Chapter 7. Popular Culture and Communist Ideology: Folk Epics in Tito’s Yugoslavia

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When he started translating the story of Tito’s life and work into a series of epic poems, Milorad P. Mandić, a thirty-nine-year-old Montenegrin and tractor driver by profession, already had considerable experience in the field. He had published three books on various episodes from the Second World War. In two more describing new achievements in science and technology, he was especially fascinated with and dwelled long on the Soviet “space heroes” Yuri Gagarin and German Titov. These two men with the red star on their foreheads were like “heroes on the battlefield” who conquered the Universe.¹ The decision to tackle the life of Tito came, in his own words, as a result of an “unrelenting desire” to have his verses “talk about dear Comrade Tito.”² Unrelenting desire or not, his decision to record a rather long biography of Tito in verse (composed in twenty-seven songs over forty-three pages, starting with Tito’s birth and ending with the year 1965, when the book was published) brought Mandić into the ranks of epic folk poets. The tradition of oral epic folk poetry, commonly but wrongly identified with the guslar tradition only,³ has a long and important history in the Balkans. In general, the verbal art of East and South Slavs has been predominantly epic in character.⁴ But by the time Mandić was composing his songs, much had changed in the culture that nurtured epic poetry. Keep this in mind as we read the introductory verses of Mandić’s rhymed biography of Tito:

This is the book to be read
About the path of life of Comrade Tito.
Even if I had the knowledge of Njegoš,
It would hardly help to sing this song.
It would not satisfy me
Had I the artistry of Gorky
Or of Tolstoy from the country of Russia,
It would not meet my desires.
Had I the talent of Pushkin,
I would not have the desired song.
Or the talent of Balzac or of famous Socrates,
It could not please me.

(…)
If I knew the meaning of all words,
It would not fulfill my wishes.

(…)
It is not easy to sing about a genius,
Whose past shines like the sun,
And it will shine as long as the world lasts
For our future generations.\(^5\)

Although he finished only four grades of primary school before the war broke out and a short course for tractor drivers after the war in Tito’s Yugoslavia, Mandić was socialized in a predominantly literate culture, in which he had access to the works of Tolstoy, Pushkin and Balzac. And yet this did not mean that oral culture, which was the originating ground for epic, had disappeared entirely from the scene. As this chapter hopes to demonstrate, many traces of the traditional culture and traditional social structures could be encountered in the modernized Communist society of Yugoslavia. There they underwent a certain transformation but did not lose their essential features, nor did their performance lose popular appeal. Even to the present day, oral epic performers enjoy fame in the eyes of the general public. Hence they were readily employed by politicians of quite different political leanings—Franjo Tuđman in Croatia and Slobodan Milošević in Serbia, to give the two most obvious examples.

### Remembering in Songs and Verses

One of the most important functions of oral epic poetry is, as I will argue later in more detail, recording and preserving the memory bank of a given group. Epic singers are custodians of memory and tradition, and thus of the identity of the group. The spread of literacy does not mean that they lose their position in society; it only means that they are no longer the only ones in charge of safeguarding the content of memory. The epic poem is thus a competing medium for upholding the group memory. It is precisely through
the epic’s content that I want to explore the perception of the Second World War and the Communist revolution in Yugoslavia. The purpose of this article is to investigate the way in which the war and the rise of a new era were interpreted by the folk poet, who was, as I argue below, decisively influenced in his performance by the group of which he was a member. The attitude of the Communist Party, as the newly emerging historical arbiter, towards folklore is crucial for the proper understanding of the role folk singers played. As is shown below, this attitude is best described as ambivalent: at the early stage of the war the party was opposed to folklore, because it was considered as “irreconcilable with the party style.” Yet the party had ultimately to give in if it wanted to win the support of the broader population. With power firmly in its hands, the party again thought itself strong enough to banish folk performances. This, however, was only a short-lived experiment, especially because the party did not want to abandon the heroic tradition of the folk epics, from which it learned to derive a significant part of the explanation of its “historical mission.” Already in the early sixties, the League of Yugoslav Communists saw before its eyes the revival of folklore performances, much to the discomfort of some older members. All the same, folklore, and together with it the oral epic poem, ultimately became an integral and incontestable part of everyday life in Yugoslavia.

In order to understand the persisting appeal and attraction of this specific poetic genre, we must turn our attention to the more distant past. The first epic poems were created as far back as the twelfth century. Leading scholars hold that epic poems, “like medieval chronicles, safeguarded popular … consciousness,” and that “[ordinary] people claim they could not have had any other history but [the one sung on the] gusle.” To comprehend it properly, it is necessary to clear this picture of its romantic overtones and break it down into its component parts. According to Jan Assmann, an awareness of unity, uniqueness and belonging to a group is created and reproduced through what he calls cultural memory. It is concretized through linguistic objectifications, symbolizations, rituals and sacred (canonical) texts. Rituals and texts fulfill two functions: normative (prescribing orientation points for acting) and formative (defining the group identity). In order for cultural memory to be effective, it has to be objectivized, stored, reactivated and circulated in the group. This can be achieved in one of two ways: through the repetition of a ritual in an illiterate society or through the interpretation of a text in a literate society. The former creates what is called ritual coherence, while the latter results in textual coherence within a given group. When there is no possibility to preserve the content of cultural memory in writing, human memory (and material culture) is the only place where the knowledge necessary to secure the identity of a group can be stored. In that case, the content of the memory will be most commonly saved in poetic form, for
the purpose of easier remembrance. Reactivation follows through ritualistic enactment, usually in a multi-media fashion: through singing, playing and dancing, when the content of memory is actively re-lived. The reactivation of memory requires collective participation: a story-teller and an audience. Through the ritualistic repetition and reliving of the content of memory, the coherence of the group is created and recreated through time and across space.

This short summary of Assmann’s admittedly complicated theory identifies the function of oral epic poetry. Matija Murko defined the epic poem as “a chronicle in verses, the purpose of which is [the promulgation of] truth, entertainment, education and the instruction of successors.” In a predominantly illiterate society, the population at large has no means to record the content of tradition when it wants to communicate it outside of the so-called synchronic space of communication comprised of three generations (this being the temporal frame of communicative memory). In order to transmit any subject matter vertically, along the generational axis, something seemingly anchored in the distant past is needed that will at the same time enable group members to communicate and exchange news both about the past and the present. This “something” is, for the society we deal with here, the oral epic poem. While it is undoubtedly also a source of aesthetic pleasure to the listener, the main function of the epic poem is the mediation and transmission of recent news and the exchange of the relevant collective experiences.

In 1963, a folk poet from Herzegovina, who most probably never in his life left his small town, sang about his role while taking for himself the old folk name Radovan:

Radovan is old history,
He breathes through wind and talks through darkness.
I will tell you truthfully, my dear brothers,
I remember all kinds of devils.
I remember [the Roman emperor] Diocletian
And the Mongolian leader Batu-khan,
And Attila, dragon of fire,
I remember each and every tyrant.

A precondition for the existence of oral tradition is the existence of a group that accepts and sanctions the products of this tradition. Jakobson and Bogatirjev have called this “preventive censorship by the group.” What it means is that if we regard oral folk poems as a process of communication, then the sender (folk singer) and the receiver of the message (the group) are to be found in the same field in interaction. The receiver inspires and thus to some extent controls the sender. Only if the singer offers the tones and
text that please the group can her/his song live. It is the group that grants the singer the authorization to translate into verse the group’s way of perceiving and interpreting social developments. This means that by using the singer’s stories we can reconstruct the popular understanding of different events the group lived through and thought important to “put into verse.” But we should also be aware that the narratives sung by the folk poet do not represent some kind of unspoiled, true version of history, liberated from interventions or pressures by those in power. They are neither true nor false versions of the past. They represent a repository of names, dates and events that were meaningful to the group at the moment the songs were created, and the stories they convey from times of war or peace are stories the group exploited to make sense of its present reality.

The Gusle in the Holy Space

The oldest references to folk epic poems on the territory of former Yugoslavia are found in 1557 in the writings of a Croatian poet from the island of Hvar, Petar Hektorović. Probably the most influential and widespread printed collections of the poems are the anthologies compiled by Vuk Stefa
nović Karadžić and printed in their first editions in the periods 1823–1833 and 1841–1862. In the first half of the twentieth century Matija Murko observed that still the most popular book among the Croats was Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskog [A pleasant talk of the Slavonic people] by Andrija Kačić Miošić, first published in 1756. Even though it was written by one man, and an educated one on top of that, the book owes its enormous appeal to its form, which faithfully follows the pattern of the oral epic poem. Kačić composed his collection of poems with the intention of making it accessible to “the poor peasants and shepherds of the Slavic people.” Its style is deliberately close, indeed almost identical, to the style, metrics and themes of oral epic poetry. As a consequence, many researchers later mistakenly believed numerous poems in the collection to be of folk origin. Kačić has been a constant inspiration to folk singers. In 1987, the guslar Mile Krajina proclaimed: “When I learned to read and write in the primary school, I started reading the old heroic poems by Father Andrija Kačić Miošić.” The population at large used Kačić’s book to learn the alphabet, and through it, history. It should not come as a surprise that in 1952 in certain areas of the counties of Šibenik and Drnić in Croatia, Kačić’s collection was a universal synonym for the book: whatever they had read and irrespective of when they read it, people believed they had read it in his collection.

The fate of Kačić’s collection eloquently demonstrates that the introduction of writing does not displace oral expression: it merely opens another
channel of communication. Oral, that is, natural or direct communication, is taken by the older generation of scholars to be the fundamental feature of folkloric text. They hold that the circumstances of oral communication conditioned a so-called secondary feature of folkloric creations: the stability of the basic structure of the text or the formulaic style. Formula is defined as a word or a group of words that is often used in the given metric conditions for the purpose of expressing an important idea; when grouped, formulae make up a system of expression, and these systems create different narrative patterns. Champions of this approach to the study of oral epic poetry are Albert Bates Lord and Millman Parry. They have related the formulaic style of oral communication to the uninterrupted variability of the content of the folkloric text, but always within constant systems of expressions. Matija Murko noted many years ago that “our printed epic poems have only once been sung or dictated [in the form printed] and never again,” because the folk singer changes and moulds the song with every new interpretation (s)he makes. As a consequence, it would appear that when written down (or recorded on tape), the text ceases to be a part of folklore, because it can no longer be reshaped and modified by a performer.

The more recent approach to the study of folklore has repudiated this view and focused instead on the “[e]xamination of the performance of folklore in concrete situations of use.” Detailed empirical research in the 1930s into oral texts has demonstrated that an orally performed folkloric text is directed foremost to the problems related to the existing conduct of social life. It is not concerned with some distant or exotic past; rather, it tackles issues that bear relevance in the moment of its creation. This means that the folkloric text cannot be seen as a natural object that somehow survives from the past into the present: if we want to believe it to be a part of tradition, then we must also take into account that tradition does not exist by itself as an unspoiled link with some imagined past. Rather, tradition is “a selective, interpretive construction, the social and symbolic creation of a connection between aspects of the present and an interpretation of the past.” It is thus wrong to assume that we can distinguish between “real” and “false” or “authentic” and “fake” folklore, because folklore itself is a symbolic construct. If modern epic folk songs appear to bear little resemblance to the folk songs told by epic singers two hundred years ago, this does not mean that they are any less part of folklore. What it means is that social life in the modern culture has changed, but that in spite of that, folk songs do not cease to have “an important role in the personal, familial and social life of the widest population strata,” and that through them symbolical communication between members of different communities takes place.

With the dawn of the twentieth century, oral epic folk songs and folk singers did not lose their appeal and power. Existing literature leaves no
doubt that up until the outbreak of the Second World War, folk singers were not only present but were very popular and widely distributed throughout the territory of interwar Yugoslavia. They were admired by the broader public, while each house and region took special pride in its own singer(s). In the area of Dubrovnik, when a folk singer with a gusle appeared, the entire village gathered. In Nova Varoš, the singer occupied a place next to the icon: a holy space. In Dalmatia at the time, people reportedly listened to the singer more closely and faithfully than to the priest in church. Epic song was considered by the broad masses as the main entertainment and “the main type of sport.” The practice of epic singing was most strongly present in the zadruga (extended household) where several families and generations lived together. It should also be noted that prior to the formation of the first Yugoslavia in 1918, a gusle used to hang over the bed of each candidate for the priesthood in the Catholic catechism school in Mostar. While it is generally believed that epic poems are inspired primarily by war, we know that after 1918, in addition to the songs about the First World War, there was an entire cycle of folkloristic texts about the murder of the Croatian Peasant Party leader, Stjepan Radić, in the Yugoslav Parliament in Belgrade in 1928. I have also tracked down epic songs that were performed in the course of the pre-election campaigns and agitation in Croatia in 1935, 1936 and 1939.

O, peasants, martyrs,  
You poor people, sufferers,  
The election day has arrived  
The twenty-eighth is here.  
Be careful, my brother, where you go,  
As one has to give a vote.  
Be smart, make no mistake,  
And relieve yourself of the evil destiny.  
(…)
We should vote for no more pasha,  
He is not for our kind,  
We need someone who is cautious with money  
And who is the real peasant brother.  
Our Vasa Mihajlović,  
He is the real peasant and our kind.  
He will make the people proud,  
He will be the real president.

If we consider that the majority of the population of interwar Yugoslavia was illiterate, none of this comes as a surprise. All social strata were represented in the ranks of the singers of epic: peasants, factory workers, sailors,
fishermen, county clerks, military officers, notaries, professors, school principals, engineers, artisans. Murko identified among female singers women who were widows of lawyers, mothers of drama writers, daughters of shipowners, and “ladies with Italian family names.”

There were quite a number of county prefects who were epic singers, and often the reason behind their election was precisely the prestige they enjoyed for the ability to recite folk tales, with or without the gusle. The age structure ranged from the youngest reported singer who was only 3 years old, to the oldest one who was allegedly 120.

Despite the arrival of the Communist regime and vigorous educational efforts targeting the illiterate populace, all of these singers did not simply disappear from the scene. Additionally, we know that in the 1980s the commercial market for the distribution of epic folk songs, most notably those accompanied by the gusle, was highly developed. It was not exceptional for a guslar to sell more than 50,000 copies of a recording. One joint-edition of four guslars sold out its 100,000 copies in a short period. An engineer in Podgorica, Boško Vujacic, was able to sell half a million records and tapes by 1980, while in 1990 a tape by Milomir Miljanić, “The Wings of Kosovo,” was selling at the amazing rate of three hundred copies per day.

And it was around this same time that the Serbian singer voiced his concerns:

O, Slobodan, our sharp sword,
Will the battle at Kosovo take place soon?
Will we call upon Strahinjić,
Stari Jug, nine Jugovićes,
Or Boško to carry our flag
And to wield his sword at Kosovo.

(…)
If needs be, just let us know,
We will fly like gun bullets.

On the Croatian side, the same atmosphere was echoed, but the names were different:

O, I create a new song
To be sung in my Čista Provo.
Our Tuđman, prince and knight,
Has been shot upon.

(…)
I made a new gusle,
To revive the Croatian princes—
Rise, lion Tomislav,
Who touches each Croatian heart!
Earth is warmed by the rays of the warm sun,
And Croatia by the Croatian heroes.
Let Zrinski-Frankopan arise
And return me banus Jelačić.44

Like many others of the same kind, these poems were composed by a (more often than not) anonymous author. Alois Riegel held that in folkloric art, there is no difference between the producer and the consumer; in other words, products of folklore are not intended for the open market but rather for the producer’s own consumption.45 This allows us to claim that in the late 1980s people in Yugoslavia still felt it appropriate and desirable to express their emotions using the form and style of an oral epic folk song. What is important here is not only the fact that in both cases the singer resurrected old folk heroes, knights and princes, to help the great leaders, Milošević and Tuđman respectively, in fighting some very modern battles which were considerably different from those in which the epic heroes originally took part. It seems more significant that these are only two examples of the kind of communication that was intimately familiar to many persons in former Yugoslavia during the years when their country was breaking apart.

To Make Communist Epics?

Prior to the Second World War, the population of Yugoslavia was predominantly rural: it is estimated that roughly 80 percent of Yugoslavs inhabited rural areas and lived from agricultural pursuits. Like many other Communist countries, Tito’s Yugoslavia embarked on an ambitious program of industrialization and urbanization. As a result, in 1971 less than 50 percent of the population lived off agriculture. In the period 1948–1971, 6.5 million people migrated from rural to urban areas. This was a sudden, almost brutal migration, which did not result in turning peasants into workers but in creating a unique combined stratum of peasant workers. Its outcome was not a city with an urban population, but what Dunja Rihatman-Auguštin aptly called “a village in the city.”46 Among the features of the pre-industrial life in the zadruga (community), we count things such as a very strong pressure toward conformity within the community, group solidarity, and radical egalitarianism in division of goods.47 The latter is connected to the “theory of limited goods”: due to a peasant’s inability to enlarge the quantity of goods possessed by the zadruga this quantity is permanently unchangeable and cannot be influenced. If one member of the community receives more bread, this will mean that another member will inevitably receive less. This custom not only strengthens group solidarity, but it also means that much atten-
tion will be paid to each division of goods. Such social structures proved to be very resilient, even in a historically new, supposedly modernized situation. According to research related to the strikes caused by firings of workers (carried out in 1969), group solidarity was still of great importance to the new working class: 89 percent of all interviewed workers said that they advocated putting an end to the firings, even though they were aware that their factories would in that case perform less efficiently and that their living standards would correspondingly drop. In 1966, the Economic Institute in Zagreb conducted research into the effects of the economic reforms of 1965 in the companies and factories in the area of Zagreb. A number of them did not want to raise the salaries of their workers, even though they had the means to do so, because “they did not want to differentiate too much in earnings from others.” Finally, if the workers believed that the distribution of earnings was not “egalitarian” enough, they took matters in their own hands. There were cases of building and construction companies where, each month after they received their salaries, workers would meet in their quarters and there bring together on the table all the money they had received, in order to distribute it among themselves in exactly equal portions. Similar patterns were observed in other professions, too. As one fisherman explained: “When salaries of different amounts arrive ..., we first put all of it together, then divide it with the number of people [who went to sea that month to fish], and only then does each person take his share. We believe this to be best, and that is how we work.”

The new working class, the migrants, also brought their folklore with them. It was not a rare sight immediately after 1945 to see in the cities original folklore groups performing on the streets and city squares, while the spectators either voiced their approval or joined the performance. For the party this was a large problem to deal with, but something they had encountered already before. In the course of the Second World War, the Communist leadership of the Partisan movement faced a major obstacle in its efforts to secure the support of the broader population for their cause. Educated in somewhat stiff party discourse, they were unable to explain “the party line” to the people. Their words simply did not resonate with the peasant majority in particular. As it was quickly noticed, village school teachers, who were very well versed in folk poetry, knew much better how to rally popular support—either to encourage people to join the fighting on the Partisan side or to persuade the peasants to give food freely to Partisan units. The reason for this was quite simple: they were able to recite long lines of the older heroic epic poems, mingling their motifs with events from the current war.

Epic vocabulary, which was as different from party discourse as can be, was considered suspicious by party commissars and unwelcome, but with the need to enlarge the Partisan units they had little choice.
the propaganda department of ZAVNOH (the Antifascist Council of the National Liberation of Croatia), which had charge of culture and the arts, published in the course of the war two editions of *Our songs*, a collection of folk songs with motifs from the liberation struggle. Moreover, from 1943 the same propaganda department had one person whose only job was to record and collect Partisan folk songs.\(^{54}\) When we read them today, it is not difficult to understand what it was that so bothered Communist commissars in those songs: the repeated invocation of the name of God, fairies taking part in people’s destinies, voices from the graves commanding the acts of the living—a world of spiritual forces and actors with which the Communist Party could not do much. While waiting for better times to come when it would become possible to dispense with folklore, the party took an active part during the war in supporting and promoting folk performances and production. Milovan Djilas, for example, embellished his war-time speeches to the Montenegrin peasants by quoting repeatedly from anti-Turkish folk songs or lines from Njegoš’s *Mountain Wreath*.\(^{55}\)

Once power was seized, the Communist Party changed its positive attitude towards folklore. Much in agreement with the interwar policy of the USSR that the products of folklore were “a worthless remnant of patriarchal society,”\(^{56}\) the party in Yugoslavia also labeled folklore “primitivism of the worst kind” and banned it by decree from social life.\(^ {57}\) With their full efforts directed towards industrialization and urbanization, scenes of groups of people singing folk songs and dancing *kolo*, a traditional folk dance, in the center of Zagreb or Belgrade were hardly a welcome sight for the party; they suggested that the revolutionary transformation was not succeeding as originally envisaged. As an example reflecting their negative feelings on the matter, the choir “Joža Vlahović” was not allowed to perform on the final evening of the Festival of Yugoslav Youth in Belgrade in 1948. The folk song they prepared for performance, which had as its main motif the conversation between a grieving mother and her dead son speaking from his grave, was considered mystical and was thus forbidden.\(^ {58}\) But the relation of the party towards folklore was in no sense unequivocal and clear. While perhaps disinclined to listen to “mystical” songs, the party happily seized upon the popularity and prestige enjoyed by heroes of the older epic poetry in order to create its own symbolic imagery. The published editions of Partisan songs were usually carefully arranged. The collection, whose subtitle reads “Folk songs about the war and the revolution,” opens with several old folk songs which include motifs from the peasant uprisings, the anti-Turkish wars and the resistance the ordinary peasant offered against his feudal master. The first song to follow after these is “To the Communist Party, leader of the popular uprising.”\(^ {59}\) The line of continuity is clearly and consciously emphasized, and historical legitimacy thereby imparted.
While the Partisan folk songs were accepted in this sense as valuable, the same did not hold true for songs with themes from contemporary life. This negative attitude provoked protests among folklorists and ethnologists. Partly in defense of the integrity of their own profession, they complained about the “habitual practice” of consigning folkloric production prematurely to oblivion.\(^{60}\) When people were hired by institutions researching folklore to record in various communities the songs that were commonly recited, they rarely returned with poems about contemporary themes such as the rebuilding of the country or life in the new peasant collectives;\(^{61}\) only old songs were considered good, the new ones were deemed not worth recording. When they heard songs with new themes, the researchers simply switched off the recorder.\(^{62}\)

In spite of the disapproving attitude of the party towards folkloric performances, the folk songs lived on. In the new peasant collectives, Bosnian writer Mak Dizdar heard people singing them both during work and in late evening popular gatherings.\(^{63}\) Some ethnologists noted a song or two with motifs from contemporary everyday life. There were workers’ unions in Belgrade which organized guslar sections, and their members performed in factories and sometimes even in schools.\(^{64}\) After existing for some time unofficially, the folk poets were ultimately allowed onto the public scene in the early sixties. In 1961 the first guslar society was founded in postwar Yugoslavia. From then on, epic poets were regularly invited to perform on local radio stations, and they toured the country singing before enthusiastic audiences. Sometimes it was possible to discuss through the medium of the epic poems subjects that were otherwise considered a strict taboo in society, such as the Partisan reprisals after the Second World War. On one occasion a folk poet, who described in his poem the bad economic situation in his company, was accused of “disturbing the citizens and spreading false information.”\(^{65}\) Guslars, who initially accepted the claim that their performances were obsolete and primitive, were back.\(^{66}\) And they were there to stay.

**Singing the Songs of War**

We know that the Second World War was a very painful time for the general population in Yugoslavia. It does not then surprise us that the folk singer found that there was a special quality to this war.

When furious winds start blowing on Earth  
When an animal without law becomes judge  
That was the year 1941;  
The black earth hit by the plague.
The sun over Kordun goes into eclipse
And everything falls into nightly darkness.
Mad wolves scream everywhere,
And the devil holds rifles in his hand.67

Animals in control of human life, wind and plague, darkness: this is the familiar set of popular topoi used to describe the end of the world.68 For the epic singer, one from the area of Kordun especially, the apocalypse seemed to capture perfectly the reality they had to face from one day to another during the war. This was no time for humans; it was an era of animal rule. Document 1 bears eloquent testimony to what was enacted in the darkness: heinous crimes, the magnitude of which was unprecedented. The poem refers to an event that took place on 18 April 1942, in the village of Furjan, when a squad of Croatian Ustaša soldiers attacked the Serb village, set it on fire, tortured and killed the young and the old, and raped and then killed local women. Interestingly though, according to the folk singer, the evil times did not begin with the arrival of fascism but much earlier with the arrival of the Serbian “tyrant Pero Živković,”69 King Aleksandar’s closest military advisor, whom the king appointed as prime minister at the start of his royal dictatorship in 1929. Complete darkness then descended with the appearance of the “three-headed dragon”—Adolf Hitler.70 The folk song tells us through the mouth of Ante Pavelić that Hitler’s forces created the Independent State of Croatia and that the Ustaše were aware of the weak support they enjoyed among the people,

Which rejected them a long time ago
And followed Radić Stjepan instead.71

Even though the epic poems describing the Ustaša massacres provide an exact chronology with full names for those affected, and often with their birth places as well, they very rarely identify a single person on the Croatian side who inspired the crimes.72 To be sure, the Ustaša soldiers and their leaders are called “bastards,” “Hitler’s servants,” “dogs,” and “beasts,” but the origins of the idea for the massive slaughter of Jews and Serbs are found in Hitler’s Berlin. However, the clouds and darkness he brought could not last forever.

In Montenegro, the appearance of clouds signified a new temporal plane: “Thunder reverberated / Across the hills and valleys of former Nemanja’s Zeta / The lightning struck near Vir Pazar / And cut the cloud over Zeta in pieces.”73 Zeta was the medieval Serbian kingdom, and Stefan Nemanja is considered to be its founder. For the folk poet, the rather large time lapse did not cause a problem. On the contrary, the popular uprising, aiming “to
free the people from slavery” and “expel executioners from the country,”
was seen by the folk poet as a “rebellion like before.” The original word
used in the poem for “rebellion” is buna, and we know from older songs
that this is the word used to refer to the Serbian uprising against the Turkish
rule (buna na dahiye or, in English, “rebellion against dahijas”).74 The
beginning of the National Liberation Struggle (NOB—Narodnooslobodi-
lačka borba) or the Partisan war is never referred to in official Communist
discourse as a buna (rebellion) but as an ustanak (uprising). The resistance
did not come by itself, it was initiated literally by someone “from above”:

O, people, what a miracle—
A great lake has been created
And within it, a three-headed dragon
That wants to swallow the people.
With unhappiness, comes luck, too:
There was a hard nest in the world,
In which white swans were hatched,
Among them, a grey bird falcon,
That spreads his wings all over the country—
Underneath the wings, he scatters his feathers,
From which white swans will arise,
And with them grey falcons,
All together to smash the dragon with force.75

The lake is the Third Reich, the dragon, as we have seen, is Hitler. The nest
in which fighters are born is the homeland (Yugoslavia), and there we find
Communists (white swans) and the grey falcon, Tito, who flies over the
country and sheds feathers, that is, calls for uprising, which stimulate more
people to join the struggle. “The cradle of the young Partisans” is the moun-
tain Romanija in Bosnia and Herzegovina,76 probably the strongest demon-
ic chronotopos in Yugoslav epic poetry; the place where time and space
meet and open a new dimension, in which supernatural and demonic forces
reign. This is the holy space, which, as Ivo Žanić has noted, must be crossed
by each person wanting to become a true hero: it is a stage set for the rite of
passage, and only the individual who, in the poem, sets foot there can claim
his heroism.77 Tito was no exception in this regard.

Set against grey falcons and white swans, there was a wide range of ene-
mies. What becomes readily obvious when reading the poems is that they
pay considerably more attention to the “traitors to the homeland” than to
non-Yugoslav foes. With the exception of Hitler, foreign adversaries of the
Partisan army are dubbed simply “enemies” or are given their national des-
ignations (Italians, Germans). Mount Romanija, on the other hand, remem-
bers vividly “black days and black dungeons” that were opened with the treason allegedly committed by the Serbian noble Vuk Branković who did not appear (or appeared too late) at Kosovo in 1389 and thus, according to the folk poem, caused the greatest of all defeats. For the folk poet singing about the Second World War, the black days of treason extend from humiliation and shame provoked by Vuk Branković’s betrayal, all the way: “To executioner Ante Pavelić / Notorious Milan Nedić / Dense Captain Ljotić / Kvaternik, General Draža / And Rupnik, old traitor / King Peter, Paul and Stepinac / The worst of the Balkans’ sons.”

78 The folk poet saw no difference between various Chetnik leaders, the Ustaša Führer, young Yugoslav King Petar in exile in London or Archbishop Stepinac; these were details that did not matter. What mattered was the heroism of the freedom fighters. They had a range of predecessors, as the source of strength and inspiration. Partisan youth could exclaim in a poem, “We are the children of Obilić,”79 referring to the greatest Serbian hero who was killed in the Kosovo battle. In similar terms, Ratko Pavlović from Toplice, the legendary organizer of the popular uprising in southern Serbia, was seen “As equal to Prince Marko / And Miloš Obilić. / He was an excellent orator / As if he were taught by Njegoš! / If Njegoš were to rise from his grave / Ratko from Toplice would be in his company.”80 When such a hero dies in the battle, he falls silently: “Without cries or shouts/The young boy sleeps in the grass.”81 Interestingly enough, bodies of the fallen heroes do not emanate any kind of special power that would prevent wild animals from eating them.

When heroes touch the grass,
Crows and ravens fly to them,
And drink from their hot blood,
Eat their heroic flesh.
At night, a wolf comes from the woods
And scatters corpses all over the forest.82

The destiny of a young Bulgarian fascist was not much different:

The raven ate of the flesh,
And searches now a place where to rest.
His legs are bloody to the knees,
Bill and head almost to the shoulders!
In the bill he holds the eyes of the hero,
Among them there is no star
But a cockade washed in blood,
Punched by a bullet through the middle.83

A few seconds later, when the bird finds a branch on which to sleep, it swal-
allows the eyes of the Bulgarian soldier. The only way in which we can then differentiate the dead Partisan hero from the dead fascist, the poems seem to suggest, is through the record of history: it will have the last word, and its judgement will be final. On top of that, there comes the scream of the mother. Each fallen hero leaves behind him, again in accordance with the existing folk tradition, a weeping mother, sometimes also a sister. Unlike the archetypical mother in the folk tradition, the mother of the nine young Jugović’s, who died of grief caused by the deaths of her husband and all nine sons at Kosovo, the mother of the Partisan hero lives on and finds the cure for her sorrow in the hope of revenge: “I will not curse my destiny / But everyone who won’t avenge my son.”

Even though the folk singer makes a conscious effort to explain that “[t]he [liberation] battle was fought not by Communists only,”85 he never questions the party leadership of the Partisan troops. And this is how he explains who these Communists were: “These people who incite rebellion, / Who despise masters and the crown, / Who want the same law for everyone, / These people are called Communists. … They want to build the house anew / To bring peace among brothers and peoples / And fight against the masters.”86 And yet, in spite of all their strength, there were moments when Communists and Partisans just could not move ahead. These instances did not come as a consequence of their weakness, for in direct conflict with the enemy they were always victorious. They had to bow their heads, as the singer shows, when Mother Nature stood in their way.

Probably one of the most beautiful epic poems about the Second World War describes the battle on the river Neretva. This was one of the bloodiest but also the most renowned episodes in the war. The German army, together with the Ustaša and Chetnik forces, surrounded Partisan troops in March 1943. Partisans were additionally slowed down in their advance by the 4,000 wounded they carried with them. Had they chosen to leave the wounded behind, they could have easily fled from the enemy; but the Partisan headquarters, together with Tito, decided that the wounded had to be saved. Even though they suffered great losses, they managed to create confusion in the enemy’s ranks by blowing up the only existing bridge on the river Neretva that could have saved them. Immediately upon doing so, they built a provisional bridge for Partisan forces (which consisted only of infantry) that could not support German tanks. Ultimately, the Partisan army successfully escaped from the encircled area.

The folk song about this event relies heavily on the existing folk tradition, but it also introduces several new elements into the poetics of the genre. The narrative revolves around the inability of Tito’s army to build the second bridge: whatever material they bring, they manage only to get halfway across the river, when the wild water demolishes it: “What Tito’s
soldiers build, / Until they reach half of the river, / Wild Neretva takes all away.”

Anyone familiar with Yugoslav folk poetry will recognize this motif from another, much older source—the poem about building of the city of Skadar on Bojana: “What constructors build during the day / A fairy destroys during the night.” In order to find the solution, Tito sends 900 couriers to bring him “the old books of wisdom.” There he reads that the bridge will be built only after a young couple in love is sacrificed to the river—an un kissed girl and an unmarried boy. In the old poem, the fairy reveals to the king that in order to erect the city, he needs to find two children, a brother and a sister, with similar names, and build them into the foundations of the city. In both cases, this is the old Greek concept of φαρµακον: the need to make a sacrifice of innocent humans which will please the gods (or Nature, which amounts to the same), ease their rage and allow human actors to continue with their plans. And while in the old poem the king was unsuccessful in finding two children and instead built his sister-in-law into the foundations of the city, Tito did locate his young couple in love, the young courier Ivan and Janja, his proletarian sweetheart. They understand the situation and willingly submit their bodies to the river. The Neretva is tamed, and the story has a happy ending. On the other side of the river, Ivan and Janja are buried, “Their crosses decorated with [red] stars.”

The last line, describing the crosses with red stars on the grave markers, proves Maja Bošković-Stulli right when she notes that two completely different eras meet in this poem. While old folk songs often began with the line “Dear god, what a miracle!” this one opens with “Dear comrade, what a miracle!” Untamed Nature that can be domesticated only by a human sacrifice is also from an older world: in the new one, machines will take care of that. The actors on Neretva are, however, fresh. This is not just any innocent couple, it is a Partisan courier and a proletarian girl. And they do not meet their death blindly and unknowingly (as happens regularly in the old songs), but with eyes open and fully aware of their actions. Mythical ambience may still be present, but people are no longer entirely helpless when facing their destiny.

The wide range of heroic sacrifice and human loss among Partisans and civilians made dealing with prisoners of war more complicated. As noted above, the call for revenge was loud and could not be simply disregarded. In official Communist accounts, historiography especially, mention of Partisan reprisals was an absolute taboo. Questions about retaliation were suppressed to the extent that even today it is difficult to estimate the number of victims. However, as Document 2 testifies, the folk poet and thus his community were very well aware of the massacres and their extent, and their talk about these painful issues was tolerated, as we see, despite the tasteless tone employed by the poet (the large quantity of decomposed enemy bodies
fertilized what had hitherto been barren land). That this was acceptable behavior should not surprise us, because in the traditional heroic codex of honor, vengeance is something desirable.

When the Communists, people who fought during the war “For Freedom and for ideals / So everyone would equally have bread,”90 seized power, many things had to change. Numerous songs describe the process of rebuilding the country, celebrating what was indeed an incredible work ethic on the part of the mostly youthful brigades. A folk poet observed: “Each person works on reconstruction / There is no more hunger.”91 When compared to the war years of starvation and the prewar experience of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the latter claim must have made a particularly strong impression. Advancing industrialization and electrification prompted the folk singer to state: “America has been created now in our country.”92 In spite of the change of the ideological paradigm, America stayed in the folk imagination as a synonym for a prosperous country offering limitless possibilities. The USSR, the proper ideological mate, never came to occupy that place. Moreover, the conflict with Stalin that soon followed in 1948 left no space for anything like that. It is interesting that folk poets in relation to the split spoke much more about attacks coming from other Communist countries than from the USSR. Quite appropriately, the whole campaign was perceived by the poet as directed against Tito, and he chose thus to defend the country and the party by defending the Yugoslav marshal. Tito’s superiority over other Communist leaders was easily established on the basis of his war record as in this reference to the Hungarian Communist leader, Mátyás Rákosi.

O, Rakosi, where were you
When Tito spilled his blood?
You rested in the coolness of Moscow,
Whilst Tito fought the war!
You, the coward of this war,
 Pretend now to be a democrat!
If a battle develops again,
The old story will repeat:
Our Tito will be the leader,
And you will hide again.93

A similar strategy was employed when the poet had to stand for “our people.” As shown in Document 3, Yugoslavia’s postwar history is differentiated from the history of other Communist countries by the argument that Yugoslavs fought hard for their freedom, whereas others received it as a gift. The unstated conclusion was that because they did not invest much in
their freedom, these countries were ready to submit to someone else’s (i.e. Stalin’s) rule. Even though the initial prospect was, as we know, very daunting, the folk singer never lost his optimism: “The truth has to win.” But it was quickly noted that as the consequence of “the politics of the blocs” things were not developing smoothly. In Document 4 we notice a concern for world peace. The song opens in a way similar to the poems about the beginning of the Second World War. The threat to peace is epitomized again in the dark cloud, “the Big Two” (i.e. leaders of the US and the USSR), much like Hitler in 1941, concoct their infernal plans, while the hungry do not even have bread. The real novelty in this poem is its mention of grieving widows. In the old traditional folk poems, women could grieve for sons, fathers and brothers, but mourning for husbands was considered a taboo. Murko claims that even if such poems existed, they were not recorded by the collectors because of shame. The new era, among other changes, evidently brought a revolution in this respect, too.

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It is often asserted that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had a rather easy path to power in 1945, because, unlike its counterparts in the rest of Eastern Europe, it enjoyed popular support and legitimacy on the basis of the recently won war. My reading of Yugoslav oral epic poetry suggests that this is only part of the answer. That the victory in the war was an important asset for the party is clear. But perhaps equally important was the way in which this victory was perceived by the broader public. The Second World War was for the folk singer not just any war in which just any two sides fought each other. The poems analyzed here suggest that because bloody reality was encountered on a daily basis, the war was experienced as an ultimate clash between good and evil, the white swan and the black devil. In the Serb-populated parts of Croatia, the beginning of the war introduced all too often scenes such as this: “Many a sister seeks her brother now / A little child calls for his daddy. / Above the cave, crows scream / For the caves are badly covered / And the crows have found piles of flesh. / Crows scream, the skies cry. / In the cavity a small creek originates / Bloody creek that runs into the river; / The river is no longer blue / But runs on filthy and bloody.” As the end of the poem puts it, only the Party is able to end this darkness and in the only way it knew—by turning on the light of the red star.

Since the Yugoslav Communists came to power in a country with a predominantly rural population, they had to create ex post facto the working class in whose name they seized power. But despite that problem, the Communists were not faceless or abstract people to the folk poet and, with him, the wider community. We have seen that they inherited in the popular imag-
ination a place in the line of heroes reaching as far back in history as the fourteenth century. We know that every new power-holder asserts the legitimacy of his rule by building a line of continuity with some distant past. Great origins, as Pierre Nora noted, magnify the greatness of the present generation.\textsuperscript{97} Past heroes are a reservoir of bones on which the present rulers can feed and from which they draw their strength. Due to the fact that, as Funkenstein explains, collective memory is entirely topocentric and is insensitive to the passage of time (i.e., it is basically ahistorical),\textsuperscript{98} it was very easy for the Yugoslav folk poet to tell his story of the war, in which Communists led “our” army, by inserting the names of the brave Partisans in the long line of popular heroes. Miloš Obilić from the fourteenth century, Njegoš from the nineteenth century, and Tito from the twentieth century rub shoulders in the folk poem; consequently, the glory and brilliance of one hero were easily appended to another one. Tito’s Communists were thus given a chance to avenge all “our” tragic heroes who died in their various struggles, and this chance they did not want to miss. When the Ustaše slaughtered more than five hundred Serbs in the small town of Veljun in Croatia, the folk poet reasoned: “[The Ustaše executioner] made Kosovo out of Veljun.”\textsuperscript{99} When Tito’s Partisans were killing the Ustaše soldiers, this too was vengeance for the dead bodies that remained at Kosovo. If looked at from this perspective, the arrival of Communists, often portrayed as discontinuity in historical development, was for the folk poet a natural sequel in the story of a glorious and heroic past. The conflict with Stalin served only to enhance this point.

The desired continuity was obvious in at least one more respect. Yugoslavia’s historians of the Communist period who dealt with the Second World War are often reproached for their simplistic stories about “the good Partisans” and “the evil foreign occupiers and domestic traitors.” Such stories left a lot of empty and unexplained space for competing versions of the past that would ultimately return to haunt the country and its inhabitants, still today unable to cope with the more complex picture. While I do not disagree, it seems important to state two qualifications. First, the analysis of the folk poems shows that they were in their very origin a narrative about “the good us” and “bad them.” Folk poems have long since cultivated the story about the Good, the Bad and the Ugly. The Good is the young hero who defends his land. The Bad is the foreign aggressor who launches an assault on his land. And the Ugly is the hero’s brother who commits treason and sells his loyalty to the aggressor for a handful of golden coins. Yugoslav historiography merely filled these roles with concrete names. Tito and his Partisans were the Good, Germans and Italians the Bad, while the role of the Ugly was taken over by the Ustaše, Chetniks and other “domestic traitors.” The golden coins for which, e.g., the Ustaše sold themselves to Hitler,
was, obviously an independent Croatian state—no matter of what kind. And secondly, one has to wonder whether it was possible at all for Yugoslav historians to change this naive narrative and insert more tones of grey in it. If, as stated before, the legitimacy of the Communist Party depended upon its fulfilment of the tasks posed by predecessors from the distant past, any shifting in the ruling narrative would have undermined the party’s position in the hierarchy of power.

Benefiting from the distant heroic past, the Communists presented themselves, as the folk poet tells us, as people “who want the same law for everyone.” They came bringing with them the principle of ending class exploitation. This theme was familiar to the peasant mind, which recalled through poems the burden imposed by the feudal master. In the course of the war, the party offered to the peasant a possibility for change. The call for an uprising asked the peasant: “For whom do you work the land, for whom sow, / For whom do you spill your blood? / There has been enough of pains and suffering, / enough of robberies and the kuluk! / Wake up, take off the dark veil, / break your heavy chains!” According to Momčilo Zlatanović, this was one of the favorite peasant songs of the uprising. True, it sounded much like the call for peasant uprisings from earlier centuries, but this only enhanced its appeal and strength. Seen by the folk poet as liberators from the foreign oppression, walking in the footsteps of glorious ancestors and with the promise to bring bread to everyone, Communists must have appeared to be the winning combination. And this is precisely what they were.

Sources

Document 1:

“Bloody song”

(…)

As they spoke those words,
The first houses burst in flame,
From houses people emerge
Naked, bare-foot, hardly awake,
In disarray they don’t know what to do.
The mother grabs her four children,
One on her back, another dragging by the hand;
The old man grabs three grandchildren,
Drags children, himself stumbling
For his old body is aged,
Misery is pushing him forward,
It does not let him die in peace.
The little brother, not even eight years old,
Carries his one-year-old sister;
The young daughter-in-law, last year married,
Carries the old woman,
Under her belt an unborn child;
(…)
From the bush then jump slayers,
Jump, take out their knives;
Those heroes from Cetingrad,
That bunch of filthy bastards
They start slaughtering women and the old,
Stab children with blades,
Smash heads with guns;
Creeks of blood flow.
(…)
When the slaughter ended,
They start their dirty work;
Collect chained girls
Take them out of blood,
Tear down their clothes,
Push them to the black ground,
Place knives near their heads
To show what awaits them,
What awaits them, if they resist,
What awaits them, they know well,
No matter submissive or not;
They grab them with their bloody hands,
Grab their white bodies;
Again you hear screams and cries,
As if people were slaughtered by wolves;
(…)
Dear brothers, what else is there to say,
Fifty of them did the same,
Then butchered them with knives
And left them naked in blood.

Source: “Krvava pjesma,” in Stanko Opačić-Čanica, ed., Narodne pjesme Korduna
(Zagreb: Prosvjeta, 1971), 16.
In 1945, beginning of April,
Our army penetrated the front of Srijem,
Tito’s great offensive
Surrounded then its opponent
In Croatia and Slovenia
It cut off the road to Austria
So the enemy could not slip away
But so it would pay for what it did yesterday,
So did Tito tell to the comrades
That they do not allow the fascists to run away
Tito’s belligerent army
Fulfilled his plan,
On 15 May 1945
It defeated the Germans completely,
When the last battles were fought
The army killed many of the German soldiers
The number of the dead
Was almost one hundred thousand,
And the large number of the prisoners
Over two hundred thousand soldiers,
While the military equipment then acquired
Was also very great,
The so-far barren land
Was fertilized by the bodies of the Germans
Sponges, great eaters of the world,
They stink all through our hills and valleys
Their bones have been spread around
From Africa all to famous Moscow
There, they soaked the soil with blood—
And they thought to conquer the Kremlin,
Millions of German heads
Await to be cultivated
In the broad fields of the kolkhoz
By the strong Soviet tractors,
Their land became fruitful then
The Germans from the West fertilized it
The whole people was then happy
With the defeat of the aggressor of the world.

Document 3:

Tito led us in the battle
He spilled his own blood,
He did not lie in a soft bed,
But he fought on the real battlefield.
It has not been achieved as a joke
That Tito is called the Marshal,
But it has been gained through the battle
That Tito is called the hero.
Where were those from different countries
When our people were dying?
They were all over the place,
But not there where one had to defend the people.
They were not there, where the battlefield was.
Or else they would know to value freedom more.
Donated freedom is easy
And servility must be such, too.
Our pure blood has been spilled,
So the freedom gained would be more valued.

…

Our people knows also
That Comrade Tito before the war
Had raised the Communist cadre
For the uprising against the fascists.
Lies are coming from some countries
That our party is no good,
That in the countryside there is anarchy
That we are heading toward capitalism.
They lie even much more
But their lies cannot be proven
Because the party headed by Tito
Stays on the correct path.
Let the speculating contemptible hear and see
What goes on in our midst
Let them see and be ashamed,
Let them see how the zadragas work.
Everyone will say to the one who asks
That we love the party and Tito.

…
Let them come and see
What our heart is made of,
They will see it is made of granite,
That it dies and lives for Tito.

Source: Savremene narodne pjesme (Sarajevo: 1957), 275–81.

Document 4:

“Peace, Freedom and Equality of All People”
A dark cloud is menacing the Earth,
Such a dark one nobody has ever seen before.
People would like to live in freedom,
Peace is wavering like a boat in the water.
Major powers keep threatening us with rockets,
At any time they can be hurled to the sky.
The Big Two govern insolently the world,
Determined to realize their infernal plans.
Eight hundred billion bucks, my dear,
For armament has been spent in a year!

The twentieth century is coming to its end,
But the oppression of men has not stopped yet.
There are still tyrants in the government,
They don’t obey human laws and will.
Millions of people are dying from hunger now,
And the neutron-bomb is being constructed.
The atomic arsenal is big enough
To destroy the whole globe, the land and sea.
Poisonous gas and bombs of all kinds,
Together with life-dangerous laser beams
Can burn down the Earth in a minute.
All mankind could die in no time.
Europe would be all in a flame,
Not a stone would remain upon stone.
Those lucky ones who remained in a shelter
Would die from the radiation afterwards.
What man has built in hundreds of years,
The bomb can destroy at once.

So I ask all the rulers of the world:
Spare and save this planet of ours, please!
If you don’t want to give us our daily bread
Don’t kill our children and our friends.  
For us all there’s enough killing and war,  
Enough blood, evil and heavy pain.  
Our mothers still black shawls wear,  
Pulling out their hair for their dead sons.

Every mother weeps deeply for her boy killed,  
Like a bird with a broken wing.  
Poor wives still mourn for their husbands  
With tears in their eyes, sobbing is still heard.  
Grieving widows forever they will be—  
Raising and taking care of their children.  
Woe! This damn foolish tragedy war!  
Why must man kill man?  
How much humiliation we’ve been through!  
How many murders and bestial tortures!  
Why don’t people come to an agreement,  
Knowing that nobody can really win?

Let the army serve the people,  
All the people in the United Nations!  
Pass the laws all together,  
Thwarting all plans of despotism.  
These laws should be fully obeyed,  
Tyrannical regime mustn’t exist.  
Let every man live in freedom  
Using natural resources as he pleases,  
Let him elect democratically the best.

If people don’t come to an agreement,  
It will be too late when they find the truth.  
The birth-rate can be controlled and decreased  
Without killing innocent unborn children.  
Make the deserts yield crops,  
They will be the granary for all people.  
There is sunshine enough, make rain,  
Everybody will have plenty of bread.  
All powers should be directed to peace,  
All energy should be in the service of man.  
Instead of bombs, make tractors,  
Let’s use all the land and sea.
No country will lack food,
And starving children won’t die any more!
(trans. by Antun Šimunić)


Notes

1 Milorad P. Mandić, “Predgovor,” in Milorad P. Mandić, *Pjesme o životnom putu druga Tita: U čast sedamdesetogodišnjice* (Bački Petrovac: Novinsko-izdavačko štampačko preduzeće “Glas ljudi,” 1965), 1. He takes special pride in the fact that his poems were mentioned in a radio show broadcast by Radio Moscow.

2 Mandić, “Predgovor,” 2.

3 A guslar is a player on the gusle, a one-string folk instrument used for musical accompaniment of the recitation of an epic poem.


5 Mandić, “Uvodna pjesma o Maršalu Titu,” in *Pjesme o životnom putu druga Tita*, 5–6.


7 Murko, 375.


9 Chapter 5 in this volume by Andrew Wachtel tackles one such case.

10 Assmann, 54. However, in spite of the introduction of the sacred canonized text, the crucial components for the achievement of cultural coherency of a given society remain customs, festivals, and rituals. Evidence of their importance for Yugoslavia’s Pioneers is provided in Chapter 6 by Ildiko Erdei.

11 Assmann, 54.

12 Assmann, 55.

13 Murko, 421.


15 The song was performed by Jozo Karamatić from Posušje, and written down by Zlatko Tomčić, *Hrvatske narodne epske pjesme iz Hercegovine i Dalmacije*, 1963, Archive of the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore, Zagreb, manuscript 3.

16 Jakobson and Bogatirjev, as quoted in Zdenko Škreb, *Studij književnosti* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1976), 93.

18 Up to the official beginning of the Croatian national re-awakening in 1830, Kačić’s work was published in seven editions, in 1756, 1759, 1780, 1801, 1811, 1816, 1826.


21 Murko, 64. Some people learned to read just so they would be able to read Kačić’s and other collections of epic poems.

22 Maja Bošković-Stulli, Narodne pjesme, pripovijetke i običaji iz okolice Šibenika i Drića, 1952, Archive of the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore, Zagreb, manuscript no. 102, 3. Murko encountered Kačić’s songs recited as far apart as in Kruševac and Macedonia (Murko, 252).

23 Jack Goody, “Oral Culture,” in Richard Bauman, ed., Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 12. And further: “The notion of an oral tradition is very loose. In a nonliterate society the oral tradition consists of everything handed down (and ipso facto created) through the oral channel—in other words, virtually the whole of culture itself. In a society with writing, both the literate and oral traditions are necessarily partial. Moreover, elements of the oral tradition, like folktales, inevitably get written down, whereas elements of the written tradition are often communicated orally, like the Indian Vedas.” (13)

24 In the case of oral poetry, some of the formal classificatory features are: prosodic elements (metrical patterings, alliteration, assonance, end assonance), parallelism (a type of repetition with variation in meaning or structure), distinctiveness of the language of oral poetry from everyday speech. Ruth Finnegan, “Oral Poetry,” in Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments, 122–23.

25 Vladimir Biti, Pojmovnik suvremene književne teorije (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1997), 401.

26 Murko, 12.

27 Richard Bauman, “Folklore,” in Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments, 33.


29 Bauman, 32.

30 Bauman, 32.

31 Čolović, Divlja književnost, 319.

32 The literature is weakest in the case of Slovenia. I therefore cannot equally strongly claim that what follows applies in the same degree for Slovenes.

33 Murko, 367.

34 Murko, 368.

35 Murko, 376.

36 Murko, 43.

38 Opačić-Čanica, 197–98.

39 Murko, 61.

40 Murko, 191.

41 Murko, 62.

42 Žanić, 67.

43 As quoted in Ivan Čolović, *Bordel ratnika*, 3rd edition (Belgrade: XXth vek, 2000), 35. All names, except of course Slobodan Milošević, are of legendary Serbian heroes who died during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

44 As quoted ibid., 36–37. Čista Provo is a small town in Croatia. Tomislav is believed to have been the first Croatian king, crowned allegedly in 925. Petar Zrinski and Fran Krsto Frankopan are two Croatian nobles executed on the orders of the Habsburg emperor Leopold in 1671. Josip Jelačić was a governor of Civil Croatia and Slavonia in the middle of the nineteenth century.

45 As quoted in Arnold Hauser, *Filozofija povijesti umjetnosti* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1963), 204.


48 Ibid., 39.

49 Ibid., 36.

50 Ibid., 36.


52 Žanić, 313.


55 For the content and importance of this work, see the article by Andrew B. Wachtel in this volume.


58 Boštović-Stulli, *Pjesme, priče, fantastika*, 201.

59 The collection referred to is *Plameni cvjetovi: Narodne pjesme o borbi i revoluciji*, ed. Tvrtko Ćubelić, Svetozar Petrović and Grigor Vitez (Zagreb: Mladost, 1961).


62 Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, Institute for Ethnology and Folklore in Zagreb, personal conversation.

63 Dizdar, 141.

64 Zanić, 65.


66 Krajina, 137–38.

67 Kordun is a part of Croatia where a great number of the Croatian Serbs lived. The area experienced some of the worst Ustaša pogroms in the Second World War. The quotation is from the song “Crni Đurđevdan,” in *Narodne pjesme Korduna*, 268.

68 *Topos* (from the Greek word *tópos* for “a place”) denotes in literary theory a conventional formula.

69 “Crni Đurđevdan,” in *Narodne pjesme Korduna*, 269.


71 “Crni Đurđevdan,” in *Narodne pjesme Korduna*, 269–70. Radić is in general a positive hero in the poems, while the same cannot be said about his successor, Vladko Maček.

72 This pertains especially for the poems from the Serb-populated areas of Croatia that were composed by the Serbian folk singer.


76 “Ustanak na Romaniji,” in Orahovac, 21.

77 Žanić, 204–25.

78 “Ustanak na Romaniji,” in Orahovac, 21.

79 “Pjesma partizanske omladine,” in Orahovac, 188.


82 Ibid., 114.

83 “Bukilića majka,” ibid., 110.

84 “Zašto narod tol’ke suze lije,” ibid., 88.
89 Bošković-Stulli, “Narodna poezija naše oslobodilačke borbe,” 414.
94 Ibid., 283.
95 Murko, 267.
100 “Ustanak na Romaniji,” in Orahovac, *Narodne pjesme bunta i otpora*, 22.