House to utter sheepishness in this instance, such is the power of a single word.

4.9.1. Echoes of Churchill

During his "War on Terror", George W. Bush placed a bust of Winston Churchill in the Oval Office (the bust, he says, was given to him by Tony Blair).[374] Perhaps it might seem strange to pay tribute to a foreign leader, but Bush no doubt shares the Republican aversion to the legacy of the American wartime leader, Franklin Roosevelt, a Democrat and father of the New Deal.[375] Bush has tried to take on – as Marx put it – the "battle slogans and costume" of Churchill, aided by his speechwriters:

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[372] Woodward, Bob, *Bush At War,* Simon and Schuster, New York, 2002, 197-198.

[373] Ibid.

[374] Bush, George, W., *Decision Points*, Crown Publishers, New York, 2010, 108.

[375] Although in his memoir, there are many laudatory remarks about Roosevelt, as well as other historical icons like Lincoln. The degree to which the book has been ghost written is an open subject; Eliot Weinberger's London Review of Books (Vol.33. No. 1, 6 January 2011) review – already a minor literary classic – speaks mocking of the memoir as being like "a line of fashion accessories or a perfume does to the

This is an enemy without conscience – and they cannot be *appeased*. If we were not fighting and destroying this enemy in Iraq, they would not be idle. They would be plotting and killing Americans across the world and within our own borders. By fighting these terrorists in Iraq, Americans in uniform are defeating a direct threat to the American people. Against this adversary, there is only one effective response: *We will never back down. We will never give in. And we will never accept anything less than complete victory.*[376]

In his memoirs, Bush also evokes the familiar co-ordinates. Referring to a telephone conversation with Blair, Bush says "I heard an echo of Winston Churchill in my friend's voice. It was a moment of courage that will stay with me forever."[377] In the same chapter Bush talks of a meeting with Elie Wiesel. The meeting was in the context of the planning for war against Iraq, "I sought opinions on Iraq from a variety of sources":

Elie is a sober and gentle man. But there was passion in his seventy-four-year-old eyes when he compared Saddam Hussein's brutality to the Nazi genocide. "Mr. President," he said, "you have a moral obligation to act against evil." The force of his conviction affected me deeply. [378]

4.9.2 "There are glib and sometimes foolish comparisons"

Prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, to which Bush Jr. is referring above, British Prime Minister Tony Blair readied his country for war. In doing so, he unsurprisingly plunged back into the 1930s. Munich was again very much in the air. The Guardian's Richard

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movie star that bears its name; he no doubt served in some advisory capacity. The words themselves have been assembled by Chris Michel (the young speechwriter and devoted acolyte who went to Yale with Bush's daughter Barbara); a freelance editor, Sean Desmond; the staff at Crown Publishing (who reportedly paid $7 million for the book); a team of a dozen researchers; and scores of 'trusted friends'. I am inclined to agree: something about the tone of Bush acknowledgments: "they are responsible for many of the book's strengths and none of its flaws" are notably detached, as though he briefly forgot that he is supposed to be the book's author.

[376] Bush, George W., Speech "The War on Terror" November 30, 2005, available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051130-2.html (italics added). Although ironically, Churchill's speech contained a strong echo of a speech of Chamberlain quoted in section 4.2.

[377] Bush, George W., 2010, 246.

[378] Ibid., 248.

Norton-Taylor wrote that; "Blair similarly evoked ghost of the past. He could not endure the 'shame' of appeasement, he said a few days before the Iraq invasion. Britain would face a 'living nightmare' if it appeased Saddam Hussein." [379]

When addressing the House of Commons on March 18, 2003, the day prior to the attack, Blair said: "And now the world has to learn the lesson all over again that weakness in the face of a threat from a tyrant, is the surest way not to peace but to war."[380] This speech is worth reviewing in some detail. Excepting only Thatcher, Blair is the most significant British Prime Minister since the Second World War. The Iraq War was the most controversial and divisive event of his tenure and his legacy will stand or fall by it (as he is no doubt well aware). His speech continued:

> What would any tyrannical regime possessing WMD think viewing the history of the world's diplomatic dance with Saddam? That our capacity to pass firm resolutions is only matched by our feebleness in implementing them.
>
> That is why this indulgence has to stop. Because it is dangerous. It is dangerous if such regimes disbelieve us.
>
> Dangerous if they think they can use our weakness, our hesitation, even the natural urges of our democracy towards peace, against us.[381]

Shrewdly, Blair then denied that he was manipulating the very historical analogies that he was manipulating. This verbal method is worth pausing to note. Such verbal trickery was typical of Blair. In April 1998 he gave his most famous – and cringeworthy – soundbite, "the hand of history upon our shoulders" after listeners were assured that, "A day like today, it's not a day for soundbites". Like Lloyd, Eden and Macmillan before him, also Blair strenuously defends his record (in his case, on Iraq) in his memoirs. He is clearly aware that he is justifying what many British commentators and voters still see as a deeply dishonest piece of statecraft in getting his country involved in the war, and one which had proved very costly in human terms (even if one only accepts the most conservative

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[379] Norton-Taylor, Richard, Guardian, 12 July, 2006.

[380] Blair Tony, Speech in House of Commons, March 18, 2003, available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/mar/18/foreignpolicy.iraq1

[381] Ibid.

estimates of the numbers killed). At one point he addresses this issue, stating; "There is no moral judgment that can or should be based on mathematics, here's the number Saddam killed; here's the number that died after his fall. Such a calculation is necessarily invidious."[382] Have stated this, Blair then fills two pages with exactly a "judgment based on mathematics", (for what it's worth, his final figures are "112,000 too many, but a far cry from half a million.")[383] But to revert to his speech:

> There are glib and sometimes foolish comparisons with the 1930s. No one here is an appeaser. But the only relevant point of analogy is that with history, we know what happened. We can look back and say: there's the time; that was the moment; for example, when Czechoslovakia was swallowed up by the Nazis - that's when we should have acted.

> But it wasn't clear at the time. In fact at the time, many people thought such a fear fanciful. Worse, put forward in bad faith by warmongers…

> Naturally should Hitler appear again in the same form, we would know what to do. But the point is that history doesn't declare the future to us so plainly. Each time is different and the present must be judged without the benefit of hindsight.[384]

No doubt Blair – or his spin doctors, though he states in his memoirs that he alone wrote the speech – seemed to be at least aware of the risks of such an analogy. Interestingly, he had doubts about the Hitler passage, but nonetheless left it in the speech:

> In one passage, which I regretted and almost took out, I made reference to the 1930s and to the almost universal refusal, for a long time, of people to believe Hitler was a threat. I was careful not conflate Saddam and Hitler and

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[382] Blair, Tony, *A Journey*, Hutchinson, London, 2010, 278-280.
[383] Ibid., 280.
[384] Blair, 2003.

specifically disowned many of the glib comparisons between 2003 and 1933.[385]

The tone of Blair's moral crescendo was to present a familiar moral/existential dilemma, to which there could be only be one choice. Having very disingenuously told the House of Commons that; "No one here is an appeaser", Blair *concludes* by drawing his lines in such a way that *not* to act with him *is* to appease. Though he does not even need to use the word, so embedded is it in his argument:

> Tell our allies[386] that at the very moment of action, at the very moment when they need our determination that Britain faltered. I will not be party to such a course. This is not the time to falter. This is the time for this house, not just this government or indeed this prime minister, but for this house to give a lead, to show that we will stand up for what we know to be right, to show that we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk, to show at the moment of decision that we have the courage to do the right thing.[387]

The most obvious connection is the fact that both Bush Senior and Blair were committed to war against the same country, Iraq, but what is of importance is that in both cases there was a *negotiation* process taking place, in which neither Bush or Blair had any faith but to which they had to pay lip-service, while the process failed and they could finally use force, as they wanted all along. The 2003 Bush Jr./Blair White House Memo as it is called, stated that Blair really only wanted diplomatic "cover" for military action; "a second resolution would give us international cover, especially with the Arabs".[388] The summary of the memo, which recorded a two-hour White House meeting between both leaders in late January 2003, says: "Our diplomatic strategy had to be arranged around the

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[385] Blair, 2010, 436. Who, one must ask, was making these glib comparisons? And surely the point is that 1938 (not 1933) was the pivotal year?

[386] Of course, the term "allies" is itself very suggestive of World War II.

[387] Blair, 2003.

[388] Bush-Blair Iraq war memo revealed, BBC, March 27th, 2006, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4849744.stm.

military planning."[389] Again one notes the familiar pattern and sequence: "diplomatic strategy had to be arranged around the military planning". The military option was put *first*, and the diplomacy *second*, and in selling this policy to the public Munich was one of the most powerful legitimisers.

In this sense, the political deployment of "Munich" becomes almost a form of *non-diplomacy*. After all, goes the argument, negotiation failed in the 1930s, and look what happened, therefore negotiation is a waste of time.

While still in office, Tony Blair's successor Gordon Brown defended his country's increasingly unpopular involvement in Afghanistan in terms of the 1930s. Speaking at the Lord Mayor's Banquet at Guildhall on November 16, 2009, the then Prime Minister said:

> …vigilance in defence of national security will never be sacrificed to expediency. Necessary resolution will never succumb to appeasement. The greater international good will never be subordinated to the mood of the passing moment...[390]

Having badly lost a general election since, one might question Mr. Brown's ability to calculate the "mood of the passing moment". In any event, Brown's use of Munich was different to that of his predecessor Blair; Blair needed to justify a very controversial decision to go to war, Brown needed to justify his country's ongoing commitment to a war that (unlike Iraq) was not greatly opposed by public opinion at the start, but has become increasingly unpopular. Therefore he needed to revisit, old, ever-reliable Munich.

3.10.2 Islamo-fascism, the debate

A very curious outgrowth of the mining of Munich is the bizarre idea that the ongoing War on Terror is morally equivalent to the European politics of the 1930s, and is being fought on the legitimacy conferred by the Second World War. It is deeply a-historical, even more so than the elevation of Nasser to Hitler in the 1950s. So far, the idea has

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[389] Ibid.

[390] Brown, Gordon, Speech, November 16th, 2009, available at
http://www.**timesonline**.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6918483.ece

mostly been thrown rather loudly among journalists, although at least one prominent historian has contributed to the debate, as it has developed thus far.

If nobody had explicitly used the formula: Osama Bin Laden = Hitler, it is nonetheless the same well of legitimacy that is being used by the sanctioning of the term Islamo-Fascism. Of course, merely to use such a formula would show just how unsustainable Islamo-fascist is as a concept. The itinerant Bin Laden did not even officially reside in one state; he was a fugitive not a dictator. And indeed, before the capture and execution of Saddam Hussein in late 2006, such a formula could not have been used; had it been, we would have found ourselves living in the era of Two Hitlers, much like the two Popes of yesteryear.

Of those who have used the term uncritically, probably the best known was the gifted journalist Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011), during his descent into Blimpish self-parody.[391] He did not coin the phrase, but as William Sapphire (1929-2009) has written, Hitchens had been the populariser of the phrase.[392] Certainly Hitchens tried to elevate the phrase to a coherent argument: "Does Bin Ladenism or Salafism or whatever we agree to call it have anything in common with fascism?"

> I think yes. The most obvious points of comparison would be these: Both movements are based on a cult of murderous violence that exalts death and destruction and despises the life of the mind. ("Death to the intellect! Long live death!" as Gen. Francisco Franco's sidekick Gonzalo Queipo de Llano so pithily phrased it.) Both are hostile to modernity (except when it comes to the pursuit of weapons), and both are bitterly nostalgic for past empires and lost glories. Both are obsessed with real and imagined "humiliations" and thirsty for revenge. Both are chronically infected with the toxin of anti-Jewish paranoia (interestingly, also, with its milder cousin, anti-Freemason paranoia). Both are inclined to leader worship and to the exclusive stress on the power of one great book. Both have a strong commitment to sexual repression—especially to the repression of any sexual "deviance"—and to its counterparts

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[391] If descent it was; Alexander Cockburn wrote that "Christopher had been pretty much the same package since the beginning", "Farewell to C.H.", available at http://theava.com/archives/13394

[392] Sapphire, William, "Language: Islamofascism, anyone?" New York Times, January, 10th, 2006, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/opinion/01iht-edsafire.2988871.html?_r=1

the subordination of the female and contempt for the feminine. Both despise art and literature as symptoms of degeneration and decadence; both burn books and destroy museums and treasures.[393]

Even the tone of Hitchens's language is unconvinced; he was a very sharp polemicist, and the above, ramble-to-the-point style was far removed from his usual rapid and pointed response. Nor do the content of his arguments stand even the faintest critical glance: The "exclusive stress on the power of one great book" presumably refers to Mein Kamp; are we to believe that this was a user's manual, regularly checked in the ordinary, everyday affairs of being a Nazi? As for "despise art and literature", some was very selectively despised some but also revered. None of this convinces.

Katy Pollit, who exchanged many polemics with Hitchens, was far more accurate in saying that "I think it is worth preserving "fascism" as a term with specific historical content":

"Islamo-fascism" looks like an analytic term, but really it's an emotional one, intended to get us to think less and fear more. It presents the bewildering politics of the Muslim world as a simple matter of Us versus Them, with war to the end the only answer, as with Hitler. If you doubt that every other British Muslim under the age of 30 is ready to blow himself up for Allah, or that shredding the Constitution is the way to protect ourselves from suicide bombers, if you think that Hamas might be less popular if Palestinians were less miserable, you get cast as Neville Chamberlain, while Bush plays FDR.[394]

Agreed, but surely and importantly wrong about FDR; as was stated above, George W. Bush like Thatcher before him was happy to wrap himself in Churchill's legacy. One historian who has entered this journalists' debate is Niall Fergusson, who despite a provocative profile and right wing beliefs, distances himself from the phrase and makes perfect sense:

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[393] Hitchens, Christopher, "Defending Islamofascism. It's a valid term. Here's why". Slate, Oct. 22nd, 2007,available at
http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2007/10/defending_islamofascism.html
[394] Pollitt, Katy, "Wrong War, Wrong Word" The Nation, September 11, 2006, available at
http://www.thenation.com/article/wrong-war-wrong-word.

> ...what we see at the moment is an attempt to interpret our present predicament in a rather caricatured World War II idiom. I mean, "Islamofascism" illustrates the point well, because it's a completely misleading concept. In fact, there's virtually no overlap between the ideology of al Qaeda and fascism. It's just a way of making us feel that we're the "greatest generation" fighting another World War, like the war our fathers and grandfathers fought. You're translating a crisis symbolized by 9/11 into a sort of pseudo World War II. So, 9/11 becomes Pearl Harbor and then you go after the bad guys who are the fascists, and if you don't support us, then you must be an appeaser.[395]

"In rather caricatured World War II idiom" states it correctly, but at present there seems no end in sight.

Interestingly, a biographer of Mussolini and historian of Italian Fascism feels that there is still a struggle against fascism to be fought, although by this he means a struggle to promote those humane values that Fascism despised, and which he feels are not being delivered by contemporary societies; "But I must also accept that the democracies of our time (not to mention the dictatorships) have not brought us to happiness and, sadly, may be presently be transporting us away from that desired state."[396]

> Yet the world which lives under the hegemony of economic rationalism and which seems every day more in the care of new conservatives is a frighteningly irrational and brutal place. The ghosts of the Fascist past may indeed break open the champagne when they hear of the current approval of pre-emptive strikes and the cheerful acceptance of collateral damage that accompanies them.[397]

He was writing in 2006, with the wars in Afghanistan and especially Iraq seem to provide the background to his pessimistic but sincerely-felt world view. He concludes that

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[395] Ferguson, Niall, Conversations with History; Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley, available at http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people6/Ferguson/ferguson06-con5.html

[396] Bosworth, R.J.B*., Mussolini's Italy, Life Under the Dictatorship,* Penguin, London, 2006, Xxvi

[397] Ibid.

"Historic Fascism is probably dead and buried but, in our future, anti-fascism, loosely defined as a sustained search for liberty, equality, fraternity and sorority, must go on."[398]

It is surely this fact, "historical fascism is probably dead and buried" that makes it fascinating. In an insightful essay '"Never Again" is Now', Hans Keller has written about how aspects of the past are imaginative ventures, which may horrify but also fascinate.

> Both fictional and historical representations are dreamlike in that they express some sort of desire, in all the complexity of that term. The pressing need to represent the Holocaust in poetry, novels, films, drama, and history must come from a desire to repeat in the imagination happenings and events that horrify and fascinate. We only represent what we desire. The desire to represent the Holocaust however, is not the desire to repeat it as an event, nor necessarily the desire to repeat the form-giving pleasure of representation itself; rather, it is a desire to repeat the Holocaust in a suitably altered form to meet complex, often contradictory, sets of present needs.[399]

This compelling insight goes far beyond the Holocaust. One might well substitute Munich, Katyn, (although they are bound together as World War II) the *Holodomar*, the Vietnam War, or 9/11, all of which fascinate their respective audiences. The *desire* of which Keller writes may seem morbid, but it is also cunning; it is a desire to repeat "in a suitably altered form" from a safe distance, knowing that the desired events cannot occur; if it could occur, there would not be the desire, there would be fear.

4.10 Next up, Iran?

As an attack on Iran looks increasingly possible[400], one cannot but notice the language being used. There are many sceptical voices on the issue of Iran's nuclear ambitions, but their reasoned arguments are not winning the battle of the airwaves (the necessary prelude

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[398] Ibid.

[399] Hans Keller '"Never Again" is Now', In Fay et al. (eds.) *History and Theory, Contemporary Readings,* Blackwell, Oxford 1998, 226.

[400] Between the time of writing and publishing, following the election of a new President in Iran, there seems to be a hope of de-escalation.

to actual battles). Speaking in Los Angeles in 2008, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu shared the following anecdote with his audience:

> In a restaurant in New York, he was approached by a father who introduced himself and his 12 year old son. He asked the PM if he could give the boy one sentence to share with his classmates in social studies: I looked at that boy and said "why do you want that sentence?" and the boy replied "Because I'm interested in the future of the world". Netanyahu then told the boy that "It's 1938 and Iran is Germany. It's 1938 and Iran is Germany and it's racing to arm itself with atomic bombs."[401]

Netanyahu is a very capable spokesman, and has a knack of connecting well with Western – especially American – audiences and making his alarmist assertions seem reasoned and convincing. And his speech indeed reached higher levels of alarm. The Holocaust was evoked, Iran's President Ahmadinejad compared to Hitler and the former is even made to sound even *more* cunning and ambitious than the latter. "The big difference is this; Hitler first embarked on a world conflict and then tried to develop atomic weapons. Ahmadinejad is going about it in reverse order; he first wants to develop atomic weapons and then embark on the world crisis."[402]

One might draw attention to the weasel word, "crisis". When speaking about Hitler Netanyahu spoke of "world *conflict*". When then comparing Ahmadinejad to Hitler he uses a similar-sounding but not identifiable term "the world *crisis*". This would be the get-out-of-jail-card (in case anyone might actually question if Iran could somehow ignite a world conflict). This type of alarmism is classical paranoid discourse. "He (the paranoid spokesman) constantly lives at a turning point: it is now or never in organizing resistance to conspiracy. Time is forever running out."[403] But somehow time never actually runs out; "The apocalyptic of the paranoid style runs dangerously near to hopeless pessimism, but usually stops short of it."[404] More recently (September 2012), Prime Minister Netanyahu

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[401] Netanyahu, Benjamin, Speech in Los Angles, November, 13th 2006, viewable at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xg7r7-R-H2Q

[402] Ibid.

[403] Hofstadter, 30.

[404] Ibid.

delivered a speech in the United Nations General Assembly – warning the world of a nuclear-armed Iran. He literally drew lines but also sketched in his background along familiar patterns:

> For today, a great battle is being waged between the modern and the medieval. The forces of modernity seek a bright future in which the rights of all are protected, in which an ever-expanding digital library is available in the palm of every child, in which every life is sacred...[405]

Thus is the world broken down into binary opposites, and the negative forces – and the global scope of their ambition – are then identified.

> Yet the medieval forces of radical Islam, whom you just saw storming the American embassies throughout the Middle East, they oppose this….
>
> They seek supremacy over all Muslims. They are bent on world conquest. They want to destroy Israel, Europe, America. They want to extinguish freedom. They want to end the modern world.

This project is then translated back into the Second World War.

> Some 70 years ago, the world saw another fanatic ideology bent on world conquest. It went down in flames. But not before it took millions of people with it. Those who opposed that fanaticism waited too long to act.

A linkage is then made to the present crisis and the inability of diplomacy to stop it.

> For nearly a decade, the international community has tried to stop the Iranian nuclear program with diplomacy.
> That hasn't worked.

The next sentence then links historical catastrophe, the present crisis, and the failure of diplomacy:

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[405] Netanyahu, Benjamin, Speech to United Nations General Assembly, September 27th, 2012, available at http://www.nationaljournal.com/nationalsecurity/full-text-benjamin-netanyahu-s-speech-at-the-united-nations-general-assembly-20120927.

> If the Western powers had drawn clear red lines during the 1930s, I believe
> they would have stopped Nazi aggression and World War II might have been
> avoided.

He ends on a note of high alarm, stating that: "it's only a few months, possibly a few weeks before they get enough enriched uranium for the first bomb."

Veteran Middle-Eastern journalist Robert Fisk demonstrated this "time is forever running out" and "dangerously-near-but-not-quite" aspects of alarmism in his debunking of Netanyahu's speech:

> Iran is the centre of terrorism, fundamentalism and subversion and is … more
> dangerous than Nazism, because Hitler did not possess a nuclear bomb …"
> Bibi speaking on Thursday? Nope. The ex-Prime Minister of Israel, Shimon
> Peres, in 1996. And – I'm indebted here to the indispensable Roger Cohen –
> Peres himself said in 1992 that Iran would have a nuclear bomb by 1999!
> That's 13 years ago. And Ehud Barak – now Bibi's Defence Minister – said in
> 1996 that Iran would have a nuke by 2004. That's eight years ago.[406]

If we are being asked seriously to compare the recent Iranian President to Hitler, we must have a Chamberlain. At the time of writing, right-wing opinion in the United States has already decided who to nominate for this role, their present President (who, not coincidentally has had a less than smooth relationship with Netanyahu, indeed the former has been humiliated by the latter). Early in his first term, Obama publically stated that he was willing to hold talks with Iran, explicitly with regards to the latter country's nuclear programme. For critics, this was probably already ominous: willingness to engage in positive diplomacy is a sign of "weakness" (need it be said that, conversely, Netanyahu's confrontational manner has wide appeal to the same audience). Voices are now accusing Obama of appeasement in the face of Iran (and/or a not-very-well-defined general Islamic threat). I can quote two: the elderly American stand-up comedian Jackie Mason and the Professor of Classics and conservative political commentator Bruce Thorton, who has

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[406] Fisk, Robert, "Benjamin Netanyahu's warning reveals his moments of memory loss", Independent, September 29, 2012, available at http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/benjamin-netanyahus-warning-reveals-his-moments-of-memory-loss-8190461.html?origin=internalSearch

recently published a work called The Wages of Appeasement; Ancient Athens, Munich, and Obama's America. One notes the moral/evangelical tone of the title, and the implied urgent message to us, now, in our present crisis. The comedian has taken to making short videos and posting them on YouTube, offering unsolicited political analysis, which is mostly him talking ad hoc about what seem like cherished grievances. About Obama we are told: "He acts as if he is Winston Churchill but he is really Chamberlain, this man is giving up without a fight and we are going to be destroyed without a fight 'cause he hasn't got the guts to make a fight".[407] This has reached this level of absurdity; the comic is as deadly serious as the professor (whose only difference is the more refined language the professor uses to make the same allegation).

4. 11 Summary

The above case studies all reveal similar patterns. In the cases of Suez, the Falkland's War, both Gulf Wars and the Kosovo War (it is too early to know if Iran can be included) we noted that the evocation of Munich was used by one side in a conflict, and that in each of these cases the side was largely going through the motion of a negotiating a settlement to a conflict, while in fact preparing itself for the military action that eventually took place. In Suez, despite the cover of the formation of the Suez Canal Users Association and the setting up of the London Conference, the actual course of action decided on was military force. As early as July 31, 1956, the American ambassador in London cabled the Department of State, saying: "Eden, Macmillan and Lloyd showed throughout unexpected calm and no hysteria. They act as though they really have taken a decision after profound reflection. They are flexible on procedures leading up to showdown but insist over and over again that whatever conferences, arrangements, public postures and manoeuvres might be necessary, at the end they are determined to use force."[408]

A very similar pattern is discernible with the Falklands War. As Al Haig reported regarding his diplomatic efforts with Mrs Thatcher: "*She is clearly prepared to use force.*

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[407] Viewable at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzMi2R05XQU

[408] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Volume XIV Arab-Israeli Dispute 1955, Volume XVI Suez Crisis July 26-December 31, 1956,* United States Department of State, Washington, 1990, 61.

Though she admits her preference for a diplomatic solution, she is rigid in her insistence on a return to the status quo ante, and indeed seemingly determined that any solution involve some retribution."[409] This alleged preference for a diplomatic solution was most probably disingenuous and only calculated the keep the US on-side, has Haig continued, "It is clear that they had not thought much about diplomatic possibilities."

In the first Gulf War George H. Bush could state "This time I wanted no appeasement" and argued the point to Gorbachev. He also used the image and language of standing up to dictators, much like Thatcher before him.

The second Gulf War is probably the most flagrant case to date of the subversion of a diplomatic effort in order to pursue a military option. What become the main reason – the now notorious WMD – had they in fact existed, could have been located by the efforts of Blix and the AEC, *had they in fact existed*.[410] Had the inspections been allowed to continue, as Blix wished, they would have proved what is now general knowledge; that there were no WMDs. The White House Memo provides compelling evidence that the decision was made to go to war against Iraq, and that the only useful diplomacy was that which would give "cover":

- That Bush said, "if ultimately we failed [to get the second resolution], military action would follow anyway."
- Blair responded that he was: "solidly with the President and ready to do whatever it took to disarm Saddam."
- Blair also said that: "a second Security Council resolution would provide an insurance policy against the unexpected, and international cover, including with the Arabs."

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[409] Haig, 1982.

[410] On this issue I asked the journalist John Rentoul, currently working on a biography of Blair, if the weapons did exist, then what type of preparations were made by the invading forces? His reply (which he generously allows me to quote) was: "I understand from former Ministry of Defence civil servants that British troops did have anti-biological and chemical weapons suits. They did fear that Saddam would use (biological or chemical weapons), but they also knew that they would be pretty crude and that, as the invasion went on, Saddam's army would not have much chance to deploy them, as its tactic was mainly to run away. It is, however, an important question about which more should be known." (Personal communication).

Not that in this conversion, either Bush JR or Blair mentioned Munich, but as evidenced above they were both – especially Blair – happy to use it as a rhetorical tool, and the fear of appearing to commit appeasement as they understood it, was surely a strong element of their personal calculus. According to Alistair Campbell's diary, "TB (Blair) said we were in high-risk, high reward territory." [411] Bush was simply not interested in diplomacy and wanted to wage war: "He (Saddam) is not going to get between us and freedom. Once we strike we go for it, we don't wait for the world to sing Kum by yah, to hold hands and wait for Saddam to develop a better karma."[412] A later entry by Campbell states that "Bush was talking the diplomatic talk while clearly irritated by the whole thing."[413]

It is not being suggested there that all evocations of Munich contribute to war; some cases have been quoted that have been expressions of ideological conflict, but nonetheless these seem enhanced by reference to the events of late 1930s.

There are, no doubt, many cases where the politics of the 1930s might indeed be relevant or instructive, or just inherently interesting (which indeed they are). Even in those cases above where it has been argued that Munich was used as a rhetorical tool that some side in a conflict felt useful to escalate or – just as importantly – *justify* an escalation, it was not the only tool used or the sole motivation. All this said, I believe that there is nonetheless a sinister pattern linking 1956, 1982, 1991, 1999 and 2003 (and perhaps 2013, if there is to be an attack on Iran). Munich has been a variable in this; strongest surely in 1956, weakest probably in 1991 (when there was the strongest legalistic and diplomatic case, although as stated, there are unanswered questions about the lead up to that conflict).

This pattern – allowing, of course, for the specific circumstances of each – is simple; plan for war, pay lip service to international diplomatic efforts to avoid conflict, and actively frustrate/subvert the diplomatic project so that there is seemingly "no other option left". And, as I hope had been demonstrated, using argumentation and rhetoric about appeasement seems to be an ideal vehicle for this: "we know what happened back then, it cannot be allowed to happen now". "History" seems to be conveniently on your side.

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[411] Campbell, Alastair, Diaries, Extracts, the Guardian, June 15, 2012, available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/jun/15/campbell-blair-bush-iraq-war.

[412] Ibid.

[413] Ibid.

Not only as students of history, but also as ordinary citizens, we have a right to ask when will our statesmen stop indulging in this Churchill not Chamberlain posturing? Surely this quaint triangle of traitor/fool (Chamberlain), agent of evil (Hitler) and 11th hour saviour/hero (Churchill) is not the best model on which to conduct foreign policy. Bosworth had written that: "It is the ghost of Adolf Hitler who ensures that we think of all dictators and all societies that have the misfortune to be ruled by them as the replica of this murderous and inexorable regime."[414] He continues, "But letting Hitler be our history teacher and implicit model is not a good idea."[415]

The danger of building up an enemy into Hitler is that is places the builder in a dilemma. He, (but is had been she on occasion), forces himself into a corner. No matter how problematic the conflict is, he cannot be seen to waver or hesitate; to do so is to open himself to the accusation of "appeasement". That being the case, he will have to persevere with the conflict – no matter what the cost is – hoping for something that might be claimed as a victory. He will have dismissed any chance of negotiation; indeed the very idea of negotiation is seen as delusion at best, treason and cowardice at worst.

It is hard to think of a more dangerous way to conduct policy. As has been argued here, evocations of Munich have contributed considerably to war in, and for, our time.

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[414] Bosworth, 1.

[415] Ibid.

5 Conclusions

At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to that not only is political myth, when properly defined, a useful concept in examining the political instrumentality of the past, but also proposed that Munich be considered a political myth, even though most many of the elements associated with political myth seem to be absent from Munich. The reason behind the comparative method was to broader the concept of a political myth and to argue that it is not merely confined to national narratives, emerging countries and states, romantic sensibilities and less-than-fully-open political systems. To restate; few would argue that Kosovo is a classic political myth, but many might argue that Munich is such.

On what basis can "Kosovo" as defined above be compared with "Munich" as defined above?

One can note the strange coincidence that Kosovo did (however inadvertently) ignite the First World War, and Munich (notoriously) tried but failed to prevent the Second.

5.1 Methodological comparison

The differences between the two are notable, if one goes back to the original checklist:

1. Durability

2. Factual accuracy

3. Group-centeredness and "ownership"

4. Flexibility

5. Level of usage

6. Media of transmission

1. Durability: Although both cases are examples of how the past is evoked and seen as relevant to the present, they seem to operate in two distinct, though related, modalities. The Kosovo legacy, at least after it could become institutionalised with the emergence of a Serbian polity in the 19th Century, is more like a case of linear continuity.

If one looks at Munich and the way it has been evoked, there is a difference. Munich, as seen by the British in 1956, or by Madeline Albright in 1999, is not so much a *continuity* as a *recurrence* of the past, the process of which Marx's The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon remains the classic diagnosis. Marx noted the asymmetry of past and present comparisons (at least of those that he mentions) the latter is farce compared to the original, which is tragedy. This asymmetry had been identified as an essential aspect of authority, which is one of the keywords of this thesis. Authority deriving from a past event is that which grants that event its ability to legitimise later actions. This legitimacy seeking task is very accurately described by Marx as a process of "translating back into the language of the original".

The two modalities are distinct – and this distinction is an important aspect of the comparative agenda of the thesis – but they do have a common functionality, using the past to legitimise present actions.

The Kosovo Myth has existed for over 600 years. It had for a longer period a *covert* existence and later an *overt* one. The first existence we know little of, but it was sustained by a vibrant folk culture. On the second overt lifetime we can say much more, as we are able to chart its influence from the early 19th Century; in its overt, institutionalized lifetime, it has been utilised for almost 200 years now. Munich by contrast is a much younger narrative; but it has had a busy lifetime and one fears it will live long.

2. Factual accuracy: There is no way of escaping the fact that this is deeply problematic. For historians, factual accuracy is fundamental to the discipline: gaining as accurate an account of the past is the primary task. But political myths are often a disconcerting mixture of the empirically-provable and the empirically-dubious, but this latter seems to matter little to its target audience. It is this audience, through its tellings and re-tellings of a narrative, that often project their concerns and onto the past event. It was argued above that Gallipoli in Australian experience has gone through several rounds of re-versioning; a

Vietnam-era anti-war tale, an anti-British tale of betrayal and slaughter of the innocents, even most recently an attempt to make the original commitment sound like an contemporary UN-style peace keeping mission. None of these later readings can be squared with the facts that Australians *volunteered* to *fight* in *British* colours. Considerably more dubious claims have been made about other events; and this is certainly the case with Kosovo. The Kosovo Maiden did not exist, Brankovic was not a traitor, and the elaborate metaphysical narrative – Tzar Lazar's choice – that was grafted onto the historical event could only be believed – at the most literal of levels – by the most religious literalist. But many of the most salient aspects of the battle, the death of Lazar, the killing of Murat, the huge slaughter are more than enough to make the story deeply compelling. All these aspects – even the factual dubious – add the authority to the narrative, and to ignore the aspects that are dubious (because they too are sources of political legitimacy) is to be, in Burke's worrying phrase; "wise historically, a fool in practice."

How does this compare with Munich? It has been argued above the Munich's factual accuracy is probably more contestable that might be habitually assumed; the simplistic image of Chamberlain, and he alone, carried out the policy with neither political nor popular support, is a triumph of hindsight bias. But to date that has remained *the* enduring image, despite the openness of the appeasement debate.

3. Ownership: The ownership of the Kosovo Myth has mostly been Serbian – although it has been noted that at times of Serbian success and leadership, such as the gaining of independence and especially at the time of the First Balkan War, other South Slavs were willing to share in the praising of *Vidovdan*, for example, the Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović made plans for an elaborate *Vidovdan* monument, and also depicted some figures from the Kosovo myth, the Kosovo Maiden and Miloš Obilić.[416] It had been noted too that rival*,* external groups and outright enemies were willing to use *Vidovdan*; the Ustaša regime as a pretext to begin massacres of Serbs in the NHD – supposedly there was

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[416] He was also a committed Yugoslav and member of the Yugoslav Committee (although he later refused invitations to live in post-war socialist Yugoslavia). However, his plans for a *Vidovdan* monument date from 1907, and his sculpture of the Kosovo Maiden dates from 1908.

going to be a Serbian rebellion starting June 28th, this was fictitious. In the post-war period, Stalin chose the same date to expel Yugoslavia from Cominform.

Among Serbs, of numerous political creeds and both religious and anti-religious beliefs, the ownership rights of the Kosovo legacy has been furiously contested.

Here there is a large contrast with Munich.

Munich is not explicitly *owned* by anyone. In this, it differs from national myths, which are usually centered on one particular group; most typically and self-defined as a culture or nation. Because of this, in no way is Munich a calendar event; and it is not geographically grounded. No ceremonies of rituals evoke it, and beyond newspaper headlines, no institutions transfer it (Gallipoli is commemorated in numerous ways noted above, there is even a sporting event between the Turkish, New Zealand and Australian handball teams called the Gallipoli Tri-Nations). Munich is deeply political and its "message", its loud urgent "Never Again!" has seemingly universal relevance, and has been utilised in many different political cultures and contexts. This message is, of course, a subjective interpretation.

The many users of Munich quoted in this thesis have been mostly from the political right, or at least, centerists like Tony Blair and Madeline Albright who are committed to liberal interventionism. It is a point of inconvenience that appeasement – in the context of 1930s Britain – was a policy carried out by a Conservative Prime Minister (albeit of a National Government, though an overwhelmingly Conservative one). It would be an even stronger right wing trope if appeasement had been a policy of the left. It was not however. In this sense Munich has evaded the right/left dichotomy to a considerable extent. Indeed, among the first voices of the "Guilty Men School" were left-wingers such as Michael Foot (who was one of the three anonymous authors of the 1940 pamphlet "Guilty Men"). Some right-wing spokesmen, such as Ronald Reagan did try to link appeasement with liberal weakness (as he perceived it) but this requires some historical amnesia. But as is the case of political myths, facts often fall into second place.

4. Flexibility: The range of political creeds argue the formidable flexibility of the Kosovo Myth; one can hardly imagine two more diametrical worldviews than those of the Bosnian rebels and Patriarch Gavrilo, yet both were able to draw upon Kosovo, in the case of the

former, as a modernising, revolutionary creed, in the later a deeply spiritual commitment. This, of course, ignores the degrees of exploitation of the myth, some trivialising by merely commercialising images, although even some of this commercialisation could become sinister, as in the case of the Obilić football club, which became owned by the warlord Arkan.

By contrast Munich had shown little flexibility. So far (although this could change, and could have been otherwise) it had been used a very direct cautionary tale, "history" as an urgent lesson, that must be applied now to avoid past disasters from recurring. This alarmism has been very instrumental politically; this instrumentality cannot really be challenged, even if one does not agree with any of the cases of its usage tabulated above.

5. Level of Usage: The levels at which Kosovo has functioned are layered and complex. In calendar terms *Vidovdan* was ritualised into becoming a framework through which later experiences were refracted as Halpern noted; the dead of *all* wars were remembered on *Vidovdan* each year. The number of hugely important events that were timed to take place on *Vidovdan* must make it date almost with parallel. Even following the fateful day in 1914; 1919, 1921, 1948, 1989, 2000 all continued to make it a day of huge resonance and gravitas.

In spatial/geographic terms it was deeply problematic. "Kosovo" was both an event and the site of that event; the actual site was mostly alienated from the subscribers to the myth; at least in the popular imagination, it was lost, longed for, eventually regained, only to be recently lost again.

Little of this applies to Munich. It is not commemorated in any physical or spatial sense, it has not generated any rituals, and it is not a calendar event. Its main level of usage had been political speech and political discourse, which leads us to the final point of comparison.

6. Media of Transmission: The story of the Battle of Kosovo Polje was firstly preserved by Church text, but – as was the case everywhere in the Middle Ages – very few Serbs could read. However there was the vibrant tradition of oral poetry and song, and for centuries Serbian peasants shared and transmitted the hagiography of the battle via their singers and guslars. As was argued above, when a Serbian state emerged, first autonomous

later independent in the 19th Century, Kosovo could be institutionalised in an overt way through the agencies and institutions of the emerging state. At the cultural level – not that it should be divided too sharply from the political level – it became the subject of plays, visual arts and literary debate. The medieval Serbian Empire, which popularly if not strictly was brought to an end by the battle of 1389, became a model for the emerging nation – as was witnessed by the Garašanin's *Nacertanje* (discussed above). That the Kosovo legacy and its heroes, martyrs (and sometimes traitors) became a rallying cry in times of conflict is well attested; indeed, the Kosovo legacy (however inadvertently) inspired an huge conflict in 1914 that went some way to destroying the young nation, certainly killing many of the men whose mothers had greeted them as "avengers of Kosovo".

Munich, as stated, is largely confined to the realms of political speech; the political speech of power holders, often facing a crisis or, – and this is significant – often *causing* a crisis.

5.3 Structural comparison

Is one then justified in comparing Kosovo and Munich?

On one level, the two overlap in the diplomacy of the Kosovo war of 1999, one can argue that Madeline Albright's *Munich Moment*, gave Milošević his *Kosovo Moment*, leading his country against overwhelming forces.

On another level, that is, a simple structural/functional level, one can observe a resemblance between the contents of the two myths, their triadic structure. It is worth requiting Lincoln's argument that "a taxonomy that forces us to separate narratives so similar in form and structure…..surely serves us ill as an analytic tool."[417] If one looks at the structure of the two narratives, one notes symmetries:

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[417] Lincoln, 1989, 11.

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	Lazar	
Son-in-law		Son-in-law
Obilić	Accused of treason by	Brankovic
Becomes hero		Commits treason

Hero	Traitor	Arch-enemy
Obilić	Brankovic	Murad
Churchill	Chamberlain	Hitler

To use the term "traitor" for Chamberlain is inexact and unjust; but certainly that is implied by authors like Leibovitz and Finkel (who argue that Chamberlain actively colluded with Hitler) and indeed with much of the "Guilty Men" school. Chamberlain did not change sides like a traitor, however he is seen as somehow an *enabler* of evil, not the exact equivalent of a traitor morally, but nonetheless a deeply repulsive figure, the one who brought the wolf to the door. Nonetheless this central figure, traitor or enabler, seems to be an essential component, and this is intriguing. Because in terms of factual accuracy, we know that Vuk Brankovic was not a traitor, and one can point out that – however misguided his actions seem in cosy retrospect – Chamberlain was not alone in carrying out the policy of appeasement, and the policy was more popular than will ever be admitted afterwards.

Brankovic was easily identified as a traitor for the simple reason that he survived a battle in which the other leaders died. By contrasting symmetry, Chamberlain was so easily defamed for the very reason that he died (having remained in government until forced to retire due to illness) in 1940.

Theoreticians of myth like Barthes and Lincoln have stressed myth's connotative aspect, and this certainly comes into play during usages of Munich; politicians (see the speech of George W. Bush quoted in section 4.9.1) who use Churchillian rhetoric are not only

associating and aligning themselves with the British wartime Prime Minister, but they are also "proving" themselves the opposite of Chamberlain. Conversely, a politician who accuses an opponent of appeasement is promoting himself to Churchill's role, a *hero* not a *compromiser*. It would be an amusing game if it were not so dangerous.

But it is dangerous, and seeming deep-rooted. The pairing is seemingly very compelling. Noted in the simple table above was the traitor/hero pairing. Certainly others could be added; Ganelon and Charlemagne as told by Roland, and – most famously – Judas and Jesus (who served as quite explicit models for Brankovic and Lazar). To say that these pairings are Biblical is not entirely satisfactory; as though the Bible was cultural bedrock and there was nothing prior to it. One can at least argue that the symmetry is moral, and/or psychological, even and/or aesthetic. Trivial as the last category may sound, one can quote Richard Wollheim:

> It seems natural to me that art is more deeply rooted in human nature than morality, and I am surprised by the fact that philosophers make little of the fact, that though good art is more likeable than bad art, virtuous people do not enjoy this same advantage over those to whom we are drawn primarily for their charm, their gaiety, or their sweetness of nature, or their outrageousness.[418]

Surely the appeal of these pairings – and narratives that embody such pairings – is the sense of moral navigation they offer, their *clarity*.

However, where both cases are most worthy of comparison is their extraordinary degree to which they have been sought after to supply political legitimacy. The twin wells of political authority seem vast; the archetypical figures have become paradigmatic. In this, both are master narratives.

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[418] Wollheim, Richard, *The Mind and its Depths"* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993, Preface.

5. 2 "Everyone has their own madness"

In his book on Serbia, veteran historian Stephan Pavlowitch makes a "Plea for Saint Guy" (that is, Saint Guido, the Saint Vitus of *Vidovdan*) and asks that perhaps he should finally get some time off (and, by implication, Serbia therefore get a healthier breed of politics). Admittedly, Pavlowitch was writing during the despair of the Milošević years, and things have improved since then (although writing in 2013, the jury is certainly still out, certainly as regards to Serbia's willingness to acknowledge Kosovo's independence).

Bogdan Bogdanovic (1922-2010) sculptor and one-time mayor of Belgrade once stated in an interview that "everyone has their own madness, their own Kosovo."[419] Perhaps not everyone, but other peoples have also had to deal with the weight of painful historical experience.

The Polish journalist Magda Jelonkiewicz, the grand-niece of a victim of the Katyn massacre, wrote of the Smolensk plane crash that killed President Kaczyński (and many other prominent Poles on their way to a Katyn remembrance ceremony): "On hearing the news, I thought it just couldn't be true. 'Why is it happening to us? Are we cursed as a nation?' I wondered."

> And there it was. I had fallen victim to the stereotypical perception of Poland. Our history's pages are written with heroic deaths. As children, we were taught that Poland's suffering would help to redeem the sins of the evil world.
>
> The idea of being a victim cemented us as a nation. However, I think it is dangerous to fall into the trap of old-fashioned thinking and view the crash in terms of yet another sacrifice.

Yet for all her desire to be free of the traumatic past, Jelonkiewicz still concludes; "If we have erased our battles, heroic deaths, regimes and uprisings from our national memory – what are we left with?"[420]

For many Serbs, the loss of Kosovo (now actualised by Kosovo's independence) means a similar reckoning: "If we have erased our battles, heroic deaths, regimes and uprisings

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[419] *Novi List,* February 24, 2005.
[420] The Irish Times, April 15, 2010.

from our national memory – what are we left with?" (It is hoped that the above study offers evidence of how formidable such a reckoning will be).

However, one must point out that Kosovo only belonged to Serbia from 1912 until 1999 (when it became an international protectorate and *de facto* independent state) and even not fully for all of that period (if one factors in the occupation regimes of the Second World War).

Political myths can sometimes fall out of use (especially if replaced by another, as happened in the case of Masada, when it was securely institutionalised but then displaced by the Holocaust). The Kosovo Myth may now be losing its instrumental value; Duijzings writing in 2000 stated that "The myth has been discredited by those who have utilised and manipulated it most."[421] That said, and it is hoped that this thesis had offered evidence; political myths can be easily and unexpectedly revived (as was Joan of Arc when circumstances suited).

In the same spirit (as with Pavlowitch pleading for poor Guido), one might ask that our own madness, that is, Munich be ditched, and ask our contemporary statesmen and stateswomen to legitimise their actions on *merit*, not on the borrowed authority of the past.

5.3 To horrify and fascinate

Hans Keller – quoted above –has written about how aspects of the past are imaginative ventures, which may horrify but compel, betraying as he puts it "a desire to repeat in the imagination happenings and events that horrify and fascinate." He continues:

> Both fictional and historical representations are dreamlike in that they express
> some sort of desire, in all the complexity of that term. The pressing need to
> represent the Holocaust in poetry, novels, films, drama, and history must come
> from a desire to repeat in the imagination happenings and events that horrify
> and fascinate. We only represent what we desire. The desire to represent the
> Holocaust however, is not the desire to repeat it as an event, nor necessarily

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[421] Duijzings, 205.

the desire to repeat the form-giving pleasure of representation itself; rather, it is a desire to repeat the Holocaust in a suitably altered form to meet complex, often contradictory, sets of present needs.[422]

The important caveat however, is that the desire is to repeat the event, but to repeat it *in a suitable altered form*. This is almost a perfect diagnosis for the fixation with Munich, and by implications, the war it failed to prevent.

"We do not draw the moral lessons we might from history" wrote Edmund Burke. He went to argue:

> …seldom have two ages the same fashion in their pretexts and the same mode of mischief. Wickedness is a little more inventive. Whilst you are discussing fashion, the fashion is gone by….you are terrifying yourself with ghost and apparitions, while your house is the haunt of robbers.[423]

It had been argued above that the many evocations of Munich seem to betray an immaturity, a form of wishful thinking that seems longs for chance to do what was *not* done in 1938. But that can never happen; "the fashion is gone by".

But given the huge moral appeal of Munich, and the endless appeal of the Second World War as a legitimacy source, I fear we may be stuck with it until something better replaces it; or perhaps something even worse.

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[422] In Fay et al., (eds.), 226.

[423] Burke, 1968 (1790), 247-8.

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