

## **The Weight of War Crimes**

By Zijad Burgic

The film "*The Weight of Chains*", by Serbian-Canadian filmmaker **Boris Malagurski**, is yet another of a series of films that seeks to hide Serbian responsibility for the bloody Balkan wars of the last century's final decade. Besides this film, others that fall into this category include documentaries by the Norwegian authors Ole Flyum and David Hebditch. The films "The city that could be sacrificed" – about Srebrenica, and "Traces from Sarajevo" – about Al-Qaeda in Sarajevo, were aired recently on Norwegian national television. Also worth mentioning is the documentary "An agreed-upon war", recently aired on Serbian television. Although "The Weight of Chains" actually premiered last year in Subotica, these days it's being aggressively promoted on the internet. This is most likely in response to the media highlighting the July 11th commemoration of the Srebrenica Genocide.

### **Other are to blame!**

One website that propagandized the content of the film – the film was displayed without any indication of who the author was – stated that the film had been recently aired on Russian television, without any mention of which channel it was on, leaving one to assume that it was aired on state television. The film's title is described as "inspirational", and it's mentioned that it received support from the Canadian organization "Global Research Centre." Also mentioned is the support of the "Peaceful Humanitarian Action" organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Emphasis is also placed on how the film deals with "the complex theme of western involvement in the internal affairs of the former Yugoslav republics, then and now". The film reportedly offers a different answer as to "why Yugoslavia fell apart in a bloody war." All that's needed is to watch the film and listen to the people that are interviewed. You'll come to the same conclusion – others are to blame! An air of mystery (wow!) and exclusivity is added with the mention that the film features American administrative documents from the 1980's – shown for the first time ever. These documents are, in fact, decisions and actions of the U.S. administration connected to the protection of U.S. economic interests from 1984 to 1990; the film's director presents these as being key to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Particularly prominent in the film is the mention of the establishment of the National Endowment for Democracy and the involvement of the CIA.

I saw Boris Malagurski (born in 1988 in Subotica, Vojvodina, in northern Serbia) for the first time at the beginning of this year on the "National News", the main news program of the Canadian national television station CBC. At the time, he was being interviewed at Vancouver airport. He lamented and preached of the error of Canadian and American authorities, after Canadian customs officials refused to allow Dr. Srdjan Trifkovic to enter Canada. Dr. Trifkovic, as a guest of a Serbian students' organization, was supposed to lecture to students at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. The ban was preceded by enormous activism on the part of Bosniak organizations in the USA and Canada who opposed this guest's appearance, because they claimed that this individual was a denier of the Bosnian genocide. Circumstances were such that Dr. Srdjan Trifkovic was denied entry into Canada, and students were deprived of a lecture by this right-wing individual – or one that can simply be described as a Chetnik.

### **Kosovo mythology**

The beginning of the film is marked by scenes which describe the Yugoslav community in an easy-going, even pleasant, manner. This film, made up of carefully-chosen words, mentions the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which, as the director nonchalantly concludes, "was broken up by the war." Of course, it's never mentioned that this state, almost from its inception, had functioned as

a dictatorship and Greater Serbian hegemony. And there's no need to mention the intense political debate in the Kingdom of SHS in which they occurred, and murder in the Assembly... The author, the narrator in the film, does not forget to include a few sentences about the alleged anti-fascist struggle of the Chetniks and Draža Mihailović, described as "anti-fascists" and "the first guerrillas" of Europe.

A better-informed scholar of Balkan history will, after several minutes of watching this film, understand clearly that "The Weight of Chains" is based on the complex matrix of the "Kosovo myth". The director (of course, subconsciously) remarks that the end of the medieval Serbian state came after the Battle of Kosovo in the year 1389. It's a historical fact, however, that the fall of Smederevo (which happened seven decades later) ended the Serbian empire of the middle ages and from that moment began life in Serbia under the Ottoman Empire. Following this are some vague terms intended to appeal to an ultra-nationalist Serbian audience, regarding the Turkish ways of ruling, along with some epic notions regarding the reasons for the spread of Islam in the Balkans.

Director Boris Malagurski has gathered the cream of the crop of the right-wing milieu, lobbyists for the alleged "Serbian interest" in the U.S. and Canada. Thus, in the film there are an already internationally-known selection of individuals: Gregory Elich, Bari Litucci, John Bosnich, Canadian General Lewis MacKenzie (UN commander in the Balkans during the past war and a man of highly questionable moral values), James Byron Bissett (former Canadian ambassador to Yugoslavia from 1990-1992), Dr. Srdjan Trifkovic, a known genocide denier who lives in America... These people are all in fact promoters, lobbyists, and bloodsuckers, textbook Chetniks and right-wing extremists who've profited on the misfortunes of Serbs and other people in the Balkans.

Using skilful techniques and a sophisticated story line in order to win the trust of potential movie-goers, the director continues with his attempts to prove that the bloody break-up of Yugoslavia was caused by U.S. interests and the interests of large corporations, along with the consequences of the process of globalization on a global scale. When examining the local, Balkan-level causes of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the film leaves one believing that the emergence or awakening of the Ustasha movement in Croatia and radical Islam in Bosnia are the sole factors at play. These and similar views are propagated by other organizations such as: "The Lord Byron Foundation for Balkan Studies" – headed by James Byron Bissett and "Global Research Centre" – led by Michel Chasudowsky, professor at the University of Ottawa. In the Bosnian Serb Republic, these individuals are aided in their work by the organization "Peaceful Humanitarian Action".

### **Skilful manipulation**

In order to make this documentary material as compelling as possible, the film repeatedly uses dialogue from other films; this film's author, however, does not warn viewers about this. Hence, in this film we see a number of famous film stars of the era.

Also interviewed for the film are individuals whose good faith and honesty cannot be doubted. Rade Aleksic from Trebinje is interviewed; he's the father of Srdjan Aleksic, a young man known for his courageous actions in protecting fellow citizens of other nationalities and ended up killed by drunken Serbian soldiers. Also featured are the stories of two rappers from the Balkans: Vedran Mujagić, a member of the popular Sarajevo band "Dubioza kolektiv" and Bosko Ćirković from the famous Belgrade band "Beogradski sindikati". There's also Vlade Divac, the former Yugoslav basketball national team representative and NBA star. It's apparent that these people were not aware of how their participation in the film would be utilized.

The director uses extreme forms of propaganda in order to portray Croatia as a criminal state, skilfully using an interview with the widow of the belated Josip Kir, the police chief of Osijek before the war, to this end. Kir was assassinated by Croatian nationalists (there's speculation that the command for his death came from the Croatian state leadership); in a rather distasteful manner, the director uses the story of Kir's heroism to cast blame for the war (in Croatia) on the Croats. The story of the murder of Milan Levar, a Croat who was also assassinated by Croatian nationalists, is used in the same context. During the war, there were crimes committed against Serbs in Gospic, and it appears that Levar knew too much about this. However, while Kir was killed just before the war in Croatia started, Levar was killed in 2000.

By claiming that the blame for the break-up of Yugoslavia lies with "new leaders", namely local leaders, the filmmaker dismisses the responsibility of the Serb leadership; after all, Slobodan Milosevic, is an old leader! In this context, the narrator calls Alija Izetbegovic a "Nazi collaborator", a claim that distorts facts for viewers. As a matter of fact, Izetbegovic was born in 1928; the attribute of a World War II "Nazi" can hardly be assigned to a 13 year-old! A similar method of manipulating images and various events and documents is used by the filmmaker to describe pre-war Yugoslav society and conditions. Of course, the utmost care is taken never to mention the Serbian oligarchy of that period in any sort of negative context.

### **What's not in the film never even happened!**

According to that old saying of Bašeskija, that which is not documented never even happened! The greatest propaganda trickery of the film consists precisely in what's not found in it – on the issues not discussed. In the film you will not find any mention of the following: the activism of SANA and the well-known Memorandum from the second half of the 1980's; there's not a word regarding the military plans of the already well-reformed JNA (Yugoslav National Army) and the strong influence that Greater Serbian nationalists had on these – the military plans of RAM1 and RAM2; there's no mention of the plans and boundaries of Greater Serbia (even though some players are still in the Hague and on trial precisely because of this); the film does not include a word regarding the aggression of the JNA in Croatia, and especially not on combat operations in Bosnia. In this film you'll neither see nor hear a single thing regarding the fact that the wars that took place in the 1990's were a result, above everything else, of a desire to create a so-called Greater Serbia! Or that the main perpetrators were the Serbian political clique headed by Slobodan Milosevic and his political supporters and compatriots in the republics of the former Yugoslavia.

In the film, the rebellion of Serbs in Croatia is treated as a legitimate demand for cultural autonomy; the actual truth of the nature of this armed rebellion and secession is bypassed. In the film you will not find anything regarding the horrific destruction of Vukovar or the bombing of Dubrovnik, except in isolated instances. Or the arming of Serb civilians in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the JNA... or the concentration camps... or Ravno, Zvornik or Bijeljina... Or of Prijedor, Kozarac or Brcko.... Of the siege of Sarajevo and its suffering... of the genocide in Srebrenica and the murder of over 8,000 people..... Yes, in this film you will hear a "different truth", of Clinton's speech and his agreement with Izetbegovic of the need for 5,000 murdered Srebrenica residents in order for the U.S. to intervene!?! When war crimes and war criminals are discussed in this film, you'll see nothing regarding Milosevic, Karadzic, Mladic and the recently arrested Goran Hadzic. You'll learn only about the alleged war crimes of others.

A distortion of the presented themes is one of the main characteristics of this film. The tragedy of Bosnian Muslims (known as Bosniaks), the genocide against the Bosniaks of Srebrenica and the crimes against these people during the four-year war are not subjects that are covered in this

film. Nor is there any acknowledgement and recognition of other crimes committed by Serbian nationalists. This film and all of the actors in it are used, and some even misused, simply to cover up the historic responsibility of Serbs for the wars.

One rather interesting statement is made in the film regarding the work of journalists from top news agencies, who are described as being nothing more than agents of their respective states; their reporting is described as being non-objective, and they're accused of laying all the blame of the wars on the Serbs. One witness in the film claims that all of these individuals have received money and publicity for their dishonourable work.

A good portion of the film deals with the secession of Kosovo and the role of the United States and NATO in this regard. However, this part of the story is less relevant when it comes to evaluating the work of Boris Malagurski and his team.

### **Joint criminal enterprise of the media**

In a review by **Azer Pehilj** titled "*Denial of genocide in Norway – the night when they massacred the truth*", on the Bosnian-Herzegovinian website "[tačno.net](http://tačno.net)" the documentaries by Norwegians **Ole Flyum** and **David Hebditch**, "*The city that could be sacrificed*" and "*Traces of Sarajevo*" are characterized as a "*joint criminal enterprise of the media involving one small film company*". The same evaluation can be given to the creator of the film "The Weight of Chains". Under the headline "**Cinematic trickery and historical revisionism**" by **Sanjin Pejković** on the website "[media.ba](http://media.ba)", you'll find an interesting and readable review of the documentary film, "**An agreed-upon war**" by **Sladjana Zaric** and directed by **Philip Čolović**. The film was aired recently on Serbian national television. Judging from the above-mentioned review, the film is really nothing more than propaganda. "An agreed upon war" will surely continue to be, in the future, a convenient modus operandi and model for a documentary that reconstructs recent history, writes S. Pejkovic. The hard-core, ruthless nationalist propaganda of the '90s is already being replaced by a pro-European oriented revisionist brew, one in which Draza Mihajlovic and a yearning towards European values are mentioned in the same breathe. By presenting rumours as truth and assigning equal blame for the war to all sides, facts are being tailored to suit the objectives of the film. Cinematic trickery is being used to justify a policy that is present in Serbia even today, twenty years after the war, says Pejković. He rightfully points out that these films "instead of clarifying an image, do nothing more than to blur it and create a historical revision – sometimes barely noticeable and other times very explicit."

It's worth noting, however, that this assessment was made before Friday, July 22nd, 2011 – before Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik carried out a bombing and shooting spree in Oslo and on the island of Utoya, killing 76 and injuring 96 people. Before this rampage, the mass murderer left behind over 1,500 pages of written text in which he discusses the reasons and objectives for his crimes. The mere fact that Breivik was inspired by Serbian atrocities and the leaders who carried them out in the '90 's, and that he is not the sole author of the material left behind (he mentions that he used the writing of other right-wing individuals) puts all of these so-called documentary films, their authors and collaborators, in a very sensitive context. Of course, the same can be said of all those academics who sell themselves out for a fistful of dollars and an easy life, often remunerated by the blood of innocent people, like those children in Norway. All fascist ideas are an equal danger to world peace, whether they carry Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or any other demarcation, in addition to the one that's adorned by the swastika.

Hence, instead of promoting "a mythical vision" of their own past, Serbian intelligentsia ought to reconsider its own role and responsibility in the recent crises and wars. This kind of film, instead

of being called “The Weight of Chains”, could be more appropriately titled “The Weight of War Crimes”!

(Translated into English: Suzana Vukic, journalist)