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*Professor Dragan Simeunović, Ph.D.*¹

The Tradition of Collective Guilt

ABSTRACT

Collective guilt, i.e. ascertaining “guilt” to large social groups, whether they may belong to religious, ethnic, class, or simply “dangerously different” collectives, has been present in all environments, but, some nation states have developed it as a tradition.

The first phases of this phenomenon existed since pre-Christian times on the basis of religious schisms. This may be considered from the aspect of the development of the civilization as a specific way of building ethnic and especially religious identities based upon a drastic form of distinction as well.

Since those earlier days the natural basis of thinking and determination of guilt was the guilt of resistance and of being different, even present today.

Added to this structure of collective guilt is the domination of the winner over the defeated, common for all environments and all outcomes of war. The general domination of Christianity in Europe and frequency of religious schisms intensified the aspect of sin and need for atonement, thence the Jews became the first collective sinners in Europe.

In time, the accent of collective guilt became more secular and of this world.

Punishment for religious differences more and more grew into punishment for exclusivity and of not fitting within the concepts of the social establishment — especially for resisting those dominating the society.

Ideology ever more substituted religion for political interests as a reason for ascertaining collective guilt. This was especially affected by the state of absolute political domination of one political power. Therefore the next great guilt was the guilt of class. Following the October Revolution all those who somehow belonged to the bourgeoisie, even children, were considered guilty.

The collective guilt of the Germans was a mixture of the guilt of the defeated and the guilt formed by the dominant ideological circles of liberalism and socialism over fascism. Their guilt was then expressed as the guilt of “threatening harmony” which was mapped out by both winning sides.

¹ Dragan Simeunović, Ph. D., Professor of Political science at the University of Belgrade.
E-mail: dragan.simeunovic@fpn.bg.ac.rs.

Collective punishments ranging from excommunication and eviction to extermination. Proofs of guilt and innocence are unnecessary. The strong trust themselves and judge.

Modern America (USA) like Europe suffers from an exaggerated aestheticism of politics. It is in that context that the tradition of collective guilt is developing a new dimension. The position of total superiority is possible even without totalitarianism. In order to be bad, it is enough to be a collector of unfavorable qualities.

The Serbs are such an example. First of all, they negatively provoked by their behavior the modern conception of European harmony imposed by the dominating powers and thereby directly threatened these interests. The religious difference of the Serbs was not in itself sufficient, so they were forced to accept the status of losers in a war which in fact they militarily survived if not won. As in the ancient inquisition, or not so long ago in the days of fascist and Stalinist totalitarianism, they were openly satanized as a collective. The practice of isolation by the powerful was once again repeated. The guilty are also required to degrade themselves obediently thereby acknowledging and giving legitimacy to the violence committed upon them. Transfer of guilt is also present. Old sinners are always active in pursuit of new ones, as they believe that it washes away their guilt and leads towards distribution onto other subjects.

Today as before, no distinctions are made in collect guilt thereby compromising and destroying the innocent as well which is evidence that this ritual still survives in Europe.

Key words: collective guilt, christianity, Balkan, punishment, justice

Individual guilt, as well as a feeling of guilt due to committing a sin, are an integral part of the life of all human beings. Since the earliest days, man has arranged by a mechanism of taboo the identification of sin and its repentance through sanctions which implies and admits the feeling of guilt. Even today “the ability to feel guilt ... is not fear of revenge, but the feeling of fear before man’s own activity which affected world harmony, anxiety which comes after breaking not laws but taboos”.²

Collective guilt is a far more artificial phenomenon than individual guilt. Except for cases when there is the attributed collective guilt of small collectives, like criminal groups — with respect to the larger community it is more difficult to discuss collective guilt as the guilt of all its members. Which bespeaks more for the graduation of guilt.

Collective guilt has existed since primeval times and does not refer only to small collectivities whose members have been identified per personem, but it has spread to large social groups such as religious and ethnic communities or classes.

² Lesek Kolakovski, *Religija*, BIGZ, Beograd, 1987, p. 237–38.

The ascertainment of guilt to large social groups, or “simply dangerous” collectivities is present in other environments, but mostly in Europe did it develop as a tradition.

The beginnings of ascribing collective guilt in Europe existed since pagan times based on tribal conflicts. In classical times defeated tribes carried the seal of collective guilt and often suffered repentance through lifelong slavery. In this regard Europe did not differ from other regions of similar development.

The domination though of a general religion like Christianity was to be characterized by the specific feature of a European tradition of collective guilt.

Religious rifts and armistices, which left a powerful trail in European history like Westphalia, can be seen in terms of civilization development and also considered as a means of building an ethnical and an especial religious identity based on collective sin and guilt as a drastic form of distinction.

Since those earlier times when this pattern arose, it remains present in the determination of guilt as guilt by resistance to the dominating event and identification of holiness as the highest, godlike power, and simultaneously thereby the guilt of being different. Distinction is guilt because it is disobedience. Nonacceptance of the dominating way of religious organization of the society is at the same time nonacceptance of submitting to those with the greatest power within the community.

Because if there were no such power it would not be possible to impose this religious model as taboo. Non-acceptance of such a model, and/or the resistance to it is the resistance against taboo out of which ostracism or destruction is derived. The absolute domination of Christianity as a European religion was achieved more by means of the sword than has generally been known and came as a painful outcome of a long process of oscillation and identity formation by virtue of differences which not insignificantly relied on violence.

Serbs, like other European people were not spared from the destruction of religious schisms. The conversion to Christianity as part of the general European process of Christianizing the continent, brought dilemmas and with it conflicts between the Eastern and Western Church. Also, painful phases like uprooting the Bogomils and later the renunciation of fellow tribesmen who accepted Catholicism and Islam resulted in violent forms of defense and fratricide. In all this the Serbs collectively suffered tremendous loss with absolutely no historical benefit.

Since absolute domination most often brings a totalitarian spirit, the absolute domination of Christianity regardless of the fierce disputes within it, brought the first permanent stigma of collective guilt — that is, the guilt of the Jews. There could be no new transient victories and transient guilt which resulted from instantaneous defeats, however collectively determined. Victory

forever meant the establishment of the eternity of Christianity and it sought out those who were defeated forever.

Old animosities in the social environment and contributing economic circumstances to no small extent determined a Christian Europe that designated the first eternal collective sinners who would repent their “guilt” in various stages in different ways and with different intensity — but always keeping the status of the permanently differentiated.

With time the accent for determining collective guilt moved from the religious into the secular sphere. Collective guilt became not only ever more of this world but also caused by secular reasons. Punishment for religious particularity and resistance because of original sin, “*peccatum originale*” more and more grew into concepts of the social establishment, especially with reference to resisting those dominating the society both politically and economically. Along with the Catholic overemphasis insisting on original sin, “*peccatum originale*” a collective guilt of political impurity emerged. The conflict between the Church and the State, which would end by the retreat of the altar before the crown, presented only the beginning of the proliferation of the collective as state and/or antistate guilt. The French Revolution which may be construed in various ways, undoubtedly introduced collective ad hoc revenge for class as collective guilt, which resulted in 700,000 dead in its first historic attack.³

As the matrix of guilt recognition ideology more suppressed religion as a basis for determining collective guilt, the reasons became more of class in nature, though still carrying religious and national dimensions. This was especially possible due to the state of absolute domination by one political power.

Since the next great guilt was to be the guilt of class, it is understandable that after the October Revolution all those affiliated or belonging in any way to the bourgeoisie were considered guilty. The Bolsheviks in Russia did not do anything that would stand out from the European tradition of collective guilt and collective punishment. It is only the ideology that was new and perhaps the class which made it possible for socialism as a movement to grow into a system.

The next great designation of collective guilt in Europe was the guilt of the Germans, which followed the failure of the Nazi leadership with their aggressive ambitions during the Second World War.

Attempts and failures to conquer the world by those who are currently militarily, politically and economically most powerful are neither new nor unknown in history. Only what was new was the Nazi ambition to destroy simultaneously all those deemed as collectively guilty — varied racially,

³ Reinhold Oberlecher, *1789 et les révolutions de l'ère moderne*, Vuloir, Bruxelles, 1989, pp. 54–5.

ethnically and ideologically. In that framework religious distinction was implied and included into at least one of the variants of guilt. Speaking now from this historical distance, a complete and critical consideration of this period makes this framework more clear. And so in losing the war the Germans could not have avoided the destiny of being charged themselves with collective guilt. They were guilty both because of having been defeated and because the winners carried banners of ideologies opposite to the Nazi ones. The collective guilt of the Germans was set as a combination of the guilt of the defeated and ideological guilt determined by the dominating political leaders of liberal and socialist countries. It can also be identified as the guilt of threatening the general harmony, a determination mapped out by both winning sides, each in its own way.

Since the tradition of collective guilt in Europe implies collective punishment ranging from excommunication to extermination, the German people experienced what their political leadership in somewhat different modalities had carried out over those whom they had been punishing in their exercising of collective guilt. Germany was divided up as a country, the way it divided up other countries. The German people were forcibly moved out like the German Army moved out others and even genocidal behavior found its equivalent in the often unnecessary and total destruction of cities such as Dresden and Mannheim with women and children being the commonest victims.

This alteration of positions, of the guilty ones and the ones who punish shows the firmness of this European tradition of collective guilt which does not distinguish the innocent from among the guilty or the collective. Proofs of guilt and innocence are simply unnecessary.

The one who overpowers trusts himself most of all as well as his fated predestination to judge as if he were to judge forever. In the final instance it is nothing else but the expression of civilization's immaturity and of a worldly superiority that believes in the everlastingness of its own position.

The old collective conscience of Europe has not retreated from this pattern even now in the time of the dominating individualistic ideology of liberalism.

War and class conflicts are still bringing mass winners and mass sinners.

The guilty ones are guilty simply because they potentially or in fact do threaten projects and conditions of harmony. What harmony really means is always defined by the strongest, i.e. the most powerful. Since the times of magic rituals up to now collective guilt has been determined only from the very top of the power pyramid — magicians, church leaders and politicians.

A rather overstressed aestheticism of politics is permanently reflected in this domain as well. "Nice" is all that is friendly, "ugly and evil" is all that is not friendly. The dichotomy of "friend — enemy" was defined by Carl Schmidt. In Europe it has always existed on the basis of a civilizational controversy between

the creators of the greatest deeds and culture and the greatest social conflicts ever recorded in history. Political aestheticism finds guilt in these differences of religion, ideology, race and ethnic origin, social position, material wealth, special political aims and interests. Any differences understood as opposition should be eliminated by excommunication, extermination or at least by pointing out the danger coming from the one who is different.

Collective guilt is the expression of the spirit of European totalitarianism which has its germ in totalitarian religion and subsequently ideology as well. The totalitarian conscience of collective guilt is the extreme expression of nontolerance towards differences and competitiveness. Harmony must be achieved by military, political or economic means and finally why not culturological means as well! Force is nothing else but the expression of the strivings for total control and subordination of all to the creators of the concept of global harmony and order. However, total superiority is possible even without totalitarianism. In order to be designated bad and guilty, it is enough to simply possess unfavorable qualities.

At present the Serbs are such an example. Yet their guilt did not appear overnight, nor is it separate from an environmental treatment. It ought to be considered in the light of the two centuries long European attitude towards the Balkans and sought within the range of Europe's distancing itself from the Balkans in the field of culture while accepting it on geopolitical terms as an important military and strategic part of the European continent.

Since the word "Balkans" was first used by John Morritt in 1794 for the peninsula so far variously called, though most often Haemus, Europe never ceased with its scorn and satanization of these borders with Islam and the East.⁴ It is clear that in the general sum of its aesthetic political opinions, Europe did not adore this marginal part of its body. Yet the boundaries as such could guarantee safety for Western Europe and the Balkans provided this protection.

Showing no respect for this advantage forced many Balkan people to make the same mistake Europeans made. They also resorted to an aestheticism when claiming that Europe was evil and ungrateful.

This criticism was directed to Western Europe as being the center of the long standing military, economic and political power of the continent.

The reasons for this negative treatment of the Balkans and its people ought to be looked for in the power interests and not emotions of Europeans.

Accusations against the Serbs are today only the essence of a long history of blaming the Balkans and its people, generally and individually.

⁴ John Morritt of Rokeby, *A Grand Tour; Letters and Journeys 1794–96*, Century Publishing, London, 1985, p. 65.

The discovery of the Balkans and growing interest in it at the end of 18th century, primarily by English explorers and authors who wrote about their travels, coincided with the growth of Russia into a power that wanted to enter Europe over the corpse of the Turkish Empire. Fear of this growing Russian power had the English make efforts to preserve the Ottoman Empire as a defense against Russian threats. A special problem thereby was caused by the people of the Balkans who were striving to achieve their national liberation from the Turks with the help of the Russians.

It was not so much that the Balkan people looked to Russia for help, but that Russia chose the Balkans based on her own strategic interests. In reality Serbs had little choice since it was not in the interests of the European powers that the Balkans should be freed to develop into nation states. But as Serbs learned, even Russian support was not always sincere or reliable. Still, in spite of Russian interference that caused conflicts in Balkan internal affairs, Serbs shared with Russia a common perspective in foreign affairs. There was no other chance.

Europe as usual followed the interest of its strongest power and shared its opinion that the people of the Balkans should be satisfied with their status as border guards.

There should be good order at the border and any insurrection of special interests was seen as opposed to the general European interest and the survival of all empires. In fact England was right in sensing that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire would mean the beginning of the end of all empires. Anxiety and rage due to thwarting these imperial European interests continued as the Balkan people persisted in leading their struggle for freedom and so affected the first views being formed regarding the Balkans. The fact that the realpolitics of Great Britain was supported by scientists with their evaluations only confirms the sad truth that science was then as it is nowadays, a servant to politics.

The frustrations of Europe can be understood. It was difficult to have an impact on the varied, unknown and boiling Balkans and even more difficult to control it. In an historically short period of time, it destroyed the illusions of many powers concerning their omnipotence and for that reason the region continued to be blamed by its critics. So even the term "Balkan" came to have a negative attachment. The pejorative connotation in European and modern usage of the word "Balkan" and "Balkanization" has remained up to this day a derogatory one.

The guilt of the Balkans because of its resistance and particular interests was increased when these people turned to Russia for help. The more they relied upon Russia, the more guilty they became. The negative collective picture of the Balkans and its people was built by virtue of science and the press. No one wanted to be regarded as being "Balkan" and even today the Balkan people themselves waive these traits attributing them to those who live more southward.

A better geopolitical term, Southeastern Europe, was first used as far back as 1869 by the German geographer Johann Georg von Hahn and defined far more precisely the Balkan Peninsula in its geomorphologic boundaries than was done by numerous English and French explorers. The term, mainly used in Germany lost its right to wider popularity because of its favored use in Nazi Germany, though presently this geographic term is being used again. Other reference terms did not survive in the historical political vocabulary because standard usage of the Turkish version, conceded the attachment of this region to the Ottoman Empire.

European praise directed towards the Turks and reproach towards the Balkans was reflected in an aestheticism as well. The Turks were regularly described at that time in many, popular travel books as “noble and kind” while the subjugated peoples were “dirty, illiterate and greedy” (a quality often found in the poor), “inhospitable and uncivilized” (characteristics not uncommon in frightened people).⁵

Nor did the European socialists have a very good opinion of those European people occupied by the Turks. It is enough to recall Marx and Engels’ rudeness stating that the Balkan Slavs were “dregs of people” who were better off assimilating with the orientality of Turkey.⁶ However, the socialists in the countries comprising the Balkans did not greatly respect Marx and Engels, nor their proposal to assimilate into the Turkish nation. Furthermore, the majority of them like Svetozar Markovic and his fellowthinkers in Serbia did just the opposite and actively participated in the struggle for national freedom.

Serbs as an ethnic and religious group had already irritated European sensibilities because of the Great Serbian Migration under Carnojevic during the 17th century when they penetrated deeply and planted their wedge in the present day Tokai region, on the Hungarian, Ukrainian and Slovakian borders. Orthodox Serbs had massively entered uninvited into the Catholic and Protestant territory of Europe.

Out of the general condemnation of the Balkans, the Serbs would be especially singled out as guilty because of the the two Balkan Wars and the First World War. In addition to characteristics such as primitivism, tribalism, progress incapability, commonly attributed to the Balkan people, the Serbs were given one more — irrational aggressiveness!

⁵ John Morrill of Rokeby, *A Grand Tour, Letters and Journeys 1794–96*, ed. G.E. Martin (Century Publishing, London, 1985), p. 65.

⁶ Fridrih Engels, *Madjarska borba*, in: Karl Marx/Fridrih Engels: *Dela*, tom 9, Prosveta, Beograd, p. 143.

This growing negative European attitude appeared back in the wake of the 1903 May coup in Serbia, with the violent murders of members of the ruling Obrenovic family, when international sanctions were for the first time imposed on Serbia and the same condemnation by all European powers was reinforced again after the Second Balkan War.

So too Gavrilo Princip's guilt in assassinating Austria's Archduke Ferdinand in 1914 (the shot heard round the world) that triggered the First World War was not only his, but the the guilt of all Serbs.

Gavrilo Princip should be remembered in that he differs from most other assassins who have attempted to kill important political figures because while others may want to believe they are changing the course of history, he was one of the very few who actually succeeded. Kings and presidents can be replaced, but the regimes remain. It is the tragic misconception of assassins who believe that injustice can be resolved by the simple elimination of certain individuals. However when Gavrilo Princip, a Serbian high school student shot the Austrian Archduke, it did precipitate actions that endangered the stability and harmony of Europe, already on the brink of a great war. It should be noted too, that Princip never imagined his act of murder would be the cause of world turbulence. Europe had already split into two sides at odds with each other for a long time. The real problem Serbs faced was not because they belonged to one of these sides, but because they were drawn unwillingly into the conflict as the pretext to spur these powerful camps to war.

American literature also shared European feelings about the harmony spoiled by "Serbian madness". John Gunther in his after war best seller, "Inside Europe", deemed that it was an "unbearable offense that those poor and unfortunate small countries in the Balkans could and even are managing to cause by their conflicts an outbreak of world war. Some 150,000 young Americans were killed because of the events happening in 1914 in a muddy and primitive village of Sarajevo".⁷

However, proving that interest overpowers repulsion Gunther himself admitted that it is "loathsome and almost impertinent to interfere in the politics of the Balkans, which could hardly be grasped by Western readers, (and yet was) still of great importance for peace in Europe, and maybe in the world as well".⁸

Serbs, bearing the imputation of being a violent people found few authors like the Grimm brothers who extolled the Slavic culture, or politicians like William Gladstone who rightly condemned Turkish terror over the Slav people

⁷ John Gunther, *Inside Europe*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1940, p. 245.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

and defended their right to freedom, especially expressing sympathy for the people of Bosnia and Hercegovina.

The collective guilt of the Serbs appeared again during the Second World War on two levels of the European tradition of collective guilt. Firstly, the strongest power of Europe (Germany) faced resistance from Yugoslavia in the form of guerrilla war, with Serbs in the lead and secondly, the harmony of Europe was being wracked in its war efforts against Germany. There were divisions everywhere.

Yugoslavia itself split and Serbia, although an ally, took a separate position acting outside of the generally accepted conditions of subordination. This caused the Allies to look down on the Serbs with a certain reserve and to even entice rifts among them.

After the Second World War the Serbs were subject to another dimension of collective guilt. The Balkans became mainly communist. The Serbs took a leading role in this, many having been partisans during the war. In any case, the seeds of socialism in the Balkans were traditionally and still are the strongest in Serbia going back to the 19th century. All this combined to stamp a new, ideological dimension to be added to their guilt.

The present collective guilt of the Serbs is also a result of European realpolitik. The Serbs in recent time have by their aspirations and legitimate concerns expressed desires which are directly opposed to the interests of the most powerful. The Serbs were accused by these same powers of threatening European peace. The Serbs have again spoiled the harmony of the most cultivated continent that despises violence, although it is not adverse to using it. The wrongful accusations that Serbs were interlopers in Croatia, Bosnia and even Kosovo in relation to the Albanians, grew into an accusation against them — of an aggression over innocent native people — although the war was led by these very people close to Serbian houses in traditional Serbian lands — while Serbs fought mostly to protect themselves. The result of this opposition to the interests of the dominating powers called for another assignation of Serbian collective guilt.

Those who mold public opinion, politicians and the media helped to shaped this image, always fixing blame on the Serbs. Bullets fired by Albanian terrorists in Kosovo were ignored or played down, while every bullet fired by the Serbs had the echo of a committed crime. Guilt based upon being different has also become the guilt of nonattendance to the winning party and separation from the political trend of the triumph of transition in the countries of Eastern Europe. Namely, it is was in Serbia, among all other former socialist countries that the same party remained in power, although having changed its name. This increased suspicion and accusations on the level of an ideological clash.

Serbia in the collapse of Yugoslavia was constantly apostrophized as communist.

The status of the guilty one was very quickly prepared in the broader media for the service of politics.

Renunciation of communism was esteemed as too slow and insincere.

Unwillingness to cooperate, meaning subordination, was seen as resistance.

Punishment was inevitable.

The current punishment for Serbian collective guilt, still in effect was to be a combination of the punishments so far implemented in Europe for this sin. Because of the betrayal of the Son of God, the Jews were exterminated and expelled. And for the sin of getting rich, the bourgeoisie in socialist countries paid by losing both their possessions and lives. The Germans for their collective guilt were exclusively fixed with the labels of genocide and fascism although these were practiced by others, including the Italians and Croats.

So too, the Serbs were exterminated, expelled and divided. They paid a large price — the loss of their lands, possessions and lives — all for their wish to be safely united in a Serbian state. They have never learned that what a small nation needs besides wishes, are political know how and luck. Twice within the 20th Century the Serbs had the good wind of history blowing at their backs and they did not know how to use it. They had the support of the great powers and frankly speaking, they did not reach Maribor by themselves. Now the good wind of history is helping Croats, Muslims and Albanians whose fortunes are rising at the expense of the Serbs.

It is the misfortune of the Serbs that the United States, apt to copy Europe in various ways, adopted this concept/tradition of European collective guilt in dealing with the Serbs and their “difference”. The global interests of the U.S. were directly opposed to the nationalist interests of the Serbs. Serb nationalists make a mistake when they say that the U.S. “hates the Serbs”. Because the underlying reasons and what is really at stake are interests and tradition based on practice.

Since the beginning of American colonization, racially white America imposed a model of collective guilt with all the attendant consequences. The Indians were guilty because they resisted submission, and because they were racially different. Their religion and customs were not part of the tradition and values of the colonizers. America, lacking its own indigenous tradition and coming from European stock was inclined to copy Europe, adopting the tradition of collect guilt and manifesting it in its own skewed way.

For when a bigger entity bends over a smaller one, the shadow becomes more visible than the original. The European tradition of collective guilt was in

time transferred to America which was to practice this speciality with most favorable results on European soil.

For instance the International Court for the Far East, established after World War II was never accepted by the Japanese as the Germans accepted denazification, implemented by the American led Nuremberg Court. In a poll done among the members of the Japanese parliament in June, 2006 and published in the Mainichi Daily News (26 June, 2006), sixty one percent said that the Tokyo Court had to be accepted, but that it was unjust. The Japanese never having developed a tradition of collective guilt have maintained a resistance to the condemnation.

In a continuity of the Nuremberg Trials, the Hague War Crimes Tribunal, though international in face has had a strong American profile. And though the conflict at the collapse of Yugoslavia was a civil war, the court proceedings have been directed mostly against the Serbs.

America's initial doubts about a nationalist led Serbia being the potential military ally and possible fist of Russia in the Balkans set it in opposition to the Serbs, Because of this Serbia was progressively punished by isolation and nonsignificance, easily achieved by diminishing her economy, military, communications and necessary resources. What is new is not that Serbia passed through this prison of sanctions and the fact that many people, even the innocent and vulnerable such as children (who are always absolutely innocent) were also severely punished — but that the right to progress was also denied them. To make an enemy insignificant in this way is more severe than narrowing his territory, because it intends ultimate harm.

In order to confirm the guilty status of Serbs and make it indisputable, the Serbs had to lose the war on paper, their leadership was paralyzed and they had to become cooperative to the extent of subjugation. This tradition of collective guilt imposed on the Serbs is unimaginative and caste on the imitative destiny of the Germans, insisting first on making Serbs the international aggressors and later, the defeated. The paradox is that the Serbs, from a military aspect, were not defeated. Just politicly.

If the modern understanding of Serbian sin and guilt is analyzed from the aspect of political anthropology, it is easy to see that not much has changed since ages past. Former rule breaking concerning entering forbidden places are sins attached to Serbs because they “entered” the interest zones of the great powers and had contacts with the impure, therefore with the enemies of the masters of the world. The consumption of forbidden food has been transposed into the consumption of forbidden ideology — both socialism and nationalism.

Accusations against the Serbs as well as ascertaining their collective guilt were not so much based upon Christian tradition, but on an even earlier Neolithic form.

Such repentance requires abject submission and the readiness of the victim to fall on his knees.

Even the abolishment of progress is of pre-Christian origin, mentioned in a pagan curse, though rejected by Christianity in which the sins of the father must be atoned for by the descendants.

The pagan institution of a mediator between the deity and sinner is also present — they being the only ones who have the right to judge who is guilty and to what extent and to estimate whether the repentance is sincere and effective.

The function of supervision requires supervisors. By virtue of this medium an anathema is invoked whereby God is asked to punish the sinner.

The function of punishment is primarily reflected as in Neolithic magical rituals. The guilty one is condemned first and must admit his guilt although guilt need not be apparent or proven. What matters most is that the guilt must be believed in. Pronouncing a sentence is the equivalent of crown evidence.

Repentance is experienced as ritual. Admitting guilt regardless of commission is considered a duty towards the divine power and community for remedial purposes. The recorded agreement on repentance like the text imposed onto a sinner about sin and punishment is more about proving the power of the one who is punishing than a true metamorphosis of the sinner. As a warning to others as well as a ritual element, it includes open confession, repentance and public display.

Without a victim there is no forgiveness and catharsis for sin. The most valuable punishments require blood sacrifices. A strict respect for the repentance ritual is a condition for removing the punishment of being excommunicated from the community. It requires sacrificing things near and dear in exchange for one's own life and doing so willingly and in humility.

The problem at stake is that the ritual of sacrifice implies the innocence of the victim, and that is something the present day great powers and level of civilization cannot accept, unless this falls into being a non-selective practice.

An example of this are the innocent victims largely and non-selectively sacrificed during sanctions when due to shortages of medicine, food and heating fuel, children and elderly people were dying in far greater numbers.

On the whole, the way collective guilt is ascertained, accusations of sin and the methods of repentance are more likely to prove a retardation as the American involvement draws the whole ritual towards the spectacle and

recovery of superstition, (ἄεισιδαισίω) rather than towards Godfearing (εὐσεβεία).

Even participation in a ritual requires some mutuality and approximate level of being civilized for the sake of communication, since after all there is a real and implied responsibility for success due to the selection of punishment and of having presumed the status of God's emissary. The issue concerning the effectiveness of repentance is particularly delicate if constant and humiliating obedience is required from the sinner in which he not only admits his guilt but must also provide the legality of the violence made upon himself.

So too, the concept of guilt transfer is persistent. Old sinners are always active, hunting new ones because as they believe, it washes away their own guilt feelings leading towards a distribution onto as many other subjects as possible.

True justice in contradistinction to that of ritual atonement and ascribing collective guilt should isolate individuals by name. All those who committed war crimes and crimes against the innocent should be held responsible, whatever their ethnicity.

If it is any comfort to the bearers of collective guilt — though punishments are destructive and can give the illusion of being everlasting — they do not necessarily have an absolutely destructive effect. If the Jews managed to survive a prolonged history of antisemitism, if the bourgeoisie survived the revolution and if the Germans have become once again the greatest power in Europe — things may not look so bad in the future for the Serbs either if they succeed in learning the lessons from their own still living past and from the experience of others. For then the stigma of guilt can gradually be turned into an historically and often profitable advantage to those once stigmatized.

Who is going to be next?

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