



# Response to Hayden and Denich

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Professors Robert Hayden and Bette Denich have offered strident critiques of both me and my article 'Anthropology and Genocide in the Balkans: An Analysis of Conceptual Practices of Power'. The former editor of *Anthropological Theory*, Richard Wilson, has made several points in his response which I had intended to make and so I refer the reader to his commentary and thank Professor Wilson for defending the spirit of open debate, critique, and the integrity of the peer-review process.

In order to provide some context for readers, I should point out that debates between Robert Hayden and myself on matters pertaining to the former Yugoslavia go back at least a decade. Hayden attempts to present himself as the 'victim', when in fact each of us have roundly criticized each other's work, which is as it should be in scholarly life.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this period, I have elaborated my empirically grounded observation of pro-Serbian (and anti-Croatian) bias in his work, provided critiques of his historical relativism and moral equivalence of the combatants in the war, and his specific denial that what took place in Croatia and Bosnia in the early 1990s was not a civil war, but an armed aggression of a genocidal nature orchestrated by Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadzic and others. In addition to being a major point of my article in this journal, I have written elsewhere on the politics of conceptualization of these events, noting that the term 'civil war' embodies a certain degree of moral and historical equivalence, which I consider to be historically inaccurate and ethically problematic in the Yugoslav case (see Cushman, 2000a). I have supported the legitimacy of the multicultural Bosnian state and its defense, he has denied that it has any legitimacy and, instead, suggested that 'a better approach would be to accept that the recognition of Bosnia with its existing boundaries was a gross error and to draw new borders, presumably accompanied by transfers of population, a "solution patterned after the partition of India in 1947"' (Hayden, 2004 [1992]: 77). Partitions. Population transfers, forced migrations. If this is Robert Hayden's idea of applied anthropology, I want nothing of it, and I doubt very much that other anthropologists would either.

In our intellectual battles, Hayden has never centrally addressed my arguments, but instead has resorted to tautological legalistic arguments, threats of legal action, professions of outrage, and now, it seems, assaults on my character and ethics. As Richard Wilson notes, in response to Hayden's demands for the retraction of my article in its original form in *The Donald Treadgold Papers*<sup>2</sup> and thinly veiled legal threats by Hayden,

the current editor of the Treadgold papers forwarded the matter to the Attorney General's Office of the State of Washington, which then wrote to Hayden in a letter dated 30 July 2004, informing him that my article contained no defamatory assertions of fact about any individual and suggesting that he address his concerns in scholarly forums. Thankfully, Hayden has chosen to respond to my article in *Anthropological Theory* and restricted himself to disagreements about the facts of the history of this period, but he has still failed to address the substance of my theoretical arguments.

By way of chastising Richard Wilson, the former editor of *Anthropological Theory* for failing to send him my paper for his vetting before publication (an unheard of practice in academic publishing), Professor Hayden has accused me of *ad hominem* arguments, but has provided no examples of the use of this logical fallacy in my article. An *ad hominem* attack involves using arguments about a person's qualities or characteristics to discredit his or her argument. There are no such arguments in my article. My article, as I see it, is a kind of archaeology of knowledge, in which my central purpose was to: 1. point out the homologies between Serbian nationalist discourse and the discourse of two anthropological accounts of conflict in the former Yugoslavia and; 2. point out how these accounts mask and elide some of the central facts of the case regarding atrocities and war crimes in the region. These accounts are examples of what the French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut (1997) has referred to as 'indifferent memory'. I painstakingly avoid any *ad hominem* arguments and stick very closely to the analyses of the texts of the authors. I consider my contribution to be an exercise in the critique of anthropology, an area so widely developed in the field that there is a journal explicitly devoted to it.

Hayden seems to miss the point that it is *his* work which is the data for my study in the sociology of knowledge and my ethical critique of the knowledge he produces. The precise goal of my article is to criticize his scholarly arguments and use his own writing as data that shows us something about the connections between anthropological writing and politics in extreme social situations, in this case, war and aggression of a genocidal nature. Hayden's only response to my critique of the use of the concept of orientalism to interpret events in the former Yugoslavia is to reel off a list of names of people who have based their work on this concept. If there are any logical fallacies in these debates, it would seem to be Hayden's use of *argumentum ad populum*, the idea that if everyone believes something is true, it is true. It is hard to counter such arguments logically, since the recourse is not to empirical data or to theoretical argument, but to the fact that since orientalism is such a popular explanatory model for the Balkans it must necessarily be the case. One ought to be able to criticize its application outside of the original historical contexts that Edward Said was addressing in his development of the idea. Hayden has not answered my critique. Might my article be a good occasion for anthropologists to consider the limitations of the application of this concept to the interpretation of cultures outside of the historical contexts to which it was originally applied?

For the sake of readers, I should offer an explanation of why I decided to publish my revised article in *Anthropological Theory*. Beyond simply being a study in the sociology of knowledge, in the time that transpired between the original publication of my article and the time I decided to republish it, Slobodan Milosevic was indicted and brought to trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. It had been clear to me much earlier, and to many others (see for instance Williams and Cigar, 1996), that in the 1990s Milosevic was a major architect of the aggression and genocidal

violence against Croatia (events which, contrary to Hayden's assertions, were in fact taking place at the time of his writing and revising of the article) and Bosnia and the ICTY seems to have confirmed that in its indictment. According to Human Rights Watch (2004):

Milosevic is charged with 66 counts of genocide, crimes against humanity, grave breaches of the Geneva Convention, and violations of the laws and customs of war. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo between 1991 and 1999, including the atrocities in Vukovar and Srebrenica.

Milosevic has been indicted for his role in fomenting and supporting atrocities in Croatia at the time Hayden himself claims he was writing the article. As a sociologist of genocide, I think a sociological case can be made that events in Croatia were genocidal, even though Milosevic has not been indicted for that crime for actions in Croatia, a decision on the part of the ICTY that I disagree with (Vukovar being a perfect example of the destruction of a city, planned and systematic mass executions, and the forced evacuation of Croats from the city). As a result, I felt even more strongly about my view that Hayden's early accounts of the situation in Yugoslavia were masking some central historical realities and echoing several of the themes of Serbian nationalist ideology and felt that a discussion of this would be a perfectly appropriate topic for a journal such as *Anthropological Theory*.

Hayden's claim, and his central case against me that he was not writing the article when the events were happening, is just simply false. Denich wrote her article much later, and, as I noted in my article, her article did not mention anything about the facts of the war. She claims that her article wasn't meant to examine the war, but the symbolic revival of genocide, yet it is inconceivable that any article dealing with this revival, which was a central ideological justification for Milosevic's assault on Croatia, would not mention the war. As I said in my article, in reading the accounts, one comes away thinking that the whole affair was the fault of Croatia: no mention of Milosevic, no mention of JNA armed aggression against Slovenia and Croatia, no mention of agency, just Slovenian and Croatian orientalists who brought the war on themselves. The latter is a theme that would immediately be evident to anyone with just a cursory consideration of the structure of thinking in Serbian nationalist ideologies.

Hayden's own chronology is all we need to discredit his case: he notes that he wrote the article in late 1990, submitted it on 6 December 1990, it was accepted on 2 July 1991, revised and resubmitted on 12 August. It was published in 1992. Hayden claims the date of resubmission 'was before much armed conflict had taken place in Croatia'. I do not know what Hayden's operational measure of 'before much armed conflict had taken place' is. So let us consider this according to actual events because this is the crux of my argument: that Hayden was, indeed, creating an account of events which sounded much like the accounts put forth by Serbian nationalists long before the war and during the war against Croatia and Slovenia. By his own admission, he was revising the article precisely as Serbian military and paramilitary organizations were committing crimes and atrocities against Croatia, grounded, in the case of Croatia, in the ideology of supposed Croatian 'orientalist' aspirations for hegemony over Serbs in Croatian territory.

As evidence of the falsity of my claims, Hayden cites a letter that he wrote to me,

which he reprints, in part, in his response. In the letter, he raised several disagreements with my account, disagreements with which I respectfully disagreed. He chastises me for republication of the article without modifying it to accommodate his interpretation of history, in fact, he argues that based on his rather odd consideration that his interpretations are the epistemological basis for knowledge about the former Yugoslavia, my paper makes 'allegations that in my [Hayden's] view should never have seen print'.

Just a brief chronology of events shows that Hayden's own claims are false: in the spring of 1991, Croatian Serbs, emboldened by Milosevic's material and ideological support and local Bosnian Serb leaders, occupied Plitvice National Park. No mention of this in Hayden's article. On May 2–3, the town of Borovo Selo was assaulted and occupied by JNA tanks. No mention of that. In June, 1991, the war against Slovenia (the 'orientalists' in Hayden's view) by the Serb dominated JNA under the control of Milosevic occurred. No mention of this. In July 1991, a village in Croatia, Celije, was sacked and burned by Serbian forces. No mention of this. And just about the time that Hayden claims he sent in his revisions, the Yugoslav National army began the siege of Vukovar, one of the most heinous acts in the entire history of the war in the former Yugoslavia. Even if he claims that he sent in his article prior to the siege, one would think that, in light of such an event, someone who considers himself a foremost scholar of this region might consider contacting the editor and offering at least some mention of these events. But the very fact that he ignored all the aforementioned acts of aggression while he was revising his article would not lead us to expect that he would do so.

So Hayden's claims that his article was written before these events took place is false. I assume most scholars would agree that revision is part of the writing process, so Hayden's own chronology discredits his argument.<sup>3</sup> Absent are any discussions of the war itself, or the Serbian nationalist rhetoric, which was extant since at least 1988 when Milosevic began his nationalist agenda, capitalizing on the social construction of the Serbs as victims of Kosovar Albanians, Slovenians, and Croatians. That Hayden's argument recapitulates that rhetoric is undeniable. By the time I read his article in 1993, a year after it was published, the atrocities in Bosnia were in full swing, being justified by the very same ideologies that resonate in Hayden's writings and are a staple of Serbian nationalist propaganda: 'it's all the Muslims' fault because they never should have seceded.' This resonance was further demonstrated to me through consideration of other of Hayden's writings (see, for example, Hayden, 2004 [1992]), in which he denied the legitimacy of Bosnia and suggested that a solution was forced population transfers, an argument which was more or less the same one made by Serbian nationalists. I should also point out that I have written elsewhere critically of Croatian actions in the subsequent defense of Croatia, and of territorial aggrandizement in Hercegovina, but what concerned me in my article was how certain types of work in anthropology made victims look like perpetrators.

One would imagine that readers of *Anthropological Theory*, especially those anthropologists who have done so much to study the relations between power and knowledge, would welcome such a reflexive sociology of knowledge, especially when it comes to the issue of genocide. There is clearly a tradition in anthropology which stresses the importance of witnessing the experiences of victims of atrocity and countering those accounts which devalue or deny those experiences. I suppose my article might be considered to

be in the humanistic tradition of what Nancy Scheper-Hughes calls 'militant anthropology'. In this case its militancy has to do with checking historical revisionism in regard to genocide and other mass atrocities. In genocide studies, a field in which I am actively involved, there is a saying that the victims are killed twice, the first time physically, and the second by those who deny the reality of their experience. The reality of denial is, in some senses, as important to study as the events themselves. Thus it was that in reading Hayden and Denich's accounts, I not only saw the elision and denial of the experiences of Croatian and Bosnian victims of Serbian aggression, but also – and most importantly – a degree of moral equivalence which redescribed the victims of atrocities as the *cause* of not only the dissolution of Yugoslavia, but the war itself. And this latter point is really the central point I would like to stress in my response here.

My article offers a critique of moral and historical relativism in social analysis using the work of Denich and Hayden as examples of the relationship between relativism and political ideology. This is indeed a provocative argument, but certainly not a new one in anthropology or in the field of human rights. Indeed, in a recent landmark work Michael Ignatieff (2001) notes, quite rightly, that in many cases, 'relativism is the handmaiden of tyranny.' Hayden wants us to imagine that he is the true heir to the Weberian tradition of *Wertfreiheit*. But it is exactly the point of my article that his work is not value-free, but laden with political positions and consequences. Relativism, for all of its pretensions, is not value-free, nor, as Jurgen Habermas (1972) so eloquently argued, is any social-scientific knowledge.

I welcome, but disagree with, both Hayden's interpretation of my interpretation of his work, and his critique of supposed 'editorial failure' on the part of *Anthropological Theory*. If anything, I consider the fact that the article was peer-reviewed four times an indication of editorial success, and the receptivity to my arguments in the field more generally, a testament to the fact that I am not the only one who sees certain ideological tendencies in these authors' works. There is nothing in either Hayden's or Denich's responses that would cause me to change a single word in my original article. In fact, in the sociology of knowledge, the intensity of response on the part of those who are the subjects of ideological critique is generally considered a measure of the extent to which the critical sociologist has hit his mark.

## Notes

- 1 Readers interested in the history should see Robert Hayden's (1997) review of my volume, edited with Stjepan Mestrovic, *This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia* (1996), my response to this review (1999), as well as my review (2000b) of Hayden's book *Blueprints for a House Divided* and Hayden's (2001) and my own response (2001) to that review.
- 2 I should like to clarify the provenance of the appearance of the original article, a revised version being the one which appeared in *Anthropological Theory*. That article was submitted to *The Donald Treadgold Papers*, a very prestigious series, which was then edited by Sabrina Ramet, one of the leading Balkanists in the world. Ramet did not solicit the paper, but simply did her job as editor and sent it out for review. The review was positive and the paper was published. This is normal scholarly practice.
- 3 Hayden makes much in his response of a series of letters that he and his wife wrote to Sabrina Ramet and myself, in which he laid out his accusations in his review here.

I disagreed with his arguments then, as I do now, that he was not writing the article during the time when significant acts of Serbian aggression against Croatia were taking place. And so, his declaration that my arguments are spurious is based solely on his own interpretation of what constitutes spuriousness and his redefinition of the act of writing.

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