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Proofreading and lecture in English: Danijela Milićević

Proofreading and lecture in Montenegrin: Miodarka Tepavčević

Address: Danila Bojovića bb 81 400 Nikšić, Montenegro;

E-mail: mjss@ucg.ac.me

www.mjss.ucg.ac.me

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Lektura i korektura na engleskom: Danijela Milićević

Lektura i korektura na crnogorskom: Miodarka Tepavčević

Adresa: Danila Bojovića bb 81 400 Nikšić, Crna Gora;

E-mail: mjss@ucg.ac.me

www.mjss.ucg.ac.me

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Review Paper

WE DID NOT TORTURE: MORINJ CAMP AND THE POSSIBILITY OF RECONCILIATION IN MONTENEGRO

Srdja PAVLOVIC¹

Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, University of Alberta

Address: Edmonton, T6G 2H4 Alberta, Canada

Email: pavlovic@ualberta.ca

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the largely overlooked and deliberately obscured issue of the treatment of Croatian prisoners of war detained at the Morinj Camp in Montenegro during the Yugoslav wars, with particular focus on the 1991–1992 siege of Dubrovnik. The study explores the dynamics of selective forgetting in Montenegro and its impact on historical memory and reconciliation. Relying primarily on testimonies from former prisoners, limited official documents,

¹ **SRDJA PAVLOVIC:** had earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1986 at the Department of Ethnology, Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade. He completed his Master of Arts in Ethnology degree in 1991 at the Mongolian State University in Ulaan Bataar (Mongolia), and earned his Doctor of Philosophy in History degree at the University of Alberta (Canada) in 2003. Dr. Pavlovic's areas of scientific interest include history, culture, literature, and politics of Modern Europe, the Mediterranean region, and the Balkans. His research focus is on modern political and cultural history of the Balkans with an emphasis on the issues of nationalism, construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of national identities among the South Slavs. He authored historical monographs such as *Balkan Anschluss: The Annexation of Montenegro and the Creation of the Common South Slavic State* (2007); *Prostori Identiteta: Eseji o Istoriji, Sjećanju i Interpretacijama Prošlosti* (2006); *Iza Ogledala: Eseji o Politici Identiteta* (2004); *Zapadna Ljuljaška* (1997); *Mongolski Piktogram* (1989), and edited scholarly collections and literary anthologies such as *Transcending Fratricide: Political Myths, Reconciliations and the Uncertain Future in the former Yugoslavia* (2013) and *Threshold: Anthology of Contemporary Writing from Alberta* (1998). He also authored numerous scholarly articles in peer reviewed journals worldwide. Dr. Pavlović is an associate editor of *Nationality Papers* (Columbia University) and *Treaties and Documents* (University of Maribor), and was the North American coordinator for the research projects *Direct Democracy and Active Citizenship: Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. He is a research associate with the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies, University of Alberta, and is currently co-editing (with dr. Dejan Guzina) a special issue of the *Canadian Slavonic Papers* devoted to the theme of post-Yugoslav identities.

and rare archival materials, it highlights the challenges historians face due to restricted access to sources and alleged destruction of key records. The paper argues that the systematic minimization or erasure of evidence by political and military elites still in power perpetuates a dominant narrative of Montenegro's marginal involvement in the conflict. This not only obstructs historical reckoning but also impedes regional efforts toward reconciliation. The case of the Morinj Camp thus serves as a revealing lens through which broader issues of post-conflict memory politics and transitional justice in the former Yugoslavia can be understood.

KEY WORD:

Morinj; Montenegro; Yugoslavia; Yugoslav wars; Prisoners of war; Historical memory;

SAŽETAK:

Rad se bavi pitanjem koje je u velikoj mjeri zanemareno i namjerno potiskivano – tretmanom hrvatskih ratnih zarobljenika u logoru Morinj u Crnoj Gori tokom ratova u bivšoj Jugoslaviji, posebno u kontekstu opsade Dubrovnika 1991–1992. godine. Analizira se fenomen selektivnog zaborava u Crnoj Gori i njegov uticaj na istorijsko pamćenje i procese pomirenja. Oslanjajući se prvenstveno na svjedočenja bivših zatvorenika, ograničenu službenu dokumentaciju i rijetke arhivske materijale, studija ukazuje na prepreke sa kojima se istoričari suočavaju zbog ograničenog pristupa izvorima i navodnog uništavanja ključne građe. Autor tvrdi da sistematsko minimiziranje ili brisanje dokaza od strane političkih i vojnih elita koje su i dalje na vlasti doprinosi održavanju dominantnog narativa o marginalnom učešću Crne Gore u sukobima. To ne samo da otežava suočavanje s prošlošću, već i usporava regionalne napore ka pomirenju. Slučaj logora Morinj tako postaje važna tačka za razumijevanje šire problematike politike sjećanja i tranzicione pravde na prostoru bivše Jugoslavije.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

Morinj; Crna Gora; Jugoslavija; Jugoslovenski ratovi; Ratni zarobljenici; Istorijsko pamćenje;

On Selective Forgetting and Historical Sources

Since the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (also known as the Dayton Peace Accord) in December 1995, all of the states that emerged from the Yugoslav dissolution had struggled with the same problem: the lack of ability (or will) to critically evaluate their own roles in the wars of the Yugoslav successor states. Such 'lack of will', to borrow from James Gow, has been coloured by the notions of national pride as much as it has been driven by fear of being stereotyped as nationalists, barbarians, or even as a genocidal nation.¹ This, in turn, has a negative impact on the issues of reconciliation and post-conflict resolution in the region. The region is yet to see a successful initiation of a reconciliation process. In Montenegro, much like in the rest of the former Yugoslavia, the process of *selective forgetting* is well under way indeed.²

This paper tackles the thorny issue of the treatment of the Croatian prisoners of war by the Montenegrin authorities as the result of the eight month-long siege of Dubrovnik, from October 1, 1991 until mid-May 1992. The case study of the alleged torture and mistreatment of the prisoners of war in the Morinj Camp located in the Bay of Kotor (Montenegro) illustrates the importance of fully addressing the issues of responsibility for the events from the recent past and also highlights some of the more problematic aspects of the ongoing reconciliation process in the region.³

This topic calls for an additional clarification of the nature of sources used and their general availability to researchers. It warrants stating that the events that occurred in the Morinj Camp are anything but a desired topic of conversation in Montenegro. With that in mind, most of the research has been completed in a semi-clandestine manner in a sense that the author had to keep his plans and schedules very close to his chest and make unusual arrangements for interviews and document viewing in Montenegro. With regards to primary sources in Montenegro it is necessary to point out the scarcity of official documents related to political decision-making and military operations during the 1991 Dubrovnik campaign in general and to the Morinj Camp detention facility in particular.

Reasons for this lack of available sources are many. The official discourse about the so-called tangential involvement of Montenegro in the wars of the Yugoslav successor states is still a dominant discourse.⁴ One of the important building blocks of this discourse that is brought forward with a worrying regularity is precisely the lack of primary sources (government and military documents, and audio-visual material) that could shed additional light on the role Montenegro played in the Yugoslav breakup. Such lack of sources is often (if not as a rule) presented as the final proof about the marginal involvement of Montenegro. This author had a good fortune of gaining a limited access to a multi-volume collection of the Minutes of the Plenary Sessions of the Montenegrin Parliament for the years 1991 and 1992 that are part of a private collection. The volumes of documents covering the initial two years of the Yugoslav breakup are missing from the parliamentary archives. Repeated written requests by this author to the parliamentary secretary seeking an explanation of the whereabouts of these volumes had remained unanswered. Furthermore, in early 2003 all the copies of the *Pobjeda Daily* covering the years 1991 and 1992 that had been stored in the City Library *Radosav Ljumovic* in Podgorica were stolen. Following a week-long significant media coverage of this case, the police located the stolen material and returned it to the city library.⁵ What was missing from each copy, however, were the articles written by the two most senior political leaders of Montenegro at the time, Milo Djukanovic and Svetozar Marovic. The articles in question could be best described as warmongering.⁶ Access to military archives is highly restricted for historians and in particular for those whose published work on the Yugoslav breakup shows a desire to critically evaluate the events from the recent past.⁷ Despite such restrictions we have managed to gain access to a relatively small but important number of documents produced by the Yugoslav Army.

The restricted access to primary sources and the general lack of those as well as the examples of sources being destroyed could be interpreted as concerted efforts of the war-time elite that is still in power in Montenegro towards eliminating historical sources that might cast a shadow over their political legacies. Many argue that such alleged destruction of sources, in turn, prevents

professional historians from fully examining and analyzing past events, while leaving the story of the marginal involvement of Montenegro in the Yugoslav breakup as the only historical narrative available to future generations. This could also be seen as an example of the creating a particular kind of collective memory, while promoting forgetting as a virtue and creating a sizable historical absence in the process.⁸ We hope, however, that all of the primary sources on the role Montenegro played in the Yugoslav breakup and the specific topic of the treatment of the Croatian prisoners of war would soon be made available to researchers.

Most of the former Croatian prisoners of war that had been detained in the Morinj Camp were more than willing to discuss their life stories. All of the stories this author heard share a common theme of undeserved suffering and torture at the hands of the prisons guards and interrogators. There is, however, certain uniformity of style and language to the stories of the former prisoners of the Morinj Camp that might warrant caution. The arguments presented here are, for the most part, based on the testimonies of the former Croatian prisoners of war and a few former prison guards from the Morinj Camp. I had also examined rather scarce secondary sources on the treatment of the Croatian prisoners of war in Montenegro, and scrutinized numerous media reports on the ongoing legal proceedings before the Montenegrin high court. The identities of those interviewed are not revealed due to a sensitive nature of their testimonies and also because the issues at hand have been a matter of the ongoing legal proceedings before the Montenegrin high court.

Over the summer months 2008 the municipal courts in Dubrovnik, Split, Sisak, Vukovar, Rijeka, and Sibenik recorded the testimonies of 170 former prisoners of war in the Morinj Camp and forwarded those sworn testimonies to the Montenegro State Attorney in Podgorica, Ms. Ranka Carapic. These testimonies have been part of the court case involving six former members of the Yugoslav Army Reserve Forces of the 9th VPS Boka (*Military Naval Sector Boka*), Mladjen Govedarica, Spiro Lucic, Boro Gligic, Ivo Meزالin (*tried in absentia*), Zlatko Tarle, and Ivo Gojnic. The Special Prosecutor, Ms. Stojanka Radovic, had charged them

with violating international law and committing war crimes against the civilian population and the prisoners of war. It had been alleged that between October 3, 1991 and August 18, 1992 the accused ordered and engaged in the torturing of 169 prisoners of war and civilians captured in the municipality of Dubrovnik who were detained in the Morinj Camp.⁹

Morinj Camp and the Treatment of Prisoners

On October 1, 1991 the Yugoslav Peoples Army (JNA) soldiers and reservists initiated military operations in the region of Konavle and around the Croatian coastal city of Dubrovnik. The order for attack was issued on September 29, 1991 by General Jevrem Cokic who was in charge of the 2nd Operational Group of the JNA with the headquarter in Kifino Selo (Herzegovina). His order was approved on that same day by the JNA Chief of the General Staff, General Blagoje Adzic.¹⁰ Just after 5:00 a.m. the people living in the Croatian village of Vitaljina and throughout the region of Konavle were awakened by heavy artillery fire coming from the JNA positions in Montenegro: Prevlaka Peninsula, Prijevor, Mojdez as well as the JNA's naval vessels anchored off the Croatian coast. The artillery fire was followed by infantry thrust into Croatian territory. The bulk of those forces consisted of army reservists from Montenegro, whose crossing onto the Croatian territory was backed by planes, armour and artillery of the JNA.¹¹

According to the indictment against the six former JNA reservists the Morinj Camp was established by the JNA on 3 October, 1991 and only three days after the initial attack on Dubrovnik. The camp was operational until 18 August, 1992 even though the military operations in the Municipality of Dubrovnik had seized in late May 1992. It is important to say that the Morinj Camp was one of three detention centers in Montenegro where the Croatian prisoners of war were kept from the fall 1991 until summer 1992. There was also a smaller camp in the army barracks in the coastal town of Kumbor (Bay of Kotor) that served as a transit center.¹² In addition to those facilities, the Montenegrin reservists and the regular army units kept their prisoners and interrogated them at various locations such as hotels along the coast (*Motel Vinogradi*, for example)

and several make-shift army headquarters located in private houses. Each of those detention centers were run and controlled by the Yugoslav Peoples Army. Most were staffed by members of the reserve forces from Montenegro and a number of volunteers.

The Morinj Camp was located in the Bay of Kotor, some 50 kilometres south-east from the administrative border between Montenegro and Croatia. The buildings are located in the deep woods approximately 2 kilometres north of the main highway leading towards the city of Kotor. At the time this researcher attempted to visit the camp no one was allowed to drive up or walk to the gates of the facility.¹³

The sources available indicate that during the ten months period the Morinj Camp housed the total of 289 prisoners – mainly civilians; some were members of the Croatian Police Force and members of the Croatian Territorial Defence. The Camp was staffed with 36 soldiers (Yugoslav Army reserve forces), army officers, and support staff. There were also several volunteers wearing the uniform of the Yugoslav Army. On a daily bases there were 10 armed guards on duty in the camp with 2 guard dogs.¹⁴ The prisoners were interrogated by the members of the military police and military intelligence services since the camp was under the jurisdiction of the Security Department of the Federal Ministry of Defence. (*Uprava Bezbjednosti SSNO*) also known as the *12th Department of the MoD*. The officers in charge of the *12th Department* were Generals Marko Negovanovic, Aleksandar Vasiljevic, and Nedjeljko Boskovic. They had initiated the establishing of a special counterintelligence unit tasked with interrogating prisoners at the Morinj Camp. The person in charge of this special unit was Mirsad Krluc and his immediate supervisor was Major Huso Kunic, who was later replaced by Colonel Ljubisa Beara.

According to the testimonies of former prisoners, 3 inmates had died as a result of torture, while 31 prisoners died within a year from the date they had been released from the Morinj Camp. Physicians in Dubrovnik and Split had determined that the deaths of 18 of the former prisoners can be connected directly to the torture they underwent while imprisoned in the Morinj Camp.

Those interviewed had confirmed that the following forms of torture were practiced in the Morinj Camp:

- Beating - a few times a day; during and after every meal; several times during the night; fists, batons, pipes, rifle butts.
- Sleep deprivation – nightly beatings and hourly inspections of the barracks.
- Food deprivation – poor diet, beatings during the meal time.
- Water deprivation – little or no water given; 1.5 litres per 90-100 prisoners, per day.
- Unsanitary conditions in the camp – no toilets; less than 1 square meter of space per prisoner in the barracks.
- Denial of medical care – very few doctors visited the camp; no medication given to prisoners.
- Fake executions.
- Sodomizing prisoners.
- Water Boarding – simulated drowning.
- Fake prisoner exchanges.
- Hiding prisoners for the Red Cross and the UNHCR officials.

Physicians who examined the prisoners after being released noted a number of injuries, ranging from broken teeth and jaws, and broken ribs and collar bones as well as traumas to the head and body. General state of malnutrition and signs of the post-traumatic stress disorder had also been noted.

Multiple beatings almost every day. Before every meal, we had to stand up, cross ourselves three times and shout: "Long live Yugoslavia"! One of the guards, Boro Gligic, from

Kotor, had divided us in five groups and we had to line up according to his orders – in five rows. Those in the first row he called hosovci (members of the HOS, the Croatian Armed Forces), and those in the second, mupovci (members of the MUP, Croatian Police Force), while the third row were all zenge (members of the ZNG, Croatian National Guard). Those in the fourth row he called armed civilians, and those in the fifth row were the unarmed civilians. I ended up in the third row, by mistake. But that is life! It was Boro Gligic's decision which row is going to receive the most severe beating. I guess I was lucky because I ended up in the middle, sort of speak.¹⁵

Other prisoners told similar stories of torture and suffering and while the specifics varied slightly the main thread of their narrative remained unchanged. Another former prisoner from the village of Dunave in Konavle (Municipality of Dubrovnik) told us about beating and hiding of severely beaten prisoners from the Red Cross delegation that visited the Morinj Camp.

They took me to the Motel Vinogradi in the back of a pick up truck, where the military police took over, handcuffed me and locked in a small bungalow. In there, they interrogated and tortured me for seven days. Every hour during the night a different person in uniform would unlock the door, walk in and start beating up on me. As soon as we got to Morinj Camp (I was transported with a group of prisoners) all of us were given a severe beating. During the first month of my imprisonment at the Morinj camp, I was beaten up every day. They forced us to face the wall, put our hands on top of our heads and spread our legs. Then the beating

would start – batons, fists, metal pipes. They broke several of my ribs and I could barely move for almost 2 weeks. The Red Cross delegation had visited the camp twice and on both occasions I was taken away to a solitary confinement so that no one could see me. That is where I heard a story of a young prisoner, Obrad, from the village of Kuna. Other prisoners said that the guards tortured him so much that he died in a container used for interrogation. Then, the guards hanged him by the sleeve of his shirt to look like he had committed suicide.¹⁶

Beatings and food deprivation constitute a common theme in the testimonies of the former prisoners.

One of the guards kicked me in the head so forcefully that I fell unconscious and woke up soaking wet and bloodied an hour later. After a few days I felt a sharp pain in my side and realized that one or two of my ribs might have been cracked. The main torturers were a soldier called Milan (allegedly from the Croatian town of Gospić) and a fellow from Nikšić that everyone called Boxer. That Boxer worked on us every day, particularly during meal time. He broke my nose and my cheek bone. The thing with food and meal time was interesting. During the first couple of weeks or so, very few prisoners were able to eat anything. As soon as the food would arrive and as soon as we would sit down to eat, the guards would storm in and start beating up on us. So, even though there was scarce food, we barely touched it.¹⁷

A former guard in the Morinj Camp had described the treatment of prisoners

as less than appropriate and argued that he had never witnessed first hand any beatings or torture but also acknowledged that not every guard followed the rules.

I did my best, under the circumstances. My duty was to guard those prisoners but I never tortured anyone and would never approve of it. I can't say anything about the other guards and military personnel in the camp. I don't know who tortured them, if there was torture to being with. I did try to help as much as I could. You know, I was not in that camp all the time. I did ask other guards to spare prisoners, but you can not reason with everyone all the time. I was just a guard. Yes, we were at war but those were my neighbours, and many of them were civilians. There were boys as young as 12 and men as old as 80 imprisoned there. All I did was bring them some painkillers and some pills for indigestion /laxatives. I do not know if that counts for anything? And I was not the only one doing this. Z. P. did the same. That was no way to treat prisoners of war. I had many friends from Konavle and Dubrovnik. I did not cross the border since late 1991. I did answer the call for mobilization because I am a patriot and am bound by my duty to my country. But I signed up to be a soldier and not a torturer. Who planed all that (if there was a plan at all) and which politicians should be called to account is not mine to determine. There are courts and other institutions to deal with that.¹⁸

M. P's story was disputed by the retired JNA Colonel, Radomir Goranovic who, according to the prisoners and the Croatian authorities, was the chief interrogator at the Morinj Camp. It is interesting to note that Colonel Goranovic

was not charged with any offences by the Montenegrin Special Prosecutor even though he admitted interrogating 49 prisoners in the Morinj Camp. Colonel Goranovic insisted, however, that he had completed his interrogations without using *any assertive tactics whatsoever*.¹⁹ While his defence might sound weak and unconvincing, he does bring forward an important question of the responsibility of the ruling elites for the policies that led to a mistreatment of the prisoners of war and alleged war crimes being committed. The process of determining political responsibility for the events that occurred in the Morinj Camp is yet to be initiated in Montenegro.

It was the guards – reserve forces - that should be blamed for any cases of torture. We, the interrogators, did nothing wrong. If the prisoners were tortured that could have happened only in the afternoon, after we left the camp, or it could have happened in a remote corner of the camp, or maybe inside one of those containers used for solitary confinement. I was against all that from the start. The whole thing was put together in a wrong way. They brought in civilians and the elderly. All three of us that worked there as interrogators had the rank of colonel but our superior had the rank of Captain 1st Class! I had to ask Huso Kunic for permission to do everything. And he was a Croat. The main man in the camp also had the rank of Captain 1st Class. His name was Mirsad, and he was a Muslim. I have constantly complained about many irregularities but I am certain that there was no plan to mistreat prisoners. Then again, during the night there were only prisoners and guard in the camp. Who knows what was going on then? I have defended my people, lived through the thick and thin, and never lost faith in my people and my army. I do not care about politicians and particularly about those that play the game

of Carla Del Ponte. All I care about are my people and my army. I worked on behalf of the Yugoslav Army – the army I belonged to. People's representatives – presidents of states were in charge and their decisions led to the bloodbath.²⁰

The guards, on the other hand, deny ever mistreating any of the prisoners and entirely shift the blame onto the interrogators. It is interesting that some of the camp personnel made references to army officers brought in from Belgrade to deal with the prisoners in the Morinj Camp and implied that they could have been torturing them.

The guards didn't beat anyone up, let alone torture any of the prisoners. Never! The interrogators did beat the prisoners up and some of them might have tortured. I want to say that during the first couple of months the interrogators were recruited from the reserve forces. Afterwards, those duties had been taken over by the active-duty military personnel from Belgrade. Their commander was Ljubo Knezevic. They used the military police units stationed in Kumbor. We had nothing to do with all that business of beating up prisoners.²¹

While it is clear that actual jurisdictions need to be determined beyond a reasonable doubt, the argument about active-duty army officers who had been brought from Belgrade to the Morinj Camp acquired a new significance in Montenegro. The political leadership in Montenegro claimed that they had never been a part of the decision making process in the early 1990s but that all decisions, including the one about the running of the Morinj Camp, had been

made by the politicians and the army brass in Belgrade. In late 2007 even the former Montenegro State Attorney, Ms. Vesna Medenica, had said that according to the sources from the *Military Naval Sector Boka*, the Morinj Camp was under the jurisdiction of the army command in Belgrade.²² It is, however, apparent that a high level of political interference in the realm of the judiciary seriously eroded the confidence in the independence of the Montenegrin courts and many former anti-war activists and members of some of the NGOs expressed such sentiment.

Trials and Justice

Despite the persistent claim of eminent deniability and because of a mounting public pressure to address the accusation of torture, the Montenegrin government initiated legal proceedings against several former members of the JNA's Reserve Forces Unit that had manned the Morinj Camp.

In March 2008, the *Organized Crime, Corruption, Terrorism and War Crimes Unit* of the Montenegrin High Court had charged six former camp guards and interrogators with committing war crimes.²³ It is worth noting that the Montenegrin judiciary had been encouraged to open those court proceedings by the office of the State Attorney of Croatia (DORH). In late March 2007 the DORH staff provided the office of the State Attorney of Montenegro with evidence of alleged war crimes committed by ten Montenegrin citizens in the Morinj Camp between October 3, 1991 and July 2, 1992. The Montenegrin High Court chose to prosecute six of them, and in May 2010 had convicted Ivo Gojnic, Spiro Lucic, Ivo Menzalin, Boro Gligic, Mladjen Govedarica and Zlatko Tarle of torturing prisoners of war, and sentenced them to a total of 16.5 years in prison.²⁴

Six months later, however, the Appellant Court had dismissed the case and ordered a new trial.²⁵ That new trial by the High Court concluded in January 2012 with the convicting of four of the accused and the dismissal of charges against Mladjen Govedarica and Zlatko Tarle. Those convicted were sentenced to a total of 12 years in prison.²⁶ Following two appeals by both the prosecution

and the defendants, the Appellant Court ruled in February 2014 to uphold the decision of the High Court from 2012, thus concluding legal proceedings related to the treatment of the prisoners of war in the Morinj Camp.²⁷

That, however, was not the end of the affair because the two former camp guards whose charges were dropped in 2012 had sued the Montenegrin state for compensation. They were awarded a total of 123.000 Euros for unlawful incarceration for the duration of the trial. Retired Navy Captain, Mladjen Govedarica and his co-accused, Zvonko Tarle, had received a total of 63.000 Euros and 60.000 Euros in compensation, respectively.²⁸

Those trials of the six former camp guards and interrogators were hailed as a legal process of paramount importance for Montenegro. The prosecution was trying to prove that the camp itself was set up by the military brass in Belgrade without consulting the government in Podgorica. Failing to prove that, the government would have been forced to admit that Montenegro was indeed at war with Croatia in the early 1990s, which is something Podgorica has been strenuously denying for many years. If the camp personnel were selected by Belgrade, then the responsibility of the guards and interrogators for possible torturing of prisoners had little to nothing to do with Montenegro. Such argument meshed nicely with the official discourse about the tangential involvement of Montenegro in the Yugoslav breakup. In a 2003 interview for the documentary film *War for Peace*, the former prime Minister of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic, stated that his government had very few information about the situation on the ground and had to reply on a single source: the military leadership in Belgrade.²⁹ This tactic of eminent deniability pursued with vigor by the Podgorica government over the past twenty-nine years had helped portray the Montenegrin war-time leadership as the victims of unfortunate historical circumstances.

To further polish up its image of a responsible neighbour, the government of Montenegro and its judiciary were engaging in retributive justice by putting on trial former foot-soldiers and camp guards even though they allegedly acted on the behest of a power structure outside of Montenegro. The protracted legal battle

was an attempt to absolve the creators of the war-time policy of any political or criminal responsibility. Instead, the first step in addressing mistakes from the past should have been an official parliamentary resolution acknowledging that crimes had been committed in Montenegro and by Montenegrin citizens. It is also important to stress that societies as divided as Montenegro can not rely exclusively on retributive justice and courts in advancing the case for reconciliation. The government in Podgorica, nevertheless, claimed that it had addressed a very sensitive issues from the recent past, and that it had initiated reconciliation on the local level.

The available sources, however, clearly show that even though during the wars of the 1990s no fighting took place on the Montenegrin soil, its political leadership, its police and security forces, as well as the large segment of its population did play an active role in the fighting in both Croatia and Bosnia. The most significant event that defined the role Montenegro played in the war was the October 1991 attack on the Croatian city of Dubrovnik. The issue of the Morinj Camp can not be examined and evaluated outside of this context.

Reckoning and Historical Memory

One of the most important questions in contemporary Montenegro is about the willingness of the political elites to personalize the responsibility for the war years, and create conditions for the demos to become aware of the importance of facing the past? The personalization of responsibility – from the prison guards and foot-soldiers, to the editors of state-controlled media and the state television, and including the upper echelons of government bureaucracy - seems to be the most significant feature that is missing from what the government refers to as reconciliation.

The desire to see the Montenegrin political leadership from 1990s being held accountable for the events of the war years was also evident in the region of Dubrovnik. According to the 2008 survey by the *East-West Institute*, 97% of those interviewed in the Municipality of Dubrovnik believe that the Montenegrin and the Serbian armies had committed war crimes, and that the former Prime

Ministers, Milo Djukanovic, has the greatest responsibility for the destruction that occurred and crimes that were committed. At the same time, 67% of those surveyed believe that no Croatian politician should apologize to anyone for any crimes that were committed during the patriotic war in the early 1990s.³⁰

Furthermore, the judgments of the Hague Tribunal in the cases of Genaral Pavle Strugar, Admiral Miodrag Jokic and his deputy Milan Zec, and several other officers convicted for the assault on Dubrovnik has been challenged as well. In early December 2009 the municipal court in Dubrovnik had field charges against these individuals for the shelling of the city, the killing of civilians, and the destruction of cultural property. The representatives of the *Montenegrin Association of the Veterans of the Wars 1991-1995*, qualified this latest lawsuit as a hostile act and accused the official Zagreb as well as the *Croatian-Hague lobby in Montenegro* for initiating these new accusations.

At the same time, the communication between communities along the common border were for many years almost non-existent. Any vehicle with the Montenegrin licence plates in addition to an entry visa required a special permit to cross into the Dubrovnik municipality. Vehicles that fail to obtain such permit risked being demolished and even thrown into the sea.

When it comes to the memories of war and the calls for reconciliation in Montenegro it is possible to distinguish between three broadly defined approaches. The first practices the rhetoric of amnesia - promoting a belief that a consensus about the past events (facts we can all agree on) should be reached so that the memories of war-years stop being the obstacle of progress and good neighbourly relations. Such view has been advocated by the significant political actors, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and its former coalition partner, the Social-Democratic Party (SDP). This sounds like a story of a new beginning, and it could be summed up by the phrase *forgive and forget*. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the focus is on promoting forgetting as a virtue. This approach constitutes fear-mongering because it discourages thorough analyzing the past. It warns us that each glimpse into the recent past could pull us back into the dark abyss of nationalism, weekend-Chetniks,

paramilitaries, war-mongers, and war criminals.

Advocates of reconciliation who oppose such view argue that what could and should be done to enable critical evaluation of the past is work on changing our relationship to it by revealing carefully guarded secrets. Despite the fact that the Montenegrin attack on Dubrovnik was the single most traumatic and important event of the post WWII Montenegrin history, it earned just a single sentence in the history textbook for the fourth year of high school: *In the attack of the JNA on the Dubrovnik region reservists from Montenegro took part as well.* This is a good example of the *absolute minimum* mentioned earlier. Furthermore, there had been politically induced impulse and a media driven campaign to try and formulate the final version of the official historical narrative about the wars of 1990s in order to burry the inconvenient truth about the past. The long-time ruling DPS-SDP coalition and the plurality of their supporters believed in the benefits of the breaking off with the past and focusing on the larger integration processes in the future. The new official historical narrative, therefore was based on the selective forgetting. That, however, required an alternative to that which was being forgotten. The alternative offered in Montenegro was a *bi-level narrative*.

First level consisted of the revamping of the image of Montenegro as a Mediterranean country with a centuries-old tradition of multi-ethnicity, multi-religiousity, tolerance and multiculturalism. The second level was a broader framework of the so-called Euro-Atlantic integrations and was being marketed as a solution that would heal all the wounds from the past while allowing the citizens and the ruling elites to turn away from ever examining that very past. Furthermore, the ruling elite kept reminding the citizens that insisting on the absolute *achieving of justice* for the crimes committed could jeopardize the efforts to *secure peace and stability* in the country. Many argued that it would be prudent to maintain the peace and stability at the expense of justice, and that problems from the past should be simply forgotten.

Others practiced the *rhetoric of national catharsis* – a promotion of the narratives of pain by those who were victims of war and nationalism. It was argued that such approach would restore honour and humanity taken away

from the victims in the process of generalization of responsibility. The proponents of this approach hoped that publicizing personal stories would help identify those responsible and provide some closure to the victims. The aim of publicizing such narratives and first-hand accounts was not, they claimed, to provide the complete solution to the problem but to **recompose** the problem and create the **critical distance** necessary for the full evaluation of it. To that effect a number of books and first-hand accounts as well as documentaries appeared in Montenegro during early 2000s.

Moreover, there was the legal approach demanding retributive justice through the Montenegrin court system. The advocates of this approach, many of whom belonged to various ethnic minorities, argued that the court proceedings would bring out the truth about the past and also pass a judgement on those found responsible – therefore – achieve justice, in some measure at least. Many victim groups and family members of those who suffered in the war called for tough sentences that would, in their estimation, match the severity of crimes committed. Despite all this, we are yet to witness a true legal effort by the state to meet the expectations of those who were wronged during the war years, and respond to persistent calls by victims for accountability for crimes committed.

NOTES:

1 See James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

2 For a comprehensive analysis of the issues of selective forgetting and historical absences see Andreas Huyssen, "Present, Past: Media, Politics, Amnesia," in *Public Culture*, Br. 12 (2000), p. 26, as well as Avishai, Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 14.

3 I would like to acknowledge the generous financial assistance provided to me by the University of Alberta Killam Research Fund in conducting research on this topic. The *Small Research Operating Grant* and the *Special Opportunity Grant* made it possible for me to undertake two research trips to Montenegro and Croatia and collect data used in this article. I would also like to thank my research assistant in Montenegro, Mr. Vasilj Karadzic, who also acted as a great facilitator during my stay there.

4 The minutes from the meetings of the *Supreme Defence Council* (VSO) that this author had access to do not support such views. The president of Montenegro was the member of the VSO and played an active role in the decision making process. The minutes from the VSO meetings held on July 23, 1992 and February 10, 1993, and also August 25 and September 7, 1993 as well as March

16, 1994 clearly show that all decisions related to the military had been made collectively. The claim that the Montenegrin political leadership was kept in the dark or, at best, fed a minimum of carefully tailored information by the Chief of the General Staff of the Yugoslav Army could not withstand a serious scrutiny. On September 20, 2005 and again on April 6, 2006 judges Theodor Meron and Fausto Pocar signed two confidential documents on behalf of the ICTY that effectively prevented the using as evidence of the minutes of the VSO meeting in the case of *Bosnia and Herzegovina vs Serbia and Montenegro* tried before the International Court of Justice.

5 This author was conducting research in the city library in Podgorica at the time and was working on these same volumes only to have them disappear over the weekend. It was this author who alerted the editors of the *Vijesti* Daily to the stealing of the newspaper volumes.

6 Svetozar Marovic, "Vlak Mira," *Pobjeda*, No. 9222, Podgorica, August 5, 1991, p. 5, and an interview with Svetozar Marovic in J. Stamatovic, "Dogovor Evropu Gradi," *Pobjeda*, No. 9226, Podgorica, August 9, 1991, p. 5. Also see "Razgovori Vranicki-Djukanovic," and "Razgovori Djukanovic-Mok," *Pobjeda*, No. 9253, Podgorica, September 5, 1991, p. 1 and p. 20.

7 In addition to a number of short journalistic pieces on the assault on Dubrovnik published by the weekly Monitor (Podgorica), Koca Pavlovic's Documentary entitled "Rat za Mir" (Podgorica: IPG OBALA, 2004. Translated as *War for Peace*) and the personal journals of one of the most prominent Montenegrin journalists who responded to the call for mobilization in the summer 1991, Veseljko Koprivica, published under the title *Sve je Bilo Meta*, (Podgorica: Monitor, 2004. Translated as *Everything was a Target*) are among a very few substantial secondary sources on this topic. Marko Stojanovic's documentary film entitled "Moringj Camp" (Podgorica: TV Montena, 2006) is the only material on this detention facility currently available in Montenegro.

8 Jan-Werner Muller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 26. Also see Joshua Foa Dienstag, "The Pozsgay Affair: Historical Memory and Political Legitimacy," *History & Memory*, Br. 8 (1996), pp. 51-65 as well as Christopher, Kurtz, "Justice in Reparations: The Cost of Memory and the Value of Talk," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, No. 32 (2004), p. 283.

9 Montenegro State Attorney's Office press release, Podgorica, August 16, 2008. Also see *Vijesti Daily*, "Ratni Zlocin u Logoru 'Moringj,'" Podgorica, August 16, 2008.

10 *Directive for Attack. OP.No.2. Top Secret. No. 32-1*. Issued by General Jevrem Cokic on 29 September 1991.

11 For a detailed account of the siege of Dubrovnik see Srdja Pavlovic, "Reckoning: The 1991 Siege of Dubrovnik and the Consequences of the 'War for Peace'," *Spaces of Identity, Multidisciplinary Scholarly Journal*, Issue No. 5.1 (2005). Available at: <http://www.spacesofidentity.net>

12 Indictment against Slobodan Milosevic, Case No. IT-01-xxx, Counts 6 – 13: Unlawful Confinement, Imprisonment, Torture and Inhumane Acts, Articles 64a and 64 b. ICTY. Available at: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/ind/en/ind_cro010927.pdf

13 This author had learned that the barracks where the prisoners were housed had been renovated and sold to private developer sometimes during late fall 2008.

14 Hrvatsko Društvo Logorasa Srpskih Koncentracijskih Logora, Sjećanja Dubrovackih Logorasa 1991-1992 (Dubrovnik: Dubrovacki Muzeji-Muzej Savremene Povijesti, 2003), p. 27.

15 Interview with M.K., a civilian from the town of Slano, Municipality of Dubrovnik. He was brought to Morinj Camp on May 23rd, 1991 and remained there for 40 days. He was forced to fight his fellow prisoners (box match) while the guards cheered.

16 Interview with I.L., a civilian from the village of Dunave, Konavle. He was arrested by the reserve forces of the Yugoslav Army and the Montenegrin volunteers on June 3rd, 1991 in his house and kept in the *Motel Vinogradi* for seven days. He was transferred to Morinj Camp on June 10th.

17 Interview with B.O., a member of the reserve forces for the Dubrovnik Territorial Defence. He was captured at Resnica on November 3rd, 1991 and brought to the village of Djurinici, where members of the volunteer force from Niksic (northern Montenegro) wanted to execute him. He was then taken to the Morinj Camp where he remained until his release in a prisoner exchange on December 13th, 1991.

18 Interview with M. P., a member of the reserved forces of the JNA. He was the guard at the Morinj Camp and had assisted prisoners by secretly providing them with medication. He also maintained communication with the families of several prisoners and was passing messages to them.

19 Vlado Jovanovic, "Ko je Osnovao Morinj?" *Monitor*, Podgorica, 23 january 2009. Section: Focus.

20 Interview with Colonel Radomir Goranovic. He was stationed in Kumbor (Montenegro) on the border with Croatia, and was put in charge of the Morinj Camp interrogation unit. Colonel Goranovic had been named by the Croatian authorities as one of those responsible for the torturing of prisoners. Also see Marko Stojanovic, "Morinj Camp" Documentary film. (Podgorica: TV Montena, 2006).

21 Interview with N.I., a member of the reserve forces of the JNA. He was the prison guard in the Morinj Camp. All of the former prisoners we interviewed mentioned him as someone who was treating them fairly and did not torture them. Also see Marko Stojanovic, "Morinj Camp" Documentary film. (Podgorica: TV Montena, 2006).

22 Vlado Jovanovic, "Ko je Osnovao Morinj?" *Monitor*, Podgorica, 23 january 2009. Section: Focus.

23 High Court rulling. Case No. KtS.br.7/08. Podgorica, 15 August, 2008.

24 High Court ruling. Case No. K.br.214/08. Podgorica, 15 May.2010.

25 Appelant Court ruling. Case No. Ksz.20/10. Podgorica, 25 November, 2010.

26 High Court ruling. Case No. K.br. 33/10. Podgorica, 25 January, 2012.

27 Appelant Court ruling. Case No. KŽ-S.br.44/13. Podgorica, 27 February, 2014.

28 *Dan*, Podgorica, July 30, 2016. Available at: <https://www.dan.me>.

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29 Koca Pavlovic, “Rat za Mir” (Podgorica: IPG OBALA, 2004. Translated as *War for Peace*).

30 “I Mila Krive za Zlocine: Istok-Zapad Institut Kompletirao Istrazivanje,” *Dan*, Podgorica, 6 December, 2008. Also see “Vidljiv Otpor saradnji i Prastanju,” *Pobjeda*, Podgorica, 6 December, 2008.

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