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Branimir Anzulovic. *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*. New York: New York University Press, 1999. Pp. xiv + 233. No Price Listed.

[1] Given recent events in the Balkans, Anzulovic's book is quite apropos to understanding not only Serbian history but more importantly its myths that have lead up to the atrocities in Bosnia and the current crisis in Kosovo. The purpose of Anzulovic's book is to explore "the process through which the old myth of an innocent, suffering Serbia, and concomitant myth of foreign evildoers who conspire against its very existence, influenced the behavior of Serbs at the close of the twentieth century" (4). To demonstrate both the origins and power of these myths and their internal impact on Serbian identity as well as their external influence on foreign diplomacy relating to Serbia, Anzulovic details five salient features of Serbia's history: the intermingling of church, state and nation resulting in the secularization of the first, and deification of the last two entities; the impact of Ottoman rule on Serbian identity and its national development; the indigenous violence of the Balkans; Romanticism and the glorification of blood and soil; and the ignorance of Western diplomacy, founded on external mythical perceptions of Serbia that directly and indirectly facilitated Serbian expansionism. Anzulovic's essay is divided into six chapters.

[2] Chapter 1 explores the birth of the "Heavenly Serbia" myth through the battle on the Field of Kosovo in 1389. While in fact the Serbs and Turks were rather evenly matched in the battle, and there were no clear victors, Serbian folklore presents a different picture. According to this account, Serbian Prince Lazar chose martyrdom and moral purity for him and his troops, over military victory, the triumph of the "heavenly kingdom" over the "earthly kingdom." Folksongs identifying the Kosovo supper with the Last Supper depict innocent victims sacrificing themselves for the good of all Serbs. In the case of Prince Lazar and the Serbian people, the resurrection will take place with the birth of a "Heavenly Serbia," a culturally, linguistically, ethnically, religiously, geographically homogeneous Serbia. This vision melding the sacred with the secular, according to Anzulovic, is endemic to both Byzantine culture as well as the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1219, Saint Sava. In fact, "Saint-Savaism" is a common Serbian aphorism for the unique blend of church, state and nation. It is this blend that was conceived in the Battle of Kosovo, went

through a lengthy gestation of some six centuries, and is laboring through the latter twentieth century to give birth to a "Greater Serbia."

[3] A brief treatment of the Ottoman occupation and the myths of Serbian victimhood and heroic resistance are the themes of chapter 2. Again, Anzulovic points out, historical fact conflicts with myth, though the latter transforms the former as a hermeneutical key to interpreting the impact of this period on Serbian national and religious identity. Historically, during the Ottoman occupation generally Serbs experienced religious tolerance though socially and economically there were benefits for Muslims within the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, many Serbs did convert to Islam. Due to these conversions, there was collaboration with the Muslims as well as resistance to them throughout the Ottoman occupation. Myth, however, transforms the complexity of the story of an occupied territory caught between Catholic Austro-Hungary and the Turkish Ottoman empire, where Serbia is at home neither culturally, ethnically nor religiously, into the mythical story of heroic Serbian resistance that sought to preserve its culture, history and ethnicity through great sacrifice and moral uprightness amidst persecution.

[4] Part of the Balkan culture, history and ethnicity, which Anzulovic depicts in chapter 3, is its endemic violence. Though this characteristic applies to Catholics, Muslims and Orthodox, it is the latter's merger of this propensity towards violence with the union between church and state as it is made manifest in and through caesaropapism that has created a volatile situation between Serbia and its neighbors. The most notorious of the caesaropapist rulers or *vladikas* - heads of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church and, at the same time, the ruler of Montenegro - was Vladika Njegos who penned *The Mountain Wreath*, first published in 1847. This poem depicts the conflict between Christian and Muslim Montenegrins and, through the use of religious symbolism, justifies the massacre of the former by the latter at any cost, including genocide, which is a central theme of the poem. In this poem one finds the goal of establishing a "Heavenly Serbia," the religious sanctioning and justification of such a goal, and the political authority to do so.

[5] Chapter 4 details the cultural impact of Rationalism and the reaction to it, Western Romanticism, on the transformation of Serbian ideology from Njegos' militant tribalism, towards a tolerant and non-militant Pan-Serbism advocated by Dositej Obradovic based on ethnicity, geography and language, to a militant Pan-Serbism nationalist ideology. Whereas Obradovic's rationalist predilection proposed peaceful co-existence between Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims in the Balkans, the failure of the latter two groups to assimilate to this vision paved the way for a militant Pan-Serbism. Spearheaded by Serbian intelligentsia, the Romanticist return to the "Kosovo Myth" - avenging the Serbian "defeat" and resurrecting Serbia as an empire - became the core of Serbian national ideology. Under the auspice of this myth, all future political and military conflicts merged the profane and religious. This merger is most aptly demonstrated in the establishment of Vid - a pagan war God - as the patron saint of the nation. Through this merger, political and military activity takes on a sacramental character with the goal of creating a "Heavenly Serbia."

[6] Chapters 5 and 6 detail the internal proliferation of Serbian myths and the uncritical Western mythical perception of Serbia which has stymied Western comprehension of Serbia's relations with its neighbors and prevented international intervention up until the

crises of Bosnia and Kosovo. Internally, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, philosophers, theologians, authors and artists have propagated the theme of an innocent, "Suffering Serbia" whose enemies sought its annihilation. The epitome of this intelligentsia "conspiracy theory" is the *Memorandum* composed by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the mid 1980s. Essentially, it renounces decentralization as an enemy of the state socially, culturally and economically, and calls for the establishment of an independent Serb state at whatever costs. The *Memorandum*, according to Anzulovic, was implicitly supported by the Orthodox hierarchy, and became the ideological platform for the pan-Serbian policy of Slobodan Milosevic. Throughout the 20th century the West's perception of Serbia has been influenced by historical events, especially Serbia's alliance with the Allied forces in both World Wars. The aphorism, "charity covers a multitude of sins" is apropos the West's perception of Serbia. Both the internal myths of a "Greater Serbia" and the external myths of a heroic, steadfast, faithful ally were on a collision course, however, when Serbia sought to make its myth a reality.

[7] Anzulovic concludes with lessons we can learn from Serbia's tumultuous, mythical history that has, once again, engulfed the preeminent world powers in a military conflict.

[8] There are two minor points that deserve greater attention in Anzulovic's work. First, one important clarification that would have better served his thesis at the introduction, rather than the conclusion, is Anzulovic's definition of "myth." Not only are not all myths bad (181) but, more to the point, it depends on how one *uses* a myth; that is, its moral, social, cultural or political agenda which determines the moral quality of a myth. In other words, it is not the myth itself that is moral or immoral, but an individual's interpretation and application of the myth to a certain state of affairs. Obviously, Milosevic and his cohorts have used the Kosovo myth to justify ethnic cleansing and genocide. However, another use of that myth could instill tranquil national pride and the virtue of martyrdom. This leads into the second point that deserves greater attention and clarification. One gets a sense in Anzulovic's introduction and throughout the text that the power of the myth in some way exonerates from moral culpability those who utilize the myth to justify moral atrocities. Anzulovic writes, "Thus, the primary driving force leading to genocide is not the pathology of the individuals organizing and committing the genocide, but the pathology of the ideas guiding them. These ideas are often produced and propagated by relatively normal people who may be unaware of the consequences of their escape from reality into myths" (4). Or, again, Anzulovic refers to the drafters of the *Memorandum* and other intellectuals "who have painted an apocalyptic picture of the state of their nation and accepted violence against their neighbors as a solution" as "generally normal men who acted abnormally when they combined the fear of their own annihilation with the expectations of a glorious future" (118). As Anzulovic himself points out, Radovan Karadzic is highly educated and could be considered part of the intelligentsia; yet his moral culpability for genocide is far from ambiguous. Though I do not deny Anzulovic would agree with this assessment, his comments on the power of myth to transform relatively normal people into orchestrators of genocide, regardless of whether or not the perpetrators believe they are "following their consciences" (4), too easily exonerates those who violate the dictum, "Never Again!" as Serbia's political and military leaders have done in the latter 20th century.

Reviewed by Todd Salzman, Creighton University

