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To take the measure of things and their
mismeasure, to reason unto unreason, to
suffer to count and to be accountable—such
is the ratio of that form of life called the hu-
man.

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ENVISIONING EASTERN EUROPE

Postcommunist Cultural Studies

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countries, the postsocialist utopia might prove similarly "successful."¹²

¹²For further analysis, see the paper by Arista M. Cirtautas and myself, "The Articulation and Institutionalization of Democracy in Poland," *Social Research*, forthcoming; and my "A New Middle Class?" in *Beyond Modernity*, ed. Richard Kilminster and Ian Varcoe (London: Routledge Press, forthcoming).

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE MOTHER NATION IN THE YUGOSLAV CONFLICT

Renata Salecl

About the French Revolution, Kant wrote that its significance for world history lies not in what actually happened on the streets of Paris but in the enthusiasm this endeavor to realize freedom aroused in the eyes of the observers, the educated, enlightened public.¹ It may well be that what actually took place in Paris was horrifying, that the most repulsive passions were let loose, yet these events' reverberations among the enlightened public throughout Europe bear witness not only to the possibility of freedom but to the actual tendency toward freedom as an anthropological fact. For Kant, what matters in such a historical moment is simply "the mode of thinking of the spectators which reveals itself publicly in this game of great revolutions and manifests such a universal yet disinterested sympathy for the players on one side against those on the other, even at the risk of this partiality becoming disadvantageous for them if discovered, owing to this universality."²

The same shift, from an event's immediate reality to the modality of its inscription into the great Other epitomized by passive observers, is visible in the violent anti-immigrant outbursts in the summer of 1992 in Rostock and other cities in former East Germany. The true meaning of these events lies in the approval or at least "understanding" with which the silent majority of observers met the neo-Nazi pogroms. Even some top Social Democratic politicians invoked the attacks as a reason to reconsider Germany's liberal immigration laws. This shift in *Zeitgeist* holds the real danger. It lays the ground for the possible hegemony of an ideology that perceives the pres-

¹Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

²Kant, *Conflict* 153. He adds: "This mode of thinking demonstrates a character of the human race at large and all at once; owing to its disinterestedness, a moral character of humanity, at least in its predisposition, a characteristic which not only permits people to hope for progress towards the better, but is already itself progress in so far as its capacity is sufficient for the present."

ence of "aliens" as a threat to national identity, the principal cause of antagonisms dividing the body politic.

Especially noteworthy is the difference between the "postmodern" racism now rampant in Europe and the more traditional form of racism. The older style was direct and raw—"they" (Jews, Blacks, Arabs, East Europeans) are lazy or violent, plotting against us, eroding our national substance—whereas the new racism reflects the struggle *against* racism, which is why it can assume the form of its opposite. Etienne Balibar christens this new attitude "metaracism" and shows its reliance on the theory of anthropological culturism.³ He writes: "There is no racism without theory." Because every racist complex expresses "a violent desire for immediate knowledge of social relations," it has to invent theories that are easily intelligible to the masses. For old racism, racial difference was biologically determined, but metaracism no longer regards races as isolated biological units. Balibar finds that this new "differential racism" is actually "racism without races." It perceives racial tensions in terms only of incompatible cultural differences, lifestyles, and traditions. But the fact is that in this racism, culture functions as a "natural" determinative force: it locks individuals and groups a priori into their cultural genealogy. Metaracism perceives cultures as fixed entities and desires to maintain "cultural distances." This racism, "at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harm of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions."⁴ At the same time, it differentiates cultures as "universalistic and progressive" on the one hand and "particularist and primitive" on the other. The "progressive" cultures are usually of European origin, while the "primitive" types are exotic, tribal cultures, which we might admire or take an anthropological interest in, but should always keep at a distance.⁵

³Etienne Balibar, "Is there a 'Neo-Racism'?" in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso Press, 1991).

⁴Balibar, "Is there a 'Neo-Racism'?" 19, 21.

⁵The only way to think multiculturally without being metaracist is to view cultural background as something contingent, that does not determine us totally. Here the abstract notion of the Kantian cogito is relevant. It is the

How, for example, would metaracists react to the outbursts in Rostock? They would begin by expressing horror and repulsion at the neo-Nazi violence, yet would be quick to add that these deplorable events must be seen in context, as a perverted, distorted expression and effect of a real problem: namely, that in our contemporary Babylon, the experience of belonging to a well-defined ethnic community that gives meaning to the individual's life is fast waning; in short, the true culprits are cosmopolitan universalists who, in the name of multiculturalism, mix races and thereby set off natural self-defense mechanisms. Apartheid is thus legitimized as the ultimate form of antiracism, as an endeavor to prevent racial tensions and conflicts.⁶ Because the metaracists do not speak of actual races, they call people of other cultural traditions "immigrants" and seek to establish a new form of apartheid by changing liberal immigration laws. Here we have a palpable example of Lacan's insistence that "there is no metalanguage." The distance of metaracism from racism is void. Metaracism is racism pure and simple, and it is all the more dangerous for posing as its opposite, advocating racist measures as the very means of fighting racism.

On a different level, we encounter the same paradox in the Western media coverage of the current war in Bosnia. A striking contrast emerges between this reporting and the coverage of the 1991 Persian Gulf War. During the Gulf War, newscasts featured the standard ideological personification. Instead of providing information on social, political, or religious trends and antagonisms in Iraq, the media ultimately reduced the conflict to a quarrel with Saddam Hussein, Evil personified, the outlaw who excluded himself from the civilized international community. Even more than the destruction of Iraq's military forces, the true aim of the Gulf War was presented as

non-substantial notion of the subject that establishes the necessary distance from the cultural background.

⁶A letter to *Newsweek*, 26 October 1992, wrote: "Maybe it's fundamentally unnatural for different races or ethnic groups to live together.... While no one can condone the attacks against foreigners in Germany, the Germans have every right to insist that their country remain ethnically German."

psychological—the necessary humiliation of Saddam.⁷ In the case of the Bosnian war, however, isolated demonizations of Serbian president Milosevic notwithstanding, the predominant attitude is that of the quasi-anthropological observer. The media outdo one another giving lessons on the ethnic and religious background of the conflict. Traumas hundreds of years old are being pointed to and explained, as though to understand the roots of the conflict, one must know not just the history of Yugoslavia, but the entire history of the Balkans from medieval times.⁸ One *New York Times* journalist writes: “The history of all the southern Slavs in the Balkans is a tangled tragedy of mass rape and barbaric slaughter, the product of the kind of ethnic hatred that perhaps only people who are closely related to each other could nurture so well for so

⁷For analysis of American media coverage of the Gulf War, see Samuel Weber, “The Media and the War,” *Alphabet City* (Summer 1991).

⁸Thomas L. Friedman (*New York Times*, 8 April 1993) analyzes the change in American politics toward Bosnia through the new Clinton Administration’s talk about Bosnia, starting “to cast the problem there less as a moral tragedy—which would make American inaction immoral—and more as a tribal feud that no outsider can hope to settle.” Friedman notes that this change was especially pronounced in Secretary of State Warren Christopher’s discourse on Bosnia March 28, 1993: “It is really a tragic problem. The hatred between all three groups—the Bosnians and the Serbs and the Croats—is almost unbelievable. It’s almost terrifying, and it’s centuries old. That really is a problem from hell. And I think that the United States is doing all we can to try to deal with that problem.... The United States simply doesn’t have the means to make people in that region of the world like each other.” This contrasts totally with his description the previous month, February 10, of the conflict as the destruction of one people by another: “Serbian ethnic cleansing has been pursued through mass murders, systematic beatings, and the rapes of the Muslims and others, prolonged shellings of innocents in Sarajevo and elsewhere, forced displacement of entire villages, inhumane treatment of prisoners in detention camps.” He added that the way Americans respond to this conflict “tests our commitment to nurturing democracy and the support of environments in which democracy can grow and take root ... and it tests what wisdom we have gathered from this bloody century, and it measures our resolve to take early concerted action against systematic ethnic persecution.” This change in official discourse shows how, as Friedman says, “what had been an outrage that was immoral to stand by and watch became a Balkan feud that was simply ‘terrifying’ to watch.”

long.”⁹ In the Bosnian conflict, therefore, it is impossible simply to take sides, to name evil and assign blame, because (according to a second *New York Times* writer) we are dealing with “irreconcilable warring tribes”;¹⁰ we can only patiently try to grasp the background of this savage spectacle, so alien to our system of civilized values.¹¹

This ideological mystification is even more cunning than the demonization of Saddam Hussein. Assuming the comfortable stance of a distant onlooker and evoking the allegedly intricate context of the struggles enable the West to shed its responsibility toward the Balkans, avoiding the bitter truth that, far from an eccentric conflict, the Bosnian war is a direct result of the West’s failure to grasp the political dynamic of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The logic is ultimately the same as that of racism: the effective tolerance and thus support of “ethnic cleansing” under the guise of its opposite; the distance of an impartial observer.

What the West does not want to recognize is that Yugoslavia “died” several times before officially disintegrating. Although symbolic death usually follows real death with the burial, in Yugoslavia the symbolic death took place before the country’s final collapse. Because “Yugoslavia” functioned as a

⁹Craig R. Whitney, *New York Times*, 11 April 1993.

¹⁰Leslie H. Gelb used this expression in a *New York Times* commentary 8 April 1993, in which he tried to be favorable to Bosnians but enumerated obstacles to greater Western involvement in the conflict.

¹¹When the Serbs rejected all mediators’ plans to stop the war in Bosnia, the Western media started seeking clues to their behavior in the Serbian “sacrificial nature” implied in the Bosnian Serbian leader’s words, “For us the Serbs, it is better to commit collective suicide than to live with others any longer” (Kemal Kurspahic, *New York Times*, 7 May 1993). To explain this puzzling statement, the Western media (Stephen Kinzer, *New York Times*, 7 May 1993) cited Serbian history:

Some of the greatest Serbian heroes were men who led their nation to disastrous defeats, and many students of Serbian culture say it harbors a strong suicidal streak. After traveling through the Balkans half a century ago, the novelist Rebecca West wrote that Serbs were gripped with an “infatuation with sacrifice” and were “preoccupied with the idea of failure and humiliation.” “They want to receive the Eucharist, be beaten by the Turks, and then go to Heaven,” she wrote.

floating signifier that each constitutive nation incorporated into its own political discourses in different ways, the moment of the country's symbolic death arrived for different Yugoslav nations at different times: for the Serbs in 1974, when the Constitution gave full autonomy to the Serbian provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo; for the Albanians in 1989, when they lost their autonomy; and for the Slovenes and Croats with the disintegration of communism, when half of Yugoslavia formed a multiparty system while the other half remained communist.

But the most dramatic symbolic death came in 1991, after the federal army had occupied Slovenia, when mothers all over Yugoslavia began to protest the war and demanded their sons' return from service. The discourse changed significantly. Young soldiers, who had previously been referred to as men (since entering the army traditionally marked the boy's initiation into manhood), were suddenly renamed children, to emphasize the purity of the mother/child relationship, which supposedly transcends all ideological or national struggles. The Slovene mothers surprisingly gave their full support to the Serbian mothers' call for their sons' return, even though the Slovenes perceived the Serbs as the principal aggressor. But as soon as the Serbian mothers arrived in Slovenia to retrieve their sons, the supposed universality of maternal feelings collapsed underneath national identification.¹² Army ideologues convinced the Serbian mothers that their sons were fighting their national enemy, and the mothers quickly changed their minds and let the sons stay. Not long after the war in Slovenia,

¹²That no universal maternal feelings exist was confirmed on another level by the U.S. government's handling of the Branch Davidian cult in Waco, Texas, in 1993. After seven weeks of unsuccessful negotiations with the cult leader, the FBI finally decided to use tear gas to force the cult members out of the compound, because the "authorities believed that once the gas started seeping into the compound, 'maternal instincts' would take over and the mothers of the 17 small children inside would come rushing out with them" (*New York Times*, 22 April 1993). Once again another form of identification, this time with the cult, apparently overpowered the supposed maternal feelings; it now seems that the members not only did not try to protect their children but together committed mass suicide. Both cases, the reaction of Serbian mothers during the war in Slovenia and the resistance in Waco, show maternal identification to be only one among others fighting for dominance in a hegemonic struggle.

the army, which had been considered the principal guarantor of the transnational character of the Yugoslav federation, openly took the side of the Serbs. This was the final symbolic death of Yugoslavia.

War and the Fantasy Structure of the Homeland

How is it that war can distort all human relations until only national identification prevails? What is the logic of war? As Elaine Scarry has pointed out, the motives that usually trigger war (urges for freedom, national sovereignty, possession of territory) are not linked to the logic of the war itself or its inner structure.¹³ In a way, they remain outside the war. Different motives are offered before the war starts (as an excuse for war) and after it ends (identifying what it accomplished); during the war itself, these play a secondary role. When war begins, the ideological excuse for it "materializes" in the body of the soldier that must be killed or in the building that has to be destroyed. Scarry emphasizes that the inner logic of war concerns the contest over which side will be quicker to inflict injury on the other. Death and injury, though presented as by-products of war, are actually its only aim. But the true aim of harming the enemy is not so much to cause it material loss, capture its territory, or destroy its political system, as to destroy the enemy's very self-perception, the way it forms its identity.

I cannot fully agree with another thesis Scarry develops, that war starts when a "country becomes a fiction for its population."¹⁴ A country is always already a kind of fiction, not only "a piece of land," but a narration about this land. In the language of psychoanalysis, a country (or fatherland, motherland, homeland) could be defined as a fantasy. What does this mean? In Lacanian psychoanalysis, fantasy is linked to the way people organize enjoyment (*jouissance*), the way they structure their desire around some traumatic element that cannot be symbolized. Fantasy gives consistency to what we call "reality." Social reality is always traversed by some funda-

¹³Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and the Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 63.

¹⁴Scarry, *Body in Pain* 131.

mental impossibility, an "antagonism," that prevents reality from being fully symbolized. It is fantasy that attempts to symbolize or otherwise fill out this empty space in social reality. Fantasy thus constructs a scenario that conceals the ultimate inconsistency of society.¹⁵

In the fantasy structure of the homeland, the nation (in the sense of national identification) is the element that cannot be symbolized. The nation is an element in us that is "more than ourselves," something that defines us but is at the same time undefinable; we cannot specify what it means, nor can we erase it. We may even say that the nation is linked to the place of the Real in the symbolic network.¹⁶ In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Real is a dimension that is always missing, but at the same time always emerges. This elusive dimension, which society tries to incorporate in the symbolic order and thus neutralize, always exceeds society's grasp. Even though the social symbolic order is oriented toward a homeostatic equilibrium, it can never attain this state, because of the alien, traumatic dimension at its core. It is precisely the homeland that fills out the empty place of the nation in the symbolic structure of society. The homeland is the fantasy structure, the scenario, through which society perceives itself as a homogeneous entity.

The aim of war is to dismantle the fantasy structure of the enemy country. The aggressor tries to destroy the way the enemy perceives itself, creates national myths about certain territory, takes this territory (or political system) as a sacred symbol of its existence. This is why the aggressor intends not merely to impose its beliefs on the enemy but mainly to destroy the enemy's belief and dismantle its identity. Thus, when the

¹⁵Although the imaginary order and fantasy may appear similar in content, they belong to different domains of psychic reality. The imaginary order is linked to the mirror stage through which the subject forms his or her first forms of identification. It designates the immediate form of experience, oblivious to its structural conditions of possibility. Fantasy, on the other hand, emerges when the subject encounters a gap in his or her identity. By forming a fantasy scenario, the subject tries to fill this gap.

¹⁶The notion of the Real must be distinguished from what we understand as reality. While social reality is always symbolically structured, the Real designates precisely that which resists symbolization. On the notion of the Real, see Jacques Lacan, *Les Psychoses* (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

Serbs occupied part of Croatia, their main aim was not primarily to capture Croatian territory but to destroy the Croatian fantasy about that territory. The Serbs forced the Croats to reinvent national myths and start perceiving themselves in a new way, redefining their national identity without reference to the previous territories.

In war, the destruction of fantasy takes place by infliction of injury upon the enemy. We could say that in war, the Real gets inscribed in the wound the soldier receives in battle. When the aggressor attacks, he tries to injure or kill the enemy soldier, insofar as some surplus resides in him—the element that makes him the enemy, a member of the other nation. The soldier who is wounded in the war will find that for the rest of his life, his very existence becomes organized around this wound. If he recovers, the memory of the wound will make him a loyal citizen; his heroism will be interlaced with the wound and he will be honored by the state because of the wound. If the soldier should be permanently disabled, the wound will receive an even greater symbolic meaning, because it will always remain visible as a mark of sacrifice for the country. And if the soldier dies, his death will be seen as heroic, a death worth dying.¹⁷

What does an analysis of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the help of this theoretical apparatus reveal? First of all, significantly, this case lacks the usual fantasy con-

¹⁷This notion of the "death worth dying" sets a parallel between the sacrifice of the soldier for the country and the sacrifice of Christ in the Christian religion. As Jesus was prepared to die for the sake of the people, today's soldier has to sacrifice his life for the "just cause" of his country. In *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), Ernest Kantorowicz offered a historical explanation of this parallel, noting that it first appeared in the time of the Crusades, when Christian religion likened the "love for God" to the "love for brothers." At that time, dying in defense of Christian brothers was proclaimed a martyr's death. From the thirteenth century on, as monarchic power increased, the idea of the holy war became secularized. It was replaced by the "quasi-holy war" for the defense of the kingdom or, later, of the nation as symbolized by the crown. Defense of one's country became a struggle for justice, and the most noble death was that linked to the "agony for Justice." Kantorowicz argues that the state came to be seen as a "corpus mysticum," as a secular expression of the mystical body of Jesus. Therefore, the duty of every citizen was to love the country more than himself, and the individual had to be prepared to sacrifice his life for the country.

struction regarding the nation. The Muslims at the beginning of the war still organized their fantasy scenario of the homeland around the idea of Yugoslavia. They were the only ones who took literally the transnationality of the Yugoslav federation and believed in the notion of "brotherhood and unity." The whole existence of Bosnia and Herzegovina was, in a way, a realization of the socialist aim to erase the element of the nation from social organization. The Muslims persisted in this transnational attitude even after their towns had been bombed; they did not want to call the attackers by their name nor give them a national connotation. Thus, at the beginning of the war, they called the aggressors "criminals" and "hooligans," and only much later did Muslims refer to them as Chetniks or Serbian nationalists.

The inhuman persecutions¹⁸ of Muslims by Serbs reveal how disturbing it was to the aggressor not to find the standard fantasy structure on the side of the Muslims, as if the Serbs could not bear that the Muslims do not organize their fantasies of the homeland along national lines. This is why the Serbs try to create an impression of their enemy's nationalistic and religious extremism by naming them "fighters of Jihad," "green berets," or "Islamic fundamentalists." By torturing Muslims, the Serbs are actually trying to provoke Muslim fundamentalism. Thus, the Serbs' primary aim is to belittle the Muslims' religious identity by ruining their mosques and raping young Muslim women.¹⁹

¹⁸Roger Cohen (*New York Times*, 9 May 1993) calls the Bosnian war among the cruelest wars of the century, and offers an explanation:

Every evening the desolating images fill the television screens: mutilated bodies, tales of rape and castration. There is a peculiar savagery to the butchery in Bosnia, even by the standards of war, a savagery also evident in the 1941-45 period, when babies were shot. Why such horror? "You have to understand the fratricidal element to the bestiality," says Zarka Kovac, a prominent psychologist. "These are people with scarcely any physical difference. The Muslims are Serbs or Croats converted during Turkish occupation. So you mutilate the person you have killed in order not to recognize your brother. This war is Cain and Abel."

¹⁹*Newsweek*, 11 January 1993, estimates the number of Muslim women raped in Serbian detention camps as between 30,000 and 50,000. Cases were reported where girls as young as six or seven were raped. Women who con-

If the aim of war is to destroy the fantasy structure of the whole population, the aim of rape, as of any other torture, is to shatter the fantasy structure of the individual. But rape is for Muslim women an especially horrible crime, because Islam forbids sexual contact before marriage. For a young Muslim woman, rape is a symbolic death. The fact that Serbian soldiers see performing rape on the captured woman as a kind of a "duty" reveals how the aggressors work to destroy precisely that aspect of the individual woman's fantasy structure that touches her religious and sexual identity. These attacks dismantle the frame through which a Muslim woman perceives the outer world and herself as consistent, and destroy the way she organizes her identity and the identity of her world. Rape humiliates the victim, ruining her world, so that she will never be the same again and will never see herself as she did before. For this purpose, the Serbs are inventing the most horrible forms of torture, raping women in front of their mothers or fathers or demanding incest.²⁰

The war itself is perceived as the "rape" of the enemy's motherland. In a very patriarchal culture, as in both Serbia and Bosnia, the image of the mother holds a special meaning. For Serbs, it is one of the greatest personal offenses to curse someone's mother. The image of the mother affects how Serbs refer to their country. Serbian national myths and poems constantly invoke the expression "Mother Serbia." Although in Bosnia the same mythology of the motherland does not prevail, patriarchal ideology strongly determines the structure of the Muslim community. The Muslim family features a strong divi-

ceived during the rape were later prohibited from having an abortion. They were forced to stay in the detention camps long enough that it was no longer possible. Forcing women to give birth to unwanted Serbian children is another way to destroy identity, to "pollute Bosnian blood."

²⁰As part of their strategy, Serbian soldiers occupying a Muslim village or town first remove those who represent power or whom people trust and identify with. When the power structure is destroyed, it is much easier to control the "ordinary people." American journalist Roy Gutman wrote about the dismantling of the power structure in the Bosnian town Prijedor. The first to be captured and later executed were judges, businesspeople, teachers, doctors, and public employees, that is, "all prominent people of Prijedor," members of the non-Serbian elite (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 15 November 1992).

sion between women and men. Men are expected to command women, and women are expected to obey men and do all the housework. Sometimes women are not even allowed to sit at the same table with men. Because in Muslim patriarchal ideology, woman is viewed as man's possession, the rape of a Muslim woman might have the meaning of stealing the property of a Muslim man. A common tradition holds that if an enemy burns a Muslim man's house, he will return and build a new house, but if his wife has been raped, he will never return to her. The rape of Muslim women is thus another "weapon" the Serbs use to destroy the enemy, invested with special meaning because of the patriarchy that dominates both cultures.

In Croatia, the aim of the aggressor was to destroy the fantasy structure of the enemy's national identification. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is more paradoxical. Here, because of the lack of national identity, the soldiers try to destroy Muslims' sexual and religious identity. However, by doing this they are, in a violent way, actually forcing the Muslims to forge a fantasy structure of national identification. The war constructs Bosnia and Herzegovina as a homeland and creates the fantasy dimension that is necessary for Muslim soldiers to be willing to die for their country.

Fantasy and Political Discourse

In analyzing why the war in the former Yugoslavia started, we must consider a dimension of fantasy that was at work in the discourse of Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic. How could the Serbian people support the war while their official political discourse explicitly distanced itself from it? Why did the people actually identify with Milosevic's politics?

The key to the success of Milosevic's discourse is the delicate balance between what he says and what he leaves unspoken. He knows that an ideological discourse must always be supported by a fantasy framework, by some unspoken fantasy setting that organizes its economy of enjoyment. To locate this fantasy, we turn to the theory of French linguist Oswald Ducrot, who distinguishes between presupposition and surmise.²¹ Presupposition is an integral part of the act of speaking; re-

²¹Oswald Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).

sponsibility for it rests with the speaker. Surmise, on the other hand, is what the addressee ascribes to an enunciation; it is the addressee who is responsible, deriving it from what was said. The surmise emerges as an answer to the question that the addressee necessarily poses him- or herself: "Why did the speaker speak that way? Why did he say that?" The surmise reflects the way the addressee deciphers the meaning of what was said, which is why it touches upon fantasy. In Lacan's graph of desire, fantasy is specified as an answer to the famous question *Che vuoi?*—"What did he mean by saying that?"²²

How does this notion of the surmise function in the war in the former Yugoslavia? Let us first consider Milosevic's statement that triggered the war in Croatia: "It is the legitimate right and the interest of the Serbian people to live in one state—this is the beginning and the end." This superficially factual sentence carried a clear, unspoken political message: the Serbs had to defend this right at any price; they had to start the war. Milosevic's statement about the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina carries a similar implication: "We have no right to stop caring about our fellow Serbians in Bosnia and Herzegovina and stop sending them humanitarian aid. This is our national duty. If the nation is destroyed, there is no freedom or prosperity for the individual." This sentimental expression of concern about Serbs' poor treatment outside Serbia implies the duty of every Serb to go to war. Each Serbian addressee easily recognizes this surmise, although it is not directly stated (that is, is not the utterance's presupposition or part of its elocutionary force).

The same can be said of all other successful neoconservative populist ideologies, including Thatcherism and Reaganism. Their success rests on the distance between ideological meaning (the return to the old moral values of the family, the self-made man, and so on) and the level of racist or sexual fantasies that, although unmentioned, function as surmise and determine the way the addressee deciphers the symbolism of ideological statements. But far from deplorable, this distance perhaps marks the difference between neoconservative populist ideologies, still attached to democratic space, and totalitarian-

²²On Lacan's graph of desire, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso Press, 1989).

ism. Totalitarianism—at least in its radical version—can be said to state directly what other ideologies imply as surmise. Fascists say what their fellows of the moderate right only allude to between the lines. Hitler, for example, appealed directly to racist, sexual, and anti-Semitic fantasies. He said openly that it is necessary to eliminate the enemy (Jews, for example). But what remained as a surmise of the fascist discourse was the fantasy scenario of the forms of torture by which the enemy was to be eliminated.

Peculiarly, Milosevic has not transformed his discourse into an openly totalitarian one. Instead, he found allies on the extreme right in Serbia who freely express fascist ideas. Milosevic has not had to dirty his hands. He has retained a position of “neutrality” much easier for the public to identify with. Milosevic all the time silently supports the open aggression that the extreme right provokes against the “enemies,” and he continues to provide the means to carry it out. Thus, his position is similar to that of the metaracists in Western Europe. Both he and they position themselves as impartial observers; both emphasize analyzing the context of national struggles; and both effectively perceive homogeneous national states as the only solution to national tensions and conflicts. Milosevic acts out this position by silently condoning ethnic cleansing, while metaracists send their similar message, more politely, by mutely studying racial conflicts or by urging reform of liberal immigration laws.

One lesson democratic politics can learn from Lacanian theory is that politics without fantasy, without modes of enjoyment manipulated in the place of surmise, is an illusion. As long as “society doesn’t exist,” as long as a social field is inconsistent, split by antagonisms that resist being wholly reabsorbed into ideological symbolism, built around some central impossibility, then these voids in the social structure will always be filled by fantasies. The question we must ask is how political discourse plays on these fantasies. Why do some political discourses aggressively dismantle other peoples’ fantasies? Ultimately, the only step we can take to prevent sexist, racist, and nationalist conflicts is to keep open the distance between the ideological meaning of political discourse and its surmise.

The dilemma of democratic politics is not how to replace one type of fantasy with another, more democratic fantasy, or

how to prevent the articulation of racist fantasies. The goal of democratic politics should be to create a political space in which racist fantasies would have no real effect. Only a society that “believes” in democratic institutions can hear such fantasies articulated without fearing that the democratic order will consequently collapse. Democratic political institutions incorporate the system of checks and balances that prevent any one person from occupying permanently a seat of power or changing arbitrarily the existing political order. If, for example, a political party in power implied extreme racist and nationalist fantasies in its discourse and wanted to expel all foreigners, democratic institutions such as the parliament, media, and international organizations would prevent or at least hinder the expulsion; whereas in a totalitarian regime, there would be no debate at all: the party in power would simply introduce measures to make racist or nationalist fantasies immediately take effect.