

# Truth and Reconciliation Are Not What We Really Need

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The question seems to be simply rhetorical: now, after the war, is the process of confronting the truth and working toward reconciliation what the peoples of the former Yugoslavia most need? After ten years of violence and destruction, after, as we hope, they have finally gotten tired of hatred and mutual humiliation, what else should they want more? What could be more important to them than to face up to their recent past, to exhume the mass graves, and to examine the responsibility not only for the crimes they committed but for those they incited or tacitly agreed to? The process will certainly be long and painful, but do these peoples have any alternative if they really want to live in peace with each other? Only an overall process of reconciliation among individuals and peoples in the region can bring about the stability that is the precondition for necessary democratic reforms and economic achievement, and that alone could enable the societies of the former Yugoslavia to complete the transition from the totalitarian past toward a modern liberal democracy. If we believe that the Yugoslav tragedy can still have a happy outcome, the process of truth and reconciliation seems to be the only comprehensible way to achieve it.

Unfortunately, the real state of affairs looks neither as simple nor as promising. First, the war seems not yet to be over. As we gather here in Delhi in May 2001, there is fighting in Macedonia. The clashes between Macedonian forces and Albanian rebels that suddenly flared up two months ago resumed last week. The international public was astonished; no one expected this — at least no one outside the region. After the successful NATO military intervention in 1999, Macedonia and the whole region around Kosovo was thought to be completely under control, both politically and militarily. But the fighting happened anyway. The war broke out again, despite an excessive military presence, massive political and economical support, and — perhaps worst of all — the more than ten years of experience that the so-called international community has now had with political conflict and war in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia.

We already have the evidence, it seems, to say openly that the West's engagement in the Balkans has suffered a shameful defeat. Of course it is not the West's military, economic, and intelligence powers that have failed; the debacle is in the first place political. What has been defeated is the developed, democratic, Western political mind, which has failed to deal with the political challenge of the Yugoslav crisis from its very beginning until the present moment. So we must ask: what has caused this political fiasco?

## Free and Independent Illusion

First let us go back to the recent events in Macedonia. This eruption of violence was no less predictable than the outbreak of war in Slovenia ten years ago, and the beginning of the violent dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The international community was well aware how dangerous the tensions between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians were, and what incalculable consequences another Balkan war might have. Moreover, it even tried to intervene in the crisis to prevent catastrophe.

If we must choose a practical example that both typifies how the modern democratic West deals with dangerous political conflicts around the world and illustrates the inherent logic of its political failure, let me suggest the following one: shortly after the Kosovo war, the *Financial Times* reported on a joint project that the creators of the famous American television series *Sesame Street* and *The Muppets* had started with Macedonian television. The idea was to produce a forty-show TV series for

children telling the story of two families, one Macedonian and one Albanian (a third of the Macedonian population is Albanian), who live in a so-called "mixed neighborhood." The series was to be geared toward ten-year-olds. The project was organized by an American nongovernmental organization called Search for Common Ground, and its goal was "conflict prevention" and, to quote the *Financial Times*, "to tackle two of the root causes of ethnic conflict in Southeast Europe: segregated education and partisan media."<sup>1</sup>

For many of those who are acquainted to some extent with the political and historical reality of the former Yugoslavia, the statement is strange in itself. Neither of the causes it identifies as the roots of ethnic conflict in the region is correct. The worst cases of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia happened precisely where "segregated education" is unheard of, notably in Bosnia. Bad educational practice is by no means the cause of violent conflicts and ethnic cleansing. Nor are the so-called partisan media: although it is certainly true that many newspapers, magazines, and especially television and radio stations have been directly controlled by the state, there have also been independent media in the region since the very beginning of the 1990s and even earlier, during the last days of communist rule. The media have enough freedom to provide objective information and to generate a relatively independent public space. Even the country recently considered the worst dictatorship in post-1989 Europe, that is, the Serbia of Slobodan Milosevic, never suspended the basic freedom of the press. On the contrary! According to a report on the independent media in Yugoslavia published shortly before the NATO intervention began, there were in Serbia half a dozen independent dailies, several weeklies, three independent news agencies, more than forty independent local newspapers and journals, more than fifty independent radio and television stations together reaching about 70 percent of the country's territory, two associations of independent journalists, and an independent international press center.<sup>2</sup> Many a Western democracy could only envy Serbia its wealth of independent media.

A lack of information has never been the problem in the former Yugoslavia. The public was quite well informed — for instance, about the war crimes committed in its name. Yet this never had the consequences a democratic public usually expects. Let me take an example from Croatia. As early as 1994, an independent weekly published all the relevant facts about a war crime in which a Croatian paramilitary unit in Zagreb had brutally murdered an entire Serbian family, including a twelve-year-old girl. The magazine even published the complete confessions of the perpetrators, down to the smallest detail.<sup>3</sup> Yet solely on the basis of a minor error in legal procedure, the murderers were set free and lived happily ever after, neither persecuted by the law nor disturbed by the moral feelings of their countrymen.

Let us agree for the moment: everyone who was really interested in what was happening in the war had the opportunity to know it. The real mystery, though, was not the facts of the war crimes themselves — of who was killing and torturing whom, and how — but rather the political circumstances that made these crimes possible. No one had to wait for the mass graves to be exhumed to know where the 8,000 Muslim men who disappeared from Srebrenica in the summer of 1995 were dumped, and who deserved the blame. Europe's worst war atrocity since World War II happened under the eyes of an international public. More: it happened under the protection of United Nations forces. The scene of the crime, the perpetrators and the victims, were completely exposed to the public. What we had been in the dark about, though, was the backstage interplay of political deals and power arrangements made either between the parties to the conflict or between them and the political representatives of the international community. This includes the whole range of actively and passively involved international political agents in the Yugoslav wars, their historical and ideological blindness, and their particular political interests. What was really obscured was the question of the political responsibility for the violent dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and all the crimes that accompanied this political tragedy. It is the political truth of the war that still waits to be disclosed, not the factual record of the crime or its moral and psychological consequences.

One aspect of the international community's blindness toward the Yugoslav political crisis and wars has to do with the extraordinary belief in the power of the so-called free and independent media. The media were thought to play a decisive role in the political reality of the postcommunist countries, especially in cases where democratic development was endangered by nationalistic conflict and revived totalitarian tendencies. It seemed to be expected that free media could correct the mistakes of young democracies and prevent their regression into dictatorship or violence, in short, could protect democracy from its enemies and show it the way to the safe haven of political stability, economic growth, and cultural progress. Yet concrete political realities never confirmed this expectation. As political events ran their course, no "free and independent media," whatever the truth they exposed, could have changed it. Many examples from the former Yugoslavia demonstrate this.

What lies hidden in this problem is an old assumption that when people get accurate information, when they hear "the truth," they will change their opinions and undertake collective action against social evil, aiming to change the existing social and political reality. In the Yugoslav case this would have meant that, having been properly informed of "the truth," they would have opposed nationalist manipulation, overthrown the evil dictatorship, restored democracy, urged their legal institutions to prosecute war criminals, and established a democratic procedure to call to account all those who had been politically responsible for these terrible crimes. But this idea obstinately overestimates the political effectiveness of the "free and independent media." The fetishism of information on which it is based typifies both the bourgeois understanding of the political role of the media in modern democracies and the leftist concept of the counterculture, as reflected in numerous alternative media projects and massively applied in the political struggles of new social movements, especially during the period of their formation in the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Even then, critics recognized the problem that some information will only be received, people will only perceive it as truth or lie, if they also have the opportunity to actively change the social and political situation it concerns. Otherwise the realism of the media's reporting won't matter.<sup>5</sup> The information will be ignored. The decisive issue, then, is not so much freedom of information as the freedom of articulating — ideologically as well as practically — alternative political options that could challenge existing conditions. People are not oblivious to the horrible reality around them because they lack information about it. No information, however true, will make politically aware subjects of democratic change out of passive masses. Rather, it is the political subject who generates the truth of necessary political change out of neutral information. We already know enough; the problem is that our knowledge has no political consequences. Why, then, has this concept of the crucial political role of the media, although credibly criticized in theory and never proven in reality, become one of the anchoring elements of the Western strategy in the Yugoslav drama?

## **Kiss of Truth**

The first idea that occurs to us is that the real objective of this belief in media is to generate some sort of ideological interpellation. The relentless insistence on the importance of "free and independent media" in a situation of nationalist hatred, ethnic conflict, populist mobilization of the masses, severe violations of human rights, and ultimately war — the case in most parts of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s — actually functions for the West as its call for the healthy forces of democracy. Those who perceive the information delivered by the "free and independent media" as the truth of their social, political, and moral reality, the truth kept hidden by the other, lying (biased, partisan, or state-controlled) media, see themselves as the addressees of the imposed democratic mandate, the historic mission, the struggle for democracy. By opening their eyes to the facts and finally seeing reality as it is, they simultaneously cast themselves as the subjects of democratic change. Beyond any kind of manipulation, they freely and rationally decide to vote for democrats over dictators, to choose peace over war, to abandon the totalitarian idea of dominating ethnic and other minorities, and so forth. Actually, what else could they have chosen?

Yet the kiss of the truth-telling media has never awoken the sleeping beauty of democracy into real political life. The masses of the former Yugoslavia have never identified with the call of the democratic West. The interpellation has failed. While the free and independent media were delivering their truths, the ethnic cleansing continued until it had reached its goals, and the führers retained their support until they died or lost their last battle. The masses kept protecting their war criminals until the pressure from outside finally became unbearable and threatened to destroy the very basis of their economic and political survival. Even the recent changes of regime in Croatia and Serbia, celebrated in the West as the final victory of democracy in the Balkans, were nothing but continuations of the same old opportunism that had in fact been the most reliable resource of nationalist politics. These changes have brought to power precisely those political forces whose active and passive support made nationalist rule possible, with all its tragic consequences, and who have always been blind and deaf to the truth delivered by the so-called free and independent media.

One is accordingly justified in asking, what, then, is the ultimate effect of this truth? It has obviously functioned as an agency of interpellation, but this interpellation has failed; it has never produced the political subject of democratic change. If some democratic change in the former Yugoslavia has nevertheless taken place, the truth we are discussing here was surely not among its motivations. Was this truth only an illusion, then? Yes, an illusion, though a necessary one — but the question is for whom. Certainly not for the masses in the former Yugoslavia. For them, this illusion — the truth of the political reality they had been facing in the mirror of their free media — was of no political importance whatsoever. The real effects of this illusion must be found in the democratic West, the proper place of its use. The purpose of this illusion projected on the Balkans, the illusion of the extraordinary political importance of the objective truth, was to support the political reality of the existing Western democracies.

The common belief that truth can liberate people from the chains of political manipulation to which they are supposedly exposed by their nondemocratic rulers, and by the media those rulers control, is a misunderstanding. The fact that this liberation, as we have seen, never took place in the former Yugoslavia does not make this belief dispensable; it still provides a plausible explanation of why people voluntarily support nondemocratic politics, why they vote for populist mass leaders instead of for proven democrats: namely, because they lack the truth. If only they had known the truth, we say, they would never have made the wrong choice. In its final effect, this belief makes out of the people — always imagined in democracies as mature political beings who are responsible for their decisions — a mass of passive, manipulable objects, the innocent victims of political seduction. What has been constructed here is an illusion of primal innocence as the zero level of political community. Every time the democratic system crashes upon some inexplicable internal error, that illusion makes possible a kind of political "restart."

The fantasy of primal innocence supports the reality of the modern democratic order in its most vital element. It alone enables the democratic system to rebuild its subjective precondition, popular sovereignty, after that sovereignty has been regressively dissolved in some kind of antidemocratic, mostly nationalist politics. There is always some innocent *demos* to be recalled behind the mob, and there is accordingly no democracy that could not restore itself out of its deepest regression. "We the people!" the famous call to action that constitutes the horizon of democratic politics, still functions today only if it can be instantaneously translated into "We the innocent victims!" For it is only on the ground of the victim's passivity that the political subject of modern democracy can be reactivated and recast in the role of an agent of democratic change. We are inclined, for instance, to forget that NATO bombed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 in the name not only of the hundreds of thousands of Albanian refugees who were victims of Serbian terror but of the Serbian people whom the international community recognized as innocent victims of Milosevics manipulation. They were bombed precisely because of their innocence. It is the cause of the universal victim that makes the ultimate difference between war in a traditional sense and its new form, now called "humanitarian intervention."

But the fantasy of primal innocence supports our postmodern democratic reality in one more important way: it suggests that all the antagonisms conceivable in a democratic society can ultimately be represented by the relation between victims and perpetrators, which should be imagined as the only still-visible residue of the antagonistic character of the social totality. This decides, in a critical way, how a society constructs the field of politics. For the only social space in which we are now supposed to experience the real effects of social antagonism is the court, not the political arena. The truth of social antagonism no longer emerges out of collective political action but rather through a juridical procedure along the relation between victims and perpetrators. It is a juridical truth, not a political one. It does not disclose the complexity of power relations in the society, pointing at some social injustice and urging a political action to change it. On the contrary, by focusing on what has been acted out between victim and perpetrator, the truth of social antagonism mystifies social relations and obscures interests of power and domination. It will probably reveal the truth of how hatred has been made in a community, but will never ask how that community has been made out of hatred. And maybe the most important point here is: it presupposes an instance — the court — that remains neutral to the whole issue. This is the instance that makes the truth possible without being itself in any way involved in it. In this way, even the clearest and the most fully verified juridical truth may well turn out to be a dangerous political lie.

Let us take the example of the international tribunal in The Hague that has been given the task of prosecuting the war criminals of the former Yugoslavia. No doubt we can expect the tribunal to disclose the truth of these men's crimes as far as that is possible to do, and to punish, after fair trials, those who committed them or are in the juridical sense responsible for them. The tribunal will also give the victims an opportunity to have their stories heard. The international pressure put on the regimes in the region to arrest and extradite their culprits has already had positive political effects. But what will happen to the question of political responsibility for the Yugoslav wars, which is obviously shared by both the political agents on the ground and the international community that has organized the tribunal in The Hague? What if this tribunal primarily serves the democratic West as an escape from its own political trauma — the fact that it never found proper answers to the political challenge of Yugoslavia's violent disintegration? Will the tribunal enable the West to avoid facing the Yugoslav conflicts as a moment of its *own* political crisis, or give it a chance to maintain the illusion that social antagonisms can always be resolved in the courts? What if the tribunal is not a revolutionary act of global politics but just another means of an overall depoliticization? By treating the Yugoslav wars primarily as a criminal case, we are obviously running the risk of suppressing its political truth.

From Hannah Arendt we have learned that a curious relationship between truth and lie in politics does not have much to do with facts.<sup>6</sup> Since politics is a matter of a human action whose characteristic is that it can always change existing conditions and begin something new, a deliberate denial of factual truths is an inherent part of political activity. Facts in politics are never compellingly true. This means that the political truth of some historical event can only be grasped if the people involved in it have been recognized as political beings — that is, recognized in their ability to act and to change the existing reality.

Humans are political beings inasmuch as they can imagine that things might as easily be different as be what they actually are — inasmuch as they have the freedom to change the world and to start something new in it.<sup>7</sup> Otherwise they are passive marionettes of history, whether as its victims or — in the role of perpetrators — as its outlaws.

## Children of Transition

If the historical framework of the Yugoslav political tragedy has a name, it is surely the notion of transition. The concept of transition was invented by political scientists in the late 1960s and early '70s

to explain various contemporary cases of regime change in South America and Southern Europe.<sup>8</sup> In its early phase, the theory emphasized uncertainty and unpredictability as the main features of politics, and attached much more importance to the actions of political actors than to various objective factors determining the particular historical situation. It was precisely the so-called subjective side of politics that most interested the early "transitologists." They considered the outcome of a transitional process completely open. Transition out of an authoritarian regime, they saw, could lead equally to the instauration of democracy or to the restoration of a new and possibly more severe form of authoritarian rule. A military junta in South America could undergo a transition not just to a Western type of democracy but to a socialist type of democracy, like Salvador Allende's Chile. Even a kind of Maoist dictatorship was at the time conceivable as well.

The revolution in Eastern Europe in 1989 radically changed the discourse of transition. The rapid and unexpected collapse of communism so surprised the transitologists that they had to modify their theory: now a set of objective factors made every outcome of the transition not only predictable but completely predetermined. To arrive at democracy was now simply to follow a set of external factors, whether economic, cultural, or institutional. Sometimes it was enough to follow geography, for "geography is indeed the single reason to hope that East European countries will follow the path to democracy and prosperity."<sup>9</sup> Other transitologists went a step further in their deterministic views: it was ultimately nature itself that decided the necessarily democratic outcome of transition, for democracy was "a natural tendency and therefore not difficult to achieve."<sup>10</sup> One of them even based his theory of democratization on the Darwinian theory of evolution by natural selection.<sup>11</sup> The main characteristic of the concept of transition after 1989 is historical determinism. Post-1989 transition theorists believe in a universal historical trend that inevitably leads societies in a backward phase of authoritarianism on to the developed phase of liberal democracy.

For the so-called children of communism such ideas are not unfamiliar. The system that collapsed in 1989 was strictly speaking not communism but socialism, a type of society in transition from capitalism to the classless society of communism. In that sense 1989 brought no essential change in the historical position of the masses; one type of transition was simply replaced by another. Instead of an iron law of historical progress based on the universal notion of class struggle, a law reflecting the necessity of the disintegration of capitalism and the passage to communism, we got after 1989 a universal trend of history leading every postcommunist society necessarily from totalitarianism to democracy.

How this concept of transition really works in a practical situation is shown to us, for instance, by the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe.<sup>12</sup> The international community worked out this pact in 1999, after the Kosovo war, in a final attempt to pacify the whole region and to integrate it into the European Union. If the countries in the region wanted to make any progress toward "European integration," they had to fulfill a double criterion of democracy and economic achievement established by the declaration of the Stability Pact. First they had to introduce a free-market economy. Such an economy does not work, however, without social and legal stability and appropriate institutional arrangements, which in turn cannot function unless supported by democratic political institutions and activities. Then of course traditional parliamentary politics alone cannot provide the security needed for normal economic development; they must be controlled and moderated by an appropriate public sphere. And there is no genuine public sphere without free media and a strong civil society, which does not function well until a democratic political culture is developed.

Since every country in the region had already introduced a free-market economy, had long ago institutionalized parliamentary democracy, and already had a functioning public sphere generated by free and independent media, the problem of their transition to democracy and integration into the European Union appeared to be ultimately cultural. Accordingly the task of the transitional project is predominantly educational. The peoples of the region must be educated in order to be able to use their preexisting democratic institutions and to follow the democratic will of their enlightened po-

litical elites. Transition means ultimately nothing but an endless process of education. A number of metaphors used in the transitional discourse only confirm this: education for democracy, exams of democracy, classrooms of democracy, democracy that is growing and maturing, and perhaps that might be in diapers, or making its first steps, or, of course, suffering from children's illnesses.<sup>13</sup>

The children of communism have become the children of transition — the world has changed indeed. But the general dependency of the masses on political powers and processes completely alienated from them has not changed. The moment of their maturity, again and again postponed during the communist period, has finally disappeared altogether in the bad infinity of the transitional process.

Where maturity is understood as the goal of an infinite process, the use of this notion serves to extend not "the circle of the mature, but the circle of those who are for the time being declared to be immature."<sup>14</sup> In that sense the process of transition does not automatically extend the space of democratic freedom. On the contrary, it extends the power of so-called objective factors that are completely out of the control of the masses and indefinitely defers the moment of their political maturity.

This regression corresponds with the move from the pre-1989 idea of transition as a contingent political process with an open, unpredetermined outcome to the post-1989, determinist idea of transition in which liberal democracy becomes not just the best possible result of the transitional process but the only natural, the only *possible* aim for all existing societies. What has changed here is not just the transitional paradigm but the very status of politics.

We often say that the East European revolutions of 1989 reinvented democracy, but what they actually reinvented was the political subject of democracy, the famous "we the people" of the democratic revolutions. In a genuine act of self-determination and self-liberation, the peoples of Eastern Europe reinstated the autonomy of the political — the idea that politics, despite its historical conditions, is nevertheless ultimately founded upon itself. In the concept of transition after 1989, there is no place for an autonomy of the political. The truth and reality of politics are not *within itself* in its own activity, but *outside itself* in its external conditions.<sup>15</sup> This in fact resembles the situation under communist rule, where politics was considered to belong to the so-called superstructure: the general direction of history toward communism was decided not by political forces but by the economic sphere. The current concept of transition similarly does not expect politics to bring us to democracy; geography, nature, or simply the universal trend of history will do that instead. This is also the reason why transition no longer needs a genuine political subject.

It would be wrong, however, to say that this transitional road to democracy is without a social agent. That agent is the concept of civil society, which has today become a universal answer to all crises of existing democracies, thanks to the role it played in the struggles against communist and military dictatorships in many parts of the world.<sup>16</sup> In that sense civil society is a genuine transitional concept, not only historically but also essentially. If there is a subject that can push forward democracy today, it should be civil society; if there is a place where democracy can still expand, this again should be the social space occupied by civil society; and if there is some utopian potential we can still imagine in today's democracies, its name is again civil society.

This is the idea behind the Macedonian Muppets project: that the solution of political conflict must be found somewhere within civil society — in the distribution of independent information, say, or in the processes of public education and cultural development. The project is actually very successful; the TV series is very popular among both Macedonians and Albanians. Unfortunately this seems in no way to have influenced the political reality in Macedonia. Whereas both Albanians and Macedonians enjoy the TV program that is supposed to reconcile them, the fighting between Albanian rebels and Macedonian government forces threatens to escalate into a full-scale civil war. No doubt the Mup-

pets will improve cultural life in Macedonia. But as long as this and similar cultural projects are not accompanied by resolute political decisions, they will remain merely a symptom of a political failure by the West in the Balkans.

## No More Auschwitz!

Nothing can replace a political solution — not TV programs for children, not free and independent media. From the very beginning of the Yugoslav crisis, at the end of the 1980s, until the present day, the international community has found no appropriate answer to the political challenge of Yugoslavia's disintegration. It has been disgusted by primitive Balkan nationalism while simultaneously recognizing that movement's political achievements: not only the newly established nation-states but almost all of its other, violently reached goals, including ethnic cleansing. The international community has passively accepted the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia as a kind of historical necessity. It counted the process's victims and to some extent took care of them; it started to prosecute war criminals and, with the fall of Milosevic, even to celebrate the final victory of democracy in the Balkans and the rest of Eastern Europe. Commenting on the political turn in Serbia in October 2000, the German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, remarked, "The last piece of the wall has fallen."

The truth is, unfortunately, that democracy has not won at all. Neither Serbian politicians nor the free democratic world have any idea how to solve, in a democratic way, the problem of the political status of Kosovo; there is still no democratic solution for Bosnia either. A military protectorate in an ethnically cleansed Kosovo ... an all-powerful governor in Bosnia, who can suspend the decisions of a parodic parliament at any moment ... so-called sovereign constitutional states (*Rechtsstaaten*) that cannot prosecute their war criminals on their own ... economies that need ten to fifteen years to reach the level of development they had ten years ago under communism ... a peace grounded only in a military threat from the outside ... and now new fighting in Macedonia. There is no reason for celebration.

The political problems that have arisen out of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia are obviously much greater than the problems that allegedly caused that disintegration. The best example is that of Kosovo: for its future status, the international community has suggested the same political autonomy that it used to have within the former Yugoslavia under Tito's constitution of 1974. Not only does this intention show how far from reality the political mind of the democratic West is, it discloses that mind's profoundly nostalgic streak in dealing with the Yugoslav crisis. To be nostalgic for the former Yugoslavia is quite normal for the real victims of the Yugoslav wars. They have good reason to long for a better past. But why should the modern democracies, after their final victory over totalitarianism, still be politically nostalgic?

Let us remember the pictures of those identified during the war as victims. We saw all those children, women, and old men on the streets of Vukovar, expelled from their destroyed homes by the Yugoslav army and by Serbian paramilitaries in 1991; for years we watched them running for shelter under sniper fire in besieged Sarajevo, and met them again in endless columns leaving Croatia in the summer of 1995. These pictures evoked pity from the international public and induced massive humanitarian aid. The victims of political violence, ethnic cleansing, and war were treated like any other victims of some natural catastrophe or tragic accident. The fact that their tragic fate had something to do with politics was noticed for the first time when a British TV station showed pictures of emaciated figures standing behind barbed wire in the Serbian concentration camp in Trnopolje, in northern Bosnia. "No more Auschwitz!" the international public cried out, and this slogan initiated and symbolized the whole political and military engagement of the West in former Yugoslavia, including the NATO intervention in 1999 and the establishment of the tribunal in The Hague.

It was not the truth, however; it was an analogy — as if the whole political meaning of the Yugoslav breakup and war could be reduced to an already known episode of the common past, and the only political other for democracy today were an old, curiously resurrected, and already defeated fascist

enemy, and any claim to the political dignity of the war's victims were actually derisory. Historical resentment seems to be the main driving force of this approach. The only history that the political mind of the developed democratic West is still able to recognize is a new version of the eternal repetition of the same. Behind its nostalgic longing for a clear, already known — and politically nonchallenging — historical situation is a deep fear of facing something new and unknown.

This is why the people of the former Yugoslavia do not need to establish truth commissions and launch the processes of organized reconciliation. It is an overall depoliticization that they have most been suffering from, and no truth of the past will help them to get rid of it. What they really need is to repoliticize their tragic experience and to seize the suppressed freedom to radically change their miserable reality. They must invent a new form of political solidarity, one that goes beyond their national, ethnic, cultural, and religious identities, if they really want to build new bridges toward each other over the mass graves and ruins. No reconciliation, however deep and thorough, can do that instead. For every reconciliation is finally a reconciliation with the status quo, with the existing power relations and ideological deadlocks that should be the first to be blamed — rather than a few political knaves and war criminals — for the Yugoslav tragedy. None of the victims need such a reconciliation, for it would be nothing but a reconciliation with the historical senselessness of their depoliticized fate.

What victims need most is not to remain mere victims. They need a political cause to be recognized in their tragic fate. It is not humanitarian aid, of whatever sort, from bread to bombs, that can help them; it is only political solidarity — a clear commitment to the cause of their emancipation — that can liberate them from the misery they have been suffering over the last ten years.

*Boris Buden. Truth and Reconciliation Are Not What We Really Need. In: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): Experiments with the Truth. Documenta11\_Platform2. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2002, pp. 56-78.*

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- 13** See Jovic, "Tranzitologija kao ideologija."
- 14** Robert Spaemann, "Autonomie, Mündigkeit, Emanzipation. Zur Ideologisierung von Rechtsbegriffen," in *Kontexte 7* (Stuttgart, Berlin) (1971): 96.
- 15** See Etienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, trans. James Swenson (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. x.
- 16** See Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), chapter 1: "The Contemporary Revival of Civil Society," pp. 29-83.