

*In the silence of the media, Europe plays its future*

***Bosnia, the time of the law***

*Six years have not been enough to redeem the shame of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Yet something has changed in Bosnia. Among many contradictions of European system, so weak as cynical, the rule of law, democracy, slowly advances. A dramatic reminder of the ethic of responsibility.*

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If every city has its own mean of transport, Sarajevo is a tram city. A long, narrow circuit that follows the river and stretches its rails on the large, bright boulevard, become the "sniper boulevard" during the war. The tram has the right pace, the nice balance between Levantine laziness and Middle European efficiency, always crowded but never hostile, as, instead, some cars peeled out for no reason on the lanes of "Selimovic" road, which then becomes "Marshal Tito" . The military columns of the SFOR constantly reminds the normal abnormality of Bosnia almost seven years after the dirty Dayton peace. Normal abnormality. Bosnia is a complicated puzzle, where the monster is always lurking behind the innocent facade. The uncovered mirror of our contemporary civilization, so tremendous as we have looked the other way. In Sarajevo you do not perceive it (just for the military presence, and some rare buildings to rebuilt). No more yellow lines to delimit the mined areas in the gardens of the apartment blocks, no more signs on street corners signaling the presence of snipers, no more sandbags protecting basements, no more grenade signs and bullet holes on walls. And they glazed every window, virtually non-existent in 1996, a few months after the end of a war considered by many people as an authentic "city killing" the premeditated and wild destruction of the city and its spirit (peaceful coexistence, the meaning of the "polis").

"We do not know why the war started, we do not know why the peace came": this was the prevailing attitude in Sarajevo and throughout Bosnia, after the war. Neither anger nor excitement, only a painful surprise, a general sense of frustration and the desire for normality, to rediscover the spirit of good old times, maybe the most traditional attitude of Bosnian, masterfully described by Ivo Andric, 1961 Nobel Prize, in his masterpiece, "The Bridge on the Drina". A normality heroically lived in Sarajevo during the three-year siege, a precise defense of its ancient urban civilization, the "*genius loci*" (spirit of the place) building up generation after generation. The spirit of Sarajevo refused to surrender to the barbarism and eventually won his battle against everything and everyone. But Bosnia, unfortunately, is not just Sarajevo. Bosnia is also Mostar, a city still divided into two (between Catholics and Muslims, or, more correctly, between Croats and Bosnians), awaiting the reconstruction of "Stari Most", the old bridge, as a symbol of reconciliation yet to come (and Italy will be the first country to sponsor the work). Bosnia is also and above all Srebrenica, a name which must remain imprinted in the memory of contemporary Europe more than any other, just as Auschwitz marked the project of modern Europe (which is against all racism, fascism and totalitarianism). Srebrenica is the "silver town", a small mining town not far from the Drina, where Muslims (the majority) and Serbs (the minority) have always coexisted. Seven years ago, in four days (11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1995), the Bosnian Serb troops led by General Ratko Mladic massacred eight thousand Muslims under the eyes of the UN contingent, a Dutch battalion, which provided even the gas to transport the victims to the mass graves (Bianca Jagger, "The European", 1995). The "green light" of that operation was given indirectly by French General Bernard Janvier, militarily, and politically by many other Pontius Pilate of the time: primarily Japanese Yasushi Akashi, and with the exception of Polish Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who, disgusted, resigned. The war in former Yugoslavia came to an end, the divider logic had won, it was to complete the "ethnic cleansing" before the peace agreements (Dayton, December 1995).

Srebrenica today looks like a ghost town. It is awful, anonymous, abandoned, and it still stinks of

death. In the surrounding countryside the signatures of terror stand out even now: the name of the commander Arkan, the symbol of the four "S" (which look like four "C" in Cyrillic) on the walls of a destroyed school (they built the new one nearby): Samo Sloga Srbina Spas, "only unity saves the Serb".

The street welcoming some of the returned Muslim refugees (a small minority here in Srebrenica) is named after Radovan Karadzic, the former psychiatrist who became the leader of Bosnian Serbs, currently wanted for genocide by Hague Tribunal. Husband and wife Halilovic, fled from Srebrenica in 1992, found their home in good condition, because the neighbor (from Serbia) was always interested in the apartment, and favored the transaction with the occupant, from Serbia too, who had lost his home in Sarajevo. "We're not afraid now – they say – because soldiers, who occupied the city, came from outside, and now they are no longer here." They know that many of them were killed, "they went the way of Arkan."

In this little story there is already a key to understanding the conflict and the following peace. A mysterious war and a messy peace, both almost incomprehensible, because product of Machiavellian cunning, a mountain of lies, deceptions and mystifications. The first and most powerful one is that it was a war of peoples, a series of national claims resulted in violence and typically Balkan ethnic, almost irredeemable, hatred. One of the journalists who followed more closely the entire evolution of the Yugoslav tragedy, Paolo Rumiz, dissects the theory of ethnic and national wars in his book, "Masks for a massacre", explaining with extraordinary lucidity how the media hoax was essential in the concatenation of events, and how this diabolical premeditated machination found a clear confirmation in our television culture. "The aggressors of Bosnia - writes Rumiz - understood in advance that our voyeuristic television was equivalent to perfect blindness" and again: "The Balkans were an impressive detector of our weakness in the political, informational, intellectual field".

What, in essence, were we supposed to see and we did not see? That the war in Yugoslavia was not a real war and less than ever a war of peoples, but a gigantic, heinous criminal operation at expense of the civilian population, largely created by the Yugoslav leadership, by its intelligence services and by the Balkan mafia and even beyond, acted by a manpower of vulgar bandits, ruthless murderers and fanatic crooks, unfortunately aided by the passivity of most of the population (manipulated by the propaganda of the regime), and by the cynicism and incompetence or the complicity of the so-called "international community". The ideological disputes (the communist Serbia against the fascist Croatia, for example), the ethnic one (the wealthy Northerner Slovenes and Croats, for example, against the poor Southerner Serbs and Montenegrins), or even a religious one (Catholics against Orthodox Christians or against Muslims) were only the irrational instruments used by the most rational criminal power to create a situation of "permanent war" within and to confuse outside.

Only war, in fact, could allow the survival of a ruling class (the communist Yugoslav one) rotten to the marrow, and the stratospheric enrichment of a "new" oligarchy (the one of the robbery capitalism, once blessed by the West), thrived in the four fat years of the conflict. Only war allows everyone to feel innocent, and to confuse the perpetrators and the victims. Killers become patriots, fanatics heroes, leaders of Mafia presidents of republic, the cynical international political leaders great peacemakers. The ethnic group becomes a guilt: "it is the fault of Serbs", "it is the fault of Croatians", "they are Balkans, they have always killed each other". It is the grotesque accusation that the victims do to each other, as in the wonderful film "No Man's Land", by continuing to make the game of the more or less hidden manipulators, who seem enemies, but they are actually allies in the crime. So were the two main protagonists of the war, Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic, but also those that have appeared in minor roles, like the ineffable Slovenian President Kucan and the Bosnian Izetbegovic. For the avoidance of doubt, all Yugoslav nomenclature (although Tudjman had lived a dozen years in prison under Tito), to do justice to another cliché passed for truth: at the time of Tito everything went well, others have broken Federal Yugoslav dream. In fact, it is under the dictatorship of Tito that the mechanism to "backwards selection" of the ruling class started

(army, police, judiciary, economic administrators and political leaders), and continued the mental castration of people who go on, virtually nonstop, since the dawn of time.

Therefore, leaders who wanted to become "Founding Fathers" were, more or less, recycled communists, without a shred of ideology and unscrupulous, so perfect to make the big leap into the soulless capitalism that dominates the West. No coincidence that their acolytes quietly mingled religious symbols and every kind of national call (from Nazi-Fascism of Ustashas for Croatian to the reactionary monarchy of Chetniks for the Serbs), spreading hatred and fear necessary for their dirty business.

The war in the former Yugoslavia has never had a military logic. The line of the "front" was incredibly able to wind for 2,800 kilometers, in a crazy maze of besieged enclaves, so-called autonomous republics, protected areas and vital corridors (the areas, occupied by the Serbs in Bosnia, were subtly linked to Brcko, and they could be cut in two at any time). The bombing on the Dalmatian coast had no military target: on the other hand, the blind fury of Serb artillery allowed Erzegovesi mafia, which represented most of the Zagreb government, with the funding from the Croatian diaspora, to take possession of the finest houses and most of the tourist facilities dirt cheap.

In defiance of sieges and international sanctions, never, at any time, goods, weapons, oil and capital have stopped running from one end to the other of the orgy of black market and stolen goods (the spoils of war). A perfect metaphor for globalization. Cypriot banks, protected accounts in Switzerland, Slovenia's casinos, American televisions, oil from Russia, cigarettes and alcohol from Albania and Montenegro (the "Philip Morris Republic"), Japanese technology, Italian clothing, German currency. The famous "international community".

The war in Yugoslavia could only end by exhaustion, and so was it. The bluff of Croatian offensive (almost non-existent from a military standpoint, but terrible for the consequences for civilians) had to allow all players to withdraw well: Tadjman redeemed the "defeat" of 1991; Milosevic could make a honorable retreat in the face of American power (and of ridiculous NATO bombing); Arkan and many others like him already enjoyed themselves as millionaires in their luxurious residences in Belgrade, Pale, Dalmatia. In Bosnia it was to well manage the business of reconstruction, with a plethora of criminals to divide the thousand chairs of the monstrous political structure as the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was (and is): two entities (the Muslim-Croat federation and the Republika Srpska), three presidents in rotation, four levels of government, eight hundred "ministers" (if one includes also the cantons), with a population of three million people (a half million had fled to other countries) and one million mines scattered over a line of a thousand miles. No one could rejoice at such a peace, which rewarded the perpetrators and humiliated the victims, namely the Serbs, Croats and Bosnian. And among the victims, those who had less responsibility than everyone, were inflicted more serious wounds: Muslims. "(...) In exile, in the grave / careless like a child / leave, fall / Muslims of Bosnia", complains the poet Abdulah Sidran in his elegy . It is around them, with great difficulty, that the idea of Bosnia did not die completely. The idea that a unitary secular state, where one is only Bosnian and nothing else. Where religion, which often means just be called Ismet or Fatima, is not reduced to ethnic element, as it was incredibly accepted by our pundits of realpolitik, the same people who today would like to convince us that Bosnia has become an outpost of Al Qaeda, the new cradle of Islamic fundamentalism in Europe. A ridiculous and scandalous idea. If the presence of Islamic countries has been increasing, it is primarily because in many cases they were the only ones wanting to help Bosnian (for example, in the reconstruction of the glorious "Oslobodjenje", independent daily newspaper in Sarajevo, which has continued to be published during the siege, only a Saudi bank accepted the request for funding). In Sarajevo and its environs women do not wander with chador, with few exceptions, the customs and traditions are those of any other European city, except for the harmonious lines of the many mosques and the voice of the muezzin calling to prayer. "If there are terrorists, they must arrest them - says Mr. Pekaric, director of the Islamic humanitarian organization "Merhamet"- we help everyone who needs it, without any distinction. We work with Caritas, and among our most generous donors there is the German Caritas".

Once again, the divisions decided by hatred strategists are denied by the people. Once again, unfortunately, civil society must try to make up for the terrible political vacuum. But even the humanitarian sector has enormous contradictions and outrageous amnesia (when it lends itself to play dirty with politics). More than five hundred UN agencies, NGOs, religious bodies, foundations, various institutions are not able to heal the breakdown of war. A jungle of acronyms, which often hides the total emptiness, humanitarian professionals sometimes in competition with each other and still unable to express a coherent line. In some cases their tasks go largely beyond their strength. It is not clear, for example, why more than twenty thousand cases of "missing person" (officially reported), people swallowed by the barbarity, are entrusted to the good offices of the International Red Cross, which certainly can have access to the corpses in war time for its neutrality, but it is unclear how it can perform this mandate. It is difficult, after all that we saw, not think about the desire to remove all responsibility, clear the past, accept the status quo and hope in the power of inertia. It was the great temptation of European diplomacy, and probably also the reason why the lights of the media were turned off in the former Yugoslavia in general and particularly in Bosnia. The war becomes a fatality (or a necessity, according to convenience), the fault is of the spirit of the Balkans, the responsibilities of no one. They start again as if nothing had happened, business as usual.

For this reason the early years of peace were depressing. Good results only in the physical reconstruction (and certainly good business for some people), with everything else they got by. Nothing seemed to budge, and people, probably noticing the lack of a strong and clear political will, responded with distrust and pessimism: who was abroad not even dreamed to go back, who remained sought refuge in second homelands (Croats in Croatia, Serbs in Serbia). The vote confirmed nationalist parties (SDA Muslims, HDZ Croats and Serbs SDS), fueling the pessimism and the resignation to the divider logic. But then the wind began to change. Slowly, with great difficulty, but stubbornly, another line established itself. There are many factors that affected on it, even some mysterious ones (or perhaps we should say "providential"). The rationality and effectiveness of the evil seem to be significantly higher in the short term. Yet "The devil teaches us his tricks but not how to hide them". Slowly, the internal settling of scores started. A real slaughter. When a police commander and Vice Minister of the Interior (the Serb Radovan Stojicic-Badza) is killed in an Italian restaurant in Belgrade by a barrage of gunfire while he brings a briefcase full of 700 thousand marks in cash, you understand better that the Yugoslav politics is a war of gangs. Killed Arkan, murdered Djordjevic and Gojak, two senior members of the notorious "Tigers", the Serb death squads. Murdered Caldovic Centa, Serb boss in Germany, eliminated Kovacevic, a friend of Milosevic's son, gunned down Todorovic, king of the oil (see again "Masks for a massacre" Rumiz). But the gangs are not the only ones that don't close with the past. The Hague tribunal begins to make gradually more and more excellent arrests. Austrian Wolfgang Petric arrives in Sarajevo, as High Representative of the international community, the highest office in Bosnia. It is clear that Bosnia is still now like a protectorate, and the High Representative has enormous powers. But Petric's predecessors have left no trace. It is easy to live off one's wealth, to work as bureaucrats or the "Viceroy of the Indies" (scornful definition of an American teacher of the High representative). It is harder to have a political will and above all take the blame. Petric does. He immediately understands that the key issue is the one of refugees. A matter of pure principle, blatantly contradicted by facts: the areas of Bosnia are now "homogeneous" for ethnic groups, as expected from the early years of the war by international diplomacy (for example, the Vance-Owen plan). The message that three peoples can not live together was spread because we know (even if officially it is not said), the Balkans are genetically designed to kill each other. Just the message the warlords and their henchmen, the only real killers, have hidden behind.

The right of everyone to return, ratified in Dayton, seemed to be a sop thrown to the usual idealist. Pure rhetoric, typical of Western hypocrisy. In the early years it was the case. But Petric seems to know that an Europe that legitimizes the principle of "ethnic purity" is not even worthy to be born. A community of bankers that hides Srebrenica is a shame that we can bring along for generations:

and stability based on massacres will always be a false stability, as well as a peace without justice will always be a half peace, a peace at risk. The High Representative has two good allies: the SFOR troops, with Italians ahead, which slowly redeems the branded Unprofor cowardice, and especially the High Commissioner for Refugees, largely the toughest of the UN agencies in Bosnia, as far as we see. Udo Janz, UNHCR Executive Chairman, rattles off data, not just good intentions: "From 1999 on, over 220 thousand people came back home in places where their ethnic group is a minority. By the end of the year about one hundred thousand others will be added. We can therefore say that we are halfway as far as the number of displaced persons, and a third as number of refugees. We have still to do a lot, however these are concrete results. You should also consider that not everyone wants to come back, and that at least half of refugees have chosen to live abroad (about 650 thousand in a million 400 thousand who were abroad at the end of war)". The issue of refugees and internal displaced persons is extremely complicated, because it is linked to the restoration of legal ownership or the physical reconstruction of their homes. "Too many people still live in collective centers in poor condition," says René Knupfer, program director of the UNHCR.

Things are proceeding slowly, but they are proceeding. And the more people regain confidence, the more extremist and nationalist parties lose ground. They already became opposition. The crucial appointment is parliamentary elections in October: the chosen government will be the first to stay in office for four years. It must make a constitutional reform, continue the renewal of judiciary and the security force. A huge task, but not impossible. Especially if the true Bosnian spirit prevails, which is the true European spirit. Ivo Andric, the great Bosnian writer, knew it well. And he knew, just as the inhabitants of Visegrad, the protagonists of his history, "that life is a unfathomable miracle, because it outwears incessantly, but it lasts and is strong like the bridge on the Drina".

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