

Vladimir Petrović  
Institute for Contemporary Serbia  
Trg Nikole Pašića 11, Belgrade

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**Ethnopolitics of Death: The Ethnicisation of Cleansing in  
Yugoslavia**

The presentation is an inquiry into the genesis of the term and the practice of “ethnic cleansing”. The visibility the term gained in the course of the collapse of Yugoslavia, both in its Serbo-Croat form (etničko čišćenje) and the translations (eng. ethnic cleansing, de. ethnische Säuberung, fr. nettoyage ethnique, ru. этническая чистка) was a subject to a set of political, legal and scholarly debates about its meaning and feasibility. Already in 1995 ethnic cleansing was described by Ahmed Akbar as “a metaphor for our time”.<sup>1</sup> However, two years afterwards, Slaven and Bartol Letica labeled it “a great fraud of our time.”<sup>2</sup> For more than a decade, the term has been both widely endorsed and widely contested. However, this growing attention went alongside with the scholarly “fog of war”, in which no one was grabbing for the authorship over the notorious term.<sup>3</sup> Its etymology remained elusive. Its analytical usefulness and appropriateness is also questioned. This strain is reflected in an uneasy compromise – some of the authors apply the term, the others use it under quotation marks or avoid it altogether.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmed Akbar, “Ethnic Cleansing: a Metaphor for our time?”, *Ethnic and racial studies*, vol.18, no.1, 1995, 2-25

<sup>2</sup> Slaven Letica, Bartol Letica, *Postmodernity and Genocide in Bosnia. „Ethnic Cleansing“: The Great Fraud of our time*, Zagreb 1997, 26-27

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Miroslav Brant *et alia*, *Izvori velikosrpske agresije* [The Sources of Greater Serbian Aggression] Zagreb 1991; Mirko Grmek *et alia*, *Etničko čišćenje. Povijesni dokumenti o jednoj srpskoj ideologiji* [Ethnic Cleansing. Historical Documents about a Serbian ideology] Zagreb 1993, as opposed to Vasilije Krestić *et alia* (prir.), *Velika Srbija--Istine, Zablude, Zloupotrebe* [Greater Serbia – Truths, Blunders, Abuses], Beograd, 2003; Dušan Bataković, *Le Nettoyage ethnique?* [http://www.rastko.org.yu/istorija/batakovic/batakovic-nettoyage\\_fr.html](http://www.rastko.org.yu/istorija/batakovic/batakovic-nettoyage_fr.html) (1.1.2007)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005; Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia. The Policy of „Ethnic Cleansing“*, College Station : Texas A&M University Press 1995; Klejda Mulaj, *Ethnic Cleansing in the Former Yugoslavia in*

In an attempt to contribute to this debate the presentation focuses on the prehistory of the term. It analyses the current findings that have plausibly connected the discourse of “ethnic cleansing” (etničko čišćenje) of the early nineties with the discourses of “ethnically pure” (enički čisto), which appeared in the context of the Yugoslav late communist policies of ethnicities in the 80’s.<sup>5</sup> Those findings are furthered chronologically, as the presentation reaches out for the interwar period in order to track the amalgamation of two concepts loaded with meanings – the concept of *ethnicity* and the concept of *purity*.

Furthering the investigation into the interwar period benefits from the abundant literature on the Yugoslav experience. The presentation examines the body of literature on the continuities of violence in political culture (to which the usage of the expression “cleansing” for removing the political opponents could be attributed), the literature on the religious aspect of Yugoslav conflicts (with the ritual element of purification through the elimination of other denominations) and the literature concerning the interethnic tensions inherent to a multiethnic state. All the three elements, which have so far received considerable attention, would benefit from the additional insight into the main intellectual trends of the interwar period which contributed influenced the Yugoslav example of “landscaping the human garden”, resulting in the crimes of large scale, aimed towards achieving the desired ethnic composition of population on a given territory. Among those, the course of reception of ethnology and anthropology in Serbia and interwar Yugoslavia is seen as an important intellectual precondition for the amalgamation of discourses of ethnicity and purity, as well as for the articulation of the practice of ethnic cleansing in political language and practice in Yugoslavia during and immediately after the Second World War.

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*the 1990s: A Euphemism for Genocide?*, u: Stephen Vardy et alia, (prir.), *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-century Europe*, Boulder : Social science Monographs, 2003, 693-713; Alfred Rieber, (prir.), *Forced Migrations in Central and Eastern Europe*. Portland, OR : F. Cass, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Krieg-Planque, "*Purification ethnique*". *Une formule et son histoire*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2003; Dražen Petrović, «Ethnic Cleansing – An Attempt at Methodology», *5 European Journal of International Law* (1994) 1.

The specificities of the Yugoslav reception and articulation of the research on ethnicities are revisited in the light of the evolving comparative contributions on the interwar intellectuals currents in the sciences of man and their application in the society, as well as in the light of the recent academic output of Serbian anthropologists.<sup>6</sup> Revisiting the works of early Serbian ethnologist and anthropologist (Jovan Cvijić, Jovan Erdeljanović, Dušan Nedeljković...), and their fixation on the migration of population and the evolution of atropogeography and ethnopsychology is important for understanding the specificities of the dangerous nexus between the power and the knowledge, expressed in the interwar Yugoslavia through a number of “policy papers” regarding the minority policies, and manifested in the immediate postwar period through mass expulsion, colonization and agrarian reform, conducted, among others by Cvijić’s disciples Vaso Čubrilović and Sreten Vukosavljević. In addition to the opening of this research angle, the aim of the presentation is to utilize on the insights of the conference participants on the specificities and similarities of developments in Yugoslav ethnopolitics in comparison to other regional cases, and to track down its possible sources and models in the main European intellectual and political currents of the period.

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<sup>6</sup> Manfred Hettling (ed.), *Volksgeschichten im Europa der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Göttingen 2003; Marius Turda, Paul J. Weindling (ed.), *Blood and Homeland*, Budapest 2006; Ivan Kovačević, *Istorija srpske etnologije I-II*, [History of the Serbian Ethnology] Beograd 2001; Slobodan Naumović, «Romanticists or Double Insiders? An Essay on the Origins of Ideologised Discourses In Balkan Ethnology”, *Ethnologia Balkanica* 2 (1998), 101-120;