

AGAINST THE DOUBLE BLACKMAIL

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The top winner in the contest for the greatest blunder of 1998 was a Latin-American patriotic terrorist who sent a bomb letter to a US consulate in order to protest against the American interfering into the local politics. As a conscientious citizen, he wrote on the envelope his return address; however, he did not put enough stamps on it, so that the post returned the letter to him. Forgetting what he put in it, he opened it and blew himself to death - a perfect example of how, ultimately, a letter always arrives at its destination. And is not something quite similar happening to the Slobodan Milosevic regime with the recent NATO bombing? For years, Milosevic was sending bomb letters to his neighbors, from the Albanians to Croatia and Bosnia, keeping himself out of the conflict while igniting fire all around Serbia - finally, his last letter returned to him. Let us hope that the result of the NATO intervention will be that Milosevic will be proclaimed the political blunderer of the year.

And there is a kind of poetic justice in the fact that the West finally intervened apropos of Kosovo - let us not forget that it was there that it all began with the ascension to power of Milosevic: this ascension was legitimized by the promise to amend the underprivileged situation of Serbia within the Yugoslav federation, especially with regard to the Albanian "separatism." Albanians were Milosevic's first target; afterwards, he shifted his wrath onto other Yugoslav republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia), until, finally, the focus of the conflict returned to Kosovo - as in a closed loop of Destiny, the arrow returned to the one who lanced it by way of setting free the spectre of ethnic passions. This is the key point worth remembering: Yugoslavia did not start to disintegrate when the Slovene "secession" triggered the domino-effect (first Croatia, then Bosnia, Macedonia...); it was already at the moment of Milosevic's constitutional reforms in 1987, depriving Kosovo and Vojvodina of their limited autonomy, that the fragile balance on which Yugoslavia rested was irretrievably disturbed. From that moment onwards, Yugoslavia continued to live only because it didn't yet notice it was already dead - it was like the proverbial cat in the cartoons walking over the precipice, floating in the air, and falling down only when it becomes aware that it has no ground under its feet... From Milosevic's seizure of power in Serbia onwards, the only actual chance for Yugoslavia to survive was to reinvent its formula: either Yugoslavia under Serb domination or some form of radical decentralization, from a loose confederacy to the full sovereignty of its units.

It is thus easy to praise the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia as the first case of an intervention - not into the confused

situation of a civil war, but - into a country with full sovereign power. Is it not comforting to see the NATO forces intervene not for any specific economico-strategic interests, but simply because a country is cruelly violating the elementary human rights of an ethnic group? Is not this the only hope in our global era - to see some internationally acknowledged force as a guarantee that all countries will respect a certain minimum of ethical (and, hopefully, also health, social, ecological) standards? However, the situation is more complex, and this complexity is indicated already in the way NATO justifies its intervention: the violation of human rights is always accompanied by the vague, but ominous reference to "strategic interests." The story of NATO as the enforcer of the respect for human rights is thus only one of the two coherent stories that can be told about the recent bombings of Yugoslavia, and the problem is that each story has its own rationale. The second story concerns the other side of the much-praised new global ethical politics in which one is allowed to violate the state sovereignty on behalf of the violation of human rights. The first glimpse into this other side is provided by the way the big Western media selectively elevate some local "warlord" or dictator into the embodiment of Evil: Saddam Hussein, Milosevic, up to the unfortunate (now forgotten) Aidid in Somalia - at every point, it is or was "the community of civilized nations against...". And on what criteria does this selection rely? Why Albanians in Serbia and not also Palestinians in Israel, Kurds in Turkey, etc.etc? Here, of course, we enter the shady world of international capital and its strategic interests.

According to the "Project CENSORED," the top censored story of 1998 was that of a half-secret international agreement in working, called MAI (the Multilateral Agreement on Investment). The primary goal of MAI will be to protect the foreign interests of multinational companies. The agreement will basically undermine the sovereignty of nations by assigning power to the corporations almost equal to those of the countries in which these corporations are located. Governments will no longer be able to treat their domestic firms more favorably than foreign firms. Furthermore, countries that do not relax their environmental, land-use and health and labor standards to meet the demands of foreign firms may be accused of acting illegally. Corporations will be able to sue sovereign state if they will impose too severe ecological or other standards - under NAFTA (whic is the main model for MAI), Ethyl Corporation is already suing Canada for banning the use of its gasoline additive MMT. The greatest threat is, of course, to the developing nations which will be pressured into depleting their natural resources for commercial exploitation. Renato Ruggerio, director of the World Trade Organization, the sponsor of MAI, is already hailing this project, elaborated and discussed in a clandestine manner, with almost no public discussion and media attention, as the "constitution for a new global economy." And, in the same way in which, already for Marx,

market relations provided the true foundation for the notion of individual freedoms and rights, THIS is also the obverse of the much-praised new global morality celebrated even by some neoliberal philosophers as signalling the beginning of the new era in which international community will establish and enforce some minimal code preventing sovereign state to engage in crimes against humanity even within its own territory. And the recent catastrophic economic situation in Russia, far from being the heritage of old Socialist mismanagement, is a direct result of this global capitalist logic embodied in MAI.

This other story also has its ominous military side. The ultimate lesson of the last American military interventions, from the Operation Desert Fox against Iraq at the end of 1998 to the present bombing of Yugoslavia, is that they signal a new era in military history - battles in which the attacking force operates under the constraint that it can sustain no casualties. When the first stealth-fighter fell down in Serbia, the emphasis of the American media was that there were no casualties - the pilot was SAVED! (This concept of "war without casualties" was elaborated by General Collin Powell.) And was not the counterpoint to it the almost surreal way CNN reported on the war: not only was it presented as a TV event, but the Iraqi themselves seem to treat it this way - during the day, Bagdad was a "normal" city, with people going around and following their business, as if war and bombardment was an unreal nightmarish spectre that occurred only during the night and did not take place in effective reality?

Let us recall what went on in the final American assault on the Iraqi lines during the Gulf War: no photos, no reports, just rumours that tanks with bulldozer like shields in front of them rolled over Iraqi trenches, simply burying thousands of troops in earth and sand - what went on was allegedly considered too cruel in its sheer mechanical efficiency, too different from the standard notion of a heroic face to face combat, so that images would perturb too much the public opinion and a total censorship black-out was strictly imposed. Here we have the two aspects joined together: the new notion of war as a purely technological event, taking place behind radar and computer screens, with no casualties, AND the extreme physical cruelty too unbearable for the gaze of the media - not the crippled children and raped women, victims of caricaturized local ethnic "fundamentalist warlords," but thousands of nameless soldiers, victims of nameless efficient technological warfare. When Jean Baudrillard made the claim that the Gulf War did not take place, this statement could also be read in the sense that such traumatic pictures that stand for the Real of this war were totally censored...

How, then, are we to think these two stories together, without sacrificing the truth of each of them? What we have here is a political example of the famous drawing in which we recognize the contours either of a rabbit head or of a goose

head, depending on our mental focus. If we look at the situation in a certain way, we see the international community enforcing minimal human rights standards on a nationalist neo-Communist leader engaged in ethnic cleansing, ready to ruin his own nation just to retain power. If we shift the focus, we see NATO, the armed hand of the new capitalist global order, defending the strategic interests of the capital in the guise of a disgusting travesty, posing as a disinterested enforcer of human rights, attacking a sovereign country which, in spite of the problematic nature of its regime, nonetheless acts as an obstacle to the unbridled assertion of the New World Order.

However, what if one should reject this double blackmail (if you are against NATO strikes, you are for Milosevic's proto-Fascist regime of ethnic cleansing, and if you are against Milosevic, you support the global capitalist New World Order)? What if this very opposition between enlightened international intervention against ethnic fundamentalists, and the heroic last pockets of resistance against the New World Order, is a false one? What if phenomena like the Milosevic regime are not the opposite to the New World Order, but rather its SYMPTOM, the place at which the hidden TRUTH of the New World Order emerges? Recently, one of the American negotiators said that Milosevic is not only part of the problem, but rather THE problem itself. However, was this not clear FROM THE VERY BEGINNING? Why, then, the interminable procrastination of the Western powers, playing for years into Milosevic's hands, acknowledging him as a key factor of stability in the region, misreading clear cases of Serb aggression as civil or even tribal warfare, initially putting the blame on those who immediately saw what Milosevic stands for and, for that reason, desperately wanted to escape his grasp (see James Baker's public endorsement of a "limited military intervention" against Slovene secession), supporting the last Yugoslav prime minister Ante Markovic, whose program was, in an incredible case of political blindness, seriously considered as the last chance for a democratic market-oriented unified Yugoslavia, etc.etc.? When the West fights Milosevic, it is NOT fighting its enemy, one of the last points of resistance against the liberal-democratic New World Order; it is rather fighting its own creature, a monster that grew as the result of the compromises and inconsistencies of the Western politics itself. (And, incidentally, it is the same as with Iraq: its strong position is also the result of the American strategy of containing Iran.)

In the last decade, the West followed a Hamlet-like procrastination towards Balkan, and the present bombardment has effectively all the signs of Hamlet's final murderous outburst in which a lot of people unnecessarily die (not only the King, his true target, but also his mother, Laertius, Hamlet himself...), because Hamlet acted too late, when the proper moment was already missed. So the West, in the present intervention which displays all the signs of a violent

outburst of impotent aggressivity without a clear political goal, is now paying the price for the years of entertaining illusions that one can make a deal with Milosevic: with the recent hesitations about the ground intervention in Kosovo, the Serbian regime is, under the pretext of war, launching the final assault on Kosovo and purge it of most of the Albanians, cynically accepting bombardments as the price to be paid.

When the Western powers repeat all the time that they are not fighting the Serb people, but only their corrupted leaders, they rely on the (typically liberal) wrong premise that Serbs are victims of their evil leadership personified in Milosevic, manipulated by him. The painful fact is that the Serb aggressive nationalism enjoys the support of the large majority of the population - no, Serbs are not passive victims of nationalist manipulation, they are not Americans in disguise, just waiting to be delivered from the nationalist spell. On the other hand, this misperception is accompanied by the apparently contradictory notion according to which, Balkan people are living in the past, fighting again and again old battles, perceiving recent situation through old myths... One is tempted to say that these two cliches should be precisely TURNED AROUND: not only are people not "good," since they let themselves be manipulated with obscene pleasure; there are also no "old myths" which we need to study if we are really to understand the complex situation, just the PRESENT outburst of racist nationalism which, according to its needs, opportunistically resuscitates old myths. To paraphrase the old Clintonian motto: no, it's not the old myths and ethnic hatreds, it's the POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLE, stupid!

So, on the one hand, we have the obscenities of the Serb state propaganda: they regularly refer to Clinton not as "the American president," but as "the American Fuehrer"; two of the transparencies on their state-organized anti-Nato demonstrations were "Clinton, come here and be our Monica!" (i.e. suck our...), and "Monica, did you suck out also his brain?". This is where the NATO planners got it wrong, caught in their schemes of strategic reasoning, unable to forecast that the Serb reaction to bombardment will be a recourse to a collective Bakhtinian carnivalization of the social life... And the Western counterpoint to this obscenity is the more and more openly racist tone of its reporting: when the three American soldiers were taken prisoners, CNN dedicated the first 10 minutes of the News to their predicament (although everyone knew that NOTHING will happen to them!), and only then reported on the tens of thousands of refugees, burned villages and Pristina turning into a ghost town. Where is the so-much-praised Serb "democratic opposition" to protest THIS horror taking place in their own backyard, not only the - till now, at least, bombardments with relatively very low casualties?

The atmosphere in Belgrade is, at least for the time being, carnivalesque in a faked way - when they are not in

shelters, people dance to rock or ethnic music on the streets, under the motto "With music against bombs!", playing the role of the defying heroes (since they know that NATO does not really bomb civilian targets). Although it may fascinate some confused pseudo-Leftists, this obscene carnivalization of the social life is effectively the other, public, face of ethnic cleansing: while in Belgrade people defiantly dance on the streets, three hundred kilometers to the South, a genocide of African proportions is taking place.

It is interesting to watch in the last days the Serb satellite state TV which targets foreign public: no reports on atrocities in Kosovo, refugees are mentioned only as people fleeing the NATO bombing; the overall idea is that Serbia, the island of peace, the only place in ex-Yugoslavia that was not touched by the war raging all around it, is attacked by the NATO madmen destroying bridges and hospitals... So when, in the nighttime, crowds are camping out on the Belgrade bridges, participating in pop and ethnic music concerts held there in a defiantly festive mood, offering their bodies as the live shield to prevent the bridges from being bombed, the answer to this faked pathetic gesture should be a very simple one: *why don't you go to Kosovo and make a rock carnival in the Albanian parts of Pristina?*

In the recent struggle of the so-called "democratic opposition" in Serbia against the Milosevic's regime, the truly touchy topic is the stance towards Kosovo: as to this topic, the large majority of the "democratic opposition" unconditionally endorses Milosevic's anti-Albanian nationalist agenda, even accusing him of making compromises with the West and "betraying" Serb national interests in Kosovo. In the course of the student demonstrations against the Milosevic's Socialist Party falsification of the election results in the Winter of 1996, the Western media who closely followed the events and praised the revived democratic spirit in Serbia, rarely mentioned the fact that one of the regular slogans of the demonstrators against the special police forces was "Instead of kicking us, go to Kosovo and kick out the Albanians!". In today's Serbia, the absolute *sine qua non* of an authentic political act would thus be to unconditionally reject the ideological topos of the "Albanian threat to Serbia."

In the last years, the Serb propaganda is promoting the identification of Serbia as the second Israel, with Serbs as the chosen nation, and Kosovo as their West Bank where they fight, in the guise of "Albanian terrorists," their own intifada. They went as far as repeating the old Israeli complaint against the Arabs: "We will pardon you for what you did to us, but we will never pardon you for forcing us to do to YOU the horrible things we had to do in order to defend ourselves!" The hilariously-mocking Serb apology for shooting down the stealth bomber was: "Sorry, we didn't know you are invisible!" One is tempted to say that the answer to Serb complaints about the "irrational barbaric bombing" of their

country should be: "Sorry, we didn't know you are a chosen nation!"

One thing is for sure: the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia will change the global geopolitic coordinates. The unwritten pact of peaceful coexistence (the respect of each state's full sovereignty, i.e. non-interference in internal affairs, even in the case of the grave violation of human rights) is over. However, the very first act of the new global police force usurping the right to punish sovereign states for their wrongdoings already signals its end, its own undermining, since it immediately became clear that this universality of human rights as its legitimization is false, i.e. that the attacks on selective targets protect particular interests. The NATO bombardments of Yugoslavia also signal the end of any serious role of UN and Security Council: it is NATO under US guidance that effectively pulls the strings. Furthermore, the silent pact with Russia that held till now is broken: in the terms of this pact, Russia was publicly treated as a superpower, allowed to maintain the appearance of being one, on condition that it did not effectively act as one. Now Russia's humiliation is open, any pretense of dignity is unmasked: Russia can only openly resist or openly comply with Western pressure. The further logical result of this new situation will be, of course, the renewed rise of anti-Western resistance from Eastern Europe to the Third World, with the sad consequence that criminal figures like Milosevic will be elevated into the model fighters against the New World Order.

So the lesson is that the alternative between the New World Order and the neoracist nationalists opposing it is a false one: these are the two sides of the same coin - the New World Order itself breeds monstrosities that it fights. Which is why the protests against bombing from the reformed Communist parties all around Europe, inclusive of PDS, are totally misdirected: these false protesters against the NATO bombardment of Serbia are like the caricaturized pseudo-Leftists who oppose the trial against a drug dealer, claiming that his crime is the result of social pathology of the capitalist system. The way to fight the capitalist New World Order is not by supporting local proto-Fascist resistances to it, but to focus on the only serious question today: how to build TRANSNATIONAL political movements and institutions strong enough to seriously constraint the unlimited rule of the capital, and to render visible and politically relevant the fact that the local fundamentalist resistances against the New World Order, from Milosevic to le Pen and the extreme Right in Europe, are part of it?

Dear Guy, thanks again for your efforts. You got the point right: I definitely SUPPORT the bombing and am disgusted by the usual pseudo-humanitarian stuff in the style of "the true victims are ordinary civilians both among Serbs and among Albanians"! Slavoj