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Times of Security

Ethnographies of Fear, Protest and the Future

Edited by
Martin Holbraad and
Morten Axel Pedersen



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6 Parasecurity and Paratime in Serbia

Neocortical Defence and National Consciousness

Maja Petrović-Šteger

All the kingdoms in the future will be the kingdom of mind.

—Winston Churchill, September 1943

In the 1990s Serbia was involved in three wars. Much of the male population signed up for, or was else conscripted into, the army. The country was maimed politically, economically, and in its infrastructure; it in effect broke down. People lived in an atmosphere of heightened yet depleted nervous energy: on the one hand, they were apathetic, wilfully blind to local politics; on the other, they spurred themselves into activism, either for or against the war. Most of the population had sunk into a distressful degree of poverty. The politicised elite of the nouveaux riches, who flourished through war profiteering and the grey economy, often helped in popularising the notion that it was others—that is, non-Serbs—who bore the blame for Serbia's plight. Deploring other powers and their policy interventions (such as the 1999 NATO bombing), they painted foreign newspapers and media as frankly unjust: the world was stacked against the Serbs.

Although the main fronts were in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, a major part of Serbia's population entertained sharp criticisms of the West, viewing it as the agent who stoked the former Yugoslavia's conflicts. Western elites, especially those in the United States, it was held, were conducting an all-out economic, technological, psychological, informational, religious, cultural, environmental, and geophysical war against the Serbs. More particularly, the United States was damnable in apparently engaging Serbia in a highly sophisticated psychic, or more precisely *neocortical war*, with no less an aim than erasing Serbian national consciousness and frittering away the Serbs' cultural inheritance. These claims were propagated, among others, by a collection of army officers, public intellectuals, astrologers, parapsychologists, numerologists, healers, and other public figures in Serbia that went under the name 'Group 69'. Neocortical warring, a term

oined by Richard Szafranski, a US military strategist and theoretician, in 1994, designates a dimension of war that employs various planned methods and psychological techniques to influence the brain's wiring. Group 69 reserved the term neocortical warfare for a set of practices that sought to manipulate groups of people or even whole nations, by manipulating their brainwaves, exerting influence over their values, belief systems, reasoning, and behaviour and thus inducing them to accept ideas contrary to their real interests.¹ Arguing that technologically superior countries use weapons of this kind to 'rule the world', the group called for the adoption in Serbia of specific security measures to shore up Serbs' supposedly distinctive patterns of thought.

The chapter discusses the temporal dimension of some specific security technologies—technologies that safeguard the integrity not of physical places, but of a presumed national consciousness under threat in time of war. Its immediate occasion is an analysis of interviews as well as of numerous speeches, writings, and media appearances made by members of Group 69 in conflict and also postconflict Serbia. In it I revisit the premise that cultural constructions of time often stand as “symbolic and hermeneutic reservoirs for the legitimisation of social institutions” (Greenhouse 1996, 106). From this angle, ‘time’ is not neutral but may be taken to concern culturally specific formulations of “agency and their compatibility or incompatibility with specific institutional forms” (ibid., 4). The idea of security is perhaps inherently marked temporally, in that security is something coming under threat *now*, or that can sustain us *going forward*.² In engaging with the ideas of security and self-possession put forward by Group 69 and others, the chapter suggests that certain temporal techniques can enable ways of killing anxiety, and of managing security, to become nationally recognised and amplified during wartime. Equally, certain strategies for psychic defence become current in public discourse in times of postconflict. Ethnographically, the chapter examines military and psychological concerns with security in Serbia, which it partly maps to the notion of neurosecurity in the United States.

GROUP 69

The ideologues of Group 69 claimed Serbia's enemy had adopted versatile all-channel military tactics to ‘swarm up’ and weaken the nation. In their view, these multidimensional attacks singled out a range of political, technological, religious, economical, and cultural targets. In effect, the Serbs were satanized. Global media networks portrayed them as the ultimate violent aggressors, representing postcommunist violence in the Balkans and, further, embodying a simultaneously paradigmatic and exceptional form of vampire-like evil (Longinović 2011, 5). This particularly harmful and insidious tactic of neocortical war slowly but profoundly poisoned not

only global public opinion about the Serbs but also the Serbs' self-image. Working to dehumanize the Serbs, the country's enemies set out to displace Serbs' traditional national thought-pattern and to allow the new social values of the West to be implanted in its stead (see Milutinović 1998; Radišić 2003, 2011; Vlajić 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). The Serbs had allegedly endured invisible attacks for years, in which they were mind-mapped and biophysically poisoned—through infected objects invested with subliminal commands that were making people ill. These so called 'astral attacks' were coordinated by Serbia's enemies involving cabalists, voodoo magicians, and parapsychologists. According to some outspoken members of the Group, the "cabalistic and neo-Babylonian administration has also succeeded in creating the phenomenon of self-incrimination amongst Serbian administration and so called nongovernmental organisations. The anti-Serbian Serbs in contemporary Serbia are the products of psychological warfare" (Radišić 2011).³

Recognising the threat posed by 'neocortical war', a team of military experts, scientists, and the especially gifted organised themselves to take on the psychological and electromagnetic weaponry targeting the Serbs with their own, patriotic technology of mind (Vlajić 2010a, 5). The aim of Group 69 was to find means of nonviolent defence that would technically and spiritually fortify the national psyche and thereby save people's souls and their consciousness.⁴ These skills would presumably preserve the Serbian audience from the 'brainwashing' to which they were being submitted under the direction of 'global dark centres' (most particularly, the Pentagon).

For a number of reasons, the exact number of people who participated in the operations of the Group 69 remains unknown. Firstly, the Group for a while worked under the auspices of the Yugoslav National Army, meaning that its operations could be classified as a military secret. Secondly, the organisation of the Group was highly centralised—for 'security' reasons, the group's members claimed that they were often not aware of the identity of other members. Thirdly, many people, allegedly, contributed to the Group unknowingly, as they were themselves manipulated to act on Group's behalf. A number of army teams were not aware that for a while in fact they served as parapsychological units, believing they were acting as classical military psychological sections. Fourthly, the nature of the Group's goal—battling psychological warfare, which included black magic—was highly classified in such a way that members' identity had to remain hidden if they were to remain protected. For example, it was insinuated that shortly after a couple of members' names were publically announced in the beginning of 2000, three members of the Group unexpectedly died.⁵

At the same time, several members of Group 69 made regular public appearances in the Serbian media throughout the 1990s. One of the Group's public faces was Colonel Svetozar Radišić, who would often appear on TV screens to assert that Serbia's then position was directly attributable to the

agency of dark forces going back to the Middle Ages—forces that had convoked a series of troubles to haunt and plague the Serbian people at every turn. Extremely articulate, soft-toned, and personally charismatic, Colonel Radišić, who for a while in 2005 even served as the spokesman of the Yugoslav Army, presented himself openly as an expert in parapsychological warfare, with a specialty in nonarmed means of combat and so-called multidimensional defence. Deploying a rhetoric that, while highly specific in terms of military strategy, was both esoteric and religious, Radišić set out a view that Serbia should fight to its utmost not just on conventional battlefields, but in the minds of its people. The locus of psychological warfare, he explained, was not Serbia's land but Serbia's consciousness.

ASTRAL ENGINEERING AND NEOCORTICAL DEFENCE

From numerous television appearances, books, and writings authored by Spasoje Vlajić, another prominent and charismatic Group orator, it may be understood that the beginnings of the Group could be traced back to 1987 (see Vlajić 2010a). Back then, a number of people from across former Yugoslavia who would regularly meet at scientific conventions to discuss findings in the areas of metapsychology and psychoenergetics started to worry about heightened political tensions in the country. Recognising the threats to which Yugoslavia and Serbia were exposed, a group of these researchers organised to form a 'psychological shield' to ward off the enemy's parapsychological strategies of neocortical war. The team came up with a strategy of neocortical defence, in many ways inspired by orthodox mysticism and the scientific legacy of Nikola Tesla.⁶

Firstly, after a series of numerological and 'light and conscious formula' calculations,⁷ the originators of the Group decided that the team should start its operations on December 12, 1998, and that its mission would end on December 12, 2008. Members of Group 69 believed that hostile powers were 'manipulating time using black magic'. This theory (*magijašanje vremenom*) implied that the force of future events could be controlled and brought to one's advantage if these events fell on particular historical dates. By creating so-called 'historical doubles', neocortical practitioners could endow present and future happenings with the force of past events that had transpired on the same day of the year (see Vlajić 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, and Radišić 2011 for substantiation). In this vein and in order to protect themselves, it was decided that the Group should start operations on December 12, 1998, exactly six centuries after the despot Stefan Lazarević, an important historical figure in Serbia (the son and heir to Prince Lazar, who died at the Battle of Kosovo fought against the Turks in 1389), was allegedly announced as the highest European knight (Vlajić 2010a, 39).⁸

Secondly, members' scientific expertise in the legacy of Nikola Tesla, and in the properties of energy, light, heat, and radio and brain waves, and

their subsequent influence on the human mind, decisively influenced their strategizing. Much of the Group's effort focused on developing the ability to control people's minds through an amalgam of psychic force and electronics. They proposed a learning-centred, spiritually informed approach to defence that would encourage people to train their minds and focus their attention in particular ways. The group defined the elementary weapons of defence as intentions or wishes taking the form of mental patterns or mental 'chips' (meaning symbolic patterns that, like mental pictures, pass from mind to mind and animate certain meanings). Mental patterns, it was argued, can be passed to and imprinted onto nature only if conceived in a state of extreme relaxation. Importantly, for this to happen, people's mental pictures had to be exclusively clear and calm. The group based its defence plan on a premise that nature will always lend a hand to boost good people's intentions, if these intentions are clearly and calmly defined (Vlajić 2010a, 65). Serene thoughts, it was argued, carry colossal amounts of powerful energy that nature can detect, decode, and redirect in helping people to realise their plans. In thinking and uttering words, we send electromagnetic signals to our brain. Energy fields are then imprinted on matter. Because they leave holographic traces on the air, the nature and quality of thoughts (as well as those of objects) can be determined even in those thoughts' absence. Thoughts (as well as spoken and written words) therefore influence events and, depending on how people use them, can damage or improve their future. Predicting events, then, under certain conditions, could call the future into being (Vlajić 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Radišić 2011).

Working on the premise that natural clairvoyants change the magnetic field around them and that of the Earth in their immediate vicinity, the Group brought together with military and scientific experts a number of specially sighted members—gifted astrologers and clairvoyants.⁹ These team members, 'astral warriors', were committed to elaborating sophisticated methods of neocortical defence. They allegedly learned how to detach harmful energy fields from thoughts and objects. They mastered hypnosis, autovisualisation, and meditation. Some excelled at telepathy, remote viewing, telekinesis, and out-of-body experiences. The states of deep relaxation they cultivated (bringing themselves routinely to the alpha and theta states of consciousness) and their visualisation of biological energy fields (the bio-physical fields that surround the human body) were found to increase the efficiency of their channelling psychical energies. These advantages underlay the group's interest in Tesla coils—coils tuned to radiate extremely low frequency (ELF) waves at 7.8 cycles per second (hertz), the Earth's natural frequency (known also as the Schumann resonance), which was thought to amplify tremendously the voyants' psychic abilities.

Maintaining that thoughts create and structure reality, the Group thus promoted the idea that the Serbs ought to exercise extreme responsibility towards how they thought about the war, as well as about general local

and global circumstances. The Serbs, it was suggested, would be able to defend their nation only by paying great attention to the creation of positive mental patterns (*misaoni obrasci*) or psychic instructions: by loving and respecting their ancestors, by extending their knowledge (as carried in, and energised by, historical archetypes), and by being true to their religious path (here, Christ's learning). The Serbs, it was proclaimed, should believe in themselves and in their nation. Moreover, they should cultivate their own psychic abilities by tuning in to the epiphysis, man's third eye, the organ of human bioenergy. They could prevail over the enemy only through purity of heart,¹⁰ greater strength of faith, and greater calmness of mind. The Group thus understood prophetic (precognitive) abilities in people not as paranormal but as a consequence of formulaic thinking—that is, of thinking that followed certain algorithms or mental patterns. Thinking correctly, imagining well, and maintaining a calm, positive state of mind would spiritually strengthen the Serbian nation and weaken the enemy. This premise was stated as a “formula for the synchronicity of intentions (or wishes) and their realisation”. In other words, high astral magic, combined with the physics of consciousness and this formula for the realisation of wishes, could together mount a supercausal parapsychological defence that would disable the enemy and deflect his bad intentions.

Among other things, Group 69 claimed a significant role in blunting the 1999 NATO intervention in Serbia. With their supersecret weapon, the ‘power of their minds’—which they also called *Tesla's weapon*—the Group claimed to have downed a number of enemy aircraft and rockets using mental patterns. A famously invincible stealth ground-attack aircraft, the Lockheed F-117 or ‘Nighthawk’, invisible to radar systems, was indeed shot down on March 27, 1999, in the Serbian village Buđanovci. This is the only F-117 in history lost to the United States Air Force. The Yugoslav Army, it was later explained by the NATO Commander Wesley Clark, detected F-117s by operating its radars on unusually long wavelengths, making the normally undetectable aircraft visible for brief periods.¹¹ A second F-117A was allegedly damaged during the same campaign, on April 30, 1999. This particular aircraft returned to base, but is believed never to have flown again. Another US F-16 fighter had crashed on takeoff from an aircraft carrier in the Adriatic on April 13, 1994. The Group 69 claimed these events as their trophies and examples of astral engineering.¹²

NEUROSECURITY AND STUDIES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Efforts to understand brain activity and consciousness, and to harness it to military ends, are not as far-fetched, esoteric, or specifically Serbian as my account of Group 69 may have suggested. On the contrary: in an age when the concept of *optimisation* almost ideologically permeates every domain of life, it is more and more believed that human behaviour can be understood

and explained entirely in brain and neural terms. Neuroscience (understood as instrumentalist studies of consciousness) is especially favoured in this climate as a research field. As many have noted, consciousness studies, until recently classified as a spiritual or philosophical enquiry within academe, have been annexed by experimental science, growing rapidly into an industry with active research programmes in medicine, business, and the military (Gray 1997; Moreno 2006).

The long-standing interest of US military institutions in enhancing soldiers' endurance and reaction time in combat, as well as in developing a range of disabling technologies (through, for instance, electronic warfare, cyberspace security, and computer networks), is well described in the literature (Campen 1996; Dunnigan 1996; Denning 1998; Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Gray 2001; Hayles 2004; Moreno 2006). Jonathan Moreno's *Mind Wars: Brain Research and National Defense*, for example, describes how military agencies, such as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), in rationalising and seeking to optimise the conduct of war, generously support research in the behavioural sciences and neuroscience, advanced mathematics, computer science, psychology, radiology, and psychiatry (Moreno 2006, 7). The neuroscientific research covers the development of new generations of neuropharmaceuticals ('smart drugs' like modafinil and CX717), implants, and neural stimulations, designed to change the human metabolism, boosting combatants' wakefulness and focusing their attention. Further biomedical interventions include vaccinations meant to inure soldiers against pain, attempts at biomechanical telepathy, and supposed computer-chip implants acting as a 'brain prostheses' increasing the 'bandwidth' of soldiers' brains (See Moreno 2006, also Clynes and Gray 1995; Dunnigan 1996; Moreno 2008). Importantly, Moreno argues that, besides its promotion of classical neuroscientific research (a field representing the convergence of medical, computer, and behavioural science), the Pentagon's interest in more speculative brain-related studies, including those of paranormal phenomena like ESP (extrasensory perception), represents not a dizzy new trend but a tendency several decades old.

Indeed, there is a history of military parapsychological research. Recently unclassified documents and books arising from this material confirm that even before the Cold War, both the Soviets and the Americans, as well as many other nations, were exploring the possibilities for psychotronically augmented spying and warfare, using the techniques of extrasensory perception, telepathy, and spiritualism.¹³ The modern military in the information age, as Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1997) argue, has only further developed this interest in parapsychology, as it has finally understood the value of information. Attaching more importance to communications than to targeting, information is nowadays treated as a basic, underlying, and overarching dynamic of all theory and practice about modern warfare (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1997). The authors of military doctrines that promote

informational warfare thus stress that military power fortified through neocortical strategies can increase in effectiveness even as it decreases in violence. Neocortical interventions are seen as strategies that can “help establish the essential preconditions for meeting national security political objectives without force or contact battles” (Szafranski 1994, 1997). As Merrill A. McPeak, the former general of the US Airforce (under whom special sections for military parapsychology were formed) stated: “This is the key point: the effective employment of air and space power has to do not so much with airplanes and missiles and engineering as with thinking and attitude and imagination” (McPeak 1993 quoted in Szafranski 1997, 395). Or, as Richard Szafranski, the author of the term ‘neocortical warfare’ maintains, military power primarily resides in the domain of the mind and will, inclusive of the provinces of choice, ‘thinking’, ‘valuing’ or ‘attitude’, and insight or ‘imagination’ (Szafranski 1997, 395).

TEMPORALITIES OF NEUROSECURITY

The ethnographic material on practices of mental cultivation and alternative security knowledge networks and communities presented earlier could be productively analysed from several vantage points: that of cognitive anthropology (MacDonald 1986; Hoyt and Wheatley 1976; Luhrman 2001; Roepstorff and Jack 2004), of the anthropology of the extrasensory (Battaglia 2005), through anthropological studies of paranoia and conspiracy (Marcus 1999; West and Sanders 2003), the anthropology of the paranormal (Young and Goulet 1994; Wilson 2011), or anthropology that analyses how the military and defence industries affect science and society (Lutz 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Lutz and Gonzales 2011; Holland et al. 2007; Gusterson 2007, Gusterson, Gonzales and Price 2009; Bickford 2008; Vine 2009; Simpson 1998; Frese and Harrell 2003).¹⁴

The presented data, however, has also a certain interest in the light of anthropological interest in time. In her *A Moment's Notice* Greenhouse is concerned with how specific state processes create an internal demand for fresh representations of the state among the very people who in their official capacities embody the state. She writes:

In different ways any formal representation of temporality lends itself to service as a code of representation by which formulations of agency can be claimed in the service of . . . people's causes. Importantly, the efficacy of such claims is not inherent in the temporal forms themselves. Social time has no practical existence or intrinsic logic apart from its contexts of use. To put this another way, social time borrows the appearance of logic from the world of events, where accountability appears to be the most immediate experience of time. (Greenhouse 1996, 212)

The critical point here is that history, or perhaps barely the passage of time, does not validate any action without a framework of interpretation being superimposed upon it (some of these frameworks, indeed, are nationally authorised histories). An implication of Greenhouse's reading of temporality, then, is that "it is not the pastness of the past which makes history but the codes by which some 'elements' are selected for special attention in particular circumstances" (*ibid.*, 215). Yet this pointing-up can be so ideologically potent that the effect of referring to time as a dimension can be to recall an overwhelming national past or history—a logic so apparently inexorable that it mandates actions that within a discourse of reason might seem contentious. So 'social time borrows the appearance of logic' and 'accountability appears to be the most immediate experience of time'.

Without making the claim that Group 69's and the Pentagon's military defence strategies are on par, I will try to observe one analytical parallel in pointing out the temporal elements recognisable in both militaries' finessing of the form of 'manifest destiny'. The phrase 'the War on Terror' is often used in contemporary United States and Europe in symbolically overdetermined ways to function as an accountability mechanism justifying military actions and aspirations (see Sluka 2000; Hirsch 2010; Sundar 2004).¹⁵ As public opinion polls, government policies, and academic studies have repeatedly shown, the recruitment of (neuro)science to practical warfare is, for a number of Americans, legitimised by the epochal break of 9/11 and the 'justice' that it compels the American nation to seek.

Serbia's agenda for legitimising its conflicts during the wars of 1990s, on the other hand, broadly drew on the prestige that had historically accrued to those who protected the country from foreign aggression or liberated it from foreign occupation. The past thereby invoked could be near or distant; both the 1389 battle of Kosovo and Second World War served as reference points. Nationalist demagogues used the ethnic crimes of the past to fuel new cycles of ethnic violence. In a bid to attract honour to the idea of fighting for the Serbian nation, war apologists described a citizen as someone with a proper degree of respect for his recent and distant ancestors. Acts performed in the name of an ancestral principle found justification in an idiom of anteriority and claims over land and property. Isolated actions in the war, including war crimes, sought justification in a historical principle that simultaneously elevated and sanctioned them. Prowar Serbs professed fidelity to an ideology of transhistorical Serbia, marking their proximity to political power, through spatial markers and land claims (see Petrović-Šteger 2009).

If this very nationalistic energy fuelled certain attempts at psychological warmongering and defence in wartime Serbia, in postconflict Serbia the continuing agitation of Group 69 seemed to go completely ignored for a long while. No serious analytic attention was paid to their account of the 'uniqueness' of Serbian mind and Serbian consciousness, and the topic was often mocked as ridiculously wishful and high-flown. If there was any

emotional reaction to Group 69's mind-hacking theories, it was one felt through a register of shame. The Group had set themselves up as some kind of modern knights battling 'satanic forces' in unearthly combat. Thus it became common to say that the Group ideologues had reached for an anachronistic, spiritual vocabulary to disguise their powerlessness in the face of real power. For example, the former colonel of the Yugoslav Army and possibly former Group 69 member, Ljubodrag Stojadinović, wanting to disassociate himself from the Group, explained that "you only resort to war by 'paranormal means' when your actual weapons are all degraded or useless" (Stojadinović 2000). The political left, particularly, tended to run down Group 69's storehouse of images as the morally tainted remnants of nationalism. This served to displace the group's vocabulary and narratives to the exceptional time of war. Characterising Radišić as a cartoonish figure on the Serbian public scene, many have understood his stories of neocortical warfare not just as propaganda but also as specifically new-agey Orthodox imputations blaming the Pentagon and the Vatican for all the ills befalling Serbia in the past twenty years.

Moreover, those few scholars who have taken the notion of neurosecurity in Serbia as worth discussing in any context seem to have researched and analysed, or rather disputed, it purely on a discursive level. Byford, for example, claims that the representation of 'neocortical war' offers an example of a more general discursive dynamic, in which everything was blamed on some form of conspiracy in 1990s Serbia (Byford 2002, 2006). He claims, further, that references to 'neocortical war' in the US military literature are purely metaphorical and were thus strategically misunderstood when Group 69 levered the concept into anti-American conspiratorial discourse in Serbia. 'Neocortical war', in his reading, was ultimately objectified as a literal allusion to brain manipulation, but this too was a distortion owing to temporality or repetition (see Byford 2002).

I argue ahead that the popular and academic uneasiness with which people referred to the topic of neocortical defence in the immediate postconflict period had to do less with its conspiratorial aspects than with certain expectations that came with the postconflict regime. Astral engineering was too esoteric and atavistic a concept for the sensitive period in which the Serbs were investing all their efforts in 'washing their face', as the idioms had it, and gaining international economic and political support in the name of a new democratic Serbia.

RESPONSIBILITY, MORALITY, AND DEFENCE IN CONTEMPORARY SERBIA

Contemporary attempts to account for abuses, crimes, and wars—that is, postconflict settlements—are often understood as matters that ought to be worked out at local, national, and supranational levels (see Petrović 2003).

Global canons of justice promote projects of reconciliation and of facing the past as elementary to achieving peace among former enemies. Many, indeed, suppose that times of conflict will yield to a period of justice only through people's engagement with governmental and nongovernmental organisations and with initiatives that promote responsibility, morality, and human rights—initiatives, that is, that seek to heal individuals, groups, and the national psyche by attending to their injuries.

Needless to say, this logic is present also in contemporary Serbia, which today, more than twenty years after the beginnings of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, seems once again to stand on the brink of slipping into some sort of political and economic quagmire. After a period of shaky political stability, artificial economic poise (a time marked by unsustainable credit growth), and a demonstrable desire on the part of most citizens to integrate with the rest of Europe, Serbs are again becoming increasingly disillusioned with local, European, and world politics, seeing little ahead for them but a future of impoverishments. Many want to demystify and square up to the nationalistic agenda of the war times, which is felt as a historical and political burden. Some are desperate to prove that their pursuit of war-time accountability through reconciliation projects can potentially prop up the current government and restore dignity to war victims and their families. They want to shed the stigma of being premodern and atavistic and to dislodge pervasive assumptions about Serbian nationalism. Yet they often resist the haste with which they feel that some projects of reconciliation and European integration are being forced on them. The people I talked to would often state that the everyday facts of their lives made it hard for them to imagine themselves actively participating in remaking, or just in contesting, the political and economic fabric of contemporary Serbia, which was (they thought) irretrievably torn or 'pocked'; Serbia was, in their view, an increasingly repressive society beset by corruption and hypocrisy.

One way of parsing this ambivalence is to say that a number of Serbs, I have talked to, understand their pasts and futures as belonging to two or more scripts, which they enacted in at least two ways. Surely, a merely dichotomous categorisation would be of little help in glossing their simultaneous aversion from, and pride in, memories of their pasts and the hopes they still entertain for their future. Some constantly worry over how to explain the atrocities that happened in the former Yugoslavia to their children, while others invest their energy in educating the new generation in how to prevent possible future 'disappointments' by not allowing them to form emotional ties with 'former enemies'.

Others, further, understand their social and political responsibility in an entirely different way. While recognising the value of understanding the past, in their view, current civil reconciliation projects ultimately amount to no more than another political and colonising project of the West. I have often heard claims that foreign political and economic incentives do not set out to help people but just to highlight or sting Serbian vulnerability.

Although many still roll their eyes at the tactics of Group 69 and their use of ‘electronic magic’, some agree that the programme of mental hygiene advocated by the Group is not so undesirable or improbable. In an attempt to contain and nullify not only foreign but also local destructive forces (like criminality and corruption), as these are loosed by those wanting to dominate Serbia economically, culturally, and politically, a number of people consent to the proposal that alternative technologies of security at least deserve a hearing.¹⁶

The last three years have seen a rise in public workshops, lectures, television documentaries, book launches, radio programmes, and other promotional activities stressing the importance of creating and nurturing positive Serbian mental patterns.¹⁷ More than ten thousand *nemanjićki krstevi*, crosses with four firesteels—the expression of Serbian respect for tradition and its ancestors—have been distributed across Serbia as amulets people could wear (Vlajić 2010a). Numerous TV programmes, books, and YouTube videos instruct people how to develop the algorithms necessary to guard their inner alpha shield—an alpha state of serene, steady, and mindful relaxation, marked by brainwaves of a frequency between eight and fourteen cycles per second (hertz)—and so engineer for themselves better futures.

Though it is not in doubt that this spiritual idiom of defence is of service to those wanting to shed the burden of an uncomfortable and ugly past, neocortical discourses at the same time seem to provide hope to those otherwise struggling to shape their own futures. As a matter of fact, people show interest in various ways of fighting everything that depletes their everyday levels of energy. Consequently, some are willing to coquet with the idea of alternative Serbian mind knowledge, as the following example intends to show:

This [television show] at times does sound odd and silly. I certainly don’t swallow everything they say. But it doesn’t hurt me to watch it. Really, these people [referring to Spasoje Vlajić’s appearance on TV] want only what is best for Serbia. They’re true believers. They have a deep faith in God and in all that is good. They fought for Serbia with their hearts and minds. It’s not as if they killed anyone, right? So there can’t be any harm in listening to what they have to say. Actually, I feel rather good after watching these shows. And I keep telling my son that he should put his own two kids in front of the telly when the programme comes on. Youngsters should watch and join in these debates instead of being brainwashed with what brand of sneakers or longboard they could buy. . . . We all could benefit from reminding ourselves that people can be strong, that they can be proud and conscious if they get in harmony with nature again, and with their spiritual heritage. . . . Serbia is a too palsied and vitiated society to be relied upon, so each of us has to find a way to help oneself. . . . I am surrounded by apprehensive, nervous,

angry people. They are angry for all kinds of reasons. Generally, folk feel let down and cheated by the politicians who keep promising prosperity and the future, while giving us nothing but corruption and poverty. But people are also angry at their neighbours, at their relatives, at their colleagues and friends. At the end of the day, most of us are angry at ourselves, because we do not know how to deal with our frustrations and disabilities. To deal with your anger and regret, you need time, you need to reflect rigorously. And that's hard . . . as we are not a very patient nation [. . .] A number of my friends spend their evenings doing yoga, pilates, and all kinds of meditation in the hope they will be quickly cleansed of their everyday worries and bigger problems. There is nothing wrong in doing that. Of course not. But they spend so much time learning oriental mumbo-jumbo, while forgetting that a Serbian mumbo-jumbo might help them too. . . . If this spiritual heritage they [Group 69] are talking about is real or imagined . . . I don't care. I like the idea that I could influence the future. It's empowering. Don't you agree? And I like the call for responsibility towards our thoughts, for deep reflection, and discipline. I like the idea of training myself for better times. I know I might sound a little strange, but I honestly feel lighter after watching these shows. It is certainly better watching this on the box than wasting my time with TV programmes that do nothing but show the same ranks of hypocritical, corrupt, sick politicians, TV stars, and so-called intellectuals. (Rada, fifty-nine years)

In a context in which many Serbs feel alienated and on the wrong end of inequality and are having to deal with an increasingly precarious future, the self-help held out by the proponents of national security and formulaic thinking seem to be gaining traction. In effect, neocortical defence doctrine has been repackaged into a tool of mental hygiene holding potential for both regeneration and atonement. Precognitive defence seems to hold out to some people a means of 'holing up', of avoiding having to face the difficult facts of their lives; but it suggests to others a new kind of political and temporal intermediation, using arcane disciplines to question the past and current Serbian politics. As one interviewee joked:

This parapsycho-pathological reprogramming of the Serbian trans-historical psyche might not be that bad after all. We could heal or brainwash, if you like, all the old and new nationalists into people who had an everlasting love for all mankind. It would be great if the universe could help all of us to come up with a better, or at least more manageable, world to live in. It would be awesome if we could graft the theory of historical and temporal doubles on our mental habits, and play with time so it could inspire us and make us better. What do you think, in what time sequence does imagination reside? (Toma, thirty-seven years).

ON PARASECURITY AND PARATIME

As suggested earlier, for the US military, soldiers' mental security is important because soldiers serve as agents of an American national destiny, a temporally specified drive towards justice (see, for example, Hirsch 2010). In Serbia, the nation is attached to its imagined past through the need some people feel to be faithful to the Church as well as mentally relaxed, thus safeguarding the integrity of its consciousness in continuity with seven or more centuries of threat and hurt. Both Group 69 and official American military doctrines, then, adduce a national dimension to the notion of the mental security of combatants and the population in times of war. Their respective temporal construals of consciousness, however, may seem to provoke substantially different effects (due also to the different temporal narratives they conjured).

Although overt criticism has been voiced in the United States of the ethical implications of the military's mobilisation and instrumentalization of neuroscience (Moreno 2006; Gray 2007; Bickford 2008), more broadly advances in consciousness technology tend to be welcomed as progressive and modern (Gray 2007; Moreno 2006). In other words, a specific contestation of one ethical valence of time lapses in the context of the acceptance of a wider dynamic of optimisation noted earlier. The concept of neurosecurity, cast in a progressive scientific language, often allows the justification of military actions in a general way. Moreover, the scientific and cyborg metaphors used in the United States morally justify not only present but also future military actions, by promoting an open-ended militarization of security. The rhetoric depicting the conflict—that is, the War on Terror—indeed often comes across as naturally futuristic and hence deserving of support, funding, and perpetuation.

In Serbia, on the other hand, the militarization of neurosecurity is usually seen just as an obscure remnant of a sorry past. The medieval, chivalrous metaphors used in neocortical warfare propaganda in 1990s Serbia have a very specific military genealogy (they lent themselves to public discourse by being connected with other metaphors), as I have shown. During the war, they served as a fund of extra heroism for fighters, at a time when the war effort was being described as needing a new stimulus. The immediate aftermath of war cast grave doubt on the concept and narratives of neocortical war. While Group 69 was allegedly officially part of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (JNA) from 1993 to 1999, other Serbian army officials questioned whether the Group had in fact any accurate understanding of military techniques of mind control in a more conventional sense. Radišić, a Group 69 proponent, explains this as a symptom only of the regular army's demoralization after the NATO bombardments of 1999. The army, he explains, had used physical weapons and come off the worst. The group's 'astral duels' thus became a little too post-Enlightenment for an army still smarting at its losses. However, the Group's experts were cast as laughably

weak and implausible and pointed at as part of the explanation of why the army had done so badly. Many seemed to regard prosthetising neocortical defence strategies as ‘paleo-Balkan theories’ par excellence.

The metaphors of parapsychological defence in Serbia certainly invite a reading in terms of paranoia (see Petrović-Šteger, forthcoming). As Marcus (1999) notes, the paranoid style is generally qualified as fundamentalist and extremist. Group 69 images wanted to weaken the enemy and revitalise the flagging energy of the national psyche. However, regarding this type of mental defence as only an esoteric and paranoid pattern of thinking would explain the phenomenon away too easily. In engaging with the learning-centred and spiritually informed approach to security and self-possession put forward by Group 69 and reappropriated by others, I suggest, some Serbs are addressing the political and cultural challenges of their time in temporal and mental security terms. The cultivation of alternative security knowledge networks and communities in postconflict Serbia is then not necessarily a sign of Serbian nationalism, but can be adopted as a personal strategy with which some reflect upon and criticise local political structures—structures criticised as corrupt, intrusive, and undemocratic. The cultural others that mental security, for the people adopting these strategies, tries to resist are no longer the faraway others in the West and foreigners, but Serbs’ fellow citizens, neighbours, colleagues, relatives, and (especially) leaders.

Moreover, the public and academic practice of relegating neocortical warfare to a paranoid oddity, or treating it as a sign of something else (criticising it from a purely discursive and political point of view, without close engagement with its specific temporal logic), misses the degree to which many contemporary armies take it very seriously as integral to military operations. It may also miss the degree to which psychological operations are the default mode of combat of today—that is, the temporal overdetermination of this concept of warfare in a time presided over by concepts of optimisation and efficiency. In effect, the dismissal of neocortical war bypasses the point that all interpretations of it (treating it with suspicion, denial, or moral sensitivity, normalizing or glorifying it) are less reactions to its concept than effects of the temporal sequencing of its representation.¹⁸ Their logic, in all these cases, is to discriminate between implausible, and morally impossible, forms of war and more proper forms. The reactions themselves serve a function of handling uncertainties and legitimising war (the modern form of war ‘today’) or postwar projects and aspirations.

This chapter has offered an anthropological treatment of neurosecurity—of specific technologies aiming to safeguard the integrity not only of physical places, but also of a presumed national consciousness. In teasing out the contours of certain ‘military definitions of reality’ (in the terms of C. Wright Mills), and interpreting them through their ideological and temporal concerns, I have shown how two instances of politicisation of consciousness are underpinned by particular configurations of time, right, and

agency. The temporal dimensions of these specific security technologies are important here. In both the Serbian and American cases, time was and is understood as a medium that could give rise to impulses so ethically justified that they broke free of time, to become the motives for an action that would be demanded any time or anywhere. Time became elevated into paratime, a time of justice. In the American case, this emerged out of a rhetoric of futurity, of continually striving for justice, while in wartime Serbia it was authorised by the immemorial, sacralised heritage of the past. In postconflict Serbia, fear of anachronism first inhibited people's interest in neocortical security. More recently, mental security has become thinkable again with a resurgence of anxieties about the nation's prospects and the futures individuals can imagine for themselves. In other words, neocortical defence has reacquired sanitary and reconciliatory value. If the calls in the 1990s to uphold the unique mental and spiritual patterns of the Serbian psyche were seen mainly as nationalistic, antisatanizing,¹⁹ or anaesthetising strategies,²⁰ nowadays the same rhetoric seems to be received as guidelines encouraging self-help. My argument is that a former fortress mentality, whose aim was to safeguard the integrity of a presumed national consciousness, is again animated by a specific chronological logic in thinking over the time (the anachronism, the pastness, the futurity) of threat. In one sense, what I have described as a political instrumentalization of memory need not have taken Serbia's 1990s wars as its object at all. My suggestion, rather, is that the political styling of security as a form of psychic war is only an example of a wider contemporary practice of legitimation, which engages a temporal process to justify a practice as something, regardless of whether we like it, that we will have to continue doing for the foreseeable future.

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NOTES

1. The ideologues of neocortical war theorise that in pursuit of a competitive advantage, conventional military strategies may be supplemented by psychological, informational, and electromagnetic warfare techniques. The brain can be influenced by electromagnetic energy, psycho-aerosols, meditation, in regression, during hypnosis, etc. See Szafranski (1997), Luković (2000), Tolevski (2010) and Radišić (2009, 2011).
2. For an argument about how 'progressive temporality' underpins liberal political ontology, see Pedersen and Holbraad (this volume).

3. See Radišić's text from 1998 published online: <http://www.facebook.com/notes/radi%C5%A1i%C4%87-svetozar/srbija-zemlja-mentalnih-patuljaka/476129369073534>
4. Terms such as national consciousness, psyche, and spirituality were interchangeably used by the people I both interviewed and read to designate what the Group members wished to defend.
5. It is argued that the astrologer Milja Vujanović Regulus, painter Milić od Mačve (Milić Stanković), and military expert Dragoš Kalajić died soon after their identities as members of Group 69 were publically revealed. The unusual circumstances of their deaths reminded some alleged members of the Group of the famous Marconi, or 'Star Wars' affair, a British political scandal famous for 'mysterious suicides' of twenty-two employees (mostly electronic engineers) that worked for Marconi Company Ltd., Britain's largest electronics-defence contractor in the 1980s.
6. Nikola Tesla was a famous engineer and inventor of Serbian origin who invented the principle of the rotating magnetic field and developed a poly-phase alternating current system for the generation, transmission, distribution, and use of electrical power.
7. 'Light and conscious formula' is a method by which one can supposedly calculate and predict a person's intentions and life's mission by decoding his or her name and surname (Vlajić 1994, Vlajić 2010a).
8. Despot Stefan is celebrated in Serbia as a fifteenth-century poet and moderniser who introduced knightly tournaments, modern battle tactics, and firearms to Serbia.
9. Indeed, people with special parapsychological abilities (figures such as Vava, Trgovčević, Kleopatra, and 'vidovita Zorka') flourished on the public scene in Serbia in the late 1980s and 1990s. Milja Vujanović Regulus, for example, was a famous regime prophet of the 1990s and alleged member of Group 69. She was known for predicting the triumph of the Serbs in war, the dissolution of United Nations, and the rebellion of Americans against Bill Clinton. Vujanović was often likened to other regime prophets of the time: to "vidovita Vanga", a mystical elderly lady from Bulgaria, favoured by Bulgarian political elites; and to a Russian magician Alan Chumak (Алан Чума́к), who attained celebrity as a repetitor of cosmic energy. Chumak was allegedly subject to the scrutiny of both the Russian Academy of Sciences and KGB.
10. In another treatise on paranormal military methods, Elmar Gruber (1999) called this phenomenon 'the Parsifal Effect'. This law can be formulated as follows: 'If you approach psychic phenomena with a pure heart, you will experience them—clairvoyance, clairsentience, astral travel, mediumship—all will be open to you. If, however, you want to harness psychic phenomena for your own financial or political or other gain, you will notice that your psychic abilities cease to work.'
11. Western news reports and foreign blogs on the other hand, suggested that a French mole was providing information of when the plane was taking off and where it was heading. For example see <http://z7.invisionfree.com/worldconflictsforum/ar/t538.htm>
12. As Vlajić explains in one of his books, the Group allegedly received help in these actions from the 'World Spiritual Network'. The planes and pilots were stunned by this network's workings and by the electromagnetic weapons of the Russian and the Chinese. These were shot from the 'Persian arc' or bow of the mind, taking the form of mental arrows endowed with prodigious spiritual energies (2010c, 29).
13. For the literature on military parapsychical research programmes in Russia, the United States, and Britain, see Ebon (1983), Seager (1995), Targ (1996),

- Rifat 1996, Gruber (1999), Alcock, Burns, and Freeman (2003), Barlow and Durand (2004), and Moreno (2000, 2008).
14. Much of this work explores how the funding and recruitment of scientists (including anthropologists) have tried to win ideological acceptance for work on issues of 'national security' in the United States. As Gusterson (2007) notes, the War on Terror has disturbed settled norms that anthropologists should not assist counterinsurgency campaigns, such that for the first time since Vietnam, anthropologists are debating the merits of military anthropology versus a critical ethnography of the military. In this 'Weaponization of Culture' debate, those who support the military's so-called Human Terrain Teams, strengthened by 9/11, seem to think it proper for anthropology to lay its methodological skills and substantive knowledge at the service of the state, particularly in a time of war. On the other side, the Network of Concerned Anthropologists is very active in voicing criticism at the turning and co-opting of anthropological and other scientific knowledge to military purposes.
 15. We see this as much as in last year's killing of Osama bin Laden as in the second Iraq war or drone attacks in northwestern Pakistan.
 16. See Kernaghan (this volume) for a wonderful analysis of 'magical security' among Peruvian cocaine traders.
 17. The published material for this research is very fresh. The majority of books written by Group 69 members were published only in 2010. TV shows such as *Kosmos* and *Crni biseri*, featuring guests like Miroslav Mika Marković, Svetozar Radišić, and Nikola Čanak, started airing only two years ago.
 18. I too experienced a certain unease in writing up and presenting the research data for this analysis. Finding the material at once fictitious, fascinating, disturbing, and compelling, I wondered how to free myself from the urge to adopt a cynical tone in relating my data. The struggle stemmed not from the 'paranormality' of the data, but from my personal history of understanding Group 69 activities. Twenty years ago, when I first heard radio programmes featuring Serbian clairvoyants and their pompous predictions of Serbia's fate, together with their recommendations that Serbia should 'defend' itself from 'bad foreign influence', I understood these narratives as simply belonging to nationalist propaganda. I therefore emotionally dismissed the possibility of seriously paying attention to, or researching, residual phenomena such as neocortical defence. How then was I to take my ethnographic inquiry seriously and present it faithfully now? Secondly, some of my fellow anthropologists, to whom I presented the material, colleagues who themselves investigate heterogenous phenomena all around the world, understood my subjects' stories as completely beyond the pale. 'This is simply wacky' was one reaction. Most specifically, the most outrageous aspect of my presentation seemed to be the parallel I was drawing between Serbian neocortical war and the interest taken in parapsychology by the US military establishment in the wake of the War on Terror.
 19. Group 69 positioned themselves in contradiction to the West by representing themselves as a team of experts whose goal was only to halt violence by nonviolent means. They claimed to have reversed the satanization techniques meted out to Serbia in successfully having attributed gothic qualities to the West. For an analysis of a different use of political metaphors of vampirism and satanism in former Yugoslavia, see Longinović (2011).
 20. One very popular clairvoyant in the early 1990s was Dubravka Melka, better known as Vava. Born in Bosnia, and a proclaimed left-oriented communist, this woman, famous for her kindness and work ethic, heavily supported Slobodan Milošević and his wife, Mira Marković, in the early days of their political reign. She famously predicted, for example, that in time Serbia

would become like California, and that Milošević would reign for forty-nine years. Her radio and televised predictions contributed to what can be taken as a massive public hypnosis, the instilling of the belief that Serbia was a country of the highest values that could fight only for just causes.

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