



Srdja Pavlovic

"Mirror, Mirror on the Wall..."

Prophecies, Horoscopes, and the Politics of the Paranormal in Serbia

Srdja Pavlovic looks at the cult of the paranormal that pervades Serbian society and argues that the current obsession with the supernatural is fuelled by the Serbian government as a distraction from its own shortcomings and failures.

It can be argued that, in any given society, the feelings of isolation (social, political or cultural) of a group and its members, and the helplessness that often derives from such isolation can create and condition a paranoid-like perception not only of one's own reality and immediate environment, but of the world as well. Through a complicated web of causalities, such feelings can also gradually induce feelings of one's particular importance, grandeur and generally superiority in regard to others, as well as a belief that the group in question is the subject of others' hate, persecution and conspiracy. Such convictions are often employed in a community "under siege" as modes of explaining the state of affairs and are used for bringing together (preserving) goals and motivations of individuals, thus enhancing a sense of togetherness in the members of the group. Moreover, as the case of Serbia will show, they are employed as tools for rationalizing a political or economic crisis (or both), and for sustaining persons in power. Such a way of thinking and perceiving the world, in turn, calls for and legitimizes (within its own narrowly defined sets of references) violent reactions against those perceived as the enemy. Given such modes of behaviour and perceptions of reality, it is understandable why the diplomatic efforts of a third party towards easing the tensions between the contesting parties are usually doomed to failure. Such political mediation and crisis management represents, in most cases, an effort to find suitable solutions based on a pragmatic evaluation of the available options and an assessment of the consequences, but often does not take into account the particular character and construction of the problem itself.

Even though such patterns of behaviour could be illustrated with numerous examples throughout the world and throughout history, we consider it important to draw attention to the situation of modern day Serbia. Much has been written about the recent political developments in Serbia and the purpose of this essay is to shed some light upon an aspect of Serbia's political system and its mechanisms of deception that has not received the attention it deserves. We will show a contemporary mechanism of deception used by the elite in Serbia in order to rationalize the chaotic social conditions and preserve its authority. The multi-themed character of this essay is an indication that the findings presented here are only an initial phase of research into a much broader topic. What then is this sinister and apparently effective mechanism? Nothing less than the use of occult, paranormal and prophetic themes by both

the state-controlled media and by some of the media that champions the cause of the opposition political parties.¹ These interpretative resources are used to explain everyday occurrences within Serbia, as well to interpret political and economic changes on a global scale.

What makes this case interesting is not the fascination with the paranormal, with horoscopes, numerology, prophecies, and the occult among the general population in Serbia, but the efforts of the elite to sustain such infatuation. The widespread popularity of the unknown and the other side of reality seem to be part of a carefully constructed mechanism of deception and control. Public opinion polls in Belgrade and in Serbia in general have become monthly occurrences over the last ten years or so. These "general checkups" of the nation's health by various sociologists and psychologists have mostly been used to project the size of an electoral body and to indicate the political preferences of individuals. A study of this sort showed that the citizens of Belgrade and Serbia were generally in a negative psychological frame of mind. The most common feelings expressed were those of fear, anticipation and disappointment. Some 80 per cent of the citizens of Belgrade feared a civil war, while 70 per cent were afraid of hunger in the future.² The same opinion poll concluded that some 38 per cent of the sample group felt constant fatigue and exhaustion, 32 per cent were constantly nervous and angry, while 37 per cent felt that they had had enough of everything. The least number of complaints had to do with sleep and eating disorders. The most common problems appeared to be fatigue, lack of energy and a lack of self-confidence. These findings reflect a common theme in any society that has been through a stressful period of war or some other form of prolonged crisis. What is intriguing are the responses to the questions about individual beliefs in numerology and astrology, prophecy and horoscopes, as well as in the inevitability of punishment (in the forms of an epidemic or a natural catastrophe) for NATO countries. Approximately 50 per cent believed that events of cataclysmic proportions would take place in NATO countries, while 11 per cent regarded the question as utter nonsense. The level of education was a variable in the answers. For instance, 60 per cent of those with an elementary school education believed in the doomsday scenario and the suffering of NATO countries, and no one discounted the possibility. Among university graduates, 30 per cent expressed their firm belief that some kind of punishment will be imposed upon NATO countries in the future (but by what or whose agency is unclear).

Furthermore, those who are believers and devoted practitioners of Eastern Orthodoxy have shown a greater inclination towards believing in supernatural phenomena than non-believers. This might raise a different set of general questions about the nature of Eastern Orthodox religious practices among the Serbs and lend certain credibility to the theories of an incomplete or inadequate process of Christianization of South Slavs. Moreover, an emphasis on the inclination towards occultism and superstition on the part of Eastern Orthodox South Slavs (in comparison to Catholic South Slavs) could be a convenient argument for those wishing to emphasize (and castigate) the oriental character of their culture and perception of reality, thus removing them from the European cultural and political context altogether. However, turning towards superstition and horoscopes in times of hardship is neither specific to the South Slavs, nor a characteristic solely of Eastern Orthodoxy, but rather a common reaction by people in times of crisis. It is, nevertheless, possible to argue over the means, levels and methods of its presentation within any given society.

Naturally, one could also say that such beliefs are the result of frustration and hopelessness that, in turn, creates the need to employ the tools of superstition in order to ease anxiety. One could expect people to act angrily and in an irrational fashion after so many lost battles and broken dreams, as is the case with Serbia and its people. A vengeful attitude towards NATO countries is to be expected and is easily explainable. What should be kept in mind here is the fact that the elite in Serbia has an instrumental role in nourishing such attitudes. On a more general note, as theorists of the authoritarian state (eg. Adorno, et al.) have pointed out, superstition is considered to be one of the generic components of the authoritarian personality, which derives from the need of an individual to ascribe responsibility to external agents that he/she cannot control in any way.³ To fully grasp the significance of this calculated irrationality in Serbia and to analyze its impact on the population, we should address the issue of the government's involvement in advocating, endorsing and manipulating such a perception of reality. Keeping in mind the authoritarian character of the government and the fact that the Serbian public sphere is entirely controlled by it, and judging by the type of literature produced in Serbia these days, and the fact that the market is flooded with books on "formulas of light," prophecies, horoscopes, numerology and conspiracy theories, one would readily suspect the involvement of the state apparatus in all this. Various healers and prophets are constant features on almost every TV show and it is difficult to find a newspaper or a magazine in Serbia that does not have a section with horoscopes. Moreover, there are specialized magazines devoted to occultism and the paranormal, such as *Trece Oko* (The Third Eye), *Tajne* (Secrets), *Sesto Culo* (The Sixth Sense), *Cudo* (Miracle), *Zona Sumraka* (Twilight Zone), *Nostradamus* (Nostradamus), *Horoskop* (Horoscope)...

This flourishing market can also be explained in a less dramatic fashion. One could argue that these magazines were designed as a form of entertainment and a way of escaping the gloomy reality of everyday existence. Moreover, they could be viewed as a counterbalance to the all-encompassing and constant politicization of Serbian society. Furthermore, the attraction of the supernatural and paranormal, and of literature devoted to these subjects, could be seen as a marginal activity, as an insignificant segment of the publishing industry and its market in Serbia. This argument is particularly appealing if one favours the view that the state apparatus and the party in power is busy battling its political opponents and, thus, not likely to devote much time and energy to regulating the publishing activities of such fringe groups. Both arguments imply that the population is being manipulated by the sources and powers that reside outside of the system and that the system, once relieved of the pressure of everyday political and economic struggle, will deal effectively with these issues.

One might agree with the view that literature of this kind is a convenient way of escaping the reality of a devastated country, especially if such a view refers to individual members of a group and their need to transcend the profanity of their everyday existence in an unconscious and collective way. However, the falsity of these claims about its non-political content and fringe character can be easily detected upon closer examination. First, what is apparent from the pages of these magazines is the dominance of political themes and content. To illustrate this point, we will mention a handful of titles such as "Programming the Brain in American Schools – The Demonic Project of the American Government," "The Era of Aquarius and the New World Order," and "Americans Admitted that their Army is Using Black Magic," as well as "The U.S. Government Sold its Soul to Aliens in Order to Become the Only Superpower and Subdue Other Nations on the Planet," and "Nemanjic Dynasty

and the Third World War."⁴ Moreover, these articles mention Serbian politicians more often than Serbian folk singers and other local celebrities. The magazine *Horoskop* repeatedly publishes profiles of prominent political figures such as Slobodan Milosevic, Dobrica Cosic, Vojislav Seselj and many others. The content of such publications performs the important political function of expressing, reinforcing and canonizing a belief that the local power structure and its exponents are the true representatives of a Serb collective being.

The strength of the argument about the peripheral nature of those publications and the lack of government influence on them is somewhat diminished if we know that *Trece Oko* (The Third Eye) is published by the government-controlled *Borba Inc.* In turn, *Borba Inc.* was originally established and is funded at present by the federal government of Yugoslavia. The magazine *Horoskop* is published by *Politika Inc.*, yet another government-funded and controlled publishing corporation. On the other hand, television shows featuring various prophets and astrologists are prime-time events on the state television and TV stations closely connected to the government of Serbia. At one point in early 1992, the Belgrade daily *Politika*, in its supplement *TV Revija* (TV Review), began publishing photographs of a local healer and prophet, claiming that he was able to project positive energy through his printed image to readers who managed to gather a substantial collection of his photos.

Long before magazines such as *Zona Sumraka* (Twilight Zone) came into existence (1995), the biggest Serbian daily, *Politika*, introduced regular sections on astrology and Chinese Horoscopes. In March of 1992, the science editor of *Politika* organized (and his newspaper sponsored) a unique event in Belgrade – the transfer of mental images from the Russian city of Novosibirsk to Belgrade.⁵ The same editor continued to cover similar issues, and in one of his articles claimed to have discovered an unusual scientific study that successfully solved a number of cases of alien abduction.⁶ At the beginning of 1992, amidst the constitutional, political and economic crisis in the former Yugoslavia, *Politika* began publishing a series of articles about the miracles of parapsychology in the former Soviet Union.⁷ While Slovenia was seceding from SFR Yugoslavia and Croatia was bracing itself for war, and while the politics of nationalism and populism were on the rise in Serbia, readers of *Politika* were presented with details of paranormal occurrences in the former Soviet Union. For example, the author of that series of articles claimed that the former General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Leonid Breznev, had died of some sort of telepathic aggression rather than of cancer.⁸ There was also a lengthy and detailed description of the case of a "flying woman from Moscow." The connection between the paranormal and politics finds its illustration in a story about Andrei Gromiko, the former Soviet Foreign Minister. According to *Politika*, every time someone would mention the name of Viktor Grishin as a potential candidate for the position of the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, the flowers in Gromiko's office would begin to wilt.⁹ More recently, the editorial policy of *Politika* has changed and shifted towards putting less emphasis on paranormal activities involving individuals and devoting more space to unveiling various conspiracies by Western historians and philosophers. A common theme in these articles is secretive groups that control the planet, and people who carry the "sign of beast," as well as the magical significance of the numerical combination 666, that was, according to findings by *Politika*, placed in the new EU passports.¹⁰

Conspiracy theories do not necessarily fall into the category of superstition but both spheres share certain common features. First, they both place an individual in the position of a helpless toy in the hands of mighty and invisible forces. Such positioning implies that the methodological apparatus of history, sociology or economics is insufficient for the analysis of one's private situation. Only through the analysis of these mighty forces can one explain and rationalize one's daily existence. It goes without saying that the only people who possess such analytical tools and are blessed with secret knowledge are experts in occultism and the paranormal. Second, the content and framework of conspiracy theories have many elements of pseudo-rational forms of thinking, which, in turn, are the basis of superstition.

How are we to interpret the fact that the mainstream media in Serbia devotes so much time and space both to endorsing irrational modes of thinking and to actively encouraging them? It seems that such encouragement is based on the existing beliefs in superstition and the paranormal, and that the structures of power are taking advantage of that fact.¹¹ One can argue that what we are seeing in Serbia today is the process of rehabilitating the imaginary at the expense of the rational and that such state-sanctioned rehabilitation is the direct product of the economic, social, political and cultural crisis in the country. Manipulating a population that is already displaying a considerable attachment to supernatural mode of thinking seems to be a rather pragmatic move on the part of the elite. Moreover, such manipulation is not, in essence, based on coercion and force, and does not provoke resistance within the population. It is relatively easy to fabricate a prophecy; one does not have to follow rules and regulations, nor are there any restrictions in that respect. The truthfulness of prophecies (or the perception of it) is almost never questioned and debated after the designated deadline regardless of the actual outcome. Its acceptance by the general public depends entirely on the popularity and the media profile of the prophet. The fact that a particular prophecy, its message and the messenger are being presented through and endorsed by the state-controlled media lends them certain credibility. Visions of the future and prophecies are far removed from any factual base and that characteristic might be where their strength lies. The further removed a prophecy is from the social context, the more credible it becomes. Furthermore, a prophet is perceived as a medium that only conveys a message initiated by an unknown (cosmic or divine) source. The personal responsibility of the prophet is never an issue, since he/she is not perceived as the one who generates the message. If need be, the falsity of his/her claims can be easily explained by emphasizing the frailty and unreliability of human nature. It is possible to compare the role played by modern day prophets in Serbia with that of medieval sorcerers. Both were seen as mediums through whom a higher power spoke, and the truthfulness of their words was never questioned. Moreover, in the case of modern day Serbia, these extraordinary personalities are thought to represent, and through their messages convey, the purest expression of the spirit of Serbhood. The fact that in present day Serbia the entire mechanism for creating such an environment and controlling its structure is in the hands of those in power makes this transition towards the realm of irrationality less obvious and less traumatic for the average citizen.¹² It seems that the structures of power in Serbia went even a step further than merely promoting various prophets through the media. According to some reports in the local press, a number of those predicting the future via TV screens have been instructed not to say anything detrimental to the image of the party in power or its leaders. There we may find the reason why in many prophecies broadcast or published in Serbia Slobodan Milosevic is seen as its president until the year 2010.¹³

There is yet another element to the prophecies that more or less guarantees their acceptance by the general population – the relative value of their truthfulness. False predictions, in general, are not taken as a sign of fraud and lies but can be easily explained, again within a particular cognitive framework. Failure to predict the future correctly can be seen as the result of a loss of energy on the part of the prophet or as the product of some strange and unwanted psychic intervention from outside sources. On the other hand, one could say that a particular prediction has not been understood correctly and that the instructions given by the medium were misread. Furthermore, no matter how spectacular and wrong a particular prophecy might be, what turns it into *sancta facta* is the notion that the population has developed, in time and with the generous assistance of the ruling elite, rather significant short–time memory loss. In the process of lobotomizing the minds of the entire population of Serbia, those in power have managed to elevate the concept of short–term memory loss to the level of a virtue.

Another method used for prolonging the state of detachment from reality and for ignoring the mistakes of the past has been the frequent replacement of visionaries and prophets. Every once in a while a new face appears on the TV screens and on the pages of newspapers. It is interesting to notice that such *substitute psychics/prophets* are called upon only in the time of an immediate crisis, and only when the existing psychic network proves to be grossly inaccurate in its predictions. These replacements, however, must strictly correspond to particular rules and must conform to a clearly delineated field of action. Naturally, minor variations are acceptable but, in general, there cannot be any compromise in regard to their social status, place of birth, and educational and cultural background. They are representatives of a "common folk," usually older (and predominantly male) peasants from the heartland of Serbia, whose education consists of their life experience and whose cultural background is closely interwoven with traditional Serbian culture. In other words, they are representatives of that acclaimed "Slavic soul" – the people of simple means that are blessed with an uncommon gift. They are perceived as being spiritually strong and independent because they draw their energy from that deep well of the pure and generous tradition of the Serbian collective being and announce their visions in a traditional manner using the language of the common people.

One example of such a *substitute prophet* in Serbia is Grandfather Miloje, a prophet from the Morava valley. His profile closely corresponds to those just enumerated and despite the fact that none of his visions materialized in any way, his name still commands respect. Miloje's prophecies were published in Belgrade in 1993, and the book became an instant bestseller despite persistent rumours that its contents were entirely constructed by its editor and that a man by the name of Miloje never really existed. Moreover, the prophecies published were out and out wrong.¹⁴ For example, Grandfather Miloje had predicted that Bill Clinton would die on May 19, 1996 and that former Russian president Boris Yeltsin would be defeated by Mikhail Gorbachev and would end up being assassinated.¹⁵ The fascination with an allegedly fabricated text and with its allegedly non–existent author only proves the effectiveness of the use of archetypes in manipulating the public perception of reality. The real purpose of introducing (or inventing) Grandfather Miloje seems to be the need to legitimize the present rather than to call upon the past in order to predict the future. His authority as a prophet was needed to ultimately strengthen the charisma of Slobodan Milosevic, since Miloje had made specific references to the Serbian president and his role in shaping the future of his people. Miloje tells us that Milosevic "is the only one capable of battling the Devil," and that

"he must not fall from power under any circumstances."¹⁶

Salman Rushdie, when talking about nationalism and its mechanism of recalling the past, makes mention of a "return to the absolutism of the pure." In the case of modern day Serbia and its population's attraction to the supernatural, those voices from the past, visions and fantasies that belong to the times when "there was no time yet" will ultimately have a negative impact on the mental health of the nation.¹⁷ Their function is to displace an individual, at least temporarily, from the envelope of everyday life and to try and position him/her on the ethereal levels of an aesthetic existence. Such visions and fantasies make it less difficult for an individual to step out of his/her own reality of daily existence and cross the boundaries between two worlds: to inhabit that other reality even for a brief moment. The appeal of such a voyage is so strong that people live and re-live those special moments, waiting for them to happen again.¹⁸ This is what constitutes the nostalgic feeling about the "good old days." People in Serbia live in multiple universes while not being ready (or refusing) to recognize and battle the horrid conditions of their immediate political and economic environment. Occasional flashbacks of rational thinking only bring about feelings of helplessness and hopelessness and that could, in time, amount to a particular kind of karmic overload that might result in an uncontrollable explosion. Such temporary awakenings only reinforce the feeling – as noted some time ago by a cynical (deluded) Danish prince – that our world is more than the stuff that dreams are made of. The mysticism of geopolitics that is being carefully nourished by the structures of power in Serbia can only produce further isolation, irrationality in dealing with the problems of everyday life, and the inability to project one's aspirations in an objective manner.

For now, the elite is able to control events and to carefully measure the occasional injections of new miracles. Some say that the impact of numerology and astrology upon Serbian daily life is so forceful that the system feels secure at present, while claiming the right to maintain such security at any cost. It seems that a significant portion of the population in urban centres is organizing its daily schedules according to the advice provided in horoscopes, and that the government in Belgrade is conscious of this fact. For example, it has been noted that every astrological sign in the horoscope published in *Politika* on March 9, 1992, carried the same message. People were advised to stay at home and spend time with their families rather than venture outside.¹⁹ March 9, 1992, was the day on which mass political rallies took place in Belgrade, rallies which had been organized by the opposition parties and the student organizations. That was one of the most significant challenges to the power of Slobodan Milosevic during his regime. That was also the day when people's hopes for political change and a better life in the future were running high. To use the horoscope section in the biggest daily in Serbia to utter threats in such a blatant way indicates two things. First, it shows how serious the challenge by the opposition was, since the government resorted to appealing to people's supernatural beliefs and their fears of the unknown. Second, it indicates how important these beliefs were in an unstable political climate and speaks of the government's readiness and ability to manipulate those aspects of human life for its own benefit.

Influencing the beliefs, feelings, and behaviour of individuals seems to be the intended effect. As a rule, prognoses for the future are bright and always encourage supporting the regime. On several occasions, readers have been presented with an abbreviated version of the scenario for achieving the centuries-old political dream of Greater Serbia:

Astrologist Soka from Vukovar spoke yesterday. She said that the Republic of Srpska Krajina will cease to exist as an independent state because it will become a part of the union of Serbian states whose capital will be in Ohrid! That big new state will be a monarchy and its monarch will come from the Nemanjic family. In the future, the world will call this war a world war, and Croats will be of Eastern Orthodox faith, and will respect and celebrate, as the Serbs do, the family saint.²⁰

What is important to notice here is the timing of this revelation and its source. This vision of a future Serb state appeared in the Serbian press during the London Peace Conference (May–December 1992), at a time when the popular sentiment in Serbia was that of an approaching victory on the battlefield, as well as of an imminent and favourable political settlement. Even Slobodan Milosevic, during his flight to London, remarked that the Serbs "are the winning party."²¹ The astrologist was a woman from Vukovar, a Croatian town that was obliterated by Serb artillery and ethnically cleansed of its Croat population.²² Throughout the fighting over Vukovar and its surrounding areas, the Serbian propaganda machine claimed the city and referred to it as ancient Serbian land. Such claims were partially based on the notion that the former SFR Yugoslavia was somehow a gift from the Serbs to other nations in the region and that they had the right to claim back their territory. Moreover, those claims reinforced the feeling that wherever Serbs live that territory should become a part of Greater Serbia. Such sentiments were clearly defined in a speech given by then president of Yugoslavia, Dobrica Cosic, during his brief visit to the front line with Croatia in late May 1992. Among other things, Cosic stated that wherever there is a Serbian house and wherever there is a Serbian cemetery that will become Serbian land.²³ Judging by this prophesy, Macedonia was also destined to become a part of that new Serb kingdom. The formation of this state was to be followed by the conversion of all infidels to Eastern Orthodoxy, since that religious affiliation is perceived as the only true faith.²⁴

As Theodor W. Adorno indicated, constant exposure to this model of thought inevitably creates a special form of pseudo–rationality. In this context, astrology can be seen as a tool in promoting totalitarian ideology.²⁵ A decade–long promotion of the paranormal and occult by the media in Serbia indicates constant and substantial dissolving of rationality. Prophets and people who perform miracles have replaced astrologists and parapsychologists, and even the quasi–scientific façade is slowly disappearing. Once induced, such a psychotic mode of thinking becomes the magnifying glass for assessing private life, the economy, history, social relations, international politics, etc.

There are indications that those in power in Serbia are also susceptible to supernatural beliefs and one might argue that the popular fascination with the paranormal is not only and exclusively the result of manipulative tactics. In the spring of 1999, some senior members of the *Yugoslav Left* (JUL) political party established in Belgrade the *Yugoslav Committee for Coherence and Invincibility*.²⁶ The role of this committee was to work according to the instructions of Maharishi Mahesh on training some one thousand yoga–flyers to protect Yugoslavia with the power of their positive energy.²⁶ Among the project's many supporters were the Yugoslav Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Health. It seems that the Yugoslav Ministry of Defence has been interested in projects of this nature for some time. In January 2000, Serbian newspapers published several articles dealing with this phenomenon. Journalists have alleged that in the early 1990s the Yugoslav Army established

Group 69, a secret organization that was to deal with the issues of psychological warfare and paranormal activities. According to the report, this group consisted of various specialists for para-psychological phenomena, a number of high profile politicians, prophets, astrologists, intellectuals, opponents of the New World Order and a number of army officers.²⁷ Further reports on the activities of this group appeared on the pages of *Zona Sumraka* (Twilight Zone), where the author states that he has been cooperating with the group since 1993.²⁸ According to this article, *Group 69* was formed as a section of the General Headquarters of the Yugoslav Army with the purpose of researching and eventually using new weapons for defending the country. The author tells us that the group was sending positive signals to the outside world from the very beginning of the Yugoslav crisis and pledging peace and cooperation. However, once attacked, these Yugoslav yoga-flyers fought valiantly against the intruders and emerged victorious. Moreover, the group successfully used a special procedure called the *Serbian Mirror*. Readers are given no details about the nature of the weapon itself other than that it had been based upon the past inventions by the Serbian-born physicist and inventor Nikola Tesla.³⁰ The practical results of the use of the *Serbian Mirror* were such that some of the enemy died (Turgut Ozal, Francois Mitterand, Yitzak Rabin), some lost members of their immediate family (former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl lost his son, and the Czech president Havel lost his wife), while others got away with minor injuries (Bill Clinton only broke his leg).²⁹ Speculations on the validity of claims made in the articles were put to rest in an interview with the spokesperson for the Yugoslav Army (VJ), Colonel Svetozar Radisic, that appeared in *Politika*. In this interview, Colonel Radisic refers to the use of the paranormal, black and white magic and the *Serbian Mirror*, as well as yoga-flyers, as a "multidimensional defence against the New World Order and a struggle that, besides the army, must encompass all state institutions."³⁰

This trend has continued more or less unchanged through the late 1990s, and the end of the millennium has served as a convenient context for venturing further into the unknown and into the world of prophecies. More recent predictions were intended to have a soothing effect upon the population, as well as to reinforce Milosevic's grip on power. All predictions dealt with the current state of affairs in Serbia and closely corresponded with one other. For example, a certain grandmother Vuka predicted that Milosevic would stay in power while Clinton would "fall as a rotten pear" while another prophet, Zorka, stated that no one would be able to harm Milosevic and that Kosovo "will be ours again."³¹ Such rosy visions of the future were supported by yet another prophet, Vanga IV, who said that the KFOR troops would withdraw from Kosovo and that Serbia would be successfully ruled by "a group of wise people, including one woman."³²

The usage of prophecies and prophets as tools in gaining and strengthening one's political status acquired a new dimension during the presidential election campaign in Serbia in the fall of 2000. This campaign indicated, among other things, that the ruling coalition in Serbia does not possess the exclusive right to rely on ingrained notions of superstition among the general population in order to gain the political upper hand. The leaders of the opposition parties and some of the independent media (*Danas Daily*, for example) have adopted the tried and true tactics of the ruling elite. The new player in this field of dreams and fantasies is the *Serbian Democratic Opposition*. In the midst of the presidential campaign, the presidential candidate for the Serbian Democratic Opposition (DOS), Vojislav Kostunica, made a point of visiting the village of Kremna, the birthplace of the late Tarabic brothers, well-known Serbian prophets. His stay

in Kremna featured prominently on the pages of several independent newspapers. Upon his arrival at Kremna, Kostunica was greeted by Jovan M. Tarabic, a descendant of famous prophets: "Welcome Mr. President! It was said that a man of the people would come and bring prosperity, and that he would save our people from misery."³³ When asked who that man might be, Jovan M. Tarabic replied: "Mr. Kostunica, of course!"³⁴ The author of the report took it upon himself to describe not only Kostunica's visit to the village, but to present his readers with a brief but effective historical account of the entire region. While praising the natural beauty of Kremna, the author repeatedly referred to it as the "Serbian Delphi" and as a place where people live long and prosperous lives.³⁵ He even managed to incorporate into his narrative a part of the title of one of Milan Kundera's books:

Fertile land. In the foothills of the mountain Tara, in a landscape so beautiful as if it has been created by a divine hand, lies hidden the village of Kremna. Shielded by pine trees. From every rock a mountain spring flows. People say that when the sun rises it does so first over Kremna and only then over the rest of the world... A snake-like dirt road leads to this Serbian Delphi, the homeland of Tarabici's... Even though it might not seem that way, there are no miracles here. Here, human spirit and nature have been establishing a relation of mutual respect for centuries and have acquired the fine balance of 'the lightness of being.'³⁶³⁹

Kostunica's visit to Kremna was depicted as nothing short of a religious experience and as the ultimate confirmation by the late prophets' descendant of Kostunica's worthiness to become the future president of Serbia. He traveled to Kremna to be embraced by a spiritual authority as the victor in the upcoming elections and as the saviour of Serbia. However, his comments regarding the visit and the treatment he got confirm the general attitude of the elite towards the other segments of Serbian society. Kostunica's response to Tarabici's enthusiasm was that "the upcoming elections are our last chance to save Serbia and we will make sure to do that. These elections are not simple ones because only after the elections Serbia will show its real face."³⁷ This entire episode could be analyzed within the category of the so-called "well-intended deception," that is, a sophisticated, manipulative tactic used for centuries by many rulers and institutions (religious and civic) in order to gain the necessary support among the populace. Judging by the final results of such tactics in the past, it is not entirely clear how "well-intended" these deceptions have been. Similar suspicions could be cast upon the modern day Balkan version of Pia Fraus:

What is important to me is the fact that people in Serbia are ready for a change. They are determined to follow a new course and they know that what we need is a normal state. Anything that could help in this process is a good thing... I have great respect for the symbolic connection to one's homeland but the most important thing is to be among your own people.³⁸

Given the examples presented in this paper, one might wonder whether the population in Serbia has been the object of manipulation and mind games by the elites, or whether the representatives of the power structure believe in and are guided by the rules of the paranormal. There is no definitive answer to this and one can only speculate. I am inclined to believe that the two options are

not mutually exclusive but complement each other in an effort to preserve the status quo in Serbia. The homology between the individual and the group in modern day Serbia only reinforces the idea of such a merger. The ideological construction that is offered as an explanation of the political events, economic and social changes is analogous to the construction that tries to explain and rationalize those same occurrences on an individual level. Only by means of such a mental framework could an individual manage to rationalize the constructed image of the unjust and unprovoked punishment of Serbia and Yugoslavia by the international community. The economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations are presented to the population as an event that has been initiated and conditioned by outside forces. Following the same logic, it has been suggested to the citizens of Serbia that their own personal life experience and future prospects cannot be controlled, but are subject to various stellar occurrences and magical powers. It should be added that such a mode of thinking and frame of reference are, at the same time, a product of the reality of Serbia's economic, political, social and cultural isolation. In an unprecedented environment of isolation, paired with a series of lost military conflicts, it seems that the paranoid perception of the world is the main characteristic of public discourse in Serbia. To make matters more complex, such discourse is being constructed and applied in order to justify isolation through the reinforced notions of superiority over others and hatred by the rest of the international community. This discourse is present within both categories in Serbian society: those who are being manipulated and those who are manipulating.

It would be rather difficult to find an example of a modern government adopting similar practices in order to rationalize its own political and economic shortcomings in as open a way, as is the case with the Serbian government. One could attempt to draw parallels with Nazi Germany and Hitler's fascination with the occult and the paranormal. However, such a connection could be made only on a superficial level and only in view of the principle of relativism that is shared by both systems of governing. Moreover, relativism as the philosophical corollary to a particular nationalism is a common feature of nationalist movements around the world.³⁹ The case of Serbia is not an exception. It could further be argued that the basic defining element of its system of governing is fascist. Comparisons have also been made between Milosevic's regime and that of Mussolini.⁴⁰ Ideological similarities aside, what makes the political system in Serbia unique among modern states is the extent to which the elite in Serbia creates, orchestrates and controls elements of new-age culture for its own purposes. In Serbia today, one might argue, such a mechanism of deception has been fully adopted by mainstream society, and one is tempted to define the system of governing in Serbia today as kind of new-age fascism.⁴¹ Naturally, one also finds evidence of numerology, occultism and prophetic themes in many cultures and societies in the West. The difference, however, lies in the circumstances that nourish such popular beliefs, the manner in which they are employed and presented, and, above all, the fact that such set of references exist on the far end of the periphery of Western cultures.

¹ Even though many would argue that this tactic is exclusive to the state-controlled media in Serbia, sources indicate that those media outlets in Serbia that advocate the political programs of the opposition parties, as well as the opposition politicians themselves, have recently adopted similar methods in manipulating public opinion. The fact that the examples of such manipulative tactics on the part of the Serbian opposition are less numerous does not minimize the importance of the general trend. Moreover, it indicates clearly the attitude of the elite towards power, its political credo and its relationship with the electoral body.

- ² These findings and all subsequent figures/percentages were taken from an opinion poll conducted in autumn 1999 in Belgrade. The complete report was published as: Srecko Mihailovic, Ed., Javno Mnjeje Srbije: Izmedju Razocarenja i Nade, CPA/CPS. Beograd, 2000. See also: Popadic, Dragan, "O mentalnom zdravlju naroda," *Republika*, br. 233. Beograd, 2000.
- ³ Adorno, Theodor W., Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and Nevitt R. Stanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York, 1950. 236.
- ⁴ These titles are from the following magazines: *Trece Oko* (August issue, Beograd 1993), *Sesto Culo* (June issue, Beograd 1996), and *Horoskop* (April issue, Beograd 1998).
- ⁵ *Politika Daily* (17th March, Beograd 1992).
- ⁶ *Politika Daily* (14th May, Beograd 1995)
- ⁷ *Politika Daily* (January-February, Beograd 1992).
- ⁸ *Politika Daily* (Ibid, Beograd 1992).
- ⁹ Colovic, Ivan, Kad Kazem Novine, Samizdat, Free B92, Beograd, 1993. 11-17.
- ¹⁰ Vasic, Biljana, "Srbija Pod Gigantskom Sljivom," *Vreme* (Beograd 4.03.2000).
- ¹¹ One of the most significant books of prophecies that has never lost its charm and appeal among the reading public in Serbia is Kremansko Prorocanstvo: sta je bilo, sta nas ceka, edited by Dragoljub Golubovic and Dejan Malenkovic, (Third edition, Beograd, 1987). The book has gone through numerous editions in various publishing houses in Serbia. The book is the collection of prophecies by two brothers, Milos and Mitar Tarabic, from the village of Kremna in central Serbia. It would be safe to say that this collection of prophecies is still the central reference point for anyone in Serbia who ventures into the realm of the unknown and represents a blueprint against which the accuracy of all new prophecies is measured.
- ¹² It should be kept in mind that the phrase "those in power" refers to both the government and to political parties in the opposition in Serbia. Even though the public discourse in Serbia is almost entirely created and controlled by the government, one should not forget the fact that the opposition parties are able to exercise a certain amount of control over segments of the society.
- ¹³ Matic, Pavle, Deda Miloje Prorok iz Pomoravlja – Bice Tumbanje po Celom Svetu. II dopunjeno izdanje, Beograd, 1993. 230.
- ¹⁴ Matic. Ibid, 96.
- ¹⁵ Matic. Ibid, 154.
- ¹⁶ Popadic, Dragan, "Zvezde – Putokaz Nebeskom Narodu," *Republika* (br. 41-42. Beograd, 1992).
- ¹⁷ L'Anthropologie, Marabout, 1974. 39.
- ¹⁸ Caillor, Roger, L'homme et le Sacre, Paris: Gallimard, 1950. 125.
- ¹⁹ *Politika Daily* (Beograd, 9 March 1992).
- ²⁰ *Politika Daily* (Beograd, 22 November 1992).
- ²¹ Silber, Laura and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, Revised edition, London, 1996. 258.
- ²² The author had the opportunity to review a confidential report by the Yugoslav Army Special Forces operating in and around Vukovar. According to that report, during the eighty-plus days of the siege the Special Forces units fired 1,485,000 rounds of mortars and artillery shells at the town. The ferocity of this attack and the level of destruction of the town become more obvious if we remember that St. Petersburg (Leningrad) was hit by some 24,000 shells during the nine hundred day siege in the Second World War. (This information is displayed on the Memorial Plaque at the Piskarevski Bridge in St. Petersburg.)
- ²³ This author personally witnessed the event and recorded the speech for the Montenegrin independent magazine *MONITOR* (Podgorica). Even though some of the recordings had been confiscated and destroyed by the members of the Serbian paramilitary units operating in the area ('Arkan's Tigers' led by Zeljko Raznjatovic Arkan and 'White Eagles' led by Dragoslav Bokan), a brief article on the subject appeared in the magazine *MONITOR* (Podgorica, June 1992).
- ²⁴ Devotion to Easter Orthodoxy and the insistence on its absolute connection to the Serbian heritage, tradition and history is a constant theme in the mainstream media. Belgrade writer Momo Kapor wrote that "Even the cosmonauts have noticed from space how our sacred places such as Patriarchy of Pec together with Hilandar are illuminated by some strange light. That is the positive energy which is ours, eternal and indestructible" (*Borba Daily*, Beograd, 14-15 August 1999).
- ²⁵ Adorno, Theodor W., "Zvezde Silaze Zemlji," *Treci Program* (br.28. Beograd, 1976).

- ²⁶ The closest comparison in North America to those Serbian Yoga–Flyers is the *Canadian Natural Law Party*. In Serbia, however, even before the formal establishment of the committee, members of this group took part in several local election campaigns and acted on behalf of the ruling political parties (*Socialist Party of Serbia* and the *Yugoslav Left*).
- ²⁷ *Glas Javnosti* (Beograd, 4 January 2000). According to the report, one of the members of *Group 69* is army colonel Svetozar Radisic who is the Editor–in–Chief of the Yugoslav Army monthly *Vojno Delo* and a regular contributor to *Trece Oko*. At present, Colonel Radisic is the spokesperson for the Yugoslav Army (VJ).
- ²⁸ *Zona Sumraka* (Beograd, 30 November 1999).
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ *Politika Daily* (Beograd, 27 September 1999).
- ³¹ *Politika Daily*, Ibid.
- ³² Ibid
- ³³ Kovacevic, Nenad, "It Was Said," *Danas* (Beograd, 14th September, 2000. No. 1080).
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ For a brief but insightful analysis of Serbian nationalism, see: Kis, Danilo, "On Nationalism," in *Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War*, ed., Rabia Ali & Lawrence Lifschultz. Stony Creek, Conn. 1993. 126–128.
- ⁴⁰ For more details on the nature of the political system in Serbia, see: "Separating History from Myth: An Interview with Ivo Banac," *Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War*, ed. Rabia Ali & Lawrence Lifschultz. Stony Creek, Conn. 1993. 134–164; Bakic–Hayden, Milica, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review*, 54–4 (Winter 1995); Jelavich, Charles, "Nikola Pasic: Greater Serbia or Yugoslavia?" *Journal of Central European Affairs*, XI (July 1951); Stokes, Gale, *Legitimacy Through Liberalism: Vladimir Jovanovic and the Transformation of Serbian Politics*, University of Washington Press, 1975; Pavlovic, Aleksandar, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism in a Multinational State*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Basic, Husein and Milika Pavlovic, *Smrt Duse / Podrum Podgorica*, 1992 (Montenegrin PEN Center). For more general analysis of the issue of nationalism and national consciousness among the South Slavs, see: Banac, Ivo, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, Ithaca and London: Cornell, 1984.
- ⁴¹ The author is indebted to Dennis Sweeney for pointing out a possibility of such a characterization and for elaborating on the broader connotations of the term "new age fascism."

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