

Terrorists And Freedom Fighters

2nd EDITION

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A Narcissus Publications Imprint, Skopje 2004

First published by Central Europe Review
Not for Sale! Non-commercial edition.

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ISBN: 9989-929-29-7

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Created by: LIDIJA RANGELOVSKA
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Terrorists and Freedom Fighters

"'Unbounded' morality ultimately becomes counterproductive even in terms of the same moral principles being sought. The law of diminishing returns applies to morality."

Thomas Sowell

There's a story about Robespierre that has the preeminent rabble-rouser of the French Revolution leaping up from his chair as soon as he saw a mob assembling outside.

"I must see which way the crowd is headed," he is reputed to have said: "For I am their leader."

http://www.salon.com/tech/books/1999/11/04/new_optimism/

People who exercise violence in the pursuit of what they hold to be just causes are alternately known as "terrorists" or "freedom fighters".

They all share a few common characteristics:

1. A hard core of idealists adopt a cause (in most cases, the freedom of a group of people). They base their claims on history - real or hastily concocted, on a common heritage, on a language shared by the members of the group and, most important, on hate and contempt directed at an "enemy". The latter is, almost invariably, the physical or cultural occupier of space the idealists claim as their own.

2. The loyalties and alliances of these people shift effortlessly as ever escalating means justify an ever shrinking cause. The initial burst of grandiosity inherent in every such undertaking gives way to cynical and bitter pragmatism as both enemy and people tire of the conflict.
3. An inevitable result of the realpolitik of terrorism is the collaboration with the less savoury elements of society. Relegated to the fringes by the inexorable march of common sense, the freedom fighters naturally gravitate towards like minded non-conformists and outcasts. The organization is criminalized. Drug dealing, bank robbing and other manner of organized and contumacious criminality become integral extensions of the struggle. A criminal corporatism emerges, structured but volatile and given to internecine donnybrooks.
4. Very often an un-holy co-dependence develops between the organization and its prey. It is the interest of the freedom fighters to have a contemptible and tyrannical regime as their opponent. If not prone to suppression and convulsive massacres by nature - acts of terror will deliberately provoke even the most benign rule to abhorrent ebullition.

5. The terrorist organization will tend to emulate the very characteristics of its enemy it fulminates against the most. Thus, all such groups are rebarbatively authoritarian, execrably violent, devoid of human empathy or emotions, suppressive, ostentatious, trenchant and often murderous.
6. It is often the freedom fighters who compromise their freedom and the freedom of their people in the most egregious manner. This is usually done either by collaborating with the derided enemy against another, competing set of freedom fighters - or by inviting a foreign power to arbitrate. Thus, they often catalyse the replacement of one regime of oppressive horror with another, more terrible and entrenched.
7. Most freedom fighters are assimilated and digested by the very establishment they fought against or as the founders of new, privileged nomenklaturas. It is then that their true nature is exposed, mired in gulosity and superciliousness as they become. Inveterate violators of basic human rights, they often transform into the very demons they helped to exorcise.

Most freedom fighters are disgruntled members of the middle classes or the intelligentsia. They bring to their affairs the merciless ruthlessness of sheltered lives. Mistaking compassion for weakness, they show none as they unscrupulously pursue their self-aggrandizement, the ego trip of sending others to their death.

They are the stuff martyrs are made of. Borne on the crests of circumstantial waves, they lever their unbalanced personalities and project them to great effect. They are the footnotes of history that assume the role of text. And they rarely enjoy the unmitigated support of the very people they proffer to liberate. Even the most harangued and subjugated people find it hard to follow or accept the vicissitudinal behaviour of their self-appointed liberators, their shifting friendships and enmities and their pasilaly of violence.

In this series of articles, I will attempt to study four such groups which operated in the tortured region of the Balkans. I will start with the [IMRO \(VMRO\) in Macedonia and Bulgaria](#), proceed to Serbia and its union with death (["Union or Death", aka the Black Hand](#)), study the [Ustasha](#) in detail and end with the current mutation of Balkan spasms, the [KLA \(UCK\)](#).

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Macedonia to the Macedonians

"Two hundred and forty five bands were in the mountains. Serbian and Bulgarian comitadjis, Greek andartes, Albanians and Vlachs... all waging a terrorist war"

Leon Sciaky in "Farewell to Salonica: Portrait of an Era"

"(Goce Delcev died) cloak flung over his left shoulder, his white fez, wrapped in a bluish scarf, pulled down and his gun slung across his left elbow"

Mihail Chakov, who was nearby Delcev at the moment of his death, quoted in "Balkan Ghosts" by Robert D. Kaplan

"I will try and tell this story coldly, calmly, dispassionately ... one must tone the horrors down, for in their nakedness, they are unprintable..."

A.G. Hales reporting about the Illinden Uprising in the London "Daily News" of October 21, 1903

"The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization directs its eyes neither to the West, nor to the East, nor to anywhere else; it relies primarily on its own powers, does not turn into anybody's weapon, and will not allow anybody to use its name and prestige for personal and other purposes. It has demonstrated till now and will prove in the future that it establishes its activities on the interests and works for the ideals of struggling Macedonia and the Bulgarian race."

***TODOR ALEXANDROV, The Leader of the IMRO
from 1911 to 1924***

The Treaty of Berlin killed Peter Lazov. A Turkish soldier first gouged his eyes out, some say with a spoon, others insist it was a knife. As the scream-imbued blood trickled down his face, the Turk cut both his ears and the entirety of his nose with his sword. Thus maimed and in debilitating agony, he was left to die for a few days. When he failed to do so, the Turks disembowelled him to death and decapitated the writhing rump.

The Ottomans granted independence to Bulgaria in the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano unwillingly, following a terminal defeat at the hands of a wrathful Russian army. The newly re-invented nation incorporated a huge swathe of Macedonia, not including Thessaloniki and the Chalcidice Peninsula. Another treaty followed, in Berlin, restoring the "balance" by returning Macedonia to Turkish rule.

Turkey obligingly accepted a "one country, two systems" approach by agreeing to a Christian administration of the region and by permitting education in foreign languages, by foreign powers in foreign-run and owned schools. Then they set about a typical infandous Ottoman orgy of shredded entrails, gang raped corpses of young girls and maiming and decapitation. The horrors this time transcended anything before. In Ohrid, they buried people in pigsty mud for "not paying taxes". Joined by Turks who escaped the advancing Russian armies in North Bulgaria and by Bosnian Moslems, who fled the pincer movement of the forces of Austro-Hungary, they embarked on the faithful recreation of a Bosch-like hell. Feeble attempts at resistance (really, self defence) - such as the one organized by Natanail, the Bishop of Ohrid - ended in the ever escalating ferocity of the occupiers. A collaboration emerged between the Church and the less than holy members of society. Natanail himself provided "Chetis" (guerilla bands) with weapons and supplies. In October 1878, an uprising took place in Kresna. It was duly suppressed by the Turks, though with some difficulty. It was not the first one, having been preceded by the Razlovci uprising in 1876. But it was more well organized and explicit in its goals.

But no one - with the exception of the Turks - was content with the situation and even they were paranoid and anxious. The flip-flop policies of the Great Powers turned Macedonia into the focus of shattered national aspirations grounded in some historical precedent of at least three nations: the Greeks, the Bulgarians, and the Serbs. Each invoked ethnicity and history and all conjured up the apparition of the defunct Treaty of San Stefano. Serbia colluded with the Habsburgs: Bosnia to the latter in return for a free hand in Macedonia to the former.

The wily Austro-Hungarians regarded the Serbs as cannon fodder in the attrition war against the Russians and the Turks. In 1885, Bulgaria was at last united - north and formerly Turk-occupied south - under the Kremlin's pressure. The Turks switched sides and allied with the Serbs against the spectre of a Great Bulgaria. Again, the battleground was Macedonia and its Bulgarian-leaning (and to many, pure Bulgarian) inhabitants. Further confusion awaited. In 1897, following the Crete uprising against the Ottoman rule and in favour of Greek enosis (unification), Turkey (to prevent Bulgaria from joining its Greek enemy) encouraged King Ferdinand to help the Serbs fight the Greeks. Thus, the Balkanian kaleidoscope of loyalties, alliances and everlasting friendship was tilted more savagely than ever before by the paranoia and the whims of nationalism gone berserk.

In this world of self reflecting looking glasses, in this bedlam of geopolitics, in this seamless and fluid universe, devoid of any certainty but the certainty of void, an anomie inside an abnormality - a Macedonian self identity, tentative and merely cultural at first, began to emerge. Voivode Gorgija Pulevski published a poem "Macedonian Fairy" in 1878. The Young Macedonian Literary Society was established in 1891 and started publishing "Loza", its journal a year thereafter. Krste Misirkov, Dimitrija Cupovski, the Vardar Society and the Macedonian Club in Belgrade founded the Macedonian Scholarly-Literary Society in 1902 (in Russia). Their "Macedonian National Program" demanded a recognition of a Macedonian nation with its own language and culture. They stopped short of insisting on an independent state, settling instead for an autonomy and an independent church. Misirkov went on to publish his seminal work, "On Macedonian Matters" in 1903 in Sofia.

It was a scathing critique of the numbing and off-handed mind games Macedonia was subjected to by the Big Powers. Misirkov believed in culture as an identity preserving force. And the purveyors and conveyors of culture were the teachers.

"So the teacher in Yugoslavia is often a hero and fanatic as well as a servant of the mind; but as they walked along the Belgrade streets it could easily be seen that none of them had quite enough to eat or warm enough clothing or handsome lodgings or all the books they needed" - wrote Dame Rebecca West in her eternal "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon" in 1940.

Goce Delcev (Gotse Deltchev) was a teacher. He was born in 1872 in Kukush (the Bulgarian name of the town), north of Thessaloniki (Salonica, Solun, Saloniki). There is no doubt about his cultural background (as opposed to his convictions later in life) - it was Bulgarian to the core. He studied at a Bulgarian gymnasium in Saloniki. He furthered his education at a military academy in Sofia. He was a schoolteacher and a guerilla fighter and in both capacities he operated in the areas that are today North-Central Greece, Southwestern Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia. He felt equally comfortable in all three regions. He was shot to death by the Turks in Banitsa, then a Bulgarian village, today, a Greek one. It was in a spring day in May 1903.

The death of this sad but steely eyed, heavily moustached youth was sufficient to ignite the Ilinden uprising three months later. It erupted on the feast of Saint Iliya (Sveti Ilija). Peasants sold their sacrificial bulls - the fruits of months of labour - and bought guns with the proceeds.

It started rather innocuously in the hotbed of ethnic unrest, Western Macedonia - telegraph wires were cut, some tax registers incinerated. The IMRO collaborated in this with the pro-Bulgarian organization Vzhovits. In Krusevo (Krushevo) a republic was proclaimed, replete with "Rules of the Macedonian Uprising Committee" (aka the "Constitution of the Uprising").

This document dealt with the liberation of Macedonia and the establishment of a Macedonian State. A special chapter was dedicated to foreign affairs and neighbourly relationships. It was all heart-achingly naive and it lasted 10 bloody days. Crushed by 2000 trained soldiers and horse bound artillery, the outnumbered 1200 rebels surrendered. Forty of them kissed each other goodbye and blew their brains out. The usual raping and blood thick massacres ensued. According to Turkish records, these ill-planned and irresponsible moments of glory and freedom cost the lives of 4,694 civilians, 994 "terrorists". The rape of 3,000 women was not documented. In Northwestern Macedonia, an adolescent girl was raped by 50 soldiers and murdered afterwards. In another village, they cut a girl's arm to secure her bracelets. The more one is exposed to these atrocities, the more one is prone to subscribe to the view that the Ottoman Empire - its halting and half hearted efforts at reform notwithstanding - was the single most important agent of retardation and putrid stagnation in its colonies, a stifling influence of traumatic proportions, the cause of mass mental sickness amongst its subjects.

As is usually the case in the bloodied geopolitical sandbox known as the Balkans, an international peacekeeping force intervened. Yet it was - again, habitually - too late, too little.

What made Delcev, rather his death, the trigger of such an outpouring of emotions was the IMRO (VMRO in Macedonian and in Bulgarian). The Illinden uprising was the funeral of a man who was a hope. It was the ululating grieving of a collective deprived of vengeance or recourse. It was a spasmodic breath taken in the most suffocating of environments. This is not to say that IMRO was monolithic or that Delcev was an Apostle (as some of his hagiographers would have him). It was not and he was far from it. But he and his two comrades, Jane (Yane) Sandanski and Damyan (Dame) Gruev had a vision. They had a dream. The IMRO is the story of a dream turned nightmare, of the absolute corruption of absolute power and of the dangers of inviting the fox to fight the wolf.

The original "Macedonian Revolutionary Organization" (MRO) was established in Sofia. The distinction between being a Macedonian and being a Macedonian-Bulgarian was not sharp, to use a polite understatement. The Bulgarians "proper" regarded the Macedonians as second class, primitive and uncultured Bulgarian relatives who inhabit a part of Bulgaria to the east. The Macedonians themselves were divided. Some wished to be incorporated in Bulgaria, the civilized and advanced society and culture. Others wanted an independent state - though they, too, believed that the salvation of such an entity - both demographic and financial - lies abroad, with the diaspora and benevolent foreign powers. A third group (and Delcev was, for a time, among them) wanted a federation of all states Balkan with an equal standing for a Macedonian polity (autonomy).

The original MRO opted for the Bulgarian option and restricted its aims to the liberation and immediate annexation of what they solemnly considered to be a Turkish-occupied Bulgarian territory. To distinguish themselves from this MRO, the 6 founders of the Macedonian version - all members of the intelligentsia - added the word "Internal" to their name. Thus, they became, in November 1893, IMRO.

A measure of the disputatiousness of all matters Balkanian can be found in the widely and wildly differing versions about the circumstances of the establishment of IMRO. Some say it was established in Thessaloniki (this is the official version, thus supporting its "Macedonian"-ness). Others - like Robert Kaplan - say it was in Stip (Shtip) and the Encyclopaedia Britannica claims it was in ... Resen (Resana).

Let it be clear: this author harbours no sympathy towards the Ottoman Empire. The IMRO was fighting for lofty ideals (Balkan federation) and worthy goals (liberation from asphyxiating Turkish rule). But to many outside observers (with the exception of journalists like John Sonixen or John Smith), the IMRO was indistinguishable in its methods of operation from the general landscape of mayhem, crime, disintegration of the social fabric, collapse of authority, social anomie, terror and banditry.

From Steven Sowards' "Twenty Five Lectures on Modern Balkan History, The Balkans in an Age of Nationalism", 1996 available HERE:
<http://www.lib.msu.edu/sowards/balkan/lect11.htm>

"Meanwhile, the Tanzimat reforms remained unfulfilled under Abdul Hamid's reactionary regime. How effective had all these reforms been by the turn of the century? How bad was life for Christian peasants in the Balkans? In a 1904 book called 'Macedonia: Its Races and Their Future', H. N. Brailsford, an English relief worker, describes lawless conditions in Macedonia, the central Balkan district between Greece, Serbia, Albania and Bulgaria. In the areas Brailsford knew, the authorities had little power. He writes:

'An Albanian went by night into a Bulgarian village and fired into the house of a man whom he regarded as an enemy. ... The prefect...endeavored to arrest the murderer, but [his Albanian] village took up his cause, and the gendarmes returned empty-handed. The prefect ... marched upon the offending village at the head of three hundred regular troops. ... The village did not resist, but it still refused to give evidence against the guilty man. The prefect returned to Ochrida with forty or fifty prisoners, kept them in gaol for three or four days, and then released them all. ... To punish a simple outbreak of private passion in which no political element was involved [the prefect] had to mobilize the whole armed force of his district, and even then he failed.'

Robbers and brigands operated with impunity: 'Riding one day upon the high-road ..., I came upon a brigand seated on a boulder ... in the middle of the road, smoking his cigarette, with his rifle across his knees, and calmly levying tribute from all the passers-by.'

Extortionists, not police, were in control: "A wise village ... [has] its own resident brigands. ... They are known as rural guards. They are necessary because the Christian population is absolutely unarmed and defenceless. To a certain extent they guarantee the village against robbers from outside, and in return they carry on a licensed and modified robbery of their own.'

Self-defense by Orthodox peasants was dangerous: 'The Government makes its presence felt ... when a 'flying column' saunters out to hunt an elusive rebel band, or ... to punish some flagrant act of defiance ... The village may have ... resented the violence of the tax-collector ... [or] harboured an armed band of insurgents ... or ... killed a neighbouring civilian Turk who had assaulted some girl of the place ... At the very least all the men who can be caught will be mercilessly beaten, at the worst the village will be burned and some of its inhabitants massacred.'

It was not surprising that peasants hated their rulers. 'One enters some hovel ... something ... stirs or groans in the gloomiest corner on the floor beneath a filthy blanket. Is it fever, one asks, or smallpox? ... the answer comes ..., 'He is ill with fear.' ... Looking back ... , a procession of ruined minds comes before the memory--an old priest lying beside a burning house speechless with terror ... a woman who had barked like a dog since the day her village was burned; a maiden who became an imbecile because her mother buried her in a hole under the floor to save her from the soldiers ... children who flee in terror at the sight of a stranger, crying 'Turks! Turks!' These are the human wreckage of the hurricane which usurps the functions of a Government.'

Four things are worth noting in Brailsford's account as we consider the prospects for a reform solution to Balkan problems. First, revolutionary politics was not the foremost issue for the Christian population: nationalism addressed the immediate problems in their daily lives only indirectly, by promising a potential better state.

Second, loyalties were still local and based on the family and the village, not on abstract national allegiances. If criminal abuses ended, the Ottoman state might yet have invented an Ottoman "nationalism" to compete with Serbian, Greek, Romanian, or Bulgarian nationalism.

Third, villagers did not cry out for new government departments or services, but only for relief from corruption and crime. The creation of new national institutions was not necessary, only the reform of existing institutions.

Fourth, and on the other hand, mistrust and violence between the two sides was habitual. So many decades of reform had failed by this time. The situation was so hopeless and extreme that few people on either side can have thought of reform as a realistic option."

During the 1890s, IMRO's main sources of income were voluntary (and later, less voluntary) taxation of the rural population, bank robberies, train robberies (which won handsome world media coverage) and kidnapping for ransom (like the kidnapping of the American Protestant Missionary Ellen Stone - quite a mysterious affair). The IMRO developed along predictable lines into an authoritarian and secretive organization - a necessity if it were to fight the Turks effectively.

It had its own tribunals which exercised - often fatal - authority over civilians who were deemed collaborators with the Turkish enemy. It must be emphasized that this was NOT unusual or unique at that time. This was the modus operandi of all military-organized ideological and political groups. And, taking everything into account, the IMRO was fighting a just war against an abhorrent enemy.

Moreover, to some extent, its war was effective and resulted in reforms imposed on the Sublime Port (the Turkish authorities) by the Great Powers of the day. We mentioned the peacekeeping force which replaced the local gendarmerie. But reforms were also enacted in education, religious rights and tolerance, construction, farm policy and other areas. The intractable and resource-consuming Macedonian question led directly to the reform of Turkey itself by the Macedonia-born officer Atatürk. And it facilitated the disintegration of the Ottoman empire - thus, ironically, leading to the independence of almost everyone except its originators.

The radicalization of IMRO and its transformation into the infamous organization it has come to be known as, started after the Second Balkan war (1913) and, more so, after the First World War (1918). It was then that disillusionment with Big Power politics replaced the naive trust in the inevitable triumph of a just claim. The Macedonians were never worse off politically, having contributed no less - if not more - than any other nation to the re-distribution of the Ottoman Empire. The cynicism, the hypocrisy, the off-handedness, the ignorance, the vile interests, the ulterior motives - all conspired to transform the IMRO from a goal-orientated association to a power hungry monstrosity.

In 1912 Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece - former bitter foes - formed the Balkan League to confront an even more bitter foe, the Ottoman Empire on the thin pretext of an Albanian uprising. The brotherhood strained in the Treaty of London (May 1913) promptly deteriorated into internecine warfare over the spoils of a successful campaign - namely, over Macedonia. Serbs, Greeks, Montenegrins and Romanians subdued Bulgaria sufficiently to force it to sign a treaty in August 1913 in Bucharest. "Aegean Macedonia" went to Greece and "Vardar Macedonia" (today's Republic of Macedonia) went to Serbia. The smaller "Pirin Macedonia" remained Bulgarian. The Bulgarian gamble in World War I went well for a while, as it occupied all three parts of Macedonia. But the ensuing defeat and dismemberment of its allies, led to a re-definition of even "Pirin Macedonia" so as to minimize Bulgaria's share. Vardar Macedonia became part of a new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later renamed Yugoslavia).

These political Lego games led to enormous population shifts - the politically correct term for refugees brutally deprived of their land and livelihood. All of them were enshrined in solemn treaties. The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) led to the expulsion of 375,000 Turks from Aegean Macedonia. 640,000 Greek refugees from Turkey replaced them. Each of the actual occupiers and each of the potential ones opened its own schools to indoctrinate the future generations of the populace. Conflicts erupted over ecclesiastical matters, the construction of railways and railway stations. Guerilla fighters soon realized that being pawns on this mad hatter's chessboard could be a profitable vocation. The transformation from freedom fighters to mercenaries with no agenda was swift.

And pecuniary considerations bred even more terror and terrorists where there were none before.

In the meantime, Greece enacted a land reform legislation in "Aegean Macedonia" - in effect, the confiscation of arable land by thousands of Greek settlers, refugees from Turkey. Much of the land thus "re-distributed" was owned by Turkish absentees, now refugees themselves. But a lot of land was simply impounded from its rightful, very much present and very Macedonian owners. The Serb authorities coerced the population to speak the Serb language, changed Macedonian names to Serb ones in brutally carried campaigns and imposed a corrupt and incompetent bureaucracy upon the suffering multitudes.

IMRO never gave up its proclaimed goal to liberate both occupied parts of Macedonia - the Aegean and the Vardar ones. But, as time passed and as the nature of its organization and operation evolved, the perfunctoriness of its proclamations became more and more evident. The old idealists - the intellectuals and ideologues, the Goce Delcev types - were removed, died in battle, or left this mutation of their dream. The IMRO insignia - skull and crossbones - linked it firmly to the Italian Balckshirts and the Nazi brown ones. The IMRO has developed into a fascist organization. It traded opium. It hired out the services of its skilled assassins (for 20 dollars a contract). It recruited members among the Macedonian population in the slums of Sofia. Finally, they openly collaborated with the Fascists of Mussolini (who also supported them financially), with the Ustashe (similarly supported by Italy) and with the Nazis (under Ivan Mihailov, who became the nominal quisling ruler of Vardar Macedonia). It was an IMRO man ("Vlado the Chauffeur") who murdered King Alexander of Yugoslavia in 1934.

All this period, the IMRO continued to pursue its original agenda. IMRO terrorists murdered staff and pupils in Yugoslav schools in Vardar Macedonia. In between 1924-34, it killed 1,000 people. Tourists of the period describe the Yugoslav-Bulgarian frontier as the most fortified in Europe with "entanglements, block houses, redoubts and searchlight posts". Throughout the twenties and the thirties, the IMRO maintained a presence in Europe, publishing propaganda incessantly and explaining its position eloquently (though not very convincingly).

It was not very well liked by both Bulgarians and Macedonians who got increasingly agitated and exhausted by the extortion of ever increasing taxes and by the seemingly endless violence. But the IMRO was now a force to reckon with: organized, disciplined, lethal. Its influence grew by the day and more than one contemporary describes it as a "state within a state". In Bulgaria it collaborated with Todor Alexandrov in the overthrow and murder of the Prime Minister, Alexandur Stamboliyski (June 1923) and in the appointment of a right wing government headed by Alexandur Tsankov.

Stamboliyski tried to appease Yugoslavia and, in the process, sacrifice inconvenient elements, such as the IMRO, as expediently as he could. He made too many powerful enemies too fast: the army (by cutting their inflated budget), the nationalists (by officially abandoning the goal of military expansion), the professional officers (by making them redundant), the Great Powers (by making THEM redundant as well) and the opposition (by winning the elections handsomely despite all the above). By signing the Treaty of Nis (allowing Serb forces the right of hot pursuit within Bulgarian territory), he in effect sealed his own death warrant.

The IMRO teamed up with the Military League (an organization of disgruntled officers, both active duty and reserve) and with the tacit blessing of Tsar Boris and the forming National Alliance (later renamed the Democratic Alliance), they did away with the hated man.

Following the murder, the IMRO was given full control of the region of Petric (Petrich). It used it as a launching pad of its hit and run attacks against Yugoslavia with the full - though clandestine - support of the Bulgarian Ministry of War and Fascist Italy. From Pirin, they attacked Greece as well. These were exactly the kind of international tensions the murdered Prime Minister was keen to terminate and the IMRO no less keen to foster. In the meanwhile, Alexandrov came to an end typical of many a Bulgarian politician and was assassinated only a year after the coup d'etat.

The decade that followed did not smile upon the IMRO. It fragmented and its shreds fought each other in the streets of Sofia, Chicago-style. By 1934, the IMRO was a full-fledged extortionist mafia organization. They ran protection rackets ("protecting" small shop-owners against other gangs and "insuring" them against their own violence). Hotels in Sofia always had free rooms for the IMRO. The tobacco industry paid the IMRO more than a million British pounds of that time in six years of "taxation". Robberies and assassinations were daily occurrences. So were street shoot-outs and outright confiscation of goods. The IMRO had no support left anywhere.

In 1934, it was disbanded (together with other parties) by Colonel Kimron Georgiev, the new Prime Minister of Bulgaria and a senior figure in the Zveno association of disgruntled citizenry. His rule was brief (ended the next year) but the IMRO never recovered. It brought its own demise upon itself. Colonel Velcev (Velchev), the perpetrator of the coup, was swept to power on the promise to end all terrorist activities - a promise which he kept.

The modern Republic of Macedonia is today ruled by a party called VMRO-DPMNE. It is one of a few political parties to carry this name and the biggest and weightiest amongst them by far. It is founded on the vision and ideals of Goce Delcev and has distanced itself from the "Terrorist-IMRO". The picture of Delcev adorns every office in both Macedonia and Bulgaria and he is the closest to a saint a secular regime can have. In 1923, the Greeks transferred his bones to Bulgaria. Stalin, in a last effort to placate Tito, ordered Bulgaria to transfer them to Macedonia. Even in his death he knew no peace. Now he is buried in his final resting place, in the tranquil inner yard of the Church of Sveti Spas (Saint Saviour). A marble slab bearing a simple inscription with his name under a tree, in a Macedonia which now belongs to the Macedonians.

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The Black Hand

"I live and shall die for federalism; it is the sole salvation for the monarchy, if anything can save it."

Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria

The IMRO was a populist organization established by intellectuals (as such groups often do) but staffed by peasant, lumpenproletariat and dwellers of the slums formed by Macedonian refugees all over the Balkans and especially in Sofia. Its members swore allegiance on a bible and a gun - two universally potent symbols. The nationalist-terrorist movement which bore the improbable by-name of "The Black Hand" was no such thing. It was elitist - only members of the officer corps and government officials could join. But the two shared an ethos and methods of operation. The IMRO sought to liberate the parts of Macedonia which were under Greek and Serb control - and the Black Hand (official name: "Union or Death") sought to do the same for Serbs under Ottoman or Habsburg rule. The Black Hand was the precursor of the Great Serbia dream. But whereas the IMRO - at least until 1913 - did not enjoy the support of the state and its mechanisms, the Black Hand was, for a long time, the long arm of the Serb government and the Serb state. To the generation of post-Yugoslavia It is a familiar story. In human affairs, the dream of a Greater Serbia is no less a recurrent nightmare than the numerable German Reichs and Serbia erupted upon the world stage no less frequently and regularly than its northern equivalent.

Serbia, Montenegro and Russia fought a war against Turkey in an effort to capitalize on a Serb peasants' revolt in Bosnia in 1875. The latter were mightily and rather inhumanly oppressed by the local Moslem nobility (enmity has long roots in the Balkans). It was a holy war for the protection of holy (Orthodox) mother church. It was this conflict that led to the Turkish capitulation embedded in the San Stefano Treaty of 1878. It was not the first time that Balkan borders were re-drawn but, with the creation of Bulgaria, extending all the way to lake Ohrid, a few taboos were broken. A new state was created, Russia was introduced as a major player and the Sick Man of Europe (the Ottoman Empire) was in death throes. It also generated a new problem, the Macedonian one. The treaty of Berlin sought to restore the balance but to no avail. The inexorable germination of the nationalistic ideal has commenced. When the Treaty placed Bosnia-Herzegovina under Austro-Hungarian administration and allowed Habsburg garrisons to camp inside Serbia (effectively severing it from Montenegro) - the seeds of discontent blossomed into the evil flowers of violence.

No one cared what the local populace had to say. The Austrian brought roads and railways and modern mining and forestry and industry to this hitherto European backwater. Reversing the Ottoman infliction was no mean feat. Yet, the Austrians chose to rule by division, to motivate through hate and to buy the love of their subjects rather than to earn it.

They befriended the Moslem landlords and pitted the Serbs against each across a denominational divide. This volatile state of affairs was only aggravated by the abolition in 1881 of the Military Frontier, which brought hundreds of thousands of Serbs into the remit of an increasingly and virulently nationalistic Croatia. The Hungarians used this to their advantage by fanning Croat-Serb hostility. After all, they had a historical account to settle with the Serbs who quashed an Hungarian rebellion not 40 years before (in 1848-9) and were awarded with the half autonomous Duchy of Vojvodina, an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary.

The Ausgleich of 1867 (which divided the loot between Austria and Hungary) deprived Vojvodina of its autonomy. The Magyars rushed back in with German and Austrian settlers and immediately embarked upon a massive campaign of forced assimilation. Thus, as Vojvodina prospered with roads and railways and large commercial farms ("the breadbasket of the empire") - it became more hate-riven and explosive. In the Balkans, affluence and commerce seem only to encourage envy and belligerence and neighbourly relations are no barrier to mutual slaughter.

A self-appointed "guardian of all Serbs", the Serbian state willingly engaged in agitation and confronted both other ethnicities and the Dual Monarchy in its quest to safeguard the well-being, welfare, prosperity and equal treatment of the Serbs, all noble goals, no doubt.

Yet instability is contagious, a lesson not learned by Serb politicians. Even as the Bosnian uprising was in progress, King Milan stuck an Austrian knife into its back. He agreed to not foment rebellion in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in return for a free hand in Macedonia and some export concessions for some agricultural produce. In 1885, he acted upon his grandiosity to disastrous outcome. Four years later, he abdicated in disgrace. Not till 1893 was order restored in the person of King Alexander whose most important act was marrying his concubine, Draga Masin in 1900. They were both massacred in June 1903 by disgruntled officers in their own palace and that was the end of one dynasty (the Obrenovic's) and the beginning of another (the Karadjordjevic's). A young officer, a member of the general staff of the army, by the name of Dragutin Dimitrijevic ("Apis" - the "Holy Bull" was his endearing nickname, or, perhaps, the bee, from the Latin root, as Petrovic, the attache to the Serbia legation in London has it in "Black Hand Over Europe" by Heneri Pozzi) planned it all in 1901. Remember this name, his role in our history has only just begun.

As is usually the case, the honeymoon looked both passionate and auspicious. The new King was of the reforming kind and keen on economic progress and wealth formation. Regretfully, his implementation fell short of his intentions. Serbian agriculture lagged behind its more commercialized and industrialized competitors, the population grew relentlessly and rural debts buried the semi-feudal rustic peasantry under its increasing burden.

It is against this background of mounting and mercurial discontent that the "Black Hand" was formed. Attesting to the spreading of the rot throughout the Karadjordjevic state, was its cancerous metastasis through all levels of the army and the government. Apis the regicide was appointed chief of intelligence of the general staff, no less. He later confessed to planning the murders of King Nicholas of Montenegro, King Constantine of Greece, the German Kaiser and King Ferdinand of Bulgaria. How much of it was Balkan delusions and how much reality is still open to debate - but the man relished death and firmly believed in its transforming and catalysing powers. The Black Hand became a state within a state (a feat later emulated by the IMRO). Those bureaucrats and politicians not already members of the shady outfit, obeyed its express or perceived wishes out of terror, more imagined than exercised. The army was entirely in thrall. The accelerated advance of Dimitrijevic through the ranks serves proof of the growing influence of his cankerous outfit. He became professor of tactics at the Military Academy where he taught subversion and terror more than military strategy. By 1913, he was chief of intelligence, as we mentioned and by 1916 he was attained the rank of colonel at the age of 40.

Though formally established only in 1911- the Black Hand cast its shadow long before. It engaged mostly in propaganda and in the seeding of armed bands in Macedonia prior to the two Balkan wars. Its biggest achievement was probably the inception of numerous revolutionary cells among the Serbs of Bosnia.

The longer and more thorough the meddling, the more the languid relationship between Austria and Serbia deteriorated. The former imposed tariffs on the exports of the latter in an aptly named "Pig War". As Serb subversion intensified in Bosnia, Austria annexed it and Herzegovina outright discarding the pretence of autonomy it has maintained. Stymied in one border - the Serbs reverted to another. The Ilinden uprising ignited Slav imagination. Serbia has long hungered after its slice of a dismembered Macedonia and Thrace in a banquet attended by both Bulgaria and Greece. But the fresh atrocities - not devoid of religious and ethnic dimensions - endowed the whole endeavour with an aura of a holy war. This delirium was further stoked by the apparent disintegration of the Ottoman Empire following the revolution of the Young Turks in 1908. Yet, in its drang nach suden, Serbia found itself once more entangled with the Austrians who had their own designs on Macedonia and Novi Pazar. The risk of losing Kosovo and Metohija was very real and the conflict assumed the robes of a crusade, both cultural and religious. To the Serbs the very maintenance of their self-identity and civilization was at stake.

This was the background to the onslaught of the Balkan Wars.

Serbia collaborated with the more potent of its potential enemies (Greece, Bulgaria) in the Balkan League. To cleanse the Balkans of all Turks was the explicit goal of hush-hush treaties and clandestine encounters. The hidden agenda bespoke of Austria. The initial triumphs against the Turkish army (reversing a trend three centuries old) lent an air of inevitable invincibility and divine justice to the whole endeavour. It is interesting to mention that it was little Montenegro which was the first to declare war in almost all Balkan conflicts. Whether as Serbian proxies or because of the contentious nature of the Montenegrins remains unclear. Whatever the case may be, a second war among the winners of the first left Serbia with its agenda fulfilled and with its territory almost doubled. It gained part of the Sandzak, all Kosovo and Metohija and the bulk of Macedonia. Its tax paying population increased by half as much in less than two years. Had it not been for Austria's minacious insistence, Albania would have never been born on Serb occupied territory. The creation of this (artificial, so the Serbs felt) Albanian state deprived Serbia - alone among the victors - from access to the sea. It had another cause for paranoid delusions and deepening sense of victimization at the hands of vast conspiracies. Relegated to the geopolitical sidelines, denuded of their conquests, coerced by a Big Power, the Serbs felt humiliated, stabbed in the back, discriminated against, inferior and wrathful. Frustration breeds aggression we are taught and this true lesson was never more oft-repeated than in the Balkans.

The raging rivalry between an eastward-bound Austria and a defiant Serbia was bound to boil over. The Black Hand was there to provoke the parties into a final test of strengths and willpower. Dame Rebecca West voices her doubts regarding the true intent of the Black Handers in their involvement (which she does not dispute) in the events that followed. Based on all manner of circumstantial evidence and the testimonies of mysterious friends of furtive conspirators she reaches the conclusion that they did not believe in the conspiracy to which they lent their support. The Black Hand went along with the planning and execution of the assassination of Archduke, heir to the throne Franz (Francis) Ferdinand in 1914, disbelieving all the way both the skills and the commitment of the youthful would be assassins.

Perhaps so. Yet there can be little doubt and, indeed, there is no dispute that The Black Hand was introduced to a cabal of plotters called "Mlada Bosna" (Young Bosnia), headed by one Illich and that this introduction was effected by the 22 year old influential Bosnian revolutionary Gacinovic (Gachinovich) who lived in Lausanne in Switzerland. The Black Hander Ciganovic (Tsiganovitch) made contact with one Gavrilo Princip and Chabrinovich and together with another Bosnian, Tankosic (Tankosich). The latter - a self proclaimed sharpshooter - immediately set about testing the sniping skills of his co-schemers in a secluded wood. With the mild exception of Princip, they were no good.

Despite this disheartening display of incompetence (Princip claimed at his trial to have aimed at a general sitting next to the Archduke), the Black Hand equipped them with bombs (of the wrong kind, points West correctly), pistols and suicidal Prussic acid (which didn't work). They were smuggled to Sarajevo by two collaborating border guards. As opposed to rumours, Gavrilo Princip was not a member of the Black Hand, nor was the Black Hand involved in his training. Moreover, the connection between Mlada Bosna and Crna Ruka (Black Hand) was made only a short time before the eventful June 28, 1914.

It was a challenge and on Serbia's national day at that. The Austrians were elated having been handed the excuse to educate Serbia and cut it to size. They issued an ultimatum and the rest is the history of the first truly global conflict, the First World War.

In 1917, in a surprising turn of events, Alexander, the Commander in Chief of the Expatriate Serbian Army in collusion with the Serb premier, Nikola Pasic, arrested Apis and 200 of his collaborators, thus shattering the Black Hand irreversibly. It is always surprising how really brittle and vulnerable these apparently invincible organizations of terror are. The IMRO, after having terrorized Bulgaria for decades and decimated its political elite, was reduced to rubble, bloodlessly, in a matter of a few weeks in 1934.

The same happened with the omnipotent and all-pervasive Black Hand. It vanished in a whimper. In May 1917, Dragutin Dimitrijevic (Apis) was executed together with 2 or 6 of his Black Hand colleagues. Finally it was death, not union that caught up with them. The trial was closed to the public, opaque and hurried. The King apparently believed - or claimed he did - that the prisoners conspired on his life. West testifies in her great opus "Black Lamb Grey Falcon" that transcripts of the trial were banned and that it was forbidden to mention the mere historic fact either in speech or in print. The members of the Black Hand lived secretly and dies mysteriously and meaninglessly.

But the Black Hand - like the IMRO - was a child of the times. The Balkans was perceived to be the gate to the crumbling Ottoman Empire, The coveted prizes were not dirt poor Macedonia or Albania. It was the stepping stone and the springboard that they represented to much vaster territories, to the riches of the orient, to the exotic realms of Asia. All Big Powers and would be Big Powers engaged in the pugilistics of self-positioning. The demise of the Ottomans was imminent and this imminence exerted subtle but verifiable pressure on all the participant in this grubby grabbing game. Additionally, in this fin de siecle, all involved felt doomed. The rumblings of counter-revolutionary Russia, the drang nach Osten of Austria - all were attempts at self re-definition and self-preservation.

Perhaps this explains the outlandish and disproportionate reaction of Austria to the needling of Bosnian terrorism. assertive minorities constituted a direct threat to the very cohesion of Empire. And Serbia blocked the hitherto unhindered path to eastern territories - depriving Austria of lebensraum and raison d'etre. Faced with a limiting event horizon, Austria imploded like a black hole, unto itself.

The driving force behind it all was really Austria and its growing existential angst. It struck a modus vivendi of mutual paralysis in the Balkan with Russia as early as 1897. It lasted ten years in which only Austria and Russia stood still but history defied them both. To its horror, Austria discovered that in its pursuit of glorious and condescending isolation, it was left only with Germany as an ally, the very Germany whose Weltpolitik put it on a clear collusion course with the moribund Sublime Port. Russia, on the other hand, teamed up with a rising power, with Britain, at least implicitly. The abrupt and involuntary departure of the pliable and easily corruptible Obrenovic's in Serbia bode ill to the checks and balances Austria so cultivated in its relationship with the recalcitrant Serbs. Karageorgevic was much less enamoured with Austrian shenanigans. The final nail in the ever more crowded coffin of Austrian foreign policy was hammered in in 1908 when the Young Turks effectively re-opened the question of the administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria.

These territories were always under Turkish sovereignty, the Austrians "discovered" to growing alarm. One solution was to annex the administered units, as Austria's Minister of Foreign affairs suggested. He further offered a trade-off: recognition of Russia's rights of passage through the Dardanelles. The Russians accepted only to be abandoned by the Austrians in the crucial vote. Austria annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina unilaterally - but Russia was still prevented from crossing into the warm waters, its ambition and obsession. Russia learned a lesson: always back your client (Serbia), never back down.

Elsewhere, tensions between the Big Powers were growing and eroded their capability to institute a system of efficacious self-regulation. Armed conflict erupted between Germany and France in Morocco more than once. Britain and Germany were engaged in a naval arms race which depleted the coffers and the social cohesion of both. Italy declared war on Turkey in 1911 and even invaded the Dardanelles. Serbia and Bulgaria struck a bargain to expel the Ottomans from Europe (see above, the Balkan Wars). Thus, with the field narrowing and getting more crowded, an Austrian-Serb Armageddon was all but inevitable.

The irony of it all is that Austria presented the only viable solution to the problem of multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism. The history of the Balkans in the 20th century can be effectively summed up in terms of the contest between the Serb and Hungarian model of co-existence and its Austrian anathema.

The Serbs and Hungarians aspired to ethnically and culturally homogenous states and were willing to apply violence towards the achievement of this goal either by forced assimilation of minorities or by their expulsion or worse. The Austrians proposed federalism. They envisaged a federation of politically, culturally and religiously autonomous entities. This peaceful vision constituted a direct threat on the likes of the Black Hand. Peaceful, content citizens do not good rebels make. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says: "Such is the logic of terrorism: Its greatest enemies are the peacemakers".

The Black Hand did not operate in empty space and was not alone. In 1908 Serbia formed "The National Defence". Its main function was to agitate against the Austrians and to conduct propaganda for the Serb cause. There were other organizations but all of them were contemptuously labelled "intellectual" by Apis, who craved violence.

Ironically, one of the original band of conspirators against King Alexander in 1901-3 was Petar Zivkovic (Zhivkovitch). But he soon separated himself from the Black Hand and joined the White Hand, another group of officers, more moderate, though no less authoritarian. Another King Alexander (who was also murdered but in 1934), King of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed "Yugoslavia"), appointed him Commander of the Palace Guards in 1921 and Prime Minister eight years thereafter.

Zivkovic lost no time in disbanding all political parties and (elected) municipalities. He embarked upon an endless string of show trials of opponents of his dictatorship, communists and anti-monarchists. He introduced a one-party, government-controlled electoral system.

Thus, in an ironic twist of history, the Black Hand came to its own, after all. One of its former members a Prime Minister, a dictator, under a king installed by its slaughterous coup. Black Hand or White Hand - the means disputed, the ends were always in consensus. A Great Serbia for the Great Serbian people.

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The Insurgents and the Swastika

"Even going back ten years it was easy to see something gripping Yugoslavia by the throat. But in the years since then the grip has been tightened, and tightened in my opinion by the dictatorship established by King Alexander Karageorgevitch.

This dictatorship, however much it may claim a temporary success, must inevitably have the effect of poisoning all the Yugoslav organism. Whether the poisoning is incurable or not is the question for which I have sought an answer during two months in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and central Europe."

"Black Hand over Europe" by Henri Pozzi, 1935

THE SIN

Yugoslavia was born in sin and in sin it perished. The King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Alexander I, a freshly self-proclaimed dictator, declared it on October 1929. It was a union of East and West, the Orthodox and the Catholic, Ottoman residues with Austro-Hungarian structures, the heart and the mind. Inevitably, it stood no chance. The Croats and the Slovenes - formerly fiery proponents of a Yugo (Southern) Slav federation - were mortified to find themselves in a Serb-dominated "Third World", Byzantine polity.

This was especially galling to the Croats who fiercely denied both their geography and their race to cling to the delusion of being a part of "Europe" rather than the "Balkans". To this very day, they hold all things Eastern (Serbs, the Orthodox version of Christianity, Belgrade, the Ottoman Empire, Macedonia) with unmitigated contempt dipped in an all-pervasive feeling of superiority. This is a well known defence mechanism in nations peripheral. Many a suburban folk wish to belong to the city with such heat and conviction, with such ridiculous emulation, that they end up being caricatures of the original.

And what original! The bloated, bureaucracy-saddled, autocratic and sadistic Habsburg empire. Hitler's Germany. Mussolini's Italy. Unable to ignore the common ethnic roots of both Serbs and Croats - one tribe, one language - the Croats chose to believe in a vast conspiracy imposed upon the Serbs by corrupt and manipulative rulers. The gullible and self-delusional Cardinal Stepinac of Zagreb wrote just before the Second World War erupted, in a curious reversal of pan-Serbist beliefs: "If there were more freedom... Serbia would be Catholic in twenty years. The most ideal thing would be for the Serbs to return to the faith of their fathers. That is, to bow the head before Christ's representative, the Holy Father. Then we could at last breathe in this part of Europe, for Byzantium has played a frightful role ... in connection with the Turks."

The same Turks that almost conquered Croatia and, met by fierce and brave resistance of the latter, were confined to Bosnia for 200 years. The Croats came to regard themselves as the last line of defence against an encroaching East - against the manifestations and transmutations of Byzantium, of the Turks, of a vile mix of Orthodoxy and Islam (though they collaborated with their Moslem minority during the Ustashe regime). Besieged by this siege mentality, the back to the literal wall, desperate and phobic, the Croats developed the paranoia typical of all small nations encircled by hostility and impending doom. It was impossible to reconcile their centrifugal tendency in favour of a weak central state in a federation of strong local entities - with the Serb propensity to create a centralist and bureaucratic court. When the Croat delegates of the Peasant Party withdrew from the fragmented Constituent Assembly in 1920 - Serbia and the Moslem members voted for the Vidovdan Constitution (June 1921) which was modelled on the pre-war Serbian one.

While a minority with limited popular appeal, the Ustashe did not materialize ex nihilo. They were the logical and inescapable conclusion of a long and convoluted historical process. They were both its culmination and its mutation. And once formed, they were never exorcised by the Croats, as the Germans exorcised their Nazi demon. In this, again, the Croats, chose the path of unrepentant Austria.

Croat fascism was not an isolated phenomenon. Fascism (and, less so, Nazism) were viable ideological alternatives in the 1930s and 1940s. Variants of fascist ideology sprang all over the world, from Iraq and Egypt to Norway and Britain. Even the Jews in Palestine had their own fascists (the Stern group). And while Croat fascism (such as it was, "tainted" by Catholic religiosity and pagan nationalism) lasted four tumultuous years - it persisted for a quarter of a century in Romania ("infected" by Orthodox clericalism and peasant lores). While both branches of fascism - the Croat and the Romanian - shared a virulent type of anti-Semitism and the constipated morality of the ascetic and the fanatic - Codreanu's was more ambitious, aiming at a wholesale reform of Romanian life and a re-definition of Romanianism. The Iron Guard and the Legion (of the Archangel Michael, no less) were, therefore and in their deranged way, a force for reform founded on blood-thirsty romanticism and masochistic sacrifices for the common good. Moreover, the Legion was crushed in 1941 by a military dictatorship which had nothing to do with fascism. It actually persecuted the fascists who found refuge in Hitler's Germany.

Fascism in Hungary developed similarly. It was based on reactionary ideologies pre-dating fascism by centuries. Miklos Horthy, the Austro-Hungarian Admiral was consumed by grandiose fantasies of an Hungarian empire. He had very little in common with the fascists of the "white terror" of 1919 in Budapest (an anti-communist bloodshed).

He did his best to tame the Hungarian fascist government of Gyula Gombos (1932). The untimely death of the latter brought about the meteoric rise of Ferenc Szalasi and his brand of blood-pure racism. But all these sub-species of fascism, the Romanian, the Slovakian (Tiso) and the Hungarian (as opposed to the Italian and the Bulgarian) were atavistic, pagan, primal and romanticist - as was the Croat. These were natural - though nefarious - reactions to dislocation, globalization, economic crisis and cultural pluralism. A set of compensatory mechanisms and reactions to impossible, humiliating and degrading circumstances of wrathful helplessness and frustration. "Native fascism" attributed a divine mission or divine plan to the political unit of the nation, a part of a grand design. The leader was the embodiment, the conveyor, the conduit, the exclusive interpreter and the manifestation of this design (the Fuhrerprinzip). Proof of the existence of such a transcendental plan was the glorious past of the nation, its qualities and conduct (hence the tedious moralizing and historical nitpicking). The definition of the nation relied heavily of the existence of a demonized and dehumanized enemy (Marxists, Jews, Serbs, Gypsies, homosexuals, Hungarians in Romania, etc.). Means justified the end and the end was stability and eternity ("the thousand years Reich"). Thus, as opposed to the original blueprint, these mutants of fascism were inert and aspired to a state of rest, to an equilibrium after a spurt of cleansing and restoration of the rightful balance.

When Serb domination (Serb ubiquitous military, Serbs in all senior government positions even in Croatia) mushroomed into the "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes", it was only natural for dissenting and dissident Croats to turn to their "roots". Unable to differentiate themselves from the hated Serbs racially - they appealed to religious heterogeneity. Immediately after the political hybrid was formed, the Croats expressed their discontent by handing election victories to the "Croatian Peasant Party" headed by Radic. The latter was a dour and devout anti-Yugoslav. He openly agitated for an independent - rustic and pastoral - Croatia. But Radic was a pragmatist. He learned his lesson when - having boycotted the Constituent Assembly in Belgrade - he facilitated the imposition of a pro-Serb, pro-central government constitution. Radic moderated his demands, if not his rhetoric. The goal was now a federated Yugoslavia with Croat autonomy within it. There is poetic justice in that his death - at the hand of a Montenegrin deputy on the floor of the Skupstina in 1928 - brought about the dictatorship that was to give rise to Macek and the Sporazum (Croat autonomy). The irony is that a peasant-favouring land reform was being seriously implemented when a deadlock between peasant parties led to King Alexander's fateful decision to abolish the parliamentary system.

King Alexander I was a good and worthy man forced by circumstances into the role of an abhorrent tyrant. He was a great believer in the power of symbols and education. He changed the name of his loose confederacy into a stricter "Yugoslavia". In an attempt to defuse internal divisions, he appealed to natural features (like rivers and mountains) as internal borders. Croatia vanished as a political entity, replaced by naturally-bounded districts and provinces. The majority of Croats still believed in a federal solution, albeit less Serb-biased. They believed in reform from the inside. The Ustashe and Pavelic were always a minority, the Bolsheviks of Croatia. But King Alexander's authoritarian rule was hard to ignore: the torture of political opponents and their execution, the closure of patriotic sports societies, the flagrant interference in the work of the ostensibly independent judiciary, the censorship. There was bad blood growing between the King and more of his subjects by the day. The Croats were not the only "minority" to be thus maltreated. The Serbs maintained an armed presence in Macedonia, Kosovo, the Sandzak and even in Slovenia. They deported thousands of "Turks" (actually, all manner of Muslims) under the guise of a "re-patriation" scheme. They confiscated land from religious institutions, from the deportees, from big landowners, from the Magyars in Vojvodina and "re-distributed" it to the Serbs. Ethnic homogenization (later to become known as "ethnic cleansing") was common practise in that era. The Turks, the Bulgars, the Germans, the Greeks were all busily purifying the ethnic composition of their lands. But it made the King and the Serbs no friends.

The Serbs seemed to have been bent on isolating themselves from within and on transforming their Yugo Slav brethren into sworn adversaries. This was true in the economic sphere as well as in the political realm. Serbia declared a "Danubian orientation" (in lieu of the "Adriatic orientation") which benefited the economies of central and northern Serbia at the expense of Croatia and Slovenia. While Serbia was being industrialized and its agriculture reformed, Croatia and Slovenia did not share in the spoils of war, the reparations that Yugoslavia received from the Central Powers. Yugoslavia was protectionist which went against the interest of its trading compatriots. When war reparations ceased (1931) and Germany's economy evaporated, Yugoslavia was hurled into the economic crisis the world has been experiencing since 1929. The Nazi induced recovery of Germany drew in Yugoslavia and its firms. It was granted favourable export conditions by Hitler's Germany and many of its companies participated in cartels established by German corporate giants.

King Alexander I must have known he would be assassinated. Someone tried to kill him as he was taking the oath to uphold the constitution on June 28, 1921. For 8 long years he had to endure a kaleidoscope of governments, a revolving door of ministers, violence in the Assembly and ever-escalating Croat demands for autonomy. After the hideous slaughter on the floor of parliament, all its remaining Croat members withdrew.

They refused to go back and parliament had to be dissolved. Alexander went further, taking advantage of the constitutional crisis. He abolished the constitution of 1921, outlawed all ethnically, religiously or nationally based political parties (which basically meant most political parties, especially the Croat ones), re-organized the state administration, standardized the legal system, school syllabi and curricula and the national holidays. He was moulding a nation single handedly, carving it from the slab of mutual hatred and animosity. The Croats regarded all this as yet another Serb ploy, proof of Serb power-madness and insatiable desire to dominate. In an effort to placate the bulk of his constituency, the peasantry, King Alexander established rural credit unions and provided credit lines to small farmers and rural processing plants. To no avail. The insecurity of this hastily foisted regime was felt, its hesitation, the cruelty that is the outcome of fear. The scavengers were gathering.

It was this basic shakiness that led the King to look for sustenance from neighbours. In rapid succession, he made his state a friend of Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania (the last two in the frame of the Little Entente). Another Entente followed (the Balkan one) with Greece, Turkey and Romania. The King was frantically seeking to neutralize his enemies from without while ignoring the dangers from within.

His death lurked in Zagreb but he was travelling to Marseilles to meet it. A vicious secret police, a burgeoning military, a new constitution to legalize his sanguinous regime conspired with a global economic crisis to make him a hated figure, even by Serb Democrats. Days before his death, he earnestly considered to return to a parliamentary form of government. But it was too late and too little for those who sought his end.

The Ustasha movement ("insurgence" or "insurrection", officially the "Croatian Ustasha Movement") was a product of the personal rebellion of Ante Pavelic and like-minded others. Born in Bosnia, he was a member of the Croat minority there, in a Serb-infused environment. He practised as a lawyer in Zagreb and there joined the Nationalist Croatian Party of Rights. He progressed rapidly and by 1920 (at the age of 31), he was alderman of Zagreb City and County. He was a member of the Skupstina when anti-Croat sentiment peaked with the triple murder of the Croat deputies. When Alexander the King dissolved parliament and assumed dictatorial powers, he moved (or fled) to Italy, there to establish a Croat nationalist movement, the Ustasha. Their motto was "Za Dom Spremny" ("Ready for Home" or "Ready for the Fatherland"). Italy the fascist was a natural choice - both because of its ideological affinity and because it opposed Yugoslavia's gradual drift towards Germany. Italy was worried about an ultimate anschluss ("unification or incorporation") between the Reich and Austria - which will have brought Hitler's Germany to Austria's doorstep.

Thus, the Ustasha established training centres (more like refugee camps, as they included the family members of the would be "warriors") in Italy and Hungary (later to be expelled from the latter as a result of Yugoslav pressure). Having mainly engaged in the dissemination of printed propaganda, they failed at provoking a peasant rebellion in north Dalmatia (promised to Italy by the Ustasha). But they did better at assassinating their arch-foe, King Alexander in 1934 (having failed earlier, in 1933). In this the Ustasha was reputed to have collaborated with the fascist IMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) under Ivan Mihailov in Bulgaria. By joining forces with the IMRO, the Ustasha has transformed itself into a link in the chain of terrorist organizations that engulfed the world in blood and flames prior to the onslaught of the greatest terrorist of all, of Hitler. While some versions of the unholy alliance between the Bulgarian-Macedonian outfit and the Croats are unsubstantiated (to put it gently), it is clear that some assistance was provided by both lower Italian ranks and the IMRO. The actual murderer of the King was Mihailov's Macedonian chauffeur, Vlado Georgiev-Kerin. The Ustasha was also known for blowing trains and for attempting to do so on more than one occasion both in Croatia and in Slovenia. King Alexander seemed to have ordered the systematic annihilation of the Ustasha just before his own untimely Ustasha-assisted annihilation. Lt. Colonel Stevo Dutich "committed suicide" in Karlsbad and there were attempts - some successful, some less - on Pavelic in Munich, Percevic in Vienna, Servaci (Servatsi) in Fiume and Percec in Budapest. It was made abundantly clear to the Ustasha that it was an all-out war with no prisoners taken. The King had to go.

It was a strange movement, the Ustashe. Claiming the continuous "rights of state" of the Great Croatian Kingdom under Peter Kresimir and Zvonimir in the 11th century - they nonetheless gave up Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to Italy and, later, accepted a German occupation of eastern Croatia. Composed of frugal ascetics and avaricious operators, merciless romanticists and hard nosed pragmatists, murderous sadists and refined intellectuals, nationalist Croats and Serb-haters who had no coherent national agenda bar the mass slaughter of the Serbs. Thus, it was a social movement of the dispossessed, a cesspool of discontent and rage, of aggression too long suppressed but never sublimated, of justified social and political grievances irradiated by racism, national chauvinism, militarism and sadism. A grassroots reaction turned cancerous, led by a second hand, third rate Hitler-clone. A terrorist organization displaying the trappings of a state in the making. This is not to say that it lacked popular support. Tensions ran so high between Serbs and Croats that daily brawls broke in pubs and restaurants, trains and public places between Serb soldiers and Croat citizens in Croatia. The Ustashe fed on real friction, were charged by escalating tensions, mushroomed on growing violence.

Prince Paul, who acted as regent for 12 years old Peter II, permitted the operation of political parties but did not reinstate parliament. All this time, a Yugoslav opposition of democratic forces included Croat as well as Serb intellectuals and wannabe politicians. Vladko Macek himself - later, the epitome of Croat separatism and the most successful promoter of this cause - was a member. In the 1938 elections, his party - the Peasant Party - won an astounding 80% of the votes in Croatia.

The regent, now much humbled by years of strife and paralysis - bowed to popular opinion so eloquently and convincingly expressed. He backed negotiations with Macek which led to a declaration of Croat independence in everything but name. The Sporazum of August 1939, a few days before the outbreak of World War II, granted Croatia self-government except in matters of national defence and foreign affairs. The Serbs were now disgruntled. The Serb Democrats felt abandoned and betrayed by Macek and his Faustian deal with the dictatorship. All other Serbs felt humiliated by what they regarded as a capitulation to irredentism, bound to have a disintegrative domino effect on the rest of Serbia's possessions. It is a surrealistic thing, to read the transcripts of these vehement and sincere arguments just four days before the world as all the conversants knew it, came to a shrieking end.

When German planes were pulverizing Warsaw, Yugoslavia declared its mock-neutrality. Everybody knew that Paul was pro-German. Even King Alexander before him signed a few secret pacts with the rising, ignore at your peril, Central European force. The Austrian national socialists who were implicated in the murder of the Austrian prime minister, Dolfus, in July 1934, escaped to Yugoslavia and resided openly (though disarmed by the Yugoslav police) in army barracks in Varadzin. In 1935, a fascist movement was established in Serbia ("Zbor"). Fascism and Nazism were not without their attractions to Serbs and Croats alike.

This is the great theatre of the absurd called the Balkans. Pavelic and the Ustasha were actually closer in geopolitical orientation to the Yugoslav monarchy (until Paul was deposed by the Yugoslav army) - than to Mussolini's fascist Italy. They were worried by the latter's tendency to block German designs on Austria. In a region known for its indefinite historical memory and lack of statute of limitations, they recalled how the Italians treated Montenegrin refugees in 1923 (returning them to Yugoslavia in cattle cars). They wondered if the precedent might be repeated, this time with Croat passengers. The Italians did, after all, arrest "Longin" (Kvaternik), Jelic and others in Torino following the assassination of the King. In the paranoid twilight zone of European Big Power sponsored terrorism, these half hearted actions and dim memories were enough to cast a pall of suspicion and of guilt over the Italian regime. Mussolini called Pavelic his "Balkan Pawn" but in that he was mistaken. There are good reasons to believe that he was shocked by the murder of King Alexander. In any event, the free movement of Pavelic and the Ustasha was afterwards severely restricted.

On March 1941, the Crown Council of Yugoslavia decided to accede to the Tripartite Pact of the Axis, though in a watered down form. Yugoslavia maintained the prerogative to refuse the right of passage in its territory to foreign powers.

Yet, no one believed this would be the case if confronted with such a predicament. This decision - to give up Yugoslavia's main asset and only protection - its neutrality - was taken under pressure from the Croats in power at the time. The Pact was already joined by Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. Two days after the Yugoslav Prime Minister (Dragisa Cvetkovic) and his foreign minister signed the Pact in Vienna - they were deposed together with the Regent Paul. The precocious Peter was made King of Yugoslavia by the rebellious officers, headed by General Dusan Simovic. The generals now in charge reverted to Yugoslavia's neutrality and refused to join the British-Greek naval treaty, for example. But what appeared to be spontaneous demonstrations in favour of the conspirators and against the Tripartite Pact erupted all over Serbia. It was a challenge to Germany which it could not ignore. The Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW) issued "Undertaking 25" (against Yugoslavia) and "Case Marita" (against Greece). The Yugoslavs mobilized (albeit with a surprising procrastination), the Germans invaded (on April 6, 1941) and, within 10 days it was all over. The Croats did their best to assist the new forces of occupation, disrupting and sabotaging the best they could army operations as well as civilian defence. It was clear that many of them (though by no means the majority) regarded the Serbs as the real occupiers and the Germans as long awaited liberators.

On April 10, 1941, six days into the invasion, the Germans declared the Independent State of Croatia (NDH, after the initials of its name in Croatian - Nezavisna Drzava Hrvatska). Vladimir Macek, leader of the Peasant Party and Deputy Prime Minister of Yugoslavia called on the people to collaborate with the new government. Overnight, a fringe terrorist organization, (erroneously) considered to be more a puppet of Italy than a true expression of Croat nationalism, found itself at the helm of government in circumstances complicated by internecine rivalries, inter-ethnic tensions, an history of hate and mutual resentment, a paranoia stoked by sporadic violence. The Serbs were evidently a fifth column and so were the Jews. Indeed, Croatia's Serbs wasted no time in joining resistance movements against the Nazis and the NDH. Anyhow, the vacuum created by Macek's surprising passivity and by the Church's abstention - was filled by the Ustashe. The new state included a part of Dalmatia (the rest went to Italy), the region of Srem and the entirety of Bosnia Herzegovina. It was the closest Croatia ever got to re-creating Great Croatia of a millennium ago. Fearful of Croat encroachment, the Slovenes hurried to discuss the declaration of their own state modelled after the NDH - only to discover that their country was split between Italy and Germany. In Zagreb, the enthusiasm was great. The 200 nor so returning Ustashe were greeted back even by their political rivals. People thronged the streets, throwing flowers and rice at the advancing former terrorist and German convoys.

The NDH existed for four years. It had 7 governments - only 5 of which were headed by Ante Pavelic. As opposed to popular opinion, the Ustashe were not a puppet regime, far from it. Both the Italians and the Germans express their continued frustration at being unable to control and manipulate the Ustashe. Despite their military presence and economic support - both Axis powers lacked real leverage over the ever more frantic activities of the Ustashe. Even when it was clear that the Croat NDH - in its genocidal activities - is alienating the Serbs and adding to the ranks of resistance movements throughout Yugoslavia, there was precious little the Germans or Italians could do. They held polite and less polite talks with the top echelons of their own creation but like the fabled Dr. Frankenstein found that the NDH had a life very much of its own and an agenda it pursued with vigour and conviction.

It is impossible - nor is it desirable - to avoid the issue of the mass killings of Serbs, Jews and Gypsies. Some Croats claim that "only" 60-70,000 were killed in Jasenovac and other camps. The very use of the word "only" in this context ought to send a frisson of repulsion down the spines of civilized men. The Serbs, Jewish scholars and many international scholars claim the number was between 300-600,000 people. The reason for the disparity in numbers is that - despite their "German" pretensions, the Croats acted like the least of the barbarous Balkanians in their mass slaughters. This was no industrial affair, replete with bureaucracy and statistics. The massacres were atavistic, primitive, the call of blood and guts and scattered brains. It was an orgy, not an operation.

There is nothing much to tell about the NDH. The regime was busy enacting laws against deadly sins and minor vices (such as pornography). The collaboration with the Catholic Church proceeded smoothly. Laws were passed against the Jews. The NDH army fought the partisans and the Allied Forces. When it tried to surrender to the British army in 1945 - it refused to accept their capitulation and turned them over to the partisans. In a series of death marches army soldiers and civilian collaborators with the Ustashe were deliberately exterminated. The Balkans knows no mercy. Victims become butchers and butchers victims in nauseating turns. By 1944, the NDH lost half its territory either to the Germans or to the partisans. The rump state survived somehow, its leaders deserting in droves. Pavelic himself escaped to Austria, from there to Italy and Argentina. He survived an attempt on his life in 1957 and then fled to Paraguay and Spain where he died in 1959.

THE DEAD

"After all, if the Croat state wishes to be strong, a nationally intolerant policy must be pursued for fifty years, because too much tolerance on such issues can only do harm."

Adolf Hitler to Ante Pavelic in their meeting, June 6, 1941

"For the rest - Serbs, Jews and Gypsies - we have three million bullets. We shall kill one third of all Serbs. We shall deport another third, and the rest of them will be forced to become Roman Catholic."

Mile Budak, Minister of Education of Croatia, July 22, 1941

"There are limits even to love... (It is) stupid and unworthy of Christ's disciples to think that the struggle against evil could be waged in a noble way and with gloves on."

Archbishop of Sarajevo, Ivan Saric, 1941

"Croats no longer think that German troops are present merely to provide peace and security, but that they are here to support the Ustasha regime [...] The Ustashes promote the impression that they act not only in agreement with German instances, but actually on their orders. [...] There is here today a deep mistrust of Germany, because it is supporting a regime that has no moral or political right to exist, which is regarded as the greatest calamity that could have happened to the Croat people. That regime is based entirely on the recognition by the Axis powers, it has no popular roots, and depends on the bayonets of robbers who do more evil in a day than the Serbian regime had done in twenty years."

Captain Haffner to General Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, Plenipotentiary of the Wehrmacht in Zagreb, Croatia, 1941

"Our troops have to be mute witnesses of such events; it does not reflect well on their otherwise high reputation... I am frequently told that German occupation troops would finally have to intervene against Ustasha crimes. This may happen eventually. Right now, with the available forces, I could not ask for such action Ad hoc intervention in individual cases could make the German Army look responsible for countless crimes which it could not prevent in the past."

***General Edmund Glaise von Horstenau to the OKW,
July 10, 1941***

"The horrors that the Ustashi have committed over the Serbian small girls is beyond all words. There are hundreds of photographs confirming these deeds because those of them who have survived the torture: bayonet stabs, pulling of tongues and teeth, nails and breast tips - all this after they were raped. Survivors were taken in by our officers and transported to Italian hospitals where these documents and facts were gathered."

***Commander of the Italian Sassari Division in Croatia,
1941***

"Increased activity of the bands is chiefly due to atrocities carried out by Ustasha units in Croatia against the Orthodox population. The Ustashes committed their deeds in a bestial manner not only against males of conscript age, but especially against helpless old people, women and children. The number of the Orthodox that the Croats have massacred and sadistically tortured to death is about three hundred thousand."

Report to Reichsfuhrer SS Heinrich Himmler from the Geheime Staatspolizei - GESTAPO - dated February 17, 1942

"From the founding [of the NDH] until now the persecution of Serbs has not stopped, and even cautious estimates indicate that at least several hundred thousand people have been killed. The irresponsible elements have committed such atrocities that could be expected only from a rabid Bolshevik horde."

German foreign ministry plenipotentiary representative in Belgrade Felix Benzler to Joachim von Ribbentrop, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Reich

" (In Croatia under the Ustasha) ...over half a million [Serbs] were murdered, about a quarter of a million were expelled from the country, and another quarter of a million were forced to convert to Catholicism."

Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust

(All quotes from "The Real Genocide in Yugoslavia:
Independent Croatia of 1941 Revisited"
by: Srdja Trifkovic, published in:
www.rockfordinstitute.org and in: www.antiwar.com)

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KLA – The Army of Liberation

"(There is a growing tendency among foreign observers) to identify the criminal with the honest, the vandal with the civilized, the mafiosi with the nation."

Former Albanian President Sali Berisha

"They were terrorists in 1998 and now, because of politics, they're freedom fighters"

Jerry Seper, quoting an anonymous "top drug official" who refers to a 1998 State Department report, in the article "KLA Finances War with Heroin Sales", Washington Times, May 3, 1999

"The Albanian villages are much better, much richer than the Serbian ones. The Serbs, even the rich ones, don't build fine houses in villages where there are Albanians. If a Serb has a two-story house he refrains from painting it so that it shan't look better than the Albanian houses."

Leon Trotsky, War Correspondent for "Pravda", reporting from the Balkan Wars, 1912-3

"When spring comes, we will manure the plains of Kosovo with the bones of Serbs, for we, Albanians, have suffered too much to forget."

Isa Boletini, leaving the Ambassadors Conference in London, 1913

"Instead of using their authority and impartiality to restrain terrorist gangs of Albanian extremists, we face the situation in which the terrorism is taking place under their auspices, and even being financed by United Nations means"

Milosevic, March 2000

"Getting history wrong is an essential part of being a nation."

Ernest Renan, French historian

"We spent the 1990's worrying about a Greater Serbia. That's finished. We are going to spend time well into the next century worrying about a Greater Albania."

Christopher Hill, Ambassador to Macedonia, 1999

"There is no excuse for that, even if the Serbs in Kosovo are very angry. I accept responsibility. One of the most important tasks of a democracy is to protect its minorities."

Milosevic to Ambassador Hill who reported to him about atrocities in Kosovo

"I am like a candle. I am melting away slowly, but I light the way for others."

Adem Demaci, political representative of the KLA

BEFORE

The founding fathers of the KLA were Ibrahim Rugova, the pacifist president of the self-proclaimed "Kosovo Republic", established in 1991 - and Slobodan Milosevic, his belligerent Yugoslav counterpart. The abysmal failure of the Gandhiesque policies of the former to shelter his people from the recrudescingly violent actions of the latter - revived the fledgling KLA outfit. Contrary to typically shallow information in the media, the KLA has been known to have operated in Kosovo as early as the attack on policemen in Glogovac in May 1993. Its epiphany, in the form of magnificently uniformed fighters, occurred only on November 28, 1997 (in the funeral of a teacher, a victim of Serb zealousness) - but it existed long before. Perhaps as long as the People's Movement of Kosovo, founded in 1982.

The historical and cultural roots of the conflict in Kosovo were described elsewhere (["The Bad Blood of Kosovo"](#)). Reading that article is essential as this one assumes prior acquaintance with it.

Kosovo is a land of great mineral wealth and commensurate agricultural poverty. It has always languished with decrepit infrastructure and irrelevant industry. Kosovo's mineral riches were looted by Yugoslavia for decades and both Macedonia and Kosovo were the poor relatives in the Yugoslav Federation.

In Kosovo, more than 31% of all those over 10 years of age were illiterate (in 1979) and its per capita income was less than 30% of the national average. Infant mortality was 6 times that in Slovenia. Kosovo was an African enclave in an otherwise Europe-aspiring country. Caught in the pernicious spiral of declining commodity prices, Kosovo relied on transfers from Yugoslavia and from abroad for more than 90% of its income. Inevitably, unemployment tripled from 19% in 1971 to 57% in 1989.

As a result, the Federal government had to quell 3-months long, paralysing riots in 1981. Riots were nothing new to Kosovo - the demonstrations of 1968 were arguably worse (and led to constitutional changes granting autonomy to Kosovo in 1974). But this time, the authorities, reacted with tanks in scenes reminiscent of China's Tiananmen Square 8 years later. The hotbed of hotheads was, as usual, the University in Pristina. Students there were more concerned with pedestrian issues such the quality of their food and the lack of facilities than with any eternal revolutionary or national truths. These mundane protests were hijacked by comrades with higher class consciousness and loftier motives of self-determination. Such hijacking, though, would have petered out had the cesspool of rage and indignation not been festering so ebulliently. Serb insensitivity backed by indiscriminate brutality led to escalation. As the years passed, calls for the restoration of the 1974 constitution (under which Kosovo was granted political, financial, legal and cultural autonomy and institutions) - merged into a sonorous agenda of "Great Albania" and a "Kosovo Republic". The Kosovar crowd was never above beatings, looting and burning. The hate was strong.

Yugoslavia's ruling party - the League of Communists - was in the throes of its own transformation. With Tito's demise and the implosion of the Soviet Bloc, the Communists lacked both compass and leader. His natural successors were purged by Tito in the 1960s and 1970s. The party wasn't sure whether to turn to Gorbachev's East or to America's West. The Communists panicked and embarked on a rampage of imprisonment, unjust dismissals of Albanians (mainly of teachers, journalists, policemen and judges) and the occasional torture or murder. Serb intellectuals regarded this as no more than the rectification of Tito's anti-Serb policies. Serbia was the only Republic within the Federation, who was dismembered into autonomous regions (Kosovo and Vojvodina). "Getting back at Tito" was a strong motive, commensurate with Serb "the world is against us" paranoia and siege mentality. Milosevic, visibly ill at ease, surfed this tide of religion-tinged nationalism straight into Kosovo, the historical heartland of Serb-ism.

Oppression breeds resistance and Serb oppression served only to streamline the stochastic nationalist movement into a compartmentalized, though factious, underground organization with roots wherever Albanians resided: Germany, Switzerland, the USA, Canada and Australia. The ideology was an improbable mix of Stalinism (Enver Hoxha-inspired), Maoism and Albanian chauvinism. This was before Albania opened up to reveal its decrepitude and desolation to its Kosovar visitors. All delusions of an Albania-backed armed rebellion evaporated in the languor of Albania proper. Thus, the activities of the Nationalists were more innocuous than their concocted doctrines.

They defaced government buildings, shattered gravestones in Serb cemeteries and overturned heroic monuments. The distribution of subversive (and fairly bromide) "literature" was rarely accompanied by acts of terror, either in Kosovo or in Europe.

Nationalism is refuge from uncertainty. As the old Yugoslavia was crumbling, each of its constituents developed its own brand of escapism, replete with revenant nationalist leaders, mostly fictional "history", a newly discovered language and a pledge to fate to reconstitute a lost empire at its apex. Thus, Kosovar nationalism was qualitatively the kin and kith of the Serb or Croat sub-species. Paradoxically, though rather predictably, they fed on each other. Milosevic was as much a creation of Kosovar nationalism as Thaci was the outcome of Milosevic's policies. The KLA's Stalinist-Maoist inspiration was in emulation of the paranoid and omphaloskeptic regime in Albania - but it owed its existence to Belgrade's intransigence. The love-hate relationship between the Kosovars and the Albanians is explored elsewhere (["The Myths of Great Albania -Part I"](#)). The Serbs, in other words, were as terrified of Kosovar irredentism as the Kosovars were of Serb dominion. Their ever more pressing and menacing appeals to Belgrade gave the regime the pretext it needed to intervene and Milosevic the context he sought in which to flourish.

In February 1989, armed with a new constitution which abolished Kosovo's autonomy (and, a year later, its stunned government), Milosevic quelled a miners' hunger strike and proceeded to institute measures of discrimination against the Albanians in the province. Discrimination was nothing new to Kosovo. The Albanians themselves initiated such anti-Serb measures following their new gained constitutional autonomy in 1974. Now the tide has turned and thousands of Albanians who refused to sign new-fangled "loyalty vows" were summarily sacked and lost their pension rights (the most sacred possession of "Homo Socialismus"). Albanian media were shuttered and schools vacated when teacher after teacher refused to abide by the Serb curriculum. After a while, The Serbs re-opened primary schools and re-hired Albanian teachers, allowing them to teach in Albanian. But secondary schools and universities remained closed.

These acts of persecution did not meet with universal disapproval. Greece, for instance, regarded the Albanians as natural allies of the Turks and, bonded by common enmity, of the Macedonians and Bulgarians. Itself comprised of lands claimed by Albania, Greece favoured a harsh and final resolution of the Albanian question. There can be little doubt that Macedonia - feeling besieged by its Albanian minority - regarded Milosevic as the perfect antidote. Macedonia actively assisted Yugoslavia to break the embargo imposed on it by the Western powers. Milosevic was not, therefore, a pariah, as retroactive history would have it. Rather, he was the only obstacle to a "Great Albania".

Within less than a year, in 1990, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) was able to claim a membership of 700,000 members. Hashim Thaci ("Snake"), Sulejman Selimi ("Sultan") and other leaders of the KLA were then 20 years of age. Years of Swiss education notwithstanding, they witnessed first hand Kosovo's tumultuous transformation into the engine of disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation. It was a valuable lesson in the dialectic of history, later to be applied brilliantly.

The leader of the LDK, the forever silk scarfed and mellifluous Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, compared himself openly and blushlessly to Vaclav Havel and the Kosovar struggle to the Velvet Revolution. This turgid and risible analogy deteriorated further as the Kosovar Velvet was stained by the blood of innocents. Dr. Rugova was an unfazed dreamer in a land of harsh nightmares. The Sorbonne was never a good preparatory school to the academy of Balkan reality. Rugova's ideals were good and noble - Gandhi-like passive resistance, market economics, constructive (though uncompromising and limited to the authorities) dialogue with the enemy. They might still prevail. And during the early 1990s he was all the rage and the darling of the West. But he failed to translate his convictions into tangible achievements. His biggest failure might have been his inability to ally himself with a "Big Power" - as did the Croats, the Slovenes and the Bosnians. This became painfully evident with the signature of the Dayton Accord in 1995 which almost completely ignored Kosovo and the Kosovars.

True, the West conditioned the total removal of sanctions against Yugoslavia on its humane treatment of its Albanian citizens and encouraged the Albanians, though circumspectly, to stand for their rights. But there was no explicit support even for the re-instatement of Kosovo's 1974 status, let alone for the Albanians' dreams of statehood. In the absence of such support - financial and diplomatic - Kosovo remained an internal problem of Yugoslavia, a renegade province, a colony of terror and drug trafficking. The Kosovars felt betrayed as they have after the Congress of Berlin and the Balkan Wars. Perhaps securing such a sponsor was a lost cause to start with (though the KLA succeeded where Rugova failed) - but then Rugova misled his people into sanguinous devastation by declaring the "Kosovo Republic" prematurely. His choice of pacifism may have been dictated by the sobering sights from the killing fields of Bosnia - and proved his pragmatism. But his decision to declare a "Republic" was pre-mature, self-aggrandizing and in vacuo. The emergence of a political alternative - tough, realistic, methodical and structured - was not only a question of time but a welcome development. There is no desolation like the one inflicted by sincere idealists.

In 1991, Rugova set about organizing a Republic from a shabby office building and the opposite "Cafe Mimoza". His government constructed makeshift schools and hospitals, parallel networks of services staffed by the Serb-dispossessed, capitalizing on a sweeping wave of volunteerism. Albania recognized this nascent state immediately and international negotiators (such as Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance) conferred with its self-important figurehead (for instance, in September 1992). Successive American administrations funnelled money into the province and warnings against "ethnic cleansing" were flung at Yugoslavia as early as 1993. Internally, Serb extremists in both Belgrade and Pristina prevented Serb moderates (like then Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Panic) from re-opening the schools of Kosovo and reducing the massive, Northern-Ireland-like Serb military presence in it. An agreement signed in 1997 by both Rugova and Milosevic to abolish the parallel Albanian education system and re-open all the educational facilities in Kosovo was thus frustrated. Kosovo fractured along ethnic lines with complete segregation of the Serbs and the Albanians. To avoid contact with the Serbs was an unwritten rule, breached only by prominent intellectuals. The "Kosovo Republic" was far from advocating ethnic cleansing or even outright independence (there were powerful voices in favour of a federal solution within Yugoslavia) - but not far from re-inventing an inverted version of apartheid.

It faced the ubiquitous problem of all the other republics of former Yugoslavia - not one of them was ethnically "pure". To achieve a tolerable level of homogeneity, they had to resort to force. Rugova advocated the measured application of the insidious powers of discrimination and segregation. But, once the theme was set, variations were bound to arise.

Though dominant for some years, Rugova and the LDK did not monopolize the Kosovar political landscape. Following a poll in 1998, boycotted by all other political parties, which resulted in the re-election of Rugova as president - the disenchanted and disillusioned had plenty of choice. Some joined the KLA, many more joined Rexhep Qosaj's (Qosje) United Democratic Movement (LBD). The political scene in Kosovo in the 1980s and early 1990s was vibrant and kaleidoscopic. Adem Demaci - the Marxist ideologue of the KLA, a long time political prisoner and the founder of the "revolutionary Movement for the Merger of Albanians" in 1964 - established the Parliamentary Party of Kosovo (PPK) before he handed it over to Bajram Kosumi, a dissident and another venerable political prisoner. The PPK was co-founded by Veton Surroi, the English-speaking, US-educated, son of a Yugoslav diplomat and editor of Koha Ditore, the Albanian language daily. The Albanians are not a devout lot, but even Islam had its political manifestations in Kosovo.

The 1981 demonstrations gave rise to the Popular Movement for Kosovo (LPK). Apparently, it gave rise to the KLA, probably in 1993, possibly in Pristina. Whatever the circumstances, the KLA congregated in Decani, the region surrounding Pristina. Two years after the Golgovac attack - it tackled a Serb border patrol (April) and a Serb Police Station (August) in 1995. Light weapons and a crude bomb were used. The Serbs were not impressed - but they were provoked into an escalating series of ever more hideous massacres of Albanian villagers (the turning point might have been the slaughter by the Serbs of the Jashari clan in Prekaz). Machiavellian analysts ascribe to the KLA a devilish plot to provoke the Serbs into the ethnic cleansing that finally introduced the West to tortured Kosovo. The author of this article, aware of the Balkan's lack of propensity for long term planning and predilection for self-defeating vengeance - believes that, to the KLA, it was all a serendipitous turn of events. Whatever the case may be, the KLA became sufficiently self-assured and popular to advertise itself on the BBC as responsible for some of the clashes - a rite of passage common to all self-respecting freedom fighters.

The selection of targets by the KLA is very telling. At first it concentrated its fiery intentions only upon military and law and order personnel. Its reluctance to effect civilians was meritorious. A subtle shift occurred when the Serbs began to re-populate Kosovo with Serbs displaced from the Krajina region. Alarmed by the intent - if not by the execution (only 10,000 Serbs or so were settled in Kosovo) - the KLA reacted with a major drive to arm itself and by attacking Serb settlements in Klina, Decani and Djakovica and a refugee camp in Baboloc. The KLA attacks were militarily sophisticated and coordinated. Serb policemen were ambushed on the road between Glogovac and Srbica. The Serb counter-offensive resulted in dozens of Albanian victims - civilians, men, women and children (the "Drenica Massacre"). The KLA tried to defend villages aligned along a Pec-Djakovica line and thus disrupt the communications and logistics of Serb Military Police and Special (Ministry of Interior) Police units. The main arena of fighting was a recurrent one - in the 1920s, Albanian guerillas, based in the hills, attacked the Serbs in Drenica.

What finally transformed the KLA from a wannabe IRA into the fighting force that it has become was the disintegration of Albania. History is the annals of irony. The break-up of the KLA's role model - led to the resurgence of its intellectual progeny. The KLA absorbed thousands of weapons from the looted armouries of the Albanian military and police. Angry mobs attacked these ordnances following the collapse of pyramid investment schemes that robbed one third of the population of all their savings. The arms ended up in the trigger-happy hands of drug lords, mafiosi, pimps, smugglers and freedom fighters from Tetovo in Macedonia to Durrës in Albania and from Pristina in Kosovo to the Sandzak in Serbia. The KLA was so ill-equipped to cope with this fortuitous cornucopia - that it began to trade weapons, a gainful avocation it found hard to dislodge ever since. The convulsive dissolution of Albania led to changes in high places. Sali Berisha was deposed and replaced by Rexhep Mejdani, an even more sympathetic ear to separatist demands. Berisha himself later allowed the KLA to use his property (around Tropoja) as staging grounds and supported the cause (though not the "Marxist-Leninist" KLA or its self-appointed government) unequivocally.

At a certain stage, he even accused Fatos Nano, his rival and the Prime Minister of Albania of being the enemy of the Albanian people for not displaying the same unmitigated loyalty to the idea of an independent Kosovo, under Rugova and Bujar Bukoshi, Rugova's money man (and Prime Minister in exile). The KLA was able to expand its presence in Albania, mainly in its training and operations centres near Kukes, Ljabinot (near Tirana) and Bajram Curi.

Albania had a growing say in the affairs of the KLA as it recomposed itself - it was instrumental in summoning the KLA to Rambouillet, for instance.

This armed revelry coupled with the rising fortunes of separatism, led Robert Gelbard, the senior US envoy to the Balkan to label the KLA - "a terrorist organization". The Serbs took this to mean a licence to kill, which they exercised dutifully in Drenica. Promptly, the USA changed course and the indomitable Madeleine Albright switched parties, saying: "We are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with in Bosnia".

This stern consistency was followed by a tightening of the embargo against Yugoslavia and by a threat of unilateral action. For the first time in history, the Kosovars finally had a sponsor - and what a sponsor! The mightiest of all. As for Milosevic, he felt nauseatingly betrayed. Not only was he not rewarded for his role as the Dayton peacemaker - he was faced with new sanctions, an ultimatum and a direct threat on the very perpetuation of his regime.

The KLA mushroomed not because it attacked Serbs (very sporadically and to a minuscule effect). It ballooned because it delivered where Rugova didn't even promise. It delivered an alliance with the USA against the hated Serbs. It delivered weapons. It delivered hope and a plan. It delivered vengeance, the self-expression of the downtrodden. It was joined by near and far and, by its own reckoning, its ranks swelled to 50,000 warriors. More objective experts put the figure of active fighters at one fourth this number. Still, it is an impressive number in a population of 1.7 million Albanians.

During the war, it was joined by 400 overweight suburbanites from North America, Albanian volunteers within an "Atlantic Brigade". It also absorbed Albanians with rich military experience from Serbia and Croatia as well as foreign mercenaries and possibly "Afghanis" (the devout Moslem veterans of the wars in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Bosnia).

The influx of volunteers put pressure on the leadership - both organizational and pecuniary. The KLA - an entrepreneurial start up of insurgency - had matured into a national brand of guerilla. It revamped itself, creating directorates, offices and officers, codes and procedures, a radio station and a news agency, an electronic communications interception unit, a word of mouth messenger service and a general military staff, headed since February 1999 by "Sultan" and divided to seven operational zones. In short, it reacted to changing fortunes by creating a bureaucracy. Concurrently, it armed itself to its teeth with more sophisticated weapons than ever before (though it was still short of medical supplies, ammunition and communications equipment). The KLA now had shoulder-fired anti-tank rocket launchers (like the German "Armburst"), mortars, recoilless rifles, anti-aircraft machine-guns and automatic assault rifles. Some of the weapons were even bought from Serb army officers or imported through Hungary. All this required a financial phase transition. That the KLA has benefited, directly and knowingly, from money tainted by drug trafficking and smuggling of both goods and people across borders - can be in little doubt. But I find the proposition that the KLA itself has traded in drugs unlikely.

The long-established Albanian clans which control the "Balkan Route" - the same clans that faced down the fearsome Turkish gangs on their own turf - would have never let an upstart such as the KLA take over any of their territory and its incumbent profits.

The KLA might have traded weapons. It might have dabbled in smuggling. It might have received donations from drug lords. In this, it is no different from all major modern guerilla movements. But it did not peddle drugs - not because of moral scruples but because of the lethal competition it would have encountered. That the KLA had to resort to such condemnable methods of financing is not surprising. Rugova refused to share with it the funds abroad managed by Bujar Bukoshi on behalf of the "Kosovar People". It had no other means of income and, as opposed to Rugova, it could act only clandestinely and surreptitiously. The West was no great help either - contrary to the myth spun by the Serbs.

Another source of income was the 3% "War Tax" levied on 500,000 Kosovar Albanians and their businesses in the diaspora (though most of it ended up under Bukoshi's and Rugova's control). Officially collected by the People's Movement of Kosovo, the ultimate use of the proceeds was the sustenance of the shadow republic. The KLA made use of the voluntary and not so voluntary donations to the Swiss-based fund "Homeland Calls" (or "Motherland is Calling").

The USA - the pragmatic superpower that it is - began to divert its attention from the bumbling and hapless Rugova to the emerging KLA.

The likes of Gelbard and, his senior, Richard Holbrooke, held talks with its youthful political director, Hashim Thaci - suave, toggled up and earnest, he was just what the doctor ordered. To discern that a showdown in Kosovo was near required no prophetic powers. The KLA might come handy to espy the land and to divert the Serb forces should the need arise.

"The Clinton administration has diligently put everything in place for intervention. In fact, by mid-July US-NATO planners had completed contingency plans for intervention, including air strikes and the deployment of ground troops. All that was missing was a sufficiently brutal or tragic event to trigger the process. As a senior Defence Department official told reporters on July 15, 'If some levels of atrocities were reached that would be intolerable, that would probably be a trigger.'" - wrote Gary Dempsey from the Cato Institute in October 1998. The author of this article published another one in the "Middle East Times" in August 1998 in which the Kosovo conflict was delineated in reasonably accurate detail (["The Plight of the Kosovar"](#)). The article was written in April 1998 - by which time the outline of things to come was plain.

All along, the KLA prepared itself to be a provisional government in-waiting. It occupied regions of Kosovo, established roadblocks, administration, welfare offices. Its members operated nocturnally. The Serb reaction got ever harsher until finally it threatened not only to wipe the KLA out of existence but also to depopulate the parts of the province controlled by it. In September 1998, NATO threatened air strikes against Serbia, following reports of a massacre of women and children in the village of Gornje Obrinje.

This led to the October 20th agreement with Belgrade, which postulated a reduction in the levels of Yugoslav troops in the province.

The KLA was all but ignored in these events. Rugova was not. He was often consulted by the American negotiators and treated like a head of state. The message was deafeningly clear: the KLA was a pawn on the chessboard of war. It had no place where the civilized and the responsible tread. It had no *raison d'être* in peacetime. It reacted by hitting a number of "Serb collaborators" (mostly of Gorani extract - Muslim Slavs who speak a dialect of Albanian). One of the disposed was Enver Maloku, Rugova's close associate.

On January 15, 1999, in the village of Racak, someone murdered scores of people and dumped them by the roadside. The KLA blamed the Serbs. The Serbs blamed the KLA and William Walker, the head of the OSCE observer team. The media reports were inconclusive. While everyone was fighting over the smouldering bodies, NATO was preparing to attack and Walker withdrew his observer team from Kosovo into an increasingly reluctant and enraged Macedonia. Faced with sovereignty-infringing and regime-destabilizing demands at Rambouillet, the Serbs declined. Under pressure and after days of consultations, the Albanian delegation accepted the dictated draft agreement hesitatingly. In the absence of the predicted Serb capitulation, "Operation Allied Forces" commenced.

Rambouillet was a turning point for the KLA. Evidently on the verge of war, the USA reverted to its preferences of yore.

The KLA, a more useful ally on the ground in battle, took over from the LDK as the US favourite. At the behest of the United States, KLA representatives not only were present, but headed the Kosovar negotiating team. Thaci took some convincing and shuttling between Rambouillet, Switzerland and Kosovo - but finally, in March, he accepted the terms of the agreement with a sombre Rugova in tow. These public acts of statesmanship: negotiating, bargaining and, finally, accepting graciously - cemented the role and image of the KLA as not only a military outfit but also a political organization with the talent and wherewithal to lead the Kosovars. Rugova's position was never more negligible and marginal.

AFTER

"The KLA will transform in many directions, not just a military guard. One part will become part of the police, one part will become civil administration, one part will become the Army of Kosovo, as a defence force. Finally, a part will form a political party."

Agim Ceku, KLA CDR

The Western media hit a nadir of bias and unprofessional sycophancy during the Kosovo crisis. It, therefore, remains unclear who pulled whose strings. The KLA was seen to be more adept at spin doctoring than hubris-infested NATO. It started the war as an outcast and ended it as an ally of NATO on the ground and the real government of a future Kosovo. It capitalized ingeniously on Rugova's mysterious disappearance and then on his, even less comprehensible, refusal to visit the refugee camps and to return to liberated Kosovo.

It interfaced marvellously with both youthful prime ministers - Albania's Pandeli Majko and Macedonia's Ljubco Georgievski. This new-found camaraderie ended in a summit with the latter, organized by Arben Xhaferi (Dzaferi), an influential Albanian coalition partner in Macedonia (and, many say, Thaci's business partner in Kosovo). Georgievski, who did more for Macedonia's regional integration and amicable relationships with its neighbours than all the previous governments of Macedonia combined - did not hesitate to shake the hand of the political leader of an organization still decried by his own Interior Ministry as "terrorist".

It was a gamble - bold and, in hindsight, farsighted - but still, a gamble. Rugova himself was not accorded such an honour when he finally passed through Macedonia, on his way to his demolished homeland.

During the war, the KLA absorbed new recruits from Macedonia (many Macedonian Albanians died in battle in the fields of Kosovo), from Germany, Switzerland, the USA, Australia and some Moslem countries. In other words, it was internationalized. It was equipped (though only niggardly) by the West. And it coped with the double task of diplomacy (Thaci's famous televised discussions with Madeleine Albright, for instance) and political organization. It was engaged in field guerilla warfare and reconnaissance without the proper training for either. Add to this tactical military co-ordination and the need to integrate a second, Rugova and Berisha sponsored Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo (FARK) and the KLA seems to have been taxed to its breaking point. Cracks began to appear and it was downhill ever since. Never before was such an enormous political capital wasted so thoroughly in so short a time by so few.

One must not forget that victory was not assured until the last moment. The West's reluctance to commit ground troops to the escalating conflict - as mass expulsions cum sporadic massacres of the indigenous population by the Serbs were taking place - was considered by many KLA fighters to have been a violation of a "Besa" (the sacred Albanian vow) given to them by NATO.

Opinions regarding the grand strategy of conducting the war differed strongly. The agreement with Milosevic that ended the war did not mention any transition period at the end of which the Kosovars will decide their fate in a referendum. It felt like betrayal. At the beginning, there was strong, grassroots resistance to disarmament. Many Kosovars felt that the advantage obtained should be pressed to the point of independence or at least, a transition period.

Then, when the dust settled, the spoils of war served to widen the rifts. Internecine fighting erupted and is still afoot. The occasional murder served to delineate the territories of each commander and faction within the strained KLA. Everything was and is subject to fluid arrangements of power and profit sharing - from soft drink licences, through cigarette smuggling and weapons dealing and down to the allocation of funds (some of them still of dubious sources). The situation was further compounded by the invasion of criminal elements from Albania proper. The Kosovar crime clans were effected by the war (though their activities never really ceased) and into the vacuum gushed Albanian organized and ruthless crime.

But contrary to media-fostered popular images - crime was but one thread in the emerging tapestry of the new Kosovo.

Other, no less critical issues were and are demilitarization and self-government.

Albanians and Serbs have more in common than they care to admit. Scattered among various political entities, both nations came up with a grandiose game plan - Milosevic's "Great Serbia" and the KLA's "Great Albania". The idea, in both cases, was to create an ethnically homogeneous state by shifting existing borders, incorporating hitherto excluded parts of the nation and excluding hitherto included minorities. Whereas Milosevic had at his disposal the might of the Yugoslav army (or, so he thought) - the Albanians had only impoverished and decomposing Albania to back them. Still, the emotional bond that formed, fostered by a common vision and shared hope - is intact. Albanian flags fly over Albanian municipalities in Kosovo and in Macedonia.

The possession of weapons and self-government have always been emblematic of the anticipated statehood of Kosovo. Being disarmed and deprived of self-governance was, to the Albanians, a humiliating and enraging experience, evocative of earlier, Serb-inflicted, injuries. Moreover, it was indicative of the perplexed muddle the West is mired in - officially, Kosovo is part of Yugoslavia. But it is also occupied by foreign forces and has its own customs, currency, bank licensing, entry visas and other insignia of sovereignty (shortly, even an internet domain, KO).

This quandary is a typically anodyne European compromise which is bound to ferment into atrabilious discourse and worse. The Kosovars - understandably - will never accept Serb sovereignty or even Serb propinquity willingly. Ignoring the inevitable, tergiversating and equivocating have too often characterized the policies of the Big Powers - the kind of behaviour that turned the Balkan into the morass that it is today.

It is, therefore, inconceivable that the KLA has disbanded and disarmed or transformed itself into the ill-conceived and ill-defined "Kosovo Protection Corps" (headed by former KLA commander and decorated Croat Lieutenant General, Agim Ceku and charged with fire fighting, rescue missions and the like). Thousands of KLA members found jobs (or scholarships, or seed money) through the International Organization for Migration (IOM). But, in all likelihood, the KLA still maintains clandestine arms depots (intermittently raided by KFOR), strewn throughout Kosovo and beyond. Its chain of command, organizational structure, directorates, operational and assembly zones and general staff are all viable. I have no doubt - though little proof - that it still trains and prepares for war. It would be mad not to in this state of utter mayhem. The emergence of the "Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac" (all towns beyond Kosovo's borders, in Serbia, but with an Albanian majority) is a harbinger.

Its soldiers even wear badges in the red, black and yellow KLA colours. The enemies are numerous: the Serbs (should Kosovo ever be returned to them), NATO and KFOR (should they be charged with the task of reintegrating Serbia), perhaps more moderate Albanians with lesser national zeal or Serb-collaborators (like Zemail Mustafi, the Albanian vice president of the Bujanovac branch of President Slobodan Milosevic's ruling Socialist Party, who was assassinated three months ago). Moreover, the very borders of Kosovo are in dispute. The territory known to its inhabitants as "Eastern Kosovo" now comprises 70,000 Albanians, captives in a hostile Serbia. Yet, "Eastern Kosovo" was never part of the administrative province of Kosovo. The war is far from over.

In the meantime, life is gradually returning to normal in Kosovo itself. Former KLA fighters engage in all manner of odd jobs - from shovelling snow in winter to burning bushes in summer. Even the impossible Joint Administrative Council (Serbs, Albanians and peacekeepers) with its 19 departments, convenes from time to time. The periodic resignation of the overweening Bernard Kouchner aside, things are going well. A bank has been established, another one is on its way. Electricity is being gradually restored and so are medical services and internet connections. Downtown Pristina is reconstructed by Albanians from Switzerland.

Such normalization can prove lethal to an organization like the KLA, founded on strife and crisis as it is. If it does not transform itself into a political organization in a convincing manner - it might lose its members to the more alluring pastures of statecraft. The local and general elections so laboriously (and expensively) organized in Kosovo are the KLA's first real chance at transformation. It failed at its initial effort to establish a government (together with Qosaj's Democratic Union Movement, an umbrella organization of parties in opposition to Rugova and with Hashim Thaci as its Prime Minister). Overruled by UNMIK (United Nations Mission In Kosovo), opposed by Berisha's Democratic Party, recognized only by Albania and the main Albanian party in Macedonia and bereft of finances, it was unable to imbue structure with content and provide the public goods a government is all about. The KLA was so starved for cash that it was unable even to pay the salaries of its own personnel. Many criminals caught in the act claimed to be KLA members in dire financial straits. Ineptitude and insolvency led to a dramatic resurgence in the popularity of the hitherto discarded Rugova. The KLA then failed to infiltrate existing structures of governance erected by the West (like the Executive Council) - or to duplicate them. Thaci's quest to become deputy-Kouchner was brusquely rebuffed. The ballot box seems now to be the KLA's only exit strategy. The risk is that electoral loss will lead to alienation and thuggery if not to outright criminality. It is a fine balancing act between the virtuous ideals of democracy and the harsh constraints of realpolitik.

At this stage and with elections looming, Hashim Thaci sounds conciliatory tones. He is talking about a common (Albanian and Serb) resolution of the division of Mitrovica and the problem of missing persons. But even he knows that multi-ethnicity is dead and that the best that can be hoped for is tolerant co-existence. His words are, therefore, intended to curry favour with the West out of the misguided and naive belief that the key to Kosovo's future lies there rather than in the will of the Kosovar people. Western aid is habit forming and creates dependence and the KLA consumed a lot of it. Politically, the KLA has not yet pupated. Recently, it has embarked on a spate of coalition-forming, initially with Bardhyl Mahmuti of the Democratic Progressive Party of Kosovo (PPDK) - the former KLA representative in Western Europe. It seeks to marry its dwindling funds and seat at the West's banquet with the reputation and clout of the PPDK's local dignitaries.

This coveted and negotiable access to Western structures of government bears some elaboration. Kosovar parties and individuals present at the Rambouillet talks were entitled, according to the Rambouillet Agreement and UN General Resolution 1244, to serve, together with UNMIK delegates, on a Kosovo Transitional Council (KTC).

Thus, when KTC was formed in the wake of Operation Allied Force, it was made of Rugova's LDK, Thaci's KLA, and Rexhep Qosaj's (Qosje) Democratic Union League. There was a token Serb and two independents - the aforementioned Veton Surroi and Blerim Shala, editor-in-chief of the Pristina weekly Zeri.

Many newly-formed political parties, such as Mahmuti's were left out of the KTC and the Executive Council (which is made of one representative of each of the four largest Kosovar political parties plus four representatives from UNMIK). This - a seat at the cherished table - seems to be the only tangible asset of the KLA. But it came at a dear price. The Executive Council virtually paralysed Thaci's self-proclaimed and self-appointed government, absorbing many of its ministers and officials with lucrative offers of salaries and budgets. Thaci himself had to give up a part of the plethora of his self-bestowed titles. This move again proves Thaci's simplistic perception that to win elections in Kosovo one needs to be seen to be a friend of the West. I have no doubt that this photo-opportunity brand of politics will backfire. The KLA's popularity among the potential electorate is at a nadir and it is being accused of venality, incompetence and outright crime. A lasting transformation of such an image cannot be attained by terpsichorean supineness. To regain its position, the KLA must regenerate itself and revert to its grassroots. It must dedicate equal time to diplomacy and to politics. It must identify its true constituency - and it is by no means UNMIK. Above all, it must hone its skills of collaboration and compromise. Politics - as opposed to warfare - are never a zero sum game. The operative principle is "live and let live" rather than "shoot first or die". A mental transformation is required, an adjustment of codes of conduct and principles of thought. Should the KLA find in itself the flexibility and intellectual resources - rare commodities in ideological movements - needed to achieve this transition, it might still compose the first government of an independent Kosovo. If it were to remain intransigent and peevish - it is likely to end up being barely a bloody footnote in history. [Return](#)

Narcissists, Group Behaviour,
and Terrorism
Interview with Sam Vaknin
Published in ["The Idler"](#)

[Sam Vaknin](#) is the author of '[Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited](#)', owner of the [Narcissistic Abuse Study List](#), and webmaster of the [Narcissistic Personality Disorder Topic in Suite101](#). He is also an economic and political analyst for [United Press International](#) (UPI).

1. What is pathological narcissism?

All of us have **narcissistic TRAITS**. Some of us even develop a **narcissistic PERSONALITY**. Moreover, narcissism is a **SPECTRUM of behaviours** - from the healthy to the utterly pathological (known as the [Narcissistic Personality Disorder, or NPD](#)).

The DSM IV uses this language:

"An all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behaviour), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning by early adulthood and present in various contexts."

Here are the 9 criteria. Having 5 of these 9 "qualifies" you as a narcissist...

1. Feels grandiose and self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents to the point of lying, demands to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)
2. Is obsessed with fantasies of unlimited success, fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled brilliance (the cerebral narcissist), bodily beauty or sexual performance (the somatic narcissist), or ideal, everlasting, all-conquering love or passion
3. Firmly convinced that he or she is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, should only be treated by, or associate with, other special or unique, or high-status people (or institutions)
4. Requires excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation - or, failing that, wishes to be feared and to be notorious (narcissistic supply).
5. Feels entitled. Expects unreasonable or special and favourable priority treatment. Demands automatic and full compliance with his or her expectations
6. Is "interpersonally exploitative", i.e., uses others to achieve his or her own ends

7. Devoid of empathy. Is unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge the feelings and needs of others
8. Constantly envious of others or believes that they feel the same about him or her
9. Arrogant, haughty behaviours or attitudes coupled with rage when frustrated, contradicted, or confronted.

The language in the criteria above is based on or summarized from:

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). **Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fourth edition** (DSM IV). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Sam Vaknin. (1999, 2001). [Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited, second, revised printing](http://samvak.tripod.com/faq1.html) Prague and Skopje: Narcissus Publications. ("Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited"
<http://samvak.tripod.com/faq1.html>)

More Data About Pathological Narcissists

- Most narcissists (75%) are men.
- NPD (=the Narcissistic Personality Disorder) is one of a "family" of personality disorders (formerly known as "Cluster B"). Other members: Borderline PD, Antisocial PD and Histrionic PD.
- NPD is often diagnosed with other mental health disorders ("co-morbidity") - or with substance abuse, or impulsive and reckless behaviours ("dual diagnosis").
- NPD is new (1980) mental health category in the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM).

- There is only scant research regarding narcissism. But what there is has not demonstrated any ethnic, social, cultural, economic, genetic, or professional predilection to NPD.
- It is estimated that 0.7-1% of the general population suffer from NPD.
- Pathological narcissism was first described in detail by Freud. Other major contributors are: Klein, Horney, Kohut, Kernberg, Millon, Roningstam, Gunderson, Hare.
- The onset of narcissism is in infancy, childhood and early adolescence. It is commonly attributed to childhood abuse and trauma inflicted by parents, authority figures, or even peers.
- There is a whole range of narcissistic reactions - from the mild, reactive and transient to the permanent personality disorder.
- Narcissists are either "Cerebral" (derive their narcissistic supply from their intelligence or academic achievements) - or "Somatic" (derive their narcissistic supply from their physique, exercise, physical or sexual prowess and "conquests").
- Narcissists are either "Classic" - see definition below - or they are "Compensatory", or "Inverted" - see definitions here: ["The Inverted Narcissist"](#).
- NPD is treated in talk therapy (psychodynamic or cognitive-behavioural). The prognosis for an adult narcissist is poor, though his adaptation to life and to others can improve with treatment. Medication is applied to side-effects and behaviours (such as mood or affect disorders and obsession-compulsion) - usually with some success.

2. Human collectives (nations, professions, ethnic groups) and narcissism - stereotyping or racism?

Having lived in 12 countries in 3 continents now, I firmly believe in "mass psychopathology", or in ethnopsychology. The members of a group - if sufficiently cohesive - tend to react similarly to circumstances. By "cohesive" I mean, if they share the same mental world ("Weltanschauung") - possibly the same history, the same language or dialect, the same hopes, folklore, fears, and aspirations ("agenda"), the same enemies and so on.

Thus, if recurrently traumatized or abused by external or internal forces, a group of people may develop the mass equivalent of pathological narcissism as a defence or compensatory mechanism. By "abuse" and "trauma" I mean any event, or series of events, or circumstances, which threaten the self identity, self image, sense of self worth, and self esteem of the collective consistently and constantly - though often arbitrarily and unpredictably. Human collectives go through formation, individuation, separation - all the phases in individual psychological development. A disturbance in the natural and unhindered progression of these phases is likely to result in psychopathology of all the members of the collective. Being subjugated to another nation, being exiled, enduring genocide, being destitute, being defeated in warfare - are all traumatic experiences with far reaching consequences.

The members of the collective form a "condensate" (in physical terms) - a material in which all the atoms vibrate with the same frequency. Under normal circumstances, group behaviour resembles diffuse light. Subject to trauma and abuse - it forms a malignant laser - a strong, same wavelength, potentially destructive beam. The group becomes abusive to others, exploitative, detached from reality, bathed in grandiose fantasies, xenophobic, lacking empathy, prone to uncontrolled rages, over-sensitive, convinced of its superiority and entitlement. Force and coercion are often required to disabuse such a group of its delusions. But, this of course, only cements its narcissism and justifies its distorted perception of the world.

Consider the case of the Jews.

The Jews have been subjected to the kind of trauma and abuse I mentioned earlier on an unprecedented and never repeated scale. Their formal scriptures, lore, and ethos are imbued with grandiose fantasies and a towering sense of superiority and "mission". Yet, the inevitable contempt for their inferiors is tampered by the all-pervasive pragmatism the Jews had to develop in order to survive. Narcissists are not pragmatic. They live in a Universe of their own making. They see no need to get along with others. Jews are not like that. Their creed is a practical survival guide which obliges them to accommodate others, to empathize with their needs and desires, to compromise, to admit errors, to share credit, to collaborate, and so on.

Israelis, on the other hand, are "unshackled" Jews. They believe themselves to be the mirror image of the diaspora Jew. They are physical ("somatic"), strong, productive, independent, in control. They, in short, are less bound by the need to perilously co-exist with baleful, predatory, majorities. They can allow themselves a full, unmitigated, expression of whatever defence mechanisms they evolved in response to millennia of virulent hatred and murderous persecutions. Being an Israeli, I gained privileged insight into this fascinating transformation from tortured slave to vengeful master.

3. Narcissism and Leadership

Are all politicians narcissists? The answer, surprisingly, is: not universally. The preponderance of narcissistic traits and personalities in politics is much less than in show business, for instance. Moreover, while show business is concerned essentially (and almost exclusively) with the securing of narcissistic supply - politics is a much more complex and multi-faceted activity. Rather, it is a spectrum. At the one end, we find the "actors" - politicians who regard politics as their venue and their conduit, an extended theatre with their constituency as an audience. At the other extreme, we find self-effacing and schizoid (crowd-hating) technocrats. Most politicians are in the middle: somewhat self-enamoured, opportunistic and seeking modest doses of narcissistic supply - but mostly concerned with perks, self-preservation and the exercise of power.

Most narcissists are opportunistic and ruthless operators. But not all opportunistic and ruthless operators are narcissists. I am strongly opposed to remote diagnosis. I think it is a bad habit, exercised by charlatans and dilettantes (even if their names are followed by a Psy.D.). Please do not forget that only a qualified mental health diagnostician can determine whether someone suffers from NPD and this, following lengthy tests and personal interviews.

IF the politician in question is ALSO a narcissist (=suffers from NPD), then, yes, he would do ANYTHING and EVERYTHING to remain in power, or, while, in power, to secure his narcissistic supply. A common error is to think that "narcissistic supply" consists only of admiration, adulation and positive feedback. Actually, being feared, or derided is also narcissistic supply. The main element is ATTENTION. So, the narcissistic politician cultivates sources of narcissistic supply (both primary and secondary) and refrains from nothing while doing so.

Often, politicians are nothing but a loyal reflection of their milieu, their culture, their society and their times (zeitgeist and leitkultur). This is the thesis of Daniel Goldhagen in "Hitler's Willing Executioners".

More about Narcissists in positions of authority:

<http://samvak.tripod.com/faq11.html>

<http://samvak.tripod.com/msla7.html>

4. Political and economic circumstances and emerging narcissistic group behaviours

Pathological narcissism is the result of individual upbringing (see: ["The Narcissist's Mother"](#) and ["Narcissists and Schizoids"](#)) and, in this sense, it is universal and cuts across time and space. Yet, the very process of socialization and education is heavily constrained by the prevailing culture and influenced by it. Thus, culture, mores, history, myths, ethos, and even government policy (such as the "one child policy" in China) do create the conditions for pathologies of the personality.

The ethnopsychologist George Devereux ("Basic Problems of Ethnopsychiatry", University of Chicago Press, 1980) suggested to divide the unconscious into the id (the part that was always instinctual and unconscious) and the "ethnic unconscious" (repressed material that was once conscious). The latter includes all our defence mechanisms and most of the superego. Culture dictates what is to be repressed. Mental illness is either idiosyncratic (cultural directives are not followed and the individual is unique and schizophrenic) - or conformist, abiding by the cultural dictates of what is allowed and disallowed.

Our culture, according to Christopher Lasch teaches us to withdraw into ourselves when we are confronted with stressful situations. It is a vicious circle. One of the main stressors of modern society is alienation and a pervasive sense of isolation. The solution our culture offers us - to further withdraw - only exacerbates the problem.

Richard Sennett expounded on this theme in "The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism" (Vintage Books, 1978). One of the chapters in Devereux's aforementioned tome is entitled "Schizophrenia: An Ethnic Psychosis, or Schizophrenia without Tears". To him, the whole USA is afflicted by what came later to be called a "schizoid disorder". C. Fred Alford (in "Narcissism: Socrates, the Frankfurt School, and Psychoanalytic Theory", Yale University Press, 1988) enumerates the symptoms:

"...withdrawal, emotional aloofness, hyporeactivity (emotional flatness), sex without emotional involvement, segmentation and partial involvement (lack of interest and commitment to things outside oneself), fixation on oral-stage issues, regression, infantilism and depersonalization. These, of course, are many of the same designations that Lasch employs to describe the culture of narcissism. Thus, it appears, that it is not misleading to equate narcissism with schizoid disorder." (page 19).

Consider the Balkan region, for instance:

<http://samvak.tripod.com/pp25.html>

<http://samvak.tripod.com/pp29.html>

5. Christopher Lasch, American "culture of narcissism" and the long term effects of the September 11 atrocities

Lasch and his work are increasingly relevant in post September America. This is partly because the likes of bin Laden hurl at America primitive and coarse versions of Lasch's critique. They accuse America of being a failed civilization, not merely of meddling ignorantly and sacrilegiously in the affairs of Islam (and the rest of the world). They fervently believe that America exports this contagious failure to other cultures and societies (through its idolatrous mass media and inferior culture industries) and thus "infects" them with the virus of its own terminal decline. It is important to understand the left wing roots of this cancerous rendition of social criticism.

Lasch wrote:

"The new narcissist is haunted not by guilt but by anxiety. He seeks not to inflict his own certainties on others but to find a meaning in life. Liberated from the superstitions of the past, he doubts even the reality of his own existence. Superficially relaxed and tolerant, he finds little use for dogmas of racial and ethnic purity but at the same time forfeits the security of group loyalties and regards everyone as a rival for the favors conferred by a paternalistic state.

His sexual attitudes are permissive rather than puritanical, even though his emancipation from ancient taboos brings him no sexual peace. Fiercely competitive in his demand for approval and acclaim, he distrusts competition because he associates it unconsciously with an unbridled urge to destroy. Hence he repudiates the competitive ideologies that flourished at an earlier stage of capitalist development and distrusts even their limited expression in sports and games. He extols cooperation and teamwork while harboring deeply antisocial impulses. He praises respect for rules and regulations in the secret belief that they do not apply to himself. Acquisitive in the sense that his cravings have no limits, he does not accumulate goods and provisions against the future, in the manner of the acquisitive individualist of nineteenth-century political economy, but demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire."

(Christopher Lasch - The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an age of Diminishing Expectations, 1979)

There is no single Lasch. This chronicler of culture, did so mainly by chronicling his inner turmoil, conflicting ideas and ideologies, emotional upheavals, and intellectual vicissitudes. In this sense, of (courageous) self-documentation, Mr. Lasch epitomized Narcissism, was the quintessential Narcissist, the better positioned to criticize the phenomenon.

"Narcissism" is a relatively well-defined psychological term. I expound upon it elsewhere (["Malignant self Love - Narcissism Re-Visited"](#)). The Narcissistic Personality Disorder - the acute form of pathological Narcissism - is the name given to a group of 9 symptoms (see: DSM-4). They include: a grandiose Self (illusions of grandeur coupled with an inflated, unrealistic sense of the Self), inability to empathize with the Other, the tendency to exploit and manipulate others, idealization of other people (in cycles of idealization and devaluation), rage attacks and so on. Narcissism, therefore, has a clear clinical definition, etiology and prognosis.

The use that Lasch makes of this word has nothing to do with its usage in psychopathology. True, Lasch did his best to sound "medicinal". He spoke of "(national) malaise" and accused the American society of lack of self-awareness. But choice of words does not a coherence make.

"The Culture of Narcissism - American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations" was published in the last year of the unhappy presidency of Jimmy Carter (1979). The latter endorsed the book publicly (in his famous "national malaise" speech).

The main thesis of the book is that the Americans have created a self-absorbed (though not self aware), greedy and frivolous society which depended on consumerism, demographic studies, opinion polls and Government to know and to define itself. What is the solution?

Lasch proposed a "return to basics": self-reliance, the family, nature, the community, and the Protestant work ethic. To those who adhere, he promised an elimination of their feelings of alienation and despair.

But the clinical term "Narcissism" was abused by Lasch in his books. It joined other words mistreated by this social preacher. The respect that this man gained in his lifetime (as a social scientist and historian of culture) makes one wonder whether he was right in criticizing the shallowness and lack of intellectual rigor of American society and of its elites.

There is a detailed analysis here, in a reaction I wrote to Roger Kimball's "Christopher Lasch vs. the elites""New Criterion", Vol. 13, p.9 (04-01-1995):

<http://samvak.tripod.com/lasch.html>

6. Are all terrorists and serial killers narcissists?

Terrorists can be phenomenologically described as narcissists in a constant state of deficient narcissistic supply. The "grandiosity gap" - the painful and narcissistically injurious gap between their grandiose fantasies and their dreary and humiliating reality - becomes emotionally insupportable. They decompensate and act out. They bring "down to their level" (by destroying it) the object of their pathological envy, the cause of their seething frustration, the symbol of their dull achievements, always incommensurate with their inflated self-image.

They seek omnipotence through murder, control (not least self control) through violence, prestige, fame and celebrity by defying figures of authorities, challenging them, and humbling them. Unbeknownst to them, they seek self punishment. They are at heart suicidal. They aim to cast themselves as victims by forcing others to punish them. This is called "projective identification". They attribute evil and corruption to their enemies and foes. These forms of paranoia are called projection and splitting. These are all primitive, infantile, and often persecutory, defense mechanisms.

When coupled with narcissism - the inability to empathize, the exploitativeness, the sense of entitlement, the rages, the dehumanization and devaluation of others - this mindset yields abysmal contempt. The overriding emotion of terrorists and serial killers, the amalgam and culmination of their tortured psyche - is deep seated disdain for everything human, the flip side of envy. It is cognitive dissonance gone amok. On the one hand the terrorist derides as "false", "meaningless", "dangerous", and "corrupt" common values, institutions, human intercourse, and society. On the other hand, he devotes his entire life (and often risks it) to the elimination and pulverization of these "insignificant" entities. To justify this apparent contradiction, the terrorists casts himself as an altruistic saviour of a group of people "endangered" by his foes. He is always self-appointed and self-proclaimed, rarely elected. The serial killer rationalizes and intellectualizes his murders similarly, by purporting to "liberate" or "deliver" his victims from a fate worse than death.

The global reach, the secrecy, the impotence and growing panic of his victims, of the public, and of his pursuers, the damage he wreaks - all serve as external ego functions. The terrorist and serial killer regulate their sense of self esteem and self worth by feeding slavishly on the reactions to their heinous deeds. Their cosmic significance is daily enhanced by newspaper headlines, ever increasing bounties, admiring imitators, successful acts of blackmail, the strength and size of their opponents, and the devastation of human life and property. Appeasement works only to aggravate their drives and strengthen their appetites by emboldening them and by raising the threshold of excitation and "narcissistic supply". Terrorists and killers are addicted to this drug of being acknowledged and reflected. They derive their sense of existence, parasitically, from the reactions of their (often captive) audience.

APPENDIX - Responses in a correspondence following the publication of this interview

Zionism has always regarded itself as both a (19th century) national movement AND a (colonial) civilizing force:

See - *Herzl's Butlers* –

<http://samvak.tripod.com/pp27.html>

The Holocaust was a massive trauma NOT because of its dimensions - but because GERMANS, the epitome of Western civilization, have turned on the Jews, the self-proclaimed missionaries of Western civilization in the Levant and Arabia. It was the betrayal that mattered. Rejected by East (as colonial stooges) and West (as agents of racial contamination) alike - the Jews resorted to a series of narcissistic defences reified by the State of Israel. The long term occupation of territories (metaphorical or physical) is a classic narcissistic trait (of "annexation" of the other). The Six Days War was a war of self defence - but the swift victory only exacerbated the narcissistic defences. Mastery over the Palestinians became an important component in the psychological makeup of the nation (especially the more rightwing and religious elements) because it constitutes "Narcissistic Supply".

Bin Laden (and by extension Islamic fundamentalism) is the narcissistic complement of the State of Israel. His narcissistic defences are fuelled by unrequited humiliation (Millon's "compensatory narcissism"). The humiliation is the outcome of a grandiosity gap between reality and grandiose fantasies, between actual inferiority and a delusional sense of superiority (and cosmic mission), between his sense of entitlement and his incommensurate achievements, skills, and accomplishments.

When narcissists are faced with the disintegration of their narcissistic "infrastructure" (their False Self) – they decompensate. I have outlined the possible psychodynamic reactions here:

<http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/npd/87772>

Narcissism is always concomitant with the "civilizing" components of colonialism ("White Man's Burden") – though not with the mercantilist elements.

"Pathological narcissism is a well defined (and phenomenological) mental health theoretical construct. No doubt, narcissists engage in anti-Other discourse and other virulent and pernicious narratives. But the existence of such a discourse is not a DETERMINANT of pathological narcissism - merely its manifestation.

What GIVES RISE to the grandiosity gap IS socio-economic reality. The gap is between the REAL and the IDEAL, between the ACTUAL and the (self-DELUSIONAL and FANTASIZED. Socio-economic factors breed narcissistic injury and narcissistic rage.

[Return](#)

The Crescent and the Cross

Introduction

"There are two maxims for historians which so harmonise with what I know of history that I would like to claim them as my own, though they really belong to nineteenth-century historiography: first, that governments try to press upon the historian the key to all the drawers but one, and are anxious to spread the belief that this single one contains no secret of importance; secondly, that if the historian can only find the thing which the government does not want him to know, he will lay his hand upon something that is likely to be significant."

***Herbert Butterfield, "History and Human Relations",
London, 1951, p. 186***

The Balkans as a region is a relatively novel way of looking at the discrete nation-states that emerged from the carcasses of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires and fought over their spoils.

This sempiternal fight is a determinant of Balkan identity. The nations of the Balkan are defined more by ornery opposition than by cohesive identities. They derive sustenance and political-historical coherence from conflict. It is their afflatus. The more complex the axes of self-definition, the more multifaceted and intractable the conflicts. Rabid nationalism against utopian regionalism, fascism (really, opportunism) versus liberalism, religion-tinted traditionalism (the local moribund edition of conservatism) versus "Western" modernity.

Who wins is of crucial importance to world peace.

The Balkan is a relatively new political entity. Formerly divided between the decrepit Ottoman Empire and the imploding Austro-Hungarian one - the countries of the Balkans emerged as unique polities only during the 19th century. This was to be expected as a wave of nationalism swept Europe and led to the formation of the modern, bureaucratic state as we know it.

Even so, the discrete entities that struggled to the surface of statehood did not feel that they shared a regional destiny or identity. All they did was fight ferociously, ruthlessly and mercilessly over the corrupted remnants of the Sick Men of Europe (the above mentioned two residual empires). In this, they proved themselves to be the proper heirs of their former masters: murderous, suborned, Byzantine and nearsighted.

In an effort to justify their misdeeds and deeds, the various nations - true and concocted - conjured up histories, languages, cultures and documents, some real, mostly false. They staked claims to the same territories, donned common heritage where there was none, spoke languages artificially constructed and lauded a culture hastily assembled by "historians" and "philologists".

These were the roots of the great evil - the overlapping claims, the resulting intolerance, the mortal, existential fear stoked by the kaleidoscopic conduct of the Big Powers. To recognize the existence of the Macedonian identity - was to threaten the Greek or Bulgarian ones. To accept the antiquity of the Albanians was to dismantle Macedonia, Serbia and Greece. To countenance Bulgarian demands was to inhumanly penalize its Turk citizens. It was a zero-sum game played viciously by everyone involved. The prize was mere existence - the losers annihilated.

It very nearly came to that during the two Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913.

Allies shifted their allegiance in accordance with the shifting fortunes of a most bewildering battlefield. When the dust settled, two treaties later, Macedonia was dismembered by its neighbours, Bulgaria bitterly contemplated the sour fruits of its delusional aggression and Serbia and Austro-Hungary rejoiced. Thus were the seeds of World War I sown.

The Yugoslav war of succession (or civil war) was a continuation of this mayhem by other means. Yugoslavia was born in sin, in the dictatorship of King Alexander I (later slain in France in 1934). It faced agitation, separatism and discontent from its inception. It was falling apart when the second world conflagration erupted. It took a second dictatorship - Tito's - to hold it together for another 40 years.

The Balkan as a whole - from Hungary, through Romania and down to Bulgaria - was prone to authoritarianism and an atavistic, bloody form of racist, "peasant or native fascism". A primitive region of destitute farmers and vile politicians, it was exposed to world gaze by the collapse of communism. There are encouraging signs of awakening, of change and adaptation. There are dark omens of reactionary forces, of violence and wrath. It is a battle fought in the unconscious of humanity itself. It is a tug of war between memories and primordial drives repressed and the vitality of those still close to nature.

The outcome of this fight is crucial to the world. Both world wars started in central eastern and south-eastern Europe. Globalization is no guarantee against a third one. The world was more globalized than it is today at the beginning of the century - but it took only one shot in Sarajevo to make this the most sanguineous century of all.

An added problem is the simple-mindedness, abrasiveness and sheer historical ignorance of America, the current superpower. A nation of soundbites and black or white stereotypes, it is ill-suited to deal with the nuanced, multilayered and interactive mayhem that is the Balkan. A mentality of western movies - good guys, bad guys, shoot'em up - is hardly conducive to a Balkan resolution. The intricate and drawn out process required taxes American impatience and bullying tendencies to their explosive limits.

In the camp of the good guys, the Anglo-Saxons place Romania, Greece, Montenegro and Slovenia (with Macedonia, Croatia, Albania and Bulgaria wandering in and out). Serbia is the epitome of evil. Milosevic is Hitler. Such uni-dimensional thinking sends a frisson of rubicund belligerence down American spines.

It tends to ignore reality, though. Montenegro is playing the liberal card deftly, no doubt - but it is also a haven of smuggling and worse. Slovenia is the civilized facade that it so tediously presents to the world - but it also happened to have harboured one of the vilest fascist movements, comparable to the Ustasha - the Domobranici. It shares with Croatia the narcissistic grandiose fantasy that it is not a part of the Balkan - but rather an outpost of Europe - and the disdain for its impoverished neighbours that comes with it.

In this sense, it is more "Balkanian" than many of them. Greece is now an economically stable and mildly democratic country - but it used to be a dictatorship and it still is a banana republic in more than one respect. The Albanians - ferociously suppressed by the Serbs and (justly) succoured by the West - are industrious and shrewd people. But - fervent protestations to the contrary aside - they do seem to be intent on dismantling and recombining both Yugoslavia (Serbia) and Macedonia, perhaps at a terrible cost to all involved. Together with the Turks, the Serbs and the Bulgarians, the Albanians are the undisputed crime lords of the Balkan (and beyond - witness their incarceration rates in Switzerland).

This is the Balkan - a florilegium of contradictions within contraventions, the mawkish and the jaded, the charitable and the deleterious, the feckless and the bumptious, evanescent and exotic, a mystery wrapped in an enigma.

In this article, I will attempt to study two axes of friction: Islam versus Christianity and fascism and nationalism versus liberalism. It is hard to do justice to these topics in the Procrustean bed of weekly columns - I, therefore, beg the forgiveness of scholars and the understanding of frustrated readers.

A First Encounter

"In accordance with this [right to act], whenever some one of the infidel parents or some other should oppose the giving up of his son for the Janiccaries, he is immediately hanged from his doorsill, his blood being deemed unworthy."

Turkish firman, 1601

"...The Turks have built several fortresses in my kingdom and are very kind to the country folk. They promise freedom to every peasant who converts to Islam."

Bosnian King Stefan Tomasevic to Pope Pius II

"...The Porte treated him (the patriarch) as part of the Ottoman political apparatus. As a result, he had certain legally protected privileges. The Patriarch travelled in 'great splendour' and police protection was provided by the Janiccaries. His horse and saddle were fittingly embroidered, and at the saddle hung a small sword as a symbol of the powers bestowed on him by the Sultan."

Dusan Kasic, "The Serbian Church under the Turks", Belgrade, 1969

Within the space of 500 years, southeast Europe has undergone two paradigmatic shifts. First, from Christian independence to Islamic subjugation (a gradual process which consumed two centuries) and then, in the 19th century, from self-determination through religious affiliation to nationalism. The Christians of the Balkan were easy prey. They were dispirited peasantry, fragmented, prone to internecine backstabbing and oppressive regimes. The new Ottoman rulers treated both people and land as their property. They enslaved some of their prisoners of war (under the infamous "pencik" clause), exiled thousands and confiscated their lands and liquidated the secular political elites in Thrace, Bulgaria, Serbia and Albania. The resulting vacuum of leadership was filled by the Church. Thus, paradoxically, it was Islam and its excesses that made the Church the undisputed shepherd of the peoples of the Balkan, a position it did not enjoy before. The new rulers did not encourage conversions to their faith for fear of reducing their tax base - non-Moslem "zimmi" (the Qur'an's "People of the Book") paid special (and heavy) taxes to the treasury and often had to bribe corrupt officials to survive.

Still, compared to other Ottoman exploits (in Anatolia, for instance), the conquest of the Balkan was a benign affair. Cities remained intact, the lands were not depopulated and the indiscriminately ferocious nomadic tribesmen that usually accompanied the Turkish forces largely stayed at home. The Ottoman bureaucracy took over most aspects of daily life soon after the military victories, bringing with it the leaden stability that was its hallmark. Indeed, populations were dislocated and re-settled as a matter of policy called "sorgun". Yet such measures were intended mainly to quell plangent rebelliousness and were applied mainly to the urban minority (for instance, in Constantinople).

The Church was an accomplice of the Turkish occupiers. It was a part of the Ottoman system of governance and enjoyed both its protection and its funding. It was leveraged by the Turk sultans in their quest to pacify their subjects. Mehmet II bestowed upon the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, its bishops and clergy great powers. The trade off was made explicit in Mehmet's edicts: the Church accepted the earthly sovereignty of the sultan - and he, in turn, granted them tolerance, protection and even friendship. The Ottoman religious-legal code, the Seriat, recognized the Christian's right to form their own religiously self-governing communities.

These communities were not confined to the orderly provision of worship services. They managed communal property as well. Mehmet's benevolence towards the indigents was so legendary that people wrongly attributed to him the official declaration of a "Millet i Rum" (Roman, or Greek, nation) and the appointment of Gennadios as patriarch of the Orthodox Church (which only an episcopal synod could do).

The Ottoman Empire was an amazing hybrid. As opposed to popular opinion it was not a religious entity. The ruling elite included members of all religions. Thus, one could find Christian "askeri " (military or civil officials) and Muslim "reaya" ("flock" of taxpayers). It is true that Christians paid the arbitrarily set "harac" (or, less commonly, "cizye") in lieu of military service. Even the clergy were not exempt (they even assisted in tax collection). But both Christians and Muslims paid the land tax, for instance. And, as the fairness, transparency and predictability of the local taxmen deteriorated - both Muslims and Christians complained.

The main problem of the Ottoman Empire was devolution - not centralization. Local governors and tax collectors had too much power and the sultan was too remote and disinterested or too weak and ineffective. The population tried to get Istanbul MORE involved - not less so.

The population was financially fleeced as much by the Orthodox Church as it was by the sultan. A special church-tax was levied on the Christian reaya and its proceeds served to secure the lavish lifestyles of the bishops and the patriarch. In true mob style, church functionaries divided the loot with Ottoman officials in an arrangement known as "peskes". Foreign powers contributed to the war chests of various candidates, thus mobilizing them to support pro-Catholic or pro-Protestant political stances and demands. The church was a thoroughly corrupt, usurious and politicized body which contributed greatly to the ever increasing misery of its flock. It was a collaborator in the worst sense of the word.

But the behaviour of the church was one part of the common betrayal by the elite of the Balkan lands. Christian landowners volunteered to serve in the Ottoman cavalry ("sipahis") in order to preserve their ownership. The Ottoman rulers conveniently ignored the laws prohibiting "zimmi" to carry weapons. Until 1500, the "sipahis" constituted the bulk of the Ottoman forces in the Balkan and their mass conversion to Islam was a natural continuation of their complicity. Other Christians guarded bridges or mountain passes for a tax exemption ("derbentci"). Local, Turkish-trained militias ("armatoles") fought mountain-based robber gangs (Serbian "hayduks", Bulgarian "haiduts", Greek "klephts"). The robbers attacked Turkish caravans with the same frequency and zeal that they sacked Christian settlements. The "armatoles" resisted them by day and joined them by night. But it was perfectly acceptable to join Turkish initiatives such as this.

The Balkan remained overwhelmingly Christian throughout the Ottoman period. Muslim life was an urban phenomenon both for reasons of safety and because only the cities provided basic amenities. Even in the cities, though, the communities lived segregated in "mahalles" (quarters). Everyone collaborated in public life but the "mahalles" were self-sufficient affairs with the gamut of services - from hot baths to prayer services - available "in-quarter". Gradually, the major cities, situated along the trade routes, became Moslem. Skopje, Sarajevo and Sofia all had sizeable Moslem minorities.

Thus, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the picture that emerges is one of an uneasy co-habitation in the cities and a Christian rural landscape. The elites of the Balkan - church, noblemen, warriors - all defected and collaborated with the former "enemy". The local populace was the victim of usurious taxes, coercively applied. The central administration shared the loot with its local representatives and with the indigenous elites - the church and the feudal landed gentry. It was a cosy and pragmatic arrangement that lasted for centuries.

Yet, the seeds of Ottoman bestiality and future rebellion were sown from the very inception of this empire-extending conquest. The "devsirme" tax was an example of the fragility of the Turkish veneer of humanity and enlightened rule. Christian sons were kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam and trained as fighters in the fearsome Janicary Corps (the palace Guards). They were never to see their families and friends again.

Exemptions from this barbarous practice were offered only to select communities which somehow contributed to Ottoman rule in the Balkan. Christian women were often abducted by local Ottoman dignitaries, and the custom of the "kepin", allowed Moslems to "buy" a Christian daughter off her husband on a "temporary" basis. The results of such a union were raised as Moslems.

And then there were the mass conversions of Christians to Islam. These conversions were very rarely the results of coercion or barbarous conduct. On the contrary, by shrinking the tax base and the recruitment pool, conversion were unwelcome and closely scrutinized by the Turks. But to convert was such an advantageous and appealing act that the movement bordered on mass hysteria. Landowners converted to preserve their title to the land. "Sipahis" converted to advance in the ranks of the military. Christian officials converted to maintain their officialdom. Ordinary folk converted to avoid onerous taxes. Christian traders converted to Islam to be able to testify in court in case of commercial litigation. Converted Moslems were allowed to speak Arabic or their own language, rather than the cumbersome and elaborate formal Turkish. Christians willingly traded eternal salvation for earthly benefits. And, of course, death awaited those who recanted (like the Orthodox "New Martyrs", who discovered their Christian origins, having been raised as Moslems).

Perhaps this was because, in large swathes of the Balkan, Christianity never really took hold. It was adopted by the peasant as a folk religion - as was Islam later. In Bosnia, for instance, Muslims and Christians were virtually indistinguishable. They prayed in each other's shrines, celebrated each other's holidays and adopted the same customs. Muslim mysticism (the Sufi orders) appealed to many sophisticated urban Christians. Heretic cults (like the Bogomils) converted en masse. Intermarriage flourished, mainly between Muslim men (who could not afford the dowry payable to a Muslim woman) and Christian women (who had to pay a dowry to her Muslim husband's family). Marrying a Christian woman was a lucrative business proposition.

And, then, of course, there was the Moslem birth rate. With four women and a pecuniary preference for large families - Moslem out-bred Christians at all times. This trend is most pronounced today but it was always a prominent demographic fact.

But the success of Islam to conquer the Balkan, rule it, convert its population and prevail in it - had to do more with the fatal flaws of Balkan Christianity than with the appeal and resilience of Islam and its Ottoman rendition. In the next chapter I will attempt to ponder the complex interaction between Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity as it was manifested in Croatia and Bosnia, the border lands between the Habsburg and the Ottoman empires and between "Rome" and "Byzantium". I will then explore the variance in the Ottoman attitudes towards various Christian communities and the reasons underlying this diversity of treatment modalities.

The Communities of God

"From the beginning, people of different languages and religions were permitted to live in Christian lands and cities, namely Jews, Armenians, Ismaelites, Agarenes and others such as these, except that they do not mix with Christians, but rather live separately. For this reason, places have been designated for these according to ethnic group, either within the city or without, so that they may be restricted to these and not extend their dwelling beyond them."

Bishop Demetrios Khomatianos of Ohrid, late 12th century and early 13th century AD

"The Latins still have not been anathematized, nor has a great ecumenical council acted against them....And even to this day this continues, although it is said that they still wait for the repentance of the great Roman Church."

"...Do not overlook us, singing with deaf ears, but give us your understanding, according to sacred precepts, as you yourself inspired the apostles....You see, Lord, the battle of many years of your churches. Grant us humility, quiet the storm, so that we may know in each other your mercy, and we may not forget before the end the mystery of your love....May we coexist in unity with each other, and become wise also, so that we may live in you and in your eternal creator the Father and in his only-begotten Word. You are life, love, peace, truth, and sanctity...."

*East European Studies Occasional Paper, Number 47,
"Christianity and Islam in Southeastern Europe - Slavic*

***Orthodox Attitudes toward Other Religions", Eve Levin,
January 1997***

"...you faced the serpent and the enemy of God's churches, having judged that it would have been unbearable for your heart to see the Christians of your fatherland overwhelmed by the Moslems (izmailteni); if you could not accomplish this, you would leave the glory of your kingdom on earth to perish, and having become purple with your blood, you would join the soldiers of the heavenly kingdom. In this way, your two wishes were fulfilled. You killed the serpent, and you received from God the wreath of martyrdom."

Mateja Matejic and Dragan Milivojevic, "An Anthology of Medieval Serbian Literature in English", Columbus, Ohio: Slavica, 1978

Any effort to understand the modern quagmire that is the Balkan must address religion and religious animosities and grievances. Yet, the surprising conclusion of such a study is bound to be that the role of inter-faith hatred and conflict has been greatly exaggerated. The Balkan was characterized more by religious tolerance than by religious persecution. It was a model of successful co-habitation and co-existence even of the bitterest enemies of the most disparate backgrounds. Only the rise of the modern nation-state exacerbated long-standing and hitherto dormant tensions. Actually, the modern state was established on a foundation of artificially fanned antagonism and xenophobia.

Religions in the Balkan were never monolithic enterprises. Competing influences, paranoia, xenophobia and adverse circumstances all conspired to fracture the religious landscape. Thus, for instance, though officially owing allegiance to the patriarch in Constantinople and the Orthodox "oikumene", both Serb and Bulgarian churches collaborated with the rulers of the day against perceived Byzantine (Greek and Russian) political encroachment in religious guise. The southern Slav churches rejected both the theology and the secular teachings of the "Hellenics" and the "Romanians" (Romans). In turn, the Greek church held the Slav church in disregard and treated the peasants of Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Albania to savage rounds of tax collection. The Orthodox, as have all religions, berated other confessions and denominations. But Orthodoxy was always benign - no "jihad", no bloodshed, no forced conversions and no mass expulsions - perhaps with the exception of the forcible treatment of the Bogomils.

It was all about power and money, of course. Bishops and archbishops did not hesitate to co-opt the Ottoman administration against their adversaries. They had their rivals arrested by the Turks or ex-communicated them. Such squabbles were common. But they never amounted to more than a Balkanian comedia del-arte. Even the Jews - persecuted all over western Europe - were tolerated and attained prominence and influence in the Balkan. One Bulgarian Tsar divorced his wife to marry a Jewess. Southern Orthodox Christianity (as opposed to the virulent and vituperative Byzantine species) has always been pragmatic.

The minorities (Jews, Armenians, Vlachs) were the economic and financial backbone of their societies. And the Balkan was always a hodge-podge of ethnicities, cultures and religions. Shifting political fortunes ensured a policy of "hedging one's bets".

The two great competitors of Orthodox Christianity in the tight market of souls were Catholicism and Islam. The former co-sponsored with the Orthodox Church the educational efforts of Cyril and Methodius. Even before the traumatic schism of 1054, Catholics and nascent Orthodox were battling over (lucrative) religious turf in Bulgaria.

The schism was a telling affair. Ostensibly, it revolved around obscure theological issues (who begat the Holy Spirit - the Father alone or jointly with the Son as well as which type of bread should be used in the Eucharist). But really it was a clash of authorities and interests - the Pope versus the patriarch of Constantinople, the Romans versus the Greeks and Slavs. Matters of jurisdiction coalesced with political meddling in a confluence of ill-will that has simmered for at least two centuries. The southern (Slav) Orthodox churches contributed to the debate and supported the Greek position. Sects such as the Hesychasts were more Byzantine than the Greeks and denounced wavering Orthodox clergy. Many a south Orthodox pilloried the Catholic stance as an heresy of Armenian or Apollinarian or Arian origin - thus displaying their ignorance of the subtler points of the theological debate. They also got wrong the Greek argumentation regarding the bread of the Eucharist and the history of the schism. But zeal compensated for ignorance, as is often the case in the Balkan.

What started as a debate - however fervent - about abstract theology became an all out argument about derided customs and ceremonies. Diet, dates and divine practices all starred in these grotesque exchanges. The Latin ate unclean beasts. They used five fingers to cross themselves. They did not sing Hallelujah. They allowed the consumption of dairy products in Lent. The list was long and preposterous. The parties were spoiling for a fight. As is so often the case in this accursed swathe of the earth, identity and delusional superiority were secured through opposition and self-worth was attained through defiance. By relegating them to the role of malevolent heretics, the Orthodox made the sins of the Catholics unforgivable, their behaviour inexcusable, their fate sealed.

At the beginning, the attacks were directed at the "Latins" - foreigners from Germany and France. Local Catholics were somehow dissociated and absolved from the diabolical attributes of their fellow-believers abroad. They used the same calendar as the Orthodox (except for Lent) and similarly prayed in Church Slavonic. The only visible difference was the recognition of papal authority by the Catholics. Catholicism presented a coherent and veteran alternative to Orthodoxy's inchoate teachings. Secular authorities were ambiguous about how to treat their Catholic subjects and did not hesitate to collaborate with Catholic authorities against the Turks. Thus, to preserve itself as a viable religious alternative, the Orthodox church had to differentiate itself from the Holy See. Hence, the flaming debates and pejorative harangues.

The second great threat was Islam. Still, it was a latecomer. Catholicism and Orthodoxy have been foes since the ninth century. Four hundreds years later, Byzantine wars against the Moslems were a distant thunder and raised little curiosity and interest in the Balkan. The Orthodox church was acquainted with the tenets of Islamic faith but did not bother to codify its knowledge or record it. Islam was, to it, despite its impeccable monotheistic credentials, an exotic Oriental off-shoot of tribal paganism.

Thus, the Turkish invasion and the hardships of daily life under Ottoman rule found Orthodoxy unprepared. It reacted the way we all react to fear of the unknown: superstitions, curses, name calling. On the one hand, the Turkish enemy was dehumanized and bedevilled. It was perceived to be God's punishment upon the unfaithful and the sinful. On the other hand, in a curious transformation or a cognitive dissonance, the Turks became a divine instrument, the wrathful messengers of God. The Christians of the Balkan suffered from a post traumatic stress syndrome. They went through the classical phases of grief. They started by denying the defeat (in Kosovo, for instance) and they proceeded through rage, sadness and acceptance.

All four phases co-existed in Balkan history. Denial by the many who resorted to mysticism and delusional political thought. That the Turks failed for centuries to subdue pockets of resistance (for instance in Montenegro) served to rekindle these hopes and delusions periodically. Thus, the Turks (and, by extension, Islam) served as a politically cohering factor and provided a cause to rally around. Rage manifested through the acts against the occupying Ottomans of individuals or rebellious groups.

Sadness was expressed in liturgy, in art and literature, in music and in dance. Acceptance by conceiving of the Turks as the very hand of God Himself. But, gradually, the Turks and their rule came to be regarded as the work of the devil as it was incurring the wrath of God.

But again, this negative and annihilating attitude was reserved to outsiders and foreigners, the off-spring of Ishmael and of Hagar, the Latins and the Turks. Moslem or Catholic neighbours were rarely, if ever, the target of such vitriolic diatribes. External enemies - be they Christian or Moslem - were always to be cursed and resisted. Neighbours of the same ethnicity were never to be punished or discriminated against for their religion or convictions - though half-hearted condemnations did occur. The geographical and ethnic community seems to have been a critical determinant of identity even when confronted with an enemy at the gates. Members of an ethnic community could share the same religious faith as the invader or the heretic - yet this detracted none from their allegiance and place in their society as emanating from birth and long term residence. These tolerance and acceptance prevailed even in the face of Ottoman segregation of religious communities in ethnically-mixed "millets". This principle was shattered finally by the advent of the modern nation-state and its defining parameters (history and language), real or (more often) invented.

One could sometimes find members of the same nuclear family - but of different religious affiliation. Secular rulers and artisans in guilds collaborated unhesitatingly with Jews, Turks and Catholics. Conversions to and fro were common practice, as ways to secure economic benefits. These phenomena were especially prevalent in the border areas of Croatia and Bosnia. But everyone, throughout the Balkan, shared the same rituals, the way of life, the superstitions, the magic, the folklore, the customs and the habits regardless of religious persuasion.

Where religions co-existed, they fused syncretically. Some Sufi sects (mainly among the Janiccary) adopted Catholic rituals, made the sign of the cross, drank alcohol and ate pork. The followers of Bedreddin were Jews and Christians, as well as Moslems. Everybody shared miraculous sites, icons, even prayers. Orthodox Slavs pilgrims to the holy places in Palestine were titled "Hadzi" and Moslems were especially keen on Easter eggs and holy water as talismans of health. Calendars enumerated the holidays of all religions, side by side. Muslim judges ("kadis") married Muslim men to non-Muslim women and inter-marriage was rife. They also married and divorced Catholic couples, in contravention of the Catholic faith. Orthodox and Catholic habitually intermarried and interbred.

That this background yielded Srebrenica and Sarajevo, Kosovo and Krajina is astounding. It is the malignant growth of this century. It is the subject of our next instalment.

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Terrorism as a Psychodynamic Phenomenon

A Case of Group Psychopathology

Dialog between: Michael Galak and [Sam Vaknin](#)

Introduction by Michael Galak

In traditional Jewish fashion the original idea for this dialog came to me when I was 55. I felt compelled to write it despite its lack of orthodoxy and political correctness. In this rumbling and sometimes ranting opus magnum I have attempted to convey my understanding of the mechanisms underlying a formation and responses of a group psychopathology and the resulting behavior in the circumstances of totalitarian society. The size of the group, its ethnic, racial or religious identification is mostly irrelevant to the theoretical construct of this concept. It could extend to a nation or even a group of nations, as long as this group has common characteristics developed under common circumstances.

Using psychodynamic considerations I have also attempted to delineate some practical implications to the macro- and micro-management of group psychopathology. In my work I have drawn upon writings of August Le Bon, John Mackay, Sigmund Freud, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein, Sydney Bloch, Otto Kernberg, Heinz Kohut, Donald Winnicott, Paul Johnson and many others. I acknowledge my indebtedness and gratitude to these authors.

Sam Vaknin:

Are you acquainted with the work of Lloyd DeMaus on psychohistory?

In their book *"Personality Disorders in Modern Life"*, Theodore Millon and Roger Davis state, as a matter of fact, that pathological narcissism was the preserve of "the royal and the wealthy" and that it "seems to have gained prominence only in the late twentieth century". Narcissism, according to them, may be associated with "higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs ... Individuals in less advantaged nations .. are too busy trying (to survive) ... to be arrogant and grandiose".

They - like Lasch before them - attribute pathological narcissism to "a society that stresses individualism and self-gratification at the expense of community, namely the United States." They assert that the disorder is more prevalent among certain professions with "star power" or respect. "In an individualistic culture, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the world'. In a collectivist society, the narcissist is 'God's gift to the collective'".

Millon quotes Warren and Caponi's *"The Role of Culture in the Development of Narcissistic Personality Disorders in America, Japan and Denmark"*:

"Individualistic narcissistic structures of self-regard (in individualistic societies) ... are rather self-contained and independent ... (In collectivist cultures) narcissistic configurations of the we-self ... denote self-esteem derived from strong identification with the reputation and honor of the family, groups, and others in hierarchical relationships."

Having lived in the last 20 years 12 countries in 4 continents - from the impoverished to the affluent, with individualistic and collectivist societies - I know that Millon and Davis are wrong. Theirs is, indeed, the quintessential American point of view which lacks an intimate knowledge of other parts of the world. Millon even wrongly claims that the DSM's international equivalent, the ICD, does not include the narcissistic personality disorder (it does).

Pathological narcissism is a ubiquitous phenomenon because every human being - regardless of the nature of his society and culture - develops healthy narcissism early in life. Healthy narcissism is rendered pathological by abuse - and abuse, alas, is a universal human behavior. By "abuse" we mean any refusal to acknowledge the emerging boundaries of the individual - smothering, doting, and excessive expectations - are as abusive as beating and incest.

There are malignant narcissists among subsistence farmers in Africa, nomads in the Sinai desert, day laborers in east Europe, and intellectuals and socialites in Manhattan. Malignant narcissism is all-pervasive and independent of culture and society.

It is true, though, that the WAY pathological narcissism manifests and is experienced is dependent on the particulars of societies and cultures. In some cultures, it is encouraged, in others suppressed. In some societies it is channeled against minorities - in others it is tainted with paranoia. In collectivist societies, it may be projected onto the collective, in individualistic societies, it is an individual's trait.

Yet, can families, organizations, ethnic groups, churches, and even whole nations be safely described as "narcissistic" or "pathologically self-absorbed"? Wouldn't such generalizations be a trifle racist and more than a trifle wrong? The answer is: it depends.

Human collectives - states, firms, households, institutions, political parties, cliques, bands - acquire a life and a character all their own. The longer the association or affiliation of the members, the more cohesive and conformist the inner dynamics of the group, the more persecutory or numerous its enemies, the more intensive the physical and emotional experiences of the individuals it is comprised of, the stronger the bonds of locale, language, and history - the more rigorous might an assertion of a common pathology be.

Such an all-pervasive and extensive pathology manifests itself in the behavior of each and every member. It is a defining - though often implicit or underlying - mental structure. It has explanatory and predictive powers. It is recurrent and invariable - a pattern of conduct melded with distorted cognition and stunted emotions. And it is often vehemently denied.

A possible DSM-like list of criteria for narcissistic organizations or groups:

An all-pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration or adulation and lack of empathy, usually beginning at the group's early history and present in various contexts. Persecution and abuse are often the causes - or at least the antecedents - of the pathology.

Five (or more) of the following criteria must be met:

1. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - feel grandiose and self-important (e.g., they exaggerate the group's achievements and talents to the point of lying, demand to be recognized as superior - simply for belonging to the group and without commensurate achievement).
2. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are obsessed with group fantasies of unlimited success, fame, fearsome power or omnipotence, unequalled brilliance, bodily beauty or performance, or ideal, everlasting, all-conquering ideals or political theories.
3. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are firmly convinced that the group is unique and, being special, can only be understood by, should only be treated by, or associate with, other special or unique, or high-status groups (or institutions).
4. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - require excessive admiration, adulation, attention and affirmation - or, failing that, wish to be feared and to be notorious (narcissistic supply).

5. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - feel entitled. They expect unreasonable or special and favorable priority treatment. They demand automatic and full compliance with expectations. They rarely accept responsibility for their actions ("alloplastic defenses"). This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
6. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are "interpersonally exploitative", i.e., use others to achieve their own ends. This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
7. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are devoid of empathy. They are unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge the feelings and needs of other groups. This often leads to anti- social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.
8. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are constantly envious of others or believes that they feel the same about them. This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.

9. The group as a whole, or members of the group - acting as such and by virtue of their association and affiliation with the group - are arrogant and sport haughty behaviors or attitudes coupled with rage when frustrated, contradicted, punished, limited, or confronted. This often leads to anti-social behavior, cover-ups, and criminal activities on a mass scale.

Consider the case of the Jews.

The Jews have been subjected to the kind of trauma and abuse I mentioned earlier on an unprecedented and never repeated scale. Their formal scriptures, lore, and ethos are imbued with grandiose fantasies and a towering sense of superiority and "mission". Yet, the inevitable contempt for their inferiors is tampered by the all-pervasive pragmatism the Jews had to develop in order to survive. Narcissists are not pragmatic. They live in a Universe of their own making. They see no need to get along with others. Jews are not like that. Their creed is a practical survival guide which obliges them to accommodate others, to empathize with their needs and desires, to compromise, to admit errors, to share credit, to collaborate, and so on.

Israelis, on the other hand, are "unshackled" Jews. They believe themselves to be the mirror image of the diaspora Jew. They are physical ("somatic"), strong, productive, independent, in control. They, in short, are less bound by the need to perilously co-exist with baleful, predatory, majorities. They can allow themselves a full, unmitigated, expression of whatever defence mechanisms they evolved in response to millennia of virulent hatred and murderous persecutions. Being an Israeli, I gained privileged insight

into this fascinating transformation from tortured slave to vengeful master.

Michael:

I also aim to draw a parallel between the now defunct Soviet Union and the Arab states, as an illustration of the origin of group psychopathology, because of the closeness of their respective political positions, the totalitarian approach to their governance and their messianic worldview.

Rulers of both are/were notorious for their contempt of their subject people and their willingness to inflict suffering in order to remain in power.

There are some important and practical implications which could be drawn from these comparisons. For example, I have come to believe that the lifestyle inflicted by totalitarian states on their citizens leads, among other things, to the heightened state of group anxiety, fear of rejection, unfulfilled dependency needs and anger towards rejector. These traits are open to manipulation by the aspirants to the mantle of Messiah and ruling elites, eager to redirect relentless anger of their people away from themselves and towards their desired political goals. It is conceivable that the knowledge of the basis and of techniques of such a manipulation could be useful in the successful management of conflict situations.

Sam:

Institutionalized religion and totalitarian states share the same defense mechanisms (such as projection and splitting), coping methods, and psychodynamic

background. Authoritarian leaders are virtual clones, regardless of the cultures and societies that gave rise to them (see Alan Bullock's magnificent "Hitler and Stalin - Parallel Lives").

This is why I call Hitler an "inverted" saint.

Hitler and Nazism are often portrayed as an apocalyptic and seismic break with European history. Yet the truth is that they were the culmination and reification of European history in the 19th century. Europe's annals of colonialism have prepared it for the range of phenomena associated with the Nazi regime - from industrial murder to racial theories, from slave labour to the forcible annexation of territory.

Germany was a colonial power no different to murderous Belgium or Britain. What set it apart is that it directed its colonial attentions at the heartland of Europe - rather than at Africa or Asia. Both World Wars were colonial wars fought on European soil. Moreover, Nazi Germany innovated by applying prevailing racial theories (usually reserved to non-whites) to the white race itself. It started with the Jews - a non-controversial proposition - but then expanded them to include "east European" whites, such as the Poles and the Russians.

Germany was not alone in its malignant nationalism. The far right in France was as pernicious. Nazism - and Fascism - were world ideologies, adopted enthusiastically in places as diverse as Iraq, Egypt, Norway, Latin America, and Britain. At the end of the 1930's, liberal capitalism, communism, and fascism (and its mutations) were locked in mortal battle of ideologies. Hitler's mistake was to delusionally believe in the affinity between

capitalism and Nazism - an affinity enhanced, to his mind, by Germany's corporatism and by the existence of a common enemy: global communism.

Colonialism always had discernible religious overtones and often collaborated with missionary religion. "The White Man's burden" of civilizing the "savages" was widely perceived as ordained by God. The church was the extension of the colonial power's army and trading companies.

It is no wonder that Hitler's lebensraum colonial movement - Nazism - possessed all the hallmarks of an institutional religion: priesthood, rites, rituals, temples, worship, catechism, mythology. Hitler was this religion's ascetic saint. He monastically denied himself earthly pleasures (or so he claimed) in order to be able to dedicate himself fully to his calling. Hitler was a monstrously inverted Jesus, sacrificing his life and denying himself so that (Aryan) humanity should benefit. By surpassing and suppressing his humanity, Hitler became a distorted version of [Nietzsche's "superman"](#).

But being a-human or super-human also means being a-sexual and a-moral. In this restricted sense, Hitler was a post-modernist and a moral relativist. He projected to the masses an androgynous figure and enhanced it by fostering the adoration of nudity and all things "natural". But what Nazism referred to as "nature" was not natural at all.

It was an aesthetic of decadence and evil (though it was not perceived this way by the Nazis), carefully orchestrated, and artificial. Nazism was about reproduced

copies, not about originals. It was about the manipulation of symbols - not about veritable atavism.

In short: Nazism was about theatre, not about life. To enjoy the spectacle (and be subsumed by it), Nazism demanded the suspension of judgment, depersonalization, and de-realization. Catharsis was tantamount, in Nazi dramaturgy, to self-annulment. Nazism was nihilistic not only operationally, or ideologically. Its very language and narratives were nihilistic. Nazism was conspicuous nihilism - and Hitler served as a role model, annihilating Hitler the Man, only to re-appear as Hitler the stychia.

What was the role of the Jews in all this?

Nazism posed as a rebellion against the "old ways" - against the hegemonic culture, the upper classes, the established religions, the superpowers, the European order. The Nazis borrowed the Leninist vocabulary and assimilated it effectively. Hitler and the Nazis were an adolescent movement, a reaction to narcissistic injuries inflicted upon a narcissistic (and rather psychopathic) toddler nation-state. Hitler himself was a [malignant narcissist](#), as Fromm correctly noted.

The Jews constituted a perfect, easily identifiable, embodiment of all that was "wrong" with Europe. They were an old nation, they were eerily disembodied (without a territory), they were cosmopolitan, they were part of the establishment, they were "decadent", they were hated on religious and socio-economic grounds (see Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners"), they were different, they were narcissistic (felt and acted as morally superior), they were everywhere, they were defenseless, they were credulous, they were adaptable (and thus could be co-

opted to collaborate in their own destruction). They were the perfect hated father figure and parricide was in fashion.

This is precisely the source of the fascination with Hitler. He was an inverted human. His unconscious was his conscious. He acted out our most repressed drives, fantasies, and wishes. He provides us with a glimpse of the horrors that lie beneath the veneer, the barbarians at our personal gates, and what it was like before we invented civilization. Hitler forced us all through a time warp and many did not emerge. He was not the devil. He was one of us. He was what Arendt aptly called the banality of evil. Just an ordinary, mentally disturbed, failure, a member of a mentally disturbed and failing nation, who lived through disturbed and failing times. He was the perfect mirror, a channel, a voice, and the very depth of our souls.

The narcissistic leader is the culmination and reification of his period, culture, and civilization. He is likely to rise to prominence in narcissistic societies.

The malignant narcissist invents and then projects a false, fictitious, self for the world to fear, or to admire. He maintains a tenuous grasp on reality to start with and this is further exacerbated by the trappings of power. The narcissist's grandiose self-delusions and fantasies of omnipotence and omniscience are supported by real life authority and the narcissist's predilection to surround himself with obsequious sycophants.

The narcissist's personality is so precariously balanced that he cannot tolerate even a hint of criticism and disagreement. Most narcissists are paranoid and suffer

from ideas of reference (the delusion that they are being mocked or discussed when they are not). Thus, narcissists often regard themselves as "victims of persecution".

The narcissistic leader fosters and encourages a personality cult with all the hallmarks of an institutional religion: priesthood, rites, rituals, temples, worship, catechism, mythology. The leader is this religion's ascetic saint. He monastically denies himself earthly pleasures (or so he claims) in order to be able to dedicate himself fully to his calling.

The narcissistic leader is a monstrously inverted Jesus, sacrificing his life and denying himself so that his people - or humanity at large - should benefit. By surpassing and suppressing his humanity, the narcissistic leader became a distorted version of Nietzsche's "superman".

But being a-human or super-human also means being a-sexual and a-moral.

In this restricted sense, narcissistic leaders are post-modernist and moral relativists. They project to the masses an androgynous figure and enhance it by engendering the adoration of nudity and all things "natural" - or by strongly repressing these feelings. But what they refer to as "nature" is not natural at all.

The narcissistic leader invariably proffers an aesthetic of decadence and evil carefully orchestrated and artificial - though it is not perceived this way by him or by his followers. Narcissistic leadership is about reproduced copies, not about originals. It is about the manipulation of symbols - not about veritable atavism or true conservatism.

In short: narcissistic leadership is about theatre, not about life. To enjoy the spectacle (and be subsumed by it), the leader demands the suspension of judgment, depersonalization, and de-realization. Catharsis is tantamount, in this narcissistic dramaturgy, to self-annulment.

Narcissism is nihilistic not only operationally, or ideologically. Its very language and narratives are nihilistic. Narcissism is conspicuous nihilism - and the cult's leader serves as a role model, annihilating the Man, only to re-appear as a pre-ordained and irresistible force of nature.

Narcissistic leadership often poses as a rebellion against the "old ways" - against the hegemonic culture, the upper classes, the established religions, the superpowers, the corrupt order. Narcissistic movements are puerile, a reaction to narcissistic injuries inflicted upon a narcissistic (and rather psychopathic) toddler nation-state, or group, or upon the leader.

Minorities or "others" - often arbitrarily selected - constitute a perfect, easily identifiable, embodiment of all that is "wrong". They are accused of being old, they are eerily disembodied, they are cosmopolitan, they are part of the establishment, they are "decadent", they are hated on religious and socio-economic grounds, or because of their race, sexual orientation, origin ... They are different, they are narcissistic (feel and act as morally superior), they are everywhere, they are defenseless, they are credulous, they are adaptable (and thus can be co-opted to collaborate in their own destruction). They are the perfect hate figure. Narcissists thrive on hatred and pathological envy.

This is precisely the source of the fascination with Hitler, diagnosed by Erich Fromm - together with Stalin - as a malignant narcissist. He was an inverted human. His unconscious was his conscious. He acted out our most repressed drives, fantasies, and wishes. He provides us with a glimpse of the horrors that lie beneath the veneer, the barbarians at our personal gates, and what it was like before we invented civilization. Hitler forced us all through a time warp and many did not emerge. He was not the devil. He was one of us. He was what Arendt aptly called the banality of evil. Just an ordinary, mentally disturbed, failure, a member of a mentally disturbed and failing nation, who lived through disturbed and failing times. He was the perfect mirror, a channel, a voice, and the very depth of our souls.

The narcissistic leader prefers the sparkle and glamour of well-orchestrated illusions to the tedium and method of real accomplishments. His reign is all smoke and mirrors, devoid of substances, consisting of mere appearances and mass delusions. In the aftermath of his regime - the narcissistic leader having died, been deposed, or voted out of office - it all unravels. The tireless and constant prestidigitation ceases and the entire edifice crumbles. What looked like an economic miracle turns out to have been a fraud-laced bubble. Loosely-held empires disintegrate. Laboriously assembled business conglomerates go to pieces. "Earth shattering" and "revolutionary" scientific discoveries and theories are discredited. Social experiments end in mayhem.

It is important to understand that the use of violence must be ego-syntonic. It must accord with the self-image of the narcissist. It must abet and sustain his grandiose fantasies

and feed his sense of entitlement. It must conform with the narcissistic narrative.

Thus, a narcissist who regards himself as the benefactor of the poor, a member of the common folk, the representative of the disenfranchised, the champion of the dispossessed against the corrupt elite - is highly unlikely to use violence at first.

The pacific mask crumbles when the narcissist has become convinced that the very people he purported to speak for, his constituency, his grassroots fans, the prime sources of his narcissistic supply - have turned against him. At first, in a desperate effort to maintain the fiction underlying his chaotic personality, the narcissist strives to explain away the sudden reversal of sentiment. "The people are being duped by (the media, big industry, the military, the elite, etc.)", "they don't really know what they are doing", "following a rude awakening, they will revert to form", etc.

When these flimsy attempts to patch a tattered personal mythology fail - the narcissist is injured. Narcissistic injury inevitably leads to narcissistic rage and to a terrifying display of unbridled aggression. The pent-up frustration and hurt translate into devaluation. That which was previously idealized - is now discarded with contempt and hatred.

This primitive defense mechanism is called "splitting". To the narcissist, things and people are either entirely bad (evil) or entirely good. He projects onto others his own shortcomings and negative emotions, thus becoming a totally good object. A narcissistic leader is likely to justify the butchering of his own people by claiming that they

intended to kill him, undo the revolution, devastate the economy, or the country, etc.

The "small people", the "rank and file", the "loyal soldiers" of the narcissist - his flock, his nation, his employees - they pay the price. The disillusionment and disenchantment are agonizing. The process of reconstruction, of rising from the ashes, of overcoming the trauma of having been deceived, exploited and manipulated - is drawn-out. It is difficult to trust again, to have faith, to love, to be led, to collaborate. Feelings of shame and guilt engulf the erstwhile followers of the narcissist. This is his sole legacy: a massive post-traumatic stress disorder.

More here:

[*Narcissists in Positions of Authority*](#)

[*What Doth a Leader Make?*](#)

[*Fascism - The Tensile Permanence*](#)

[*For the Love of God*](#)

[*Facilitating Narcissism*](#)

[*The Cult of the Narcissist*](#)

[*The Narcissist and Social Institutions*](#)

Michael:

The essence of this dialog could be reduced to two fundamental notions. The first notion stipulates, that a

totalitarian state, be it secular or clerical, imposes on its citizens a permanent state of fear as an emotional background. The citizenry of totalitarian or violently dictatorial states has no legitimate means to discharge this fear. This continuous state of fear, or anxiety as it is clinically called, leads to a development of a group psychopathology. The development of group characteristics consists of personal exposure to the same conditions, including stress, multiplied and amplified by the number of participants.

The second notion stipulates that group psychopathology is characterized by the variety of enduring, often self-harming responses and traits, such as maladaptive coping and care-eliciting techniques, emotional vulnerability, unfulfilled dependency needs, anti-social behavior and other characteristics of personality disorders, extended to the whole or a majority of the given group. They become woven into the fabric of the national character and behavior. It could happen to a whole nation, traumatized by external and internal stressors, e.g. the Palestinians, or to a marginalised subgroup, such as the Australian Aborigines or Afro-American dwellers of inner city enclaves. Rules of interpersonal contact within these groups are quite different from the rules, governing interpersonal contact in the mainstream society.

In societies with low level of group psychopathology, these traits are given status of personal psychopathology and are regarded as personality disorders, treatable psychiatrically.

Sam:

Here I beg to differ. A personal psychopathology that is indistinguishable from the "background noise" of mass or collective psychopathology is unlikely to be diagnosed as such. In a narcissistic society, narcissism is de-rigueur - not an aberration. Conversely, some mental health syndromes and disorders are "culture-bound" - they are specific to one culture only and rarely appear elsewhere.

Consider the case of pathological narcissism:

We are surrounded by malignant narcissists. How come this disorder has hitherto been largely ignored? How come there is such a dearth of research and literature regarding this crucial family of pathologies? Even mental health practitioners are woefully unaware of it and unprepared to assist its victims.

The sad answer is that narcissism meshes well with our culture [see: <http://samvak.tripod.com/lasch.html>].

It is kind of a "background cosmic radiation", permeating every social and cultural interaction. It is hard to distinguish pathological narcissists from self-assertive, self-confident, self-promoting, eccentric, or highly individualistic persons. Hard sell, greed, envy, self-centredness, exploitativeness, diminished empathy - are all socially condoned features of Western civilization.

Our society is atomized, the outcome of individualism gone awry. It encourages narcissistic leadership and role models: <http://samvak.tripod.com/15.html>

Its sub-structures - institutionalized religion, political parties, civic organizations, the media, corporations - are

all suffused with narcissism and pervaded by its pernicious outcomes: <http://samvak.tripod.com/14.html>

The very ethos of materialism and capitalism upholds certain narcissistic traits, such as reduced empathy, exploitation, a sense of entitlement, or grandiose fantasies ("vision").

More about this here:
<http://samvak.tripod.com/journal37.html>

Narcissists are aided, abetted and facilitated by four types of people and institutions: the adulators, the blissfully ignorant, the self-deceiving and those deceived by the narcissist.

The adulators are fully aware of the nefarious and damaging aspects of the narcissist's behavior but believe that they are more than balanced by the benefits - to themselves, to their collective, or to society at large. They engage in an explicit trade-off between some of their principles and values - and their personal profit, or the greater good.

They seek to help the narcissist, promote his agenda, shield him from harm, connect him with like-minded people, do his chores for him and, in general, create the conditions and the environment for his success. This kind of alliance is especially prevalent in political parties, the government, multinational, religious organizations and other hierarchical collectives.

The blissfully ignorant are simply unaware of the "bad sides" of the narcissist- and make sure they remain so. They look the other way, or pretend that the narcissist's

behavior is normative, or turn a blind eye to his egregious misbehavior. They are classic deniers of reality. Some of them maintain a generally rosy outlook premised on the inbred benevolence of Mankind. Others simply cannot tolerate dissonance and discord. They prefer to live in a fantastic world where everything is harmonious and smooth and evil is banished. They react with rage to any information to the contrary and block it out instantly. This type of denial is well evidenced in dysfunctional families.

The self-deceivers are fully aware of the narcissist's transgressions and malice, his indifference, exploitativeness, lack of empathy, and rampant grandiosity - but they prefer to displace the causes, or the effects of such misconduct. They attribute it to externalities ("a rough patch"), or judge it to be temporary. They even go as far as accusing the victim for the narcissist's lapses, or for defending themselves ("She provoked him").

In a feat of cognitive dissonance, they deny any connection between the acts of the narcissist and their consequences ("His wife abandoned him because she was promiscuous, not because of anything he did to her"). They are swayed by the narcissist's undeniable charm, intelligence, or attractiveness. But the narcissist needs not invest resources in converting them to his cause - he does not deceive them. They are self-propelled into the abyss that is narcissism. The [inverted narcissists](#), for instance, is a self-deceiver.

The deceived are people - or institutions, or collectives - deliberately taken for a premeditated ride by the narcissist. He feeds them false information, manipulates their judgment, proffers plausible scenarios to account for his

indiscretions, soils the opposition, charms them, appeals to their reason, or to their emotions, and promises the Moon.

Again, the narcissist's incontrovertible powers of persuasion and his impressive personality play a part in this predatory ritual. The deceived are especially hard to deprogram. They are often themselves encumbered with narcissistic traits and find it impossible to admit a mistake, or to atone.

They are likely to stay on with the narcissist to his - and their - bitter end.

Regrettably, the narcissist rarely pays the price for his offenses. His victims pick up the tab. But even here the malignant optimism of the abused never ceases to amaze (read this: <http://samvak.tripod.com/journal27.html>).

Narcissists are an elusive breed, hard to spot, harder to pinpoint, impossible to capture. Even an experienced mental health diagnostician with unmitigated access to the record and to the person examined would find it fiendishly difficult to determine with any degree of certainty whether someone suffers from an impairment, i.e., a mental health disorder – or merely possesses narcissistic traits, a narcissistic personality structure ("character"), or a narcissistic "overlay" superimposed on another mental health problem.

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between the traits and behavior patterns that are independent of the patient's cultural-social context (i.e., inherent, or idiosyncratic) - and reactive patterns, or conformity to cultural and social mores and edicts. Reactions to severe life crises are often

characterized by transient pathological narcissism, for instance (Ronningstam and Gunderson, 1996). But such reactions do not a narcissist make.

When a person lives in a society and culture that has often been described as narcissistic by the leading lights of scholarly research (e.g., [Theodore Millon](#)) and social thinking (e.g., [Christopher Lasch](#)) - how much of his behavior can be attributed to his milieu – and which of his traits are really his?

Moreover, there is a qualitative difference between having narcissistic traits, a narcissistic personality, or the Narcissistic Personality Disorder. The latter is rigorously defined in the DSM IV-TR and includes strict criteria and differential diagnoses (for more, see here: <http://samvak.tripod.com/npdglance.html>).

Narcissism is regarded by many scholars to be an adaptative strategy ("healthy narcissism"). It is considered pathological in the clinical sense only when it becomes a rigid personality structure replete with a series of primitive defence mechanisms (such as splitting, projection, Projective Identification, intellectualization) – and when it leads to dysfunctions in one or more areas of life.

Pathological narcissism is the art of deception. The narcissist projects a False Self and manages all his social interactions through this concocted fictional construct. People often find themselves involved with a narcissist (emotionally, in business, or otherwise) before they have a chance to discover his true nature.

When the narcissist reveals his true colors, it is usually far too late. His victims are unable to separate from him. They are frustrated by this acquired helplessness and angry that they failed to see through the narcissist earlier on.

More here:

[The Classification of Cultures](#)

Michael:

Still, in societies, traumatised by dictatorships high level of group anxiety leads to a tendency of the universal adoption of maladaptive mode of interpersonal communication, so strikingly different to an outside observer from non-traumatised society. These differences have the potential for communication difficulties between people who reside in societies with high level of group psychopathology and those living in a society with relatively low level of group psychopathology.

Sam:

Assuming, of course, we can agree on what constitutes psychopathology.

"You can know the name of a bird in all the languages of the world, but when you're finished, you'll know absolutely nothing whatever about the bird... So let's look at the bird and see what it's doing – that's what counts. I learned very early the difference between knowing the name of something and knowing something."

Richard Feynman, Physicist and 1965 Nobel Prize laureate (1918-1988)

"You have all I dare say heard of the animal spirits and how they are transfused from father to son etcetera etcetera – well you may take my word that nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense, his successes and miscarriages in this world depend on their motions and activities, and the different tracks and trains you put them into, so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong, away they go cluttering like hey-go-mad."

Lawrence Sterne (1713-1758), "The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman" (1759)

I. Overview

Someone is considered mentally "ill" if:

1. His conduct rigidly and consistently deviates from the typical, average behavior of all other people in his culture and society that fit his profile (whether this conventional behavior is moral or rational is immaterial), or
2. His judgment and grasp of objective, physical reality is impaired, and
3. His conduct is not a matter of choice but is innate and irresistible, and
4. His behavior causes him or others discomfort, and is
5. Dysfunctional, self-defeating, and self-destructive even by his own yardsticks.

Descriptive criteria aside, what is the *essence* of mental disorders? Are they merely physiological disorders of the brain, or, more precisely of its chemistry? If so, can they be cured by restoring the balance of substances and secretions in that mysterious organ? And, once equilibrium is reinstated – is the illness "gone" or is it still lurking there, "under wraps", waiting to erupt? Are psychiatric problems inherited, rooted in faulty genes (though amplified by environmental factors) – or brought on by abusive or wrong nurturance?

These questions are the domain of the "medical" school of mental health.

Others cling to the spiritual view of the human psyche. They believe that mental ailments amount to the metaphysical discomposure of an unknown medium – the soul. Theirs is a holistic approach, taking in the patient in his or her entirety, as well as his milieu.

The members of the functional school regard mental health disorders as perturbations in the proper, statistically "normal", behaviors and manifestations of "healthy" individuals, or as dysfunctions. The "sick" individual – ill at ease with himself (ego-dystonic) or making others unhappy (deviant) – is "mended" when rendered functional again by the prevailing standards of his social and cultural frame of reference.

In a way, the three schools are akin to the trio of blind men who render disparate descriptions of the very same elephant. Still, they share not only their subject matter – but, to a counter intuitively large degree, a faulty methodology.

As the renowned anti-psychiatrist, Thomas Szasz, of the State University of New York, notes in his article "*The Lying Truths of Psychiatry*", mental health scholars, regardless of academic predilection, infer the etiology of mental disorders from the success or failure of treatment modalities.

This form of "reverse engineering" of scientific models is not unknown in other fields of science, nor is it unacceptable if the experiments meet the criteria of the scientific method. The theory must be all-inclusive (anamnetic), consistent, falsifiable, logically compatible, monovalent, and parsimonious. Psychological "theories" – even the "medical" ones (the role of serotonin and dopamine in mood disorders, for instance) – are usually none of these things.

The outcome is a bewildering array of ever-shifting mental health "diagnoses" expressly centred around Western civilisation and its standards (example: the ethical objection to suicide). Neurosis, a historically fundamental "condition" vanished after 1980. Homosexuality, according to the American Psychiatric Association, was a pathology prior to 1973. Seven years later, narcissism was declared a "personality disorder", almost seven decades after it was first described by Freud.

II. Personality Disorders

Indeed, personality disorders are an excellent example of the kaleidoscopic landscape of "objective" psychiatry.

The classification of Axis II personality disorders – deeply ingrained, maladaptive, lifelong behavior patterns – in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, fourth edition,

text revision [American Psychiatric Association. DSM-IV-TR, Washington, 2000] – or the DSM-IV-TR for short – has come under sustained and serious criticism from its inception in 1952, in the first edition of the DSM.

The DSM IV-TR adopts a categorical approach, postulating that personality disorders are "*qualitatively distinct clinical syndromes*" (p. 689). This is widely doubted. Even the distinction made between "normal" and "disordered" personalities is increasingly being rejected. The "diagnostic thresholds" between normal and abnormal are either absent or weakly supported.

The polythetic form of the DSM's Diagnostic Criteria – only a subset of the criteria is adequate grounds for a diagnosis – generates unacceptable diagnostic heterogeneity. In other words, people diagnosed with the same personality disorder may share only one criterion or none.

The DSM fails to clarify the exact relationship between Axis II and Axis I disorders and the way chronic childhood and developmental problems interact with personality disorders.

The differential diagnoses are vague and the personality disorders are insufficiently demarcated. The result is excessive co-morbidity (multiple Axis II diagnoses).

The DSM contains little discussion of what distinguishes normal character (personality), personality traits, or personality style (Millon) – from personality disorders.

A dearth of documented clinical experience regarding both the disorders themselves and the utility of various treatment modalities.

Numerous personality disorders are "not otherwise specified" – a catchall, basket "category".

Cultural bias is evident in certain disorders (such as the Antisocial and the Schizotypal).

The emergence of dimensional alternatives to the categorical approach is acknowledged in the DSM-IV-TR itself:

“An alternative to the categorical approach is the dimensional perspective that Personality Disorders represent maladaptive variants of personality traits that merge imperceptibly into normality and into one another” (p.689)

The following issues – long neglected in the DSM – are likely to be tackled in future editions as well as in current research. But their omission from official discourse hitherto is both startling and telling:

- The longitudinal course of the disorder(s) and their temporal stability from early childhood onwards;
- The genetic and biological underpinnings of personality disorder(s);
- The development of personality psychopathology during childhood and its emergence in adolescence;
- The interactions between physical health and disease and personality disorders;

- The effectiveness of various treatments – talk therapies as well as psychopharmacology.

III. The Biochemistry and Genetics of Mental Health

Certain mental health afflictions are either correlated with a statistically abnormal biochemical activity in the brain – or are ameliorated with medication. Yet the two *facts* are not ineludibly facets of *the same* underlying phenomenon. In other words, that a given medicine reduces or abolishes certain symptoms does not necessarily mean they were *caused* by the processes or substances affected by the drug administered. Causation is only one of many possible connections and chains of events.

To designate a pattern of behavior as a mental health disorder is a value judgment, or at best a statistical observation. Such designation is effected regardless of the facts of brain science. Moreover, correlation is not causation. Deviant brain or body biochemistry (once called "polluted animal spirits") do exist – but are they truly the roots of mental perversion? Nor is it clear which triggers what: do the aberrant neurochemistry or biochemistry cause mental illness – or the other way around?

That psychoactive medication alters behavior and mood is indisputable. So do illicit and legal drugs, certain foods, and all interpersonal interactions. That the changes brought about by prescription are desirable – is debatable and involves tautological thinking. If a certain pattern of behavior is described as (socially) "dysfunctional" or (psychologically) "sick" – clearly, every change would be welcomed as "healing" and every agent of transformation would be called a "cure".

The same applies to the alleged heredity of mental illness. Single genes or gene complexes are frequently "associated" with mental health diagnoses, personality traits, or behavior patterns. But too little is known to establish irrefutable sequences of causes-and-effects. Even less is proven about the interaction of nature and nurture, genotype and phenotype, the plasticity of the brain and the psychological impact of trauma, abuse, upbringing, role models, peers, and other environmental elements.

Nor is the distinction between psychotropic substances and talk therapy that clear-cut. Words and the interaction with the therapist also affect the brain, its processes and chemistry - albeit more slowly and, perhaps, more profoundly and irreversibly. Medicines – as David Kaiser reminds us in *"Against Biologic Psychiatry"* (Psychiatric Times, Volume XIII, Issue 12, December 1996) – treat symptoms, not the underlying processes that yield them.

IV. The Variance of Mental Disease

If mental illnesses are bodily and empirical, they should be invariant both temporally and spatially, across cultures and societies. This, to some degree, is, indeed, the case. Psychological diseases are not context dependent – but the pathologizing of certain behaviors is. Suicide, substance abuse, narcissism, eating disorders, antisocial ways, schizotypal symptoms, depression, even psychosis are considered sick by some cultures – and utterly normative or advantageous in others.

This was to be expected. The human mind and its dysfunctions are alike around the world. But values differ from time to time and from one place to another. Hence,

disagreements about the propriety and desirability of human actions and inaction are bound to arise in a symptom-based diagnostic system.

As long as the *pseudo-medical* definitions of mental health disorders continue to rely exclusively on signs and symptoms – i.e., mostly on observed or reported behaviors – they remain vulnerable to such discord and devoid of much-sought universality and rigor.

V. Mental Disorders and the Social Order

The mentally sick receive the same treatment as carriers of AIDS or SARS or the Ebola virus or smallpox. They are sometimes quarantined against their will and coerced into involuntary treatment by medication, psychosurgery, or electroconvulsive therapy. This is done in the name of the greater good, largely as a preventive policy.

Conspiracy theories notwithstanding, it is impossible to ignore the enormous interests vested in psychiatry and psychopharmacology. The multibillion dollar industries involving drug companies, hospitals, managed healthcare, private clinics, academic departments, and law enforcement agencies rely, for their continued and exponential growth, on the propagation of the concept of "mental illness" and its corollaries: treatment and research.

VI. Mental Ailment as a Useful Metaphor

Abstract concepts form the core of all branches of human knowledge. No one has ever seen a quark, or untangled a chemical bond, or surfed an electromagnetic wave, or

visited the unconscious. These are useful metaphors, theoretical entities with explanatory or descriptive power.

"Mental health disorders" are no different. They are shorthand for capturing the unsettling quiddity of "the Other". Useful as taxonomies, they are also tools of social coercion and conformity, as Michel Foucault and [Louis Althusser](#) observed. Relegating both the dangerous and the idiosyncratic to the collective fringes is a vital technique of social engineering.

The aim is progress through social cohesion and the regulation of innovation and creative destruction. Psychiatry, therefore, is reifies society's preference of evolution to revolution, or, worse still, to mayhem. As is often the case with human Endeavour, it is a noble cause, unscrupulously and dogmatically pursued.

VII. The Insanity Defense

"It is an ill thing to knock against a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor. He that wounds them is culpable, but if they wound him they are not culpable." (Mishna, Babylonian Talmud)

If mental illness is culture-dependent and mostly serves as an organizing social principle - what should we make of the insanity defense (NGRI- Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity)?

A person is held not responsible for his criminal actions if s/he cannot tell right from wrong ("lacks substantial capacity either to appreciate the criminality (wrongfulness) of his conduct" - diminished capacity), did not intend to act the way he did (absent "mens rea")

and/or could not control his behavior ("irresistible impulse"). These handicaps are often associated with "mental disease or defect" or "mental retardation".

Mental health professionals prefer to talk about an impairment of a ["person's perception or understanding of reality"](#). They hold a "guilty but mentally ill" verdict to be contradiction in terms. All "mentally-ill" people operate within a (usually coherent) worldview, with consistent internal logic, and rules of right and wrong (ethics). Yet, these rarely conform to the way most people perceive the world. The mentally-ill, therefore, cannot be guilty because s/he has a tenuous grasp on reality.

Yet, experience teaches us that a criminal maybe mentally ill even as s/he maintains a perfect reality test and thus is held criminally responsible (Jeffrey Dahmer comes to mind). The "perception and understanding of reality", in other words, can and does co-exist even with the severest forms of mental illness.

This makes it even more difficult to comprehend what is meant by "mental disease". If some mentally ill maintain a grasp on reality, know right from wrong, can anticipate the outcomes of their actions, are not subject to irresistible impulses (the official position of the American Psychiatric Association) - in what way do they differ from us, "normal" folks?

This is why the insanity defense often sits ill with mental health pathologies deemed socially "acceptable" and "normal" - such as religion or [love](#).

Consider the following case:

A mother bashes the skulls of her three sons. Two of them die. She claims to have acted on instructions she had received from God. She is found not guilty by reason of insanity. The jury determined that she ["did not know right from wrong during the killings."](#)

But why exactly was she judged insane?

Her belief in the existence of God - a being with inordinate and inhuman attributes - may be irrational.

But it does not constitute insanity in the strictest sense because it conforms to social and cultural creeds and codes of conduct in her milieu. Billions of people faithfully subscribe to the same ideas, adhere to the same transcendental rules, observe the same mystical rituals, and claim to go through the same experiences. This shared psychosis is so widespread that it can no longer be deemed pathological, statistically speaking.

She claimed that God has spoken to her.

As do numerous other people. Behavior that is considered psychotic (paranoid-schizophrenic) in other contexts is lauded and admired in religious circles. Hearing voices and seeing visions - auditory and visual delusions - are considered rank manifestations of righteousness and sanctity.

Perhaps it was the content of her hallucinations that proved her insane?

She claimed that God had instructed her to kill her boys. Surely, God would not ordain such evil?

Alas, the Old and New Testaments both contain examples of God's appetite for human sacrifice. Abraham was ordered by God to sacrifice Isaac, his beloved son (though this savage command was rescinded at the last moment). Jesus, the son of God himself, was crucified to atone for the sins of humanity.

A divine injunction to slay one's offspring would sit well with the Holy Scriptures and the Apocrypha as well as with millennia-old Judeo-Christian traditions of martyrdom and sacrifice.

Her actions were wrong and incommensurate with both human and divine (or natural) laws.

Yes, but they were perfectly in accord with a literal interpretation of certain divinely-inspired texts, millennial scriptures, apocalyptic thought systems, and fundamentalist religious ideologies (such as the ones espousing the imminence of "rupture"). Unless one declares these doctrines and writings insane, her actions are not.

we are forced to the conclusion that the murderous mother is perfectly sane. Her frame of reference is different to ours. Hence, her definitions of right and wrong are idiosyncratic. To her, killing her babies was the right thing to do and in conformity with valued teachings and her own epiphany. Her grasp of reality - the immediate and later consequences of her actions - was never impaired.

It would seem that sanity and insanity are relative terms, dependent on frames of cultural and social reference, and statistically defined. There isn't - and, in principle, can

never emerge - an "objective", medical, scientific test to determine mental health or disease unequivocally.

VIII. Adaptation and Insanity - (correspondence with Paul Shirley, MSW)

"Normal" people adapt to their environment - both human and natural.

"Abnormal" ones try to adapt their environment - both human and natural - to their idiosyncratic needs/profile.

If they succeed, their environment, both human (society) and natural is pathologized.

Michael:

Group maladaptive responses are often misunderstood by leaders and citizens of the developed societies, which do not have to contend with the all-pervasive societal anxiety. These responses are often accorded the status of a political or religious doctrine, when in effect they are nothing more or less than expressions of a group psychopathology.

Sam:

As Freud observed, political or religious doctrines can be rooted in psychopathology - and exert powerful religious and political influence. That they are "sick" does not detract from their essence and potency as religious and political creeds.

Michael:

For the purposes of this dialog I will not introduce such variables as history, culture and customs, important as they are. Suffice it to note, that in my view, culture and customs, apart from the important function of ethnic identification, are a threefold phenomenon: they are group attempt at environmental adaptation, the reduction of fear of the unknown and an introduction of the element of predictability in the chaos of life. All the components of this phenomenon could be said to serve the same purpose - the reduction of the levels of group anxiety.

I will offer an illustration of the expression of differing levels of societal anxiety: One of the highest accolades one can pay to another person in Australian society is to say: "Mr. So and So is so relaxed and laid-back!". In reality, the person paying this compliment is saying, "Mr.

So and So is such a considerate man. He does not bother me with his anxiety," or, "I do not feel his anxiety, so I am not getting anxious myself". Furthermore, the calming presence of a "laid-back, relaxed person" is quite therapeutic for the anxious others, which is even more appreciated.

In traumatised societies this kind of consideration also exists but is rare as hens' teeth. Public displays of emotion, aggression and anxiety are an accepted form of behavior. Conversely, in non-traumatised societies overt displays of emotions, which might be potentially harmful to others, are considered socially inappropriate. And, yes, anxiety is contagious. It does spread from person to person. It can affect groups.

I have decided to explore the psychodynamic as well as political aspects of terrorist behavior using the referential

framework, derived from the blending of my life's experiences and the knowledge I acquired as a psychiatrist in training. From a practical point of view, I believe that the knowledge of the mechanisms of group psychopathology might be helpful in devising successful strategies for the containment and rectification of critical situations.

Personal background and view from inside of prison

I was born in what used to be the USSR. As a part of our "free" education I, along with millions of my fellow students, had to study Marxist-Leninist theory and even had to pass exams in the knowledge of "the only correct system of philosophical thought in existence". We were isolated from the rest of the world, because of the "danger of corrupt and decadent bourgeoisie, which was out to get our motherland one way or another". The only source of accredited information was the official propaganda. It depicted the world as a menacing, dark place, full of starving children, oppressed workers and mothers forced to be prostitutes in order to feed their families.

Despite an almost absolute lack of alternative sources of information, we did not believe the official propaganda. Moreover, when we saw crowds demonstrating against capitalism on the streets of Western cities in the official newsreels, we were reminded of the Lenin's definitions - "fellow-travelers" and the lesser known of his expressions - "useful idiots". Stalin, semi-contemptuously, called them "professional innocents".

We knew that the Western "peace" movements were active allies of our oppressors, that at best they were unthinking and naïve kids, believing or wanting to believe

in goodness of the "New World, a progressive future of the mankind". At worst they were in the hurry to jump on the winning wagon and dissociate themselves from the decaying and corrupt capitalist society, because this society was destined for a scrapheap of history as predicted by immortal Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. We did not know it at the time, but the motto "Better red, than dead" was quite popular.

We were angry with these movements, because of the ease with which they were manipulated by the Soviet secret services. It was an open secret in the USSR that the Chairman of the KGB was at the same time the Chairman of the International Association of the Democratic Youth, responsible for mass demonstrations in defense of peace. In their eagerness to proclaim their support for our tormentors these movements made our situation worse. They gave our rulers an impression that what they did to us is not going to be called to account, that nobody gave a damn about what has been done to people living in the USSR. We lived in fear. We lived in a state of uncertainty and servitude; we were dreading a night knock on the door. We did not trust anyone and we were utterly dependent on the State for our livelihoods. We existed in fear all our lives - secret informers were at all levels of society.

As a result of a contemptuous expenditure of Soviet soldiers' lives during WWII, women made up the majority of the population, purges and back-breaking labour further diminished male life expectancy. As a result of this tragic and brutal history, people living in the Soviet society developed a range of maladaptive and enduring patterns of anti-social behavior, emotional vulnerability and seething anger. This anger was impossible to discharge

other than in the State-sanctioned direction (Zionism, capitalism, America, Israel, yellow press, bourgeoisie decadence, rock-n-roll). Mass drunkenness was a commonplace. Interpersonal violence was widespread. Verbal aggression, insulting and rude behavior, disregard for the rights of others, petty thieving and shoddy work was a norm.

In short, we lived in totalitarian society. Dissent was outlawed. The Soviet rulers accepted the existence of the Western liberal democracies as a temporary inconvenience to be terminated with extreme prejudice in a liberation war. Its (the West's) function was to supply the USSR and its allies (clients, really) with credits. Liberal democracies were expected to contribute to their own demise with the sale of technology, know-how and, above all - with injections of hard currency for the production of the weapons, directed against them. The isolation of the Soviet people from Western contacts was a political necessity to the Soviet elite. Free contacts would've quickly exposed how incompetent, corrupt and utterly contemptuous towards their own people the Soviet Nomenclature really was.

As a result of this paranoid-depressive position as well as for the reasons of a dogma and feelings of inferiority, Soviets had no choice but to adopt an aggressive stance towards the West, despite their utter reliance on the West for almost everything, including bread. Unable to face reality, they utilised manic defenses:

Megalomania - our missiles are more powerful than yours, our ballet is more elegant than yours;

Paranoia - the West is out to get us, Jewish doctors are out to kill our government;

Triumphalism - we've won more gold medals than the Americans!

Denial - nobody was as good as Soviets were in stonewalling, evasiveness and outright lying. Soviet literature of the Socialist Realism was another example of highly sophisticated form of denial.

Why has dictatorship collapsed?

One of the notable Soviet-era dissidents, Andrei Amalrik, wrote in the mid-sixties, what turned out to be a prophetic booklet, "Will the USSR still exist in 1984?". In this booklet, he stated his belief that the collapse of the USSR would happen in the vicinity of 1984. He was promptly given a

15-year sentence in a concentration camp for anti-Soviet activities and died soon after. Interestingly, Andrei Amalrik stated that the post-Soviet era of recovery will be complicated by the popular Russian understanding of the philosophical category of "Justice". He noted, that in liberal societies, the word "justice" connotes an understanding that no one is allowed to starve and most people are able to reach the level of existence commensurate with his/her abilities. In the Russian interpretation, the word "justice" means - no one is allowed to have more than I do. The converse would mean "injustice". While we are at it, here's another example of Russian peculiarities of maladaptive interpretations. It goes like that: How would you distinguish between a Russian pessimist and optimist? A Russian pessimist is a

man who does not believe that things can get any worse. A Russian optimist, on the other hand is a man who believes that things can get worse and significantly so at that.

So, why did this dictatorship collapse? It did not collapse because of its economic incompetence - it was always incompetent. Those who did not like it were made to help to stabilise the economy by digging for gold in concentration camps of Kolyma. It did not collapse because the Soviets were contemptuous towards their own people - they always were. Those who wanted to increase their feelings of self-respect were made to undergo a crash course: digging for uranium in concentration camps of Yellow Waters. It did not collapse because of a loss of the compact of trust between the Government and the governed - this compact never existed. Those who were indignant about the lack of trust could.. There were thousands of locations described in well-researched tour guide to Gulag Archipelago by A.Solzhenitzyn. Analysis of the constellation of reasons for the collapse of the USSR is best to be left to a professional political scientist. I speak from a beneficiary's point of view. The USSR collapsed, I believe, because it was publicly confronted and exposed by Ronald Reagan for what it was - a dictatorship, a totalitarian State, a chunk of prime real estate ruled by an illegitimate clique, bent on making a mischief around the world in order to safeguard and extend their power - in itself a maladaptive strategy. It collapsed, because the West refused to participate in its own "burial", so eloquently promised by Nikita Khrushchev at the memorable session of the General Assembly of the UN. The Western political will demonstrated that at long last the Soviet people had a powerful ally. This ally was quite open: the lack of

political and economic freedoms in their country was regarded as a security threat to Western liberal democracies.

The Soviet population, not afraid of mass terror of Stalin era, exposed to Western media and personal accounts of the Soviet Jewish emigration simply laughed off attempts to salvage remnants of regime's respectability. The fear has gone. The healing began. Besides, Western music and fashion were so much better than the Soviet ones.

Danger, inherent in a lack of freedom

Lack of freedom and impoverishment in failing or dysfunctional states, is an inevitable security threat towards Western democracies. For totalitarian states and organisations, confrontation with liberal democracy is not a matter of choice, but a matter of survival, a matter of propping up their sorely lacking legitimacy, a matter of asserting their political and economic competence, where there is none. Marxist doctrine provided a theoretical justification for the world revolution. Marx, a self-hating, angry and dependent man, clearly understood the impossibility of co-existence with liberal democracies. For the Soviet Union and communism the territorial expansion was a vital necessity - elimination of any country its citizens could be able to defect to. Class war and the state of permanent revolution was a communist jihad. It divided the planet into a Socialist camp - an area of beauty and law, and a Capitalist camp - an area of ugliness and law of the jungle. The mission - creation of the World Communist Republic and the achievement of the world peace (which is possible only when the entire world has become communist). We know how it ended.

Sam:

I hate to interrupt this eloquent expose (really! I am enjoying it greatly!) - but Western liberal-democracy is as missionary as socialism has ever been.

Stalin, actually, was AGAINST "internationalism" and coined the phrase "socialism in one state" (in Russia). He banished Trotsky because Trotsky sought to export the revolution to other countries!

Every dominant narrative - Communism, fascism, Islam, liberal-democracy - invents "enemies", develops a "we-against-they" mentality, and tries to export its ideology worldwide. What is the war in Iraq? What was the war in Kosovo? "Humanitarian" intervention is the code word for Western imposition of Western values by force of arms on (often unwilling) populations.

Consider the Huntingtonian pair in the "Clash of Civilization - Islam and Liberal-Democracy.

Islam is not merely a religion. It is also - and perhaps, foremost - a state ideology. It is all-pervasive and missionary. It permeates every aspect of social cooperation and culture. It is an organizing principle, a narrative, a philosophy, a value system, and a *vade mecum*. In this it resembles Confucianism and, to some extent, Hinduism.

Judaism and its offspring, Christianity - though heavily involved in political affairs throughout the ages - have kept their dignified distance from such carnal matters. These are religions of "heaven" as opposed to Islam, a

practical, pragmatic, hands-on, ubiquitous, "earthly" creed.

Secular religions - Democratic Liberalism, Communism, Fascism, Nazism, Socialism and other isms - are more akin to Islam than to, let's say, Buddhism. They are universal, prescriptive, and total. They provide recipes, rules, and norms regarding every aspect of existence - individual, social, cultural, moral, economic, political, military, and philosophical.

At the end of the Cold War, Democratic Liberalism stood triumphant over the fresh graves of its ideological opponents. They have all been eradicated. This precipitated Fukuyama's premature diagnosis (the End of History). But one state ideology, one bitter rival, one implacable opponent, one contestant for world domination, one antithesis remained - Islam.

Militant Islam is, therefore, not a cancerous mutation of "true" Islam. On the contrary, it is the purest expression of its nature as an imperialistic religion which demands unmitigated obedience from its followers and regards all infidels as both inferior and avowed enemies.

The same can be said about Democratic Liberalism. Like Islam, it does not hesitate to exercise force, is missionary, colonizing, and regards itself as a monopolist of the "truth" and of "universal values". Its antagonists are invariably portrayed as depraved, primitive, and below par.

Such mutually exclusive claims were bound to lead to an all-out conflict sooner or later. The "War on Terrorism" is

only the latest round in a millennium-old war between Islam and other "world systems".

Such interpretation of recent events enrages many. They demand to know (often in harsh tones):

- Don't you see any difference between terrorists who murder civilians and regular armies in battle?

Both regulars and irregulars slaughter civilians as a matter of course. "Collateral damage" is the main outcome of modern, total warfare - and of low intensity conflicts alike.

There is a major difference between terrorists and soldiers, though:

Terrorists make carnage of noncombatants their main tactic - while regular armies rarely do. Such conduct is criminal and deplorable, whoever the perpetrator.

But what about the killing of combatants in battle? How should we judge the slaying of soldiers by terrorists in combat?

Modern nation-states enshrined the self-appropriated monopoly on violence in their constitutions and ordinances (and in international law). Only state organs - the army, the police - are permitted to kill, torture, and incarcerate.

Terrorists are trust-busters: they, too, want to kill, torture, and incarcerate. They seek to break the death cartel of governments by joining its ranks.

Thus, when a soldier kills terrorists and ("inadvertently") civilians (as "collateral damage") - it is considered above board. But when the terrorist decimates the very same soldier - he is decried as an outlaw.

Moreover, the misbehavior of some countries - not least the United States - led to the legitimization of terrorism. Often nation-states use terrorist organizations to further their geopolitical goals. When this happens, erstwhile outcasts become "freedom fighters", pariahs become allies, murderers are recast as sensitive souls struggling for equal rights. This contributes to the blurring of ethical percepts and the blunting of moral judgment.

- Would you rather live under sharia law? Don't you find Liberal Democracy vastly superior to Islam?

Superior, no. Different - of course. Having been born and raised in the West, I naturally prefer its standards to Islam's. Had I been born in a Muslim country, I would have probably found the West and its principles perverted and obnoxious.

The question is meaningless because it presupposes the existence of an objective, universal, culture and period independent set of preferences. Luckily, there is no such thing.

- In this clash of civilization whose side are you on?

This is not a clash of civilizations. Western culture is inextricably intertwined with Islamic knowledge, teachings, and philosophy. Christian fundamentalists have more in common with Muslim militants than with East Coast or French intellectuals.

Muslims have always been the West's most defining Other. Islamic existence and "gaze" helped to mold the West's emerging identity as a historical construct. From Spain to India, the incessant friction and fertilizing interactions with Islam shaped Western values, beliefs, doctrines, moral tenets, political and military institutions, arts, and sciences.

This war is about world domination. Two incompatible thought and value systems compete for the hearts and minds (and purchasing power) of the denizens of the global village. Like in the Westens, by high noon, either one of them is left standing - or both will have perished.

Where does my loyalty reside?

I am a Westerner, so I hope the West wins this confrontation. But, in the process, it would be good if it were humbled, deconstructed, and reconstructed. One beneficial outcome of this conflict is the demise of the superpower system - a relic of days bygone and best forgotten. I fully believe and trust that in militant Islam, the United States has found its match.

In other words, I regard militant Islam as a catalyst that will hasten the transformation of the global power structure from unipolar to multipolar. It may also commute the United States itself. It will definitely rejuvenate religious thought and cultural discourse. All wars do.

Aren't you overdoing it? After all, al-Qaida is just a bunch of terrorists on the run!

The West is not fighting al-Qaida. It is facing down the circumstances and ideas that gave rise to al-Qaida. Conditions - such as poverty, ignorance, disease, oppression, and xenophobic superstitions - are difficult to change or to reverse. Ideas are impossible to suppress. Already, militant Islam is far more widespread and established that any Western government would care to admit.

History shows that all terrorist groupings ultimately join the mainstream. Many countries - from Israel to Ireland and from East Timor to Nicaragua - are governed by former terrorists. Terrorism enhances social upward mobility and fosters the redistribution of wealth and resources from the haves to have not.

Al-Qaida, despite its ominous portrayal in the Western press - is no exception. It, too, will succumb, in due time, to the twin lures of power and money. Nihilistic and decentralized as it is - its express goals are the rule of Islam and equitable economic development. It is bound to get its way in some countries.

The world of the future will be truly pluralistic. The proselytizing zeal of Liberal Democracy and Capitalism has rendered them illiberal and intolerant. The West must accept the fact that a sizable chunk of humanity does not regard materialism, individualism, liberalism, progress, and democracy - at least in their Western guises - as universal or desirable.

Live and let live (and live and let die) must replace the West's malignant optimism and intellectual and spiritual arrogance.

Edward K. Thompson, the managing editor of "Life" from 1949 to 1961, once wrote:

"'Life' must be curious, alert, erudite and moral, but it must achieve this without being holier-than-thou, a cynic, a know-it-all or a Peeping Tom."

The West has grossly and thoroughly violated Thompson's edict. In its oft-interrupted intercourse with these forsaken regions of the globe, it has acted, alternately, as a Peeping Tom, a cynic and a know it all. It has invariably behaved as if it were holier-than-thou. In an unmitigated and fantastic succession of blunders, miscalculations, vain promises, unkept threats and unkempt diplomats - it has driven the world to the verge of war and the regions it "adopted" to the threshold of economic and social upheaval.

Enamored with the new ideology of free marketry cum democracy, the West first assumed the role of the omniscient. It designed ingenious models, devised foolproof laws, imposed fail-safe institutions and strongly "recommended" measures. Its representatives, the tribunes of the West, ruled the plebeian East with determination rarely equaled by skill or knowledge.

Velvet hands couched in iron gloves, ignorance disguised by economic newspeak, geostrategic interests masquerading as forms of government, characterized their dealings with the natives. Preaching and beseeching from ever higher pulpits, they poured opprobrium and sweet delusions on the eagerly duped, naive, bewildered masses.

The deceit was evident to the indigenous cynics - but it was the failure that dissuaded them and others besides.

The West lost its former colonies not when it lied egregiously, not when it pretended to know for sure when it surely did not know, not when it manipulated and coaxed and coerced - but when it failed.

To the peoples of these regions, the king was fully dressed. It was not a little child but an enormous debacle that exposed his nudity. In its presumptuousness and pretentiousness, feigned surety and vain clichés, imported economic models and exported cheap raw materials - the West succeeded to demolish beyond reconstruction whole economies, to ravage communities, to wreak ruination upon the centuries-old social fabric, woven diligently by generations.

It brought crime and drugs and mayhem but gave very little in return, only a horizon beclouded and thundering with vacuous eloquence. As a result, while tottering regional governments still pay lip service to the values of Capitalism, the masses are enraged and restless and rebellious and baleful and anti-Western to the core.

The disenchanted were not likely to acquiesce for long - not only with the West's neo-colonialism but also with its incompetence and inaptitude, with the nonchalant experimentation that it imposed upon them and with the abyss between its proclamations and its performance.

Throughout this time, the envoys of the West - its mediocre politicians, its insatiably ruthless media, its obese tourists, its illiterate soldiers, and its armchair economists - continue to play the role of God, wreaking greater havoc than even the original.

While confessing to omniscience (in breach of every tradition scientific and religious), they also developed a kind of world weary, unshaven cynicism interlaced with fascination at the depths plumbed by the locals' immorality and amorality.

The jet-set Peeping Toms reside in five star hotels (or luxurious apartments) overlooking the communist, or Middle-Eastern, or African shantytowns. They drive utility vehicles to the shabby offices of the native bureaucrats and dine in \$100 per meal restaurants ("it's so cheap here").

In between kebab and hummus they bemoan and grieve the corruption and nepotism and cronyism ("I simply love their ethnic food, but they are so..."). They mourn the autochthonous inability to act decisively, to cut red tape, to manufacture quality, to open to the world, to be less xenophobic (said while casting a disdainful glance at the native waiter).

To them it looks like an ancient force of nature and, therefore, an inevitability - hence their cynicism. Mostly provincial people with horizons limited by consumption and by wealth, these heralds of the West adopt cynicism as shorthand for cosmopolitanism. They erroneously believe that feigned sarcasm lends them an air of ruggedness and rich experience and the virile aroma of decadent erudition. Yet all it does is make them obnoxious and even more repellent to the residents than they already were.

Ever the preachers, the West - both Europeans and Americans - uphold themselves as role models of virtue to

be emulated, as points of reference, almost inhuman or superhuman in their taming of the vices, avarice up front.

Yet the chaos and corruption in their own homes is broadcast live, day in and day out, into the cubicles inhabited by the very people they seek to so transform. And they conspire and collaborate in all manner of venality and crime and scam and rigged elections in all the countries they put the gospel to.

In trying to put an end to history, they seem to have provoked another round of it - more vicious, more enduring, more traumatic than before. That the West is paying the price for its mistakes I have no doubt. For isn't it a part and parcel of its teachings that everything has a price and that there is always a time of reckoning?

Regarding Communism:

The core countries of Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Poland) experienced industrial capitalism in the inter-war period. But the countries comprising the vast expanses of the New Independent States, Russia and the Balkan had no real acquaintance with it. To them its zealous introduction is nothing but another ideological experiment and not a very rewarding one at that.

It is often said that there is no precedent to the extant fortan transition from totalitarian communism to liberal capitalism. This might well be true. Yet, nascent capitalism is not without historical example. The study of the birth of capitalism in feudal Europe may yet lead to some surprising and potentially useful insights.

The Barbarian conquest of the teetering Roman Empire (410-476 AD) heralded five centuries of existential insecurity and mayhem. Feudalism was the countryside's reaction to this damnation. It was a Hobson's choice and an explicit trade-off. Local lords defended their vassals against nomad intrusions in return for perpetual service bordering on slavery. A small percentage of the population lived on trade behind the massive walls of Medieval cities.

In most parts of central, eastern and southeastern Europe, feudalism endured well into the twentieth century. It was entrenched in the legal systems of the Ottoman Empire and of Czarist Russia. Elements of feudalism survived in the mellifluous and prolix prose of the Habsburg codices and patents. Most of the denizens of these moribund swathes of Europe were farmers - only the profligate and parasitic members of a distinct minority inhabited the cities. The present brobdignagian agricultural sectors in countries as diverse as Poland and Macedonia attest to this continuity of feudal practices.

Both manual labour and trade were derided in the Ancient World. This derision was partially eroded during the Dark Ages. It survived only in relation to trade and other "non-productive" financial activities and even that not past the thirteenth century. Max Weber, in his opus, "The City" (New York, MacMillan, 1958) described this mental shift of paradigm thus: "The medieval citizen was on the way towards becoming an economic man ... the ancient citizen was a political man."

What communism did to the lands it permeated was to freeze this early feudal frame of mind of disdain towards "non-productive", "city-based" vocations. Agricultural

and industrial occupations were romantically extolled. The cities were berated as hubs of moral turpitude, decadence and greed. Political awareness was made a precondition for personal survival and advancement. The clock was turned back. Weber's "Homo Economicus" yielded to communism's supercilious version of the ancient Greeks' "Zoon Politikon". John of Salisbury might as well have been writing for a communist agitprop department when he penned this in "Policraticus" (1159 AD): "...if (rich people, people with private property) have been stuffed through excessive greed and if they hold in their contents too obstinately, (they) give rise to countless and incurable illnesses and, through their vices, can bring about the ruin of the body as a whole". The body in the text being the body politic.

This inimical attitude should have come as no surprise to students of either urban realities or of communism, their parricidal off-spring. The city liberated its citizens from the bondage of the feudal labour contract. And it acted as the supreme guarantor of the rights of private property. It relied on its trading and economic prowess to obtain and secure political autonomy. John of Paris, arguably one of the first capitalist cities (at least according to Braudel), wrote: "(The individual) had a right to property which was not with impunity to be interfered with by superior authority - because it was acquired by (his) own efforts" (in Georges Duby, "The age of the Cathedrals: Art and Society, 980-1420, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1981). Despite the fact that communism was an urban phenomenon (albeit with rustic roots) - it abnegated these "bourgeoisie" values. Communal ownership replaced individual property and servitude to the state replaced individualism. In communism, feudalism was restored. Even geographical mobility was severely curtailed, as was

the case in feudalism. The doctrine of the Communist party monopolized all modes of thought and perception - very much as the church-condoned religious strain did 700 years before. Communism was characterized by tensions between party, state and the economy - exactly as the medieval polity was plagued by conflicts between church, king and merchants-bankers. Paradoxically, communism was a faithful re-enactment of pre-capitalist history.

Communism should be well distinguished from Marxism. Still, it is ironic that even Marx's "scientific materialism" has an equivalent in the twilight times of feudalism. The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed a concerted effort by medieval scholars to apply "scientific" principles and human knowledge to the solution of social problems. The historian R. W. Southern called this period "scientific humanism" (in "Flesh and Stone" by Richard Sennett, London, Faber and Faber, 1994). We mentioned John of Salisbury's "Policraticus". It was an effort to map political functions and interactions into their human physiological equivalents. The king, for instance, was the brain of the body politic. Merchants and bankers were the insatiable stomach. But this apparently simplistic analogy masked a schismatic debate. Should a person's position in life be determined by his political affiliation and "natural" place in the order of things - or should it be the result of his capacities and their exercise (merit)? Do the ever changing contents of the economic "stomach", its kaleidoscopic innovativeness, its "permanent revolution" and its propensity to assume "irrational" risks - adversely affect this natural order which, after all, is based on tradition and routine? In short: is there an inherent incompatibility between the order of the world (read: the church doctrine) and meritocratic (democratic)

capitalism? Could Thomas Aquinas' "Summa Theologica" (the world as the body of Christ) be reconciled with "Stadt Luft Macht Frei" ("city air liberates" - the sign above the gates of the cities of the Hanseatic League)?

This is the eternal tension between the individual and the group. Individualism and communism are not new to history and they have always been in conflict. To compare the communist party to the church is a well-worn cliché. Both religions - the secular and the divine - were threatened by the spirit of freedom and initiative embodied in urban culture, commerce and finance. The order they sought to establish, propagate and perpetuate conflicted with basic human drives and desires. Communism was a throwback to the days before the ascent of the urbane, capitalistic, sophisticated, incredulous, individualistic and risqué West. it sought to substitute one kind of "scientific" determinism (the body politic of Christ) by another (the body politic of "the Proletariat"). It failed and when it unraveled, it revealed a landscape of toxic devastation, frozen in time, an ossified natural order bereft of content and adherents. The post-communist countries have to pick up where it left them, centuries ago. It is not so much a problem of lacking infrastructure as it is an issue of pathologized minds, not so much a matter of the body as a dysfunction of the psyche.

The historian Walter Ullman says that John of Salisbury thought (850 years ago) that "the individual's standing within society... (should be) based upon his office or his official function ... (the greater this function was) the more scope it had, the weightier it was, the more rights the individual had." (Walter Ullman, "The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages", Baltimore, Johns Hopkins

University Press, 1966). I cannot conceive of a member of the communist nomenklatura who would not have adopted this formula wholeheartedly. If modern capitalism can be described as "back to the future", communism was surely "forward to the past".

Michael:

Still, compare Communism with the Islamic interpretation. For radical Islamists the justification of territorial expansion has been provided by the principle of Jihad, established by Mohammed in response to refusal to acknowledge his prophetic mission by Jewish tribes of Hijaz. He divided the world into the dar al-Islam, the peaceful territory of Islam, where the Law rules and dar al-Harb, the "territory of war", controlled temporarily by non-Muslims.

Sam:

Sounds to me like the division offered by the democratic states (Israel, the USA, the UK) today:

Liberal-democracy pitted against the "Evil Empire" (USSR), or the "Axis of Evil" (North Korea, Iran, and Iraq).

We-against-they. Every regime must find an enemy - or, in the absence of one, invent it. Read Orwell's "1984".

Michael:

But Jihad is the *necessary and permanent* state of war waged against the dar al-Harb, which can only end when entire world submits to Islam. The similarities between

the secular totalitarian dogma of communism and the monotheistic Islam are remarkable.

Sam:

Jihad is the continuous fight to achieve perfection. It can - and does - take place within each and every individual Muslim. It is a striving, a state of mind, not necessarily an act. Politically, it is the war against "infidels" who harm Muslims, violate their rights, and act against the interests of Islam. Jihad is reactive - not proactive. It is not missionary - it is intended to right wrongs (or what Muslims perceive to be wrongs).

Michael:

So, why terror? What has it got to do with psychodynamic approach? Terrorism actually is not a new doctrine. Looking back in recent history, we will find Russian terrorists of the Peoples' freedom, Jewish terrorists of the Stern gang, Serbian terrorists such as Danilo Princip who's shots in Sarajevo triggered WWI, Arab terrorists of Hamas and Hizbullah, Palestinian terrorists of Al-Fatah, Tamil terrorists or Tigers, Irish terrorists from the IRA and many others. Should Attila the Hun or Robin Hood be called terrorists?

Semantics could be quite confusing. What is terrorism? Being a planetary phenomenon terrorism could be defined as an application of unconventional, unexpected and illegal power designed to achieve political goals.

Sam:

"'Unbounded' morality ultimately becomes counterproductive even in terms of the same moral principles being sought. The law of diminishing returns applies to morality."

Thomas Sowell

There's a story about Robespierre that has the preeminent rabble-rouser of the French Revolution leaping up from his chair as soon as he saw a mob assembling outside.

"I must see which way the crowd is headed", he is reputed to have said: "For I am their leader."

http://www.salon.com/tech/books/1999/11/04/new_optimism/

People who exercise violence in the pursuit of what they hold to be just causes are alternately known as "terrorists" or "freedom fighters".

They all share a few common characteristics:

1. A hard core of idealists adopt a cause (in most cases, the freedom of a group of people). They base their claims on history - real or hastily concocted, on a common heritage, on a language shared by the members of the group and, most important, on hate and contempt directed at an "enemy". The latter is, almost invariably, the physical or cultural occupier of space the idealists claim as their own.
2. The loyalties and alliances of these people shift effortlessly as ever escalating means justify an ever shrinking cause. The initial burst of grandiosity inherent in every such undertaking

gives way to cynical and bitter pragmatism as both enemy and people tire of the conflict.

3. An inevitable result of the realpolitik of terrorism is the collaboration with the less savory elements of society. Relegated to the fringes by the inexorable march of common sense, the freedom fighters naturally gravitate towards like minded non-conformists and outcasts. The organization is criminalized. Drug dealing, bank robbing and other manner of organized and contumacious criminality become integral extensions of the struggle. A criminal corporatism emerges, structured but volatile and given to internecine donnybrooks.
4. Very often an un-holy co-dependence develops between the organization and its prey. It is the interest of the freedom fighters to have a contemptible and tyrannical regime as their opponent. If not prone to suppression and convulsive massacres by nature - acts of terror will deliberately provoke even the most benign rule to abhorrent ebullition.
5. The terrorist organization will tend to emulate the very characteristics of its enemy it fulminates against the most. Thus, all such groups are rebarbatively authoritarian, execrably violent, devoid of human empathy or emotions, suppressive, ostentatious, trenchant and often murderous.
6. It is often the freedom fighters who compromise their freedom and the freedom of their people in

the most egregious manner. This is usually done either by collaborating with the derided enemy against another, competing set of freedom fighters - or by inviting a foreign power to arbitrate. Thus, they often catalyze the replacement of one regime of oppressive horror with another, more terrible and entrenched.

7. Most freedom fighters are assimilated and digested by the very establishment they fought against or as the founders of new, privileged nomenklaturas. It is then that their true nature is exposed, mired in gulosity and superciliousness as they become. Inveterate violators of basic human rights, they often transform into the very demons they helped to exorcise.

Most freedom fighters are disgruntled members of the middle classes or the intelligentsia. They bring to their affairs the merciless ruthlessness of sheltered lives. Mistaking compassion for weakness, they show none as they unscrupulously pursue their self-aggrandizement, the ego trip of sending others to their death. They are the stuff martyrs are made of. Borne on the crests of circumstantial waves, they lever their unbalanced personalities and project them to great effect. They are the footnotes of history that assume the role of text. And they rarely enjoy the unmitigated support of the very people they proffer to liberate. Even the most harangued and subjugated people find it hard to follow or accept the vicissitudinal behavior of their self-appointed liberators, their shifting friendships and enmities and their pailful of violence.

Terrorists can be phenomenologically described as narcissists in a constant state of deficient narcissistic

supply. The "grandiosity gap" - the painful and narcissistically injurious gap between their grandiose fantasies and their dreary and humiliating reality - becomes emotionally insupportable. They decompensate and act out. They bring "down to their level" (by destroying it) the object of their pathological envy, the cause of their seething frustration, the symbol of their dull achievements, always incommensurate with their inflated self-image.

They seek omnipotence through murder, control (not least self control) through violence, prestige, fame and celebrity by defying figures of authorities, challenging them, and humbling them. Unbeknownst to them, they seek self punishment. They are at heart suicidal. They aim to cast themselves as victims by forcing others to punish them. This is called "projective identification". They attribute evil and corruption to their enemies and foes. These forms of paranoia are called projection and splitting. These are all primitive, infantile, and often persecutory, defense mechanisms.

When coupled with narcissism - the inability to empathize, the exploitativeness, the sense of entitlement, the rages, the dehumanization and devaluation of others - this mindset yields abysmal contempt. The overriding emotion of terrorists and serial killers, the amalgam and culmination of their tortured psyche - is deep seated disdain for everything human, the flip side of envy. It is cognitive dissonance gone amok. On the one hand the terrorist derides as "false", "meaningless", "dangerous", and "corrupt" common values, institutions, human intercourse, and society. On the other hand, he devotes his entire life (and often risks it) to the elimination and pulverization of these "insignificant" entities. To justify

this apparent contradiction, the terrorists casts himself as an altruistic saviour of a group of people "endangered" by his foes. He is always self-appointed and self-proclaimed, rarely elected. The serial killer rationalizes and intellectualizes his murders similarly, by purporting to "liberate" or "deliver" his victims from a fate worse than death.

The global reach, the secrecy, the impotence and growing panic of his victims, of the public, and of his pursuers, the damage he wreaks - all serve as external ego functions. The terrorist and serial killer regulate their sense of self esteem and self worth by feeding slavishly on the reactions to their heinous deeds. Their cosmic significance is daily enhanced by newspaper headlines, ever increasing bounties, admiring imitators, successful acts of blackmail, the strength and size of their opponents, and the devastation of human life and property. Appeasement works only to aggravate their drives and strengthen their appetites by emboldening them and by raising the threshold of excitation and "narcissistic supply". Terrorists and killers are addicted to this drug of being acknowledged and reflected. They derive their sense of existence, parasitically, from the reactions of their (often captive) audience.

See this:

[*Pathological Narcissism, Group Behavior, and Terrorism*](#)

Michael:

From a psychodynamic view, however, terrorism is one of the results of the inherent insecurity of the totalitarian

mind; its claim to significance, an attempt to publicly declare the perceived suffering, thus justifying the right to inflict suffering in return. Being inspired by whatever grievances the terrorist wants rectified, he uses a simple reframing technique: dehumanizing an opposition. Labeling all non-Moslems as 'infidels' he gives and receives permission to use whatever force he deems necessary to win.

Curiously, in the context of the ongoing conflict between the terrorist and the rest of the civilized world there might be an element of a dependent child, angrily hitting a daddy who holds him, to indicate the distress he feels.

Sam:

Objectifying (and, thus, dehumanizing) language is used by all political regimes and institutions, terrorist or not.

What is "collateral damage" if not an objectifying, dehumanizing form of speech?

The Anglo-Saxon members of the motley "Coalition of the Willing" were proud of their aircraft's and missiles' "surgical" precision. The legal (and moral) imperative to spare the lives of innocent civilians was well observed, they bragged. "Collateral damage" was minimized. They were lucky to have confronted a dilapidated enemy. Precision bombing is expensive, in terms of lives - of fighter pilots. Military planners are well aware that there is a hushed trade-off between civilian and combatant casualties.

This dilemma is both ethical and practical. It is often "resolved" by applying - explicitly or implicitly - the

principle of "over-riding affiliation". As usual, Judaism was there first, agonizing over similar moral conflicts. Two Jewish sayings amount to a reluctant admission of the relativity of moral calculus: "One is close to oneself" and "Your city's poor denizens come first (with regards to charity)".

One's *proper* conduct, in other words, is decided by one's self-interest and by one's affiliations. Affiliation (to a community, or a fraternity), in turn, is determined by one's positions and, more so, perhaps, by one's oppositions.

What are these "positions" and "oppositions"?

The most fundamental position - from which all others are derived - is the positive statement "I am a human being". Belonging to the human race is an immutable and inalienable position. Denying this leads to horrors such as the Holocaust. The Nazis did not regard as humans the Jews, the Slavs, homosexuals, and other minorities - so they sought to exterminate them.

All other, synthetic, positions are made of couples of positive and negative statements with the structure "I am *and* I am not".

But there is an important asymmetry at the heart of this neat arrangement.

The negative statements in each couple are fully derived from - and thus are entirely dependent on and implied by - the positive statements. Not so the positive statements. They cannot be derived from, or be implied by, the negative one.

Lest we get distractingly abstract, let us consider an example.

Study the couple "I am an Israeli" and "I am not a Syrian".

Assuming that there are 220 countries and territories, the positive statement "I am an Israeli" implies about 220 **certain** (true) negative statements. You can derive each and every one of these negative statements from the positive statement. You can thus create 220 perfectly valid couples.

"I am an Israeli ..."

Therefore:

"I am not ... (a citizen of country X, which is not Israel)".

You can safely derive the true statement "I am not a Syrian" from the statement "I am an Israeli".

Can I derive the statement "I am an Israeli" from the statement "I am not a Syrian"?

Not with any certainty.

The negative statement "I am not a Syrian" implies 220 **possible** positive statements of the type "I am ... (a citizen of country X, which is not India)", including the statement "I am an Israeli". "I am not a Syrian and I am a citizen of ... (220 possibilities)"

Negative statements can be derived with certainty from any positive statement.

Negative statements as well as positive statements cannot be derived with certainty from any negative statement.

This formal-logical trait reflects a deep psychological reality with unsettling consequences.

A positive statement about one's affiliation ("I am an Israeli") immediately generates 220 certain *negative* statements (such as "I am not a Syrian").

One's positive self-definition automatically excludes all others by assigning to them negative values. "*I am*" always goes with "*I am not*".

The positive self-definitions of others, in turn, negate one's self-definition.

Statements about one's affiliation are inevitably exclusionary.

It is possible for many people to share the same positive self-definition. About 6 million people can truly say "I am an Israeli".

Affiliation - to a community, fraternity, nation, state, religion, or team - is really a positive statement of self-definition ("I am an Israeli", for instance) shared by all the affiliated members (the affiliates).

One's moral obligations towards one's affiliates override and supersede one's moral obligations towards non-affiliated humans.

Thus, an American's moral obligation to safeguard the lives of American fighter pilots overrides and supersedes

(subordinates) his moral obligation to save the lives of innocent civilians, however numerous, if they are not Americans.

The larger the number of positive self-definitions I share with someone (i.e., the more affiliations we have in common) , the larger and more overriding is my moral obligation to him or her.

Example:

I have moral obligations towards all other humans because I share with them my affiliation to the human species.

But my moral obligations towards my countrymen supersede these obligation. I share with my compatriots two affiliations rather than one. We are all members of the human race - but we are also citizens of the same state.

This patriotism, in turn, is superseded by my moral obligation towards the members of my family. With them I share a third affiliation - we are all members of the same clan.

I owe the utmost to myself. With myself I share all the aforementioned affiliations plus one: the affiliation to the one member club that is me.

But this scheme raises some difficulties.

We postulated that the strength of one's moral obligations towards other people is determined by the number of positive self-definitions ("affiliations") he shares with them.

Moral obligations are, therefore, contingent. They are, indeed, the outcomes of interactions with others - but not in the immediate sense, as the personalist philosopher Emmanuel Levinas suggested.

Rather, ethical principles, rights, and obligations are merely the solutions yielded by a moral calculus of shared affiliations. Think about them as matrices with specific moral values and obligations attached to the numerical strengths of one's affiliations.

Some moral obligations are universal and are the outcomes of one's organic position as a human being (the "basic affiliation"). These are the "transcendent moral values".

Other moral values and obligations arise only as the number of shared affiliations increases. These are the "derivative moral values".

Moreover, it would be wrong to say that moral values and obligations "accumulate", or that the more fundamental ones are the strongest.

On the very contrary. The universal ethical principles - the ones related to one's position as a human being - are the **weakest**. They are subordinate to derivative moral values and obligations yielded by one's affiliations.

The universal imperative "thou shall not kill (another human being)" is easily over-ruled by the moral obligation to kill for one's country. The imperative "thou shall not steal" is superseded by one's moral obligation to spy for one's nation. Treason is when we prefer universal ethical

principles to derivatives ones, dictated by our affiliation (citizenship).

This leads to another startling conclusion:

There is no such thing as a self-consistent moral system. Moral values and obligations often contradict and conflict with each other.

In the examples above, killing (for one's country) and stealing (for one's nation) are moral obligations, the outcomes of the application of derivative moral values. Yet, they contradict the universal moral value of the sanctity of life and property and the universal moral obligation not to kill.

Hence, killing the non-affiliated (civilians of another country) to defend one's own (fighter pilots) is morally justified. It violates some fundamental principles - but upholds higher moral obligations, to one's kin and kith.

The truth is that in an age of terrorism, guerilla and total warfare the medieval doctrine of Just War needs to be re-defined. Moreover, issues of legitimacy, efficacy and morality should not be confused. Legitimacy is conferred by institutions. Not all morally justified wars are, therefore, automatically legitimate. Frequently the efficient execution of a battle plan involves immoral or even illegal acts.

As international law evolves beyond the ancient percepts of sovereignty, it should incorporate new thinking about pre-emptive strikes, human rights violations as *casus belli* and the role and standing of international organizations, insurgents and liberation movements.

Yet, inevitably, what constitutes "justice" depends heavily on the cultural and societal contexts, narratives, mores, and values of the disputants. Thus, one cannot answer the deceptively simple question: "Is this war a just war?" - without first asking: "According to whom? In which context? By which criteria? Based on what values? In which period in history and where?"

Being members of Western Civilization, whether by choice or by default, our understanding of what constitutes a just war is crucially founded on our shifting perceptions of the West.

See these:

Hitler and the Invention of the West

The Demise of the West?

The New Rome - America, the Reluctant Empire

The Doctrine of Just War

Michael:

There is also an attempt to level the playing field by destabilizing the economies and political structures of the West in order to bring the Western democracies to a lower level of 'functioning'. Superior functioning of Western societies has unacceptable implications to the terrorist. One of these implications is lower societal anxiety level. "How could you be so calm, when I am hurting?!". The conflict between high and low group anxiety societies is inevitable where the rulers or aspirants to this title claim a messianic mantle with nothing to show in tangible

benefits for the people they claim to emancipate. Stalin blamed "wreckers" for his failures, Osama bin Laden is blaming the West for the squalor in which his people live. One of the most dangerous features of the totalitarian mind is a total lack of insight coupled with messianic aspirations on the background of narcissism.

He has to have an enemy, someone who is responsible for the fact that his chosen path to nirvana for the masses has led to personal disappointment, embarrassment and universal poverty. Narcissistic lack of empathy and anti-social disregard of the rights and aspirations of others means that these self-proclaimed Messiahs have no problem with deaths of the others, be it their own people or not.

Western fellow travelers

When I started to practice in Australia in early 1980's my mentor invited me to come along to the meeting of the local branch of PND (People for Nuclear Disarmament) and was very surprised that I declined. As a matter of fact he was shocked: "Are you supporting nuclear war?". I could've told him that I came from a country where there was no family that did not lose someone in the fight against the Nazis, that for me to support any war is a sheer impossibility, but I also did not feel like social suicide. However, I did not want to offend an essentially well-meaning man, so instead I explained, that I will take part in the activities of the PND immediately after a branch of this organisation (or its Soviet equivalent) will be allowed free and unfettered right of assembly in Moscow and other cities of the Soviet Union. I find it hard to forget how smug and self-righteous, how indignant and hostile he was towards "reactionaries". He really believed, that the

reactionaries were anyone who did not think, that the Liberals (the Australian equivalent of American Republicans) were fascists. There was not a hint of tolerance or respect for a difference in opinion. This encounter with an otherwise sane and decent man profoundly shocked me. This was the first time, since leaving the USSR I came across the hold the Left had on hearts and minds of the Australian intelligentsia.

Many years later I attended a seminar dedicated to the topic of terrorism as a psychodynamic phenomenon. It was designed primarily for psychiatric registrars and was addressed by one of the prominent members of psychotherapeutic community. This esteemed academic left no one in any doubt, that the terrorism, especially the 9/11 events were prompted, indeed provoked by, American arrogance, its narcissistic view of itself and its inherent insensitivity to the values, hopes and aspirations of others. The audience was assured that the true cause of terrorism was the American status of overwhelming success and American failure to be empathic towards sufferings of others. In order to deceive masses, we were told, American oligarchy uses manic defenses. The delivery was not dissimilar to the lecture on the same topic, given by Hanna Segal, of the British Psychoanalytical Society. The only statement of consequence during the Melbourne seminar was a statement about the impossibility to negotiate with terrorists, because of the effectiveness of the brainwashing techniques their leaders use.

I listened to this in a state of astonishment. I attempted to develop a discussion, by pointing out that failure to negotiate with terrorists actually might be a result of the conviction held by a terrorist, with the intensity bordering

on a delusion, that his actions are the ultimate expression of goodness. My attempt was met with freezing disapproval. I understood that the presenter's political views prevented clinical dispassion and objectivity. I decided to risk being shouted down or ignored in my heresy. The following is the result.

Why?

For the great majority of people raised in the Judeo-Christian framework of emotional and societal reference, suicide is regarded as an ultimate self-denial and addressed as a dangerous illness. In this religious context suicide and homicide are regarded as an ultimate sin. The concept of the sanctity of life is a cornerstone of the scale of the values governing Western civilisation. However, the Islamic interpretation of this concept is different.

Sam:

Those who believe in the finality of death (i.e., that there is no after-life) – they are the ones who advocate suicide and regard it as a matter of personal choice. On the other hand, those who firmly believe in some form of existence after corporeal death – they condemn suicide and judge it to be a major sin. Yet, rationally, the situation should have been reversed: it should have been easier for someone who believed in continuity after death to terminate this phase of existence on the way to the next. Those who faced void, finality, non-existence, vanishing – should have been greatly deterred by it and should have refrained even from entertaining the idea. Either the latter do not really believe what they profess to believe – or something is wrong with rationality. One would tend to suspect the former.

Suicide is very different from self sacrifice, avoidable martyrdom, engaging in life risking activities, refusal to prolong one's life through medical treatment, euthanasia, overdosing and self inflicted death that is the result of coercion. What is common to all these is the operational mode: a death caused by one's own actions. In all these behaviors, a foreknowledge of the risk of death is present coupled with its acceptance. But all else is so different that they cannot be regarded as belonging to the same class. Suicide is chiefly intended to terminate a life – the other acts are aimed at perpetuating, strengthening and defending values.

Those who commit suicide do so because they firmly believe in the finiteness of life and in the finality of death. They prefer termination to continuation. Yet, all the others, the observers of this phenomenon, are horrified by this preference. They abhor it. This has to do with out understanding of the meaning of life.

Ultimately, life has only meanings that we attribute and ascribe to it. Such a meaning can be external (God's plan) or internal (meaning generated through arbitrary selection of a frame of reference). But, in any case, it must be actively selected, adopted and espoused. The difference is that, in the case of external meanings, we have no way to judge their validity and quality (is God's plan for us a good one or not?). We just "take them on" because they are big, all encompassing and of a good "source". A hyper-goal generated by a superstructural plan tends to lend meaning to our transient goals and structures by endowing them with the gift of eternity. Something eternal is always judged more meaningful than something temporal. If a thing of less or no value acquires value by becoming part of a thing eternal – than the meaning and

value reside with the quality of being eternal – not with the thing thus endowed. It is not a question of success. Plans temporal are as successfully implemented as designs eternal. Actually, there is no meaning to the question: is this eternal plan / process / design successful because success is a temporal thing, linked to endeavors that have clear beginnings and ends.

This, therefore, is the first requirement: our life can become meaningful only by integrating into a thing, a process, a being eternal. In other words, continuity (the temporal image of eternity, to paraphrase a great philosopher) is of the essence. Terminating our life at will renders them meaningless. A natural termination of our life is naturally preordained. A natural death is part and parcel of the very eternal process, thing or being which lends meaning to life. To die naturally is to become part of an eternity, a cycle, which goes on forever of life, death and renewal. This cyclic view of life and the creation is inevitable within any thought system, which incorporates a notion of eternity. Because everything is possible given an eternal amount of time – so are resurrection and reincarnation, the afterlife, hell and other beliefs adhered to by the eternal lot.

Sidgwick raised the second requirement and with certain modifications by other philosophers, it reads: to begin to appreciate values and meanings, a consciousness (intelligence) must exist. True, the value or meaning must reside in or pertain to a thing outside the consciousness / intelligence. But, even then, only conscious, intelligent people will be able to appreciate it.

We can fuse the two views: the meaning of life is the consequence of their being part of some eternal goal, plan,

process, thing, or being. Whether this holds true or does not – a consciousness is called for in order to appreciate life's meaning. Life is meaningless in the absence of consciousness or intelligence. Suicide flies in the face of both requirements: it is a clear and present demonstration of the transience of life (the negation of the NATURAL eternal cycles or processes). It also eliminates the consciousness and intelligence that could have judged life to have been meaningful had it survived. Actually, this very consciousness / intelligence decides, in the case of suicide, that life has no meaning whatsoever. To a very large extent, the meaning of life is perceived to be a collective matter of conformity. Suicide is a statement, writ in blood, that the community is wrong, that life is meaningless and final (otherwise, the suicide would not have been committed).

This is where life ends and social judgment commences. Society cannot admit that it is against freedom of expression (suicide is, after all, a statement). It never could. It always preferred to cast the suicides in the role of criminals (and, therefore, bereft of any or many civil rights). According to still prevailing views, the suicide violates unwritten contracts with himself, with others (society) and, many might add, with God (or with Nature with a capital N). Thomas Aquinas said that suicide was not only unnatural (organisms strive to survive, not to self annihilate) – but it also adversely affects the community and violates God's property rights. The latter argument is interesting: God is supposed to own the soul and it is a gift (in Jewish writings, a deposit) to the individual. A suicide, therefore, has to do with the abuse or misuse of God's possessions, temporarily lodged in a corporeal mansion. This implies that suicide affects the eternal, immutable soul. Aquinas refrains from elaborating exactly

how a distinctly physical and material act alters the structure and / or the properties of something as ethereal as the soul. Hundreds of years later, Blackstone, the codifier of British Law, concurred. The state, according to this juridical mind, has a right to prevent and to punish for suicide and for attempted suicide. Suicide is self-murder, he wrote, and, therefore, a grave felony. In certain countries, this still is the case. In Israel, for instance, a soldier is considered to be "army property" and any attempted suicide is severely punished as being "attempt at corrupting army possessions". Indeed, this is paternalism at its worst, the kind that objectifies its subjects. People are treated as possessions in this malignant mutation of benevolence. Such paternalism acts against adults expressing fully informed consent. It is an explicit threat to autonomy, freedom and privacy. Rational, fully competent adults should be spared this form of state intervention. It served as a magnificent tool for the suppression of dissidence in places like Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. Mostly, it tends to breed "victimless crimes". Gamblers, homosexuals, communists, suicides – the list is long. All have been "protected from themselves" by Big Brothers in disguise. Wherever humans possess a right – there is a correlative obligation not to act in a way that will prevent the exercise of such right, whether actively (preventing it), or passively (reporting it). In many cases, not only is suicide consented to by a competent adult (in full possession of his faculties) – it also increases utility both for the individual involved and for society. The only exception is, of course, where minors or incompetent adults (the mentally retarded, the mentally insane, etc.) are involved. Then a paternalistic obligation seems to exist. I use the cautious term "seems" because life is such a basic and deep set phenomenon that even the incompetents can fully

gauge its significance and make "informed" decisions, in my view. In any case, no one is better able to evaluate the quality of life (and the ensuing justifications of a suicide) of a mentally incompetent person – than that person himself.

The paternalists claim that no competent adult will ever decide to commit suicide. No one in "his right mind" will elect this option. This contention is, of course, obliterated both by history and by psychology. But a derivative argument seems to be more forceful. Some people whose suicides were prevented felt very happy that they were. They felt elated to have the gift of life back. Isn't this sufficient a reason to intervene? Absolutely, not. All of us are engaged in making irreversible decisions. For some of these decisions, we are likely to pay very dearly. Is this a reason to stop us from making them? Should the state be allowed to prevent a couple from marrying because of genetic incompatibility? Should an overpopulated country institute forced abortions? Should smoking be banned for the higher risk groups? The answers seem to be clear and negative. There is a double moral standard when it comes to suicide. People are permitted to destroy their lives only in certain prescribed ways.

And if the very notion of suicide is immoral, even criminal – why stop at individuals? Why not apply the same prohibition to political organizations (such as the Yugoslav Federation or the USSR or East Germany or Czechoslovakia, to mention four recent examples)? To groups of people? To institutions, corporations, funds, not for profit organizations, international organizations and so on? This fast deteriorates to the land of absurdities, long inhabited by the opponents of suicide.

See these:

[*The Myth of the Right to Life*](#)

[*Ethical Relativism and Absolute Taboos*](#)

Michael:

There is a provision, that a person who is killed while defending Islam becomes a martyr and is guaranteed a place in Paradise with all the attendant benefits, including services of quite a number of virgins. This particular Islamic belief is extensively used in the process of training of suicide bombers. As a historical aside, the British occupation authorities during the time of the Palestine Mandate when confronted with similar tactics used to wrap the remains of terrorists in the pig's skin for burial.

This practice automatically prevented the aspiration of the bomber to exist in the state of perpetual orgasm in paradise. The terrorist campaign petered out.

Sam:

All soldiers are brainwashed into believing that they are fighting for a higher cause and all war casualties are treated by their countries or organizations as secular saints. Israeli soldiers (I have been one myself) are raised on myths of self-sacrifice (as were Soviet soldiers). Muslim suicide bombers regard themselves as fighters first and martyrs second. They are no different than any other soldiers in the world. In war, one is expected to die and sacrifice one's life.

Michael:

Why now? Why at all?

This question is not as naïve as it seems. It is interesting to note, that terrorism as we understand it now came to being after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its ignominious retreat from Afghanistan. I believe that these events are interconnected.

Sam:

In my view, this is simply wrong. Modern terrorism - multinational, amorphic networks, with access to technology - is at least 50 years old. The only "new" element is the religious overtones. Religion replaced nationalism as an ideology - only to be expected in a post-nationalistic world.

Michael:

During its heyday, Soviet Union and its allies were providing training facilities as well as tuition for a variety of "freedom fighters" - the PLO, IRA, Red Brigades and many others. To a greater extent, the Soviets were able to control terrorist activities by bankrolling them and providing logistical, organisational and infrastructural support.

Sam:

As did the United States and Israel. Bin-Laden, for example, was bankrolled by the CIA. Israel aided the nascent Hamas and Hizbullah.

Michael:

The collapse of the Soviet Union, its retreat from Afghanistan and American humiliation in the Tehran Embassy has left a lot of militants without Soviet or American support. No doubt, there were a lot of anxious terrorists around. They may have thought that they were not needed anymore. Similar anxieties were played out in the Special Services of several Western nations - the end of the Cold War has left them feeling superfluous. With militants, who before the USSR disintegration were able to milk both sides of the conflict, things were even more complicated. Before, there were Israelis to scare, Americans to fool, Soviets to massage - life was good. Classic splitting in other words. Now, they had to find alternative sources of finance. Nature does not tolerate a vacuum. Other paymasters were found.

The ultimate source of money supply, however, remained the same. The West.

Western societies continued to buy oil and narcotics, ultimately financing the terrorist assault upon themselves.

Sam:

I largely agree with the rest of this document - with one, very large, reservation:

The West needs enemies at least as much as its enemies need the West. Having an enemy is good for every ruler, democratically elected or not. Ask George Bush.

Michael:

Clash of Civilisations

There has been much discussion about the possibility of the clash of civilizations. I suppose it is within the frame of Western infidels versus Muslim defenders of righteousness. Western reluctance to talk about the clash of civilizations is understandable - nobody sane and responsible likes to support inflammatory and provocative concepts.

I am trying to understand my enemy and, if possible, to learn from him. I also think that it is self-defeating to deny the opposition's humanity or to trivialise his suffering. However, in my attempts to understand I am not hampered by persecutory activities of the state, religion or the mob. As an example, I am sure, that there are quite a number of people, who will find my writing fairly disagreeable, even, downright offensive. Nevertheless, I am free to enquire, to explore and to question. Thank God, never again I will have to go through the experience of burning personal letters at night on the meadow outside of my flat at the thought that the KGB might arrest me. I would not wish it on to anyone. My counterparts in the Islamic theocracies are not in the same privileged situation. The concepts of secularism and individual's rights, the greatest achievements of the Western liberal societies are largely unknown in the Islamic countries. Moreover, the intolerance to the existence and practice of alternative belief systems is likely to attract retribution and put the adherents of these beliefs in the harms' way. It is significant to note that in Islamic society a change of personal religious doctrine, so easily available in the West, is not possible. A person, born Muslim can not change his/her religion for fear of an apostasy charge and possible death. There is a startling similarity between the punishment meted out by the Soviets and Islamic theocrats to those, who are regarded as apostates.

Where does danger come from?

At the present time, the Arab dominated world is a basket case. The leadership of these countries, given free and safe election, would be booted out of the office at the nearest elections as incompetent and corrupt. But there are no free and safe elections. These countries, despite the exorbitant oil wealth in some, have the highest child mortality rates, lowest per capita incomes and lowest literacy rates in the world. The exotic destinations of Western tourists are stagnating, living from hand to mouth.

The government controls everything, women are regarded as chattels and lack of respect for human rights is the norm. The result is, overwhelmingly -

poverty, the obnoxious, degrading kind, the kind where there is no sewer, children do not know what secular school is, where the weak are not protected, where officials are corrupt and a doctor is not accessible.

Diseases are rife, the young are angry, the old are helpless, the future is bleak. They see Western riches on TV, the internet is becoming available, they listen to the Western music, watch Western movies and are asking questions - why do we not have the same? What's wrong with us? Whose fault is it?

There are two versions of an answer they are given.

One - they (Westerners/America) do not want us to have it, they want to dominate us. Two - the Jews are out to destroy our people and deny our cultural heritage to us.

Both answers are interchangeable and, what is more important, absolve both rulers and subjects from assessing reality objectively. This point of self-perception of victimhood as a result of collective denial is one of the very few points of a tacit agreement between rulers and the ruled in the Arab world. This state of denial is facilitated by conspiracy theories, so common in closed societies. The increase of entropy inevitably leads to stagnation and possibility of implosion as happened in the USSR.

In psychodynamic terms one can hypothesize that the dominant emotional background of this people's existence would be the duality of unresolved anger and unrelieved state of narcissistic injury in the context of perpetually reinforced anxiety.

It is not by chance that the most common self-descriptions of the aggrievement suffered by Arabs in most of the encounters with the Israelis or other non-Arabs is one of humiliation. In historical terms, the humiliation or its perception, as a background of a national feeling state, could be manipulated for political goals, as happened with German people after the signing of the Versailles Treaty.

What aspects of Islamic-informed society seem to be likely to provoke a conflict with the Western liberal democracies?

Arab people, as any other oppressed, are unable to express dissatisfaction with their rulers legitimately. As we know, totalitarian regimes are not disposed kindly towards their critics. Totalitarian governments rule by fear and terror. According to Nadezhda Mandelshtam, wife of the famous Russian poet Osip who was killed on Stalin's orders, as a

result of a terror campaign, - "Russian people were slightly unbalanced mentally - not exactly ill, but not normal either". Fear affects people regardless of geography - be it Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, Rwandan genocide or Hussein's Iraq. To criticize the government openly a citizen of an Arab State must be either a member of the militant Islamic orthodoxy or recklessly indifferent towards his own safety or both. Fear is a continuous state of mind of an ordinary Arab citizen. He knows, that the ruler's displeasure will be expressed violently - suppression of Syrian revolt by Hafez Assad, gassing of the Kurds and mass graves of Shiites by Saddam Hussein, massacre of the Palestinians in Jordan - the list is quite long. On the other hand there is a relentless personal necessity to express anger, to let it spill out, no matter in which direction. The anger caused by the daily assault on human dignity, humiliation and jealousy felt by the citizens of the Arab states towards rich and free Westerners, anger towards Arab ruling elites, inordinately extensive influence of Islamic practices on the society's life

- all these factors contribute to the increase of the pressure in the emotional pressure cooker. The emotional background is remarkably similar to the glorious days of the Soviet Union. The absence of independent justice, corrupt law enforcement, non-existent freedom of press, religion, assemblies, speech, lack of secular education - the list is endless. It is in the interest of the existing ruling elites in the Islamic countries to direct this ever present, simmering anger of the populus towards outsiders, such as Westerners or Jews.

Who are the "Shaheeds"?

In the process of suicide, or martyrdom as Islamic extremists prefer to call it, there are two important components - motivation of the deed and the personality of the "shaheed". Motivation of the perpetrator consists of the many factors. To start with, he (mostly shaheeds are males) is surrounded by human misery. The conditions of life in the most Arabic countries are inimical to human dignity and represent what I consider to be a state of a permanent insult - poverty, filth, lack of safety, powerlessness, corruption, contempt and despotism, to name just a few. If we are to accept the universality of human species, these conditions which are virtually pathognomonic to the totalitarian society, are bound to traumatize people.

They live in the state of perpetual emotional trauma. This trauma need not be personal. On the contrary, personal fulfillment and prosperity may enhance the feelings of guilt towards less fortunate brethren and predispose the person to manipulation by recruiters. People's misery, altruism, anger, relentless glorification of martyrdom and disregard for human life begets candidates. Manipulative tactics of recruiters into the ranks of shaheeds include the use of mentally retarded adolescents and young women guilty of extramarital affairs. Members of leadership families are excluded as a rule.

Especially traumatic experiences are the lot of Palestinians. These unfortunate people who, on top of the usual set of privations experienced by the majority of Arabs, had to go through wars, flight, loss of possessions and habitat, they have suffered uncertainty, fear and contempt of their brethren. They are kept in the refugee camps with the expressed purpose of breeding hatred, resentment and anger towards Israelis and the West. They

live in squalor, dependent on the largesse of the Arab governments and an impotent UN, who, for political reasons will not allow or facilitate the resettlement of these people in the huge landmass of the Arab world. Arab Governments are finding it expedient to have a living example of the brutality of Israelis and Westerners. They (the governments) understand very well, that the state of trauma of their own people could be translated into a demand for reforms or even insurrection. They know well the degree of volatility and potential explosiveness of a brutalized population.

Virtually, these governments have no choice, but to have an identifiable enemy and to feed the population a diet of paranoia and conspiracy through the State-controlled media. Arab Governments are inherently unstable. Their legitimacy is suspect. Their borders are the result of the historical chance. They are corrupt and incompetent. Their only critics of substance, and some measure of safety, are the Orthodox Muslims, who criticize the government from the position of piety and militant Islamism.

On this background, the existence of the rich West in general and Israel in particular is a constant, clear and well-identified threat to the ruling Arab elite or the aspirants to this title, exposing their inability to improve the lives of their citizenry. It is expedient to maintain the state of terror in the countries where the treat is coming from. Shaheeds are expendable which is consistent with the contempt Arab people are treated by their leaders. It also reminiscent of the contempt the Soviet rulers treated their population in similar circumstances.

Israel as West Berlin of the Middle East.

In political terms Israel could be compared with the West Berlin of the Cold War. To the Soviet rulers, the virulent, visceral hatred of the West Berlin, the tiny island of light in the sea of communist darkness was inspired by the geographic closeness of the objective fact of its better functioning and ability to provide its citizens with better life. It was pretty difficult for the Soviet nomenklatura to describe East Berlin as paradise, looking across the Wall at the glittering Kurfurstendamm or after watching Western TV. Therefore, the Soviet Nomenclatura felt threatened by the demonstration of its incompetence and dishonesty. Similarly, the existence of Israel in the immediate vicinity of the decrepit and dysfunctional Arab countries if regarded by both - the population as well as a government as an insult, a gross humiliation, an unspoken but real accusation of incompetence and impotence. In the macho Arabic cultural tradition this is too much to bear.

To add an insult to injury, the protective stance by the USA towards Israel, however lacking consistency and continuity is perceived by the Arabs in rather biblical terms as a rejection of one son in favor of another. Fear of rejection and abandonment is one of hallmarks of a traumatised, dependent and anxious human. In this context, the construction of the separation perimeter between Palestinians and Israelis and the Palestinian reaction to it has fairly significant psychodynamic connotation. The anger and distress Palestinians feel at the sight of this wall, apart from political, military and economic implication has also a deeply disturbing dimension of rejection by the enemy. This rejection and abandonment, if anything, has a very powerful anxiety provoking capacity. Anxiety of a dependent human, terrified of being abandoned.

The corollary to this is incompatibility of the Arab and Israeli aims. Arab Governments have no tangible benefits from peace with Israel. They have nothing to gain and stand to lose power in case of a genuine peace with Israel, as a result of inevitability of reformist demands by their population.

What are the conditions likely to breed terror?

A combination of:

- * subconscious fear of rejection and abandonment by the system, government, "the West" - anything or anybody identified as introjected symbol or object of authority; important other.
- * permanent state of traumatization by the conditions of living in a poverty-stricken, closed totalitarian society leading to high degree of anxiety/fear
- * narcissistic injury of implied incompetence/impotence, compounded by shame and rage which is difficult and dangerous to express
- * immersion into and identification with the most militant and literal interpretation of the Islamic doctrine as a means of self-worth enhancement, acquisition of the feeling of aloofness and specialness
- * lack of the tradition of unimpeded intellectual pursuit, culture of questioning the written word and tolerance of the differences of opinion
- * deep-seated inferiority complex

* the aggressive hatred of the liberal West and Israel as the only approved channel of discharging anger

The points listed above create a background of a quiet determination, burning anger, which at last had found an effective outlet and resolute conviction of one's own infallibility. A terrorist is implacably determined to inflict a maximum of damage to the people, structures or doctrines, which he perceives to be wrong. He is not capable of conceiving that there are alternative belief systems worthy of taking them seriously or according these beliefs a legitimacy of an intrinsic value content. Besides, it must be a wonderfully empowering feeling - to have a God-like power of judgment, power of giving or withholding life or death. For someone, who spent his life in squalid streets of Peshawar or refugee camp around Beirut, it represents an ultimate high - to be able to have this much power.

Also, coming from the cultural background conducive to the development of the borderline traits - as evidenced by the self-flagellation of the Shiite pilgrims - self-mutilation and self-infliction of pain has some attractive connotations. For instance, it reduces the overwhelming anxiety in the sufferer. However, it also bespeaks the existence of suffering, which cannot be expressed by conventional means for a variety of reasons. I think this is an important point, which should be elaborated upon. This type of behavior could be compared with the acting out of the profoundly dependent human, who found out that he is not loved by the important other. The crashing realization of abandonment, unsatisfied dependency needs - be it material, emotional or spiritual - anger at the rejector and desire to inflict damage commensurate with the suffering experienced by the rejectee creates the desire for revenge.

It brings us back to the heightened state of narcissistic injury, which brooks no logic, reason or mollification. This emotional state, compounded by confounders of religion and culture, political and economic expediency, altruistic and manic defenses is skillfully manipulated by the leaders of the terrorist organisations. As long as Arab countries will be plagued by totalitarianism, monopolistic Islamic theocracy, near total absence of human rights and poverty - we will suffer further terrorist attacks.

What is group psychopathology?

It should be clear by now, that I took as a model of the concept of a group psychopathology a comparison between seemingly incompatible state systems - the Soviet Union and Arab states conglomeration. I have to accept, that in doing so I have displayed a significant bias - be it religious, cultural or emotional. On the other hand, the formation of this particular model was dictated by my extensive personal experience of living inside a totalitarian state: my belief in the universality of human species and the universality of human emotional reactions to fear. In this case - universality of the human reaction to fear inflicted by a totalitarian regime. I believe that it bears repeating, that the fear, inflicted by the totalitarian regime is the breeding ground for terror. This fear, by traumatizing thousands, creates a milieu of group psychopathology or what we, in the relatively calm West call personality disorder.

Therefore, the abhorrence of totalitarian regimes is not only in their denial of human rights, freedom and safety to their own and others. The danger of these regimes is also in inflicting on multitudes the state of mass fear and, consequently, the state of psychological abnormality. We

know that a significant personal psychopathology might be the result of childhood trauma - be it sexual, physical or emotional. Traumatization of a group would lead to the same outcome. The results, for the group involved will be of the most serious kind. The group cohesion, trust, closeness, intimacy, respect for others, feeling of self worth, self respect - all of these parameters will be affected.

On the other hand, the migration to societies with the relatively low levels of fear has healing properties for the migrants and refugees from the totalitarian societies. Far from being traumatic, such a migration plays a role of a healer. Everyday acts of simple kindness, respectful treatment by authorities and ability to sleep without fear of arbitrary arrest - all of that is a potent restorative. In my choice of a model for presenting my views, I am mindful, that there are many other totalitarian regimes on the planet. The UN General Assembly is full of them. I would like to make it clear, that the principle of universality of human species applies - it does not matter, where the fear is inflicted - in Stalinist Russia, the Arab Middle East, Sudanese Darfur or Khmer Rouge Cambodia, the consequences are equally devastating.

How the Nation /group heal?

A task of such magnitude is clearly beyond the scope of this dialog.

Nevertheless, I have some points to make.

Firstly, the understanding of the existence and extent of group psychopathology is an important first step. The

reason I am saying this is that one cannot treat an illness without a knowledge that the illness exists to start with.

Secondly, the victory in the Cold war was brought about not only because of overwhelming superiority of the USA, but also because of the other factors, such as propaganda, economic potential, political will, relentless pressure in all possible points. There is a treasure trove of the accumulated experience in nation building. In my part of the dialog I made a particular point of comparing Arab states with the USSR. I believe, what worked then, will work again.

Thirdly, there is a treasure trove of successful nation-building in Germany, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore by the much maligned USA. These exercises, without the parallel in history, (some of them could be served as the remarkable examples of magnanimity in victory), clearly show the possibilities and benefits for the population of the formerly hostile states.

I also believe, that we should stop financing terrorism against ourselves - we should not buy the oil from countries which use our money to support militant Islamists. Consequently, the research and development of the alternatives to the fossil fuel should be regarded as part of the national security priorities.

Fourth, we should also physically eliminate the raw materials used for the production of narcotics. As a physician, I cannot be placid about what I see every day of my professional life. As a father, I am terrified of the prospective, that my children will become drug addicts and will not be able to utilize God's given opportunities to use their human capacities, because some crook sold them

mind-altering drugs. Our work, as doctors, is very much influenced by the supply and demand of the illegal narcotics. Frankly, I don't give a toss, that the farmers who grow poppies or coca leaves are not able to grow anything else. To me, it is a political problem, like man-made famines in Africa. It might be possible to help these farmers out through the UN. The issue here is that the narcotics do not only serve as a money producing substance, they also serve as a very effective weapon against the free world. The concept of the destruction of the USA by the drugs was conceived by the USSR. It was called "Oruzhie individualnogo porazheniya" -

weapon of individual destruction. I am dealing with this weapon every day of my professional life - kids who become psychotic and remain so for the rest of their lives.

Fifth, the theocratic monopoly of the mullahs contributes to the closeness of Islamic societies. Equality of other religions, instead of Dhimmi status, would be useful in bringing these societies in to a family of democratic nations. Secular, rather than exclusively religious education would be crucial.

It is conceivable, that a host of measures, designed to reduce the level of the societal fear will be most conducive to the beginning of the process of healing of a traumatized nation.

Conclusion

Sigmund Freud was a good hater. He did not tolerate apostasy well. To those, who left the new church he established, he was persistently venomous.

Quoting Heine, he wrote: "One must forgive one's enemies, but not before they have been hanged." When one of his dissidents, Adler, died in 1937 on the trip to Aberdeen, Freud wrote to Zweig: "I don't understand your sympathy for Adler. For a Jew-boy out of Viennese suburb, a death in Aberdeen is an unheard - of career in itself".

Freud's break up with Jung was even more acrimonious. Both have never forgiven each other for the lost hopes, aspirations and dreams. Jung, undoubtedly gifted and talented physician, was scarred enough by this separation to seek a shelter in the seductive simplicity of the Nazional-

Socialism. Jung wrote:" One can not of course accept that Freud or Adler is a generally valid representative of European mankind. The Jew as a relative nomad has never created, and presumably never will create, a cultural form of his own, for all his instincts and talent are dependent on a more or less civilised host people. In my view it has been a great mistake of medical psychology to apply Jewish categories, which are not even valid for all Jews, to Christian Germans and Slavs. In this way the most precious secret of Teutonic man, the deep-rooted, creative awareness of his soul, has been explained away as a banal infantile sump, while my warning voice, over the decades, was suspected of anti-Semitism. has the mighty phenomenon of National-Socialism, at which the whole world gazes in astonishment, taught them to know better?"

Leaving the perceptible anger of the unforgiven son towards harsh and rejecting father aside, I'd like to get to the core of Jung's accusation.

What he is saying, in my mind, is that there are different mechanisms, by which different humans react to the same stressors. I disagree. As I have written before, I believe, that fear affects humans, as members of the same biological species, in the same way, regardless of race, color, religion or origin. While the critique of Freud's writing is a legitimate intellectual exercise, the acceptance of the universality of human reactions to similar stimuli could not be opposed on any reasonable ground.

My contributions to this dialog were written from the distinctly Jewish point of view. Can this view be regarded as universal ? I guess, it depends which point of view my reader supports - Freud's or Jung's.

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T H E A U T H O R

SHMUEL (SAM) VAKNIN

Curriculum Vitae

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Born in 1961 in Qiryat-Yam, Israel.

Served in the Israeli Defence Force (1979-1982) in training and education units.

Education

Graduated a few semesters in the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa.

Ph.D. in Philosophy (major: Philosophy of Physics) – Pacific Western University, California, USA.

My doctoral thesis and other books are available through the [Library of Congress](#).

Graduate of numerous courses in Finance Theory and International Trading.

Certified [E-Commerce Concepts Analyst](#) by [Brainbench](#).

Certified in [Psychological Counselling Techniques](#) by [Brainbench](#).

Certified [Financial Analyst](#) by [Brainbench](#).

Full proficiency in Hebrew and in English.

Business Experience

1980 to 1983

Founder and co-owner of a chain of computerised information kiosks in Tel-Aviv, Israel.

1982 to 1985

Senior positions with the Nessim D. Gaon Group of Companies in Geneva, Paris and New-York (NOGA and APROFIM SA):

- Chief Analyst of Edible Commodities in the Group's Headquarters in Switzerland
- Manager of the Research and Analysis Division
- Manager of the Data Processing Division
- Project Manager of the Nigerian Computerised Census
- Vice President in charge of RND and Advanced Technologies
- Vice President in charge of Sovereign Debt Financing

1985 to 1986

Represented Canadian Venture Capital Funds in Israel.

1986 to 1987

General Manager of IPE Ltd. in London. The firm financed international multi-lateral countertrade and leasing transactions.

1988 to 1990

Co-founder and Director of "Mikbats-Tesuah", a portfolio management firm based in Tel-Aviv.

Activities included large-scale portfolio management, underwriting, forex trading and general financial advisory services.

1990 to Present

Freelance consultant to many of Israel's Blue-Chip firms, mainly on issues related to the capital markets in Israel, Canada, the UK and the USA.

Consultant to foreign RND ventures and to Governments on macro-economic matters.

President of the Israel chapter of the Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA) and (briefly) Israel representative of the "Washington Times".

1993 to 1994

Co-owner and Director of many business enterprises:

- The Omega and Energy Air-Conditioning Concern
 - AVP Financial Consultants
 - Handiman Legal Services
- Total annual turnover of the group: 10 million USD.

Co-owner, Director and Finance Manager of COSTI Ltd.
– Israel's largest computerised information vendor and developer. Raised funds through a series of private placements locally in the USA, Canada and London.

1993 to 1996

Publisher and Editor of a Capital Markets Newsletter distributed by subscription only to dozens of subscribers countrywide.

In a legal precedent in 1995 – studied in business schools and law faculties across Israel – was tried for his role in an attempted takeover of Israel's Agriculture Bank.

Was interned in the State School of Prison Wardens.

Managed the Central School Library, wrote, published and lectured on various occasions.

Managed the Internet and International News Department of an Israeli mass media group, "Ha-Tikshoret and Namer".

Assistant in the Law Faculty in Tel-Aviv University (to Prof. S.G. Shoham).

1996 to 1999

Financial consultant to leading businesses in Macedonia, Russia and the Czech Republic. Collaborated with the Agency of Transformation of Business with Social Capital.

Economic commentator in "[Nova Makedonija](#)", "[Dnevnik](#)", "Makedonija Denes", "Izvestia", "Argumenti i Fakti", "The Middle East Times", "[The New Presence](#)", "[Central Europe Review](#)", and other periodicals, and in the economic programs on various channels of Macedonian Television.

Chief Lecturer in courses organised by the Agency of Transformation, by the Macedonian Stock Exchange, and by the Ministry of Trade.

1999 to 2002

Economic Advisor to the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and to the Ministry of Finance.

2001 to 2003

Senior Business Correspondent for [United Press International \(UPI\)](#).

Web and Journalistic Activities

Author of extensive Web sites in:

– Psychology ("[Malignant Self Love](#)") - An [Open Directory Cool Site](#),

– Philosophy ("[Philosophical Musings](#)"),

– Economics and Geopolitics ("[World in Conflict and Transition](#)").

Owner of the [Narcissistic Abuse Announcement and Study List](#) and the Narcissism Revisited mailing list (more than 4900 members).

Owner of the [Economies in Conflict and Transition Study List](#) and the [Link and Factoid Study List](#).

Editor of mental health disorders and Central and Eastern Europe categories in various Web directories ([Open Directory](#), [Search Europe](#), [Mentalhelp.net](#)).

Editor of the [Narcissistic Personality Disorder](#), the [Verbal and Emotional Abuse](#), and the [Spousal \(Domestic\) Abuse and Violence](#) topics on Suite 101 and [Bellaonline](#).

Columnist and commentator in "The New Presence", [United Press International \(UPI\)](#), InternetContent, [eBookWeb](#), [PopMatters](#), and "[Central Europe Review](#)".

Publications and Awards

"Managing Investment Portfolios in States of Uncertainty", Limon Publishers, Tel-Aviv, 1988

"The Gambling Industry", Limon Publishers, Tel-Aviv, 1990

"[Requesting My Loved One – Short Stories](#)", Yedioth Aharonot, Tel-Aviv, 1997

"[The Suffering of Being Kafka](#)" (electronic book of Hebrew and English Short Fiction), Prague and Skopje, 1998-2004

"The Macedonian Economy at a Crossroads – On the Way to a Healthier Economy" (dialogues with [Nikola Gruevski](#)), Skopje, 1998

"[The Exporters' Pocketbook](#)", Ministry of Trade, Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 1999

"[Malignant Self Love – Narcissism Revisited](#)", Narcissus Publications, Prague and Skopje, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2004

[The Narcissism Series](#) (e-books regarding relationships with abusive narcissists), Skopje, 1999-2004

"[After the Rain – How the West Lost the East](#)", Narcissus Publications in association with [Central Europe Review/CEENMI](#), Prague and Skopje, 2000

Winner of numerous awards, among them [Israel's Council of Culture and Art Prize for Maiden Prose](#) (1997), The Rotary Club Award for Social Studies (1976), and the Bilateral Relations Studies Award of the American Embassy in Israel (1978).

Hundreds of professional articles in all fields of finances and the economy, and numerous articles dealing with geopolitical and political economic issues published in both print and Web periodicals in many countries.

Many appearances in the electronic media on subjects in philosophy and the sciences, and concerning economic matters.

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Economy / Politics:

<http://ceeandbalkan.tripod.com/>

Psychology:

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Philosophy:

<http://philosophos.tripod.com/>

Poetry:

<http://samvak.tripod.com/contents.html>

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After the Rain

*How the West
Lost the East*

The Book

This is a series of articles written and published in 1996-2000 in Macedonia, in Russia, in Egypt and in the Czech Republic.

How the West lost the East. The economics, the politics, the geopolitics, the conspiracies, the corruption, the old and the new, the plough and the internet - it is all here, in colourful and provocative prose.

From "The Mind of Darkness":

"'The Balkans' - I say - 'is the unconscious of the world'. People stop to digest this metaphor and then they nod enthusiastically. It is here that the repressed memories of history, its traumas and fears and images reside. It is here that the psychodynamics of humanity - the tectonic clash between Rome and Byzantium, West and East, Judeo-Christianity and Islam - is still easily discernible. We are seated at a New Year's dining table, loaded with a roasted pig and exotic salads. I, the Jew, only half foreign to this cradle of Slavonics. Four Serbs, five Macedonians. It is in the Balkans that all ethnic distinctions fail and it is here that they prevail anachronistically and atavistically. Contradiction and change the only two fixtures of this tormented region. The women of the Balkan - buried under provocative mask-like make up, retro hairstyles and too narrow dresses. The men, clad in sepia colours, old fashioned suits and turn of the century moustaches. In the background there is the crying game that is Balkanian music: liturgy and folk and elegy combined. The smells are heavy with muskular perfumes. It is like time travel. It is like revisiting one's childhood."

The Author

[Sam Vaknin](#) is the author of [Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited](#) and [After the Rain - How the West Lost the East](#). He is a columnist for [Central Europe Review](#) and [eBookWeb](#), a [United Press International \(UPI\)](#) Senior Business Correspondent, and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in [The Open Directory](#) and [Suite101](#).

Until recently, he served as the Economic Advisor to the Government of Macedonia.

Visit Sam's Web site at <http://samvak.tripod.com>