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**Conspiracy theory in Serbian culture at the time of the Nato
bombing of Yugoslavia**

by

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A doctoral thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

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Abstract

The thesis examines Serbian conspiracy culture at the time of the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999. During the war, conspiratorial themes became a regular occurrence in Serbian mainstream media, as well as in pronouncements by the Serbian political establishment. For the most part, conspiratorial explanations focused on the machinations of transnational elite organisations such as the Bilderberg group or, more generally, on the conspiracy of 'the West'. However, conspiratorial accounts of the war occasionally invoked themes which were previously deemed to be beyond the boundaries of acceptable opinion, such as the allusion to a Jewish conspiracy or to the esoteric and occult aspects of the alleged plot.

The thesis outlines the history of conspiracy theories in Serbia and critically reviews psychological approaches to understanding the nature of conspiracy theories. It suggests that the study of conspiratorial discourse requires the exploration of the rhetorical and argumentative structure of specific conspiratorial explanations, while paying special attention to the historical and ideological context within which these explanations are situated.

The thesis is largely based upon the examination of the coverage of the war in the Serbian press. Recorded conversations with two well known Serbian conspiracy theorists are also analysed. The study suggest that conspiratorial interpretations of the war drew upon a longstanding conspiracy tradition of explanation which has a strong antisemitic legacy and is rooted in right-wing Christian ideology. Analytic chapters explore the discursive and ideological dynamics by which the antisemitic and mystical aspects of the conspiracy tradition emerged briefly in Serbian mainstream media and political discourse. The thesis concludes by examining the status of conspiracy theories in Serbia in the aftermath of the political changes in October 2000.

Key Words: conspiracy theory, Serbia, Yugoslavia, antisemitism, Serbian Orthodox Church, Nikolaj Velimirović,

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The thesis examines Serbian conspiracy culture at the time of the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia. During my first post-bombing visit to Belgrade, in the summer of 1999, I was struck by the readiness of people I spoke to – my friends, their parents, librarians, taxi-drivers or shopkeepers - to invoke the idea of conspiracy when trying to explain the causes of the war with Nato. Even those who had in the past mocked conspiracy theories propagated by the Milošević regime, no longer appeared inclined to do so. To be fair, not everyone I spoke to endorsed the wilder reaches of conspiracy theory. In many cases my collocutors merely acknowledged that the idea of a world plot no longer seemed fanciful and therefore could not be dismissed outright as being beyond the bounds of acceptable opinion.

The visible change in the popular perception of the mechanics of world politics was also visible in the *kind* of conspiracy theories which citizens of Serbia appeared ready to accept. As the thesis will show, around the time of the Nato bombing, a number of conspiratorial themes which used to be confined to the margins - such as the notions of a Jewish conspiracy or the idea of parapsychological mass manipulation – became invoked, spoken about and elaborated as fairly unproblematic, even in the mainstream media.

The present thesis can be seen as an attempt to understand the dynamic behind the broadening of the boundaries of acceptable opinion in Serbian society, the dynamic that turned antisemitic or paranormal conspiratorial explanations into acceptable interpretations of the conflict with Nato. What follows is a brief summary of the forthcoming chapters.

Chapter 2 introduces the notion of conspiracy theory as an ideological tradition. Here it will be suggested that conspiracy theory constitutes a loose pattern of ideas, arguments, beliefs and rhetorical devices, all of which are used to support the idea of a sinister conspiracy, the aim of which is world domination. The chapter begins by outlining the history of the conspiracy tradition, from the time of the French Revolution to the present day. Historical analysis is followed by an outline of the basic characteristics of the conspiratorial explanatory framework or 'style'. Also, a taxonomy of conspiracy theories is provided. The proposed distinction - which is elaborated in the empirical chapters - is that between *classical, world elite* and *protoconspiracy* theories. Finally, Chapter 2 contrasts the view of conspiracy theory

as a tradition of explanation with alternative and broader conceptualisations of the term, which can be found in American literature in cultural studies.

Chapter 3 examines the history and idiosyncrasies of the Serbian conspiracy culture. It traces the roots of Serbian conspiracism to the late 19th Century, and examines in greater detail the 1930s populist movement which played a crucial role in the shaping of contemporary Serbian conspiracy theory. The links between the conspiracy tradition and Slavophile anti-Westernism are also examined. This chapter introduces into the thesis the figure of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, the high priest of Serbian conspiracism, whose right-wing antisemitic religious ideology resonates in much of the recent conspiratorial writing in Serbia.

Chapter 4 provides a critical review of existing socio-psychological explanations of conspiratorial beliefs. It examines the cognitive and motivational factors, identified in psychological literature, which are thought to underpin the belief conspiracy theory. The chapter also considers the contribution of research on the psychology of rumour and paranormal beliefs to the understanding of conspiracy theory. Critical examination of psychological approaches to conspiracy theory is used to argue that the study of conspiratorial discourse requires the exploration of the rhetorical and argumentative structure of specific conspiratorial explanations, while paying special attention to the historical and ideological context within which these explanations are situated. Finally, the chapter reflects on the question of method and argues that 'traditional scholarship' is more suitable for the study of ideological aspects of conspiracism than any specific and well-defined qualitative or quantitative methodology.

Chapter 5 lists the data and materials used in the empirical chapters and provides brief descriptions of specific publications looked at in the study. Biographical details of the principal exponents of Serbian conspiracy culture, whose work is examined in the thesis, are also provided.

Chapter 6 examines the notion of *protoconspiracy theory* which was the most 'reasonable' and the most widespread type of conspiratorial discourse in the Serbian media at the time of the Nato bombing. Using the example of the Belgrade daily *Politika*, the chapter examines various ways in which protoconspiracy theory differs from other forms of conspiratorial discourse and argues that, in spite of the important differences and its apparent 'reasonableness', this type of explanation often draws on the arguments and rhetorical devices originating from the conspiracy tradition. This chapter also suggests that, although protoconspiracy theory had been one of the principal features of Serbian government rhetoric

ever since the early 1990s, with the breakdown of alternative explanations which occurred at the time of the Nato bombing, protoconspiracy theory was elevated almost to the status of common sense in Serbian media and political discourse.

Chapter 7 examines the emergence of antisemitic conspiratorial themes in the mainstream daily *Politika*. It explores the way in which the propagation of ostensibly more reasonable and innocuous versions of conspiracy theory, such as world elite conspiracy theories, brings into the open the darker side of conspiratorial ideological tradition. Using the example of a number of articles from *Politika* and the book *The Trilateral* by Smilja Avramov, this chapter suggests that, in formulating their version of conspiracy theory, writers on the conspiratorial machinations of the world elite regularly draw on the longstanding ideological tradition of conspiracy theory. In doing so they often inadvertently promote the more contentious themes of that tradition, thereby contributing to its legitimisation.

Chapter 8 looks at the relationship between paranormal explanations and conspiracy theories. Using the example of the alleged activities of *Group 69*, a team of enthusiasts for the paranormal with tentative links with the Yugoslav military, this chapter suggests that, in Serbia, paranormal and conspiratorial explanatory frameworks were often integrated into a single explanation. The examination of the way in which the activities and the philosophy of *Group 69* were treated by the military establishment in the mid-1990s will be used to suggest that, at that time, paranormal explanations and conspiracy theories did not occupy the same status in relation to the prevailing standards of reasonableness. Paranormal explanations were regarded as being beyond the pale, while conspiracy theory was already an established aspect of military discourse.

Chapter 9 picks up this point and examines the way in which the discrepancy between conspiracy theories and paranormal explanations, in terms of public perception and status, diminished in subsequent years. It suggests that by the late 1990s, the kind of mystical theorising which military authorities once deemed to be beyond the bounds of respectability, gradually became regarded as a valid explanatory discourse. Drawing on the work on social representations by Serge Moscovici, the chapter explores in more detail the discursive and rhetorical processes which facilitated the legitimisation of pseudo-scientific and mystical explanations in the late 1990s. Specifically, the analysis will focus on the way in which the term 'neocortical war' - originally used in US literature on information warfare - made its way, or became *anchored*, into Serbian conspiratorial culture, and how the adoption of this term by conspiracy theorists, such as Colonel Svetozar Radišić, contributed to the legitimisation of paranormal aspects of conspiratorial explanations.

Chapter 10 examines the fate of Serbian conspiracy culture in the aftermath of the fall of the Milošević regime in October 2000. It revisits the major themes examined in the earlier chapters and explores them in the light of the recent political changes in Serbia. The chapter argues that after the events of October 2000, conspiracy theories (and theorists) by and large returned to the margins of politics. An important exception is the Yugoslav army, whose publications continue to promote conspiracy theories. This chapter will also suggest that in spite of a general marginalisation of conspiracy culture, conspiracism continues to play a role in Serbian politics, albeit a more limited one, and persists as an enduring feature of conservative political ideology.

It should be noted at this point that the present thesis does not provide an analysis of *every* aspect of contemporary Serbian conspiracy culture. In fact, some significant aspects of Serbian conspiracism are not addressed in the forthcoming chapters. The ideology of the Radical Party of Vojislav Šešelj, a right-wing political organisation which openly propagated conspiracy theories throughout the 1990s is not examined. Similarly, the thesis does not explore, in any detail, conspiracy theories propagated by Orthodox Christian publications, and right-wing elements within the Serbian Orthodox Church. These aspects of Serbian conspiracy culture were neglected on this occasion because they, by-and-large, relate to places where conspiracy theories can be expected to be found. Most modern societies, even developed Western democracies, have, in their midst right-wing political parties that promote conspiracy theories, or Christian Right movements which justify their clericalist political ideology through the notion of a world plot. The focus of the present thesis is to examine how this cultural tradition, which habitually occupies a marginal position in modern societies, suddenly became regarded as an acceptable and tolerable interpretation of world politics by state institutions which are not traditionally associated with the wilder reaches of conspiracy culture (such as the Army) and more importantly by the mainstream media in Serbia.

Chapter 2

Conspiracy theory as an ideological tradition: history and taxonomy

'...that everything in the French revolution, even the most dreadful of crimes, was foreseen, contemplated, contrived, resolved upon, decreed; that everything was the consequence of the most profound villainy, and was prepared and produced by those men who alone held the leading threads of conspiracies long before woven in the secret societies, and who knew how to choose and to hasten the favourable moments for their schemes.

Auguste de Barruel, *Memoirs pour servir a l'histoire du Jacobinisme*,
Vol. I, p. ix-x, Hamburg, 1803

'This movement among the JEWS is not new. From the days of Spartacus-Weishaupt to those of Karl Marx, and down to Trotsky (Russia), Bela Kun (Hungary), Rosa Luxembourg (Germany), and Emma Goldman (United States), THIS WORLD-WIDE CONSPIRACY FOR THE OVERTHROW OF CIVILIZATION AND FOR THE RECONSTITUTION OF SOCIETY ON THE BASIS OF ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT, OF ENVOIOUS MALEVOLENCE, AND IMPOSSIBLE EQUALITY, HAS BEEN STEADILY GROWING.'

Winston Churchill in *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, 8th February, 1920.

'How can we account for our present situation unless we believe that men high in this government are concerting to deliver us to disaster? This must be the product of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man. A conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principles shall be forever deserving of the maledictions of all honest men.'

Senator Joseph McCarthy, addressing the United States Congress, 14 June, 1951
Cited in Hofstadter, 1966; p.7

'The creators of the New World Order leave nothing to chance. The great religious and esoteric war over spheres of interest and power which has been fought for years, is simply the final crusade which brings us into the era of New Age, into the 'new kingdom of humanism without God... A great majority of visible world politicians, such as Tony Blair, Robin Cook, Madeline Albright, even Bill Clinton are just protégés, toys. Behind the idea of the New World Order lies capital, which, it is thought, is in the hands of the most powerful world bankers, who spread their tentacles, power and influence via a hierarchical web of public and secret organisations'

Gordana Knežević, *Invisible clique rules the planet*, *Politika*, 4 June 1999, p.15.

The above passages were written at different times over the past 200 years. They reflect the beliefs of three men and a woman of dissimilar social, cultural and political backgrounds who were or are citizens of four different countries. The quoted observations have been made in response to diverse social events, ranging from the French Revolution to the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. And yet, in spite of these and other differences, the remarks of a French Jesuit priest, a British Conservative politician, an American Republican Senator and a young Serbian journalist share important similarities. First and foremost, all four assume the existence of a conspiracy. They reflect the view that social and historical events occur as a

consequence of a carefully worked out plan, plotted in secret by a small group of powerful individuals. They endorse what Popper (1966) referred to as the 'conspiracy theory of society', the view that 'explanation of a social phenomenon consists of a discovery of the men [sic] or groups who are interested in the occurrence of this phenomenon (sometimes it is a hidden interest which first has to be revealed) and who have planned and conspired to bring it about' (p.95). Although the passages invoke different conspiratorial bodies - the Illuminati, Jews, Communists or international capitalists - 'the same fundamental claim appears beneath the variants - that there is an occult force operating behind the seemingly real, outward forms of political life' (Roberts, 1974; p.29-30).

The causal attribution illustrated by the opening paragraphs, which is characteristic of conspiratorial accounts generally, might suggest that conspiracy theory represents an extreme form of personal explanation. As a subsequent chapter will show, there have been attempts in social psychology to explain belief in conspiracies in terms of the theory of attributions (e.g. Kruglanski, 1987; Zukier, 1987). However, literature on conspiracy theories repeatedly proposes that there is more to conspiratorial explanations than the supposition that causes of events in the world can be attributed to someone's volition and design. Tales of conspiracies are said to constitute a distinct manner of expression. Richard Hofstadter (1966) referred to conspiracy theory as a political or rhetorical 'style'. He employed the term 'much as a historian of art might speak of the baroque or the mannerist style. It is above all a way of seeing a world and of expressing oneself' (p.4). Hofstadter proposed that the 'paranoid' style of conspiracy theory consists of a distinctive pattern of ideas, values, interpretations and images which reflect a specific world-view and perspective on history and politics.

The essential features of the broader conspiratorial outlook have been summarised by Billig, (1989). Besides attributing causality to the will of specific groups or organisations, in conspiracy theories:

'all events are seen in terms of an evil conspiracy to take over the world. The conspirators are said to work insidiously to subvert independent nations and races. They do their evil damage by poisoning the minds of ordinary people, who are innocently unaware of the conspiracy. Moreover, there is an apocalyptic tone to such publications, for it is asserted that conspiracy is nearing success. The conspirators have already succeeded in controlling most of the powerful organisations of the world. Communism and capitalism are seen as being controlled by the conspirators, and their apparent opposition is yet another dastardly trick to confuse the unsuspecting public. So powerful is the conspiracy, that the manipulators are on the threshold of attaining their goal of complete world domination.'(Billig, 1989; p.155-156)

Comparable descriptions of the conspiratorial explanatory style have been offered by Cohn (1957), Hofstadter (1966), Lipset and Raab (1978), Johnson (1983) and others. All of these

analyses point to the existence of a common thematic configuration in conspiratorial narratives and of an ideological structure which justifies the characterisation of conspiracism as a distinct explanatory discourse.

The regularity which appears to be present in conspiratorial accounts can be attributed to the persistence of an ideological *tradition* of conspiracy theory (Billig 1978, 1987a, 1988a, 1989). This tradition consists of a corpus of ideas, arguments, 'facts', revelations and 'proofs' pertaining to the alleged world plot, which have accumulated over the past two centuries, and which are referred to, cited, quoted and perpetuated by new generations of conspiracy theorists. In other words, conspiracy theories are rarely created *de novo*. Instead, writers typically draw upon the existing tradition of explanation. They regurgitate, revamp and apply to new circumstances the body of knowledge, the explanatory logic and rhetorical tropes previously expounded in texts, books or pamphlets which have attained the status of 'classics' within the conspiratorial tradition of explanation (Billig, 1978, 1989). Over time, the ideological tradition of conspiracy theory gathered a momentum of its own. It has now become difficult to construct a theory of world conspiracy that does not, at least inadvertently, draw upon the cultural heritage of the conspiracy tradition. The main reason for this self-perpetuating quality of conspiracist ideology is that it is easier to build on existing explanations than to create new ones (Billig, 1989). This is especially so considering that the conspiracy theory of society is not only a view of the world as it is at present, but also an interpretation of the past. As conspiracy is thought to be the motive force in history, the writer on conspiracies must place his 'discoveries' and revelations about the present within a broader historical context. Rather than 'inventing' a whole new history of conspiracy, theorists typically draw on the work of their predecessors, thus assimilating their interpretation within the existing conspiratorial tradition.

The way in which the conspiracy tradition shapes contemporary conspiratorial thinking has been demonstrated in the past using the examples of the British far-Right and the far-Left (Billig, 1987a, 1989, 1978) the American Right (Lipset and Raab, 1978) and the Arab political culture (Pipes, 1996). One of the principal aims of the present thesis is to demonstrate the emergence of this tradition of explanation in the Serbian media and popular discourse in the final years of the 20th century. The present chapter will set the scene for the subsequent analyses by elaborating further on the theme of conspiratorial ideological tradition. It will begin with an historical outline which will trace the origins of conspiracy theory to the time of the French Revolution, and sketch the vicissitudes of conspiracism to the present day. The overview will be based on literature which deals with the history of conspiracy theory in more detail (Cohn, 1957; Lipset and Raab, 1978; Poliakov, 1974; Berlet

and Lyons, 2000, Katz, 1980). Consequently, rather than providing a comprehensive historical analysis, this section will identify key moments in the evolution of the conspiracy tradition, especially those which are relevant, in one way or another, to the later examination of Serbian conspiratorial culture.

The chapter will then proceed to explore in greater detail the basic characteristics of the conspiratorial explanatory framework and 'style'. This is important as even the greatest sceptics, when it comes to the explanatory value of conspiracy theories, such as Popper (1966, 1972), Hofstadter (1966), or Lipsett and Raab (1978), admit that conspiracies occur regularly and are even a 'typical social phenomenon' (Popper, 1966; p.95). Political assassinations, dramatic transfers of power, political scandals and cover-up, as well as much of everyday political activity, all involve the collaboration of multiple individuals who collude in the attempt to bring about a desired outcome. Consequently, a belief in a conspiracy is not a priori questionable, excessive or part of the conspiratorial tradition of explanation. In order for an explanation to be located within the conspiracy tradition, it must be shown to possess the ideological structure and thematic organisation characteristic of the conspiratorial explanatory 'style'. First and foremost, in contrast to various references to local instances of conspiracy and secret collusion, explanations which belong to the ideological tradition have an exceedingly *comprehensive* and all encompassing character (Lipset and Raab, 1978). *All* social events are monomaniacally attributed to a single world conspiracy (Lipset and Raab, 1978; Billig, 1989). Also, texts which draw on the ideological tradition of conspiracy theory have other common features which are characteristic of the conspiratorial explanatory 'style' and which distinguish them from alternative explanations. These include the particular way in which the conspirators are portrayed, the assumption of a Manichean distinction between Good and Evil, the emphasis on the notion of mass manipulation and the apocalyptic tone of the conspiratorial narrative.

After the outline of main characteristics of the conspiratorial explanatory style, a taxonomy of conspiratorial discourse will be proposed. It will be argued that the transformation of conspiracy theories over the past two centuries has made conspiracism a heterogeneous culture which consists of different variants, including *classical*, *world elite* and *protoconspiracy theories*. Each of these types will be briefly outlined and explained. It will be the task of subsequent chapters to show that, in spite of the differences in content and style, all three variants can be linked to the ideological tradition of conspiracy theory.

The chapter will conclude by contrasting the view of conspiracy theory as a tradition of explanation with alternative conceptualisations found in the more recently published literature

on the subject (Fenster, 1999; Melley, 2000; Knight, 2000). As will become apparent, the latter tends to depict conspiracy theory as an almost ubiquitous feature of contemporary (American) mass-culture and a legacy of the post-modern condition. Following from the broader definition of conspiracy theory is often a more positive stance towards this phenomenon. A critical examination of the recent conceptualisations of conspiracy theory will suggest that a distinction needs to be maintained between, on the one hand conspiracy theory as a specific ideology and an explanatory style, and on the other, the broader *discourses of suspicion* evident in contemporary mass culture which often invoke the general theme of conspiracy. One reason in favour of the distinction is that confounding conspiracist ideology with various broader cultural trends has significant political implications. As will become apparent, the over-inclusive definition of conspiracy theory often trivialises the role which the conspiratorial ideological tradition continues to play in the construction of racist ideology, primarily antisemitism.

2.1. Historical overview

The roots of the conspiratorial ideological tradition can be traced to a variant of the mythology of secret societies which developed at the end of the 18th century. Two classical works on the causes of the French Revolution, both of which were published in 1797, are usually cited as the first examples of modern political conspiracy theory (Hofstadter, 1966; Lipset and Raab, 1978; Billig, 1978; Cohn, 1957; Roberts, 1974; etc.). First is the four-volume *Memoirs pour servir a l'histoire du Jacobinsme* by Augustin de Barruel, a French Jesuit priest exiled in England. The other, *Proofs of conspiracy against all religions and governments of Europe, carried on in the secret meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati and the Reading Societies* was written by John Robison, a professor of Science at the University of Edinburgh and an active member of the English Masonic Lodge. Although the first two volumes of Barruel's book were published several months before Robison's work, it is generally acknowledged that it was Robison who first speculated on the alleged conspiracy, and that his ideas inspired Barruel to embark on his own literary project (Cohn, 1957; Roberts, 1974).

Both Barruel's and Robison's books allege that the French Revolution was orchestrated by the Bavarian Illuminati, a secret society of 'enemies of the human race, sons of Satan' (Barruel, 1797; quoted in Cohn, 1957) who at the time supposedly controlled the European Freemasonry and the Jacobins of France. In reality, the Illuminati were a relatively obscure Bavarian secret society, founded in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt, a young professor of law at the University of Ingolstadt. Like the Freemasons, the Illuminati advocated the Enlightenment

values of rationalism and anti-clericalism and championed causes such as the abolition of torture and of witchcraft trials, the improvement of education, etc. (Cohn, 1957; Roberts, 1974). There is no evidence that the Illuminati ever 'controlled' the Freemasons, or wielded any significant political influence. The two secret societies were rivals for the short period of time before the Illuminati were dissolved in 1786.

It would be naïve to assume that a long-standing tradition of explanation like conspiracy theory has a fixed point of origin that could be unequivocally traced to a particular book or to the thinking of a specific individual or individuals. As Roberts (1974) points out, the broader mythology of secret societies which is reflected in Barruel's and Robison's work on the Illuminati conspiracy existed throughout the 18th century. Consequently, the demonisation of the Freemasons and the Illuminati in the post-Revolutionary reactionary literature is a continuation of this older tradition. At the same time, Barruel's and Robison's books are without a doubt the first comprehensive and widely read examples of the type of social and historical explanation which assumes that political and social events are caused by a vast clandestine plot, the aim of which is nothing less than world domination. Moreover, Barruel's and Robison's works proved to be an endless source of inspiration for subsequent generations of conspiracy theorists worldwide. The *Memoirs* and the *Proofs of Conspiracy* have been cited, quoted and recommended in conspiracy literature ever since, and are recognised by conspiracy theorists themselves as pioneering and seminal studies within this tradition of explanation.

In his analysis of the early history of the secret society mythology, Roberts (1974) sheds some light on the reasons why the conspiratorial interpretative framework emerged as a distinct pattern of explanation in the aftermath of the Bourgeois Revolution, rather than at any other point in history. The Révolution, Roberts argues, shook the foundations of the French society like no other event, questioning its every belief and challenging every institution. For the frustrated advocates of the old aristocratic order, everyday canons of explanations, which typically invoked the 'force de choses', (i.e. the inertia of history), climactic or psychological causal interpretations, could not adequately account for the dramatic and sweeping societal transformation. Interpretation was thus driven towards an alternative explanatory framework, one which Roberts suggests was central to European civilisation, and which drew upon the Christian cultural tradition – 'men were responsible for their own history: things happened because people wanted them to' (Roberts, 1974, p.371).

Importantly however, the interpretative framework of early conspiracy theory did not only reflect the Christian notion of 'free will'. According to Groh (1987), embedded in conspiracy

theory is the secularised version of the animistic view of the world (*mentalité primitive*) which dominated pre-modern Europe. Animism interpreted causality exclusively in terms of the actions of concealed forces. Also, conspiracy theory took on board the conceptions of politics and power which were prevalent at the time. As Roberts (1974) points out, in the *ancien régime* power was wielded by a small number of members of the aristocracy whose daily political activity consisted of plots, court intrigues, back-stabbing and secret collusion. The French Revolution was therefore seen as yet another plot, one of unprecedented size and scope. The culprits were sought among the 'usual suspects', the progressive secret societies demonised for decades by the Church authorities, who advocated the same ideas and propagated the same values as the ominous Revolution.

The belief in the existence of a 'vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life' (Hofstadter, 1966, p.29), which inspired the early reactionary writing on the Revolution, persisted in subsequent decades. Moreover, it became a regular feature of conservative political ideology in France, Germany, Russia and Italy. Interestingly, the United States proved particularly receptive to the emerging conspiracy culture (Hofstadter, 1966; Lipset and Raab, 1978; Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Davis, 1972). *The Proofs of conspiracy* was published in the US only a year after it first appeared in England, and soon became a best-seller. Robison's earliest American follower was the Boston Congregationalist minister Jedidiah Morse, whose sermons in the late 1790s warned the Americans about the threat posed by Illuminism.

In his analysis of the history of American conspiratorial culture, Davis (1972) suggests that for the American public, the appeal of early conspiracy theories lay in the fact that 'the circumstances of the [American] Revolution conditioned Americans to think of resistance to a dark, subversive force as the essential ingredient of their national identity' (p.23). Conspiracism subsequently became embedded in American populist culture. Practically every populist project in American history, from the nativist, anti-Masonic and anti-Catholic movements of the 19th century, to the most recent Militia organisations and the Christian Identity Movement, were based on a threat from some form of conspiracy. The idiosyncrasies of the history of American conspiratorial culture are examined in considerable detail in other literature on the subject (Hofstadter, 1966; Lipset and Raab, 1978; Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Barkun 1994). The present historical overview however, will focus solely on the aspects of conspiratorial cultural tradition which have had international and global implications.

A particularly notable development in the history of conspiratorial explanatory discourse, was the emergence of the myth of a Jewish conspiracy in the early decades of the 19th century. By

the 1850s, the Jews will have replaced the Illuminati and the Freemasons as the masterminds behind the alleged world conspiracy, relegating the secret societies to the position of foot soldiers and pawns in the hands of the international Jewish elite.

The reasons behind the victimisation of Jews in conspiracy theories, which culminated in the Holocaust, are usually sought in the long history of Jewish demonology which goes back to the early days of Christianity (Cohn, 1957; Poliakov, 1974). As Cohn (1957) notes, 'in this [conspiratorial] fantasy the remnants of ancient demonological terrors [were] blended with anxieties and resentments which are typically modern' (p.27). In other words, the thesis of Jewish conspiracy politicised and secularised the ancient myths of Jews as 'killers of Christ', poisoners of wells and murderers of children, thus ensuring the persistence of antisemitism in the modern age of secular politics, Enlightenment values and Reason.

Norman Cohn (1957) traces the myth of Jewish conspiracy to 'Simonini's Letter', a document allegedly written by an Italian army officer which was sent to Barruel in 1806. The letter drew Barruel's attention to the activities of the financially powerful 'Judaic sect', which supposedly controlled the Illuminati, the Freemasons and the Vatican, and which planned to subvert Christianity, 'turn Christians into slaves' and annihilate the House of Bourbon.

'Simonini's Letter' is interesting not only as the first known allusion to a Jewish plot, but also as an early example of a way of reasoning that has characterised conspiracy theory ever since. It reveals a tendency to infer causality on the basis of an event's consequence. The implementation of the values of equality, liberty and fraternity in post-revolutionary France led to the granting of civil rights to French Jews, rights which were subsequently extended by Napoleon to much of European Jewry. The fact that Jews benefited from the Revolution was enough for contemporary conspiracy theorists to conclude that Jews must have planned the event, or at least controlled those who did, i.e. the Freemasons and the Illuminati (Cohn, 1957). Moreover, in Russia the alleged 'collusion' between Napoleon and the Jews was used by the Church and state authorities to reinforce the image of the French Emperor as the 'Antichrist'. In 1806, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church accused Napoleon of colluding with the Jews in the attempt to overthrow Christianity and 'proclaim a false messiah in his own name' (Doubnov, 1933, cited in Cohn, 1957).

After these early allusions to a Jewish conspiracy, the idea remained dormant until approximately half a century later. According to Katz (1980), the myth was revived by the writing of Gougenot des Mousseaux, who in 1869 published an elaborate account of a satanic plot supposedly orchestrated by 'kabalistic Jews' (*Le Juif, le judaisme et la judaïsation des*

peuples cretiens). Cohn (1957) however notes that even before des Mousseaux's work was published, antisemitic conspiratorial themes emerged in two works of fiction. First was Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Coningsby* published in 1848. One particular sentence in the book has earned Disraeli a prominent place in the history of the myth of the Jewish conspiracy. In Chapter 15, one of the novel's Jewish characters makes the following remark:

'So you see my dear Coningsby, that the world is governed by very different personages from what is imagined by those who are not behind the scenes' (Disraeli, 1848)

The sentence followed a (false) claim that finance ministers in all major European countries at the time were Jews. Although it has been pointed out on numerous occasions that the allusion to a Jewish secret network was part of a 'naughty joke' (Cohn, 1957), by which Disraeli attempted to mock contemporary beliefs in Jewish financial power (Poliakov, 1974), antisemites and conspiracy theorists have since then interpreted this passage from *Coningsby* as an important admission, straight from the pen of a famous and influential Jew, that the Jewish financial elite is 'the hidden hand' behind European politics. Even today, Serbian antisemitic conspiracy theorists such as Ratibor Đurđević and Spasoje Vlajić, whose work will be examined in subsequent chapters, allude at times to Disraeli's work.

The 1850s also saw the emergence of another fictional piece of work which, although relatively unknown in its own right, later provided the basis for *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The novel *Biarritz*, written by the German author Hermann Goedsche under the pseudonym of John Retcliffe (published in 1868), contained a chapter entitled 'On the Jewish cemetery in Prague'. The chapter described a meeting by the representatives of the twelve Tribes of Israel who gathered to discuss global conquest. Although purely fictional, the theme of the Jewish plot can be seen as a romantic and sensationalist manifestation of the rising German antisemitism of the 1860s and 70s (Cohn, 1957). Over the next four decades, the chapter from *Biarritz* was gradually taken out of its fictional context and printed as an 'authentic' document (*Rabbi's Speech*). Moreover, it was attributed to different 'reliable' sources, such as an 'English diplomat' or even a Rabbi. Eventually, early in the 20th century, the initially fictional account of the conspiring Jewish elders was combined with extracts from Maurice Joli's work *Dialogues en Enfer entre Montesquieu et Machiavelli* and was distributed by the Russian secret police under the title *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (see Cohn, 1957 and Poliakov, 1974, for a detailed account of the origins of *Protocols*). The purpose of *Protocols* was to incite and legitimise pogroms against Russian Jews in the early 1900s. Some 30 years later, the booklet had considerably more devastating consequences

when it became, as Cohn (1957) aptly described it, a ‘warrant’ for Nazi genocide against the Jews.

The myth of a Jewish conspiracy dominated the conspiratorial tradition throughout the first half of the 20th century. *Protocols* was translated into most languages and published throughout the world. Although it was soon revealed as a forgery, its principal theme even struck a cord with certain prominent political figures. As the paragraph at the beginning of the chapter suggests, Winston Churchill endorsed the idea of the Jewish conspiracy in the 1920s. In the United States, the famous industrialist Henry Ford emerged as the champion of conspiratorial antisemitism. His four-volume work, *The International Jew*, which echoed the principal themes of *Protocols*, subsequently became a best-seller in Hitler’s Germany. Hitler himself admitted that ‘Heinrich Ford’ was one of his heroes and a source of inspiration.

An important addition to the conspiratorial tradition in the early 1920s was the inclusion of communism in the conspiratorial narrative. In the years following the Russian Revolution, explanations of this dramatic event were gradually assimilated into the existing conspiratorial tradition. Communism was blamed on Jewish bankers, mainly from the United States, who allegedly financed the Revolution and were due to profit from pitting capitalism and communism against each other. The story of Jewish involvement in the Revolution has been traced to yet another forgery, a document sold to an American diplomat by a Russian journalist in 1918 (Poliakov, 1987). The document alleged that German-Jewish bankers such as Schiff or Warburg controlled the Bolshevik government. The document was subsequently endorsed and propagated by White Russian émigrés in the West, most notably General Arsene de Goulevitch, author of the book *Tsarism and the Revolution* (Billig, 1978).

The general idea that Jewish power lay behind the Revolution echoed an older belief, widespread in Russia in the early 20th century, concerning the connection between Jews and socialism. For instance, in 1905 Russian Tsar Nikolai II famously wrote to his mother that ‘nine out of ten’ revolutionaries in Russia were Jewish (Poliakov, 1987; Pipes, 1998). Also, in the early 1900s Russian clerical authorities regularly used antisemitic rhetoric to denounce the workers’ protests (Poliakov, 1987). As a result, in the years after the Revolution, Marx’s Jewish roots and the disproportionate number of Jews in socialist movements both in Russia and elsewhere were regularly invoked in antisemitic conspiracy literature as evidence of the inherently Jewish nature of Bolshevism (see, for instance, the quote from Churchill).

The early writing on the causes of the Revolution by Russian reactionaries struck a cord with conservatives world-wide, who projected their fear of socialist revolt into the theme of

conspiracy. In Germany, France, Eastern Europe and elsewhere, conspiratorial antisemitism and anti-communism gradually became interchangeable discourses in the ideology of right-wing and conservative political forces. Also, the idea of collusion between Jews and Communists caught the imagination of populist ideologists in the US. Ever since the 1870s, North American agrarian and producerist movements resented wealthy bankers and financiers from the East Coast of the US who were often referred to as the 'corporate Jew class' and portrayed as enemies of the (white) American worker (Lipset and Raab, 1978). In the 1920s and 30s, champions of American producerism such as Henry Ford, or nativism like Father Charles Coughlin took on board the 'revelations' about the 'Jewish capital's' communist connections, and used them to substantiate their antisemitic, anti-corporate claims.

The developments within conspiratorial culture after the Russian Revolution are significant for two reasons. First of all, to the present day, the claim that the Revolution was organised by the Western (Jewish) financial elite remains a ubiquitous feature of many strands of conspiratorial explanatory discourse. Although the Jewish origin of the 'financiers' and 'bankers' is often not explicitly stated (e.g. Gary Allen, 1965), the fact that this theme can be traced to antisemitic writing in the 1920s provides evidence of continuity within the conspiratorial cultural tradition. Secondly, the blurring of boundaries between antisemitic and anti-communist rhetoric led to a gradual emergence of the idea of a vast communist plot, paving the way for the kind of conspiracism that became a trademark of the McCarthy era in early days of the Cold War.

The myth of the Jewish conspiracy reached its most dramatic point in Nazi Germany, where Hitler's genocidal policies were impaled throughout by the ideology of conspiratorial antisemitism. Books such as *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Eckart's *Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin*, Fritsch's *Handbook of the Jewish Question* and Ford's *International Jew*, sold hundreds of thousands of copies throughout the Third Reich in the 1930s and 40s. The common theme which runs through all these books – that of a vast Jewish conspiracy which aims for world domination – inspired Hitler's racist policies and contributed to the death of over six million European Jews.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, conspiracy tradition of explanation underwent another noteworthy transformation. Once the true extent of Nazi war crimes became known to the world, it became impossible to champion the idea of a Jewish conspiracy with the same degree of openness as before the events of 1939-1945. As Leon Poliakov noted,

'Today the Jews are no longer accused of weaving a permanent plot against mankind, of unleashing revolutions and historical catastrophes. They are no longer attributed with supernatural powers. Any display of fanatical and "paranoid" anti-Semitism by an individual, which, as we described, had such a hold on certain leaders of nineteenth-century thought, is dismissed by public opinion as a freak, or even a psychosis' (Poliakov, 1974, Vol. 3, p.469)

In many ways, the belief in a Jewish conspiracy became a criterion for distinguishing the respectable from the unacceptable in politics. Ideologists who continued to promote antisemitic prejudice became confined to the outer reaches of the political spectrum (Billig, 1987a).

As anti-Jewish prejudice became a detestable political option, many conspiracy theorists abandoned the notion of a Jewish plot in favour of a seemingly more acceptable version of conspiratorial explanation. For instance, Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society, went to great lengths to distance himself and his organisation from allegations of antisemitism. In 1963 he denounced *Protocols* as a 'communist forgery' and in subsequent years expelled several members of the Society who expressed anti-Jewish prejudice in public (Lipset & Raab, 1978). Unwilling to pursue the notion of a Jewish conspiracy, Welch and other conspiracy theorists in the 1950s and 60s turned to an older tradition, one that locates the hub of the alleged plot among non-ethnic and secular secret (or not-so-secret) societies and organisations. Characteristics previously associated with the conspiratorial Jewish corporate elite were gradually transferred onto the 'Soviet Empire', the Bilderbergers, the Trilateral Commission, the leaders of the 'New World Order' or even the 'United Nations'. What emerged was a new and seemingly more legitimate, innocuous and non-prejudicial version of conspiracy theory.

Hofstadter (1966) suggests that in the post war years, conspiracy theories, especially in the US, changed in other important ways. Post-war conspiracy theorists no longer saw themselves as protectors of a well-established way of life which was under threat from alien forces. Instead, conspiracy theorists began to see themselves as already dispossessed. As a result, anti-conspiratorial activity turned into a fight to reclaim what was already lost, and prevent the final act of destruction by the evil conspiracy. This change in emphasis gave conspiracism a significant subversive character. From McCarthy to McVeigh the goal of conspiracy theorists has been to uncover the secret behind the American establishment, and expose it for what it is: a façade for the machinations of 'Communists', 'New World Order', the 'Zionist Occupational Government' or the trans-national financial and political oligarchy. Hofstadter attributed this change in conspiracy culture to the development in mass media. The media made the 'enemy' more visible, thus shifting the attention of anti-conspiratorial activity from

vaguely described villains such as Masons, Jesuits or International Bankers, to concrete and eminent public figures who are seen as crucial players in the conspiracy.

An important implication of the relatively new, subversive element of conspiracy theory is that it entrenched this ideological tradition on the margins of politics, among the disenchanting and the resentful. The very assumption that outward forms of political life are just a front for an evil conspiracy excludes this tradition of explanation, and those who subscribe to it, from mainstream political life (Billig, 1978). In the West, conspiracism is restricted mainly to the extreme Right (e.g. Hofstadter, 1966; Lipset and Raab, 1978, etc.), although there is evidence of conspiratorial thinking in the ideology of the Left (Billig, 1987a; Pipes, 1998; Berlet, 1994; Berlet and Lyons, 2000, etc.). In both cases conspiracism is the ideology of fringe movements which operate outside the framework of conventional politics.

The post war developments in American conspiratorial culture have had important implications for conspiracism elsewhere. Since the Second World War, conspiracy theories have been one of America's more successful cultural exports. For instance, the notion of the Bilderberg conspiracy, first put forward by the likes of the John Birch Society, was subsequently endorsed by Soviet propaganda (Pipes, 1998). Also, in the UK, books written by American authors are regularly distributed by the far-Right (Billig, 1978). In Yugoslavia, American 'classics' (e.g. Allen, Coleman etc.) have been translated, published, quoted and cited by domestic conspiracy theorists. An important implication of the global influence of American conspiracy literature is that theorists around the world now locate the heart of the alleged plot within the US establishment, which is thought to be under the heel of evil conspirators. As a result, in many parts of the world the rhetoric of conspiracy has been assimilated within the more general anti-imperialist and anti-American political argument. Conspiracy theory became the creed not only of the disenchanting and the 'dispossessed' within the US, but also of all those around the world, who feel marginalised and threatened by American military, economic and diplomatic supremacy. This development within conspiratorial culture has turned conspiracy theory into a common language of resistance against the dominance of Western political culture. It has coloured anti-Western ideology in the Middle East, in Russia, and elsewhere. The way in which this particular aspect of contemporary conspiracism influenced the proliferation of conspiracy theories in Serbia in the 1990s will be the topic of subsequent empirical chapters.

The aim of this historical overview has been to demonstrate that throughout the past 200 years writers, politicians and people in general, have at times attributed the causes of social and political events to an evil conspiracy. However, in order to establish the existence of a

tradition of thought, it is not enough to point out the similarities between the ideologies or beliefs of different historical periods (Billig, 1978). What is required is evidence of *continuity* of thought. The clearest evidence of continuity comes from the way in which writers of conspiracy material address the question of the history of conspiracy. When locating current plots and schemes within the centuries-long tradition of conspiratorial activity, conspiracy theorists will often openly acknowledge their ideological roots. The John Birch Society for instance reissued Robinson's book almost two centuries after its original publication and acknowledged its relevance to the understanding of contemporary society (Lipset and Raab, 1978). Similarly, in the earlier quotation from Churchill, the alleged Jewish conspiracy is traced back to the days of Weishaupt, thus implicitly invoking the historical beginnings of the conspiracy tradition. Similar examples can be found in the writings of Nesta Webster, the British far-Right, American populist movements and in Middle Eastern conspiracy culture (Billig, 1978, Lipset and Raab, 1978, Pipes, 1996)

The question of continuity, which is essential to the notion of an ideological tradition will feature prominently throughout the present thesis. A theme which runs through all the empirical chapters is the presence of antisemitism in contemporary Serbian conspiracy culture. This may seem unusual considering that in Serbia, unlike in the Middle East for instance, there was no Jewish dimension to the crisis, and therefore no visible political gain from an allegation of Jewish involvement. In spite of this, antisemitic themes were to be found. One possible explanation is that there is something culturally specific about antisemitic ideology (Billig, 1989). The specificity of antisemitism will be sought in the fact that, after dominating conspiratorial discourse for almost hundred years (from the 1850s to the end of WWII), anti-Jewish themes become firmly embedded in the conspiratorial cultural tradition and remain a continuing aspect of its ideological heritage. Consequently, antisemitic themes appear in Serbian conspiracy theories not because of their political relevance, but because they are a legacy of this conspiratorial cultural tradition. The demonstration of the often subtle allusion to the Jewish nature of the conspiracy in Serbian conspiratorial writing will therefore be a recurring reminder of the continuities within the conspiratorial ideological tradition.

2.2. Principal features of conspiratorial explanatory style

As well as showing evidence of continuity, in order to locate a particular explanatory discourse within the conspiratorial ideological tradition, an explanation must be shown to possess the ideological structure, and explanatory 'style' characteristic of the conspiracy tradition. The task of the present section will be to outline and examine some of the features

of the typical conspiratorial 'tale', as identified by Hofstadter (1966), Lipset and Raab (1978), Billig (1978, 1987a), Groh (1987) and others.

2.2.1 Leap of the imagination

While most characteristics of conspiracy theories which will be outlined in this section pertain to the *content* of the conspiratorial narrative, the 'leap of the imagination' is more about the logic, nature and presentation of the conspiratorial argument.

Hofstadter (1966) suggests that an important feature of the conspiratorial explanatory style is the elaborate concern with demonstration and presentation of proof. Conspiracy theories will usually include a detailed elaboration and exposition of plausible and verifiable historical facts. For instance, Barruel's and Robison's work contains accurate historical data about Weishaupt's Illuminati and 18th century French Freemasonry. Similarly, contemporary conspiracy literature on the Bilderberg group or the Trilateral Commission will often describe, in considerable detail and with a commendable degree of accuracy, the history and structure of these organisations. The historical element of the conspiracy theory provides a 'kernel of truth', around which the rest of the narrative is constructed.

Also, conspiracy literature will seek to establish credibility by emulating conventional scholarship. The 'high brow' conspiracy theorists (Hofstadter, 1966) will flaunt dubious academic credentials (professor, Dr., etc), publish books with scholarly-sounding titles, and mimic mainstream academia by using references, graphs, footnotes, bibliography, etc. For instance, Senator McCarthy's 96-page 'manifesto' *McCarthyism* contains no less than 313 footnote references (Hofstadter, 1966). The application of a quasi-academic style gives the conspiracy treatise a plausible appearance and an aura of respectability.

Importantly however, in conspiracy theories, the multitude of disparate arguments placed along factual lines and veiled in quasi-scholarly rhetoric usually lead to fantastic conclusions. 'The most careful, conscientious and seemingly coherent application to detail' which characterises conspiracy theory, turns out to be mere preparation for the 'big leap from the undeniable to the unbelievable' which occurs, often in a subtle way, at some crucial point in the narrative (Hofstadter, 1966; p.37). The vast amount of the detailed 'evidence' becomes encapsulated into a completely consistent and coherent theory which claims that conspiracy is the motive force in history and that the 'unbelievable is the only thing that can be believed' (p.36).

Once the 'leap of the imagination' is made, the conspiracy theory acquires a 'specific kind of irrationality associated with a stubborn, highly rational and highly operational logic' (Groh, 1987). Logical contradictions, or contrasting evidence, cease to have any bearing on the conspiratorial story-line (Moscovici, 1987). The theory of conspiracy becomes a closed narrative whose claims are irrefutable: the lack of proof about conspiracy, or any positive proof against its existence, is always turned around and taken as evidence of the craftiness of the secret cabal behind the alleged plot and as confirmation of its ability to conceal its clandestine machinations (Groh, 1987). As Billig (1987a) notes, 'conspiracy theorist is to the professional historian what the treasure-hunter is to the archaeologist; only in the case of the conspiracy theorist, there is no means of convincing them that their quick dig among the documents has revealed only false gold' (p.132).

The 'leap of the imagination', and the irrefutable explanatory logic which it helps to establish, enable conspiracy theory to 'tie together the untidiness of the social world into a tale of deception and conspiracy' (Billig, 1988a, p.203) and weave a tale of secret collusion that has no temporal or geographical limits. By denying the existence or relevance of mistakes, failures and ambiguities, conspiratorial narrative sees society in a way that is 'far more coherent than the real world' (Hofstadter, 1966; p.36). It establishes connections between diverse historical events by a 'causal nexus that, in the end is not demonstrable' (Groh, 1987, p.11) and assumes that conspirators are ubiquitous and omnipresent, active in every part of the world and unaffected by logistical constraints.

2.2.2. Character of the conspirator

The defining feature of conspiracy theory is the belief in the existence of a narrow circle of powerful individuals (Jews, Illuminati, Bilderbergers, vast industrial-military complex, etc.) whose covert plans and schemes determine the course of history. The personalisation of historical and social causality which is implicit in conspiracy theory attaches considerable importance to the character of the persons behind the alleged plot. It has even been suggested that conspiracy theorists become obsessed with the conspirators and 'mesmerised by the enemies they have studied so assiduously and with such horrified fascination' (Bell, 1962, cited in Billig, 1978). Although the identity of the conspiratorial groups varies considerably, texts belonging to the conspiratorial tradition of explanation tend to view the conspirators in similar ways.

Conspirators are typically seen as 'the perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman: sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving' (Hofstadter, 1966, p.31-32). The conspiratorial clique is thought to wield enormous power. It is able to bring about devastation:

it 'causes depressions, manufactures disasters and then enjoys the profits from the misery [it] has produced' (ibid, p.32).

The conspirators are also presented as deprived of admirable human qualities. In classical conspiratorial discourse, conspirators are often associated with illicit sexual behaviour, sometimes involving children, and are even attributed Satanic qualities (Davis, 1972; Billig, 1978, 1989). These features can be seen as the legacy of the early conspiracy literature of Barruel, Mousseaux and others who emphasised the anti-Christian motives behind the conspiracy. Also, they reflect the Jewish medieval demonological themes of child ritual abuse, which became incorporated into the conspiratorial tradition in the mid-19th century. In conspiracy theories where explicit satanic themes are absent, the enemy is more frequently attributed criminal, psycho- and socio-pathological qualities. The conspirators are the epitome of the machiavellian political principle that the end (world domination) justifies the means. It is not by accident that it is Machiavelli's contribution to the *Dialogue en Enfer* that was subsequently attributed the Elders in the forged *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Ever since the earliest conspiracy theories, the hub of the alleged plot was, as a rule, located amid the elite: among the Illuminati and the Freemasons, or more recently in 'universities', among 'intellectuals' or within the higher echelons of business and politics. It is the position of privilege that gives the conspirators power and the ability to control the masses and keep everyone in ignorance about their sinister aims. The conspirators have at their disposal effective means of influence such as control over education, the press and technology as well as endless financial resources. According to Lipset and Raab (1978) this particular feature makes the populist appeal of conspiracy theories easier to understand. The conspiratorial elite are presented as distinct from 'the people' and characterised as 'secret and alien, dealing as they do in arcane subjects' (p.16) Just like the conspirators' debauchery, their elitism also drives a wedge between the conspiratorial minority and the masses whom the conspiracy theorist explicitly or implicitly addresses.

When it comes to identifying the actual conspirators, writers of conspiracy theories are faced with a dilemma. As the personification of Evil and the ultimate causal agent in history, conspirators have to be made visible and identifiable. However, this demand needs to be reconciled with the necessity for the conspirators, and the conspiracy itself, to remain clandestine (Lipset and Raab, 1978). In the early days of conspiracy theories, the mysterious secret societies fitted the bill perfectly. Today, the identity of conspirators is often formulated in vague terms, using economic vocabulary such as 'capitalism' or 'American bankers', or by means of symbolic geographical locations like New York, Wall Street, Vatican, or Kremlin.

In this way, a specific body of people (Bankers, Catholics or Communists) is given a 'secret, arcane centre', thus enhancing the mystery surrounding the conspiracy without compromising the conspirators' concrete identity (Lipset and Raab, 1978; p.16). However, no matter how broad or vague a category is used to describe the conspirators, the assumption of plotting and decision-making usually invokes personal attribution. The motive and actions are described using personal adjectives: 'lust for power', 'power hungry megalomaniacs' etc. (Billig, 1978).

The use of broader categories such as 'international bankers' or 'Communism' (characteristic of the John Birch Society propaganda in the 1960s and 70s and the McCarthyite rhetoric before that) has the additional advantage of being sufficiently broad to include potentially anyone. Individuals previously identified as belonging to the chosen broad category can be excluded if circumstances so require: they become renegades, 'former members', escapees from the grip of the conspiratorial clique, and therefore valuable 'witnesses'. At the same time, the ambiguity of the chosen category enables someone's previously unknown association with the evil ruling oligarchy to be 'revealed'. Although even classical conspiracy theories, which use the less flexible category such as 'Jews' often expose someone's secret Jewish origin in order to account for their participation in the conspiracy, the use of broader categories in the more recent forms of conspiracy literature enables the theorists to achieve the same aim in a more plausible and 'reasonable' way.

2.2.3. Manipulation of many by the few

At the heart of the belief in conspiracy is typically a recognition of delusion. Visible reality is not what it seems, but is an illusion, a façade which conceals the true motive of the conspirators. As Roberts (1974) put it, at the core of the conspiracy mythology is a 'community unaware of its true nature. Apparently self-conscious and self-regulating, it is unknown to itself, in fact directed by concealed hands' (p.365). Ordinary masses are seen as 'soft and seduced by the opiates of welfare and propaganda' (Lipset & Raab, 1978, p.16).

According to conspiracy theorists, the masses are kept under control through a wide range of techniques. Traditionally, educators, politicians and journalists are seen as the principal manipulators. As will become apparent in subsequent chapters, contemporary versions of conspiracy theory, especially protoconspiracy theories, focus primarily on the media as the 'instrument of seduction', thus reflecting the broader cultural beliefs in the power of the media and propaganda. Other types of conspiratorial discourse invoke more bizarre and less plausible means of manipulation. Robison, for instance, referred to a type of tea that causes abortion, or a stench bomb that would fill 'a bedchamber with pestilent vapours' (Robison, 1797, cited in Hofstadter, 1966). In more recent times, even popular music has been said to be

a means of control which causes 'nerve jamming, mental deterioration and retardation' (Noebel, 1965, p.1). Among those who see conspiracy as an inherently Satanic venture, manipulation is formulated mainly in terms of hidden symbolism which affects the public subliminally. Honouring of Lucifer, audible when pop records are played backwards, the apparent omnipresence of number 666 in everything from Macdonald's food to Microsoft software, or the existence of hidden messages in political speeches, newspapers and on TV, are only some of the 'favourites'. Also, the assumption that conspirators have at their disposal yet undisclosed technological inventions enables conspiracy theorists to speculate on devices and procedures worthy of science fiction literature, such as brain manipulation, microchip implants, chemically altered water supplies, etc. The theme of mass manipulation and its crucial role in the conspiratorial explanation will be examined in more detail in subsequent chapters.

2.2.4. Manichean view of politics

It has already been mentioned that conspiracy theory vilifies the conspirators, who are portrayed as the epitome of Evil and malice. Within the conspiratorial narrative, the malevolent conspiracy is presented as diametrically opposed to the ultimate force of Good. According to Moscovici (1987) 'conspiracy mentality divides people, things and actions into two classes, one is pure, the other impure. Classes are polar opposites: everything social, national, etc. vs. what is anti-social, anti-national' (p.154).

Within conspiratorial Manicheanism, political activity is reduced to fighting things out to a finish between two moral opposites. The course of history is seen as 'almost exclusively a matter of good or ill will' (Lipset and Raab, 1978, p.13) allowing no room for chance, or mistakes. Similarly, politics is reduced to a struggle between good and bad intentions, which precludes negotiation or compromise. Importantly, Manicheanism has a self-perpetuating quality. The 'all or nothing' perspective makes success virtually impossible, thus increasing the frustration and strengthening the belief in the terrifying qualities of the 'enemy' (Hofstadter, 1966).

Some authors have traced this binary opposition between good and bad in conspiracy theories to the historical link between conspiracy tradition and Christian theology. For example, Popper (1966) referred to conspiracy theory as a 'primitive kind of superstition' which results from the 'secularisation of religious ideas'. Hofstadter saw conspiratorial Manicheanism as the 'secular and demonic version of Adventism' while Groh (1987) interpreted it as reflecting St Augustine's 'anthropological universalism' and the distinction between *civitas dei* and *civitas diaboli*.

Roberts (1974) however, sees the dualism in conspiracy culture as a legacy of the French Revolution. He suggests that the fall of the *ancien régime* transformed the political sphere and created a polarisation of opinion in which 'for' and 'against' became two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive positions. This aspect of political dualism still persists in a symbolic form in the traditional distinction in politics between Left and Right. The Manicheanism of conspiracy theory is therefore seen as a relic of this aspect of late 18th century political culture, which over the years became tainted with Christian eschatology, thus acquiring a particularly dramatic dimension.

It is also noteworthy that Manicheanism is sometimes seen not just as a feature of conspiratorial narrative, but also as its condition of possibility. Popper (1972) argued that conspiracy theory tends to be characteristic of those belief systems or political ideologies which are concerned with the implementation of fundamental truth, or with the creation of 'heaven on earth'. The unavoidable failure of such projects can only be explained by reference to an evil force which has a 'vested interest in thwarting this illustrious endeavour'. The simplistic moral dualism of conspiracy theory imposes itself as an appealing explanation why the promised *parusia* (second coming of the saviour), whether literal or metaphorical, has failed to occur (Groh, 1987).

2.2.5. Apocalyptic tone of the conspiracy theory

Closely related to conspiratorial Manicheanism is the apocalyptic tone of the conspiracy theory. Explanations of events in a conspiratorial narrative often assume that the evil aspirations of the conspirators are coming close to being fulfilled. The present is defined as the time for the final 'showdown' which will determine whether evil will accomplish world domination. Just like Manicheanism, the apocalyptic vision is driven by the fact that the conspiracy theorist

'traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values. He is always manning the barricades of civilisation. He constantly lives at a turning point: it is now or never in organising resistance to conspiracy. Time is forever just running out' (Hofstadter, 1966, p.29-30)

Although conspiratorial apocalypticism runs dangerously near to hopeless pessimism, the theorists never lose their determination to fight. Conspiracy theory typically envisages a positive outcome, a rebirth which will ensue after the final clash with the forces of evil. Somewhat paradoxically, the stronger the enemy gets, the closer their final defeat is thought to be (Billig, 1978). Billig (1978) suggests that the theme of decisive confrontation with the evil enemy draws upon the Millennial pattern of thinking which has been assimilated into the

conspiracy tradition from Judeo-Christian religious philosophy. Millennialism reflects the belief that the establishment of Heaven on earth will follow the inevitable destruction of the current order and the end of the temporary rule of Satan. Millennial eschatology drives the naïve optimism of conspiracy theory by enforcing the belief that success is always the result of good intentions: positive spirit and honourable intent can and will overcome the technological and economic superiority of the enemy.

...

The extent to which the described characteristics appear in specific conspiratorial accounts, as well as their precise shape and form, varies considerably. This depends on the type of conspiracy theory, the local context, level of detail and the nature of the social problem that the theorist wishes to explain. However, personal attribution, the leap of the imagination, the specific construction of the enemy, the Manichean moral dualism, apocalyptic tone and the notion of mass manipulation are typical characteristics of the conspiratorial explanation, and have become entrenched in the ideological tradition over its 200-year long history. Consequently, it is the presence of these characteristics that can be used to locate specific explanatory discourses within the conspiratorial tradition of explanation. As subsequent chapters will show, these characteristics were notably present in the way in which the bombing of Yugoslavia in the Spring of 1999 was perceived and accounted for in the Serbian media and political discourse.

2.3. Classification of conspiracy theories

As the historical outline suggested, the 200 year-long history of modern conspiracism has been marked by continuous evolution and transformation. The catalyst for change has often been the need to make conspiracy theories more plausible, acceptable, and pertinent in response to changing social circumstances. For instance, the notion of a Jewish conspiracy emerged at the time of, and reflected, the antisemitism which swept through Europe in the mid-19th century, only to be discarded in the years after the Holocaust, when anti-Jewish prejudice became ostracised from mainstream politics. The fluid and dynamic quality of conspiratorial discourse can be said to have contributed significantly to the endurance and persistence of this type of explanation.

As a result of its continuous transformation, contemporary conspiracism is not a monolithic culture. As conspiracy theories underwent various changes, remnants of the older versions managed to survive. As a result, conspiratorial discourse today consists of numerous variants,

ranging from the relatively sophisticated to the absurd, which exist side by side. Considering that different types of conspiratorial explanation share a common ideological heritage, the boundaries between them are often fuzzy and a clear distinction is difficult to draw. On the other hand, classification, even if only theoretical and conjectural, can often provide a useful analytical tool. For that reason, the present project will propose a distinction between *classical*, *world elite*, and *protoconspiracy* theories. This distinction, which was derived from the analyses in the empirical chapters, proved to be a convenient and valid taxonomy in the context of Serbian conspiratorial culture. The relationship between the three types of conspiracy theory, and the way in which they interrelate in order to perpetuate the conspiratorial ideological tradition, will be examined in later chapters

- ❖ *Classical* conspiracy theories are a legacy of the 19th century conspiracy tradition. They are concerned with the esoteric working of the Jews or secret societies such as the Illuminati or the Freemasons. This type of conspiratorial discourse is characterised by strong pseudo-scientific, mystical and esoteric overtones, which are often manifested in the way in which methods of mass manipulation are conceptualised. Also, classical conspiracy theory often refers to the Satanic and anti-Christian aspects of the world plot. It is in this version of conspiracy theory that the features of the ‘paranoid style’ are most visible.
- ❖ *World elite conspiracy theories* include accounts which focus on the sinister and clandestine activities of more recent, essentially non-ethnic and secular organisations such as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg group, or the Trilateral Commission. World elite conspiracy theories can be distinguished from classical counterparts by their ‘reasonable’ appearance. They abandon mystical and religious overtones in favour of a more rational style associated with mainstream studies of international relations.
- ❖ *Protoconspiracy theories* include explanations which draw heavily on the idea of a ‘hidden hand’ that is behind historical and political events. However, proto-conspiracy theories fall short of making explicit references to the identity of the conspirator or an overall world plot. Protoconspiratorial narrative typically adopts the passive voice thus avoiding the labelling of the conspirators, or uses euphemisms such as ‘directors of horror’, ‘advocates of the New World Order’, etc. Also, as well as often having a geographically limited scope (e.g. reference to anti-Serbian conspiracy without necessarily mentioning a world plot), protoconspiracy theory has a restricted temporal dimension in that the contemporary conspiracy is rarely explicitly linked to the

conspiracies of the past. Finally, like world elite conspiracy theories, protoconspiracy theories have a more acceptable and respectable guise, and tend to avoid the mysticism and the millennialism of classical conspiratorial discourse.

The origins of *classical* and *world elite* conspiracy theories can be easily traced to specific stages in the history of the conspiratorial tradition of explanation, i.e. to the periods before and after the post-World War II marginalisation of antisemitic conspiratorial themes. On the other hand, the roots of *protoconspiracy* theories appear to be not so clear. However, as the most 'reasonable' and rational of the three types, protoconspiracy theories could be seen as a response to the contemporary 'intellectual presumption against conspiracy theories' (Pidgen, 1995). Recent literature on conspiracy theory repeatedly remarks that in recent decades this type of explanation has become regarded as an irrational, paranoid or absurd mode of thinking. As one writer on the subject points out, 'very few notions generate as much intellectual resistance, hostility and derision within academic circles as a belief in the historical importance and efficacy of political conspiracies' (Bale, 1995). Conspiracy theories are often perceived as the stuff of kooks and extremists, something which lies beyond the bounds of what is considered a rational explanation. Moreover, conspiracy theory is not only seen as irrational or false, but also as politically suspect, as antithetical to "proper" democratic politics' (Fenster, 1999, p.xii).

Because of the dismissive connotations associated with the term 'conspiracy theory', there has been a tendency within conspiratorial literature to seek to avoid this epistemologically damaging label. For instance, Serbian authors whose work will be examined in subsequent chapters seldom refer to their own explanation as 'conspiracy theory'. Unlike self-proclaimed conspiracy theorists of the past such as John Robison, Auguste de Barruel, Nesta Webster, Senator McCarthy or Gary Allen, contemporary writers, especially those with greater pretension towards mainstream status, present their work as something other than conspiracism. By distancing their claims from the category of 'conspiracy theory', their world-views are made to seem more rational, reasonable and plausible.

The emergence of protoconspiratorial discourse can be seen as a manifestation of this more general rhetoric of dissociation. It represents an attempt at distancing from the conspiracy culture by modifying its most obvious features: by obscuring the identity of the conspirators, or by toning down some of the more contentious aspects of conspiratorial rhetoric such as its apocalyptic tone or its temporal and geographic dimensions. However, as Chapter 6 will demonstrate, in spite of the attempts to conceal the link between this type of explanation and other forms of conspiracy theory, the explanatory style of protoconspiracy theory can be

traced to the conspiratorial ideological tradition and plays an important part in its perpetuation.

2.4. Ideological Tradition Vs Post-modern Culture: alternative interpretations of conspiracy theory.

In recent years there has been a rise in academic interest in various aspects of contemporary conspiracy culture (Fenster, 1999; Knight, 2000; Pipes, 1998; Melley, 2000; Robins and Post 1997; Berlet and Lyons, 2000). With the exception of Pipes's earlier book on conspiracy theories in the Middle East (Pipes, 1996) and a recent edited volume with a more internationalist perspective (Marcus, 1999), most contemporary scholarly analyses of conspiracy theories focus on the American context. The revived interest in American conspiracy culture can be attributed to two distinct influences. Firstly, the 1996 Oklahoma bombing drew the attention of the public to the potential danger posed by the conspiracy theory-wielding militias and fringe right-wing movements. Secondly, in recent years there has been a proliferation of conspiracy themes in US mass culture, including books, films, TV, the internet, popular music, etc. The rise in the popularity of conspiratorial explanations is further reflected in the fact it is only relatively recently (1997) that the term 'conspiracy theory' established itself sufficiently firmly in colloquial language to warrant a separate entry in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Recent literature which emerged in response to the atrocity in Oklahoma (Barkun, 1994; Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Pipes, 1998) by and large follows the intellectual tradition of Hofstadter (1966), Lipset and Rabb (1978), Billig (1978) and other writers who examined conspiracy theories primarily as a feature of radical politics. Like the present thesis, these studies endorse the view of conspiracy theory as a specific ideological tradition of explanation. On the other hand, literature on conspiratorial themes in American mass culture (Knight, 2000; Melley, 2000; Fenster, 1999), whose interests lie in the domain of cultural or American studies, tended to adopt a different and altogether broader conceptualisation of conspiracy theories, which will be examined in the present section.

Rather than seeing conspiracy theory as an fringe political ideology antithetical to mainstream democratic politics, cultural studies of conspiracy theories regard the belief in conspiracy to be an inherent feature of American post-modern culture. For instance, in *Conspiracy Culture: from Kennedy to the X-Files* Knight (2000) argues that contemporary conspiracy theory constitutes an 'ironic stance towards knowledge and the possibility of truth' (p.2), arising from 'a cynical and generalised sense of ubiquity – and even the necessity – of clandestine

conspiring forces in a world in which everything is connected' (p.3). Knight sees conspiracy theory as signifying the 'permanent uncertainty about the fundamental issues of causality, agency, responsibility, and identity' (p.4) which defines contemporary America.

Timothy Melley (2000) makes a similar point in *The Empire of Conspiracy*, when he suggests that conspiracy theory 'arises out of a radical doubt about how knowledge is produced and about the authority of those who produce it' (p.13). Melley suggests that in today's world, conspiracy theory individualises contemporary impersonal forms of control and regulation; attributes to them the human capacities of volition, intent and agency; and transforms them into an image of an almighty plot (Melley refers to this process as *agency panic*). Likewise, in *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* Mark Fenster (1999) argues that conspiratorial narrative 'ideologically addresses real structural inequities, and constitutes a response to a withering civil society and the concentration of the ownership of the means of production, which together leave the political subject without the ability to be recognised or to signify in the public realm' (p.67).

In locating the origin of contemporary conspiracy culture in the postmodern condition, Knight, Melley and Fenster draw upon two intellectual sources. First is Frederic Jameson's pronouncement that conspiracy theory constitutes the 'poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age', and represents a 'degraded figure of the total logic of late capital' (Jameson, 1991). In recent writing on conspiracy theories, Frederic Jameson's work is mainly referred to in order to undermine the traditional conceptualisation of conspiracism as a feature of fringe political movements (Knight, 2000, p.19). The suggestion that conspiracy theory reflects a 'utopian desire to understand and confront the contradictions and conflicts of contemporary capitalism' (Jameson, 1991; p.116), releases the term from its negative political connotations and establishes conspiracy theory as a widespread 'theory of power' which oversimplifies the political and social complexities of the (post)modern age, and challenges problems such as high-technology surveillance, consumerism, or the monopoly of international capital (Fenster, 1999, Melley, 2000).

As well as drawing upon Jameson's ideas, recent cultural analyses of conspiracy theories refer, either directly or indirectly, to Paul Ricoeur's notion of 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. In *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricoeur proposed that interpretation can take the form of an 'exercise of suspicion'. He identified Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, as 'masters of suspicion' in that all three authors based their work on religion on the practice of unmasking the 'true' meaning by stripping away the 'false consciousness' (Ricoeur, 1970; p.33). Marx famously exposed religion as the 'opium of the people' which hides true class inequalities; Nietzsche argued that

religion serves as the refuge for the weak and a justification for 'slave morality' (Stewart, 1989); while Freud traced religion to a particular psycho-sexual dynamic in the unconscious.

The practice of revealing the 'real' by throwing light on the 'apparent', which underlies Ricoeur's 'hermeneutic of suspicion', has led some authors to draw a parallel between this interpretative exercise and 'paranoia'. For instance, the *Encyclopaedia of Postmodernism* (Routledge, 2000) suggests that 'hermeneutic of suspicion', refers to the 'incipiently paranoid interpretative posture which presumes that the deep organization of culture is unintelligible to the knowing subject'. Similarly, Melley notes that 'going "more deeply" into the "obvious"' is a feature which psycho-analysis shares with 'paranoia' and conspiracy theory. Melley draws further parallels between psychoanalysis and conspiracy theory when he points out that they share not only an interpretative stance, but also a theory of agency. By conceptualising the unconscious as a 'mental agency' or 'system', psychoanalysis, just like conspiracy theory, locates the motive force of human actions, thoughts and desires to an inaccessible 'system', and employs a rhetoric which accords this system human capacities such as motive, unity or efficacy (Melley, 2000; p.24).

Peter Knight invokes Ricoeur when he suggests that conspiracy theory reveals the dynamic of a 'quasi-paranoid hermeneutic of suspicion' (Knight, 2000, p.10) which is largely taken for granted by the American public. Similarly, using the example of the *X-Files*, Knight suggests that contemporary conspiracy theory, 'far from offering a paradoxically comforting and fixed paranoid interpretation...revels in an infinite hermeneutic of suspicion which undermines every stable solution that the Special Agents [Moulder and Scully] reach' (p.28). In other words, conspiracy theory is seen as reflecting a ubiquitous suspicion that 'nothing is ever quite as it seems' which in turn leads to an epidemic of mistrust, and a continuing drive for endless interpretation.

What is noteworthy - and problematic - about Fenster's, Melley's and Knight's recent writing on conspiracy culture is not the broadness of the definition as such, or the general idea about the proliferation of suspicion and mistrust in post-war American society. The problem with this approach is that what the three authors describe as 'conspiracy culture' or 'conspiracy theory' is regarded as having originated from the Hofstadterian 'paranoid style'. The broader culture of suspicion is seen as a post-modern development within the conspiratorial tradition, as its new variant which has almost completely supplanted the older varieties.

For example, Knight (2000) suggests that in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination, conspiracy theories ceased to be the prerogative of the 'obsessive-minded right-wing,

paranoid nut' or 'the dangerous proponent of extremist politics' (p.3). Instead, 'new forms of conspiracy culture have emerged' (p.23) which have become a widespread phenomenon, and have 'spilt over' into contemporary mass culture. Conspiracy theories were 'no longer the lingua franca of the extremists, but [have] become part of the American vernacular' (Knight, 2000, p.25). In the process, conspiracy theories developed a 'self-ironising' and reflexive quality. Conspiracy culture no longer provided 'simple moral certainties, but increasing doubt about even the most fundamental assumptions about What Is Really Going On' (p.10). It became 'less of a mark of irrational extremism than the default view for a countercultural generation' (p.34). Melley (2000) similarly suggests that the post-WWII conspiracy culture in the US is not driven so much by the dynamic of scapegoating or by radical politics, but by the need to manage the 'sense of *diminished human agency*' (p.11) in the face of the increasingly menacing '*organisations, technology, or system*' (p.8, original emphasis). Fenster, (1999) adds to the critique of Hofstadter (1966) and other classical literature on conspiracy theories by arguing that the narrow conceptualisation of conspiracy theories as a 'style' characteristic of populist movements fails to take into account the emerging role of conspiratorial discourse as a widespread 'popular conception of power'. Conspiracy theory is today an 'extreme form of political cynicism in which dissatisfaction is stabilised within a narrative that provides an all-encompassing scandal at its centre' (Fenster, 1999; p.71). The general idea about the recent changes in the nature, content and function of conspiracy theory has been summarised by Silverstein (2000) who notes that 'if the previous paradigm of conspiracy was the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the new model is the *X-Files*'.

It is intriguing that in outlining the assumed post-modern transformation of conspiracy theories, none of the three authors entertains the possibility that the broader philosophy of postmodern suspicion which underpins the *X-Files*, Oliver Stone's *JFK*, novels by DeLillo, Pynchon or Borroughs and other cultural products which they examine in their work, may not be the direct descendant of the Hofstadterian 'paranoid style' or in any direct way related to the conspiratorial ideological tradition. Knight, Melley and Fenster ignore the possibility that the broader discourse of suspicion and a pervasive scepticism about power and agency, which developed after the second world war and became particularly acute in the US after the Kennedy assassination, may in fact constitute a different, albeit related, cultural phenomenon. However, there are good reasons why the 'hermeneutic of suspicion' and the broader post-modern scepticism (both of which undoubtedly characterise contemporary American culture) need to be distinguished, both historically and conceptually, from the conspiratorial ideological tradition.

First of all, the conspiratorial tradition of explanation, as described by Hofstadter (1966) or Lipset and Raab (1978) continues to exist, both in the United States and elsewhere, unabated by the new 'forms' exemplified in novels by DeLillo, Burroughs, Atwood, Pynchon and Heller or in TV dramas such the *X-Files*. As Berlet and Lyons (2001), Barkun (1994) and other writers on the American extreme Right repeatedly point out, the conspiracy tradition, with its antisemitic elements and populist rhetoric persists on the fringes of American politics. Moreover, the conspiracism of extreme political movements appears not to have changed in the way that recent literature suggests. There is nothing 'postmodern' about the conspiracy theories propounded by the Posse Comitatus, the Christian Identity Movement or Farrakhan's Nation of Islam. The ideology of the far-right contains nothing of the postmodern tongue-in-cheek playfulness and the 'self-reflexive' tone found in the *X-Files* or the 1997 film *Conspiracy Theory*. Rather, the ideological single-mindedness of conspiracist ideology remains entrenched in the realm of modernity, where tales of clashes between civilisations, the implementation of truth, and battles between moral extremes can be elaborated without even the smallest dose of postmodern irony.

Also, there is little evidence to suggest that cultural products on which contemporary literature on conspiracy theories focuses (i.e. novels, films or TV shows), belong to, or are an extension of the previously outlined conspiratorial tradition of explanations. Ideologists of Militia or White supremacist movements seldom refer to, for instance, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* when elaborating some conspiratorial argument. They are more likely to invoke Gary Allen's *None Dare Call it Conspiracy*, which was published in the same year as Pynchon's novel. Similarly, Timothy McVeigh's terrorist act in Oklahoma City was inspired by *The Turner Diaries*, a book about the popular revolution against Jews and Blacks, rather than by Heller's allegorical novel *Catch 22* or any similar contemporary piece of literature. In the same way, one will seldom find Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* mentioned on the reading lists of White supremacist organisations, along with the work of Robison, Henry Ford or Nesta Webster. The reason is that the two types of literature belong to different cultural traditions. Post WWII fiction, which echoes the broader discourse of suspicion, is not part of the ideological tradition which is described by Hofstadter (1966), Billig (1978) or Lipset and Raab (1978). Although they may have a common underlying theme of conspiracy, the narratives of the *X-Files* or Don DeLillo's *Libra* neither draw on the conspiratorial tradition of explanation, nor contribute directly to its perpetuation.

The second problem that stems from the failure to distinguish between the conspiracy tradition and general trends in contemporary postmodern culture, is that the political implications of the conspiracy tradition are repeatedly undermined. Although recent writing

on conspiracy culture recognises the dangers posed by the excessive versions of the 'paranoid style' and their inherently prejudicial and anti-democratic potential, they nonetheless discuss political extremism in the context of mainstream, postmodern cultural trends. The *Turner Diaries*, Tim McVeigh, the rhetoric of the Nation of Islam, and other examples of conspiracist tradition are not granted separate chapters or sections. There is no visible attempt to enforce an unequivocal conceptual, moral or political distinction between the conspiracy tradition and the more innocuous versions of the post-modern 'paranoid' culture. Melley (2000), for instance, refers to the belief in the Zionist Occupational Government, *The Turner Diaries* and the militia ideology as manifestations of the same 'agency panic' which is thought to underlie the writing of Pynchon and Heller. Similarly, Tim McVeigh and the Unabomber are cited as examples of the pervasive fear of technology also evident in Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The problem with this approach is that by confounding the conspiracist ideological tradition with various symbolic representations of modern society, the more positive stance towards conspiracy culture is stretched so as to include many controversial aspects of the conspiracy tradition.

This particular point is evident in the opening chapter of Knight's (2000) book. Although the author acknowledges that the New World Order conspiracy theory 'can easily shade into tedious and vicious scapegoating which often contains a barely concealed antisemitic strain' (p.38), in the same paragraph he recognises that 'though sometimes farfetched, stories about the US government knowingly collaborating with 'alien' powers, or about the sinister influence of unelected, shadowy internationalist organisations, make sense in the current age of rapid globalisation' (p.38). Conspiracy theories are thus seen as only 'sometimes' farfetched. Otherwise, they are presumably on to something. On the previous page, Knight similarly noted that conspiracy theories propounded by the militias and Patriot movements seem unreasonable only 'at first sight' (p.37). Knight's willingness to regard these theories as potentially acceptable and reasonable (once one goes beyond the first impression) stems from the fact that militia ideology, and traditional conspiratorial themes such as the New World Order conspiracy, are treated as manifestations of the 'postmodern suspicion' which addresses genuine concerns of contemporary society in a playful and self-ironising way. The failure to distinguish between the conspiracy tradition and the discourses of suspicion, elevated the ideology of extremism and radical politics to the status of what Knight later calls 'routinised paranoia', which today is the 'default mode of contemporary cultural criticism' (p.73).

The disregard for the political dimension of the conspiracy tradition is also apparent when Knight discusses Macdonald's *Turner Diaries*. Although Knight acknowledges that *The*

Diaries are conspiracy theory 'taken to its most bloody and dangerous extreme', he goes on to claim that

'in the haste to condemn the novel's heavy handed message, however, few if any considered what makes up the bulk of the book. In many places the overarching story of violent revolution is almost forgotten amid the welter of mechanical detail...As much as it is a conspiratorial blueprint for racial warfare and an attack on multiculturalism, *The Turner Diaries* is also a homage to the value of skilled labour...and lament for the way those skills have begun to be redundant in post-war America.' (p.40)

The bigotry of *The Turner Diaries* is allocated secondary importance in Knight's analysis. Macdonald's book is presented as yet another example of literature in which the theme of conspiracy is invoked to represent the dissatisfaction with contemporary industrial relations in the US. Regardless of the formal dismissal of the prejudicial message of *The Turner Diaries*, the fact that the book is discussed in the context of fairly innocuous fictional literature underestimate the novel's antisemitic and anti-Black dimension, as well as its ideological origins in the American far-Right.

This pattern is repeated in the discussion of conspiracy theories among the Black community in the US, where Knight mentions the presence of antisemitic themes in the conspiratorial rhetoric of the Nation of Islam (NOI). Rather than tracing the roots of NOI's antisemitism to the conspiratorial ideological tradition, Knight interprets the anti-Jewish prejudice of Black militants as a rather trivial aspect of American race relations. The contempt for the 'Jewish slumlord' expressed in NOI propaganda is explained away as 'part of the longer tirade against a host of other "white slumlords"' (p.163). Moreover, Knight suggested that the recent 'mutual fear and loathing' between Blacks and Jews was exacerbated by the 'moral panic' whipped up by the mainstream media, Jewish organisations (ADL), and the US Senate, in response to the suggestion, made by a NOI leader, that Jews have organised the slave trade. Knight's dismissal of conspiratorial antisemitism as a by-product of American race relations, for which Jewish organisations such as B'nai Brith and the ADL are partly responsible, not only ignores the legacy of antisemitism in the conspiratorial cultural tradition but also trivialises the political and social implications of anti-Jewish prejudice.

The way in which the over-inclusive definition of 'conspiracy theory' or 'conspiracy culture' undermines the political and ideological dimension of the conspiratorial tradition is also apparent in Fenster's (1999) work. Although mainly critical of conspiracy theory as a political project, Fenster (1999) suggests that conspiracy theories '[have] had a remarkably productive role in American history, in the development of a secular Enlightenment rationality' (Fenster, 1999, p.xv). Presumably, Fenster is referring to the variety of 19th century populist

movements whose role in American history is rarely thought to be particularly commendable (see for instance Berlet and Lyons, 2000). In fact, these movements provide the ideological basis for contemporary Militias, supremacist movements and other right-wing groups in the US. Also, Fenster suggests that 'fascist racism' is not 'conspiracy theory's necessary result'. Rather, as a counterculture which encourages suspicion about the existing power structure, conspiracy theory is thought to harbour a progressive and democratic potential. This is a claim that is hardly supported by the history of the conspiratorial cultural tradition, and is defensible only if the term 'conspiracy theory' is taken to be sufficiently broad to include *any* suspicion about power and government.

The purpose behind this examination of recent cultural studies of conspiracy theory has not been to belittle their general aim, which is to analyse contemporary mass culture and its preoccupation with the idea of conspiracy. Instead, the intention was to draw attention to the necessity of a distinction between post-modern cultural trends and the ideological tradition of conspiracy theory; as well as to highlight the problems, both conceptual and political, which arise out of the failure to separate the two phenomena. At the same time, this is not to say that there is not a more subtle and complex interconnection between conspiratorial tradition and the general discourse of suspicion. This issue will be picked up in a later chapter, where examples from the Serbian political context will be used to suggest that the exercise of suspicion, while not drawing on the conspiratorial tradition of explanation, often poses the general question and introduces an explanatory dilemma to which the conspiratorial tradition of explanation can offer a simple and coherent answer (see Chapter 6).

2.5. Conclusion

The aim of the present chapter has been to introduce a conceptualisation of conspiracy theory which will be adhered to throughout the thesis. Conspiracy theory was defined as a tradition of explanation which comprises of a set of ideas, values, interpretations and images which are used to construct a causal explanation at the heart of which is the idea of world conspiracy. It was further suggested that conspiracy theory constitutes a type of explanation that is typically found on the fringes of contemporary democratic and pluralist political culture, and which has traditionally inspired (and was in turn perpetuated by) extremist and populist movements worldwide. In defining conspiracy theory in this relatively restricted way, the present project sides with what is today widely regarded as the classical literature on the subject, including Hofstadter (1966), Lipset and Raab, (1978), Davis (1972), Roberts (1974), Billig (1978) etc.

The relatively narrow definition of the subject matter not only excludes from the category of conspiracy theory the broader discourses of suspicion which characterise contemporary Western culture, but also eliminates other types of explanations, such as institutional analysis (Chomsky) or some versions of 'vulgar Marxism' which are occasionally included in the category of conspiracy theory (e.g. Pipes, 1998). As the examination of the recent studies of conspiratorial themes in US mass culture demonstrated, the imposition of strict conceptual boundaries is necessary and well-justified. Over-inclusive definitions which incorporate into the category of conspiracy theory any allusion to secrecy and collusion, or any attribution of causality to actions and motives of determinate individuals, often undermine the political implications of the conspiratorial tradition and the role which it continues to play in the production of extremist ideology and discourses of prejudice.

Chapter 3

Serbian populist right-wing politics: the roots of conspiracy culture

In outlining the historical development and main characteristics of the conspiracy tradition, the previous chapter focused on the tradition's 'universal' features, rather than on the specificities of Serbian conspiratorial culture. This approach was justified, considering that there appears to be an informal exchange of information, resources and knowledge among conspiracy theorists worldwide. For instance, the writing of Ratibor Đurđević, one of Serbia's most prolific conspiracy theorists, contains frequent references to American writers such as Eustace Mullins, Gary Allen or Henry Ford. At the same time, Đurđević's name appears on the 'reading list' recommended by the Islamic Association for Palestine webpage. Similarly, various right-wing organisations in the US such as the LaRouchians, even the Christian Identity Movement, often share conspiratorial resources and arguments with the Nation of Islam as well as with some left-wing critics of the American establishment such as the former Attorney-General Ramsey Clark (Berlet & Lyons, 2000; Pipes, 1998). This cross-cultural dimension of conspiracy theories plays an important part in the preservation and continuation of a distinct cultural tradition.

The more general appeal of the conspiracy tradition does not imply that the precise shape, form and tone of a conspiratorial explanation is not affected by individuals, political movements or ideological traditions which are unique to the social and cultural context in which that explanation emerges. For this reason, the present chapter will outline the history and idiosyncrasies of the Serbian conspiratorial tradition and identify various religious, political and cultural influences which have helped shape the explanations of the bombing of Yugoslavia in the Spring of 1999.

In examining the history of Serbian conspiracy culture, the chapter will pay particular attention to the Serbian populist movement of the 1930s, which played a crucial role in the development of Serbian conspiratorial discourse. In this context, the chapter will reflect on the teachings of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović (1880-1956), a Serbian Orthodox Christian thinker, who as well as being a respected religious scholar, is also a prominent authority within Serbian conspiracy culture. As the empirical chapters will show, Velimirović's name repeatedly crops up in Serbian conspiracy material. In fact, it can safely be said that in contemporary Serbia it is difficult to find an elaborate account of a world conspiracy that does

not, in one way or another, reflect upon some aspect of the Bishop's work. The reasons behind Velimirović's prominent status within Serbian conspiracy culture will be sought in his role as the spiritual leader of 1930s populism and as one of the architects of the clerico-nationalist dimension of Serbian conspiracism. Following the historical overview of Serbian conspiratorial discourse, the chapter will outline various aspects of the ideological climate in Serbia in the 1990s which facilitated the proliferation of conspiratorial explanatory discourse.

3.1. Early history of Serbian conspiracy culture and the emergence of conspiratorial antisemitism

The roots of Serbian conspiracy culture can be traced to the emergence of conspiratorial antisemitism in the final decades of the 19th century. As the previous chapter indicated, in most of Europe, antisemitic conspiratorial themes emerged in reaction to the emancipation of Jews in the first half of the 19th century. In Serbia, conspiratorial antisemitism developed relatively late (after 1870), but like elsewhere, it was in reaction to the abolition of anti-Jewish legislation and the liberalisation of Serbian society.

Serbia's struggle for independence in the early 19th century was accompanied by the persecution of the country's Jewish minority. From 1804 onwards, Jews were systematically driven out of provincial Serbia and made to settle in Belgrade.¹ The exodus of the Jewish community culminated in 1846 when Jews were forbidden by law to live outside the city. Importantly, in the early days of persecution, the victimisation of Jews was not based on fear of Jewish conspiracy, but on religious antisemitism which was deeply entrenched in Orthodox Christianity and which contributed to a general distrust of and animosity towards the 'alien' Jewish community (Poliakov, 1974; Cohn, 1957; Perdurant, 1995). As an English Consul noted at the time, Jews were 'shut off from their so-called fellow-subjects as if contact with them would communicate the plague' (cited in Cohen, 1996). Later, with the emergence of the Serbian mercantile class in the mid 19th century, antisemitism attained a commercial dimension as pressure was placed on the Serbian authorities to curb the competition from Jewish businesses and impose legal limits on the dealings of Jewish-owned companies outside the capital. This led directly to the ghettoisation of Jews in Belgrade after 1861.

Interestingly, in the 1860s and 70s Britain exercised regular diplomatic pressure on Serbian rulers to end the persecution of the country's Jewish community.² As a result of British pressure, the Berlin Treaty, signed in 1878, which formally granted Serbia its independence and statehood, required of the newly established kingdom to recognise political and civil rights of all religious minorities. Resistance to this section of the treaty was considerable, so

aspects of anti-Jewish legislation remained in force until 1889, when the new constitution brought Serbia in line with its treaty obligations. The subsequent period was characterised by the speedy emancipation of the Jewish community. By the early 20th century, six Jews had entered Serbia's government, education authorities and the military establishment (Freidenreich, 1979).

The gradual liberalisation of Serbian society, which began with the signing of the Berlin treaty, was accompanied by a widespread feeling of resentment and backlash among sections of the Serbian population. The Serbian Orthodox Church authorities in particular complained against the new rights given to Jews, and numerous antisemitic tracts were published at the time (Cohen, 1996). One of them was the translation of a German pamphlet *Religious Teaching of the Talmud or the Mirror of Kike Honesty*, which was translated and published in 1878 by the well-known publicist Vasa Pelagić. Another was the 1882 antisemitic tract *Let's not give Serbia to the Kikes*, the authors of which were several anonymous 'Serbian patriots'. The book called for the formation of a 'Serbian anti-Jewish (antisemitic) society' similar to those founded by 'German and Hungarian patriots'. These and other antisemitic publications of the period focused on two related themes: the portrayal of Jewish religion as 'evil', and of the Jewish community as an exploitative and alien force in Serbian society. For instance, Pelagić's 1878 pamphlet asserted that the Talmud requires of Jews to 'cheat, steal, grab, have pawn shops, plunder, hate, destroy, exploit, and kill all people who are not Jews'. Subsequent publications, such as *The Book about Jews: At whose store should we shop* (anonymous, 1904) elaborated on the economic theme by accusing the local Jewish population of immoral practices such as price-rigging or usury, the aim of which was to impoverish the Serbian rural community. Significantly, these anti-Jewish ideas reflected the sentiments of 19th century German antisemitism (Poliakov, 1974). This is not surprising, considering that Serbia's fledgling bourgeoisie was principally educated in Germany, Austria and Hungary from where it imported the dominant ideas of that period. Consequently, while drawing most of its force and popular appeal from the longstanding Jewish demonology propounded by the Orthodox Church, the late 19th century antisemitism, which signalled the arrival of the conspiratorial tradition of explanation to the Serbian society, developed under the strong influence of the German nationalist writing of that period.³

In the first half of the 20th century, and especially during the reign of King Peter I Karađorđević (1903-1918), antisemitic discourse persisted in Serbia amid a generally more liberal political climate which brought with it greater tolerance towards Jews. In 1919 the first Jewish community organisation, the Alliance of Jewish Municipalities was founded. The Alliance acted on behalf of the Jews in the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and

Slovenes (renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929) and served as a kind of anti-defamation league which ensured equal treatment and social equality for Jews. In 1936, for instance, the Alliance won a lawsuit against the publishers of the Serbian translation of *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, thus managing at least to delay the book's publication by several years. In this period the status of conspiratorial antisemitism in Serbia was comparable to that in other European democracies. The notion of a Jewish plot existed as an explanatory discourse and often constituted what Billig (1987b) referred to as the 'polite currency of gentile conversation' (p.250). However, in the sphere of politics, antisemitic ideas were confined to marginal organisations and movements and as such did not affect government policy. This state of affairs persisted until the arrival of the German occupational forces in 1941.

Although of limited political significance at the time, conspiratorial antisemitism propounded in the 1930s by fringe political movements proved crucial for the subsequent development of the conspiratorial culture in Serbia. In the decade which preceded the Second World War, the notion of Jewish conspiracy was raised to the level of political ideology, and was formulated as a fairly coherent set of ideas and assumptions which have inspired Serbian conspiratorial writing ever since.

3.2. Conspiracy theory as a political ideology and religious doctrine: Dimitrije Ljotić, Nikolaï Velimirović and 1930s Serbian populism

The mid to late 1930s witnessed the democratisation of Yugoslav society. In the aftermath of the assassination of King Alexander Karađorđević in Marseilles in 1934, a number of pro-Western and pro-European parties emerged on the political scene (e.g. the Popular Front), and endeavoured to strengthen the country's democratic institutions and prevent the emergence of fascism and nazism. At the same time, increasing ethnic tension and the activity of various subversive organisations such as the Communist Party (outlawed in 1920) or the Croatian Ustashi movement, threatened to destabilise Yugoslavia's new democracy. The rising sense of political uncertainty spawned a number of right-wing movements which offered an alternative 'solution' to the problems of corruption, political squabbling and what they called the 'overall moral deterioration of the nation'. The most significant Serbian right-wing movement of this period was Zbor (Rally) founded in 1935 by Dimitrije Ljotić (1891-1945). Ljotić is today considered to be the main architect and representative of pre-World War II Serbian right-wing populism (Martić, 1980; Popov, 1993; Stefanović, 1974; Kljujić, 1974; Gligorijević, 1965).

Zbor's political program consisted of a blend of Italian Fascism, German Nazism, and Orthodox Christian fundamentalism. Ljotić spoke of 'the people' as an 'organic being' which must abandon individualism, parliamentary democracy, communism, the emancipation of women and other values of modernity. He argued that the nation must rally round a charismatic Leader (preferably the King from the Karađorđević dynasty), and return to its religious and cultural traditions (Popov, 1993). Ljotić advocated a strong state



based on the categories of 'God, King and *pater familias* [*domaćin*]', in which the teaching of Orthodox Christianity and Serbian peasant traditions would provide the main organising principles (Martić, 1980; Kljujić, 1974; Stefanović, 1974).

Apart from a strong base among students of the University of Belgrade (where the organisation even had its own restaurant) and among members of the Orthodox clergy (see below), Zbor was, by and large, an unpopular political movement. Membership never exceeded a couple of thousand, and included, as well as priests and students, mainly members of urban middle classes such as doctors, lawyers, judges, bureaucrats, teachers and traders (Popov, 1993).⁴ In the elections of 1935 and 1938, Ljotić's organisation attracted around one percent of the vote and failed to win a single seat. It is generally believed that most Serbs rejected Zbor because its ideology was considered to be too close to fascism and nazism. The late 1930s were a time of widespread support for Western powers among the Serbs, and was accompanied by intense distrust and hatred of Germany and its allies (Martić, 1980; Irvine, 1995). Because of his open admiration for Hitler, Ljotić was often referred to in the press as a 'German agent', a label which he strongly rejected.⁵ As a profoundly anti-democratic movement, Zbor was subjected to regular police intimidation in the pre-war years. Its assets were confiscated, rallies interrupted, and prominent members arrested, especially after 1940, when the movement was officially outlawed by the authorities (Martić, 1980).

Ljotić's political fortunes changed with the arrival of German troops in April 1941. Zbor and its military wing, the Serbian Volunteer Force (Srpski Dobrovoljački Korpus; SDK) became Serbia's main collaborationist organisation, and a much more reliable ally of the Germans than the official puppet regime of General Milan Nedić (Martić, 1980).⁶ Members of the SDK fought alongside the Germans against Partizan and Chetnik insurgents, and were even involved in the organisation of retaliatory executions of civilian population.⁷ Ljotić founded the Serbian equivalent of the Hitler Jugend, and opened a prison camp in the town of Sremska Palanka the aim of which was to 're-indoctrinate' Serbia's communist youth (Martić, 1980;

Stefanović, 1974). Also, a number of prominent members of Zbor obtained high positions in the Serbian collaborationist government (Cohen, 1996).

While general aspects of Ljotić's populist ideology and his collaborationist activity are dealt with elsewhere (Popov, 1993; Martić, 1980; Stefanović, 1984; Gligorijević, 1965; Kuljić, 1974; Petranović, 1983; Borković, 1979; etc.) the present discussion will focus on the theme of conspiracy which runs through, and is in many ways central to Ljotić's political outlook. In Ljotić's writing the uncompromising anti-modernist stance, which includes radical anti-individualism, anti-rationalism, anti-humanism, anti-pluralism and anti-intellectualism (Popov, 1993), is repeatedly justified and rationalised by reference to a global international Jewish-Masonic-Communist conspiracy against the Serbs and other Christians.

For example, in the book *The Drama of the Contemporary World*, which contains a collection of transcripts of Ljotić's speeches delivered in 1939 and 1940, it is alleged that behind the world's problems lies the 'Great Director' (as in theatre director), a 'collective personality' which consists of 'a people without land, language, a stable religion, a people without roots, the Jews' (Ljotić, 1940; p. 9-11).⁸ Ljotić traces the origins of the Jewish conspiracy to the French Revolution (p.22) and claims that every significant historical event since 1789 (including the Berlin Treaty and the Russian Revolution) was caused by the Jews, and by the European Masonic Lodges whom Ljotić referred to as the 'Jewish Continental Comintern' (Martić, 1980). In Ljotić's writing, Jews are portrayed as the force behind Zbor's three main anathemas: liberal democracy, Freemasonry and communism, and therefore as the movement's (and by extension the nation's) principal enemy (Popov, 1993). In fascism Ljotić saw a form of resistance against global Jewish control and he praised Hitler for uncovering the conspiracy of 'World Jewry' (Martić, 1980).

Before the Second World War, Zbor's conspiracy theory was disseminated and popularised mainly by means of public rallies and through Zbor's own publications such as *Otažbina* (Fatherland), *Naš Put* (Our Path), *Novi Put* (New Path), *Bilten JNP Zbor* (Bulletin of the Yugoslav Popular Movement Zbor) and a German language publication *Die Erwache* (Awakening), aimed at Serbia's Volksdeutsche community which inhabited parts of the northern province of Vojvodina. Individual issues of these publications were occasionally prohibited by the authorities, in some cases as a result of successful lawsuits by the Alliance of Jewish Municipalities. However, during the Second World War, Zbor's publishing activity flourished. Ljotić and his associates were responsible for the publication of a significant proportion of the total of 51 antisemitic titles published in Serbia between 1941 and 1945 (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Report on Antisemitism, Belgrade 2001). Authors of

books such as *Under the Star of David: Judaism and the Freemasons movements in the past and today* (Pavlović, 1943), *The Serb People Under the Clutches of Jews* (Mojić, 1941) and *Jews in Serbia* (Prokić, 1941) were all prominent members of Zbor. Furthermore, Zbor was behind the notorious *Great Anti-Masonic Exhibition*, organised in Belgrade in October 1941 under the auspices of the German authorities. The exhibition, the aim of which was to publicise the alleged existence of a Judeo-Masonic-Communist conspiracy, was the largest in a series of similar propaganda activities which Zbor organised throughout Serbia in the early 1940s.

Ljotić's principal contribution to Serbian conspiratorial culture is that his writing gave the local version of conspiracy theory a narrative coherence and political direction which it previously did not possess. He performed a function comparable to that of Henry Ford in the US or Hitler in Germany. In the populist ideology of the 1930s, the concerns of Serbian nationalist and conservative forces were assimilated into the conspiratorial tradition of explanation, and the 'problems' of Serbian society were projected into the idea of a global Jewish, communist and Masonic conspiracy. More importantly, the publishing activity of Zbor both before and during the war produced the core material of Serbian conspiracy culture and elaborated many themes which are still in evidence in strands of Serbian conspiratorial discourse sixty years later.

While literature on Ljotić and 1930s Serbian populism regularly acknowledges the role of Zbor in laying the foundations of Serbian conspiracy theory (Popov, 1993; Martić, 1980; Stefanović, 1984), studies on the subject often neglect to mention that Zbor was in many ways a political manifestation of a wider cultural phenomenon of that period, one that had a particularly strong religious dimension. In fact most of Ljotić's political beliefs, including the notion of world conspiracy, reflect the views of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović who, as early as in the 1920s, propounded many ideas which were subsequently popularised by Zbor.

Bishop Velimirović was one of the most respected Serbian religious figures of the early 20th century, famous for his nationalism and clericalism as much as for his personal charisma, oratorical skills and erudition (Bigović, 1998).⁹ As an ardent follower of the medieval Serbian Saint Sava, Velimirović advocated the union of church and state, claiming that a 'state which is not Christian is – Satanic' (quoted in Subotić, 1996). Like Ljotić, Velimirović believed in society founded on the principles of Orthodox Christian tradition, and a state based on religion, rather than science, art or economics (*Dream about a Slav Religion*, Velimirović, 2001; p.11-25). Also, Velimirović proposed the 'God-King-pater familias' triad as the basis of a future Christian society long before it was taken up by Ljotić (Subotic, 1996).

In contrast to Ljotić, who openly politicised many of Velimirović's ideals, the Bishop propagated his views in a more surreptitious way, through a less formal religious movement. In early 1920s he founded *Bogomoljci (the Devotionalists)*, an evangelical movement consisting of a dispersed network of cells which disseminated Velimirović's teachings throughout Serbia (see Subotić, 1996).

In one of his last interviews Bishop Velimirović openly claimed that he was the spiritual leader and *eminence grise* of Serbian populism. Velimirović insisted that Ljotić was his 'pupil and faithful follower in Christ' who, metaphorically speaking, was merely 'passing the incense burner' (quoted in Popov, 1993). At the same time, Velimirović held his 'apprentice' in high esteem. At Ljotić's funeral in 1945, Velimirović spoke of the deceased as 'a politician bearing a cross', and praised him as the 'ideologue of clericalist nationalism' whose importance transcends the



Nikolaj Velimirović

boundaries of Serbian politics (cited in Kostić, 1991 and Subotić, 1996). Further evidence that Ljotić and Velimirović were actually part of the same broader political movement, comes from the fact that there was a significant overlap between the membership of Zbor and the Devotionalists. According to some sources, from 1935 onwards, leaders of Zbor were the 'backbone' of Velimirović's movement (Subotić, 1996; p.195), while according to others, the Devotionalists collectively joined Ljotić's Zbor in the late 1930s (Stefanović, 1984, Cohen, 1996).

Particularly significant to the present discussion is the fact that the conspiratorial antisemitism evident in Ljotić's political project is also apparent in Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović's writing, where the religious aspect of the anti-Jewish bigotry is especially prominent. For instance, in *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window*, written in the final years of the Second World War, Velimirović spoke of all modern ideas including 'democracy, and strikes, and socialism, and atheism, and religious tolerance, and pacifism, and global revolution, and capitalism, and communism' as the inventions of 'Jews, or rather their father, the Devil' (p.194). According to Velimirović, behind modernity lay a Satanic conspiracy, the aim of which is to 'place a Jewish Messiah on Christ's throne' (p.194). Velimirović most frequently referred to Jews as 'Čivuti' ('Kikes') and to the Jewish ghetto as 'čivutana' a derivative of the derogatory name for Jews.

It is important to note that antisemitic references in Velimirović's religious philosophy cannot be dismissed as a mere remnant of the older anti-Jewish tradition which persists in Orthodox Christian theology. Rather, the antisemitism evident in Velimirović's teaching and in various early devotionalist publications bears the hallmarks of European and American conspiracy tradition. In fact, the Devotionalist movement played a crucial role in the dissemination of conspiracy theories in the 1920s, long before Zbor was established. As early as 1926, and therefore more than ten years before *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* was first published (and banned) in Serbia, the Devotionalist journal *Hrišćanska Zajednica (The Christian Community)* printed parts of *Protocols* in the text *Bloody foundations, or the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (No.2-3, March 1926; p.6-9). Incidentally, the article was taken from the Catholic journal *Nova Revija (The New Review)*, published in Croatia. In the same year, *The Christian Community* reprinted extracts from Pelagić's aforementioned translation of the German pamphlet *Religious Teaching of the Talmud...* (No 4, April, 1926; p.8-11). Also, the Devotionalists, who maintained strong links with the Serbian diaspora in the US, introduced the antisemitic ideas of Henry Ford to the Serbian public. In the spring of 1927, *The Christian Community* published the article *Enemies of Christianity, according to Henry Ford* in which socialism and Freemasonry were identified as two 'darlings of the Jew' (No.1-2, January, 1927; p.4-9).¹⁰ Similar conspiratorial texts conveying the antisemitic, anti-masonic and anticommunist message were a regular feature of Devotionalist religious publications at the time (see Subotić, 1996).

It is also worth mentioning that Velimirović's writing in the 1930s and 40s reveals traces of Nazi political rhetoric. For instance, on one occasion Velimirović publicly referred to Nazi Germany as a realisation of his own nationalist ideal. In a speech delivered in 1935, Velimirović described Hitler as an inadvertent follower of the principles laid down by the Serbian medieval Saint Sava. Velimirović suggested that 'one must applaud the current German Leader, who as a simple craftsman and a common man, realised that nationalism without faith is an anomaly, a cold and insecure mechanism' (Velimirović, 2001, p.36). Also, Velimirović's writing in the 1930s reflects the racist ideology characteristic of that period. In the essay *Whose are you, little Serbian people*, written in 1939, Velimirović speaks of Serbs as 'God's children and people of the Aryan race, who have been granted the honorary role of being the main pillar of Christianity in the world' (Velimirović, 2001, p.40). He suggests that 'we are Aryan by blood, Slavs by surname, Serbs by name, Christians in heart and spirit' (ibid.). For Velimirović, Serbs were the guardians at the gates of Aryan Europe, who protect its purity from 'inferior tribes'.

In spite of the noticeable presence of Nazi political rhetoric in Velimirović's discourse, the Bishop's attitude towards Germany and its regime was somewhat ambivalent. In 1941, Velimirović was one of the staunchest opponents to the decision by the Yugoslav government to sign a pact with the Axis forces. Also, in some of Velimirović's later writing Nazism and Fascism were dismissed as the 'pneumonia' of society which needs to be eradicated (see Bigović, 1998). Yet, such criticisms of Nazism tend to appear side by side with what is effectively the Serbian clerico-nationalist variant of the same ideology, characterised by the claims about the moral, spiritual and racial superiority of the Orthodox Slavs, Serbs and the Dinar race¹¹ and which, like its German equivalent, has the notion of a Jewish conspiracy at its core.¹²

Velimirović's ambivalence towards the Germans was also reflected in Ljotić's writing. Ljotić's initial enthusiasm for Hitler diminished significantly after September 1939, when, according to his own account, the leader of Zbor became disappointed that the German dictator 'fell for the Jewish trick' and started a war from which Jews would ultimately benefit both politically and financially (Martić, 1980). And yet, doubts about Hitler's military strategy did not prevent Ljotić from assisting the Nazis in the implementation of the 'final solution' during the German occupation of Yugoslavia. Ljotić resolved his ambivalence by adding a peculiar apocalyptic twist to his conspiracy theory. He predicted that the war between Germany and the Allies would ultimately end in the defeat of the Nazis, but that the winners, the Soviet 'Judeo-Communists' and the 'Judaised West' would both end up drained by the lengthy conflict. At this point, true Christian nations (including of course the Serbs) would rise from the ashes, establish a new and better world, and deliver a fatal blow to the 'cunning Jew' and his Satanic conspiracy (Ljotić, *World Revolution*). In other words, Ljotić justified Zbor's collaboration with the Nazis as a temporary and necessary measure, which would preserve the strength of the Serbian nation for the impending and much more important showdown with the real enemies, the Jews, Freemasons and Communists (Martić, 1980).

In contrast to Ljotić, whose political career flourished under the Germans, Bishop Velimirović was arrested in the summer of 1941. In 1944, he was sent briefly to the Dachau concentration camp, along with the Serbian Patriarch Gavrilo. According to one of Velimirović's biographers, the order for the arrests of two of Serbia's most influential church dignitaries came directly from Hitler who was apparently outraged by Bishop Nikolaj's role in the organisation of the anti-Axis demonstrations in Belgrade which preceded the invasion (Bigović, 1998).¹³ Although Velimirović's pro-British political stance has been recognised by most historians of that period (Petranović, 1983; Nenezić, 1984; Borković, 1979), favourable biographical accounts of Velimirović's life fail to mention that Bishop Nikolaj spent most of

the war under house arrest in the Ljubostinja monastery. He was interned at Dachau only in 1944, for less than two months, before Ljotić intervened and had both the Bishop and the Patriarch released.¹⁴ Moreover, according to some accounts, Velimirović was held at Dachau as an *Ehrenhaftling*, an 'honour prisoner', which meant that he lived in separate quarters within the camp hospital and ate the same food as the German officers (Cohen, 1996). These revelations undermine the claims of Velimirović's supporters that the Germans feared the Bishop's influence and popularity, or that he suffered significant hardship (even torture) during the imprisonment. Nonetheless, Velimirović's alleged 'martyrdom' at the hands of the Nazis is often invoked by his admirers as a way of building the Bishop's political and moral credibility, and undermining the accusations that Velimirović was a Nazi sympathiser or at least a close associate and spiritual guide of Serbian nationalist collaborators.¹⁵

3.3. Serbs vs. 'the rotten West': The roots of anti-Western political discourse in Serbia

As will become apparent in subsequent chapters, in contemporary Serbian conspiracy theories, the hub of the alleged plot is most frequently located in 'the West'. Although the focus on the West (and America in particular) is not unique to Serbian conspiratorial discourse (see previous chapter), the roots of anti-Westernism in Serbian conspiracy culture go beyond the conspiracy tradition. The antagonism towards Western political and cultural influences, which is evident in strands of contemporary Serbian nationalist discourse is grounded in the mid 19th century Slavophile movement (Čolović, 1997; Perović, 1992, 1994). It was only in the 1920s and 30s that Slavophile anti-Westernism became assimilated into the conspiratorial explanatory discourse. Once again, a key role in this development was played by Nikolaj Velimirović.

Slavophile sentiments, which first developed in Russia in the early 19th century, did not arrive in Serbia from Russian Orthodox pan-Slavists like Aksakov or Homjakov, as is often thought, but from Czech and Slovak sources, notably Ludevít Stur and the poet Jan Kolar (Škerlić, 1925; Čolović, 1997, Perović, 1992). Slavophile ideas were brought to Serbia by students from the universities of Budapest and Posen who propounded their newly acquired ideas through the Serbian Youth Association (*Družbina Mladeži Srpske*) which they founded in 1847.

The basic tenet of Slavophilia was the belief in 'Slavdom' which has the power to 'revive weakened humanity, replace the exhausted Latin and incomplete Germanic civilisations, form a great Slav empire and establish a complete, humane and ideal civilisation' (Škerlić, 1925; cited in Čolović, 1997, p.89). According to Škerlić (1925), pan-Slavism was inspired by the

writings of Hegel and Fichte who saw Germany as the embodiment of 19th century culture and human spirituality.¹⁶ Slavophiles took German romanticist ideas further, arguing that the 'spiritually fresh' Slavs will eventually inherit the 'spiritual hegemony' of the Germans, and that Slavic culture will become the 'ultimate creation of the human spirit' (Skerlić, 1925; p.167). The alleged superiority of Slavic culture was often formulated in racial terms. Slavs were presented as a separate 'race' whose strength lies in the freshness and healthiness of its 'blood' (Čolović, 1997).

Inherent in the Slavophile argument was the idea that 'Slav East' and 'European West' were two irreconcilable worlds, engaged in a perpetual cultural, religious, national and economic struggle (Perović, 1994). This feature of the Slavophile ideology was particularly prominent in the writing of Russian authors, especially Dostoyevski, who gave the racial and cultural anti-Westernism a strong religious emphasis. In his writing, the East-West dichotomy was transformed into the conflict between Orthodox East and Catholic/Protestant West.

From 1860s onwards, anti-Westernism became a particularly strong theme in Serbian Slavophile discourse, which in this period also attained significant nationalist overtones (Skerlić, 1925). Attributes previously associated with Slav people in general were gradually confined to the Serbian nation (Čolović, 1997). Serbs became the epitome of Slavophile values, the role model for other Slav nations, and the standard-bearers in the crusade against the 'rotten West'. In the decades which followed, Slavophilia, and its anti-Western element in particular, remained a credible force in Serbian nationalist discourse. In some cases it is even said to have influenced mainstream politics. For example, the writing of Russian Slavophile philosopher Danilevski is thought to have affected the politics of two prominent early 20th century Serbian statesmen, Nikola Pašić and Stjepan Radić (Perović, 1994; Čolović, 1997).¹⁷ However, in the early 20th century, nowhere was Slavophilia more influential and popular than among members of the Orthodox clergy. Under the influence of Dostoyevski's later writing, a number of Serbian Orthodox thinkers, including Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović and Father Justin Popović, turned Slavophile anti-Westernism into an ideological weapon against the liberalisation and secularisation of Serbian society.

Velimirović and Popović, both of whom were educated in Western Europe, believed that Europe was under the influence of 'new ideologies: individualism, nationalism, liberalism, conservatism, materialism and secularism'. All of these values signalled the 'de-Christianisation' of Europe and its imminent end. Father Justin Popović argued that '*Homo Europaeicus*', whose culture is based on the concept of Man rather than on God, will self-destruct as 'deicide must end in suicide' (quoted in Subotić, 1993). Velimirović also had an

apocalyptic vision of the future of Europe. He saw Marx, Darwin and Nietzsche as the three 'ghosts of Europe' whose influence would bring the annihilation of Western civilisation.

Also, both authors were critical of the progressive trends among the Serbian intelligentsia in early 20th century, which, they argued, polluted the 'nation's soul' with 'European nihilism'. For Velimirović and Popović the antidote to the damaging secularisation of Serbian society lay in the adherence to Orthodox Christian values. The difference between 'Orthodoxy' and 'Europe' was often described in the form of simple dualities: Europe stands for death, materialism and Nietzschean Superman, Orthodoxy for eternal life, spiritualism and Dostoyevskian Omnihuman (Bigović, 1998).¹⁸ Predictably, the qualities of 'Orthodox Slavs' were often reduced to narrower categories such as 'Serbs' or the 'Balkan people'. Velimirović, for instance, claimed that the 'Balkan mentality' (which refers more or less exclusively to Serbs) is the 'symbol of the authentic, Christian view of the world, man and culture'.

In the 1920s, Velimirović's rampant anti-Westernism, and the fear of European cultural influence among the Serbian masses, led him to take action. The establishment of the Devotionalist movement, which was mentioned in the earlier section, was a direct consequence of the perceived need to protect the Serbs from European secularist philosophy, as well as from the emergence of non-Orthodox religious communities such as the Adventists (Subotić, 1993, 1996). It is in the Devotionalist evangelical teachings and especially in its literature and publicity material (*Orthodox Christian Community*) that the Slavophile anti-Westernism became blended with the conspiratorial tradition. Partly under the influence of Russian nationalist writing, secularism and rationalism became regarded as Jewish ideas, humanism became a Masonic value, and the Adventists were seen as no more than the 'spawn of Judeo-masonry' (Subotić, 1996) and a cuckoo's egg planted to undermine Orthodox Christianity. In the 1930s, these issues were further politicised by Ljotić and other ideologues of the Serbian Right and were integrated into a coherent explanatory discourse which became the essence of Serbian conspiracy tradition. The totality of Serbia's social, economic and political problems were blamed on a global conspiracy behind which stood 'the rotten West' as the epitome of the 'Judeo-Masonic' values loathed by Serbian conservative philosophers and politicians of that period.

The amalgamation of conspiracy tradition and Slavophile ideology in the 1930s gave Serbian conspiratorial discourse a characteristic nationalist even racist tone, and a strong religious dimension. As the empirical chapters will demonstrate, in addition to the general characteristics of the conspiratorial narrative outlined in the previous chapter, Serbian

conspiratorial discourse often refers to the spiritual (or in some cases genetic) superiority of the Serbs or Orthodox Christians in general, which supposedly explains their victimisation in the hands of the secularised, modern and conspiratorial 'West'.

3.4. Post World War II developments and the marginalisation of conspiracy theory

After the end of the Second World War, the new government of Yugoslavia, led by President Tito, took a very tough stance towards the defeated collaborationist forces in all parts of Yugoslavia. Ljotić did not live long enough to face the Partisans' version of 'revolutionary justice'. He died in a car crash in Slovenia in 1945, where, together with other Serbian collaborators, he was planning one last anti-Communist offensive. After German capitulation, most of Ljotić's forces fled Yugoslavia for fear of Communist reprisals, preferring to surrender to the British authorities in Austria (Stefanović, 1974; Kostić, 1991). However, they were promptly extradited back to Yugoslavia where most of them were summarily executed by the Partisans at Kocevski Rog. Velimirović, who joined Ljotić in Slovenia after his release from Dachau and gave his blessing to some of the most notorious Serbian warlords including Momčilo Đujić, Pavle Đurišić and Kosta Pećanac, managed to escape this fate and emigrate to the United States, where he died in 1956. A number of other representatives of Serbian populist movements who were accused of entertaining fascist ideas and collaborating with the Nazis (including a number of well known intellectuals such as Vladimir Velmar-Janković or Miloš Crnjanski) also emigrated to various parts of the world including the US, Australia, England, Spain or parts of South America.



Velimirović, during a visit to the Serbian collaborationist forces in Slovenia, 1945

Back home, the new authorities went to considerable lengths to sideline and marginalise the 1930s right-wing nationalist ideological tradition. Tito's government was dedicated to the principles of 'brotherhood and unity' between Yugoslav nations, which implied official opposition to any kind of nationalism and chauvinism, including antisemitism (Sekelj, 1997). In the post-war years, Communist Yugoslavia was largely devoid of the kind of institutionalised antisemitism which persisted in other Eastern European countries, including the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary (Sekelj, 1997; Volovici, 1994; Pipes, 1998). Although different to right-wing conspiratorial antisemitism, left-wing versions of anti-Jewish prejudice which were propounded by Communist regimes during the Cold War, reflected some of the themes of the conspiracy tradition such as the fear of Jewish economic power,

and its subversive potential (see Billig, 1987a). Not only were these themes absent from Yugoslav state ideology, but the authorities were occasionally openly critical of antisemitic campaigns in other countries (see Sekelj, 1997).

In this period, Nikolaj Velimirović, Ljotić and other exponents of pre WWII conspiracism were branded 'traitors', and the publication of their work was officially prohibited. Also, various organisations within the Serbian Orthodox Church, such as the Association of Orthodox Priests, were made to publicly denounce Velimirović's ideas (Bigović, 1998). Nonetheless, a small number of theologians from the Belgrade seminary (such as Bishops Atanasije Jeftić, Irinej Bulović and Amfilohije Radović) continued to defend Velimirović's religious philosophy, mainly within official church publications (Bigović, 1998). Their activity became especially intense in the 1980s (Radić, 1996).

While conspiratorial discourse was being marginalised in post-war Yugoslav society, various organisations within the Serbian diaspora endeavoured to keep the flame of Serbian conspiracy culture alive. The publishing company *Iskra*, based in Munich, published most of Velimirović's and Ljotić's work in the 1960s and 70s, while a magazine of the same name was being published in Birmingham (UK) by a group of Ljotić's supporters. In the US and Australia, countries with the largest number of 'political émigrés' fleeing 'communist persecution', the memory of Velimirović, Ljotić, Momcilo Đujić, Pavle Đurišić, Draža Mihajlović and other collaborators was frequently celebrated within various community organisations and 'veteran associations'. It should be noted that a major role in the preservation of Serbian nationalist and populist ideology within the diaspora was played by the Serbian Orthodox Church, which in many cases was, and still is, the focal point of community life for Serbian expatriates.

Serbian nationalism, populist political tradition and conspiratorial explanatory framework remained the province of Serbian right-wing emigrant organisations and various dissident groups until the end of the Cold War which saw the revival of right-wing ideology throughout Eastern Europe, including Serbia.

3.5. The fall of communism and the revival of Serbian nationalism

The post-communist revival of Serbian nationalism is usually associated with the ascent of Slobodan Milošević in the late 1980s. In the Western media in particular, throughout his 10-year rule, Milošević was regularly referred to as a 'ruthless', 'militant' nationalist and the mastermind behind the notorious project 'Greater Serbia'. However, as numerous political

analysts point out, the insistence on the nationalist dimension of Milošević's ideology tends to miss the essence of his charisma and political longevity (Vujačić, 1995; Ramet, 1991; Silber, 1996; Đilas, 1993, Trifković, 1997). Analysts of Milošević's rule argue that the former Serbian president was above all a political opportunist, whose 'ideals', nationalist or otherwise, were simply the means of preserving his position of power and authority. The key to Milošević's rise to power lay not in a strong nationalist conviction, but in his ability to ride the wave of popular nationalism, while at the same time presenting himself as a 'socialist' and the guardian of the 'legacy of the country's socialist revolution'. This 'dual ideology' (Vujačić, 1995; Markotić, 2000) enabled Milošević to attract popular support while keeping the country's most reactionary institutions (such as the army) on his side. The upshot of Milošević's ideological indistinctness is that he did not 'invent' contemporary Serbian nationalist ideology or the idea of Greater Serbia, but simply embraced them once it became apparent that doing so would be advantageous to his political career.

Greenfeld (1992) points out that the principal role in the elaboration and popularisation of nationalist ideology is traditionally played by a country's intelligentsia. This appears to be true in the case of the revival of Serbian nationalism, which was formulated and disseminated in the 1980s, first and foremost by the Serbian intellectual elite gathered within two prominent institutions, the Union of Writers and the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences (Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti; SANU).

The concern for Serbian national issues among the country's intelligentsia resulted from the attempt to address what was known at the time as the 'Serbian' or the 'Kosovo question'. In 1981, Communist Yugoslavia witnessed the largest popular revolt in its recent history, when the Albanian political elite, which governed Kosovo at the time (1968-1981), demanded constitutional changes that would effectively enable the province to declare independence from Yugoslavia. The 'separatist' demands were accompanied by violent and intimidatory expression of anti-Serbian sentiments which led to a mass exodus of the Serbian minority from the province. The plight of the Serbian refugees, which at the time was frequently ignored or sidelined by the Serbian and Yugoslav authorities, provoked widespread dissatisfaction and anger at the inability, or unwillingness, of state institutions to tackle the problem (Popov, 1993). In 1986, the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences drafted a 'memorandum', the aim of which was to assess the political and economic situation in Yugoslavia and draw attention to the deterioration of the status of the Serbian people within the federation. The memorandum, which was leaked to the press, later became known as the 'requiem for Yugoslavia' and the 'blueprint for Greater Serbia' (Silber and Little, 1995). It accused the federal authorities of an 'anti-Serbian' bias. It suggested that post-war economic

development in Yugoslavia prioritised the interests of Slovenia and Croatia, thus crippling Serbia's economic potential. Also, the memorandum alleged that the Serbian nation, the largest of Yugoslavia's constitutive nations, had been deliberately 'dismembered' and divided by the administrative borders between federal units established by Tito and Kardelj after WWII. The document lamented the current status of Serbian minorities in Croatia (which were seen as endangered by rising Croatian nationalism) and Kosovo, where Serbs were said to be subjected to 'physical, political, cultural and legal genocide'.

The memorandum was effectively the first authoritative elaboration of Serbian nationalist concerns in the 1980s. The ideas contained in it are important to the present discussion because they reflect a relatively novel component of Serbian nationalism which has helped shape contemporary conspiratorial discourse. This aspect of nationalist ideology, which the sociologist Aleksa Đilas refers to as 'historical nihilism', is characterised by the conviction that Serbs had been treated unfairly by other Yugoslav peoples, who failed to appreciate the sacrifices of the Serbian nation during the two world wars and who refused to acknowledge the Serbian contribution to the creation of the Yugoslav state (Đilas, 1993). This sentiment can be illustrated using the example of the writing of Dobrica Ćosić, a best-selling Serbian author, who is said to have played a prominent role in the drafting of the 1986 Memorandum. As early as in 1982, Ćosić spoke of the 'ungrateful brothers' of the Serbian people, and noted that

'We have allowed those whom we have liberated and helped create their own nations and nation states, to come and deny us our freedom-loving past, declare us hegemonists and occupiers and confine our history to the limits imposed by the Comintern and its ideological interpretations' (Ćosić, 1992a; p.63)

In a later book he went on to suggest that the ingratitude of others had turned Serbs into 'second class citizens without rights' who were being exploited, bullied, and 'subjected to chauvinist terror, assimilation, discrimination' etc. (Ćosić, 1992b; p.190). In its most drastic form, 'historical nihilism' called for the abandonment of the failed 'Yugoslav project' and the creation of a homogenous Serbian state, in the shape of a 'Greater Serbia' (Popov, 1993).

In the late 1980s, Milošević joined the Serbian intelligentsia on the increasingly crowded nationalist bandwagon, and promised to return the lost dignity and pride to the Serbian people in Kosovo (1987-89), Croatia (1991) and Bosnia (1992). Also, as soon as it became apparent that the Serbian nationalist project did not have the support of international power structures, the claims of 'historical nihilism' were extended to the international community. One of the better known myths concerning the world's 'ingratitude' towards the Serbs is the belief that

by weakening the Turkish army in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, the Serbs, although defeated, effectively saved European civilisation from a Turkish invasion. According to the myth, this was a sacrifice for which the Serbs had never been properly rewarded. Milošević himself invoked this theme during the notorious speech delivered at the commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in June 1989. In the subsequent period, the apparent lack of understanding for the 'Serbian cause' led to a growing sense of injustice and resentment towards the West. As the empirical chapters will show, the lack of international support was eventually attributed to sinister motives, thus setting in motion the conspiratorial interpretative framework which culminated in the proliferation of conspiratorial discourse.

At this point, it should be noted that the revival of nationalism in Serbia in the late 1980s, followed a somewhat different pattern compared to that in other former Communist countries in Eastern Europe. According to Irvine (1995) the change in the status of right-wing ideology in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall can be represented using a refrigeration metaphor. During the Cold war, the extreme Right was in a state of 'deep freeze' before being 'defrosted' following a period of post-communist 'thawing'. The implication of this metaphor is that the extreme Right is assumed to have effectively picked up where it left off in 1945. For instance, this can be said to be true of Croatia, where the ideology propounded by Franjo Tuđman often bore the hallmarks of the Second World War version of Croatian nationalism. Many controversial historical figures such as Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, Ustashi leader Ante Pavelić and other nationalists were officially, or semi-officially rehabilitated, and the anti-Serbian and antisemitic themes characteristic of 1940s Croatian Fascism were revived, albeit in more moderate forms (see Irvine, 1995; Ramet, 1999; etc.). In Serbia, the pattern of transition was different, mainly because of Milošević's double-pronged ideological strategy which included a blend of nationalism and socialism. Milošević's enduring devotion to Titoist ideology, which some argue was the result of his wife's influence on his political thinking (Đukić, 1998), made the Serbian leader hostile to Serbian Second World War nationalist movements. Nationalist figures from the 1940s were never officially rehabilitated in Serbia. Also, Milošević always remained distant towards the Serbian Orthodox Church. Even as the President of Serbia and Yugoslavia, Milošević only ever sent Christmas or Easter greetings to the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the clergy, never to the Serbian people as a whole. Moreover, on a rare visit to a Serbian monastery in Mount Athos, in April 1991 Milošević famously addressed the monks with a partisan-style informal greeting 'Hello' ('Zdravo'), without showing the kind of humility or respect which protocol demands. In other words, the nationalism and populism on which Milošević's rule was founded, and which Popov (1993) referred to as 'regime populism' can not be said to constitute a continuation of

the older nationalist tradition outlined earlier, which has characteristic clericalist and neo-fascist overtones.

Although Milošević himself was not actively engaged in the revival of pre-World War Two versions of nationalist ideology, he did little to curb the activities of others. In some ways, this would have been unnecessary considering that once he had established himself as the champion of the Serbian nationalist cause, Milošević could only benefit from the popularisation of nationalist sentiments (Irvine 1995). Also, by tolerating nationalist extremism among his political opponents, the Serbian leader was able, if and when necessary, to present himself as a moderate, especially before western leaders. Consequently, Milošević effectively gave free rein to various extreme right-wing organisations and movements, allowing them to promote their version of Serbian nationalism (Irvine, 1995; Markotić, 2000).

Popov (1993) labelled the activity of right-wing parties and organisations in the 1990s 'opposition populism', which, unlike the 'regime populism', had a strong anticommunist dimension. Anticommunism within the Serbian Right led to a misguided historical revisionism and the glorification of everything that communist authorities once satanised, including the populist movements of the 1930s and 1940s. Ljotić, Zbor, the Chetniks, the collaborationist government of Milan Nedić and other controversial historical figures and movements, all became regarded as 'real patriots', victims of 'communist persecution' and 'architects of Serbian national unity' (Popov, 1993). In the early 1990s, the main exponents of this strand of Serbian nationalism, were the Serbian Chetnik Movement of Vojislav Šešelj (later renamed the Serbian Radical Party), Serbian Popular Renewal of Mirko Jović, the St Sava Party led by Father Žarko Gavrilović and some strands within the Serbian Renewal Movement of Vuk Drašković.

The apologist trend within 'opposition populism', which flourished in the early 1990s, was endorsed by the Serbian Orthodox Church, which saw in the emerging nationalism a way of re-establishing the Church as the leading force in Serbian society and politics (Popov, 1993). In 1994 for instance, the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pavle, justified the actions of Nedić and other collaborators by arguing that 'it was a way of saving the people from the revenge of the occupiers' (quoted in Cohen, 1996). An especially significant role in the politicisation of the Serbian Church authorities in this period was played by the 'hawks' in the Patriarch's entourage, Bishop Atanasije Jević, mentioned earlier as a prominent Velimirović scholar, and Bishops Amfilohije Radović and Irinej Bulović. All three were disciples of Father Justin Popović. Velimirović too was fully 'rehabilitated' by the Church. The Bishop's remains were brought back to Serbia from the United States in 1991. His

reburial, which was attended by church dignitaries, (opposition) politicians, intellectuals and over 30,000 members of the public (Bigović, 1998) was seen by many at the time as indicative of rising Serbian nationalism. Also, calls for Velimirović's canonisation became louder and more frequent.¹⁹ Bishop Nikolaj is today regarded as the most respected Serbian religious figure since the medieval Serbian Saint Sava (e.g. Najdanović, *Bishop Nikolaj, Glas Crkve [Voice of the Church]* No.3, 1991) Velimirović has also been compared to St John the Baptist and St John Chrysostom (Bigović, *Word on Bishop Nikolaj, Glas Crkve*, No. 3, 1993; Radović, *Bishop Amfilohije's address, Glas Crkve*, No. 3, 1987). At the same time it is noteworthy that Velimirović's antisemitism was never officially condemned by the Church authorities. This aspect of Velimirović's work appears to be taboo within Serbian theological circles, and the ideological implications of his teachings are largely ignored. Consequently, most believers appear to be unaware of the controversy surrounding Velimirović's writing.

The rehabilitation of Velimirović and others by the religious authorities contributed to the re-emergence of the clerico-nationalist ideas characteristic of the 1930s and 40s. Representatives of 'opposition populism' have often propagated various Velimirovićesque themes such as the notion that Serbs are the purest representatives of Christianity, that they are under threat from the 'the West' and its alien values, and that the future of Serbia lies in its alliance with Orthodox Russia (Popov, 1993). The revival of these ideas also signalled the resurrection of the Slavophile tradition mentioned in the earlier section. Šešelj's Radical Party for instance, maintained links with a number of Russian extremists such as Vladimir Zhirinovski, the author Eduard Limonov, leaders of the nationalist Pamyat movement, and other organisations and individuals who propounded anti-Western and anti-liberal ideas in Russia.

Although 'opposition populism' - with its anti-communist and pseudo-religious dimension - is distinguishable from Milošević's 'regime populism' - which had secular overtones and laid greater emphasis on the issues of national unity and 'historical nihilism' - the two have an important common element. They share the strong anti-Western sentiment which, in both cases was projected into a notion of an international, anti-Serbian conspiracy, the aim of which is the subjugation, even the destruction of Serbs. As the empirical chapters will show, in constructing their explanatory narratives, Serbian conspiracy theorists from both camps drew on the same conspiratorial tradition of explanation. They invoked similar themes and arguments and drew upon both the more general, 'trans-national' conspiracy tradition examined in the previous chapter, and its local expression outlined in the present discussion. By the late 1990s, this reliance on a common ideological heritage effectively brought the two versions of Serbian populism together and contributed to a broadening of the boundaries of acceptable opinion in a way that turned many conspiratorial claims which were previously

deemed to be unreasonable, unacceptable and unwarranted into what appeared to be legitimate explanations of the Serbian predicament.

Chapter 4

Social psychology and the study of extraordinary explanations: From attributional bias to ideology

In the previous chapters it was suggested that conspiracy theory constitutes a distinct tradition of explanation, a set of ideas, values, interpretations and images which are used to construct a causal account at the heart of which is the idea of a world conspiracy. Also, the conspiracy tradition, both in general and specifically in the Serbian cultural context, was shown to be a historically-situated discourse, one whose dynamic development in the past two hundred years is deeply intertwined with other broader political and social transformations. This historical and ideological approach to conspiratorial discourse stands in contrast to a number of explanations of conspiracy theories which have been offered by traditional psychology. The present chapter will begin by critically examining a number of psychological explanations of conspiratorial belief. It will suggest that most psychological explanations, which focus primarily on the cognitive and motivational aspects of conspiratorial belief, share an important shortcoming. They all seem unable to account for the *content* of conspiracy theories. Any satisfactory explanation of conspiracy theories should be able to account for the persistence of the distinct explanatory style outlined in previous chapters, as well as for the cultural specificity of conspiratorial antisemitism. As was already mentioned, a theme that runs through the present thesis is the emergence of the idea of a Jewish conspiracy in contemporary Serbia. The focus on Jews in Serbian conspiracy culture may seem odd considering that there was no Jewish dimension to the Yugoslav crisis in the 1990s. Serbia's enemies were not Jews, and the Jewish minority in Serbia did not play any part in the recent wars. And yet Jews were accused of plotting world domination in the same way that they are accused of such sinister activity in other countries, including for instance Japan, a culture whose contact with Jews is minimal. Following the ideas of Moscovici (1984a), Gergen (1973, 1994, 1985), Billig (1988a) and others, the chapter will suggest that a better insight into the dynamic of conspiracy theory as a collective belief can be gained by examining it within its historical context, and as an ideological tradition which prescribes particular patterns of thinking and behaviour.

The chapter will reflect on the question of method. Following Billig (1978, 1988a), it will be suggested that specific methodologies, whether qualitative or quantitative, are not always useful for investigating the ideological aspects of social phenomena, including the conspiracy tradition. Instead, it will be proposed that a better insight into the tradition of conspiracy theory

can be gained through the application of what is commonly known as 'traditional scholarship'. By applying the scholarly method, particular discourses can be situated within the broader tradition of explanation, and in doing so the historical and cultural contingency of conspiracy theory as a social phenomenon can be demonstrated.

4.1. Social psychology and conspiracy theory: the limits of explanation

In the concluding remarks to the edited volume *Changing conceptions of conspiracy* (Graumann & Moscovici, 1987), Carl Graumann reflected on the complex relationship between psychology and conspiracy theory. Graumann noted that although conspiracy theories are a topic of 'intrinsic psychological interest' (p.245), there is no such thing as a distinct 'social psychology of conspiracy theory'. There does not appear to be a body of social psychological knowledge or research which is devoted specifically to the study of conspiracy theories. Research in this area has been left, almost completely, to the mercy of disciplines such as history, anthropology or political science. However, as Grauman also pointed out, literature on conspiracy theories which has been presented by historians and social or political scientists contains many explanations which are essentially of a psychological nature. Analysts typically speak of conspiracy theories as manifestations of fears, fantasies, projections, aggression or paranoia (Grauman, 1987). Even the historian Norman Cohn, whose book *Warrant for Genocide* resisted the temptation of psychological reductionism until the very last chapter, concluded his history of Jewish conspiracy mythology with an elaborate psychoanalytic examination of 'collective projection' (see below).

The complex relationship between conspiracy theory and psychology is compounded by the fact that when psychological terms are used in sociological literature to explain belief in conspiracy, their meaning is often very different (usually much broader) than that which academic or clinical psychologists would deem appropriate. Most of the time in fact, the use of psychological jargon is merely metaphorical. In his classical analysis of the 'paranoid style', Hofstadter (1966) openly asserted that his use of the word 'paranoid' is only analogous to the conventional clinical meaning. However, a number of other authors, who at first sight seem to follow Hofstadter's approach to conspiracy theory, have allowed the reference to paranoia to drift from the realm of metaphor to its literal, clinical meaning. For instance, in *Political paranoia: the psychopolitics of hatred* (1997), Robins and Post offer an extensive psychological profile of Stalin, with particular focus on his susceptibility to paranoid delusions. The purpose of the example was to illustrate the relationship between clinical paranoia and belief in conspiracies, thus drawing a direct parallel between a clinical and a cultural phenomenon (Knight, 2000). A similar pattern is observable on occasions in Pipes'

book *Conspiracy*, where, within a predominantly cultural and historical analysis of conspiracy culture, there are references to the fact that many pioneers of conspiracy theory, such as Nesta Webster, showed signs of clinical paranoia. Apparently, Webster never opened her front door without a revolver in her hand (Pipes, 1998).

The reasons behind the tendency to 'psychologise' conspiracy theories can be sought in the rhetorical implications of psychological explanations. There is a general tendency for psychological explanations to be invoked when unusual social phenomena need to be accounted for. In particular, psychological theories tend to be called upon when the phenomena in question involve ideological positions which are not perceived to be normative or acceptable. In these instances, psychological explanations can be employed to construe a particular political or ideological perspective as irrational, unreasonable and dysfunctional, thus placing it beyond the arena of rational discussion and debate. If a point of view is portrayed as resulting from a dysfunctional psychological process, then its claims do not have to be contested or refuted on rational grounds.

The latter point is particularly relevant to belief in conspiracy, because conspiracy theories are inherently irrefutable and unfalsifiable. As was mentioned in an earlier chapter, the hermeneutic of conspiracy theory is such that empirical or logical evidence against the existence of conspiracy can always be interpreted as further proof of the cunning nature of the conspirators (Billig, 1978, 1989). This is acknowledged by Groh (1987), who argues that:

'this logic [of conspiracy theories] can only be refuted in the realm of the theory of action and history, and the motives exposed from a socio-psychological point of view. If this is really so, then in the strict sense, conspiracy theories cannot be scientifically refuted- at least as long as one maintains the scientifically-historical assumption of paradigms as developed and refined by Thomas S. Kuhn and others' (p.4)

In other words, since conspiracy theories cannot be refuted through the application of rational argument and empirical enquiry, they can be undermined by being relegated (or promoted) to the domain of clinical or social psychology.

It should be noted however that the reference to psychological underpinnings of conspiratorial beliefs is not only a way of resolving the epistemological problem posed by the irrefutability of conspiratorial claims. It is also a way of dealing with a notable moral dilemma commonly associated with explanations of conspiratorial antisemitism. The dilemma can be illustrated by the example of Cohn's (1957) *Warrant for Genocide*, where the reliance on psychological explanation was justified in the following way:

‘There is no denying that many attempts to apply the findings of dynamic psychology to social phenomena have been misguided. But one is dealing here with very bizarre phenomena indeed; and I do not think that one can account for these particular fantasies [about a Jewish world-conspiracy], nor for the fact that they are always attached to this particular group, unless one takes unconscious mechanisms into account’ (p.284-285)

In some sense, the psychoanalytic conclusion to Cohn’s mainly historical account of the conspiracy myth reflects a historian’s recognition that ideological underpinnings of a truly devastating historical event such as the Holocaust, cannot be adequately understood by means of history alone. The murder of European Jews was so shocking and disturbing, that it could not be merely ‘historicized’. Instead, the explanation needed to go deeper, into the depths of human psychology. The same drive for a deeper psychological explanation of Nazism and conspiratorial antisemitism motivated the likes of Adorno, Bettelheim, Ackerman, as well as subsequent generations of social psychologists who have attempted to tackle the problems of prejudice from a psychological perspective. At the same time, there has been a tradition in social psychology that warned against reductionism and questioned the possibility of purely psychological explanations of social phenomena. Henri Tajfel (1981) for instance cautioned against universal psychological theories, and allocated to social psychology the more modest task of providing mere ‘insights’ into specific events and behaviour (Billig, 1996). As Billig (1996) points out, universal psychological explanations also harbour the danger of trivialising dramatic social events. The suggestion that conspiratorial antisemitism, as the ideology behind the Holocaust, was a mere manifestation of the general phenomenon of ‘prejudice’ or ‘scapegoating’ would trivialise the immensity of the Nazi crimes against the Jews and would undermine the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust.

Although Graumann was correct to point out that there is not a specific branch of social psychology dedicated to the study of conspiracy theories, a number of research paradigms within social psychology have been applied, directly or indirectly, to the phenomenon of conspiracy theory. Research on attribution theory for instance has been used to account for the cognitive dynamic of conspiratorial beliefs. Other psychological perspectives, like the theory of scapegoating as well as a number of psychoanalytic approaches, focused on the relevant motivational factors. In the following sections the two aspects of the psychology of conspiracy theory will be critically examined in turn. Also, research on rumour will be briefly examined and its relevance to the understanding of conspiracy theories outlined. Finally, psychological explanations of paranormal beliefs will also be looked at, considering that later chapters (Chapters 8 and 9) deal with the emergence of paranormal conspiracy theories during the war.

4.2. Cognitive factors in conspiracy theory

A tradition in social psychology which is most commonly applied to the explanation of conspiracy theories is the research on causal attribution. Ever since the 1950s, psychologists have emphasised the tendency in human thought to ascribe causes to events (Heider, 1958, 1967; Kelley, 1967, 1972; Shaver, 1975; Antaki 1985; Fiske and Taylor, 1984; Hewstone, 1983, 1989, etc.). It has even been argued that causal inference is one of the most fundamental cognitive activities and therefore a universal aspect of the human mind (e.g. Jones and Davis, 1965; Heider, 1958).

According to attribution research, in trying to understand the world around them, people are thought to act as 'naïve scientists' (Heider, 1958). They appear to use different, quasi-rational strategies to understand causal relationships between events. According to some theories, people use a 'causal calculus' in which different types of information such as *consensus*, *distinctiveness* and *consistency* are used to arrive at an attribution (Heider, 1958; Brown, 1986). Kelley's (1967) covariation model proposes that the cognitive strategy used to make a causal inference is effectively a lay version of the statistical analysis of variance.

One of the more general findings which emerged from attribution research is that people tend to make two broad types of causal attribution. Sometimes, causes of events are attributed to the activities of the actors involved (*personal attribution*), while on other occasions, causes are traced to situational factors, which lie beyond the motives, intentions and behaviour of specific individuals (*situational attribution*). Much of attribution research examines different factors which affect the type of attribution made, e.g. the effect of political beliefs (Furnham and Lewis, 1986), mood (Bohner et al., 1988; Schwarz and Clore, 1983), personality (Rotter, 1966), and many other situational and personal variables.

The relevance of attribution research to the phenomenon of conspiracy theory comes from the fact that belief in conspiracy can be seen as reflecting a 'causal schemata' and a specific 'attributional style'. In conspiracy theory, causes of social events are attributed to the deliberate activities and intentions of a small group of powerful individuals (Kruglanski, 1987; Zukier, 1987). As has already been mentioned in an earlier chapter, conspiracy theory shows a blatant disregard for situational factors and denies the possible causal implications of historical accident, or of social, economic and political conditions. In that sense, conspiracy theory can be seen as an extreme form of personal or group attribution, used to explain political and social events.

The cognitive style of conspiracy theory, characterised by the overabundance of personal causal inferences, is neither dysfunctional nor particularly remarkable, from the perspective of attribution research (Billig, 1978, 1989). It is generally recognised that, in Western society at least, when observing the behaviour of others, there is a preference for personal attributions over situational ones (Kelley, 1967; Alexander and Epstein, 1969).¹ This widespread trend is known as the 'fundamental attribution error' (Nisbett and Ross, 1980). Its ubiquity in Western society is noteworthy because it suggests that conspiracy theories reflect the general attributional tendencies of our society, rather than deviate from them. Moreover, the compatibility between conspiratorial reasoning and 'normal' cognitive functioning facilitates the presentation of certain conspiratorial claims as 'reasonable'. For instance, in the context of the broader bias towards personal attribution, suspicion about the 'real' motives behind a political action or the search for hidden agenda in politics - both of which are inherent in conspiracy theory - appear neither objectionable nor particularly 'conspiratorial', in the conventional, pejorative sense (Billig, 1978). On the other hand, one thing that does make conspiracy theory cognitively peculiar is that it takes the bias towards personal attributions to the extreme, in the spirit of Hofstadter's notion of the 'leap of the imagination'. Within the conspiracy tradition, it is always the same causal attribution which is being made (Billig, 1989). Conspiracy theorist will 'monomaniacally' come back, over and over again, to the same simple explanation, and will account for every event in terms of the same secret group engaged in a global conspiracy (Lipset and Raab, 1978). This 'monomaniacal' attributional tendency goes against a general trend noted in attribution literature. Research on causal attribution seems to suggest that complex events of high magnitude, tend to be explained using multicausal explanations (Cunningham and Kelley, 1975). Conspiracy theorists seem to fail to develop the multicausal schemata for complex events. Instead, they 'see simplicity in complexity' and construct a causal explanation for wars, historical changes, economic crises etc. in terms of recognisably simple conspiratorial narrative (Billig, 1978).

Although it may be possible to regard the absence of 'multicausal schemata' as a criterion for distinguishing conspiratorial from non-conspiratorial attributional tendencies, little is known about the factors which determine whether the 'multicausal schemata' will or will not develop. It is therefore difficult to state what it is that leads some individuals but not others to succumb to the temptations of conspiratorial explanations. Although there have been attempts to relate attributional styles to various enduring personality factors, it is unlikely that these would be of much relevance to conspiracy theory (Billig, 1978). Any explanation of the cognitive dynamics of conspiratorial belief would have to take into account the fact that social groups, societies - even entire cultures - from time to time become engulfed in conspiratorial beliefs. In other words, attribution research would have to explain what it is that leads a large

number of people to alter, often for a limited period of time, their cognitive or attributional style.

One possible factor that might provoke such widespread change in the way in which attributions are made is the implication of the event-to-be-explained on a group's cherished beliefs. There is empirical evidence to suggest that ways of attributing causes change if there is a threat to the attributor's self-esteem (Stevens & Jones, 1976). With their self-esteem under threat, people generally tend to seek causes of negative events externally, regardless of evidence to the contrary. A similar dynamic might be at work on a collective level. In the face of a threat to a group's core beliefs or to the social identity of the group's members, a defensive mechanism or a self-serving bias might kick in, leading the group to seek the causes of relevant events externally, in the personal attributes of an outgroup (Hewstone and Jaspars, 1982; Tajfel, 1981, etc).

This and other motivational aspects of conspiracy theory will be looked at shortly. At this point, the shortcomings of the attributional interpretation of conspiracy theory will be briefly examined. One significant problem with the applicability of attribution research to collective phenomena, such as the belief in conspiracies, is that most of the relevant studies have been conducted in fairly artificial and sterile experimental conditions. Results of these studies have been shown to be sensitive to very minor alterations in the experimental situations which means that findings are unlikely to be sufficiently robust to be applicable to the more fluid and unpredictable conditions of everyday life. More importantly, as Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) point out, the experimental paradigm typically used to study attributions has a tendency to neutralise the context in which people deal with causes. Attribution research assumes that when faced with an event, people engage in a complex quasi-scientific process which guides them towards, for instance, an 'external' or an 'internal' attribution. The approach focuses on the cognitive dynamic of the attributional process as if it exists in 'a raw state', isolated from general theories or representations (Moscovici and Hewstone, 1983). The research ignores the fact that most people 'know' in advance what caused an event. They have pre-existing representations or accounts within which specific events are assimilated. People 'know the outcome of the question they meet: Jews are to blame because...; the poor are exploited because...; blacks are inferior because...' (p.120). These explanations are not rationalisations of a purely cognitive 'attributional bias', but are ready-made, lay theories about history, society and power, which stem from historically situated social representations (Moscovici, 1984a; Moscovici, 2000), interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), cultural myths (Tajfel, 1981) or discursive resources. These explanations are manifested (and observed in an experimental situation) as a specific attribution. In focusing on 'how'

attributions are made rather than 'why', attribution theory 'deals with the surface matter and forgets the heart composed of common-sense theories' and causal explanations (Moscovici and Hewstone, 1983; p.121).

A similar point was made by Billig (1978, 1989), specifically in relation to conspiracy theories. Billig (1989) points out that while attribution theory may shed some light on what is thought to be the cognitive dynamic of conspiratorial thinking, it cannot explain the content of a conspiratorial explanation. It does not elucidate the persistence of antisemitism as an enduring feature of conspiratorial culture throughout the world, in the same way that it cannot explain why it is that conspiracy theories, apart from attributing causes to a global plot, also consist of a distinct explanatory style which was examined in Chapter 2 as characteristic of a particular ideological tradition. The upshot of Billig's (1978, 1989) argument (which is echoed by Moscovici and Hewstone, 1983) is that conspiracy theories need to be looked at as a tradition of explanation, and a historically-situated explanatory discourse, rather than as an outcome of a universal cognitive process.

4.3. Motivational factors in conspiracy theory

Besides examining conspiracy theory as a somewhat distorted cognitive schemata which leads to a propensity for simplistic personal attribution, social psychologists have also examined the motivational dynamic of conspiracy theory (Billig, 1978; 1989). They have been interested in the psychological processes that lead an individual, or a group to 'push the personal attribution to the point of absurdity' (Billig, 1989, p.161).

One motivational aspect of conspiratorial belief has already been touched upon in the previous section where it was suggested that attributional pattern is contingent upon the perceived threat to self-esteem. The adoption of what Kruglanski (1987) refers to as 'defensive attributions', enables the person making the causal inference to avoid responsibility for certain events by shifting the blame onto others. The self-serving implications of external and personal attribution of societal events is related to the notion of 'scapegoating'. The idea of 'scapegoating' was developed in the 1940s by Hovland and Sears (1940) within the broader framework of frustration-aggression theory. The principal claim of the theory is that in frustrating situations, when the causes of some social strain are unclear or out of reach, majority group members tend to displace their aggression onto relatively defenceless minority groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). In that sense, conspiracy theory is seen as the rationalisation of the majority's displaced aggression.

There is a strong historical association between explanations of conspiracy theory and the notion of minority scapegoating. The earliest formulations of the psychology of scapegoating were motivated by the desire to explain conspiratorial antisemitism in Nazi Germany (Dollard et al., 1939). Both in literature on conspiracy theory and on scapegoating, the two phenomena are often treated as inextricably linked. For instance, in his writing on the 'conspiracy mentality', Moscovici (1987) argued that 'minorities, heretics or dissidents will surely be accused of conspiracy in periods of sudden societal upheaval. It is enough for such minorities merely to exist, and they will be accused' (p.157). Similarly, in social psychological literature on scapegoating, conspiracy theory is often cited as a relevant example. Allport (1954) illustrated scapegoating by quoting an American political agitator whose claims reflect some of the basic themes of conspiracy theory:

'When will the plain, ordinary, sincere, sheeplike people of America awaken to the fact that their common affairs are being arranged and run for them by aliens, communists, crackpots, refugees, renegades, socialists and traitors' (p.69, quoted in Hogg and Abrams, 1988)

The problem with the 'scapegoating' explanation is that, just like the attribution research, it fails to account for the cultural specificity of antisemitism and its enduring presence in conspiracy culture. Poliakov (1987) illustrates the problem by pointing out that usual ideas of 'scapegoating' cannot explain for example why Jews were blamed for the Russian revolution, and not the Letts, another minority group which at the time was equally influential within the Russian workers' movement. Similarly, Blee (2002) suggests that contemporary antisemitism has certain idiosyncracies which a general psychological theory of prejudice or scapegoating cannot adequately account for. First of all, unlike other forms of prejudice, antisemitism is almost exclusively conspiratorial. Jews are the only minority group that consistently gets accused of a *global* conspiracy, even in cultures which have no Jewish minority (e.g. in Japan, see Billig, 1989; Pipes, 1998) or in societies where the population in general harbours relatively mild negative, or even neutral feelings towards Jews (Hockenos, 1993). A general psychological theory cannot explain the existence of what Lendvai (1971) and Hockenos (1993) referred to as 'antisemitism without Jews' .

It outlining the difference between antisemitism and other forms of minority prejudice, Blee (2002) suggests that in the contemporary United States, most racial prejudice (e.g. against Hispanics or African Americans) has a concrete and personal dimension. Racism is typically formulated by recounting personal anecdotes or specific instances of 'bad experiences' with racial minorities. As a result, among activists in rightwing groups in the US, prejudice against African Americans, Hispanics or Asians and any scapegoating that follows from it, emerges as an elaboration or abstraction of 'everyday racism'. Moreover, many members of far right

organisations have joined groups such as the KKK, Christian Identity Movement or the Skinheads in order to act upon existing prejudicial views (Blee, 2002). Antisemitism in contrast has a pronounced abstract and mythical quality (Smith, 1996). Most American right wing activists interviewed by Blee (2002) who harbour antisemitic views admit to have never encountered a Jew. In fact, few of them held any opinions about Jews before joining racist organisations and becoming acquainted with the conspiracy tradition. They absorbed the antisemitic tradition from the ideology of right-wing organisations, from oral and written propaganda, the media or the internet (Blee, 2002). A similar point is made by Zygmunt Baumann in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1999), where it is suggested that, unlike in early Twentieth Century, antisemitism is no longer a 'private affair of the lower classes' (p.80) or merely an instance of 'heterophobia'. Rather,

'The now dominant form of antisemitism is a product of theory, not of elementary experience; it is supported by the process of teaching and learning, not by intellectually unprocessed responses to the context of daily interaction' (Baumann, 1999, p.79)

Consequently, unlike many other forms of racist scapegoating, conspiratorial antisemitism does not appear to be a mere rationalisation of existing anti-Jewish sentiments. The myth of Jewish conspiracy '[refers] to facts normally inaccessible to and unknown to the masses, and certainly not located in the realm of their daily and unmediated experience' (Baumann, 1999, p.80). In other words, conspiratorial antisemitism can be said to emerge *from* the belief in the conspiracy, as part of the heritage of the conspiracy tradition. This idea will be pursued in greater detail in later chapters, where it will be shown that the emphasis on the ideological aspects of conspiracy tradition can help explain the emergence of antisemitic conspiratorial discourse in Serbia, a country in which Jews do not constitute a politically, economically or demographically significant minority, at a time when Jewish involvement in the political events was non-existent.

An additional benefit which belief in conspiracy is thought to bring to those who subscribe to it is the illusion of control. According to Bains (1983), blaming various conspiratorial groups such as the Illuminati, Freemasons, Jews or the Bilderbergers, enables the conspiracy theorists to attribute various crises to a cause that is ultimately controllable. As Herzstein (1980) noted: 'Nazism was one of the most optimistic of ideologies...optimistic because the physical destruction of a people could salvage the world for an ideal Germany of goodness and virtue' (quoted in Bains, 1983; p137). The 'package of control' (Bains, 1983) inherent in the conspiratorial belief gives the explanation an element of wish-fulfilment. Conspiracy theory cultivates unrealistic hopes of change and promises a better world, once the evil conspirators are finally overthrown (Billig, 1978).

Besides the notions of 'scapegoating' and defensive attributions, both of which draw on research belonging to traditional social psychology, accounts of motivational factors in conspiracy theory have also been derived from the psychoanalytic intellectual tradition. Much of the theorising in this vein is based on the work of Adorno et al. (1950), Ackerman and Jahoda (1950) and Bettelheim and Janowitz (1950).² All three studies have attempted to explain prejudice, and especially antisemitism (including that of the conspiratorial kind), in terms of the psycho-analytic concept of 'projection'. Adorno et al. (1950) suggest that in conspiracy theory, the alleged conspirators are seen as harbouring the thoughts, feelings and motives which the theorist cannot consciously admit to and which he projects onto the conspiratorial group (see Billig, 1978).

In examining projection as the motive force behind conspiratorial antisemitism, psychoanalytic explanations have traditionally emphasised the link between projection and ethnocentrism, i.e. the belief in the superiority of the ingroup in relation to outgroups. Adorno et al. (1950), for instance, reported that, according to their measures, antisemitism and ethnocentrism were highly correlated variables (cited in Billig, 1978). The correlation was interpreted by Ackerman and Jahoda (1950) as reflecting the antisemite's unconscious 'identification with the Jews because of their symbolic weakness' (cited in Billig, 1978). The more general ethnocentric description of prejudice which emanated from this tradition later became influential in social psychology. There appears to be a widespread tendency to explain antisemitism and other forms of prejudice in terms of perceptions of (Jewish) inferiority and weakness (Billig, 1978).

The problem with the common emphasis on the link between projection and ethnocentrism is that conspiracy theory actually perceives the enemy as anything but weak. Bettelheim and Janowitz (1950) attempted to resolve this problem by arguing that the perception of Jews may reflect 'superego stereotypes', i.e. the suppressed wishes of the superego, projected onto the outgroup. However they never fully developed this idea or examined its implications for the general ethnocentrism model (Billig, 1978). On the other hand, Cohn (1957), in outlining a psychoanalytic interpretation of the Jewish conspiracy myth, suggested that conspiratorial antisemitism reflects 'unconscious negative projection' (p.285), which presents the Jews in a dual fashion. Jews are perceived both as the 'bad' son (through projected Oedipal fantasies) and as a 'collective father figure' who is seen as possessing tyrannical and merciless qualities. Hofstadter (1966) also pointed out that conspiracy theory reflects 'both the ideal and the unacceptable aspect of self' (p.32). The conspirators are usually almost admired by the conspiracy theorists, and are seen as being in possession of the same virtues that the theorist

himself promotes, such as patriotism, discipline, traditional values, dedication, etc. Consequently, if there is some identification with the enemy in conspiracy theory, it is not with its 'symbolic weakness' and inferiority but with qualities which the conspiracy theorist cherishes.

In Cohn's (1957) analysis, the idea of an outgroup as a 'collective father figure' is not only invoked to explain the portrayal of conspirators as powerful, but also to account for the continuing presence of Jewish conspiracy theory. Cohn thus argues that in Nazi Germany, cultural stereotypes of Jews as organised, traditionalist, rich, etc. made them almost archetypal father figure and therefore a convenient target for the projection of unresolved hostilities towards parental figures.

A common problem associated with psychoanalytic explanations of conspiracy theory is that they are largely speculative and based primarily on *post hoc* reasoning (Billig, 1978). For instance, Cohn (1957) explains the belief in conspiracy as a rationalisation of an 'inner necessity' (p.295), a psychological compulsion generated by unresolved ambivalence towards parental figures. Cohn traces this 'regression to infantile modes of thinking' (p.288) to incomplete 'maturation' caused by, among other things, 'unfavourable educational and cultural pressures' (p.287). Conspiratorial beliefs are therefore regarded primarily as an individual, rather than a collective phenomenon, and one that is attributable to aspects of psychosexual development. Such a claim is problematic because it ignores the periodicity of conspiratorial beliefs and the noted popularity of conspiracy theories across cultures and across generations. 'Educational practices' change over time and differ across cultures and yet belief in conspiracy appears to persist. Psychoanalytic explanations have been unable to identify specific experiences and child-rearing practices that lead to the tendency towards negative projection, and have failed to demonstrate the role of these practices in the creation of collective beliefs in diverse cultures and at different times. An additional problem associated with psychoanalytic explanations of conspiracy theory relates to the assumed role of psychosexual development, and especially the resolution of the Oedipus complex. The Freudian theory of psychosexual development assumes important gender differences in the way in which the Oedipal conflict is resolved. However, psychoanalytic explanations of conspiracy theories have not explained whether this ought to lead to gender difference in the dynamic of 'negative projection'. There is no evidence that such gender differences exist. Also, if 'negative projection' is seen as a collective phenomenon, then psychoanalytic theories must account for the unjustified male bias, and explain why it is that society typically follows what is essentially the psychosexual development of *men* (Blee, 2002).

A further problem associated with Cohn's psychoanalytic explanation lies in the reference to unfavourable 'cultural influences' as a causal factor in 'negative projection'. In the concluding pages of his book, Cohn recognises that conspiratorial antisemitism is also an 'ideology' which played an important part in creating the mindset of Nazi Jew-killers, in that it legitimated their crimes. While the appeal to the ideological basis of antisemitism may be seen as reflecting Cohn's own reservations concerning the validity of a purely psychological explanation, it also contributes to the circularity within the general psychoanalytic argument. If conspiratorial antisemitism is the rationalisation of a deeper psychological dynamic of projection (and therefore its consequence) then it cannot at the same time be a part of its cultural origins. A similar problem of circular reasoning is posed by the assumption concerning the relation between cultural stereotypes of Jews and belief in conspiracy. Bearing in mind Blee's (2002) suggestion that specific representations of Jews tend to develop simultaneously with the belief in conspiracy, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the view that cultural stereotypes of Jews *cause* the latter to become targets of conspiratorial claims. In fact, it is questionable to what extent stereotype of Jews as 'rich' or 'powerful' can be distinguished at all, either ideologically or psychologically, from the conspiracy myth itself. Consequently, the relationship between conspiracy theory and the cultural stereotypes of Jews is likely to be more complex than is suggested by the psychoanalytic explanation.

4.4. Psychology of rumour and conspiracy theory

Another aspect of social psychological research which, often inadvertently, reflects upon the concept of conspiracy theory, is the research on rumour. Literature on the subject of rumour (Allport and Postman, 1947; Rosnow and Fine, 1974; Shibutani, 1967; Turner, 1993; Neubauer, 1999) often cites stories of conspiracies, plots and subversion, as examples of its subject matter. For instance, in *I heard it through the grapevine: Rumour in African American culture*, Patricia Turner (1993) examined many conspiratorial myths prevalent amongst the Black community in the US. Allegations concerning deliberate attempts to render Black men infertile through poisoning, or stories about the deliberate spreading of AIDS among the Blacks, which Turner examined as examples of rumour and 'urban mythology', are also claims about the existence of the anti-Black conspiracy. Also, in their classical book *The Psychology of Rumour* Allport and Postman (1947) cite, as a relevant example, the rumour of Jewish conspiracy during World War II and alleged attempts by the Jewish community to take over the US government (p. 21-22). Similarly, Rosnow and Fine (1974) give as an example of rumour the claim that playing pop records backward reveals satanic and menacing messages. These claims are also a regular feature of contemporary conspiracy culture (e.g. in

Durđević, 1997a; Milošević, 1999; see also Pipes, 1998). Finally, in his analysis of the Jewish conspiracy myth, Cohn, (1957) pointed out that medieval Jewish demonology, which subsequently evolved into an elaborate conspiracy theory, took the form of periodical outbreaks of rumour about well-poisoning or ritual abuse of gentile children.

The link between the social psychology of rumour and conspiracy theory is also evident in the similarity between what are thought to be the underlying cognitive and motivational factors. Rumours, just like conspiracy theories, are thought to offer explanations for troubling social events. Allport and Postman (1947), Shibutani (1966) and others all suggest that inherent in a rumour is a desire to provide an explanation which would bring relief (sense of control, wish-fulfilment etc.) to those who believe in it. Also, research in this area suggests that rumours flourish in times of war, social crises or economic disasters, when previously established 'social machinery' breaks down and available canons of explanation prove inadequate for explaining the causes and the implication of a social strain (Nkpa, 1975, 1977; Shibutani, 1966). A similar dynamic has been said to underlie the proliferation of conspiracy theories. Tales of conspiracy tend to emerge in response to some social strain, especially one that has significant implications and dubious causes (Graumann, 1987; Zukier, 1987; Pipes, 1998).

Social psychological literature on rumour also frequently draws on the notion of 'scapegoating' when accounting for the prevalence of 'hate' or 'hostility rumours' about the treacherousness of various ethnic minorities and outgroups. Allport and Postman (1947) argued that rumours about minority subversion emerge in order to '*relieve, justify, and explain*' (p.36; emphasis original) the basic negative emotion and hostility towards minorities. The emergence of prejudicial rumours is therefore seen as a rationalisation of 'everyday prejudice', in that blame in the 'hate rumour' is fixed on a group towards which there is an existing distrust in a particular social context.

Similarly, thoughts on the motivational aspects of rumour resemble explanations of conspiracy theories in that they draw on the psychoanalytic notion of 'projection'. For instance, in order to support the argument about the dynamic of projection in 'hate rumours' against various minorities, including Jews, Allport and Postman (1947) cited a study by Frenkel-Brunswik and Sanford (1945). This study, in which a link was found between projection and antisemitism, belongs to the same research tradition which established the existence of a projective element in the beliefs in a Jewish conspiracy.

The shared notions about the motivational and cognitive underpinnings of rumour and conspiracy theory implies that most of the criticisms of psychological explanations of

conspiratorial beliefs outlined earlier are also applicable to the explanations of rumour. At the same time, there are reasons why studies of rumour can offer additional and valuable insight into the phenomenon of conspiracy theory. First and foremost, studies on rumour tend to pay greater attention to the *content* of an explanation, rather than merely on the type of attribution inherent in it or the general underlying motives. As a result, in rumour research, there has always been a greater recognition of the relevant social and cultural dynamic. For instance, although early studies focused on rumour as 'a specific (or topical) proposition or belief, passed along from person to person usually by word of mouth' (Allport and Postman 1947, p.ix) it has since been recognised that electronic and printed media contribute greatly to the perpetuation of hearsay and rumours (Rosnow & Fine, 1976; Shibutani, 1966, Rosnow, 1980). The emergence of the Internet in the 1990s has provided rumour with another significant new medium for transmission (Yarbrough, 1998). In recognition of the wider social aspect of rumour, the research on rumour now regards its subject matter as a social phenomenon as much as an aspect of interpersonal communication. This change of emphasis has led to a notable fuzziness of boundaries between psychological explanations and those offered by other disciplines such as sociology, or folklore studies. As a result there is considerable overlap between the work of, for instance, psychologists Allport, Postman, Rosnow, or Fine, sociologist Shibutani (1966) or folklorists Patricia Turner (1993) and Jeffrey Victor (1994).

Interest in the sociological and historical aspect of rumour has been partly driven by the recognition that rumours often contain cyclically reappearing symbolic themes (Rosnow, 1980; Rosnow and Fine, 1976; Shibutani, 1966). Even Allport and Postman (1947), who originally commented that rumours are characteristically of 'temporary interest', acknowledged the existence of 'solidified rumours' as 'unusually persistent hearsay' which is transmitted from generation to generation. These recurrent rumours are thought to be similar to legends, in that they have 'become part of the verbal heritage of a people' (La Piere and Farnsworth, 1936). An example of a 'solidified rumour' would be what are commonly known as 'urban legends' or 'urban myths'. These include tales of 'dead hitchhikers', paranormal experiences during camping trips, alleged discovery of rat meat in hamburgers bought in fast-food chains etc. (Brunvand, 1988, 2000). A more sinister example of recurring 'rumour', which comes directly from the conspiracy tradition, would be the idea of Jewish ritual physical and sexual abuse of children, mainly boys (Cohn, 1957; Billig, 1989). This theme, the origins of which lie in medieval Jewish demonology has become entrenched in the conspiracy culture and has persisted to the present day.

A related aspect of rumour research which is relevant to conspiracy theories is the notion of 'diving rumours', introduced by Allport and Postman (1947). Many recurring rumours are current for a while, before 'diving' under the surface, only to reappear sometime later, when circumstances warrant their re-emergence. For instance, in the two World Wars many rumours were remarkably similar. Tales of enemy atrocities against children or subversion at home, which were common in 1918, resurfaced in 1939-1945 (Allport and Postman, 1947, Neubauer, 1999). Similarly, many urban myths from the African American community analysed by Turner (1993) tend to crop up from time to time, as do rumours of Satanic ritual abuse in the US (Richardson et al., 1991; Victor, 1994). Bearing in mind the periodical recurrence of conspiratorial claims, conspiracy theory could also be conceptualised as a type of recurring, diving rumour.

An important question regarding the concept of 'diving rumours' is the status of any particular claim in-between its periodical resurfacing. Allport and Postman (1947) offered two possible explanations. First, they suggested that there might not be any real continuity between the manifestation of the same rumour at two different points in time. They proposed that 'human needs generate similar stories' in response to similar circumstances. This implies that what appears to be a single diving rumour are in fact two different manifestations of the same underlying psychological process. Thus, the emergence of the same rumour at different times is attributable to common cognitive and motivational underpinnings rather than to an ideological link. However, Allport and Postman (1947) also reflected on the possibility that people 'revive' the same explanations in response to similar social conditions. In contrast to the first interpretation, the latter reveals a sensitivity to cultural and historical aspects of rumour as an explanation. It proposes that a solidified diving rumour constitutes an explanation that can be drawn upon in times of crisis, and which, like legends or myths, give the world 'a meaning that does not have to be constantly recast' (Young, 1936). This interpretation is compatible with the notion of conspiracy theory as an ideological tradition, in that it reflects the view of conspiracy theories as a ready-made explanatory discourse which can be drawn upon in the face of a breakdown of alternative explanations.

Evidence to support the claim about the existence of an ideological connection between separate manifestations of a diving rumour comes from the fact that conspiracy theories, urban myths, stories of satanic abuse, and other periodically occurring rumours never really 'disappear'. Rather, they are merely confined to the margins, to the writing of fringe authors, to newsletters published by marginal political or religious movements, or to web pages belonging to various 'enthusiasts'. The 're-appearance' of these rumours is therefore a matter of reinstatement in mainstream discourse, not of complete re-creation. For instance, theories

about the possibility and actuality of Satanic ritual abuse are kept constantly alive by various extreme Christian movements and other quasi-scientific organisations and institutions (Victor, 1994). They become part of mainstream public discourse in response to some crisis when they provide simple and comforting explanations. Urban myths about ghosts of hitchhikers, camping experiences, etc. are similarly maintained in books or web pages from where they occasionally emerge into everyday discourse. The same dynamic can be said to apply to conspiracy theories. As has already been indicated, conspiratorial claims which existed in Serbia in the 1930s and 40s did not disappear in 1945, and therefore did not have to be created *de novo* by some particular cognitive or motivational process in the 1990s. Instead, the conspiracy culture was kept alive throughout that time in Serbian emigrant publications, in the propaganda of expatriate organisations, and in the writings of individual conspiracy theorists. The dynamic which propelled this marginalised explanation into mainstream media and political discourse will be the topic of subsequent chapters.

4.5. Paranormal beliefs and conspiracy theories

In Chapters 8 and 9 it will be suggested that conspiracy theories were not the only extraordinary explanatory framework that emerged from the margins during the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia. The war with Nato will be shown to have contributed also to the proliferation of paranormal beliefs. The present section will explore aspects of traditional psychological explanations of beliefs in the paranormal and examine any potential contribution that this research could make to the understanding of the proliferation of paranormal beliefs in Serbia in recent years.

Research on paranormal beliefs within the traditional social-cognitive theoretical framework is closely related to the research on causal attribution outlined earlier. In the same way that attribution theorists have been interested in cognitive factors which underpin the propensity towards, for instance, 'personal' as opposed to 'situational' causal attribution, so researchers within what has become known as the 'psychology of anomalous experience' are interested in the cognitive dynamic behind the tendency to attribute causes to factors which lie beyond what is considered to be possible within the limits of natural science. Put simply, psychologists have been interested in the cognitive factors which distinguish between 'sheep' and 'goats', i.e. between the believers and the non-believers in paranormal phenomena (French, 1992; Blackmore, 1990).

The basic assumption shared by many psychologists who have attempted to uncover psychological dynamic beneath paranormal beliefs (Alcock, 1981; Blackmore, 1990; Hines,

1988; Irwin, 1993, etc.) is that such beliefs occur as the result of 'cognitive biases within our information processing system, leading to the misinterpretation of certain kinds of situation' (French, 1992; p.296). Following from this assumption is the belief that some individuals are more prone to relevant cognitive biases than others, and that the nature of these biases can be uncovered by identifying the differences in cognitive functioning between 'credulists' and 'sceptics', 'sheep' and 'goats'. The research paradigm within this line of research typically consists of comparing two experimental groups - believers vs. non-believers – distinguished on the basis of scores on standard questionnaires such as Belief in the Paranormal Scale (BPS, Jones et al., 1977); and identifying potential differences between them in what is effectively the process of causal attribution.

The most frequently cited biases which are thought to underpin beliefs in the paranormal, are the 'illusion of control' bias (i.e. perception of a random process as being under one's control, Ayeroff & Abelson, 1976; Langer, 1975, McGarry and Newberry, 1981), bias in probability judgement (Kahneman et al., 1982; Blackmore & Troscianko, 1985; Blackmore, 1990); impaired performance on syllogistic reasoning tasks (Wierzbicki, 1985); lack of critical thinking (Alcock and Otis, 1980; Roe, 1999) and the tendency to seek confirmatory evidence for our own beliefs (Russel and Jones, 1980; Jones and Russell, 1980). Also, there have been attempts to trace the distinction between 'sheep' and 'goats' to differences in intelligence (Killen et al, 1974), educational attainment (Emmons and Sobal, 1981, Messer and Griggs, 1989), even authoritarianism (Adorno, et al. 1950).

One of the recognised shortcomings of research in paranormal beliefs is the fact that 'belief in the paranormal' is treated as a single category of beliefs, which includes a multitude of very different types of assumptions about the world of the supernatural. French (1992) for instance acknowledges that 'it would be extremely naïve to hope that any one factor could be identified as underlying all aspects of paranormal belief, given the wide variety of alleged paranormal phenomena' and goes on to suggest that 'different biases would underlie different beliefs' (p.296). So far, however, scepticism about the possibility of a unified theory of paranormal belief has not prevented psychologists from using general measures in their research, or from drawing fairly general conclusions from their findings. At the same time, the prospect of each specific belief having a different underlying bias limits the explanatory and predictive value of the cognitivist explanation. It opens the possibility of an infinite number of potential biases which can be speculated on when specific beliefs do not fit the general pattern of findings.

Another noteworthy aspect of research in the psychology of paranormal beliefs is the distinction between 'sheep' and 'goats'. Inherent in the division is the assumption that people either believe or do not believe in paranormal phenomena. However, the existence of such a formal dichotomy is highly questionable. Even the measures used to assess the level of paranormal beliefs (e.g. the PBS) tend to assume the existence of a continuum rather than of distinct categories. The distinction between 'sceptics' and 'believers' is, therefore, one of the researcher's discretion. Gagné and McKelvie (1990) for instance used the top and bottom 30 percent of the normally distributed scores on the PBS to create 'sheep' and 'goats' categories. This left 40 percent of the population whose 'cognitive biases' were effectively not investigated.

More importantly, researchers who regularly divide their subjects into clear and formal categories (often labelled with rather undignified animalistic metaphors) consider themselves to be beyond the proposed categorisation. Published papers on paranormal beliefs will often begin with a philosophical argument which establishes the author's own position on the matters of paranormal phenomena (e.g. French, 1992; Blackmore, 1990). Significantly, writers will rarely define themselves as 'sheep' or 'goats'. Instead they will adopt an agnostic and ambivalent stance. The reality of paranormal phenomena will be neither denied nor firmly endorsed. Blackmore (1990), for instance, acknowledges that when examining a subject's belief in his or her psycho-kinetic powers, 'we cannot rule out the possibility that they do [possess such powers]' (p.65). Yet Blackmore (1990) says nothing about the state of her own cognitive biases or the nature of the cognitive processing which informs her own ambivalent stance or that of her similarly agnostic colleagues.

The rhetoric of ambivalence evident in scientific writing on paranormal phenomena reflects an ideological dilemma faced by most writers on the subject. In the contemporary scientific community there is a significant bias in favour of scepticism towards paranormal phenomena. Paranormal beliefs challenge many commonsense notions about the world, as well as the basic postulates of natural sciences (Wooffitt, 1992). As a result, members of a scientific community are accountable for any opinion that falls short of unequivocal scepticism. At the same time, there are important philosophical reasons why the existence of paranormal phenomena cannot be denied outright (French, 1992, Humphrey, 1996). Also, bearing in mind the widespread nature of some form of paranormal belief in contemporary society (e.g. Gallup and Newport, 1991; Humphrey, 1996), writers proclaiming extreme scepticism would be accountable for what might be seen as evidence of excessive and somewhat outdated scientific rigidity.³ The rhetorical management of ambivalence in scientific reports is a way of addressing this ideological dilemma. Significantly however, while engaging in this rhetorical

work, advocates of cognitive explanations of paranormal phenomena such as French (1992) or Blackmore (1990) consistently deny their subjects a similar discursive and rhetorical practice. In his examination of the rhetoric of paranormal accounts Wooffitt (1992) suggests that ordinary people are just as accountable for their paranormal claims and therefore susceptible to similar cultural pressures. With that in mind, there is no reason to assume that lay accounts of paranormal phenomena or experiences would not be constructed and formulated in a way that addresses the same ideological dilemmas as professional writing on the subject. Belief in, or scepticism towards paranormal phenomena are not manifestations of some enduring feature of an individual's cognitive capacities or a stable attitude, but stances in an argument, rhetorical positions which can be used differently to construct a factual claim about causal relations in the world. In constructing their social world, people draw upon what are essentially culturally available explanations. These include both reflections on the possibility of paranormal phenomena and commonsense assumptions about the boundaries of science. Neither of these positions are ever unequivocally accepted or rejected. Instead, they are constantly negotiated, reshaped and modified, depending on the demands of the situation, the speaker's need to manage his accountability, or any other rhetorical activity in which the speaker may be involved. As discourse analysts often point out, mutually exclusive categories, such as 'believer' and 'sceptic', which are used in psychological studies, are all too frequently mere constructs of the research methods used by cognitivist approaches (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, Edwards and Potter, 1992).

A related criticism of traditional psychological approaches to paranormal beliefs concerns the categories used by researchers to describe paranormal phenomena. Personal experiences which psychological literature deals with consist typically of individual instances of psychokinesis or the control of mind over matter (e.g. changing the colour of the traffic-lights by thinking about it), instances of extrasensory perception such as telepathy, clairvoyance, or precognition, and finally, encounters with ghosts. These categories are derived mainly from literature on parapsychology. They are not necessarily concepts or categories which feature in commonsense notions about the paranormal. Moreover, by limiting itself to areas belonging to parapsychology, psychological literature fails to deal with, for instance, religious beliefs, which also involve numerous assumptions about the existence of the world of the supernatural. As a result, in the realm of psychological theory and research, the assumed psychological dynamic underpinning the belief in parapsychological phenomena is (at least implicitly) treated as psychologically distinct from institutionalised religious belief. As the examination of paranormal accounts which emerged in Serbia in the 1990s will demonstrate (Chapter 8), beliefs in phenomena such as psychokinesis or clairvoyance, can be, and often are constructed within the framework of institutionalised (Orthodox Christian) religion, thus

undermining the assumed conceptual and practical distinction between different types of supernatural belief.

A further problem with the cognitivist approach to paranormal beliefs relates to the claim that such beliefs are generally the result of personal experience (e.g. Glicksohn, 1990; Haight, 1979; Murphy and Lester, 1976; etc). Blackmore (1984) even found that personal experience is the single most commonly reported reason for belief in the paranormal. This assumption is often used to back up the claim about the cognitive and attributional element of the psychological mechanisms behind the belief in the paranormal. It is assumed that explanation of a *personal* experience is more likely to be attributable to aspects of individual cognitive functioning rather than to some broader social or cultural dynamic. However, as Humphrey (1996) points out, the assumption about the importance of personal experience is greatly misleading. Even if personal experience is reported as influential among those who have supposedly had it, this does not mean that personal experience is a decisive factor in determining the belief in the population as a whole. Humphrey (1996) notes that 'the fact that personal experience may be sufficient, does not entail that they are in any way essential' (p. 164). In the review of relevant surveys, Humphrey found a fairly stable pattern: between only a third and a half of reported believers for any specific category of paranormal phenomena have allegedly had the relevant personal experience (Humphrey, 1996). For instance, while, on average, 70 percent of British people report believing in ESP, only 30 percent claim to have had a relevant personal experience. Out of 45 percent of the British who believe in ghosts, only 15 percent have 'seen' one. By far the greatest influence on the paranormal beliefs of the population at large was not personal experience but the cumulative effect of television, radio, books and magazines. In a survey conducted in Reading, which Humphrey uses as a representative example, the combined effect of the media was more than 50 percent, as opposed to 21 percent who cited personal experience as the decisive factor.

The reinterpretation of survey data opens the possibility that personal experiences are simply *reported* as the most important and decisive factor by those who claim to have had it. The reasons why such experiences are regularly singled out as significant stem from the rhetorical and epistemological implications of first-hand knowledge. In a climate of scepticism, professing a belief in 'psi' because one 'read it in the paper' or 'heard in on TV' is much more easily disputable than a reference to personal experience. As discourse analytic research on fact construction points out, a claim such as 'I never believed in ghosts/psi/ESP, until one day I saw...' plays an important role in the construction of factual accounts of paranormal phenomena (e.g. Wooffitt, 1992; Potter, 1996)

For the present purposes, the influence of the media on paranormal beliefs is noteworthy because it suggests that susceptibility to this type of belief may be the result of a wider social and cultural dynamic. Evidence in favour of this proposition comes from the fact that the prevalence of beliefs in the paranormal fluctuates across time, and periodically engulfs whole communities, cultures or societies (e.g. Jahoda, 1972). Also, anthropological research suggests that in many societies, the use of paranormal explanations is governed by very strict rules behind which lie specific social norms. For example, a psychological explanation of paranormal beliefs, founded on the notion of fairly general cognitive biases, would struggle to explain why among the Azande tribes studied by Evans-Pritchard (1937), witchcraft as a causal explanation is limited only to certain types of events. So, adultery, disloyalty or any violation of a social taboo are considered to be beyond the explanatory power of witchcraft (Bains, 1983). The fact that the boundaries of a paranormal explanation are governed by social norms, points towards the existence of a cultural and ideological mechanism behind this type of explanation.

Social and cultural factors which have been identified as contributing to the proliferation of beliefs in the paranormal tend to be similar to those which are thought to bring about belief in a conspiracy. First, there is the reference to the need to provide a simple explanation for a complex reality and the desire to explain why 'bad things happen to good people'. Also, the emergence of paranormal and conspiratorial explanations are both associated with a breakdown of traditional, normative explanations of social phenomena. According to Michael Shermer (1997), author of *People Believe in the Weirdest Things* and an established sceptic when it comes to the world of the supernatural, people's belief in the paranormal is determined by a need for 'simple explanations for an often complex and contingent world. Good and bad things happen to both good and bad people, seemingly at random' and beliefs in some transcendental reality 'provides a simple path through life's complex maze' (1997, p.275). Also, in *Magic, Science and Religion* Malinowski (1954) puts forward the view that a belief in magic builds confidence in situations of uncertainty (O'Keefe, 1982). Paranormal beliefs have also been said to offer a solution to seemingly insoluble problems (Defrance et al. 1971; Marty, 1970; Scheidt, 1974; Tiryakian, 1972). Similarly, Schumaker (1990) argues that the function of 'paranormal self-deceptions' is to provide means of coping with an 'otherwise terrifying world' (p.10). In emphasising the social or cultural dynamic behind the onset of extraordinary beliefs, all these approaches tend to view paranormal explanations as a type of explanatory discourse which can be resorted to, or drawn upon in response to social crises. Also, there is a common tendency to trace both conspiracy theories and paranormal beliefs to a culturally founded faith in a higher, transcendental power, that is to religion or superstition of some kind. Popper (1966, 1972) and Hofstadter (1966) both recognised the

roots of conspiracy theories in 'ancient superstitions' or religious belief. Popper (1972), for instance argued that the conspiracy theory of society 'comes from abandoning God and then asking "who is in his place"' (p.123)

Bearing in mind the functional similarity and assumed historical link between conspiracism and beliefs in the paranormal, it should not be surprising to find that the two belief systems are seen as emerging from similar social conditions. For example, in the analysis of the development of the spiritualist movement in the 19th Century United States, Nelson (1969) suggested that the popularity of spiritualism was brought on by increased secularisation and rationalism. The challenge to 'traditional cultural patterns' and 'old beliefs', required a novel form of transcendentalism which would provide a means of dealing with human transience. Interestingly, in *The Politics of Unreason*, Lipset and Raab (1978) see the development of anti-Masonic conspiracism in the US in the 1820s as a consequence of the same Enlightenment-induced secularisation of American society. However, anti-Masonism was the means by which those unwilling to abandon religious orthodoxy explained their increasingly marginal position in American society. Although spiritualism and anti-Masonism represent two different consequences of the onset of rationalism and Enlightenment, they nonetheless seem to have emerged from the same period of transition and normative crisis.

In Chapters 8 and 9 it will be suggested that the proliferation of conspiracy theories in Yugoslavia in the 1990s was accompanied by an increase in the popularity of paranormal beliefs. Significantly however, it will be argued that paranormal explanations and conspiracy theories were not rival discourses, but complementary explanations of a social and national crisis. As will become apparent, paranormal explanations were often constructed within the broader explanatory framework of conspiracy theory. Consequently, the emergence of paranormal beliefs will be examined within the relevant cultural and ideological context, and in terms of the broader ideological dynamic which led to the proliferation of conspiracy theories.

4.6. Social psychology as history: social constructionism and the study of collective beliefs.

On the basis of the examination of psychological approaches which have been applied to the problem of conspiracy theory, it is possible to draw a number of general inferences about the contribution of traditional psychology to the understanding of this phenomenon. First and foremost, psychological explanations of conspiracy theory typically approach the belief in conspiracy as a manifestation of one or more universal social-psychological processes.

'Causal attribution', 'scapegoating' or 'projection', for instance, all refer to fairly basic cognitive and motivational mechanisms which are essentially independent of the historical and ideological specificities of the environment in which they occur. It is taken for granted that people attribute causes to events using identifiable rules and strategies; that scapegoating is an inherent feature of inter-group dynamic; and that projection is a natural and ubiquitous mechanism of ego defence. A similar pattern is visible in psychological research on paranormal beliefs, where underlying dynamic is generally examined as a function of cognitive or perceptual biases.

The assumption about the universality of psychological processes stems from the positivist-empiricist philosophy which underpins traditional approaches within sociobehaviourist sciences (Gergen, 1973, 1994). The essence of this metatheoretical set of assumptions is that psychology, as the science of the human mind, can, and should endeavour to identify general laws and principles which govern human behaviour (e.g. Morgan et al., 1979; Mills, 1969, Krech, et al, 1962). Ideally, by formulating such laws, the science of psychology should be able to explain, predict and control human thought and actions (Glenn et al, 1976; Houston et al., 1981, all cited in Gergen, 1994).

The positivist-empiricist philosophical basis of traditional psychology gives psychological explanations a pronounced ahistorical dimension. The mechanisms of the human psyche which social psychology aims to uncover are thought to be universal across time and space and essentially independent of the broader mechanisms of history, ideology or culture. The reductionist tradition in social psychology even attempted to reduce various aspects of ideology (and, by extension, history itself) to particular psychological mechanisms (Eysenck & Wilson, 1978; Adorno et al, 1950, etc.). Berkowitz (1962) once said of intergroup behaviour and conflict, that these social phenomena 'ultimately become problems of the psychology of the individual. Individuals decide to go to war, battles are fought by individuals and peace is established by individuals'.

As Billig (1996) points out, more recent writing in social psychology exhibits greater awareness of the limits of the narrow, universalist assumptions of traditional psychology. The idealistic aim of explanation, prediction and control, has been substantially modified in recent years. Many psychologists today admit that their discipline failed in its quest for universal laws which could explain and predict behaviour (see Gergen, 1982). Social psychologists who subscribe to traditional approaches and methodologies will typically acknowledge the significance of social context, and recognise the potential contribution of other social sciences and history to the understanding of social phenomena (e.g. Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Hogg &

McCarthy, 1990; Hogg and Vaughan, 1995). Hogg & Abrams (1988) for instance recognise that 'content [of a social phenomenon] or culture' cannot be explained 'by recourse to psychological processes alone' (p.18, cited in Billig, 1996). Yet in spite of the apparent appreciation of the influence of culture, ideology, or social institutions on social-psychological dynamic, the essence of Hogg and Abrams' (1988) analysis conforms to the established metatheoretical and philosophical tradition. It focuses primarily on the examination of psychological processes in isolation, and the identification of common psychological underpinnings (such as 'social identification') of outwardly different phenomena (identification with race, national religious, professional groups, etc; Billig, 1996). 'Culture' and 'ideology' are thus kept separate from 'psychology' and relegated to the position of residual explanatory categories, used merely to account for observations which appear to deviate from the predicted behavioural or cognitive pattern.

In response to the ahistorical approach to social phenomena found in traditional social psychology, there have been attempts to redefine the discipline as an essentially historical endeavour (Gergen, 1973; Moscovici, 1984a; Tajfel, 1981, etc.). In his seminal paper on social psychology as history, Gergen (1973) argued that the purpose of social psychology is not to describe scientific principles and build general laws of psychological functioning, but to explore the historical nature of social phenomena. Gergen challenged the two basic axioms of traditional psychology. First, the existence of stable relationships between events in nature which can be formulated in terms of transhistorical laws; and secondly the assumption that the ontology of various psychological mechanisms is in the human mind, or as Gergen (1985) put it, 'in the head'. Gergen proposed that social psychological phenomena are 'largely nonrepeatable' and 'fluctuate markedly over time' (Gergen 1973, p.310). Consequently, patterns of thinking and behaviour are not contingent upon some underlying principles of 'universal' social psychology, but are historically situated 'social performance' (Gergen, 1985). A similar sentiment was expressed in Serge Moscovici's (1984a, 1988, 2000) writing on social representations. The theory of social representations also revolves around the idea that social psychological concepts are socially and historically created and irreducible to individual psychological functioning. Also, Tajfel (1984, 1981) spoke of 'beliefs' and 'mental states' of individuals as historically situated, and argued that social psychology must study ideology and social conditions that produce different patterns of thinking and behaviour.

Many of the above points have become part of the broader social constructionist perspective in psychology (see Burr, 1995; Smith et al. 1995), including the various discourse-based approaches such as the discursive and rhetorical psychology (Antaki, 1994; Billig, 1987b, 1990; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter 1992; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and

Potter, 1992). Within the discursive approaches, psychological states are not thought of as the hidden essence behind an observable linguistic expression. Rather, they are treated as being constructed *within* and *through* that expression. Aspects of human psychology such as 'emotion' (Averill, 1982, Edwards, 1997), 'disorder' (Garfinkel, 1967), 'attitude' (Billig, 1987b; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), 'attribution' (Edwards and Potter, 1992), even 'memory' (Middleton and Edwards, 1995) have all been investigated not as universal processes and structures located within the 'psyche' or 'the brain', but as discursive constructs which are constituted through the practical activity of communication. For instance, within discursive and rhetorical psychology, the study of 'identity' does not assume the subject matter to be a hidden mental structure, which somehow needs to be tapped through a study of its linguistic manifestation. Instead, 'identity' is regarded as nothing other than a discursively accomplished activity and the practice of self-description and self-definition which is occasioned by the specific rhetorical context. Similarly, discourse analytic work is interested in what emotion-talk, identity-talk, memory-talk, jealousy-talk or race-talk does for the speaker in a particular context (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analytic taking on causal attribution emphasises the fact that causal inferences are not the outcome of some 'causal calculus' through which objective or perceived reality is interpreted, but are discursive practices inherent in the occasioned descriptions of reality (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Therefore, within the broader discourse analytic perspective, utterances and accounts are treated as 'the phenomena of social psychology, not the second best approximation for the real, but hidden psychological events' (Billig, 1997; p.219).

General assumptions of discursive and rhetorical psychology are applicable to the phenomena of conspiratorial or paranormal explanations. These explanations can be seen not as outward manifestations of some universal processes, but as discourses which accomplish a particular rhetorical function in the process of reality construction. The implication of this assumption is that a conspiratorial claim, together with its rhetorical construction and function, are themselves a worthy topic of interest and material for analysis, not a phenomenon behind which lies an identifiable cognitive or attributional bias.

4.7. Social psychology and the study of ideology

Following the general social constructionist assumption that psychological 'states', 'beliefs' and 'attitudes' are socially and materially constructed, it can also be suggested that these are constituted through ideology (Billig, 1997). Speakers providing an utterance or an account must locate their speech act within an existing conceptual framework, or ideology, which prescribes what can or should be said in a given context. Ideology, as a pattern of ideas,

values and interpretations about the world and relations within it, delineates the boundaries of any discourse. Significantly however, language also has an original dimension and a creative potential in that utterances always occur in response to a novel conversational situation. As Volosinov (1973) wrote, all utterances are conditioned 'by the social organisation of the participants involved, and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction'. Moscovici's (1984a, 2000) theory of social representations contains a reference to the same duality. Representations are thought to be prescriptive, in that they determine the possibility of an utterance, while being at the same time dynamic and transformed through the 'babble of everyday talk' (Moscovici, 1984b, p.950). In that sense, every utterance is shaped by the historical and social context in which it occurs, while being able to challenge, reformulate, and reconstitute some aspect of the ideology within which it is situated. It is this 'dialectic of communication' (Billig, 1997), inherent in every speech act, that makes one simultaneously the 'master and slave of language' (Barthes, 1982).

The perpetual transformation of ideology through communication is made possible by the argumentative and dialogic nature of ideology (Billig, 1987b, 1990). Ideologies are not internally consistent constructions, but often collections of contrasting claims. For instance, nationalist ideology in Western democracies contains competing notions of 'citizenship' and 'ethnic origin' as criteria for belonging to a nation. Each of these notions is a historical as much as a social psychological category. In everyday talk about nation and nationhood, ethnic and civic nationalist discourses are negotiated, contrasted, endorsed or rejected. Similarly, in the case of conspiracy theory, various broader types of conspiratorial discourse identified earlier, such as classical or world elite conspiracy theories, reflect different aspects of the same ideological tradition. Within this tradition, the mystical or the antisemitic heritage is pitted against the need to present the conspiratorial claim as a reasonable, pertinent and moderate explanation of politics. As will become apparent later (Chapters 6 and 7), much of the rhetorical work within each type of conspiratorial discourse is contingent upon the existence of an alternative construction of the world as ruled by conspiracy.

Also, ideologies and ideological traditions do not exist in isolation or as hegemonic discourses. Instead, each ideology is engaged in clashes with opposing constructions of reality (Billig, 1990, Billig et al. 1988). For instance, those who speak of conspiracy or of paranormal phenomena must position their claim (logos) in relation to alternative discourses (antilogoi) such as conventional history or natural science. The counter-position to which a particular discourse orients varies with the argumentative context, so claims have to be constantly reconstructed and reconstituted, thus contributing to their perpetual transformation.

The proposition concerning the dynamic nature of ideology goes against the traditional Marxist conceptualisation of the term (Billig, 1990). According to the Marxist philosophical tradition, ideology is a unitary system of ideas which occupies a hegemonic position within a society (Marx and Engels, 1846/1986). Recipients of ideology are seen as 'helpless dupes' whose thinking (or 'false consciousness') is shaped by ideas imposed by the ruling classes (Billig, 1990, 1997; Hall, 1988). Traces of this tradition of thought are visible in the writing of a number of Serbian commentators and political analysts who reflected on the proliferation of conspiracy theories and paranormal beliefs in the 1990s. In many cases, the popularity of extraordinary explanations was attributed to the successful propaganda of the Milošević regime (Čolović, 1999; Popadić, 2000; Pavlović, 2001). It was suggested that conspiratorial and paranormal explanations were deliberately imposed by the authorities in order to divert public attention from the regime's own responsibility for the deteriorating social crisis. At first sight, this idea does not seem all that farfetched. Both historical and empirical evidence can be cited to support it. For instance, many masters of propaganda in history have recognised the PR potential of paranormal explanations. In 1942, Goebels noted in his diary that Nazi propaganda should include some occult themes, and that relevant agencies should seek to recruit as many experts in occult prophecies as possible (Howe, 1968; cited in Popadić, 2000). Also, there is experimental evidence to suggest that lasting exposure to a particular stimulus or idea is often sufficient to induce an attitude change (Zajonc, 1968; Grush, 1976). It seems that sometimes it is enough to repeat the same idea over and over again, for it will eventually catch on, or at least appear reasonable, even if not believed. At the same time however, propaganda-based explanations paint a rather unflattering picture of Serbian society, or any other society for that matter. They construct an image of an 'unthinking society', one that is easily hoodwinked by propaganda experts. This implies that people readily accept communication from relevant power-structures, without challenging, doubting or disputing ideological claims.⁴ As has already been mentioned, recent conceptualisations of ideology have emphasised its dynamic quality and its constant transformation through everyday language use (Billig, 1990). Also, post-structuralist theories of culture and communication suggest that people are not passive recipients of ideology, but agents engaged in a 'free play of signification', able to create their own readings of dominant ideas, as well as to challenge, dispute and undermine the ruling ideologies (Billig, 1997, Thompson, 1984).

The suggestion that the argumentative and dynamic nature of ideology is played out through inter- and intra-ideological clashes which take place on the level of discourse and communication, implies that aspects of 'ideology' and 'culture' (as well as the related social psychological phenomena), can be explored through the study of everyday discourse within

which the dynamic of ideology is played out. The following section will address the question of method and examine the ways in which the ideological aspects of discourse might be studied, specifically in relation to conspiracy theory.

4.8. The idea of method and the practice of 'traditional scholarship'

In traditional psychological approaches, the aforementioned ahistoricity of psychological theory is reflected in the choice of research method. The emphasis on carefully controlled experimentation as the preferred method is based on the assumption that social, political and cultural influences are little more than potentially confounding variables, mere pollutants which contaminate the 'pure' psychological processes which are of interest to social psychologists.

Behind the focus on experimentation lies a more general interest - and belief - in the value of *method*. The practice of science, and this includes much of social science as well, is founded upon the idea that scientific findings, insights and discoveries must be devoid of personal bias. 'Objective reality' is thought to exist independently from the perspective of the observer, so science, with its prescribed methods of inquiry and strict procedures, offers an impersonal and objective viewpoint from which reality can be observed and studied. From this assumption follows the emphasis on *replicability* as an epistemological criterion. If a scientific observation is 'objective', then any other person ought to arrive at the same conclusion, providing he or she follows the same methodological rules (Billig, 1988a). In traditional psychological writing, procedures and methods are held in high esteem. Method is described in great detail, so that other researchers can go and replicate a particular finding, thus enhancing its status as a scientific 'fact' (Gergen, 1973, 1994).

Because traditional science consists of a systematic accumulation of relevant knowledge and research, there is an implicit drive among scientists towards the standardisation of scientific practice. Scientific findings are thought to be more easily compared and combined if they are derived from similar methodologies, so the need to integrate scientific knowledge leads to the emergence of distinct research paradigms. Content analysis commonly used in the study of media material is a case in point. A well-established method involves the coding of messages from a carefully chosen sample of newspapers, or electronic media broadcasts (Deacon et al., 1999). The frequency of specific words, messages or themes is noted and expressed numerically before being subjected to statistical analysis. Everything is done to minimise the subjectivity of readers and coders (often two coders are used, whose results are then compared) in order to eliminate bias and ensure that the results are independent from the

influence of the researchers involved. Such standardised and 'objective' procedures have made it possible for different studies to be compared, and integrated from time to time within larger meta-analyses. In social psychology, the use of standardised questionnaires serves a similar purpose in that it facilitates comparison between different studies.⁵

In spite of the practical advantages inherent in the application of established research paradigms and standardised procedures, it is questionable to what extent the adherence to a specific methodology is useful in the study of ideology. Traditional questionnaire studies for instance are of little use as they undermine the aforementioned idea about the argumentative and dynamic nature of ideology. As discourse analytic research often points out, inherent in attitude surveys and questionnaire studies is the idea of stable attitudes as enduring cognitions about, and emotions towards, a specific topic (Billig, 1987b; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Once the concept of an 'attitude' is brought into line with the argumentative conceptualisation of ideology, it becomes evident that 'attitudes' cannot be adequately investigated by fairly static questionnaire-type investigations. Questionnaires cannot explore 'attitude' as a rhetorical stance in a matter of controversy or as an occasioned response to a particular argumentative context (Billig, 1987b, 1990). Similarly, in examining the ideology of the National Front in Britain, Billig (1978) reflected on the shortcomings of methods such as content analysis, when it comes to providing insight into the conspiracy tradition. In order to demonstrate the presence of the conspiratorial explanatory tradition within British Fascism, it was necessary to show that the rhetoric of the National Front shares an ideological heritage which goes back to the writings of Robison and Barruel. This is a task that content analysis could not adequately tackle. For instance, looking for the prevalence of specific words such as 'conspiracy' or 'conspiracy theory' in National Front propaganda would have been quite unrevealing. Conspiracy theorists rarely refer to their work as 'conspiracy theory', and may not even mention the word 'conspiracy'. Even if they did, that would not in itself be sufficient to locate a text within an ideological tradition. Reference to a 'conspiracy' is neither necessary nor sufficient to demonstrate the belief in a 'conspiracy theory of society' nor to suggest the presence of the conspiratorial explanatory 'style'. As Beardsworth (1980) noted, locating or counting particular words says nothing about their meaning or connotations. Also, George's (1959) analysis of Nazi propaganda emphasised the rhetorical implications of uniquely occurring messages, of the kind that quantitative analyses would miss (cited in Billig, 1988a). Moreover, as subsequent chapters will show, the conspiracy tradition often reveals itself in the shape of very subtle conceptual links, coded references, allusions, etc. Consequently, the study of the conspiracy tradition requires in-depth knowledge of conspiracy culture, its ideology and its rhetoric, rather than extensive training in a particular methodology.

In earlier sections it was noted that explanations, including those of an extraordinary nature, are historically-placed discourses which reflect relevant ideology. Consequently, the study of an explanation ought to focus on uncovering where (in relation to the broader social and historical pattern) the particular explanation comes from and how it is played out in specific argumentative context (Billig, 1988a). This idea is inherent in Billig's critique of traditional social psychological methods. Billig suggests that the study of social explanations requires a piece of ordinary discourse (i.e. an explanation) to be situated within an ideological tradition. Such a proposition is in line with the idea of social psychology as history (Gergen, 1973) in that it involves a type of inquiry that traces specific explanations to their cultural origins and demonstrates their historical contingency.⁶ For instance, Billig (1988a, 1990) traced the arguments of young racists to the ideology of Voltaire and the enlightenment. Similarly, he demonstrated the way in which the conspiratorial ideological tradition informed the political outlook of Enoch Powell (Billig, 1988a), the National Front propaganda (Billig, 1978; 1989), the thinking within the British Far Left (1987a) and the French Right (1989).

In the above studies, all of which were as much historical as social psychological inquiries, there was no discernible method or technique involved. Words were not counted, and responses were not quantified. There was not even a specific sample of texts which was analysed in minute detail. For instance, although the analysis of Enoch Powell's rhetoric began with an examination of a specific speech, the transcript of the speech was not treated as 'data' in any accustomed sense of the word. Instead, it was a starting point which drove the search for more information and new interpretations of Powell's political discourse (Billig, 1988a). Billig referred to this type of inquiry as 'traditional scholarship' arguing that

'Part of the scholar's skill is not to follow a pre-set programme, laid down in advance by a methodologist, but to gather up clues which can nudge the search one way or another. Scholars have to feel their way around the library and archival sources, backing hunches as they proceed.' (p.207)

The emphasis on the skills of traditional scholarship reflects the idea of social psychology as a historical endeavour. After all, historians do not have carefully identified techniques or procedures which they follow in their investigations. The same can be said of those who study ideology (Thompson, 1984; Billig, 1982; Eagleton, 1984, etc.). In this type of inquiry, as in traditional scholarship, 'hunches and specialist knowledge are more important than formally defined procedures' (Billig, 1988a, p.199). Moreover, Billig emphasises that

'individual quirkiness is very much part of traditional *scholarship*. It was taken for granted by the traditional scholar that one should read as widely as possible, and in as many languages as

possible. Through wide reading, breadth and depth of knowledge would be gained, as well as the ability to make connection between seemingly disparate phenomena. The learned scholar would be able to interpret individual texts with an acuity not available to those of restricted reading. Traditional scholars are not particularly bothered with the origins of their insights, in the sense that they do not attempt the impossible task of laying bare all the intellectual experiences which lead up to the ability to make a scholarly judgement. Nor do they presume that other scholars will read the same texts in just the same way as they have. In fact scholars spend a great deal of energy in criticising the readings of their fellow scholars' (Billig, 1988a; p.200)

Consequently, the spirit of scholarly enterprise is essentially anti-methodological in that it contains none of the epistemological or practical advantages of a well-defined research paradigm. Moreover, the practice of scholarship requires a kind of knowledge and erudition which can never be fully accomplished. As new knowledge and expertise is gained, old work will look as if it needs expanding, updating or rewriting. In that sense, scholarly analysis will never provide definitive explanations or solutions, but mere insight and arguments. More often than not, the outcome of scholarly inquiry will be criticised by other scholars. As Billig (1988a) warns, a scholar cannot hide behind a method and the illusion of objectivity which surrounds it, but will always remain fully accountable for his arguments and claims. Scholarship is therefore in itself argumentative and rhetorical, just like the ideology which it can help understand (Billig, 1988a).

Finally, it should be noted that the study of ideology in the aforementioned way should go beyond merely situating specific explanations within established ideological traditions and showing how specific historically-situated ideas have informed contemporary explanations. In previous sections, the critique of traditional psychological approaches to social phenomena was often formulated by contrasting psychological explanations with the relevant sociological or historical alternatives. For instance, numerous socio-historical studies on conspiracy theories have demonstrated the limits of a purely psychological explanation by highlighting the historical contingency of this type of belief and identifying specific social and ideological conditions which contribute to their emergence. At the same time however, socio-historical explanations have their own shortcomings in that they seldom reflect on the *actual* processes by which a marginal explanatory discourse (such as conspiracy theory or the paranormal) gains popularity in times of social crisis. Social and cultural explanations rarely elaborate on the dynamic behind what amounts to collective 'attitude change'. Instead, they either assume that they are dealing with an 'unthinking society' or look to psychology, and especially social psychology, to provide the relevant answers. However, as was shown in earlier sections, in its quest for transhistorical and universal laws of human behaviour, traditional psychology has neglected the notion of interdependence between the individual and society, and ignored the contingency of psychology upon history.

In the present thesis, an attempt will be made to go beyond the socio-historical explanation by examining specific conspiratorial and paranormal accounts and explanations, and analysing their rhetorical and argumentative structure. The study will look not only at where these ideas came from, but also examine what it is about them and about how they were told that made them so popular at the time of the war. As will become apparent, the popularity of conspiracy theories was made possible by a gradual broadening of the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable explanation, which propelled both conspiracy theories and paranormal explanations into the realm of legitimate explanatory discourses. Crucially, behind the proliferation of these beliefs was not simple propaganda manipulation, nor some universal psychological mechanism but a more complex discursive and ideological dynamic at the heart of which is the argumentative nature of the conspiracy tradition.

Chapter 5:

Data and Materials

The data analysed in the present thesis consists primarily of articles published during the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia (23rd March – 10th June 1999) in a number of Serbian daily publications (*Politika*, *Borba*, *Glas Javnosti*, *Blic* and *Danas*), periodicals (*Vreme*, *Nin*, *Duga*, *Nedeljni Telegraf*, *Vojska*, *Velika Srbija*) and military magazines and journals (*Vojska*, *Vojno Delo*, *Vojni Glasnik*). The bulk of this material was obtained, in printed form, during the visit to Belgrade in the summer of 1999. With most periodicals and journals it was possible to get hold of complete sets of issues published during the three and a half months of war. Copies were either bought, or obtained free of charge from the publishers. As far as daily publications are concerned, some (*Glas Javnosti*, *Blic*) were available over the internet. The rest were obtained in printed form either from the publishers or by other means.¹ Thirty seven issues of *Politika*, 33 issues of *Borba* and 41 issues of *Danas* (out of 77 published during the eleven week long conflict) were obtained in this way. Considering that the dates of the printed copies did not always correspond to certain key events in the war (such as the bombing of the Serbian television centre, the accidental targeting (by Nato) of the Albanian refugee convoy, the bombing of the Chinese embassy, or the first and last days of the bombing), additional material was obtained by photocopying relevant issues from copies held at the Serbian National Library or at the newspaper archive belonging to the independent weekly magazine *Vreme*. Even with these additional measures it was not possible to obtain every copy of every daily newspaper published during the conflict. However, bearing in mind the nature of the analysis, the absence of individual issues was not deemed to be a hindrance to the analytic process.²

Although most of the material analysed in subsequent chapters consists of texts which appeared in the Serbian press during the 11 weeks of Nato bombing, the analysis was by no means limited to the Serbian press during the 77 days of hostilities, or to conspiratorial explanations which emerged at the time of the conflict. Texts published in this period were neither historically nor ideologically isolated from the preceding years and could therefore not be examined independently of the broader cultural trends which marked the development of Serbian society throughout the 1990s. Consequently, in order to explore Serbian conspiracy culture at the time of the conflict with Nato, it was necessary to take into consideration conspiratorial discourse, as well as the content of the national press, in the years preceding the

war. Newspapers and magazines published outside the 11 week period of bombing were therefore looked at, and are also referred to in subsequent chapters. This material was obtained from the archives of the Serbian National Library.

The broad range of printed material gathered in the first instance was examined in the context of a preliminary exploration of the coverage of the war in the Serbian press. As will become apparent, analytic chapters tend to focus on a smaller proportion of magazines, newspapers and periodicals. The selection of publications for closer scrutiny was made on the basis of their relevance to specific issues dealt with in the analytic chapters as well as on the basis of their influence in Serbian society. For example, the most commonly referred to publication is *Politika*, a mainstream daily newspaper which occupies a special status in Serbian society (Nenadović, 1996; Thompson, 1999; Čolović, 1999). On the other hand, in chapters 8 and 9, where the analysis focuses on conspiratorial discourse in Serbian military publications (for reasons which will be made clear later in the thesis) most relevant examples are taken from military magazines and journals such as *Vojska*, *Vojno Delo* and *Vojni Glasnik*. What follows is a brief description of the most commonly cited newspapers, magazines and journals.³ Information pertaining to other publications which are only occasionally referred in the thesis will be provided in the form of footnotes in the analytical chapters.



Politika (*Politics*) is Serbia's oldest and best-known mainstream daily newspaper. It was founded in 1904 by the publicist Vladislav Ribnikar.

Before the Second World War, *Politika* was an independent and centre-left newspaper. During Tito's communist regime, the newspaper was under the control of state institutions such as the People's Front and the Socialist Alliance of the Working People. In spite of the influence of the state apparatus, in the context of the Serbian media, *Politika* was widely regarded as a fairly liberal newspaper. For many decades, *Politika* was the most widely read and most trusted daily publication (Thompson, 1999). The credibility of *Politika* has suffered since the late 1980s, when it was taken over by the Milošević regime and turned into one of the most notorious ideological weapons of the Serbian political establishment. Because of its links with the Serbian regime and a developed network of local correspondents, *Politika*'s coverage of the war with Nato was more detailed and comprehensive than that of rival daily publications (*Danas*, *Blic*, *Glas Javnosti*) which were severely affected by various censorship rules and informal pressures which existed at the time. During the weeks of the bombing, an average issue of *Politika* was printed on twice as many pages as its rivals, and, together with Serbian state television and radio, was the principal source of information (albeit not always accurate) about developments at home or abroad.



Glas Javnosti (The Voice of the Public) is an independent daily newspaper founded in the mid-1990s. Although a fairly recent addition to the Serbian daily press, *Glas* claims to originate from the newspaper of the same name which was published in the city of Kragujevac before the Second World War. *Glas Javnosti* was generally opposed to the Milošević regime. At the same time, the newspaper frequently took a 'patriotic' and conservative stance on many social issues. This was reflected in its negative attitude towards the West. In the summer of 2000, *Glas Javnosti* serialised the book *Opus Dei* written by Smilja Avramov, one of Serbia's best known conspiracy theorists (see below).



Duga (The Rainbow) founded in 1945, is one of Yugoslavia's oldest news magazines. It is published fortnightly. In the late 1980s *Duga* became the principal voice of Serbian nationalism. Dragoš Kalajić, a known antisemite had a regular column in the magazine. Also, *Duga* glorified Serbian 'heroes' such as the paramilitary leader Arkan, and the Bosnian Serb leaders Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. Serbian conspiracy theorists such as Đurđević, Vlajić, Avramov and Radišić (see below) all either wrote for, or were interviewed by *Duga* at some point during the 1990s. For many years, Mirjana Marković, Slobodan Milosević's wife, published her weekly diary in *Duga* so it has been suggested on more than one occasion that the editors of the magazine were close to the former Serbian regime (e.g. *Mediji pred ogledalom*, NIN, No.2398, 13 December, 1996). Four issues of *Duga* were published during the 11 weeks of bombing.



Nedeljni Telegraf (The Weekly Telegraph) was founded in 1996 by Momčilo Đorgović. *Nedeljni Telegraf* is an independent weekly political tabloid consisting mainly of sensationalist stories about individuals from the world of Serbian politics and entertainment. It boasts the largest circulation in Yugoslavia, in the category of weekly news magazines. Although often critical of the Serbian authorities, *Nedeljni Telegraf* is a profoundly 'patriotic' publication, and is in that respect similar to *Duga*. *Telegraf's* patriotic orientation became particularly prominent during the months of the Nato bombing.



The fortnightly magazine *Revija 92 (Review 92)* first appeared in 1989. It was initially devoted primarily to law enforcement issues which is reflected in the publication's title. In Yugoslavia, '92' is the emergency telephone number of the police force. Over the years the magazine shifted its attention to military matters as well as to what are often referred to as 'geopolitical issues'. In terms of its editorial policy, *Revija 92* is thought to be close to the Yugoslav military establishment.



Vojno Delo is Yugoslavia's most prestigious military journal founded in 1949 by the Ministry of Defence. Its aim was to provide a forum for informed discussion on matters of military strategy and skill. Issues of *Vojno Delo* also contain articles on global trends and the relationship between Yugoslavia and the international community.



Vojni Informator (The Military Informer) was founded in 1947 by the Military Publishing Institute. It is in many ways similar to *Vojno Delo* except that issues contain a larger number of shorter articles, often with black and white illustrations. Like *Vojno Delo*, *Vojni Glasnik* is published between four and six times a year.



Vojnska (The Army) is a fortnightly magazine distributed free of charge to Yugoslav Army personnel. It is also available from selected newsagents. As will become apparent, articles printed in *Vojnska* were occasionally quoted in the mainstream media including *Politika*. During the 11 weeks of bombing, 40 special 'war editions' of the magazine were published. The war issues were generally shorter and contained stories of the bravery and heroic accomplishments of the Yugoslav army as well as articles on global political issues.

In the thesis, names of newspapers, periodicals and journals will appear in the original, Serbian language (e.g. *Politika* not *Politics*). However, titles of articles and books written by Serbian authors will appear in English. It should therefore be borne in mind that all these texts were published in Serbian. All translation into English was done by the author of the present study solely for the purposes of the thesis.

Apart from looking at various daily newspapers and periodicals, the thesis examines a number of books (approximately 20 titles), published in Yugoslavia in the period 1995-2001, which contain more detailed and elaborate accounts of contemporary world politics. Many of these have been written by leading Serbian conspiracy theorists. These examples of conspiracy theory provided important insight into the broader framework of conspiratorial explanation within which accounts appearing in the Serbian media are situated. Also, extracts from books written by leading conspiracy theorists will be used to illustrate the rhetoric and argumentation of the conspiracy tradition. What follows are brief biographies of the conspiracy theorists whose work is analysed in subsequent chapters. Titles of books printed in bold refer to books which are examined in the analytical chapters.



Professor Smilja Avramov (born in the town of Pakrac in 1918) is a retired professor of international law at the Belgrade Law Faculty. Avramov studied law in Belgrade and Vienna in the 1930s. During the Second World War she volunteered as a nurse. In the 1950s she continued her academic career as a postgraduate student at the Hague Academy of International Law, Columbia University (New York) and the London School of Economics. Avramov is one of the best-known Serbian experts in international law. She is also the honorary vice-president of the World Association of International Lawyers based in London. At one point in her career she presided over the World Federation for Disarmament and Peace.

Although author of over 150 articles and a number of specialist books in the field of international law, Avramov is best known as the former advisor to President Milošević on matters of international law and foreign relations. Avramov met Milošević as early as the 1960s when she supervised Milošević's Masters thesis (which he never completed). From 1990 to 1992 Avramov was a member of the team of experts which represented Serbia at the Geneva peace talks chaired by Lord Carrington, as well as at other international conferences devoted to the resolution of the Yugoslav crisis.

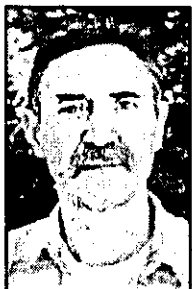
In Serbia Avramov is also known as an 'expert' on world elite organisations such as the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderberg Group or Opus Dei, and their involvement in Balkan politics. Throughout the 1990s, she was frequently interviewed by the press and appeared in numerous televised discussions on this topic. Three of Avramov's most recent books – *The post-heroic war of the international community against Yugoslavia (Post-herojski rat međunarodne zajednice protiv Jugoslavije, 1995)*, *Trilaterala (The Trilateral; 1998)* and *Opus Dei (2000)* - deal with the role of secret and semi-secret international organisations in the disintegration of Yugoslavia. She is also vehemently opposed to the institution of the Hague War Crimes Tribunal. After Milošević's extradition to the Hague she appeared on BBC television where she condemned the 'kidnapping' of the former president. She is a founder member of the International Committee for the Truth About Radovan Karadžić, a recently formed panel of 'experts' and public figures aimed at uncovering the 'political manipulation' behind the indictment of the former Bosnian Serb leader.



Dr Ratibor (Ray) Đurđević⁴ (born in the Serbian village of Ristovac in 1915), received a BSc in forestry from the University of Edinburgh before returning to Serbia in 1938. Upon his return, Đurđević took up a secretarial post with the Serbian Christian Youth Organisation. During the Second World War, Đurđević worked for the propaganda department of the collaborationist government of General Milan Nedić. In the final months of the war, he fled to Slovenia together with other collaborators, before escaping first to Italy and then Germany. In exile Đurđević worked as a secretary at the YMCA. In 1950 he moved to the US where he trained as a social worker. He received a PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Denver in 1958. Đurđević is the author of two books in the field of psychology, *No Water in My Cup: Experiences and a Controlled Study of Psychotherapy in Delinquent Girls* published in 1968, and *Direct Psychotherapy : 28 American Originals* published in 1973. For 25 years he was a member of the American Psychological Association. It is indicative of Đurđević's political views that he left the Association in protest against the latter's 'pro-homosexual stance', following the decision by the APA to erase homosexuality from the DSM.

In the 1980s Đurđević founded 'Ichtys Press' a publishing company based in Kansas which published primarily his own antisemitic conspiracy literature, including titles such as *The Contemporary Faces of Satan* (1985) *Christian Revolt, Long Overdue - Towards American Freedom From Aliens* (1991), *The Fear Of Jews Syndrome in America, Vol A: Bamboozled Americans & Their Vile Brainwashers* (1988), *The Fear Of Jews Syndrome in America, Vol. B: Americans - A Nation of Dupes, Sheep, & Wimps?* (1988). In 1992 Đurđević returned to Serbia, where he founded the St Sava Youth and Student Organisation aimed at re-educating the Serbian youth in the 'healthy spirit of Orthodox Christianity'. After the failure of the youth project, Đurđević turned exclusively to publishing. He established the Serbian branch of Ichtys Press which has so far published over 30 titles, mostly Đurđević's own work. Apart from publishing Serbian translations of the aforementioned titles which first appeared in the US, Đurđević also brought out books such as: *Karl Marx: the servant and victim of Satan* (*Karl Marks: Sluga i Žrtva Satane*, 1996); *The Gay Brigade* (*Pederska Brigada*, 1996); *On the Senselessness of Antisemitism and Anti-antisemitism* (*O Besmislu Antisemitizma i Antiantisemitizma*, 1997); *Superbankers: the vampires of the contemporary world* (*Superbankari: vampiri savremenog sveta*, 1997); *Western ideological and spiritual poisoners* (*Idejni i duhovni trovaci sa Zapada*, 1997), *Masonry: a conspiracy against God and man, through the centuries and today* (*Masonerija: Zavera protiv Boga i čoveka, kroz vekove i danas*); *Five Bloody Revolutions of Judeo-bankers and their Judeo-masonry* (*Pet Krvavih Revolucija Judeo-bankara i njihove Judeo-masonerije*; 1999); and *Freud's False*

Science (Frojdova Laž Nauka, 2000). All of Đurđević's books contain the same mixture of antisemitic and quasi-religious conspiratorial material which is examined in later chapters.



Spasoje Vlajić, (Born in Belgrade, in 1946) is an engineer of crystallography, and a teacher of information technology in a secondary school in Belgrade. Vlajić is best known to the Serbian public for his ideas concerning parapsychological warfare and his pseudoscientific work on the so-called 'universal formula of light' (see Chapter 8). His ideas have had some coverage in the press, although mostly in fringe magazines such as

Trece oko (Third Eye), *Čudo (Miracle)*, *Nostradamus* and others which specialise in paranormal phenomena. More important for Vlajić's public image were his appearances on the popular sensationalist television chat-show *Black Pearls (Crni Biseri)*; produced by the private BKTV channel) which often discusses the world of the paranormal. Vlajić claims to have taken part in the programme more than eight times. Significantly, the frequency of his appearances increased in the months preceding the Nato intervention in the Spring of 1999. Vlajić has featured in the Western media too. His extraordinary views have been noted for instance in *The Independent* and the American daily *USA Today* (*Aliens are in control of Blair, say Serb psychics, The Independent, 10 August 1999; Amid strikes, fortune tellers' fame soars, USA Today, 6 April 1999*).

Vlajić regularly receives his followers and other members of the public in his office, situated in a block of flats in the Belgrade suburb of Zemun. These meetings, held six days a week throughout the year, are attended by up to fifteen people (mostly women) who seek Vlajić's guidance and discuss various aspects of his work. The sessions are free, and are occasionally advertised in the magazine *Trece Oko*, at the bottom of Vlajić's regular column.

Vlajić is also a prolific writer. His prophesies and quasi-scientific theories are described in great detail in over ten titles all of which have been published by a fringe publishing company 'Miroslav'. Vlajić's books are on display in most larger bookshops. His work includes titles such as *Formula of Light (Svetlosna formula, 1992)*; *New (Meta)physics (Nova (meta)fizika; 1992)*; *Intent (Naum, 1993)*, *Torch (Luča, 1994)*, *A Word on Pure Energy (Slovo o čistoj energiji, 1995)*, *The Prophecy of the Formula of Light (Proročanstvo svetlosne formule, 1996)*, and most recently the trilogy *The First World Parapsychological War (Prvi svetski parapsihološki rat, 1998)* *The First World Anti-Christian War (Prvi svetski antihrišćanski rat, 1999)*, and *A History of the Future (Istorija budućnosti, 2000)*.



Colonel Dr. Svetozar Radišić (born in the Southern Serbian city of Leskovac) began his military career as a teenager. In the late 1980s he obtained a PhD in military studies. From 1992 to 1994, Radišić held the post of editor-in-chief of the military journal *Vojno Delo*. From 1994 to 1995, Radišić worked in the Section for Psychological and Propaganda Operations affiliated to the Yugoslav Army Bureau of Information. In late 1995 he was reinstated as the editor of *Vojno Delo* (see Chapters 8 and 9 for a more detailed account of Radišić's career). In May 2000 Radišić became the official spokesperson of the Yugoslav Army. He teaches at the Centre for Higher Military education.

Since 1995, Radišić has published regularly in *Revija 92*, *Vojno Delo*, *Vojni Glasnik*, *Vojska*, etc. In 1997, he wrote a pamphlet '*Defence doctrines- the concept of full-dimensional defence*' which was published by the Yugoslav Army's Centre for higher military education. Two years later his book *Neocortical War (Neokortikalni Rat)* was published by the Yugoslav Army Publishing Institute. In 2001, a second, revised edition of the book appeared in the bookshops. Radišić's work is examined in greater detail in Chapters 8 and 9.



Nebojša Krstić, a sociologist of religion and property developer, was born in the Southern Serbian city of Nis in 1964. Krstić is the author of four books as well as of numerous articles in the field of Orthodox theology, philosophy, politics, and international relations. Most of Krstić's articles appeared in fringe rightwing publications such as *Zbilja (Reality)*, *Beli Orao (White Eagle)*, *Beogradski Dijalog (Belgrade Dialogue)*, *Vizantijsko Ogledalo (Byzantine Mirror)*, *Monarhija (Monarchy)* and others. In 1995 Krstić founded the rightwing nationalist journal '*Obraz*' (*Dignity*). He also edited the notoriously rightwing and antisemitic religious journal *Logos* published by the Orthodox seminary in Belgrade. Significantly, Krstić's publishing activity was not confined to fringe journals. He occasionally published in the Yugoslav military magazine *Vojska (The Army)*, in the official Serbian Orthodox Church publication *Pravoslavlje (Orthodoxy)*, in the daily *Glas Javnosti* as well as in the culture supplement of *Politika*.

In 1991 Nebojša Krstić received the St Sava Prize, awarded by the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, for his study *The concept of Logos in the philosophy of St John* which appeared in the journal *Logos*. Two years later, the collection of essays *Orthodoxy and Politics*, edited by Krstić, was awarded the annual prize of the Yugoslav Association for the scientific study of religion. Krstić was a member of the Serbian Writer's Union.

In 1998, Krstić founded the extreme right wing organisation Otačastveni Pokret Obraz (Patriotic Movement Dignity) which propounds the ideology of Dimitrije Ljotić and Nikolaj Velimirović. The activities of this organisation are examined in Chapter 10. Krstić died in a car crash on 3rd December 2001.⁵

As well as examining the written work of Avramov, Đurđević, Vlajić, Radišić and Krstić, the thesis is also based on the analysis of recorded conversations with Spasoje Vlajić and Smilja Avramov. Encounters with Vlajić and Avramov took place during visits to Belgrade in December 2000 and July 2001 respectively.

The recorded meetings with Vlajić (two two-hour sessions) could be described as an *ad hoc* mini-ethnographic study. Vlajić was visited during two of his regular afternoon encounters with members of the public. Vlajić was informed that the researcher was a 'postgraduate student' doing a 'sociological study' related to his ideas (see chapter 8 for a more detailed description of the encounter). Upon arrival in Vlajić's office, the researcher was introduced to regular attendants as a 'special guest from England', and was allowed to sit close to Vlajić and ask specific questions. Vlajić consented to the sessions being recorded. It should be pointed out that the encounters with Vlajić did not constitute 'interviews' in any formal sense. Vlajić's status as a 'guru' and the researcher's as a 'guest' eager to learn more about Vlajić's esoteric skills, limited the latter's contribution to the conversation to occasional comments which merely guided Vlajić's discourse towards specific topics of interest.⁶

In June 2001 a recorded conversation with Smilja Avramov was conducted in her flat in Belgrade. As with Vlajić, contact with Avramov was established through her publisher. Avramov was told that the researcher was writing a thesis on the 'influence of trans-national organisations on Balkan politics' and could therefore benefit from her 'expertise'. The conversation lasted approximately one hour. Again, the researcher's contribution to the conversation was limited to occasional comments. At the same time, the face-to-face encounter provided an opportunity to question Avramov on specific aspects of her explanatory framework which were not elaborated upon in her written work.

It was explicitly made clear to Vlajić and Avramov that recorded material would be used solely for academic purposes. However, details of the study were not discussed. Vlajić and Avramov were not told that the main topic of research was conspiracy theories or that the researcher would take a critical stance towards their work. Bearing in mind that the conversation was very much in the public domain, the failure to disclose details of the study was not judged to be in violation of standard ethical considerations.

Chapter 6

Protoconspiracy theory and the proliferation of suspicion in the Serbian media and political discourse

In Chapter 3 it was suggested that the revival of Serbian nationalism in the 1980s was accompanied by the emergence of what Đilas (1993) referred to as 'historical nihilism'. A number of prominent members of the Serbian intelligentsia, who played a crucial role in the nationalist resurgence, attributed the lack of understanding for Serbian nationalist concerns among other Yugoslav nations and the Western powers, to some hidden agenda and sinister motive. The ensuing conflict with the international community was blamed on a deliberate and premeditated policy aimed at undermining the national integrity and sovereignty of the Serbian state and nation. 'Historical nihilism', and the idea of conspiracy which emanated from it was said to have become, in the early 1990s, an essential component of 'regime populism' (Popov, 1993), the ideological orientation which was endorsed and propagated by the ruling political establishment in Serbia.

In Popov's (1993) study of Serbian populist culture in the 1990s, 'regime populism' is distinguished from 'opposition populism'. The latter, associated primarily with fringe right-wing opposition parties and sections of the Serbian Orthodox Church, was also said to contain a xenophobic element and the notion of an international anti-Serbian plot. Crucially however, only the opposition populist version of conspiracy theory can be said to constitute a direct continuation of the conspiratorial cultural tradition as manifested in the work of the likes of Velimirović and Ljotić. In contrast, the notion of conspiracy inherent in 'regime populism' cannot be so easily linked to the elaboration of Serbian conspiracism in the 1930s and 40s. As will become apparent in the present chapter, the allusions to an international conspiracy in the rhetoric of Milošević's establishment and state controlled media belong primarily to the type of explanation defined in Chapter 2 as protoconspiracy theory.

In the earlier chapter, protoconspiracy theory was said to be the most sophisticated and ostensibly the most 'reasonable' type of conspiracy theory within the proposed threefold classification of conspiratorial discourse. While drawing heavily on the notion of the 'hidden hand' behind world politics, this type of explanation was said not to contain the more controversial and problematic aspects of the conspiracy tradition such as the mystical and quasi-religious themes and arguments. Also, it was suggested that protoconspiracy theory seldom makes explicit references to the identity of the conspirator, so the monomaniacal

attributional style characteristic of other forms of conspiratorial discourse is not made transparently obvious. Most crucially, protoconspiracy theory does not link the alleged present-day conspiracy either to conspiracies, or conspiracy theories, of the past.

The present chapter will examine in greater detail the specific features of protoconspiratorial explanation, as manifested in the mainstream Serbian media and political discourse, both in the early 1990s and during the Nato bombing. The similarities and the differences between protoconspiracy theory and the other types of conspiratorial discourse, namely classical and world elite conspiracy theories, will be explored. The chapter will demonstrate that, in spite of a number of distinguishing features of protoconspiracy theory, which give it a more reasonable and acceptable guise, this type of account draws upon many of the themes and arguments characteristic of the conspiratorial explanatory style. It will be suggested that the idea of secrecy and a hidden agenda in world politics, which is inherent in protoconspiratorial explanation, draws the protoconspiracy theorist into adopting the rhetoric associated with the conspiracy tradition, including the references to manipulation of the many by the few, the Manichean distinction between good and evil, the apocalyptic tone, etc.

After demonstrating the presence of elements of the conspiratorial explanatory style in protoconspiratorial discourse, the chapter will propose that the proliferation of this type of explanation at the time of the bombing played an important role in the discursive and ideological dynamic (examined further in the next chapter) which enabled the mystical and antisemitic conspiratorial themes to emerge in the mainstream press during the war with Nato.

6.1. Protoconspiratorial argument and Milošević's political rhetoric in the early 1990s

From the early 1990s, the notion of a hidden agenda in world politics was a regular feature of Serbian government propaganda. The causal attribution implicit in the allusion to a conspiracy enabled the ruling regime to avoid responsibility for various political, economic and social crises which hit Serbia in the 1990s.¹ The theme of foreign threat and conspiracy was also used, by the regime propaganda, to dent the credibility of Milošević's political opponents.

At the time of Serbia's first multiparty elections in December 1990, two largest opposition parties, the Democratic Party and the Serbian Renewal Movement, advocated a pro-European, and generally a pro-Western political option. In order to undermine Milošević's main political rivals, the state-controlled media and government propaganda accused the opposition of

'treason' and of participation in the plot to subjugate Serbia. In one of his pre-election speeches, Milošević himself pointed out that:

'we must face the danger which looms over our independence. We are faced with a deliberate policy aimed at the economic destruction of our industry, all with the aim of causing an economic crisis in Serbia, and provoking social unrest through which the noose would be tightened around our necks, aided by new Serbian traitors. Debts in the game of border changes in this part of Europe would once again be settled with Serbian lives.' (reported in *Politika*, 22 November, 1990, p.2)

The reference to the 'deliberate policy' invokes the theme of conspiracy, especially when the policy is aimed at causing destruction and subjugation of a nation. Also, the gambling metaphor evident in the reference to the settlement of debts and 'the game', conjures up the imagery characteristic of conspiracy theories, where small nations are portrayed as little more than gambling chips in a game played by some evil and powerful minority.

The reference, in the above quotation, to the 'economic destruction' of Serbia as the ultimate aim of Western involvement in the Balkans, became a regular feature of government rhetoric in subsequent years. Following the imposition of international economic sanctions in May 1992, the idea that the whole world was conspiring against the Serbs enabled Milošević to avoid the blame for the disastrous consequences of the 'unjust and undeserved' sanctions:

'We simply found ourselves under overwhelming pressure from the interests of the powerful, the calculations of the greedy, and the vindictiveness of those whom we defeated in past wars.' (reported in *Politika*, 10 October, 1992)

The use of the word 'simply' to describe the causes of an economic crisis reveals the attribution style characteristic of conspiracy theory. Social problems are not presented as requiring complex explanations, but as a matter which can be 'simply' explained away by reference to someone's 'interests' and 'calculations', and therefore to deliberate actions.

Finally, throughout the 1990s, the allusion to an international conspiracy provided Milošević and his regime with the means of maintaining national cohesion at times of social unrest. In March 1991, during anti-government demonstrations organised by the students from the University of Belgrade, Milošević met with a number of prominent local officials from around Serbia.² The purpose of the meeting was to ensure the co-operation of local authorities and prevent the unrest from spreading outside the capital. During the meeting, the President of Serbia revealed that:

'[The unification of Germany] led to the revival of very significant aspirations regarding the restoration of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and I can tell you quite freely, since this is not a public meeting, that we have information, very serious information that they are counting on the

whole of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina, part of Sandžak, that their strategy is to give the whole of Kosovo to Albania, because according to their sources only 8.4% of its population is Serb and Montenegrin, that with this demographic explosion all this should be joint with Albania so that on their map, Serbia would be reduced to what would amount to the Belgrade Pashaluk....They say between them that there can be no peace in the Balkans as long as Serbs are the largest people, that they are a savage people which will cause trouble and political conflict, so they must be reduced to borders which will make them powerless, where they won't be a threat to the new order. They have been working on this for some time.' (reported in *Vreme*, 12 April, 1991; p.64)

Milošević's reliable 'evidence' of a secret plot against Serbia's territorial integrity helped divert the attention from Serbia's internal problems, at a time when anti-government demonstrations in Belgrade were at a peak. More significantly, Milošević claimed to be revealing to his collocutors some reliable, yet secret and confidential details regarding the plan to destroy Serbia. Secrecy surrounding a devious plot is a crucial element in every conspiratorial narrative. Conspiracy theorists always deal with information obtained from leaked documents, secret meetings, confessions of renegades, etc. which provides them with 'hidden knowledge' to be revealed to the public (Hofstadter, 1966, Billig, 1978). The reference to the secret document proving the existence of an anti-Serbian plot, positions Milošević's account of Serbia's predicament well within the domain of conspiratorial explanations.

In spite of the implicit allusion to the secret machinations of the world's power structures, the explanatory framework of the former Serbian leader lacks a critical feature of the conspiratorial ideological tradition. None of the above examples clearly state the identity of the 'hidden hand'. In the first quotation Milošević does not elaborate on who it is that pursues the 'deliberate policy' to destroy Serbia. In the third quotation he only mentions that 'they are counting...', that 'they say....', that 'they have been working on this....', without stating exactly who 'they' are. Milošević refers to the 'interests of the powerful and the calculations of the greedy' without specifying to whom this reference applies. The 'vindictiveness of those whom we defeated in past wars' mentioned in the second quotation probably refers to Germany. The speech was delivered at a time of widespread animosity towards Germany provoked by that country's early recognition of the breakaway states of Slovenia and Croatia. Nevertheless, the vindictiveness of the Germans is cited in addition to the 'interests' and 'calculations' of the (unspecified) powerful and the greedy.

Similarly, there is a reference, in the above quotation, to the 'aspirations regarding the restoration of the Austro-Hungarian empire'. However, it is unlikely that Milošević was referring to actual territorial aspirations of either Austria or Hungary. The allusion to a new 'Austro-Hungarian' or 'Habsburg' empire should, in this context, be interpreted in a symbolic

sense, as signifying any kind of foreign colonial administration in south-eastern Europe. Similar symbolic reference was evident in the article entitled *The reconstruction of the Habsburg monarchy* which appeared in the Yugoslav Army publication *Vojska* in August 1999. In spite of the prominent place in the title, the Austro-Hungarian empire is mentioned only once, right at the end of the article:

'Considering that German administrators are already overlooking Bosnia-Herzegovina, it can be said that the borders of united Europe already match those of the Habsburg monarchy, with a tendency (under the mandate of international forums!) for further expansion towards the South' (Stojković, *Vojska*, 26 August 1999, p.8)

Apart from this passing allusion to the former occupiers of the Balkans, the text in *Vojska* dealt mainly with the intervention in the region by the international community. The Austrian empire was therefore invoked, not as a specific conspiratorial body, but merely as a symbol of foreign occupation and the antithesis of Serbian national freedom.

The absence of a clear reference to a group or organisation engaged in the plot against Serbia makes the conspiracy theory explicated by Milošević 'conspiratorless'. Having a conspiracy theory without an identifiable conspirator constitutes a departure from the conspiratorial explanatory style. The reference to specific groups, organisations or movements which are supposedly orchestrating historical and social events, is one of the distinguishing and defining characteristics of conspiracy theories. As was noted in Chapter 4 the personal attributional style characteristic of conspiracy theory not only traces all events to deliberate decisions taken by *specific* individuals or organisations, but also always attributes the causes of social events always to the same and *identifiable* conspiratorial group (Billig, 1978, 1989). Also, in everyday discourse, conspiratorial constructions of reality are usually labelled in terms of the identity of the 'hidden hand'. People typically refer to 'the *Jewish* conspiracy', 'the *Masonic* conspiracy', 'the *Vatican-Comintern* conspiracy' or the '*Bilderberg* conspiracy'.

Equivocation regarding the identity of the conspirators plays an important role in the overall rhetoric of protoconspiracy theory. By not naming the individuals or groups behind the plot, this type of explanation presents itself as a reasonable and plausible alternative to the more simplistic and naïve types of conspiratorial causal explanation. This crucial feature of protoconspiratorial discourse will be illustrated further later in the chapter, using examples from articles featured in *Politika* during the war with Nato.

In spite of the lack of a clearly identifiable 'conspirator' in protoconspiratorial discourse, there is a feature of Milošević's rhetoric in the early 1990s, which links it to the conspiratorial

explanatory style. It is the already-noted reference to *secrecy* which is as crucial to a theory of conspiracy as the existence of the conspirator. Pidgen (1995) for instance defined conspiracy as a 'secret plan on the part of the group to influence events partly by covert action', while Cohn's (1957) definition of Jewish conspiracy theory includes the assumption that the alleged 'Jewish government' is *secret*. Other authors have indirectly referred to the notion of secrecy by, for instance, defining the activity of the conspiracy theorists as a 'discovery' (Popper, 1966) or by comparing them to the 'treasure hunter', engaged in uncovering something that was (deliberately) hidden (Billig, 1978). In many ways, secrecy constitutes the conspiracy theorist's *raison d'être*. It underpins the idea that there is more to social and political reality than meets the eye and, therefore, that there is something to be explained and revealed.

A consequence of the emphasis on secrecy is that every conspiratorial explanation must account for the fact that the sensational information it exposes has, until then, been kept secret. The theorist must explain how it is that the masses, whom he or she implicitly addresses, have been hitherto kept in the dark about the existence of a sinister plot. For that reason, considerable time and space in every conspiratorial narrative, even in protoconspiracy theory, is devoted to exposing the different ways by which the manipulation of the masses is accomplished. In Chapter 2 it was noted that the means of mass manipulation invoked in conspiracy literature ranges from the plausible to the ridiculous and includes anything from news management and customary wartime propaganda, to the transmission of subliminal Satanic messages and brainwave manipulation. Such broad scope of available means of mass manipulation, gives the conspiracy theorist some flexibility of choice when it comes to the description of this aspect of the conspiracy. As will become apparent, in protoconspiratorial explanations, the notion of mass manipulation tends to be limited to the more plausible methods and techniques, primarily media manipulation. The focus on the media makes the protoconspiracy theory seem reasonable because basic conspiratorial claims can be easily assimilated within the more general debate about the role of the media in the shaping of public opinion. In the following section the notion of media manipulation in protoconspiratorial discourse will be explored using the example of the reports, reactions and commentaries which appeared in *Politika* in the aftermath of the bombing of Serbian Radio Television.

6.2. Protoconspiracy theory vs. the conspiracy tradition: the important differences

6.2.1. Protoconspiracy theory and the use of metaphor: theatre, factory and drug addiction

The military conflict over Kosovo in the spring of 1999 was accompanied by an equally intense propaganda war. On a daily basis, Nato officials presented their side of the story at

regular press conferences held in Brussels, London and Washington. The Serbian regime attempted to counteract the stories of 'precision strikes', 'collateral damage', 'legitimate military targets' and 'humanitarian intervention' with footage of civilian casualties and destroyed hospitals and schools. The propaganda war reached fever pitch in early April 1999, when a Nato official announced that the headquarters of the Serbian state television (RTS) – the mouthpiece of the Milošević regime – would be included on the list of 'legitimate military targets'. The threat to bomb the RTS was executed on 24 April 1999, when the station's head office in the centre of Belgrade was destroyed with a single air strike.

Around the time of the bombing of the state television centre, the propaganda aspect of the war with Nato was frequently discussed in the Serbian media, especially in that owned and controlled by the government. Crucially, the way in which the propaganda warfare was conceptualised involved references to mass manipulation thought to be aimed at concealing some sinister motive underlying the military intervention in Yugoslavia.

Following the first indication that the Serbian Radio Television might be targeted, one of the station's chief news editors read out, live in the main news bulletin, an open letter to the Nato general Wesley Clark. The letter was subsequently reprinted verbatim in *Politika*. In the message to the General, the Yugoslav media, portrayed as dedicated to 'truth' and 'professionalism', were contrasted with the manipulative western media:

'We know, and we broadcast this, that thousands of Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija have fled in fear of your Nato bombs, as well as that hundreds of them are being manipulated by CNN and Christiane Amanpour, in the big-stage managed performance about a humanitarian catastrophe, financed by Soros, which is supposed to justify every Nato crime against our civilians' (*Let Clarke shoot, we are waiting, Politika, 9 April 1999, p.18*)

Similar allegations were made in an editorial in *Politika* which appeared the following day:

'The Western followers of Goebels have surpassed their role model. The mighty media machinery, led by the turbo-manipulators CNN, Sky news, the BBC and other make-up artists for truth have fought in vain for our souls, with means unseen in the history of propaganda activity' (Petrović, *The pinnacle of Nato's media agony, Politika, 10 April 1999, p.14*)

Other articles on the western media which appeared in *Politika* during the bombing campaign dealt specifically with the modus operandi of foreign media manipulators. In the text *When ideas run out, there are always mass graves (Politika, 22 April 1999, p.21)*, the journalist A. Apostolovski, writes of 'death and lies which spread, like a poisonous cloud, through the world's airspace' and about the imminence of yet another 'polluted overdose' for millions of

viewers of Western media around the world.³ The aim of Apostolovski's article was to explain how the 'state of hypnosis' is maintained among the Western population:

'The whole mechanism of international relations connected with events in the former Yugoslavia is based on an ordinary bluff and a cheap editing trick worthy of 'Funniest home videos'' (ibid.)

In all three of the above descriptions of the Western media which appeared in *Politika*, the notion of mass manipulation is constructed through the use of metaphors drawn from the world of theatre, television and film. References to 'cheap editing tricks', 'make-up artists for truth', 'stage-managed performance', 'funniest home videos' are cases in point. According to Billig (1978), metaphors taken from the world of puppetry and theatre are a common feature of conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theorists typically talk of 'well-orchestrated', 'hidden conductors', 'pulling strings'. All these metaphors reinforce the idea about the non-spontaneous nature of events and actions. In the case of *Politika* the cinematic and theatrical metaphors enhance the claim that material shown in the Western media is deliberate fabrication rather than truth.

Another set of metaphors used in the above examples are the mechanistic ones. CNN, Sky and the BBC are defined as '*turbo*-manipulators' who provide the basis for a system of international relations constructed as a 'mechanism'. Similarly, 'enemy' media agencies and personnel are referred to as propaganda 'machinery' and 'factory of lies'. The use of mechanistic metaphors to refer to enemy institutions has become a regular feature of modern war-time rhetoric (Taylor, 1992). The rhetorical purpose of the construction of the enemy as a 'machine' is manifold. First of all, the enemy, on this occasion the opponent in the propaganda war, is dehumanised and constructed as part of the military infrastructure. Such a representation does not only serve to undermine the credibility of the enemy media as the source of information. It also legitimises certain courses of action, such as the targeting of TV stations (in the case of Nato) or the expulsion of foreign journalists on grounds of involvement in subversive activities (in the case of the Yugoslav authorities). Neither of these actions would have been appropriate if the journalistic activity had been constructed as a human endeavour, separate from the depersonalised military confrontation. In addition, the mechanistic representation of the enemy introduces into the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy inherent in any war narrative a related distinction between man and machine. Through the metaphor, the humanity of 'us' is contrasted with 'them' as an amoral, insensitive and inanimate contraption. So, during the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia, the 'factories of lies', which are the Western media, were often contrasted with the Serbian media as the 'spirit of freedom' or the 'voice of truth'. The day after the bombing of the television headquarters, the

anthropomorphic representation of the Serbian media offered by a journalist contained a double biological metaphor. It was alleged that 'this barbaric act by the criminals has stricken in the heart of our voice of truth' (*By trying to assassinate President Milošević and the bearers of the public word, the criminals are trying to break the freedom-loving spirit of our people, Politika, 24 April 1999, p.20*).⁴

The use of a mechanistic metaphor in protoconspiratorial discourse also emphasises the notion of manipulation. The media 'machinery' has to be both owned and operated by someone. Consequently, the media are represented as mere tools in the hands of others. Significantly, the 'enemy lies', which the media produces are described as a 'polluted overdose' and 'poisonous cloud'. Enemy 'machinery' is thus constructed as a source of contamination (pollution, poison), as something which deliberately corrupts things which are pure and natural, in most cases 'the truth'. This broader ecological metaphor overlaps with a psycho-medical connotation. The allusion to a polluted *overdose* introduces the imagery of drug addiction. Similarly, there is talk of a 'state of hypnosis' which is maintained, through the media, among the population in the West. Both drug addiction and hypnosis refer to wilfully and deliberately invoked altered states of consciousness. As such they constitute suitable metaphoric representations of mass manipulation. The mechanistic metaphor, commonly found in the representation of the enemy in a military conflict, thus becomes also a reference to mass manipulation and effectively to a conspiracy. Overdose and hypnosis simultaneously account for a particular mental state (of submission and passivity) and for the fact that these cannot occur spontaneously but as a result of (deliberate) intervention: someone has to do the hypnotising or administer the overdose.

The reference to psycho-medical intervention in *Politika* is purely metaphorical. There is no suggestion that overdoses are actually being administered, or that TV broadcasts have a genuinely hypnotic effect. In contrast, classical conspiratorial discourse often refers *literally* to psycho-medical methods of mass manipulation. For example, in an interview published in *Duga* in May 1999, Dr Todor Jovanović (introduced in the article as 'an expert in the field of immunology') offered a comprehensive account of the pharmacological component of the world conspiracy:

'Through the constant effect of tablets targeted at a certain segment of the population, and one should include vaccines in this category, it is possible to act directly upon the human brain, which on average weighs 1,400 grams. Its weight can be reduced to 500 grams, and you can imagine what consequences this can have on the changes within it. Take a look at an average American. Anyone can spot the dumb expression on his face, which is in many ways the effect of the pharmaceutical industry. This man accepts anything he is told. How many times have you been surprised by the comments of average Americans interviewed in the streets. Surprised

both by their appearance and the answers. Total dumbness.' (*Fascism can be spread with a syringe, Duga, May 1999, p.17*)

In Jovanović's revelation there is no sign of metaphorical meaning. The American population is said to be kept in a state of submission through the *literally* constant administration of specialised drugs which reduce intellectual ability. A similar claim was made in the article *The aggression of profit against the soul*, published in an earlier issue of *Duga*. The piece, written by the journalist Mišo Vujović focused on the satanic aspects of the international conspiracy. It suggested that international drug trafficking is a means of mass manipulation:

'Oliver Stone protested publicly against the murder of Blacks with powerful synthetic drugs. Is there a country in the world with such a deep division between the rich and the poor? Addicts are the easiest to manipulate' (*Duga, April 1999, p.30*)

Vujovic went on to suggest that 'in the last ten years, more people died of drug abuse in great Russia than anywhere else in the world' (*ibid.*). The rise in drug abuse in 'great Russia' is interpreted as a deliberate means of subverting the 'return to Orthodoxy, tradition and roots' (*ibid.*). This type of explanation, with reference to a satanic conspiracy aimed at destroying Russia and the rest of the Orthodox world, belongs to the domain of classical conspiracy theory.

The reference to *literal* drug abuse in classical conspiracy theory reflects the common pseudo-scientific aspect of this type of explanation, which will be examined in more detail in later chapters. For the present purposes, the distinction between metaphorical and literal allusion to psycho-pharmacological aspects of mass manipulation illustrates an important difference between protoconspiracy theory and classical conspiracy tradition. One of the ways in which protoconspiratorial discourse constructs a more reasonable and acceptable account of a world plot is by preserving the distinction between metaphor and reality. Protoconspiracy theory thus appears to be devoid of the more controversial quasi-scientific aspect of classical conspiratorial explanations, while at the same time preserving, through the employment of suitable metaphoric representation, the underlying idea of a deliberately-induced altered state of mind with the purpose of manipulation.

6.2.2. 'Conspiratorless conspiracy': the use of agentless passives and euphemisms

As was the case in Milošević's speeches quoted earlier, references to mass manipulation which appeared in the mainstream Serbian press lacked a direct reference to the organisation or body behind the manipulation. For example, in the quotation from the article *When ideas run out there are always mass graves*, the manipulation of the masses is formulated in a

passive tense, in that the 'bluffers' and those who stand behind the 'editing trick' are not identified. The reference to the Western media as 'poisonous clouds that pollute the airspace' does not identify the source of the poisonous cloud. The very title of the article *When ideas run out there are always mass graves* omits a direct reference to who it is that ran out of ideas. According to Hodge and Kress (1993), the syntactic construction of a statement has important implications for the way in which the audience interprets its content. So, the passive form a sentence, which omits any reference to the agent behind an action, can have the effect of suppressing the existence or relevance of specific agents. However, agentless passives can also be seen as a way of managing ambiguity regarding the agent's identity. By concealing the agents, the passive syntactic form contributes to their mystification, and enables the uncertainty surrounding their identity to be maintained (Hodge and Kress, 1993). With that in mind, the regularity of the passive in protoconspiratorial discourse should be seen as a strategy within the overall management of reasonableness which takes place in this type of explanation. Passives facilitate the avoidance of reference to an all-powerful body behind the covert actions, enabling protoconspiracy theory to evade the accusation of simplism which is frequently directed at classical conspiratorial explanations.

A related strategy employed in protoconspiracy theory to manage the ambiguity regarding the identity of the conspirators is the use of euphemisms. When the syntactic structure of a sentence demands the agent to be named, the conspirators are referred to as 'directors of horror', 'producers of this war', 'the evil management from Washington' etc. Many of these terms reflect the aforementioned use of theatrical analogies in conspiratorial discourse and can therefore be seen as an extension of the reference to the 'cheap editing trick', 'make-up' of truth, a 'stage-managed' performance or the repetition of the Bosnian 'scenario'. In Chapter 3 it was noted that Dimitrije Ljotić referred to Jews as 'the Great Director'. Crucially however, Ljotić did not use metaphorical language in order to conceal the identity of the alleged conspirators. The metaphor was used merely to illustrate a feature of a Jewish conspiracy. In protoconspiracy theory on the other hand, euphemisms are used as the only descriptions of the conspirators, thus contributing to their vagueness.

The preference for vague concepts and code words when referring to the conspirators is not a novel development within the broader context of conspiratorial discourse. In the 1960's, the propaganda of the John Birch society frequently omitted a clear identification of the 'enemy'. Instead, general and ambiguous terms such as 'communism' were favoured. Similarly, in the UK, National Front literature tended to use broader categories such as 'capitalism', 'American bankers', etc. (Billig, 1978). In the Serbian media the 'enemy' behind the anti-Serbian plot was most frequently constructed merely as 'the West'. The non-specific nature of

the term made it malleable, thus enabling the protoconspiracy theorists to set its boundaries in different places, depending on the requirements of the specific context.

The choice of the phrase 'the West' to refer to the source of the anti-Serbian plot may not be considered all that controversial considering that Nato, Serbia's formal enemy in the war, is widely alluded to, even in Nato countries, as the 'Western military alliance'. In that sense the use of the phrase 'the West' could be interpreted as a relic of Cold War rhetoric, or a geopolitical reference. At the same time, as was noted in Chapter 3, the category of 'the West', as the source of conspiracy has deeper roots in Serbian conspiratorial culture and invokes the imagery characteristic of Slavophile discourse. Although references to 'the West' in mainstream Serbian press and electronic media were by and large devoid of the religious connotations apparent in the anti-Western rhetoric of the likes of Velimirović or Đurđević, the choice of phrase constitutes a potentially significant conceptual link between protoconspiracy theory and the classical conspiracy tradition.

6.2.3. *Who controls the Western media: the nameless, the World's elite or the Jews*

So far it has been suggested that protoconspiracy theory maintains its more reasonable and respectable image by obscuring the identity of the conspirators and by formulating the theme of mass manipulation in a way that does not invoke the more controversial and farfetched claims about the actual techniques involved. The present section will explore these features further, by contrasting the representation of the Western media in the Serbian press with that found in world elite and classical conspiracy theories.

In the quotes from *Politika* cited earlier, the BBC, CNN and Sky were singled out as the main 'turbo-manipulators' of public opinion. These and other Western media companies were often constructed, in the Serbian pro-government press, as the main agents of the conspiracy, whose principal task was to hide the truth from the (Western) public and conceal the real motives behind the intervention in the Balkans:

'[Second condition for American intervention abroad is that] American public must be convinced that the attack will save some other people from suffering. The task of fabricating heartbreaking footage and texts is performed by the media, those great masters of mystification and manipulation, trained to maximise on every mistake of the future victim' (*Cynical moral of the aggressor, Politika, 17 April, 1999, p.27*)

'[Serbian Information minister Aleksandar Vučić] illustrated the speeding up of the propaganda campaign with what he says are directions received by the CNN correspondents in Yugoslavia, instructing them not to report on any military successes of Serbs, but to talk only of demoralised Serbian forces, to create a list of intellectuals who would attack the Serbian authorities and support the Nato aggression, and find some military installation in the vicinity of the 'Dragiša

Mišović' hospital, in order to justify its bombing' (*Missiles cannot silence Serbian media, Politika*, 31 May, 1999, p.13)

'The foreign media are the extended arm of multinational companies which are trying to triple their capital by exploiting the resources of others' (*Extended arm of capital, Politika*, 28 April 1999; p.25)

In the first two quotations, it is alleged that journalistic activity is the result of 'training' and 'instruction', sharing with the last quotation the idea that the media are the 'arm' rather than the brain of the conspiracy. This fairly typical portrayal of journalists as tools in the hands of the conspirators was further expanded in the article by D. Bećirević entitled *The dictionary of journalistic lies* published in *Politika* at the end of May 1999. The article reveals the 'instructions given to journalists who are in the service of the aggressor's propaganda on how to report from our country' (*Politika*, 31 May 1999, p.13). The 'instructions', which were supposedly issued by the Nato HQ in Brussels, include guidelines regarding the choice of interviewees and the manner of questioning, and the vocabulary to be used when referring to Serbian soldiers, Albanian refugees or civilian casualties. The alleged reason for issuing these instructions to the Western media is noteworthy. The move by the Nato HQ was said to have been a response to the fact that 'certain media in Nato countries have escaped control'. Implicit in this suggestion is the notion that the Western media were, and to a large extent still are, under someone's control. The 'inaccurate' reporting of foreign journalists is therefore not attributed to low professional standards or journalistic incompetence, but to the existence of a deliberate strategy, masterminded by those who use the media to hide the real motives behind the Nato aggression against Yugoslavia.

Significantly however, none of the above mentioned articles went into much detail when it comes to revealing who it is that controls the media or operates the mechanisms through which foreign journalists are kept under control. The final quotation contains a vague and euphemistic reference to 'multinational companies', but the reader is still left none the wiser about the specific aspects of mass manipulation.

Similar vagueness was present in articles on the same topic which appeared in other publications. This was the case even in texts where the subject of media manipulation was explored in more detail. For instance in the final weeks of the bombing, the weekly newsmagazine *Nedeljni Telegraf* published two longer articles on the Western media entitled *Five riders of the Apocalypse* (26 May 1999, p.18-19) and *The world's 50 media emperors* (9 June, 1999, p. 26-27). Both articles tread on conspiratorial ground by suggesting that media manipulation is made possible by the fact that a large amount of power over the European media is concentrated in the hands of a small number of people who could be using it for

sinister purposes. In *Five riders of the Apocalypse* the author Dejan Berković argues that the European media is dominated by five moguls (Leo Kirsch, Silvio Berlusconi, Silvio Ringi, Otto Beusheim, and Johan Rupert) who are not only connected by a complex network of business ties (which is illustrated in the magazine with a very elaborate and largely incomprehensible chart) but also by a common conservative political outlook and friendly connections with the European political establishment. The power of the 'big five' is seen as so great that 'it is practically impossible to publish a piece of news anywhere in Europe, unless it has been approved by one of these people' (p.18). Similarly, in *The world's 50 media emperors*, the same author recognises the potential danger of the concentration of media ownership, in relation to mass manipulation:

'the fact that the world of mass communication and information lies at the disposal of only a few centres of power leads directly to hegemony and the unlimited possibility for control and domination' (*Nedeljni Telegraf*, 9 June 1999, p. 26-27)

Although the power is seen as located in the hands of a small group of connected individuals, the accounts in *Nedeljni Telegraf* resisted from explicitly implicating the world's richest media moguls in any kind of conspiracy. Also, control, domination and abuses of power were presented more as a dangerous possibility, even probability, but not actuality.

Berković's equivocation can be contrasted with examples from world elite conspiracy theory, where the issue of media manipulation is resolved more clearly and neatly by assimilating the topic of mass manipulation within the more explicit Bilderberg-style conspiracy. In world elite conspiracy theory, the Bilderberg group and related organisations, such as the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign relations are typically constructed as the forum that binds together political, media and industrial elite. For instance the author of the book *The Trilateral*, Smilja Avramov (1998), whose work will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, argues that the control over 'the press, telecommunications and computer industry is a fundamental component of the power of the Trilateral Commission'. Avramov suggests that:

'According to the strategists of the Trilateral, the masses must be pacified, and brought into a state of total apathy; total control must be established, through the application of modern technology and the implementation of the most recent findings in the domain of psychology...Through a monopoly over the mass media, a planned manipulation of the masses and the shaping of human choices is made possible.' (Avramov, 1998, p.58)

Later in the book, Avramov discusses the network which links the largest media companies around the world, concluding that 'the communications market has been left to the main players in the Trilateral' and that trans-national media companies, controlled by world elite

organisations, have become 'pioneers of the "new order" and the so called "global culture" (p.77).

In addition to specific media companies or their owners, the Serbian mainstream media frequently cited the American public relations company Rudder and Finn, as a crucial player in the process of global mass manipulation. Over the past decade, Rudder and Finn earned a special place in the heart of Serbian conspiracy theorists. In the early 1990s this company promoted the interests of Croats and Bosnian Muslims, before taking on the job of advocating the political cause of the Kosovo Albanians. As a result, the firm became synonymous with the alleged 'satanisation of Serbs' in the West and the manipulation of the world public opinion.

On 27 April, 1999, *Politika* published a report provided by the Yugoslav state news agency *Tanjug* which reflected on the 'satanisation of Serbia, its people and its president' (*Genocide over Serbs with the help of exposed media lies*, 27 April 1999, p.20) The anonymous author of the report attributed a 'leading role in the denigration of Serbs in the World media' to Rudder and Finn, a PR company which in the past 'protected the interests of Croats and Muslims, and now does the same for Kosovo Albanians'. The company's work was portrayed in the article as 'deadly', considering that it robs the victim of aggression (i.e. the Serbs) of public support and assistance from international organisations such as the UN Security Council or the Red Cross as well as from various non-governmental organisations and charities.⁵

A reference to Rudder and Finn was also found in an article written by the journalist Zoran Petrović-Piroćanac which appeared in *Duga*:

'Following the already experienced pattern of Rudder and Finn, the principle Western media are simply 'bludgeoning' their public with the footage of crying children, Albanian women who are fainting precisely at the time of the filming, children lying in mud fighting for food brought by Nato soldiers...'*(Disposable spiral of Death, Duga, May, 1999, p.6)*

The attribution of uncanny powers to a single public relations company is a pattern characteristic of conspiracy theories, especially when Rudder and Finn is constructed as having a 'leading role' in mass manipulation. However, although considerable power and influence is attributed to Rudder and Finn, both in *Politika* and in *Duga*, the precise role of the company in the overall conspiracy is never unequivocally stated. Neither article explains where the company's influence stems from, or how it is able to fool the whole world (except of course the Serbian pro-government media) about what is 'really' going on in the Balkans. What is clear is that Rudder & Finn are not themselves conspirators, in that they are paid to

protect the interests of 'the Croats, Muslims and now, Albanians'. Similarly, it is not the 'clients', that is the Albanians (or before them Croats and Muslims), who are cited as conspirators. As can be seen in the earlier quotations from *Politika*, Albanians are portrayed either as accomplices in the conspiracy (through their participation in various 'staged performances') or as fellow victims, who are fleeing the Nato bombing. Consequently, once again, the identity of those who have ordered the 'spreading of the lies' and who orchestrate the manipulation of the masses remains unspecified.

In contrast to the vague protoconspiratorial discourse stands the classical conspiracy theory of Dr. Ratibor Đurđević. In the book *On the senselessness of antisemitism and anti-antisemitism* Đurđević 'reveals' in more detail the dynamic behind Rudder and Finn's anti-Serbian campaign:

'The boss of the lobby firm Rudder & Finn...will be remembered for his famous statement: "The very moment we got the Jews in America on our side, the battle (against the Serbs) was won"'(Đurđević, 1997b, p.49)

According to Đurđević, after this PR coup within the Jewish community 'the Jew Roy Gutman "invented" the concentration camp in Omarska and got a Pulitzer prize for it' while 'the Jew Frank Cesno of the CNN brought greater evil to the events in Yugoslavia than the war itself...Not to mention the "philosophers" such as Levi in France or the scandalous writing in Jerusalem Post, etc.' (ibid., p.50).

Đurđević thus places the activities of Rudder and Finn in the context of a global Jewish-Masonic conspiracy. Similar allegations concerning the Jewish involvement in mass manipulation were found on the antisemitic website, *www.compuserb.com*, where Rudder and Finn's motives are also 'explained' through the reference to Mr Finn's Jewish origin.⁶

Interestingly, even in classical conspiracy theory the Jewish involvement is somewhat unclear. In Đurđević's explanation, Jewish public opinion is initially seen as the *target* of the PR exercise. Only later are Jews 'promoted' into the role of masterminds behind the various media manipulations through which Serbs are maligned before the Western public. Nonetheless, the assumed link between Rudder and Finn's anti-Serbian activity and the influence of Jews in Western media and politics, leaves the reader in no doubt as to whom Đurđević believes to be behind the mass manipulation. The anti-Serbian activity on a global scale could not have been initiated without the involvement of those who have always been 'pulling the strings' in world affairs, i.e. the Jews.

6.3. Protoconspiracy vs. the conspiracy tradition: the similarities

In spite of the important differences between protoconspiracy theory and other types of conspiratorial explanation there are aspects of protoconspiratorial discourse which link it to the conspiracy tradition. In the following sections it will be suggested that by invoking the idea of secrecy, protoconspiracy theory is, often inadvertently, drawn into adopting the conspiratorial explanatory 'style'. Protoconspiratorial discourse will therefore be shown to contain some of the rhetorical moves characteristic of the conspiracy tradition.

6.3.1. Inconsistent portrayal of foreign journalists

In spite of the frequent portrayal of Western journalists as accomplices in the overall plot, the mainstream Serbian media did not always treat the Western media as bad. More positive treatment of western press manifested itself in two ways. Firstly, foreign journalists were sometimes portrayed as fellow victims of Western imperialist tendencies:

'The federal Minister [of Information, Matić] stated that the majority of [foreign journalists] report as correctly as they can, adding that this has led to attacks from their governments, like Tony Blair does with the BBC correspondent [John Simpson]. Such a position and the attitude of journalists is encouraging and promises that there may be some healthy forces which might stop and reverse this madness and evil.' (*Truth cannot be murdered, Politika*, 24 April 1999, p.16)

'Vujović emphasised that in Belgrade and Yugoslavia there are currently around 500 journalists and other support staff from the media from around the world and that the bombing of the Television was at the same time an attack on all of them, that is on their profession, truth and honesty.' (*Vujović: Nato is trying to silence truth, Politika*, 24 April, 1999, p.5)

On these occasions, Western journalists were presented as victims of political pressure, and guardians of the integrity of the journalistic profession. The positive stance towards Western journalism was also evident in the fact that information reported by the Western media was not always a priori disregarded as false. On some occasions, reports in the Western media were invoked to support the position of the Yugoslav government. For example, the day before the RTS was bombed, President Milošević presented the Russian envoy Victor Chernomyrdin with the draft of a peace proposal. The proposal was immediately rejected by NATO as it fell short of the Western alliance's key demands. The Yugoslav political establishment and the media contended that the proposal contained maximum concessions which Yugoslavia, as a sovereign state could make and that NATO's demands were unreasonable. In *Politika* this argument was presented not only as the view of the Yugoslav government, but as one that has been taken by the Western media too:

'The protagonists of this farce, without precedent in modern world history, are the American War president and the British prime minister, who, only a few hours after the issuing of a statement about yesterday's talks between the Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević and the Russian envoy Victor Chernomyrdin, rejected the most recent proposal from Belgrade, which was, as many of the world's media claim, the maximum that Yugoslavia could offer... This maximum, as many news agencies noted, is contained in the declaration concerning foreign presence in Kosovo under the auspices of the UN and the safe return of refugees.' (*Response to a peace initiative from Belgrade – bombing of the RTS, Politika, 24 April, 1999, p.5*)

Similarly, editorials from the Western press which were against Nato aggression were regularly reported verbatim in *Politika* and other pro-government and patriotic publications.⁷ For example, *Nedeljni Telegraf* printed an article taken from *The Independent* in which Philip Hammond, Professor at London's Southbank University 'discloses the propaganda war against the Serbs' (*Nedeljni Telegraf, 14 April, 1999, p.20*). Also, the same publication featured an article from *The Times* in which 'the propaganda war which uses "poor Albanian refugees" is uncovered' (*Nedeljni Telegraf, 31 March, 1999; p.13*). The most positive reactions from the Western media, such as Julie Burchill's article *The age of reason: A war of words* which lists '40 reasons why Serbs are not Nazis' (*The Guardian, 10 April 1999, p.3*) were subsequently reprinted in a collection of articles entitled *Twilight of the West* (Verzal Press, 1999).

The inconsistent treatment of the foreign media in the Yugoslav press might appear to undermine the conspiratorial narrative, bearing in mind that the reference to foreign journalists as fellow targets of conspiracy contradicts the view that the media are part of the conspiracy and the principle 'instrument of seduction' (Lipset and Raab, 1978). On the other hand, consistency of this kind is not generally a requirement of conspiracy theories. Similar incoherence can be found in much of modern antisemitic literature, regarding the portrayal of 'ordinary Jews'. While 'ordinary Jews' are mostly constructed as innocent fellow victims of a conspiracy carried out by the evil Jewish elite, the criticism of Jews is sometimes generalised on the whole population.

For example, Dr. Ratibor Đurđević often makes the distinction between ordinary Jews and the conspiratorial 'Judaists'. In one of his more recent books *Five Bloody Revolutions by Judeo-bankers and their Judeo-Masonry*, Đurđević (1999) makes a slight digression from his conspiracy narrative to make the following point:

'Before I move on and quote the analysts and critics of Jews, I think it would be appropriate to draw the reader's attention to a fact that is often overlooked. We are talking about the crimes committed by Jews, and that is a fact: criminals known as Jewish financiers and their allies Pharisees-Rabbis have been some of the chief planners of crimes in the form of the majority of contemporary wars and revolutions. However, in some sense, this statement is false, since these deeds were not committed by all Jews, but by a small number of Jewish activists, perfidious

conspirators, who do not comprise more than 1 to 2% of the Jewish people. We do not blame all Italians for the crimes of the Mafia, or all Irish Catholics for the crazy bombings and murders committed by the IRA. In the same way, ordinary Jews must not be blamed for the crimes of Judeo-bankers.' (Đurđević, 1999, p.23)

Similarly in his other writing, Jewish majority is seen as a collection of 'quiet citizens, and mostly ordinary, respectable people' who pose no threat to 'us or the whole world' (Đurđević, *Western ideological and spiritual poisoners*, 1997a, p.29) and as such is contrasted with Judaists, 'the spawn of Satan, the descendants of the Pharisees, nihilist conspirators against God and man in the Western world: Judeo-Masons, Judeo-bankers, leaders of the New World Order, directors of financial institutions, proprietors of World media and industry, destroyers of morals and good customs, masterminds of revolutions and world wars, proponents of decadent culture, poisoners of Christian youth' (p.29).

However, this proposed distinction within the Jewish community is not always adhered to. The distinction between the 'respectable Jewish majority' and the Judaic conspirators is obscured by linking the anti-Christian, demonic and Satanic aspect of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy to the very core of the Jewish religion, and attributing it to all Jews.

For instance, Đurđević often talks about the psychopathology of the Jews, one which is characterised by its racial specificity. The brutality of the bombing of Yugoslavia is attributed to the fact that 'Jews are susceptible to intensive and sadistic hatred. As the proverbial elephant they never forget, and in accordance with their Satanic subjection they never forgive. They are not a spiritual people like Russians and Serbs used to be, and to an extent still are' (Đurđević, *Five Bloody Revolutions by Judeo-bankers and their Judeo-Masonry*, 1999, p.111). In this instance no distinction was made between Jews and 'Judaists'.

Similarly, in *Western ideological and spiritual poisoners*, Đurđević refers to Serbia's Jewish community as 'our' Jews, adapted to life in the Balkans [who] do not pose a threat to Serbs, or any other people on Yugoslav territory' (p.30). However, only a few pages earlier, the same Jewish community was said to be 'profiteering from the Jewish control over the World's and even the Serbian media, and seduced by the *secularist, Judeo-Masonic, ideological antagonism towards Christ*' (p.23). Moreover, in Đurđević's positive evaluation of 'our' Jews, it is unclear what being 'adapted to the life in the Balkans' means. It is possible that Đurđević is referring to the relative secularisation and assimilation of the Jewish community. Therefore, although the statement places Serbian Jews on the 'good' side of the

moral divide, they are only seen as being good and unthreatening because they are assimilated into Serbian culture and appear to have abandoned their Jewish cultural roots.

The contradictory portrayal of the Western media in Serbian protoconspiratorial discourse and the description of Jews in antisemitic literature can be said to have similar rhetorical implications. In some sense the coexistence of contradictory references and the persistent fluctuation between positive and negative portrayal contributes to the overall 'paranoid' image of the conspiracy theory. It opens the possibility that everyone may turn out to be part of the conspiracy. Although the honourable majority is praised and celebrated, its link with the conspirators (through professional, religious, political or ethnic ties) opens the possibility that their true colours might be revealed in the future. The majority of journalists or Jews are seen as being on 'our side' but should circumstances change the contradictory construction provides a way of accounting for the change in allegiance. So for instance, after the bombing of the RTS when some Western journalists refused to join their Yugoslav colleagues in condemning the targeting of the TV station, the editor of *Politika's* television channel revealed that:

'Many journalists around the world have found themselves aligned with Nato, ready to enter history by the wrong entrance.' (Kozic, chief editor of TV *Politika*, quoted in *Politika*, 26 April, 1999, p.13)

The apparent permeability of the boundaries between good and bad also contributes to the never-ending quality of the conspiratorial hermeneutic as it provides the source of a practically infinite number of new revelations to be made.

6.3.2. Protoconspiracy theory and the figure of the renegade

It has already been mentioned in Chapter 2 that conspiracy theories pay particularly important attention to the figure of the renegade from the enemy cause (Hofstadter, 1966). The importance attributed to confessions of ex-masons, former nuns and priests, ex-communists, etc in classical conspiracy literature is derived from the emphasis on secrecy surrounding the alleged plot. The renegade 'brings forth with him or her the final verification of suspicion which might otherwise have been doubted by a sceptical world' (Hofstadter, 1966; p.35) During the war with Nato, the 'confessions' of Nato pilots, German politicians, Albanian refugees, etc. received a lot of coverage in the Serbian media, especially in the weekly news magazine *Nedeljni Telegraf*, whose more general enthusiasm for sensationalist material made it particularly suitable for publicising these revelations. The confessions of defectors from the enemy cause usually revealed the 'real motives' behind the international intervention and the mechanics behind the implementation of the devious plot.

In April 1999, *Nedeljni Telegraf* published an article allegedly written by the Indian Army General Satish Nambiar, former commander-in-chief of the UN forces in Bosnia. In the article, the General claimed that 'there was no genocide [in Bosnia], it was all invented by the media' (14 April, 1999, p.10). Similarly, *Nedeljni Telegraf* published a testimony by a returning Kosovo Albanian refugee who revealed that 'at the border crossing they would shove us all into camps so that foreign journalists could film us' (12 May, 1999, p.10). The same magazine published the article *Our colonel was transferred when he refused to order us to throw cluster bombs on Priština and Niš*, written by someone with the Spanish name Jose Luis Morales (*Nedeljni Telegraf*, 16 June 1999, p.5). The article contained a 'confession' of a Spanish Nato pilot 'Martin de la Oz', who, among other things, blamed the Spanish government for 'lying to the Spanish public in the press, radio and television, via foreign correspondents and agencies'. In his confession, the pilot claims to reveal the 'truth' behind the attacks:

'A country is being massacred, bombarded with new types of weapons, toxic gases, surface mines which are parachuted to the ground, uranium bombs, black napalm, biological weapons which ruin the crops, as well as other weapons we don't even know about yet...The Americans have committed one of the greatest atrocities against humanity ever...All this, according to those who have spoken to American and British commanders, was done to subjugate Europe, and keep it under occupation for many decades.' (*Nedeljni Telegraf*, 16 June 1999, p.5)

A particularly interesting example of the use of renegades in protoconspiratorial discourse was the alleged confession of a 'high official of the government in Bonn', which was published in *Nedeljni Telegraf* in April 1999. The confession, heard by a priest belonging to the 'Order of Peace', was said to have been provoked by the inability of the anonymous official to 'keep silent about the lies surrounding Nato's war in the Balkans'. The fact that the revelation took the form of a religious confession is significant because it implies a guilty conscience, rather than some other less respectable motive for the revelation. Also, it suggests that what is to be revealed is in some way particularly wicked or sinful. Finally, the religious nature of the confession is a testimony to the dangerous and secret nature of the disclosed information. The German official stated that the medium through which he decided to disclose the truth was partly motivated by the 'confidentiality of a confession, so that no detail regarding my identity could ever be revealed'. Interestingly, the admission was made in written form, which is somewhat unusual for a religious confession. However the availability of written evidence is accounted for by the indication that the unnamed priest was authorised to 'pass on the confession to those who must know the truth' (*Nedeljni Telegraf*, 21 April, 1999, p.5). In other words, the official was not just trying to get things off his chest,

but was actively trying to undermine the conspiracy by uncovering its secret and dangerous mechanisms.

In the 'confession' reported in *Nedeljni Telegraf*, the anonymous official claims that the

'infernal trio: Shroeder, Sharping and Fisher, here in Germany, are shamelessly lying to the public with almost every 'fact' that they offer about the war in the Balkans, while the media willingly and eagerly spread those lies, without bothering to check them, as if they were the evangelical truth...The federal government knows the real reasons why people are fleeing and cynically plays on the deliberately provoked misery of the refugees in Kosovo's border regions, in order to maintain the comparison with Second World War deportations and 'ethnic cleansing'.' (ibid.)

He goes on to argue that 'Sharping spreads the lies' about concentration camps, and mass detention in the Priština stadium, in spite of the fact that the German government knows that these allegations are false, and that

'on the border crossing, the American and European private media offer up to US\$ 200,000 for video footage of massacres, real or staged' (ibid.)

At the end of the article, the unnamed German government official reveals the real purpose of the mass manipulation, and the reasons behind Nato's intervention in Kosovo:

'Under the codename 'Roots', there lies a secret operation planned by the CIA, which prepared the war in the first place, with the aim of destroying Yugoslavia through the loss of Kosovo, Montenegro and Vojvodina...Ever since the first day of Clinton's administration, the USA (CIA and DIA) have been working - backed by Germany - on the secret operation 'Roots'. The aim is a military and ethnic destabilisation of Yugoslavia, the last bastion of resistance in the Balkans.' (ibid.)

The confession of the German official provides first hand evidence, from a credible (albeit anonymous) witness, about the plot which lies behind the bombing of Yugoslavia. Also, it reveals the mechanisms through which these motives are kept secret. Particularly interesting is the way in which the conspiracy is packaged into a well defined formal 'secret operation' of the CIA, the epitome of covert subversive activity in conspiracy literature. It is also noteworthy that the confession alleges that the real motive behind the anti-Serbian plot is to destroy the 'last bastion of resistance'. The article thus exposes the basic conspiratorial claim that the bombing is not a local conflict between Serbia and Nato, as western media are trying to present it, but is a final stage in the implementation of a global conspiracy aimed at world domination.

According to Hofstadter (1966) the role of the renegade in a conspiratorial narrative is not merely to provide first hand proof of conspiratorial claims, but also to bring 'promise of redemption and victory' (p.35):

'...there is deeper eschatological significance attached to the person of the renegade: in the spiritual wrestling match between good and evil which is the paranoid archetypal model of the world struggle, the renegade is the living proof that all conversions are not made by the wrong side.' (p.35)

In other words, implicit in the emphasis on the renegade are a number of features characteristic of the conspiratorial explanatory style including the 'Manichean psychology', the apocalyptic tone and the naïve optimism. All of these features tend to reflect the influence of Millennial thinking in the conspiracy culture (Hofstadter, 1966; Cohn, 1957) and therefore constitute a link between protoconspiratorial discourse and other forms of conspiracy theory. Further examples of this link will be offered in the following section.

6.3.3. Protoconspiracy theory and the conspiratorial explanatory 'style'

The notion of secrecy which underpins the emphasis on mass manipulation assumes that behind the false visible reality lies truth which needs to be exposed. In the earlier sections it was already noted that the bombing of the Serbian State Television, as the 'voice of truth' was widely interpreted, in the regime media, as being motivated by the desire, on the part of the unnamed conspirators, to conceal the real motives behind the attack on Yugoslavia. The same theme runs through the following examples, all which have also been taken from *Politika*:

'[The bombing of RTS demonstrates] the unscrupulous and mindless nature of those who think that real information about the evil acts of the proponents of the New World Order and their failure to subjugate the freedom-loving and brave Serbian people will not reach the world.' (Dragan Božanić, deputy foreign minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina, quoted in *Proof that journalists have become legitimate targets*, *Politika*, 24 April, 1999, p.5)

'When they could not stop the truth in any other way, they resorted to bombs. These are nothing but criminal, terrorist acts which demonstrate that Nato and the USA wanted our country as the offering on the altar of Nato on its 50th anniversary, and to make Kosovo the victim of New World Order. The real aim of Nato is to occupy our country in order to destroy the last island of freedom and independence in this part of Europe.' (Ivica Dačić, the spokesperson for the ruling Socialist party of Serbia quoted in *Today, Nato's targets only civilians*, *Politika*, 25 April, 1999, p.15)

'In the last three days the Board of Evil from Washington has put into place all the bloody pieces of the jigsaw puzzle thus revealing even to the blind a basic fact which our leaders have been pointing towards for months: the aim of the pressure and barbaric aggression against FR Yugoslavia is its sovereignty and integrity, while Kosovo, the Albanians, human rights and everything else that was used as a medium and grounds for manipulation in the past is only a criminal camouflage for the attempt to rule over our complete territory.' (Petrović, *Political misses by Nato's cross-eyed marksmen*, *Politika*, 24 May 1999)

'Truth, justice and right cannot be murdered...these are people who are trying to create a New World Order with force, corpses and crimes...anyone who raises his voice against the new totalitarianism will probably be warned with a similar criminal act.' (Minister Goran Matić, quoted in *Truth cannot be murdered*, *Politika*, 24 April 1999, p.16)

'The unprecedented attack on truth, through which the RTS uncovered the aggressor's tricks and subterfuge, is the sign of the darkened state of mind of the front-men of the NWO...The attack on the RTS is an attack on truth, the symbol of freedom... a mindless act through which Nato criminals definitely uncovered their murderous intentions.' (from a statement issued by the pro-government daily *Večernje Novosti [Evening News]*, quoted in *By trying to assassinate President Milošević and the bearers of the public word, the criminals are trying to break the freedom-loving spirit of our people*, *Politika*, 24 April, 1999, p.20)

In the above quotes the RTS is constructed as having a pivotal role in the fight against the aggressor. Its journalists are seen as being in the 'front line' of the battle against the media manipulations on which the whole conspiracy depends. Each of the condemnations of the bombing of the Serbian television centre imply the same thing. Firstly that the institution was bombed because it told the truth, and exposed the lies presented by the Western media. Secondly, it is alleged that the true intentions which the 'aggressor' was trying to hide and which the RTS successfully uncovered was the concept of the New World Order, which was being implemented through the attacks on Yugoslavia. Unlike in other instances, where the actual motive of the conspirators was either glossed over or limited to the subjugation of Serbia, in the above quotes the idea of world domination was openly propagated.

The concept of a 'New World Order' was introduced into mainstream discourse in 1990 by the former American President George Bush, in reference to the new post-Cold War political reality (*Time*, October 1990). In the early 1990s the phrase was often used to describe the aftermath of the triumph of liberalism, the free market economy and the rule of international law (Freedman, 1992). However, as the phrase was gradually abandoned by mainstream politicians, academics and journalists, the idea of the 'New World Order' became confined to the world of conspiracy theories, where it signifies the ultimate aim of the world conspiracy (Ronson, 2000; Pipes, 1996, 1998). Crucially, in the articles in *Politika* the New World Order is not invoked as a symbolic reference to the existing trends in international relations, but as a sinister plan which is being executed to the detriment of the Serbian people and other freedom loving nations. As a result, the reference to the New World Order in *Politika* constitutes a significant thematic link between protoconspiracy theory and other forms of conspiratorial discourse.

Also, inherent in the idea about the sinister plot to create the New World Order, as manifested in the explanations of the bombing of RTS, is the Manichean distinction between Good and Evil and the apocalyptic tone, both of which are prominent characteristics of the

conspiratorial explanatory style. For instance at the funeral of the 16 employees of the RTS killed in the Nato attack, Dragoljub Milanović, the director-general of the Serbian Radio Television, said that:

‘This is a war between reason and unreason, light and darkness, good and evil. As always the winner is already known. That is why the mindless creatures targeted knowledge, profession, morals and patriotism.’ (*The enemy killed the bravest and the most devoted, Politika, 27 April 1999, p.15*)

In the attempt to enhance the image of the evil enemy, Milanović described him as ‘mindless’. A similar reference to the psychopathology of the aggressors is evident in the following extracts:

‘What CNN, BBC and Sky are doing is a disgrace not only to these media institutions but to the nations that spawned such channels. It is evident that we are dealing with sick minds and that is why the fight will be tough, but I am an optimist.’ (D. Kojadinović, chief editor of Belgrade’s TV station Studio B in *For the first time in the history of war and television [a television station] was destroyed deliberately, Politika, 26 April 1999, p.13*)

‘[the sending of Alistair Campbell] didn’t help. The indisputable facts about the crimes planned in Washington, Bonn, and Paris have broken many barriers, thanks to our television, so the consortium of sick brains decided to destroy it.’ (*For Nato, a different opinion is a military target, Politika, 25 April, 1999, p.15*)

The allusion to psychopathology through the use of phrases such as ‘sick minds’ and ‘sick brains’ is a particularly effective and common rhetorical device in conspiracy literature used to explain and accentuate the evil nature of the ‘hidden hand’. In his antisemitic conspiracy theory Đurđević often refers to the ‘Talmudic perversion of personality’ as a ‘disease’ specific to Jews characterised by the ‘total absence of compassion for other people and their suffering’ as well as ‘total depravity, paranoia, madness, Satanisation of the spirit, brutality’ (Đurđević, 1999, p.96).

It should be borne in mind that both moral dualism and the reference to psychopathology are common features of war-time rhetoric and as such should not be automatically associated with the conspiratorial explanatory style. At the same time, there are further aspects of the protoconspiratorial narrative, as found in *Politika*, which offer evidence that the overall explanatory style may be linked to the conspiratorial tradition.

For instance, in the above examples the reference to ‘sick minds’ is not only descriptive, it also explains why ‘the fight will be tough’. This introduces the apocalyptic tone of the narrative, where the omnipotent enemy is presented as being at the peak of strength and therefore close to the achievement of their aims. This is evident in the allusion to Serbia as the

'last island of freedom'. Serbia is presented as the final obstacle to world domination, and therefore as the last and only hope for the rest of the world's population.

The assumed strength of the conspirators does not only stem from their psychopathic mental constitution, but also from the sources of power at their disposal such as the media, unlimited funds, technological superiority etc. Yet in spite of the technical advantage, conspiracy theory portrays the conspirators as weak. As was noted in Chapter 2, the apocalyptic tone of the paranoid style, which is derived from the portrayal of the conspirator as the epitome of Evil, runs dangerously close to hopeless pessimism, but usually stops short of it. In the case of the reporting of the war in *Politika*, the apocalyptic theme falls short of becoming a declaration of imminent defeat. Kojadinović, for instance, presented the bombing of RTS as an 'act of desperation' and the ultimate evidence that the West lost the war in spite of 'all the technology and money at their disposal' (*Politika*, 26 April 1999, p.13). Similar sentiment is reflected in the following examples from *Politika*:

'The fact that the Nato criminals tried to smother truth, the journalistic word and television screens with their tomahawks, reflects their inability to cover up their unscrupulous lies which contributed to the destruction of industrial plants and bridges. They did this out of despair, trying to place their lies before the world and present them as an excuse for bombing a sovereign country.' (*The pinnacle of inhumanity and senselessness, Politika*, 25 April, 1999, p.16)

'The defeat in the media war and, above all, the failure to create panic among our citizens, as well as the inability to conceal the reports and facts concerning the crimes against the civilian population, have hit the New World Order monsters so hard that they resorted to a nervous and capitulating act, getting stuck even deeper in crime, and betraying the principles of the same democracy they tried to bring to us on their tomahawks, phantoms and flying citadels.' (Petrović, *For Nato, a different opinion is a military target, Politika*, 25 April, 1999, p.15)

The 'desperation' of the enemy and his 'nervous and capitulating' acts are interpreted as the final struggle of a dying 'New World Order monster'. Similarly, in the above example, Kojadinović qualifies his apocalyptic view with the claim 'but I am an optimist', while Dragoljub Milanović stated that in the war between good and evil 'as always, the winner is known'. Both statements reflect the archetypal belief in the victory of good over evil, and invoke the imagery of a technologically and financially powerful enemy whose sinister plan is foiled by a weaker opponent, who is victorious because of his dedication to truth and justice. This is an example of the kind of naïve optimism which in the earlier chapter was said to be typical of conspiracy theories. It assumes that a successful battle against the conspiracy is the result of good intentions, and that the healthy spirit of the forces of Good will inevitably defeat the 'complex machinations of the conspirators' (Billig, 1978).

Besides displaying some features of the conspiratorial explanatory style, protoconspiratorial discourse, as manifested in the writing in *Politika* can also be shown to possess the key aspects of conspiratorial rhetoric, namely the circularity of argument which leads to the irrefutability of conspiratorial claims.

For example, in the aforementioned report on Rudder and Finn, which appeared in *Politika*, the unscrupulousness of the company was illustrated by quoting its chairman, who revealed the *modus operandi* of his organisation:

'Public relations agencies are not paid to moralise and the most important thing is to use simple stories about good and bad guys for launching emotionally strong expressions such as ethnic cleansing and concentration camps which awake memories of Nazi Germany and Auschwitz gas chambers. These provoke a strong emotional charge and are difficult to resist as any refusal to accept them may lead to accusations of historical revisionism.' (*Genocide over Serbs with the help of exposed media lies, Politika, 27 April 1999, p.20*)

The quotation plays a crucial role in the overall argument of the article. *Tanjug's* report contained explicit denials of Serbian responsibility for a number of war crimes such as the Sarajevo bread queue and market place massacres, the Srebrenica killings, Omarska prison camps, ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, etc. All these events were attributed to media manipulation in which Rudder and Finn were supposedly involved. Through the quotation from the Chairman of Rudder and Finn, *Tanjug's* report acknowledges the fact that, because of the apparent similarity with Nazi crimes, the denial of the recent massacres perpetrated by Serbs might be regarded as a matter of controversy and as morally suspect. Crucially however, the idea of controversy is not introduced in order to undermine the denials of war crimes, but is incorporated into the overall conspiratorial argument in a way that pre-empts and weakens any kind of moral critique of 'historical revisionism'. The very fact that the denial might seem morally questionable or hard to justify is taken as proof that what seems undeniable *must* be denied, because the apparent undeniability is itself the effect of mass manipulation.

A similar rhetorical move is evident in classical antisemitic literature, when dealing with the accusations of revisionism and Holocaust denial (see Lipstadt, 1995; Seidel, 1986; Billig, 1987a). For example, David McCalden of the so-called Institute for Historical Review argues that the 'myth of the Holocaust' was fabricated to legitimise Zionist aspirations: 'If we can show that [the Holocaust] didn't happen, Israelis would have no excuse for depriving the Palestinians of their rights' (cited in Billig, 1987a). Similarly, Đurđević's work deals extensively with the so-called 'fear of the Jews syndrome' (Đurđević, *The FOJ Syndrome in America: Brainwashing of Americans into a special neurosis: A psychosocial and political*

inquiry about the secret US rulers, the Pharisees/Zionists, 1988). According to Đurđević, the Jewish conspirators have created the 'Holocaust myth' in order to make any criticism of Jews and their covert activities anti-normative:

'The *bogeyman* of anti-Semitism was created by Zionists after the Second World War. Together with their compatriot, the infamous chief of Stalin's secret police Lavrentii Beria, they inflated the number of Jews who died in Hitler's concentration camps from around 350.000 (according to the Swiss Red Cross) to as many as 6.000.000. Then, through the Western media, which at that time were already under Judaic control, as well as via Hollywood and other film centres around the world, created, literally, thousands of films about the suffering of Jews in concentration camps. In that way they brainwashed the Euro-Americans and characterised all the enemies of Judaic dirty work as people similar to Nazis.

...

I called this the *most scandalous trick which the Judaists played on the Americans*' (Đurđević, 1997a, p.17)

The introduction of the FOJ syndrome is seen as 'part of a strategy to silence the enemies of the secret enslavement of Euro-American Christians by Judeo-bankers, or rather the Judeo-Masonry and their New World Order. This was a strategy for creating an uneasy sense of security among the Jews with the aim of facilitating the extortion of donations for Zionist aims, as well as for silencing all criticism of Zionist crimes and their evil plans...' (ibid., p20).

As was the case with the denial of various Balkan massacres in *Politika*, the introduction of the 'FOJ syndrome' into the explanatory framework of a Jewish conspiracy theory recognises the fact that Holocaust denial is regarded by most as a disreputable political claim. At the same time, the disrepute in which Holocaust denial is held is turned into evidence that supports historical revisionism. As long as the conspiracy theorist can persuade the audience that the moral standpoint from which his arguments can be criticised is consciously imposed by the conspirators – and therefore an essential part of the conspiracy – any criticism is a priori destabilised or rendered invalid.

This rhetorical move, which is present in both protoconspiracy theory and classical conspiratorial discourse, illustrates the essence of the conspiratorial interpretative framework, namely its irrefutable quality. It shows the way in which any criticism (moral or epistemological) of a conspiratorial claim can be turned on its head, and transformed into further proof of the cunning and deceitful nature of the 'hidden hand' behind social and political events.

6.4. Protoconspiracy theory, the breakdown of alternative explanations and the broadening of the boundaries of acceptable opinion

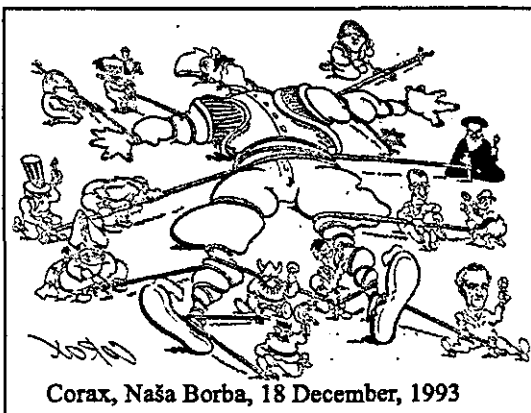
In Chapter 2 it was suggested that in order for an explanation to be considered part of the cultural tradition of conspiracy theory, it must satisfy two criteria. Firstly, it must be shown to possess the characteristics of the conspiratorial explanatory style. Secondly, the account must be shown to be part of the ideological tradition of conspiracy theory. On the basis of the examination of the coverage of the war with Nato in the Serbian mainstream media, (primarily *Politika* and *Nedeljni Telegraf*) it can be argued that protoconspiratorial explanation does not fully meet either of these two criteria, and therefore cannot be unequivocally declared part of the conspiracy tradition, on a par with classical or world elite conspiracy theories. As was shown, protoconspiracy theory does not possess some of the critical features of classical conspiracy theories, such as a focus on a specific conspiratorial body. More importantly, there is no allusion, either direct or indirect, to the history of conspiracy theory. Save for the occasional reference to the 'New World Order', there was little in the articles in *Politika* that would link them directly to the conspiracy tradition. There were no references to secret societies such as the Freemasons, the Illuminati or the Bilderberg group, there were no antisemitic themes, and the conspiracy of the present was not linked to the conspiracies of the past.

At the same time the coverage of the war in *Politika* was shown to contain many features characteristic of conspiracy theory. Allusion to secrecy and sinister motives in world politics, conspiratorial Manicheanism, apocalyptic tone, and the general circular argumentation characteristic of conspiratorial rhetoric were all shown to be present in protoconspiratorial discourse.

The ambiguous status of protoconspiratorial discourse in relation to the conspiracy tradition can be said to have played a key role in the dynamic which enabled more extreme forms of conspiracy theory to appear in the mainstream press. As the more reasonable, and in some ways watered-down, exoteric version of conspiracy theory, protoconspiratorial discourse disseminated in a more acceptable way the idea that someone out there is pulling the strings of Serbian destiny. In doing so, protoconspiratorial explanations effectively exonerated the interpretative framework traditionally associated with classical conspiracy theory. Once the idea that that 'someone out there' is pulling the strings of world politics becomes recognised, other types of conspiratorial explanations inevitably become regarded as more acceptable. Crucial to this dynamic is the fact that protoconspiracy theory is in many ways an incomplete explanation. It alludes to secrecy in world politics and the fact that there is a organised and

calculated plot against Serbia whose ultimate aim is the creation of the New World Order, but it does not explain who is behind it. In obscuring the identity of the conspirator, protoconspiratorial discourse effectively invites other types of account to fill in the explanatory gap. The way in which this gap is filled by the world elite and by classical conspiratorial themes will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

However, before moving on, there is a further issue regarding protoconspiratorial discourse that warrants attention. Earlier in the chapter it was suggested that protoconspiracy theory, as a feature of ‘regime populism’ was observable in the Serbian mainstream media and political discourse from the early 1990s. With that in mind, the presence of this type of explanation in the reporting of the war with Nato was not in itself a novel or a noteworthy phenomenon. It was in many ways a continuation, and in some sense the culmination of a ten-year-long tradition. On the other hand, there is evidence which suggests that the arrival of Nato bombs did bring about some change, if not in the *content* of protoconspiratorial discourse, then certainly in its *status* within Serbian society. As will become apparent, circumstances surrounding the Nato intervention greatly undermined the credibility of alternative explanations of the Serbian predicament, thus in some ways enhancing the apparent plausibility, and popularity, of protoconspiratorial explanation propagated by the Serbian government.



Throughout the 1990s, protoconspiratorial discourse, as manifested in the rhetoric of regime media and government officials existed, within the Serbian ideological context, side by side with more conventional views of international relations. Ever since Milošević’s arrival on the political scene, opposition politicians, independent media such as *Naša Borba*, *Danas*, *Vreme*, *NIN*, and numerous

liberal intellectuals (including Nebojša Popov and Ivan Čolović) openly dismissed and mocked the allegations about the existence of a secret anti-Serbian plot. The work of the cartoonist Predrag Koraksić, who in the early 1990s published regularly in the daily *Naša Borba* provides illustrative examples of the way in which conspiratorial explanations were ridiculed. In 1993, one of Koraksić’s cartoons showed a Serbian peasant pinned to the ground in the manner of Gulliver, and held down by images from the conspiracy culture, including the Star of David, Uncle Sam, the Pope and Khomeini. Milošević and the right-wing

politician Vojislav Seselj were shown trying to bite the cords and set the peasant free. Another cartoon, published several years later, showed Milošević and the then Prime Minister of Serbia, Radosav Zelenović running away with Serbia in their hands, chased once again by Uncle Sam, the Pope, Khomeini, Hitler, Stalin and others.

Koraksić's cartoons are provided on this occasion merely as an illustration of the fact that, although a crucial element of government rhetoric, protoconspiracy theory was for much of the 1990s, one of a number of available interpretations of international relations. In fact it is the existence of alternative explanations, propagated by a large proportion of the Serbian political opposition and the liberal public, that made the exponents of protoconspiratorial discourse accountable for their potentially controversial claims, thus contributing to the development of the protoconspiracy theory's more reasonable and acceptable guise.⁸



Corax, Naša Borba, 16 March, 1993

Significantly however, at the time of the bombing, the scope for the dissemination of alternative explanations was severely limited. Independent news media (news magazines *Vreme* and *Nin*, radio stations *B-92*, *Radio Index*, *Studio B*, etc.), which in the past ridiculed conspiracy theories, were either shut down (e.g. *B-92* radio) or subjected to stringent censorship regulations and informal pressures.⁹ Censorship rules were in most cases vaguely defined. For instance, one clause prohibited the spreading of 'fear, panic and defeatism'. The category of 'defeatism' was taken to include anything short of the 'patriotic' line propounded by the government. Overall, the regime of censorship resulted in a greater reluctance, among independent media, to test the limits of free speech. While most did not openly embrace the overall protoconspiratorial explanatory framework found in *Politika* or the RTS, the possibility for propagating alternative explanations, or mocking the official rhetoric was greatly restricted.

In addition, the bombing appears to have brought about a genuine breakdown of alternative explanations, something that is often considered a crucial factor in the proliferation of conspiracy theories. During the war, the only authentic alternative to the explanation of the conflict offered by the Serbian regime was that propounded by Nato officials. The Serbian public was aware of the Nato perspective from broadcasts, in Serbian, by Radio Free Europe, BBC, Deutsche Welle, Voice of America or Radio France Internationale, all of which were available to the Serbian population on medium wave frequencies. Also, American and British

news channels (SKY, BBC, CNN, etc) were widely available in Serbia and provided a source of information for the English-speaking population. Finally, the Serbian media regularly publicised the views of the Nato spokesperson Jamie Shea and other officials in order to dismiss the somewhat cynical, anodyne wording of Nato propaganda. However, the account of the war propounded by Nato, which was based on the notion of 'humanitarian intervention', 'collateral damage', 'minimal damage to civilian infrastructure' etc. did not present itself as an adequate and plausible explanation of the events. It seemed hard to reconcile the Nato rhetoric with regular nightly bombings, destroyed infrastructure and civilian casualties. According to an opinion poll carried out half way through the bombing campaign by the independent Belgrade news magazine *Vreme*, 91% of respondents claimed to have experienced psychological problems, mostly fear; 96% stated that they were 'concerned about the future of their family and their country'; while 71% experienced shortages of basic household goods (*Vreme*, Special Edition No. 11, 22 May, 1999). In such a climate of fear and anxiety, the suggestion that the war was directed at the Milošević regime not the Serbian people presented itself as a questionable proposition.

The apparent implausibility of the alternative explanation of war led to the emergence of what may be called a discourse of suspicion. Even members of previously pro-Western political parties and organisations, liberal academics and intellectuals, began to express doubt about the sincerity of Nato actions and question the motives behind the military intervention.

Examples of the emerging discourse of suspicion can be found in the contribution of a number of Serbian intellectuals and politicians to the program *Radio Bridge*, broadcast every Sunday on Radio Free Europe. Radio Free Europe, based in Prague, was, together with other Western radio services, the only medium through which traditional opponents of the Serbian regime could freely voice their opinion on the events in Yugoslavia. The examples that follow include the contribution to *Radio Bridge* by Sonja Liht, chair of the Yugoslav branch of the Soros Fund for Open Society and Žarko Korać, a psychology professor and president of one of Serbia's minor opposition parties, the Social-democratic Union. Both Liht and Korać were known throughout the 1990s as staunch supporters of the pro-Western and liberal political option. Moreover, they have both featured in Serbian (proto)conspiracy theory. The Yugoslav branch of the Soros foundation, which Liht runs, was mentioned in an earlier quotation from *Politika* as the sponsor of the 'stage-managed' humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo. Similarly, the party which Žarko Korać founded was one of the myriad of smaller opposition parties which were consistently accused of 'treason' and of being 'Nato stooges'.¹⁰

In expressing their views on the Nato intervention, the previously unequivocally pro-Western stance of Liht and Korać was blunted by a noticeable dose of suspicion regarding the sincerity of Western rhetoric:

'It is not Milošević and his regime who are being bombarded, but the whole country and its infrastructure, civilian infrastructure more than anything else. Kosovo is being bombed very intensively, perhaps more intensively than anywhere else.' (Sonja Liht, *War against Milošević or the Serbian people?*, *Radio Bridge*, 9 May 1999;)

'In Aleksinac entirely civilian targets have been destroyed, people got killed, the same thing happened in Priština, the principal square has been ruined, the post-office has been destroyed, there are no telephone links with Priština.' (Korać, *Life under bombs*, *Radio Bridge*, 11 April 1999)

'It is not only that people are getting killed, and that all this will leave terrible traumas, but the fact that a whole country is being destroyed. One of Nato's leaders said, I think, that Serbia will be bombed into the Stone Age. I ask myself what good will that do to anyone?' (Sonja Liht, *ibid.*)

'I must also tell you that it would be wrong to see this war as a computer war, as very clean and precise. It is not like that really. These briefings in the Pentagon, in Brussels in Nato HQ, are not exactly correct and honest. It is normal that warring parties will present information in a way that suits them. But in this war there are many civilian victims.' (Korać, *ibid.*)

None of the above quotations can be said to be either conspiratorial or protoconspiratorial, in that they do not allude to the existence of a secret or sinister motive behind the West's intervention over Kosovo. Neither Liht nor Korać offer an explanation comparable to that contained in the official government line. At the same time, by stating what Nato's intervention is not (it is *not* a war against Milošević's military machine, it is *not* aimed strictly at military targets etc) the two traditional allies of the West expressed reservation about the sincerity of the Nato leadership. Similar sentiment is evident in Liht's comment about the failure of the West to support the pro-democracy movement in Serbia:

'When I think about why the West did not support all that, I can't and won't accept that it was lack of understanding or ignorance. It was something worse. Simply, the world's powerful were not ready to accept that a democratic option in Serbia is possible. Why? That is a different discussion.' (Liht, *ibid.*)

Liht goes on to suggest that the West missed an 'incredible chance to reconstruct Serbia from within', and instead 'cynically stated that [the bombing] is a way to import democracy in Serbia'. As a result, democracy was made 'one of the first victims of this bombing'. Again, in challenging the justification of the war given by Nato officials, Liht questions the actual motives behind the Nato intervention. The suspicion is epitomised in the question 'Why?'. Crucially however, Liht does not provide an answer. She dismisses misunderstanding or ignorance as possible explanations, but then argues that actual reasons belong to 'a different

discussion'. It could be argued that the answer to the question 'why' is evaded in order to avoid having to invoke the idea of international conspiracy or at least a reference to some clandestine interests of Western powers. Yet in spite of this implicit rejection of a conspiratorial interpretation, the absence of an answer leaves a gap which needs to be filled. The incompleteness of Liht's account effectively becomes a silent invitation to the conspiracy hermeneutic and speculation on the West's true intentions. This is especially so considering that the 'lack of understanding' and 'ignorance', which in this case would constitute plausible candidate answers from the perspective of the 'cock-up theory of society', are eliminated.

In conclusion, once Nato rhetoric, with its stories of 'collateral damage', 'humanitarian intervention' or 'legitimate military targets' lost credibility even among the segment of the population which traditionally had a positive stance towards the West, there emerged a widespread discourse of suspicion. This discourse, while abstaining from making allegations of a secret plot in the manner of protoconspiracy theory, nonetheless posed the crucial questions about what was 'really going on'. It was undoubtedly something sinister, otherwise Nato would never have had to invent the story of 'humanitarian intervention'. In these instances the idea of a 'hidden agenda' of a powerful Other, propagated by the regime media, presents itself as a credible answer to the question which Groh (1987) cites as fundamental prerequisite to the emergence of conspiratorial discourse: 'why do bad things happen to good people?'. This is especially so considering that the dissemination of alternative views was severely restricted. As the next chapter will show, this led to the lifting of constraints which until then kept the more controversial aspects of the conspiracy tradition on the margins. As a result, antisemitic and mystical aspects of that tradition were allowed to emerge out of the woodwork.

Chapter 7:

The emergence of antisemitic conspiracy themes in the mainstream Serbian press

In the previous chapter it was suggested that protoconspiracy theory, as the ‘conspiratorless’ conspiracy theory was in many ways an incomplete explanation. Reports, commentaries and editorials in *Politika* as well as in other government-owned and ‘patriotic’ publications, consistently attributed Nato intervention to a sinister motive and a devious plot, while at the same time failing to explain exactly who was behind the alleged anti-Serbian conspiracy. While the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the conspiratorial body made this type of explanation seem more level-headed and sensible, it also created an explanatory gap which invited other types of explanation to provide the necessary elaboration.

The present chapter will explore the responses, in the mainstream Serbian media, to the call for explication implicit in the vagueness of protoconspiratorial discourse. As will become apparent, a number of articles published in *Politika* during the Nato bombing abandoned the ambiguity characteristic of protoconspiracy theories and expanded on the identity of the forces thought to be responsible for the bombing of Yugoslavia. Significantly, elaborations of the basic conspiratorial claim were not created *de novo*, but drew on a long tradition of conspiratorial explanations which goes back to the time of the French Revolution and the writing of Barruel and Robison. While most of these accounts cited world elite organisations such as the Bilderberg group, the Trilateral Commission or the Council on Foreign Relations as the centre of the conspiracy, some articles in *Politika* will be shown to have touched upon the conspiracy tradition’s antisemitic legacy. The analysis of these texts will explore the ideological dynamic which enabled explanations that might have previously been seen as extreme or unacceptable to emerge in the respectable media.

In the earlier chapters it was suggested that conspiratorial tradition has for many years been linked with antisemitism as conspiracy theorists often identified Jews as secretly plotting world domination. Since the Second World War, this tradition of explanation has been resoundingly discredited in mainstream Western politics. No major Western political party has sought power using an ideology based on the thesis of a Jewish conspiracy. In consequence, ideologists who have continued to peddle such ideas, have been confined to the outer reaches of the political spectrum. Antisemitic conspiracy theorists have found

themselves on the wrong side of the boundary that divides the politically respectable from the discredited.

Yugoslavia, for the most part, has conformed to this pattern. According to a number of recent analyses of antisemitism in Serbia, anti-Jewish ideology is a marginal phenomenon, without strong institutional or ideological basis (Sekelj, 1997). For the past 10 years, the principal exponent of antisemitic conspiracy theory has been Dr. Ratibor Đurđević, whose biography was outlined in Chapter 5. Đurđević's antisemitic writing is published by Ichtys Press, a small company he himself owns. Apart from Đurđević, antisemitic conspiratorial culture is disseminated by a relatively small number of activists who belong to the 'stratum of half educated intelligentsia' (e.g. Dragoš Kalajić, Radmilo Marojević, and until recently Nebojša Krstić) as well as by isolated members of the right-wing Orthodox clergy (e.g. Father Žarko Gavrilović; see Sekelj, 1997, see also Institute for Jewish Policy Research report, 1997, Yugoslav Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Report on Antisemitism, 2001).

The fact that Đurđević has to publish his own work illustrates the extent to which his antisemitic ideas have been considered to be beyond the bounds of respectability. Similarly, antisemitic material has been generally absent in the mainstream press. Expressions of antisemitic ideology were largely confined to fringe nationalist and religious publications with a limited readership, such as *Logos*, *Pravoslavni Misionar (Orthodox missionary)*, *Kruna (The Crown)*, *Glas Srpski (Serbian Voice)*, *Ovdje (Here)* and *Velika Srbija (Greater Serbia)* as well as magazines with a more esoteric and quasi-religious orientation such as *Treće Oko (Third eye)* and *Nostradamus*. Overall, the impact of these publications on public opinion in Serbia has been limited. The only more widely read publication with a history of antisemitic content was the sensationalist fortnightly magazine *Duga*. As was noted in Chapter 5, over the years the magazine published interviews with various representatives of the Serbian conspiracist community including the antisemites Radmilo Marojević, Father Žarko Gavrilović and Spasoje Vlajić. This trend continued during the months of the bombing. In April 1999, *Duga* featured an article which inferred a link between the Satanic and Jewish influences among those responsible for the bombing of Yugoslavia:

'The frustrated Jewish aunt [Madeline Albright] has been dragging her animosity towards Serbs since early childhood, when Serbs hid her from the Nazis, thus saving her life. And if you lend a hand to Satan, he will try to destroy you will all the powers at his disposal, thus removing the complexes of his own weakness.' (Vujović, *Aggression of profit against the soul*, *Duga*, April 1999, p.29)

In contrast to *Duga* and various fringe publications, the pages of *Politika* were customarily free of antisemitic material. In fact, although *Politika*'s credibility had suffered since the late

1980s, the paper often provided a forum in which liberal intellectuals and mainstream institutions could voice their concerns regarding the re-emergence of antisemitism in other, less reputable publications. For example, in December 1994, following the publication of an antisemitic text in *Logos*, a theological periodical published by the students of the Orthodox seminary in Belgrade, a group of Orthodox Christian intellectuals chose *Politika* as the medium through which to publicise a petition denouncing the article's antisemitic content (Sekelj, 1997). Also, in 1995, following the publication of the first edition of Đurđević's book *On the senselessness of antisemitism and anti-antisemitism* an editorial in *Politika* criticised the book as a manifestation of rising antisemitism in Serbia (Ranković, *Who is inciting antisemitism?*, *Politika*, 18 October, 1995). The next day, *Politika* published an interview with Aca Singer, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia in which Đurđević was further criticised (*Antisemitic incidents must be taken care of*, *Politika*, 19 October, 1995). Finally, in the early 1990s, *Politika* covered extensively the activities of the Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society (SJFS), a government-sponsored organisation founded in 1988, whose representatives frequently made a point of drawing a parallel between the fate of the Jews during the Nazi era and that of Serbs in the 1980s and 90s. The Society was never officially endorsed by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, and its activities were often seen as the 'functionalisation' of Jews and their history driven by propagandist motives rather than by genuine compassion and solidarity with the Jewish people (Sekelj, 1997). In spite of the possibility that the Society's motives were not entirely sincere, the sentiments expressed in *Politika*'s coverage of its activities were essentially pro-Jewish. All this suggests that *Politika*, as Serbia's oldest daily newspaper, and for many decades the most widely-read and trusted daily publication, was not a medium for the wilder reaches of the conspiracy tradition. And yet, as will become apparent, in June 1999, at the end of the war with Nato, a number of articles containing references to antisemitic ideology appeared in *Politika*. The present chapter will examine this development. It will be argued that the emergence of antisemitic themes in a reputable newspaper occurred as a disturbing by-product of a more general proliferation of non-antisemitic (mainly world elite) conspiratorial accounts in the mainstream Serbian media, which brought into the open the less acceptable aspects of the conspiratorial cultural tradition.

7.1 *Politika and the Bilderberg Conspiracy*

In the spring of 1999, *Politika* published several articles which dealt with the activities of the Bilderberg group, claiming that this organisation lay at the core of a Western conspiracy against Yugoslavia. For example, on 28 May, *Politika* published an interview with Mirko Vraneš, a relatively unknown conspiracy theorist and author of books such as *The Nightmare*

World and The New World Order: Where and What for?. In outlining a conspiratorial view of world politics, Vraneš attributed particular importance to the 'Bilderberg forum', 'a secret organisation founded half a century ago' which plays a crucial role in world affairs (*Mysterious 'World Government' creates nightmares around the world, Politika*, 28 May 1999, p.19). In the interview, Vraneš pointed out that:

'Everything becomes clear once it is known that for 22 years this forum was headed by Prince Bernard of the Netherlands, as well as by prominent politicians such as Douglas-Horne, Walter Schell, Lord Carrington...This circle also includes 120 personalities from Europe and the US. They meet in secret, once a year, and are sworn to secrecy. However, occasional leaks do happen. It is also known...that the [Bilderberg] forum includes persons who have played a crucial role in the destruction of the Former Yugoslavia.' (ibid.)

Apart from the conspiratorial activities of the Bilderberg group, Vraneš also revealed to readers of *Politika* the existence of the Committee of 300, 'the secret World Government' which 'intentionally provokes (and maintains) nightmares around the world'. The Committee is said to be devoted to the creation of a 'totalitarian and absolutely controlled new world community and the establishment of a single world government' (ibid.).

Two days after printing the interview with Vraneš, *Politika* featured the article *Cunning plan of the Bilderberg group* which contained similar conspiratorial themes (*Politika*, 30 May, 1999; p. 15). The article was provided by the Yugoslav state news agency *Tanjug*. It was in fact a summary of a longer piece which had appeared in the Yugoslav Army's publication *Vojska* earlier that month (*War as a lucrative business, Vojska*, War Edition No.27; p.22-23). Just like the interview with Vraneš, the article analysed the causes of the conflict with Nato. Its thesis of conspiracy was apparent right from the start:

'The plan to provoke a new 'Balkan Vietnam', according to the magazine *Vojska*, was plotted secretly as early as in 1996, and was subsequently reactivated in 1998 at the meeting of the so-called Bilderberg group...' (*Politika*, 30 May, 1999; p. 15)

The article cited the Bilderberg Group as the force behind the conspiracy, describing it as consisting of 'members of the mondialistic elite, financial moguls, owners of multinational companies, political leaders, crowned heads and world famous scientists'. The Group's involvement in the Balkans was described as part of a global conspiracy:

'We are talking of a self-proclaimed world super-government which is making money out of crises and wars, which, and this is the saddest part, it itself produces. In addition, explorers emphasise, they keep the press and television under control on a global scale.' (Ibid.)

On 9 June, 1999, several days after the cessation of the bombing, *Politika* published another piece on the Bilderbergers. The article *Europe remains under US guardianship*, also provided by the *Tanjug* news agency, reported on a Bilderberg Group meeting held in Portugal earlier in the year. The Bilderbergers were described as the 'informal world government'. The piece was printed on page four of *Politika* and dominated the regular 'World news' section. It was published as a genuine report on an important aspect of international relations, without any critical comment regarding its conspiratorial content. Notably, the emphasis in this article was not so much on the role of the Bilderbergers in provoking armed conflicts, but on the Group's desire to establish 'puppet regimes' in developing countries around the world, and especially in Yugoslavia. *Tanjug's* reporter revealed to *Politika's* readers that, in Portugal, the Bilderberg group agreed that the next step on the road to world domination was:

'the creation of a 'partner' in Belgrade, a government which is 'democratic' and 'co-operative'. They want a government that would not care for the state, its people or their future, but would simply represent the interests of 'globalisation', executing orders from abroad, from across the Atlantic.' (*Europe remains under US guardianship, Politika, 9 June, 1999; p.4*)

The change in emphasis in this article becomes clearer if one bears in mind the time of its publication. The report on the Bilderberg conference appeared several days after the cessation of the bombing, at a time when the Serbian regime was celebrating its 'victory' over Nato. There was no longer any need to remind the public of who was behind the Western military intervention. Moreover, doing so would necessitate for the victory over the 'rulers of the world' to be explained. Instead, the state-controlled media turned its attention to the battle ahead, against the Serbian opposition parties. As will become apparent in Chapter 10, references to Serbian opposition politicians as 'traitors', 'Nato stooges' and 'servants of the New World Order', intensified in the state-controlled media in the post-war period.

In the previous chapter it was argued that, from the early 1990s, the Serbian political establishment and government controlled media (including *Politika*) actively disseminated the idea that Western involvement in the Balkans was motivated by a hidden agenda aimed at subjugating Serbia and its people. With that in mind, the emergence of a small number of articles on the Bilderberg group may not appear all that remarkable. However, the three articles in *Politika* are noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, unlike in the case of protoconspiracy theory examined earlier, there was no attempt to conceal the identity of the conspirators. Instead, blame and responsibility were attributed directly to an identifiable group consisting of the world's elite, namely the Bilderbergers and the Committee of 300. More importantly, in elaborating the theme of an anti-Serbian conspiracy, two of the three articles drew upon the 'classics' of conspiracy literature. The author of *Cunning plan of the*

Bilderberg group talked of the 'third Balkan war' which the Bilderbergers were allegedly trying to provoke in Kosovo. In support of this claim, the author suggested that the same idea was 'indirectly hinted at by Gary Allen in his 1986 best-seller *Say No to New World Order*'. Gary Allen is one of the principal exponents of world elite conspiracy theory in the US. His best-selling books (*None dare call it conspiracy* is said to have sold over five million copies world-wide) have been endorsed and distributed by the John Birch Society and other far-right organisations ever since the late 1960s (Billig, 1978; Lipset & Raab, 1978) By citing his work, the article in *Politika* was presenting Allen as a reputable political source. Similarly, in the interview in *Politika*, Mirko Vraneš supported his claims about the 'Committee of 300' by citing 'a certain John Coleman, who, some ten years ago wrote a book about this Committee'. Just like Gary Allen's work, Dr. John Coleman's book *The Conspirator's hierarchy: The story of the Committee of 300* focuses on the conspiratorial machinations of the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations and the Bilderberg Group. Although Dr. Coleman may not be as famous as Gary Allen in his native USA, he is probably better known to the Serbian public. In the months after the Nato bombing, Coleman's book *The Conspirator's Hierarchy* competed with Noam Chomsky's *What does America really want?* for the top spot on the best-sellers list in most of Belgrade's larger bookshops.

During the months of the bombing, conspiracy theories referring to the activities of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral Commission, were also advanced by certain segments of the Serbian intellectual establishment. On 30 May, 1999, *Politika* reported a public lecture given by Professor Mihajlo Marković, an eminent Serbian philosopher and dissident during the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1980s Marković had become a high ranking official and ideologue of Milošević's Socialist Party of Serbia. In the lecture given at the 'Europe at the crossroads' conference, held in the Kolarac cultural centre in Belgrade in May 1999, Marković reflected on the world elite conspiracy theories. Professor's words were reported by *Politika*'s journalist B. Radivojša:

'In relation to the globalisation trend, professor [Marković] reflected upon the so-called conspiracy theories. He said that these theories turned out to contain a lot of truth, considering that a large part of the world is run by secret organisations. He mentioned some of them: the Council on Foreign Relations, founded in 1921, the Bilderberg group, established in 1954, and the Trilateral commission established in 1973. Members of these organisations are leading politicians, eminent business personalities, even some crowned heads. These powerful organisations function as some sort of 'secret world government'. They have first of all brought into question the sovereignty of the state, declaring universal human rights to be older and more important than national sovereignty.' (B. Radivojša, *Fourth attempt to conquer the world*, *Politika*, 30 May, 1999, p.16)

Marković went on to argue that, like Austro-Hungary, Hitler's Germany and Stalin's USSR beforehand, this 'kind of "secret world government"' is trying to 'introduce dictatorship into the sphere of international relations', and ultimately 'rule the world in the name of the so-called New World Order'.

The conspiratorial triad of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral Commission featured in the explanation of the Yugoslav crisis offered by another established Serbian academic. The year before the war with Nato, Smilja Avramov, a retired law professor and former advisor to President Milosevic, (see Chapter 5 for biographical details) published the second edition of her book *The Trilateral* (Avramov, 1998). In this work, Avramov exposes the conspiratorial machinations of the Bilderberg Group, the Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission, both in the context of global international relations and Balkan politics. Like in the aforementioned articles published in *Politika*, many arguments put forward in *The Trilateral* are based on the 'classics' of Western, primarily US, conspiracy literature, including the work of Gary Allen (1968), and his 'followers' such as Dr. John Coleman (1992) and Richard Gaylon Ross (1995).

7.2. Links between the world elite conspiracy theory and the classical conspiratorial tradition

The fact that the world elite conspiracy theories received regular coverage in the mainstream press and were endorsed by at least two respected academics, suggests that at the time of the war, this type of conspiratorial account was regarded as more respectable, credible and acceptable outside the communities which are traditionally associated with conspiracy theories, namely the extreme Right. One way in which world elite conspiracy theory managed to achieve respectability is by distancing itself from the classical conspiracy theory. In Chapter 2, it was suggested that a distinction can be made between the world elite conspiracy theories of Avramov, Marković, Gary Allen or John Coleman and the classical conspiracy theories propounded in Yugoslavia by Ratibor Đurđević and other antisemites. The former type of explanation cites existing organisations (Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg group) as the hub of the world conspiracy and does not see these organisations as ciphers for the hidden esoteric workings of Jews, Freemasons or the Illuminati. Most crucially, Gary Allen, John Coleman and others do not identify an ethnic group as controlling organisations such as the Bilderberg Group. In contrast, for writers such as Đurđević, as for other antisemitic theorists, groups such as the Bilderbergers and the Trilateral Commission are merely instruments for a deeper, hidden Jewish plot.¹ In this regard, the Bilderberg conspiracy theory need not be linked to the long-standing tradition of

antisemitic conspiracy theories, and might, just like protoconspiracy theory, appear as more acceptable.

Although it might be possible to make a theoretical distinction between world elite and classical conspiracy theory, in practice the boundaries can be blurred. As was established in Chapter 2, the conspiracy theorist is operating in an ideological space with a long antisemitic tradition that cannot be easily discarded. In the present section the linkage between the more 'reasonable' face of conspiracy theory and the less respectable ideological tradition of conspiracy notions will be illustrated by the example of *The Trilateral* and a recorded conversation with Avramov which took place in July 2001.²

In the introduction to *The Trilateral*, Avramov makes an explicit attempt to distance herself from the wilder reaches of the conspiracy tradition. She argues against the 'mystification of secret societies' and the placing of 'all secret organisations in the same basket'. (p.12) Avramov claims to favour careful 'evaluation', and 'observation'. (p.10) and proposes that the explanation of the anti-Serbian activities of the world's elite requires 'extensive, multidisciplinary research' (p.14). Similarly, during the recorded conversation, Avramov revealed that the writing of *The Trilateral* was motivated by the need to 'demonstrate the complexity of the anatomy of the contemporary world'. In emphasising the complexity of international relations, Avramov positions her argument away from the naïve and simplistic classical conspiratorial explanations.

A more direct form of distancing from classical conspiracy theory occurred during the conversation when Avramov explicitly stated that she did not consider herself to be a conspiracy theorist. She was providing an account of the dissolution of Yugoslavia when she introduced a disclaimer:

'no, it is not a conspiracy...I am not an exponent of conspiracy theories of any kind, but there was one thing, one basic principle which was used to resolve crises in Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall. It was to return everything to the previous state, *status quo ante*, before Communism. Everywhere except in Yugoslavia'

Behind Avramov's rejection of conspiracy theory was, once again, the insistence on the complexity of world politics and the 'entangled threads which connect different secret organisations, intelligence services, etc.'. For Avramov, as well as for other world elite conspiracy theorists, 'conspiracy theory' is a label reserved for exponents of the classical conspiratorial discourse. Their own work, on the other hand, is seen as an informed analysis of elite organisations and their influence on international politics. Consistent with the attempt

to distance the world elite conspiracy theory from classical conspiratorial discourse, and present it as a scholarly analysis, the overall literary style of *The Trilateral* appears to be closer to mainstream analyses of international politics (e.g. that of Noam Chomsky) than to classical conspiracy literature which has strong quasi-religious, mystical and esoteric overtones.

A similar form of distancing to that found in *The Trilateral*, was evident in the aforementioned lecture by Mihajlo Marković reported in *Politika*. Professor Marković did not declare himself to be a believer in conspiracy theory of society. Instead he stated that ‘so-called conspiracy theories’ ‘turned out to contain a lot of truth’. The way in which Marković’s attitude towards conspiracy theories was reported in *Politika* has significant rhetorical implications. Firstly, the qualification ‘so-called’ which precedes the reference to conspiracy theories is noteworthy. To have said that conspiracy theories contain a lot of truth would have brought the established philosopher uncomfortably close to the likes of Radibor Đurđević and other antisemites. By referring to ‘so-called conspiracy theories’ Marković indicates that explanations based on the machinations of the world elite (which he seems to support) are not *really* ‘conspiracy theories’, but something else, something more respectable and believable. Also, Marković presents himself as someone who used to be a sceptic regarding the ‘so-called conspiracy theories’, but who changed his mind when the weight of the evidence about the Bilderberg group and its ‘sister’ organisations proved his scepticism to be misguided. Stated in this way, the apparent reservation about the conspiracy theory of society is employed rhetorically, to present the belief in world elite conspiracy theory as the result of empirical observation and rational inquiry, not superstition or naivety.

The distancing apparent in Marković’s speech appears to have been effective. The journalist reporting Professor Marković’s words did not comment critically on the conspiratorial claims made in the lecture. Instead, Radivojsa reported Marković’s explanation as the voice of intellectual authority. Conspiratorial interpretation of the Yugoslav crisis was treated as a legitimate position endorsed by a well-established and respected academic and an opinion worthy of a mention in a mainstream daily newspaper.

7.3. World elite organisations: between reality and the conspiratorial imagination

As has already been noted, an important characteristic of world elite conspiracy theories, which makes it easier for them to be presented as serious and informed analysis (rather than as a wild or paranoid ‘conspiracy theory’), is that they deal with existing elite organisations, most notably the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg

Group. The influence of these organisations is widely recognised, even by political analysts and journalists who do not subscribe to the conspiratorial world view (Peters, 1996; Gill, 1990; see also Ronson, 2000). Examples from the British media illustrate the point. In December 1999, *The Observer* published an article about the whereabouts of Peter Mandelson, following his sacking from Tony Blair's cabinet earlier that year. *The Observer* revealed that the former minister spent some time with the Bilderberg group, 'an international talking shop for the world's business and political elite. Participants are hand-picked; the press is strictly at bay' (Antony Barnett, *Revealed: Mandelson's £20,000 of junkets*, *The Observer*, 26 December 1999, p.7). Similarly, in February 1999, *The Guardian* cited membership of the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg group as an important aspect of the credentials of President Clinton's friend Vernon Jordan, and testimony to his political influence:

'But it is as a political powerbroker that Mr Jordan has made himself into what the White House counsel Charles Ruff last month called 'one of this country's greatest citizens'. A director of the Ford Foundation and the Brookings Institution, as well as a member of the Trilateral Commission and the Bilderberg group, Mr Jordan has known six presidents, but Bill Clinton best of all.' (Martin Kettle, *Nervous prosecutors ask Jordan about his 'best friend' Bill Clinton*, *The Guardian*, 3 February, 1999, p.14)

In these articles there is no mention of a Bilderberg conspiracy. At the same time, secrecy, exclusivity and the power of the Bilderberg group are emphasised. These are the exact qualities of world elite organisations which made them so appealing to conspiracy theorists in the 1960s and 70s. As a *Financial Times* columnist once noted, 'even if the Bilderberg group is not a conspiracy of some sort, it is conducted in such a way as to give a remarkably good imitation of one' (quoted in *Passnotes No:1218*, *The Guardian*, 13 May, 1998).

It should be pointed out however, that when the Bilderberg group is mentioned in the British media, this is not always in a non-conspiratorial context. In April, 1999, *The Guardian* featured a report from the Serbian town of Pancevo, in which Maggie O'Kane, *The Guardian's* Belgrade correspondent, commented on the conspiracy theories circulating in Serbia:

'As an information blackout remains in force on state television, the explanation for their country's tragedy is left to such people as Aradunik Mihailovic, an academic writing in yesterday's *Politika*. According to Mr Mihailovic, the crisis was triggered by the 'Bilderberg group', a secret organisation of companies, politicians and businessmen who want to control Serbia. He goes on to reveal, in Serbia's most popular newspaper, that the shadowy group is chaired by Lord Carrington, that Bill Clinton is on the board and that the US special envoy, Richard Holbrooke, and Sadako Ogato of the United Nations are also secret members.' (*War in Europe: Rage unites battered town*, *The Guardian*, 13 April, 1999, p.5)

In contrast to previous citations of the Bilderberg group in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, O’Kane places the name of the organisation in inverted commas, suggesting that the group is the product of the imagination of (Serbian) conspiracy theorists.³ Similarly, the description of the Bilderberg group as ‘a secret organisation of companies, politicians and businessmen who want to control Serbia’ (which is most probably a quote from *Politika* rather than O’Kane’s own definition) is not contrasted with what the Bilderberg group really is. O’Kane’s article leaves the impression that ‘the Bilderberg group’ belongs strictly in the domain of conspiratorial imagination. Significantly however, unlike her Serbian colleague B. Radivojša, Maggie O’Kane did not treat the allegations made by the academic as a serious and noteworthy comment on international relations, but cited them as an example of the unusual and farfetched explanations of the conflict publicised in the Serbian media.

Examples from the British press reveal that that articles published in the same newspaper only a few months apart refer to what are effectively two, in an ontological sense, very different Bilderberg groups – one which is ‘real’ but non-conspiratorial, and the other which is imagined and conspiratorial. A possible explanation for the dual existence of the Bilderberg group is that once the Bilderbergers and similar organisations were incorporated into the conspiracy tradition in the 1960s, they became so strongly associated with conspiracy theory that their link with reality was to some extent severed. As a result, world elite forums are today occasionally treated, as in O’Kane’s report, solely as the product of conspiracist ideology. What is important however, is that in the British press, world elite organisations are examined *either* as real discussion forums of the financial and political elite, *or* as an aspect of contemporary conspiratorial discourse. There is seldom any blurring of boundaries between the two conceptualisations, and the possibility of Bilderberg conspiracy is never seriously entertained.

The situation is different in world elite conspiracy literature, where the basic argument rests heavily on the blurring of those boundaries. For instance Avramov acknowledges the public nature of world elite groups. During the conversation, she recognised that these organisations are ‘a necessity’ and even pointed out that she attended conferences organised by the Trilateral Commission. Similarly, in *The Trilateral* Avramov substantiates various claims about the nature and the activities of these organisations by citing reports (*Trilateral Commission’s Task Force Reports*) and journals (*Foreign Affairs*) published by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral commission. In doing so she recognises the existence of these organisations in the public domain.

However, parallel with this ‘innocent’ portrayal of world elite organisations, which is no more conspiratorial than *The Guardian* reports on Vernon Jordan or Peter Mandelson, runs a rather different representation of these groups, one that emphasises their secret character and involvement in world conspiracy. For instance, Avramov contrasts the ‘public image’ of these organisations with their secret dimension:

‘It should be noted that it is sometimes very difficult to classify these organisations, as in some cases they at the same time are and are not secret. Their existence is not a secret, and neither is the outer circle of members. Their decisions are secret and are implemented via secret channels, and in indirect ways. What is strictly conspiratorial is the inner circle of members’ (Avramov, 1998; p.13)

Similarly, Avramov reflected on the stratification of elite organisations during the conversation. She said that the Trilateral Commission ‘has three circles of members’. Again, ‘the inner circle’ was the most secret but also the most sinister. The second circle, Avramov argued, was ‘more elastic, on a higher intellectual level’.

The significance attributed to the dual nature of the Bilderberg group, the Trilateral and the Council on Foreign Relations, and the secrecy surrounding the ‘inner circle’ of their membership, brings Avramov’s explanation closer to the domain of the ‘paranoid’, conspiratorial explanatory style. For instance, while recognising that world elite organisations appear to have fairly ‘honourable aims’ regarding the wellbeing and prosperity of the whole of humankind, Avramov goes on to challenge this positive image:

‘The question that imposes itself spontaneously is: why the need for secrecy, if their aim is to benefit the whole humanity? Why the conspiracy, if they are motivated by such highly humanistic ideals?’ (Avramov, 1998, p.13)

Avramov attributes the secrecy to sinister motives, and provides an explanation which draws on conspiratorial explanatory tradition. The most important allegations regarding the conspiratorial activities of world elite organisations are not corroborated by what *is* printed in the Trilateral Commission Reports and other journals, but by what is *absent* from them:

‘Crises in various parts of the world were a customary subject matter for the Trilateral Commission, and regular reports were written about these crises, such as for example the one on the Middle East, or the Israeli-Palestinian war ([Task Force Reports] No.20 and 38). On the list of published reports there are no special reports about Yugoslavia, which should not be taken to mean that no such report exists, but rather that it is secret...The precise time and place where the idea about the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the biggest crime in Europe since the Holocaust, was made, will remain a secret for a long time.’ (Avramov, 1998, p.117)

While the precise citation of *Task Force Reports* gives Avramov's work a scholarly appearance, the reference to secret documents signals a leap of the imagination, and progression from the 'undeniable to the unbelievable' (Hofstadter, 1966). The same applies to the differentiation between 'inner' and 'outer' circles of members. In *The Trilateral*, Avramov notes that, while the 'outer circle' functions in the public domain, among the 'inner circle' 'absolute discipline is a sacred principle' (p.13). A breach of discipline can cost members of the Trilateral their life - she cites Olaf Palme, JF Kennedy and Aldo Moro as recent victims. Not only is the death of these individuals attributed to a single evil conspiratorial cause – in line with the monomaniacal conspiratorial attributional style – but the allusion to *secrecy* sets in motion the basic conspiratorial argument: the absence of proof about the conspiracy is taken as incontrovertible evidence of its existence and of its hostile nature. Moreover, the alleged ability of the conspirators to keep the public in the dark about their plans and about the 'truth' behind the death of well-known and popular politicians is used to enhance the image of the conspirators as the epitome of power and evil in the world.

7.4. World elite conspiracy theory and the historical continuity of conspiracy

Further evidence that the differentiation between 'reasonable', world elite conspiracy theories and classical conspiratorial discourse is not hard and fast, can be sought in the way in which the 'reasonable' writer attempts to understand the present political situation in terms of a longer history of conspiracies. A conspiracy theory, regardless of whether it focuses on the world's political and financial elite, the Freemasons or Jews, has at its core the 'conspiracy theory of society': the assumption that things happen because people, groups or organisations want them to happen (Popper, 1966). It would be implausible to make this general metatheoretical assumption about the functioning of society historically specific and argue, for example, that before 1921, when the Council on Foreign Relations was founded, things happened by chance, while since then everything has been the result of a conspiracy. Conspiracy theory of society is a view of the world not only as it is at present, but also as it always was. Consequently, world elite organisations, as conspiratorial bodies, cannot be conceived as historically isolated.

The assumption of a historical continuity of conspiracy creates an ideological dilemma for exponents of world elite conspiracy theories. While distancing their work from classical conspiracy literature, authors of this type of account must at the same recognise the historical significance of past conspiracies. In the introduction to *The Trilateral*, Avramov links the conspiracy behind the current Western involvement in the Balkans to a whole chain of 'influences' which have shaped the history of Serbia and the rest of the world:

'It used to happen, not at all infrequently, in the history of not only small but also big countries, that politicians who found themselves at the head of these states were not the persons who directed the political and economic trends of those countries, but were just the communication links for invisible governments; so the people inevitably became the object of manipulation. The former high ranking CIA official Dr. John Coleman says the following about his country: 'We are not an independent nation, and we will not be one as long as our country is ruled by the invisible government- Committee of 300'. Yugoslavia too has been faced with similar problems: three times in its seventy-year-long history it has found itself in the hands of secret and semi-secret organisations.' (Avramov, 1998, p.9)

Avramov goes on to mention the influence of Freemasons in Yugoslav history ('functioning continuously for three centuries'; p.10), the Comintern ('that vanguard organisation of the world proletariat'; p.9) and most recently the Bilderberg group.

During the encounter in July 2001, Avramov was asked to expand on her views about the three organisations and the relationship between them:

'I am not saying that they have succeeded one another, but some mutual influence is beyond doubt. If you take for instance the influence of the Illuminati on the Freemasons, or the Freemasons on the true Marxists, regardless of the fact that their ideologies and strategies were different, there are absolutely some common points... the contemporary globalisation ideology, as understood by the Trilateral...that was also the idea of the Communists: the destruction of the state through proletarian internationalism.'

Later in the conversation, Avramov also pointed out that 'almost all...in fact, not almost, but all members of Trilateral are Freemasons'. She explained that contemporary world elite organisations consist of the most prominent members of the Freemasons, who organised themselves into new, more exclusive groups after the Second World War, when '[traditional] Freemasonry reached its lowest point in history'. Consequently, in spite of the attempts at differentiating the explanations based on the activities of world elite organisations from classical conspiratorial discourse, Avramov presents the Bilderberg group, the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations as the most recent manifestation of an ancient conspiracy. Similarly, in the penultimate paragraph of the book Avramov warns that even if the ideology of the Trilateral fails, the fight is not over:

'The centres of transnational capital will not surrender easily; one should not exclude the possibility that, even as soon as tomorrow, it may emerge in a new form. The Trilateral is neither the first nor the last in that chain' (p.140)

By alleging that there may be a 'chain' of conspiracies behind which stands 'transnational capital' Avramov once again recognised the temporal dimension of the conspiracy.⁴

The reference to the historical continuity of conspiracy is not an idiosyncrasy of Serbian conspiracy theorists. In Chapter 2 it was already noted that in 1967 the John Birch Society reissued Robison's 1797 book *Proofs of Conspiracy*. The fact that an organisation which propounds world elite conspiracy theories published a classic piece of 18th Century conspiracy literature is itself a significant indication that the ideologues of the John Birch Society regarded the accounts of past conspiracies to be relevant to the understanding of the contemporary world plot. Moreover, in the introduction to the reprint of Robison's book, an anonymous commentator established a direct connection between the Illuminati and the more recent world elite organisations. The latter were presented as the contemporary manifestation of a classical conspiratorial organisation, the Illuminati:

'the main habitat [of the Illuminati] these days seems to be the great subsidised universities, tax-free foundations, mass media communication systems, government bureaux such as the State Department, and a myriad of private organisations such as the Council on Foreign Relations' (quoted in Lipset and Raab, 1978, p.258)

Going back to *The Trilateral*, further thematic links between the world elite conspiracy theory and classical conspiratorial themes can be found in the account of the origins of the Bilderberg group. Avramov describes the group's 'ideological father' Joseph Retinger, as a 'catholic priest of the Jesuit order' and a 'Freemason of the 33rd degree' (p.30). Retinger's membership of the Freemasons is invoked as a description of his 'political stance'. His attempts to create various supranational political organisations such as the 'the world government' are therefore explained by the reference to his Masonic ideological roots. In this way the continuity between the Bilderberg and the Masonic conspiracy is once again documented.

Avramov's reference to Retinger's 'profession' and religious identity is also interesting. Although somewhat neglected in recent years, anti-Catholic conspiratorial themes were a common feature of Serbian rightwing nationalism during the war in Croatia (1991-95). Just like much of Serbian conspiracy culture, the anti-Catholic themes can be traced to the writing of Nikolaj Velimirović. In the late 1930s, Bishop Nikolaj and his disciples led the campaign against the signing of the Concordat between Yugoslavia and the Vatican. They interpreted the Concordat as an attempt by the Vatican to undermine the Serbian Orthodox Church, with the aim of destroying Orthodox Christianity generally. In contrast to the anti-Catholicism of the Orthodox Right, Avramov's reference to the Vatican conspiracy in *The Trilateral* contains no direct reference to the anti-Orthodox plot by the Holy See. As such the account in the book appears to be distinguishable from the Velimirovićesque ideological tradition. However, during the recent conversation, Avramov stated that the 'disintegration of Yugoslavia was

demanding by the Vatican' with the aim of 'destroying Orthodox Christianity'. Also, when asked to comment on the 'proliferation of religious sects in Serbia' Avramov pointed out that both sects and various foreign NGO 'are employed by secret services' as part of the whole 'Trilateral movement and globalisation'. Their function, Avramov insisted, is to 'destroy traditional society and create a society which would not be based on traditional values'. In perceiving non-Orthodox religious communities and various pro-Western civil rights organisations as foot-soldiers in a vast anti-Serbian and anti-Orthodox conspiracy, Avramov drew her explanatory framework closer to Velimirović's ideological position, where anti-Westernism and religious intolerance are based on a similar fear of an anti-Serbian and anti-Orthodox conspiracy.

The allusion to the historical continuity between conspiracies past and present, which is evident in Avramov's explanatory framework, has a more disturbing dimension. In the introduction to her book, Avramov briefly mentions conspiratorial organisations such as the Illuminati and the Skull and Bone Society, and finally the Elders of Zion, 'an elitist Judaic organisation... with missionary aims, which still functions through various organisational forms' (p.10) In mentioning the Elders of Zion, Avramov not only refers to the antisemitic version of the conspiracy, but also repeats one of the major themes of the notorious *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. She suggests that there is a Jewish group of conspirators named the Elders of Zion. Although she suggests that this group may have been part of past conspiracies and, indeed may have been more important in former times, she nevertheless asserts that the Elders of Zion are still operating. In doing so, she links her present 'reasonable' conspiracy theory directly to the antisemitic conspiracy tradition.

Avramov was asked about the Elders of Zion during the encounter in July 2001. While in *The Trilateral* the Elders are mentioned only in passing, in the conversation Avramov elaborated on antisemitic themes without any visible sign of embarrassment or resistance.

J.B.: In your book you also mention the Elders of [Zion]...

Avramov: [Yes..]

J.B: and you mention that they are no longer...

Avramov: [no, they are active...I merely said when they were founded. I did not go into the Elders of Zion, but they are...I think that I mentioned it in a single sentence that they are still operating. In fact they are the most secret of all secret organisations, you know...The most interesting thing, which to me is completely unclear, is that these Jewish organisations were in fact terribly Serbophobic. The main anti-Serbian campaign was led by Jewish organisations in America and France. What is the cause of this, I still don't know...

The expression of ignorance about the reasons behind Jewish 'Serbophobia' is interesting because Avramov falls short of attributing the causes directly to a Jewish conspiracy or to the

machinations of the Elders of Zion. Instead she expresses 'bemusement' at the fact that Jews failed to sympathise with the Serbs despite the fact that

'King Alexander [of Serbia] was the first European head of state to express support for the Balfour declaration in 1917...between the two world wars, the Zionist organisation had a centre in Yugoslavia, and had the blessing of the Royal family. Huge favours were done to Jews...'

The construction of Avramov's antisemitic argument contains traces of historical nihilism. The apparent ingratitude of the Jews is interpreted as a sign of some ulterior, and inevitably sinister, motive. Significantly, the fact that Avramov raised the problem of Jewish 'ingratitude' in reply to the question about the Elders of Zion, indicates that behind the apparent 'Srbophobia' amongst Jews she sees the kind of causality characteristic of the most infamous example of the antisemitic conspiracy tradition.

In Chapter 7 of *The Trilateral*, classical antisemitic conspiratorial themes are also incorporated into the analysis of contemporary conspiracy. In the chapter entitled *Yugoslavia caught in the net of conflicting interests* Avramov reveals the Vatican's influence in the dissolution of Yugoslavia, partly through the mysterious 'charity organisation' Opus Dei (p.127).⁵ The Vatican's aim is said to be the creation of a 'Roman Europe' a principle on which 'the Vatican has been building its policies for centuries' (p.131). Avramov goes on to discuss the alleged conspiratorial collaboration between the Vatican and the Trilateral Commission. The coalition between the Catholic Church and the Trilateral Commission is explained by reference to the 'Holy Alliance' between the US and the Vatican. She describes this alliance as 'an unusual, informal, Catholic-Jewish united front' (p.128). Avramov made a similar point during the conversation when she commented on the 'perfidy of Vatican policy' and noted that 'the Vatican entered a coalition both with Jews and with Muslims, all against Orthodox Christianity'. In both instances, Avramov equates the US establishment and the Trilateral Commission with the Jewish community, thus attributing to Jews a key role in the anti-Serbian conspiracy. In doing so she was once again drawing upon the antisemitic heritage of the conspiracy tradition.

Finally, Avramov's book contains numerous other, less direct allusions to the Jewish nature of the alleged conspiracy. For example, in the conclusion to the book, when referring to the 'chain' of conspiracies, Avramov alleges that behind the contemporary world elite conspiracy lies 'transnational capital'. She goes on to suggest that the:

'The main exponents of the 'new' social engineering are the transnational European and American banking houses, the same ones which financed the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, at the end of the First World War.' (Avramov, 1998; p.137)

In Chapter 2 it was noted that the alleged involvement of Western banking families in the financing of the Russian revolution originates from one of the best known antisemitic conspiratorial myths of the 1920s, disseminated at the time by White Russian émigrés (Poliakov, 1987; Billig, 1978). Although Avramov on this occasion does not directly implicate Jews, by reproducing this myth, she effectively perpetuates a notable aspect of the antisemitic ideological tradition. Something similar applies to the revelation made in the introduction to *The Trilateral* about the life of Karl Marx. Avramov suggests, in a very matter-of-fact way, that Marx, 'who learnt a lot from [the founder of the Illuminati] Weishaupt' (p.13) was a member of a Satanic cult, which affected his political writing. The allusion to a connection between Marx, the Illuminati and Satanic influences, all in the context of a conspiratorial explanation, is once again a pattern characteristic of antisemitic conspiracist culture exemplified by the writings of Ratibor Đurđević.

The presence of antisemitic themes in accounts belonging to the world elite conspiracy theory suggests that while apparently distancing itself from the antisemitic tradition of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, and portraying itself as a reasonable explanation of international relations, this type of explanation is at the same time a continuation and refinement of the same conspiratorial ideological tradition.

7.5. Emergence of antisemitic tradition in *Politika*

Avramov's work illustrates how the Bilderberg-type conspiracy theory can make reference to the older antisemitic tradition, while not seeming, at first sight, to situate itself within that tradition. A further example of such work appeared between 4 – 6 June, 1999 in *Politika*, when the newspaper published a three-part series of articles entitled *Are the creators of the New World Order inventing a New Age Religion?*. The author, a young journalist called Gordana Knežević, explored the hidden powers supposedly lying behind the 'new geopolitical map of the World'. The first article in the series, entitled *Invisible clique rules the planet* begins by outlining the basic idea shared by all the 'tireless explorers of the so-called conspiracy theories and interpreters of hidden symbolism in crucial world events' (*Politika*, 4 June, 1999, p. 15). The 'basic idea' is the assumption that the war in Yugoslavia was part of a wider conspiracy:

'Creators of New World Order leave nothing to chance. The great religious and esoteric war over spheres of interest and power which has been fought for years, is just the final crusade which brings us into the era of the New Age, into the new kingdom of humanism without God.' (ibid.)

The theme of hidden manipulators is then elaborated. Knežević writes that

‘visible world politicians, such as Tony Blair, Robin Cook, Madeline Albright, even Bill Clinton are just protégés, toys. Behind the idea of the New World Order lies capital, which, it is thought, is in the hands of the most powerful world bankers, who spread their tentacles, power and influence via a hierarchical web of public and secret organisations’. (ibid.)

The series of articles outlines the familiar themes of world elite conspiracy theory. The group of seven most developed countries (G-7), the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations and the Bilderberg group are some of the institutions which are said to belong to the myriad of ‘public and secret organisations’ implicated in the conspiracy. Significantly, the author also includes the Illuminati in this list. In the second article in the series (*Who is who in the anti-Christian conspiracy*) Knežević links the ideology and aspirations of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral Commission to the ideal of a New World Order, ‘developed as long ago as the 18th century, within the circles of the secret organisation of the ‘illuminated’ (the Illuminati), a heretical Christian sect, with strong elements of mysticism’ (*Politika*, 5 June 1999, p.12). The source cited to support this claim is the Yugoslav Army publication *Vojska* which, ‘in a series of articles published in 1994, claimed, with certainty, that the number of ‘Illuminati’ in Yugoslavia suddenly increased prior to the beginning of the war in 1991’ (ibid.)

From the Illuminati to the wilder reaches of conspiracy theory is a short step. Knežević describes the organisation cited as the most important and the most secret of all conspiratorial forces: the Committee of 300, ‘a gigantic, oligarchic supra-national octopus with a grip on the whole planet’, whose members are also known as the ‘Olympians’ (*Invisible clique rules the planet*). The Committee is seen as the highest ruling body of the New World Order, consisting of ‘ancient oligarchic families from Venice, Europe’s Black nobility, the British Royal family, representatives of Wall Street’s largest financial institutions and liberal politicians from the East Coast of the US’ (*Who is who in the anti-Christian conspiracy*). At the head of this supreme ruling body is ‘David Rockefeller (who holds the title of the Emperor of Davidian stock) and 12 of the world’s most powerful financial moguls’ (*Invisible clique rules the planet*).

The reference to David Rockefeller is not an unusual occurrence in the context of classical conspiracy theory. The Rockefellers are in reality a Protestant family and some conspiracy theorists, wishing to distance themselves from the charge of antisemitism, sometimes make a point of emphasising their non-Jewish origin (e.g. Allen in *None dare call it conspiracy*).

Nevertheless, the antisemitic tradition of the conspiracy theory, which seeks to link all powerful financial forces into a Jewish network, have often 'Judaised' the Rockefellers. This is certainly the case amongst Yugoslav antisemitic conspiracy theorists. For example, in one of his books, Đurđević claims that 'Rockefellers are Portuguese Jews - and only a few Americans are aware of this' (Đurđević, 1996).

The description of Rockefeller in the *Politika* article as an 'Emperor of Davidian stock' is revealing. The term 'Emperor' suggests something more than merely a financial mogul - an Emperor possesses supreme political power. As a further illustration of Rockefeller's authority, Knežević describes the Trilateral Commission, the Bilderberg group and the Council on Foreign Relations as 'Rockefeller's agencies' (*Invisible clique rules the planet, Politika*, 4 June, 1999, p.15). However, it is the term 'Davidian' which is particularly interesting. It is a code-word referring to the Jewish aspect of the alleged conspiracy. To have used 'Jewish' would have run the risk of introducing the key theme too blatantly. Many of *Politika's* readers might then have dismissed the piece as antisemitic. Instead a code-word is used whose significance might pass unnoticed by the majority of the readers of *Politika*. What matters is not whether the readers recognised what was being asserted but that the writer used an unusual term whose rhetoric suggests a tactic of partial concealment. Knowledgeable readers – especially sympathisers well-versed in the conspiracy theory and its rhetoric – would recognise the code word. Moreover, they would pick up a further reference. The choice of the number of Emperor Rockefeller's 'deputies' was not haphazard. The writer mentions the '12 financial moguls' who work with Rockefeller. Those versed in the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* would recognise a thematic link with the twelve Jewish Elders of that conspiracy. In this way, the most notorious themes of the conspiracy tradition are signified.

It is noteworthy that Knežević did not present the views in the articles specifically as her own.⁶ She claimed to be reproducing the opinions of various 'experts', such as Pavle Matić, editor of a fringe quasi-religious and mystical publication *Nostradamus*, and Spasoje Vlajić, author of a number of volumes in the field of pseudo-science and para-psychology. In doing so, Knežević was effectively distancing herself from the views that she was reporting. Also, she qualified some claims with clauses such as 'it is alleged' or 'they say'. Significantly, such distancing is limited within the context of the article. The main thrust of the argument is to suggest that there might be something in such a view - they are not to be dismissed as fanciful. Thus, the author claims that one does not have to be either 'paranoid' or a 'fanatic for hidden symbolism' in order to see 'the contours of the new kingdom which erases all national and religious sovereignties which stand in its way' (*Invisible clique rules the planet*).

Knežević also made a reference to the 'esoteric war', and gave constant allusions to number 666 which is seen as underlying the whole New World Order (see below). In such references there was no distancing.

The reference to 'paranoia' and 'fanaticism' in Knežević's article is worthy of note because it reveals an orientation towards the popular conception of conspiracy theory as a feature of psycho-pathology, political extremism or quirkiness. Similarly, Pavle Matic, editor of the *Nostradamus* magazine, is quoted in the articles in *Politika* as saying that his idea of the 'great esoteric war' 'might seem ridiculous at first' (*Invisible clique rules the planet*). Yet in both cases, the recognition of the potentially questionable nature of the conspiratorial explanation is not used to undermine it. On the contrary, it is used to argue that the belief in conspiracy theory is a normal and rational way of interpreting reality. The fact that the idea of an esoteric war might seem ridiculous 'at first' implies that, as one becomes better acquainted with what Matic refers to as 'the magic of esoterica', the mystical and quasi-religious conspiracy theory might prove to be credible and reasonable. Similarly, Knežević invokes 'paranoia' and 'fanaticism' in order to dismiss these accusations and argue that the views of the 'tireless explorers' should be taken seriously.

The fact that Knežević explicitly presents Vlajić and Matic as experts is also significant. She describes them as 'tireless explorers of so-called conspiracy theories and interpreters of hidden symbols in crucial world events' (*Invisible clique rules the planet*) As important as what Knežević says is what she omits. She provides no word of warning to readers that the 'tireless explorers' might belong to the discredited fringes of politics (see below). Quite the reverse, she presents her sources as credible figures.

Another interesting feature of Knežević's three articles is their mystical element, including numerology. For example, Francois Mitterand is revealed to be the first of the 'Seven bald-headed rulers of the world' whose arrival was prophesised by Nostradamus, while 'G-7', the group of seven most developed world countries are linked to the 'Greghors', the fallen angels who rebelled against God (*Invisible clique rules the planet*). Also, in Knežević's article the presence of the number 666 in the barcode of the Shengen Visa is cited as significant in the context of the conspiracy (*Men with the seal of the Beast, Politika, 6 June, 1999, p.15*). Since the 1980s, allegations concerning the Satanic nature of the barcodes have been a regular occurrence in literature propagated by the Christian Right in the US (Pipes, 1998). Interestingly, Pipes traced the roots of this curious claim to early 20th Century antisemitic literature which saw in (Jewish-owned) big business the representatives of Satan. Sergei Nilus, the first publisher of *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is said to have developed a

'system' for detecting satanic messages in commercial trademarks (Pipes, 1998; p.231, n31). The overall mystical-religious aspect of the articles in *Politika* places the conspiracy theory articulated by Knežević closer to Đurđević's work than to the more 'rational' style of Avramov's *Trilateral*.

Something similar can be said of the portrayal of the conspiracy as having an anti-Christian and Satanic character. The titles of the articles set the scene: *Who is who in the anti-Christian conspiracy* (*Politika*, 5 June, 1999) and *Men with the seal of the Beast* (*Politika*, 6 June, 1999). The destruction of Christianity is seen as the ultimate aim of the conspiracy. For example, Spasoje Vlajić an 'expert in the field of parapsychology' is quoted in the final article:

'The web of dark symbols from the planners in the shadows and their demonic influence are hanging over the whole of humanity, threatening to poison it materially, mentally and spiritually, and code it in accordance with the requirements of the new Empire which threatens to replace the two thousand-year-old Christian civilisation.' (*Men with the seal of the Beast*, *Politika*, 6 June, 1999, 15)

Reference to the Satanic and anti-Christian aspects of the alleged plot are a common feature of extreme Orthodox antisemitic writings in Serbia, where the terms 'Satanic' and 'Judaic' are integrally linked. This is certainly the case in Đurđević's books, as well as in some of Velimirović's antisemitic writing. For instance, in *Words to the Serbian People Through the Dungeon Window* Velimirović portrayed Jews as the representatives of Satan:

'[Jews] had risen against Christ, and had trodden on Him and killed him...Blinded by Satan just like Judas, they did not see God in Christ. Inspired by the stinking breath of Satan, they tried and killed Christ. And on top of everything, they proved to be worse enemies of God than the godless Pilate...The Devil taught them how to rise against the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Devil taught them throughout all the centuries up until today how to fight against the sons of Christ, the children of light, the followers of the Gospels and eternal life.' (Velimirović, 1998, p. 193)

As was noted in Chapter 3, Velimirović's teachings provided an ideological basis for a number of antisemitic conspiracy theorists, including Đurđević. Although Knežević's articles contain no explicit antisemitic references comparable to those found in the writings of Velimirović or Đurđević, the constant emphasis on the Satanic and anti-Christian nature of the conspiracy provides a thematic link with the antisemitic tradition of Serbian ultra-Orthodoxy. For instance, as has already been noted, Knežević's article *Men with the seal of the Beast* quotes 'Professor' Spasoje Vlajić. While quotations in *Politika* contained no outwardly antisemitic references, in other writings Vlajić directly implicates Jews in the anti-Christian conspiracy. Vlajić's writing will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter so only a single example will be considered at this point. In a recent interview in *Duga*, Vlajić

expands on the idea of Satanic influence in Western culture and ponders on its manifestation in the development of the Internet:

'The code for entering the internet is WWW. According to the numerical coding of the Jewish alphabet, WWW corresponds to 666. One should also bear in mind that computer technology was invented and developed by the military industry with the aim of mastering our lives.' (*Tesla's secret in the service of the people, Duga, April, 1999, p.39*)

The numerical symbol of the Devil, the presence of which was mentioned and elaborated upon in *Politika*, was on this occasion explicitly linked with Jewish culture. Consequently, although Knežević's articles do not explicitly mention the role of the Jews in the Satanic, anti-Christian conspiracy, they nonetheless lead the reader on a sort of 'paper-chase' towards the kind of antisemitism that cannot be directly expressed in a mainstream daily newspaper. The same applies to the treatment of Pavle Matić, the editor of the magazine *Nostradamus* as a respectable authority on 'hidden symbolism in world affairs'. Although Matić does not invoke any overtly antisemitic themes in his contribution to Knežević's articles, the reader is directed to *Nostradamus*, a fringe publication known for propagating antisemitic conspiracy theories (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia Report on Antisemitism, 2001; Čolović, 1999).

7.6. Antisemitism and the Serbian Orthodox Church

So far the conspiracy tradition has been shown to have appeared in the mainstream Yugoslav press during the war with NATO. Despite coded references to the antisemitic elements of this tradition, a boundary was still maintained. A notoriously antisemitic writer such as Đurđević was not given space, at least not in *Politika*. However, Đurđević can be seen to have benefited from a general widening of the boundaries. He was able to publish openly in *Pravoslavlje*, the official publication of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The issue of July 1999 featured his article *Serbs in Europe-Yes, Europe in Serbs-God forbid*. In the article, Đurđević offered a conspiratorial explanation of the Western intervention in Kosovo, as well as depicting the overall 'moral and spiritual pathology' of Western civilisation:

'Satanic Forces - conspiratorial, political, cultural, liberal, leftist - these forces gained the upper hand over healthy, spiritual, Christian traditions. They lead towards the New World Order which is in fact disorder and decay inspired by Satan.' (*Pravoslavlje*, no. 775; July, 1999)

On this occasion, Đurđević's habitual crude and explicit antisemitism was carefully concealed and he made no reference to Jews. Reasons for moderation in Đurđević's article can probably be sought in the fact that explicit antisemitism would not have been tolerated by the editors

and readers of *Pravoslavlje*, nor by the Orthodox mainstream in general. However, in the article Đurđević linked the values of Western civilisation (materialism, liberalism, secularism, etc.) to Satan. This reflected a theme prominent both in Đurđević's overtly antisemitic writings and in the anti-Jewish aspects of the teachings of Nikolaj Velimirović, who refers to Europe as 'Death, eternal Death' (Velimirović, 1998; p.182), to science, industry, politics and individualism as 'four walls of the new tower of Babel' (p.190), and argues that:

'All modern European ideas were invented by Jews, who crucified Christ: democracy, and strikes, and socialism, and atheism, and religious tolerance, and pacifism, and global revolution, and capitalism, and communism. All of them are the inventions of Jews, or rather their father, the Devil.' (Ibid. p.194)

Consequently, even if unequivocal reference to Jewish involvement in the conspiracy is missing from Đurđević's article, the inferred connection between Satanic forces, the development of Western civilisation, and an anti-Christian conspiracy, constitutes a legacy of the semantic link between Satanism and Judaism inherent in classical conspiratorial discourse. Similarly, by providing Đurđević with column space, the editors of *Pravoslavlje* offered one of Serbia's most notorious antisemites the opportunity to promote his ideas and to continue the ideological tradition of the Orthodox Christian Right. Moreover, in the article, Đurđević explicitly directs the reader to his books *War against Christ in America*, *Contemporary Faces of Satan* and *Christian Fort under Siege*, where conspiratorial antisemitism is openly propagated.

7.7. Psychological or ideological problematic: reactions to the emergence of antisemitism in *Politika*

The emergence of antisemitic conspiratorial themes in *Politika* in June 1999 passed virtually unnoticed by the usually perceptive liberal public opinion. The only known reaction at the time came from the sociologist Ivan Čolović, who commented on Knežević's articles in his column in the independent daily newspaper *Danas*. Čolović argued that what made these texts worthy of critical attention and scrutiny was the fact that until then, classical conspiracy theory, with its antisemitic, quasi-religious and Satanic themes, was virtually absent from Serbia's mainstream press. He went on to interpret Knežević's articles as a 'warning that the environment in which such stories breed is in chaos' and predicted that when:

'reasons for chaos are not being sought where they might logically be found, but are sought, in a manner of the centuries old tradition of antisemitism, desperately, somewhere else, in the wrong place, [that place] is then struck by waves of hate and crime' (Čolović, *Rockefeller and the Seven Baldies*, *Danas*, 7 June, 1999)

Six months after the publication of Čolović's comments, in an interview with the Montenegrin daily *Pobjeda* (*Victory*), Serbian-Jewish author Filip David also reflected on the appearance of antisemitic themes in the mainstream press. Like Čolović, David interpreted the emerging antisemitism as a sign that Serbian social and political contexts have become 'abnormal'. He proceeded to explain the dynamic behind this development:

'Once other enemies- Croats, Muslims, Albanians- had been used up, the only one left was one that can never be used up, one that was used by many regimes, in different ages and various situations...in the stories of an external conspiracy there is that final, insipid and poisonous stereotype: Jews rule the world. And I would like to say clearly: these racist and persecutory messages are not transmitted by people on the streets, by those we call the ordinary people, but by the influential part of the intellectual elite and media controlled by the ruling parties' (*New stories about world conspiracies, Pobjeda, 13th January, 2000*)

Both David's and Čolović's comments were published in daily newspapers, and were therefore never meant to provide thorough and scholarly explanations of complex phenomena such as conspiratorial antisemitism or ethnic prejudice. Nonetheless, it is possible to find, in these reactions, echoes of some of the conventional psychological explanations of conspiratorial beliefs examined in Chapter 4. For instance, both David and Čolović invoke the idea of scapegoating. Anti-Jewish prejudice is seen as resulting from the misattribution of blame for a social crisis. Significantly, both authors recognise the cultural specificity of antisemitism: Jews are seen as almost a residual category, a quintessential minority which can be used as a scapegoat once all other 'options' have been exhausted.

As was noted in Chapter 4, the general framework of scapegoating cannot adequately explain the persistence of conspiratorial antisemitism in contemporary society. Reference to a universal psychological dynamic undermines the important differences which exist between antisemitism and other forms of ethnic prejudice. Jews are the only minority who are consistently accused of a global conspiracy. In the case of Yugoslavia, there are no comparable conspiracy theories which invoke Albanians or Croats as conspirators. Prejudice towards these ethnic groups is based primarily on negative feelings and stereotypes, akin to the kind of 'everyday racism' among the White Americans, which Blee (2002) describes in her work (see Chapter 4), or to what Baumann (1999) refers to as 'heterophobia'. The aetiological dynamic behind conspiratorial antisemitism is quite different. As the analysis in the present chapter suggested, anti-Jewish themes emerged from the more general belief in conspiracy, as a result of the antisemitic heritage of the conspiracy tradition. Consequently, different forms of prejudice in contemporary Serbia cannot be explained away by means of an all-inclusive social psychological dynamic such as scapegoating.

It is also interesting that David's explanation of the emergence of antisemitism in Serbia proposes that antisemitic conspiracy theories were disseminated deliberately, for reasons of propaganda, by the Serbian intellectual elite and by the state-controlled media. This seems like a curious claim considering that the advantages of antisemitic conspiracy theory, from the perspective of propaganda, are not immediately obvious. In Serbia, unlike in the Middle East for example, there was no Jewish dimension to the crisis, and therefore no visible political gain from an allegation of Jewish involvement. In fact, reference to anti-Muslim or anti-Catholic themes would have been politically more pertinent considering the religious affiliation of Serbia's 'enemies', namely Bosnian Muslims, Albanians and Croats. And yet, as the present thesis repeatedly suggests, the heart of the conspiracy has been consistently located in the West, often implicating organisations which feature prominently in conspiratorial literature worldwide, namely the Bilderberg group, the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations. The suggestion that 'racist and persecutory' claims about Jews were 'used' or encouraged, for political reasons, by the Serbian regime is too simplistic. While there is no doubt that the Serbian regime and its media promoted the idea of a conspiracy, they did not consciously or deliberately implicate the Jews. Antisemitic themes emerged inadvertently, as the legacy of the conspiratorial culture.

The present chapter has examined in greater detail the dynamic responsible for the emergence of antisemitic themes in Serbian media. It has been suggested that conspiratorial explanations which focus on various world elite organisations are neither historically nor ideologically isolated. Instead, they belong to the established cultural tradition of conspiracy theory, which in the past - from mid-nineteenth century, up until the end of Second World War - was dominated by the notion of a Jewish plot to rule the world. Antisemitism became firmly embedded in the conspiratorial culture and remains a continuing aspect of its ideological heritage. This is especially so considering that the differentiation between world elite and classical conspiracy theory is incomplete, so even the 'reasonable' versions of conspiratorial explanations often include subtle references to the other less acceptable aspects of the conspiracy tradition. Consequently, the proliferation even of outwardly innocuous versions of conspiratorial discourse (e.g. the Bilderberg-type conspiracy), brought into the open the darker, antisemitic aspects of the conspiracy tradition.

Furthermore, this dynamic was facilitated by the fact that the dissemination of the more 'reasonable' versions of conspiratorial discourse (e.g. protoconspiracy theories or Avramov-style world elite conspiracy theory) led to a wider acceptance of the overall interpretative framework based on the notion of hidden forces and motives in politics. Once this idea achieved the status of common sense, the more extreme and prejudicial versions of

conspiracy theory such as those promoted by Đurđević and the Orthodox Right, became perceived as more credible. Classical conspiracy theory loses a lot of the unreasonableness usually associated with it, if one accepts the notion that world events are, and always have been, the result of a conspiracy. Consequently, the more general proliferation of conspiratorial discourse during the war with Nato, contributed to the gradual shifting of boundaries between what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable explanations in a way that promoted various themes, previously thought to be too extreme and radical, into the realm of acceptable, albeit not always normative explanatory discourse. As a result of this dynamic, classical antisemitic conspiracy theories were allowed to appear, relatively unnoticed, in a Serbian mainstream newspaper such as *Politika*.

Chapter 8:

Conspiracy Theory and Paranormal Explanations

The previous chapter examined the emergence of antisemitic conspiracy themes in the Serbian mainstream press at the time of the Nato bombing. This development was illustrated using the example of the three-part series of articles entitled *Are the creators of the New World Order inventing a New Age Religion?*, published in *Politika* in June 1999. However, the articles in question were not noteworthy solely because of the link with the antisemitic conspiracy tradition. The three texts by Gordana Knežević also contained references to a number of esoteric and occult themes, including the symbolic significance of the number 666, and Nostradamus' prophecies. In the article *Men with the seal of the Beast*, Knežević even quoted Spasoje Vlajić as asserting that Nato's war against Yugoslavia was part of the 'first world parapsychological war' (*Politika*, 6 June, 1999, p.15).

A number of authors have noted that, ever since the early 1990s, there has been an increased interest in paranormal phenomena in Serbian society (Popadić, 2000; Pavlović, 2001). In Serbia today there are at least five specialist magazines which deal with paranormal phenomena: *Zona Sumraka (Twilight Zone)*, *Dosije X (X Files)*, *Čudo (Miracle)*, *Treće Oko (Third Eye)* and *Fenomeni (Phenomena)*. Importantly, none of these is distributed solely through networks of enthusiasts, or by mail order, but are available from newsagents throughout the country. The number of publications is particularly noteworthy bearing in mind that in Serbia newspapers and magazines are relatively expensive, so editors of most publications are engaged in a continuous struggle with the financial consequences of decreasing circulation. The fact that five magazines of the same genre are able to survive in a competitive media market suggests that there is a public demand for the material they provide.

The increased interest in paranormal phenomena in the 1990s appears not to have been limited to the specialist press. Serbian mainstream press and electronic media also became more open to the views of various clairvoyants, fortune-tellers and astrologers, whose predictions and prophesies were publicised fairly regularly (Popadić, 2000, Pavlović, 2001). *Politika* too occasionally reported the achievements of Russian parapsychologists (Pavlović, 2001). Significantly however, for the best part of the decade, mystical and esoteric themes were confined to specialist columns devoted to astrology or the world of esoterica. With

Knežević's articles this was not the case. In June 1999, Nostradamus, the number of the Beast and the idea of parapsychological warfare were invoked in the context of a political explanation.

The presence of paranormal themes in *Politika*, and the fact that they are invoked in a rather matter-of-fact way, without any critical comment, suggests that conspiracy theories may not be the only extraordinary type of explanation whose status in Serbian society changed at the time of the Nato bombing. This apparent change in the perceived acceptability of paranormal explanations has been noted by Ivan Čolović, in the article in *Danas* cited in the previous chapter.

'The number 666, the Mark of the Beast, has been widely discussed in local quasi-scientific and quasi-political literature (for example *Nostradamus* magazine and books by the renowned inventor of the "formula of light" [Spasoje Vlajić]) but I cannot recall it ever having been written about in [Politika] before. It seemed that our senior newspaper had not lost its level-headedness when it came to this kind of lunacy.' (Čolović, *Rockefeller and the Seven Baldies*, *Danas*, 7 June 1999)

Chapters 8 and 9 will explore further the proposition that, in the late 1990s, the status of paranormal, esoteric and mystical ideas underwent an important shift. The chapters will examine the dynamic which turned certain paranormal ideas, which were previously considered to be beyond the pale, into acceptable explanations of the war with Nato.

The present chapter will begin by examining in more detail the explanatory logic and the rhetoric of one of the more widely known paranormal accounts which were disseminated in the Serbian media in the 1990s. The tale in question refers to the alleged activities of the so-called *Group 69*, a team of enthusiasts for the supernatural, who were supposedly engaged in the development of a parapsychological defence system for the Serbian people. This particular paranormal account has been chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the principal exponent of *Group 69* is Spasoje Vlajić, one of the 'experts' quoted in Knežević's articles. Knežević herself invoked Vlajić's connection with this group when she noted, in one of the articles, that Vlajić was 'an associate of the "Group 69", the former special unit of the Yugoslav Army for "defence against psychotronic weapons and parapsychological attacks"' (*Men with the seal of the Beast*, *Politika*, 6 June, 1999). Therefore, by choosing to focus on *Group 69* the chapter will build on the argument presented in the earlier chapters. Also, Vlajić can be said to be a recognisable public figure and a prominent exponent of the discourse of the paranormal. As was suggested in the biographical details provided in Chapter 5, Vlajić was a frequent guest on the popular chat show *Black Pearls* and occasionally appeared in other media as well. With that in mind the story of *Group 69* is probably familiar to a sizeable

proportion of the Serbian public, and is one of the better known examples of contemporary paranormal explanatory discourse in Serbia.

The examination of the accounts of *Group 69* will not be limited to Vlajić's work. The analysis will also look at the early writings of Colonel Svetozar Radišić, a military officer associated with the group, whose more recent writing will be explored in the next chapter.

Vlajić's and Radišić's work will be used to suggest that, in Serbia, conspiracy theories and paranormal accounts were not competing explanatory frameworks. Rather, as is evident from Knežević's articles in *Politika*, the two extraordinary explanations complemented each other, and were often blended into a single account. At the same time, the present chapter will suggest that, in spite of the compatibility between conspiratorial and paranormal explanations, in the mid-1990s the two did not occupy the same status in the Serbian ideological milieu. This will be illustrated by the example of military publications. While the basic thesis of conspiracy penetrated mainstream military journals, mystical and occult themes were noticeably absent. In other words, while conspiracy theory was gradually becoming a tolerable (and tolerated) explanatory discourse, paranormal explanations were, at that time, still considered to be beyond the boundaries of acceptable opinion. This particular argument will set the scene for the following chapter, which examines the convergence, in terms of public standing and presence in the media, between conspiracy theory and paranormal explanations around the time of the Nato bombing.

8.1. Who has the secret weapon? - 'pipe dream' rumours in time of war

In Chapter 4, it was suggested that there is a notable overlap between the phenomena of rumour, conspiracy theories and paranormal beliefs. Conspiracy theories and tales about paranormal events often take the form of rumours and are disseminated by channels traditionally associated with rumourmongering. Also, all three phenomena tend to emerge out of the same social conditions. They proliferate in times of crisis and uncertainty, especially in response to the breakdown of alternative explanations.

Traditional research on rumour has paid particular attention to rumourmongering in times of war (Allport and Postman, 1947; Rosnow, 1974; Knapp, 1944; Nkpa, 1975, 1977). This is not surprising considering that wars are a typical example of the kind of traumatic conditions thought to be conducive to the development of rumour. Also, rumours are generally considered to be detrimental to the war effort and the morale of the population, so psychologists have been especially encouraged to focus on this aspect of the phenomenon.

One particular type of rumour which has been shown to appear in times of war concerns the alleged existence of some secret and powerful weapon (Nkpa, 1977). Most frequently, these rumours contend that the enemy has come into possession of some unusual means of waging war. Such allegations fall within the category of 'bogey' or 'fear' rumour (Knapp, 1944), in that they reflect the fears and the anxieties of the population. Neubauer (1999) cites the example of one such rumour, popular among Russian soldiers after the First World War. According to this rumour, the English had trained a herd of monkeys in the skills of military warfare. These monkeys were thought to be superior to ordinary soldiers because 'monkeys are immune to propaganda' and were therefore capable of defeating the otherwise invincible Bolsheviks (Neubauer, 1999; p.92-93). Similarly, during the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), residents of Biafra believed that the Nigerian army had developed a weapon which caused the death of unborn babies. Some rumours even alleged that the Nigerian army employed witches capable of killing the babies by eating the hearts of the foetuses (Nkpa, 1977).

Significantly, not all rumours of secret, and often supernatural weapons are 'bogey' rumours. Shibutani (1966) describes a rumour which swept through England in the Spring of 1915, where an unusual means of warfare was cited in a positive context. According to this story, in the battle of Mons British troops had been outflanked by the German cavalry. As German horsemen advanced towards the British soldiers, a row of shining white angels allegedly arose and stood before the enemy, allowing the British to retreat (Shibutani, 1966; p.89). In this case, the tale of divine intervention served as a 'pipe-dream' rumour, an often excessively optimistic evaluation and interpretation of events which is thought to express the relevant population's hopes and wishes (Knapp, 1944; Nkpa, 1975, 1977).¹

The concept of a 'pipe-dream' rumour is interesting for the present discussion, in that many of the ideas contained in the account of *Group 69* and its activities could be interpreted as reflecting the hopes and wishes of the Serbian population, caught up in the tide of war. As will become apparent later, the principal theme which runs through the story of *Group 69* and its pursuits is the notion that this unit was in possession of a powerful defensive weapon, created on the basis of secret esoteric knowledge which transcends the boundaries of contemporary science. However, if examined in a broader context, the story of *Group 69* does not appear to be a straightforward 'pipe-dream' rumour. As Vlajić's contribution to Knežević's articles suggests, the optimistic account of the *Group 69*'s endeavour is embedded in a much darker story about a sinister and threatening Satanic conspiracy. As such, the account of *Group 69* is simultaneously a bogey and a pipe-dream rumour. Nkpa (1975) refers to this type of hearsay as 'neo-pipe-dream' rumour. In this type of story, 'bogey' and 'pip-

dream' rumours are fused together but in a way that allows the 'pipe-dream' component to neutralise the 'bogey' aspect of the tale.

Importantly, the alleged activities of *Group 69* were not the only instance of secret weapon rumour in Serbia in the 1990s. Shortly before the 'existence' of *Group 69* was revealed to the public, the story about a powerful electronic device, said to have been developed by the Russians, began to spread across Serbia. The 'rumour' in question did not emerge spontaneously, but was started by the Russian nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky during a visit to Yugoslavia in early 1994 (Frazer and Lancelle, 1994). Interestingly, the rumour about Zhirinovsky's lethal device, and allegations concerning the existence of *Group 69* were not unconnected events. As will become apparent, the existence of *Group 69* was first revealed to the public in response to 'rumours' about the Russian electronic weapon.

8.2. Prelude to the revelations about *Group 69*: Vladimir Zhirinovsky and 'elipton'

During a brief visit to Serbia and Montenegro, in February 1994, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the far-right Russian Liberal Democratic Party and a known antisemitic conspiracy theorist (Frazer and Lancelle, 1994) made a somewhat unusual disclosure. At a press conference held in the Montenegrin capital Podgorica, Zhirinovsky revealed that he is in possession of a 'new weapon' which could 'save the Slavic world and help the Serbs defend themselves from the terrorist West' (*Zhirinovsky from our street, Vreme*, 7 February, 1994). He explained that:

'Nobody in the world has such a powerful weapon. We are talking about an electronic-laser weapon which can be used from the ground or from the air. It leaves nothing alive, but after its use there is no radiation or consequences like after an atom bomb. It is in fact an ecological weapon which we won't use unless we have to' (ibid.)

Zhirinovsky went on to argue that the weapon, 'elipton' would be tested, by Russian officers 'loyal to him', on a 'small area near [the Bosnian town of] Brčko', but that the tests would be sufficiently convincing to 'cool the heads of Western politicians' (ibid.).

While Serbia's independent media, such as the magazine *Vreme*, mocked Zhirinovsky's claims regarding 'elipton' (e.g. *Zhirinovsky from our street*, 7 February, 1994; *Elipton in a potty*, 21 February, 1994), pro-regime newspapers treated Zhirinovsky's contribution to the Serbian struggle against the 'terrorist West' with greater respect. Although Zhirinovsky's visit itself was largely ignored by the pro-regime media (because of Zhirinovsky's association with the then much maligned leader of the Radical Party, Vojislav Šešelj), revelations regarding

'elipton' received some coverage. For example, *Politika* accurately reported a press conference organised, at the time of Zhirinovskiy's visit, by the Party of Serbian Unity (PSU), a marginal right-wing political party founded by the paramilitary leader Željko Ražnjatović Arkan. Present at the press conference, besides Arkan, was Alexei Vidnyenkin, deputy leader of Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic party. The principal topic of the conference was 'elipton'. Vidnyenkin explained, and *Politika* reported, that 'the weapon is based on the integration of protons and neutrons at high temperature'. Zhirinovskiy supposedly gave the 'elipton' to Arkan 'who will activate it should great powers decide to bomb [Bosnian Serb] cities'. Arkan and his Russian visitor also revealed that the 'elipton' was designed in 'a secret lab, by a Russian professor and his three associates' (*Politika*, 5 February, 1994; p.11). Four days later, *Politika* dedicated a few inches of column space to another press conference organised by the Party of Serbian Unity, where it was revealed that 'elipton' would be produced in the Serbian town of Šabac, by a company owned by the local PSU official, Tomislav Simić (*Politika*, 9 February, 1994, p. 9).

Importantly, neither of the two articles in *Politika* contained any scepticism regarding the claims made at these conferences, and did not approach the issue with the sort of irony which was in abundance in opposition media. The articles merely reported what Arkan and Vidnyenkin told the press. Several weeks later however, *Politika* explored the topic of secret weaponry within its science section. The article *Is there a Russian secret weapon? Canon with neutron particles* (*Politika*, 20 February 1994 p.13), written by Stanko Stoilković, attempted to examine, in more general terms, the possibilities of electronic warfare. The analysis was based on a book *Scientific/technical programme and warfare* written by a former Yugoslav Army officer, Dr Zlatko Rendulić. Stoilković's article expressed some doubt regarding the applicability of electronic warfare. It suggested that these weapons were initially designed to work in space, and as such could not be easily adapted to 'atmospheric conditions'. However, the examination of the topic ended with the question 'What is happening now?'. The question was left unanswered, thus leaving open the possibility that Russian scientists may have overcome the problems encountered by other researchers and indeed managed to build this sophisticated type of weapon.

The credibility of the claim regarding the power of 'elipton' suffered a serious blow just a few weeks after Zhirinovskiy first publicised the existence of the weapon. In late February, *Vreme* revealed that, *Elektron*, the company from Šabac which was supposed to manufacture the newly acquired electronic weapon, in fact produces children's potties which play a tune 'once liquid comes into contact with the inner surface of the potty' (*Elipton in a potty*, *Vreme*, 21 February, 1994; p, 27). In addition, the author of the article claimed that relevant state

authorities considered the allegation about 'elipton' to be 'the pinnacle of stupidity' and would not even investigate whether a private company from Šabac was capable of producing 'the most powerful laser weapon' in the world.

8.3. 'Yugoslav army's best kept secret' is revealed to the public

Shortly after Vladimir Zhirinovskiy first revealed the existence of the 'elipton', the fortnightly magazine *Duga* published an article which attempted to 'shed some light on the field that links science and esoterica', assumed to be responsible for the development of the Russian electronic weapon. The author of the article, Svetozar Radišić, presented the arguments as a way of 'setting the record straight' by providing an informed analysis of the 'application of esoteric knowledge by the [Yugoslav] military'. (*Anticipating cramp in Clinton's face, Duga, No. 521, 19 February 1994, p.54-56*). Radišić's article was followed by a further two pieces which were published in *Duga* over the period of two months (*Involuntary suicide of Turgut Ozal, Duga, No. 522, 5 March, 1994, p 6-8; No More Secrets, Duga, No. 524, 2 April, 1994, p. 8-9*).² Like the first article in the series, the sequels dealt with the topic of parapsychological warfare and identified a military unit, *Group 69*, as playing a key role in the maintenance of Serbia's parapsychological defence system. The unit was introduced as the 'Yugoslav Army's best kept secret'.

Revelations concerning the existence of *Group 69* were presented as based on conversations with anonymous military officials who belonged to this mysterious group. The first article mentioned, as the main source, a 'surprisingly helpful officer' eager to discuss the topic of 'esoterica in the military' (*Anticipating cramp in Clinton's face*). In a later article Radišić revealed that the officer in question was a 'magically helpful colonel' and presented a further source, a 'second lieutenant, who is known within the group as **Zombi**, because he often directed the conversation towards the topic of "zombing" and the "Western PSI-virus"' (*No more secrets*). All three articles were presented as if they had been written by a dispassionate observer and outsider to the group. The majority of the readership of *Duga* probably assumed that Svetozar Radišić was an ordinary reporter doing a bit of investigative journalism.

What the articles failed to reveal is that Radišić was in fact an active military officer (at that time a second lieutenant), and editor-in-chief of the prestigious military journal *Vojno Delo*. More importantly, he was also one of the founding members of *Group 69*.

The reasons behind the concealment of Radišić's credentials in *Duga* are manifold. Firstly, Yugoslav army regulations prevented officers from disclosing their military status when presenting an unofficial position in the national press. According to Ljubodrag Stojadinović,

former Chief of the Army Information Bureau, and Radišić's superior officer at the time of the publication of the articles in *Duga*, before 1995 (when tighter regulations were introduced) army personnel were allowed to communicate with the media without the authorisation of the Information Bureau. However, they could only do so 'as citizens', and therefore without disclosing their rank.³

There is another possible reason for the absence of information regarding Radišić's military background. One of the motifs which runs throughout the three articles is the idea that *Group 69* was veiled in secrecy. Radišić's collocutors are referred to by means of nicknames or initials, and their work is said to be 'concealed in safes with "seven locks"' (*No more secrets*). The whole subject of parapsychological warfare is regarded as one that 'cannot be accessed without a "special permit"' (*Anticipating cramp in Clinton's face*). The element of mystery surrounding the group would have been severely undermined if it had been made obvious that the revelations came from an active officer and one of the group's more prominent members. In other words, if the group indeed was the 'Yugoslav Army's best kept secret' why would a relatively high ranking officer disclose its existence and describe its operation in a magazine like *Duga*?

At the same time, it is interesting that Radišić chose not use a pseudonym, which is a common practice in the Yugoslav press when some disclosure is seen as sufficiently sensitive or controversial to warrant anonymity. It is possible that Radišić did not particularly wish to dissociate himself from the claims made in the articles, or to conceal his identity entirely. In some ways, this reveals the use of the tactic of partial concealment. For the majority of *Duga's* readers Radišić's identity would remain obscure, and his relative anonymity would reinforce the mystery surrounding the group. At the same time, for a small proportion of the readership who might be aware of Radišić's military status, or for those who share his fascination with the paranormal, his association with the military establishment would give the claims about *Group 69* additional rhetorical force. This is apparent in the way in which Radišić's rank, which was initially concealed, becomes invoked in subsequent literature on *Group 69*. For example, in the book *The First World Parapsychological War*, Spasoje Vlajić suggests that parapsychological warfare was taboo 'until Colonel S. Radišić revealed in the Belgrade magazine *Duga* that the previously unknown *Group 69*, in charge of defence from psychotronic weapons and parapsychological attacks, operates under the auspices of Yugoslav Army joint Chief of staff' (Vlajić, 1998; p.6).⁴ In this case Radišić's rank is cited in support of the claim regarding the existence of *Group 69*. After all, the disclosure of institutional secrets generally tends to be regarded as more believable when made by insiders. Vlajić acknowledges this later in the same book when he suggests that Radišić's rank of

colonel and position within the military (as the chief editor of *Vojno Delo*) make his testimony particularly credible as it originates 'from the very sources of objective information' (p.31). In that way, Radišić's revelations about *Group 69* have subsequently acquired, in certain circles, the kind of institutional authority which was absent from the articles themselves.

Radišić's revelations in *Duga* constitute the first mention of *Group 69* in the Serbian national press. Most of the ideas outlined in the articles were subsequently elaborated by Spasoje Vlajić, in the above mentioned book *The First World Parapsychological War*, published in 1998.⁵ In fact, there is not a single aspect of the activity of *Group 69* which Radišić explores in his articles, which is not discussed in greater detail in Vlajić's books. Because of the similarities between Radišić's and Vlajić's accounts, the conceptualisation and the public image of *Group 69* can be said to be the product of the intellectually fruitful (albeit possibly informal) co-operation between the group's two principal promoters. For that reason in subsequent sections, which deal in more detail with the accounts of *Group 69*, the work of Vlajić and Radišić will be examined as belonging to a single explanatory framework. The analysis will focus mainly on Vlajić's more detailed and elaborate writing, as well as on two recorded conversations with Vlajić which took place in December 2000. Further extracts from the transcripts of the recorded conversations with Vlajić are provided in Appendix A. Both Vlajić's and Radišić's biographical details have been outlined in Chapter 5.

8.4. The structure and membership of *Group 69*

Information about *Group 69* and its activities does not come solely from Radišić and Vlajić. Evidence that an assembly of enthusiasts for the paranormal actually existed, and met on a regular basis in the Yugoslav Army headquarters, comes from Ljubodrag Stojadinović, chief of the Yugoslav Army Information Bureau from 1993 to 1995. Since his expulsion from the army in 1995, Stojadinović has been writing on defence-related matters in the independent press and news media.⁶ In 1997, the glossy current affairs magazine *Profil* published an extract from Stojadinović's as yet unpublished memoirs, which revealed some interesting facts regarding *Group 69* (*American jets were shot down without missiles, Profil, No.13, 1997*). Since then, Stojadinović has written about the group in a number of other publications, including *Veciti Fenomeni (Eternal Phenomena)*, *Glas Javnosti*, *Argument* and others.

In contrast to Vlajić's and Radišić's account of the 'Yugoslav army's best kept secret' Stojadinović is not sympathetic towards the alleged aims of *Group 69*. He regards the existence of a 'parapsychological unit' as convincing evidence of the absurd situation in

which the Yugoslav army found itself in the 1990s. In his writing, Stojadinović recounts how, in January 1994, he was approached by Colonel Bogi Stojmenović (possibly the 'magically helpful colonel' mentioned in Radišić's article), an inconspicuous 'old man' troubled by numerous 'tics', who revealed to him the existence of a group of officers interested in the 'paranormal'. The group allegedly included Stojmenović, Svetozar Radišić, and Simeon Savić, a former sergeant who was forced to retire in 1991 on grounds of 'emotional immaturity'. The three officers met regularly with other 'experts' including the Serbian painter and nationalist Milić od Mačve, Serbia's most famous astrologer and clairvoyant Milja Vujanović-Regulus, and Spasoje Vlajić. According to Stojadinović, the six constituted the core of *Group 69*.

The structure of the group outlined by Stojadinović largely matches that which can be found in the works of Vlajić and Radišić. However, the names of the individuals involved are absent from the latter accounts. In *The First World Parapsychological War*, Vlajić suggested that the group consisted of 'high ranking officers of the VJ' who were primarily interested in the 'consequences of the application of different types of electromagnetic radiation on brain waves', and who adhered in their research to 'scientific criteria, especially mathematical probability and informational entropy' (Vlajić 1998; p. 54). On the other hand, the bulk of the work of *Group 69* was allegedly carried out by 'individuals gifted with extraordinary parapsychological powers, eager to participate in experiments and execute specific tasks' (p.54). Vlajić also warned that the efforts of the group were constantly undermined by various 'fanatics' who 'overestimated their own abilities and the power of parapsychological defence' as well as by 'useless charlatans', 'agents provocateurs' and 'individuals employed by foreign intelligence agencies' (p.55). The 'gifted individuals' are also mentioned in Radišić's articles in *Duga*, where they are described as 'extralucid individuals whose status is equivalent to that of an expert in associated disciplines' (*Involuntary Suicide of Turgut Ozal*).

It is interesting that during the conversations in December 2000, Vlajić denied the involvement of any 'extralucid' individuals, who in his 1998 book were presented as the group's most active members. Instead, emphasis was placed on 'scientists' within *Group 69*:

'[members of Group 69] were mainly electro-engineers, physicists and psychologists... it was publicised in the press, and the former Army spokesman, who is still the spokesman [Svetozar Radišić] wrote that -and these are colonels who know what this is all about- the group was affiliated to the Yugoslav Army, it is even mentioned that it was affiliated to the Army Chief of Staff. Therefore discoveries are made through specialist work, by people who are experts in this field, electroengineers, physicists, psychologists and probably army personnel in charge of these things...'

. During the second encounter Vlajić was even more explicit:

'I have not met a single esoterist, a single astrologer, nor anyone else who comes from one of these, how should I say, fields which are far away from science. But I certainly did communicate, and in some instances co-operate, with physicists, especially electro-engineers, psychologists. So the stories about some clairvoyants...who today seriously believes in clairvoyants?'

This shift in emphasis could be partly attributed to the context in which the conversation with Vlajić was conducted. Before the first meeting, Vlajić was told that the conversation was to provide material for a project which 'looks at the application of heterodox (scientific) theories in the explanation of historical and political events' and which examines the relationship between Vlajić's work and 'conventional science'. Throughout the interview, Vlajić was eager to shun the label 'heterodox theory' (which was chosen by the author of this thesis as a more neutral alternative to 'pseudoscience') and attempted to present his approach as pure empirical endeavour (see below). The emphasis on scientists within the group, at the expense of 'gifted individuals with parapsychological powers', can therefore be seen as an attempt to manage the identity of 'real scientist'. Furthermore, the denial of the involvement of individuals with paranormal powers reflects a broader trend in Vlajić's more recent writing, where greater emphasis is placed on a blend of (pseudo)science and Christian mysticism, rather than on any kind of pagan 'magic' (see below).

In spite of the fact that the group's more 'gifted' members were neglected in Vlajić's recent writing, one constant feature of the accounts of *Group 69* which is crucial to its rhetoric is the alleged association with the Yugoslav military. Radišić's 1994 articles in *Duga* introduced the group as affiliated to the Yugoslav army, while Vlajić too, recognised the role of 'high ranking officers' in its activities. However, both Vlajić and Radišić treat the involvement of army personnel with notable equivocation. For example, in the earlier extract from the conversation with Vlajić, army personnel were said to be 'probably' involved in the group's activities. Moreover, the responsibility for revealing the link between the group and the army is shifted to Radišić, who as a colonel (and since May 2000, the official army spokesman) 'knows what this is all about'. Yet in the articles in *Duga* to which Vlajić refers, Radišić also attempted to undermine the importance of army personnel by suggesting that the officers had only an 'advisory role' (*No more secrets*). The equivocation regarding the role of the military can be seen as an attempt to manage the issue of (military) credibility without directly implicating the institution of the army in a project with which it might not want to be associated (see below).

It is also noteworthy that although revelations concerning *Group 69* are a regular feature of Vlajić's work, he is adamant that he was never an active member. For example, during the conversation, he explicitly stated that he is 'not a member of any group'. On the other hand he did admit to co-operating with *Group 69* on the project to build the 'long-wave mental shield called the **Serbian Mirror**' (Vlajić, 1998; p.54). The distancing from the group on which Vlajić insists is, in terms of the credibility of his claims, a twin-edged sword. On the one hand it plays an important rhetorical function in reinforcing the veil of mystery which surrounds the group's membership and which is fundamental to the narrative through which *Group 69* is constructed. Members of secret military units seldom interact with the public on a daily basis and talk about their activities, as Vlajić does. At the same time, Vlajić's status of an outsider presents a problem, in that he needs to account for his detailed knowledge of the group's pursuits. How could an outsider know so much about the activities of the supposedly secret group, and why would he be allowed to disclose its efforts in the media and in his publications? Vlajić addressed this issue during the conversation, when following the description of a recent success of *Group 69*, he attended to the issue of accountability:

'I used to socialise with some people from *Group 69*. In fact it is as if they chose me to be some kind of a spokesperson for them, so a lot of information, this is unofficial, but a lot of information had, in some ways...we would be sitting here and the phone would ring and they would tell me something... [addresses a woman in the audience] Ljiljana, you remember, you were here too...and then I would look at it and realise that something important had happened'

Vlajić presented himself as an outsider but, as a spokesperson, a well-informed one. The information he presents is made to appear credible, because it comes directly from the members, without undermining the secrecy and mysterious qualities of the group. In fact, the mystery is enhanced by the suggestion that the group communicates with Vlajić only by phone (Vlajić claims that he *used* to socialise with the group's members, which suggests he no longer does so). The phone on Vlajić's desk, through which the group's discoveries are supposedly revealed to him, at unpredictable times,



is a somewhat old-fashioned and bulky piece of equipment, whose piercing ringing tone adds to the theatrical aspect of Vlajić's public sessions. In his meetings with fans, Vlajić sits at a desk, slightly elevated in relation to the visitors, almost as if on stage. He is surrounded by his books and religious icons, in a small, cold and dark room filled with the scent of incense, characteristic of Orthodox churches. It is in this already eerie atmosphere that the alleged phone-calls occur. Moreover, Vlajić is contacted by *Group 69* during 'office hours', when the conversations are witnessed by people like Ljiljana whose testimony can be called upon when the question of accountability is being addressed. This makes *Group 69* appear remote and

intangible, while the acknowledgement from regular visitors provides evidence that the group communicates to, and in some sense through, Spasoje Vlajić.

8.5. Theoretical framework of Group 69: science, religion and conspiracy theory

The principal idea underlying the activity of *Group 69*, as manifested in the work of both Vlajić and Radišić, is that the future of warfare lies in the mastery of ‘sub-quantum energies’ which bring about parapsychological phenomena. This idea is outlined by Vlajić in the introduction of his book, as a justification for the title *The First World Parapsychological War*. Vlajić postulates that a future ‘Third World War’ will take place on these sub-quantum, ‘psychotronic’ levels, and that the principal target will be ‘human psyche, the conscious and the unconscious’ (1998, p.8). Similarly, in the articles in *Duga*, Radišić quotes members of *Group 69* as claiming that the ‘psychological, information and parapsychological war is well under way’ and that this is why ‘the application of hypnosis, telepathy, precognition, telekinesis, and other esoteric skills by the military’ has become a legitimate concern (*No more secrets*, *Duga*, 2 April, 1994). Significantly, the ‘parapsychological war’, which is effectively a war between Serbs and ‘World powers’, is constructed entirely within a conspiratorial framework. In the introduction of *The First World Parapsychological War*, Vlajić suggests that ‘teams which have the greatest world powers behind them’ work on devising weapons based on ‘various kinds of magic, combined with scientific findings’ (p.5). Parapsychological war is constructed as ‘part of a wider strategy undertaken by the leading world powers’ (p.8). Furthermore, Vlajić emphasises that *The First World Parapsychological War* is not just about parapsychology, but rather:

‘The book that is before us gives a partial answer to the question: Who are the rulers from the shadows who call such dark and radical shots, and of course, what is their aim?’ (Vlajić, 1998, p.6)

In a similar fashion, Radišić refers to Serbia’s enemies as ‘creators of the new order in the Balkans, and even the whole world’ (*No more secrets*). Also, he suggests that one of the mottoes of *Group 69* is a passage from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*: ‘Don’t eat the fruits from the tree of good and evil, which ripen on the branch which is growing for your offspring’. This saying was chosen ‘because it provides a warning to the creators of the newest “New World Order”’. Radišić predicts that the failure to comply will bring defeat to the conspirators, in the same way that it did to ‘Alexander the Great, Napoleon and Hitler’. In other words, the subversion of the New World Order conspiracy is seen as the very reason for *Group 69*’s existence.

The sections that follow will explore in more detail the idea that the account of *Group 69* in Vlajić's and Radišić's work, is interwoven with the notion of international conspiracy. It will be suggested that accounts of *Group 69* and its activity consist of two different, but nonetheless related, types of explanation, the *(pseudo)scientific*, and *mystical/religious*. Each of these will be shown to be inundated with themes belonging to the conspiratorial cultural tradition.

8.6. Pseudoscientific dimension of international conspiracy:

In Chapter 4 it was suggested that there is a powerful cultural scepticism towards the possibility and existence of paranormal phenomena. Much of this scepticism stems from the fact that science and the paranormal are often constructed as mutually exclusive categories of knowledge. For example, Beloff (1974) defines the paranormal as 'phenomena which, in one or more respects conflict the accepted scientific opinion as to what is physically possible' (p.1). Considering the monopoly which Science has over what is considered the valid and truthful description of the natural world (as opposed to 'rejected knowledge', Wallis, 1979), those who proclaim belief in the paranormal often have to defend their views against accusations of eccentricity, even psychological deficiency (Wooffitt, 1992).

One way in which explorers of paranormal phenomena have attempted to undermine the myriad of labels, inferences and prejudices which exist against them, is by denying the distinction between science and their own research. Drawing on the work of Harry Collins and Trevor Pinch, the building of scientific credibility in parapsychological theorising and research can be said to consist of three related components:

- 1) Adoption of 'symbolic and technical hardware of science', i.e. the rigour of **scientific method** (Collins and Pinch, 1979). As early as in the 1930s, J.B. Rhine made the first claim to science with sophisticated experimental techniques. The application of scientific methods, especially experimentation, has led to the blurring of boundaries between science and the study of paranormal phenomena, in that the latter has become regarded, at least in some circles, as a legitimate and respectable scientific enterprise.
- 2) Reference to **institutional respectability**, and the fact that parapsychological research has, in some cases, been accepted by the heavily guarded fortresses of knowledge production: the universities, research bodies etc. (Collins and Pinch, 1979).⁷
- 3) Adoption of a **theoretical framework** which is compatible with, and draws on mainstream science. Critics of parapsychology in the 1950s and 60s have argued that the discipline failed to produce an adequate theoretical framework for the phenomena it

examines (Szasz, 1957). Many parapsychologists took on board these criticisms, so the most significant debates in parapsychology since the 1970s revolved around theory rather than method (Collins and Pinch, 1979). Theoretical conceptualisations have relied heavily on models and formulations originating from established natural sciences, primarily physics (Gardner, 1981).⁸

All three of the above criteria are implicitly addressed in Vlajić's work, in the attempt to reject the qualification of his work as a 'heterodox theory' or pseudoscience. At the beginning of the first of the two conversations held in December 2000, Vlajić reflected on the scientific foundations of his approach:

'In my research, in order to reject what is borderline, or as you called it 'heterodox', or in order to make it part of science, I adhered to one of the basic scientific postulates, which was pronounced by Mendelyev, the inventor of the periodic system. These postulates are as follows: scientifically based is that which can be predicted, and which is beneficial to man. I tested some of my observations in this way. I would announce a prediction, and wait and see if it comes true. If it comes true- of course through the balance of probabilities I estimate how likely it is to come true-... therefore a scientific mechanism. Then I move onto a strictly scientific field, and try and ensure that it to the advantage of benefit [*sic*]...'

Similarly, in the first of his three articles published in *Duga*, Radišić suggests, that 'only that which has been scientifically validated is taken [by the Group] as possible truth' (*Anticipating cramp in Clinton's face*).

It is questionable to what extent the 'scientific criteria' to which Vlajić or Radišić claim to adhere are compatible with those adopted by 'mainstream', 'academic' parapsychology or any other scientific community. There are few scientists today who would include an *ethical* consideration such as the 'benefit to mankind' into the list of key *epistemological* criteria, at the expense of, for instance, the criterion of falsifiability. More importantly, Vlajić's ideas have not been subjected to any kind of experimental scrutiny or systematic evaluation. Instead, his work consists of thousands of very vague predictions, some of which are interpreted *post hoc* as having successfully predicted some subsequent event (e.g. Milošević's downfall, George W. Bush's election victory and, most recently, the World Trade Centre terrorist attack). Nevertheless, in spite of the absence of any kind of 'scientific rigour' the reference to a scientific method has the same underlining rhetoric as in the more sophisticated parapsychological research, namely a quest for recognition and acceptance.

During the interview Vlajić also invoked the theme of institutional respectability, when he suggested that his approach has been studied at several universities, both in Yugoslavia and abroad.

'Let me tell you...a doctoral thesis on the basis of my formula of light was successfully completed at the Faculty of Organisational Sciences, which today is one of our strongest faculties. Also, at the Moscow Language Institute, Irina Cerepanova defended her doctorate about the colour of words, colour of names. In the book 'Formula of Consciousness' I cite dozens of academics and Universities which research this field and which have given a positive evaluation of the approach based on the Formula of Light. Therefore, all this is less and less heterodox. And according to the evidence, in which the key role is played by these two-successful prediction and benefit- it is becoming more and more monodox [sic], or whatever you want to call it, science...or orthodox [laughter]...Orthodox is true faith, and heterodox is something that is dissolved, dispersed.'

The 'Faculty of Organisational Sciences' where the formula of light was supposedly researched, is not usually perceived as one of Serbia's 'strongest' academic institutions. The 'doctorate' to which Vlajić refers was in fact an undergraduate project written in 1992 by Vlajić's son Siniša, who currently works as a research assistant at the faculty. The title of the project, completed under the supervision of Dr Vidojko Ćirić was *Expert informational systems of the Serbian language based on the Formula of Light* (reference number 186/86). As was the case in the instance with the adherence to scientific method, Vlajić's claims to institutional recognition are of dubious credibility. Nonetheless they reveal the underlying rhetoric, the aim of which is to present his approach as a (scientifically) valid and accepted account of the natural world and its functioning.

Similar rhetorical effect is achieved by the title 'professor' which is frequently associated with Vlajić's name. Vlajić's publisher referred to him as 'professor', when contacted by phone to find out if a meeting with Vlajić can be arranged. The label was also used by some of Vlajić's visitors, the ones who did not feel intimate enough to call the 'professor' 'Spasoje'. In Yugoslavia, 'professor' is a title commonly used to refer to secondary school teachers and in that sense the use of the term to address Vlajić is legitimate. In fact, Vlajić made no attempt to hide his real credentials in that he introduced himself as 'secondary school teacher of information technology', rather than as a 'lecturer'. Even so, the general ambiguity surrounding the title gives Vlajić a more authoritative voice. This is compounded by the fact that when appearing in the media (e.g. in the Black Pearls chat show, even in Knežević's article in *Politika*) Vlajić is commonly introduced not only as a 'professor' but also as an 'engineer of crystallography', and therefore an expert in a very specialised, and somewhat mysterious area of physics.

In line with Collins and Pinch's (1979) third criteria for the building of scientific credibility, Vlajić attempted to assimilate the activities of *Group 69* within the theoretical framework of conventional science. During the encounter, Vlajić invoked some very illustrious scientific and intellectual authorities such as physicist and Nobel Prize laureate Wolfgang Pauli, the

eminent psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, and biologist Rupert Sheldrake. Also he referred to some well-publicised aspects of quantum mechanical research such as the EPR (Einstein, Podolski, and Rosen) paradox also known as the 'non-locality problem'. Most frequently however, Vlajić cited the theories and ideas of the Serbian-born physicist and inventor Nikola Tesla.

When referring to the well-known figures from the world of physics, psychology and biology, Vlajić most frequently invoked aspects of their work which are rarely considered part of 'conventional science'. This, for instance, is the case with Pauli and Jung's concept of 'synchronicity'⁹ or Sheldrake's idea of 'morphogenetic field'¹⁰. Something similar can be said of the reference to the EPR experiment.¹¹ Most of Vlajić's allusion to contemporary physics consisted of a regurgitation of parapsychological interpretations of quantum mechanics which have been around since the 1950s.¹²

In the present discussion, specific features of Vlajić's rather complex pseudoscientific theoretical framework will not be explored in detail. Instead the discussion will be limited to the role which the work of the physicist Nikola Tesla plays in the accounts of *Group 69*. Tesla was chosen because references to other 'scientific' traditions such as aspects of contemporary quantum theory, as well as the work of Wolfgang Pauli, Carl Gustav Jung and Rupert Sheldrake, are a fairly recent development in Vlajić's work. In most cases they merely build upon the more enduring feature of the pseudoscientific discourse of *Group 69*, which is the work of Tesla. Also, as has already been noted, the ways in which QM, Pauli or Jung are invoked resembles closely similar pseudoscientific literature available in the West (see Gardner, 1981; Collins and Pinch, 1979, 1982; Jahoda, 1972).

The importance attributed to Tesla in Vlajić's work is reflected in the fact that the book *The First World Parapsychological War* bears the subtitle *Tesla's weapon is already being implemented*. Also, the appreciation of Tesla's work is evident in Radišić's writing. In the articles in *Duga*, Radišić quotes the 'second lieutenant Zombi' as saying that

'Officers have material for research, mainly material stored in the Museum of Nikola Tesla [in Belgrade]. No army in the world has these materials so readily available and accessible. That of course does not mean that none of us has already 'peeked' inside the metaphysical world of Nikola Tesla- the Second Lieutenant added, while the mysterious grin seemed to have moved from his face and sparkled in his eye, as if it wanted to say that what had been said was enough.'
(*No more secrets, Duga*, 2 April, 1994)

Two out of Radišić's three articles in *Duga* were illustrated with portraits of Tesla. *Anticipating cramp in Clinton's face* included a photo of Tesla holding a pigeon which was

printed over the whole page, accompanied by the caption *What did military experts discover in Tesla's will?* (see photo). The final, and particularly important reason for singling out Tesla's work is that it is through the reference to Tesla's thinking that the link between pseudoscience and conspiracy theory is established in Vlajić's and Radišić's writing.

Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) was a physicist and inventor of Serbian origin who spent all of his working life in the US. Over five decades, Tesla registered over 700 inventions with the US patents office, most notably the induction motor and the alternating-current power transmission. He was engaged in the construction of the Niagara Falls power plant where his work on alternating current was first put to the test. However, the Serbian inventor is also known for a number of more eccentric projects. Tesla claimed that it was possible to split the earth with electromagnetic waves and destroy aircraft with beams radiated from a distance of several hundred miles. Also, Tesla allegedly made attempts at communication with aliens.



The reverence of the work of Nikola Tesla is not limited to Serbian enthusiasts for paranormal phenomena, although the inventor's Serbian ethnic background certainly contributed to his popularity in Yugoslavia. Tesla's extraordinary claims have been capturing the imagination of mystics and believers in the paranormal ever since the mid-20th Century. For example, the building in downtown New York which used to house the New Yorker Hotel, in which Tesla spent the last few years of his life, was subsequently bought by the Moon Unification Church, because of rumours that Tesla had communicated with aliens from the hotel's penthouse suite. Even more bizarrely, prior to the Tokyo subway poisoning, the members of the Aum Shinrikyu sect visited Belgrade, in search of information on Tesla's theories of wave amplification, which the inventor asserted could be used to create artificial seismological disturbances.¹³ It was only after the quest for 'Tesla's weapon' failed that leaders of the Japanese sect decided to use sarine gas.

Most of the interest in the work of Nikola Tesla shown by Western believers in the paranormal focuses on Tesla's ideas about extraterrestrial life or artificial earthquakes. Among Serbian followers, it is the application of the inventor's ideas to parapsychology which takes centre stage. The 'metaphysical world of Nikola Tesla' which fascinated Radišić, Vlajić and other members of *Group 69* is in fact a blend of quantum mechanical interpretation of psi energy and Tesla's work on long wave radiation. In *The First World Parapsychological*

War Vlajić explains that the activity of *Group 69* is based on the transmission of brainwaves with frequencies below 32Hz. According to Vlajić, these waves (which Tesla referred to as 'scalar waves') travel faster than light, and function at 'quantum or borderline levels' (p.13). It is the mastery of the 'scalar waves' which brings victory in parapsychological war.

In *The First World Parapsychological War*, Vlajić identifies, as one of the principal tasks of the group, 'psychotronic shooting down of enemy jets and affecting other material resources with the aim of cautioning, warning and defending', as well as 'undermining the activities of enemy politicians and invention of other means of warning off leading politicians and states which lead the anti-Serbian campaign' (Vlajić, 1998; p.57-58). Both of these activities were said to involve the transmission of sub-quantum, 'scalar' waves. Similarly, in the articles in *Duga Radišić* explains that 'extrasenses' associated with the group countered the negative thoughts of Western politicians visiting Belgrade, contributing to 'the cramp in the faces of the visitors, which occurs as a result of the conflict between their negative energy (which carries cruel and hypocritical intentions) and the positive energy of their hosts and the extrasenses' (Ibid.). This 'sub-quantum shield', known as the 'Serbian Mirror', or the 'Shield of St Nikola', which members of *Group 69* supposedly created, is said to have contributed the death of the Turkish prime minister Turgut Ozal, who was particularly active in the anti-Serbian campaign and therefore radiated a lot of negative energy (*Involuntary suicide of Turgut Ozal*). Also the shield was allegedly responsible for the deaths of Manfred Werner (former NATO secretary-general), Francois Mitterand and Yitzhak Rabin, as well as for the family tragedies of Helmut Kohl and Vaclav Havel, personal injuries to the Pope, Bill Clinton and Otto Von Habsburg, and the political decline of various foreign politicians such as Genscher, Kozirev, De Michaelis, Benazir Bhutto, and others (Vlajić, 1998, p.173-174).

Tesla's role in Vlajić's narrative goes beyond the rhetoric of science. Nikola Tesla constitutes the meeting point between pseudoscience and the overall idea of conspiracy which surrounds the notion of parapsychological warfare. As was mentioned earlier, parapsychological war is constructed as 'part of a broader strategy, undertaken by leading world powers' (Vlajić, 1998; p.8). The alleged aim of this strategy is to develop research areas which could enable the world powers to 'rule over subquantum levels which lie even deeper and closer to the heart of nature than nuclear energy' and 'master the secret natural forces which would enable them to establish an earthly dominance over humanity' (p.8). Vlajić suggests that a crucial part in the 'race for power and planetary dominance' involves the hunt for the 'secret legacy of Tesla's work'. Apparently, before his death, Tesla claimed to have made a discovery which subsequently became a topic of interest for the creators of the New World Order. In a letter written by Tesla in 1899, the scientist is said to have mentioned that in 'scribbles created by

strong electromagnetic discharges [he] discovered traces of the mind, or rather intelligent behaviour'. Vlajić links this to the idea that 'complex electrical circuits in the brain could be affected by radiation of different frequencies' (1998; p.29) and that in the West experiments with microwave transmitters are under way, with the aim of 'creating, by means of electronic impulses, false visions and auditory hallucinations, which would bring a man into different states such as sentimentality, insecurity, apathy, fear, panic or anger' (p.31). Interestingly, in support of this claim, Vlajić cites none other than Svetozar Radišić, who suggested - in a pamphlet published in 1997 by the Yugoslav army - that 'there is little doubt that psychotronic weapons have been used [in the actions against Serbs] to neutralise the will of the people in the war-affected areas, bearing in mind that the West is not selective when it comes to the application of the means and methods for achieving its interests' (cited in Vlajić, 1998; p.32). The pamphlet in question was subsequently published in the form of a book entitled *Neocortical War* which will be examined in the next chapter.

It appears therefore that (pseudo)science not only provides a 'rational' explanation for parapsychological activity in which *Group 69* is supposedly engaged, but also describes a level on which the international conspiracy functions. Sub-quantum energies are the front line of the new 'parapsychological war', and members of *Group 69* are soldiers in a battle against the international conspiracy, engaged in a race for the rediscovery of Tesla's secret weapon. Consequently, the notion of an international anti-Serbian plot is intertwined with the pseudoscientific explanatory framework. The fear of conspiracy justifies the existence of *Group 69*, while pseudoscience 'returns the favour' by providing a novel formulation of the idea of mass manipulation which plays such a central part in the conspiratorial narrative. The idea of mass manipulation by parapsychological means will be examined further in Chapter 9 using the example of Radišić's aforementioned book *Neocortical War*.

8.7. Mystical/Religious element of the activities of *Group 69*

In spite of the presence of a strong (pseudo)scientific element in Vlajić's and Radišić's work, and the claimed adherence to scientific principles (exemplified in Radišić's insistence that only what has been verified by science is accepted by the group) the two authors admit that their framework transcends the boundaries of conventional science. Radišić thus argues that science is 'too limited', and that *Group 69* takes pride in its eclectic approach which draws on ideas from a variety of disciplines including 'astronomy, cosmology, systemology, philosophy, mathematics, theoretical physics, macro and micro physics, but also metaphysics, astrology and parapsychology'. Members of the group are said not to be troubled by the '(un)scientific nature of some suggestions'. Strangely enough, Radišić finds

support for the group's epistemological liberalism in the work of one of the fiercest critics of anti-scientific mysticism, Karl Popper. Radišić quotes Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* as suggesting that 'mysticism is the basis of all inventions and solutions, while science takes over only that which has been verified' (*Involuntary suicide of Turgut Ozal*). In some ways this pronouncement introduces into Radišić's and Vlajić's explanatory framework a mystical and quasi-religious element.

The mysticism of Vlajić's and Radišić's is once again justified through the reference to Nikola Tesla. According to John O'Neill, a biographer of the Serbian inventor, Tesla's philosophical outlook was, at first glance, strictly materialistic (O'Neill, 2001). Tesla denied the existence of the soul and often referred to man as a 'meat machine'. However, O'Neill also suggests that materialism could have been a cover for a deeper mysticism, which became prominent later in Tesla's life. Tesla's philosophical and mystical writings have been collected in the book *Tesla's Prophecy* (M. Matic, 1996) which Vlajić cites extensively in his work. The aspect of the inventor's mystical theorising which Vlajić repeatedly refers to is the idea of 'cosmic pain'. In *The First World Parapsychological War* Tesla is quoted as saying that:

'Whenever I, a person I am devoted to, or an idea I am dedicated to would be wronged by someone, I would experience a unique and inexplicable pain which, in want of a better term, I call "cosmic pain". Soon afterwards, those who caused the pain would regret it. After many such experiences, I confided in some friends who were in a position to verify the theory I gradually came to formulate... This truth has been proved by hundreds of examples, and I urge other naturalists to devote their time to this topic, in the belief that with a common effort we could achieve results of immeasurable value to the world as a whole' (Tesla, quoted in Vlajić, 1998; p.170)

In the reference to 'cosmic pain', Vlajić blends the spiritual and the scientific aspects of Tesla's work in a way that blurs the boundaries between the two discourses. The mysticism is not presented as inconsistent with hardcore science, but rather as an elaboration of Tesla's accomplishments in physics. Vlajić explains that research conducted by *Group 69* had allegedly shown that when 'extralucid' individuals experience 'cosmic pain' they emit 'alpha waves (8-16 Hz) while some sink into deeper, delta states (below 3 Hz)' (p. 171). Tesla's 'scalar waves' are therefore interpreted as the force behind 'cosmic pain'. By extension, the 'Serbian Mirror', the parapsychological weapon devised by the group, constitutes a way of channelling 'cosmic pain' against Serbia's enemies.

Significantly, Vlajić does not define 'cosmic pain' in purely physical terms, but describes it as the 'pure pain of the righteous', and a feeling 'devoid of anger, curse, vengefulness and

hatred' in the true Christian spirit of 'turning the other cheek' (Vlajić, 1998, p.171). In the same vein, he refers to psi-energy as 'God's justice' or 'spiritual energy' which 'is infinitely more powerful than atomic energy' because 'it comes from greater depths than the atomic, quantum level, so we would be justified in saying that it is a source from beyond the material, physical world' (p.15). This blending of science and religion is further exemplified in the fact that Vlajić sometimes refers to Serbia's parapsychological shield 'Serbian Mirror' as the 'Shield of St Nikola' incorporating the name of a Saint and the famous Serbian inventor.

As the conversation with Vlajić in December 2000 progressed, the general argument gradually shifted from the pseudoscientific aspect of the explanation, which dominated the early stages of the encounter, towards what seemed like religious preaching. Vlajić described a study allegedly conducted in Germany in the 1980s, which showed that 'hypnotically induced alpha states' cannot offer access to the 'information field' necessary for parapsychological warfare. These 'results' led Vlajić to conclude that the information field has a more spiritual dimension which goes beyond wave research:

'I spoke to some people who researched this area and figured out that this is not just the energy of brain waves. It is not just the energy of brain waves that carries the message into the universal field. It is as if there is something adjacent, even more refined, a part of the soul, which leaves the person and penetrates the universal field aiming for the spiritual and the divine, areas which are mystical, and only then will it materialise and become true, as if it won't come true completely without God's help, and God can be accessed only with the soul, not the body.'

On this occasion, paranormal powers were not presented as reducible to brain waves emitted in the alpha state. Alpha state is seen as necessary but insufficient for accessing hidden knowledge stored in the 'universal field'. What is required is that 'bit of the soul' which comes only from closeness with God. This formulation of the group's activities goes against the rhetoric of science which attempted to locate alleged paranormal phenomena within the boundaries of what is considered possible in the material world. Similarly, near the end of the encounter, when asked what forms the essence of the method employed by *Group 69*, the 'spokesperson' of *Group 69* did not sight either his own 'formula of light', or Jung's 'synchronicity', or Tesla's 'scalar waves' but instead suggested that 'instructions come from Bishop Nikolaj [Velimirović]'.

The religious element of Vlajić's activity is further exemplified by the fact that his encounters with the public occasionally take the form of an informal religious service. When Vlajić was first contacted over the phone, in December 2000, he invited the 'guest from England' to attend the session the following day. Vlajić then pointed out that he would have to inform his assistant Hristoslav (whose name means 'the one who celebrates Christ') about the change of

plan, and let him know that they will not be holding their 'regular [religious] service'. Also, the sessions in Vlajić's office always end with visitors reading out aloud a prayer which, as Vlajić explained, was brought back by one of his followers from the Holy Mount Athos in Greece. The text of this prayer, which mentions the 'righteousness of the suffering Serbian people' is printed on the back cover of Vlajić's recent books.

The spiritual and religious element of Vlajić's work, especially the reference to prayer, has its own rhetorical purpose. It has already been mentioned earlier in this chapter that materialism, which dominates contemporary culture, creates a bias against belief in paranormal or mystical phenomena. In many ways, it is this scepticism that motivates parapsychologists, including Vlajić and Radišić, to employ (pseudo)scientific rhetoric. At the same time, in contemporary society, the misgivings about the possibility of paranormal phenomena coexist with a deeply entrenched belief in supernatural forces in the form of institutionalised religion. The belief in God and biblical miracles represents a sanctioned form of paranormal belief that does not invite as much scepticism or ridicule as do for instance clairvoyance or psychokinesis. The rites of established religious ideologies or so-called 'social' religions (Tiryakian, 1974) have significant magical elements and are founded on a belief in the supernatural. And yet, esoteric and occult movements are not graced with the kind of legitimacy traditionally associated with Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam. Instead the former are confined to the domain of 'subculture', and are criticised both by the scientific and religious establishment (Tiryakian, 1974; Nelson, 1969).

The social acceptability of institutionalised religions suggests that assimilating potentially controversial views or beliefs within an established religious ideology (such as that of Orthodox Christianity) can have similar rhetorical implications to the reference to scientific discourse. In other words, by constructing the parapsychological activities of *Group 69* within an established belief system, Vlajić is able to make his views appear far less unfamiliar, less threatening and more acceptable to the public.

Vlajić's attempt to present his approach as grounded in Orthodox Christianity was necessitated further by the strong antagonism which the Serbian Church authorities show for alternative religious movement. According to Tiryakian (1974), religious authorities are traditionally opposed to any kind of esoteric or occult teachings with which they would have to compete over the power which is bestowed on those who are believed to hold the keys to some hidden knowledge about the natural world and human existence. In recent years, the Serbian Orthodox Church has been at the forefront of the attack on smaller religious communities, most frequently described as 'cults' or 'sects' which are said to pose a threat to

the traditional Orthodox Christian belief system.¹⁴ For example, on the internet presentation of the Serbian Orthodox Church, in the section devoted to religious education, it is possible to find an article, written by the Sisters of the Monastery of St Stefan in the town of Lipovac, which warns against the danger posed by religious sects. The article singles out, as particularly dangerous, the following organisations and movements:

'movement for the consciousness of Krishna, Transcendental meditation, Ordo Templi Orientis, open Satanists, Rosencrucians, Oso Raxens, New Age, Sai Baba's movement, White Gnostic Church, association of parapsychologists 'Nikola Tesla', anthroposophers and theosophers and many other smaller groups which surface on a daily basis and keep their location and meeting places secret.' (*Sects- alienation from God and the destruction of God's Church: a sin against Christ*; Serbian Orthodox Church web page)¹⁵

In a climate of religious and ideological intolerance, there was a lot to be gained from aligning with official Orthodox religious dogma, especially as the 'association of parapsychologists "Nikola Tesla"' was also included in the list of dangerous, 'aggressive', anti-Christian sects, competing for the 'Orthodox souls' of the Serbian people.

Also, during the conversation Vlajić revealed that 'enemies' of the *Group 69* in the parapsychological war are 'witches', and 'Voodoo Warriors' who are supposedly employed by the US military.¹⁶ These individuals are said to use 'magic' which is 'the opposite of prayer':

'Prayer asks...its says, Lord please, let it be your will, that is in accordance to God's justice, but help...and then the mental images are transmitted. And magic says: this is how it should be! It neither asks nor seeks permission.'

The contrast between the piety and righteousness of the members of *Group 69* and the profanity of the 'Witches' of the West forestalls any potential accusations that Vlajić is involved in witchcraft or magic, thus reinforcing his status as a believer, who endorses the values and the way of life of the Orthodox Christian religion.

As the emphasis on the religious aspect of *Group 69* increased, the apparent devoutness of the members began to undermine their alleged 'militarism'. The importance attributed to prayer made the members seem more like pious monks engaged in continuous worship than brave soldiers involved in a ruthless parapsychological battle.

8.8. Links with the conspiratorial cultural tradition

Vlajić's reference to Nikolaj Velimirović's, as the principal spiritual guru of *Group 69* is not simply part of the attempt to attain institutional legitimacy by invoking a respected religious authority. The emphasis on the Satanic character of the Western world, which is ubiquitous in Velimirović's writing, underlines the conspiratorial element of Vlajić's overall conceptual framework. According to Vlajić the objectives of *Group 69* include the 'discovery of methods, symbols and psycho-energetic keys, through which the planners of the "New World Order", by means of operative magic, strive to achieve planetary dominance' (Vlajić, 1998, p.56). The group aims to reveal the 'satanic symbolism' and the 'anti-Christian essence [of the planners of the NWO] which leads to the destruction of the very basis of life: light, water, air, food, earth and spirit' and combat it by 'enhancing the religious feelings which would create a psychological force directed against the "leaders from the shadows"' (Vlajić, 1998, p.56). As was already hinted in earlier chapters, in Vlajić's work, 666 is shown to be omnipresent in Western culture, and he resorts to a series of different strategies to calculate its presence in the names of politicians, crucial world events, the internet, etc. Other evidence cited by Vlajić includes the fact that the frequency of the word 'dollar' (calculated according to Vlajić's 'universal formula of light'), is 666, as well as the revelation that the word 'America' was derived from the name 'Don Amerigo' which, it is alleged, is an anagram of the Serbian spelling of the word 'Armageddon' (Armagedon).¹⁷ Other countries linked to the number of the Beast include the Vatican, Germany, Turkey and Croatia, and their Satanic origins are invoked as an explanation of the fact that 'all of [them] are bearers of the so-called New World Order, and were implicated in the most recent war against Serbia' (1998; p.77).

References to Satanic symbolism are apparent even in Radišić's writing, where the devotion to Orthodox Christian religion, is largely absent. In Radišić's articles in *Duga*, Orthodox spirituality gives way to a medley of Far Eastern mysticism, in that prominence is given to the teachings of Milarepa,¹⁸ Sai Baba, Mahatma, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, I-Ching, and John Hegelin, the founder of the Natural Law Party and follower of the Maharishi Yogi.¹⁹ However, in spite the absence of explicit Christian themes in Radišić's articles, a link to Christianity is present through the reference to Satanic themes and the alleged significance of the number 666. For example, Radišić suggests that

'many will be surprised to hear that the extrasenses awaited a man who would confirm the presence of the energy of three sixes in the most recent catastrophe in California (in religion, 666 is thought to be the number of negative energies). It may be a coincidence, but Los Angeles, which had 42 victims of the earthquake, and 42 incidents of looting, was visited by the 42nd president of the US. For some, numbers mean a lot, for others they mean nothing, while group

69 follows the effects of numbers, words, colours, sound and different energies that carry them' (Radišić, *'Anticipating cramp in Clinton's face, Duga, 19 February, 1994)*

The episode with the Californian earthquake refers to one of the group's 'discoveries' outlined in two of Vlajić's books (*Intent*, 1993; and *The First World Parapsychological War*, 1998), where 42 is also interpreted as the sign of the Beast. The Gospel according to John, which reveals the meaning of 666 also says that the Beast would rule for 42 months, making the number 42 also a symbol of Satan. Consequently, although Radišić defines the number from St John's gospel as the 'number of negative energies', and in doing so provides a pseudoscientific reinterpretation of the original religious symbolism of numbers 666 and 42, the very fact that these numbers are mentioned as significant establishes a link between the pseudoscientific aspects of the paranormal explanatory framework and the conspiracy tradition. In some sense, the persistence of Satanic themes in Radišić's otherwise non-Christian discourse resembles the pattern found in Avramov's book *The Trilateral*, where indirect references to the anti-Christian aspect of the plot are embedded in an otherwise secular conspiracy theory (see Chapter 7).

In Vlajić's book *The First World Parapsychological War* the statement about the Satanic nature of Serbia's enemies is supplemented with an elaboration of an international conspiracy which contains all the elements of a conspiratorial narrative outlined in the earlier chapter. Vlajić begins his account of the international conspiracy with transnational organisations such as the Bilderberg group, the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations, which are said to be dominated by familiar conspiratorial figures such as J.P. Morgan, David Rockefeller and Baron Rothschild. The Rothschilds are described as 'the ancient family of Judeo-bankers which had a decisive influence over the industry, finances, politics, revolutions and wars of the 19th and 20th centuries' (p.78) The ultimate aim of the conspiracy is supposed to be the formation of a world government, which would be led by Pharisees and Masonic rulers of Judeo-Khazarian origins (p.80). They would rule over a shadow world government consisting of 72 members of a Supreme Council'. Vlajić's exposé ends with a quotation from the work of 'a famous American prophet Jeanne Dixon, who is especially renowned among Catholics', which conclusively links the idea of international conspiracy with Satan. Dixon is said to have predicted the formation of a world government, the aim of which would be to 'prepare the world for the arrival of the anti-Christ' (Vlajić, 1998; p.79). During the encounter in December 2000, Vlajić also invoked the Jewish conspiracy theme when he reflected on conspiratorial media manipulation. He noted that the word 'times' as in *The Times*, when read backwards reads 'semit' the Serbian word for Semite. Vlajić saw in this a coded reference to the Jewish control over the world's media

The antisemitic conspiratorial themes invoked by Vlajić, which are backed with references to known conspiracy theorists such as Gary Allen and Eustace Mullins, reflect most of the themes and logic of the mystical and quasi-religious conspiracy theories propagated by the likes of Ratibor Đurđević. More importantly, Vlajić does not introduce the notion of the international conspiracy as a mere background to the more general description of the activities of *Group 69*. Rather, conspiratorial theorising is seen as integrally linked to the group's existence and functioning. Details of the conspiracy (including its Satanic connections) are introduced as originating 'from secret files compiled by *Group 69*' (Vlajić, 1998, p.80) indicating that the group is specifically engaged in compiling evidence of the conspiracy. Also, the esoteric interpretations of various events, which are the principal activity of the group, are carried out within the confines of the conspiratorial tradition, and are cited as proof of the validity of some of the principal claims of that tradition.

8.9. What is acceptable and what is not? - conspiracy theory and the paranormal discourse in Yugoslav military publications

In the preceding sections an attempt was made to outline the pseudoscientific and religious elements of the paranormal explanatory discourse which surrounds the accounts of *Group 69* in the work of Spasoje Vlajić and Svetozar Radišić. Furthermore, it was argued that each dimension of paranormal explanatory discourse was constructed in the context of a broader assumption of an international conspiracy, of which parapsychological war is seen as an essential aspect. The conspiratorial element of Vlajić's descriptions of *Group 69* was shown to reflect many of the features associated with the cultural tradition of conspiracy theory, including its more disturbing elements such as antisemitism. Considering that these extreme views were presented as an integral component of the operation of *Group 69*, and were shown to underlie the group's overall explanatory framework, it can be argued that they cannot be dismissed as simply reflecting Vlajić's personal opinion. Instead, conspiratorial tradition can be seen as constituting an inherent feature of paranormal explanations of the Yugoslav crisis in the mid-1990s.

It has also been argued that Radišić's and Vlajić's accounts of *Group 69* place a particular emphasis on the unit's alleged affiliation to the Yugoslav Army. The group was presented as consisting of army officers and was referred to as 'the Yugoslav Army's best kept secret'. Moreover, the paranormal unit was said to function 'under the auspices of the Army's joint Chief of Staff' thus suggesting that *Group 69* had some kind of institutional backing. However, the presumption that *Group 69* had the backing of the Yugoslav military

establishment was largely unwarranted. Although Stojadinović suggests that the group met regularly in the building which, before the Nato bombing, housed the army headquarters, the military authorities did not condone this kind of activity. Radišić's articles in *Duga*, in which the existence of *Group 69* was first revealed, were not welcomed by his superiors. This was not because some great military secret had been disclosed, but rather because senior officers considered that such an extraordinary kind of explanation would leave the army open to mockery and undermine its integrity. Early in 1994, even before Radišić published the articles in *Duga*, Colonel Ljubodrag Stojadinović ridiculed the whole parapsychological project in the Yugoslav Army magazine *Narodna Armija* (subsequently renamed *Vojska*). This critical article was provoked by his encounter with Colonel Bogi Stojmenović during which Stojadinović first found out about the existence of *Group 69*. Stojadinović claims that following the publication of Radišić's articles in *Duga*, he was ordered by the then chief-of-staff General Momčilo Perišić to 'remove Radišić and keep an eye on him' (*Profil*, 1997, No.13, p. 54). In other words, Radišić's articles in *Duga* directly contributed to his removal from the position of editor-in-chief of *Vojno Delo*. During the recent conversation, Stojadinović revealed that he had known Radišić very well in the early 1990s, because they used to travel to work on the same army bus every morning. Apparently, Radišić used to entertain fellow passengers with stories about paranormal phenomena, and was ruthlessly ridiculed by the more sceptical officers. Stojadinović also pointed out that the dismissal of Radišić followed a lengthy interview which he, as Radišić's superior, organised with the purpose of finding out 'the extent to which Radišić's thinking is dominated by mystical themes'. The seriousness with which Radišić approached the topic of parapsychological warfare convinced Stojadinović that it would be better to move him to a post where he would have less influence on the Army's public image. Ironically, Radišić was transferred to the section for 'psychological and propaganda activities', although the nature of his work, at least for a while, involved minimal media exposure.

The fact that Radišić's views were not endorsed by the military establishment seems to suggest that, at the time, the boundary of acceptable opinion within the military was positioned in a way that excluded the interpretative framework endorsed by Radišić, Vlajić and other members of *Group 69*. However, a note of caution is necessary, as it is questionable to what extent General Perišić and Colonel Stojadinović, the only two high ranking officers whose opinion on the matter is known, can be considered representative of the Army as a whole. Within a year of the events described above, Stojadinović was stripped of his rank for questioning certain political actions of the then President of Yugoslavia, Zoran Lilić. Several years later (in December 1998) Perišić, too, was forced into retirement, again for political reasons, which suggests that the ideological orientation of Stojadinović and Perišić was not in

line with that of the ruling political clique. Although the downfall of the two officers appears not to be related to their scepticism towards *Group 69*, there remains the possibility that their attitude towards Radišić was a manifestation of a more progressive outlook, which other officers in the military may not have shared. This possibility is in some way supported by the fact that soon after Stojadinović's suspension, Radišić was reinstated to his earlier position as editor of *Vojno Delo*. This would not have occurred if the mysticism which led to Radišić's suspension had been considered completely beyond the pale.

However, even if Stojadinović cannot be regarded as representative of the military establishment, one aspect of his account of *Group 69* is noteworthy. In his writing on the group, Stojadinović regularly outlines, in a mocking fashion, the more bizarre ideas propagated by the members. The dismissive tone which runs throughout Stojadinović's description of the group's activities is also applied to the personality of Svetozar Radišić, who is portrayed as the 'last person in the Army worthy of the post of editor-in-chief of *Vojno Delo*'. It is interesting however, that it is only the parapsychological and paranormal aspect of *Group 69*'s activity which is subjected to Stojadinović's mockery. Although the idea of an international conspiracy runs throughout the theoretical framework within which *Group 69* is said to operate, this aspect of the group's ideology is not treated by Stojadinović as a topic worthy of criticism. Also, in 1994 Stojadinović did not hold Radišić responsible for propagating the wilder reaches of the conspiracy tradition, but only for his mysticism. In other words, conspiracy theory, even of the more excessive kind, was considered by Stojadinović to be more respectable than the mystical overtones.

Significantly, other critical writing on Radišić's work does not make the same omission. In an article published in the Montenegrin daily *Vijesti* in August 2000, Ištvan Molnar of the Institute of War and Peace reporting, criticised Radišić's 'xenophobia' as much as his beliefs in the paranormal (*Pukovnik Radišić defends the Serbs from the magic of the New World Order*, *Vijesti*, 19 August 2000, p.10). Molnar described Radišić's 'bizarre theories' as including 'dark forces originating from the Middle Ages, supernatural events and magical and evil spirits which are persecuting the Serbian people'. He went on to quote Radišić as saying that 'the Serbian humane model had been destroyed and replaced by the new social values of the West. The aim was to push us into the third race of the New World Order'.

The disparity between Stojadinović's and Molnar's account of Radišić's work could be attributed to their different backgrounds. Molnar writes for a Western institution and primarily for a Western audience. For him, Radišić's conspiratorial outlook probably seems as extraordinary as his belief in the supernatural. On the other hand, the absence of reference

to conspiracy theory in Stojadinovic's critical account of Radišić's beliefs suggests that for Stojadinovic, and presumably also for its audience, conspiracy theory is not in itself worthy of critical reflection. In addition, as has already been noted, when Stojadinović describes the events that followed the publication of Radišić's articles in *Duga*, he does not refer to the conspiratorial dimension of Radišić's work as the justification for suspension. Instead he focuses entirely on the paranormal. This suggests that, at the time of Radišić's dismissal, paranormal explanations were considered beyond the boundaries of respectability, while on the other hand conspiracy theory had already become part of the military discourse.

Evidence in support of this claim can be found in the content of *Vojno Delo* in the early 1990s. A year prior to the publication of Radišić's texts in *Duga*, the journal, edited by Radišić, published a number of articles which indicate an increasingly positive stance towards a conspiratorial interpretation of Western involvement in the Yugoslav crisis. The 1993 Spring issue of *Vojno Delo* contained a special subsection entitled *The New World Order and the defence policy of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*. As a short editorial explained, the articles were based on conference papers presented at a 'round table' meeting held in the building of the Yugoslav Army Club in Belgrade in February 1993. The meeting was organised by the Directory for Strategic Studies and Defence Policies (affiliated to the Yugoslav Ministry of Defence) and by the editors of *Vojno Delo* (i.e. Radišić). The editorial outlined the intended objective of the gathering:

'The aim of the academic gathering was to lay the foundation for work on the formulation of national interests, aims and programmes (from the perspective of defence) and for the pursuit of defence policies and modelling of a system of defence and protection. Eminent experts in a variety of disciplines, both civilians and officers, from various universities and academic institutes, attended the conference. Academics laid out their views on recent developments and trends in international relations, the military and political situation in the former Yugoslavia, the influence of certain external and internal factors, and the basis for the development of a new notion of defence.' (*Vojno Delo*, 1993, Issue 1-2, 1993, p.5)

At first sight there appears to be nothing peculiar about this meeting. In an earlier chapter it was already noted that in the early 1990s, the term New World Order was commonly used to refer to the post-Communist political reality. In that sense, it seems only natural that the military establishment of a small Balkan state would need to examine the implications of the end of the Cold War, and reformulate its defence policy accordingly. However, a closer examination of the perspectives laid out during the conference suggests that the gathering looked at the concept of a New World Order from a somewhat different angle. The participants, introduced as 'eminent experts' included, among others, two known advocates of conspiracy theory: Svetozar Radišić and Dragoš Kalajić. The presence of Dragoš Kalajić is

somewhat mystifying in that he is not a recognised 'expert' on international relations or a military figure, but a journalist and publicist. More importantly he is one of the more prominent Serbian antisemites, cited by Sekelj (1997) as a prime example of the 'stratum of half-educated intelligentsia' which disseminates antisemitic conspiracy theories in Serbia. In the early 1990s, Kalajić used to write a regular column in *Duga*, which became (in)famous for its anti-Western, xenophobic and often antisemitic content. Some of his work was subsequently included in two volumes of selected essays entitled *American Evil* and *American Evil II*. Significantly, the second volume of his work includes a reprint of the article published in *Vojno Delo*.

Bearing in mind Kalajić's public profile, it would be implausible to suggest that the organisers of the meeting on the New World Order were unaware that they were dealing with a notorious antisemite and conspiracy theorist. Therefore the fact that Dragoš Kalajić was invited to address a conference organised by the Yugoslav MoD's Directory for Strategic and Defence Studies and *Vojno Delo*, suggests that he was someone whose views on international relations were deemed interesting, significant and worth listening to. Kalajić's presence at the 'round table' meeting can be seen as another piece of evidence that, at the time, conspiracy theory was gradually becoming an acceptable perspective in the Serbian military, and that conspiratorial culture was emerging from the margins and penetrating Serbia's state institutions.

Kalajić's participation becomes even clearer if one bears in mind the prevailing mood in the Yugoslav Army in the early 1990s. After the break-up of Yugoslavia, and the disintegration of the old Titoist Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija), the newly formed Yugoslav Army (Vojaska Jugoslavije) underwent a noteworthy, albeit short-lived, shift to the right. The embarrassing retreat from Slovenia and Croatia delivered a strong blow to the moral of the Yugoslav forces. In addition, Milošević transferred many privileges which the army enjoyed under Tito, to the Serbian police. Dispirited and impoverished, the army, and especially its middle echelon, gradually turned to Vojislav Šešelj, the militant leader of the Radical party, whose rhetoric promised a return to former glory. In the early 1990s, Šešelj masterminded a witch-hunt against non-Serbian officers who provided convenient scapegoats for lack of success on the battlefield. This 'ethnic cleansing' of the military was implemented by General Domazetović, deputy chief-of-staff, known for his connections with the Radical party. Right wing militants were also influential within the air force (*Riders of fog, Vreme*, 29 March 1993; p.29-31). Yugoslav army helicopters were readily available to Vojislav Šešelj and the paramilitary leader Arkan during visits to the Croatian front. Similarly, according to

Stojadinović, General Života Panić, Army chief of staff until late 1993, held a positive view of Šešelj as a 'patriot' and was allegedly an admirer of Kalajić.

Kalajić's contribution to the 'round table' discussion will be examined shortly. Before that it would be interesting to look at Radišić's own article, entitled '*Conspiracy theory*' and *defence policy* (p. 162-186). The article is significant because in it Radišić discusses, in a rather incoherent and confusing fashion, the notion of 'conspiracy theory'. Radišić's position is to claim agnosticism, in that he argues that 'after all that has happened to us, it would be hard to argue against the existence of conspiracy theory, while at the same time it is not easy to prove the opposite' (p.185). Similarly, he claims that:

'In relation to 'conspiracy theory' the real solutions may be suppressed and concealed if all necessary measures are not taken to remove or reduce the effect of a conspiracy, if one really exists. If it is revealed that a conspiracy towards Serbs, the Orthodox or Slavs exists- it means that one specific scenario needs to be followed. When the effects of foreign interests have the same impact as a conspiracy-a different scenario is needed. If it is discovered that the existence of a conspiracy is an illusion- a third scenario is required.' (p.184)

Radišić even suggests that conspiracy is a function of perspective: instigating changes around the world in order to achieve the 'American dream' may not appear to be a conspiracy from the American perspective, while 'for all those who find themselves in the way of this plan, it is a conspiracy' (p.179)

Radišić contends that the Yugoslav crisis was caused by a mixture of 'insufficiently controlled partial interests of the newest centres of power (which are sometimes achieved through conspiracies), the continuation of centuries-long religious war, which is also a kind of conspiracy, and another attempt to suppress the complexes acquired in earlier wars' (p. 168).

Importantly, Radišić's claimed 'agnostic' view of the conspiracy theory of society falls short of an unequivocal denial of conspiracy. In suggesting that 'many agree that secret collusion against other races, nations, followers of other religions, or in order to achieve national interests, may exist', Radišić acknowledges that conspiracy theory is a legitimate view. However it is also one that is essentially advocated by others. Radišić's proclaimed agnosticism, and the attribution of conspiratorial beliefs to others reflects a common rhetorical strategy employed to persuade doubters. The impression that the author shares the same doubts as the critics provides a useful defence against the usual accusations of paranoia, oversimplification etc. At the same time, the fact that, in spite of all these doubts, Radišić presents himself as still troubled by facts and evidence, which suggests that there indeed is a

conspiracy, implies that this evidence must be strong, persuasive and therefore worthy of attention.

Also, Radišić makes no reference to the possibility of a global, world conspiracy, which is usually emphasised in classical conspiratorial literature. Instead, he offers a fairly moderate definition of conspiracy as a 'secret agreement to harm a third party, by all means necessary' (p.172). The innocuous definition plays an important rhetorical function in the overall argument. It introduces the term 'conspiracy' in a way that appears reasonable, but this only prepares the ground for the conspiratorial 'leap of imagination' when the argument shifts 'from the undeniable to the unbelievable' (Hofstadter, 1966). That way, the 'reasonableness' associated with the initial mild definition is extended onto the more radical conspiratorial claims.

This becomes apparent when Radišić proceeds from the rather bland definition to reiterating some of the major themes of the conspiratorial tradition. Radišić's article invokes arguments common in conspiratorial explanations of the Western intervention in the Balkans. These include the notion that many of the war crimes allegedly committed by Serbs were 'scripted' in order to justify anti-Serbian actions. Also there is the claim that the Western media are controlled by a higher power, and that the disintegration of Yugoslavia was facilitated by the presence of Western stooges in the Yugoslav government, Army, Security services, etc. Moreover, Radišić appears to tread on mystical ground when he alludes to the existence of the Age of Aquarius conspiracy, an idea commonly found amongst theorists who target the New Age movement:

'If we accept the existence of Plato's year, we need to address the question about whether the so called conspiracy of Aquarius will bring the existent conspiracies to their peak, or will it destroy them?' (p.171)

Consequently, Radišić eventually acknowledges the possibility that all the minor conspiracies, 'partial interests', plots and instances of collusion could be integrated into a global conspiracy, which has world domination as its principal aim.

Radišić also invokes the Freemasons in suggesting that the policy of indoctrinating the public by keeping the masses in a state of 'ignorance and poverty' is the legacy of the influence of this organisation. In doing so he positions himself within the conspiracy tradition. Radišić acknowledges that 'legitimate planning of the future' is supplanted by 'other influences' including 'Masonic protocols, plans made by politicised religions and trans-national corporations', to the point when it becomes 'uncertain which of these is most important'

(p.175). In a footnote it is explained that 'politicised religions' alludes to the forceful conversion of Serbs to Catholicism and Islam. Reference to Freemasons, the Vatican, Islamic world and World bankers indicates that Radišić is well-versed in the classical themes of conspiratorial culture, and acknowledges their validity and relevance. It can also be speculated that Radišić's allusion to 'Masonic protocols' is an indirect link to the antisemitic conspiratorial tradition, in that in conspiratorial culture the reference to 'protocols' is commonly associated with the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Evidence for this comes from Radišić's most recent book, *Neocortical War*, which will be examined in the next chapter. In the book Radišić refers to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and then in a footnote clarifies that 'it is irrelevant for the present discussion whether the protocols are Zionist or Masonic' (Radišić, 1999; p.51). Bearing in mind that Radišić appears not to make any distinction between the 'Masonic' and the 'Zionist' protocols, the reference to the former in the article in *Vojno Delo* may therefore be seen as a coded reference to the antisemitic document.

Consequently, in Radišić's article the principal themes from conspiratorial culture seem to emerge from behind the screen of intellectual scepticism towards conspiracy theory. Freemasons, protocols, Age of Aquarius, international capital are not invoked as examples of a discredited perspective but rather as describing reality.

The other overtly conspiratorial paper presented at the conference was the article *Defending Europe, against the New World Order* by Dragoš Kalajić (p.76-95). The abstract of Kalajić's article lays out the basic notion of conspiracy. In the very first sentence it says that 'in the New World Order, the author sees the most recent project and attempt by the international financial capital to implement its pseudo-imperialist aspirations, by means of American military and political force' (p.76). Predictably, Kalajić names David Rockefeller as the leader of the 'secret world super-government', which consists of 'world bankers and intellectual elite' (p.77). Kalajić's Gary Allen-style account of the world elite conspiracy is later supplemented with references to Freemasons, whose influence over Dositej Obradović, the 19th Century Serbian intellectual and Serbia's first education minister is blamed for the subsequent 'intellectual and moral crippling of the brains and souls of numerous generations of our youth' who became the 'reproductions of the nihilist orders from the strategists of New World Order' (p.93).²⁰ Kalajić's account also contains an antisemitic reference in that the ideological roots of the New World Order are traced to the 'pseudo-imperialism of the Old Testament' and the 'commercial theology and miserly morality of the Jewish and Protestant religions' (p.78).

The papers presented at the round table discussion were not the only examples of conspiracy theory on the pages of *Vojno Delo*. Conspiratorial ideas were promoted in the very next issue of the journal, in what was effectively a 'critical review' of Gary Allen's book *Say No to New World Order* (Jovan Despotović, *Through Global Conspiracy to Anti-Utopia*, 1993, Issue 3-4; p.259-269). Allen's 1986 book was published in the Serbian language in 1992. The fact that book was reviewed in a prestigious military journal suggests that *Say No to New World Order* was considered to be worthy of note.

The author of the review, Jovan Despotović, was somewhat critical of Allen's book. Despotović suggests that although 'interesting, especially for the lay public' the book 'stands on the boundary between political analysis and political "fantasy"' (p.269). Similarly, he points out that 'advocates of "conspiracy theories" may find [in the book] the 'crucial' evidence to back their claims, while their opponents might claim that they have found justification for their own views' (p.269). Despotović also argues that the book is not a 'piece of scientific work', but rather a 'popular political publication' (p.269). However, the main criticism of Gary Allen focuses on his political allegiance. It is argued that Allen is 'an American traditionalist, a member of conservative (Right wing) circles in America, who still believes in the "American dream" about private property, and "equal opportunities for everyone"' (p.261). The fundamental disagreement with Allen's political orientation is also reflected in the rejection of his view that capitalism and communism are the same (in terms of their role in the conspiracy). Despotović implies that rather than being in collusion, the two systems are opposed, but that the building of the NWO required communism to be destroyed, 'which explains some of the dramatic events taking place in Russia' (p.261).

In spite of criticising the book as insufficiently academic and bordering on fiction, Despotović also suggests that, *Say No to New World Order*, is 'significant' because

[it] broke the intellectual "blockade" (embargo) in which our public found itself, regarding the discussion of "New World Order" and possibly international relations in general. This "auto-embargo" was imposed during a fiery political battle in our country over the last couple of years, during which the more common (intellectual) trend was to deny the reality of 'New World Order', or present it without any criticism, in cases when its existence was at least implicitly acknowledged.'(p.261)

The author then goes on to outline, Allen's principal ideas, none of which are disputed or challenged. New World Order is cited as 'a new term invented with the purpose of hiding the conspirators', who have been attempting to achieve world dominance 'since the time of the great Flood' (p.262). It is also suggested that 'that which was once known as the tower of Babel, is today called the UN' (p.262). Fairly standard conspiratorial themes are then

reiterated including those concerning the world elite organisations, the financial influence of David Rockefeller and James Warburg, control of the media and mass manipulation. Some of Allen's ideas are even applied to the contemporary context in that they are invoked to account for the media 'satanisation' of Serbs:

'Maybe the rapes, the Banski Dvor incident, cannibalism, the bombing of Dubrovnik, the Vase Miškin Street bombing, and many other events throughout the Former Yugoslavia, might be explained by a fact cited by Gary Allen, namely that "the greatest power of television journalism is not in transferring information, but- happiness, sadness, shock and fear.' (p.266)

The outline ends with Allen's own conclusion that "*New World Order is a conspiracy above all conspiracies*' (p.267, original italics) . This conclusion is cited as an explanation why the book was 'a thorn in the side of all those who denied the existence of a New World Order and of opponents of so-called conspiracy theories, who for months ridiculed any attempt to prove the influence of foreign factors in the Yugoslav crisis' (p.267). So in the end, Despotović acknowledges the validity and relevance of a conspiratorial explanation of the conflict in the Balkans.

Consequently, just like Radišić's article in the earlier issue of *Vojno Delo*, Despotović's review of *Say No to New World Order* contains an equivocal, albeit positive, evaluation of the conspiratorial explanations of international relations and Balkan politics. The publication of the two articles suggests that as early as in 1993, the conspiratorial tradition began to emerge in fairly respectable military publications. In some ways this signalled a change in the perceived legitimacy of the conspiratorial explanatory framework. Despotović himself suggests that at the time of the publication of Allen's book, the dominant view in Serbian public life was once of scepticism towards the notion of New World Order and conspiracy theory. The emergence of Radišić's, Kalajić's and Despotović's articles, as well as the fact that the conspiratorial interpretation of NWO was discussed at a gathering organised by the military establishment suggests that the alternative perspective was gradually making a breakthrough.

The content of *Vojno Delo* in subsequent years reveals a continuing presence of articles with overtly conspiratorial content, written by some of Serbia's better known conspiracy theorists including Mihajlo Marković (*Fascism and the New World Order*, 1995, Issue 3, p.61-74) and the anti-Catholic conspiracy theorist Zoran Milošević (*War in the civil doctrine of the Roman-Catholic Church*, 1995, Issue 6, p.80-99; *Political journeys of Pope John-Paul II*, 1995, Issue 2, p.188-202). However, prior to 1999 there is little evidence of paranormal themes, conspiratorial or otherwise, which suggests that the mystical viewpoint was still beyond

respectability. Significantly however, on two occasions the journal published articles on the philosophical outlook of Nikola Tesla, the physicist whose work had been shown to play a crucial part in the paranormal conspiracy theory (Dr Smiljana Đurović, *Nikola Tesla and the foundations of modern civilisation*, 1996, Issue 3, p. 147-156; Branimir Jovanović, *The Views on Nikola Tesla on War*, 1996, Issue 4-5, p.217-223). In some ways these articles heralded the gradual arrival of some of the ideas which Radišić and Vlajić propagated in the early 1990s.

The next chapter will examine the way in which paranormal conspiratorial themes came to the fore around the time of the Nato bombing. As will become apparent, the crucial role in the legitimisation of paranormal conspiracy theory in the late 1990s was played by Svetozar Radišić whose post-1995 writing consists of a more 'moderate' and 'respectable' version of the ideas identified in this chapter. Radišić's more recent paranormal theorising will be examined on the example of the book *Neocortical War* (1999). It will be suggested that in his recent writings Radišić incorporated, into the paranormal conspiracy theory, concepts and arguments originating from US literature on information warfare, which gave his views a more credible and acceptable image. More importantly, it will be suggested that the legitimisation of Radišić's 'neocortical war' perspective in the late 1990s was facilitated by the more general proliferation of conspiratorial explanations within which Radišić's views continue to be embedded.

Chapter 9

'Neocortical Warfare': conspiratorial re-presentation of a biological metaphor

As was noted in the previous chapter, Radišić's banishment to the relative obscurity of the Yugoslav Army's Section for Propaganda and Psychological Operations was short-lived. Soon after the much-publicised expulsion from the army of Ljubodrag Stojadinović, the officer who demoted Radišić in 1994, the latter was reinstated as the editor in chief of *Vojno Delo*. Following his reinstatement, Radišić's analyses of the Yugoslav predicament were published fairly regularly in the Serbian national press, especially in *Revija 92*, a magazine which specialises in police and military matters and whose editorial policy is considered to be favourable towards the Yugoslav army. Radišić's articles which appeared in *Revija 92* were subsequently published in the form of a pamphlet distributed internally by the army (*Defence doctrines- the concept of full-dimensional defence*, 1997) and two years later as a book entitled *Neocortical War*.

The examination of Radišić's recent work, which will focus on the 1999 book *Neocortical War*, will begin with the suggestion that, in his post-1995 writing, Radišić effectively continued to promote the blend of mystical and pseudoscientific explanations which, like his earlier writing on *Group 69*, is integrated into a more general conspiratorial thesis. However, it will also be argued that the openness with which Radišić has been able to discuss non-conventional, paranormal aspects of warfare in recent years is partly due to a noticeable change in emphasis which gave his extraordinary views the appearance of respectability and reasonableness. In recent years, Radišić has incorporated into his strand of paranormal conspiracy theory various concepts which originate from mainstream Western military literature. The concept of 'neocortical war', which Radišić chose for the title of his book and which plays a central role in his more recent writing, was itself taken from US military literature on *information warfare*, a subject which has become increasingly popular among military theorists world-wide.

The way in which information warfare terminology was incorporated into Radišić's explanatory framework will be examined in the light of the theory of social representations developed by Moscovici and others (Moscovici, 1976; Farr & Moscovici, 1984; Moscovici 2000). It will be suggested that aspects of Moscovici's theoretical work on social representations can offer valuable insight into conspiratorial hermeneutics and the dynamic

which contributed to the proliferation of paranormal and mystical conspiratorial themes in Serbia in recent years. Specifically, the semantic transformations of the concept 'neocortical war' - *en route* from US literature on information warfare to Serbian paranormal conspiracy theory - which contributed to the broader acceptance of Radišić's extraordinary ideas, will be considered as a manifestation of the processes of *anchoring* and *objectification* (Moscovici, 1976, 1984a).

The chapter will conclude with the suggestion that the legitimisation of paranormal themes was not the only conspiracy theory-related development in Yugoslav military discourse in the late 1990s. At the time of the Nato bombing, military publications will be shown also to have become more open to the conspiratorial anti-Western ideology of the Orthodox Right. This development will be illustrated using the example of an article on Nikolaj Velimirović which appeared in *Vojno Delo* in the months after the bombing. It will be suggested that the positive evaluation of Velimirović's ideology in *Vojno Delo* cannot be attributed to any shift to the Right within the military, but that it emerged as a legacy of the conspiratorial cultural tradition which transcended the habitual political divisions between Left and Right.

9.1. Hindu Mysticism and modern warfare in Radišić's recent work

The examination of Radišić's 1999 book *Neocortical War* provides ample evidence that Radišić's post-1995 writing constituted a continuation of the explanatory discourse outlined in the previous chapter. As will become apparent, Radišić continued to propagate a blend of mysticism and pseudo-science. This is evident, for instance, in Radišić's elaboration on the nature of contemporary warfare used by foreign powers:

'There is a tendency in the area of military skill which warrants special attention. While on the one hand high technology weapons are being devised, keeping the insatiable military industry and trade in business, at the same time, destructive forces are shifting their activities beyond the physical sphere, through energy, to the sphere ruled by superstrings' (p.11)

In a footnote, Radišić clarifies that the term 'superstring' comes from the works of 'theoretical physicist John Hagelin', and that 'strings are vibrations (waves) of the universal field of consciousness'. Apart from being a renowned expert in quantum physics, Dr Hagelin is also founder of the Natural Law Party of Yogi flyers, and was its presidential candidate in two US elections (1992 and 2000). He is best-known for offering a 'scientific', quantum-mechanical basis for a version of ancient Hindu mysticism propounded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (Stenger, 1993).¹ As was noted in the previous chapter, Maharishi Yogi featured in Radišić's articles in *Duga* published in 1994.

Radišić's continuing interest in esoteric theories of universal knowledge goes beyond Hegelin's interpretation of Maharishi's theory of transcendental meditation. In Chapter 4 of *Neocortical War*, entitled *The Information Shell*, Radišić poses the following questions:

'1) What can be achieved through the mastery of the unified field? 2) Are the 'Akashic records', Maharishi's universal field of intelligence and Hegelin's superstring field, Steiner's spiritual panorama, Borhes's cosmic memory, Eschenbach's cosmic chronicles, Earth's information shell (linked to the space 'database' described by B.S. Elepov and V.M. Chistyakov), Tesla's scalar field and Jung's collective unconscious as a treasury of memories, Murphy's infinite intelligence and universal mind – one and the same thing?' 3) Can the 'field that remembers everything' only be observed, read, interpreted, or also used and changed?' (p.57)

In these questions Radišić displays an awareness of a variety of theories concerning 'chronicles of the universe', 'universal knowledge' etc., which originate from Hindu mysticism, theosophy, occult teachings, Russian pseudoscientific theories, etc. The allusion to all the different theories is indicative of the level (and persistence) of Radišić's interest in the world of the paranormal and the occult. Later in *Neocortical War*, Radišić even mentions the Holy Grail (which is nothing more than 'intuition' that offers access to the cosmic database; p.70) and the lost continent Atlantis, whose inhabitants apparently had paranormal powers due to some 'anomalies in the world's magnetic field' (p.72).

The presence, in Radišić's work, of mysticism, pseudo-science and even mythology reflects the explanatory discourse identified in the previous chapter. Furthermore, not only is the general framework the same, but specific ideas outlined in *Neocortical War* are directly taken from the *Group 69* tradition. So, at one point, Radišić introduces the distinction between the 'material, astral, spiritual and archetypal existential planes'. This classification, which originates from the Kabbalah, is also offered by Vlajić in *The First World Para-psychological War*. Vlajić uses the same categories to describe the metaphysical framework within which *Group 69* is said to operate. Also, Radišić cites 'Maharishi's followers' as claiming that ideas could be

'implanted via the unified field, with absolute certainty that they would be received and accepted, if a critical mass is established, that is if the square root of the total population in an area is concentrated upon the same thought. A unification of ideas is thus established on the most basic level of nature, the so-called superstring field' (*Neocortical War*, p.64).

This is more or less a direct Hindu-mystical reformulation of Vlajić's ideas about synchronicity and the 'creation of the future'. Moreover, it is identical to a claim which Radišić made in 1994, in the article which contributed to his downfall:

'According to John Hagelin, when a critical mass of thought energy is achieved, space will move and take the shape which was imagined by the greatest number of people. It would be dangerous if all this were true, because it would mean that Serbs would have to abandon key spots in Bosnia, under pressure from the Americans' (*Involuntary suicide of Turgut Ozal*, Duga, 18 March, 1994, p.8)

Further evidence of continuity in Radišić's work comes from the fact that the name of Spasoje Vlajić, Radišić's old associate from the days of *Group 69*, is invoked on several occasions in *Neocortical War*. Radišić cites Vlajić as an expert on matters related to short frequency waves, formula of light, etc. Also, in the final paragraph of Chapter 6, entitled *The magic of words* the author of *Neocortical War* gives a flattering evaluation of Vlajić's work. Radišić quotes 'Professor Dr Miloje M Rakočević', one of the reviewers of Vlajić's book *Formula of Consciousness* :

'If future research confirms that everything is the way it is described in chapter 8.1. [of *Formula of consciousness*] 'The Basic Code' then it will quite certainly become apparent that this section of the book contains an epochal discovery. The fact that it is not a coincidence that the genetic code contains 64 codons, just like the number of hexagrams in the I-Ching book of changes, for me is beyond dispute; but if it turns out to be true that the 'end product of the interaction between the physiological and the psychological' is also 'based on the number 64' then the book *Formula of Consciousness* will be read and re-read, for years to come.' (*Neocortical War*, p.56)

Such positive description of Vlajić's writing confirms that Radišić's *Neocortical War* is constructed within a framework that does not depart significantly from that which Radišić endorsed in 1994.

A further parallel between the ideas contained in *Neocortical War* and the tradition of *Group 69* can be found in the fact that paranormal themes found in Radišić's book are incorporated within a conspiratorial narrative. Besides constant references to the 'creators of the New World Order' etc., Radišić refers to some of the classics of conspiracy literature. It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that *Neocortical War* contains a reference to *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In Chapter 6 of his book Radišić noticed that 'it is interesting that the newest doctrinal rules in the West remarkably coincide with the basic assertions of the famous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*'. In the footnote which accompanies the citation of *Protocols* Radišić claims that it is irrelevant whether the protocols are 'Zionist or Masonic'. He goes on to suggest that it is also irrelevant whether *Protocols* are 'original or a forgery. What is important is that this text, which is occasionally reprinted, exists and is *de facto* misused for aggressive and inhuman doctrinal solutions' (p.51, original emphasis).

In spite of the apparent scepticism about the document's genuineness, Radišić failed to affirm the established fact that *Protocols* are a forgery (Cohn, 1957). Instead, he reasserted the well-known conspiratorial notion that *Protocols* provides an insight into the contemporary world

of politics. Also, the fact that *Protocols* is quoted from, suggests that Radišić is acquainted with the content of one of the most notorious examples of the conspiratorial tradition, and considers it worthy of mention in his book.

Besides *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Radišić also cites in his book numerous well-known conspiracy theorists. In listing the authorities on the politics of the New World Order, Radišić mentions 'Chomsky, Gary Allen, Dragoš Kalajić, Ratibor Đurđević and many others'. Chomsky apart, all the authors are right-wing conspiracy theorists, whose significance in the Serbian conspiratorial culture has been noted in earlier chapters. Also present in Radišić's book is the high-priest of Serbian conspiracism, Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović. Although the Christian element which dominates Vlajić's work is absent from Radišić's writing, the spiritual significance of Velimirović is nonetheless acknowledged. Bishop Nikolaj is briefly mentioned twice in the book, on both occasions in the context of drawing a distinction between the 'qualitative' and 'spiritual' Serbian culture, and the 'quantitative' and 'materialistic' Western civilisation:

'Of course, those belonging to quantitative civilisations haven't got people like Bishop Nikolaj, Justin Popović, Petar Petrović Njegoš...' (p.47)

'Can the West understand the thoughts of Bishop Nikolaj: "It is madness that the sheep gave itself for a handful of grass, when grass is for life and not life for the grass", and find a way of abandoning empty dreams and adopt a qualitative way of life?' (p.143)

Velimirović is also present in Radišić recent writing in other, less conspicuous ways. For example, the title one of Radišić's articles published in *Duga* in 1996 (see below) was *A world of slaves or a world of omnihumans*. The term 'omnihuman' comes from Velimirović's religious philosophy and signifies a new type of individual devoted to God and the principles of Orthodox Christian dogma and way of life (see Chapter 3). Consequently, in Radišić's work, Velimirović's teachings are invoked specifically to amplify the division between Serbia and the rest of the world, thus reinforcing the moral dichotomy implicit in the Manichean dimension of conspiracy theory.

9.2. The change in emphasis in the post-1995 writing of Svetozar Radišić

In spite of the persistence, in Radišić's more recent writings, of pseudo-scientific and mystical themes, following his reinstatement in 1995, Radišić's ideas were no longer perceived to be beyond the bounds of respectability or as in any way damaging to the integrity of the Army. Evidence for this comes from, for instance, the way in which his work was presented in the national press. The aforementioned article *A world of slaves or a world of omnihumans*,

(*Duga*, 27 April, 1996) which, in terms of content, was not dissimilar to Radišić's articles published in *Duga* two years earlier, was introduced in the following way:

'The world today stands before two possible paths. One leads to a slave-driving order in which the population would be controlled with drugs and by means of electronics. The other path leads to an all-dimensional war for the liberation of the revived humanity. This is how Colonel Svetozar Radišić, the editor-in-chief of *Vojno Delo* sees the future, exclusively for *Duga*.' (*A world of slaves or a world of omniumans, Duga, 27 April 1996*)

Thus in 1996 the author's affiliation to the military, his rank and his position as the editor of *Vojno Delo* were made visible.² Moreover, Radišić's credentials were specifically invoked to augment the significance of the ideas presented in the article. What makes the disclosure of the author's rank and position even more noteworthy is the fact that, shortly before the article was published, Yugoslav military authorities introduced tighter regulations regarding the media exposure of its officers. According to Ljubodrag Stojadinović, after 1995 the army was keen to restrict unauthorised contact with the media by military personnel. Bearing in mind Radišić's rank and previous record, it is highly likely that Radišić sought and obtained approval from the Army's Information Bureau. Consequently, Radišić's article in *Duga*, and presumably most of his subsequent writing, seem to have been sanctioned by the Yugoslav military authorities.

Further support for the claim that Radišić's recent writing was approved by his superiors comes from the fact that his 1999 book *Neocortical War* was published by the Yugoslav Army's official publishing house, the Military Publishing Institute. The list of the book's editors includes some high ranking officers, including Major-General Zlatoje Terzić and Colonel Mirko Bojanić, which suggests that the content of *Neocortical War* was judged by senior officers to be pertinent and valid. Moreover, in an interview to the daily *Politika* in October 1999, the director of the Military Publishing Institute, Colonel Slavko Brstina singled out Radišić's book as one of the more significant titles promoted by the Institute at the Belgrade International Book Fair and one that is likely to attract considerable public interest (*Military Publishers at the Belgrade Book Fair: numerous important titles, Politika, 15 October, 1999*).

The most striking evidence that Radišić's views eventually became perceived as normative within the military establishment is the fact that in May 2000, the author of *Neocortical War* was promoted to the position of the Yugoslav Army's official spokesman. In other words, the man whose extraordinary world-views had been considered unworthy of a military officer in 1994, was deemed, five years later, to be suitably qualified for the most public profile job in the Yugoslav military.

A possible reason behind Radišić's rapid ascent up the military hierarchy, and transformation from being dismissed as a liability to becoming the Army's face and voice, lies in the shift in emphasis apparent in Radišić's more recent writing and subtle dissociation from his earlier work. For instance, the book *Neocortical War* concentrates almost entirely on the way in which parapsychological weaponry is used by Serbia's enemies in the context of international conspiracy. The issue of parapsychological defence, which was the focus of the articles in 1994, is totally neglected. There is no mention of the Serbian successes in the parapsychological showdown with forces of the New World Order. No unsubstantiated claims are made about the 'psychotronic shooting down of enemy jets' and there are no references to the 'Serbian Mirror' and other means of parapsychological protection. Importantly, *Group 69*, the unit whose activities Radišić first revealed to the world in 1994, and which was the focus of his interest at the time, appears only once in his recent writing. The group is mentioned in passing in the article *Washington aims for the enemy's brain* published in *Revija 92* in April 1998 (subsequently reprinted in *Neocortical War*, Chapter 5):

'following the revelation about the existence of extra-lucid experts in Yugoslavia who function within the so-called group 69, the American journal "The Military Review" announced that Nato's special parapsychological forces "voodoo warriors" have been transferred from the Gulf to the Balkans, and were preparing for a final showdown with Belgrade's "Group 69" (*Washington aims for the enemy's brain, Revija 92*, 3 April 1998).

The phrase 'so-called' which precedes the reference to *Group 69* indicates some equivocation on Radišić's part regarding the status of the group. Also, when first mentioned the word 'group' is not printed with a capital 'G', which gives the impression that the unit is not in any way acknowledged as a formal organisation. Moreover, Radišić fails to mention that it was he himself who made the 'revelation' referred to in the text, which suggests an attempt at dissociation from the group. Interestingly, when the above paragraph was reprinted in the book *Neocortical War*, the modifier 'so-called' was for some reason excluded. Either way, it is clear that Radišić no longer wished to attribute to the group the importance manifest in his earlier writing, where *Group 69* was given the illustrious title of 'the Yugoslav army's best kept secret'. However, in spite of the distancing, the Group's activities are neither dismissed nor criticised. In fact, the claim that revelations concerning *Group 69* provoked a response from Nato implies that the actions of 'extra-lucid individuals' need to be taken seriously. The allusion to the contribution of *Group 69* to the overall parapsychological struggle thus binds Radišić's more recent perspective with his early work, and offers yet another indication that his post-1995 writing constitutes a refinement of the pseudo-scientific and mystical ideas outlined in the previous chapter.

In the context of the overall rhetoric, the general shift in emphasis in *Neocortical War* - from the activities of Yugoslav parapsychologists to those of World powers - makes Radišić's account seem more reasonable and acceptable. As will become apparent shortly, attributing parapsychological manipulation of the masses to the technologically superior world power (primarily the US) is not difficult to integrate within the conspiratorial framework which already constructs the enemy as omnipotent and unscrupulous. Also, over the years, the US Army has achieved notoriety within conspiratorial culture in terms of the implementation of weapons aimed at subtle brain manipulation (e.g. Miller 1995). These conspiratorial themes concerning mass-manipulation provide a suitable point where paranormal claims can be meaningfully incorporated into the overall narrative of conspiracy, and promoted side by side with the ideas of the international anti-Serbian plot which had already engrossed the Serbian ideological milieu.

9.3. From esoteric to information war

One aspect of Radišić's post-1995 writing which has played a crucial role in the legitimisation of the paranormal conspiratorial perspective is the fact that paranormal fighting is discussed as an aspect of information warfare. Information war is a topic that has attracted considerable interest among Western military analysts in recent years (e.g. Whitehead, 1997; Stein, 1995; Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1997; etc.). According to George Stein of the US Airforce's Air War College, 'information warfare' refers to a variety of techniques, ranging from the interception of enemy communication to psychological operation, all of which are aimed at achieving military objectives through persuasion, without the use of violent means' (Stein, 1995). Since the early 1990s, the notion of information as a weapon has been discussed at length in books, articles in professional military journals and official publications in the US (DiNardo and Hughes, 1995). The concept of information warfare has even entered the United States Airforce Basic Doctrine (21 May 1996), where it is defined as any activity which 'can enhance power projection by diminishing the adversary's will and capacity to fight'.

In his more recent writing, Radišić grounds his claims within the framework of information warfare, and occasionally refers to established foreign authorities on the subject. In the above-mentioned article published in *Duga* in 1996, as well as in his later work, Radišić quotes what has become known as the bible of information warfare literature, the book *War and anti-War: survival at the dawn of the 21st century* by Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1993). According to DiNardo & Hughes (1995) the popularity of this book in military circles is greatly responsible for the rising interest in information warfare in the 1990s, and its authors are cited in

practically every piece of literature on the topic.³ In *War and Anti-War* the Tofflers (1993) applied their well-known 'wave theory' of history (Toffler, 1981) to the military context and argued that in the contemporary world (which entered the third, 'information age') the supremacy on the battlefield depends on the mastery of information technology (Toffler and Toffler, 1993). Radišić cites the book in support of a similar claim that 'in the "third wave" the battle for supremacy will be fought with the power of information systems, through knowledge and fast communication' (*A world of slaves or a world of omnihumans*, *Duga*, 27 April 1996). Also, the Tofflers are cited as referring to future conflicts as "wars of knowledge" because in them a crucial role would be played by the information technology of highly developed societies' (Ibid.). Significantly, the Tofflers are not the only authorities on information warfare cited by Radišić. The views of Eliot A. Cohen, (Professor and Director of Strategic Studies at the Johns Hopkins University and former professor at Harvard and the US Air War College) and Andrew Marshall (Director of Net Assessment in the Office of the Secretary of Defence) both of whom have written on information warfare in the past are also mentioned. The citation of American sources has significant rhetorical implications because their authority gives Radišić's perspective an air of respectability. Through the reference to US military literature, Radišić's rhetoric shifts from esoterical and pseudo-scientific theorising towards what is widely perceived as an established and legitimate area of interest.

The grounding of Radišić's argument in the information war paradigm is also apparent in the fact that the concept of 'neocortical war', which plays a central role in Radišić's work and provides the title of his most recent book, originates from US military literature on the subject. The term was first coined by a retired Colonel of the US Army, Richard Szafranski, in the article *Neocortical war: the acme of skill*, published in the US military journal *The Military Review* in November 1994. In the forthcoming sections, the way in which Szafranski's idea of neocortical warfare was incorporated in Radišić's work will be examined in more detail. It will be suggested that in Szafranski's original formulation, the term 'neocortex' was used in the context of a biological metaphor the aim of which was to facilitate the understanding of the relatively novel concept of information warfare. In Radišić's work, on the other hand, 'neocortical warfare' is interpreted as the targeting of actual brains, in the context of mass manipulation orchestrated by international conspirators. The discursive and hermeneutic processes involved in this transformation of neocortical war from metaphor to literal interpretation will be examined in the light of Moscovici's social representations theory.

9.4. Creating a reasonable version of conspiracy theory: a process of representation

In Chapter 2, it was suggested that one feature of conspiracy theory which contributed to its endurance and persistence in modern society is its fluid and dynamic quality. Over the past two hundred years, conspiracy theories have been continuously transformed. The perpetual evolution was fuelled by the need to make the notion of conspiracy more plausible and relevant in response to the changing political and social reality. The example of this process cited in Chapter 2 was the transformation from *classical* to *world elite* conspiracy theory in the 1950s and 60s. In the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust, antisemitic conspiracy theories, which dominated the conspiracist culture from the mid-19th Century, were relegated to the outer reaches of the political spectrum. However, the marginalisation of conspiratorial antisemitism did not mean that conspiracy culture was itself banished from public discourse. Many conspiracy theorists abandoned the notion of a Jewish plot, and turned their attention towards non-ethnic world elite organisations such as the Council on Foreign Relations or the Bilderberg Group (Lipset and Raab, 1978; Billig, 1978).

Significantly, as was pointed out in Chapter 7, the Bilderberg group, the Trilateral Commission and other organisations which feature in the more 'reasonable' and seemingly innocuous world elite versions of conspiracy theory were not invented by the conspiracy theorists themselves. Instead, these real and existing world elite organisations were imported into the conspiracy tradition from other contemporary discourses, such as various explanations of current affairs, international relations, world politics, etc. In other words, instrumental in the transformation of conspiratorial culture after the Second World War was the process of communication and exchange between conspiracy theories and other more socially acceptable and respectable worldviews. Through this kind of interaction, concepts, arguments and ideas originating from reputable, non-conspiratorial discourses were incorporated within the conspiratorial tradition, transforming it in a way that gave the basic thesis of conspiracy a more acceptable and convincing image.

The inter-ideological communication and exchange which underlies the continuous transformation of conspiracy theories can be said to reflect the dynamic of *re-presentation* (Moscovici, 1976, 1984a). In his work on the interpretation of psychoanalysis in the French press in the 1960s, Moscovici examined the way in which concepts belonging to a specific, specialist discourse (i.e. psychoanalysis) were *re-presented (anchored, objectified)* in everyday language before becoming part of the commonsense understanding of the world. A similar process can be said to underlie the way in which concepts, images and metaphors from reputable discourses are incorporated and assimilated within conspiracy theory before

becoming a regular feature of the conspiratorial explanatory framework. This aspect of conspiratorial rhetoric will be illustrated using the example of the way in which the initially metaphorical reference to 'neocortical war' in US military literature was *anchored* into the Serbian conspiratorial culture, and the way in which this process contributed to the legitimisation of Radišić's explanatory framework.

As will become apparent, the representation of 'neocortical warfare' in Serbian conspiracy theory consisted of two distinct stages. In the first stage of representation, the term was anchored within world elite conspiracy theory. At this stage, the phrase retained its original, metaphorical meaning. Only in the second stage was 'neocortical war' anchored into the more extreme, classical conspiratorial discourse. At this point the concept was *objectified*, and its original metaphorical meaning was transformed into a literal reference to attacks on the human brain. Each of the two representations will be examined in turn. Before doing so, the original meaning of the term 'neocortical war', as featured in US literature, will be briefly examined.

9.5. 'Neocortical warfare' in US military literature

As was already mentioned, the phrase 'neocortical war' originates from US literature on information warfare which has been largely inspired by the writings of Alvin and Heidi Toffler. According to some critics of the information warfare paradigm (e.g. DiNardo & Hughes, 1995) the Toffleresque wave theory of warfare is somewhat simplistic in its assumption that history, and by extension warfare, can be divided into three distinct, and radically different periods or 'waves'. One implication of such strict categorisation of history is that the emergence of the so-called 'information age' is presented in much of relevant literature as a radically new development, which warrants the reorganisation of the entire military doctrine and the formulation of innovative ways of waging war. For example, in the introduction to a recently published collection of essays on information warfare entitled *In Athena's Camp: preparing for conflict in the information age*, the editors, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (1997) of the RAND corporation consistently refer to the information age as a new 'epoch' which has transformed the battlefield. Significantly for the present discussion, the novelty of the 'information age' is seen as warranting the construction of new metaphors. So, Arquilla and Ronfeldt suggest that

'Epochal shifts call for new metaphors. Metaphors and analogies help convey new concepts by providing simplified images that encapsulate complex points' (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1997, p.8)

The title of their book, *In Athena's camp* is itself a metaphor. As the authors explain, in the information age, Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, is the new goddess of war. The era of brute force epitomised by Ares or Mars is over, in that 'where war is about information, [Athena] is the superior deity' (p.9).

The use of metaphor to make the relatively novel concept of information warfare more accessible to the uninitiated reader is also evident in the work of Colonel Richard Szafranski, who, in 1994, introduced the concept of 'neocortical warfare'. Szafranski, a retired US army colonel and military analyst, outlined neocortical warfare in two articles, *Neocortical warfare? The acme of skill* published in *The Military Review* in 1994 and *A Theory of Information Warfare: Preparing for 2020* which appeared in *Airpower Journal* in 1995. The former article was reprinted in Arquilla and Ronfeldt's (1997) recent edited collection of texts on information warfare.

In *Neocortical warfare? The acme of skill*, Szafranski endorses one of the main themes of information war theory, and argues that the principle aim of war is to subdue the enemy's hostile 'will', rather than to destroy it physically:

'object of war is quite simply, to force or encourage the enemy to make what you assert is a better choice, or to choose what you desire the enemy to choose. Said in another way, the object of war is to subdue the hostile will of the enemy. We cannot meet the immediate objective of war unless we subdue hostile will' (Szafranski, 1994/1997; p.397)

While traditional warfare achieves this aim through violent activity that 'resides at the high end of the spectrum of coercion' (p.397), Szafranski argues in favour of subduing the enemy through a more 'peaceful' technique based on persuasion. Szafranski proposes this kind of 'persuasion' as an alternative to traditional war, where the subjugation of hostile will could be achieved without force:

'What if we viewed war not as application of physical force, but as a quest for metaphysical control? What if we pursued the possibility that war might have as much to do with the idea of willpower and non-fighting than it does with the idea of physical power and fighting?' (p.399)

The aim of 'neocortical warfare' is thus 'to cause the enemy not to fight by exercising reflexive influence'. In other words, 'military power resides in the domain of the mind and the will; the province of choice, "thinking", valuing and "attitude", and insight or "imagination"' (p.395).

Interestingly, Szafranski acknowledges that his re-discovered interest in the importance of 'the moral, the mental and the will in conflicts' reflects the ideas of some of the principal theorists of warfare, ranging from Krishna of the Bhagavad-Gita, through Machiavelli and Clausewitz, to Mao and Napoleon. Among all the 'classics' cited in his work, Szafranski appears to have special affinity towards the ancient Chinese thinker Sun Tzu, whose aphoristic statement that 'subduing the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill' appears to be the author's favourite. However, the recognition that the psychological dimension of warfare is almost as old as war itself did not prevent Szafranski from bringing in a new term, 'neocortical warfare', to describe what Sun Tzu acknowledged, many centuries earlier, to be 'the acme of skill'. The introduction of new terminology was in some ways necessitated by the fact that 'information age' is seen as a radically new epoch which demands innovative modes of thinking and new 'paradigms', rather than the reliance on classical texts. Therefore, consistently with Arquilla and Ronfeldt's (1997) dictum about new epochs demanding new analogies, Szafranski incorporated his conceptualisation of 'third wave warfare' within a distinctive biological metaphor where the human brain is used to represent the characteristics of war in the information age.

In using the analogy of the human body to aid the understanding of an aspect of social life (in this case modern warfare), Szafranski followed a trend that dates back to antiquity (Gergen, 1990). In the *Republic*, Plato drew an analogy between classes in a society and different body parts. Similarly, in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, different functions of individuals in a society were compared to roles of different parts of the anatomy. Essentially the same metaphor underlies Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* (1876), as well as Durkheim's writing on 'collective representations' and McDougall's *Group Mind* (Gergen, 1990). Moreover, biological metaphors appear to be particularly common in war-time rhetoric, when they are often used to represent the enemy state or society. References to the striking at the 'heart' of the Serbian regime, or breaking its 'backbone' are some examples used by Nato propaganda during the bombing campaign. Even relatively neutral sources such as Amnesty International, described the bombing of the Serbian state television building as a way of destroying 'the nerve system and apparatus that keeps Milošević in power' (paragraph 76) and referred to the RTS as a propaganda 'organ'.⁴

To justify the use of a biological analogy, Szafranski cites the work of two historians, Will and Ariel Durant (1968) who are quoted as saying that

'the laws of biology are fundamental lessons of history. They describe nations or states as biological organisms, human organisms ourselves multiplied, our good and evil natures writ large' (quoted in Szafranski, 1994/1997, p.396).

The metaphor itself is constructed on the basis of a number of neuro-physiological theories, including Ornstein's and Thompson's (1984) work on the hemispheric division of the cortex. However, crucial to the labelling of the new form of warfare as 'neocortical' is Paul McLean's idea of the 'triune brain' which proposes a threefold differentiation of the human central nervous system, based on different stages of evolutionary development. After outlining the distinction between the reptilian, paleomammalian and neomammalian/neocortical parts of the brain, Szafranski (1994/1997) notes that 'the triune brain suggests an analogy. Might there also not be three approaches to warfare?' (p.403). The 'neo-mammalian brain' or the 'neocortex', which is capable of 'organisation, integration and the conceptualisation of time and space' is taken to represent war in the information age. The suggested aim of 'neocortical warfare' is 'influencing, even to the point of regulating the consciousness, perception and will of the adversary's leadership: the enemy's neocortical system' (p.404).

Throughout Szafranski's article, the term 'neocortex' is used primarily as a metaphor referring to the enemy's (collective) decision making structures, i.e. their leadership. Consistently with the cerebral analogy, the metaphorical 'brain' is portrayed as having its own psychological mechanisms. Szafranski argues that the collective 'neocortex', needs to be presented with 'perceptions, sensory and cognitive data' in order to influence its 'patterns and images'. Also, he advocates the use of 'tools similar to Bandler's and Grinder's neurolinguistic programming to understand how the adversary receives, processes and organises visual and kinaesthetic perceptions.' (Szafranski, 1997, p.405)

Literature on metaphors, especially those used in psychological writing, suggests that when analogies are employed to facilitate the understanding of a novel idea, there is often a slippage from metaphorical to literal expression (Soyland, 1994). As the analogy becomes more elaborate, concepts originally used for comparison within a figure of speech tend to become treated as if they are the actual object under discussion. Soyland (1994) for example discusses the way in which the analogy of a hologram was used in neuro-psychological literature in the 1960s to refer to the way in which memory is stored within the brain. Soyland suggests that as the analogy was elaborated by researchers, the explanation gradually shifted from the metaphoric to the literal, and memory became treated 'as if it were holographic' (Soyland, 1994; p.43). Similar slippage is visible in Szafranski's text. On occasions the word 'brain' is used not as a metaphor for enemy leadership, but as a metonymy for individual

enemy soldiers. For example, Szafranski describes traditional warfare as consisting of 'more elaborate means and methods of destroying brains', as an indirect way of getting at the collective will:

'Destroy enough brains, or the correct brains, our studies seem to encourage us, and 'will' necessarily dies along with the organism' (Szafranski, 1994/1997, p.398)

The metaphorical status of the 'neocortex' is further obscured when Szafranski challenges his own biological analogy by recognising that 'analogies suggesting that states are like biological organisms are convenient, simplistic and of course flawed' (p.396). The equivocation regarding the validity of his choice of metaphor leads Szafranski to adopt a reductionist stance which acknowledges that the 'chain of events that culminates in war' is attributable to the 'human factor' ('crazy leaders') rather than to the qualities of some metaphorical organism ('crazy state'). Reductionism of this kind undermines the metaphorical status of the psychological jargon employed in the rest of the article. Furthermore, if collective 'psychology' is portrayed as reducible to individual psychological functioning, then only a short hermeneutic step is needed before the references to 'sensory and kineasthetic' perceptions or neurolinguistic programming are interpreted as aimed at actual, individual 'neocortices' rather than at their metaphorical, collective equivalent.

As will become apparent later, the literalisation of the metaphor was precisely what happened when the idea of 'neocortical warfare' was represented within the wilder reaches of Serbian conspiracy culture. However, although the ambiguity of the original metaphor may have contributed to the nature of the representation of the concept in Serbian conspiracy literature, it is important to remember that in the original text, 'neocortical warfare' was explicitly introduced as an 'analogy'. It was also interpreted as such in US military literature which commented on Szafranski's article (e.g. Whitehead, 1997; DiNardo & Hughes, 1995). Although the idea of 'neocortical warfare' has been heavily criticised by numerous Western military analysts, none of the criticisms imply that Szafranski's article proposes a revolutionary method aimed at actual brain manipulation.⁵ This can be taken as evidence that the interpretation of Szafranski's ideas in Yugoslav conspiracy literature cannot be attributed solely to the ambiguity of the original metaphor. Instead, as the following sections will demonstrate, instrumental in the literalisation of the 'neocortical' metaphor was the process of *re-presentation* and, more specifically, *anchoring* and *objectification*.

9.6. First phase of conspiratorial re-presentation: transforming a personal view into 'doctrinal rule'

Approximately a year after *The Military Review* published Szafranski's article in the US, Yugoslavia's principal military journal *Vojno Delo* featured a text entitled *Information operations – a further examination of US military doctrine*. As the author – retired navy captain Živko Lukić – explained in a footnote, the aim of the article was to 'provide the outline of a series of texts' published in *The Military Review* in November 1994, and shed some light on the conceptualisation of information warfare in the *Doctrine FM 100-5*, which had been adopted by the US military in 1993 (Lukić, 1995, p.210). Because Lukić's article was intended as an appraisal of the whole issue of *The Military Review*, specific contributors were not individually identified. Instead, authors were collectively referred to, again in a footnote, as 'a group of eminent authors from the Fort Leavenworth Military Academy'. Consequently, although Lukić's article devoted four pages (out of the 20-page text) to Szafranski's formulation of 'neocortical warfare', the latter's authorship was never acknowledged. Even though the omission can be dismissed as poor scholarship on Lukić's part, the misattribution of authorship has had important rhetorical implications. By associating Szafranski's ideas with 'eminent authors from the Fort Leavenworth Military Academy', the notion of 'neocortical warfare' was given institutional legitimacy which it would not have had if it had been accurately presented as a widely criticised personal view of a retired army colonel. Moreover, Lukić not only presented 'neocortical war' as an idea promoted by prominent policy makers within the US military establishment, but also treated it as an established 'doctrinal rule' that had already been implemented in the Balkans, to the detriment of the Serbian people. Lukić commented that 'Americans have never publicised a doctrinal rule without trying out most of its postulates whether on polygons or in practice – on one of the victims of their foreign policy' (p.226). He went on to attribute the widespread anti-Serbian bias in Western media to the successful application of the 'doctrine of neocortical warfare' (p.226).

The transformation of 'neocortical warfare' from the vision of an individual analyst to an important aspect of US military doctrine can be seen as the first step in the re-presentation of 'neocortical warfare' in Yugoslav conspiracy literature. According to Moscovici, the process of re-presentation is a manifestation of the universal need to make the unfamiliar familiar. Novel concepts and ideas become part of common sense by being assimilated within an existing world view. In other words:

'The images, ideas and language shared by a given group always seem to dictate the initial direction and expedient by which the group comes to term with the unfamiliar' (Moscovici, 1984a, p.26)

Instrumental in the process of re-presentation is *anchoring* which aims to 'reduce strange ideas to ordinary categories and images, to set them in a familiar context' (Moscovici, 1984a, p.29) and '[integrate] new information within a system of familiar categories' (Abric, 1996, p.72). The same dynamic can be said to underlie Lukić's reading of Szafranski's formulation of 'neocortical warfare'. The world view which dictated the direction of Lukić's interpretation was the conspiratorial cultural tradition.

As was noted in the previous chapter, ever since the early 1990s, the journal *Vojno Delo* played an important part in the dissemination of conspiracy theories. Although some articles published in the journal were shown to contain traces of classical conspiratorial tradition, most focused on the world elite conspiracy aimed at the creation of a 'New World Order'. It is within this tradition of explanation that Lukić's article can be located.

As was noted in Chapter 2, one of the basic premises of conspiratorial culture is the idea of mass manipulation (Hofstadter, 1966; Billig, 1978). Conspiracy theorists believe that visible reality is just a façade that hides the intentions of evil organisations which are plotting world domination. Within the conspiracist culture, the idea that it may be possible to affect perceptions and thinking patterns is not treated as, at best, a vision of warfare in the future, but is accepted as a crucial feature of contemporary reality. Consequently, as the idea of 'neocortical warfare' was *anchored* into a conceptual framework which takes the reality of the New World Order conspiracy for granted, (Szafranski's) personal vision was re-presented as describing existing and effective methods of manipulation.

Significantly however, Lukić's article, as the first stage of re-presentation of 'neocortical warfare' in Serbian conspiracy literature, did not question the metaphorical dimension of Szafranski's argument. Although Lukić did not reflect on Szafranski's elaborate discussion of the cortical anatomy, he nonetheless interpreted and described 'neocortical warfare' within the confines of the biological analogy. For example, the original formulation of the 'enemy's neocortical system' as referring to 'its leadership' was faithfully reported, thus preserving the metaphorical connotations of the 'neocortex'. At the same time, some of the original ambiguity of the metaphor was further accentuated when Lukić noted that

'The authors then direct their attention to the characteristics of the human brain, consulting various experts in the sphere of psychology and the human mind and will, and conclude that "war is the only thing that simultaneously allows and demands the employment of all human

capacities, the highest as well as the lowest". This means that the human brain is capable of organising the strength and the means for killing and destruction, but at the same time it allows the limitation of the application of brute force' (Lukić, 1995; p.224)

'Various experts' (presumably Ornstein, Thompson and McLean) whose work was originally cited in order to justify the cortical analogy, were on this occasion represented as being actually 'consulted' by US policy makers. This, and the fact that 'the brain' is presented as the subject of the authors' attention, constitutes a significant departure from the otherwise mainly metaphorical allusion to the cortex. Importantly, although the ambiguity obscures the metaphor, Lukić at no point suggests that 'neocortical warfare' directly aims at the brains of individuals.

Lukić's relatively 'moderate' interpretation of neocortical warfare, in spite of the ambiguous nature of the metaphor, can again be attributed to the fact that Lukić's work belongs to the more 'reasonable', world elite conspiracy theory which tends to avoid the more controversial mystical and pseudo-scientific themes characteristic of classical conspiracy literature. In world elite conspiracy theories, allegations concerning the implantation of microchips in people's brains, interference with neural functions, etc. are largely absent. Therefore, the retention of the metaphorical meaning of 'neocortical war' in Lukić's writing can be attributed to the fact that this was a meaningful, and rhetorically advantageous way of anchoring Szafranski's ideas within the tradition of explanation which featured in *Vojno Delo* in the mid 1990s.

9.7. Second phase of re-presentation: objectification of the 'neocortex' in the writing of Svetozar Radišić

Several years after 'neocortical warfare' was introduced into Serbian conspiratorial discourse, the term became incorporated into the wilder reaches of the Serbian conspiracy culture. The key role in this process was played by Svetozar Radišić. Radišić first used the term in the article *Washington aims for the enemy's brain* published in *Revija 92* in April 1998. As has already been mentioned, arguments laid out in this article were subsequently reprinted, and developed, in the book *Neocortical War* (1999).

The title of Radišić's book suggests that Szafranski's concept of 'neocortical warfare' captured his imagination. However, a closer examination of the book's content offers no indication that the author actually read any of Szafranski's work. Instead, descriptions of 'neocortical warfare' found in the book consist entirely of paraphrases of Lukić's representation of the concept. For example, Radišić notes that :

'in articles which have been published in the journal "The Military Review", in November, 1994, a group of eminent authors from the Fort Leavenworth military academy confirmed, in their analysis of US military power in the 21st Century, that the Pentagon examined various aspects of the operationalisation of "neocortical warfare". It only confirmed that the (un)popular methods of mind control found their way into military doctrines' (Radišić, 1999; p. 15-16).

The misattribution of authorship and the interpretation of Szafranski's article as describing actuality rather than a vision of the future, match, practically word for word, Lukić's representation of 'neocortical warfare'. However, although Lukić's article seems to have been Radišić's only source of information on the subject of 'neocortical war', the latter treats the phrase as signifying much more than a metaphorical reference to methods used to influence the decision-making processes of the enemy leadership. As the above paragraph suggests, the concept is taken to signify the '(un)popular method of mind control'. Crucially, the 'mind' does not refer to the collective will of the metaphorical enemy as in Szafranski's or Lukić's texts, but to the actual mind of individuals. This is evident when Radišić suggests that:

'the working definition of this increasingly popular term could be stated as: neocortical war is a conflict in which one side uses the totality of methods aimed at the cortex, so that by deforming specific areas and by interfering with their functions, a person's relationship with his innate 'voice of conscience' would be disrupted, thus creating conditions for manipulating individuals, groups and peoples, in a way that would lead them to incorporate particular ideas, most frequently those which are inconsistent with their real interests' (p.12)

Radišić proposes that this new method of war 'includes the so called inactivation or blocking of neural functions which can cause death, because we are talking about the pinnacle of total war and its crucial characteristic' (Radišić, 1999; p.11). These allusions to the attacks on the neocortex and the interference with neural functions are not in any way metaphorical, but refer literally to techniques aimed at the organic brain. This becomes clear later in the book when Radišić examines the techniques of neocortical war in more detail, invoking many themes associated with the pseudoscientific and mystical strands of classical conspiracy theory such as the implantation of microchips, brainwashing, the use of subliminal messages, Satanic ritual abuse, etc.

The literalization of Szafranski's biological metaphor apparent in Radišić's interpretation of 'neocortical war' can be seen as an instance of *objectification*, a process which, according to Moscovici, often accompanies anchoring in the creation and maintenance of social representations. Objectification refers to the process that turns the 'invisible' and abstract concepts into something 'perceptible' and concrete (Farr, 1984), leading to a state of affairs where

'distinction between image and reality is obliterated. The image of the concept ceases to be a sign and becomes a replica of reality, a simulacrum in the true sense of the word. Then the notion or entity from which it had proceeded loses its abstract, arbitrary character and acquires an almost physical, independent existence. It has the authority of a natural phenomenon for those who use it.' (Moscovici, 1984a, p.40)

Like much of social representations terminology, the idea of objectification lacks a precise definition. Arguably, objectification involves the use of metaphor *per se*. Moscovici (1984a) suggested, for example, that the analogy with the 'father' *objectifies* the idea of a transcendental God by providing a *figurative nucleus* through which 'God', as an abstraction, is suffused with concrete meaning, and thus given a more real and tangible existence. However, the process of objectification seems to involve more than just metaphoric representation. It also assumes that 'the figurative paradigm [is] detached from its original milieu' and an abstract idea is 'let loose in a society [where] it is accepted as a reality, a conventional one but nonetheless a reality' (Moscovici, 1984a, p.39). In that sense objectification entails the *literalisation* of a metaphorical expression. Literalisation of a metaphor objectifies because it 'de-contextualises' a concept by removing it from the initial theoretical discourse and organising it in a different and original way (Abric, 1996). In Radišić's book, the reference to the 'neocortex' was dissociated from the discourse of information warfare where it had a metaphorical meaning, and was re-organised or re-presented in a way that transformed the metaphor into a literal allusion to the organic brain targeted by the malicious cabal behind the evil conspiracy.

Importantly, objectification, which can be said to underlie Radišić's use of the phrase 'neocortical war', was accompanied, and in some sense instigated by the process of anchoring. The literalisation of the original metaphor was steered by the 'images, ideas and culture' inherent in the more extreme pseudoscientific versions of conspiracy theory within which the concept was being imported. A common feature of classical conspiracy theories is a profound interest in the way in which conspirators use scientific achievements, real or imagined, to advance their evil causes. Conspiracy theorists who subscribe to this view place particular emphasis on the progress in the field of neuro-physiology or brain-wave research (Miller, 1995; Constantine, 1997; Keith, 1999, Vlajić, 1998, 2000) reflecting the conspiracy theorist's preoccupation with the notion of mass manipulation on which the alleged plot depends. Within these more outrageous strands of conspiratorial cultural tradition, the possibility and actuality of brain manipulation is treated as crucial to the process of deceiving the masses. Therefore, the anchoring of 'neocortical' warfare within the pseudo-scientific conspiratorial system of thought, prepared the ground for the process of objectification and the resulting literalisation of Szafranski's biological metaphor.

9.8. Rhetorical implications of re-presentation

The above sections attempted to illustrate the dynamic which underpins an important aspect of conspiratorial rhetoric, namely the tendency to incorporate, within the conspiratorial narrative, arguments and concepts which originate from relatively uncontroversial and commonsense discourses. In some sense, this process can be said to lie at the foundation of what Hofstadter (1966) called the 'leap of the imagination' frequently found in conspiracy theory. The accumulation of 'convincing evidence' which, according to Hofstadter, precedes the conspiratorial leap from the 'undeniable to the unbelievable' can be said to involve the process of representation through which concepts and arguments from less contentious perspectives and discourses are *anchored* within the conspiratorial interpretative framework. When various extraordinary conspiratorial claims, such as the possibility of parapsychological warfare, appear rational or convincing to the audience, this is frequently because they are coated in a set of otherwise sensible and reasonable representations.

As far as the actual process of re-presentation is concerned, it might be tempting to interpret *anchoring* and *objectification* described above as manifestations of various cognitive biases which mar the psychological functioning of Lukić, Radišić, or other conspiracy theorists. In fact, there is a tendency among some advocates of the social representations approach, to treat *anchoring* and *objectification* as taking place on the level of individual cognition (van Dijk, 1991; Potter and Billig, 1992). Traces of cognitivism in social representations theory have attracted some criticism, especially from the discourse analytic perspective (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Potter & Litton, 1985; Potter & Edwards, 1999). Discourse analysts have been particularly critical of the frequent neglect, in social representations research, of the communicative aspects of representations, and its occurrence in everyday talk and interaction.⁶ Also, the cognitivist interpretation of anchoring and objectification can be said to neglect the strong social dimension and purpose of re-presentation. The assimilation of concepts within an existing representation reproduces and maintains the world-view contained in that representation, and propagates the broader cultural tradition of the group that shares it (Billig, 1993). So, incorporating, redefining and reinterpreting novel concepts from the conspiratorial perspective binds the conspiracist community together and enriches the explanatory framework to which it subscribes. Moscovici (1984a) himself suggests that the function of social representations is not just to guide interpretation of social phenomena and facilitate understanding of novel concepts, but also to bind groups together, groups which are defined by the very fact that they endorse the same world-view and belong to the same culture. Consequently, rather than being a mechanical process, akin to traditional socio-psychological notions of categorisation or assimilation, re-presentation can be said to involve

a dynamic and a fundamentally *social* activity. In other words, in the present chapter, Lukić's and Radišić's writings have been used as illustrative examples of a broader social and ideological dynamic which takes place at the level of discourse and communication.

Also, conspiratorial re-presentation illustrated the dynamic quality of social representations. Representations are in a state of perpetual transformation, which entails continuous creation of novel and more convincing ways of stating particular claims, and justifying a stance in a matter of controversy. Anchoring and objectification are therefore functional practices which reflect the epistemological orientation of language and the rhetorical nature of communication (Billig, 1987, 1991). In the case of conspiratorial discourse, re-presentation plays an essential part in the permanent battle against the widespread 'intellectual presumption against conspiracy theory' (Pidgen, 1995) and popular scepticism towards conspiratorial claims.

The rhetorical impact of the dynamic of representation is evident in the role which 'neocortical war' presently occupies in Serbian conspiratorial culture. Since the publication of Radišić's and Lukić's work, the term has become a regular feature in Serbian conspiratorial literature. 'Neocortical war' is used to refer to practically any aspect of conspiratorial mass manipulation. More importantly, Radišić's and Lukić's writing has provided those who promote the idea of mass manipulation with a credible and respectable authority to support their claims. Writers who use the concept of 'neocortical war' seldom omit to acknowledge that revelations concerning the reality of this aspect of contemporary warfare originate from 'a group of eminent authors from the Fort Leventworth Military Academy' or from the writing of Svetozar Radišić whose military credentials augment the rhetorical force of his extraordinary conspiratorial argument.

One particularly interesting example of the increasing popularity of the concept of 'neocortical war' is the fact that the third, revised edition of the book *Religious Sects*, published in 2000, contains a ten-page chapter entitled *Neocortical warfare* (Luković, 2000). This book, which has been endorsed by the Yugoslav Army, the Serbian Ministry of Interior and the Serbian Orthodox Church, is used as a textbook at the Serbian Police Academy. The author of the book is Zoran Luković, a lecturer at that institution. However the chapter on 'neocortical war' was the special contribution of Aleksandar Senić, an expert on sects who has been writing on the subject for various religious publications as well as *Revija 92*. In the chapter in Luković's book, Senić interpreted the emergence of new religious movements in contemporary Serbia as an instance of 'neocortical war', i.e. as part of an attempt at mass manipulation the aim of which is the subjugation of the Serbian people. It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that attack on religious sects is an important feature of

Serbian conspiratorial discourse. In *Religious Sects*, various legitimate religious communities (such as the Hare Krishna movement, Jehovah's Witnesses or the Adventists) are discussed as belonging to the same category as Satanic cults, the Freemasons, Ordo Templi Orientis, or the Illuminati, and therefore are constructed as instruments in the anti-Serbian plot.

The inclusion of Senić's chapter in the third edition of Luković's book suggests that by the year 2000, the concept of neocortical war had become established as a normative category used to refer to conspiratorial mass manipulation. Moreover, the idea of neocortical war was considered to be significant enough to warrant a separate chapter, written by a different author. Interestingly, the description of 'neocortical war' in *Religious Sects* resembles Luković's interpretation closer than Radišić's, in that direct and literal brain-manipulation (through electromagnetic and psi-weapons) is not mentioned. At the same time, Radišić's 1997 pamphlet (which was subsequently published as *Neocortical War*) is referred to, so the reader is directed towards Radišić's more extreme ideas. The pamphlet is cited as evidence that 'the defence against neocortical war- the idea of full-dimensional defence- is being taught in the School of National Defence and the Military Academy [Generalstabna Skola]' (Senić, 2000; p.302) which gives the whole discourse of 'neocortical war' further institutional legitimacy.

The respectability which paranormal and esoteric themes achieved through the association with the information war paradigm appear to have propelled these themes into the domain of acceptable (political) explanation. This is apparent in the recognition which paranormal theorising attained among members of the regime of Slobodan Milošević. In the Spring of 1999, around the time of the Nato bombing, two senior members of the Party of the Yugoslav Left which at the time was part of the ruling coalition (and led by Mirjana Marković, Slobodan Milošević's wife), proposed the formation of a 'Yugoslav committee for coherence and invincibility' which would train one thousand Yogi fliers who would protect Yugoslavia with their positive energy (Pavlović, 2001, Popadić, 2000). The two officials, Jara Ribnikar and Prvoslav Marković (who at the time was chairman of the board of Belgrade's main mental hospital) got the backing for their project from a number of state-owned companies (including the Post Office and the Electricity Board) as well as from the Ministries of Health and Defence. The presence of the Ministry of Defence on this list is especially noteworthy. It suggests that in 1999 the military not only endorsed a venture based on the mystical theories of Maharishi Yogi, but also formally backed the same project - the building of a parapsychological shield over Serbia - from which some five years earlier (at the time of *Group 69*) it was so eager to distance itself. With this in mind, it no longer seems surprising that in the spring of 2000, Radišić was considered a suitable candidate for the main spokesman of the Yugoslav military.

9.9. Conspiracy theory beyond left and right: Bishop Velimirović in *Vojno Delo*

So far the chapter focused on the emergence of paranormal conspiratorial themes in Yugoslav military discourse in the late 1990s. However, this development was not the only conspiracy theory-related ideological shift in the Yugoslav military at the time. The Army publications also became more open to the Velimirovićesque ideas propagated by the Orthodox Right.

Earlier in the chapter it has been noted that, unlike Radišić's articles in *Duga* in 1994, the book *Neocortical War* contains several references to Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović. On both occasions, it was Velimirović's anti-Westernism - such as the allusion to the idea of the *omnihuman*, or to the 'qualitative' Serbian spirit - that appealed to Radišić. Further evidence that, in the late 1990s, the Army was becoming more open to the views of the Orthodox Right comes from an article published in the Autumn 1999 issue of *Vojno Delo*. The article in question, entitled *The philosophical thought of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović on War and Europe* was written by Zoran Milošević, a sociologist of religion, whose articles on the Vatican conspiracy were published in *Vojno Delo* at various points in the 1990s. The piece outlined Velimirović's life and work, and summarised his views on war and the Western world. Velimirović's overtly antisemitic book *Words to the Serbian people through the dungeon window* was introduced as containing Bishop's 'most significant thoughts on Europe' (Milošević, *Philosophical thought...*, p.180). These 'significant thoughts' include the reference to Europe as the 'white devil' (p.179), and the antithesis to Christianity (p.182). Velimirović's view of Europeans as betrayers of Christ and representatives of Satan were cited in the article without critical reflection.

In Milošević's article, as in Velimirović's writing, the anti-European and anti-modern sentiments gradually slip into antisemitism. In the article's conclusion, where the author endorses Velimirović's idea that Serbia should turn away from Europe towards Russia, Velimirović is quoted as saying that the required re-orientation is 'not towards anti-Russian and Jewish Russia, but Orthodox Russia' (Milošević, 1999; p.183). The reference to 'Jewish Russia' alludes to the Communist Soviet Union. The article therefore not only resonates Velimirović's antisemitism, but also echoes a well known right-wing conspiratorial myth concerning the Jewish origins of communist ideology and the alleged role of Jews in the Russian revolution. Once again, no critical commentary of Velimirović's antisemitism or his right-wing ideas was offered by the author.

The endorsement of a right-wing conspiratorial myth in Zoran Milošević's article is noteworthy because unlike in 1993, when *Vojno Delo* published the article by the right-wing journalist Dragoš Kalajić, on this occasion there was no comparable shift to the right which might explain the openness to right-wing conspiratorial myths. As will become apparent shortly, by 1999 the Yugoslav Army had by-and-large returned to its Titoist, leftist roots. Also, around the time of the publication of the article in *Vojno Delo* the relations between the army and the Orthodox Church deteriorated significantly.

In the summer of 1993, Slobodan Milošević became increasingly aware of the danger posed by the influence of right-wing political forces within the military. The purge of army generals which ensued saw the departure of most officers with open links to the Right (*Military Coup, Vreme, 7 June 1993, p. 19-21; Panić ate lamb, Vreme, 19 July 1993, p.13-16.*). The army was subsequently infiltrated by the Party of the Yugoslav Left (YUL) an organisation led by Slobodan Milošević's wife Mirjana Marković. Total control of the military by left-wing parties was finally established in December 1998, when General Dragoljub Ojdanić, an officer with affiliations with the Party of the Yugoslav Left, became the Army Chief of Staff (*General spring cleaning, NIN, 3 December 1998. Ongoing reshuffle, Vreme, 28 November 1998, p.6-8.*).

With the rising influence of YUL in the military came a return to the old Titoist tradition. In February 1995, one of the leaders of YUL, Zoran Čičak, told a journalist that the army was 'torn between its tradition, the tradition of the old Yugoslav People's Army which was freedom-loving, anti-Fascist and (why hide it) leftist, and the hysterical demands from sections of the public for its "depolitisation" (*Who marches with the Left?, NIN, 24 February 1995, p.10-13*). It was clear that YUL favoured the restoration of the leftist tradition of Tito's Partizans.

The shift to the left was also visible in the Army's stance towards the Serbian Orthodox Church. This is significant with respect to the article on Velimirović, considering that he represents not only the Serbian Right, but is also a highly esteemed Church figure. Although from the early 1990s senior military officers paid occasional visits to the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Army consistently refused to allow church services for soldiers, continuing the secular tradition of the Communist Yugoslav National Army.⁷ In addition, frequent allegations of clericalism, directed against the Orthodox Church by the Serbian regime, were reiterated in military publications, including *Vojno Delo*. Incidentally, one such article, *Pros and cons of spiritually guided policies*, published in 1995, was a critical review of a book by Zoran Milošević, author of the subsequent article on Velimirović. The

reviewer, Jovan Despotović (mentioned earlier as the reviewer of Gary Allen's *Say no to New World Order*), criticised the claim, made in Milošević's book, that clericalism was absent from Orthodox Christian dogma. Despotović accused the Serbian Orthodox Church of interference in state matters and of siding with extreme right-wing elements in Serbian society. Criticism was directed especially at those within the church who attempted to rehabilitate 'quislings and fascists' from the Second World War (Despotović, 1995, p.193). The article echoed the old Communist assessment of the Church as the extended arm of right-wing Nazi collaborators, and as such was implicitly criticising the rehabilitation of Velimirović by the Church authorities.

In the months after the bombing, the relations between the Serbian regime, including the Army, and the Serbian Orthodox Church were particularly strained. Following the end of the war with Nato, the Church openly sided with Serbian opposition parties and demanded reform and the establishment of a 'government of national salvation' (*He touched my finger, Vreme*, 19 June 1999, p. 8-10). The response of Milošević's regime was, yet again, to accuse the Church of interference in state affairs. Some prominent Church figures were even labelled 'puppets of the West'. Significantly, the Yugoslav Army openly sided with the regime: two senior generals, Dragoljub Ojdanić and Nebojša Pavković publicly stated their readiness to defend the Serbian regime from all 'Nato stooges' and 'traitors' (*The misuse of oak leaves, Vreme*, 24 July 1999, p. 2).

It appears, therefore, that a positive evaluation of the work of Nikolaj Velimirović, one of the principal exponents of right-wing clericalism, appeared in *Vojno Delo* at a time when the Army was controlled by left-wing parties, and when accusations of clericalism and right-wing bias were regularly directed at Church authorities. What is especially remarkable is that the article in *Vojno Delo* focused on precisely those aspects of the Bishop's teachings which have significant political and ideological implications and which reflect his devotion to right-wing politics governed by Christian religious teachings.

The paradoxical situation where a publication belonging to a left-wing, secular institution implicitly endorses a right-wing, clericalist political outlook, becomes more comprehensible once the proliferation of conspiratorial discourse in the 1990s is brought into the equation. Throughout the years of Milošević's rule, the habitual antagonism between Left and Right, or between 'regime' and 'opposition' populism was continuously eroded by the increasing popularity of the shared notion of international conspiracy against Serbia. The proliferation of conspiracism eventually brought on, as the dominant categorisation in the Serbian ideological context, an alternative distinction between pro- and anti-Western political stances. The

emergence of a united anti-Western front, defined by an ideology which circumvented the traditional distinction between Left and Right, had the idea of conspiracy at its core. One of the most significant institutional manifestations of this ideological convergence of contrasting political outlooks was Serbia's ruling 'Red-Black' coalition, which brought together the Socialist Party, the Party of the Yugoslav Left and the nationalist Serbian Radical Party of Vojislav Šešelj.⁸

If the Serbian ideological context is observed in terms of the distinction between pro- and anti-Western stances, then it becomes evident that, at the time of the publication of the article on Velimirović, the Orthodox Right and the Army were effectively on the same 'side'. Significantly, the distinction between pro- and anti-Western stances never totally superseded the Left-Right division in Serbian politics. Instead, the two different classifications of ideas interacted and clashed with each other on the level of political discourse, with the salience of each depending on the rhetorical demands of specific situations. That is why it was possible to accuse the Church of right-wing bias on one occasion (as Despotović did in 1995) and praise its leading right-wing ideologist on another.

In summary, the positive evaluation of Velimirović's work in *Vojno Delo* cannot be attributed to a shift towards the Right in the military. Instead Zoran Milošević's article should be seen as a tribute to Bishop Nikolaj's contribution to the anti-Western conspiratorial discourse and a testimony to his role as the high-priest of contemporary Serbian conspiratorial culture. The dynamic which enabled the text on Velimirović to appear in *Vojno Delo* can be said to have involved the broadening of the boundaries of acceptable opinion similar to that described in Chapter 7. As the idea of an international conspiracy came to be regarded, in Serbian military discourse, as the standard way of perceiving politics and history, it was only a matter of time before aspects of the conspiracy tradition, which at first sight might seem incongruous, emerged from the woodwork and became treated as respectable. The continuing presence of Velimirović's religious ideology in Yugoslav military discourse will be considered in the following chapter, which examines the fate of conspiracy theories following the fall of Milošević's regime in October 2000.

Chapter 10

Conspiracy culture in post-Milošević Serbia: the return to the margins

In the previous chapters, it was suggested that at the time of the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia, conspiratorial explanations of the Western intervention in Kosovo gradually came to prominence in Serbian political, media and everyday discourse. Although the basic thesis of conspiracy played an important role in Milošević's political rhetoric ever since the early 1990s, the presence of conspiratorial culture in Serbian society was never as pervasive and ubiquitous as at the time of the war with Nato. In the Spring of 1999, and for many months afterwards, Serbia resembled Daniel Pipes' description of contemporary Middle East as a place where conspiracy theory 'suffuses life, from the most private family conversations to the highest and the most public levels of politics'; where it flourishes 'on the street and in the palace and everywhere between' (Pipes, 1996, p.2).

The proliferation of conspiracy theories in Serbia in the final years of the 20th century can be at least partly attributed to the traumatic nature of the 11 weeks of Nato bombing. Outbreaks of conspiracism are usually sparked by disturbing social or political events which lead to a breakdown of traditional explanations. Conspiracy theories, and indeed other extraordinary beliefs (e.g. the paranormal), fill the explanatory vacuum by providing simple and coherent accounts of relevant social strains and traumas.

Another important reason why the belief in sinister international plots imposed itself with such force and conviction on Serbian political culture is that this type of explanation presented a convenient and culturally available explanatory framework which could account for years of international isolation and the confrontation with the Western military alliance. In the contemporary world, conspiracism is typically found among cultures (Middle East), societies (North Korea, Russia in the mid 1990s) or political movements (John Birch Society, Liberty Lobby, International Action Centre, etc.) which feel in some way marginalised or threatened by the US-dominated post-communist political reality. Across the globe, critics of Western military, economic and diplomatic supremacy, and those eager to challenge the authority of the liberal-democratic political discourse, appear to project their fears and discontents into a general thesis of conspiracy. In that sense, Serbia in the late 1990s, impoverished by lengthy international economic sanctions and under threat from Nato attack, constituted the ideal breeding ground for conspiratorial culture. In addition, the international

aspect of the Yugoslav crisis brought into the open the significant anti-Western dimension of Serbian nationalist discourse which contains, at its core, the notion of an anti-Serbian plot.

The assumed significance of the conflict with the Western world as a contributing factor in the proliferation of conspiracism in Serbian society, implies that an improvement in the relations between Serbia and the relevant international power structures would influence the status and importance of conspiratorial culture. The events of October 2000, which resulted in the collapse of the twelve year-old regime of Slobodan Milošević, provide an opportunity for testing this proposition. The transition of power in Serbia instantly changed the country's international standing. Once a 'pariah state', Serbia suddenly became inundated with promises of financial aid and offers of membership in various international political and economic organisations. Many of these organisations, including the OSCE, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had been habitually portrayed by Milošević's media as the extended arms of the anti-Serbian conspiracy. In other words, more or less overnight, international isolation, as a predicament which had to be accounted for and which generated conspiratorial explanations, disappeared from the political agenda. The present chapter will attempt to explore the fate of conspiracy theories in the new political climate and examine the extent to which the political changes affected the status of conspiracist ideology in Serbian society.

The chapter will consist of four separate sections, which will deal with different issues relating to the status of conspiracy theory in post-Milošević Serbia. The first of the four sections will examine the transition of power in October 2000 in the light of the pervasiveness of conspiratorial beliefs at the time. If anti-Western sentiments, articulated in terms of a belief in an international conspiracy, were as strong and widespread as earlier chapters suggest, then how is it possible that the Serbian electorate decided to substitute the anti-Western regime of Slobodan Milošević for a government which brought about a reconciliation with the Western world? A brief examination of the events leading to the downfall of Slobodan Milošević will suggest that the transition of power was not brought about by a sudden ideological transformation in Serbian society, or a widespread endorsement of liberal and pro-Western ideas by the electorate. Instead, the fall of the Milošević regime was precipitated by the fact that the Serbian political opposition took on board the prevailing anti-Western sentiments, and opted for a campaigning strategy which brought together the rhetoric of national pride and the necessity for political change. It will be suggested that the rise to prominence of Vojislav Koštunica, who played an instrumental role in the ousting of Milošević, was largely attributable to his strong anti-Western credentials, and a defiant stance, which in the past had incorporated elements of conspiratorial rhetoric.

In the second section it will be suggested that, as predicted, once the problem of international isolation had been removed from the political agenda, the thesis of conspiracy lost most of its explanatory value, giving way to a more reconciliatory tone with regard to Serbia's relations with the Western world. Since the events in Autumn 2000, conspiratorial culture has been relegated to the margins of politics and public life. The marginalisation of conspiratorial culture will be illustrated by the example of Otačastveni Pokret Obraz (Patriotic Movement Dignity), a fringe far-right organisation which became active after Milošević's ousting, and which is today the principal exponent of the wilder reaches of conspiratorial culture. This section will also reflect on the different ways in which known conspiracy theorists Spasoje Vlajić and Smilja Avramov, whose work was examined in earlier chapters, interpreted the recent political changes and accounted for the decline in their public standing.

The third section will suggest that one important state institution in Serbia has managed to resist the overall marginalisation of conspiracy theories. The institution in question is the Army, which has not, as yet, undergone significant personnel and systemic changes since the transition of power. As a result, military publications continue to promote the kind of explanatory discourse examined in earlier chapters. This section will focus particularly on the way in which the exponents of conspiratorial anti-Westernism in military publications reconcile this somewhat anachronistic perspective with the all-embracing changes in the relations between Serbia and the international community.

Finally, after examining the general disappearance of conspiracism from the mainstream media and its continuing presence in military publications, it will be suggested that in spite of the overall marginalisation of conspiracy theories and those who promote them, this type of ideology still features in Serbian political life. Moreover, it occasionally manages to penetrate the mainstream media. The enduring presence of conspiracism will be attributed to the fact that conspiracy theory still constitutes a culturally available explanatory discourse which is occasionally invoked to explain and criticise various Western influences in Serbian society and its greater liberalisation. As such, conspiracism is becoming an integral part of at least the more extreme elaborations of a conservative, nationalist and traditionalist political option which is gaining ground in post-Milošević Serbia.

10.1. Conspiracy theory and the transition of power in October 2000:

In the introductory chapters, it was indicated that an important feature of the conspiracist worldview is the Manichean view of politics. Conspiracy theorists often interpret the

everyday political struggle as a battle between the irreconcilable forces of Good and Evil. As a result, in societies dominated by conspiracism, everyday political disputes are seen as a confrontation between right and wrong and as the final showdown between the two moral opposites (Hofstadter, 1966; Lipset & Raab, 1978).

In the aftermath of the war with Nato, the Serbian political arena was dominated by the spirit of conspiratorial Manicheanism. In the eyes of the regime and its media, the political sphere was divided between two diametrically opposed alternatives. One was the superior, freedom loving and patriotic option epitomised by the 'heroic' efforts of Slobodan Milošević in the fight against the 'New World Order'. The other, which included anything short of unequivocal support for Milošević and his political regime, was branded 'collaborationist' and regarded as the continuation of the aggression by Nato and other Western imperialists. In the regime media, Serbian opposition parties were regularly referred to as 'puppet-like political structures' whose every move was 'instructed' by 'mentors' from Washington or Brussels. At a reception organised in honour of the representatives of the Serbian Diaspora in August 1999, Milošević personally accused the opposition parties of trying to 'implement the aims of the Nato alliance' and vowed that 'patriotism and the love of our country would defeat treason', and that 'good would triumph over evil' (quoted in *Serbian Dialogue between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, Vreme*, 14 August 1999, p.5).

The dualism inherent in Serbian government rhetoric reflects the important countersubversive dimension of conspiratorial discourse. As Berlet & Lyons (2000) suggest, the search for the 'fifth column', and the witch hunt against groups which are portrayed as wanting to overturn the established political order, constitutes an important element of contemporary conspiracy culture. In many ways the counter-subversive dimension of conspiracism is a manifestation of the inherently reactionary nature of the conspiracy culture. In Serbia for example, the escalation in the hunt for 'collaborators' in the months after the war with Nato helped maintain the status quo by making it difficult for Milošević's opponents, who were known for their pro-Western views, to formulate a political programme which could not be easily dismissed as an act of 'treason' plotted by international powers.

In the first months after the bombing, the Serbian opposition tried to ignore the constant vilification in the state media, and openly propagated a reformist, pro-Western agenda. For instance, opposition representatives (Vuk Drašković, Žarko Korać, Dragoljub Mićunović, Vesna Pešić) met with the one of the most denigrated Western politicians, the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in an attempt to negotiate the lifting of sanctions against Serbia. Vuk Drašković, leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement, even kissed Madeleine Albright's

hand, in an act of gentlemanly courtesy which turned out to be also an act of political suicide. Behind such openly pro-Western campaigning strategy stood the belief that Serbian public opinion would not be deceived by the paranoia whipped up by the pro-regime media, and that verbal assaults on the opposition parties would actually lead to public outrage culminating in widespread protests against the government (veteran Serbian opposition politician Dragoljub Mićunović in *Are fair elections possible?*, *Vreme*, 21 August, 1999). However, the predicted uprising in defence of the opposition's integrity failed to materialise. Instead, the public display of pro-Western sentiments only fuelled the ongoing witch-hunt against 'Nato mercenaries'. For instance, the footage of Drašković's 'intimacy' with Mrs. Albright was subsequently replayed over and over again on Serbian state television, often in slow motion and accompanied by vulgar innuendoes. Ivan Marković, one of the leaders of the Party of the Yugoslav Left commented that 'citizens of Serbia and voyeurs around the world were given the opportunity to watch a live broadcast of the fable about the stupid wolf [Vuk is Serbian for Wolf] and the evil pig' (*Politika*, 10th January, 2000, p.14). For months after the event, images of Drašković kissing the 'bloody paw' were regularly invoked as the ultimate proof of the collaboration between the Serbian opposition and the West.

The opposition's disregard for the widespread anti-Westernism seriously undermined the perceived legitimacy of the democratic political option in the months after the bombing. The prevailing sentiment among the voting public was that of apathy. The only two, and both equally unattractive political options that seemed to be on offer at the time were the existing regime - which proposed the preservation of national pride at the price of poverty and economic instability; and the opposition - which promised democratisation and economic development in exchange for what was perceived to constitute outright capitulation to Nato and the West. The prevailing 'they are all as bad as each other' attitude, accompanied by a general disillusionment regarding the prospects for political change, favoured the status quo and contributed to the continuation of Milošević's rule.

The unenviable position in which the Serbian opposition found itself in this period became particularly acute late in July 2000, when Milošević's Socialist party of Serbia formally announced the date of the presidential elections. For the first time since 1992, the election entailed a direct one-to-one 'face-off' between Milošević and an opposition candidate. Finding a suitable challenger proved to be a difficult task for Serbia's recently united opposition. Independent opinion polls conducted at the time indicated that around 30% of voters were hard-core opposition supporters, who would vote for the opposition candidate regardless of their character or political profile (*Ripe for a candidate*, *Vreme*, 5 August, 2000) Milošević on the other hand could count on a steady portion of around 33 percent of the

electorate. The remaining 37 percent were the indifferent and apathetic floating voters, whom the opposition needed to woo in order to ensure victory over Milošević. However, neither of the two main contenders, Vuk Drašković and Zoran Đinđić, was able to make inroads into the undecided proportion of the vote. The main problem was that both had dubious patriotic credentials. Đinđić fled the country during the bombing which was widely perceived as an unpatriotic and almost treacherous act, while Drašković had had the unfortunate and unforgivable encounter with Madeleine Albright. The popularity of each of the two opposition leaders was likely to diminish as the election date approached, considering that candidature would bring about an even more intense and more focused vilification in the state media.

However, an intriguing result which emerged from the same opinion polls conducted during the summer of 2000, was that 43% of those questioned by pollsters replied that they would vote for the opposition if the candidate was Vojislav Koštunica. Koštunica was then leader of the relatively minor Democratic Party of Serbia (DPS) which in previous elections had attracted (on its own) around 6% of the vote. And yet, Koštunica suddenly emerged as the preferred candidate of the united opposition. Furthermore, the 43% of the vote attracted by Koštunica included an unprecedented 5% swing away from Milošević, whose percentage was reduced to 28%. It subsequently emerged that the main quality which distinguished Koštunica from other opposition leaders, and which enabled him to infringe upon Milošević's proportion of the vote, were his impeccable patriotic credentials and a firm and uncompromising anti-Western stance.

Throughout the 1990s Koštunica and the DPS propagated a political ideology based on the ideas of patriotism, national pride and the revival of Serbian cultural traditions. Hand in hand with this conservative and nationalist political agenda went a strong anti-Western rhetoric. This latter aspect of Koštunica's political orientation became particularly prominent at the time of the bombing, when he emerged as one of the fiercest critics of the military intervention. Koštunica's anti-Westernism was often formulated in way that echoed the official government rhetoric. As a result Koštunica's Democratic Party of Serbia was practically the only credible opposition organisation in Serbia whose press-releases were regularly reported in the regime media, including *Politika* and state television. In *Politika*, the views of the DPS were habitually given a few square inches of column space, usually among a variety of other, similar texts which expressed an outrage at the Nato intervention and praised the bravery of the Serbian people. The same press releases were also read out in television news bulletins. Significantly for the present discussion, the anti-Westernism

evident in the views of Koštunica and the DPS often included themes characteristic of what in earlier chapters was referred to as protoconspiracy theory.

For instance, DPS press releases contrasted the 'real' intentions of the Nato bombing with its assumed humanitarian purpose. Predictably, the 'real' motives, which the DPS exposed in its statements were far more sinister, and involved the destruction of Serbia:

'The systematic bombing of bridges, railroads and industrial plants which are far away from Kosovo, clearly suggests that the aim of William Jefferson Clinton and his European satellites is not the solution to the Kosovo problem, which they themselves created, or the protection of the Albanians whom they have themselves endangered...

The real purpose of the bombing, is to impede Serbia's economic development, and reduce it to the status of a backward American colony, incapable of performing an active role in the international community. One thing which this man [Clinton], who has defiled the idea of democracy, has lost sight of is the vast force of resistance possessed by the Serbian people...' (*Politika*, 11 April, 1999)

Although the statements consistently referred to the 'conquest of Serbian territory' as the aim of the campaign (e.g. *Politika*, 16 April, 1999, p.14; 17 April, 1999, p.14; 31 May, 1999, p.14), sometimes the assumed hidden motives of Nato were extended to include the destruction of the Serbian people. DPS claimed that Nato was deliberately targeting Serbian civilians, as it supposedly did when it bombed 'the first floor of a 23 storey tower-block, ensuring that no one inside could get out alive'. This particular argument was used to suggest that the real objective of the Nato campaign, orchestrated by 'Madeleine Albright and other similar creatures', was the 'deliberate annihilation of a whole [Serbian] people' (*Politika*, 23 April, 1999).

Also, Nato's assumed desire to destroy Serbia and its people was presented by the DPS as simply a stepping stone towards global control. For instance, in early April 1999, Koštunica gave an interview to the sensationalist political magazine *Nedeljni Telegraf*, in which he condemned the 'mixture of [American] imperialism and totalitarianism', aimed at 'conquering new territories, and ordering the whole world in a new way' (*Nedeljni Telegraf*, 7 April, 1999; p.12-13). The reference to the 'ordering of the whole world' reflects the New World Order theme characteristic of conspiracy theory.

Finally, as in other instances of protoconspiratorial discourse, which were examined in an earlier chapter, significant emphasis in the rhetoric of Koštunica's DPS was placed on the notion of mass manipulation, the aim of which was to conceal the West's colonial or even

genocidal aspirations. For instance, Koštunica compared Nato to Nazi Germany and argued that the policy of retaliation against civilian targets is

'accompanied by unprecedented manipulation and the presence of the most transparent lies. Since the bombing has up to now been a political and military failure, various exoduses, executions, mass graves, concentration camps and rapes are more and more frequently being invented in Brussels' (*Politika*, 20 April, 1999; p.14)¹

As in much of Serbian government discourse, the plight of the Albanian refugees was either ignored, blamed on Nato's bombing campaign, or in most cases portrayed as a product of media manipulation.

An important consequence of the thematic compatibility between Koštunica's explanation of the Nato intervention, and that found in Serbian government discourse, is that Koštunica's patriotism was never questioned by the regime media. Unsullied patriotic credibility provided Koštunica with valuable political capital. His anti-Westernism not only appealed to the substantial percentage of voters for whom the idea of an international anti-Serbian conspiracy seemed a plausible explanation of the Nato intervention, but it also made Koštunica immune from the accusations which Milošević's media habitually directed at other opposition leaders. Not even Milošević's propaganda machine could argue convincingly that Koštunica was a 'Nato stooge' or a 'mercenary'. This became evident during the election campaign, when much of the propaganda on state media revolved around rather lame personal insults, such as that Koštunica had no children (an argument which had been used against Vuk Drašković on numerous occasions throughout the 1990s, and one which carries some weight in patriarchal Serbian society) or that he was a cat lover, which was meant to portray the opposition candidate as something of an eccentric and an oddball. Interestingly however, in spite of his anti-Western credibility, Koštunica did not manage to escape the wrath of the extremists. During the election campaign a graffiti appeared in central Belgrade which said 'Koštunica son of a Jew', while one of the large billboards in the Slavija square in Belgrade had the star of David sprayed over a photo of Koštunica's face.

In summary, Koštunica's unexpected popularity and political success in Autumn 2000 can be attributed to his capacity to transcend the radical dualism which dominated Serbian politics at the time. Unlike other opposition politicians, Koštunica was able to promote the idea of social and political reform without undermining the national and patriotic credibility of the anti-Milošević political front. In that sense, Koštunica matched Jowitt's (1992) definition of a charismatic leader as someone who is able to 'combine (with varying degrees of success for varying degrees of time) orientations and commitments that until then were seen as mutually exclusive' and recast 'previously incompatible elements into a new unit of personal identity

and organisational membership' (Jowitt, 1992; p.2). In other words, Koštunica managed to bring together the ideas of reformism, liberalism, moderate nationalism and traditionalism. As will become apparent later, this combination continues to feature in Koštunica's political rhetoric.²

The examination of Koštunica's anti-Western posture as a factor which contributed to his popularity and rise to prominence is important because it reinforces the assertion that political changes in Serbia were not brought about by a widespread abandonment of conspiratorial beliefs and the endorsement of (pro-)Western political values by the broader public. On the other hand, although the rhetoric of anti-Western conspiracism was never explicitly and overtly rejected, the new political climate and the improvement in relations between Yugoslavia and the international community led to a significant marginalisation of this type of explanatory discourse. Evidence for this comes from the examination of the Serbian media in the aftermath of the political changes in October 2000.

10.2. The marginalisation of conspiratorial discourse in post-Milošević Serbia

One of the immediate consequences of the popular uprising of October 2000 was the 'liberation' of the state-controlled media, and their placement in the hands of independent trades unions. The greater freedom of the press led to a drastic change in editorial policy. Xenophobic and paranoid themes which constituted the essence of Milošević's propaganda, many of which have been examined in earlier chapters, were by and large banished from the pages of *Politika* and the news bulletins of Serbian state television. Gone were the lengthy editorials which revealed, on a daily basis, new 'evidence' about the existence of an anti-Serbian conspiracy orchestrated from Washington or Brussels. Instead, *Politika*, the RTS and other media suddenly became preoccupied with the diplomatic activities of the new leadership, praising the improved relations between Serbia and the international community.

The changed stance towards conspiratorial discourse in the Serbian media can be illustrated by the example of the private television channel *Palma*. Although it was never under the direct control of the regime, *Palma* was notorious for promoting conspiracy theories in a regular evening chat show, hosted by the channel's owner Miki Vujović. Only a few hours after Milošević's downfall, in the evening of 5 October 2000, Vujović's guest in the live show was none other than Zoran Đinđić, a leader of the Serbian opposition widely known for his pro-Western views. Đinđić found himself sitting in the familiar black leather chair previously occupied by the likes of Smilja Avramov or Dragoš Kalajić. On this occasion, Vujović set

aside his profound interest in the vast anti-Serbian conspiracy, and treated the former 'Nato stooge' and 'German spy' with a notable dose of sycophancy.

The emergence of new political reality also contributed to the marginalisation of individuals who had promoted conspiracy theories in previous years. Many foreign 'heroes' of the Serbian struggle against the New World Order and media celebrities such as the Belgian journalist Michel Colon (who wrote extensively on media manipulation) or the former US attorney general Ramsey Clark, ceased to be praised on television and in the press. Smilja Avramov, Spasoje Vlajic and other domestic promoters of conspiratorial culture suffered a similar fate. A notable exception to this general trend was the article *How the war in Bosnia started* published in *Politika* on 11 December 2000. The article was a report on a 'round table discussion' featuring Smilja Avramov and another well known conspiracy theorist, historian Milorad Ekmedžić. Avramov's contribution to the discussion, which the article described as 'important' and 'interesting', revealed the existence of a 'strategic alliance between the New World Order and radical Islamism, and reiterated a number of themes typical of the world elite conspiracy theory. However, the publication of this report proved to be an 'isolated incident', significant only as a reminder that the legacy of the Milošević regime could not be erased overnight. On the whole, Avramov, now well into her 80s, has been forced into retirement, at least from the mainstream media.

The marginalization of conspiracism also affected Spasoje Vlajić. During the encounter in December 2000, the inventor of the 'formula of Light' and the self-proclaimed spokesperson for *Group 69* admitted, with a dose of sadness and surprise, that calls from journalists were becoming increasingly infrequent. Vlajić's media exposure is now restricted to his column in the fringe magazine *Treće Oko* and to books which he continues to write and publish.

The absence of explicit references to conspiratorial material and to those who promote it, which was evident in the aftermath of the transition of power, appears to have persisted. In May 2001, the Media Centre conducted a content analysis of the Serbian electronic and printed media, concentrating specifically on the portrayal of the US and its administration.³ The analysis was conducted at a particularly sensitive period in terms of Yugoslav-American relations, as it coincided with the announcement by the Bush administration that it would boycott the impending donors conference for Yugoslavia. The contentious issue was Yugoslavia's reluctance to extradite Milošević to the Hague. Significantly, diplomatic tension failed to revive the anti-Western sentiments which had characterised the Milošević years, and which in the past had generated conspiratorial explanations. Instead, references to the US and its administration remained neutral. Rather than downplaying the incident or criticising the

American government, the media emphasised the need for reconciliation and co-operation. In fact, the only explicit criticism of the US during the period monitored by the Media Centre concerned the controversial missile defence plan proposed at the time by George W. Bush.

10.3. Accounting for political change: the case of Avramov and Vlajić

Bearing in mind that in the aftermath of the political changes in Serbia, the leading promoters of conspiratorial culture were excluded from the mainstream press and electronic media, it would be interesting to examine briefly the way in which the conspiracy theorists themselves accounted for their altered status and interpreted the political changes which brought their marginalisation.

One possible rhetorical strategy open to conspiracy theorists when faced with a sudden fall from grace, is to admit defeat and, in the case of the recent events in Serbia, interpret the fall of Milošević as yet another success for the transnational oligarchy on the road towards world domination. This is exactly the way in which the likes of Michel Colon and Ramsey Clarke interpreted the events of October 2000. On the website of Ramsey Clarke's International Action Centre (IAC), Michel Colon and others among Clark's associates interpreted the fall of Milošević as a victory for international power structures and the CIA, which would lead to the inevitable 'Nato occupation of Yugoslavia'.

A similar strategy was adopted by various public figures who had direct links with the former Serbian regime. For instance, the philosopher Mihajlo Marković, a former ideologue of the Socialist party of Serbia (mentioned in an earlier chapter as one of the members of the intellectual establishment who endorsed the idea of world elite conspiracy) predicted, in an interview posted on the IAC website, that Serbia would become a 'half colony of foreign capital and the New World Order, primarily the USA'.⁴ Milošević's daughter Marija went a step further. After her father's extradition to the Hague, Marija Milošević told the Montenegrin newspaper *Istok (East)* that since October 2000, Serbia had been ruled by 'Gypsies, Tzintzars, Jews, and everyone else except the Serbs'. The presence of Jews on the list of current 'rulers' of Serbia is clearly a legacy of the antisemitic tradition within conspiratorial culture. Živorad Igić, one of Milošević's close associates, made a similar allegation on television during the stand-off between the police and Milošević's bodyguards on the evening of Milošević's arrest. Also, in a telephone interview given to the American TV channel *FOX News* from his Hague prison cell, Milošević himself stated that Serbia's new administration 'is a marionette regime' brought about by the Western powers as a way of 'occupying Serbia' (24 August 2001). Since the beginning of his trial in February 2002,

Milošević has been propagating a similar type of protoconspiracy theory, much to the annoyance of the prosecutors and the judge, Justice Richard May.

The view that political changes in Serbia constitute an (at least a temporary) victory for Serbia's archenemies appears to be characteristic of those believers in the international conspiracy who had more or less direct political involvement in the former Serbian regime. Their allegiance to Milošević's political project was so immense, that no amount of rhetorical gymnastics could enable them to interpret the recent developments as anything other than a catastrophe. On the other hand, conspiracy theorists such as Vlajić or Avramov, who habitually portrayed themselves as 'not belonging to any political party', and who insisted that they were 'impartial scientists' (Vlajić) or 'independent researchers' (Avramov) adopted a very different rhetorical strategy. Both Vlajić and Avramov expressed acceptance, and even approval of the new political establishment. During a conversation in July 2001, Avramov insisted that political changes in Serbia were 'long overdue'. Similarly, during a meeting in December 2000, Spasoje Vlajić, whose books consistently equate the West with Satan, kept thanking God that Yugoslavia was no longer in conflict with the West.

Importantly however, Avramov's and Vlajić's positive assessment of the recent political developments does not signify a substantial ideological shift which in any way undermines the validity of their past revelations regarding the conspiracy. Instead, both authors try to reconcile their belief in an international conspiracy with the new political reality.

For instance, as was noted in the earlier chapter, during the same conversation in which she greeted Milošević's downfall, Avramov reiterated many of the conspiratorial themes found in her books. She even referred to the more controversial claims, such as that about the 'Elders of Zion' being an actual organisation and 'probably the most secret of all secret organisations'. At the same time however, Avramov admitted, somewhat surprisingly for a conspiracy theorist, that she had always believed that fighting the international conspiracy was futile. Rather than resisting the Trilateral and the Bilderbergers, as most other conspiracy theorists advise, Avramov insisted that Serbia ought to infiltrate these organisations and use them to its own advantage. Avramov even suggested that this particular belief caused the rift, in 1992, between herself and Milošević, leading her to resign from the Serbian expert negotiating team:

'I have my own views on the Trilateral, but I would be happiest if we had someone in the Trilateral who would say a few good words about and for Serbia. Therefore, in these times we need some channels which will link us [to the Trilateral]. So, then [in 1992] I told Milošević: 'It

is not something you or your establishment could do, so you must resign'. But he wouldn't. So, the changes were necessary'

In other words, while still promoting the idea of an international conspiracy, Avramov suggested that Serbia's new political establishment must negotiate a place for Serbia within the New World Order. The implication of this rhetorical strategy is that it brings Avramov's explanatory discourse in line with the recent political developments in Serbia, while at the same time, it does not visibly undermine the basic tenet of conspiracy. As a result, Avramov is able to continue to believe that her work is relevant and useful. For instance, during the recent conversation, she insisted that a demand for her writings still exists: she mentioned that her publisher was interested in bringing out a new and revised edition of her first book *The post-heroic war of the international community against Yugoslavia* (1995). As far as her diminished public profile is concerned, Avramov has frequently appealed to her advanced age, suggesting that responsibility for the implementation and promotion of her ideas now lies with the younger generations. However, whether her 'retirement' from public life is as voluntary and age-related as she suggests, or whether her explanation of it is simply a rationalisation of her diminishing social status, it is difficult to judge.

The way in which Spasoje Vlajić accounted for the recent political changes in Serbia is even more remarkable. During the encounter in December 2000 Vlajić presented 'conclusive evidence' that he himself had predicted, as early as in 1992 that only Vojislav Koštunica or the Montenegrin president Milo Đukanović had the capability to bring down Milošević (page 83, *Serbian book of predictions*, 1992). Even more bizarrely, Vlajić suggested that the activity of *Group 69* was instrumental in the improvements in relations between Yugoslavia and the US. He revealed that the group 'predicted', using its secret and esoteric knowledge, that reconciliation between the two countries required the presence of two names: George and Richard. Members of *Group 69* then used their paranormal skills to 'send a mental chip' to the 'universal field' and bring about individuals with these names. The result was the political victory of George Bush and Richard Cheney, whose take-over of the American presidency signalled an immediate end of hostilities between Serbia and the US (see Appendix A, Extract 1).

What makes Vlajić's explanation noteworthy in the context of conspiratorial rhetoric is the suggestion that Serbs, or more specifically *Group 69*, have effectively brought an end to the conflict between Serbia and the forces of the New World Order. Although Vlajić does not explicitly suggest that Serbs triumphed over the conspirators, he clearly recognises that the

world has entered a new and more peaceful era, in which Serbs have an important educational role in providing spiritual guidance for the rest of the world:

'The west has a lot to learn from the Serbs, if it wants to survive. That is where the alliance between the Serbs and the West lies. We are not going to be simply blind followers who listen to everything they are telling us. What purpose would that serve? That would lead both them and us into desolation. One thing that president Koštunica sensed very nicely, which is important and salutary for the Serbs and their place in the world, is the message of Saint Sava that Serbs are East in the West and West in the East. A bridge, not only physical but also spiritual, not only spiritual but a bridge between the spiritual man and nature. That is what they can learn from us...'

'Bishop Nikolaj [Velimirović] writes about the revival of the internal spiritual senses, which has nothing to do with a technique or a method. This is where our advantage lies, because we have kept our spirituality. That is where Europe can learn a lot from us. It can help that spirituality to survive, and take some for itself. The advantages will be immeasurable. For both the individual, and for the whole nation. Also, through the co-operation of nations, for Europe, to which we belong, and through the co-operation of continents, for world civilisation.'

It should be noted, however, that within Vlajić's rather bewildering explanatory framework, the reconciliatory and to some extent celebratory sentiments are intertwined with the traditional paranoid and apprehensive tone of conspiracy theory. The above paragraphs were uttered in the context of the same conversation quoted in the earlier chapter, during which Vlajić elaborated on classical conspiratorial themes. This suggests that, as in the work of Avramov, the recognition of the new political reality is formulated in such a way that it does not undermine the validity of the conspiratorial framework which Vlajić continues to promote in his books and articles.⁵ In other words, the interpretation of recent political events is anchored into the existing conspiratorial framework. Significantly however, attempts to adapt the paranormal conspiratorial framework to the new political conditions proved insufficient to rescue Vlajić from the marginalisation which affected Serbian conspiracy theorists.

A common feature shared by Avramov and Vlajić, as representatives of Serbian conspiratorial culture, is that they both function, and always have functioned, as individual authors and researchers. For both of them, the subject of international conspiracy was a personal fascination, and although they were always keen to share their expertise with the broader public, they never participated in broader political projects and organisations. However, conspiratorial culture is not the prerogative of solitary enthusiasts. In much of the Western world, conspiracism is also the fundamental feature of political extremism, and is promoted by organisations which subscribe to radical political ideologies (Lipset & Raab 1978; Berlet & Lyons, 2000, etc.). A similar trend has begun to emerge in Serbia in recent months. As Serbian conspiracist culture was pushed away from mainstream politics, it gradually started gaining ground on the fringes of politics. As will become apparent, exponents of the more

extreme, right-wing forms of conspiracist ideology organised themselves within a small number of radical clerico-nationalist political groups, creating the category of 'extreme Right' on the Serbian political map.

10.4 Radicalisation of the Orthodox Right: the emergence of Obraz

After the fall of the former regime, Serbia saw a rise in hate crimes and instances of antisemitic prejudice. In March 2001, the monument erected in the town of Zrenjanin in honour of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust was desecrated. Around the same time, posters and stickers with Nazi symbols were posted on a synagogue in Belgrade. Behind this new development were not just the 'usual suspects' such as the Serbian branch of 'Blood and Honour' or various neo-Nazi and skinhead groups, but also activists of several emerging organisations of the Christian Right. The appearance and increased activity of these organisations can, in many ways, be seen as the legacy of the marginalisation of conspiracism in Serbian society.

In Autumn 2000, the Patriotic Movement Obraz emerged on the political scene as a youth movement which propagated the ideology of Serbian right-wing clericalism, as found in the writings of Bishops Nikolaj Velimirović and Justin Popović. Obraz (meaning *Dignity* or *Honour*) was founded by Nebojša M. Krstić (b. 1964), a sociologist of religion and businessman from the Serbian city of Niš (see Chapter 5). Obraz currently operates from its base at Belgrade's Philosophical Faculty, where the organisation's stickers and promotional material have become a disturbingly common sight. Obraz also has a website which features the leaders' biographies, the organisation's political program as well as a variety of articles with conspiratorial content. Significantly, Obraz is openly antisemitic. It blames Jews for the plight of the Serbs, and lists 'Zionists – Jewish racists' (also referred to as 'judeo-masonic murderers') as the principal 'enemies' of the Serbian people.⁶ The organisation promotes the same kind of extreme Velimirović-like conspiratorial anti-Westernism and antisemitism, which began to emerge, in a coded form, in *Politika* during the Nato bombing (see earlier chapter).

Although Obraz was founded in 1997, the movement was relatively unknown and inactive until late 2000, when, as Nebojša Krstić himself acknowledged, the organisation 'increased its activities'.⁷ The proclaimed need for increased 'activity' was brought on by the liberalisation of Serbian society which Obraz vehemently opposed. In November 2000 Obraz activists disrupted the meeting of the Serbian Writer's Union during which a group of liberal intellectuals attempted to challenge the authority of the Union's existing and much

compromised nationalist leadership. Members of *Obraz* explained their presence by the need to 'supervise the activities of the Jewish lobby' (*Whose is Obraz?*, *Danas*, 20 November, 2000), thus equating the impending liberal reform of the Union with a Jewish conspiracy. More recently, members of *Obraz* were involved in the violent disruption of the first Serbian Gay Pride parade organised in Belgrade in June 2001. Predictably, *Obraz* interpreted calls for sexual tolerance and equal rights for homosexuals as a deliberate attempt to undermine Serbian society and its 'spiritual being'.

The emergence of *Obraz* and its involvement in aggressive public campaigning suggests that in the aftermath of the political changes, exponents of extreme right-wing conspiracism have become funnelled into various dissident and subversive organisations. Significantly, the emerging political category of 'extreme Right', is obliged to propagate its ideas using methods characteristic of fringe political organisations. This includes not only public protests and street violence, but also the increased reliance on the Internet. According to Pipes (1998) cyberspace provides the 'ideal back channel for those who are excluded from the mainstream media' (p.199). Although a small number of Serbian websites with conspiratorial content existed in the past (e.g. the anti-Semitic www.compuserb.com) most of these were run by right-wing organisations within the Serbian diaspora. Serbian based websites, representing domestic groups or organisations, were practically non-existent until the emergence of *Obraz*.⁸

The relegation of radical conspiracist ideology to fringe political movements, stands in stark contrast to its status before the fall of Milošević. Prior to October 2000, the ideologists of *Obraz* did not need to resort to leaflets, the Internet, or public disturbance to promote their ideas. Instead, they were regularly represented in the mainstream media. As was noted in Chapter 5, The founder of *Obraz*, Nebojša Krstić, was on the editorial board of a number of religious publications including *Pravoslavlje* and *Svetigora*. More importantly, he was an occasional contributor to *Politika*'s culture supplement. His views appeared even in publications which were not sympathetic to Milošević's regime, such as the dailies *Blic* and *Glas Nedelje* and the weekly magazine *Reporter*. In those days Krstić was typically introduced as 'author, publicist, theologian, analyst of globalisation and geopolitics' (*Glas Nedelje*, 3 March, 1999), without any critical references to his antisemitism or racial, sexual or religious bigotry. Today however, when mentioned in the media, Krstić is presented as leader of a 'far-right', 'extremist' or 'nationalist organisation' (e.g. *Impression of the week*, TV show on *Studio B* channel, 28 July, 2001). This suggests that the status of this kind of ideology is changing, and that the ideas propounded by *Obraz* are once again regarded, at least by the mainstream press, as being beyond the boundaries of acceptable opinion.⁹

So far it has been suggested that one of the more dramatic changes which followed the transition of power in October 2000 was the liberalisation of the media and the disappearance of the kind of anti-Westernism which had in the past generated the proliferation of conspiratorial discourse. The mainstream media ceased to provide the likes of Vlajić or Avramov with the opportunity to voice their views in public. Conspiratorial culture, and especially its more extreme forms, became largely confined to fringe political movements which, in the new and more liberal climate, are widely regarded as 'extremist'. However, as the following section will demonstrate, there is an important exception to this general trend: publishing projects of the Yugoslav Army, which played an important role in the dissemination of conspiracist culture in previous years, continue to promote this type of explanation, apparently unaffected by the recent political changes.

10.5 Conspiracy theory and Yugoslav military publications

Following the transition of power in Serbia, most state institutions, including the media and state-owned industry, underwent significant personnel and organisational changes. The only state organ which has eluded major reorganization was the Yugoslav military. The army Chief of Staff, General Nebojša Pavković, once Milošević's trusted henchman and personal friend, who made a significant contribution to Milošević's election campaign by vowing to destroy all 'terrorists' and 'Nato stooges', remains in office to the present day. Furthermore, Koštunica's personal adviser on military matters is General-colonel Slavoljub Sušić, an officer who held the same post in Milošević's cabinet.

The reason behind the reluctance of the new authorities to reorganise the military establishment remains a mystery.¹⁰ In a recent interview, Koštunica indicated that his unwillingness to discharge Pavković was motivated by the need to protect the army, as the 'guarantor of stability' and an institution which 'together with the Orthodox church commands the greatest amount of respect amongst the Serbian people', from political quakes which disrupted the functioning of many other state institutions. An alternative explanation is that for Koštunica, as president of a disintegrating federation which the current Montenegrin leadership does not even recognise, the military is the only consequential federal institution under his jurisdiction. It is therefore possible that the preservation of the old military establishment, which in the aftermath of 5 October 2000 swiftly and enthusiastically embraced Koštunica as its new 'supreme commander', allows the federal president to exercise tighter control over the army, and therefore command greater authority in society as a whole.

Political intrigue aside, an important consequence of the preservation of the status quo in the military is that its publishing infrastructure remains intact. As a result, military publications such as *Vojno Delo*, *Vojnska*, *Vojni Informator*, etc., which played such an important part in the transmission of conspiratorial cultural tradition during the 1990s, continue to publish material reminiscent of the times before the transition.

The most striking illustration of how little has changed in the military is the continuing presence of Svetozar Radišić as the main army spokesperson. Although Radišić avoids making references to neocortical war and other paranormal and pseudo-scientific themes in his recent public appearances, and has adopted a very reasonable and professional persona, there is little to suggest that the author of *Neocortical War* has changed his outlook since Milošević's departure. Quite the contrary, as a new, revised edition of his book appeared in bookshops in the summer of 2001. Apart from a few additional references, the book contains identical material to the first edition, indicating that both Radišić and the military authorities who published *Neocortical War* still consider this kind of esoteric pseudo-scientific work to be worthy of promotion. Even more remarkably, a recent edition of the journal *Vojni Informator* (Jan/Feb, 2001) contained a text by Radišić, entitled *The art of political deception*. The content of the article matches, practically word for word, one of the most controversial chapters of *Neocortical War* – chapter five entitled *The Magic of Words*. It is in this chapter that Radišić cited Ratibor Đurđević, Smilja Avramov, Gary Allen and Spasoje Vlajić as credible authorities. On this occasion too Radišić drew, albeit with some equivocation, the parallel between ideas contained in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and the current Nato policy in the Balkans, thus reiterating the thesis of Jewish conspiracy.

Although by far the most drastic example of conspiracism in recent military publications, Radišić's article is not the only one. In the same issue of *Vojni Informator* it is possible to find a number of texts which deal for instance with the role of the world media in the creation of a 'New World Order' (Borisav Popović, *Spider's web above human consciousness*) or the participation of international humanitarian organisations and pacifist movements in the 'neocortical war' which is being waged against the Serbian people (Colonel Milan Jovanović, *Objection to conscientious objection*).

Similar conspiratorial themes can also be found in recent issues of *Vojno Delo* (Issue 1, 2001). In an article entitled *Political Aggression*, Dr Slobodan Mikić, a retired Major-General, suggests that the aim of the continuing attacks on Yugoslavia is the establishment of a New World Order which would allow the whole world to be 'controlled from Washington'.

Interestingly, the methods of 'political aggression' which Mikić criticises include the policies which the international community used to harm Milošević's regime, such as the imposition of travel limitations for government officials, or the indictment of the Serbian leadership by the war crimes tribunal. Moreover, Mikić's argument draws on the same rhetoric of counter-subversive conspiracism which Milošević's media and government officials regularly used to discredit Serbian opposition parties and organisations:

'[Agressors] create trades unions, student organisations, and media, [they] establish and finance illegal groups and organisations engaged in the bringing down of a legitimate government with violent means, including terrorist actions. Therefore the aggressor will try to bring into power his own exponents...' (Major General Slobodan Mikić, *Political Aggression*; p.126-127)

The idea that Western powers wish to establish their own satellite government in Belgrade lies at the heart of the accusations that Milošević's opponents are 'Nato stooges' or 'traitors'.

An important feature of the above mentioned articles is that they appear oblivious to the recent political changes and the improved relations between Yugoslavia and the rest of the world. However, among the texts published in military publications since October 2000, it is also possible to find another kind of conspiratorial writing, one which continues to promote the anti-Western ideology of the bygone era, while at the same time acknowledging the emergence of a new political reality.

In the text *Defence against unarmed aggression* published in the same issue of *Vojno Delo* as Mikić's text, Colonel Aleksandar Simić outlined the modus operandi of the West's continuing 'offensive' against the Serbian state and society. Simić's arguments were in many ways similar to those found in Mikić's article on 'political aggression'. However, unlike his retired colleague, Colonel Simić demonstrated that he was well aware of the political changes brought on by the fall of Milošević:

'After the changes in power relations on the political scene in FRY, its international standing is also rapidly changing. Bearing in mind the events of the previous decade and the new, objectively better position of the FRY, and with regard to the political axiom that politics, especially that of the great powers is dictated *exclusively by interests*, we must ask ourselves once again the old question about what we can expect from the future' (Colonel A. Simić, *Defence against unarmed aggression*; p.57)

The author proceeds to outline various strategic options available to Yugoslavia, including the previously unmentionable idea that it should consider joining the 'Partnership for peace' initiative and investigate the extent to which its own interests converge with those of 'US, Germany or the Islamic world'. These suggestions present an important departure from the pre-October 2000 writing in *Vojno Delo* (and some writing since then) where considerations

of closer ties with the Western alliance were noticeably absent. However, the expression of a more broad-minded approach towards co-operation with Western military powers is permeated with conspiratorial themes which were ubiquitous in *Vojno Delo* in previous years. For example, Colonel Simić acknowledges that the UN 'is taking over the functions of the projected "World government"' and asserts that the 1999 bombing was caused by Serbia's defiance against the forces of the creators of the 'newest New World Order'. Also, Simić quotes Avramov's most recent book on the machinations of the Vatican-based organisation Opus Dei and reiterates the well known conspiratorial allegations about the sinister activities of the Soros foundation, and the world's media.¹¹

Significantly, Simić also establishes a link with Radišić's paranormal framework when he interprets the new, non-violent, 'unarmed' methods of aggression as an aspect of 'neocortical war', whose

'main characteristics include all-dimensionality and totality, with an emphasis on the psychological dimension, that is the impact on the neocortex (Latin for the surface of the cortex) and the "communication with other minds" as R. Szafranski seemingly innocently suggests.' (p.61).

The reference to Szafranski's 'seemingly innocent' allusion to the nature of 'neocortical war' indicates that the concept in reality refers to something much more sinister.¹² This interpretation reflects Radišić's conceptualisation of neocortical war which was examined in earlier chapters. A further tie with Radišić's explanatory framework is established when Simić examines the possibilities for resisting 'unarmed aggression'. He proposes the creation of various 'institutions and agencies' which would be engaged in 'information and propaganda activities' and which would explore the aims and methods of the 'creators of the "New World Order"'. Simić explains in the footnote that such bodies would consist not only of 'psychologists, historians, sociologists, priests, cultural theorists, connoisseurs of other cultures and religions, propaganda experts, journalists, computer experts – the so-called hackers' (p.82) but also members of 'alternative professions and interests whose activities concern the exploration of the human mind and emotions' (p.82) Although the precise meaning of 'alternative professions' is unclear, it is possible to speculate that it is a reference to the kind of 'experts in fringe disciplines' – mystics, parapsychologists, etc. – which Radišić refers to in his work.

Consequently, although Simić appears to approve of the political changes in Serbia, he continues to promote the tradition of conspiracy theory (including its more controversial,

mystical elements) which characterised segments of the Yugoslav army discourse throughout the 1990s.¹³

In many ways, the continuing presence of the conspiracist culture in Yugoslav military publications could be dismissed as isolated and inconsequential in the broader social context. Military journals have a limited readership, and, since the political changes, they have not been quoted in the mainstream media as they were before. However, at the same time, the Army is far too influential an institution in Serbian society to be left to the mercies of conspiracy theorists. An important reason for this is that exponents of conspiratorial tradition, especially when under threat of isolation, tend to flock together and form at least an informal ideological partnership (Berlet & Lyons, 2000). In the case of contemporary Serbia, this means the disturbing possibility of an ideological alliance between certain elements in the army and the exponents of extreme right-wing nationalism, such as *Obraz*.

The existence of such an 'alliance' became evident in December 2000, when the army leadership announced that, after 60 years of absence, a chaplaincy service would be reintroduced into the Yugoslav army. The decision to allow religious activity in the military followed numerous consultations between representatives of the army's Section for morale and the Orthodox church, various experts on the subject, and the relevant government institutions. As part of this consultation process, the Yugoslav Ministry of Defence organised a 'round table discussion' on the topic of 'faith and the military' (December, 2000). The contributions of various participants were subsequently published in the book *Army and Faith* (2001, Military publishing institute). Extracts from the book were also printed, as a special supplement, in the military magazine *Vojska*.

The relevance of this particular event for the present discussion comes from the fact that the round table discussion gathered together some very prominent members of the Serbian conspiracist community. In some ways this is not surprising, considering that the meeting was chaired by Svetozar Radišić. 'Experts' invited to give their informed opinion on the subject of 'faith and the army' included Nebojša Krstić from *Obraz*, and the notorious Orthodox priest Žarko Gavrilović, a known antisemite, religious extremist and one of the first publishers of Velimirović's antisemitic books in the early 1990s. The status of 'expert' given to Gavrilović and Krstić contravenes the aforementioned emerging tendency to refer to them as 'extremists'. More importantly, both participants interpreted the need for a clerical presence in the army in terms of the international conspiracy. Krstić's exposé referred extensively to Radišić's work on 'neocortical war' and outlined the way in which the ideas of Nikolaj Velimirović could be used to resist the onslaughts by the exponents of the 'geopolitics of

chaos' who aim to destroy 'Serbs', 'Russians' and other Orthodox people (*Army and Faith*, p.42). Similarly, Gavrilović spoke of the 'atheist-mondialist bells' which will 'chime' (p.116) against the spiritual revival of the Yugoslav Army, and warned against the continuing 'destructive influence of sects and satanists' (p. 119) in Serbian society. The views of Krstić and Gavrilović resonated in the presentations of other participants. For instance, Milen Simić, head of the Army's Section for Morale who gave the introductory address, suggested that in spite of the 'current process of the all-round opening of FRY towards Europe and the rest of the world, after the events of September/October [2000]' one should anticipate

'even stronger assaults on the spiritual being of the Serbian people. This is why it is necessary to create a strong dam against the spiritual colonisation through the activities of various religious sects, cults and occultism of all kinds, which is at the same time the certain path towards the protection of our spiritual and national identity.' (M.Simić, *Regulating religious affairs in the VJ, Army and Faith*, 2000; p.7)

Milen Simić, like his namesake and other colleagues mentioned earlier, preserved the paranoia inherent in conspiratorial culture in spite of the recognition of the new political reality. Once the continuing threat of an anti-Serbian and anti-Christian conspiracy was recognised in this way, the elaboration of the topic by 'experts' like Krstić or Gavrilović was a natural progression.

The fact that the idea of an international, and essentially anti-Orthodox conspiracy underpins the interpretative framework of some prominent military officers, representatives of the Orthodox Church and exponents of the far Right, and the fact that they are able to discuss such ideas together, in an official capacity, illustrates the existence of an at least informal conspiracist united front. Again, it should be stressed that the *direct* influence of these individuals in Serbian society is marginal. For example, when *Politika* reported on the aforementioned round table discussion, it mentioned neither Krstić nor Gavrilović. Also, none of the conspiratorial arguments uttered during the discussion found their way into *Politika*. At the same time, bearing in mind the influence which both the Army and the Orthodox Church have in Serbian society, the 'partnership' between sections of the officers corps (especially those responsible for 'morale' and public relations), extremist Orthodox clergy and clerico-nationalist organisations like *Obraz* contributes to the perpetuation of the conspiratorial cultural tradition. The continuing *indirect* presence of conspiratorial culture will be examined in the final section.

10.6. Indirect presence of conspiracist ideology: rhetoric of conspiracy and the conservative political option

At this point it may be necessary to elaborate on the proposed distinction between the *direct* and *indirect* presence of conspiracy theories in Serbian society. In Milošević's Serbia conspiracy theorists were regularly interviewed, cited and quoted in the media, and were held in high esteem as 'experts' in the field of international relations. This constituted a *direct* presence of conspiratorial culture, as a specific, and in many cases preferred, explanatory framework attributable to the conspiracist elite - the 'experts', 'researchers' and 'connoisseurs'. As was demonstrated earlier, with the exception of the army, this type of presence largely perished after the transition of power. Elaborate conspiratorial narratives disappeared, and the former 'experts' were either forgotten or relegated to the status of 'extremists'. On the other hand conspiratorial themes continue to feature in the Serbian political context in a more indirect form. Arguments from the conspiratorial rhetorical arsenal are still occasionally invoked even in the mainstream media. However, such conspiracist arguments appear in isolation, as mere fragments, rather than as part of an elaborate narrative, which explains the totality of Yugoslavia's position in the world. Bearing in mind that conspiratorial rhetoric contains significant anti-Western and antiliberal connotations, the continuing and *indirect* influence of conspiratorial culture is most clearly noticeable on occasions when tighter links with the West and the liberalisation of the Serbian society are criticised.

Evidence for the continuing presence of conspiratorial themes comes from the daily newspaper *Glas Javnosti*. *Glas* is an independent publication which, although in principle opposed to the Milošević regime, nonetheless often promoted the conspiratorial worldview. For instance in early 2000 *Glas* serialised the book *Opus Dei* by Smilja Avramov thus promoting a conspiratorial interpretation of the machinations of this Vatican-based semi-secret organisation. However, after the transition of power, *Glas* no longer promoted conspiratorial culture in a direct way. On the other hand, conspiratorial rhetoric can be detected in individual articles appearing in this publication.

For instance, in July 2001, *Glas* published the article *Is it OK to be gay?* written by the journalist Nataša Kordić. The publication of the article reflected the increased public interest in the topic of homosexuality which followed the disruption of the first Gay Pride parade in Belgrade on 30 June 2001. The physical attack on the participants of the parade and members

of the police who tried to intervene sparked a debate in most media on the topic of gay rights. The article *Is it OK to be gay?*, quoted a number of professionals, including psychiatrist Danijela Tiosavljević, sociologist Petar Opačić, criminologist Dušan Davidović and theologian Ljubivoje Stojanović. All four experts expressed a negative attitude towards homosexuality, regarding it as a mental aberration and a significant social problem which faces Serbian society. Among other things the article reflected on the link between 'homosexuality and politics'. Dr Opačić stated that:

'Human rights, the indisputable value of the modern western civilisation, which often conceal something quite different and in the name of which countries are sometimes bombed, have become the smokescreen for the implementation of western (American) interests. That is why it is interesting that George Soros - and a lot had been written about his political activities, as well as his Fund for Open Society, and the Fund for humanitarian law - are the main sponsors of the Yugoslav associations supporting gay rights. With this in mind, one gets the impression that someone's sexual orientation and personal suffering [sic] are being used for some ulterior reason.' (*Glas Javnosti*, 8 July 2001, p.12)

The portrayal of human rights as a cover-up for more sinister motives, as well as the targeting of George Soros, are both reminiscent of the Serbian conspiratorial discourse which dominated Serbian pro-government media in the late 1990s. A further link with the conspiracy tradition was established when the 'political implications' of homosexuality were given an additional, religious dimension. LJ. Stojanović of the Theological faculty argued that in demanding the legalisation of homosexuality, the Serbian authorities were 'bowing to the golden calf of "Europeanism"', which would lead to the 'loss of ourselves and our identity'. This particular argument reflects the conspiratorial anti-Europeanism of Nikolaj Velimirović and his followers.

It should be noted that none of the homophobic 'expert opinion' mentioned in the article was critically examined by the author. Similarly, counter-views of various gay rights activists or human and civil rights organisations were ignored. Consequently, rather than providing a balanced review of different positions within a wider social debate on homosexuality, Kordić's article simply reinforced a very conservative view on the issue. However, on this occasion conspiratorial themes were just one aspect of homophobic rhetoric, rather than a topic in their own right. Conspiracism emerged as a culturally available argument against liberal tendencies rather than as an elaborate and all-embracing explanatory framework, expounded by competent conspiracy theorists. On the other hand, by disseminating the ideology now largely confined to *Obraz* and similar organisation which have become the beacons of conspiracism in post-Milošević Serbia, *Glas* and other similar publications preserve this tradition of explanation on the visible and audible margin of Serbian political and ideological space.

The indirect presence of conspiratorial culture does not only manifest itself in isolated articles in the press. In spite of the evidence that the boundaries of acceptable opinion in Serbian society are gradually narrowing, and that militant conspiracy theorists are being reduced to the status of 'extremists', occasional 'incidents' act as reminders that the same boundaries of opinion are in places stretched beyond reasonable limits. Specifically, there is some evidence to suggest that instances of unacceptable conspiratorial extremism are sometimes tolerated by the new authorities. Behind such tolerance is not necessarily the endorsement of this type of ideology, but rather a lack of sensitivity left over from the Milošević years.

For example, shortly after the fall of Milošević, a re-print of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, (Centar, 2001) edited by a certain Đorđe Katić, appeared in Serbia's bookshops.¹⁴ This edition of the *Protocols* included an introduction, written by Katić, in which he not only failed to challenge the historical authenticity of *Protocols*, but also highlighted their relevance in contemporary Serbia:

'the sowing of bombs across Yugoslavia with the aim of destroying the obstacles to [Nato's] Eastward offensive resembles in many ways the claims made in the *Protocols*...The Jews had neither the necessary military potential nor the arms to execute the planned conquest of the world, but they had the money which could be materialised for such ambitions' (Katić, p.2)

The publication of *Protocols* provoked the Union of Jewish municipalities to take legal action against Katić. Representatives of the Jewish community claimed that both the book, and its introduction 'incite national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance', an offence prohibited by the Serbian constitution. The legal action, as well as the reaction of much of the liberal media and human rights organisations led many bookshops to withdraw the title from their shelves. However, the book was never formally banned, as the deputy district public prosecutor Milija Milovanović decided that there were no legal grounds for prosecuting Katić or banning the book. Milovanović suggested that, after a 'formal conversation with Katić and a careful reading of the introduction', he decided that 'there appears to have been no intention, either in writing the introduction or in the act of publishing, to incite religious or ethnic hatred and intolerance'. He also suggested that *Protocols* 'contain no elements of the stated criminal act'. With regard to the quotation from the introduction, which was used as an illustration of Katić's antisemitic views, Milovanović suggested that:

'this quotation exists, but in the context of the whole introduction, the passage itself, quoted in the way it is, does not indicate that the defendant, by writing that sentence, incited, neither is there reasonable suspicion that he incited, national hatred and racial intolerance' (*Radio B-92, Morning News, 28 July 2001*)

The failure of the judicial authorities to undertake decisive action against exponents of anti-Semitic ideology plays into the hands of various right-wing organisations which have emerged in Serbia since the transition of power in Autumn 2000. By suggesting that the publication of the most notorious example of conspiratorial antisemitism constitutes a legitimate act vindicates the views of those who propagate extremism, and facilitates the continued existence (as well as physical presence on bookstalls) of conspiratorial cultural tradition in Serbia. Like the endurance of conspiratorial rhetoric in the media, the lack of initiative in the fight against racism and religious intolerance maintains conspiratorial culture on the visible margin of Serbian political life.

Finally, the indirect presence of conspiracist culture is evident at the highest levels of politics. For instance, in spite of the recent discovery of numerous mass graves containing the bodies of Albanian civilians, President Koštunica still refers to these graves as containing 'alleged victims'. Such statements not only constitute a morally suspect denial of Serbian participation in war crimes, but also reflects the conspiratorial idea, which Koštunica himself propagated during the bombing, that the 'alleged' victims of ethnic cleansing and mass murder were simply the product of 'manipulation'. Similarly, in the summer of 2001, Koštunica's DPS joined the Serbian Radical party of Vojislav Šešelj in condemning the broadcasting, on Serbian state TV, of a British documentary on the Srebrenica massacre. The documentary was branded a hoax, intended to demonise the Serbian people. Although it would be unfair to regard Koštunica as a conspiracy theorist in the traditional sense, there is little doubt that his pledge to political conservatism, nationalism and anti-Westernism, often leads him to draw upon arguments from conspiratorial culture, thus perpetuating its existence.

10.7. Conclusion

The aim of the present chapter was to examine the fate of conspiracy theories in the aftermath of the political changes in October 2000. After considering the transition of power in Serbia in the light of the prevalence of conspiratorial culture at the time, it was suggested that the improved relations with the West and the general liberalisation of society and its media drove conspiratorial culture and its main exponents to the margins of politics and media discourse. The only exception to this general trend are military publications which, pending a more substantial and far-reaching reform of the military establishment, continue to promote the idea of an ongoing international plot against Yugoslavia. However, the chapter also suggested that although the direct presence of conspiratorial culture and its exponents was dramatically reduced following the fall of Milošević's regime, conspiracist culture nonetheless continues

to be present in Serbian society. Arguments which originate from conspiracist ideology continue to feature in conservative political rhetoric in the media and political discourse.

As far as the future of Serbian conspiracism is concerned, the described trends will probably continue in the years to come. With the further liberalisation of Serbian society, and with the tightening of the newly-formed bonds with the international community, conspiratorial culture will continue to lose its relevance and with it its position in public discourse. At the same time, it should be noted that roots of conspiratorial culture in Serbian society go deeper than the 12 years of Milošević's regime. Conspiratorial anti-Westernism was always an integral part of the anti-liberal tendencies within Serbian nationalist discourse (Čolović, 1997). With that in mind, the removal of Milošević's legacy does not necessarily imply the eradication of conspiratorial culture. This is especially true when one considers that, concurrently with the rising pro-Western and liberalising trends in Serbian politics and public life, post-Milošević Serbia has also seen the emergence of a conservative, traditionalist political option, epitomised in its moderate form by Vojislav Koštunica and his increasingly popular DPS. It is this political option that maintains, and benefits from the indirect presence of conspiracist ideology, which keeps the flame of anti-Westernism burning.

With this in mind, it would be dangerous to perceive either the present or the possible future status of conspiracism in Serbia in terms of a centrist/extremist perspective. Although conspiracy theories are, and will continue to be over-represented on the fringes of politics, especially on the extreme right, it is unlikely that they will be altogether banished from mainstream politics. Instead conspiracism will flow between extreme political groups, such as *Obraz*, and mainstream political structures, such as the DPS. It has recently been reported that the inauguration of regional branches of *Obraz* in provincial Serbia often takes place in offices belonging to the Democratic Party of Serbia (Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Report on Antisemitism, 2001). Similarly, in 1996, Koštunica wrote an article for the magazine *Obraz*, whose editors subsequently founded the political organisation of the same name. More recently, Koštunica contributed a text to the religious publication *Pravoslavna Misao*, edited by Father Žarko Gavrilović. These and similar instances led the Yugoslav branch of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights to conclude that in Serbia 'aggressive antisemitism is being generated from the highest structures of power' (HCHR Press release, 25 July, 2001).

Although the conclusion reached by the Helsinki Committee might seem excessive, the informal links between *Obraz* and the DPS illustrate the complex relationship between the political centre and extremist organisations. This kind of relationship is not a strictly Serbian

phenomenon. In *American Populism*, Berlet and Lyons (2000) suggest that a similar connection exists in the United States between elements in the Republican party and the exponents of the extreme Right. In the UK as well, the links, on an ideological level, between the fringes of the Conservative party and the BNP have also raised some concerns in recent months. On the other hand, what makes the Serbian case different is the fact that the country is in a period of transition following 12 years of Milošević's autocratic rule. The continuing presence of conspiracism holds back attempts to introduce a broader ideological change in Serbian society. It will be hard to get Serbs to come to terms with all the horrors which have been committed in their name in previous years, when the president of Yugoslavia and the country's most popular politician is himself reluctant to admit that the horrors are 'real'. More importantly, Serbia does not have a party-political infrastructure like the US or Britain, which keeps extremists at bay. Consequently, the possibility remains that, if the economic reforms fail, and the improved relations with the West turn 'sour', the mood of anti-Westernism might be revived, and with it the belief in an international conspiracy.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

The aim of the present thesis was to examine Serbian conspiracy culture at the time of the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia. Specifically, the thesis looked at the general broadening of the boundaries of acceptable opinion in Serbian society which enabled some more objectionable and contentious aspects of the conspiracy tradition – such as the antisemitic and esoteric/mystical themes – to come out of the margins and find their way into the mainstream press and political discourse.

The thesis began with a critical review of psychological explanations of conspiracy theories which highlighted the shortcomings of approaches that interpret conspiracy theory as a mere manifestation of general psychological processes such as attribution, scapegoating or projection. Also, it was suggested that purely sociological or historical explanations often fail to reflect on the actual dynamic through which extraordinary explanations, like conspiracy theory or paranormal beliefs, rise to prominence in specific cultural or political contexts. The present thesis suggested that a better insight into conspiracy theory as a periodically occurring collective belief might be gained by exploring the rhetorical and argumentative structure of specific conspiratorial explanations, while paying special attention to the historical and ideological context within which these explanations are situated. By approaching conspiracy theory in this way, the cultural and historical contingency of the phenomenon was acknowledged, while, at the same time, it was possible to explore the ideological dynamic of boundary change which contributed to the proliferation of conspiratorial discourse at the time of the Nato bombing of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999.

On the basis of the material examined in the empirical chapters, the process of boundary change which affected Serbian society around the time of the Nato intervention can be summarised as follows:

Throughout the 1990s, the political establishment of Slobodan Milošević propagated the notion that the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the ensuing economic and political crisis, were the result of an international conspiracy, i.e. of deliberate intent and actions by the world's power structures. For the most part, the conspiracy theory propagated by the ruling regime in Serbia belonged to the category of protoconspiracy theory. The specific body behind the conspiracy was seldom named. Metaphors, euphemisms and agentless passives were used

instead. The 'conspiratorless' nature of the protoconspiracy theory, and the absence of quasi-religious or right-wing conspiratorial themes, gave this type of explanation a reasonable and acceptable appearance.

For much of the past decade, protoconspiracy theory was merely one of a number of explanations of the Serbian crisis available on the local 'market-place of ideas'. Serbian opposition parties, the independent media and liberal intellectuals often mocked the xenophobic element of the conspiracy notion, and propagated a more open, democratic and pro-Western political option. However, with the arrival of the Nato bombs, the status of the alternatives to protoconspiracy theory changed dramatically. The imposition of a number of formal censorship rules and the application of informal pressures on the liberal media and public opinion made it increasingly difficult for pro-Western political option to be articulated in public. More importantly, the bombing brought about a discourse of suspicion which reflected the widespread disillusionment with the Western powers and which questioned Nato's motives. Although the discourse of suspicion did not necessarily take the form of protoconspiracy theory, the fact that it questioned the nature of visible reality and asked 'what is really going on' gave conspiratorial interpretations of the war greater credence and contributed to their legitimisation.

While protoconspiracy theory, with the assumption of an anti-Serbian plot at its core, provided a simple, coherent and for many a comforting explanation of the war, it was in many respects an incomplete explanation. It claimed that someone out there was pulling the strings of Serbia's destiny, without revealing who the mysterious individual, group or organisation might be. The explanatory gap left by protoconspiracy theory paved the way for the world elite conspiracy theories which blamed the anti-Serbian plot on a number of specific and existing organisations of business and political elite, such as the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission, or the Council on Foreign Relations. World elite conspiracy theory also had a fairly 'respectable' guise. After all, the elite organisations described in this type of explanation actually exist, and few people would question their influence on the economic and political trends in the world. Also, writers of world elite conspiracy theories often enhanced the reasonable image of their thesis by contrasting it with simplistic, naïve and 'paranoid' classical conspiratorial explanations which invoke mysterious groups from the past such as the Freemasons or the Illuminati.

Crucially however, in spite of the attempt at dissociation, the boundaries between world elite and the classical conspiratorial discourse were shown to be not watertight. World elite conspiracy theories propagated in the Serbian media and by some well-known and otherwise

respectable intellectuals were not created *de novo*. Instead they drew upon the established ideological tradition of conspiracy theory. The presence of the conspiracy tradition was particularly visible in the way in which writers attempted to place contemporary anti-Serbian plots in the history of world conspiracy. The reliance on the conspiratorial ideological tradition meant that many controversial conspiratorial claims, such as antisemitism or the quasi-religious themes, affected the discourse of world elite conspiracy theory. As a result, the proliferation even of the outwardly 'reasonable' and acceptable forms of conspiracy theory brought into the open the darker, antisemitic aspect of the conspiracy tradition. Eventually, many conspiratorial themes that were previously thought to be too extreme or radical gradually became promoted into the realm of acceptable, albeit not always normative explanatory discourses. This dynamic, which was illustrated using the example of the daily *Politika*, enabled antisemitic and quasi-religious conspiratorial themes to emerge, relatively unnoticed, in this mainstream newspaper which has no history of antisemitism.

The thesis also examined the way in which paranormal and esoteric explanations of the conflict with Nato became regarded as respectable in the spring of 1999. The investigation of this topic focused mainly on the Yugoslav military and its publications. Specifically, the thesis looked at the example of *Group 69*, a team of enthusiasts - including some active army officers - who were supposedly engaged in the building of a parapsychological shield over Serbia. The fate of this 'unit' was used to suggest that, in the mid-1990s, military authorities considered the pseudo-scientific and quasi-religious theorising promoted by *Group 69*, to be beyond the boundaries of acceptable opinion. On the other hand, the idea of a conspiracy, which this group also propagated, was shown to have been perceived, at the time, as fairly unproblematic.

In subsequent years, the discrepancy between the status of conspiracy theory and paranormal explanations diminished. By the time of the Nato bombing, many of the ideas from which the army was keen to distance itself in the mid-1990s became regarded as acceptable. The dynamic which turned paranormal explanations into an acceptable view was shown to be in many ways similar to the process which underlined the proliferation of conspiracy theories in the Yugoslav media. The development of a moderate and 'reasonable' version of a seemingly objectionable view led to a general shifting of the boundaries of respectability in a way that eventually brought the previously rejected outlook within what are seen to be acceptable limits. After 1995, the pseudo-scientific and mystical theoretical framework was propagated in a ostensibly more palatable way by incorporating, within the paranormal explanation, various concepts and arguments which originate from uncontroversial discourses, such as (Western) military literature on information warfare. The transformation of paranormal

explanatory discourse was explored in the context of Moscovici's (1984a; 2000) theoretical work on social representations, and was illustrated using the example of the concept of 'neocortical war'. The way in which this phrase was taken from US military literature and incorporated into the work of Svetozar Radišić was examined as a manifestation of the processes of *anchoring* and *objectification*. The rhetorical implications of the representation of 'neocortical war' was that the association with the US military gave Radišić's paranormal perspective an air of respectability, making it possible for ideas about paranormal warfare to be promoted in a more acceptable and convincing way. Significantly, the legitimisation of mystical and esoteric themes in the late 1990s was closely intertwined with the proliferation of conspiracy theories. The way in which Radišić formulated the idea of 'neocortical war' and the subsequent positive reception of his work was made possible by the fact that the concept of 'neocortical warfare' was anchored into the already established conspiratorial explanatory framework, and presented as a method of conspiratorial mass manipulation.

The thesis ended with an examination of the fate of conspiracy theories in the aftermath of the political changes in October 2000. It was suggested that with the end of the conflict with the international community, conspiracy theories lost much of their explanatory value. This led to an overall marginalisation of the conspiracy tradition, which today is largely confined to the fringes of politics, sections of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the military establishment, which still awaits reform.

However, the final empirical chapter also suggested that dismissing conspiratorial culture as the prerogative of extremists or disenfranchised political minorities may prove complacent. Over the last fifteen years, the notion of an international conspiracy entrenched itself in Serbian nationalist discourse and has become an enduring feature of conservative political ideology and populist political culture. As a result, conspiracy culture persists, albeit in fragments, as a culturally available set of arguments invoked mainly to argue against the liberalisation of Serbian society in the post-Milošević era. The continuing presence of the conspiratorial tradition is likely to diminish with the success of the ongoing political reforms. At the same time, one should not dismiss as fanciful the possibility that, should these reforms fail, or should the relations with the West deteriorate, the political potential of anti-Western conspiracism might prove not to have been exhausted. This is especially so considering that conspiracy theory continues to be propagated by two institutions that command great respect in Serbian society, namely the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Yugoslav Army. In that sense, the status of conspiracy culture within the argumentative context of Serbian politics remains tied up, in an inverted way, with the impending development of democracy in Serbia and the building of a truly liberal society.

Appendix A

Extracts from transcripts of recorded encounters with Spasoje Vlajić (31 December, 2000 and 2 January, 2001)

What follows is a collection of extracts from the transcripts of recorded conversations with Spasoje Vlajić. The recordings were made during two of Vlajić's regular afternoon encounters with his followers, on 30 December 2000 and 2 January 2001. Vlajić's meetings with the public take place in a small office, located on the ground floor of a seven-storey apartment block in the Belgrade suburb of Zemun. The transcripts are intended to complement the analysis in Chapter 8, by providing additional examples of Vlajić's extraordinary paranormal and conspiratorial explanatory framework.

The recorded sessions lasted approximately two hours. They were attended by between eight and twelve people (mostly women), some of whom claimed to be regular visitors. Most of those present were in their late thirties and forties, and appeared to be economically disadvantaged. However, they all gave the impression of being reasonably well educated which suggests that they belong to the middle class section of Serbian society which suffered economic demise under the Milošević regime. Some of the Vlajić's more enthusiastic visitors stayed for the full duration of recorded sessions, others came and left as they pleased. While this led to occasional interruptions in Vlajić's exposé, it also created a more informal atmosphere.

In the transcript, pauses of half a second and longer are noted in brackets within the text. Pauses have been included in the transcription in order to draw the reader's attention to the Vlajić's somewhat unusual manner of talking, which includes numerous, often lengthy silences. The pauses add to the mysterious and 'prophetic' appearance of Vlajić's discourse. Overlapping utterances are indicated with large brackets [].

Each of the 5 extracts is preceded with information regarding the date of the meeting and how for into the recording the particular extract took place.

Extract 1: 30 December 2000; 11 min- 18min

Vlajić Here, I will show you a concrete example
(2.0)
of how this force of meaning works. When I give examples, I usually try and ensure they are totally up to date, topical as they say. Look now (1.0) In the book *History of the Future*¹ ((Looks in book))
(4.0)
on page sixty two it says (1.5)((reads from book)) in the book *Intent*, from September 1993, a prediction was made that a lasting co-operation between Serbs and Americans would be heralded by signs connected with the names Đorđe² and Richard. This can always be checked on the page 135 of the book *Intent* (1.0) because science consists of verifying
(2.0)
What happens then? (1.0) Political changes (1.0) take place in Yugoslavia, which make it possible (1.0) for relations with the Americans to improve. Now, where is the name Đorđe? and where is the name Richard? (0.5) And then the name Đorđe appeared, and at the very top: George Bush. The first part came true (1.0) I won't go into all the branching, I am talking only about the basics, there are many other manifestations of the force of meaning. And then we thought where will the name Richard appear? After the president comes the vice-president. Now take a look at this. A text is published, this is from an issue of *Nedeljni Telegraf* ((rummages through a copy of the magazine)) which states ((reads)) In Bush's entourage, Serbs have acquired a strong base: mother of the Vice-president is a Serb. It goes on 'according to sources from our Diaspora in America, the mother of the new Vice president of the USA, Dick Cheney is Serbian', and Dick's real name is Richard. Bruce. Cheney. (1.0) And that is not all. For example, the American magazine 'Time' in 1989 asked the question: how come the then secretary of state for defence Dick, or rather Richard Cheney, speaks the Serbian language. The answer was because his mother is of Serbian origin. And look now (1.0) In ninety three (0.5) ((folds back the newspaper)) out of all the possible names (1.0) precisely those two names were given. And they were confirmed in September in the book *History of the Future*.
(3.0)
And then
(2.0)
it happened that those two names, at the very top and crucial for the possible improvement of relations between Americans and Serbs. Now watch. Is this just the case of prediction? (1.5) I repeat: if it were only for these three examples, I would not even consider them because they would not have statistical significance. There are hundreds of such examples. (0.5) What is happening? I am more and more convinced, but on the basis of scientific facts, that this is not prediction, but the creation of the future (0.5)

Through the force of meaning the future can be created and the force of meaning so to speak, directs and is present as a part of as something conjoined to, our brain waves. Now (1.0) hhhm (1.0) these energetic structures, this energy of thought contained in the names Đorđe and Richard could be considered as distinctive mental chips. As they pass through the consciousness of individuals they are united with the brain waves, they are emitted into the unified information field, or Sheldrake's morphogenetic field. They are recognised

(2.0)

on the quantum mechanical level and they are diffused into, how should I say, every pore of nature and that way, through that the force of meaning, nature itself starts to help and ensure that our wishes and intentions are fulfilled.

(2.0)

While Americans were our enemies and thank God that they no longer are, and will not be

(3.0)

naturally there had been many such chips, by the means of which we defended ourselves and resisted. One such chip (0.5) was revealed in the book *First World Parapsychological War*. This is what it was about. Within the Yugoslav Army the so called Group 69 was formed. Group 69 was in charge of researching phenomena in the domain of physics of hidden states. Physics of hidden states refere...refers to the exploration of those domains which, in terms of energy, could be defined as near-quantum, borderline-quantum and sub-quantum. So, low frequency brainwaves and other radiation. Eh, you see, in nineteen ninety-eight, the co-ordinator of these defence groups, Colonel B.S. (0.5) revealed one of these mental chips.

(2.5)

The chip was: if they pass Prokletije³, the Zastan peak, Americans will be drawn into a labyrinth without an exit and trigger off the suicidal matrix 'Iris 301'. This was noted, in the book *First World Parapsychological War*, in July 1998. Americans did cross Zastan and activated the code Iris 301. Eh now, what does this chip mean? (1.0) Iris is hhh the name for *perunika*⁴ and *perunika* got its name after our God Perun and signifies the one who comes first the president the one who presides. And 301 can be broken down as 43 times 7. Forty-third American president. And in the books *Intent* and *First World... erm, History of the Future* as early as in '93, in September, therefore as early as in 1993 it was indicated number seven is a code for the name Đorđe (1.5) And what is 301? The highway that connects Florida with Washington (0.5) What needed to be done first of all, was to create (1.0) among the Americans. I am recounting what, in 1998, was revealed to the public by colonel B. (0.5) What was needed was to provoke within the American nation such divisions and schisms, which would lead into a further (0.5) political constitutional and I-don't-know-what-kind of discord.

(2.0)

Therefore the code contained the president forty third (0.5) Đorđe and a decision brought to Washington, from Florida. It came true completely. Thank God that Americans are no longer our enemies and there is no need to go further. As far as I am informed (0.5) erm experts from Group 69 have the knowledge and the ability to (0.5) hrrm, how should I say, de-activate certain codes so that the one that is currently in play, which is in transmission, is the other code Đorđe Richard through which we seek active co-operation with the Americans. Again if it were only for these two codes or these five it could still be assigned to some category of probability-could be, but not necessarily. But there are so many codes that it leaves one breathless.

Extract 2: 30 December 2000; 31 min -36 min

J.B. I would also like to ask you another question, a question that is more... considering that you are concerned with the exploration of political, or rather, more concretely the political dimension, the exploration of some political (1.0) developments in the world...I noticed that in your book *First World Parapsychological War*, you reflect on who it is that really rules the world. So, I would like you to tell me in [what way

Vlajić [Well let me tell you, even the little birds in newspaper publishing companies know that. In *Politika*, in *Blic*, in *New York Times*, in all the other 'Times' and 'Time's'.(0.5) Eight of the richest banking families in the world are trying to rule the world.(0.5) It is a kind of subterfuge. They call themselves Jews (0.5)but they are not. According to Rabbi Altman, they are Jews only by name. They are primarily of Khazarian origin, and according to sources, both Jewish and Khazarian, and Arab and Byzantine, Khazars are of Turkish origin. They are not Jews, they are Judaised Turks. And they know their origins. Ahh, the best example, as far as I know, is Disraeli, and that nice (0.5) I could call it a story (0.5) of his, the tale of Al Roy.

(6.0)

J.B. What tale is that?

Vlajić I think I mention it in *First World Parapsychological War*...((Vlajić is distracted by a middle age woman walking into his office)) May the Lord be with you Tereza...It says it nicely there, you will find it all there, I give exactly what it is [all about...

J.B. [Yes, yes]

Vlajić [I won't retell it to you now, I hope you will

have the book and read it there. ((addresses Tereza in a soft voice)) Well where have you been Tereza?

Tereza I am coming from my office so I brought you the video tape. ((hands video tape to Vlajić)) This is a New Year present from me.

Vlajić Aaah...thank you...this seco...third one made an impression...(0.5) people are calling...we spoke about (1.0) why, in Montenegro, Gauss drove out Njegoš. Because our most common banknote here, the smallest, that of 10 dinars, (1.0) bears a picture of Njegoš. On the German is Gauss⁵. We also spoke about Njegoš's curse.

(2.0)

The title was: Why did Gauss - Gauss was a German mathematician, a contemporary of Njegoš- drive out Njegoš...((pensively)) Why did a arithmetician drive out a Bishop. Why did a mathematician drive out a poet, why did some contraption, some sextant, some instrument drive out the Cetinje monastery. That is what we spoke about.

(3.0)

The English probably would not like it either, somebody in the Balkans accepting the German Mark as a currency, why not the Pound..

J.B. Yes...indeed

Vlajić Well you see, there's a further issue here which is related to what you call heterodox. Look (1.5) There are words of different auditory makeup (0.5) with a similar or identical meaning...These are synonyms. Or, there are words with the same auditory form, but a different meaning. But, you see, there is another thing.

(2.0)

Words that have both a different meaning and a different auditory makeup, but a common nerve impulse, the energy which strikes the brain cells, and these we called ahh photonyms. Now...I worked on this in Germany, and cooperated with a famous company there(0.5) my task was to determine, by looking at a name and its energy, what a particular person most likes...what their photonym is. Look now. As early as in 1993, it was published

(3.0)

that for Izetbegović, the photonym is the ((German))Mark, as is the case with Đukanović.

(2.0)

In the brain cells, (1.0) the words Đukanović and Mark cause identical vibrations. With Izetbegović and the Mark, the situation is the same. On the basis of this knowledge, a prediction was made (1.5) and it came true. First, Izetbegović accepted the Mark as his currency, and later Đukanović did the same. This was calculated using a formula which was developed in 1976, and was published, in the form of a book, in 1984. Here it is, it's easy to calculate: Izetbegović, that is 585 equals Izetbegović, equals Đukanović, equals Mark, equals the purity of gold (1.5) Now,

if the enemy wants to pass onto us some mental chips, they would look for such things, and they found Đukanović who seems, as if hypnotically attracted to an idea which is inappropriate.

(2.0)

The mental chip is upon him, and he is working for someone else, and the poor man is not even aware of it. However, nature is rebelling, so something is happening (1.5) I don't need to tell you what is happening, but I hope that Đukanović (0.5) whose family is honorable, will come to his senses, and remember who he is. Can Gauss really drive out Njegoš? (1.0) No way. It is very dangerous when one tries (1.0) to destroy the roots of a people (0.5) because deprived of its roots, a people disperses, disappears.

J.B. So who are the these enemies who are able to get to Đukanović in this way?

Vlajić Let me tell you something. When we are talking about enemies, things are multi-layered (0.5) There are interest groups. (1.0) There is (0.5) a Turkish lobby, it is strong in America, hidden under the name of Jewry (1.0) but there is also a wider Islamic lobby, but beneath that one, maybe the most powerful of all is that of the Illuminati, I would not call it a lobby (0.5) but the Illuminati (1.5) force which has its own aims. Therefore, it is a combination of numerous interests. We would be looking for the resultant, the resultant of the vectors, which (0.5) is leaving its tentacles or its trace on Montenegro. But to point and say it is this person or that person, that would be inappropriate

Extract 3: 30 December 2000; 49 min- 54min

J.B. Yes, yes, and one thing that I found especially interesting about your work, is the way you apply ((heterodox theories)) to social phenomena, social and historical events.

Vlajić Well you saw it. For example, specifically what happened. (1.5) Sometime in March last year, or maybe in February (1.0) A man walks into this very room. A wonderful man. A doctor. Cardiologist. He says, come on and tell us, once and for all, because he has his own political beliefs, I am neutral there because I am a scientist, and it is all the same to me, in a scientific sense...not in a social sense, but in scientific work, I research objectively. Whether it is Janko, Marko, Miloš, Sulejman, in a scientific sense one has to be objective - God forbid Sulejman - to be neutral (inaudible)
You see, he walks in and says, who could replace that Milošević, (0.5) the man got sick of him for some reason. How should I tell you...Only Koštunica. He says, don't tell me such nonsense. First of all he did not even get through to

parliament, he failed at the elections, and also he is out of politics now. And I showed him this book from 1992. He is from Čačak which should tell you something about him.⁶ Once all this was over, he came back. Just like today, there were about 10-15 of us. He said, I must congratulate you. How did you know? ((laughs)) There, it is all in practical verification. Those who are ready to listen

(2.0)

will receive many useful instructions. Especially with regard to these mental chips. It's a whole science directed at that. How the energy of thought affects the sum of future events. How to turn that which is most beneficial into reality.

(3.0)

No matter what the domain, whether it is electing a president, the economy, or something else. That is a matter of opinion or the specific moment.

J.B. And these mental chips, are they dispatched...is that whole method based on your Formula of light, [or is it

Vlajić

[In some sense it is.

Also, it is based on the teachings of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović. In some sense it is also derived from the ideas of Nikola Tesla, which he left through his writing on the energy of cosmic pain and thought-waves which can disturb the fine balance and cause earthquakes. So the approaches (0.5) are different, different means are being employed. The Formula of Light is useful when one is looking for a mental chip which resonates and guides a man in his actions. This is what was done with Đukanović. And now he is as if under remote control (1.0) In addition, you know how this things go, they threaten him with Interpol and so on. The poor man is in a state of chaos, and hopefully God will help him. Nikčević and Amfilohije Radović are nearby.⁷

(2.0)

Their light can be felt (1.0) With God's help he will realize

(3.0)

who he is - the descendant of Pavle Orlović. Yes, the Đukanović family are descendants of the Prince's young flag bearer, Pavle Orlović.⁸ If only that realization would rise inside him. Then, the rest, that which has been imposed from outside would be erased. He still has not recognized him ((Orlović)), but with God's help...

J.B. You mentioned Bishop Nikolaj, as an influence [in the whole...

Vlajić

[Yes. He wrote an excellent booklet (1.0) entitled *Symbols and signals*. In it he talks about how to recognize the inner senses and recognize (0.5) what nature is telling us, and what it recommends (1.0) In this book ((points to his book *History of the Future*)) you will find enough about it and I am sure you can use it in your study.

(3.0)

You will have so much material that them over there will be stunned. You will have some concrete things. Here I even give

instructions (0.5) about how to use (0.5) the force of meaning to bring about a desired outcome. For instance on the occasion when we sent out the name Ljiljana, as a code, a mental chip, into the universal field (0.5) Seven women turned up, five of them called Ljiljana.

(4.0)

I describe this in the book

(15.0)

J.B. That is interesting. You say you sent the name into the universal field?

Vlaji• We all went quiet and agreed...look it says here how its done. It is not just the name Ljiljana, but it has to be attached to some powerful symbol which is recognizable in the universal field. We chose white ljliljan ((white lilly)) which is the symbol of the Mother of God (1.5) That is such a great force in the field. It is not just a technique, but the feeling of the soul.

(2.0)

A part of the soul must be dispatched into the universal field. United with this symbol and the word. Then it responds.

(2.0)

That is why Bishop Nikolaj writes about the awakening of the inner, spiritual senses. It is not a technique, it is not a method.

(2.0)

That is where our advantage lies. We retained our spirituality. That is where Europe can learn a lot from us. It can make sure that the spirituality survives, and take some for itself.

(2.0)

The benefits would be infinite. Both individual, but through cooperation also for whole peoples, and through cooperation of peoples also for Europe as a whole to which we belong. And through cooperation of continents for all of the world's civilization.

Extract 4: 2 January 2001; 9 min - 16 min

Vlajić If only you knew how it is done. But it is described in books. The basis is derived from Jung's, or rather Jung-Pauli's synchronicity. The states when one contemplative state (0.5) corresponds to one physical state. Now, the one who knows how to prepare a contemplative state (0.5) so that at some place at a certain time (0.5) it transforms itself into the physical, he has mastered the unified field and can use this method to turn spiritual energy into physical work. The examples I give in my book (0.5) are only hints, because they won't tell me about all that they are capable of.

Experts from Group 69 are in possession of this knowledge. (1.0) I try...I am more of a independent journalist, I want to find out, so I ask around. However some things (0.5) I still [haven't figured out]

J.B. [yes, yes]
Vlajić

But my scientific

(3.0)
and how should I say journalistic curiosity (0.5) is compelling me to keep investigating. But, I must underline what I told you last time. (0.5) There is every indication that the final victory belongs to those who are closer to God. Closer to God's laws. (1.5) When this is established as a condition for victory, then people will start competing in Good. (1.0) They will compete over who is closer to God, who is better, not only in order to win, but in order to survive. In that sense I really do expect that soon even that

(3.0)
which (1.5) until now has been concealed from the public will be revealed. For instance the files of Group 69. So far, only File 552 was made accessible to journalists. This file which consists of over 1000 pages (1.0) of densely typed text, in itself indicates

(2.0)
that they have made significant progress.

(3.0)

J.B. So this file is accessible
(2.0)
to journalists?

Vlajić In fact, I have parts of File 552 and I bring them here when someone needs it.

(3.0)
This file was compiled, over the past ten years by engineer Davor Koledić and a group of his associates. They were directly linked with Group 69. That is one of the files available to the public.

(2.0)

J.B. That's the one you use in your work?

Vlajić Primarily, I primarily use that one, but I used (1.0) other sources, mainly stuff that was published in the press.

(3.0)
Therefore I speak and talk only about things which are not filed under 'highly confidential'

J.B. [Yes, yes

Vlajić [Or 'super-highly confidential', but only that which is available to the public. Eh, this is where there is another one of those riddles.

(3.0)

If all this, which is unusual and promising is available to the public,

(2.0)

what's the other stuff. How is it that that F117 was shot down so easily? And many other questions. How did the people stay so calm. (1.5) Unbelievably calm. In fact it is in England that they talked about this gene 19, but it is not just that. For instance (1.5) those experiments that were carried out in Eugene, the American town, with low wave frequencies, of what 7-8 Hz? They were driving the inhabitants crazy with the vibrations. And this was in peaceful times, when there were no other pressures. What happened with the Serbs? (1.0) Sanctions, threats of war, war. Then came bombing, greatest amount of force the world has ever seen. And the people? Unbelievably calm. So what is it that these experts possess? Listen, anyone normal... imagine Nato is attacking you. Enough to make the hair on anyone's neck stand on end. And hardly any hairs were standing on end here. In fact people were even singing calmly. Not even traces of panic were anywhere to be seen

(2.0)

All this while the radiation was far higher than in Eugene, during a war, and at a time of great exhaustion

(2.0)

Is this a sign of some of the things which the experts of Group 69 are capable of? This is what needs to be investigated.

Extract 5: 2 January 2002; 21 min – 30 min

Vlajić For instance, especially in Great Britain (5.0) Have the English, and I often ask myself this (1.0) really relinquished their distinctiveness as a people? Or Great Britain as a nation (0.5) comprised of three or four peoples. Which ones... the English (0.5) the Scots (0.5) the Welsh and partly the Irish. And you see what is happening now (1.0) the influx from their former colonies is so great, that the distinctiveness of the Englishman, as a Christian, even as a white race is being lost. I do not comment, I merely ask: is that OK? The Hindus will continue to exist (1.0) as will the Arabs, with their religions, and (0.5) how should I put it racial characteristics, while a people, whom I consider to be very noble in terms of their contribution to civilization, (0.5) is disappearing. Is that OK? Is the question I am asking nationalist? (1.0) No, this is one of those areas (0.5) where the rulers, the hidden hand, as they call them, the rulers from the shadows, the international brotherhood of bankers are doing their job. It is not in their interests, at least according to what is happening now (0.5) for European people to be preserved. As a white race, and (0.5) above all as Christians. Rather, (1.0) as if they are aiming for a creation of some oblivious medley ((inaudible))

(4.0)

And they know, again from the past experience of Serbs (1.5) about the aims of fundamentalist Islam. Not Islam as a religion, which I respect, but the fundamentalist kind which we experienced through the Turks, and to some extent through (1.0) the current goings-on. What they will bring to Europe, to Germany, France and England especially...

J.B. Do you think that the Khazarian origin of the rulers of the world , or their Turkish origin, is in any way connected with this Islamic dimension and expansion.

Vlajić Look, in the book *First world...* It is a shame you don't have this book, because I describe it there in some detail. What is it all about? (1.0) All those who want to rule the world and its population, who want to have the power to rule (0.5) will begin by destroying nations with roots. Because with their spirit and faith, these nations refuse to be led for the sake of someone's invisible interests. The interests of some multinational capital. In that sense, strong faith is not (0.5) in their interest. They aim to destroy both Christianity and Islam, and Hinduism and Taoism, and all major religions, but gradually. In the first instance, they seem to have calculated that Christianity is the strongest and should be weakened. That are trying to achieve this in a number of ways. For example (1.0) the most obvious one is this. Since the inauguration of the Trilateral, the (1.5) organized institution that implements the intentions of the Banking brotherhood, has sided with the Muslims in every conflict (1.5) which involved Christians fighting against Muslims. Specifically, it started with East Timor in Indonesia. They sided with the Muslims, and almost (0.5) I won't say destroyed, but completely weakened Christianity, Roman Catholic Christianity at that, in Timor. Then came (2.0) came Cyprus, where they were against the Orthodox Greeks (0.5) and for the Turks. Then came Lebanon where they almost destroyed Christianity which used to be very strong. It was the hub of Christianity (1.5) in that part, around Jerusalem, in the Holy Land. There were Roman Catholics there, but also Orthodox Christians. (0.5) Then came Nagorno-Karabakh. No first Eritrea (1.0) In Ethiopia they were once again for the Islamic conquest and against (0.5) Christians. Then came Nagorno-Karabakh, where they were against the old, suffering Christian people, the Armenians, whom the Turks destroyed at the beginning of the century. The greatest genocide in this century was maybe against the Armenians, and later in the Second World War, against a number of peoples, including Serbs. After that comes Chechnya (0.5) where once again they were against Orthodox, not only Russians, but all the other surrounding peoples, peoples who live around Chechnya. (0.5) Then came Bosnia and Herzegovina. They supported the Muslims, against Roman Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs. Now came the their 'black crown': Kosovo (1.5) Aided by the, how should I say, their poor mercenaries who did not realize what was happening. I am talking about the young men whom I truly

love, for they are our kids. I am talking about these multinational forces, about these Christians, they haven't got a clue about what is going on. In the last couple of months the Albanians have destroyed over 150 Christian Churches, some of which were over six hundred years old, and represent the legacy of the world of Christianity. For instance the monastery in Sočiste ((inaudible))And Kosovo and Metohija are themselves, if we take a broader look, the hub of Christianity. And don't get me started (0.5) on all the tricks within Roman Catholicism with the number 666, or the Anglican or Protestant Church which is breaking up into sects, which often take over, and instead of being Christian (0.5) tend to drift into magic, or even Satanism.(0.5) Christianity is under threat. And as Christians, we must understand that time has come to fight for our survival. There is no more time for quarrelling. (1.5) Let all the big religions live, but I would not like Christianity to disappear. Now, they are not friends of the Muslims (0.5) I am talking about the international brotherhood which is non-religious (1.5) and which is not even Judaist, nor Christian, nor Islamic. I would say that they are driven, at least through the prof... principles of profit, by Satanism. This is because their basis consists only of that which is material. No spirituality. Now let me finish. They are not friends of Islam.

(2.0)

It is only that at the moment, Christianity is stronger, so they are targeting it. Once it is weakened, they will turn against Islam, because their motto (1.0) their favourite sentence is: the easiest victory is when the enemy destroys himself. That is what this is all about. (1.0) Are we going to allow Satanism to take over this planet. I am talking about the broader definition of Satanism. For me Satanism is all that indiscriminately, and brutally destroys nature as (0.5) created by God. All that is destroying the ozone layer, (0.5) water (0.5) air, food, forests, spirituality, morals, what is it in essence but Satanism? In that sense, I am glad that Serbia, after all these changes, and Yugoslavia, became part of Europe, so that we too could say things which we could not say in different circumstances. How can they say that Serbs are not part of Europe. How could they say this when Serbs as Europeans are more established than some of the great Europeans, or so called Europeans.

Notes

Chapter 3: Serbian Populist right-wing politics: the roots of conspiracy culture

- 1) The majority of the Serbian Jewish community originates from the Sephardic Jews who, after fleeing the Spanish inquisition, inhabited regions of the Balkans under Ottoman rule. Turkish authorities adopted a fairly liberal stance towards the Jews, who were recognised as a *millet*- a non-Islamic religious community within the Empire. Jews were allowed to practise their religion and customs as long as they paid the necessary taxes and accepted the Ottoman secular authorities. Most Jews lived in towns, where they worked as leather craftsmen or feather pluckers (Sekelj, 1995). As town dwellers, Jews and other minorities such as Tsintsars, Greeks, Armenians, Gypsies and Turks were almost completely isolated from the Serbian peasant population, which by and large lived a self-contained existence in the rural areas (Petrovitch, 1976). The persecution of Jews in Serbian society, which began with the first Serbian popular uprising in 1804, was accompanied by the banishment of Jews from a number of southern Serbian cities.
- 2) A British parliamentary motion passed in 1867 concluded that the 'conduct of the Servian people in regard to the Jewish community residing amongst them has been utterly unworthy of a people who reasonably and justly aspire to take their place among the civilised communities of Europe' (*Jews in Servia: Motion for Papers*, Parliament, 1867; p. 839-842).
- 3) The liberalisation of the Serbian society after the Berlin congress also led to the emergence of the anti-Masonic movement (Nenezić, 1984). Incidentally, the first anti-Masonic arguments came from Serbian left-wing thinkers who saw Freemasonry as a 'mysterious activity' of international capitalism aimed at subjugating the working classes. However, in 1895 the Radical Party published the book *Freemasons in Education (Framasoni u Prosveti)* a series of articles on the 'Masonic conspiracy'. This marked the beginning of Serbian anti-Masonic movement which in the 1920s and 30s became an extension of conspiratorial antisemitism.
- 4) There was some speculation in the 1930s that Ljotić had sympathisers among Yugoslav army officers who were probably drawn to Zbor's authoritarianism and the emphasis on the powerful national army (Popov, 1993).
- 5) Ljotić was also considered by many to be a religious fanatic. One of Ljotić's better known nicknames was 'Mita [short for Dimitrije] the bible-basher' (Popov, 1993).
- 6) The only significant dispute with the Germans occurred when Ljotić refused to send a division of his supporters to the Eastern front in the latter stages of the war.
- 7) SDK are said to have been responsible for rounding up the victims of the notorious mass shooting in the town of Kragujevac in October 1941. On that occasion, over two thousand civilians (including all of the town's Jewish men) perished in a single day (Cohen, 1996, Martić, 1980)
- 8) Published transcripts of Ljotić's speeches include descriptions of audience reaction such as 'rapturous applause' or 'the audience cheers ecstatically'. Although the accuracy of the transcript is difficult to verify, it is noteworthy that cheers and applause often follow overt antisemitic claims.
- 9) Velimirović's personal charisma was noted by Rebecca West, who met the Bishop during a visit to his diocese in 1938.

'He struck me now, as when I had seen him for the first time in the previous year, as the most remarkable human being I have ever met, not because he was wise or good, for I have still no idea to what extent he was either, but because he was the supreme magician...He was so apt for magic that had it not existed, he could have invented it' (West, 1993; p.720)
- 10) In 1941, Henry Ford's antisemitic ranting was serialised, in a more detailed and comprehensive form, in the newspaper *Naša Borba (Our Struggle)* published by Zbor.

11) The 'Dinara race', named after the mountain of the same name, is the most common racial type amongst Southern Slav people, according to early 20th century racial theories.

12) A more detailed discussion of Velimirović's ambivalence towards the West and especially Britain is beyond the scope of the present discussion. Historical literature appears to agree that Velimirović, a former Oxford student, harboured strong pro-British attitudes and maintained links with the Anglican Church (Nenezić, 1984; Stefanović, 1984, Borković, 1979). Velimirović's affinity towards the Anglican church stemmed largely from the fact that the COE, as a national church, seemed to Velimirović to be compatible with his own vision of the union between church and state (see *Nationalism of St Sava*, in Velimirović, 2001). Consequently, Velimirović's support for the military coup in March 1941, in which the British intelligence played no small part, was probably a reflection of his pro-British stance. However, as will become apparent, Velimirović's was otherwise strongly opposed to Western political and cultural influences. It is also interesting that writers on the Masonic movement in Serbia frequently suggest that Velimirović's pro-British stance was the result of him being a Freemason (Nenezić, 1984; Lopusina, 1998). Bearing in mind Velimirović's anti-Masonic discourse, this is unlikely to be true. However, the allegation can be seen as a reflection of the general tendency, in anti-Masonic writing, to attribute pro-Western attitudes to the involvement in the Masonic movement.

13) Subotić (1996) even suggested that Velimirović and the Patriarch were 'the only religious figures interned in Dachau' which is inaccurate. There were several thousand religious dignitaries of various denominations imprisoned in Dachau, including over 1700 Polish catholic priests (see, for instance, Berben, 1975; Musiol, 1975).

14) According to Petranović (1983), in 1945, German authorities in Yugoslavia proposed the establishment of a Serbian-Montenegrin federation which would be governed by pro-German nationalist forces. Ljotić, Nedić and others, who have been hoping for a 'Greater Serbia' that would include parts of Bosnia and Croatia, claimed that in order to get their forces to accept the new, and less appealing state borders, they need to have the support of Velimirović and Patriarch Gavriilo, who at this point had already been taken to Dachau. The clearance for the release of Velimirović and the Patriarch came from Herman Neubacher, the German emissary for Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Greece.

15) In spite of the role which Ljotić and other leaders of Zbor played in laying the foundations of contemporary conspiracy culture in Serbia, they are seldom explicitly mentioned or cited in recent versions of conspiracy theory. The reason for their absence lies mainly in the controversy surrounding Zbor's collaboration with the Nazis, which has undermined Ljotić's public standing. Although there have been several attempts in recent years to rehabilitate Ljotić and present him as a saviour of Serbian lives and a martyr rather than a traitor and collaborator (see Popov, 1993) Ljotić's political integrity is still seen as questionable, even within the Serbian Right. Interestingly, for many critics on the right, it is often not Ljotić's antisemitism or his fascist tendencies that are regarded as objectionable, but the fact that, in helping the Germans, Zbor and the Serbian Volunteer Force often fought against the Chetniks of Draža Mihajlović, a nationalist guerrilla force which, in the post-war years acquired a privileged status within Serbian nationalist mythology, as the embodiment of WWII patriotism and anticommunist resistance. As the wrangle about Ljotić's political credibility continues, it is Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović who has emerged as the most prominent authority within Serbian conspiratorial culture.

16) Jovan Skerlić is a well-known and respected historian whose work includes some of the most reliable analyses of cultural, political and ideological trends of 19th and early 20th century Serbia.

17) In 1915 Nikola Pašić sent none other than Nikolaj Velimirović on a diplomatic mission to Western Europe and the United States to advocate the Serbian cause.

18) The term 'omnihuman' was first introduced by Dostoyevski in his work *Pushkin's address*. Dostoyevski envisaged it as a Orthodox Christian equivalent to Nietzsche's 'superman', that is as the highest ethical ideal of a devout Orthodox Christian. The concept is also central to Velimirović's philosophy, much of which is based on the critique of Nietzsche (Bigović, 1998)

19) An anecdote connected to calls for Velimirović's canonisation provides a clear illustration of the extent to which Velimirović's antisemitism is taboo within religious circles in Serbia. On one occasion Patriarch Pavle is said to have admitted that canonising Velimirović would be 'controversial'. However, the alleged controversy is not in Velimirović's questionable political orientation or his rabid antisemitism, but in the fact that he 'smoked cigarettes' and that some of his personal friends are still alive. 'It would sound strange' the Patriarch is said to have argued, 'if someone could say "I once knew a saint"' (reported in *Heroes of our times: Prayers and requests*, *Nin*, 1 January, 1999).

Chapter 4: Social psychology and the study of extraordinary explanations: from attributional bias to ideology

1) The FAE is thought to be less evident in the attribution of causes of one's own behaviour, when situational factors are preferred. However, this again depends on the type of event and the use of various self-serving biases in attribution (Storms, 1973).

2) All three books were published in the same *Studies in Prejudice* series (see Billig, 1978)

3) A *New Scientist* survey in the early 1970s, cited by Collins and Pinch (1979) revealed that 70% or readers believed in the possibility of psi phenomena. Also, discussions with scientists conducted by the two authors revealed little hostility towards parapsychology among physicists. At the same time, there is less evidence of institutional bonding between mainstream science and parapsychology, in that the same physicists reported that a public display of enthusiasm for the paranormal would probably adversely affect their careers.

4) Also, while the existence of a myth of anti-Serbian conspiracy was undoubtedly politically advantageous to Milošević and his regime, it is hard to see how any concrete political advantage could be derived from antisemitic conspiracy theory.

5) The emphasis on method is not only the prerogative of traditional experimental and other quantitative approaches to scientific inquiry. Discourse analysis (DA, Potter & Wetherell, 1987) or conversation analysis (CA; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998; ten Have, 1999) are also inherently linked to assumptions (no matter how vaguely defined or even denied) about how analysis of social psychological phenomena should be done. Both CA and DA are defined by what is thought to be the correct or at least recommended practice of analysing discourse or conversation, as well as by their theoretical or meta-theoretical assumptions.

6) A similar sentiment was expressed by Tajfel (1981) when he noted that understanding prejudice requires the examination of relevant '[cultural] myths, be they called *representations collectives*, social representations, or *social* (as opposed to individual) stereotypes'. Tajfel recognised the historical and cultural specificity of these 'myths' and their irreducibility to individual and universal psychology. In doing so he effectively sided with Moscovici in the desire to turn social psychology into 'an anthropological and historical science' (Moscovici, 1984b, p.948).

Chapter 5: Data and Materials

1) For instance, it is common practice in Yugoslavia to keep copies of old newspapers for recycling or for general use in the house. Consequently, in the summer of 1999, door-to-door inquiries were often a productive data-gathering exercise.

2) In addition to the data listed above, in the initial stages of the data-gathering process recordings of over 20 hours of radio news bulletins broadcast during the bombing campaign were obtained from the Radio Belgrade audio archive. However, this material was not used. The bulletins consisted mainly of

factual information about targets of Nato attacks and the occasional commentaries were similar to those examined in Chapter 6, which were found in *Politika*.

3) Several attempts were made to obtain the circulation figures for the publications used in the thesis, but with little success. According to Prvosav Plavšić of the independent Media Centre based in Belgrade, who is one of the leading experts on the Serbian media, official statistics are impossible to come by. The reason is that most publishers inflate the sales figures when trying to attract advertisers, investors or donors, and deflate them when doing their tax returns. Plavšić pointed out that editors are sometimes willing to give out information to researchers 'off the record', but that without independent verification, the source cannot be treated as reliable.

4) The name is pronounced Jurjevich. This is also the spelling which Đurđević adopted during his career in the US. The thesis will use the original, Serbian spelling.

5) Incidentally, Krstić died in a virtually identical way as his political role-model Dimitrije Ljotić. He was killed in a car accident, after his vehicle careered off the road and crashed in a ditch.

6) Extracts from the transcript of the encounters with Vlajić are provided in Appendix A.

Chapter 6: Protoconspiracy theory and the proliferation of suspicion in the Serbian media and political discourse

1) The tendency of conspiracy theories to emerge in time of war has been noted in literature on the subject (e.g. Pipes, 1998). As one author put it, 'all wars start with conspiracy theories, put out by the various governments, proving to the satisfaction of their citizens, at least for a while, that all the trouble was caused deliberately by the other side' (Wernick, 1994; p.120)

2) The transcript of the document was subsequently leaked to the weekly news magazine *Vreme* which published it in April 1991.

3) A. Apostolovski is one of *Politika*'s regular journalists whose contributions during the war ranged from straightforward reports from bombed sites or press conferences, to bitter anti-Western commentaries.

4) Further discussion of the use of biological metaphors can be found in Chapter 9. As will become apparent, biological metaphors are in some contexts also used to represent the enemy. This is the case for instance in references to strikes 'at the heart' of the enemy, or breaking the enemy's 'backbone'.

5) The reference to international organisations in this context is interesting as it implies that these organisations, just like the lay public, are the victim of media manipulation. However, on other occasions international organisations and charities were often portrayed not as victims of manipulation, but as participants in the conspiracy. For example in the issue of 14 April 1999, *Nedeljni Telegraf* revealed that OSCE verifiers in Kosovo were recruited from a 'private intelligence company from Virginia' and that during their brief stay in the province they placed many missile guidance devices in crucial locations. In an earlier issue the magazine revealed that *Medecins sans Frontieres* as well as 23 other charity organisations were systematically gathering logistical information for Nato. The view of charities as spy nests was 'confirmed' when Steve Pratt, an Australian charity worker arrested during the bombing, 'confessed' that he spied for Nato.

6) The website belongs to the so called Serbian Defence League, a California-based antisemitic organisation run by the Serbian émigré Boris Pribić.

7) Such articles were also read out in Radio Belgrade's principal daily news bulletin at 3.00 pm.

8) In addition, the development of the idiosyncratic style of protoconspiratorial explanation in the mainstream political discourse of the early 1990s can be said also to have been motivated by the desire

to maintain the distance between the official rhetoric of the Milošević regime and the 1930s right-wing ideological tradition which was still largely considered to be beyond the boundaries of acceptable opinion.

9) On 11 April 1999 Slavko Ćuruvija, founder and editor of the daily *Dnevni Telegraph* and the magazine *Evropljanin* was assassinated in front of his home in Belgrade, by the Serbian security forces. The killing was interpreted by most of Serbia's independent media as a warning and as a sign of the regime's determination to use violence in dealing with any kind of dissent.

10) In Chapter 10 there is a reference to a media campaign in the months after the war against members of the Serbian opposition who met with Madeline Albright. Korać was a member of the delegation that visited the former US Secretary of State, and was as such labelled 'traitor' and 'servant of the West'.

Chapter 7: The emergence of antisemitic conspiracy themes in the mainstream Serbian press.

1) In Đurđević's books *Masonry: a conspiracy against God and man, through the centuries and today* and *Five Bloody Revolutions of Judeo-bankers and their Judeo-masonry*, the Bilderbergers and other world elite organisations are located on the third level of the conspiratorial pyramid. Above them are the Committee of 300, which in turn is ruled by leaders of the 'Judeo-Masons' and 'Pharisees', namely Rockefeller and Rothschild.

2) Although *The Trilateral* does not deal directly with the bombing of Yugoslavia (it was published in 1998), the book warrants further attention. *The Trilateral* is the clearest and the best known elaboration of the world elite conspiracy theory available in the Serbian language to date. Avramov claims that the book sold over 10,000 copies.

3) The name 'Aradunik Mihajlovic' is most probably a printing error as 'Aradunik' does not exist as a Serbian name. Unfortunately, in spite of all attempts to trace the article in *Politika* which O'Kane mentions in her report, it was not possible to find the original text.

4) Umberto Eco (1989) reflects upon this temporal dimension of conspiracy theory in *Foucault's Pendulum* when one of the characters in the novel describes 'the lunatic', one of the categories in a somewhat cynical classification of humanity. The 'lunatic' in many ways resembles the conspiracy theorist :

'For him everything proves everything else. The lunatic has an 'idee fixe' and whatever he comes across confirms his lunacy. You can tell him by the liberties he takes with common sense, by his flashes of inspiration, and by the fact that, sooner or later, he brings out the Templars' (p.67)

Although conspiracies are often traced back to Templars, the Weishaupt's Illuminati or the early Freemasons, their origins frequently go even further back in history, mostly to early Christian times. Reference to early Christian themes, especially those relating to the death of Christ, can be regarded as a legacy of antisemitic elements in conspiracy theory, in that they accentuate the importance of the act of crucifixion which is traditionally blamed on the Jews (Cohn, 1957).

5) Two years after the publication of the second edition of *The Trilateral*, Avramov wrote another book, *Opus Dei*, devoted entirely to the conspiratorial machinations of the Vatican and its anti-Serbian and anti-Orthodox machinations.

6) There is no reason to believe that the author of the article is herself an exponent of political extremism or an enthusiast for the wilder reaches of the conspiracy tradition. Knežević is a single mother in her early thirties, with a degree in Spanish. She is only a part time journalist. Otherwise she translates subtitles for Latin American soap-operas. Knežević's biographical information was provided by a former editor of *Politika's* culture supplement, who described his young colleague as 'very intelligent'. When asked to explain the content of Knežević's articles, our source explained that Knežević was probably 'too short of money to be too concerned with morals'.

Chapter 8: Conspiracy theory and paranormal explanations

1) Research on wartime rumourmongering has led to a series of attempts at categorisation (Rosnow, 1976). One of the better known attempts was the threefold classification of rumour proposed by Knapp (1944), which distinguished between 'pipe dreams' 'bogies' and 'wedge-drivers'. 'Wedge-driving' rumours are those which divide the community in which they circulate by suggesting, for example, that certain sections contribute less to the war effort, or even collaborate with the enemy. Interestingly, Knapp's research on rumours in the US during WWII indicated that the vast majority of rumours were of the 'wedge-driving' kind (66%) with only 2% of stories collected falling into the 'pipe dream' category. On the other hand, more recent research conducted during the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) suggests that on this occasion 'pipe dream' rumours were by far the most common category (above 60%; Nkpa, 1977).

2) It appears that the articles were not initially envisaged as a series. At the end of the first article there is no 'to be continued' message, commonly found in *Duga* in the case of serialised articles. Radišić's articles are linked only by subtle references in the text itself as well as by the caption *Parapsychological Patriotic War* printed above the titles of the second and the third article. It is therefore possible to speculate that the magazine initially intended to publish only the first article, but subsequently decided to include two others, possibly because it became apparent that there was a public demand for material on this topic.

3) These issues were discussed with Stojadinović during an informal conversation which took place in Belgrade, in December 2000.

4) Radišić was subsequently promoted to the rank of colonel, which he holds to the present day.

5) *The First World parapsychological war* is the first part of a trilogy, which also includes *First World anti-Christian War* (1999) and most recently *The History of the Future* (2000).

6) After the fall of the Milošević regime, and the 'liberation' of the state media, Stojadinović moved to *Politika* where he writes on military affairs.

7) Parapsychology is today often regarded as a legitimate academic discipline which, in the US at least, attracts government funding. Collins and Pinch (1979) cite the executive secretary of the (American) National Institute of Mental Health as stating that funding for parapsychological research is justified because those involved are 'perfectly well trained, respectable scientific investigators. They are sincere and serious and they deserve a chance' (p.167).

8) According to Gardner (1981) this trend reflects both the psychic's fascination with modern science and the need for rational explanation which would ultimately lead to recognition. In the past, Maxwell's electromagnetic waves, as well as various aspects of Einstein's relativity theory, were used by psychics to account for phenomena such as precognition, psychokinesis and clairvoyance (see Gardner, 1981).

9) The concept of 'synchronicity', initially described by Jung, refers to 'a coincidence in time of two or more causally unrelated events which have the same or a similar meaning'. It includes instances such as thinking of someone shortly before receiving a phone-call from that person, etc. In other words, synchronicity refers to instances where a mental event corresponds to a physical event in a seemingly acausal manner. With Pauli's help this somewhat mystical idea attained a quantum mechanical elucidation. Jung and Pauli also argued that underpinning synchronicity is the fact that both physical and mental worlds are aspects of the same transcendental reality (*unus mundus*) which organises images in the sphere of the psyche and regulates the transformation of matter and energy on the physical level. The idea of a *unus mundus* as some hyper-reality where all information (physical and mental) is stored, links Jung's and Pauli's concept of synchronicity to the Hindu notion of 'Akashic record', William James's 'cosmic reservoir' of memories, or the 'astral plane'. In his work Vlajić insists that the key to parapsychological warfare lies in the mastery of this 'universal' or 'information

field', which would make it possible not only to predict the future, but also act in a seemingly acausal way on a subquantum level.

10) Jung and Pauli did not specify the precise 'location' of the *unus mundus*. However, the idea of a realm consisting of pure information led other theorists, such as the biologist Rupert Sheldrake to speculate about the existence of actual physical 'morphogenetic fields' which 'carry information only (no energy) and are available throughout time and space without any loss of intensity after they have been created' (Gilman, 1986). These fields supposedly contain information on the structural organisation of all living matter. In Vlajić's work, 'morphogenetic fields' are treated as synonymous with the 'universal field' (see previous note).

11) The EPR (Einstein, Podolski, and Rosen) paradox, or the 'non-locality problem', presents one of the principal unresolved issues of QM. A comprehensive description of the paradox and a discussion of its implication for psi-research can be found in Gardner (1981) and Collins and Pinch (1982). For the present purposes, it suffices to say that, according to quantum theory, in some situations it appears as if 'information can go instantly from one particle to another one that is ten light years away', travelling at superluminal speeds (Gardner, 1981). Therefore, theoretically speaking, causes of some physical events need not be temporally or spatially local, suggesting the possibility of 'action at a distance' (Collins and Pinch, 1982). This phenomenon has led some well-known physicists, most notably David Bohm, to speculate that the particles in question may be connected on a subquantum level, which lay outside the time-space dimension of relativity theory (Gardner, 1981).

The implication of the EPR paradox, which is still a subject of controversy among experts in QM, but which makes it appealing to parapsychologists, is that it opens up the theoretical possibility that the space-time reality which we inhabit is just the surface of a hyperspace, in which some type of information can travel instantly. More importantly, as Vlajić indicates in his account of the EPR paradox, the force which supposedly links the two electrons featured in the famous experiment is constructed as somehow originating in the human mind.

The attribution of causality in quantum phenomena to the human mind, common in parapsychological theorising since the 1970s, appears to be the result of an unfortunate semantic confusion, resulting from the ambiguity of the category of 'observer' referred to in specialist literature. According to Stenger (1992), when describing how the state of a system is affected by the act of measurement, pioneers of QM research like Bohr and Heisenberg, used the term 'observer', thus 'inadvertently [leaving] the impression that human consciousness enters the picture to cause that state to come into being'. As QM gradually became part of lay discourse, the reference to the 'observer' was interpreted as implying human involvement. Stenger (1992) concludes that

'If Bohr and Heisenberg had spoken of measurements made by inanimate instruments rather than 'observers', perhaps this strained relationship between quantum and mind would not have been drawn. For nothing in quantum mechanics requires human involvement.'

Therefore, although QM is fairly specific when it comes to identifying the limits of hypothetical sub-quantum processes and assumes that an 'observer' is an inanimate, hypothetical entity, Bohm's interpretation led many believers in the supernatural, including Vlajić, to use this type of explanation to account for telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, and practically all other parapsychological phenomena. The re-presentation of specialist concepts within external, non-specialist explanatory frameworks has been the topic of Moscovici's (1976) early work on social representation which examined the commonsense understanding of psychoanalytic terms. The dynamic through which expert vocabulary is re-presented in a paranormal conspiratorial explanatory framework will be examined in more detail in the following chapter, through the example of the term 'neocortical war'.

12) The first QM interpretation of 'psi' emerged in the 1950's (Jordan, 1950, Margenau, 1956), although this idea gained wider recognition among parapsychologists only in the 1970s, when the work of Evan Harris Walker (1974) of the John Hopkins University was first published (Collins and Pinch, 1982). Interestingly, Walker's work is said to have been approved even by some established mainstream physicists, including the Nobel Prize winner Brian Josephson (Gardner, 1981)

13) Global Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Case Study on the Aum Shinrikyo. Senate Government Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, October 31, 1995 Staff Statement (http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1995_rpt/aum/part06.htm)

14) The crusade against 'sects' in recent years was not confined to religious authorities, but included parts of the Serbian political and military establishment. In 1999, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights considered the campaign against small religious communities in Yugoslavia to be sufficiently aggressive to constitute a potential infringement of the freedom of confession prescribed by the Serbian constitution (HCFHR Serbia Report 1999).

15) <http://www.spc.org.yu/Latin/sekte.html>

16) Vlajić cites the *Military Review* as a source of information on the voodoo units. An extensive search of the *Military Review* database failed to reveal any articles in support of Vlajić's claim. However, a text found on the website of the US Army Combined Arms Research Library suggests that US special forces did use charms against voodoo magic during the 1994 operation in Haiti (Major Ronald M. Johnson, *Application Of Aspects Of Unconventional Warfare: Tools For Engaging The Current And Future Threat Trends Of The Post- Cold War Environment*, Masters thesis, Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College). The purpose of this exercise was to reduce anxiety among soldiers and prevent the spreading of rumours. It does not mean that military authorities seriously entertained the possibility of witchcraft, or that the American army employed 'witches'.

17) In fact 'Don Amerigo' is not an anagram of 'Armagedon'. The two words only have corresponding consonants, but not vowels. 'Don Amerigo' has an 'o' where 'Armagedon' should have an 'a'.

18) The 11th century Tibetan saint, Jetsun Milarepa was a poet, musician, and meditation master. Milarepa was the first Tibetan 'commoner' to attain enlightenment in only one lifetime, exemplifying the great human potential for transformation.

19) Because of the noticeable discrepancy between Vlajić's and Radišić's explanations, in terms of the emphasis on the religious element, Vlajić was asked, during the recent conversation, to comment on the apparent absence of Orthodox Christian spirituality in the work of his colleague, Svetozar Radišić. Interestingly, Vlajić denied the existence of any significant difference of opinion. Instead, he pointed out that Radišić's reference to Eastern mysticism was not used to account for methods used by Group 69, but rather, to describe the techniques of Serbia's enemies:

'[Radišić] mentions everything that is being used by the great powers, Eastern or Western. However, I read very carefully: nowhere does he say what it is that Group 69 uses. As far as I know, the basis of the work of Group 69 is accessing nature through prayer...and asking, in a way that is pleasing to God, for so-called mental chips to come about, in accordance with God's justice.'

This explanation is more applicable to Radišić's recent work (see next chapter), where he does focus on the methods employed by Serbia's enemies, than to the views expressed in the articles in *Duga*.

20) The alleged association between Obradović and Freemasonry is a common theme in early 20th Century anti-Masonic conspiracy theory in Serbia, and reflects the tendency to link all progressive figures from Serbian political and cultural life to some evil and alien anti-Serbian plot.

Chapter 9: 'Neocortical Warfare': conspiratorial representation of a biological metaphor

1) Radišić elaborates on Hagelin's ideas of universal consciousness in more detail in Chapter 7 of his book, entitled *Information shell*. In the introduction to the chapter he reveals that John Hagelin visited Belgrade in 1990, and gave a lecture at the conference centre 'Sava' in which he suggested that humanity is approaching the 'more fundamental levels of natural dynamics, that is the universal field of natural intelligence' (Radišić, 1999; p.57)

2) Radišić's article in Duga was subsequently reprinted in *Revija 92 (By winning, America is loosing the war, Revija 92, 18 October, 1996; p.8)* where it was also introduced as 'exclusive'. Large sections of this article can also be found in the book *Neocortical Warfare*, so specific ideas contained in the articles will not be examined separately.

3) Although the Tofflers' book *War and Anti-War* received relatively little coverage in academic literature it has been widely influential within the US military establishment. For a number of years Alvin Toffler, the book's first author, has been teaching the 'wave theory' of warfare at the highly esteemed Air War College in the US. The popularity of *War and Anti-War* within the military is evident in the fact that it was through an example from this book that Professor George Stein of the Air University justified the inclusion of the concept of information warfare in US military doctrine: 'if the world really is moving into a third-wave, information-based era, failure to develop a strategy for both defensive and offensive information warfare could put the United States and the US military into the situation of being on the receiving end of an "Electronic Pearl Harbor"' (Stein, 1995).

4) *Collateral Damage or Unlawful Killings?, Violations of the Laws of War by NATO during Operation Allied Force* (AI Index: EUR 70/18/00), published in June 2000.
<http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/EUR700302000?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\YUGO SLAVIA>

5) Whitehead (1997) criticises the concept of 'neocortical warfare' on the grounds that it is not a particularly original idea, but a pretentious name for 'psychological operations, propaganda and military deception'. DiNardo and Hughes (1995) perceive Szafranski's ideas as 'speculative' and 'radical', not because he proposes a revolutionary new method based on brain manipulation, but because 'information warfare' cannot provide an alternative for traditional methods of war. For similar reasons Whitehead (1997) evaluates 'neocortical war' as 'unconvincing' and 'irresponsible'.

6) In spite of the disagreements between social representations and the study of discourse, some attempts have been made to reconcile the two perspectives (Billig, 1988a; Harré, 1984, 1998). Billig, (1988a, 1993) for example, drew attention to the argumentative and rhetorical aspects of anchoring and objectification, thus bringing together the theory of social representations and rhetorical psychology. Similarly, Moscovici (1998) recently reiterated the importance of language in the process of representation, and suggested that the analysis of discourse can complement his theory by exploring in greater detail its linguistic and discursive aspects.

7) However, this appears to be changing since the fall of Milošević, see next chapter.

8) It is also noteworthy that such 'convergence of extremes', based on a shared endorsement of conspiratorial culture, is not a uniquely Serbian phenomenon. In Russia too, anti-Western forces from opposite ends of the political continuum endorse similar conspiratorial beliefs. Communist Zyuganov and nationalist Zhirinovskiy justify their anti-Western sentiments on the basis of a similar conspiratorial notion. Similarly, in the United States, former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, usually perceived as a representative of left-wing conspiracism (Pipes, 1998) maintained links with the LaRouchians, an extreme right-wing organisations known for its devotion to conspiracy theories (Berlet, 1994). In both cases, just like in Serbia, the common feature which brings diverse institutions and movements together is an antagonism towards the Western/American political establishment.

Chapter 10: Conspiracy culture in post-Milošević Serbia: the return to the margins

1) A similar analogy with Nazi Germany appeared on other occasions. On 25 May, Koštunica stated that Nazis were 'small children' in comparison with Nato generals (*Politika*, 25 May 1999; p.12). A day later he suggested that compared to Nato and its generals, 'Goering and his Luftwaffe are the epitome of honourable warriors' (*Politika*, 26 May 1999, p.12)

2) Some years ago Vujačić (1995) suggested that Jowitt's (1992) interpretation of political charisma was applicable to Milošević, who in the late 1980s successfully combined the ideas of (Yugoslav) socialism and (Serbian) nationalism. Milošević's success, Vujačić argues, lay in his ability to present himself as the epitome of the new nationalist revival, while at the same time maintaining the image of someone devoted to communist ideals. This rhetorical strategy enabled Milošević to ride on the wave of popular nationalism while preserving the support of reactionary communist institutions such as the Army and the Party.

3) This information is based on media monitoring analysis provided by the Belgrade-based Media Centre (<http://www.mediacenter.org.yu>)

4) However, Marković countered this pessimistic view of Serbia's future with the assurance that 'The power-and-money hungry American empire will collapse like a house of cards, as every empire does in the end, because its foundations are rotten to the core'.

5) The continuation of the belief in an international conspiracy was also reflected in the warning Vlajić gave his visitor from England about the dangers facing those who 'promote' his work in the Western world:

'Be careful, because their blows are powerful, yet invisible. You are simply left at the bottom. Marginalised. That is the worst kind of blow. Many competent Europeans, I know some of them, I co-operated with some of them, they are staggering around Switzerland... They are more knowledgeable than many of those who are well-known... So you have to be skilful... Let me tell you... this Brotherhood of bankers, they don't care...'

6) The list of enemies included 'Zionists (Jewish rasists)' - who are on other occasions also referred to as 'Judeo-Masonic murderers'; 'Ustashi' (a derogatory term denoting Croatian people in general); 'Poturice' (a derogatory term for Slavic Muslims from Bosnia and the Serbian region of Sandzak); 'Shiptari', i.e. the Albanians; 'Democrats' who are seen as 'impostors in the Serbian being', as well as pacifists ('false peacemakers'), members of religious sects, homosexuals ('perverts'), 'drug-addicts' and 'criminals'. This information was available on the *Obraz* webpage until late 2001, when the section *Message to Serbia's enemies* was taken off. It is highly likely that this was done following the negative publicity which antisemitic aspects of the ideology of *Obraz* attracted in the liberal media.

7) Krstić in *Racism defies Serbian democracy - violence grows despite change in leadership*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 18, 2001). Interestingly, in this interview Krstić admitted that he voted for Koštunica, although he expressed some reservations concerning the more liberal wing of the Serbian opposition.

8) This was partly because many Serbian conspiracy theorists harbour a deep-rooted suspicion towards the Internet. Many theorists, including Vlajić and Đurđević, see this Western invention (initially developed by the US military!) as a dangerous tool in the hands of conspirators. Unlike their younger counterparts, these 'old-fashioned' authors still rely mainly on the printed word.

9) Also, before the fall of Milošević, members of *Obraz* and similar organisations were not engaged in the obstruction of meetings of organisations such as the Writer's Union, because their leaders were members of those same organisations. Nebojša Krstić, for example, was himself a member of the Serbian Union of Writers, although his literary output hardly warrants membership in this elitist organisation.

10) The enduring presence of Pavković is all the more remarkable bearing in mind his involvement in a number of financial scandals concerning the appropriation of Army-owned real estate in Belgrade, not to mention his at least indirect role in the war crimes committed in Kosovo at the time when the region was officially the responsibility of the Yugoslav Army.

11) The world's media are accused of 'imposing values which appeal to the lowest human passions (surrogates of culture)' thus 'destroying the feelings of kindness and solidarity; contributing to the development of an egoistic, selfish and petit-bourgeois mentality; and raising the cult of material wealth to the level of the principal value; provoking national, religious and racial intolerance

accompanied by the loss of self-respect and self-confidence'. (p.80-81). The power of the world's media is said to turn certain societies into a 'chaotic mass, which their government cannot control and direct towards the realisation of national interests' (p.81).

12) This is the first occasion in Serbian military publications, or anywhere else in Serbian literature on the subject, that someone has mentioned 'neocortical war' and cited Richard Szafranski as the person who coined the term. Footnote in Savić's article, which follows the reference to Szafranski, points to an 1996 issue of the *Translation Bulletin (Informativni Bilten Prevoda)*, which presumably is a military publication containing a digest of foreign literature. It is however uncertain whether the *Bulletin* contained a full translation of Szafranski's article or just extracts. Either way, this does not undermine the argument put forward in the earlier chapters. The fact that most authors use Lukić's article in *Vojno Delo* as the principal source on 'neocortical war' suggests that the translation printed in the *Bulletin* was not very well known and there is certainly no indication that Radišić used it in his work or even read it.

13) A similar trend is visible in other texts. For instance in *Alliance and the protection of the national interests of the FRY*, which appeared in the same issue of *Vojno Delo*, Major General Milinko Stišović recognises the need for Yugoslavia to enter 'international political organisations, economic and financial institutions, as well as collective defence systems'. However, at the same time he suggests that the security of FRY continues to be jeopardised by 'great centres of power, which in the battle for extra profit do not chose their means and methods for creating the so-called New World Order' (p.9).

14) The book was initially available even from the more established booksellers (e.g. *Stubovi Kulture*, or *Plato*) which do not regularly stock antisemitic writing by the likes of Vlajić and Đurđević.

Appendix A: Extracts from transcripts of recorded encounters with Spasoje Vlajić

- 1) All the book titles (in italics) are by Vlajić himself.
- 2) Serbian for George, pronounced 'Georgeh'.
- 3) Mountain pass separating Kosovo from Macedonia.
- 4) Serbian term for the flower 'iris'.
- 5) Vlajić is comparing the 10 dinar note, which is illustrated with the pictures of the 19th Century Montenegrin Bishop and ruler Petar Petrović Njegoš and the Cetinje Monastery, with the 10 (German) Mark note, which features pictures of the German mathematician Carl Fiedrich Gauss and a sextant. The comparison refers to the decision by the Montenegrin leadership to abandon the Dinar as legal tender in Montenegro, and adopt the German Mark.
- 6) During the uprising of October 2000, 10,000 protesters from the central Serbian city of Čačak were at the forefront to the anti-Milošević demonstrations in Belgrade. Consequently, on this occasion, the reference to Čačak as a bastion of opposition activity is invoked as an illustration of the political views held by the 'cardiologist' who visited Vlajić.
- 7) Radomir Nikčević and Amfilohije Radović are two Montenegrin religious figures. Radović is the Bishop of Montenegro, while Nikčević is a priest in the Montenegrin city of Cetinje.
- 8) The 'Prince' whom Vlajić is referring to is the 14th Century Serbian ruler Lazar Hrebeljanović who led the Serbian army into the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. Pavle Orlović was one of the flag bearers during the battle of Kosovo, who features in Serbian folk stories and epic poetry.

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